



A BUNDLE OF
THYME
For Every Season

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TIPS

The Dressing – Just a Touch – by Marcy Lytle

I don't know if you've bought lots of new clothes for this season, or if you're frustrated with the selections in the stores you venture out to, or if you're afraid to buy on line, or where you fall on the spectrum of new clothes buying! However, I'm betting that a lot of us have been limited in what we've found and maybe are a bit sad that we don't have a ton of new clothes, or much of anywhere to wear them!

Maybe...this fall we can add just a touch of an accessory here and there, and create whole new looks with what we already have in our closet! Accessories like handbags, totes, pins, scarves, jewelry, and more can elevate a look so much! And they don't have to "fit." They just have to be worn and enjoyed!

We've searched and here are some of our favorite fall accessories for this season:

Embellished bag – Apparently, these are in this fall! And just one bag with a plain outfit will elevate your look, totally! Check out this beautiful gold clutch from Walmart! Carry it out to dinner, even if you're eating on a patio – totally will make your outfit!

<https://www.walmart.com/ip/Scheilan-Aged-Gold-Metal-Crystal-Embellished-Clutch/175931266>

Retro wide brim hat - This hat would look so pretty with your winter beiges and whites, or with a flannel tunic, or a jean jacket over a flowy dress. I've found that if I pin my hair on top of my head with a small clip, my hair doesn't go flat when the hat is removed! This hat is so cute, from H&M.

https://www2.hm.com/en_us/productpage.0650511003.html

Kitschy charm jewelry – Check out this American coin bracelet from Overstock. It's a little bit chunky, it's whimsical, and it's something I would totally wear with a sweater or blazer. I love each little charm and the fact that it's Americana!

<https://www.overstock.com/Jewelry-Watches/American-Coin-Treasures-Goldtone-Metal-Coins-Charm-Bracelet-with-Certificate-of-Authenticity/6031034/product.html>

Silk scarf or bandanna – I recently ordered both of these from Madewell and LOVE THEM. Scarves can be doubled (one shorter than the other) around your neck, rolled and worn with a side knot on the head, or even tied on a solid bag! (get my links)

Pearl earrings – Take a simple solid crewneck sweater and a pair of jeans, and dress up your outfit with one pair of pearl earrings – these from JCrew Factory are just the pair to try!

<https://factory.jcrew.com/p/womens-clothing/jewelry/earrings/pearl-hoop-earrings/AH124>

Chunky chains – I think it would be so fun to layer chain necklaces, because chunky chains are in for fall! These options from Madewell are super cute and affordable! Wear them over your chunky sweaters...or against your tight turtlenecks! (get picture)

<https://www.madewell.com/chunky-curb-chain-necklace-MA013.html>

https://www.madewell.com/chunky-curb-chain-necklace-99105922843.html?source=googlePLA&noPopUp=true&srcCode=Paid_Search%7CShopping_NonBrand%7CGoogle%7CMWGGBS00002_99105922843_1508320939_53557875290_445706781998_m_pla_online_9028279&gclid=EAlaIQobChMIuqKYtcHN6wIVTvdjBx3RzwI1EAQYBiABEgKTdfD_BwE&gclid=aw.ds

[99105922843.html?source=googlePLA&noPopUp=true&srcCode=Paid_Search%7CShopping_NonBrand%7CGoogle%7CMWGGBS00002_99105922843_1508320939_53557875290_445706781998_m_pla_online_9028279&gclid=EAlaIQobChMIuqKYtcHN6wIVTvdjBx3RzwI1EAQYBiABEgKTdfD_BwE&gclid=aw.ds](https://www.madewell.com/chunky-curb-chain-necklace-99105922843.html?source=googlePLA&noPopUp=true&srcCode=Paid_Search%7CShopping_NonBrand%7CGoogle%7CMWGGBS00002_99105922843_1508320939_53557875290_445706781998_m_pla_online_9028279&gclid=EAlaIQobChMIuqKYtcHN6wIVTvdjBx3RzwI1EAQYBiABEgKTdfD_BwE&gclid=aw.ds)

Slim sunnies – Thin sunglasses are in this fall, and we really like this white cat-eye pair from Amazon. Can you imagine it with a fall scarf wrapped around your head, windows down, and getting those Audrey Hepburn vibes while you cruise! I love these!

https://www.amazon.com/SOJOS-Vintage-Sunglasses-Goggles-Plactic/dp/B078J87N65/ref=sr_1_6?c=ts&dchild=1&keywords=Women%27s+Sunglasses&qid=1599653182&refinements=p_n_style_browse-bin%3A3388420011&s=apparel&sr=1-6&ts_id=2474971011

[Plactic/dp/B078J87N65/ref=sr_1_6?c=ts&dchild=1&keywords=Women%27s+Sunglasses&qid=1599653182&refinements=p_n_style_browse-bin%3A3388420011&s=apparel&sr=1-6&ts_id=2474971011](https://www.amazon.com/SOJOS-Vintage-Sunglasses-Goggles-Plactic/dp/B078J87N65/ref=sr_1_6?c=ts&dchild=1&keywords=Women%27s+Sunglasses&qid=1599653182&refinements=p_n_style_browse-bin%3A3388420011&s=apparel&sr=1-6&ts_id=2474971011)

Look through your closet and put together your favorite cozy outfits, then think how you could add a pop of something to create a whole new look for fall. It could be a fun animal brooch, a statement ring, any of the above suggestions, or more! Share your looks with us!

Seven for You – Fall Faves – by our panel of women

I love driving down the streets and seeing home décor for fall, pumpkins on porches, and wreaths on doors. I also love fall festivals (not sure many will be happening this year!) and I love the scents and colors of this season. It seems most of us do, and why not share what it is we love and why? Here we go...

October is my favorite month of the year. For me, it reminds me of new beginnings. It was in October 1966 that my family first arrived in Germany. It was to be our home for the next four years. Fall was exploding with browns, reds, oranges all set against a bright blue sky. The air felt crisp and clean and new. We arrived during the most celebrated month of the year! Parades and music, beer tents, and bratwurst. Jaunty polka music filled the village square. It was hard to feel sadness with so much jubilation surrounding you. October is my new beginnings month and a time to remember joy. My little Hummel collection reminds me of that time so long ago. Happy children like I was in a land far away. Finde Freude!

I LOVE visiting apple orchards and pumpkin patches in the fall! I usually end up buying apple and pumpkin butters from the family farm stores. Recently I had the idea to add Pumpkin Butter to my coffee and cream to make Homemade Pumpkin Spice Creamer! I also like to add cinnamon essential oil or ground pumpkin spice to my coffee brew basket for an extra punch of spice flavor. Yum!

My favorite part of fall is fall festivals! Hay bales, pumpkin patches, and carnival rides help put me in the mood for fall, especially when the temperature outside is still in the 80's.

My favorite part of fall is that you can almost feel nature breathe a sigh of relief. With the intense heat that we've had in August, many of the things growing around me have shut down. My elm trees are even dropping leaves early because of the heat. But when the temperatures drop and hopefully the rain comes, there will be renewed energy and growth again.

I am definitely a summer loving girl, but I do love October, probably because I love Halloween! I love to decorate, and I always enjoyed trick or treating, decorating pumpkins, and everything that went along with entertaining kids in the fall. One of my favorite memories is of a birthday party for my daughter. We all dressed up and surprised her with a haunted house effect. I was the witch that led the tour of the house and the haunted yard. My then young sons loved lying in the graveyard and sitting up from their graves to scare the girls as they walked by. I recommend every young parent have this kind of fun at least once with their children.

I recommend something crafty on the adult level and it is such a good time of the year to do this. About thirty years ago I took a ceramic class at our church. I had never done ceramics but the items I made like this ghost was so much fun along with the time I got to spend with the other ladies. It is 30 years later, and I still enjoy putting out my ghost!

My favorite part of fall is putting out my fall decor. I have several pillows, pumpkins, and other decor that I love to set out. I'm also a big fan of Hot Caramel Apple Cider. There's nothing like sipping on a hot mug of Cider on a crisp, fall evening!

<https://foodapparel.com/better-starbucks-caramel-apple-cider/>

I absolutely love everything about fall, except that the weather is still too warm, for my liking! A few of my faves are pumpkin spice candles, something new in home décor each year (this year it's a shower curtain!), and all the hues of fall in clothing. I enjoy setting out décor in groups of three, and my favorite item is my hearth rug! I wish I could find one for every season!

My favorite season is fall, and it's my birthday month as well. Growing up in Ohio the fall trees and leaves were so beautiful, with so many variations of browns, reds, yellows and greens. I loved piling up the leaves in the yard and jumping into them, with my friends. I can recall those wonderful chilly mornings I used to go outside and sit on the porch as a kid. As an adult, I just add a hot cup of tea (green tea with mint is my fave) to those early mornings and that is a great start to a beautiful day!

I love fall! After extreme, summer Texas heat, I welcome the cooler temps. I even enjoy cloudy days, feeling cozy in the house while watching the clouds roll in and the rainfall. Also, fall decor is my favorite. I collect various styles of pumpkins and display some of them year round. I'm THANKFUL for fall. It's my favorite time of year.

In the Kitchen – Tasty October – by Marcy Lytle

It's October and I suppose most of the country is starting to cool down a bit, and in our area – it's a welcome change for sure! It's the time of year when we start using the oven and stove again, and the aromas of soups and stews and comfort food become desirable, instead of salads and sandwiches (although I like those all year, as well!) We've tried a few new recipes that I think you might like to add to your fall list...as the holidays approach. A couple of desserts...and a couple scrumptious dinners. And of course, we added one spooky fun dessert for us all!

Dark Chocolate Bark

This recipe makes a big batch, so keep in fridge and grab a piece once a day for taste and a satisfying snack. It's so delish!

- 2 12oz bags dark chocolate chips, melted
- ½ c salted pretzels roughly chopped
- ¼ c dried cherries
- ¼ c unsweetened coconut flakes
- ¼ c unsalted pistachios roughly chopped
- Flaky sea salt

Line baking sheet with parchment paper. Pour a third of melted chocolate onto sheet and use an offset spatula to spread into 1/8 in thick layer (don't leave it thicker than this, or it will be hard to break, later).

Evenly sprinkle with half the pretzels, cherries, coconut and pistachios. Pour over remaining chocolate to cover ingredients and evenly sprinkle the same as above, again.

Garnish with flaky sea salt. Let cool one hour (I put in fridge). Break into pieces.

Apple Brown Betty

At first, this recipe's call for firm texture bread threw me off, but I ended up using country scratch bread from the deli, and it the dish turned out great. This is easy, and oh so good with ice cream on top! We took it for a family gathering, and we ate it all!

- 6 slices firm textured bread
- 2 large granny smith apples, 2 large golden delicious apples, cored, peeled and thinly sliced
- ½ cup plus 1 T firmly packed light brown sugar
- ½ t finely grated lemon zest
- 1 T fresh lemon juice
- ½ cup unsalted butter, melted

Preheat oven to 350, butter a 2-qt dish, set aside. Tear bread into food processor and pulse til crumbs are like oatmeal (not pulverized).

Place apples in large bowl and add ½ c brown sugar, the zest and juice and toss to combine. Place one-third of mix in dish and top with one-third of crumbs. Drizzle with 2 T melted butter. Repeat layers, then top with remaining apples and bread crumbs. Drizzle with remaining 4 T butter. Sprinkle 1 T brown sugar on top.

Cover with buttered foil and bake 30 minutes. Remove foil and bake another 30-40 minutes til browned.

Beans and Hush Puppies

We bought War Eagle Mill's bagged beans and hush puppy mix, and are including them here, in case you want to order for Christmas gifts! The beans have the directions on the bag (you'll need to possibly keep adding a bit of water so the pot doesn't run dry.) I used bacon instead of ham. These beans were superb, because of that flavoring packet in the bag! We topped with grated cheese and served in fun soup bowls from Lakeside Collections (another great gift idea!)

The hush puppies were SO EASY and quick to make. We added in the garlic powder and chopped green onion, then fried them (if oil is hot, they fry up quickly!). SO GOOD with the beans!

Many Veggies Veggie Soup! (from loveandlemons.com)

This has a lot of ingredients, but it's honestly one of the best veggie soups I've made. And it feels so healthy to eat and enjoy! A great October staple for your recipe file!

- 2 T EVOO (extra virgin olive oil)
- 1 med yellow onion diced
- Sea salt and black pepper
- 1 medium carrot diced
- 1 small sweet potato diced
- ¼ cup dry white wine (I used chicken broth)
- 1 14.5 oz can diced fire roasted tomatoes
- 4 garlic cloves chopped
- 2 t dried oregano
- 4 c veggie broth
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 c halved cherry tomatoes
- 1 c chopped green beans
- 1 zucchini diced
- 1 15 oz can chickpeas drained and rinsed
- 2 T white wine vinegar
- 1 ½ c chopped kale

Heat oil, add onion, $\frac{1}{2}$ t salt, several grinds of pepper, cook for about 8 minutes, add carrot and sweet potato, stir and cook another 2 minutes.

Add the wine and cook for 30 seconds, then add the canned tomatoes, garlic, oregano...stir in the broth and bay leaves. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to simmer and cook covered for 20 minutes.

Stir in the cherry tomatoes, green beans, zucchini, chickpeas...cover and cook about 15 min more.

Stir in vinegar, kale, and additional $\frac{1}{4}$ t salt and more pepper (taste).

For Fun...Spiderweb Milkshakes

4 oz chopped dark chocolate, in 30 sec intervals, stirring til melted. Let cool, then spoon into a ziplock bag and snip off a corner.

Pipe a spiral of chocolate into inside of dessert glasses (or martini glasses) on the sides, then use a toothpick to drag lines out from the center, creating a spiderweb pattern. Freeze until just set, about 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, blend 1 pint vanilla ice cream and $\frac{1}{4}$ c milk in a blender and pour into glasses.

Three Moms – Kids in the Kitchen

It's fall, and it's usually the time for more homemade goodies like soups and cookies and warm and tasty aromas filling the house! And it seems that kids like to be a part of making the food! So many say that if kids are involved in the making of the food, they will then be more likely to eat the food. Do you find that to be true? Our moms are weighing in on how they include the kiddos in the stirring, the making, and the preparation of dinner for the family...or not!

Mom of 4 kiddos, 10 and under...

Cooking is not my favorite, so I am thankful I have eager kids that want to help and really enjoy cooking. And, YES, I do let them help! The quicker I can train them the less I will have to cook. (Can any other moms relate?) It does get stressful when they are all in the kitchen at the same time, so we take turns.

My oldest, Grace (age 10), has gotten pretty good at cooking, and I can turn her loose while a sibling or two help! One of her (and my) favorites is her homemade cookies. These are a huge hit and are always cooked to perfection. They are iced sugar cookies, so she can spice them up for any occasion or holiday.

When it comes to dinner time, we have a "kitchen" kid for the week that helps clean up the kitchen before and after dinner, and assists in setting the table. Dishes and cleaning are not my kids' favorite chore, but cooking seems to be a fought after activity! So I always have volunteers to stir, add ingredients, help Dad with the smoker / grill, and taste test the food!

Mom of 2 littles...ages 4 and 2...

I've really had to let loose when it comes to allowing my kids to help with meals. They LOVE IT; however, I know that it will create a mess, require patience, and take at least 30 more minutes to make the meal. When I let down my guard and focus on the joy it brings to my girls, I love it too.

Their favorite things to do to help are stirring, measuring and taste testing. I found it easier to go ahead and get all the ingredients out, because if I turn my back once, I know my two year old will have everything poured out on the floor! They take turns pouring and stirring, and always eating. They get distracted easily, so I usually have them help me with simple recipes - scrambled eggs, muffins, cupcakes, and cookies. We talk about the ingredients, what we are making, and I thank them for being big helpers.

Our favorite recipe, no matter what the season, is Banana Nut Bread! The girls love helping me make this and they devour every last bit.

Mom of 3 children, ages 8 and under...

Honestly, I like being in the kitchen by myself, and I like the kids playing outside while I cook!

However, my kids do help with baking. Cracking eggs and stirring – the kids do help with that! (They love turning on the KitchenAid!) The kids each have their own aprons and my daughter has her own set of cooking utensils in a plastic tub. And we have a stool, which is a necessity for kids in the kitchen! Baking works easier for us; because items are measured out. I cook dinner on the fly, so I don't use the kids for meals as much.

We are making muffins this week, which is something fun our family enjoys. Pecan pie is a fall favorite, so they like to toss in the nuts!

My kids are required to take their dishes to the sink after dinner. However, we don't have "sets" of dishes. I plate at the counter and then serve on the table.

And lunch? All three kids have learned how to pack up from the array of choices I've given!

Tried and True – Pumpkin Nice – by Marcy Lytle

Pumpkin spice is my favorite fall scent, but the title of this piece is Pumpkin Nice. Pumpkins are the fall décor that can last right on through Thanksgiving, and I've even seen glittery silver pumpkins for Christmas! Since these orange wonders are so popular, I thought I'd share some decorating ideas with pumpkins, in case you're adding a few around your house this season.

Pumpkins with lights – We have two of these. It's so nice to add lights to your home décor any time of the year. In fact, it's one of the four things to have when decorating your table, as well! This pumpkin with lights attached, and this pumpkin with bulbs attached, is a great find and something you can place anywhere for pretty ambience.

Ceramic or paper pumpkins – These little guys are nice to nestle around on tables or mantels, in groups of three. That's another decorating tip when placing small items on shelves – keep them in groups of three.

<https://www.kirklands.com/product/Seasonal-Gifts/Harvest/Fall-Decorations/Ceramic-Pumpkins-Set-of-3/pc/2289/c/2404/sc/3029/162798.uts>

Hanging pumpkins – I found this really cute pumpkin tree on vacation in Smithville, New Jersey and have loved it ever since. It looks like a fountain tree with branches that grow little pumpkins! It looks great in a corner!

Pumpkins on porches – A sweet friend gave me this large metal outdoor pumpkin and I love sitting it on my front porch this time of year!

Pumpkins on doors – I just found this so cute welcome sign on Amazon that changes out for each celebration – 14 changing pieces – and it's so affordable. It's new on my porch this year, and it has great reviews!

Dish towel pumpkins – One easy way to decorate for fall is to just hang some new dish towels in the kitchen – there are so many cute options from trucks piled with pumpkins, to fall leaves and pumpkins, and more.

Pumpkins on rugs – This hearth rug might be my favorite piece of fall décor of all. I found it on a fluke at Marshalls and have been hunting for other season hearth rugs ever since. Providing a new rug at the hearth, the front door (going in AND out) or even in the bathroom gives a fall touch to the entire home!

Runner pumpkins – Change out your table décor and add a runner with pumpkins on it! Set the table, enjoy the season, and keep a stash of seasonal runners in a drawer!

<https://www.kirklands.com/product/Seasonal-Gifts/Harvest/Fall-Dining-Entertaining/Gather-Pumpkin-Table-Runner/pc/2289/c/2404/sc/3250/276076.uts>

Cloth pumpkins - Have you seen these? We have a couple on our shelves in our work area and I love them. I found them at a discount store, but I've linked one for you here!

<https://www.kirklands.com/product/Seasonal-Gifts/Harvest/Fall-Decorations/Orange-Sweater-Pumpkin/pc/2289/c/2404/sc/3029/281205.uts>



HOME

I Don't Do Teens – Hands Up – by Marcy Lytle

I remember when my son was in high school, and all of the friends he had on his sports teams and in his youth group, and at school. Fast forward 10 years now, and some of those boys grew up and became successful young men with a career and now are starting a family. But several of his friends struggled with the teen years, and caused their moms and dads so much worry. Although friends and family prayed, those boys never settled down from wandering and exploring...in all the wrong places.

What makes one young man grow up without incident, and others grow up with too many incidents? Perhaps you have a teen with a wandering spirit, an adventurous type that wants to explore things a bit too much, hang with the wrong crowd, and dabble in the dangerous. It's so hard to talk to other moms that seem to have compliant children that cause no trouble.

I've learned two things since watching and observing all of this over the years:

Never assume that your child is so awful, and her children are so awesome. EVERY child has issues. It's just that some are more visible than others. It's true that some children are more trying in every way than others, but ALL moms everywhere are praying for their kids for some sort of concern as they watch them mature...or not mature. Comparison never does a mom any good, and just because one son might struggle daily, it does not mean that the mom with the compliant son is doing something "right." We all know that every person has their own struggles in life. It might not be now, but it will be later. We are sure to have trials and troubles, and sometimes that comes in the form of our teens and their behavior.

Never try to muster up prayer and faith on your own. There will be days when all you can do is survive, as you wait for your son/daughter to come home when you know they've taken a drink. Or there will be that night on a date, when you worry that they aren't being wise in their decisions with the opposite sex. And there will be times when they lie, they sneak around, and they do things we've told them not to do. It's never up to us to be perfect parents, raising perfect children into perfect adults. It's perfectly okay to throw our hands up in surrender as we say in our most exasperated tone, "God, I can't do this!" That's a perfect response to a crappy day or week or month, or year!

I'm still praying for some of my son's friends that got into trouble, and are still in trouble. And you know what? I'm still praying for my son, as he navigates adulthood, marriage, owning a house, working a job, and handling the stress that life throws all of us daily. And there are still days when I throw up my hands and toss my grown kids to the hands of the Father, and release them into His care.

What I'm trying to say is that no matter how "good" or how "bad" our kids may act, they all have hearts, minds, and souls that are being pursued by God – all the days of their lives. Some of us may struggle a LOT more than others in this area, as our teens wander off. But believe me, that mom over there that seems to have a perfect son has her own set of struggles in another area.

If your teens are causing you more grief than you can bear, and you can't even kneel in prayer right now, because your knees are too sore from the hours you've already spent kneeling,

you're good. Get up and live your life, enjoy your day, and sip on a latte. Do your best, entrust HIM with the rest. It's easier said than done, so ask for help from a friend instead of worrying what that friend will think if you share. And above all, KNOW that you are not alone, you're not a bad mom, and there is ALWAYS HOPE for the most adventurous, lost and confused child among us...ALWAYS.

That son/daughter you gave birth to long ago was created in His image, and there's this awesome plan that awaits them, for good and not evil. Pray big. And when you can't pray big, throw your hands up and sit still. And let the peace that comes from surrender roll over you like the warm ocean waters on a sunny day...as the salt brings healing to your soul. Or better yet, step into the waves and enjoy the ride back to shore.

An Adage A Day - Flying High with Murphy - by Carole Gilbert

For the first half of our marriage, my husband and I used the adage of, “Murphy’s Law,” quite often. Do you know this quote of, “Whatever can go wrong, will go wrong?”

This adage has a remarkably interesting beginning and it has been around only since 1949. It was during an Air Force experiment of a very advanced innovative USAF high-speed rocket sled that an aerospace engineer, Colonel Edward A. Murphy, Jr. said this quote. He was involved in the experimental safety testing of this aircraft known as the Gee Whiz. There were a few failed tests and because of its speed no man had ridden in it. Finally, a monkey lived through one of the tests.

Colonel Murphy was afraid to try riding in the aircraft himself, but another man, Colonel John Stapp, volunteered. That test run went up to 421 miles per hour giving Colonel Stapp several injuries. This is when Colonel Murphy made the statement regarding the test’s failures, “Whatever can go wrong, will go wrong.”

Later, at a press conference, Colonel Stapp repeated Murphy’s comment and this is how the quote got pinned as “Murphy’s Law.” And it is interesting to note, Murphy did not realize that he was the author of this adage until twenty years later. He also did not say this quote in a negative way like we use it now. The positive thought Murphy had behind saying this was that it is always good to be prepared for whatever could go wrong.

Murphy went on creating and testing aircraft safety equipment. He worked with the safety systems for the Apollo moon missions along with other well-known aircraft vehicles. He is also accredited with a few other adages of wisdom, basically, all in the name of science. My other favorite is, “Every aquarium will eventually leak.” I hope you do not have an aquarium.

Even though Murphy said his quote in a positive way, my husband and I used the “Murphy’s Law” like everyone else in the negative way. When our plans for something got changed for whatever reason, we would blame good ole Murphy. It would be “Murphy’s Law’s” fault. Some people believe these changes are fate, coincidence, or just my luck. I used to believe this way also, but I do not anymore.

Many years ago, I discovered the unusual happenings, the pieces in my life puzzle being put together in astonishing ways, or just the happenstance changes in events or plans really are a product of the Holy Spirit guiding my life. Once I started believing this, so many other things in my life started to fit into place.

Like Murphy, I wanted to fly. I wanted to be an astronaut at NASA, and I wanted to fly to the moon. I wanted a pilot’s license. I did not get these things, but one thing I did get like Murphy was the understanding to be prepared for whatever happens. And the best way to be prepared, to me, is to know who is ultimately in charge of our plans.

Murphy's Law states that we plan one thing and something else may, and probably will, happen.

Doesn't this sound like the verse in Proverbs 19:21?

“Many are the plans in the mind of a man,
but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.”

So, when my plans change instead of saying it is coincidence, fate, or Murphy's Law, I will refer to these changes as being from God and being His plan for His purpose. Now that is a positive thought!

Chipped China – If We Were Free – by Jennifer Lytle

Up to the Atmosphere Up to the Highest Height

Fridays are family movie nights for us. We have enjoyed this tradition for years now and each week, every member of our family anticipates eating take-out and sitting together, laughing loudly, or holding our breath during a suspenseful scene. It's a time for us all to take a break and is a much needed moment of relief and reconnecting.

One week over the summer, we chose *Mary Poppins* - the original movie. The height of the show is when Father is fired from his prestigious position as a banker. This subplot starts with a special day where Jane and Michael join Father at work. On the way into the bank, they witness a beggar woman crying for passers-by to pay and feed the crowd of crows around her. Michael is moved to give his two-pence to the beggar. Father works to convince Michael, as does the large group of much older and wiser (and wealthy) bankers, to instead open an account with his money. The older group of men goes on to idealize how prestigious, accomplished, and powerful money can ultimately make the young boy.

Michael, however, was forewarned by Mary Poppins about the opportunity to give his two-pence to the woman. He cannot be persuaded to go along with the group. His resistance creates a ruckus and ultimately leads to Father being fired.

Let's Go Fly a Kite

This desperate moment culminates in a beautiful opportunity where Father has the freedom to fly a kite; the very thing which introduces us to the children in the first place. They are free. Now, Father is too.

What would you do if you were free? Would you paint your home emerald green? Would you declare every night family game night? Would you skip dinner to find a creek to skip rocks in or find a place to try out your kayak?

Investing in the Pause of this Pandemic

I pray that this encouragement doesn't come too late for you, dear readers. Our community is pushing forward, moving ahead . . . with life as usual. I wonder if we haven't fully embraced the opportunities the pandemic provided.

Let's paint our cabinets.

Let's dance in the rain.

Let's stop to watch the storm roll through.

Let's enjoy this moment because it won't return.

Has it been hard? Yeah, Buddy.

Has it similarly been [an invitation](#) to [step into something new](#)? Yes.

As I contemplate the required intentionality essential to [embracing today](#), I wonder: Is this biblical? Is this something Jesus would have his people practice? For me, [the answers are yes](#).

Updated Bio:

Known as Momma to three beautifully wild littles, Jennifer is in the thick of the richest journey she has yet known. She is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist Associate in the state of Texas and Founder of Joyful Journeys Counseling. Writing was among her first discovered superpowers. (And thank you very much, Jesus!) Her husband and she have been married for 12 years. She is a bred, born, and raised Texan who loves traveling. She has traveled to Greece, Central America, throughout the eastern US, and Israel. Jennifer is passionate about education, prayer, and being in the center of God's will.

A Night to Remember – Untorn – by Marcy Lytle

Did you know that about 7 pieces of paper are the limit, in how many you tear together, in half? I wondered how many and looked it up. It's a great exercise to teach the kiddos about being connected and not alone, and the power of being connected to HIM. It all came to my mind when I was observing little kids start back to school. Many had meltdowns over the frustration of online school, missing their friends, and more. Many kids are feeling isolated, since they aren't allowed to sit by, play by, or be near the groups they once were!

So...let's use paper and learn a valuable lesson that hopefully will lift our kids' spirits and remind them of the necessity of knowing that God is with them...

Preparation: You'll need seven sheets of computer paper. You can let the kids draw a fall picture on each paper, if you'd like, of one of their closest friends or family members, until you have seven faces.

First, talk to the kids about what it means to feel "torn." It obviously means ripped apart, like when a page is torn into two pieces. But it can also mean damaged...which is how one feels when something bad happens...like being ripped apart in their heart. And sometimes, even our kiddos feel torn apart with all of the craziness of the world.

Take one sheet of paper and let a kid rip it in half: One sheet of paper is easy to rip in half, isn't it? It's the same way with one lone person who has no friends, one person who feels very alone. Any little disappointment can send them to their bedroom in tears.

Question: When's the last time you cried and what made you cry? (Let one person answer). Then you felt torn...that's what we mean in this lesson.

Take two sheets and stack them and rip them apart: This was still fairly easy, but not as easy as one sheet. When we have a friend or a family member that we feel close to, someone we can talk to, someone that loves us, we aren't as easily torn apart by disappointment. For example, if a friend can't come and play, maybe we have a sibling or a parent that can be with us and we can still have fun – two are better than one!

Question: Which person have you been around lately that made you feel safe and loved?

Take three sheets of paper and fold them in half...so now you have six sheets of thickness. Try to rip into two pieces: Maybe mom/dad will have to do this – it's much more difficult to create a tear in a thick pile of paper. When we have lots of friends and family to surround us with love and care, not much can rip us apart, because we are surrounded with love.

Question: Give thanks out loud for a family member that you love.

Take that seventh piece of paper and fold in half four times and try to tear it apart: It's impossible, isn't it?

Jesus is that ONE that we need in our circle of friends to keep us together and safe and loved, even when everything in the world falls apart. He keeps outside forces from ripping our hearts

apart. He's the ONLY one that can do this, because people and situations cause problems, but Jesus is always the answer. He's the one that causes our lives to stay intact and untornd. Isn't that cool?

Question: Do you know Jesus? Do you know that there's a verse that says – There is a friend that sticks closer than a brother – like that seventh sheet of paper – and his name is JESUS.

All we have to do is call on his name and he comes to our rescue. The Bible also says that the name of Jesus is a strong tower, and we can run inside and be safe.

Any time you feel torn or sad or lonely or far away from those you love, get a piece of paper and fold it four times (that makes 8 thicknesses) and try to rip it apart. You'll see that you can't do it. And that's your reminder that JESUS is your buddy, your friend, your Savior, and your Lord...the one who holds it all together...when everything else is falling apart.

Tiny Living – Four Times in a Tent – by Leyanne Enterline

What do you do when you're in the middle of a pandemic, travel restricted, career-less, but love to travel?! You tent camp, of course! Not in the middle of the summer in Texas, though! We had to travel a bit farther for cooler weather. I mean, when you're already living super tiny (and for some reason it seems tinier during a quarantine), going even smaller is a super great idea, right? One way to get even closer to family members is to try and set up a tent and all sleep really close together. We decided we actually loved it so much we've gone four times in the past two months. That's probably more camping than we've ever done as a family.

Our first time, we eased into it. We stayed one night in the tent in Colorado in a very nice RV resort on the river. We had nice showers and restrooms. It was a pleasant experience. Our second time, we went back to Colorado for five nights. It was on the river again, a bit more remote area, with an *okay* shower area and restroom. For our third time, we heard we could camp for free in any National Forest. So off the pioneers go! I mean we're professionals now, right?

We decided on New Mexico this time. We looked up an area that looked promising and it sure was! We found a dirt road and started up it! We saw from afar a few other campers, and as we drove up the mountain saw quite a bit more. At least we knew we weren't going to be completely alone, and this seemed like a spot that was doable. It was a bit scary just driving into the woods hoping we'd land on a camping spot! Let me backtrack a bit and say we did look into U.S. government sites first. They seemed more remote and did have showers, but we drove into four different sites and they all said full! It was on a first come first serve basis, and we were arriving on a Saturday so we were out of luck. And *free* definitely is always better!

So into the woods we went, up to the highest we could go and found us a nice little spot. Of course it was dusk, so that's always the best time to put up a tent, NOT! Out came the head lamps and we started a fire as quick as we could. It got into the low 50s so we were getting chilly pretty quickly. Our spot was amazing, there was no one around us, and we hardly even heard animals at night! In fact, it was so quiet our ears hurt! Can you imagine no noise at all? It's the weirdest feeling ever. It seemed as though something was wrong!

We hiked during the day and at one point came across a herd of elk. They were beautiful and so cool to see in their natural habitat. The kids played with a horny toad, their first time to see one! This place was missing one thing though (well two if you want to count a restroom, that's a whole other story though!) It was missing FISHING! All of our places before had fishing nearby, but this part of New Mexico just happened to be barren of large water sources. So we packed up and head farther north, towards Taos. We researched some areas again and found some campsites with great fishing.

We ended up for our fourth tent trip up in a government area that was beautiful! We were on a stream with tons of trout, a mountain right in our view, few people around us, a restroom close by, and it was perfect...until... dusk. Out of the corner of my eye I caught a glimpse of something running across our picnic table. There it was - a tiny, cute, large-eared creature that wanted our food. A bit terrifying at first, but no big deal, we just packed up our food and watched out.

As we watched, more and more came out! Literally by the hundreds! It was a plague of mice! I wish this was a made up story but this is real life, y'all. We decided to get to bed quickly, hoping we didn't let any into our tent or car! This night was the longest one of my life! For one it was so stinking cold. Then, one by one, our tent became a jungle gym for the mice. I promise these were acrobatic mice. They jumped into the air (or fell out of the trees), hit our tent, then slid down it like a real slide and splated onto our tarp. This happened ALL NIGHT LONG! The kids were banged the mice off with their hands. I prayed all night that they wouldn't eat a hole in our tent and come and join us!

If that wasn't enough, we heard a terrifying noise in the trash cans close by. We've heard this noise before and knew immediately a bear was close by! Of course, this was the one and only time we left our trash out! The mice were in our trash bag so we decided to leave it hanging on the tree outside. However, with a bear too close that was not a good idea. So at 3:00 AM, Brian had to go out and throw the trash away so not to attract the bear any closer! That's not terrifying at all! He ran out, grabbed the trash bag with one hundred mice staring at him on the tree, lugged the bag across the hood of our car and rushed in to the giant trash container...where the bear is! Luckily, by then the noise had subsided. We saw our neighbors with flashlights from afar, so hopefully that scared the bear off.

Brian chunked our bag in the container and sped away. That was quite an eventful night and we all slept in pretty late the next morning. One would probably think we packed up and got out of there quickly, right?! Of course not!

We must love this odd adventure. Packing up a tent is such a pain, we decided to endure it all over again! I did get to read up a little on mice and camping and read that peppermint oil is a deterrent. AND by the goodness of God I happened to have an entire spray bottle of peppermint oil in the car! I anointed our tent with so much oil and prayed over it, and guess what? That night we only heard maybe three mice playing their weird games and we had a very peaceful night.

I must say after that last adventure I think we're good on tent camping for a while! These were experiences we will never forget and we are so grateful we can still have fun in the middle of all the craziness!

If you haven't tent camped before with the family, I highly recommend it!

Remember...

Love Grows Best in Tiny Spaces



YOU

Strengthening Your Core – Prejudiced, Still – by Marcy Lytle

On our recent vacation to Arkansas, we heard the Arkansans talk in several mountain towns with their thick mountain/country accent, and it was a reminder again of how just a few miles away...culture, life, and language can vary so much. I know that when we travel to the northeast, people there immediately note that we're from the south by the way we say "y'all" so frequently. And when I encounter someone that's British, I immediately smile because I love to hear their accent so much. In fact, I grew tired recently of my American Siri voice, so I changed it to an Australian!

There was a young girl that took my order while in Arkansas and she proceeded to tell me about her high school, and how her brother was her best friend, where she was going to college, etc. I got in the car and tried to share with my husband what she said, in her same voice, and we were both amused. Then we laughed, because we too have so many phrases that we honestly have tried to change over the years, because we just don't like them! We've worked hard to stop saying "we're fixing to leave" and exchange it for "we're about to leave," a much more proper way to express ourselves!

I kept thinking about the different accents that show up in just a few miles of separation, and how depending on where you live, those around you affect the way you speak. It seems that wherever you spend the bulk of your childhood life, that's the accent you pick up and keep for the rest of your life. I've met folks that have lived in America for a couple of decades, but grew up in England as a child, and they still have a thick accent from their country.

Everywhere we look right now on the media there is social unrest due to racism, depending on the color of our skin. But what about the accents that we speak? Is there prejudice there, as well?

I realized that the answer is yes, even in my own heart. I found the young girl that took my order to be amusing and even deemed her as a bit unlearned because of the lack of grammatical correctness when she spoke. And I felt very ashamed about that. How could I, being a Texan (where every other word is slang!) judge an Arkansan for anything she says? And yet, I did.

That girl was going to college, and the way she spoke had nothing to do with her intelligence, although I attached the two together. Skin color, economic status, and so many other differences among us are the things that divide us, mainly because we attach mental capacity or even social etiquette to others, simply because of their differences. They look different, talk different, and live different than we do, and we stay away, judge, and even chuckle at times because those folks are so "beneath" us.

I realized quickly, when I finished college, that especially education seems to set people apart and cause those condescending attitudes to rise. The higher the education we have, the more we tend to separate peoples and language and status and community. It's very rare to see a

young man or woman with Ph.D. fraternize with someone that never had a chance to finish high school, even though that second person might be “smarter than” the doctor!

I thought a lot about this as we drove back home, because I had hours on the road to do so. I have patted myself on the back about not being prejudiced toward others, but I realized that I have a ways to go. That girl at the food truck sounded unlearned, and I judged her as being so, because of the way she talked. And that’s just not right. I don’t like it when people judge me because I’m from Texas and occasionally pronounce words with a terrible southern drawl, so why in the world did I judge that young lady?

I want to continually take note of my own attitudes and judgments, and start laying more and more of them aside, in favor of noticing others in the light of exalting them above myself. Funny thing, that’s what He said to do – love others as we love ourselves and offer them the preferred seating – because he knew we’d separate and segregate and sit in judgment instead.

That’s all I have to say at the moment *y’all*, but it’s definitely not all I have to think about...

Healthy Habits – Holiday Routines – by Marcy Lytle

I know, it's not quite the holiday season, but it will be, by the next time we publish in November. So why not get a jump start on healthy habits before the holidays begin? It's the holiday season that often sets us all off of our routines, increases our stress, and thus we become more susceptible to illness because we're so run down! I can only say that from experience, that running around and crowding our calendars and squeezing in perfection can make for a way less-than-perfect holiday season! So what are we girls to do?

Here are seven little routines that might be worth noting, so that we actually enjoy the holidays this year, as different as they may look because of the weirdness 2020 has brought us so far:

Shop now, and spread out the spending: Even if you're not sure what your family wants for Christmas yet, start putting aside a little money each week, or buying gifts you do know, now...so the crunch of spending all at once is avoided.

Start planning your foods/recipes - now - while you're sipping cider and watching movies. Peruse the internet or your cookbooks or your favorite places and make a list of sweets, breads, breakfasts, and more...and place them in a folder. You're done, and all you have to do is then bake when the family's hungry!

Sleep in peace (you know, sing *Silent Night*...) by delegating holiday responsibilities. Make a list of all the things – like hanging lights, putting up the tree, cleaning linens for guests (if you have any!), going through wrapping supplies, etc. Make the list, dole out the responsibilities among family members, or among weeks if you're going it alone, then sleep...and get to each item on the list as it comes.

Step into an exercise routine and maintain it – don't let it go just because the holidays are here. Don't let life and worry and stress keep you from going outside, to a gym, in your room, or wherever you can escape to run, dance, get some sunshine, or whatever invigorates and lifts your mood and your body to a higher level of health.

Speak life. Make sure your thoughts are thinking true things about your Good Father and those around you, and then speak them out loud. Affirm the truth about yourself, your relationship with Him, and the way he cares for all that concerns you. Speak it aloud, so that you hear it, and hear it often.

Settle into a rhythm that works for your home. Most likely, there will be less events and gatherings to attend this holiday season, and that may sadden or gladden your heart! If you're sad about that, make a list now of some new family traditions to begin that involve staying home or close by. If you're happy about the lack of gatherings, start making your list of movies and games and fun to be had with your extra family time together. In fact, a few new games might be just the thing to buy for everyone!

Sink into your favorite chair, close your eyes, and sing. Singing is good for the soul, whether you make perfect notes or not. Sing your own song to him, bare your soul, praise his Name. Or sing a familiar tune that has words that send your soul soaring. But whatever you

do, sing. You could start with a Christmas carol like “Deck the Halls with boughs of holly, fa, la, la, la, la, la , la, la la.” That’s a happy tune for sure!

Holiday routines. They don’t have to kill us. They can actually send us into 2021 with a little skip in our step!

Life in a Nutshell – Simply Reminded, not Shamed – by Jill Montz

Have you ever been mad at something someone did...like really mad at them...and then soon after you accidentally do the exact same or a very similar thing? Anybody? I know I can't be alone in this boat of guilt on the Sea of Shame. Has it happened with your kid? Anybody? Please tell me I am not the only one in the running for Bad Parent of the Year.

Here's my story. See if you can relate.

The first week of school my daughter, Dotty, had a dentist appointment. Normally I wouldn't schedule a dental visit that week but (thanks to Covid) our summer appointment was cancelled. Dotty has some teeth issues so we try not to skip appointments in order to stay on top of things. The day of her appointment I told Dotty I would pick her up after second period. I reminded her she would need to check herself out of school since visitors are currently not allowed on the campus (again...thank you Covid).

I arrived a few minutes before classes let out and waited. When I saw her emerge from the building she was already in full on teenager grumpiness mode about something that had occurred in class. We pulled away from the school to head to her dentist office and Dotty rambled on about what had ruined her morning...the whole 105 minutes she had been there. When she took a breath, I just happened to ask her if she remembered to check out. She got very quiet.

Silence is golden except with toddlers and teenagers. When they are quiet, something is usually up...or at least it is so with mine.

She winced and said she had not. I pounded my fist on the steering wheel, whipped the car around, and headed quickly back to the school. The whole way there, I was berating her on how she has got to pay more attention, she cannot keep forgetting to do things I ask of her, she needs to be more focused, and on and on and on...the four blocks and two stop signs back to the school. I even went so far as to say if we were late for her dental appointment and I got charged for having to reschedule she would have to pay for it. (I am not even sure if her dentist does that, but it sounded good and Dotty believed it.)

Dotty ran back inside to check out then ran back to the car. We didn't speak the 20 minutes it took to get to her dentist. We didn't speak in the waiting room. We didn't talk much on the way back to school. We finally both talked a little that evening but not like we normally would. My frustrations were still there and so were her hurt feelings.

Now fast forward four days. Early on a Saturday morning I was watering my flowers and working in the backyard. Around 10am I decide to run some water in our pool to fill it up a little. I told myself I would turn it off in an hour or so when I came back out to feed the dogs before we left for the day.

I spent longer than I planned weeding my flowers and before I knew it I was running late to take Dotty and some friends to a birthday party. I threw dog food in the bowls and headed inside to quickly shower and get ready to leave. (I am sure you can guess what happened, but humor me.)

We were gone all day and didn't get home until dinnertime. I threw together an easy meal, we went through our nightly routine, and we both said our goodnights and headed off to bed.

Around 2:30am on Sunday morning I was awakened by the sound of thunder. Just as I started to snuggle down deep into my covers thinking how lovely it is to sleep through a thunderstorm, my brain started to trigger a chain of thoughts in its drowsy state of being. Thunder...rain...water...pool water...I won't tell you what I thought next but it was four letters and not a Baptist curse word.

I sprang to my feet, grabbed my glasses and peered out my bedroom window to the pool in the backyard. As sheets of rain poured from the sky and lightning danced across it I could see my backyard, patio, and sidewalks were covered in a thick layer of water. The pool had overflowed and the rain was just adding insult to injury. I ran to the back door, flung it open, and splashed through the water to turn off the spigot. As I sloshed through the back patio to get to the pool pump on the other side of the house in order to backwash the water out of the pool, a huge crash of thunder and a big bolt of lightning startled me. I prayed to God...*please, oh please* don't let me get electrocuted. Dotty would kill me if people found me dead in nothing but a t-shirt and undies.

By the time I got the pool started backwashing the excess water out I was soaked to the bone and madder than a hornet at myself. It took almost an hour to get the pool drained low enough to handle the extra rain headed our way, but it took me much longer to calm down. I was mad at my forgetfulness. I was mad at the money that was quite literally down the drain. I was mad at how I had treated Dotty earlier that week.

When Dotty woke that morning, I had to ask for her forgiveness. I told her what had happened with the pool (she too was glad I didn't get electrocuted, but she said it was for several reasons...though what I was wearing was definitely one of them). While she accepted my apology, she never gloated or condemned me or my parenting skills. She simply reminded me that we all forget sometimes.

The following Wednesday Dotty called me just as I got home from dropping her off at school to tell me she had left her Chromebook on the charger at the house and asked if I could bring it back up to the school for her. I told her I could. She sheepishly asked me if I was mad at her. I smiled into the phone and told her that I wasn't...because we all forget sometimes. However, I have asked her every morning since then if she has her Chromebook before we leave the house, and she in turn asks me if I have water running anywhere. Both seem like fair questions.

Many times in the days that passed since those events I have thought about other things I have forgotten. Things like...

Going to God in prayer before I go to worry.

Asking God for help before I ask others.

Seeking God's guidance before I make my own plans.

Searching God's Word before I search the internet for its worldly advice.

Some days (especially lately...thanks again Covid) I forget that God has a plan for me. That He is working all things for my good. That He loves me and He cares about me. Some days I forget that God wants a relationship with me not just a ten minute morning devotional and a five minute prayer before I drift off to sleep. Some days I forget that God never leaves or forsakes me, but rather I am the one who goes all prodigal-daughter at times. Some days I forget that God will forgive me...even when I have a hard time forgiving myself. Some days I forget that God is still in control even when this fallen world feels so out of control.

Sometimes I forget that I am just human. Sometimes I forget that Dotty is still just a kid. Sometimes I forget that little things don't matter in the big scheme of things and most of life is made up of little things...

Healthy Habits – Need to Breathe – by Tanya Dorris

Have you caught yourself holding your breath as you go about your day? Do you need healing in your body and improvement in your quality of life, especially as the holiday season approaches?

Deep or slow breathing brings a sense of well-being when practiced regularly. It benefits you in remarkable ways whenever it's carried out slowly, rhythmically and deeply...when your breath goes way down, deep in your gut.

Here are proven benefits of practicing it:

- *Regulates stress and anxiety.* Our entire body and mind enter a state of calm.
- *Eliminates toxins.* This is an interesting fact: our body is designed to release many of its toxins when we exhale.
- *Reduces the sensation of pain.* Something we often do when we feel pain is hold our breath. It's best if we breathe deeply rather than hold our breath. This is how we'll release **endorphins**, which are natural analgesics created in the body.
- *Helps improve posture.* By filling your lungs with air, you stimulate the spine to place it in a more harmonious, balanced and healthy posture.
- *Stimulates the lymphatic system.* It helps you achieve this by allowing blood plasma to flow properly so your body can work more efficiently.
- *Takes care of your heart.* Improves your cardiovascular health and helps you burn fat cells.
- *Improves digestion.* Enables your digestive organs to work more efficiently.
- *Helps regain composure and peace.* I have learned to recognize when my chest is tightening up and I'm hold my breath. It's usually during hectic or stressful times. Slowing down and taking a deep breath while counting to four, holding it for six counts, and then counting to six as I exhale several times creates calmness again.

Spending 10 minutes breathing deeply at least two or three times a day can benefit your body and emotional well-being. Quoting scripture as you breathe in and out does a double whammy to help you feel calm, empowered, and healthier.

Enjoy the upcoming season as you find the need to breathe...and take time to do it.

Life Right Now – The Best Fall Yet – by Bethany Gomez

We had a crazy early, cold front last month that came in at the end of the second week in September, here in Central Texas! It got everyone excited for fall, including myself. Even though we all knew it would be short lived, it lasted one whole day! But hey! One day is better than none.

There are things I love about every season, but fall is my favorite. I love it because it brings refreshing, cool weather after months and months of seemingly endless heat. I love it because I can go for a run whenever I have time and not when it's the coolest time of the day during the summer months, which (where I live) is before the sun comes up. I love it because of the colors, scents, and flavors that come out during fall. I love it because it's leading up to some of my favorite holidays. I love it because of how cozy it feels to snuggle under a blanket watching a good movie or show. I love it because I can enjoy hot coffee and tea again; with *enjoy* being the key word. I love pretty much everything about fall.

My love for fall has grown over the years. It hasn't always been my favorite, partly because we don't get much of a fall here. However, traveling to New England during their spectacular fall season for the past four years, soon to be five (fingers crossed) and living with my best friend, Abby, a lover of all things fall has forever caused my favorite season to be fall. Abby introduced my sister and me to what she likes to call "Fall Day." It is the first Saturday in October, when we pull out all our fall décor, candles, and blankets in preparation for the first true change in temperature. We visit a pumpkin patch, make a fall desert, and watch something fall-ish.

I watched a funny video of a wife getting excited for fall even though it was still 90 degrees outside at the time. She kept saying, "Fall will fix everything," and her husband kept looking at her like she was crazy. I know fall won't fix everything, but it will be a welcome change.

Speaking of change...By the time you read this article, my sister and I will be settling into a 2-bedroom apartment. It will be my first apartment experience. Sadly, we won't be joining Abby for "Fall Day" this year, but my sister and I will definitely be doing our own version. It will mainly involve unpacking and at the same time decorating our new living space with all our fall décor.

This will be a big change, moving from a house with wide open spaces to a small apartment in a 3-story apartment building. There are definitely pros and cons to living in either place, but here are a few for the apartment.

Pros:

-Less to clean and manage.

-It's cozier.

-This particular apartment complex is closer to both our jobs, but not too far from family and friends.

Cons:

-less space to move around

-2nd floor apartment, people above and people below

-it costs to live closer to work

No matter where I live, I want to try to be a good neighbor and an even better roommate. There are many things I can improve on in both of those instances. In the instance of being a good neighbor, I want to think of ways to reach out to people around me, whether it's the people that live in the same apartment building, the people in the checkout line at our local HEB, or my coworkers. I sometimes fail miserably at being the kind of neighbor I want to have someone be to me. It all goes back to the first and second greatest commandments that God has for us:

We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul, and with all our minds. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it, when we are told to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39.) It all starts with knowing and loving God, so that I can know how He would like me to treat my neighbors, of course, always with love and kindness.

In the instance of being a better roommate, I have definitely been lacking in being the kind of roommate I would want to live with. I am guilty of not caring about changing some of my bad habits because my roommate is my sister and she will love me no matter what. If anything, I should work harder at changing my bad habits because my roommate is my sister, who I love so much and I know she loves me, and I don't want us to resent each other. I always want us to become closer and closer.

In this new season, I will do my very best to listen better, serve others more, support my sister, and be more present because our time that we get to live together is a gift. I love my sis!

Let's all have the best fall, yet, as we welcome the change in weather...and in season...and (for me)...in location!



MARRIAGE

In This Together – Better Off – by Marcy Lytle

If I've heard it once I've heard it a hundred times, that spouses "backseat drive" when the other one is behind the wheel. It's so true, for both of us. He drives most of the time, and I'm often commenting on how close he gets to the back of another car, or that he didn't stop behind the stop sign, or something else that I note. It's annoying to him. Yet, when I drive, he does the same thing. It's SO HARD to sit in the other seat without control of the wheel...so hard!

Once in a while, I will be preoccupied with my phone or even work, and I don't look up at all. Therefore, I don't see how he's driving (unless he throws on the brake!) It's those rides that are much more peaceful for both of us. He drives without hearing my comments, and I don't make comments because I'm not even aware of what he's doing. I'm just riding!

I was thinking about this the other day and how riding with a spouse teaches us a valuable lesson about life in general. When I'm looking at unanswered prayer, illness on the rise, lack of funds, or anything else scary along the "road," I'm panicking and shouting out to the driver (*you know*, Jesus) and shaking my head at his carelessness...as I see it. I mean, wouldn't a good driver obey all the rules and grant me peace by doing so?

Driving is one of those activities where you just can't make a mistake, or it could be deadly. I remember telling my kids that when they were learning to drive. So I think when my husband is driving, or when I'm driving, there's this fear that a mistake will be made that will hurt us, or someone else!

Back to that analogy of life...I realize that when I'm busy or preoccupied with giving thanks, serving others, and working and praying and living...I'm less anxious about all the stop signs and red lights and storms slick roads that I think the DRIVER is missing. I'm less afraid that I'm going to die or someone else near me is going to be hurt.

We've often gotten in arguments in the car, when I take note too much and try to take the wheel from the passenger side. Sometimes, I've even thought I saved our life by my directive when I tell him to stop because it seems he's not going to, in time! And each time we take a road trip, I think about my mouth, my attitude and my words so that I can be quiet and just trust him and let him drive.

Marriage is so much a picture of our relationship with HIM, isn't it? Our spouses are not perfect drivers, and I'm pretty sure that's why we think we need to help them out while changing lanes or passing through lights. But HE is a perfect driver, and yet we treat HIM the same way, with mistrust, fear, and directives that aren't ours to make.

We just came back from a road trip and we managed pretty well this time, without any arguments over steering and braking. We made it to and from every destination with no mishaps, even though we took a lot of winding roads. And we arrived back home safe and sound, with no memories of arguments over managing the car!

I'm taking note of that, because I really want to be a good passenger in the trip of life that we're on. I really want to be able to close my eyes and rest my head, and become unaware of all the dangers that "could happen" because I'm so at peace with the Driver behind the wheel.

We've both got a ways to go, but as long as we're married and still traveling, we're both still learning and still growing...and we're better off after each trip...as we grow and learn and trust...close our eyes and ride.

Date Night Fun – Off the Grid – by Marcy Lytle

Okay, date nights are supposed to be romantic, expensive, and picture perfect, right? NO! Date nights can be spur of the moment, crazy goofy, and only loved by you and him alone! Since it's the month for Halloween and weirdness, we thought we'd offer some date night ideas that might be out of the norm, off the grid of normal things that couples do. After all, the whole year has been weird, so why not make date night weird, as well?

The Zoo – On our recent vacation we missed going to the zoo because of a hurricane storm that came through the town, so we are planning a date to the zoo. Zoos are usually for families and kids, but why not couples? Pack up some animal crackers and your favorite soft drink, and head to the zoo of your choice. Hold hands, make faces, and enjoy the smells...and the sights!

Rent a Convertible – If October is still reasonably nice weather, consider driving around town with the top down, and a cute scarf on our head – Audrey Hepburn style! Throw a warm plaid picnic blanket in the back, and pack some sandwiches and enjoy...stop at a roadside park to eat.

Finger paint – Visit your local craft store and grab a canvas, one for each of you, any size. Buy some finger paint and then drive around town for inspiration. End up at a park or back home in your own backyard and spread a tarp. Finger paint your masterpieces and find a place to enjoy them in your home! For a snack, consider gummies of different colors!

Believe it or Not – Visit your local bookstore and find Ripley's Believe it or Not book and read through it together. Buy a weird novelty game or item, to take home. Try something completely off the grid of your normal plate choice, from the pastry counter. Try a drink at the coffee shop you've never tasted. Enjoy the weird.

Only Vintage, Please – Find the area of town, or the small town you need to drive to, that has vintage stores. Decide you go what you can spend, say \$50 each, or \$20 each. Go hunting for treasures, either to wear or to set in your house. Then find a candy shop and only buy retro sweets, like Razzles or Lemonheads. Enjoy what used to be...NOW.

Happy October! Enjoy all these wacky ideas...and I hope it inspires you to think of your own and share!

After 40 Years – Snappy and Nappy – by Marcy Lytle

After being married for decades, there are some things we just realize and some things we just know. And one of those things is that when either of us is tired, we are snappy.

“Where did you put that paper I just printed?”

“What paper? I haven’t seen any paper.”

“Argggghh, you heard the printer going and you were just in that room, and now the paper’s gone.”

“What’s the matter with you? Your eyes look tired. Maybe you need a nap.”

Do some conversations similar to the one above seem familiar? One of us starts falling apart at the seams and starts accusing the other of something small (or big) and we just know they’re the one to blame. When in reality, we’re just simply tired.

“I’m going to lie down a few minutes, I’m tired.”

“Seriously? You slept in, this morning.”

“I feel so groggy.”

“Okay, go lie down. I’ve got to unload the dishwasher, put away clothes, and get dinner. Wish I could take a nap.”

That’s what I like to call marriage martyrdom. It’s where we take on the attitude of a martyr, when we feel as though the loads are unshared, and we become incensed and angry that he needs a nap! But, it happens.

Naps are necessary in our house, especially with him. I don’t need them very often, but sometimes I take them, too. I’ve pushed him before to keep going when he’s tired, and we both have suffered because of it. Words slip out, attitudes deteriorate, and fun evenings end up in angry bedtimes. I’ve also pushed myself when I need to lie down for a few, and yes – I got a lot done – but my crappy attitude then turns into releasing condescending words toward him, and adjusting a halo on my head, for me. And halos are for angels, not for disgruntled wives.

Being snappy to each other isn’t a fun conversation. Snappy innocent words then become mean, hateful jabs.

Taking a nap is such a simple thing and usually takes no more than 30 minutes, and yet it saves hours of angst and anger. In fact, very often he rises with energy ready to go, and I’m pleasantly surprised at his kind demeanor.

He told me today that I look tired, and I had just snapped at him. So I’m going to take note and go lie down for 15 minutes so that I can rise, too, with a kind demeanor, and we can have a happy night instead of a crappy one.

Snappy, crappy, or happy...sometimes we just need a little nappy.



ENCOURAGEMENT

Firmly Planted - Birthday Water - by Dina Cavazos

Water is a wonder. It's essential to Life. It's a liquid composed of two gasses: oxygen and hydrogen. We are made mostly of water, and the earth is covered mostly by water. It's the only substance that can exist naturally in three different states: liquid, gas, and solid. These are a few interesting facts about water that are well-known. Water is extraordinary and the science behind it is fascinating, but that's not what I love most about water. The substance of water lures me: its purity, its clarity, its simplicity, its buoyancy.

I developed a deep yearning for water about two years ago—I began to drink more of it, but mostly I wanted to be in it. A perfect storm of circumstances fed my desire: I no longer cared if I looked good in a bathing suit; I experienced swimming in heavenly pool in the country (salt-water, peaceful quiet setting); garden time was limited by seasonal heat. The idea of spending time in the water took root and grew like a weed. Before this, for years, the thought of immersing myself in water, except for bathing, never crossed my mind.

The popularity of plunge pools had me looking around my yard for a spot to tuck a tiny one, but with well-established landscaping, underground electric and water lines, and, finally, after all these years, shade—there was no place for a pool. Then, in mid-summer, a crazy thought came to me—I could put one right under the pergola! The concrete patio could be torn up because there is nothing under it! I had a consultation with my pool-builder friend. Yes, it was definitely a crazy idea. It would cost way too much and years of work would be destroyed. It was disappointing, but it had been fun looking out there and imagining it for a while!

Did the dream die? No. Did the desire subside? No. I told my daughter the disappointing news and she said, "Why don't you get a stock tank pool?" A stock tank pool! I'd seen them but didn't seriously consider it until that moment. In fact, I'd recently met a new friend who had one. I asked if I could come over and check it out to make sure it would satisfy. I loved it, and then the light came on. That's it--it's small, it's affordable, it's above ground, so no digging....and I have the perfect ready-made spot for it! In 2011 when I had the concrete patio poured as a first step of faith in creating a prayer garden, I decided on a large rounded shape. I left a section jutting out from under the patio for star-gazing. Stock tank pools require a very solid, level surface because 700 gallons of water is heavy. It would fit nicely along the rounded edge, and the spot gets a mix of sun and shade—perfect.

I wasted no time—it was already mid-July! Little did I know that the entire nation was ordering stock tanks! All stores that carry them had a 3 month wait! Then I thought of a place that wasn't as well known. They said they had ordered fourteen that should come in at the end of the month and they had five left that weren't paid for. I was so thankful! As it turned out, the order was delayed more than three weeks.

My birthday was late August and there was nothing I wanted more than to float in cool, pure, clear water, in my own backyard. I called my pool friend and immediately ordered a pump and filter so I would be ready—he said they could connect it for me. I waited. No stock tank. I called two or three times a week checking on the delivery. Finally, two days before my birthday it was delivered curbside. My friends who have the stock tank pool were the kindest! It was one of the

hottest afternoons, but they came and helped wrestle it into the back yard. You don't realize how big eight feet is until you try to move a metal stock tank. David had to dismantle the arbor over the gate and we wove it through an obstacle course to its resting place.

The next day I was so excited and ready! John was coming to connect it I wanted an early start so I could fill the pool and enjoy it with a friend coming over for an early celebration that afternoon. I waited, not oo patiently—no John. Finally, I call and he explained he had to drive to Austin to get the pump. I thought it had already come in, but, just like the stock tanks, they were on back order because of the nationwide demand. He said that this one had unexpectedly come in to the store that morning! At long last, he arrived around one and had it installed in about three hours. It was filled in another two hours, and we were soaking by 6pm.

It was a wonderful birthday gift to myself, but not just from me....my friends Karen, David, and John helped make it happen, and I give credit to God for blessing me with friends like them, and for making it happen, just in time.

Firmly Planted – Even More – by Dina Cavazos

Water is a wonder. It's essential to Life. It's a liquid composed of two gasses: oxygen and hydrogen. We are made mostly of water, and the earth is covered mostly by water. It's the only substance that can exist naturally in three different states: liquid, gas, and solid. These are a few interesting facts about water that are well-known. Water is extraordinary and the science behind it is fascinating, but that's not what I love most about water. The substance of water lures me: its purity, its clarity, its simplicity, its buoyancy.

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It was a wonderful "birthday gift to self," but I couldn't have done it without my friends Karen, David, and John. I'm thankful to God for friends like them, and for making my dream a reality, just in time. Water is restful, it restores and refreshes...just as the prayer garden does, even more.

Rooted in Love - Positive Parenting – by Kaelin Scott

At the beginning of August, I undertook the process of potty training my son. He was a few weeks shy of two years old at the time, and I was getting tired of changing diapers. So I bought him a couple packs of big boy undies and started putting him in them during the day. Like most parents, I wasn't excited about the experience. I had already been through it with my daughter, but I had heard that boys are much harder to potty train than girls. Needless to say, I was dreading the messes I would certainly have to clean up for several days until he figured it out. My expectations weren't high, and I figured it would take a while before he got the hang of it.

But he absolutely blew my expectations out of the water. Yes, he had a few accidents, and it did take him a little longer to figure out #2. But he did an amazing job! I created a sticker chart for him to use, where he would get a sticker each time he went on the potty without having an accident, and he filled the entire thing up in the first two days. He understood what he was supposed to do, and he really tried hard to do it. I think it helped having a big sister around to encourage and support him, and I'm really thankful for that. I was also so impressed by my son's determination and success.

Looking back on the experience, I realized that my attitude wasn't the greatest going into it, and that realization led to another one – my attitude isn't the best going into a lot of things. I'm guessing that most of you can relate. All too often when we encounter a challenge or undertake a new endeavor, we take on an attitude of defeat before we even get started. Instead of hoping for good results, we dread what could go wrong. We become our own worst enemies because we allow our minds to be controlled by negative thinking.

If I had chosen a better attitude going into potty training, I might have enjoyed it more. It's something you only do once with your child; and while it might not be exactly fun, it's an experience I want to remember. Throughout the process, I was able to see glimpses of my son's character. He might only be two, but he is pretty determined and quite clever. I can only imagine the challenges he will courageously conquer as he journeys through his life, and I want to be a voice of encouragement through those times.

I want my children to know I believe in them, which means that I have to be positive. I can't go into things with a negative attitude or one of defeat. I can't doubt their abilities or lower my expectations for their success. I have to be positive and encouraging, and I have to hope for the best. If I expect good things, I will create a healthy environment for growth. But if I am always expecting the worst, I will only hinder their confidence.

Now, before I finish up, I am not saying that positive thinking alone will lead my children to success. There are many ingredients that will go into it, most of all faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to His calling. But positivity is a must for their self-esteem, and it also helps foster a healthy pattern of growth. If my home is a garden and my children are the flowers, then positivity is the sunshine that helps them bloom. Their roots are watered and their souls are nourished through a relationship with God. That is the foundation that will ultimately set them up for success. But without the sunshine of positivity, their colors won't be as vibrant and their petals will start to wilt.

Whether it's potty training, learning to drive, or choosing a college, our babies need to know that we believe in them. They need our support, our encouragement, our positive contribution. When we hope for the best in their lives, they will be more confident in going after their dreams. When

we shine a light to them, they will know how to shine a light to others. A good attitude goes a long way, and it's up to us to set that stage.

“Encourage one another and build each other up.”
1 Thessalonians 5:11

Moving Forward – Pursued – by Pam Charro

I haven't always considered myself pursued by God; in fact, for many years of my Christian life I resented feeling that I needed to pursue him.

We have an enemy who so effectively misrepresents God, and I got so focused on what I felt he wanted from me that I was unable to receive God's love. Sadly, I had been blinded to what my loving creator sees in me and I was unable to respond to him.

But eventually, I learned that he is the one who initiated the pursuing in our relationship even before I was born.

- Psalm 139 says he saw me while I was still in the womb and that he has amazing thoughts concerning me.
- Ezekiel 16 says that I had been cast into an open field and was kicking about in my own blood when he passed by and rescued me.
- Matthew 13 contains two parables which suggest that I am part of such a valuable treasure that Jesus gave up everything to obtain me.
- In the first chapter of Isaiah I find God attempting to reason with me because he wants to offer me freedom from my bondage.
- Hebrews 12 tells me that Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before him, he had his eyes on the prize, and I am part of that prize.
- As Jesus' bride, Song of Solomon declares that I am altogether lovely and there is no flaw in me.

How can I respond to such love?

Even though I haven't always known what God was getting when he paid for me, he has known all along. His word makes it clear that he is absolutely smitten with the beauty he sees in me, beauty that came from him in the first place and that only he could redeem.

All I can do, now that I finally understand that, is pursue him in return.



FRESH THYME

FRESH THYME - A Magic Wand? – by Marcy Lytle

I have wished many times in my life that God would be like the Fairy Godmother who waves her wand and – poof! – Change takes place. Visible, beautiful change, from drab to fab. I'm not talking about God outfitting me in a ball gown and glass slippers, but rather wiping away all my weaknesses with a pass of his hand and a quick wave over my mind. I know that he did “zap” one guy named Saul and he was changed instantly, but that doesn't seem to be his method of operation most of the time...

Most of the time, God gently nudges us to remember his goodness and give thanks in everything so that we can rise out of our despair.

Most of the time, God reminds us of his faithfulness in the past and his promises for the future, so that we train our hands to fight the good fight of faith for the next hurdle in our path.

Most of the time, God uses others to prod us and aid us, when we are in need, so that we humbly learn to receive.

Most of the time, God invites us to his feet to pray and worship for long periods of time, until we are soaked and see his face of love and kindness toward us.

Most of the time, our trials linger and reappear causing us to pull up and adjust that full armor suit he gave us – of salvation, faith, and peace – to stave off the darts that fly at us by day...and night.

Most of the time, circumstances and people around us cause us angst and worry and frustration, and we are once again invited to lay our burdens down at his feet, and walk away rested and weary no more.

In other words, most of the time there is no magic wand or genie in a bottle that grants us three wishes daily, so that our lives are perfect and joyful. Our joyful lives come from leaping for joy in the most inopportune times, reaching out in faith when we can't see a hand to take hold of, and closing our eyes and lying back in green pastures, when the shadow of death is just over the cliff nearby.

There are days when I just hope so badly for a one and done deal – I pray and he answers and removes all that is causing me grief. In fact, I'd love it if he'd do just that so that I can never have another worrisome thought, never wonder about provision, never be daunted by illness and loss, and never stray in my faith – ever.

But here I sit, after having a day full of swirling thoughts that were anything but good ones. Mostly questions of “what if” plagued me yesterday and zapped my joy. And I felt bad about it when I went to bed and even stated so, to my husband. Being the one in our family that never worries about anything, he wisely said there was nothing to feel bad about. He prayed for me, and we shut our eyes and went to sleep. He told me he just lives each day and KNOWS that whatever happens, the Lord will be with him, as hard as that happening might be.

I'm not cut from the same faith cloth as my husband. Oh, I have immense faith when I pray for others, but I tend to struggle daily with my own mind and what could or might take place. It's a daily climb up the stairs of good thinking for me. I start with the truth, step up to higher thoughts, and keep stepping until I can praise His name and see His face instead of gazing at the field below where the floods and storms still rage.

No, it's not working hard that brings me peace. It's obedience to His word to ask for daily bread and not bread that will last on my shelves for months. That kind of bread is not fit to eat.

Most of the time, if not all of the time, it's that kind of prayer that He honors and grants – the prayer that starts with *Father, In heaven, hallowed be Your name – your kingdom come – your will be done*...you know the rest.

Fairy godmothers aren't real. And genies in bottles are only for fun, as well, to imagine. But God the Father, the good good father, is more real than we can even imagine. And he's at work to will and to do of his good pleasure in our lives. That's a promise, in the middle of the darkest night, and one we can take to the bank ALL OF THE TIME.

Philippians 2:13

... for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

FRESH THYME – Sad and Noted – by Marcy Lytle

By now, you've probably had lots of stores close in your area. Here in our city, Sears, Steinmart, Pier One, and so many more are closing their storefronts, and it's so sad. However, years ago I noted to my husband that some stores weren't "keeping up" with the styles and the times.

I recall shopping in Sears and thinking that the styles of clothing were drab and old-fashioned (my opinion, I know). Steinmart seemed to cater to just one crowd of people, maybe the more middle-aged crowd, and wasn't changing out merchandise, either. And even Pier One had the same look for decades, in their home décor. And perhaps they didn't change for good reason, or maybe they just weren't aware of the changes going on in culture and didn't care to keep up.

I don't know the real reason for so many store closures, but I've always noticed things and pondered situations, perhaps a little too much. I've noted that as some folks grow older, they become less tolerant of change and of the younger generation. And then there's this separation and judgment that occurs when the next generation has new ideas, new styles of clothing, new music, and there's a great disconnect. Our doors that were once open to change and listening and loving those young people are now closed in critical assessment that the kids have gone "to the dogs."

I think it's hard to keep up with changes, but we just have to. If we want to thrive in a changing world, then we need to be observant and love what we can, and detest only what's sin, not what's different. And that's a big thing to note! Wearing torn clothing or getting a tattoo or eating vegan isn't sin, but oftentimes we older ones act like different is sin. And we have to be careful, or our proverbial doors will slam shut for good.

What I mean is that if we don't keep our doors open and our hearts and ears open to listen to those around us that are different than we are, people won't come and "shop" for what they need at our place. Our homes won't be welcoming, our seats will be hard and rigid and uncomfortable to sit on, and our windows will be closed with only stagnant air remaining.

There are so many comments made by so many people that I hear and listen to, that make me cringe. Judgments against youth that are protesting, railing against those that do or do not wear masks, criticizing the youth and dubbing them as stupid and lazy, and all sorts of things! To me, this is like keeping a store's merchandise on the shelves that no one wants to buy, because we're just too stubborn to change and grow.

Of course, I have no idea why some of these stores really closed. But I've lived long enough to see that separation of generations occurs big-time, when we don't grow and try to understand and listen, and then offer prayer and kindness and love instead of critical snubs. Only God can change the heart if it's bent toward wickedness, but often what we see as wickedness is just souls searching for an older generation that will love them. They are often missing a parent that gave them love, so they're angry and hurt.

I am sad to see so many stores closing, especially if they just failed to keep up. I want to keep up by wiping my shelves clean of dusty old thoughts, I want to set out things that are attractive

to customers like love and joy, and I desire to fill my home with music that creates an atmosphere to dance, not mourn.

Next time you see a store close, pray for the people losing their jobs. And also pray for yourself, that you will take notice of your own shelves and stock, and see what you can do to spruce things up so that your doors can stay open...so that those passing want to enter in and stay, and leave with something good.

FRESH THYME - Tonight's the Night – by Marcy Lytle

Tonight, after the day is passed, will I be in the same state of mind as I am this morning?

Will I have noticed the colored leaves falling in beauty, or will I miss every hue because I'm in a hurry to leave?

Will I have seen the clouds part so that the sun shines through, or will I only gasp at the short downburst of rain and curse the fact that I left my umbrella at home?

Will I remember to give thanks for the jobs and provision that is ours, or will I grumble that I have to work on a holiday and that my computer needs repair?

Will I have stopped to text a friend to say I'm praying for her illness, or will I play a game of Scrabble instead and forget?

Will I listen to good music with good lyrics that lift my soul today, or will I read the news and become angry at a friend for the post she shared instead?

Will I listen to the laughter and the banter of children around me, or wallow in the whining of the adults that are cursing the government and leaders above me?

Will I love the ones that have left and abandoned, or will I hold onto hurt and avoid and hate?

When the sun starts to set and I think back over my day, I wonder what state of mind I will have, after the morning rush, the busyness of the day, the interruptions and the disappointments, the tiny failures and the big successes, the broken light bulbs and the working refrigerator, and all the minutes of the day that add up to 24 hours.

There have been many times when I've arrived at a destination after driving for miles, so preoccupied in my thoughts that I've wondered about all of the stop lights and signs – because I didn't recall any of them! I didn't pray for that homeless man at the corner because I never saw him, and I missed the sunrise right before me because I was fumbling through my purse looking for that list. I honked at the driver that cut me off and never realized that she had three children in car seats behind her. And I sizzled in anger at something someone said to me, the entire drive, and missed an opportunity to sing behind the wheel.

It's early morning as I write, and I'm taking note of my own directive, as I purpose to look up and out and see today – others and their needs and their beauty. I'm thinking that tonight, when the day is done, I'll be in a better state of mind that I was when the day began.

Won't you join me?

FRESH THYME - Pray Big – by Marcy Lytle

Prayer is one of those things that puzzles most of us. Does a certain verbiage move the hand of God, does a lot of crying and pleading need to take place, or do we just need to bow our heads and whisper and believe? And are we to stop praying after a certain length of time, assuming God is saying no? And what specific things are just too miraculous to expect, this side of heaven?

The other day I was thinking about the future (which always causes worry) and I realized that I don't really ask BIG things from God, expecting them to happen. I'm not sure if it's because I don't feel worthy, or if I feel too presumptuous to ask for things other than needs.

However, a light bulb went off in my mind and I realized that prayer isn't JUST something we do to move the hand of God so that he doles out favor in our direction. It's also a movement we are to make, in order to settle our hearts. And I had this thought, "Why not pray big?"

There's a book I once read called *Disappointed with God*, and the author was a rabbi that had lost his son. He was quite bitter and angry at God for not answering his big prayer for healing. He posed a question in that book that I'll never forget. He asked which is the bigger miracle, to get what we ask and demand from God in prayer, or to receive complete peace in the middle of disappointment? He realized that the latter is indeed the greater miracle.

Jesus showed up on the scene of people with great needs, and he healed people, provided wine for a wedding, and even raised the dead. But when we have a friend with cancer, or an impossible situation, we grow weary quickly if we don't see the results we expect. Once I had a friend that was very ill and she was more at peace than I was, about her situation. That blew my mind.

Sometimes, I have to daily visualize laying my worries and fears at His feet in a drawstring bag and walking away, leaving them to do with as He pleases, for the best. Because that's who God is. He's a God that works all things together for good.

So, why do we need to pray, if He's going to work out things according to His plan, and not the plan we give him? The best answer I know to share is to say that He said to pray, in faith, and we are to obey that directive. Remember when your parent's answer to your, "Why?" was the simple flat response, "Because I said so"? There's something beautiful about a child that just obeys because he trusts his parents and doesn't question them. I'm pretty sure all kids question, but as they grow they realize the wisdom when the answer was no.

I have decided that I'm going to pray big prayers, asking for big things, but not set them out on a table in order for God to give his stamp of approval. Because the even bigger answer to any of my prayers is to offer me peace in the waiting and the not understanding, which he has promised to us all, while He answers.

He's always at work, his eye never misses a thing, and he holds our hearts and minds and bodies in the very center of his own heart. If the answer is no, then he sees something ahead

that we do not. And if the answer is yes, then we can leap up and down for joy. And if the answer is wait, then we can hold his hand and sit in his lap and let him hold us still.

Go on. Pray Big. But expect great peace if the big you see doesn't happen just yet...because that's the bigger miracle.