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Online Women's Magazine | thymemag.com

August 2026



TIPS

The Dressing – End of Summer Hues – by Marcy Lytle

August is here already and while some of us (me!) are ready for fall, others of us realize the heat is still on (also me!). I already have fall candle burning, but the temps tell me I must keep wearing the hues of summer...

Black – Do you wear black in the summer? I love it, against lighter hues. This vintage wash oversized shirt is a favorite – it came in a pack of three. And this black cotton skirt I have worn all summer, with different tops.

Brown – I have two cotton tops I've worn this summer, one is a gauze top (I bought three colors!) from Old Navy, and the other one is from The Loft. Brown goes with just everything, and you can add so many cute accessories, too!

Tan or Neutral – Another one of those oversized tees in that same pack, from Amazon! And a light blouse I found at a discount store. It's obvious. But neutrals are always part of a well-stocked closet, right?

Denim – Light denim against neutral shorts are a pretty look to wear dressed up or down! It's hard to find lightweight denim, but keep looking until you do! I think I found this one at Walmart!

Gingham – My favorite purchase for spring/summer this year was these pants! They are cute with all sorts of tees, and they look like a skirt but they're trousers – and they're just so classy!

Multi colors – I saw these fun and colorful pants at a market and knew I wanted them! Did I say they are fun? A white tee goes with them, and they make me feel happy when I wear this market find...

Navy – I saw this sweater on Amazon and fell in love with it. I'm wearing it with my barrel jeans, and red loafers. But can't you just see it on into fall, too? I can! It's cozy and fits so well...

Pale yellow – I love this sweater with light wash denim, and black accessories. I feel like black accessories elevate the look, and makes me feel dressed up when I'm really not...

Blue – Just the prettiest blouse, found on Amazon. It just speaks happiness, and I love the smocking. Looks good with denim shorts or pants. And it's so great for end of summer color!

Seven for You – Joy Jumpers – by The Panel

Joy jumpers - that's what we're calling it - life's little pleasures that make us want to jump for joy. It could be our favorite beverage on a hot summer day, a place we like to frequently visit, someone special that brings us joy, a treat we love to eat - it can be anything at all. We asked our panel to share three, and they delivered:

The main thing that brings me joy is being with my kids and their kids. I'll take them separately or all together. Raising my kids was my biggest accomplishment, and the biggest blessing I've ever had. And seeing my grown children raising their kids is such a joy! One thing I love to do is cuddle one of my grown kids and play like they're my baby while I tell the grands that their mommy or daddy is my baby. It's so fun to see the reactions. The littler they are, the harder time they have comprehending this.

A second thing that brings me joy is every night I have a bowl of frozen yogurt. It's the last thing I eat of the day and for me it signifies that the day is done. And it's just so yummy! I always feel like I've finished the day well since yogurt is supposed to be better for you than ice cream.

My third thing that gives me joy I don't do as often as I'd like. And it would be simple to do it more, I just don't take the time. I love sitting on my outdoor swing in the backyard. It's so relaxing and peaceful to sit and swing while watching the sunset. We live in the country, so the bunnies come out in the evening in our yard and pasture. I recently counted seven out at one time. They run, and jump, or just sit watching me as I watch them. Sometimes, we see deer. I always think about how God blesses us with joy in so many ways. – Carole

Here are my joy jumpers:

1. Going to Port Aransas with my daughter. We take the dogs, stop at Weikel's Bakery in LaGrange for the best kolaches, and head on our way. The last two times we went, we rented a golf cart and drove up and down the beach. We took photos, had great food, and laughed at the seagulls shouting "Mine" (*Finding Nemo*). The image is a Man-of-War jellyfish. My daughter took this.
2. Finding a bargain at Goodwill. Growing up low-income, we often had secondhand clothes. Mom would find antique furniture for a few dollars and restore it. I have that bargain gene, too. It's hard for me to pay retail prices when I can find clothes I love for under \$12. The image is of a vintage coffee set. It was made by Winart Company in the 60s. One cup was being sold for \$10 in an antique shop. I found the entire set with the holder for \$9.99 at Goodwill.
3. Seeing the wildlife out my living room window. Deer, squirrels, and the occasional fox or possum are all in the woods right in front of my condo. My neighbors call me Snow White because the animals sometimes will follow me. The squirrels aren't afraid of me and will take peanuts right out of my hand. This is Pickay peeking in to ask for a peanut. Maybe I can get her to say, "Mine" too. – Cathy

A night at the movies brings me joy. From sitting in a cold dark theater, to having popcorn and Icee in hand, I'm smiling when a movie is on my calendar. It's my time away from chores and life's pressures...where I can escape into another story.

I recently got a day pool pass with a friend, where we hung out at a luxury hotel's pool all day and read and dined. It was a joyful day away, as if we'd gone on a trip! We dipped when we got hot, we read, we chatted, and we ate fun food.

Any time I get to spend with my kids/grandkids is a joy jumper for sure. Maybe that's a given. But their closeness, their conversations, and their innocence all speak joy to my sad soul in this hard season. – Marcy

Here are a few of my joy jumpers:

I love Starbucks Carmel Frappuccino. However, I rarely get it because of the high sugar content. I usually ask for extra Carmel drizzle. That drizzle along with the whipped cream topping is a real joy jumper to me.

Sunday morning church service is a joy jumper for me. Sometimes, I worship at home. I even worship while watching church on TV when church attendance is difficult. But, there is just something about worshipping with a group who has gathered for that particular purpose.

Driving alone and singing along with music turned up loud soothes my heart. I especially love performances that include close harmonies and meaningful lyrics. Sometimes, I want to pull over and get out and dance, but that's usually an activity I reserve for the privacy of my home. – Gina

Last week I found a young opossum sleeping in my shed. He spent every night there for about a week. That brought me joy because opossums eat rodents, roaches and the nasty things I don't like, plus I really enjoy wildlife in the garden. It brings me joy to hang out with my grandson. He's a walking encyclopedia and has a great sense of humor. He brings joy to my life. It also brings me joy when all my kids get together which isn't too often. Soaking in my stock tank pool brings me joy, especially if a friend is alongside to relax with a nice drink and watch a movie--that's joyous! - Dina

I'm blessed with a variety of "joy jumpers" in my life, things that brighten my day and fill me with joy. My dogs and my cat always give me joy, as well as my beautiful mid-century home, which feels like God handpicked and decorated for me. But I have two recent super joy-jumpers that have been great mood-lifters and continue to put a smile on my face daily.

1. I finished my "Pirates of the Caribbean" themed Privy with picture collages on the walls. I'm a huge Disneyland fan, so having a Pirates bathroom is so fun. At first, I hung some pirate stuff, but something was lacking. Then I realized the walls needed more character. I'm on a tight budget, so I prayed for help with the project. Recently, I found the rest of the supplies I needed (frames, backing paper, hanging strips, etc.) at my local Dollar Tree to hang my pirate-themed pictures. Thank You, Lord!

2. I started collecting vintage Barbies and their stuff a couple of years ago. Recently, A Barbie Townhouse from 1975 came up for auction on eBay. I longed for this Barbie home from the pages of the Sears catalog my whole childhood. Okay, my adulthood too. This townhouse was in excellent condition and still had its box! It was priced much lower than it was worth, so I got a great deal. I assembled it and put it in a place of honor next to my Barbie pool in my office. Huge joy-jumper; I get to see it every day! I'm so grateful. - Angela

One thing that will make me jump for joy, literally, is the RARE occasion that I am home alone. The sad thing is that I cannot make it happen. The other day, I left for an appointment and accidentally left my phone at home and thought, "Oh no! Oh Yessss!" I was alone. Uncontactable. Untrackable. Just me and God, out in the world. It was so, so enjoyable. So I guess alone time is a joy-jumper for me.

Babies are joy-jumpers too. I love them. I love them when they're happy, I love them when they're angry, I love them when they're sad, I love them when they're curious and get into trouble. I love

them when they're skinny, and I love them when they're fat. I love them in every color. Babies are automatic joy-jumpers for me.

And lastly, dirt. Soil/earth has always been a joy jumper for me. I'm happier when I'm dirty than when I'm clean. I'm almost 50 years old and still look longingly at large piles of dirt at construction sites. I've played in so many dirt piles....hours of fun. I *betcha* Jesus gives me mounds and mounds of dirt to play with and grow things in in heaven. He and I will garden together! – Laura

Three things. Things that bring elation, bliss, and glee. What could they be?

It's creating a delicious dinner from the armload of fresh veggies and herbs picked out of our backyard garden. Whether its tomatoes and lettuce on a BLT, pieces of fried okra on my fork, or a gently tossed cucumber salad, it all just tastes better knowing the main ingredients came from just outside the backdoor.

It's the wagging wiggly bottoms greeting me when I walk in the door. And the snuggles and kisses while relaxing on the couch. Those tiny paws patting my arm demanding more belly rubs. The unconditional love from our two Chihuahuas is delightful!

And it's the growing TBR (to be read) stack of books filling the shelf. Knowing all of these stories are waiting for me to discover is pure pleasure. Each of these simple things make me want to jump for joy!-Jennifer

Cousin Moms – School Again... – by Charissa and Kamrin

It's that time of year for the schedules and the homework and all the busyness. We asked our two moms with six littles, of all different ages, what frustrates them and what works for them...as school and schedules start up once again.

Kamrin

No more elementary school kids this year – so I'm not sure I'm ready for the change this year – and three different schedules!

As far as responsibilities, we have worked on "letting go of the leash." As a mom, to let go, my hope is by the time they are 16 they will be able to get up on time, and take care of their stuff, make a schedule, etc. The kids want to also have a job and make money by that age. So the older privileges are given from Mom and Dad, and it starts with the kids being responsible. And our oldest will be 15 years old this fall!

--That's how our back-to-school looks – who needs what and who's responsible for what. Of course, we serve our kids and school work comes first. So on long nights of homework and studying, we help. But if they have to go early, it's even harder.

Soon, we will talk about bedtime, what time they need to be up, and to start a new rhythm – so that we are all ready. Next, we will talk through who does what and how regarding coming and going. So, in general, every Thursday the kids send me what they want for snacks/lunch/dinner which helps me meal plan for the week. This helps with our budget and groceries. Once school begins, my husband is an early riser and he takes care of the lunches. And the kids set their own alarms, get up, get their water bottles ready and make sure their bags are packed for school. They make sure they have other things they need for extra activities, and they get their own breakfast.

Sometimes, yes, we might have to wake them up. They are still learning. However, we try really hard to not do that. The reason is...accountability. We spent an entire year dealing with (one of them) not wanting to get up in the morning, and it caused siblings to be late to school. We then took one and left the other. They learned consequences. So getting up and ready is important. There is always grace, but responsibility is important.

After school, they put away their things, and let us know about their homework. And if anything needs to be washed, they are to let us know early!

Middle school is hard to let them go and deal with consequences of not being responsible. But they have to grow, and parents can't do it all. It's so exhausting and the kids don't grow if the kids aren't responsible. It is hard for me! But watching our kids grow in the area of responsibility is a joy and a blessing. I and my kids have grown and learned.

I don't like it when the kids make us run late, it's a stressor! And there are always new challenges each year. I pray for the kids each day as they go to school. And for me, how I start my day and how we fill our home in the morning truly dictates the rest of the day. If I'm frustrated and yelling or stressed, or if they are, it's a ripple effect and affects the rest of our day. So planning and taking care of things ahead of time really helps our family. Communication is key! As is our character, in each of us, as we figure out what works to help us all grow. And finally, we have to be willing to pivot...so that joy and peace is in our home.

Charissa

August is here and school is starting!

The first thing I do the week before school starts is to start bedtime and wakeup time a bit earlier, so that the first week isn't a shock!

For the busy mornings, we often prepare the night before as much as we can, to alleviate stress. The night before, the girls pack their snacks. But the school provides breakfast and lunch thankfully. We also make sure the bags are packed with folders and signed papers. And...the girls pick out their outfits the night before. This eliminates morning stress in getting dressed.

When the morning comes, my husband is the one who wakes up the girls. He even gets upset if I do it! He loves doing this, telling them good morning, and getting them up. I typically make the breakfast, if some of us eat at home. And it's easy – like waffles or hard-boiled eggs (made for the week) or yogurt bowls. The girls get dressed on their own, except the two-year old. The girls then line up, so I can do their hair!

My husband and I share on taking the girls to school. One of us takes the two older, and the other takes the youngest. We have a tradition of praying for the day's needs while in the car, and then we pray for a good day.

I think what stresses me out the most is if I oversleep, or if I wake up and one of the girls is sick! Our oldest child gets up and gets dressed, as she is very routine oriented. Our middle child takes a long time to wake up, and it's a struggle to get her out of bed. Same with our youngest, and she needs extra time. It's interesting how our children are all so different in what they need!

Understanding each one and her needs helps us all, as does preparing the night before, as best we can!

In the Kitchen – Family Fun – by Marcy Lytle

It's August and it's a great month to have family dinners that are put together by everyone, are fun and inviting, and so tasty and pretty on the table.

Breakfast scones and Fishing – I had a couple friends and their little ones over for a breakfast play date, and the food was yummy. She brought chocolate chip muffins, and I provided scones and a “fishing” snack for the kids:

Scones

- 2 c flour
- ¼ c plus 1 T sugar, divided
- 3 t baking powder
- ¾ t salt
- ¼ cup cold butter
- 1 egg
- ½ c milk
- 1 ½ t vanilla extract
- 1 cup fresh blueberries
- 1/3 c chopped pecans, toasted
- 2 t grated lemon peel
- 1 egg white lightly beaten

In a large bowl combine flour, ¼ c sugar, baking powder and salt. Cut in butter until mix resembles coarse crumbs.

In a small bowl, whisk the egg, milk and vanilla, add to crumb mix. Stir in the blueberries, pecans and lemon peel just til moistened.

Turn onto a floured surface and knead 6-8 times. Pat into an 8in circle, cut into eight wedges. Separate the wedges and place 2 inches apart on a greased baking sheet.

Brush with egg white and sprinkle remaining sugar. Bake at 375 for 18-22 minutes til lightly browned. Serve warm.

Fishing

Pretzel stick

Peanut or almond butter

Goldfish

Provide each child a tray or plate. Place the Goldfish in a small bowl (pool), lay the sticks on the plate (the poles), and small container of the (bait) – the peanut butter or almond butter.

Mini Hot Dog Dinner – We had this recently and I had a helper making it – and it turned out so yummy, pretty and fun! It would be a great back-to-school dinner for sure!

- Large tray or board
- Hawaiian rolls
- Little smokies
- Condiments
- Watermelon and star cookie cutter
- Chips of your choice
- Small bowls
- Cute plates and napkins

Just grill or cook the smokies as you like, and make a cut down the middle of each roll, where you will then place the smokies and arrange the little dogs on your tray.

Take all of your small bowls and fill them with the condiments: mustard, ketchup, pickle relish, avocado, grated cheese and salsa...and then a big bowl with chips of your choice. Carrot sticks are good to have alongside too. Fill up the tray!

Finally, take star cookie cutters and shape the watermelon, then place each on a Popsicle stick. Remind the kids that they are stars – created to shine!

Walking Tacos Bar – This is great for the family, and you don't even need a "sit down" dinner for it. Each person can create their taco bag and just find a spot on the floor or in a chair, as you all enjoy and chat and taste and laugh together.

- A variety of chip bags
- Chili
- Grated cheese
- Salsa
- Bacon
- Corn
- Taco meat
- Black beans
- Sliced franks
- Guacamole
- Red onion
- Any other toppings you like!
- Large paper plates

You can search on line for taco ideas for chips in a bag, and there are so many options from simple chili and cheese over Fritos...to prosciutto and hot honey over potato chips...and they're all good. It's fun to make a chart of options for those that like to be adventurous. But many will just want to experiment themselves with all the toppings you lay out.

I found the cutest charcuterie board with clips from Amazon, for hanging the options. But it's also for hanging food!

Provide large paper plates for each person to slit open their bag and fill. And provide a pair of scissors on the table!

Bookstore – Rosalee, the PW – by Marcy Lytle

Our feature this month is a book I wrote just after my mom passed...about her life in a role she never wanted. Her dad was a circuit-riding preacher back in the early 1900's and he was ridiculed, persecuted, and he suffered from depression...all of which made my mom swear she'd never marry a preacher.

When she married my dad, he was a policeman, and in a few years felt the "call" and became a preacher, much to my mom's dismay. She often voiced this disappointment to me over the years, and sometimes made remarks about living the life she did not desire to live. Yet, there she was, and there she lived...for decades and decades, while my dad pastored the same church.

I thought about my mom's stories she told and about her own fears and misgivings as the wife of a preacher, a much misunderstood role for sure. And so...a lot of this story is mixed with memories she shared, but it's also a lot of fiction, too.

I think this book is for the woman who finds herself not living her dream at all, but rather living the life she never asked for, and especially one she never longed for. How does it happen like that, sometimes? Maybe you're a mom with a chronically ill child, so motherhood is not what you'd dreamed of. Or perhaps the expectations placed on you in your family are too heavy to carry and you can't believe you're in the middle of a heavy life, one you can barely bear. It could be that you too thought you had a great life until something changed, and all is different now, and you're devastated.

I observed my mom, her bitterness that often came out in sarcastic remarks. I even listened to some of her woes, and I knew all of my life that she had been so upset at the hand she had been dealt...after she married my dad. And yet, a story emerged – one of hope and cool insight – as I thought and wrote.

It's an easy read, and one that will encourage you. You'll probably find yourself in the story...somewhere. Or maybe you'll want to give the book to a friend.

You can visit our bookstore at the link at the top of the page and buy a copy if you please!

Tried and True – Last Month's Learning – by Marcy Lytle

July was full, the summer's been fun, and I tried and learned a lot! Hope you enjoy these things I've enjoyed...because they're worth sharing and trying!

Market bag – Target often has the cutest bags for \$5 in the dollar spot. My daughter gave me this one, which has pockets for inserting flowers. I love it!

Charcuterie board – It's a two tiered one and I saw it and loved it! You can hang your food, or just little notes, or whatever you like! See In the Kitchen to see how we used it for a family dinner.

Mixbooks – A great place to use their template and create a book of photos and text. I used it to make a memory book for the kids. Easy and arrived so quickly.

Faces book – The Dollar Tree has these sticker books full of faces and pages of stickers to dress the faces and add all sorts of accessories. The littles love it!

Float glasses – We had root beer floats this summer and I found this set, with spoons, from Amazon. It's great to have these on hand for ice cream night!

Luggage – Do the little in your family have their own luggage? This set with the astronaut, and a backpack to match, was perfect for 3 ½ year old Camp for our recent family weekend getaway.

Matthew's book – I had heard Matthew McConaughey read part of his poetry book and liked what I heard. So I bought the book. It's a fun read and good verse!

Placemats – I've bought this set twice now. They are huge paper placements that look so good on the table for parties. I just love them.

Outdoor plants – I found these two huge faux plants at Home Goods for my back patio. Aren't they pretty? They had a ton...

Pool pass – Many hotels in my area sell a pool pass – where you get to go swim all day at the hotel. I did it with a friend and we're going again. We truly felt like ladies of leisure, especially when we ordered lunch poolside...

Magnetic scarf – Saw this scarf at a store and had to have it. The scarf is already tied and it just closes with a magnet. Can't wait to wear it this fall...

Taste and See – I'm really enjoying this book SO MUCH. It's about food in the bible, it includes recipes, and it's a great read. I'm on my second time through...

Theo of Golden – I haven't finished this book yet, but more people have told me to read this than any other book. And I like it a lot so far...

Green Mats – I found this at Home Goods as well, a green mat, faux of course. I hung it on my fence and think it looks like grass art! I love it!

I saw this cool wreath in a store, wrapped with fabric and then a brooch added in the center! Elegant and so pretty – great idea for the next season.

Did you know you can order any Jersey Mike's sandwich in a bowl? I get the club, Mike's way. It's so yummy, and there's no bread...

I recently visited a museum with an exhibit of tables in America – how different cultures brought different traditions to the table. Each table was set up with an activity. One was smelling spices and guessing what they are. What a fun idea for a family night – all different table activities! Checkers, defining words, etc.

Have you seen bandannas or scarves in a frame? My DIL does this, and they turn out so pretty. And it's an inexpensive but elegant way to decorate your walls! Vintage scarves or bandannas are the best.



HOME

Practical Parenting – Indulge and Smile – by Marcy Lytle

I remember as a parent of young children that it was so hard to navigate what they should and should not eat, and especially hard if they were picky eaters. My son only wanted chicken and fries...until he was 20! My daughter ate a lot of different foods. And yet I raised them the same way. I also remember worrying that they would have some sort of deficiency if I didn't *make* them make healthy choices when it came to what they put on their plate and digested.

Fast forward a couple decades and more, and I'm happy to say that these two kids are now adults and they are healthy and well, and they sorted out their eating habits! I did my best, but honestly...just maturity and modeling and then marrying and living...helped them with their eating routines.

In today's culture, there is so much "bad" food – so we're told – that as parents we can find ourselves panicking about ingredients and we then become overwhelmed with what to buy, what to offer, and what to teach our kids to eat. And we will have friends that seem to do it all perfectly, with making their own nut butters, roasting the vegetables and finding just the right recipes and bars and snacks for packing in their kids' lunches. We might compare and feel like a failure, because one day we just placed chips and a sandwich on white bread (gasp!) in their lunchbox.

Or...maybe we are the ones with the perfect boxes filled with dried and fresh fruit, and only the best of ingredient snacks and all the things. And we feel rather smug about it when we see other parents and their kids with Cheetos smeared across their faces. We would never...

And then there's the day when snow cones are nearby. Or an aunt brings our kids a chocolate bear. What about that dessert that's on the table when friends invite us over? Is it okay to let our kids indulge?

My mom used to say to me – eat all things in moderation – and I think I said it to my kids as well. But I remember what she said and I've observed that it seems to work best!

We can rule out all unhealthy foods in our home, but the indulgences will show up at our table or in our world, because we live in a world of indulgences! We can also just let our kids run amuck when it comes to food because it's too hard to manage. Neither extreme has proved to be very wise, in my observation.

Moderation means that we do our best with healthy offerings to our kids – the fruit, the yogurt, the vegetables and the clean ingredients. But we don't have to stand in the store and read every can...or our children will suffer. Moderation means that we can have that ice cream in the freezer but we can definitely control the portions and the frequency with which it is eaten. And when we offer our kids moderation instead of never this or never that...we teach them balance. We learn together to enjoy food – all of it – as we learn to observe our own bodies and realize when we are full and how we feel after we eat something in excess.

Kids are going to ask for a snow cone. Let them indulge once in a while, at least in August!

Kids are going to be given chocolate. No, they don't have to eat it at bedtime, but they can have a few bites after lunch.

Kids are going to play games and be offered a bag of unhealthy snacks like chips and cookies. Open them and eat the snack with them. Just a few of each, perhaps, and not the whole bag.

Kids are going to watch how we eat and enjoy the good stuff, and treat ourselves to sips and bites of the sweet stuff, and they're going to follow suit.

Kids are going to grow up and go to birthday parties where cake (with icing!) is served, and they'll want a slice.

There's nothing better than a snow cone on a hot day. And a piece of fruit might be a good alternative. But why not teach our kids to indulge for pure pleasure, but in moderation, and to enjoy all things bright and beautiful alongside all things healthy and wholesome.

They might just grow up to be perfectly balanced kids as they fill their plates in college, when they leave home without us.

I Don't Do Teens – In Their Hands – by Marcy Lytle

I arrived at the game where my daughter usually keeps stats for her youngest's baseball team, and there sat the oldest...with the stat book in hand. He had watched his mom and learned the game, having played baseball himself, and now the book was in his hand. I was surprised and also thought it was so cool. And it made me think about all the things we can place in our teens' hands to offer them confidence as they approach adulthood.

Whether we know it or not, our kids do like to have responsibility. 3 ½ year old Camp in our family was given a rag and shown how to wipe down the baseboards, something his mom thought would just be a fun activity. Camp was so excited to be useful, and was given a rag and a task that he could actually accomplish. His mom texted that he was taking it up on himself as his *calling* to be a baseboard wiper!

Now, of course, our teen won't come to us and ask for responsibilities like cleaning the bathroom or unloading the dishwasher. Who wants to do that? But we will train them and show them, and require them to do chores. But for the sake of this article, let's talk about things other than chores that we can place in their hands, things that might just make them feel important and useful:

- Meal planning – maybe one of our kids would love to plan a meal, shop for the groceries and make the dinner. If so, let them!
- Making and selling their craft – maybe one of our kids is a robotics genius using a 3d printer and can design a cool fidget. Encourage them to create and perhaps sell their products to their friends.
- Banking – Got a numbers teen in the house? Maybe he or she is ready for a bank account, for saving and investing, and buying and all the things finance related. This can prove to be a great skill! And maybe they could help with grocery budgeting!
- Car detailing – If teens are about to drive or already have a car, they can have a car kit to care for their car, and be taught how to clean, vacuum, maintain and care for this gift – to steward it well.
- Their own business – maybe it's mowing lawns, walking dogs, or other service type giving that our teens are apt to enjoy. They can make flyers, create a spreadsheet, manage their earnings, as their first business!
- Party planner – maybe the teens in your family could plan their own party or a family gathering – from start to finish. Themed, or not. And learning how to feed a crowd is a good skill.
- Snacks for games – if younger siblings are playing sports and it's your family's turn, maybe an older sibling could be in charge of snacks. Picking them out, figuring out how many, and bagging them. An important job!

Sometimes, our teens are just waiting to be handed the book, or the bag, or the sheet, or the list...and they'll emerge with a new skill and a feeling of importance to the family and the world.

Homesteading – Be Still – by Leyanne Enterline

Be still.

That's what I feel like I hear the Lord saying to me when I cry out to Him.

Why?

Why so long?

Why so hard?

Why such pain?

What do we do?

How do we survive?

Please give us wisdom Lord for *all the things*.

Being still is NOT my specialty! I think I almost feel like being still is a sign of laziness. And I do not want to be known as a lazy person. Keep moving, keep cleaning, doing laundry, making dinner, preparing schedules, messaging clients, gardening, writing articles, paying bills, washing dishes, visiting family, volunteering, teaching school, attending kid activities, visiting with friends... there's no time to be still!

Some people in my household have no problem being still and it drives me nuts! I know it seems like nagging, but the second someone sits down and the dishes aren't done or beds haven't been made or rooms cleaned...I must let them know! I just don't like stillness...

I don't know who's right or wrong. Perhaps we should be somewhere in between, but I'm definitely on the struggle bus with those two words – Be still. If I am still, how do *all the things* get done? What exactly does “be still” mean, anyway?

“Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!”
Psalm 46:10 ESV

“Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him;
fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way,
over the man who carries out evil devices!”
Psalm 37:7 ESV

I think this means to not fret about *all the things*, but rather relax. And the Lord will take care of it all. This is hard for me to comprehend because, again, I feel lazy if I'm not doing. But...I am going to try to focus on the Lord and not on my circumstances.

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,
and all these things will be added to you.”
Matthew 6:33 ESV

I think I post this verse a lot. But it's because I need to remember it a lot! I think I have to try my hardest to accomplish *all the things*. However, if the Lord isn't in my busyness, then it's a waste.

“Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.
Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.”
Psalm 127:1 ESV

“Commit your work to the Lord,
and your plans will be established.”
Proverbs 16:3 ESV

In Each Room – The Tables – by Marcy Lytle

Tables are mostly where we gather to eat, and of course, we love to have them decorated so that our dining experience is a pleasure. But there are other tables to decorate as well, using what we have, or just inexpensive pieces to bring joy to a room!

I recently used Chat GPT to ask about rearranging my living area. After seeing their suggestion for a coffee table, which I haven't had for ages, I realized I did have a set of nesting tables. These are so readily available on line, but they can be pulled apart to make two table areas! I found my nesting tables locally at Uptown Modern, but just search for them. And consider a set!

I used the two small nesting tables underneath as a coffee table. But we can also separate them and use them as a "TV tray" of sorts. One way to decorate a coffee table is to use a box, a plant and a candle. This trio looks so pretty and you might be able to find all of these things in your house! If not, try Marshalls for all three.

I used the larger table of the group to place behind my sofa. Light, height and texture are a good "rule of thumb" on a table. Add a lamp, maybe a tall vase of flowers, and a smaller item beside. If you have a Trader Joe's near you, they have the best prices on fresh flowers! And look for a battery operated lamp if you can find one, since there may not be a plug behind the sofa. You might look around your home and find a table for behind the sofa, one uniquely yours and perfect!

Maybe you have a table on your patio that needs something on it. A tablecloth is always a great addition, and then a large round basket can provide the base for a faux plant – I chose a cactus. There are so many real-looking faux plants out there! After you're done, enjoy the view from inside, as you look out the window.

Trios are perfect on a table, so be creative and shop your home first, then your garage, then vintage and then new...

Rooted in Love - Beautiful, Not Perfect – by Kaelin Scott

It was a random Thursday afternoon. I was reading outside while my kids played in their inflatable pool. I decided to close my book and simply enjoy my surroundings.

- The melody of laughter created by children basking in summer.
- Golden sunlight dancing through green leaves over my head with glimpses of the deep blue Texas sky in between.
- A cool breeze drifting over my warm skin and fluttering through my hair.
- The soft fur of my dog snoring at my feet.
- Colorful flowers poking up from pots all around the yard.
- The chatter of birds as they flew from tree to tree.
- A cold drink in my hand and a good book to bury my nose in.

It was a beautiful reminder that life doesn't have to be perfect to be beautiful.

We don't need more money or better stuff in order to be happy. We don't need a fancy house or designer clothes or a shiny new car in the garage. The greatest beauty in life is found in the simplest things. We are surrounded by God's amazing, astounding, awe-inspiring creation every single day. All we have to do is slow down and open our eyes to the beautiful world around us.

Whenever I'm tempted to wish my life was different or better in some way, I go back to these simple joys. I think about how amazing it is just to be alive. How beautiful the world is and how blessed I am to be here. I may not have everything I've ever wanted. My life might be dull compared to others. But I have Jesus and I have love, and that's more than enough.

Don't wait for life to be perfect in order to be happy, because you'll probably be waiting forever. Instead, choose to find joy in this moment. Whether it's a sunset or a flower or a hug from someone you love, there is something beautiful in every day. Don't be too busy to soak in those little blessings.

A Night to Remember – Hundred Percent – by Marcy Lytle

It's a phrase I hear everywhere, from the young and the old, and I wonder how in the world things like this get started! But here it is, the comment that comes out of almost everyone's mouth when they agree with something being said to them. "Hundred percent," she said, he said, and everyone said. Aside from what 100% means mathematically, saying "hundred percent" means totally, completely, absolutely. And we can use this phrase and a couple others to learn some percentages from the word, about God and our relationship with Him!

Preparation: Make some cards or papers with these on each paper (each person will need a set of three) – 100%, 50% and 0%. Give a set of three to each one participating in the devo. You'll also need one coin. And a cookie or treat the whole family loves...but just one treat at first...then enough for all – read the entire lesson to see how this applies.)

Let's talk about the phrase "hundred percent." It means "for sure" when we say it to someone. Let's practice.

"Let's have ice cream tonight for dinner!" (Everyone holds up their 100% sign in agreement). Would all of us agree that having ice cream would be awesome? (Hopefully, all agree!) If so, we say "hundred percent" as we hold up our card.

50% means half and half. Like if I flip a coin, there's a 50% chance it will land on heads...or tails. (Flip the coin and demonstrate.) This means there are two possible outcomes that are equally likely...could be this...or that. Let's practice.

"Let's share a pizza, you get half and I get half!" (Everyone holds up the 50% sign – indicating half and half.)

0% means not a chance! If someone states something that's just not true at all, never ever, then there's a 0% chance of it happening. It just won't occur! Let's practice.

"A big elephant is going to run through our living room!" (Everyone holds up the 0% chance card – indicating no way!)

Did you know there are some things about God and our relationship that can teach us more about hundred, fifty and zero percent! There are! And it's a good thing to remind ourselves.

God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that whoever believes has eternal life...John 3:16 is this true all the time, half the time, or never? (everyone holds up 100% sign!)

God will always leave us and forsake us – no way! Deuteronomy 31:6 (everyone holds up the 0% sign!) The Bible actually says the opposite is true – he will NEVER leave us or forsake us.

Goodness and mercy will follow me all of my life. (Psalm 23) (everyone holds up the 50% sign). In other words, I get both of these all of my life – goodness and mercy – half and half – which then means 100% I'm covered by God's love!

There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother Proverbs 18:24 (hold up the 100% sign!) Jesus is always near us, all the time, it's true every minute.

"I can't do anything right. God must not love me." (hold up 0% card). There's a zero percent chance of this because the bible says God is love, He is our strength, and nothing can separate us from His love.

“Noah took animals into the ark, two of each, male and female.” (hold up 50% card!) This means there were half boy and half girl animals in the ark! 50% male, 50% female! Why? God was going repopulate the earth after the big flood! God cares about every detail of our life!

Finally, look what I have here (uncover the cookie).

Who wants zero percent of the cookie? (this means you get none!)

Who wants to share it half and half with someone? (this means you only get part of it)

Who wants 100% of this cookie? (this means you get the entire one!)

Well, of course we want the whole thing! God says he gives us himself – his entirety – he doesn’t hold anything back. He gives us his love, his protection, his direction, his forgiveness, his hand, his everything. Isn’t that so cool! And there is zero percent chance of him ever changing.

Enjoy your treats together as you give thanks for God and his hundred percent love!



YOU



We are yet a moment here
A moment meant to blaze
And leave behind a trail of firelight
For those we leave behind
A Light of love
A Light of future glory
We see the path you left us
In memory
In a child's eyes you are with us
In all the hearts you touched
We see you in Honesty
We know you in Integrity
Lessons we learned
We will not forget
Blaze on in us
Leave the light in case we stumble
We are here a moment yet
clb

A Hopeful Heart - Blessings from Heaven – by Christina Oberon

There's a certain kind of honesty that comes from sitting on the floor of your own closet. Just you and whatever you've been storing away. I didn't expect to find anything more than dust and nostalgia that day. But sometimes God uses the most ordinary tasks, cleaning out a closet, to hand us something extraordinary.

Last month, I decided to finally tackle my closet, starting with the boxes of cards and notes I'd saved over the years. I sat on the floor surrounded by them, opening each one, letting myself sink into old memories from family and friends.

When my dad passed away, I was sure I didn't have any cards or letters from him. I'm still not sure why I believed that... maybe because of all the moves over the years, mine and his, especially after he settled in Thailand. I made it through two boxes, and partway into the third, I picked up a card with "For a Special Daughter" on the cover. Assuming it was from my mom, I opened it and immediately recognized my dad's handwriting instead. I felt a pang of excitement realizing it was from him. Inside, written probably ten years earlier, were three words ~ blessings from heaven. Chills ran through my body.

I sat there for a moment, just holding it. At some point with grief, we can feel like we've already found everything we're ever going to find, that the relationship is frozen in whatever state it was left in. But this card reminded me that love doesn't stop revealing itself just because someone is gone. There are still things to discover.

My dad has been gone a year and a half now. Even with the good memories, that corner of my mind still feels quiet, sometimes sad. But finding that card was an unexpected gift, and it was only the beginning. By the time I finished organizing, I had a small stack of cards and letters from him, from before he left Hawaii where I grew up, through his visits over the years to his home country of England, and finally the handmade elephant cards from Thailand, the place he called home until the end.

That afternoon on the floor got me thinking about what it means when someone we love passes on. How every so often, life hands us a moment that stops us mid-breath. Something surreal is experienced that we couldn't have staged or planned, that can only be God's reminder that love doesn't end. It just changes shape, waiting in a closet, a box, in a drawer, or a corner we haven't looked in for a while, for the moment we're ready to find it again.

Psalm 34:18 tells us, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." I believe that closeness shows up in small, unexpected ways like a scent, a song, a handwritten card at the bottom of a box, timed for the exact moment we need it most. If you're missing someone today, I hope you find your own version of that card. A little treasure to hold onto.

Inner Strength - Growth through Fun – by Michelle Wyatt

What do you think of slingshots? Nerve-wrecking? Fun? Saturday's game sure surprised me. I never expected to recognize such growth in my kids, in myself, and in us as a family unit from such a simple game.

Last Saturday, the boys and I had a relaxing day. I'll admit the Saturday before was kind of hectic. We all needed to play this weekend low key. Matthew and I invented some simple ways to have fun using supplies around the house and then invited Brendan to join when he was ready. (Brendan is like me and needs some quiet downtime for a while first before engaging in family games, especially after a long week).

With an exercise band and two knots, a slingshot was invented. It took a few attempts to get it tight in such a way that it wouldn't come undone and we could aim it properly. Being the protective mom, I reminded Matthew to assess ahead of time whether or not we were at risk of breaking anything. We worked really well together at problem solving and I was proud of him for listening to my feedback. He used to be hypersensitive to feedback and took it as criticism. I struggled with that myself, which is why that has been part of my healing process over the years. I've grown in that area and I've seen him grow in that area as well.

We had a lot of fun using three different objects – a mini foam target from his dart game, a stuffed animal, and a tightly wrapped piece of material. We played several different versions - how high, how far, a game of catch, then baseball. Our faces lit up with big smiles, especially when Matthew hit the stuffed animal back using a pillow like a baseball bat. In fact, those smiles turned into subtle laughs too, including Matthew. Then we made a fun game of catch. We experimented with how pulling the band back affected speed and height. Man, did it go fast! It was like we were playing against a fast ball pitcher. Brendan and I were able to catch it and then we adjusted it so that it was easier for Matthew to catch. He didn't mind the adjustment. In fact, sometimes I adjusted things without him even knowing – part of that protective mom in me.

My boys have been known to have a stubborn streak in them, such as I see in myself. This is another character trait that has molded as they have gotten older. They have learned that having fun means letting go.

I have had my own lesson with letting go. I know part of my brain was always on assessing how it was going, watching my boys' reactions, taking in my own part, and making sure that the activity was fun and inclusive for all. It used to be even harder than it is now to let some of that go. I decided a long time ago that I value my time with my boys too much to let my worry get in the way of fun memories.

As I replayed that afternoon in my mind, I realized we hadn't just invented games. We had practiced listening, adjusting, encouraging one another, laughing and celebrating. We literally let go in more ways than one! A simple game of slingshot showed how our inner strength had grown, especially our humility. We released our stubbornness,

became more open to feedback, listened to one another (especially through the problem solving process) and let others take the lead.

So two main takeaways I hope you get from my story are:

1. find joy not only in the present, but also when you reflect, and ...
2. we all have lessons to learn and areas to grow in - and it's healthy to admit that.

You are not alone.

So have fun! If I can do this, so can you!

Life Right Now - Abandoned - By Jennifer Stephens

Meet Mildred.

Isn't she purty? We've been spending a lot of time together since I brought her home. And since we've been catching stolen moments, uncovering her beauty, I thought she deserved a proper name. Mildred.

You see, Miss Mildred was cast aside. Left on the curb - rusty brown and forgotten. Discarded with a hastily written free sign taped across the front. Who would do such a thing? <gasp>

Oh, who indeed. How often have we felt like Mildred? Cast aside. Left alone. Forgotten. Maybe it's the slow drifting release of a once tight friendship. A prayer not yet answered. Or the death of a loved one. These things leave us wondering why. Screaming WHY! Why have we been suddenly tossed to the curb? At a time like this we may feel abandoned by God. We even cry out asking Him, "Why have you forgotten me?"

Does questioning God indicate a lack of faith? In Psalm 42:9 we read, "I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?" Here we are reminded to go to God. We can take our raw emotions to him because he is our rock. We don't need to hide our feelings because he can handle our sad. He can handle our mad. Our confusion. This verse also shows us to give our feelings of isolation and sorrow to God, despite feeling forgotten. When our enemy is a circumstance of life that's left us feeling alone, we can put our hope in God. Calling to God can be an authentic act of faith.

So, there was Mildred on the side of the road. Abandoned. Likely by circumstance of a family doing a little spring cleaning. I immediately pulled over, scooped her up, and brought her home, hopeful to uncover her lost beauty. I'd planned to paint her (like two other freebie curbside benches I'd recently revived), but when I began cleaning her up, this gorgeous, imperfectly perfect 1950's teal color appeared. Whaaaattt? Beneath the gloomy brown was a tickled teal waiting to be discovered again. Oh, Mildred, you've stolen my heart.

Removing the rust takes time (and lots of elbow grease). She's stubborn. And if Mildred could talk, she'd probably question my ability to transform her. I still have a ways to go with her before her true beauty is revealed, but...if God can transform our skeptical, discarded hearts, I can turn this tired, forgotten chair into a treasured patio piece.

Healthy Habits – Cool Down – by Marcy Lytle

Here where I live, our city has cooling stations. These are spaces where those on the street, whether out and about, or living on the street, can go to cool off when the heat is on. Temperatures soar over 100 on too many days, and cooling stations provide a much needed service to the community. I thought about these stations and realized that we all need “cooling stations” where we can step in, cool off, and be refreshed to go on our way:

- If we need to wear something cool on a hot day, we can consider no scarves, hair up, and shorts under our skirt so our legs stay dry. And what about a neck fan? I bought my sister one when she visited, and it was a life saver.
- You know how kids love splash pads? It cools them off and they're so happy. Did you know that some hotels have pool passes, where you can get one for the day to cool off? Or, even better, check into the hotel overnight and cool off for the weekend!
- Don't forget the power of watermelon! Sometimes, I've just completely forgotten to buy one in the summer. Grab one, have a friend over, and enjoy this cool treat until you're cooled off!
- If your house is hot, remember to keep the oven off, your curtains drawn, and ceiling fans on. It's okay to eat charcuterie, lay out sandwich fixins, or order food to be delivered on hot days. While the curtains are closed, watch a movie that takes place in the snow!
- When we're heated up in controversy with family and friends, we need a way and a place to cool off instead of exploding. We can text a friend who knows how to keep us accountable with boundaries.
- If it's too hot to go for your daily walks outside, take them inside! Walk the mall, with a friend. Make a plan to avoid stepping inside any store until you've walked your steps!
- Water seems like a no-brainer, but we'd be surprised sometimes how we get busy and forget to drink. If water isn't your favorite, flavor it with fruit or cucumbers. Look up different flavored waters on line, and be creative!
- Take a trip to tour a cave! It's always the same cool degrees underground, so why not book a tour and enjoy the stalagmites and the stalactites?" Take the whole family for a break from the heat!
- So many sleep with noise on the phone, with an app...but use a real fan instead. Blow it across the bed. And if you have a ceiling fan, even better. Both fans blowing – a great cool down!
- Consider a “sleepover” with the family on the floor! Lay out sleeping bags and make it a campout at home, with snacks and fun cold drinks.

There are lots of ways to cool down when the heat is on. And sometimes, it's the healthiest thing we can do...especially in late summer!



MARRIAGE

In Unison – Cooking with Love – by Terri Barnes

My dad, an Irishman, fell in love with my mom, a South African.
One of their strongest connections was her home cooking.
They often agreed it helped convince him that she was a keeper.
He happily spent his days enjoying her home cooked meals.

Cooking enriched my parents' marriage, and I am grateful that it is enriching mine.
I learned to cook from my mom and carried some of her favorite meal ideas into my own marriage.
Over the years, I've added my own touches of inspiration.

Chris has always enjoyed my home-cooked meals.
He always clears his plate. Whenever I ask him, "Did you enjoy it?" he simply says, "Do you not see my plate?" We both smile.

What's in the oven? What's on the stove? What's in the crockpot...
He has always appreciated coming home to the warm aroma of spices.
I know he honors the ordinary consistency of me cooking for him.
His gratitude makes me feel loved and valued, while my cooking helps him feel cared for in return.

For Chris's Birthday last year, we dined at Gen Korean BBQ House.
I was his chef, grilling our selections on the built-in tabletop grill.
Since it was our first time, the server said, let him know if we needed help cooking.
With the tongs already in my hands, I knew I had it covered!

At dinner, I cooked shrimp, beef, calamari, and pork, served with a variety of sauces.
Although I had never cooked shrimp or calamari before, both turned out well.
In the dim, romantic lighting, our conversation lingered, socially and interactively.
It was memorable and we agreed we would gladly return so I could cook for us there again!

I'm not always the cook, Chris backyard barbecues.
He gladly & skillfully handles the tongs and spatula.
He grills a variety of meats, smokes briskets & ribs, while enjoying every step of the process.
I love sitting at his side; we talk, then I join in to make the side dishes!

That said, we find that cooking expresses our love and care for one another.
It shows thoughtfulness through time and effort.
Plus, creates moments of nurture and affection.

Do you think cooking with love is a meaningful way to strengthen your marriage?
Keep stirring the pot! —It's one of the best ways to invite love into marriage!

Date Night Fun – Leather Goods – by Marcy Lytle

We recently visited a leather store in a small town and were all enthralled with the options there, including watching the leather designer in his element. And the store smelled so wonderful. I started thinking about how leather is just so comforting and luxurious...so how could we make it part of date night out?

Here are five ideas:

Visit a leather store – Look in your area and find one. Take in the feel and the smells of leather, and consider purchasing something in the store, if you can. Even if it's just a car freshener! Or visit a discount store and find a leather bag at a fraction of the price of a leather store. Enjoy your leather goods, and then visit a bookstore and grab a book about leather making and just read it to each other...for fun.

Google leather facts – Yes! Find out facts about leather that you didn't know, then look in your closet for a leather item to wear out on your date night. It could be a belt or a bag, or shoes, or a wallet or jacket...anything at all. Go dancing somewhere in your leather. Then stop for coffee on the way home, as you both feel like a million bucks after wearing your leather and moving your body...

Dine on Leather – Find a steakhouse or a restaurant near you with leather booths or chairs and go there. Dress up for a date night out. Order just appetizers, or go for the full meal deal. Take your time, maybe invite another couple to meet you there. Make a list of leather chair restaurants and keep in handy for a meal on leather ever so often...because it's awesome.

Leatherback – do you know what this word means? Look it up! Then make a date to visit a zoo or an aquarium that has turtles. Then opt for something green as your food of the night – a salad, a veggie plate or mint chocolate chip ice cream! How fun this will be!

Leathery, No! - My husband was told once that he had leathery hands, and that was not a compliment! Why not make it a date night to shop for all things that soften you? Find some great lotion for your hands and your feet. Any sort of treatments to soften your skin or your look. Shop for these maybe in a mall, an indoor one, out of the heat. Walk the mall, enjoy a pretzel, and head home to try out your new products.

These are "different" than a normal date, aren't they? Try them all in the month of August, just for fun. And see if each night out isn't good...all related to leather.

After 40 Years – Coffee? Not Me – by Marcy Lytle

I'd give anything to join Jon in his favorite place...a coffee shop...once more. Every outing we enjoyed included a stop at a coffee shop, whether we were alone, or with the kids, or with friends. And while I don't like coffee at all, I do love the smell of it.

I remember back when I spent a good amount to buy Jon a Breville coffee maker that grinds the beans and brews the coffee. I think that might be the one item in our house he was the most attached to, enjoyed every day, and the best gift maybe he'd ever received. The pure pleasure of setting the time, loading the beans in the top, and then awakening to a fresh cup before he left for work. I didn't understand that joy one bit. A coffee pot as a gift? Not for me.

I still have boxes in my garage full of coffee mugs, which Jon collected. And then he had at least a dozen in the kitchen cabinet above his coffeemaker that were his favorites. He almost always chose a coffee mug as a souvenir on our vacations, so that he'd be reminded of where we'd gone, when he got home. He loved picking one out at all of the cute coffee shops we frequented across the nation...yes...the nation! A coffee cup as my souvenir? Never, for me.

One year I gave Jon a subscription to Atlas Coffee Club. He kept that subscription until the day he left this earth. He loved getting the little box in the mail and then reading the enclosed card as to where the coffee was brewed, and the flavor of the month. He had special canisters and mixing bowls, where he often poured in de-caf along with caffeinated beans, so he'd have the perfect mix. It was quite the ordeal, and I watched him do this with pleasure, often. A coffee club subscription for me? No, thanks.

I remember we found the cutest elbow length t-shirt in a coffee shop in San Diego and Jon wore it so much. He absolutely loved anything coffee related when it came to gifts. And the kids knew it. I knew it. Everyone that knew Jon knew it.

And everyone that knows me knows that I despise it.

But that's the beauty of marriage, I think. It used to bother me when my family all wanted to find the coffee shops first on vacation, and it took time and effort, and then they wanted to sit and sip. I wanted to do something else! But as I grew up and observed and learned to love this man that loved coffee, I learned to admire his simple pleasure and I too found pleasure in the enjoyment he experienced.

I'm thinking maybe Jon is a barista in heaven, or maybe he's harvesting beans somewhere, designing a whole new flavor for all...dark roast for sure. That thought makes me smile.

God made us both so uniquely different and sometimes those differences formed a wedge...until they didn't anymore...and instead formed a bond.

I'd given anything to join Jon in his favorite place...a coffee shop...once more.



ENCOURAGEMENT

A Day in the Life – Comfort – by Bekah Holland

I love comfort. All of it. Soft blankets, oversized sweatshirts, stretchy pants, and an unreasonable number of pillows. If it feels cozy, I'm all in.

But what I've realized is that I don't just crave physical comfort...I crave emotional comfort too. I like when my family is healthy, everyone is getting along, and life is moving along without too many surprises. As someone who's always been highly sensitive to the emotions of the people around me, calm feels like a gift.

The problem with this little plan is that life doesn't usually stay calm for long.

Somewhere along the way, I started wondering why some people seem to bounce back after stressful moments while others stay on high alert, even after the danger has passed. As it turns out, our nervous systems have a lot to say about that.

I'm sure we're all somewhat familiar with the typical fear responses. But did you know that it's biological? In the face of overwhelming or frightening moments, most people experience the initial fight, flight or freeze reaction. It's an innate, human survival mechanism that's triggered when our brains perceive a threat. The brain's amygdala alerts the hypothalamus, activating a surge of adrenaline and cortisol. In an instant, your heart races, your senses heighten, and your muscles prepare you to fight, flee, or freeze. The challenge is that our brains don't always distinguish between a charging bear and an overflowing inbox. Everyday stress can activate this same primal response, making it even more important to recognize how it shows up in our own lives.

Fight doesn't always look like throwing punches. More often, it shows up as a quick temper, harsh words, or becoming intensely defensive. Your brain has decided the best way to survive is to confront the threat head-on...even if the "threat" is just a stressful conversation or a never-ending to-do list.

Flight isn't always about physically running away. Sometimes it looks like avoiding difficult conversations, procrastinating, staying constantly busy, or feeling an overwhelming urge to escape. Your nervous system is simply trying to put as much distance as possible between you and whatever feels unsafe.

Freeze can be the most confusing response because, from the outside, it often looks like doing nothing at all. Inside, though, your brain has hit the emergency brake. You may feel mentally foggy, emotionally numb, disconnected from your body, or completely unable to decide what to do next. It isn't laziness or a lack of motivation...it's your nervous system trying to protect you when fighting or escaping don't feel possible.

Fawn is often the least recognized response, however many of us know it all too well. Unlike the other reaction to perceived threats or triggers, your nervous system attempts to stay safe by keeping everyone else happy. It can look like people-pleasing, apologizing when you've done nothing wrong, struggling to say "no," or sacrificing your own needs to avoid conflict. While it may create temporary peace, it often comes at the expense of your own well-being.

Surprising absolutely no one who's spent more than 20 minutes with me, I tend to default to a combination of freeze, flight, and fawn whenever emotional triggers show up. I've somehow become remarkably efficient at fawning and freezing simultaneously. After years of living in survival mode and burnout, it stopped being an occasional response and quietly became my default setting. As a highly sensitive person, my nervous system doesn't have to work very hard to settle into those patterns. Because just by walking into any given room, I've always just known or felt the emotions of anyone in the vicinity. This is not a super-power, in case you were curious. Being able to sense when people I care about are struggling, hurting, anxious or angry can be helpful in some ways, but I'm a person who believes I can, and therefore should, fix everything. Which I obviously can't and shouldn't. So it usually ends up as my trying to make everyone else more comfortable, taking on more than was ever mine to carry, and pouring from a cup that's been empty for far too long. The truth is, I'm not doing anyone any favors by trying to cushion every blow or shield them from life's inevitable hardships. Sometimes the most loving thing I can do isn't to carry it for them...it's to trust that they're capable of carrying it themselves.

I'm learning that the goal isn't to never fight, flee, freeze or fawn. These responses exist because, at one point or another, they helped us survive. The problem comes when our nervous system starts treating every difficult conversation, every unexpected setback, or every emotional discomfort like it's a life-or-death emergency.

Maybe the first step isn't changing the response at all. Maybe it's simply noticing it.

"Ah, I've been here before...shoulders are clinched up to my ears again...trying to fix everyone's problems...avoiding that phone call...stuck on the couch because my brain has slammed on the brakes."

Awareness creates space. And in that space, we get something our survival instincts don't naturally offer us: a choice.

We can take a slow breath. We can remind ourselves that this moment isn't the same as every hard moment that came before it. We can ask for help instead of carrying everything alone. We can let someone else be uncomfortable without rushing to rescue them. Little by little, we teach our nervous system that not every fire alarm means the house is burning.

I'm still learning this. Some days I catch myself before I've emptied my cup trying to fill everyone else's. Other days...well...let's just say my therapist continues to earn every penny. Progress isn't perfection; it's simply responding with a little more awareness and a little more grace than we did yesterday.

So, if you've recognized yourself in one (or all) of these responses, I hope you'll give yourself a little grace. Your nervous system isn't trying to sabotage you. It's trying to protect you with the tools it learned long ago. The beautiful thing is that those old patterns don't have to write the rest of your story. Little by little, we can teach our brains that not every uncomfortable moment is dangerous, not every conflict is ours to solve, and not every burden is ours to carry. Awareness doesn't erase old patterns. It simply gives us the chance to write new ones.

"Maybe that's where real comfort begins. Not in a life free from stress, but in finally believing we're safe enough to put some of the weight down." Bekah Holland

An Adage a Day - All Things Horses – by Carole Gilbert

2 Corinthians 12:10 says,
“For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses,
insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities.
For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

I want to focus on the last sentence of this verse. It does sound negative, somewhat discouraging, and even a little hard to comprehend. It's meant to. It's a paradox, meaning it sounds contradictory within itself. Some adages or sayings are paradoxes, and we must take them with a grain of salt. Let the chips fall where they may, so to speak. So, using all this information, I want to share a story about a time I was just horsing around. This idiom is mostly meant to be negative but in my situation it was not. I did feel weak, but afterwards I felt strong, just like the verse says. And believe me, I was praying hard before and thanking God with all I had after. I still can't believe I did it. What did I do? I was just horsing around with my granddaughters. Literally!

The irony of this story is that it can also come “straight from the horse's mouth,” being my horse that I rode for an hour at 64 years old. I never was a horse person. I've only ridden horses a few times in my life. But “wild horses couldn't drag me away” from horsing around with my grands.

I picked the girls up on spring break for a few days. My oldest granddaughter had talked before about wanting to ride a horse and she brought it up again. I thought we were “putting the cart before the horse” since the weather had been so up and down between hot and cold with high winds. But before we got to my house, she had found a couple places close to us where we could have horse rides, along trails, totally on a horse by ourselves. No wagon, no hayride, just the big, full-grown, horse!

I thought, “What? Hold your horses! I need to think about this. And it's 50 degrees.”

But as their grandma, how could I let them down? I “don't look a gift horse in the mouth” which means to look critically at something given to you, to see if it's a good deal. And I know a good deal when I see it. Any time I'm with my grands is a good deal, a true blessing.

I started praying hard for God to lead this whole endeavor and off to the saddled horses we went. It was an hour ride on trails with a few dry deep creek beds. As we went on the trails, we were going slow and then the first creek bed came along. None of us expected the horses to run down and then up the beds; but they did, and we quickly learned how to hold on to the horses for dear life with all our might, and all our bodies. I can honestly say each of us was sore when we were done, for days. But it was such a wonderful experience! I know we all loved it and felt so rewarded, so strong, that we had withstood the ride. And we're ready to do it again.

I've always heard it said, “You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink.” I felt like I'd been led to the water that day. I felt weak. But I did drink, and I'm so glad I did! That ride made me feel strong and totally guided by God. And I'm not just horsing around.

Unearthly Thing - Cat Call to Prayer – by Angela Dolbear

From the hallway outside my bedroom, a sound like a hoarse, metallic screeching persists, as if a tiny Pterodactyl were summoning me. Then a medium-sized short-haired cat appears in the doorway, calling to me.

Maddy, my formerly stray black cat who adopted me fifteen years ago, calls me to join her in another room to sit and pray.

It's mystifying to me. Maddy will persist with her unusual meows, which get progressively louder until I follow her into the living room and join her on the floor.

At first, I thought she just wanted me to rub her belly, but then I started to notice my state of mind on the nights she would call me coincided with times when my heart was heavy for me or someone else. That's when I get a cat call to prayer. I don't know how she knows.

I do know God uses my usually quiet and sweet black cat to call me to lie on my stomach on the floor of my living room and pour out my heart to God. I thank God for her. When I am going about my normal routine to get ready for bed, she stubbornly calls me until I stop and take time to pray.

He has utilized Maddy several times in an unexplainable way. I was in so much pain the night before I went to the hospital for seven days to eventually get a total hysterectomy due to a large tumor in my uterus. My lower left abdomen was aching terribly. I remember praying—no, pleading— with God to take the pain away.

Then, Maddy softly padded into my bedroom, jumping up on the bed. She climbed up my legs and lay down on top of my stomach, exactly where it hurt. The pain went away almost immediately.

How did she know where I was hurting, except that God told her? I praised Him and thanked him. And fell asleep. I always try to remember this incident, not because I think my cat is exceptional (well, she is), but because God hears me and helps me, even through my animals. He is good like that.

These kinds of “woo-woo” (as the kids currently say) events happen often. I try to notice when they do. And I don't think they are unbelievable or strange. If I believe Jesus died and rose from death to be my eternal Savior, which I do with my whole heart, then why wouldn't I believe in events such as these? Or a lovely black cat with the most unappealing meow call me to stop and come away to pray?

This sparked my interest in investigating when God worked through animals in the Bible. He used ravens to feed and care for the prophet Elijah. God made a donkey talk to reprove the wayward prophet Balaam. And a colt transported Jesus into Jerusalem, which fulfilled prophecy.

God used other creatures of the feline species, lions, to intervene in Daniel's unjust death sentence. He showed His divine protection for Daniel by defending him against the lions in the den. How awesome is that?

But my favorite animal reference in the Bible is when Jesus calls Himself the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. (More cats, big cats. Is God a cat Person? *Just kidding, Lord!*)

But I do know God surely works through His creatures; that's for sure. I'm a big animal lover, so I appreciate God's use of His creatures to accomplish His particular tasks.

I'm so grateful He brought Maddy to me. She was a kitten when she started appearing in my backyard when I lived in Austin, TX. I suspect that my older male cat, who was a kind cat soul, showed her how to come in through the dog door and into the laundry room to eat some of his food I had laid out for him.

I saw her in there; she seemed very skittish. So I took a ribbon and waved it just outside the doorway, hoping to entice her to play. She pounced on the ribbon! We've been steadfast friends ever since.

After we bonded over the ribbon play, Maddy waltzed into my office. She made herself comfortable on my desk, curling herself around my keyboard while I wrote. I named her "Maddy" after the main character in my Christian rom-com series of novels called *The Garden Key Tales*, because the main character was petite with black hair.

She is always near me. She is slowing down now and doesn't jump up on my desk anymore. It's hard to watch her age. We both take glucosamine and chondroitin supplements to ease our aging joints.

But she still makes her catcalls outside my bedroom. When God calls upon her to call upon me, she is faithful to persevere with her peculiar meowing until I relent and go to the living room floor with her.

I'm so grateful to God for her and for His unique method of summoning me to pray with Him. He's so good.

I like to think I'm not a fearful person: not necessarily brave, but confident in the Lord, living day by day, trusting him to take care of me and those I love. But, if I'm honest, I have to acknowledge I have more fears than I like to admit to.

- I'm afraid of getting old: the fading and falling of physical appearance; the possibility of dementia; losing the ability to take care of myself; the probability of having to leave my home
- I'm afraid of suffering; of the suffering of someone I love; of losing someone I love
- I'm afraid of confrontation; not knowing what to say under pressure; the uncomfortable feeling of being with someone who's overly assertive and opinionated
- I'm afraid of what will happen to my loved ones at the end of earthly life who don't know Jesus; what kind of world they'll face when I'm gone
- Then there are my most unreasonable fears: getting attacked by sharks, and torture

These aren't debilitating fears by any means, but they occupy space in my thoughts that could be put to better use. Mentally, I know that worrying doesn't help, doesn't change a thing. Mentally, I know that aging is a part of life, unavoidable, and I know that my children will do everything they can to help smooth the transition into decline. I know that I have to let go of vanity and accept wrinkles and thinning hair. Mentally, I know that suffering is also part of life and that my greatest times of growth have been in the "garlic press;" but I still ask God: *Can you spare them? Please find another way.* Mentally, I know that I don't need to argue or debate. I know that people have survived horrors through the ages and I have no control over what horrors are to come. Mentally, I know that I will never swim in the ocean, therefore the possibility of a shark attack is zilch, and I highly doubt I will ever be tortured. Mentally knowing is one thing, knowing in the center of my being is another.

There are things I know in the center of my being: Jesus *was* and *is* real, he is THE truth, THE life, and THE way. In the center of my being, I know that God is good, he is love, I can trust him. Knowing these truths, why do I fear? In my mind spiritual promises and truths ring out: the blessing of God from generation to generation; he will never leave or forsake me; when I'm weak, he's strong; God is a refuge and shield; Jesus has overcome the world; human life is temporary as the grass and beauty fades. I believe these words, but they don't reside in the center of my being, yet. I have to choose to believe them. These words of power and love are promises I hold on to, certainties in the realm of faith that help me overcome fearful thoughts.

Fearful thoughts can loom large, especially in areas that are out of my control, and the unknown future. It's easy to get carried away, to imagine scenarios that even illicit tears. That's a sure sign that I need to rein it in. Put a bit in that horse's mouth and redirect.

This is when I have to touch something real, like dirt. In the garden, the substance of matter in the form of plants, water, earth, surrounds and grounds me. GOD made this. This is reality, at least earthly reality. The intricacies of what lives in my garden is beyond comprehension. A handful of dirt is composed of the tiniest innumerable particles with microscopic organisms and nutrients. This miracle-substance together with water and sunlight produces and sustains huge trees and the smallest leaf. It's a wonder. Wonder directs my mind and heart to look "above", rather than to fear and imaginings that lurk like looming shadows.

In the garden, my peaceful, grounding place, I come to my senses. Fear looms larger than the reality. The reality is *yes, bad things happen, but God will carry me through. I may imagine a world of chaos and peril in the future, but God has always been and will always be with those who love him.* Words are powerful truths to hold on to, but the One who **IS** the very **Word** is my hiding place. It is his very **Being** that drives out fear, and that is why I cling to him.

Unprepared – How Friendship Changes – by Marcy Lytle

As I continue writing these articles on things I encountered as I grew older, I'm realizing that so much changes! Of course, we change all of our lives. But aging is a whole other ballgame, isn't it? And navigating friendships, while hard at any stage of life, gets really interesting as we age.

First of all, we have to let go of all the expectations we've had on our friends. It really bothered me when we asked friends over or out to do something, and they never reciprocated. I took it personally back then, and experienced hurt feelings, thinking perhaps those friends didn't like us. However, one day one of those friends told me they just can't think of things to do, and they wait to be asked. It was that simple. Nothing more.

Friendships might be a lot simpler than we think.

I grew up in the same city all of my school years and I still have friends from elementary school! They know me and have known me forever! I equated friendship with loyalty, and that being a close friend meant being a close friend for life. But others don't have the same experience. Lots of people move from city to city, change schools, even change families, and don't have that same type of bond. That's the point...

Friendships are gifts to be enjoyed, for however long, no ill feelings attached.

Making new friends is harder as we get older, I think. It's just easier to remain with our friends who've known us, those we feel comfortable with, and to reveal ourselves to new friends takes an effort – one we're not interested in making. But, as we all know, life throws curve balls and some of them are hard balls that send us reeling into new circumstances. We found ourselves at a new church in our early 60's and making new friends felt scary. But some of those friends have become the sweetest new friends, and I'm so glad they reached out – and we accepted.

Friendships are worth the effort, at all ages

Finally, life doesn't have to slow down as we age. We might have a whole bunch of friends, or a few. And some of those friends may enjoy an adventure, and others stay close to home. We're going to hear more about aches and pains, but we can change the narrative to sharing wins and blessings. There are creative ways to enjoy life with friends out and about, fun dinners, plays and movies, and it's totally worth getting dressed up to head out...even if you want to head out early and get home early. Life is worth the living and the enjoyment.

Friendships are like lollipops. All flavors, and all delicious.

Friendships are going to change as we grow older, but so will our bodies, our circumstances and my goodness, our whole lives can be upended in a moment's time. God is the friend of all friends, and I believe he cares about friendships with others. We can pray and ask him to bring new friends, bless old friends, and help us enjoy every friend that's brought into our lives, for whatever time we have with them.

Moving Forward – Quality – by Pam Charro

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered,
"You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed.
Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken from her."
Luke 10:41-42

All things are permitted,
but not all things are beneficial.
1 Corinthians 10:23

I like these scriptures because they both address my freedom to choose quality in my life. It is taking me some time to learn how to do it. Before I knew the Lord, I was simply desperate to find meaning and significance, and to be wanted. I wanted friends, a doting husband, fun activities, a perfect body, healthy escapes, meaningful connections, and a growing relationship with God. So I got very busy going after those things and gradually progressed in all of them.

But I also started getting tired. I only had so much time and energy to commit to all of them.

Now I want to be busy, but not overwhelmed; fit, but not obsessed with the scale or the gym; to not have to eat diet food in order to look and feel the way that I want, but not overeat; to enjoy an occasional glass of wine but not get drunk; to be noticed but not worshipped; and to balance great friendships but still have time to clean the house or take a nap.

How on earth would anyone be able to do all of that? Especially with a teen still at home and no partner helping? Truth be told, it takes a lot of godly discernment. And I finally was worn out to the point that I made myself slow down and listen to the Spirit's guidance. I began to realize that I can actually choose what I want in my life instead of mindlessly chasing after perceived needs. Not every cute guy needs to desire a romantic relationship with me, and not every friendly acquaintance must value my heart and mind (although I can limit my exposure to these people). I don't have to say "yes" to every weekend activity if it means I will start my work week exhausted. I have full control over what I eat and drink regardless of how much feasting is going on around me. I can be selective and I can choose quality.

I haven't figured it all out perfectly yet, but I'm learning to pay attention to my feelings and give myself permission to adjust when I'm tired or dissatisfied with how I'm spending my time. I can decide what I really want or wait on the Lord for it if I don't see it yet. And that is incredibly liberating.

*The one who made me and values me most didn't create me
to just survive and feel exhausted all the time,
but to listen to his promptings for my -- and his --- highest possible good.*



FRESH THYME

FRESH THYME - One Day at a Time – by Marcy Lytle

I really didn't love that song from decades ago that was so popular – "One day at a time, sweet Jesus, that's all you're asking from me." It was a country song and I just never liked it, although the tune certainly did stick in my head long after the song quit playing... And here I am, decades later, revisiting this string of words (powerful ones, I might add) once again.

I struggle daily with thinking ahead, and I always have. When on vacation, I often ruin the last couple days because I'm sad about when we will be back home and vacation will have ended. It's just so hard for me to enjoy and be in the moment.

Over the past weeks, as I have grieved and experienced the worst emotional pain ever, I have found that living one day at time is paramount and crucial to walking through grief. Each day has enough of its heaviness, and to add on the thoughts of what will the holidays be like, how can I make it through Christmas, etc. will completely sock me in for the day...if I let them. Some days, the grief hits me hard in the moment and I can barely stand, and then the thoughts of tomorrow and how in the world I am going to survive...surface and start to swim in my brain.

My niece reminded me early on to "look for the daily manna." You may know the story, but in the bible when God's people were in the wilderness following that cloud by day and the fire by night, of course they got hungry every day. God provided manna daily to sustain them, but he warned them not to gather it up and hoard it – or it would rot and stink.

I'm a planner by nature. I think a lot of us like to have our calendars full of trips, fun outings, and more. It makes us excited to see what's up ahead that we will enjoy. I still fill in my calendar weekly, so that I'm not left here sulking alone. However, when my mind calendar starts to fill up with the "what-ifs" or "how can I do that" scribbles, I start to panic. I can barely make it through today, much less when I pick up the heaviness of tomorrow.

But, how? How in the world can an active and planning mind like the one I have slow down and look for the manna today and breathe in today's air and rest? I would like to present to you a list of numbered steps that would give us all an outline on walking one day at a time. Instead, I'm finding that I do it "one day at a time."

Today, I woke up completely overtaken by grief once again. It had settled into my entire body and the sobbing began, yet again. "I can't do this," I whispered out loud to Him and I hoped he listened. "I can't make it," I said even louder, as my body hurt in pain at the loss and the loneliness.

I do reach out and tell my family to pray. I do listen to worship music that talks about Jesus and his love for me. I do breathe and make myself get up and start moving about for today's busyness, alone. Because I'm not even promised that tomorrow will come. And that too is an overwhelming thought. And then I look for today's manna. Food in the fridge, plans with friends later, the sun rising and shining into my window, and I start to breathe a little.

No, it's not a once and done sort of deal. I will need to do this again tomorrow, if tomorrow comes. And it's not easy living one day at a time. It doesn't come naturally for me, but it did for my husband. That's one of the many reasons I miss him so much. I leaned on him when I was weak. And now he's gone.

It's Monday. The past weekend was HARD. I came home sobbing until it hurt, last night. I woke up and didn't want to move.

However, here I am writing this article and sharing my personal experience and facing this day by moving my feet, getting dressed, starting to work, and giving myself grace to look for the manna all day long, but only enjoy the sweetness of it today. If tomorrow comes, there will be new manna from heaven. I have to believe this. It's the only way to live one day at a time...

FRESH THYME – SOUNDS RIGHT – by Marcy Lytle

- I'm spent
- I feel empty
- I feel sick
- I feel faint

It's not the feelings I want at all, and I've prayed for them to dissipate and disappear and they do for a moment. But just like a foul smell you can't seem to get rid of, these feelings surface again and again and literally bowl me over and I scream, "I can't do this!" Only, I'm alone and no one hears it but Him. And all of my FRESH THYME stories this month are about this grief journey, one I'm told takes a long time. And some days, I just don't think I can make the journey, at all. It's too hard. That's it. It's too hard.

This morning I took an early morning walk and I saw the moon still up in the sky, on every street I turned. Rounding one corner, the sun shone so brightly through the trees that I had to shield my eyes. There were sunflowers standing tall in bloom that caught my eye, and then I saw it...

My shadow on the fence where there used to be two shadows. And now there's only one. I went on and headed back home, without him. The one who always walked with me, held my hand, noticed the one lone leaf in a tree waving at us, and marveled at all of God's creation, without a care or worry in the world. I don't have that hand to hold, and I can't hear his voice saying, "Watch that crack in the sidewalk," anymore. I feel "on my own" without an arm on which to lean.

I haven't really hurt this badly before in my life. Not when my parents passed, not when we lost our home, not when others in my family suffered loss and it bent me over in grief. I hurt then, and I sobbed, and I cried at all the loss, but I had him to come home to, to be held, to be near...and now I'm here alone.

It's hard, this journey of grief. Unless the ones you're with have been through it, they can't feel your pain. I couldn't feel it either, before now. I could empathize, but on with life...and I was back to joy again...apart from others' pain. But those who've walked this path tell me the pain will lift eventually and joy will return, although the grief will be there forever...because he's gone. I can't imagine feeling better, yet. I'll have a few hours where I feel "okay" but it never lasts. Grief comes sweeping in like a torrent and presses me to the ground, EVEN WHEN I've just witnessed how God is surrounding me, hemming me in, and I'm reminded of his mercy and love that are new every morning. Even when the truth is LOUD, the grief swirls and attacks like a swarm of bees, and it won't let up until I'm spent once again.

Giving thanks helps, reading the Word is everything, and having friends surround me prayer is gold. So I keep on with all three, knowing that He is who He said He is –YHWH – the name he gave Moses, the spelling with no vowels. The sound that scholars say our breath makes...the rhythm when we just are...when we just breathe.

My throat is tight, my eyes are so wet, and I have to move today and live and go and do...because I can't sit here and die. But that's what I want to do. The grief hurts too badly and it comes too often and it does not relent.

Everyone, including myself, searches for words of wisdom that will make someone at their lowest point feel whole again and infused with hope. And those words do help. Because they're

reminders. Prayers are like life boats, ones I know that are being inflated with hope and power, and being sent my way daily, by so many friends. And yet...

Another day brings a deluge of grief that threatens to drown.

I can't imagine Jesus' grief at his friends abandoning him in his deepest need, or his own Father turning away while Jesus suffered – really suffered – and died. But neither can I imagine the resurrection after all that pain. And I can't even comprehend the why of Jesus being willing to obey His Father's will to lay down his life for mankind. It's all incomprehensible. But there it is. Life over death. A mystery.

And every mystery in life has to bow to the majesty of who God is, so I'm told, and that just sounds right.

Thanks for listening...until next month...

FRESH THYME – Where to Place Them – by Marcy Lytle

Memories are something else...a whole different breed of thoughts...when someone in your life exits suddenly...and the memories are all there is.

I have tried to cope with the painful memories of life with my husband. I say painful, because it's only been a few months and I still pine and long for his touch, his fun, his presence...so the memories pain me to remember. But I don't want to not have the memories, because that would mean I'm forgetting him. Again...immense pain.

I printed out photos and placed them around the house in frames, so his face and essence would surround me. That made me feel good and like he was still a little bit present. And the memories of where those photos were taken make me cry, and I mean cry hard. The vacations, the picnics, the road trips and the fun meals at home, and family gatherings. Oh my, they were all the best, but it's painful to remember because I miss him so much. Those places aren't so fun anymore, because he's not with me.

I even had a photo book made for each member of our family, ones of Mister (my husband's grandfather name) and the kids, ones with him and the family, ones of him alone...and I wrote text so that the kids would remember who he was, how he loved them, and that they can know him all of their lives. But, will they truly remember, and hold him close? Will I?

I don't know where to place the memories that flood me day and night. They hurt deeply, and I don't want to shut them off. That would be devastating, to not remember, to totally forget those special times. They define who we were as a couple. And if the memories start to fade, won't that mean that he's fading too? And I don't want him to fade. But he's not here anymore. So, this idea of where to place the memories is this constant turmoil in my mind from the first waking moment, until I finally fall asleep at night.

Here's what I'm thinking about remembering...I'm hoping to try to remember other things alongside the painful ones...because Jesus said he'd walk with us THROUGH these hard things...

In Deuteronomy 15 it's speaking to the Children of Israel to remember that they were once slaves and God redeemed them. I can remember this too...God has redeemed me from sin...a great thing to remember daily.

Nehemiah 9 speaks of how the people forgot to remember the miracles God did for them. I can remember all of the MANY blessings and prayers God has offered and answered.

Job 36 says to remember to extol his work...like maybe the heavens and the earth and all things in it! That's an easy remembrance to offer daily, as we rise and go about our day...always looking up.

Psalms 25 reminds us to remember God's mercy and love. A great thing to park alongside the sorrowful memories in my mind.

Psalms 106 says to remember God's many kindnesses. And we all have so many of these every single day, so to remember them would far surpass our painful ones. I need to try this.

Those are some good places to start, I believe. For you, and for me...and for all of us that have painful memories that are too wonderful to dwell on, because the person in those memories is

gone. But rather than forget them, I know God is inviting us to remember Him alongside those memories, because he has promised to be with us as we trust in Him...and he will direct our paths. Even the ones that take us through the remembrance halls...as we include Him in our photos and images in what we hold close.

I'm hoping this will help me today...it just has to.