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*For Every Season*

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TIPS

## **The Dressing – Summer Dresses and White Blouses – by Marcy Lytle**

I love wearing dresses or skirts in the summer...since it's so hot...and that season is so near. After a pretty long winter and cool temps here in Central Texas, we know our scorching summer is not far away. I always love jeans and pants, but one can't beat a pretty summer dress for date night, lunch with friends, or just a stroll around town. And white blouses or tops or tees – we need a bunch of them for summer! They are a staple for our wardrobe!

A good white tee – I think good white tees need to be purchased every year, because white gets dingy over time, and we need that fresh crisp look of new. Wearing a white tee under a long, thin open shirt dress or long cardi elevates an outfit so much!

A white dressy blouse – I recently found this white top with cool sleeves and I'm pairing it with red plaid pants from a Kohls clearance rack. This top can be dressed up or down, depending on your mood. But isn't it pretty?

A shirt dress - I've had this shirt dress a few years now, because it's a classic. Change out the belt for a stretchy woven one (from Amazon) and you've got yourself a whole new look. Add a straw bag for summer.

A World Market dress – Did you know World Market has such pretty dresses, some in the stores, and lots on line? I love them because they're so pretty and unique. This one is great for a summer wedding, or just dinner out with friends.

Another World Market dress – I love World Market clothes so much. Here's another that's so beautiful. It's lined, it's white with brown embroidery, and it's comfortable and cool. All the boxes checked for as summer dress that makes you feel like a million...

A red skirt – I found this on the rack at a market and the owner had it paired with a gray graphic tee, which looked so cute. So I styled it that way too! Add a short or long jacket for cold buildings or restaurants or theaters, and you're good to go.

Another, yes, another – World Market often has great sales on their clothes, and this dress was one I bought at the end of the season last year. It too is lined, and though the neckline was deep, I wore a half tee underneath. Added a belt, and felt like a picnic...

I hope you find some cute dresses for the season, and a few new white tops that you can pair with other things in your closet. If you do, drop a comment and tell us all where you shopped!

## **Seven for You – A Day for Me – by the Panel**

We asked the panel this month to describe a perfect day if money was no option and they could pick whatever they'd like to do...to enjoy. Whether we're a mom and looking forward to Mother's Day, or we long for our birthday weekend, or just any day we might be given to play and not work or do chores or parent or...you fill in the blank.

If I could have my wish for a day, it would be to go snorkeling. We've been several places and snorkeled: Sanibel Island, Florida, Hawaii, and the Bahamas, along with others. But my favorite place was Turks and Caicos. We stayed at a motel beside the beach and were able to walk right out into the crystal-clear water, put our heads down with our snorkeling gear on, and watch the sea life below us. It was beautiful! There were so many species swimming, crawling along the ocean floor, along with the coral! It was all so vivid and beautiful with so many colors. I could stay a whole day just floating and slowly swimming as I watched what was beneath me. I love snorkeling! When I had to stop to rejuvenate, I would like to eat at Coco Bistro, sitting outside under the palm trees. And then watch the sunset while sitting leisurely and quietly on the white sands beach.

Now don't get me wrong, this is a wish, but I grew up on the coast of Texas. The beaches I went to all the time there weren't covered with white sand but just as beautiful and I tried snorkeling at these beaches. The water wasn't clear enough, but I knew the same kinds of species were there. So, basically, my desired place to be for 24 hours would have to be any beach! And with any beach comes great seafood restaurants. And I would have my snorkeling gear because you never know what you might come across at the beach. – Carole

If I could see one place to visit in 24 hours, I would go back to Southport, England.

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Southport>

My English family lived there for many years. They had a large home on Westmoreland Road. My nannie, grandad, great nannie, great aunt and uncle all lived in this one home together. It was a home filled with love. I was lucky to visit there several times while living in Germany, then again in the summer between my sophomore and junior year, and the last time when I was pregnant with my daughter.

Southport is on the Irish Sea coast. It's a beautiful town, filled with B&Bs that serve English breakfasts, they often face the sea, and the sound of gulls fills the sky in the mornings. There's a boardwalk and carnival with penny arcades, shops on the tree-lined Lord Street, shops that sell candy floss, and ice cream.

I'd check into a B&B, then find a good fish and chip shop, add salt and good malt vinegar and walk on the boardwalk looking at all of the things I miss from my childhood. I would stroll along Lord Street to window shop and maybe buy a good wool British cardigan to take home.

Next, I'd go to the Southport Crematorium park where my great aunt Irene has her ashes. In 1993 I visited her and left yellow roses for her (she called me her yellow rose of Texas). I asked her to watch over my daughter when I was three months pregnant. I would tell her how wonderful Alex turned out. I would tell her that she was there with Alex looking after her when Alex had her stroke.

I would have to try a Curry at a local chippy (They didn't have curry in the UK when I was a child, so this would be a new memory). My last treat would be a 99 ice-cream cone before retiring to the B&B for a night-time cup of tea.

Memories of my past are so important to me. I would love to go to Rome but I would rather visit the places I loved as a child one more time. - Cathy

If I had a day to do what I want with no restrictions I honestly don't know what I'd do! I had to think hard about this question. I'm pretty sure it would involve shopping, eating (could there be no calories this day as well?) my favorite foods, and I think the evening would end at a Broadway play. Or...I might like to hop on a private plane and jet away to NY City for the day, doing the same things I just mentioned, except in the hustle/bustle of the energy that New York City brings. I'm not a spa lover and am not interested in manis and pedis. But I do love to sightsee and all the things that new cities bring. So just giving one answer is hard for me. The Saturdays when we get in the car and drive to a small town we've not been to before, to discover their downtown squares and history, dine in their local restaurants and visit their parks...to maybe end up in a seat in their local theater...well that's pretty spectacular to me. – Marcy Lytle

If I had 24 hours and no limits on money, I would hire laborers to work in my garden with me. I am a homebody; I don't find as much enjoyment in traveling as most people find. I would spend my morning visiting local garden centers; Snoopers is a favorite, but I also frequent Lowes in Hutto, McIntire's in Georgetown, and Round Rock Garden Center. I would pick up perennial plants and annuals as well. I would also pick up 50 bags of mulch. Then...we would work! I'd have these strong laborers dig out a lemon tree that was killed in the winter of 2021; then they would dig weeds and put in the new plants; we would lay drip lines to all of the plants. Lastly, we would lay the mulch. We would all take breaks about every hour for fresh lemonade, and for lunch, I would order Happy Panini sandwiches for everyone! At the end of the day, I'd order pizza and salad from Tony C's in Round Rock, but we would eat at home. My family and I would lounge on the back porch to watch the many birds and wait for the plants to grow. That's my perfect day; I love to garden! -Laura Mercer

What a fun thought. I would go to a luxurious Austin hotel alone. If the sheets were not soft like baby skin, I would check out immediately. If the sheets are soft, I would do a Yes Day. Do I want to stay in and read? Yes. Or do I want to shop my favorite local stores (think- A town and Book People)? Yes to that. Do I want to eat healthy or indulge in deep dark chocolate everything? Yes to whatever the leading of that particular day is. Do I want an evening cocktail sitting alongside of the roof top pool or an early bedtime for a restoring night's sleep? Yes. When the new morning comes, the choices that need a Yes are endless. What a happy thought. - Shelley

For a long time, I have had a desire to visit Europe. I would like to visit Ireland and take a Mediterranean river cruise. If money was no object I would fly first class on an airplane that has sleeping accommodations and nice meals. After touring Ireland, I would board a river cruise. I

would see a variety of sites such as museums and historical wonders both man made and nature made. I would experience different climates from my own and eat authentic food. I would schedule rest days so that I would be rested and able to enjoy the things around me. I would, of course, want my husband to travel with me, but I would want another couple to go with us to share the experience. A personal guide for our party would be necessary so that we wouldn't be frustrated trying to find all the good places. I would hope to see not just popular tourist destinations, but local culture as well. This is just one part of the world I would love to visit. - Gina

## **The Cousin Moms – A Peaceful Home – by Charissa and Kamrin**

The world is scary, the news is alarming, and it's crazy to hear the stats on the number of mass shootings this year alone. Leaving our kids at school might bring worry for parents. Even while at school, there's bullying present at times, and other situations we all encounter that might alarm our kids and alarm us, as well. So, how do these two moms deal with the fear that wants to enter their homes? Here's what they shared:

Kamrin

This is a hard question, because fear isn't something we deal with a lot in our home. I'm very thankful for that, as we do spend time with the Lord and in giving our thoughts to him. This is a testament to having parents and grandparents that taught me that our hope is in Christ, first and foremost.

However, in regards to these really big fears like school shootings and even like Covid and deathly disease...that particular one was jarring. We had to answer hard questions about why we couldn't see family, why we had to wear masks. So that might be the most fearful situation our kids have been in.

First of all, we have to make sure that we as parents are praying and staying in the Word to keep our own thoughts captive. Otherwise, we put fears and worries on the children...which affects the atmosphere in the home. And it happens whether or not we're vocally talking about it or not. During Covid, we were together all the time and my children were home...but we didn't watch the news. I've realized the more I watch the news the more fear starts to take over. I'm very careful what I let in, social media-wise and noise-wise. Our kids don't have social media. If they said they were worried someone will die from Covid, they heard it somewhere. I became very aware of the vitality of my responsibility as a parent.

Next, we had to be careful with our own words and the ears that were listening. There is nature to fear, but there is nurture to fear, as well. We can nurture it by our words, when we hear them say things that represent fear. Also, my husband and I had to make sure we were on the same page.

Prayer affects the home, and we must be praying parents especially over things we don't understand. We pray for protection at school, around friends, and that they will have eyes and ears to hear Him.

My kids always have an open door to talk and ask questions, to be held, no matter if the fear is small or large...or even if we don't understand their fear. If those above tips aren't in line, we will be worried with them.

Our kids' hope is in Christ first and foremost, and we can block out the chaos and noise of the world. Some people like to be "in the know" of all the things in the world. But we aren't like that. We are aware, but too much knowledge is worry knowledge, so we are careful. We are aware of the facts and know them. But we will not walk in fear of those things, and we as parents control the narrative in our home. We have authority in our home and over our children, even if

influences are out there that we don't even know exist. We don't have to be naïve, but we don't have to be crippled by fear. Yes, our kids knew about Uvalde, but we always pray together for those involved, and against fear.

Sometimes, we don't even have to speak but just hold our kids and be still and listen, and then pray together as a family. We establish the truth in our kids the best we know how, and that their eternity is secure.

(My daughter has fear of throwing up and can hyper-ventilate, so I've had to learn to keep my own fear in check. When the kids have panic attacks, we ask them to name physical things they see in their room, and it works! Our oldest is afraid to fail, so when he's super upset he needs time to take a break and process, not necessarily talk at first. I'm not sure our youngest has any fears! )

Charissa

Our girls although ages 4 and 6 (and we have a newborn,) the oldest two do have tangible fears we have to work through. It is a scary world in which we live, and I myself get overwhelmed with fear at the future of the world.

Ways we try to address fear are:

We talk about it. We talk about how it's normal to have fears and why we are fearful. That's very important to know and it's good to be comfortable to talk about our fears.

We pray. I always try to encourage the girls when Mommy and Daddy are not with them or even when we are with them, God is always near and present. They can talk to him with their fears. Talking to God can help with our fears as well.

We worship, or sing. There are several songs we love that deal with fear, ones we love to listen to with the girls.

We encourage physical contact, like hugging. Especially with bad dreams, we hold the girls and are present, and hug them.

We also work to address fears with baby steps. That depends on the type of fear. For example, our girls are both fearful of dogs. Our oldest has feared dogs forever, although she's never had a traumatic experience. Even if we visit a friend or wherever, she clings to me if there's a dog around. One way we've dealt with that is to slowly introduce her to a dog, to take baby steps, like putting out her hand, etc. We just lead up to talking about puppies and their excitement, how dogs are sweet, and more. She's doing a lot better. We ourselves play with the dogs and show her that they are okay.

Our second oldest has a fear of fire. She witnessed a control burn where fire trucks were present and it was a test or a scheduled fire, a burn of an abandoned house. She saw that, and ever since then she has been startled and worried about her house burning. Even at school



when the fire truck came, she was afraid of even talking about fire. We have prayed for her and told her it's normal. We assure her. We also practice rules and how to cope with emergencies.

For me, as a mom and hearing about all the mass shootings and world news, I can sometimes dwell on it and that intensifies my fears. However, I know my children are God's children, so I remind myself of that and of his protection. I just pray for that protection every day I drop them off, that they are in God's hands. Laying our fears at his feet enables us live in peace, to know that he sustains us.

## **In the Kitchen – Simply Delicious – by Marcy Lytle**

Simple. I like simple in the kitchen. Not too many ingredients, not too long to put together, and not too complicated in the process. So that's what we're sharing this month. A recipe doesn't have to be a mile long or take all afternoon, to be tasty and delicious. And these recipes prove just that!

Bean Burger – This particular burger is easy and so delicious. It's from Katie Lee and her recipes are always the best:

- 1 c canned beans (pinto, kidney or black), drained and rinsed
- ½ c walnuts
- ½ cup panko
- Kosher salt
- 1 t onion powder
- ½ t garlic powder
- Freshly ground pepper
- 1 large egg slightly beaten
- 3 T bbq sauce
- 1 T extra virgin olive oil
- 4 slices of cheese (optional)
- 4 burger buns
- Lettuce, red onion and any other toppings

Pulse the beans in a processor until coarsely chopped, then transfer to a bowl. Pulse the walnuts til finely chopped then transfer to the bowl with the beans. Add the panko, salt, onion and garlic powder, ¼ t pepper, the egg and 2 T bbq sauce. Divide into four equal parts, shape into patties and place in fridge 30 minutes.

Heat nonstick skillet over medium heat, add olive oil, brush tops with 1 T bbq sauce. Cook sauce side down for 3 minutes, flip and add cheese if desired. Cover and cook til cheese is melted and burgers heated through, about 3 minutes.

Gnocchi Gratin – Oh my, this was delicious and so easy. We both loved the flavor so much!

- 2 T unsalted butter
- ½ med butternut squash peeled, seeded and cut into ½ in pieces (I bought it already diced)
- 3 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- 1 T roughly chopped fresh sage
- Kosher salt
- 1 ¼ c low sodium chicken broth or water
- 1 bunch kale, stemmed and roughly chopped (about 8 cups)
- 1 17.5 oz pkg potato gnocchi
- ¾ c grated parmesan cheese or pecorino romano

Melt 1 T butter in ovenproof skillet over med heat. Add the squash and cook, stirring til slightly soft and golden, 5-8 minutes. Add garlic, sage, and 1 t salt. Cook until garlic is soft, about 2 minutes.

Preheat broiler. Add broth to skillet and when it simmers, stir in kale til wilts, about 2 minutes. Add gnocchi, stirring to coat. Cover and cook til gnocchi is tender, about 5 minutes. Uncover and stir in ¼ c parmesan and 1 T butter. Sprinkle with remaining ½ c parmesan and transfer to broiler til golden and bubbly, about 3 minutes.

Greens and Rice Bowl – So pretty in the bowl, so tasty, and we will so eat this again!

Rice or grain of your choice, cooked and seasoned

- 1 c kale, chopped
- 1 c broccoli florets
- 1 c chopped brussels sprouts
- ½ c chopped carrots
- ¼ c chopped parsley
- ¼ c almonds
- 1 T sunflower seeds
- 1 ½ T olive oil
- Juice of 1 lemon
- ½ T Dijon mustard
- 1 t maple syrup
- Sea salt
- Fresh ground pepper

Combine kale, broccoli, brussels, carrots, parsley, almonds and seeds in a food processor, and pulse til roughly chopped.

In a small bowl whisk the olive oil, lemon juice, mustard, maple syrup, S & P til combined.

Fluff the rice/grain and divide between 2 bowls. Top with the salad mixture and drizzle the dressing over top.

Cumin Pomegranate Hummus – Jazzing up hummus is so fun and there are SO many ways to do it. Using store bought or homemade, here's a delicious and pretty serving of hummus:

- Hummus
- 1 t ground cumin
- Pomegranate seeds
- Orange zest

Make or buy your hummus and stir in the cumin. Spread in a shallow bowl and top with the seeds and zest.

Parfait – Simple, pretty, and a great throw-together dessert for you and friends or company or family...and you can make it more...but not any less!

Pound cake (I bought Entenmann's in a box)

Fresh Strawberries

A square of dark chocolate

Just cut the cake and the strawberries into bites and layer in glass jars or glasses. Add a square of chocolate if you wish. That's it!

Fried Squash – When is the last time you had fried yellow squash and Ranch dressing for dipping? It's a spring/summer fave here:

- Yellow squash, sliced about ¼ thick
- Milk
- Egg
- Flour
- Salt and pepper
- Ranch dressing
- Oil for frying

In a cast iron skillet, heat about ½ inch of oil. While it's heating, set up bowls - one with beaten egg with milk mix, one with flour, and then a plate to lay each slice until ready to fry. Dip the slices in the milk and then the flour (can dip twice if you want). Don't fry until the oil is hot (you can drop in one breaded slice to see if it sizzles). Don't crowd the pan, but fry in bunches and drain on paper towels. Serve with Ranch.

Maple Lemon Walnuts – Lately, I've been enjoying spicing up different nuts with flavors. They're great eaten alone, or scattered over veggies or a salad, or mixed in with popcorn!

4 T maple syrup

2 T lemon zest

2 cups walnut

Stir the above together to combine. Spread on a parchment lined baking sheet. Bake at 350 degrees until fragrant and nuts start to brown, 8-10 minutes...cool on a wire rack.

Lettuce wraps – We had leftover chicken salad and I didn't want to eat it with crackers or on bread. We also had lettuce from the garden, so this was it:

- Big lettuce leaves (soft ones that easily roll up)
- Chicken salad or tuna salad

Just place chicken salad on the leaf and roll. Line up in a dish. Great for packing for a picnic, too! We had sliced dill pickles and pecans on the side!

## **Last Month's Learning – May 2023**

Every month we live we learn, and sharing what we learn is fun, and learning from others is the best. So here's my list of what I learned these past few weeks:

My husband loves to mix Italian sodas with club soda for a refreshing drink – 2/3 Italian to 1/3 club. He says it's awesome.

Save broken jewelry and mismatched earrings and bag it up for the little photo booth at their parties. They'll love it! A store we visited was selling this in little bags.

Did you know Ikea has amazing closet organization ideas? My daughter just had hers redone...

Legos are awesome, and we just recently found the aquarium set – what a cool one!

We recently tried cookies from atx sweets – oh my goodness – they're good! And big!

At a market we bought the Sunbeam Veranda rose – it's really beautiful and tall!

I found the CUTEST scarves for \$1.97 each at Walmart in the accessories section – in cool spring patterns – great for headbands as well!

Redwood and Co makes the best smelling candles – not cheap – but the scents are fantastic!

Leftover lettuce and leftover chicken? Make lettuce wraps – easy to make and great for taking on the go!

You can purchase those balloon arches on Amazon – to make. They're not too difficult and look great at parties!

Walmart has such a pretty table runner by Better Homes and Gardens that's reversible – love it so much!

Large mason jars are great for holding dips or homemade butters, for serving and storing. Like pimiento cheese or almond butter!

Check out [@lamplightfiberart](#) for her pretty jewelry. I particularly love the necklaces and earrings – very affordable and well made.

Twisting two scarves together makes for a great headband – thick, stays in place, and is comfy! You just fold each one in a triangle and roll. Then twist the two together, tie around your hair at the base of your neck – and you're done!

I learned what charoset is, and how to pronounce it, at last month's Passover dinner – look it up!

If you want a sun-kissed glow on your face, mix your foundation with tanning cream – it works.

Amazon has the coolest fire pit – it makes into a grill for cooking – and closes up as a table – or just open for a fire pit! We love it!

Those little yard spinners from Dollar Tree look cute in outdoor plants, in a group!

## **SUGAR + Spice** Brush Up...on Brushes! – by Angela Dolbear

Makeup brushes are a huge part of my cosmetic life. I use my fingers a lot, but there are a few important makeup jobs that only a good brush can perform.

I have a drawer full of brushes. Many are duplicates because they need to be cleaned. Cleaning makeup brushes never gets checked off on my “To Do” List. I will get around to it one day, especially when my favorite brushes get dirty.

Speaking of favorites, [Luxie](#) and Complex Culture are my Holy Grail brush brands. Sadly, Complex Culture has since closed their doors, but their brushes can be purchased on Poshmark and Ebay.

### **Blending**

I don't even store my blending brush in the one of several brush holders I have on my makeup desk. I use it that much. I always go over the edges of my eyeshadow with a blending brush to soften my eye makeup.

Blending hack: Keep a very light matte shadow on hand to lightly blend the outer edges of your eye makeup. I use a cream or vanilla color...not white, which tends to look too harsh.

### **Crease brush**

Swiping a medium to dark shade in the crease of your eye lid opens up the eye. I like to use a matte color, since my eyeshadow base is usually a sparkly [Super Shock shadow](#) from ColourPop.

Crease brush hack: If your eye makeup is too sparkly for your taste, use a crease brush to swipe a matte color over the sparkle shadow to tone down the shine. A little sparkle will still come through, but much less than before.

### **Other brushes**

Blush brushes: I use them for bronzer/contouring, blush and highlighter.

Big fluffy brush: I use a brush for powder; both face powder and setting powder. A brush works much better than a puff or a sponge. Brushes evenly distribute powder as well as brush off any excess product.

### **Washing Brushes**

When I do get around to washing my makeup brushes, I use a gentle shampoo, like baby shampoo. I wet the brush, lather with shampoo, and rinse. And repeat. And then repeat again, until the brush rinses clean. Rinse well and let dry....and dry....and dry. Quality makeup brushes take a couple days to dry, especially the larger brushes, since the bristles are thick and compact. But then they are clean. Yay! Check it off the list.

The beauty of blessings to you!

*Angela Dolbear, Beauty Editor, is the author of contemporary spiritual novels, such as [THE GARDEN KEY](#) Series, and [THE TORMENTOR'S TALE](#), as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). And she loves writing and recording songs with*



her husband, Tim --listen on [Sound Cloud](#). She is also a self-proclaimed beauty junkie and has been since long before her mother allowed her to start wearing makeup at the age of 14. She keeps UPS and the USPS busy delivering small boxes on a regular basis from Ulta, Sephora, Amazon, and many independent cosmetics companies to her home Nashville, TN. Please connect with her at [www.AngelaDolbear.com](http://www.AngelaDolbear.com)



HOME

## **Practical Parenting – Grown Daughters and Sons – by Marcy Lytle**

Every month, this column has mostly been to encourage parents of littles with fun and family ideas or to share tips and tricks in managing those growing up years. But I thought this month, I'd write to those of us with grown kids...gone and away from home...because it's hard to know how to be a parent when your kids no longer live with you. But your heart aches and yearns for them to listen and still learn...

Last Friday my daughter invited me to help decorate for sweet Ayla's 10<sup>th</sup> birthday party. We've transitioned to the grandkids no longer having parties where all of the adults are invited (too much food to prepare!) to just the kids...a few from school...and that's it. And at first notice, I was sad that the family birthday gatherings for the kids' parties were no more.

I remember being sad at lots of things as my daughter got married and moved on to start her own life with her husband and kiddos. It's hard on moms to transition from a parent that instructs, teaches and warns...to a parent that ...wait...what does a parent do then?

While in my mind I thought it would be cool if my grown kids still came to me for instruction, and listened to every word and learned...I observed that they preferred to talk to their peers as they were grown. Oh, yes, I get occasional calls from them to pray for this and that, to unload their frustrations, etc. but mostly they're navigating adulthood without my hovering over them. And that's a good thing, for them.

For me, and for all of us moms, we're not sure what our place is. It seems different in every family, and we even still compare those parents over there and how they're connecting with their grown kids, with what our reality looks like...and that's not wise.

So, here's what I've learned so far (I'm still learning):

- I need to have my own interests and friends. And that's not always easy, but it's the truth.
- I need to be thankful for my kids' independence, not tied to my "apron strings." This can be hard.
- I need to enjoy spending time with them, without judgment or criticism or instruction.
- I need to affirm them, and pray about anything that concerns me. He's their keeper, not me.
- I need to always be available as Mom, constant as Friend, and faithful as Warrior.

It's not worth it to ridicule our grown kids, even in jest. We recently watched a Hallmark show called Darrow & Darrow where an overbearing, self-centered, critical mom moves in with her grown daughter and granddaughter. Oh my, the things she says to her daughter! She constantly gripes about her curtains...relentlessly. And that's only one of the things! It's made to be comical, but that sort of relationship will quickly sour (and maybe for good) if that's reality with our grown kids.

If you're a parent of grown sons and daughters, that relationship you have with Him needs to be stronger than ever. He needs to meet your needs for all things relational, for purpose in life, and

for joy. The kind of joy that lasts, and is not dependent on your kids. And while they may break your heart as an adult at times; those kids belong to Him because you gave them to Him as babies, and you raised them the best you could. Let Him take care of the rest of their lives and for you...and give you rest and joy, as well.

## **I Don't Do Teens – Are They Swifties? – by Marcy Lytle**

Let's talk about Taylor Swift. Are your kids "swifties?" It appears that there are grown people all the way down to toddlers that scream and mimic Taylor Swift's moves and lyrics. She's on tour right now, and I've watched and listened to multiple moms on social media talk about the amazing concert Taylor puts on, as well as hopes and wishes that their daughters would have been at the concert. One mom saw a dad at the concert with his young daughter, and the mom thought it was so cool.

I get it. I remember going to concerts when I was a kid. And my daughter went to hear the Backstreet Boys. Music has always been a part of my life, and my brother and I went to so many cool concerts as we were growing up together. Now that I look back at some of the songs we listened to, they weren't great lyrics about life and love, but we went and enjoyed ourselves. My daughter was on cloud nine when she went with her friends, as well.

Now I'm a grandmother, oh my. But I remember all of the fun of getting dressed up, getting to hear someone famous, and honestly just idolizing those that sang on the stage. I think lots of girls and boys hope to grow up to be famous, have a huge fan base and yes...wear costumes and make the moves that make others swoon.

I watched pieces of The Eras Tour of Taylor Swift, and I too was amazed at the special effects, the multiple costume changes, the dances – oh my, the dances! One particular song about revenge, however, made me cringe. Not only are the lyrics about "getting back" at a once lover boy...but the moves in part of the song were what I'd call *not for any eyes to see*. Am I coming from the eyes of an older person? Well, yes. But we olders remember when we were younger, so it's not even that. It's just that there is SO MUCH out there to lure our kids into danger.

So...rather than write a story and urge parents to keep their kids from concerts, I'd just make sure we are all aware and maybe think about these things:

- Check the lyrics, listen to the songs yourself, and talk to your teens about them.
- Check your teens' hearts and see where their allegiance lies...in their identity...before a concert.
- Check the visuals that might be present at the concerts. Can your teen handle butts gyrating sexually to lyrics that are hateful? Does it matter? It's something to think about.

We don't have to squelch or go completely religious on our teens, because they do live in this world among this type of hype at school, on the playground, in the malls and everywhere. It's on the mannequins, it's playing through their earbuds, and is definitely on all of social media. It surrounds our kids.

What "it" am I referring to?

The performance, the glam, the "me" attitude, the get back revenge, and the sex. Oh yes, that.

Teens can have fun and listen to music, if we the parents are involved, aware, care, pray and parent wisely. And it's not easy. We enjoy a good concert as well, and have to pick our way through lyrics, and all the things.

Helping our kids navigate the lure of glam and music and popularity might be one of the biggest challenges of parenting. But talking to them, praying with them, being a good example in front of them and allowing them to hear God and make decisions as they can, on their own. Well, that's pure gold.

But doing nothing, and sending them out as we ourselves are unaware and naïve...or holding them home shaking a finger...won't end up faring well for our kids or us.

It's definitely something to think about to keep our kids "safe and sound." (That's one of Taylor's songs...listen to it...with your kids and dance around if you want...and talk about it!)

## **An Adage a Day - Iron Sharpens Iron – by Carole Gilbert**

They say iron sharpens iron.  
Are we wasting daylight?  
We know time is ticking.  
Are we ready to put up a good fight?

I like to think my time's worth money.  
But really it doesn't belong to me.  
If I give it all to God.  
He will help me to live joyfully.

Sometimes we put up a front,  
So others will not know,  
That we're really walking on eggshells,  
And missing the joy we have and could show.

Let's get up out of our rut.  
Familiarity breeds contempt.  
Let's put up a good fight,  
And let God's love preempt.

That joy forementioned only comes,  
Through Jesus Christ our King!  
Sing and shout praises to Him.  
Through all, let your voices ring!

It's music to our ears.  
We're in the nick of time.  
Gratefully for us,  
He is the branch; we are the vine.

Iron sharpens iron.  
Are we wasting daylight?  
It's time to get back to basics.  
It's time to put up a good fight.

Proverbs 27:17 says, *Iron sharpens iron,  
and one man sharpens another.*

The proverb, "Iron sharpens iron," means the same today as it did when it first began after Solomon wrote it. Starting from a Bible verse, this phrase is so widely used in different areas of our lives as encouragement for our families, friends, jobs, and even hobbies. We see it on

posters, t-shirts, plaques, and in the Bible. It gives us support for our friendships, and helps us know how we are meant to be supportive to each other.

It also shows that we are to be accountable and help each other grow. And sometimes God gives the one who sharpens or uses us as the sharpener. Either way, both are made stronger and sharper in the process. God wants us to love and grow together, therefore sharpening our love and growth for Him. This gives Him glory. It's hard to receive anything good and helpful and promising from something dull.

So, I need you to be my iron.  
And I hope to be yours, too.  
Together, as iron sharpens iron,  
Let's encounter what more we can do.

Photo courtesy of Nathan Gilbert



## **Tiny Living – A Space for Elves** – by Leyanne Enterline

Living tiny means the bedroom is pint-sized!

It has been quite the challenge to stay organized in such a small space with two people sharing it! The bed, of course, takes up almost all of the room and then there are two small “closets” (if you can call them that) on each side. It does not fit much for hanging, so most of our clothing must be folded as tight as possible and put under the bed.

We try to go through our clothes every so often to donate and free up space. Sometimes I just take everything out and just start over with reorganizing. It gets crazy under the bed and sometimes a pile of clothes is so high that we can't close the bed. That's when we know it's time to donate!

We try putting those command sticky-things on the wall to help hold up coats, belts, and my purses. However, when it's humid those things just fly off the wall and a huge mess is made. So... those items are placed creatively on the window sill or door frame. It definitely looks a bit chaotic.

I have a dresser that that blocks the main door to the bedroom so we have to enter our room through the bathroom, instead. The dresser holds a lot of the kids' school items, which is helpful, but also tricky. It's hard to access, because all my shoes are piled high on the ground which makes opening the dresser drawers a challenge. I wish I could figure out something else to do with my shoes, but I don't have an idea almost seven years later! We have an ottoman in the living area that the boys and my husband keep their shoes in, but with all their stuff it just won't fit all of mine, as well.

We have some cabinet space above the bed which houses my book collection that I will read at some point! There are some other random office items in those cabinets too, but that's all they can fit.

I feel like we're giants living in a space for elves! I think that camping in a travel trailer sounds fun for the weekend, but four people living in one long-term has proven to be quite a challenge that we experience daily! We are constantly trying to figure out this tiny space!

Remember, love grows best in tiny spaces...

## **A Night to Remember – Looking for Treasure – by Marcy Lytle**

Last month on Easter, we had a scavenger hunt instead of the traditional egg hunt, as our kiddos are getting older and finished last year's egg hunt in 60 seconds flat! The scavenger hunt was a list of toys, treats and candies that the kids had to find "in order" and it took a while, and they seemed to love it! So I thought for the month of May, why not have a scavenger hunt for the devo time?

**Preparation:** Write the following words on pieces of paper and hide them in the house or yard (remember where you hid them – make a note!) Provide one basket for the kids to use, as they all together search for their hidden treasures to place in the basket. WISDOM, KNOWLEDGE, AND KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. Then also hide a treat, a little empty box, and a photo of someone dear. Make up clues on where to find each one.

The Bible says we are God's treasured possession. What is one of your most treasured (something of great value to you) possessions? (Ask kids to share the item, and why). It often doesn't matter how much a thing costs, but more what it means to us that makes it treasured. God finds us to be a treasure because he loves what he has created and we belong to him!

Let's go on a treasure hunt as we find out more about treasures:

Wisdom - Do you know what wisdom is? It's making decisions that are good and not foolish, based on instructions and guidance from parents and God. (Give a clue and have the kids search for WISDOM)

Proverbs 2 says to look for wisdom and search for it "as for hidden treasure."

Knowledge – Knowledge we gain from learning and listening and understanding what we hear or read. What's your favorite subject to learn about? (Give a clue as the kids search for KNOWLEDGE)

Proverbs 24 says through knowledge a house is filled with rare and beautiful treasures.

Kingdom of Heaven – we are told in the bible that the kingdom of heaven is like a hidden treasure and is worth all we have to gain it! (Give a clue where to find KINGDOM OF HEAVEN)

Right now, we have three items in our basket of treasures, wisdom, knowledge and the kingdom of heaven.

Let's keep searching:

Some treasures we love the most are those we get to eat! Like treats! (give the kids a clue to find the hidden treasure of candy). Place your candy in the basket.

Other treasures we love are gifts we receive, like things we really, really want...especially at Christmas! (Give kids a clue to find the box) Place the little box in your basket.

And finally, treasures are things like friends or family or memories we make on vacations that are so special to us all! (Give the kids a clue to find a picture of the family). Place the photo on the basket.

Let's sit and look at our treasures.

Candy might be our first thing to grab, but wisdom might tell us to wait and save it for later if dinner is near, or perhaps only eat a little and share the rest, or give it to someone else!

That little box might be interesting to open, and once we do, we will then have knowledge of what the gift is, and we must use it wisely, so that the gift is a blessing!

Photos are awesome to have of friends and family, but hugs and being with those people in person – well that's just pure gold!

We are God's treasure, and he gives us wisdom, knowledge and the kingdom of heaven – all good things from his hands. Therefore, the earthly treasures we receive like treats, gifts and family/friends – we must be thankful and use them and love them wisely and with knowledge, as we lay ourselves up treasures that will last forever...like loving God and loving people.

Those are the true treasures of life.

## **In Each Room – Just Add Orange**

It's May already, summer is upon us, and maybe we want to let a little more of the season in – in our homes. This month it's all about just adding one color throughout the house, a color that's bright and cheerful. I chose orange, but you could choose whatever color makes you smile. Here are some fun ways to just add one color everywhere to make you smile, as summer nears...

*A candle* – I have this orange hued candle I purchased at Target sitting atop my dresser against a stack of books and a lamp. It's wonderful to light the candle and enter the bedroom smelling that fresh scent and seeing that pretty hue...so add a candle!

*A tote* – Maybe a tote or an organizer might be pretty sitting out. This organizer I've had for a long time in my kitchen. It's from Lakeside Collections and I use it for recipes that I tear out of magazines or print out from the internet. I have them labeled, and I use this all the time. This organizer tote pops in my kitchen!

*A new bag* – Have you considered an orange purse or bag this season? And don't just carry it. Sit it on a bench, hang on a hook, or display it somewhere that's visible so it can be seen and adored. Orange is a bright cheery color and looks good hanging around anywhere at all!

*Atop a shelf* – If you have shelves in your kitchen or den, use them to display something orange or bright. A friend gave me a small flower pop, and another friend painted me a pretty art piece. I also have a geometric a kid made. All orange, on a shelf. So fun.

*In a pot* – Most of my flowers in my front yard are yellow, but there are a few pops of orange. After all, the sunset is orange, so why not bring a bit of that beauty in your flower pots this season? Consider orange marigolds...

*On your porch* – I recently ordered a new rug for the back porch to tie in all of the orange outside from pillows to a rack and my tablecloth, to pull everything together. So look at your porch and see if orange fits, and add it!

*On the wall* – I love an orange piece of artwork on a wall somewhere in the house, as a focal point. This piece was found on Amazon and it greets us all when we walk in the front door.

It might not be orange. But pick a summer hue that you love and bring it into your home in every space, just a pop here and there, and see if it doesn't make a bright difference and make your house so invitingly cheerful this season!



YOU

## Inner Strength - Letters to My Boys – by Michelle Wyatt

I strive to balance out the ways I show my love to my kids, so I decided to write a letter to my boys. I got the idea from all the “I love you Mommy” notes that Matthew makes for me. As big of a smile as it puts on my face, I want the same for my boys. Not only that, I want them to feel God’s love through me.

“No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us.” 1 John 4:12

“And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in them.” 1 John 4:16

“We love because He first loved us.” 1 John 4:19

*Dear Brendan,*

*You are an amazing, inquisitive soul. Your uplifting spirit puts smiles on people’s faces. Your compassionate heart helps everyone that needs it. Your yearning for understanding the world encourages others. God and I always have our arms around you and are very proud of you! I love you always and forever no matter what!*

*Love,  
Mom*

*Dear Matthew,*

*You have a gift for seeing what other people need. Your joy for life is inspiring. You have many other gifts, such as recognizing and appreciating beauty in this world and bringing your contagious smiles and laughter to people. The world is a better place because of your loving heart and soul. God and I always have our arms around you and are very proud of you! I love you always and forever no matter what!*

*Love,  
Mom*

That was the first draft of my letter to the boys. The hardest part is deciding at ages 11 and 9 (as of May and June) if this is too “wordy” or not. I want them to feel my love on a level that they can understand now and cherish when they get older. So, I simplified the wording some...

*Dear Brendan,*

*You are an amazing, inquisitive person. Your uplifting spirit puts smiles on people’s faces. Your compassionate heart helps everyone that needs it. Your desire to understand the world inspires others. God and I are always with you and are very proud of you! I love you very much and always will no matter what!*

*Dear Matthew,*

*You have an amazing spirit that is loved by many. You have a gift for seeing what other people need. People are inspired by your joy for life and appreciation of nature's beauty. God and I are always with you and are very proud of you! I love you very much and always will no matter what!*

*Love,  
Mom*

Knowing my boys, it dawned on me that one way to let them know I love them equally is to write a letter addressed to both of them. It may even be one that is like a poster so they can easily see it every day.

*Dear Matthew and Brendan,  
You are amazing boys! I am blessed to call you my sons. The world is a better place because of your loving hearts and souls. God and I love you very much! We will always love you no matter what!*

*Love,  
Mom*

Love is love  
Words are words  
Put them together for my boys to see  
Believe, believe as they read  
I love them unconditionally!

## **A Hopeful Heart - The Sweet Sound of 'Mama' - by Christina Oberon**

I didn't realize what a privilege and responsibility the role of mama was until I was blessed to become one. I have such a deeper understanding and respect for the virtues of motherhood and its various forms of beauty seen in faithfulness, protection, love, growth, selflessness, sacrifice and acceptance. Motherhood is a deeply transformative experience that has brought immense joy, fulfillment, and meaning to my life, despite it also being a challenging, isolating and overwhelming journey at times that requires patience, resilience, and a lot of hard work. Motherhood can't easily be explained, but it is felt with the heart. It is the feeling of love in purest form.

One of the most significant joys of motherhood has been the profound love and connection that I feel for my son and deeper affection and gratitude for my husband. This fierce, protective, and unconditional love has provided me with a deeper sense of purpose in life. As I watch my son grow and develop, I feel so much joy witnessing his milestones, accomplishments, and personality traits unfold. I often wonder who he will be, what he will become passionate about, who he will impact, and who he will marry. I am filled with gratitude to play a role in helping him navigate his life's journey.

There is a profound quote by Osho that reads, "The moment a child is born, the mother is also born. She never existed before. The woman existed, but the mother, never. A mother is something absolutely new."

I've had many life experiences and thought I knew exactly who I was. But motherhood has revealed feelings and fears that had been deeply hidden. It has allowed me to face hard truths, sit with scars and make healing a priority. It has also allowed me to revisit my childhood through the eyes of my son and find a childlike wonder once again.

I can honestly say that I feel like a rebirth took place in me through motherhood. Becoming a mama has had a great impact on my identity and sense of self. It has changed my priorities, values, and beliefs and has given me courage and strength in ways I didn't possess before. It has opened my eyes to a greater sense of purpose. It has shown me a new way to live and lead with dedication and grace. It has allowed me to experience having a family of my own and create shared experiences.

Being called "mama" is the greatest sense of pride and accomplishment I have ever known.

When my son says, "mama," I hear the overcoming of years of infertility and heartache. When he says, "mama," I hear my husband feeling proud to be a father. When he says, "mama," I hear family. When he says, "mama," I hear restoration, redemption, and triumph from loss. It is the sweetest sound to my ears. There was a time I wasn't sure I'd ever experience motherhood, but now I smile and soak up every time I hear my son's sweet little voice say, "mama."



## **Healthy Habits – All the Downers – by Marcy Lytle**

There are some days we just feel down or blah, and we really can't pinpoint the reason. Obviously, there could be major struggles going on in our lives or in our heads or homes, but other days we just feel all sorts of emotions or "the blues" and we don't know why. I've had days like those, and there are lots of little things I do that work to shoo the blues away:

*Sluggish* – Often all I need is water. Seriously, sometimes our bodies feel sluggish and we stop and think about it, it's been hours since we drank that good old H<sub>2</sub>O. If drinking enough water is a problem, ask a friend to help you be accountable.

*Tired* – There are not medals given to moms/women for working through lunch, pushing ourselves to work 24/7 or work on the to-do list until every checkmark is placed. Taking time to nap – even just 15 minutes – does wonders for the body...and the attitude!

*Hungry* – I am mostly hungry mid-morning. Others want something mid-afternoon. My go-to snack of choice is a square of dark chocolate (Lindt 70% or higher) and a few nuts. It's satisfying and good for me, if I don't eat too much. I think the key is to eat when I'm first hungry, and not wait until I'm starving!

*Angry* – Maybe a friend hurt our feelings or said something totally uncalled for, and we feel angry and unable to let it go. I often find that I'm mad because I'm sure of why that person acted the way they did and I want them to suffer. Yikes. When I'm able to pray and give it to Him, trusting he will work on their heart (and mine) in whatever way is needed, the furious frown turns upside down.

*Blah* – Often, I feel blah after sitting at the computer all day, or cleaning house and being inside for hours. It's then that I know I need a walk outside. A brisk walk, even just around the blocks near my house, really cheers me up. But only if I put away my phone and observe all the blessings of creation...or even flowers in tires in someone's yard.

*Antsy* – There are days we just feel like we need to get out and go. But for whatever reason, we feel guilty for spending money, or think we shouldn't take the time, or all sorts of reasons we talk ourselves out of pleasure. Why? Pleasure and doing something fun, for no reason at all, is well...fun!

*Brain tired* – My brain runs at full pace all day long, from the time my eyes open in the morning. There's never a time I'm not thinking of at least five things at once, very opposite of my husband, who is only thinking of what he's doing at the moment. The only thing that works for me is reading. I have the hardest time sitting down and opening a book to read for pleasure. But when I do, well I'm whisked away into a land and a story apart from my own, and it turns off the other thoughts completely.

All the downers of the day can make for a grumpy and lackluster night, week, and even bleed into the weekend. Don't let the downers drown you! Identify how you feel, and do something about it. And don't feel guilty one bit!

## **Life Right Now - Designer Baggage - By Jennifer Stephens**

Everybody has their “thing.” Maybe it’s a certain car. Or clothing brand. Maybe you’re the person carrying THAT 40 oz. tumbler around everywhere you go. We might look at someone with their overpriced cup of water or wearing expensive black leggings that look suspiciously like yours from Target and think, “You paid HOW MUCH for THAT?” But they’re probably looking at you with whatever YOUR thing is and thinking the same thing! No matter what IT is, we all have our thing. For me it’s purses. One purse in particular. I’d only ever seen them carried by those snarky housewives living lavish lives on reality TV, but the first time I saw one in real life, carried by an ordinary teacher like me, I yearned to have one of my very own!

I’m not sure what it was about the bag. I could say it’s because of the high-quality craftsmanship used to create it (it IS made to last). But that’s not the reason. It just had that *je ne sais quoi* (yes, I had to look up spelling on that one), and I HAD to have one! I couldn’t simply run out and buy one, because the price tag attached to this bag is slightly outside of my modest teacher salary. It may seem like an extravagant expense and anybody that knows me knows I’m not one to recklessly toss money around. I wasn’t about to blow grocery funds on a handbag! Instead, I started saving all the dollars that came with birthday or Christmas greetings. Just a little bit here and there. For TEN YEARS I saved! Then, one day I counted my stash and realized I finally had enough. So, I did it. I bought THE purse. And, yes, it was as glorious as I dreamed it would be.

Walking around carrying that luxurious new tote had me thinking about other kinds of bags. I don’t mean plain department store handbags or an exquisitely beaded evening clutch. I’m talking about the kind that isn’t always visible to those around us. The kind we carry inside. Emotional baggage. We drag around all kinds of things – past mistakes, fear, guilt, disappointment, hurt, anger, worry. You name it, we hold onto it. Some of us wear it in obvious ways, explosively dumping our baggage all over everyone around us in the worst ways possible. Like emotional vomit. And others silently stuff the weight of our burdens so far down inside our souls, our lives appear to be perfect to those not looking close enough. It doesn’t matter if we flaunt it in a clear TSA approved carry-on or hide it inside a chocolate brown designer logo-ed handbag, holding onto the weight of our past prevents us from experiencing the joy filled life God wants for each of us.

God desires for us to unpack the stuff that holds us back. He’ll take it from us. He’ll take our fears and our anger. He will take away all the hurt, disappointment, and worry. And His forgiveness for past mistakes is available to us all. We just need to ask. Pray. Then pray again. He will take it all away. With God our bags won’t have room for all that negative stuff because He can fill them with love. With peace and strength. With hope.

No matter what your “thing” might be, don’t let the weight of it hold you down. We may never understand why we gravitate to a certain something, we just do. And as long as collecting that thing doesn’t take us away from what matters most, I say, go for it! People may collect fancy cars, prance around in Lululemon, guzzle water from a \$45.00 Stanley (seriously, I looked it up on Amazon), but I’ll be over here driving my twelve-year-old car, wearing thrift store threads, and drinking from an ordinary cup - all with my designer bag by my side. It may seem frivolous, but I’m okay with it. Because with God, I’m letting go of all the baggage that used to be stuffed inside.

## **Faith is His Name – by Debbie Haynes**

A personal struggle of mine is reconciling faith – even using the name of Jesus in a prayer – praying prayers in faith and yet not seeing results I expect. Or maybe I don't even see a result at all. And when this struggle surfaces, I feel certain that the fault lies with me, that my faith must be too weak and I might not even be a true believer or worse yet...maybe I have unconfessed sin in my life. Or is there something I'm missing, entirely?

In John 1 we read that Jesus was there in the beginning, that he ever was and ever is the Word of God and nothing came into being that didn't come from Him. Jesus also said he is both life and light. And in verse 17 it says grace and truth were realized through the same...Jesus.

In John 16 Jesus says that we can ask the Father for anything in his name, and he will give it to us. He further states, "Until now, you've asked for nothing in my name (because I'm here with you). But ask the Father and you will receive, so that your joy may be full." He goes on to say that the Father loves us and that we can have peace in this world.

The way I read that, is that scripture tells us we have authority to ask the Father and in his Name as a "power of attorney," so to speak. The Father will grant us our petition because we abide in the vine and so that our joy will be full.

You might be wondering what this has to do with my struggle. I have a good answer:

We know we are clean before we ask, because Jesus has spoken his life in us because we believe, and because he gave us authority to speak directly to the Father when we have needs, in Jesus' name. But we know we don't always see the results that we ask for, even though we know it's God's good pleasure to give us the desire of our hearts. This might make us so discouraged that we don't pray, at all!

However, when we believe the Word, no matter what we see or do not see, we endure.

So what is endurance? Could it be that as it says in I Peter, even though for a little while we have trials...the proof of our faith is more precious than gold and non-perishable? In other words, there is purpose to our faith when it's tested.

In the book of Romans it says that we can rejoice when we have to persevere, when our character is proven, when we continue to hope...because we will come forth as gold.

Here's what I know:

- It's always right to pray in faith, to believe we will receive
- It's always right to go to the Father in Jesus' name
- It's always right to put our faith in the Word...Jesus...the spoken Word revealed to us

So whether our faith is tested by a long wait, a very hot furnace, a period of silence, or things around us growing worse...we have a surety in Jesus' name and a golden future that cannot be taken away.

Prayer: *Father, sometimes your word feels like surgery on our hearts. Waiting sometimes wounds. We ask you to give us a glimpse of the gold as we mature into solid branches during hard times. We ask in Jesus' name that discouragement would not keep us from coming to you to ask...as we listen and hear your voice. Shine your face on us, so that the world sees your glory. Amen.*



MARRIAGE

## **In This Together – This is Love - by Bekah Holland**

One of my favorite authors has a quote from one of her books that I repeat to myself on a regular basis,

"We can do hard things."

Now, I'm sure you're thinking that I've finally broken that last thread of sanity I've been hanging on by, because even I know that quote sounds like it could be out of a children's book. And I'm a grown-up. Which means I should probably tell you that my favorite quote is from someone like John Steinbeck or Malcom Gladwell, or maybe more religiously acceptable authors like Charles Spurgeon or C.S. Lewis. But, I'm me, and not about to try to pretend that I'm someone smarter or less, well, me. Besides, given the fact that I've been writing about marriage and all of our (my) crazy for a few years now, I doubt anyone would believe me anyway.

Now back to my "we can do hard things" mantra. It sounds so simple. It sounds so doable. But dang it, it's really, really hard! Even harder when trying to maneuver through partnering with another human. And maybe the things that we struggle most with aren't the big things. It's somehow less difficult to navigate pain and loss and illness with your chosen person than it is to agree on what to have for dinner or what show to watch on Netflix. Now hear me out, because I can feel the eye rolling all the way on my side of the internet.

It sounds silly to think that we can muddle our way through bills and raising kids and still get hung up in the little things. But how often do we end up spitting mad because we let all those little things snowball into a big thing and then find ourselves wondering if smothering our partner in their sleep is a forgivable offense? Just me? Well I'm going to operate under the assumption that it's a totally normal thing and move on with my story. But seriously though, how does that even happen?

For me, I start to notice completely inconsequential things getting under my skin. Things like toothpaste splatters on the mirror, or cleaning a bathroom used by anyone of the male persuasion, or listening to snoring that makes me ride a very thin line between irritation and feeling homicidal. And if I'm being fair, I can think of at least 47 things off the top of my head that make my husband consider getting in his car and driving until he finds a place without cell reception so there's no chance of me finding him. Honestly, that's a pretty safe plan for him even if I could find his location, given my annoying ability to get lost despite Google maps and Waze giving me step by step directions out of my driveway, but that's probably beside the point.

So how do we figure our way through the land mines of petty, built-up resentments? Sometimes by just sucking it up and accepting or ignoring things that really don't matter. I learned long ago that sweetly reminding my husband or kids of something they're supposed to do (repeatedly) has been otherwise referred to as nagging. And much like my teen and almost teen kids, my husband is much less likely to do something if I annoy him about it. Nine times out of ten, it's something silly and he is absolutely, blissfully unaware of my particular strong feelings about said silly thing. Can I still talk to him about it? Of course. Should he listen and try to keep it in mind? Sure. Are my feelings valid? I mean, kind of. But just because I "can" be annoyed doesn't necessarily mean I "should" lose it just because he keeps putting the new toilet paper roll on the wrong way. Yes there's only one right way. Over. Not under. Ever. Even the CDC agrees, so there.

Okay, back to the point. I know I shouldn't melt down over how the dishwasher is loaded, but we're flawed and a bit selfish at times and those blow-up moments sometime happen. And then we get to engage in the fun activity of removing our big ole foot from our mouths and baking an "I'm sorry" carrot cake and offering a genuine apology.

However, just like just we can let little things build up in a negative way, I've found that I can also intentionally focus on the little things that my husband does that can easily go unnoticed. Little things like how every morning, he listens from his office for me to sleepily emerge in search of coffee, and waits for me to come sit on his lap and hold me for a few minutes before we start our day. And the way he still asks me what I want to watch on TV even when we both know that he doesn't like what I want to watch and I honestly don't really care what's on so I almost always give my standard, "Whatever you want babe," response. But he still asks. Every time. And he notices when I make an effort by substituting my regular attire of oh so fashionable old sweatpants and messy bun style with actual pants that button and a less messy bun. He's been known to go pick up a little treat that he knows I'd like out of the blue, and a million other tiny things he does that remind me that I'm loved. So those are the kinds of things I try to let snowball. The things that make me fall just a little more in love with him and make it easier to shrug off the homicidal 1:00 a.m. thoughts when his snoring rattles my brain. Because I chose him. And he chose me.

We chose the good, the irritating, the embarrassing and every single thing in between. And more importantly, we keep choosing each other, over and over so that we get to annoy each other for the rest of our forever. And that, ladies and gentlemen, is love.

*"I love being married! It's so great to find that one special person you want to annoy for the rest of your life." Rita Rudner*

## **Date Night Fun – Concerts – by Marcy Lytle**

We recently attended an outdoor concert (free) with another couple and laughed and enjoyed ourselves so much, even though the music wasn't the best. It was being outdoors in the evening with music in the background, families all around, people watching while the stars came out, that made the date night memorable.

It's that time of year when concerts are going to be taking place outside, because it's not so cold and it's not too hot...yet.

So get outside with him, invite another couple, or take the whole family on concert dates:

*Check your local malls* to see if they're hosting music nights. Then go early and shop and pick and eatery or enjoy an ice cream, before the music begins.

*Check your local parks* for outdoor concerts on the weekend. Buy some new lawn chairs and grab a blanket and take a picnic. Invite a couple. It's the best fun, ever.

*Check little towns around*, and see if there is music on the square this month. Make a day trip out of it, visit all the sights and fun little cafes, before you settle in and listen to the music and tap your feet.

*Check the restaurants* in your area for live music on the patio and go. Invite another couple and enjoy a good meal as you listen to the tunes. Take a little cash to place in the artist's tip bucket. Support your local talent.

*Check for the big concerts* coming near you and purchase tickets to get dressed up and go, inside OR out. Try a different genre of music. Even consider the symphony, or a musical in the park or in a big entertainment venue. Save up and enjoy without guilt, and talk about it all the way home.

Music lifts the soul, and if it lifts both of your souls, then that's a win-win for date night, now isn't it?



## **After 40 Years – Let Him Interrupt – by Marcy Lytle**

Every couple has “something” that’s an irritant about the other. I am easily irritated, so my list is long...and I’m constantly working on myself to let life flow...you know? He, however, is rarely irritated by anything except traffic...but that’s another story. But little irritants can cause big problems, as we all know. If a little pebble is left in a shoe on a long walk, blisters and pain occur. We just found that out this weekend! So it stands to reason that little irritants in a marriage can bruise over time.

One of the things I’m always telling him is that he doesn’t let me finish my stories, but rather he interrupts. For example, if we’re on a road trip somewhere and I’m in the middle of telling him a story and he sees something awesome...he points and interjects a, “Look! Isn’t that flower beautiful?” And often, my reply isn’t pleasant but rather an irritable reply like, “You interrupted me!”

In the past few months, I’ve realized that his interruptions are sometimes good ones that I need to listen to. And that flower he’s found to be awesome might be just what I need to stop and take a look at, while I’m telling my story of woe and frustration. I can drive an hour in the car and never see those wildflowers or that cloud that’s shaped like a dog (yes, he points those out as well.) I can arrive at our destination in a whole other state of mind than the mind of my husband.

He sees the beauty of creation, the wonder of something unusual, and he only focuses on the moment. I have to empty my brain through my mouth, think too many thoughts at one time, and stew on issues and ideas...with my head down instead of my eyes up. Maybe this difference is common between men and women; at least I think it is, for the most part.

While I think it’s true that he could work on his interruptions and the timing of them, there are many instances (many!) where I need to be interrupted.

God interrupted me one time decades ago when I was whining about something to him and he reminded me of a truth that I’ve held on to, since that day.

We often take walks, and we did just yesterday, a three mile walk around a lake. I tried to leave my phone in my pocket, lay aside my irritants (I was extremely irritable and bored), and observe how he walked and imitate him...because he lives in so much more peace than I do.

I tried to stay silent so that his interruptions wouldn’t be interruptions, but rather comments on the beauty of our surroundings. He pointed out a beautiful white bird that landed on the water and grabbed a fish. He noted how much the trees had grown around the trail and how big they’d gotten. He read the mile markers, he held my hand, and he looked out and up the entire time.

And he was the one with a pebble in his shoe, a mild irritant...yes. But he stopped at a bench, unlaced his sneaker and shook it out. I noticed that, as well. Get rid of irritants quickly, I thought, as he removed that stone and visited with the man at the other end of the bench.

One of my goals is to let him interrupt me without my scolding him, when that interruption is shifting my focus. I need to look up and out more, and when I do I'm thinking that my mind won't be so full of what's happening but rather of what's beautiful.

Maybe you have a similar type of irritant in your marital shoe that you might want to consider shaking loose, as well. We don't want blisters or bruises, because that ruins the long walks as the sun sets...

## **For Better or Worse - House Hunters – by Kaelin Scottt**

I hate watching house hunting shows. The people get on my nerves because they are so nitpicky! I mean, is it really a dealbreaker if the master bathroom has one sink instead of two? And does the backsplash in the kitchen really have to perfectly match the rug your grandma gave you?

Okay, that might be a dramatic example, but their complaints really irk me sometimes. Maybe it's because I've never actually had the luxury of choosing a house. My husband works as a ranch manager, so we're provided a house on the ranch. We take what we're given without any say in the matter. This arrangement is pretty cool, to be honest, and it helps us have grateful hearts. It's easy to be thankful for little things when the first house you lived in didn't even have paint on the walls.

But my real point isn't about house hunting or reality TV. I was just thinking about how nitpicky people on those shows can be, and it made me realize that we do the same thing in our marriages. We forget that our husbands are flawed people (just like we are), and we get so annoyed over their tiny imperfections.

Sometimes we get so focused on picking our spouses apart that we lose sight of their amazing qualities. We can't see the forest for the trees. We get hung up on little annoyances and let them drive us apart. But most of the things we get so worked up about aren't really that big of a deal.

It's important to stay grateful for our husbands instead of wishing they were perfect. Because if we look in the mirror, we'll realize that we'll never be perfect either. Besides, perfection isn't what it's about. In those house hunting shows, what's really important is finding a place to feel at home. And I think the same is true for marriage. We should feel at home with each other. But it's hard to feel at home if we're constantly focused on the negative.



ENCOURAGEMENT

## **Rooted in Love - No Perfect Moms- by Kaelin Scott**

There's no such thing as a perfect parent. As much as we all want to be, it won't ever happen. Everyone has areas of strength, and everyone has areas of weakness. No one can do it all perfectly.

So much goes into parenting, it can be exhausting trying to do it all well. Making healthy meals, discipline, doing fun activities, sports, vacations, education, playdates, chores, church, managing screen time. All of it can add up and become pretty overwhelming, especially if you think you have to get them all right all the time.

Obviously, it's important for us as parents to always give our best. We love our kids, and we want them to have happy and healthy lives. We want to show them what it means to work hard and also to have fun. We want to give them every possible advantage and opportunity that we can.

But the truth is that sometimes we're going to mess up, and that's okay. Perfection isn't in the job description when it comes to parenting. In fact, trying to be perfect as a parent only teaches your kids to strive for something unattainable. Anybody who wants to be perfect at everything will only ever be disappointed.

I'm not saying we shouldn't try, and I'm not saying we should have a defeatist attitude either. I mean that we should give ourselves grace in the parenting arena, just like we would do for anybody else. So you had to eat frozen pizza twice in a week, or your kids wore dirty clothes to school, or you didn't have time to scrub the toilet this week. It's okay! I guarantee that your worst critic is yourself. Your children still love you when you mess up. They still love you when you struggle. They still love you when you're stressed and overwhelmed.

The times when we mess up are great teaching opportunities. Being a parent doesn't mean you won't make mistakes, but that just means you have more chances to set an example. Executing everything perfectly isn't nearly as important as modeling good reactions when things aren't perfect. How you handle difficulty is a greater teaching tool than never messing up.

So when you feel like you don't measure up, just remember that everyone is different. You don't have to look like Susie down the road, and you don't have to do it all. Loving your kiddos and giving your best is all you really need.

## Firmly Planted – Rainy Days – by Dina Cavazos

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Spring is one of the busiest seasons in my garden. Not only is there winter clean-up, but it's a race against time to get things moved or planted before the heat sets in. Plants and projects, there's no end to either! When the clock moves forward one hour, I usually eat dinner at 9 because I'm outside until dark, working on a trellis, a new seating area, repairing something, or doing something plant-related. These tasks bring me joy (well, maybe not repairs!), but they take *time*, my most valuable resource.

"Get it done, get it done!" is often the repeating mantra in the background of my mind. Unconsciously, I let the demands of the garden dictate my actions. Unconsciously, I let my love of working in the garden and *doing* take over. Is that what I want as the driving force in my life? Definitely, not. As much as I love my garden, it cannot be my first love. There are other things in life that are more important, that need my time and attention, that *deserve* my time and attention.

Today it's raining, and that forces me to stop working outside and catch up on some of the inside things that need to be done. Like writing this article, my taxes, working on a plan for my friend's landscape, the dishes, researching plants, or.... aahh, but there I am *doing* again. Outside or inside, there is so much to DO.

The truth is, it's hard to stop doing. I have a long list of things that I need to do, and a longer list of things I want to do. The result is the feeling that I'm always behind and will never be "caught up." (Caught up with who, or what?) The more important question is:

Who made this list that never ends and seems to inexplicably multiply?

If this endless list is heavy and burdensome, why am I carrying it around like a favorite pet when Jesus said his burden is light? What would happen if most of the things never got done? Is being "caught up" an elusive and pointless goal? Is that really important?

These are questions that deserve my time to think and pray about, and, for that, I must be still.

Thank you, rainy day, for getting my attention. Thank you, God, for rainy days.

## **Moving Forward – Still Waiting – by Pam Charro**

I do not enjoy waiting, especially when it's for something I have been promised or believe I "should" have. While I know that patience is a fruit of the Spirit, I'm often surprised at how little of it I have (especially in traffic - ouch!).

I went to see *His Only Son* in the theater last night. It's the story of Abraham and his wonderful but extremely challenging relationship with God. The majority of the movie centered on Abraham's journey to Mt. Moriah to sacrifice his son, Isaac, because that is what God told him to do. But the 25 years they waited for the promised son was also depicted, and it was such a miserable experience for the couple! In one touching scene, while Abraham is pouring his heart out to God, he only receives silence in response.

I have heard that disappointing silence, too. I am also in the middle of a lot of waiting right now, and, while it seems my issues are a bit trivial compared to Abraham's, I am also feeling worn out with waiting, and with trying to understand why answers to prayer often take so long.

*How can God not seem to be moved by my suffering?*

I can so easily forget that becoming like Jesus can only be accomplished through suffering and trust. I don't have to enjoy it in order to be thankful for who it's making me into.

We all know the outcome of Abraham's suffering and obedience, but we have to walk through our own, trusting and believing that God hears and cares when all we hear is silence. I put on worship music yesterday and just allowed the cleansing tears to flow as the weight came off my shoulders and I remembered who he is. He doesn't allow any suffering that is pointless, and he doesn't allow it for a moment longer than is necessary to accomplish its purpose. He will answer my requests for good things at the perfect time, even as my character is being perfected in the waiting.

Even when it's painful and perplexing, and when it doesn't seem to make any sense. He is with me while I am still waiting, just as he was with Abraham.

## Simple Truths – Try Harder – by Marcy Lytle

I'd say the title of this article is how I lived a good part of my life...trying harder. I always tried harder to make good grades because my brother was a genius, and when I stepped into a classroom a few years after he did, the teachers expected a lot. I tried harder to be a good example at church where my dad was pastor so he'd look good and our family wouldn't be shamed. That then transferred over to trying harder with God, to give and do and do some more, so good things would be mine. Trying harder is something a lot of us do, and it's not a bad thing unless...the reason behind why we try so hard is because we don't feel accepted or loved if we fail.

Sitting at church a few weeks ago, a one-liner spoken by the preacher stuck with me and I recorded it on my phone.

*You can try harder or draw near*

I remember several years ago now when I first began to experience grace. I had been carrying that backpack full of all the things I'd tried harder at, only to find it was super heavy and stuff was starting to fall out of ripped seams and bulging pockets. We weren't made to carry heavy loads. We often think of heavy loads as life's events that cause angst and worry and fear. And yes, those are awfully heavy. But the load of trying harder might be the heaviest of all, because we think we "must" do better, perform perfectly, check off all the lists...and we never measure up...no matter how hard we try. So when my backpack started to rip apart, I was lost as to where to go or what to do.

We had always given (calculated and measured to the penny) and I thought this ensured no financial failure, but here we were steeped in debt and losing a home. I had always read at least a few verses nightly so I could say I'd read the bible, and feel good about myself that I had obeyed. I followed the rules at home except when they were impossible and even then I found a way to sort of follow, without lying. Years of trying harder began to take a toll, and my little world around me began to crumble one brick at a time.

I sat in a room with a friend/counselor and poured out my heart to him as I told him of what was happening and he said, "Sounds like you're about to experience grace."

Drawing near to Jesus is supposed to be so easy, and yet we make it so hard.

Jesus often scolded the religious leaders of his time for paying so much attention to the rules of the law that they neglected the things of the heart. I too thought my heart was connected to what I did. But when those two things severed, I found myself floundering and wondering what was true, what was real, what did I have if all of my trying harder failed?

I heard a little voice ask me if all I knew was Jesus, that he died for me and lives now, so I can live, would that be enough?

And over the years I've begun ever so slowly to draw near instead of try harder. Oh, my default is to try harder when I'm tired or I'm weak, because it was so much of part of who I was. But



when I stop and just draw near to the One that loves me, formed me, made me and invites me close...all of that performance falls away and I sit and weep in joy at this God that wants me close.

Are you trying harder to make life work, get a raise, be a perfect parent, please those around you...only to fall into bed exhausted night after night?

Draw near. Yes, read the word but read it to learn more about this One that loves you so much. And yeah, give with joy, not coercion. And most of all live and observe creation and love others and rest... He said he'd carry all the burdens that weigh us down and that includes the burden of trying harder.

## Unearthly Thing - A Space for Grief- by Angela Dolbear

Charlie Brown of Peanuts fame exclaimed, "Good grief!" whenever life gave him the short end of the stick, particularly when Lucy pulled away the football just before he could kick it, causing him to fall flat on his back.

I'm not sure where the saying "good grief" came from, since I don't find anything good about grief. I don't like it at all. But grief is part of life.

Two days ago (at the time of writing this) I learned my cousin, who was more like a sister to me, had passed away. Shock still reverberates through my skull. Today it's beginning to sink in that I cannot call her and talk to her. She is gone.

Grief is unavoidable when it comes to having to say the mortal goodbye to a loved one. And it's tiring and weighty.

"Grief is heavy and hollow," I wrote in an old song I was unable to finish. Right now, it's consuming me; my thoughts and my heart, making it hard to breathe at times. So, like most obstacles in my life, I write about them to work my way through.

I scrolled through Facebook messages about my cousin, and how she touched so many people, and loved on them so well. My heart feels heavy. And hollow. Knowing I can't laugh and share deep conversations with her anymore. Heavy and hollow at the same time. Grief is like this for me.

It's where love and loss meet. They don't play nice with each other. It's frustrating...and so very sad.

Fast forward a couple of weeks to my cousin's Celebration of Life service in Wisconsin. It was packed with more than 200 people reminiscing with stories about fun times and acts of selfless love and kindness they had experienced at the hands of my beautiful cousin. There were pictures hung everywhere of her radiant smiling face. On a table against the far wall, there was an oblong box with a tree and words carved into it. The box was surrounded by daisies and other bright flowers. The ashes of her tall willowy frame rested inside it.

*I can't believe it. This didn't happen. It wasn't supposed to be this way.*

The seven of us, my two brothers and me, and the four siblings of my mother's sister, grew up together. We spent so many days and nights at each other's homes over the years. To me they are all my brothers and sisters. They are my people. My cherished ones forever. We were supposed to grow old together. We were "the cousins." The seven of us together were whole.

I know this is silly but take away the "w" in "whole" and it leaves a "hole." There's a hole now. Something or someone, rather, has been taken away.

I have had a hard time hearing anything over the muffled cocoon of grief. I asked God to help me hear Him through the haze, and He does. I'm still hurting though.

Instead of searching for information about coping with grief on the internet, I reached out to my very dear friend Dorie Richards, who is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT). She

is a wise woman of faith as well as a mental health professional. She was kind enough to share the following information on grief.

### **Grief Facts**

1. Grief is an individual process. It has no specific timeline and is largely based on our relationship with the person we've lost;
2. Grief is cyclical in nature-it ebbs and flows in its intensity; and
3. Grief often presents itself in both emotional and physical symptoms, or ways.

### **Ways to Cope with Grief**

1. Allow yourself time or space to fully experience the loss. We fear being engulfed by grief, if we experience the pain. The reality is pain lessens when we "sit" with it.
2. Find a way to express the memories or stories of this person in your life, for example share with a trusted family member or friend, create a picture collage of times together, journal your memories.
3. Take care of yourself physically as well as emotionally. Rest when you are exhausted, eat healthy food, and take walks. Physical well-being supports emotional healing.
4. Consider finding a therapist/counselor, if grief begins to significantly interfere with daily living. <http://www.psychologytoday.com> can connect you to a therapist in your local area for either in-person or teletherapy.

I am so grateful to Dorie for sharing her knowledge. I have already re-read these points several times as I worked on this article. It comforts me to know I can let myself feel the sadness. And I don't have to force it down or try to get rid of it.

I miss my cousin so very much. We didn't get to see each other as much as I would have liked since we lived thousands of miles apart. But we texted. I have gone back through our messages and read her words. I wish I could message her again. I want to tell her how much I love her. And how much I miss her. I have asked God to tell her. I'm not sure about the soundness of the theology of my request. But I know God knows what I mean.

There are many verses in His Word that speak about how He comforts us. My current favorite is Psalm 147:3 in the Amplified Bible translation,

"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds  
[healing their pain and comforting their sorrow]."

I pray this verse over my family, my cousin's children, and myself. Thank You Lord. I know You are with us, and that means everything.

*Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series, and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories. Her novels are available*

*in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). Angela writes real, relatable, and reverent fiction. She loves reading, writing prose, as well as writing and recording music with her husband Tim in their studio in Nashville, TN--listen to their music on [Sound Cloud](#). Please drop by and sign-up for news and to read new stories and hear new original music at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>. Blessings to you!*



FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME – Brand New**

I'm the world's worst about buying new underwear...basically because I don't want to spend dollars on the undergarments that aren't seen. While some things are meant to last for a lifetime, maybe, there are others we need to note and toss and opt for new...don't we? Maybe we call ourselves frugal, but just maybe we're not used to taking care of ourselves or we think we don't deserve new. I was thinking about this very thing a few weeks ago when looking at my bathtub...

On the corner of the tub sat a metal basket that was rusted and unsightly, a basket that holds my shampoo and soaps and cleansers. Why had I let it get so yucky? I mean, tub organizers aren't expensive. And as I went out to find something new, I realized there are lots of things we need to purge and make new in our homes instead of watching them ruin away...

Like...

Underwear. Don't wear them until they're threadbare. Research, and buy some new ones that are pretty and comfy and all the things. Why are you still wearing that pair from 1980?

Pots and pans. Oh my gosh. I got a new set for Christmas that are the best ever. They are so easy to clean and I can't believe I sat with the old set for so long. Pots and pans – this set on Amazon – the replacement of the year!

Makeup. Is your eyeshadow palette so old you're scraping each color with your fingernails? Or maybe you have 20 partial sets and feel bad if you throw them away because some aren't all used up. Toss them! You don't have to buy 20 more to replace them, just buy yourself a new pretty set and enjoy!

Sheets. I see lots of ads for super expensive sheets that cost a fortune. Those aren't necessary, but neither is that same set of sheets that matches nothing, especially the comforter that's outdated by decades. Update your bed and brighten your whole year!

Purse. That black leather purse you spent a fortune on years ago that you said you'd carry for a lifetime if you could have it – well you don't have to feel guilty for not liking it anymore. Maybe it's time for a new bag, even a cute trendy tote, or a cross body for travel – yes take that trip!

Home décor. Some sit with the same décor until it comes round in style again decades later. If that's you and you like it, fine. But if you think it's too expensive to update, think again! Simple changes like throws, candles, plants and light can brighten up an otherwise old and dull room!

Shoes. My hand is up. I feel bad getting rid of those shoes I loved and hardly ever wore, thinking if I keep them I'll surely wear them again. You don't have to throw them in the trash, but you can donate them! Our feet are ever aging and ever changing, and it's okay to need new shoes, often.

Luggage. Is yours taped up, torn open, nasty and dirty inside because you refuse to buy yourself a new set? Well, you don't have to purchase an entire set of matching pieces anymore!

Mix and matching is awesome. Buy one piece you can afford now and eventually another. But get rid of that musty old thing you've had forever.

Lawn chairs. Do you show up at picnics and games with chairs that have been rained on, left in the car and torn, or dropped and dragged through parking lots for years? It's OKAY to want a new comfy chair, maybe one that rocks or has a hood that covers, or how about cup holders? Old lawn chairs, be gone!

Wreaths. These, if left hanging long enough in one spot, will be covered with grease and dust and the perky picks on them will droop, and the colors will fade, and they'll be an eyesore. Consider one new wreath, and change out the picks for just a few dollars each season. Done. Fresh and new!

What do you have hanging or sitting around that's not been updated for no good reason at all? Think about the why, and if it's just because you feel guilty or bad or think it's frivolous to toss something unless it's a century old...rework your thinking! Make yourself smile, and pick one thing and then another, and replace it with something brand new.

## **FRESH THYME – Me, Myself and Love – by Marcy Lytle**

*I can buy myself flowers  
Write my name in the sand  
Talk to myself for hours  
Say things you don't understand  
I can take myself dancing  
And I can hold my own hand  
Yeah, I can love me better than you can*

If you haven't heard this song in the background somewhere or everywhere, you must have been stuck at home for weeks...because this song by Miley Cyrus is a catchy tune that gets in your head, for sure. I even find myself humming the melody at times!

However, I'm miffed and annoyed at how many people are using this song for the background to their stories, reels, videos, etc...absolutely everywhere. Grown women use it, young teens listen to it, and yet the message is about a breakup of a married couple and now she's singing her independence anthem of how she's pretty much better off without him.

Look at the lyrics...they sound innocent enough and quite true. All we women can buy ourselves flowers and in fact, I do! And talking to myself...well I probably do that better than anything else. I've always talked to myself out loud in the car, on walks, while taking a bath, etc. I bet you do as well, because we actually listen to our own selves!

Next, the chorus says "I can hold my own hand" which I suppose means I can navigate on my own without someone holding me up...and this is where the lyrics get a bit shaky for me. I don't know about you, but I can't make it on my own in this life. I need a hand, not just the hand of my husband, but a Hand. We all do. The truth of the matter is that we can't hold our own hand. Our hands devise schemes of revenge and evil, so why would we want to hold our own...when there's a Hand that holds us and leads us on paths that are amazingly straight and lead to good places?

And that last line "I can love me better than you can" is a dangerous lyric for our little ones to sing, memorize and believe. Heck, it's dangerous for us grown women to believe that, as well.

The song is referring to a man, a husband, a boyfriend or some relationship that's gone sour and how we don't need others anyway...because we can love ourselves better than anyone else can love us.

I don't love myself so much, most of the time. Oh, I love taking care of myself and my wants and my needs...but I don't love who I am at any given moment. I fail, I think bad thoughts, I have good intentions and don't follow through, I think selfishly, I waste time and money, I do lots of things that aren't "lovely."



I don't know why this song bothered me so much, but when I saw grown married women singing and posting this song, it made me sad. I know...it's just a catchy tune. But it's also an attitude towards men in general. We don't need them to pamper us, hold us or even love us...because we can do all of that better than any man can. *Really?*

There are LOTS of men AND women in this world that are just bad at relationships, period. And bitterness is usually the result of a relationship that's broken. But this song moves past bitterness into condescension and disdain for the one that left...and that bleeds over into a rejection of all those that might try to get near us to give, hold and love us.

I haven't lost a spouse due to betrayal, but I've lost lots of friends over the years due to all sorts of reasons...as have we all. And I had that attitude portrayed in this song and kept my hand out, pushing others away, in favor of taking care of myself so I wouldn't get hurt again.

What if Jesus had done that? Everyone he knew left him, spit on him, betrayed him, mocked him and he was sent to die alone on the cross. And yet...he offered friendship to the criminal hanging next to him...and he continues to love us all.

Perhaps this article seems ridiculous to you, or maybe you agree. But I take songs to heart, and this song hurts my heart. We all suffer breakups of some kind, but we definitely cannot love ourselves into a room where all the flowers are purchased by us, our hands are held by our own selves down against our sides, and we love ourselves so much we push others away...and call ourselves happy.

Of course, we must learn from our mistakes and look for red flags before stepping into relationships again, but turning inward and pushing outward for life...that's not life at all.

Okay, I feel better...maybe I'll go buy myself some flowers (not a bad idea, actually.) But I'm going to hug my husband when he gets home because he loves me well...and I'm so thankful. And I want him to know it.

## **FRESH THYME – The Praying Circle – by Marcy Lytle**

Have you heard of the sewing circle that was formed during World War II? It appears that sewing circles started way back as early as 1895 when Mennonite women sewed clothing for the needy. A book I recently read is called *The Wedding Dress Sewing Circle* and I thoroughly enjoyed it. There's a woman that starts this circle of women that mend and sew wedding dresses for local brides during the time of war, and then for brides across the country. In one of the synopses written about the book, it says the circle was made of "plucky" women. To be plucky is to show courage during times of difficulties.

I don't have a sewing circle. In fact, I don't know many women that sew much anymore, and certainly not enough to form a circle for that purpose.

However, I do have a praying circle of friends that I for sure would describe as plucky!

These friends rise to the occasion whenever I have a need, and these ladies pray. They come alongside in difficult times and they ease my mind and heart when I text them a request, and they all text back saying they're praying, they offer words of encouragement, they ask later how I'm doing, and they go to "war" in their prayer rooms...so to speak.

These women are seasoned friends I can trust with hard requests for my family or myself. They too have experienced enough of life to empathize and not criticize...but just pray. And having this praying circle has been a lifeline for me.

When my dad passed away, a few of these friends just immediately took over the meal for the family after the service and showed up and served...and served. They brought me comfort not just by their acts of service, but by their presence. They were a familiar face in unfamiliar territory...the death of a parent.

Maybe a praying circle is something foreign to some, or perhaps we don't feel we have any friends that would be willing to pray or trusted with our deepest needs. But then again, maybe there are women we can establish this sort of circle with, if we just ask.

I'd like to think that I'm in those women's circle as well, when they encounter hard times and difficult circumstances, when they're too weak to pray themselves or have faith, or even hold up their heads. I want to be available 24/7 for their calls and be ready to offer encouragement right back to this circle of friends.

If you have a praying circle, give thanks to Him...and thank these ladies...often.

If you don't have a praying circle, here's how to start one:

- Be a friend to others and offer to pray for them when they're hurting.
- Ask God to send you helpers, other women willing to hold up your arms when they're weak.
- When hard times come, text the one person that comes to mind that loves to pray.
- Be part of a small group or church group, full of women that pray.

Those women in that book came from all sorts of backgrounds and some were quite pompous and proud, until the war hit every single person...and all of the women were on a level battleground. Their humility enabled them to see the needs during war time and to come together, from all different walks of life, to the circle where they sewed and they gave.

I think the women that pray the fiercest and boldest and with the most faith are women like these, in that book. They too have encountered struggles and they've seen the hand of God hold them and deliver them. Therefore, they know the power of prayer.

The praying circle...it's a good thing to start, be a part of, or join up...when life is hard.

## **FRESH THYME – Shopping List – by Marcy Lytle**

They say we're not supposed to go grocery shopping when we're hungry, because we'll buy way too much. And I say it's hard to shop when we're full as well, because nothing looks good! But I'm not writing about groceries in this story, but rather shopping for clothes. After all, summer is near and we're probably all in need of new sandals, maybe shorts or skirts, simple and comfy outfits, and maybe even a swimsuit or two.

Here's my list of the don'ts when we women are out in the stores, looking on line, or trying somewhere to find those clothes to fit the body we don't really love, at a price that we don't mind paying, and all the other stresses that come with shopping for new clothes:

1. Don't go shopping in clothes that are hard to take on and off. Wear something simple and easy to remove. Otherwise, it's no fun at all if you go from fitting room to fitting room.
2. Don't go shopping when you're broke. Maybe you like to window shop, and if you do, go for it. But if you're sad when you shop and can't buy, then stay home until your budget allows you to spend.
3. Don't go shopping with a friend if your tastes and budgets are opposites. You'll waste your time and she will hers, ending up in stores and places you'd not go otherwise.
4. Don't go shopping without a list. Browse your closet and see what shoes and bags and shorts and dresses you do have. See if you're keeping them and maybe what accessories you need. Then make a list and stick to it.
5. Don't go shopping if you're going to compare your body with anyone else's at all! So what if your legs are short and hers are long. Embrace your shape and smile.
6. Don't go shopping when you're stuffed from a meal. Pants will feel too tight, you'll feel bloated, and the experience of shopping will be miserable.
7. Don't go shopping at the same old places. Stop in a new store every now and then, even try junior-sized shops and size up if you see something cute.
8. Don't go shopping if you're fixated on your size. You may wear one size at this store, a size bigger at the other one. Numbers are boring. Comfort and cuteness are fun.
9. Don't go shopping in uncomfortable shoes. Or ones you have to tie or buckle. That will be a pain, after a few minutes of dressing and undressing.
10. Don't give up on shopping in stores, even though it's not been the same since Covid. Walmart has the cutest summer pants. Target's clothing game has really stepped up. Marshalls and T.J. Maxx have great prices and different items each time you visit. Jane.com has fun blouses. World Market has unique and beautiful dresses! And Old Navy has great sales!

Oh my gosh! I think I could go on and on with this list. I love to shop, but I have friends that don't like to shop at all. I have one friend that only shops twice a year – I'd die! But maybe if you consider some of the tips above, you might enjoy the process a lot more and find some cute things in your closet this season.