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For Every Season

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TIPS

The Dressing – Feels Like Summer – by Marcy Lytle

I'm guessing most of us are warming up across the nation as temperatures rise, and our sweaters and coats are tucked away in a closet or drawer somewhere. Summer is in full swing here, and I find it's the best time to pull out accessories, wear skirts and dresses, and enjoy the freedom of color and fun! Since it feels like summer, why not dress like we love it?

Here are some of my favorite summer ideas for you:

Beach blouse – Look for a tshirt or top that has a beach scene or something summery on it – grab it and wear it this season. That way, even if you're hard at work, you're thinking of that time away in the cool ocean breeze. This one is from Shein.

Loose fitting dress – I love this black boxy dress from Shein – it buttons up the front and doesn't cling to my body - making it cool and airy underneath. Consider a cotton dress that you can wear with slides for a casual look, or belt at the waist and add heels for a night out for a patio dinner! **Spaghetti strap dress** – I found this one recently at Attic Salt in our local mall. I can wear a tshirt underneath, add a jacket or sweater if I'm sitting in the AC, as this solid blue sundress is so versatile! I love the retro buttons down the front. Enjoy such a fun dress, and grab a cute tote, while you're out as well (this one is from Marshalls.)

Caramel and pockets – I love this shirt from Target – and there were other color options, as well. It's cool material and looks so cute and crisp with multiple options on the bottom like jeans, colored pants or even skirts. It's a fave I've gotten so far...

Raw hem and slides – There's an artist studio in Dripping Springs, Texas that sells clothes as well. This shirt dress with a raw hem in this pretty green was worn open in the winter as a jacket, but now closed and worn as a shirt dress. The slides are from J Crew Factory – I found them on clearance for \$10!

Blouse and a skirt – I purchased two skirts from the Loft Outlet last summer and the hems have come loose, and I've let them be! I just ironed them out and let the hems lay – and I like it that way! The elastic in the waist makes them great for wearing on trips, and this blouse is just a fun white print with little colored shapes. Comfort is key in the summer! The slides are Blowfish.

Summer stripes – This blouse – so pretty and sharp – is also from Shein. Shein has so many options for clothes – you have to love the browse – and I've found that sizing up works best for this site. This blouse is one of my favorites. Packed great, and was a fun wear for a recent weekend away.

Festival pullover – This pullover top I found at a festival – made in Mexico – for \$20 – and I love it. It was still a bit cool when I wore this with the long-sleeve tee, but a short sleeve one will work great for summer! Booths with handmade creations are a great place to shop for something unique.

What have you found so far, to wear this summer? Think outside the box, shop at odd places, and look for sales. After all, the thrill of the hunt is as fun as the purchase of the prize, isn't it? Well, sort of...

Seven for You – Insecure? Not Now – The Panel

It seems that all little girls start to feel insecure about something, at some age, and it often starts with how we look. From there, we start to compare ourselves with other girls that look “prettier” than we are, and as we get older we then start feeling less than others if we don’t have all the things...and from there we grow into an unsure, isolated and afraid woman all because of our own perceived shortcomings. We asked our panel to share this month their insecurities they’ve worked through, how it happened, and to encourage us all!

As I started to think about what I would say to my younger self about an insecurity I’ve had to overcome, I didn’t immediately come up with an answer. I couldn’t think of my insecurities from the past, or maybe I couldn’t think of only one in particular. I felt insecure about so much when I was younger. So, what was the next best way for me to come up with a possible answer to this question? I asked my husband what he thought. He knew quickly what my answer should be. I thought, “Of course.” He said it was my trust in others. I had the insecurity of distrust since I was nine and it was so warranted. It came from lots of people treating me in unacceptable ways I would have never imagined after my mother died. And it just got worse through the years. So, how did I overcome it?

First, it took lots and lots of prayer! And sometimes I could only put myself out there in a situation and hope for the best. And then secondly, and I know this was the way God had planned for me to overcome this insecurity, was through raising my children. As difficult as it was, I had to allow other people to help with my kids through their activities and events. I even had to let them take my children places and care for their needs, and I had to trust them. After all, my kids did! I was learning trust through watching their trust! Even when our family sees broken trust now, we know our trust in God will never be broken. And that’s something I never have to feel insecure about!

I still have moments of skepticism, but I have come a long way in trusting others. Like so many other things, it’s a journey to the end. – Carole

One insecurity I’ve had is my weight and height. Until I was a sophomore in high school, I was always the tallest and largest girl in my class. I wasn’t really fat, but I was fully grown, compared to their thin, petite frames. I always stood in the back row of choirs, sat in the back of classrooms so others could see and was taller than most of the boys! In my junior year, the boys miraculously grew taller which, thankfully made me feel a little less Amazonian.

The second insecurity was my hair. UGH! My friends (think 1970’s flower power) all had STICK straight, long silky locks. Not me. I had shorter (shoulder length was all my mom would tolerate) CURLY hair! What a curse! One friend washed her long silky hair with Ivory dish soap, conditioned it with Downy fabric softener and then IRONED it on her mom’s ironing board! I was soooo jealous. Instead, I had a curly-to-frizzy mop--and in those days, without much in the way of products to tame it down. All the time I was working a full-time job and raising my family, I fought my curls...by either straightening them, curling them to be a little less curly or blow drying them! But now?

About four years ago, the necessity of my life's circumstances forced me to have to be up and ready for the day of care-giving very early in the morning. I researched how to wear medium length hair in an up-do and found Milabu's YouTube channel. She taught me how to do it!! I began wearing my hair up in a "curly, messy bun" look for the first time EVER in my life...and I loved it! It stayed where I put it the entire day, took me less than five minutes to do it in the morning (even from washing it and going to bed with a wet head the night before) and I wore it that way every single day for a couple of years. Now, I still wear it very curly, but with a headband for taming it. I still love it and wonder why I didn't 'go curly' many years ago. I still do look around my surroundings, though, and I'm almost always the ONLY one in the building with naturally curly hair. And I like it that way! - Debbie

I grew up with a speech impairment and couldn't get a whole sentence out without stuttering. I was picked on and even hit by my third-grade teacher because she would get so frustrated with me. I became quite the introvert. I loved reading because when I read, the words in my head came out normally. It was hard to make friends, so I stopped trying. In one school, they gave me speech therapy, which helped my speech some, but I was then picked on more, the kids called me stupid and a moron.

Over the years, it became easier to speak but the stuttering was still there. And in high school, we had to take Speech (oration) and it was there I met Mr. Chee, the Speech teacher. He understood my extreme anxiety about public speaking and talked to me about it after class. He asked me to bring my written speech and at lunch read it to just him. Then he asked me to invite one or two friends that I trusted so that I could read it to them and to him. Over time, I became more confident. I ended up joining the debate team and lettered in it. I joined UIL speech competitions in school and recited Chekov. Who knew?

I was later hired as the Director of Human Resource Development at my job and taught all the new employees. I presented at several State of Texas conferences with hundreds of attendees.

Years after high school, I found Mr. Chee and invited him to lunch. He needed to know what a huge difference he had made in my life.

My daughter inherited the same speech impairment so the following is what I wrote for her, and for me regarding my speech impairment, and growing up poor:

10 for a Dollar Girl

*Days spent hungry with a nickel for milk that tasted sour and warm
Chapstick and a stale bread and egg sandwich
On good days a feast in a plain brown bag
Hand me down days with Buster Browns
I learned to hold my head high
no shame in not having
I've fought my entire life to be
to be someone
In 3rd grade when the words didn't come but the ruler hit home
Stutter girl learned to live inside*

*Safer to be quiet
Safer to be alone
The 10 for a dollar girl with her broken shoes
in 8th grade when it seemed to matter
an outsider beaten in a school bathroom
The hate toughened me.
My girl
an image of me I didn't see coming
Awkward and labeled "freak"
Fighting for her life to be
To be someone
Carrying the torch for the 10 for a Dollar girls
An image of IT Girls she will never be*

Cathy

I was really insecure as a "goodie Christian girl" as a teen, in that I wasn't allowed to attend parties, go to movies, even wear pants – which ALL the girls I was friends with got to do. I felt like such an outsider and different, and yet I never even understood why I couldn't do so many what I saw as "normal" things. I often felt like the odd one in the bunch, and even as I entered adulthood I was always felt like I missed out on so much because of "religion," and it made me mad...and sad.

Of course, as I got married and had my own kids and my own rules for my kids (wear a helmet on a bike, no belly piercing, etc.) some of my anger subsided because parents have to do what parents have to do.

However, I have realized that I don't really fit the "norm" in lots of areas, and not just restrictions placed on my by others. I'm just not the textbook wife or woman or friend that likes flowers for Mother's Day or charms with my grandkids' pictures hanging on my neck. I don't do or wear or think like my friends, and guess what? I've learned that it's okay and my friends love me for who I am...different and all.

Being different isn't bad. We're all different in so many ways, and letting our little lights shine in all different candle settings (jars of glass, ceramic bowls, or even incense on a stick) make a beautiful world, of which we are a part of... - Marcy

Recently, while praying about the feelings of anger and frustration that erupt when I feel blamed, I had a memory. I was a young child, in the backseat of a car. The driver was not my mother. While traveling on a gravel road, she turned a corner, and I dropped out onto the rocks. She slammed on the brakes and dashed out, blaming me for what happened. She picked me up and flung me into the car. That's all I remember.

The Holy Spirit helped me understand. I wasn't responsible for this. Being a vulnerable child, I'd internalized it as my fault, which developed into a trigger. It surfaced when I felt blamed for something I didn't do, making me question myself and angry at the situation. I forgave the woman, recognizing she was probably my caretaker and afraid she'd lose her job. Then I spoke to my inner child. I was not at fault and forgave myself for believing I was. Shame no longer had a hold. Now, when blame comes, I can stay calm, carry on, and act like an adult.

This was very significant for me. - Tanya

My weight has been a lifelong struggle. I always felt like a fat kid, like I was morbidly obese. But I look at pictures of myself from back then, and I was a normal size child and teenager! I thought I was so fat. I became so shy in high school, lacking in any self-confidence. If I could go back to my teenage self, I would make myself get rid of the harsh self-judgement. I would tell teen Angela, "Stop rehearsing the negative thoughts! Jesus loves you!"

Of course, I didn't know that back then. When I was 21, I was at my thinnest, going to the gym every day, and living on food from Jenny Craig. And I was still so unhappy. It wasn't until Jesus Christ came into my heart at 22, when He showed me outer appearance is not as important as I was making it. I still struggle with wanting to be thinner, to be more presentable and marketable in this day and age, but God keeps showing me to be healthy, and to be good to my body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit. I try to remember that. - Angela

Three Moms – Lying – by the Cousins

The first time our kids lie to us, our hearts are crushed, as parents. However, it's how kids react to the possibility of punishment, or just to protect themselves from getting caught in a wrongdoing. Remember the first couple? They disobeyed and immediately lied to the Father. So, take heart, parents. All kiddos lie. But what should be done, so that kids don't continue the lying as they grow and then start lying about bigger things than just whether or not they made their bed?

We asked, and the moms answered...

Mom of Three

It seems that the little bit of lying we've experienced has mostly been with the boys! Our oldest had more of a struggle when he was about 4 or 5, when he went through a phase of lying when he didn't want to get in trouble for something. Maybe he didn't obey or threw things in his closet instead of picking up. "I cleaned up," he said, because he wanted to play instead of obey.

We talked about honesty and truth. But when kids are ages 4 and under, those terms are abstract. We just continued to direct him to quit making up stories, and to ask if he needs help.

Maybe around age 7, when our daughter was age 5, they spent the day with their grandmother and we were told something our son had said. He had made up a huge story, and we had to tell her it wasn't true. We were embarrassed, because he said we had told him to tell her to buy him something! That was the first lie outside of our home with someone else.

We sat down both of our kids, although it wasn't both of their stories, and we used the "cry wolf" scenario. You know the story of the boy that cries wolf too many times, and no one helps when the wolf actually comes. We instructed him that if happened again, he would be the one to call and admit the lie. For him, that actually changed the game. We did not deal with that again, and when he realized that he hurt his grandmother and his parents, it bothered him enough to stop. His sister heard the story too and understood the hurt from lying.

Now the youngest, we deal with this ALL the time, as he's more deceptive at times. And it all has to do with obedience. "Put your socks on," we say. And he replies, "I have them on," and he does not. It's the same scenario over and over again, because he wants to play instead of obey. With him, we take away something, for example no television or no playing with friends. If he'd obeyed in the first place, he could have played. Those seem to work okay, but it's a battle we still deal with daily – he has big emotions! It's been hard!

As they've gotten older, we've talked about lying as sin, and as it hurts the Lord. We also mention relationships with friends, and how they won't believe them if they lie.

Relationships are important and lying breaks trust. And little lies need to be dealt with, before the bigger ones surface. We also make sure they can always come to us when they've lied or disobeyed, so that builds trust! Kids are selfish, at the core. But over time, they begin to understand.

Mom of Two

My girls are ages 3 and 5, so they have just begun exploring lying and why we don't do it! Lying mostly occurs when one does something to the other, lying about who started it or initiated it.

We've learned that the girls are afraid of the consequence, so that's why they lie.

When one of the girls doesn't tell the truth, she does have a consequence, and that's time out or maybe a spanking too, sometimes. We do tell them that the action disappointed us, yes. But we are most disappointed that they lied to us.

We then tie it back to the bible and to Jesus, and how Jesus has called us to be truthful. We remind them that our mouths can be so hurtful, but as believers we want to be more Christ-like in telling the truth. But we do make mistakes...so we reiterate again that we are so happy when they tell us the truth.

We end with telling the girls that we will always love them no matter what, but that it is more important about them telling the truth than it is about what they actually did.

As our girls test the limits more, we hope they will learn to trust us and not be fearful to tell the truth. Telling the truth ends up in a better outcome than lying!

Mom of Four

Lying is a really big deal in our home, regardless of what's happening in the situation. At the end of the day, we want our kids to know that even when they disobey or make a mistake, or do something mean and hurtful, we have to tell the truth. We have to be honest and we have to live in the truth.

I remember one time when our son was seven he lied for about an hour straight. He had hurt his sister and denied it over and over again. He was going to hold on to that lie so stubbornly that we had to do something that would send a message to his heart.

We decided to take away a hobby he loved. One of his favorite toys was Legos, and he had many Lego sets in his room. We told him we were going to put them all up for a season. Even after he officially confessed, his Legos stayed put away for over a month. He is almost 11 now, and he still remembers the severity of his lie.

We are all tempted to lie. Lies can come in many forms. Half-truths, bending the story, not telling the whole story, twisting the truth, etc., but they are all lies and they are all incredibly harmful.

In our home, it is not only important not to lie, but we want our kids to be surrounded by the truth, to speak the truth, and live the truth. There are many lies in our culture, in the media, in the kids' schools, and in our world. Lies believed destroy, but truth always builds and sets free!

“So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body.”
Ephesians 4:25.

In the Kitchen - Easy Breezy – by Marcy Lytle

We had a weekend away, lots of nights where we were in a hurry, and some days we were just too tired to spend a long time making a fancy dinner. So we needed some quick, tasty meals that were easy to put together. Summer isn't for slaving in a hot kitchen, but for picnics and fun together with family and friends. Would you agree?

Caramel pecan pie

This pie is super easy to make and tastes SO GOOD. A refreshing dessert to have on the back patio with ice cream, when guests come over.

- 3 eggs
- 2/3 c sugar
- 1 c (12 oz. jar) Smuckers caramel topping
- ¼ c butter melted
- 1 ½ c pecan halves
- 1 9inch unbaked pie shell

In a mixing bowl, beat eggs slightly with a fork. Add sugar and stir til dissolved. Stir in topping and butter, mix well. Add pecan halves. Pour filling into shell.

Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes or until knife inserted near center comes out clean. Cool thoroughly on rack before serving. Cover, and store in fridge.

Canadian bacon croissant

We had friends coming for dinner and it was a weeknight. With just a few simple ingredients, this sandwich came together nicely, and then warmed up so quickly. We added chips, fruit, and we were done!

- ¼ butter
- 1 large Spanish onion sliced thin
- 8 slices Canadian bacon
- 4 large croissants, halved lengthwise
- 8 oz brie cheese, cut into 1/8 inch wedges

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

In 12 inch skillet, melt butter and spread over med-hi heat, to cook onion. Stir occasionally, 10 minutes or until golden brown. Remove onion and set aside.

In same skillet, heat bacon, turning once.

On baking sheet, arrange the four croissant halves. Evenly top with bacon, then onions, then cheese. Bake 2 min til cheese is slightly melted. Top with remaining croissant halves and serve hot.

Charro beans baked potato

We had purchased a pouch of charro bean mix from a farmers market, and they were so tasty – but made so much! These leftover beans turned out to be a great topping, with a few other things, on top of a baked potato.

- Large russet potatoes
- Charro beans (if you don't have fresh, you can use canned)
- Cheese
- Avocado
- Fresh cherry tomatoes

Just bake the potatoes, then split open and add butter, salt and pepper. Top with the charro beans, and shredded cheese of your choice. Top with diced avocado and halved cherry tomatoes. Seriously, good.

Vegetarian Pesto Bowl

We took the ingredients for this on a weekend getaway and it was so easy, and came together in no time at all.

Ingredients:

- 3 diced bell peppers (three colors)
- Basil Pesto
- Zucchini spirals
- 6 oz shredded Parmesan cheese
- 4 tsp crushed red pepper flakes (optional)

Place a large nonstick pan on med-high heat and add the bell peppers, cooking one minute. Reduce heat just a speck and stir in pesto, cook til steam rises. Add the zucchini spirals and stir for about two minutes, then add the red pepper flakes. Remove from heat and let rest a few minutes, then serve.

Black bean and corn salsa

This is a great idea for picnics or day trips to a state park, or wherever you need to go!

- 1 can 15.5 oz black beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 large tomato chopped
- ¼ cup chopped cilantro leaves
- ¼ c sweet corn, cooked
- ¼ red onion finely chopped
- 1 T fresh lime juice
- ¼ t kosher salt
- ¼ t freshly ground pepper
- 2 T sour cream to serve, if you like

- Pickled jalapeno slices, optional

Combine the beans, tomatoes, cilantro, corn, red onion and lime juice in a med bowl. Season with salt and pepper. That's it! Then serve with sour cream and jalapeno slices on top if you so desire. Enjoy with your favorite tortilla chips!

Peanut butter and strawberry bagel sandwich

This was a spur of the moment lunch, because it's what we had, and it tasted really good!

- Everything but the Bagel
- Peanut butter
- Strawberry jam
- Fresh sliced strawberries,
- Mini chocolate chips

Toast the bagels and spread on a bit of butter, then the peanut butter on both halves. Add jam, sliced berries and chips. That's your sandwich!

Energy boosting trail mix

This mix is easy and delicious – great for taking in little containers to the theater to eat with your popcorn! Or on a road trip. You'll want to eat all of it in one sitting!

- 1 cup unsweetened coconut flakes
- 1 cup raw almonds
- 1 cup raw walnuts
- 1 cup cashews – roasted and slightly salted
- ½ cup raw sunflower seeds
- 1 cup dried cherries
- ¾ cup dark chocolate chips

Place flakes in a small skillet on the stove and toast over med-low heat til lightly golden and fragrant, gently stirring often (2-3 minutes). Watch carefully so it doesn't burn. Let cool before mixing the rest.

Place toasted coconut and all remaining ingredients in a large bowl and stir to mix. Store in airtight container.

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

I love sharing what I'm learning with you, and I hope you love learning with me! Every day, we can learn new things, taste something new, try this or that in the house, or just listen and realize we don't know everything there is to know! Then we can jot it down, commit it to memory – or not – and smile at all the learnin' that's taken place in our little world.

Here's what I learned last month:

On a trail through a park we saw an old Indian midden. Never heard that word before. Now I know – it's a low mound of heat-fractured rocks and other cooking debris that has accumulated over time from many plant baking episodes!

We also walked under an old railroad bridge and I liked the smell – thought it was the wood. My husband informed me it was creosote. Do you know that word? It's a preservative for timber against insects and fungi!

If you don't like the edges of your pillows hanging all wrinkly, just fold them and tuck them in – voila! You've got a clean edge! Saw this on Instagram.

Leftover charro beans and corn salsa are great atop chips – for nachos! Just add avocado and cheese!

Marcona almonds taste good sprinkled over pasta dishes – who knew!?

Ross has really cute melamine plates and cups in the prettiest summer prints – great for picnics or having guests - collect different sets! So does Big Lots!

Have you heard of stick style architecture? We saw it on an old homes tour, and so I looked it up. Love to learn new things!

The Wizard of Oz is a great film to watch and enjoy as an adult. We did this recently, and it was so fun – with an Icee and popcorn in hand.

Have you seen *Inventing Anna*? We just finished the limited series on Netflix. Oh wow, I found it riveting.

In the evening, just before sunset, it's one of the most relaxing and calming things to step outside and watch the stars appear on a clear night, as the breezes blow. Try it.

Sitting in my closet in the early morning hours, on the floor, listening to encouraging praise music, sets the tone for a good day.

Don't forget to enjoy a huge dill pickle, like you did when you were a kid, once in a while. It still tastes so good.

Just got a new 365-day devotional book by Paul David Tripp, called *New Morning Mercies*. It's a good one!

Leftover fries? Just heat them in a grill pan to crisp, and top on your next salad! Tasty!

SUGAR + Spice - Sunny Shadows – by Angela Dolbear

Bright, brilliant, hurt-your-eyes-they-are-so green leaves are on all the trees all around our property, and neighborhood. So it's no wonder I have developed a "thing" for bright eyeshadows lately. My Ipsy and Boxycharm boxes have brought a couple really lovely palettes that feature bright colors.

The "[Sour Ya Donin?](#)" palette from [beauty bakerie](#) has the loveliest yellow eyeshadow ("Tart") that compliments any shade swiped over it, in the crease of the eyelid (try "Choctails"). It brightened my eyes instantly! With an eyeshadow primer, the shades stay vibrant all day.

Anastasia Beverly Hills came out with the [Mini Pro Pigment Norvina Collection Vol.2](#). I have Vol. 1, which is violets and purples—my favorite—but, the shades fell flat. When I saw the bright, almost fluorescent shades of the mini Vol. 2 palette, I was intrigued. Almost scared. But I went for it, and I'm so glad I did. I applied the bright peachy shade (A3) all over my lids, with an extra layer in the crease. So bright and pretty, and flattering! Anything I paired with it is going to look so summery. I used a fluffy crease brush and blended a light dusting of the chocolatey brown shade (C3) from the palette. So lovely. I'm going to have fun playing with this palette all summer!

DESERTED ISLAND product of the month:

This spring, I put a second story on my imaginary hut, on my imaginary island, so I would have a better view of the imaginary bay. My hands were so dry, after all that work (and after everyday tasks in the real world). I was glad the Amazon sea plane captain dropped off a couple tubes of [O'Keefe's Working Hands cream](#). He always seem to bring just what I need! ☺

My hands get so dry all the time, especially since I wash them often. This cream is a life saver! I keep a tube on the bathroom vanity, one on my desk, a travel-size tube in my purse, and the big larger-size tub on my night stand for a thick coating at bedtime. My hands used to crack, especially my cuticles. Now they are smooth and lovely.

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](#). 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](#)

Tried and True - Last Month's Learnin – by Marcy Lytle

Drop a few blackberries in your next apple pie that you bake – they taste so good!

I found a cherry tomato basket at the nursery – a bush-like tomato plant – so cool.

No pretty flowers for your vases? Just snip a branch from your tree, insert and enjoy.

There are albino bluebonnets, rare, but seen. We spotted them last month.

If you live near an Alamo Draffhouse, check out their pickle fries – I liked them!

Big Lots has cute garden décor, especially retro white and black metal plant stands!

Walmart has cute pale yellow garden totes that make great totes for other things, as well! (We even used them for Easter baskets!)

Pesto is good on a ham sandwich, with sliced green olives. Tasty!

Have you tried Sister Schubert's Cinnamon Rolls? Our kids had them last time we ate with them. Easy and so good!

It's okay to burn a Christmas candle any time of the year. Really, it's actually quite fun and nice.

Did you know Home Depot has "loading sheets" for your plants, to lay under them so they don't get your car dirty? Just ask the guy in the garden center!

If your family/kids haven't seen the movie The Bad Guys, it's a good one with a good message! We had a great conversation about what it means to be good...after the movie was over.

Add a little juice from your pepperoncini jar to your next chicken salad recipe – adds some good flavor!

If a long vest or shirt is too baggy, pull it together in the back with a cute vintage pin and it looks so cute!

H&M seems to always have some cute dresses on the clearance rack, if you're willing to take time and look.

Guilt is a heavy load. Not meant for us to carry. I have to remind myself of that daily.

Marshalls has a two-pack of blue light reading glasses – just saying. They're cute, too!

Check out Barnes and Noble's bargain aisles if you haven't been in a while – great boxes for kids!



HOME

Practical Parenting – Their Aspirations – by Marcy Lytle

I remember as a child I wanted to be a famous singer. Key in on “famous.” I loved going to concerts with my brother when we got older, and I could imagine myself on a stage somewhere singing loudly, all dressed up, while crowds listened. I daydreamed about it, sometimes. But thankfully, my parents didn’t take me to competitions and push me to be a stage performer. I wouldn’t want that lifestyle!

However, many of our little kiddos have aspirations that drive them to dress a certain way, play with specific toys or become obsessed with whatever it is they’re obsessed with! How do we know, as parents, what aspirations to nourish and which ones to squelch? Or do we do either?

Ayla (pictured) has great aspirations to become an actress. She recently told us that she probably wouldn’t have time to call us when she leaves home, because she’ll be SO busy, but we were welcome to call her. She’s SO FUN to watch and listen to and observe, because she’s very expressive, thoughtful, unafraid and confident. All qualities that serve her well!

She recently had “career day” at school and I had the pleasure of shopping with her for the outfit of her choice - a Hollywood runway type of ensemble! She chose a (juniors section sized – she’s 9!) a black slinky dress and found a white sheer wrap to go with. She already had some heels, and she had her mom stop by the dollar store for the sunglasses to complete the look. Oh, and don’t forget the red lips!

I suppose we could all tell Ayla how silly it is for her to aspire to be a Hollywood actress, because we know the pitfalls and dangers of choosing such a career. I suppose we also could all push her on stage, find her auditions everywhere, and allow her space to be herself whenever and however.

I’ve watched my daughter as she parents these aspirations in Ayla. She’s offered her voice lessons, and fills the house with worship music, so that when and if she becomes a singer – it’s praise she offers – not something else. She was allowed to participate in a stage play during the pandemic, and all kids had to wear masks (so that was fun...) but this allowed her space to create and be. And yes, we all had fun shopping together for just the right outfit to wear to school, alongside her best friend who was dressed like an artist.

Aspirations, in my opinion, aren’t to be squelched, but rather guided.

Very few of our kids are going to be famous for what they do. And if they are, hopefully it won’t be because we pushed them into fame. But most of our kids are going to have jobs where they’ve studied a lot, worked hard, and might find mundane at times.

But creativity and dreams, as a kid? Let them have them! If she thinks she can paint the world on canvas like no other artist before her, let her paint! If he thinks he can outrun every other runner in the world, cheer him on!

We can encourage our kids in their strengths, guide them toward relationship with Him, and then trust that He will work all things together for what He’s called them to do. That’s the key.

Point them always to relationship with Him, first. Make family important and guard family time with a flaming sword. Pray together. Give to others as a family. Let them see, by example, what's important in life.

And then yes, let her play dress-up and sing karaoke behind her closed doors! Allow him to build and dream and sketch and pretend, for as long as he likes! Because in the end, where you guided them will take them on a path of goodness and grace...which will eventually filter out all the pride and greed associated with childlike dreams of being famous and rich.

I love the confidence that comes with wanting to be a star...which she has. And I also see that this little star is letting her light shine by the way she gives, makes cards for others, and offers love and care to her friends and family.

Aspirations. They're good for your kids to have. And being their parents – that's a good thing, too!

I Don't Do Teens – They're not the Same – by Marcy Lytle

It's June, summer is here, and you've got teens at home that need to get a job, study their driver's training, clean out their closets, help you around the house with the younger kids, go to summer camps, and all the things. You might be ready to scream already...I remember those summers. I also remember getting frustrated when my kids didn't take care of all of those things mentioned above in a timely manner like I instructed them to, or even at all! And years later, I recalled and STILL notice, now that they're way grown – my kids are different.

One thing we parents do is hope that our kids will all respond just perfectly to our directives and instructions and lessons in life. But, the truth is, they don't. We often compare our kids with other kids in those families that seem to have it all together (that's a big untruth!), but have you ever compared your own kids to each other?

Maybe she's always neat and organized, her room is like something out of a magazine, and her bathroom is spotless. His room, on the other hand, is that one place in the house you'd rather no one enter. You've even considered hanging yellow caution tape across his door!

The point in this month's story is that your own kids, ones that you raise the same, train the same, talk to the same...turn out different! And that's not a bad reflection on you, or them, because it just happens. Even twins are sometimes polar opposites!

My daughter was always the chatty one, never met a stranger, and could talk for hours when we were tired at night and wanted to sleep. My son was quiet, reserved, often sat in silence with visiting friends and yet they all said they had a good time. I never understood that!

She ate salads, vegetables and everything offered to her. He showed up at the table to observe the goods and then commented or frowned, if fries and chicken weren't in at least two of the bowls.

He was organized, on time, scheduled and particular. She was more carefree, scattered, running late and content with clutter.

And yet...we raised them both the same. Or at least, we thought we did!

As summer is now here, it's going to be a challenge to navigate having these kids that were at school all day now home and bored, with time on their hands. Maybe she'll babysit and love it, and your other daughter would rather scoop dog poop. Perhaps he'd like to sit and play video games all day, but he gets every chore done on his list you hand him in the morning.

The point it...don't compare your own kids or pit them against one another. Saying things like, "Why can't you be more like your sister?" isn't probably the best choice at making parent/child relationships grow. Pointing to your daughter and saying, "Your little brother cleans better than you do!" won't win you any mother-of-the-year awards.

If you find that your teens are different than other teens you observe, or even so odd compared to your other kids...

- Ask God to show you their strengths and admire those, and tell them so.
- Pray for wisdom on how to guide their oddities, if they're causing problems in the family.
- Try creative solutions with that kid, for her issues, without comparing to anyone.
- Relax and sigh, because soon they WILL be gone and their uniqueness will be someone else's problem.

(Okay, that last one – it's really true – you might just have to do it!)

Our kids are all different, partly because that's who God created them to be. But they might be different and a challenge because of outside influences, their own disobedience or just struggles they have personally. It's hard on parents to navigate what appears to not be the norm with our kids. But we will get through, we'll start to see their beauty shine and their quirkiness become an asset, and find ourselves amazed at these teens as adults.

I'm praying for you, moms and dads, as you survive the summer of 2022 with different personalities in the house, none of which might resemble your own. But that's okay. Just make sure you have a retreat set aside for yourself – like maybe in the drive-through at DQ for a blizzard – at least once a week alone...AC on...enjoying every bite...when things get tough.

An Adage A Day - There's No Place Like Home – by Carole Gilbert

A few years ago, my husband and I took two different road trip vacations. The first one we “dropped everything” and headed east. We “hit the road” “off the beaten path” and drove through Nashville, Tennessee all the way to the Biltmore Estate in North Carolina and “back home again.” We worked the trip out to “travel light” and “live out of a suitcase.” It was a wonderful trip! We got away from the “hustle and bustle” of our everyday routines.

Our second trip was to the west. We flew into Jacksonhole, Wyoming, rented a car, and leisurely drove back home. Jacksonhole was a place with a small airport, and we were on a big plane which started the trip in an “off the wall” kind of way. But the beauty we saw during both trips was astonishing!

We had no reservations for places to stay during both trips but found ourselves sleeping in amazing hotels. We stayed at one on the Biltmore Estate grounds, one on the beach at South Carolina, and one right outside Yellowstone National Park. We also stayed in a motel in Utah that had us putting a chair under the doorknob. Unfortunately, not all the places we found to stay on the spur of a moment were up to par. But after a night of restlessness with the door blocked, we turned around and stayed at the beautiful Salt Lake Plaza Hotel with the amazing view of the historic Mormon Temple Square of Salt Lake City, Utah. Both were “trips of a lifetime.” We loved these trips, and we loved the chance to “take a break” and “get away from it all.” And God was amazing, as always, about directing our path. But what we really loved was “going home.”

There are verses in the Bible I find fascinating and could be in reference to vacation. Jesus has sent His disciples out two by two to minister, heal the sick, and cast out demons. Also happening right before these verses is when John the Baptist is beheaded. The disciples had gotten his body and took it to a tomb, then went back to Jesus.

Mark 6:30-32, The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves.

These verses are the closest to a vacation recorded in God’s word, and I know they are intended for us too, as an example. Sometimes we just need to get away.

So, what’s this month’s adage, saying, or quote? You choose.

Famous author J.R.R. Tolkien said, “Not all those who wander are lost.”

Hans Christian Andersen, the author of many stories, among other things, including the original version of *The Little Mermaid* and *The Snow Queen* said, “To travel is to live.”

Another interesting quote, "Take only memories, leave only footprints," came from the namesake of Seattle, Washington and a leading Suquamish and Duwamish chief known as Chief Seattle.

One of my two personal favorite quotes comes from a song sung by Louis Armstrong, "And I think to myself what a wonderful world." And the other is from one of my favorite authors, Dr. Seuss, "Oh, the places you'll go."

I think of these quotes whenever I travel! But I also think of them at another time, when I am home.

So, to end your vacation dreams, here are some other wonderful quotes.

"The best journey takes you home,"

Madeleine L'Engle, a Christian author, wrote, "Maybe that's the best part of going away for a vacation-coming home again."

"East and West. Home is best," written by Charles Spurgeon.

And to end, I'd like to add that it doesn't matter whether you like to travel or stay home, Billy Graham said it best,

"My home is in heaven. I'm just traveling through this world."

Tiny living...Fishing with the Boys – by Leyanne Enterline

I'm switching gears here a bit, this month! With living so tiny, we are out and about quite a bit. So of course with living by the lake, the boys are on the water constantly. And again, when we go on vacations we try and find some cool places to fish. Even when we're out around Austin, the boys have a pole packed in the car to be able to hop out and throw a line! So... lots of fishing going on here! Along with that brings some strange things that happen while on the water.

One crazy event just took place today! But first, the back story. There's a pond the boys have been dying to fish in, close to the baseball fields where we often are. I decided to go ahead and take them right before practice one day. And... the "big one" was caught! Asher threw out a giant swim bait, whatever that is (they all have names), and a big mama grabbed it! It was so exciting and the boys were hooked (no pun intended) and, of course, were now after even larger fish.

As time went on, unfortunately the big bait got snagged and was lost at sea (pond). A very sad Asher left the pond realizing there was no way to retrieve the lost bait. The next day he had an idea. He had this rope with a super strong magnet on the end of it. We went back again and after hours of throwing this thing into the pond with no luck (and lots of prayer), it finally happened! Big bait was lured back onto shore, along with several other people's lost lures.

Asher was so excited and kept going in for more. Finally, we had to leave and as Asher went to put his shoes back on he realized he was covered in, wait for it, you're gonna vomit...leeches! What in the world? I thought those were in a foreign country! And...I had no idea what to do.

He calmly said, "Oh, I've seen someone do this before!"

My son got his knife and used the back side to scoop the leeches off. Yuck, yuck, yuck! Never ever would I have thought about this happening! Asher was so excited about his adventure and getting his lure back he didn't care one bit about those nasty parasites!

I could probably write a story on each fishing day! This one just stands out because it literally just happened!

A few more that stand out (but I won't go into detail) are...fishing off the boat ramp and zebra mussels cutting up the boys' feet. Man, they make you bleed! Another time, a cougar ran in front of the car just as we were leaving from fishing. Dusk is maybe not the best time to go! Giant water snakes came out of the water to nab the dead perch used as bait! A humongous alligator gar was caught that took three kiddos to hold! Great Grandpa used their catfish as his trade for donuts from the donut shop owners. And finally, a favorite pole fell into the water and I jumped in fully clothed to rescue it so my kid wouldn't cry! That took a while to dry out those Ugg boots!

There are so many more stories! I never thought I'd spend my days fishing, talking about fish, watching others fish on TV, going to fishing events, camping for days without a shower just to fish, eating lots of fish...but I wouldn't trade it for anything!

I guess if there's ever a food shortage, our family can trade with fish!

Remember loves grows best in tiny spaces

A Night to Remember – Our Sweet Father – by Marcy Lytle

Have you gotten into making charcuterie boards, yet? I LOVE making them, and this month call the kiddos together to create one for a movie night with the parents...as you create the board and learn about all the sweetness from the Father.

Preparation: You'll need a large board or tray for your base. Then all sorts of movie candy: sour stripes, gummies, peanut butter cups, M&Ms, Skittles, chocolate covered pretzels, popcorn, Twizzlers, Jr Mints, all the candies your family likes – include at least 7-10! As you read about the sweetness of God the Father, arrange your goodies on the tray or board, and then enjoy while you watch a family film after the prayer is prayed!

Psalm 19 says, *The decrees of the LORD are firm, and all of them are righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.*

Who likes honey? It's so sweet and good for you, just like the word from the Father – words that bring life!

- Arrange the first sweet on the board, by spilling it out in a pile in the center, like the way his goodness is poured out.

Psalm 55 talks about **sweet** fellowship at the house of God, as we walked about among the worshippers.

Did you know that worshiping the Father can be so sweet – actually delightful? It's because when we recall his goodness, it makes our feet feel like dancing.

- Add another sweet in a tiny bowl to add height, and then kick up your feet with delight.

Proverbs 3 says, *When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be **sweet**.*

What would sweet sleep look like? No bad dreams, comfy covers, stuffies all around, or what?

- Arrange another sweet in a neat shape near the other two, and talk about last night's sleep. Was it sweet?

Ecclesiastes 11 says, *Light is **sweet**, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun.*

Have you ever seen the sunrise? What was it like? Or how do you feel when you open the window and see that the sun is out?

- Set another sweet on the tray, in another bowl, or in a shape if you want!

This month has the weekend of Father's Day – a day to celebrate our dads. But the greatest Father of all is the One that originated the ability to taste things sweet, experience sweet sunrises, sleep a sweet night's sleep, and enjoy his sweet presence. He's a good, good Father, and it even says in the Good Book that we can taste and see that he is good!

- Finish arranging all the sweets on the tray with little bowls or sacks, or stacks, or shapes, until the tray is filled – every space.

God fills our hearts full with his sweetness!

Let's pray...

Father, thank you for your sweet love for all of us. May we always taste and see that you are good, and then share that sweetness with others. Thank you that your sweet presence is with us always, and forever.

Amen.

Chipped China - Apples of Gold: Ageless Communication Plan – by Jennifer Lytle

Our family carpools. We all drive around, all together, in a single-car. If someone has baseball practice and someone else has late-night Jiu-Jitsu practice, we make magic happen. We have adjusted work schedules and timing for just about everything, so everyone is dropped off and picked up . . . with one car. When I get in the car after a long day of work, my kiddos are frequently happy. They're excited. Sometimes, someone is overstimulated or upset. There is almost always someone hungry. But they want to talk! Everyone except my oldest! (He and I are probably the most alike. We could probably crack up on a date night over cake, ice cream, and cocoa. In a crowd, however, we sometimes go silent.) So our car has background music, an occasional podcast blasting in someone's earpiece, and about two to three and sometimes four conversations going on at once.

You can imagine one of us asking, "Huh?" and "What?" frequently.

Communication is a skill requiring refinement, tools, and training. While we typically learn to communicate through and in our closest relationships, there are times when poor communication habits breed in familiarity. Consider this four-step plan for conversing with those you love the most . . . and those you pray to love!

Step 1 is to share your observations. Observations are factual and free from judgment or criticism. Make like Andy Andrews, The Noticer, and try something like this:

"I see the clothes lying next to the hamper."

"I hear the volume in your voice."

"I see you threw the bag behind the chair."

Be frugal in your observation. Be specific. This step is beneficial when you recognize and attend to yourself and your own reaction when there is an emotional response to an apparently external stimulus. It's high level stuff. You can do it!

Sandy Blackard is the author of *Say What You See* in her parenting/educator handbook. I must acknowledge her contribution to this step. And, Sandy, if you read this, I just purchased your book! It, however, was a used copy. I doubt authors earn anything for second hand copies.

Step 2 is to state the obvious using an I statement. This step is about owning your feeling(s) regarding the observation. Sometimes your feeling, reaction, or response can seem obvious. For instance, if you come home and immediately raise your voice, it might be apparent that you feel upset. Stating so can be relationally and psychologically beneficial. This act can be like an invitation to be authentic and tap into the reality within your heart.

"I just cleaned these clothes off the floor last night. I feel upset."

"It's too loud for me. I feel uncomfortable with that volume."

"I feel scared when you throw things."

Step 3 is agreeing on a time to talk about it. Everyone has a window of tolerance. There are times when we can ace attentive listening and empathy. There are also times when we want to sit like a zombie and feel the warmth on our seat.

There are moments when the question, "What are you thinking?" will be an invitation to connect. Other times, it could be perceived as a jailhouse interrogation with a spotlight burning in the eyes.

Acknowledge the anticipation you have to learn more about the playground politics or lunchroom ruckus. If you need space, acknowledge that too. It's a beautiful thing to recognize your needs and ask for them. Also, this assertive, respectful request is a gift to model for others. Step 3 may sound like this:

"Oh, you want to show me your art! I love that color! I want to put the groceries away first to keep our ice cream from melting. Will you show me in 10 minutes?"

"Wow. You checked out new books? Can we look at them together when I put you in bed tonight?"

Step 4 is asking for and giving forgiveness. First, you say the name of the person you need to ask forgiveness from. Then, you acknowledge your specific misstep. Lastly, apologize for the pain that you caused the other individual. If you need to forgive the person, take this time to do it! Forgiveness is for you.

With these actions, communication can become like apples of gold... glorious to both the eyes and the ears. ([Proverbs 25:11](#)).

If you'd like a copy of *Apples of Gold: Ageless Communication Plan*, you can [download a copy here](#)



YOU

Inner Strength - The White Rose – by Michelle Wyatt

What is your favorite flower?

What is your favorite color?

The answers may come easy, but have you ever stopped to reflect on the reason behind your answer?

After reflecting, comes expressing. Expressing ourselves gives us strength. Jesus is right there with us, with open arms, receiving our words with grace and love. We can give ourselves grace and permission to express ourselves in our own unique way for we are worthy.

What is my favorite flower? The white rose.

Why?

I will share with you my answer from long ago and then my present answer. Until recently, the white rose has been my favorite flower because it's pure-looking. I don't mind the edges turning brown over time. It reminds me of nature-perfectly imperfect as we are. Recently, I made a list of the words that come to mind when I think of a white flower. Once I started the list, more and more poured out. Here are the words that appeared the most often in my list: sincerity, love, compassion, cherish, and forgiveness. I still believe in my original answer, but there is more to it now.

The White Rose

Water rippling, a white rose in the center

Petals drifting but still close

Dancing with the waves

Tears of compassion dripping off the edges

With specks of gold and silver

Shimmering like the stars

Radiating the beauty inside

Whether the tide rolls in or out

The beauty of the soul remains

I like lots of colors of roses, not just the white ones. Colors can give off different impressions to different people. Colors have several purposes in our world. They are associated with emotions, personality traits, nature, and brands. I would like to share how colors have represented emotion regulation in the life of my oldest son who is on the autism spectrum.

Brendan's favorite color has been red for a long time, which is ironic, because when he was receiving occupational therapy services between 5-7 years old red had a negative connotation

regarding emotion regulation. One key phrase the therapist taught Brendan was “check your engine.” Green meant okay, focused, calm, and attentive. Blue meant sad, low energy, struggling to complete tasks. Red meant high energy, not listening, off task, and possibly showing signs of anger. Even after he was dismissed from OT, I used that phrase with him until I’d say the 2nd grade, because he had made so much progress. It seemed to fit developmentally. That’s the key. Developmentally, the meaning behind the colors green, blue, and red fit. As he got older and his view of the world expanded, he made more independent choices. The phrase “check your engine” wasn’t developmentally appropriate anymore.

If you and or your kid’s favorite color ever changes, consider that they have their own meanings that change as we all grow.

Remember, expressing ourselves gives us inner strength. Expressing ourselves takes courage. If I can do it, so can you!

Strength in Spirit

Strength in faith

Harmony in color

Music of the soul

Clarity of the mind

Uplifting of the spirit

Smile!

Life in a Nutshell – Destination Unknown – by Jill Montz

I love to travel.

My favorite travel partner is my daughter, Dotty. We have been to both coasts of the United States and quite a few states in between. We have cruised to the Bahamas and we almost didn't leave Hawaii by choice and by American Airlines cancelling our flight home. We have been to both Disney World and Disney Land more times than I can count on Mickey's gloved hand. We ran through LAX to catch a flight and we have gambled away a few hours in Vegas on a layover (well actually I put \$20 in a slot machine but Dotty crossed her fingers and toes...and it really only took a few minutes to blow that twenty but the layover was several hours.) We have skied where Olympic athletes train. We have spent more hours in a car traveling to softball tournaments than either of us care to think about. We have ordered room service at 2am and have checked out at 4am on more than one occasion.

We have traveled with teams, with friends, with family, and just the two of us. We have spent days and weeks planning a trip and we have decided last minute to pack and head out the door in an hour. We have made blisters on the soles of our feet, made new friends, made mistakes, made a change in plans, made each other mad, made each other laugh until our sides hurt and made more memories to cherish than we deserve. Traveling is one of my favorite things to do with Dotty and I hope we have many more adventures in the years to come.

My favorite trips are the ones that people basically plan for me. I have been blessed to have a few extra special friends (some that are just good planners and some that plan vacations for a living) plan many of the biggest trips for me...practically right down to the last detail.

I simply tell them my budget, the days I can be gone, a few main things we definitely want to do and then I am happy to leave the rest of the planning up to them. I have always been thrilled with the trips and I have lots of pictures to prove it.

To be honest, my goal in life is to one day tell my friend Whitney Dowd (Whitney Dowd Travel),

"Here is how much I can spend and here are the dates I can be gone. You just tell me if I am packing for hot or cold weather and when I arrive at the airport I will check the flight to see where I am going."

Seriously, I would trust Whitney to plan my trip from start to finish and not give her a single piece of input except a budget and a timeframe. Otherwise, I know whatever she plans will be amazing and fun and a trip that I will cherish.

Traveling like that sounds like a dream come true for me. As a single mom who also manages two retail stores I make so many decisions each day that the thought of not having to make a single decision for a vacation is an ideal trip for my brain and my soul! Just letting go and letting Whitney take control would be so easy.

But I often wonder why letting go and letting God take control of my life is so hard for me to do. After all, He is the ultimate planner. He can see everything that will happen in the future...all the storms that build in the skies as well as those that build in my life. He can see when there are detours in the road and when I will face a detour in the plans I have made. He knows when my luggage will get lost and when I will feel a bit lost myself.

When it comes to vacations I am 100% okay with letting go of all the researching, planning, booking, scheduling, and the hundreds of other details that go into a trip. But when it comes to my life I have a death grip on every detail from the insignificant to the most life altering. It is so hard for me to listen and follow through with on the plans I feel like God is laying on my heart. I want to argue with Him, ignore Him, and sometimes flat out defy Him.

And let me tell you...those strategies don't work well.

Letting go and letting God have full control over every aspect of my life is so hard for me to do. I fear He will ask me to do something hard like go on a mission trip to some place without running water or air conditioning or cell service. I worry He will tell me to go talk to the homeless person on the street or my friend who is hurting but I don't know what to say or to my least favorite person who I simply avoid at all costs. I worry God will tell me to give not just my tithe but until it hurts a little or a lot...and not just my money but my time too (which is in shorter supply for me than money these days).

Asking Whitney to plan a trip for me is easy. I know she will send me someplace beautiful and fun and with all the comforts I know and love (and think I need). But asking God to plan my life is a bit scary because...well He might use me in a way that brings Him glory but brings me out of my comfort zone. The truth is both Whitney and God are just doing their jobs and both are good at what they do. My only choice now is whether or not I have the courage to say to God,

"Here is my life. You control the dates and the budget. Just let me know if I am packing for hot or cold and when I arrive please tell me where I am going and show my heart who needs me to tell them about or show them the love of Jesus."

Proverbs 2:8-9

"...for He guards the course of the just and protects the way of His faithful ones.
Then you will understand what is right and just and fair – every good path."

Healthy Habits – Daily, Do It – by Marcy Lytle

There's something to be said for routines, whether they're weekly or monthly, or what about daily? We all have the usual daily routines of getting dressed, brushing our teeth and our hair (hopefully), but what about other daily routines that bring health and life?

Here's a list of some maybe you do, and maybe you don't. But it's a good list to ponder and pick something from to make you breathe and lift your head a bit higher, or your heart pump a bit stronger...

1. Daily give thanks for all good gifts from Him.
2. Daily write down your cares and toss them in the trash, over to Him.
3. Daily eat a piece of dark chocolate.
4. Daily text someone with an encouraging word. It only takes a minute.
5. Daily forgive the little hurts, before they grow into big ones.
6. Daily open the blinds and sit and observe what you see.
7. Daily walk fast, dance in the kitchen, and smile instead of frown.
8. Daily light a candle, smell the fragrance, before blowing it out.
9. Daily grab a few nuts and enjoy a variety of flavors.
10. Daily choose water as your drink with at least one meal.
11. Daily delete emails, so they don't grow into a monster list.
12. Daily read something uplifting that warms your heart.
13. Daily sit and listen to the birds sing.
14. Daily dab your lips with moisturizer, gloss or stain.
15. Daily step outside and feel the sun on your shoulders.
16. Daily water something like your plants, your mind, your soul or your kids.
17. Daily let something go – one heavy weight at a time.
18. Daily shop your closet for a new combo of accessories, shoes, bags and clothes – do it!
19. Daily replace one lie in your head with the truth.
20. Daily admire one thing about yourself when you look in the mirror, and smile.

What's a daily activity you do that brings life? Share with us in the comments below!

Life Right Now - A Time For Rest - By Jennifer Stephens

Summer isn't just a season, it's a celebration! For many of us, flipping the calendar to June signals salty beach vacations, playful get-togethers with friends & family, and lots of time spent outside digging in the garden or cheering at a ballgame. That's true for me. But sometimes summertime isn't just about frolicking in the fields of freedom from life's responsibilities. Sometimes those sweet summer days mean something else. For some of us, it's a time for...rest.

Slowing down is a luxury I don't have ten months out of the year. I don't even have the privilege of eating a leisurely lunch or using the restroom when I need to! I am a teacher. And I am tired. Not just regular tired either – teacher tired. It's a thing. Google it. I'll wait.

Society likes to admonish teachers for having easy jobs with summers off. I get it. *Kiiiiind of*. EVERYBODY works hard whatever their chosen field. But a teacher's job is different. No matter how much a teacher loves her job - and we do, we really do - being "on" for eight hours a day (twelve hours on those days we're *voluntold* to be at an evening activity) while constantly surrounded by people (no matter how adorable they might be) takes a toll.

It's been said that teachers make more minute-by-minute decisions during the day than brain surgeons. Decision fatigue is mentally draining. Another reason we're all worn out by the end of May? Worry. We worry about all sorts of things – are the kids learning, why is that parent angry, did I just break the copy machine again, is that angry parent going to badmouth me on Facebook, active shooter drill, is that student being abused at home...the list goes on. Worry fatigue is emotionally draining. And the reality of wolfing down a few bites of lunch in 5.2 seconds (Okay, that might be a *slight* exaggeration, but can we agree the ten minutes we do get is still not long enough for proper digestion?), not using the restroom when needed (My urologist says teachers are her number one clients. Just sayin'...) and standing on our feet all day leaves us physically drained. Don't believe me? Look at a retired teacher and compare their face to a photo of that teacher before retiring – it's like they've suddenly aged in reverse!

What do we do when the constant weariness leaves us running on empty? When we're buried in the busyness of life, we tend to put our mental, physical, and dare I say, spiritual needs on the backburner.

But Jesus. He calls for us. He offers us rest. All of us. Not everyone reading this is a teacher. Even if your workplace or season of life allows you respite from constant fatigue and provides time for frequent restroom breaks, you also NEED rest. Jesus supplies rest for you too.

"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Matthew 11:28

Through rest we are strengthened. Reinforced. Our minds, our bodies, and our hearts become strong again. When someone's comment about being a lazy teacher with the summer off feels like a gut punch to your profession, just remember Jesus *desires* for us to rest.

Slowing down in summer is cherished time. A celebratory pause. A break from the mental and physical fatigue we face each day. A time to recharge so we can do it all again in August. Refreshed and ready. Until then, friends, I'm going to find a hammock, a shade tree, and a really good book. Because this moment is a time for rest.

Under Pressure – The Father of Lights – by Debbie Haynes

There's a verse in the book of James that says every good gift, every perfect gift is from above, and comes from the Father of Lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

What does that even mean?

Let's return to Genesis 1 to see...

We read that in the beginning God took a void earth without form (no shape or life in it), when darkness was upon the face of the deep, and he MOVED upon the face of the water.

He said, "Let there be light."

The light was good, and God divided it from the darkness.

Many bible scholars believe that light had already been created in eternity past, before the fall of Satan. That the lights had withheld their illumination because of sin, and were then restored to their original purpose by the Father of Lights. So when in Genesis 1:2, when God restored those heavenly lights, it was from his OWN self – the source of all light.

I John 1:5 says in God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

So, back to that verse in James. God sends every good and perfect gift. That GIFT was his SON – Jesus!

The spirit of God moved upon Mary, just like the Spirit moved in the beginning, and moved over the darkness – and light came forth. The perfect gift of God came down.

In the book of John, we read further that Jesus says,

"I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness,

but will have the LIGHT OF LIFE."

Jesus came into the world reflecting the light of His Father – the author and source of all light. And that light shone into the darkness of the world, including your heart and mine. And then he reassured us when he said to not fear the darkness of the world. Why?

"I have overcome the world!"

And now...because the Father of Lights has passed his Light on to us, we are the light of the world. We are to let our lights shine to those around us so that they see our good works and glorify – *or cast back that light* – to our Father in heaven.

What a Father he is...one that called us out of darkness into his miraculous light...and calls us to walk as his children in that same light that cancels all darkness around us.

June is the month we celebrate fathers. Pray this prayer aloud with your kids and your parents, your friends and your neighbors who may not know the Father of Lights...just yet.

Father, it's dark down here right now.

We ask you to strengthen our faith in your son, Jesus. He said we don't have to fear darkness because he's overcome it. Help us, Father, to keep walking in your light, to keep doing good works, so that others can see them. So that we reflect that light back to you, Father.

Thank you, Jesus, for bringing us goodness and light.



MARRIAGE

In This Together – Becoming Me – by Bekah Holland

I am, admittedly, someone who would love nothing more than to ignore any signs of trouble. Anything related to confrontation? I'd rather not. Just call me an ostrich. If it were up to me, I'd live with my head buried in the sand. It's nice, quiet and shaded here.

Sadly, I'm also someone who believes very much in the "know better do better" kind of thing. Which doesn't pan out well for me in my attempts at avoiding the uncomfortable. However, sometimes, the awareness that comes with peeking out of the hole I like to hide in, is way more important to me than my dislike of being out of my safe space and opening myself up to all of the hard things that are unavoidable when you have any kind of human connection.

I was listening to one of my favorite podcasts earlier this week, and they started talking about codependency. I don't know about you, but I always thought about codependent people as being weak, needy, dependent on another person for validation and permission to be happy or sad or any of the things. OBVIOUSLY, that couldn't possibly be me. Nope. I'm strong. I find my own happy. I create my own sunshine when there isn't any to be found.

But then they started talking on the podcast about other things that made me a bit, um, fidgety, in the way that you got when you were young and your mom started asking about where all of the cookies she made that you totally stress ate (at 2 a.m.) went. My fidgety-ness did not ease up as they continued, and one of the examples they gave was of being a human spotlight. A - crew. I very nearly turned it off at that point. Because that sounded very much like something that would make me put my head directly back into the sand. But, I took some deep breathes, and a few stops and starts (ok seven...seven stops and starts) and I made myself listen. Because while I may not be weak, I have been known to base much of my value on the happiness of others. Mostly, my husband and kids.

In case you are curious, that's a horrible way to find your value. So here's where I get real and uncomfortable, and a bit vulnerable. I didn't grow up in house with fighting or yelling. In fact, I can't even remember a time that my parents argued. As a person who's been married for 15 years and some change, I am real dang sure there was plenty of arguing that went on behind closed doors, just none that I ever witnessed. You'd think I'd end up something related to normal. But that's what you get for thinking.

My reaction to anger and yelling is probably similar to fear responses from wild animals....increased heart rate, panting, sweating, trembling, pacing, possible urination/defecation-I'm mostly certain those last ones never happened, but, I'm still young-ish, so never say never. But the way I have dealt with people's anger in the past is to make myself smaller and smaller so I'm not taking up any additional space or oxygen. I operate under a thinly veiled panic attack and bow and beg and take the blame for any and everything, especially things that I have no control over. Things that aren't mine to take ownership of.

Often times, if I've taken time to look at these experiences, I've chosen to look at my actions as caring and selfless, because all I want is peace, at any cost. If I get honest with myself though, I recognize it as selfish. And instead of allowing others to feel what they feel, and process upset, frustration, anger or whatever, I just try to stamp it all down. I take on the heavy lifting, and try to throw water on a grease fire. Sometimes it works out, and sometimes we all have to evacuate because everyone knows you don't pour water on a grease fire. I might be overdoing it with the grease fire analogies, but you get my point. I'm not doing anyone any favors.

I'm not protecting my husband by hiding the hard stuff from him. I'm not teaching my kids about real time consequences when I don't let them experience the fall, and let them figure out how to get back up. All I'm doing is prolonging the inevitable disasters that come with being human. I clean up the messes, and the mistakes and the inconsiderate actions and words and the stupid choices that should be giving them a better understanding of life and how the world works. Both the good and the bad.

My version of protecting is actually impeding.

Now please listen to me.....this is hard freaking work, this turning inward and digging through days, months, years, decades of sludge. I went out and bought the book *Codependent No More* by Melody Beattie and made it a whole three pages before putting it not so gently back down on the side table by our recliner (that's ugly as sin but so comfortable that I let it in my house anyway...don't tell my husband!) IT'S HARD WORK. And at the moment, this hard work is slow. Because it's exhausting and overwhelming and there's so much shame in acknowledging the ugly stuff in our lives. The stuff no one else knows about so it's easy to hide.

But just like my family deserves to experience both the good and the bad things that come along with their life choices, I deserve to set down the unrealistic expectations I've heaped upon myself, and take ownership of my stuff, and only my stuff. Did I mention this is hard? Hard enough that I decided to text my therapist to tell her I bought the stupid book and was trying to *want* to work through it, just so I couldn't wimp out in our next session and joke my way out of the harder stuff. I needed to feel accountable. And I need to feel that same accountability for taking care of my stuff, and becoming the best wife, mom, friend, daughter, sister...the best me I can be. So I can become what I need, and what I was created to be, and so the light that I've always desperately sought after would be easier to find, because all I'd need to do is look inside.

There's always more work to be done. Just when we think we've got it all figured out, something comes at us that reminds us that we have no freaking idea what we're doing and that we just need to keep doing the next right thing, taking the next right step, and walking on the next right path. I guess that means that I'll be picking that book back up and trying to make it through more than three pages at a time. And that I'll learn to be as gentle and forgiving of myself as I am with everyone else in my life, as I run, walk, crawl or inch my way through the hard work of becoming me.

"I see your pain and it's big.

I also see your courage and it's bigger.

You can do hard things."

Glennon Doyle

Date Night Fun – Old City – by Marcy Lytle

I subscribe to a site that sends me ideas for outings in my city and recently it included a list of all the “old” spots around town to visit. That sounded so fun to me! So I decided to put together a list of date night ideas that are general enough for you to make specific to your town or towns nearby. June is the perfect month to get out and experience your area “old style.” Doesn’t that sound so fun?

Burgers and a Shake – Find the oldest, still running hamburger spot in your city. It might be a drugstore counter (and they’ll have shakes, too!) Find out the year it opened and see what styles were popular then. Head to your nearest vintage or Goodwill and pick out an outfit for both of you, go home and change, then head out for burgers and a shake – just plain old-fashioned kind. Oh, and share the shake with a couple of straws!

Park and a Stroll – Check out the city’s oldest park and read about the history of it. Pack your food in a basket – with checked paper goods (you can find the red/white checked sets at Dollar Tree!) – and include IBC root beer, as well. Walk the park, swing, and even slide if you want to! Then play a game of checkers (you can also get at the Dollar Tree) and chat as you enjoy your feast in the great outdoors.

Haunted Hotel – Is there a very old hotel near you with a haunted story or history? There are a few in our town! Read about it and plan your date (or even an overnight stay!) at this hotel. If it’s a hotel with a lobby and a bar/restaurant, that’s even better. Dress up a bit and make a reservation at the restaurant, and opt for just some fancy appetizers to share. Share any “ghost” stories you remember from growing up. When you leave, pull over and observe the starlit sky in the darkness, because stars are older than dirt!

Old Cars – Check your local listings and see if you can find an old car show somewhere (they’re often in small towns or even sometimes at drive-in hamburger spots!) You might opt for a car warehouse somewhere, where vintage cars are for sale. If you dare, rent a convertible for this night out – or at least go with your own windows rolled down and hair blowing in the wind! Enjoy every car and look inside. Opt for a drive in, like Sonic, or another old one like Dairy Queen and order something you haven’t had in a long time. A Dilly Bar might be so fun!

Cemetery Crawl – We have observed that LOTS of towns have cemeteries on their list of things to see when visiting the area. Often, it’s because of the pretty grounds or even odd historic features, or where famous people are buried. Find the oldest cemeteries in your town and print out the history. Drive through. We recently found a “pest house” still standing in one cemetery where infectious disease patients were housed! After the crawl, head to the oldest shopping center and pick one store to enter, purchase a treat and enjoy.

Think of your own “old city” fun – like maybe a game at the oldest ballpark, or visiting the oldest neighborhood for a drive-through to look at the homes there. The photo above is one of our oldest drug stores in our city, where they have a diner in the back that makes the best shakes and burgers. We recently drove through the old parts of our city and loved the adventure...we might do this often!

After 40 Years – All the Boxes –by Marcy Lytle

We've been remodeling every room in our house over the past six months and we've got lots more to do. That's what happens when you've been married a long time...the old needs replacing with some new! And with that remodeling, there have been so many deliveries of furniture and décor and all the things...in cardboard boxes. Lots and lots of boxes.

I so enjoy getting the scissors or a knife and ripping down the long tape on the sides of the large boxes, to reveal what's inside. One time, inside was a nightstand which I put together all by myself, and another box was an entire bed with which I definitely needed his help!

But the one thing I detest is getting rid of all the cardboard and plastic, and some of it is just too hard and stiff for me to even bend and make smaller to fit into a trash can.

And then there's my husband.

I can leave all of the boxes in a pile by the door, and he – without saying a word – quietly picks them up and carries them to the trash can. I can hear him outside ripping and making smaller and stuffing and inserting them into our garbage cans, over and over again. Because we've received so many boxes, day after day after day.

The other day I watched him do this mundane task, one I don't even have to ask him to do. I observed how he gladly takes out the boxes and they're gone, just like that, out of my hair and out of my way. And I'm left with this beautiful thing we've nailed together, fit into a space and decorated for new.

Sometimes, it's those days of observation of his servant spirit that make me attracted to him more than ever. I don't think he's ever complained once about the pile, as he considers it a pleasure to serve. He always has. And I try to learn from him, I really do.

But truth be told, if it were me, I'd be complaining. I wouldn't want to pick up another's garbage, or take it out in the dark just before bedtime and pile it up, or wait until next week because the can is already too full. I'm not the giver in our relationship, like he is. Oh, I make dinners and clean bathrooms, but selfishly these activities are for my well-being, too. I'm just not cut from the same cloth as my husband.

I had to write about this trash removal, because it really grabbed my heart the other day as he exited the front door, arms full. He always sees the good in every pile of garbage, and I usually only see the garbage.

We just returned from a weekend away and I was sad it was over so quickly, it was Monday morning and work was waiting, and the week was full...as I sighed, coming in the door.

His first words were, "Thank you Lord for this awesome home," and I smiled at the reminder of how life is good. And how my husband is one of those good gifts from above.

And guess what? Another package is on the way soon, and inside is a new oven, and there will be packaging to discard, and arms that carry it away gladly...the same arms that hold me tight when I'm a mess and all a fright.

For Better or Worse – Greener Grass – by Kaelin Scott

The grass is greener on the other side.

We've all heard that saying, but have you ever felt that way when it comes to your marriage?

Sometimes when life is tough, or maybe when it's mundane, marriage can be one of the first things to suffer. Our lenses can get foggy, and we start to associate our spouse with problems that may not have anything to do with them. Blame is a rotten thing, but it often gets tossed around easily within marriage. Not only that, but we can start to give our spouse the cold shoulder, or maybe we use biting words with him, or perhaps the relationship just grows lukewarm in the busyness of life.

Whatever the cause, marriage goes through seasons of drought, just like anything else. It's tempting in those seasons to look around at other couples and try to measure ourselves against them. We can see how perfect they look on the outside – how put together and happy they seem to be. We see their smiles and their postcard-worthy photos on Facebook, their clean house and happy children. We think that they have it all figured out, that they don't struggle the way we do. We wish we knew their secrets, so we could be that happy, too.

None of those perceptions are rooted in reality. They're based on a small percentage of someone's life that we can't see. There's so much more to their lives that we don't know about and probably will never see. It's like an iceberg, and we only get to see the tip. Because the truth is that every couple has their struggles. Every marriage has its dry seasons, dark seasons, seasons of doubt, angry seasons, sad seasons, and torn apart seasons. There is no truly perfect couple.

When we're tempted to be envious of someone else's marriage, we have to remind ourselves that we're all human. Every couple faces unique challenges, but that doesn't make any marriage stronger or better than another. It's up to us to make our marriage as good and as strong as we want it to be. And the only way to truly stand the test of time is to put God at the center of all things. If He is woven intricately into every aspect and each little detail of our married lives, then we will come through each season united and whole.

Love isn't perfect. It's not a fairytale. And it's certainly never easy. But it's capable of surviving life's storms if we choose to see it through. If we stay focused on other people around us, wishing we had what they have, we'll never be satisfied. But if we keep our eyes on Jesus, and focus on loving our spouses, we can find the absolute beauty God intended in the covenant of marriage. It may not always be picture perfect, but it's a journey worth taking. Especially with God in the middle.

“Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.

A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”

Ecclesiastes 4:12



ENCOURAGEMENT

Rooted in Love – I Believe Him – by Kaelin Scott

Sometimes I wish life was like a sitcom. Everybody looks great all the time, and their houses are always super clean, even if they have 10 kids. They say all the funny things at all the right times. They get the coolest jobs and opportunities. Everyone has a bunch of friends. And all their problems are tied up neatly by the end of each 30-minute segment.

Wouldn't that be something? To have all your problems solved at the end of each day. But life doesn't really work that way, does it? Some problems can take weeks or months or even years to get fully resolved. Others may never get worked out at all, at least not on this side of heaven. And that's something that can be really hard to grasp.

We want answers. We want breakthrough. We want healing. We want change. We want reconciliation, restoration, peace, comfort, happiness, blessing. But we don't always get what we want when we want it. It's something I've had to teach my children, even while I'm still learning it myself.

Life isn't a TV show. We don't always find the answers we're looking for or solve our many problems. Sometimes real life just doesn't make sense. But there is one thing we can always count on, and that is the love of God.

He doesn't just love us on the perfect days, because heaven knows those are few and far between. He doesn't only accept us when our problems are tied up into nice, neat little boxes. Because as soon as we solve one, we'll surely face another one.

No, friends. God doesn't pick and choose when to love us. He loves us all the time. Every day. Right now as you read these words. Even in the midst of your chaos and heartache and anger and whatever storms you may face. He loves you.

Let me say it again. He loves you.

This life isn't perfect, but He is. And His love is big enough to cover you, no matter where you go. Whatever you're facing today, He is with you through it. He won't leave you, even when everyone else does. He won't give up on you, even when you give up on yourself. He won't stop fighting for you, even when the odds are stacked against you. He's not afraid of the battle, because He's already won the war.

I don't know what you're going through. It may be tough, it may be scary, it may be confusing. Whatever it is, trust Him to get you through it. Not only that, but trust Him to be *with you* all the way. Maybe you don't have the answers, and maybe you won't ever fully figure things out. But that doesn't mean you can't be wrapped in amazing love and grace. Your life may not be perfect, but it's beautiful and worth saving. Jesus says so, and I believe Him.

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 8:38-39

Firmly Planted – Church as an Oasis – by Dina Cavazos

Can you love God and not go to church? A sincere young man recently asked me this question. My mind turned to the Spirit of Truth for an answer. If I say “yes” then it might seem church isn’t important. If I say “no,” it reduces the love of God to rules and regulations. What should I say?

He said he didn’t like church. I remember not liking church when I was young, for different reasons. But here I am, plugged in, not so much because I enjoy it (because truth be told, sometimes I don’t), but because I’ve learned that “church” *is* important. The ritual of “going to church” has little appeal and no value to me without the communal experience of friendship with God and with one another. Friendship with God is interactive, and when we’re talking with each other...well, there’s nothing like it. God made us to live in community—encouraging one another, loving one another, bearing each other’s burdens...when it’s done right it’s a beautiful thing. But what if it isn’t?

In the early 80’s, through divine intervention, I attended a church where I actually experienced the true, deep, forgiving, sacrificial love of God. It was called People of Prayer, and it was. My life was a wreck, I was a wreck. Often I did nothing but cry through the worship (I remember angelic singing) while my two little girls were crying in the nursery because they were insecure and needy. It hurts my heart to think about it. It was a very difficult time and we were in great need of grace--lots of grace. We received it there—it was an oasis in the midst of my personal desert. No one judged our Goodwill clothes and unkempt looks. No one said I “should” do this or that, or “shouldn’t” do this or that. We were loved and my children were taken care of so that I could experience healing worship. I was encouraged in God’s love and many were the hands and feet of Jesus. Someone lent me their car, saying it was “God’s car,” and babysat the girls so I could go on a job interview. She barely knew me, how could she trust I wouldn’t wreck it? She trusted God and took his instructions to love one another seriously, even people like me.

Many years and a few churches later (because life is like that), I had a very different experience. The churches in between were ok--nothing close to People of Prayer in love and godliness. There were comments made and attitudes displayed that were less than “Christian,” but this one particular “house of worship” actually asked me to leave the church because they didn’t agree with a life choice I felt I had to make. *Sure I’ll leave—gladly!* This lack of grace contributed to my not going to church for six years. I loved God and believed in his Word. I would just read on my own and we could still be besties. But without community—the encouragement and support of like-minded people—it’s hard to stay on track. My trajectory began to curve and pretty soon I was far away from God and lost connection. But God is faithful, even when I’m not.

I was a lost sheep, and he brought me home again. Eventually, divine providence brought me to a church that felt like home. It was full of grace and love, balanced teaching, and wise counsel. It wasn’t without problems—no church is, because we, as humans, are far from perfect. Due to a tragic event and then some wacky thinking, it split. But I, and someone who matters very much to me, still remember it. We are still strengthened by the foundation this solid church gave us, and I made lifetime friends that remain close.

These experiences, together with the current climate in the Church (in America at least) all swirl together in my mind. There are some churches where I might be asked to leave if I were honest. There are some that assume Christians should all think the same and vote the same, because, after all, it's God's way of thinking. There are some that are so focused on issues, they've forgotten Jesus came not to solve world problems (there were plenty in his day), but to love and save *people*—all people. And *he* does the changing through an inner transformational process, not a “should” or “should not” stance.

I only have a few moments to think about how I will answer his question: *Can you love God and not go to church?* I understand. I do. The last thing I want is for you to go and come away with a broken heart and distaste for God's people. And so I say: *The most important thing to God is relationship. He wants to be your best friend because he loves you. It's not about going to church, it's about loving and knowing him; but it's easy to move away from God without other people who know him who will encourage and support you. God made us to love one another, work together and help each other.*

I pray those words were spoken by the Spirit of Truth. I pray he one day finds his oasis where God's love is demonstrated through acceptance, forgiveness, mercy, and acts of kindness. I pray that we, as people who love God with all our heart, mind, and soul become an oasis in the world God so loved—corporately in the place we call “church,” and individually in our daily lives. There are people living in the desert all around us who need a drink of water—it doesn't matter which glass it's served in.

Now I think I will sit in God's garden awhile and ponder the idea of church as an oasis...

Moving Forward – This Moment – by Pam Charro

I've had a challenging time really enjoying this season of my life. While I am aware of my blessings and I intentionally thank God for so many good things every day, I also don't really feel great about any specific area in my life. And I know he wants to hear about how I feel, so I tell him.

I was out walking yesterday morning as the sun was starting to come up, pouring my heart out to him about several different concerns and hurts, and I heard a small whisper,

What about this moment?

I paused and said, "This moment?"

Yes, what is missing in this moment?

So, I stopped and looked and listened. There was a light breeze, some clouds, lots of birds singing. I was walking at a pretty good pace and it felt good to be moving around so early. Brand new springtime green was everywhere. Really, it was a pretty good moment, actually.

I breathed deeply and said, "Nothin...nothing is missing in this moment."

I just let myself be in it.

I don't feel God was correcting me for sharing my concerns with him, but I am glad he stopped me for that brief time, just to be aware that those good moments, when fully experienced, can add up to a good life. I don't need an absence of problems to appreciate that, just a reminder from time to time that those moments are probably happening around me more often than I am fully allowing myself to be in them.

So now I will be watching for them.

Simple Truths - Say More – by Marcy Lytle

“Less is more” is such a good reminder in so many situations, but then again there are many situations where more is something we need to think about doing...especially when we have a voice to do so.

There’s a friend I have on Instagram that I’ve never met in person, but she’s someone I think I’d love to hang with if I could meet her! What has impressed me about her the most is how she comments on my Instagram feed, which maybe sounds like a funny thing to note...but here’s the deal.

This friend doesn’t just say “cool photo” or “so pretty” or “nice outfit.” She actually says more, and starts a conversation with a compliment and then a question. And she seems so genuine. She has gotten my attention over all of my other Instagram friends because of this and made me think of how often, I need to ...

say more.

When I see a friend anywhere – on social media or in person – share something awesome I need to tell her I enjoyed it, and why I enjoyed it. Maybe she posted a song and I listened to it and it brightened my day. It doesn’t take me more than an extra minute or two to tell her what the lyrics meant to me, and to thank her for posting.

When I hear of a friend in need - with an ill family member or going through a tough time – it wouldn’t hurt me to yes, say I will pray. But more than that, I could actually send a prayer or call and pray out loud with her, to encourage.

When I’m feeling uneasy or burdened or worried and I think it’s going to be better if I just stuff it all in and handle it all alone, I need to say more. I need to reach out, ask for help, accept a kind word and allow a friend to ease the load by reminding me of His great love.

When my kids are doing a great job at parenting, working hard and achieving, tirelessly giving and showing up for others, I need to tell them that I notice. It’s nice to share the thoughts with my husband, but why don’t I just send the kids a text to say how proud I am of them?

When I’m checking out in line at a store and the clerk says she’s tired, or seems a bit stressed, why can’t I say more than, “Hello,” and “Thank you.” “Have a blessed day” is just a few words more and might make her smile.

When he’s come to the kitchen to help me with the dishes, or he rubs my feet while we’re watching television, what if I took the time to tell him all the little things I noticed that he did and thanked him for each one...before bed? I think it would make his heart dance!

When I’m thinking of God and his goodness and the reality of his presence, I can whisper, “Thanks,” and that’s totally fine. But what if I think back to the entire day or week prior and note each little thing I noticed where was with me and his Word brought me smiles, and I told Him and He listened! It would be awesome!

Yes, less is more in so many areas of our lives. But it's not in every area. Saying more allows our good thoughts and thanksgiving and needs and admirations to slip out of our heads onto our tongues and into the ears of another. Saying more hardly takes any effort at all, and yet the ripple effect is large, to those standing near the stream as our words skip across the water so lightly.

Is there someone in your thoughts today, or standing near you, or reaching out to you? Consider saying more, to bless their day as you in turn receive a huge blessing right back on you...one pressed down, shaken together, and running over...in goodness overload.

Unearthly Thing - Supporting Role – by Angela Dolbear

All is well with me, as I write this. There are no I.V. tubes hanging out of my arms, or mysterious fevers and/or pains. God is healing me because I am asking Him too, and because He is good. (Can I get an “amen?”)

So much illness, and mental health struggles of late have compelled me to focus on myself. It has sadly, made me self-centered.

But now, God is showing me to lift my head, and look around.

People near and dear to me are suffering. They need some help, and some prayer.

If I have learned anything from my own trial and tribulations, it's that prayer works. God is very involved in the lives of those who seek Him wholeheartedly. I read it in His word. He tells me so Himself. With that in mind, I pray for those around me.

Praying for others has been so instrumental in nurturing my relationship with God and with others. It has also been an important tool to help me to move away from “navel gazing,” and being too self-involved.

When I tell people I am praying for them, I don't mean it lightly. It's not a flippant response to hearing about someone's troubles. I pray for that person, if not immediately, certainly later. I'll make a note of it. And I pray like I'm covering a territory in a war. Prayer is very important to me.

Spending so many days in physical pain, and/or in the hospital has taught me that prayer can be done anywhere and at any time.

I used to say, “Well, all I can do is pray.” As if prayer was a last resort. Not so! Prayer is the first line of defense, the very first place to go with anything and everything. It is the first thing I do in support of my loved ones. Even if there is no particular need, I will still ask Father for protection and wisdom. So important! And needed.

Along with praying for others, I learned a few things in my various life journeys about helping people, and ministering to their needs. I am no expert, but here is a list of tips when supporting others:

- “God gave us two ears and one mouth” philosophy – I don't know where I originally heard this saying, but it holds some truth. Some people don't want to hear (or can't hear) suggested solutions while they are in pain or struggling (including yours truly). Just lending an ear for listening, and then maybe some arms for a hug (if COVID is not an issue), can go a very long way in comforting others.
- Along those lines, offering unsolicited advice is a slippery slope. Sometimes, things I feel strongly about may not be someone else's convictions. I have to resist the urge to try to fix the situation or the struggle. Unless the Spirit of God has impressed a special Word, I stick to listening and a good long hug if possible (blasted COVID!).
- No Judgement. I do not have the Holy Spirit's insight, and also I could be wrong, or my thoughts come from an impure place. So no judgement of people. Even during the times when I was listening to one of my spiritual daughters lament over a wayward night of passion with a young man she was dating, I listened, and let the Holy Spirit do His job of bringing conviction, repentance, and healing, as ONLY He can. Rarely did I have to

speak on the issue. A child of God knows. And if the person is not yet a believer in God, then point number one is their need for Jesus. Again, Holy Spirit, be my/our guide.

- The Word of God is a sharp double-edged sword (please see [Ephesians 6:17](#)). We need to be careful how we wield it. Tossing out even well-meaning Scriptures can wound deeply. But in the hands of the Holy Spirit, the Word can bring truth, comfort and healing.
- Check-in and follow-up with loved ones who you are helping. I struggle to remember to do this, and have asked God to help me be a better at it, and He has. So many of my loved ones live far away, but with texting, emailing and messaging, it's easy to follow-up. I always feel so loved when people check on me, so I want to do that for others.

My main goal in life is to glorify God in all I do and say and think. One of the ways to do this is to love others as Christ has loved me. SO much love He has for us. Unfailing and everlasting love.

The least I can do is love on those around me. I'm not perfect at it, not even close, but God answers my prayer for help with it. See? So much love! Pass it on.

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, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). Angela writes real, relevant, relatable, and reverent fiction, with an aim toward spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, while hopefully inspiring readers to laugh and/or cry. She loves reading, writing prose, as well as writing and recording music with her husband Tim in their studio in Nashville, Tennessee. 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 - All the Bridges – by Marcy Lytle

I recently sent a group of pictures I'd taken on several trips to a company called Mixtiles and had them printed out in a collage of a dozen frames, to hang on my bedroom wall. They were photos of bridges – one of my favorite things to capture when we travel. I didn't realize I had so many on my phone! I'm curious if you have something you like to snap when you're out and about? Some people like flowers, others like to photograph birds, and still others love water features or other things out in nature. I also adore covered bridges, not just the kind we have here in Texas.

It's so pleasant to pull over to the side of the road, or stop on our long walks and pause to focus and snap a bridge. And why do I like bridges so much? I haven't really thought about it until now. And here are some reasons I came up with:

They're all so different. Some are rounded, some are flat and straight.

They're all constructed out of different material, depending on their purpose for weight and height.

They're a welcome crossover when needed in a park, or across a huge river when driving.

They're amazing in front of a sunset.

The massive ones are breathtaking.

The covered ones are quaint and inviting.

The swinging ones are an adventure waiting.

The rickety ones are scary and fun.

Since we hung our collage of bridges in the bedroom, we look at them often and remember where we've gone, and we admire all of the beauty of each one.

I still look for bridges when we take walks in local parks, along trails and around town. I just find them fascinating and feel so sad when graffiti peppers the sides from those that wish to mar the beauty that others have created.

One of the bridges where I live is a place where thousands of people gather in the summer evenings to watch the bat flight – a famous sight in Austin. We stand together and look toward the sky and wait for the approaching darkness just as the sun sets to see this spectacular display of these winged creatures as they emerge from under the bridge to journey for food.

It's good to have things that make us pause when we're walking, to take pictures. Otherwise, we're often too lost in thought, too distracted by life's worries, or too engrossed in our to-do list waiting for us back home. I've been there!

But when I pause, observe, stand and snap – I then have this amazing capture that lasts long after the walk and the adventure is over.

Take some happy pictures this summer of one particular thing that makes you happy. Frame your favorites. Smile when you enjoy the view. And then go out and do it all over again...

FRESH THYME – I Shop Alone – by Marcy Lytle

Shopping is a favorite pastime of mine, as it is of many of my friends. And I do love shopping with the girls on our twice-a-year outings together, because it brings me joy to see what they buy! It really does. However, when I'm shopping for personal items, I have limited time, and I know what I need, I prefer to shop alone. I'm wondering if you're the same.

For years when I was younger, I often wished for a shopping buddy. And I invited different friends to shop, which was fun if we weren't actually buying and only looking. I'm not really a window shopper, though. I'd rather be doing something else with my time, if we're only going to look in windows!

Here are a few of my experiences, which made me then realize how much I enjoy shopping alone.

Shopping with a friend that has an entirely different budget than yours is not fun. If she wants to visit high-end shops that you never consider, then you're going to go home frustrated or make a purchase you don't want to make.

Shopping with a friend that's a long-time-decision maker can be frustrating as well. Maybe she likes to visit 10 stores and feel every sheet and see the thread count, and you are fine with the best sheets on the Target shelves.

Shopping with others, like a group of ladies, is fun if that trip is mainly for visiting and sipping and having a good time. But if you really need to purchase specifics, you might get too many opinions and have to walk away from your group to find what you want. Then you wonder why you even came...

Shopping with my husband is something I do often, but not if I want to linger and look at tops and accessories. He stands patiently waiting, but it makes me feel hurried and rushed, and that's not fun.

So on most days when I have a list in hand, I set out to my favorite little stores that maybe no one else would even enter. I like shopping at the junior-type clothing stores because the prices are less, and the selection is so cute – compared to MISSES in department stores. I LOVE looking at all the inexpensive tableware and cute accessories in the discount stores and tucked in the back of vintage shops. And I enjoy marking off my list the things I'm shopping for, taking my time, breathing and creating in my brain, and all the things that come from shopping by myself.

I really did long for shopping partners for years. But I've realized that shopping with a friend is actually just time with her for fun. If I'm with her, then I'm with her to listen, to chat, and to look and not really to shop. When I separate the two, then I can have fun doing both.

I do have a shopping partner that shops like I do, but she lives 2000 miles away, and that's my sister. So since we're miles apart, we call each other after we exit Target and we share our

finds...pictures and all. I love it that she gets excited when I find a cute plant for the table on the porch.

If there's something you enjoy doing alone, don't feel guilty. And don't push or make yourself show up, be somewhere, or participate in an activity that stresses you out. Alone time is good, as long as it's not isolation for the wrong reasons. But needing a break to get what you need done, to think and linger and look...now that's some alone time I crave...and I crave it often.

Happy shopping or whatever it is you enjoy doing by yourself for fun...

FRESH THYME - Life Persists – by Marcy Lytle

His two parents and mine. Three gone, and my dad is still here but not really here. Four different experiences, yet still the same. Aging parents, losing parents, watching them decline, or losing them suddenly, is hard. Thoughts and prayers and aches and pain exist while experiencing the loss of a parent, at any stage in life.

His father had a great mind, but his body gave out, and four days into a nursing facility he passed. No prolonged walk toward death...he just passed over quickly. My mother was still working and sharp as a tack and had a simple procedure that turned into three weeks of horror...and she was gone. Just like that. His mom had dementia and it severely progressed over many years, while she lived and called the nursing home her place to work...to the hard-to-watch slow death that took her mind and then her body.

And then there's Dad.

Dad is 96, amazed us all with his stamina to mow and walk and visit and even preach. He too began to succumb to that ugly disease of dementia, yet slowly but surely. And then an infection and then the progression and still he lingers...because life persists.

I cannot even begin to understand the why's of the time of death, the circumstances surrounding death, or the sheer unexpected grief of death...but what about life that persists?

I've had this conversation with others, about their dying parent that won't die. And while that seems horrible to write, it's so true. Watching a parent decline and suffer is worse than losing them, or so we think, and so we pray for God to "take them." But what if he doesn't? And what if they linger and their life persists for months or even years, in agony and pain and loss of funds for care, and all the things?

While death surely interrupts and stops life altogether for a while, life persists as well, right alongside, like two highways going in opposite directions with this concrete median in between that we bang up against way too often...with graffiti lettering in red paint that screams, "WHY?"

My mother prayed all of her life to not be stuck in a nursing home, as she watched her mother suffer and want to never have that experience. Her wish was granted, but her death was awful. Others have prayed that same prayer, and ended up right where they dreaded...in some sort of circumstance they never dreamed they'd live.

Maybe the key is to quit praying for this or that and to just observe life as it persists, and lay aside the wondering and just live.

Maybe our prayers are way too full of petitions instead of praise. I know mine are.

Maybe we'll never know the answer, so it's best to quit asking the question...and breathe.

Maybe our definition of "life" isn't even what it should be, even the full life. Maybe life is giving.

Maybe life persists to create this wonder and this mystery we were never meant to solve.

Whether your loved one slipped away too soon, or you're caring for one that seems like he'd be better off "up there," I'm here with you. This thing called life is a gift we were all given, for a certain number of years. But oh, wait! For those that believe, it's for eternity.

Think on that for a while, and it will blow your mind again.

Life persists. Life ends. Life is a gift. Life lives on.

And I'm still here observing as the last of a generation hangs on a little while longer on this "not our home" earth...

FRESH THYME - Summer Travels – by Marcy Lytle

I'm not a worldwide traveler, not even an expert by any stretch, but I do love to get away...and get away often. And...I love to read travel tips from other people. I've even shared some of my own packing tips in THYME, before. But this month, the month that officially starts the summer season, I thought it might be fun to share other travel tips, that maybe you haven't thought of before. We have a weekend away with the kids, a July 4th three day stay, and a longer trip the end of August in Pennsylvania – so here are some ideas and tips for all three types of fun:

Weekend away with the family:

Look for Airbnb homes that sleep however many guests you have – for us we look for one that sleeps 10. And plenty of bathrooms!

Read all of the reviews! And consider if you're staying mostly at the house, or doing activities away.

If staying at the house...see if a yard is available, any swimming opportunities, and if games or other fun are included with the stay. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

Start early and pack a bin full of games and crafts and activities to do while at the house – only pulling out a few each day – so that the kids don't rip into all of them at once. It's not Christmas! You can find great plastic tubs at Michaels.

Plan your meals before you go – and include fun plates and napkins and tablecloths for each evening meal – collect them from Big Lots or The Dollar Tree. Charcuterie boards are fun and easy!

Send a list to the family of what you want each family to bring. We needed river shoes, fishing poles, mosquito spray and sunscreen!

Pick a destination that's not more than two hours away if some of the families are traveling with little kids.

Three-day fun for two:

Each July 4 we find a small town and a bed-and-breakfast for relaxing and chilling. We choose a small town with perhaps a square, and a cute home just off the square, so we can walk around...or we choose one out in the country a bit.

Look for a bnb that has character – a porch, a swing, walking lanes nearby, a dive restaurant within driving distance, and cute décor inside. Again, ask questions and read reviews.

Plan fun food to eat – like watermelon slices with mint, different dips and chips, gourmet sandwiches. And take picnic wares and a basket! Use baskets you have at home, or even big scarves to use as a tablecloth!

Pack a bag of books, puzzles and games for two. If you play Yahtzee, take a set of dice for each one of you – makes for an easier game!

Look before you go for Netflix movies you might be able to watch in the evenings while you enjoy your fun food.

Make breakfast together and eat it outside each morning, before the sun scorches. It can be easy muffins you made ahead of time, or you can make pancakes and all the works, together!

Take a walking tour of the nearby small town, of all the old buildings and their history. You can often find these on line to print out and follow.

Use this time to reconnect, rest and redirect your thoughts...

Long vacation:

We start several months prior and purchase our airline tickets and make rental car reservations, so that those are paid and over with by the time we go. Points we accumulate on our Visa add up and often pay for our entire airline tickets.

How to pick a destination? Think of what you love to do. For us, we like history, exploring and sightseeing. We subscribe to some travel spots that send us emails of charming towns in America, summer travel destinations...and we look for non-resort, non-crowded spots most of the time. But if you like a resort or a touristy place, go for it! Just google what you like, and then google itineraries for that place and often others will share all that they did, and you'll pick up ideas!

Once we pick the town, we then pull up a map of surrounding towns that we can day trip to, each day that we're gone. Usually it's about seven day-trips, and we try to not travel more than 2 hours away each day.

Use trip advisor or lonely planet, other sites to see the things to do there, places to eat, nature sights, shows, museums...and start your list.

Decide which town you'll stay based in, and book a house or a room. We try to find a small house, so that we can make some of our meals and save dollars. And we usually spend the evenings back at the house, unless we find a cool show to attend!

Create your itinerary, making sure the cost and times open of the places you want to see, and distance to travel. Sundays and Mondays - some things are closed!

Budget out the cost and start saving up a little each month; or plan now so you're not surprised later. Remember tips, parking costs, souvenir shopping and all the extras. We often allow ourselves a certain amount of spending per day.

Enjoy! If airline tickets are too expensive, drive to your destination and plan your trip on the road. And enjoy the planning together, as much as you do the going. Sit by your screens, peruse all the possibilities together, and get excited before you leave.

Can't take a vacation this summer due to obligations, funds or work? Spend time marking on your calendar day trips for every other weekend, or even staycations where you find fun things to do – mark them – plan them – and look forward to them from now through August.