



A BUNDLE OF  
**THYME**  
*For Every Season*

Online Women's Magazine | [thymemag.com](http://thymemag.com)

November 2025



TIPS

## Seven for You – Childhood Home – by the Panel

It's the month of Thanksgiving, when family members gather. And maybe you're missing someone this year, or family lives too far away and won't make the dinner, or there's just not a lot of joy to be found. We thought it would be so fun to share some childhood memories of our homes with you, to invite you to share yours, and to give thanks for those memories. While not all childhood homes left good memories, there are often some great ones to hold on to, worth sharing. Enjoy!

My favorite memory of home was having a real home for the first time. My Dad was in the military, and we moved every three to four years. I was born in Texas, but I was a year old when we moved to England, where we stayed with my family for two years before moving to a rental. After England, we moved to Nebraska. Two different rental homes there. Then Germany for four years and three different rentals. We came back to Texas in 1970. We rented a duplex and then, in 1971, Mom and Dad bought our first home on Ware Road.

I finally felt grounded, a place to call home at last. No more moving boxes!

Home

Skipping from here to there

Things left in boxes

Things left behind

Feeling Paddington lost

with my tag asking to be sent home

A plane to there

A ferry across the waves

Tossed by circumstances I never asked for

My planting uprooted more than I can count

Where is my corner to belong

that place to call home

It's over the sea to Dover

Where the gulls cry "here" – Cathy

As an Air Force brat, I had many homes throughout the world. But, the one that stands out in my mind was the one in Omaha, Nebraska. It was a 1920s triplex that had a beautiful mahogany staircase, carved pocket doors between the living room and dining room, a mahogany fireplace, and a claw foot tub in the one and only upstairs bathroom. In the front was a brick enclosed porch, and a vestibule that lead to the parlor. So grand!

I was in first and second grade in the 1960s when I lived in that house with my parents. My school was just down the block. To this day, the smell of wood-burning fireplaces take me back to the neighborhood.

In the 1990s I went back to Omaha and drove by the old house. (I still remember the address, 1210 S. 10th St.!) I was outside taking photos when the new resident came out to say hello. I told him I lived there as a child and they invited me in! It was gorgeous, they left all of the architectural details up while updating the bathrooms and the kitchen. What a treat that was.

(As I wrote this, I did a Google Earth search on the address and I am so sad to see that the property has fallen into disrepair.) – Anita

One of my favorite childhood memories is the family devotions we had at night before bed. About 20 minutes before bedtime we would gather in the living room or my parents' sitting room. Mom always had a scripture passage or an inspirational reading or both to share with us. Then we would all kneel and pray for a bit. I remember the sound of the voice of each parent as they thanked our Lord Jesus for his many blessings and talked with him about the needs of the day. As I got older I had prayer time on my own. But, I still feel comfort when I think of their commitment to worshiping God. - Gina

When I was a little girl, we lived in a small country home that my daddy had built himself. It was truly the beginning of homes with open concept. The living room and dining room flowed together along with the kitchen and hallway that led to the bedrooms. Along the connecting wall between the living and dining rooms, my daddy constructed built-in shelves from the floor to the ceiling. These shelves were only about three inches deep and they were solely for my mom's salt and pepper shaker collection. She had sets from everywhere! She had them from every vacation, every state, every holiday, everything you can imagine. Some were gifts and some had been passed down to her from family members. And she dated them on the bottom along with the location they came from.

As a child, this collection mesmerized me. I would sit for hours at a time, and yes, I said for hours, imagining stories around the sets. Sometimes I would even mix and match. Of course I was not allowed to touch them, but in my imagination, we were creating all kinds of adventures. I held on to boxes full of her salt and pepper shakers for years after she died but as time went by, I would move and lose some. And then finally, one home I lived in had no room to store them, so I had to throw away many boxes. It broke my sentimental heart. I did keep a few sets and have recently been giving them to my daughter. But I have enough to bring back the memories. Occasionally, I'll be at estate sales and see a set that looks just like one my mama had. And every time, I have to pick it up and see if there's a date and location written on the bottom, just in case. – Carole

I lived in the same modest house from birth until I left for college. The house was a 3 bedroom, 2 bath, single story home that was typical of the 1950's building boom. Prior to my family buying the home in the early 60's, a large family room was added on the back. The den, as my family called it, was magical! It had a large stone fireplace and mantle that held all the Christmas stockings. It was far enough away from the master bedroom that the noise we made as kids never bothered my parents. It was the perfect setting for so many slumber parties, birthday gatherings, and movie nights that it makes me happy just to think about it. When my childhood friends reminisce about our slumber parties, the den is always mentioned as the ideal spot for 11 sleeping bags and the 11 mischievous girls that never slept. - Shelley

My childhood home is up for sale, and it makes me sad. Life has to move on, right? And as we cleared out the house, put up furniture for sale, it felt like we were erasing the memories. But we weren't. They're still with us.

One of my favorite memories of home is Mom in the kitchen at holiday season, especially Thanksgiving and Christmas. She always wore an apron, and the house was always hot, because of the oven. She said, "Melvin, can you turn on the air-conditioner?" and he did, until the rest of us were freezing...but Mom was comfortable. She made the best gravy at Thanksgiving, and her pecan pies are still a legacy. We girls even have the recipe printed on a tea towel, hanging in our own kitchens.

When we arrived, we entered through the garage door right into the kitchen, where Mom was completely engrossed in creating dishes to set the table. It was truly her happiest moment when her kids arrived, and she hugged each of us as we entered. That kitchen is full of wood cabinets,

a bar where we could sit and converse while she cooked - and often she handed us a bowl of pecans that Dad had shelled - so that we could break them up for the pies.

They say the best memories are made in the kitchen, and I would have to agree... - Marcy

My childhood home was fun as a child and challenging as a teenager. We lived on 13 acres in the country. Our home was lovely, but the land....sighhh. All that dirt! I love dirt. My parents built our home, an amazing shop, barns, a garden that the fire ants ate up and fences all around. But with all that building....came lots of dirt. And mowing. And animals. Fresh air. Just perfect for a kid. I think every child should get to grow up where you burn your trash, lol. I still love fires! My memories consist of learning to use power tools, operating a riding lawn mower at way too young of an age, and helping my mom grow roses. They once let me paint part of the outside of the house...I was too young to realize it was underneath a porch and wouldn't be seen, lol. I was ALWAYS dirty, my brother was always dirty, and we were HAPPY. I'm still happiest (and most alive) when I'm sweaty and covered in dirt!

I appreciate suburban life, too, because it's easy to get where you're going. Living in the country was challenging as a teenager. I had to leave for school super early, which meant less sleep. And if I got grounded from my car....there wasn't a SOUL coming to pick me up way out there in the boondocks! But I wouldn't trade it...I am a country girl at heart. - Laura

## **The Dressing – Fall is Here – by Marcy Lytle**

The long awaited season in Texas is finally here. It arrived later this year, and it's so fun to finally step outside and feel the cooler breezes blow. What's fun to wear for fall, you might ask. Well, lots of things, and here are a few of my absolute favorites!

That pop of red – I found this red bag at Marshalls back in the summer and saved it for wearing this fall, especially with the chocolate brown that's popular this season. In fact, red just pops with most every neutral outfit or all the colors of all.

Brown linen – Speaking of chocolate brown, did you know there's this really cool site called Nature Queens that sells the most beautiful and flowy long duster, jackets, cardigans – not sure what to call them. But I found this brown linen one that looks like fall but it's light, on those days that are still a bit warm.

Burgundy, yes – I found a pretty pair of pants in the burgundy color family and snatched them, at the end of summer. Denim pairs so well with this shade for fall, as well as so many other colors too! I bet you have many tops that would go well with burgundy bottoms, just hanging in your closet!

Mixed prints – Maybe you too have a jacket, a blouse and a scarf just in your stash of clothing that's screaming to be paired together! This jacket is old, so is the blouse, and the scarf is a bit new. And who knew they'd look so good worn as a trio? See what you can find in your present wardrobe, to mix and match.

A new bag, maybe? – I just discovered Quince (a great resource for great clothing!) and their bags. This neutral bag is another alternative for a really nice purse this fall. Against all the dark hues you might choose to wear, it's the most elegant accompaniment, don't you think? Check out their selection of the most beautiful purses, and use my code to save!

A button-up cardi – It's a classic, for sure, and they're probably the easiest thing to find in every store. I chose a neutral one for layering, and it's the coziest fabric ever. It just speaks fall, and I love it most of all. I think I found it at one of the discount stores like Marshalls or Ross. And I love the big buttons, too!

That black jacket – Maybe it's old, maybe you want one, but I bet you have one! Bring it into this season by pairing it with brown and blue! Such a great combo and even holiday-worthy, I think. I chose a brown button up underneath and blue in the scarf. I love this ensemble for November!

One last bag – A brown leather crossbody – it's been a staple this season for me. I found it at Marshalls. I don't want to pay hundreds for a leather bag, so I look at the discount stores for one. This one I love, so very much. It's unique, holds plenty, and is great for every day or dressed up, too, for all the holiday events coming up!

## Cousin Moms – Simple Things – by Charissa and Kamrin

It's November, the time to give thanks. And while we can do our best as parents to teach our kiddos to have grateful hearts, it's sometimes a good practice to consider our own hearts. And while being a mom can bring with it total busyness, it's so nice to sit and consider a few simple things that's we're grateful for, as well, as we raise the kids God has given us. We asked the cousin moms to think of the little things they observe in their children that cause them pause, to stop and give thanks.

Charissa

During the chaos of this busy season with littles, it is easy to get caught up in the frustrations and tiredness of raising kids! As we draw closer to Thanksgiving, it's a good reminder to focus our thoughts on the blessings of what kids bring, and the true GIFT they are from God.

Below are some simple reasons I'm thankful for the kids God has blessed me with... even though raising kids is hard work. The blessings they bring (big and small) are worth it! And the best part - raising kids is KINGDOM work. We are raising the next generation of believers, helping make Heaven crowded.

- T - "Time" - When I spend uninterrupted time with my kids I am always blessed. Sometimes, I have to just put aside my to-do list & phone, and sit and play. It's a good reset for me!
- H - "Honesty" - I love how honest my kids are. At their young ages, they are not afraid to tell the truth and I love their boldness.
- A - "Active" - I'm thankful my kids like to go & do - sports, going outside, swing, etc. It keeps me active and going!
- N - "Noise" - This is hard because every day my girls are LOUD - most of the time too loud. They are either singing, running around the house & laughing, arguing, or yelling at the top of their lungs. I have to remind myself what a blessing it is to have this noise because one day, that noise will be gone, my house will be quiet and I'll wish I had the noise back!
- K - "Kisses" - A kiss before school or before bed. It's a little action but it warms my soul.
- S - "Smile" - Seeing my girls smile brings me joy. Just like a kiss, it's a small action but seeing joy through a little child is precious. It's a reminder to find joy wherever we are, and to smile through life even though it can be really hard!

Kamrin

As I'm thinking about what I'm grateful for regarding my kids, I recall that the last few -years, we've had asthma flare-ups, the flu, strep, allergies, etc., with immune systems not working well. It was hard to see them miss things because of that. But this school year, my kids have stayed healthy and I'm grateful! So that's a big thing!

As far as the little things that mean a lot, however, this is something we even talk about with our kids. They are good about praying about the big things, but teaching them that God is present in the little things, is something we are working on. The little things that we notice strengthen us so that we are then grateful for even the big and hard things!

Regarding my kids,

*It's the little moments with my daughter, when we get to talk.* She even initiates this! My daughter enjoys using our bathroom at night, instead of the one she shares with the boys. When I'm getting ready too, she talks about her day, or we will plan things. She turns off her music and phone, and we chat. I am grateful for this, and it means a lot to me as a mom.

*It's time with my oldest,* when he gives me a big hug. He gives me this hug every night before he goes to bed. He knocks on my door so that he doesn't miss this opportunity, and this means the world to me! He never misses, even when he's super exhausted!

*It's my youngest and his actions* that speak so loudly. We get time in the morning car ride, because I sub at this school. We get a lot of time to talk. He talks about his day or what he did at school, when we have this one on one time.

These moments are sort of created naturally and I can see that the kids value these things.

*It's the chores the kids do, on a daily basis.* Sometimes, they forget and aren't always great at it, but it's starting to click with our oldest. He is becoming responsible on his own, without us asking. I'm very grateful to see this growth. He offers to help me when Dad is out of town, he notices when I've had a rough day, as he's just aware!

*It's the out-to-eat dinners.* We can't eat out all the time, but we try once a week to do so. Our kids do have cell phones with hard rules, but when we go out to eat, our kids put them away and chat with each other and laugh. They engage and are present at the table. I'm so thankful for this family time.

Finally, I love that my kids love family, and I'm so grateful that they love family parties, love their cousins, and value time with each other. My youngest sometimes initiates time to cook with me, and I love that, too!

So grateful to be their mom...

## In the Kitchen – When Life is Busy – by Marcy Lytle

Holidays are upon us in a big way, and we're baking and making, and then we still have to eat dinner. But it doesn't have to be an elaborate, time consuming event. It can be simple, and still be so delicious. Enjoy these recipes and make your life easier...

**A Good Bowl** – I love food in a bowl, with individual items, that taste good all together. And it's easy to make one that's colorful and tasty.

- Pearl Couscous
- 1 can chickpeas, rinsed and drained
- Red seedless grapes
- Avocado
- Red Onion

Cook the couscous, and toss the chickpeas in your favorite seasoning. Place the items around in a circle in a shallow bowl, and the sliced avocado in the middle. Simple meal. Yet so satisfying. We enjoyed a few pita chips alongside.

**Pizza and Salad** – When the holidays are busy, it's a good idea to put together a simple supper that tastes great, but it's easy to make.

- One premade sausage pizza
- Fresh basil
- Freshly grated parmesan cheese
- Premade salad

Just cook the pizza according to directions, and then top with the fresh Parm and torn basil leaves. Toss the salad with the ingredients in the bag, and enjoy yourself a great dinner. If it's just the two of you or one, bake a small pizza. If it's the family, make it a large!

**Easy Banh Mi Sandwich** – This is a super easy sandwich that looks decadent and yet it's a snap to put together in a pinch, for the whole family.

- Ciabatta buns
- Cooked chicken
- Cucumbers, lots of them, sliced
- Lime
- Cilantro

Toast the buns. Layer the chicken, cucumbers and cilantro, then squeeze lime over top. Serve with your favorite chips.

**Quick Quesadilla** – We love quesadillas and often forget about how they can come together so quickly. Just a few ingredients, and a bit of salsa on the side, and you're done!

- Black beans, rinsed and drained
- Salsa
- Grated sharp cheddar
- Fresh tortillas

Mix and mash the beans with salsa and heat. Place the mix on half of the tortilla, then top with cheese. Fold the tortilla and grill in a pan with a pat of butter. Flip and grill the other side. Sprinkle a bit of sea salt on top and dip in salsa on the side. Yum.

**Cauliflower Mash Up** – This tasted so very good, and healthy, and it hit all the right spots. Try it!

- Sourdough sliced bread
- Avocado
- Lemon
- Cauliflower
- Roasted chickpeas

Cut cauliflower and toss in olive oil, salt and pepper. Roast in the oven. Toast the sourdough sliced bread. Mash avocado with lemon juice, salt and pepper. Spread on the toast. Top with the cauliflower, and the roasted chickpeas. What a tasty pile.

## **Tried and True – Last Month’s Learnin’ – by Marcy Lytle**

This month’s list is a good one for Christmas ideas, or things you might discover you want for yourself! I hope you enjoy each month’s rendition of things I’ve learned, observed, or found...and here’s November’s go round!

Have you seen or heard of The Rally House? It’s a new store near us, and it has all the sports gear and accessories you could want! A great place to shop for Christmas, as they’re on line as well.

One of my favorite snacks is a blob of peanut butter with dark chocolate, and graham crackers...so good.

If you’re looking for a new cologne for him, Graphite at Bath & Body is nice! And they have lots of choices for men. So stand there, and sniff them all.

The Barnyard Tumble – it’s such a great toy for 18mo or so. The little wooden disks tumble out of the barn, slide down slots, sit in little pockets, and more. It’s a good gift idea for the babies on your list!

Another idea for the kiddos – the cutest bears from Target for \$10 – plush and soft! The kids love them.

I fell in love with the cutest clock at Target in the home section. It’s retro, it’s a nice color, and it’s so pretty sitting on a shelf – battery operated.

Do you shop at Trader Joe’s? They have these adorable small totes that we love and use for toting water to and from day trips. I mean, seriously, it’s so cute, and only \$3.99. There are large options, as well!

If you enjoy making your own cards, check out this idea I saw on line. Just twine and buttons. Easy and the cutest!

We finally bought ourselves some nice stadium seats that are a game changer for those of us always at ballgames! Amazon - has a pocket for your water, easy to transport, and super comfy!

Look at this cool way to store all your handled totes! Just fold them lengthwise in thirds, then fold into the straps and wind the straps around. They all fit nicely in a drawer and they’re easy to see – how cool!

I love headbands and recently twisted a skinny scarf around one for a new look. Easy!

I found this gem of a treat for myself at Target. It looks like a tackle box but it’s a snackbox. Roomy, with a pull out tray – it’s perfect for in the car picnics or outings – or for under the tree as a gift for someone! It was \$10!

Already burned up some of your fall candles in a jar? Don’t throw them away – but repurpose! I used one to hold glasses, one for the remote, and one for my toothbrush!

Oh my gosh, I love these three mismatched earrings. Found them on Amazon. Earrings don’t have to match. In fact, it’s more fun when they don’t!

Did you know there was a machine for making rope, back in the day? We ran across one at an old-time festival recently. Who knew? I didn’t!



## November Book – by Kaelin Scott

The idea for *Game Set Love* came to me in pieces, the first of which was prayer. I wanted to write a story about a girl who prayed for people and how those prayers impacted their lives, perhaps without her even knowing it. So that was where the story started. In fact, my working title when I started writing it was “The Girl Who Prayed.”

Then, as I was writing the story, I began weaving a fun romantic plotline. (Of course, because all my books are love stories.) You know those movies on Hallmark channel where two characters pretend they’re dating for some complicated reason, and then they end up falling in love for real? Well, I had never planned on writing a story like that. Never even thought about it, to be honest. But somehow, *Game Set Love* became exactly that. I totally wasn’t expecting it, but it ended up being so much fun to write, and I still really love this story.

It’s full of redemptive themes, including a lost prayer journal that helps a woman reconnect with her faith. It also speaks on how sometimes God uses the trials in our lives to bring us closer to Him, often blessing us with something totally unexpected. Also, our prayers are important and impactful, even if we don’t always see it.

*Game Set Love* is also a sports romance, where one of the main characters is a professional athlete, so the story brings a little bit of his sport into the mix. I’m sure you can probably guess which sport that is – wink, wink!

And, of course, there’s fun banter between the characters and an idyllic mountain setting. I love creating an atmosphere that feels like home. Somewhere cozy and inviting, where I’d love to spend my time if I could. A place the readers can imagine themselves visiting along with the characters.

Fun fact: All my other books take place in Texas, but *Game Set Love* takes place in Colorado, which is where I grew up.

My hope for this book has always been simple – to make people smile and realize how loved they are. There is a God who created each one of us and wants to have a relationship with us. His plans are good, even when they hurt, even when we don’t understand. Most of all, every good love story points to the greatest love story of all. And if you don’t know that story, I hope that reading this book can help you discover what it’s all about.



HOME

## Practical Parenting – One Way or Another – by Marcy Lytle

I ran out of words, seriously. As a grandparent, watching the kids play sports and lose game after game, I didn't know what else to say at the end of the game. "Good game" sounded lame, because his face and body language knew it wasn't a good game. "You'll win next time," was hopeful but not helpful, right after a huge loss. And my heart hurt each game where the point spread was so big and the loss was so sad. This started me thinking about the parents themselves. You're the ones that go home with the kids after they lose, and it's just - quite frankly - hard. And since this is the month of Thanksgiving, why not apply giving thanks even in the hardest of situations...in training our kids:

*When they come home with a failing grade*, and they totally did their best, we can give them a hug and talk to the teacher, get them a tutor, or just hug them tight and affirm that their best was the best, and send them on their way.

*When they walk off the field with another loss*, we can smile and hold, say nothing and let them be for a while. If talk starts to blame the other players, or the referees, or the coach, we can listen and decide if actions need to be taken, or we need to let it go and enjoy the play. I often hear one mom yell at games, "Have fun!" and I smile every time.

*When she has had two best friends lie and talk behind her back*, we can listen and go to God with our child to ask Him to heal and help. We can ask for discernment on how to move forward. And we can talk about forgiveness, with boundaries, and how hurtful friends can still be loved.

*When he fails the driver's test more than once*, we can breathe, talk about how to do better, and take it one day at a time. It's not the end of the world, but we can keep that thought to ourselves, and encourage him to try again. And again.

There are multiple areas where our kids come away disappointed to the max, and we don't know what to do. And in the moment of loss, sometimes no words need to be said at all. We've already said them before, and they don't want to hear them again.

The best thing parents can do is practice thankfulness in front of the kids, when they themselves lose. They can cultivate an attitude of gratitude in front of the kids, in prayer time at night. And when they themselves fail, they can ask forgiveness, process their grief, and share their own stories at the proper time.

Thankful hearts don't spring up right after a huge loss, they take time to emerge and provide healing. But they only emerge if they've been trained in observing how a thankful and merry heart really does do good, like a medicine, as the good book says.

The last game that was a huge loss, we didn't get to see our grandson because he had to get on the bus. And that was probably the best, anyway, because I'm sure he didn't want to see anyone. But we did text him and told him we loved him, we were sorry for the loss, but we were proud of him. I mean all of that was true.

And his reply was, "Love you bunches," which was an awesome reply.

Your kids know you love them and are for them and present with them, as you tell them and hold them and hug them. And they love you, too. Losses are just hard, on the parents and the kiddos, but that makes that win just that much sweeter when it happens in that area...or another.

## I Don't Do Teens – What They Teach Us – by Marcy Lytle

Raising teens is so easy...said no parent anywhere. It's hard! And we try our best to teach them and train them and hope that they walk into adulthood with sanity, wisdom and skills. But what about the things they teach us? Oh my goodness, we can learn a lot when raising teens, while we ourselves are trying to do the teaching. It's we that become the students of lessons well learned, just by hanging with those kids once they hit the age of 13 and exit at the age of 18 or beyond...

*They're not carbon copies of us.* Have you ever said, "Where did they get that from?" when you observed a behavior you know they never learned from you? We think they ought to be just like us, but thank God they're not. They're a unique individual and we can learn to love that uniqueness that makes them different from the way we are.

*They can have a relationship with God that we don't understand.* Imagine that! I had one child that was so demonstrative (and still is) in her worship, and we used to dance and sing. But my other child is quiet as a mouse, and I often wondered – was he getting it? And little did I know that he maybe got more than I did, and God was faithful.

*They might love to wear what we would not!* My daughter and I love to shop together, but we have totally different tastes in clothing. I think she looks oh, so cute in what she wears, but it's not what I would pick out. And vice-versa. Moms love to choose their kids' clothing when they kids are small, but it's really actually cool to let go and see what they like, and then learn to like them in that!

*They most definitely will test our faith to the max,* when they stay out late, don't call, hang out with that friend, or argue over everything. And while we can fret (and I did), it's really such a lesson to learn that God really loves them more than we do. We don't have "bad" kids just because they lose it from time to time. We have normal kids, and we have a big God.

*They might find their "true love" at young age* and we will panic (and I did) because they have to finish school and then college, don't they? God can handle these surprises as well, and we can steer them, train them on the beauty of waiting, and encourage them and pray for them. That's our job. And it's healthy to trust Him, and sleep at night without worry. (It's hard, I know.)

*They most likely will pull away* and close their door and hang with friends, and we will wonder what happened to their closeness with us. But those times and those years when they grow up and move out may be the most painful, but yet the ones that send us to our knees and to closeness with Him. And that's a good thing, eventually...

*They will get their driver's license and smile* and wave as they back out of the driveway for that first solo trip, and we'll smile and wave, too. But then we'll cry our eyes out when we step into the house and worry if they will return safely. Those kids backed out because we taught them how, and they're on the same road where we have survived for years. And they're happy. It's one of the hardest things to do as a parent, to let them drive alone, but they're not alone...and neither are we.

*They will cry with their first breakup,* stomp when we tell them no, eat too much of the fast food variety, need help with their homework and then push us away, and be embarrassed sometimes when we speak to their friends. And then...they will be polite to that adult, pray and find that God does answer them, realize that our no was a good thing, and apologize when they're wrong. It's

then that we learn that our training and our testing is all working together for good for them...and for us.

## **In Each Room – Making Space – by Marcy Lytle**

Every fall, for the past few years, I've completely rearranged my living space to accommodate Christmas gatherings with family and friends, and to just make it more inviting and something "different" from the rest of the year. I do this by creating more space in our small area we call home...

Most of the year our sofas are pulled in close to the TV and our dining table (in the same room) is out with chairs around it, set and pretty. The rugs are placed under these pieces, and it's cozy yet compact, and perfect for enjoyment.

However, I realized a few years ago that when the family comes over, or when we entertain (we don't that much, but when we do...) I wanted more space to spread out, and it seemed impossible at first...

Finally, I took away the dining chairs (except two) and pushed the table up against a wall, more for serving than for actually sitting. After all, we often spread out food and let guests pick and choose, then sit on the sofas instead of around the table.

This movement of the table allows space to then pull back the larger sofa away from the TV, and we also push the smaller sofa all the way to the wall. The walk space then happens in front of the sofa instead of behind it.

Oh my goodness. This opens up the floor space and makes room for us to add a couple chairs if need be, for opening gifts, playing games, for the kids to roll around, and all the fun to be had. It allows more space for the Christmas tree, and makes me so happy that everything isn't cramped up and small.

If you too need more space, consider these options for the holiday season:

Removing a piece or two of furniture that's just for looks

Serving buffet style instead of sit-down dinners

Using floor pillows for kids in that new space you've created

Pulling back big pieces against the wall that you had in the middle of the room

Clearing tops of tables, and any clutter that makes the room feel small

Remaking your walk spaces

Just practice with what you have and envision what you'd like the space to be

Once we have everything moved and pushed and pulled, I clean and decorate and add some cozy blankets around, and make sure there's wood for the fire.

I love our new setting for the holidays, and once they're over, everything will go back to the way it was and I'll redecorate again for the next season, and enjoy my space called home...

## HOMESTEADING – But, Therefore, and However – by Leyanne Enterline

I feel like I've been wasting so much time complaining and sulking in my sorrows of, "Why me?" Poor me, my husband lost his job right as we moved into our home and still has not found full time work in 10 months! Poor me, I can't travel the world like I used to or even buy furniture or decor to go into my new house that I so longingly waited for, for eight years! Why? Well, that's annoying to hear! So, I'm trying to focus more on the positives and stop complaining and making excuses and asking why I can't do certain things, because I just don't have the funds right now.

There are so many positives. And the Bible tells us to think upon things that are good and pure and not to complain!

"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble,  
whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely,  
whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue  
and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things."  
Philippians 4:8 NKJV

"Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth."  
Colossians 3:2 NKJV

"Do all things without complaining and disputing,"  
Philippians 2:14 NKJV

As you can see, I need lots of help. It's easy to focus on the negative and the current situation. *However*, God is bigger, and if I ask, He is there to help me get through all this. There's always going to be something to worry or complain about, but we are told not to worry and to instead be joyful when trials come!

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,"  
James 1:2 NKJV

"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things.  
Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."  
Matthew 6:34 NKJV

“Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression,  
But a good word makes it glad.”  
Proverbs 12:25 NKJV

It is so hard to be joyful in my trials for sure! But our joy is in the Lord.

*Therefore*, the good news is that I have a house! And there are plenty of free things I can do around it to make it feel more like a home. The garage is still a wreck and so is my closet, *but* I will be joyful to have these things and get my act together and get organized! I think this is more of a self-help article to myself. Just venting and then realizing how ridiculous I sound makes me want to quit throwing a pity party, read the Word, and get on with living life.

“Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have.  
For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.””  
Hebrews 13:5 NKJV

He is me, and He is with you.

Amen!

## **A Night to Remember - Reverse Advent – by Marcy Lytle**

I read about a reverse advent on Instagram, and thought it would be a good idea for family devotion time this November, as we get ready for the holiday season. I love a good advent calendar and will most likely get ones for the kids, but what if – in addition to those calendars – we did a sort of reverse idea for the holiday season? I’m sharing this now so that November’s devotion can start the process, and by Christmas it will all be complete!

November is the month we give thanks, and December is the month we give gifts. What a great time of year to give thanks for Jesus and the gift that he is to us...by giving to others in the process!

**Preparation:** You’ll need a large basket for the family to fill, and paper to then wrap to give. If you have a chalkboard or whiteboard, grab it. Have a fall treat (candy corn, cocoa, cookies?) ready for enjoying at the end.

Jesus gave his life for us, when his Father sent him here to save us from our sins. The best gift of life is Jesus, and he is the best example of giving. He gives us forgiveness, he gives us life, and he gives us hope and love forever and always.

Over the next month, up until Christmas, we are going to give to others some cool things. We have a few weeks to do it, and we want offer those things as we pray and consider and then give...

This is our basket. Remember the story in the Bible of the loaves and fishes! Let’s read it. (Read Mathew 14:13-21)

The boy had a simple basket with very little in it. Jesus took the basket, gave thanks and blessed it, and it was more than enough for the hungry crowd! (Let the kids discuss this story and ask questions or comment.)

What’s in our basket right now? Nothing!

Each day until Christmas, we’re going to pray and consider what to place in our own basket, to give away. It could be money, a gently used toy, something we make or draw, a nice note of encouragement, anything at all that we want to give. Every person in the family can participate. And no gift is too small, as each gift is from our hearts.

Tonight, let’s think of a list of what we could place in the basket and write it down. ((Let the kids come up with ideas to place in the basket and write it on a chalkboard or white board, if you have it)

We will hang it up, and read it nightly, and then quietly (without others seeing who gave what) slip our gifts into the basket. Let’s try for three things each! They just have to be from our hearts. And we will stop at 12...or 24...whichever works for us for the advent season!

Right before Christmas, we will pray about who or where to leave the basket with, and we will deliver it! They’ll have an advent basket all their own to enjoy for Christmas, because we filled our basket and shared!

Enjoy a fall treat, as you sing and pray in anticipation of a reverse advent this season...

(Kids can also decorate the basket over the next few weeks, however they wish, with ribbons and bows or whatever!)





YOU

She dreams  
The dark ones she remembers  
Replaying them for years  
She dreams  
The light ones she forgets  
Sending them away to never  
remember  
She collects the heavy and the fear  
Surrounds her daily breaths with them  
A halo of pain  
He gives us grace if we take it  
There is light if we choose to see it  
Take the joy, tiny as it may be  
Give it wings to share  
in His name  
We pray  
clb



## **Inner Strength - The Magic of a Marble – by Michelle Wyatt**

Have you ever presented a challenge to a group of kids using a marble and paper towel holders? Are you someone who struggles when to intervene for your kids and when to let them work it out on their own? The following illustrates a time when I had to remind myself to take a step back and watch.

Recently, my sons and two of their friends participated in a teambuilding activity using a marble and paper towel holders – an activity that I learned about back in my days as a mental health professional.

*Setting up the activity:* *First save a few paper towel holders. You want to have one roll for every two participants and more if you want to up the level of difficulty. Cut each paper towel roll in half. Have a marble handy.*

*How to Play:* *Have everyone stand in a line side by side. Give the first person in line the marble. Then, give each person a half piece of the paper towel roll. Tell them the goal is for the group to use their materials to travel the marble from one end of the room/space to the other without the marble falling. If it falls, the group has to start at the beginning again.*

After giving my boys and their friends the “how to play” I had to stop myself from telling them the strategy behind the game. I’m glad I stopped myself. The boys immediately rose to the challenge and began communicating with each other. It was magic. The only time I said anything was to remind one of them to use encouraging/problem-solving words. Aside from that, I loved being a spectator. They each had ideas and took the lead at different times.

Now, it is worth mentioning that I wasn’t sure if my boys’ friends would be open to playing. They were glued to their video game. One of them is into engineering and the other one likes to be invited to join groups, so I knew there was a good chance. I presented the opportunity to them before it was time to start. The one who liked to be invited didn’t come right away, but he did join soon into the game. The other one was in right away after hearing it was related to an interest of his. Now granted, my oldest who gets “bored” quickly, said he was “done” after one round because it wasn’t as fun as he thought it’d be. Well, I didn’t say a whole lot about that. It didn’t have to be fun in the same way that a video game is fun. It was a success though, for many reasons.

After watching this experience, several themes came to mind:

- Let kids bring out the best in each other.
- Replace conflict with connection.
- Create memories around the natural blessings that life brings without even having to try.
- As adults, let us take a step back and watch our kids rise to the challenge.

If I can do it, so can you!

## Life Right Now - Welcome-ish By Jennifer Stephens

I love this sign. At first glance it's a snarky, silly take on an ordinary welcome sign, but there's a lot of meaning inside that ish. Because not everything is welcome here. There's no room for hate. Or hostility. Harassment and bullying are not invited.

What IS welcome?

Authenticity

Kindness

Genuine interest in others

Humility

Honesty

Acceptance

Optimism

Sympathy

Integrity

Respect

Courtesy

Self-control

And...

Forgiveness when we forget any of the above.

In a world where evil comes knocking on our door, we must take heed on what we let inside. Bad things don't arrive with a grand announcement proclaiming their true identity. They show up wearing clever disguises. They're subtle. So, we must be careful. Because there's no room here for malicious intent. We must guard the door to our hearts. We are the calm in the chaos. When hate knocks, the only answer is love.

“Blessings crown the head of the righteous, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked.

The name of the righteous is used in blessings, but the name of the wicked will rot.

The wise in heart accept commands, but a chattering fool comes to ruin.

Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but whoever takes crooked paths will be found out.

Whoever winks maliciously causes grief, and a chattering fool comes to ruin.

The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs.”

Proverbs 10:6-12

## **Healthy Habits – Do Words Matter? -by Marcy Lytle**

What does how we speak have to do with health? It totally affects the health of others, what we say and how we say it. And words spoken to us can take us from a high to a low in a matter of seconds. They say “words will never harm me” in the saying about sticks and stones, but words do harm, they do hurt, and they do wound. I have hurt others with my own words and I have been hurt by the words of others.

We were talking with friends recently about this very subject, and so I thought I'd share some of the healthy habits we at least can create for ourselves, when we speak to others:

*Leave weight off the table.* I cannot even tell you how much weight comments affect people. Even if we say, “You look so good. Have you lost weight?” This indicates we've been noticing they were heavy. One time after I'd had my last child, a “friend” told me I looked like I'd gained weight. That comment sent me into a tailspin. So, instead, if we're noticing weight loss or gain, let's keep the conversation about something else.

*Criticizing and pointing the finger is not healthy.* Maybe this seems like a no-brainer. However, we can send criticism with our eyes and expressions, without ever speaking a word. And blaming someone, especially behind their back, makes the worst of wounds...because they just might hear what we thought they did not.

*Sex and gender comments, nope.* Maybe you're in the mix of those that make gay jokes or totally think evil of those of other genders, and you make off-the-cuff remarks when with others of like minds. It's hurtful. You never know who's in your company, with ears to hear, and children struggling. Gender remarks of any kind should be zipped up. Pray for others you don't understand, and check your own heart. If people knew your struggles...what would they say?

*Generalizations about color or race are never healthy.* Maybe your parents spoke of Mexicans or Asians in a derogatory manner, or you even heard jokes about those of color. Change the narrative. Don't copy what they said because they didn't know better, because it was “acceptable” talk. It's never good to generalize anyway, so let's change and teach our kids to do the same.

*Ageism, it's a thing.* Granny panties, grandpa sweaters, little comments here and there about age and its woes and shortcomings hurt those that are aging. Assuming elderly people have lost their smarts and dignity and therefore, they're fair game for jokes, is mean. Talk to those who are older the same way you'd talk to your peers. You might realize the older generation is interesting and not old, at all!

I only mention five here, because these are heavy and weighty and so hurtful, when we participate in judgment with our words. We might mean well, but it helps to think before we speak, especially because speaking isn't usually necessary to get across our judgment on a particular group of people. What comes out of mouths is what's in our hearts. So if we think of a comment on someone's weight, actions, gender preference, age, or race...it's best to check it at the door. The door of our hearts.

God doesn't need our verbal assessments to make the world go round and to change hearts. What he does need is for our tongues, those things that we just cannot tame, to be subject to just offering prayers and praise to the One who loves us all, and transforms minds and hearts to worship him.

I'm working on this every day. And it starts at home, where we let hurtful words fly to those we love the most. It starts with one silent tongue that only whispers prayers instead of shooting darts.

## A Hopeful Heart - Autumn Walks – by Christina Oberon

I carried him on my back along the winding trails of the botanical garden, the rustle of leaves underfoot marking our pace. The season was shifting, though not yet in full autumn. The trees still held most of their green, with hints of gold and amber peeking through. Walking there with my son, it felt like the perfect moment to pause and notice life's quiet transitions.

His little hands were curious, brushing against branches and pointing at flowers I hadn't even noticed. In carrying him, I wasn't just supporting him physically, I was seeing the world through his wonder-filled eyes. And thanks to the fact that I've finally started working out, I could do it without wincing too much, which I'm counting as a personal fitness win. Who knew motherhood would double as a full-body workout plan?

As the trail curved around a small pond, the sunlight hit the water just right, reflecting the leaves that were beginning to turn. Change was happening quietly, gradually, and beautifully. Seasons, both in nature and in life, don't always arrive with bold colors or dramatic shifts. Sometimes they ease in, almost unnoticed, until you look back and realize just how much has changed. Those are often where the best lessons are found, when we are fully present and paying attention.

With each step, I thought about the many transitions in our own lives, moments of waiting, growth, and uncertainty. They can feel heavy at first, like the weight on my back. But just as with this trail, there's beauty in the journey itself. The act of carrying, of moving forward step by step, teaches patience, gratitude, and love. Even the smallest steps or the faintest shifts in color remind us that change is not something to fear. It's something to witness, embrace, and learn from. By the time we reached the end of the trail, the sun had shifted, casting a warmer light across the garden. Hope settled in. The rustling leaves, the winding path, and the crunch of our footsteps became a lesson in noticing, appreciating, and trusting the process of life.

Nature has a way of teaching without words. The subtle change of the season, the gentle sway of branches, and the curious gaze of a child remind us that every stage holds value. Sometimes, carrying someone else along the path gives us new insights of our own... while also building a few unexpected biceps. That day, on that trail, made me think about how change is always an invitation to grow, to see the world anew, and to hold hope close to our hearts.



MARRIAGE

## Date Night Fun – The Musical – by Marcy Lytle

Have you been to one, lately? Maybe you think he won't go. Perhaps you don't live near a venue that hosts one. Or you think you don't have anything to wear. Think again! Lots of small towns, and big cities, have musicals of all kinds and it's a GREAT idea for a night out with him, for lots of reasons. So this fall, find one, ask him, drive the distance, and dress up!

**The Choices** – Sometimes, we've found that live theater can have content we don't like, or there was once when the storyline changed from the original and we were surprised. So, call the theater and ask, or read reviews. Find the nearest playhouse near you and plan your date ahead of time, by picking a musical you'd both like. If it's pricey, then opt for dinner at home, but picking a musical is a wonderful idea, at least once in a while. And it's something to look forward to!

**What to Wear** – Where I live, not everyone dresses up anymore for these nice events, but I love to. And I think it's great to have a "dress up" date once in a while, instead of our normal everyday wear. Shop your closet. Pick your base – the pants or the dress – and go from there. Add a piece of bold jewelry, or a pop of color in your bag, and maybe a pretty scarf. Shop Amazon for an inexpensive piece of jewelry if you don't have one. Prepare ahead of time what you will wear, and you will anticipate the fun evening. Go shopping for him a new shirt, as well. Enjoy the process of the deciding what to wear, a couple of weeks out.

**Research** – Look up who wrote the musical, when it was written, and all of the info on what you're about to see and hear. What songs will be playing? Research the venue where you're going. When we frequent small town theaters, we love reading the history of the buildings. If we're in a big-time venue, we love finding out if there are things to see/do before the musical starts. Find out where you're going to park, and if you're going out to dinner – choose somewhere close by. You might be able to park and then walk to the theater, hand in hand. Make the musical an event...like planning a trip!

**Ideas for Good Ones** – We really enjoyed *Carole King the Musical*, *Fiddler on the Roof* is always a nice classic, and you don't have to be a kid to enjoy *Mary Poppins*! *My Fair Lady* is a wonderful local theater production, and listen...it doesn't have to be Broadway. Small town theaters or off-broadway are great choices, as you support struggling young actors. Find out school musical productions in your area, and the price will be super affordable, and you'll support your community. Make a list of all the musicals coming to your area this fall, and pick the good ones with great music because...

**Hum On the Way Home** – After the show is over, walk hand in hand to your car and head home. Which was your favorite tune? What about the actor? The scene? Pick and share. Then hum the tunes from the musical that you either knew, or the new ones that now are stuck in your heads. I'm thinking you'll both be smiling at the night you just had that whisked you away to another time, another place, another story other than your own.

And you might just head home and choose another musical to place on the calendar, right away...

## **After 40 Years – Laughable – by Marcy Lytle**

We were recently at an event and someone noted that my husband and I were dressed in the same color scheme, and then they asked, "Did you do that on purpose?" I quickly replied, "No way!" I would never try to match my husband in what we wear – nowhere and no way! I then thought it might be fun to share some of the things about us that might be quirky or make you laugh. Not dressing alike is one of them. Those t-shirts that match husband and wife – not for me!

Hope our funniness makes you laugh or wonder, or just smile at how couples are so different:

We never use the words "honey" or "sweety" or "babe" – and I'm not sure why. But those terms of endearment make me choke. We call each other by our given names even in the most closest of moments, and that's endearing enough for me! Perhaps it's the part of me that detests a lot of things southern...who knows.

I go to coffee shops with him, but only to smell. I can't stand the stuff. He makes it every morning, starting with the grind. Then I watch him heat it and reheat it over and over, while he works. And I don't understand the attraction. But I'm glad he loves it...I truly am.

Jon enjoys shopping with me, and here's why. He enjoys looking at the way the stores are made, designed, and decorated. He especially loves Anthropologie, and he notices things I would never had seen, because I'm focused on the products! Anthropologie decorates their walls in the most unique ways!

When we take walks, Jon again notices the architecture along the streets or the way the sidewalks are made, or electrical poles and such. My mind is full and cluttered and I want to complain and discuss life, but I've learned that his way of walking is better, and more relaxing and the best. I've learned that I can learn from him, and settle my soul.

We never go to bed separately, but we do wake up differently. I'm up before dawn, while he sleeps longer. And at night, we watch the news and sometimes *King of Queens*, until we laugh. Then we turn off the television. It works. For us.

We have different ways of driving places and getting there. His directions are full of compass directions and he takes completely different routes than I would ever take. He parks in parking spaces I'd never choose. And the off-feature on our new car where it turns off at red lights annoys him. I want street names when I get directions, I want direct routes, and I choose parking spots away from others...and that new feature on our car doesn't bother me one bit.

Neither of us enjoys traveling away from each other with the guys or the gals. I'm not a gal crowd kind of person, and he'd always rather be home. It works for us. At night, I want to be near him and he near me, and it makes us happy.

Sometimes, when we're getting dressed in the morning we find each other's gaze and embrace and dance, just a little. Maybe we're half dressed, he has on shoes and I don't, there's music playing or not, and the steps we take on the bedroom floor set the path for a good day.

And finally, I'm the channel surfer, not him. He'd sit and watch one channel, all the commercials and be just contented as ever. I can't stand commercials and switch the channel constantly. It probably drives him crazy, but he never complains.

That's the thing. He's not a complainer about me, he just enjoys the moments, and hasn't a care in the world. I'm uptight, strung out and always on the go in my brain and my body, and he loves me any way, and rubs my feet every single night we're at home.

We aren't like what the books says are the "norm" in most areas of couple life, but that's okay. And maybe you aren't either. And that's okay, too. Laugh about it and enjoy your life.

### In Unison - Real Talk - by Terri Barnes

As Chris and I were conversing, our eldest son said,  
"You're having RT - Real Talk."  
I will not forget it, because I loved it!  
Our son recognized our true intent to connect.

I found it to be fun, something to explore.  
Real talk means honest conversation.  
It can be shared thoughts & feelings.  
It nurtures a bond producing growth.

Chris & I transition between casual-light & serious-deep talk.  
He often contributes knowledge, while I usually provide perspective.  
There is balance in discussion, a mutual understanding.  
"RT" builds trust which can have an astounding impact on marriage.

Honest conversation can be challenging at times.  
When balance shifts, it's easy to question what went wrong.  
We end up confused, guarded, & frustrated by assumptions.  
That's because it's common to feel unheard.

Marriage relationships grow gradually, not instantly.  
Real talk has power to strengthen connection.  
In our experience, it requires curiosity & patience.  
It's possible to have a thoughtful and open bond, both willing.

An idea to set a great "RT" tone - bring up a sweet memory.  
We recently shared a memory - a church skit we were in together.  
Recognizing, because of real talk, joyful action occurred that day.  
We know it can foster again, and again, and again.

Not every real talk moment will be perfect, but meaningful ones are rewarding.  
Perhaps you might reflect on a memory with your spouse.  
Then identify the key connection & action.  
What feelings were there? Did it ignite your bond?

Honest engagement matters most.  
Everything else is learned with time.  
We choose to keep real talk going in our marriage.  
It's noticed, it's worth it!



ENCOURAGEMENT

## **A Day in the Life – Ordinary Glimmers - by Bekah Holland**

It's finally the time of year when people remember to be thankful for all of the wonderful things in our lives and the privileges we take for granted. It's the month of "no shave November," big family dinners that hopefully don't include deep-fried turkey incidents that end up on TikTok, and social media posts filled with things we are thankful for. I love the intent. I even used to try to join in on the daily thankful post trend, but then I start forgetting days, tried to catch up, got overwhelmed, which led to swearing at my phone and forgetting the things I was supposed to remember to be thankful for. And I have SO much that I am grateful for, privileges I have, for my family, both by blood and by choice, that love me in a way I don't deserve, and a million other things I take for granted. So don't panic. This isn't going to be an anti-Thanksgiving kind of article. I usually save that for Valentine's Day, so you can breathe easy for now.

For some of us, this month is hard...for so many different reasons. I know people who spend the holidays alone, whether they have families that are separated by distance or by broken relationships, some who don't feel like they have anyone to belong to. I know people who have lost someone they love, and this time of year is a stark reminder of the empty place at the dinner table. My family is about to have our first experience with this, and the idea of not having my daddy pray over us like only he could isn't something I can wrap my head or heart around, yet. I know people (it's me...I'm people) who spend days and weeks trying to make everything picture perfect, which never ever meets everyone's (fine, mainly our/my own) expectations. I wish I could tell you this was a special occasion kind of neurosis for me. It's not. The irrational picture in my head of what things should be like, look like, and feel like has yet to work out the way it does in the Hallmark movies I love to hate. Will I ever let it go? If I had one of those magic 8 balls, I'm pretty sure the answer would be "unlikely."

Times like these (both holidays and random Tuesdays), when I let those things take root, my thankfulness turns into something a little closer to a whiny pity party and self-doubt. But recently I read something that's started to change the way I see the everyday things around me. We've all heard of and likely experienced triggers, which are a trauma response to past painful experiences, even those we think we've "healed" from. However, since we know that most things have a way of balancing out, the opposite of a trigger is something called a "glimmer." This research started back in the 90s, but thanks to some dedicated scientists, psychologists, and, of course, TikTok, the glimmer theory has made its way into mainstream culture.

For those new to this idea, here's the Cliff's Notes version.

Glimmers can be:

- Tiny moments of inspiration and awe
- Things that spark joy and calm
- Micro-moments that cause small mood shifts
- Things that send our nervous system signals that let it know that you are safe
- Moments that bring hope even when we feel lost
- Anything that brings us peace and contentment

And once we start to embrace these glimmers, we have the opportunity to find so much more beauty in the world around us, creating a mindset of gratefulness even in the smallest things. Like those few quiet, peaceful minutes by yourself, while the house is still quiet, holding your favorite mug filled with hot coffee. Maybe it's a moment when you notice the sun shining through the trees, drenching your own little piece of the world around you in gold and magic.

It's so easy to find ourselves caught up in the day-to-day chaos of our lives without finding much time to stop and smell the roses. Finding things to complain about comes very easily to me. Do I vent about the fact that managing my kid's band schedule is like a full-time job that I pay to work at? Maybe once or a hundred times. Have I whined about the fact that cleaning a boy's bathroom should require a hazmat suit, OSHA regulations, and hazard pay? You betcha! But sometimes I get so caught up in all the things I am doing, or failing to do, that I forget how grateful I should that I have so many amazing things to try to juggle.

I have the kind of family that so many people dream about. We aren't perfect. We're messy, and oh so human. We've said words we wished we could take back, hurt each other, and failed so many times. But I can also tell you how big and loud we love, forgive, and stand up for each other. My husband never lets a day go by without loving me far beyond words, and I'm more in love with him today, almost 20 years after we said I do. My kids are the most beautiful and best things I've ever done. Through every mistake (theirs and mine), bad choices, and even some sassy mouths, I've been gifted the chance to watch them act out of pure kindness, speak up for others who don't have a voice, and love with a fierceness that can't be taught. I've got friends who deserve so much more than the friendship I have offered them, but they still show up for me in a million different ways. My husband and I don't have jobs right now, and we're probably more terrified than we've ever been about how we are going to make it through each day. Depression, hopelessness, and fear claw at us unrelentingly. But what I need to remember is that we've had amazing past careers that gave us the opportunity to make a home and a life for our family, reminding us that we can do everything and anything together, through the One we keep choosing to put our faith in. I've learned more lessons through my failures than I would have learned if success came easily. And most importantly, no matter what today looks like, what challenges we're facing, or how gloomy the forecast may be, today isn't the end of our story. At least not yet.

So until then, I'm going to keep searching for glimmers. The feel of the grass under my feet. The first colors of fall that give us down here in the south a bit of hope that cool breezes are just around the corner. The moments my teenagers choose to spend their precious time cuddled up on the couch with me instead of the world of Instagram. The feel of my husband's hand covering mine, reminding me that with him I'm safe. And with my family near, my heart is at home. Today, maybe look for those glimmers in your own life...you just might find a tiny bit of magic in the ordinary.

*"What a precious privilege it is to be alive – to breathe, to live, to enjoy, to love."*  
-Marcus Aurelius

have these impossible ideas of the way things are “supposed” to be. The way that our house looks and how I should be able to keep it. How I should be able to manage bills and budgets, which is extra tricky when you don’t have an income, along with keeping up with kids and schedules and appointments, making sure everyone takes their medicine and vitamins and somehow tricking my teenagers into eating something with ingredients I can pronounce, while still trying to be at least a decent wife, knowing when my husband needs extra time and when he needs space. Making weekly meal plans that at least  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the people who live here will suffer through without too many complaints, while still managing groceries and pretending I’m not completely falling apart, even though I am on the inside.

My husband notices, trying to build up what I’ve torn down in myself, and always reminds me that I’m enough. But he has his own impossible struggles, and I want to be his partner and encourager, not another added stressor. Are these my own issues and not the responsibility of anyone else? Abso-freaking-lutely. I don’t expect anyone else to understand, much less know how to make it better. Maybe my trying to do all the things and be all the things to everybody is rooted in some kind of need to control...to keep the peace in everyone else’s life but my own.

I’m a peacemaker by nature. There was a picture my mom had hanging in my room for as long as I can remember that had my name, Rebekah Eve, with its meaning...“devoted one”. And I took it to heart. I do believe that God made me to bring peace to chaos (though I’ve created plenty of that as well), and I am definitely not one to give up on anything or anyone without a fight. With one exception. Myself. I know I should be (and am) embarrassed to admit that. However, if I found someone vulnerable enough to be honest, about things that I was too ashamed to say out loud, maybe I would have been able to figure out some of the whys to my particular brand of crazy, or at least not have felt quite so alone. That’s why I promised myself that I’d be open about my own messes, especially ones that I’d really REALLY rather not admit to myself, much less broadcast to the whole freaking world. But, here we are, and if, by chance, you find yourself struggling to juggle an impossible load. Or if this time of year feels like it flies by in warp speed, like trying to keep up with all the things while running on a soapy slip ‘n slide leaves you feeling exhausted and not turning out like the Martha Stewart magazine spread you were aiming for, these next words are for you.

\*You are enough. Even if you don’t take the turkey out in time and have to pray against food poisoning like you’d cast out demons.

\*If you need to fall apart and lose it, saying things you don’t even want to admit to thinking, you can fall apart to me. Scream, cry, make no sense while you verbally process emotions dramatically. You can go full-on drama queen on me, with zero judgment. Because I’ve been there, or am likely still there.

\*You need advice? I'm much better at other people's lives than I am at my own, so I can give it.

\*You don't want a fix and just someone to verbally vomit to? I'll be your sounding board. I'm a lot stronger than I look, and I live with 2 teenagers, so I promise I can take whatever you throw at me.

\*Trying to hold it all together all the time is exhausting. I mean, like your soul being sucked out through your toes kind of exhaustion, and we aren't meant to do it alone.

Now, our partners are our people. They are there with us on the mountaintops and also down in the valleys we fall into sometimes. I've seen my husband at his worst, and also borne witness to the beauty of him finding his way to the light. And vice versa. He still loves me when I'm panicking about something (usually inconsequential) and when I haven't brushed my hair in 2 days. He is my home.

But I think that outside friendships are equally important in our lives. So you can just consider this an open invitation. I have a comfy couch, a listening ear, a bottle of wine, and a cup of coffee/tea available at all times. You can call me, and I'll actually answer the phone (even though I hate answering the phone, but I make exceptions for people who aren't calling about my car warranty). We can sit on our respective couches and vent or talk our way through a movie or TikTok session. Lean on your partners. Let them love you. But remember, you have a laundry list of women who have been where you are, and some of us who are still there. And if you don't, you can put my name at the top of that list, and any one of my personalities will be available.

We do have so much to be thankful for. And oftentimes, we allow the outside noise to distract us from all we've been given. But the beauty of that is that we can press the mute button on that noise and fill the silence with the voices of the people who love us best. So this year, while you're running yourself ragged, take a few minutes to revel in the gift of true love and true friendship that stands the test of both time and moments of insanity. I'm going to do the same, and just maybe, this year, we'll manage to give ourselves the grace we give others and use that space to be grateful for all of the people in our corner, from spouses to friends, whether you've loved them for 6 months or 3 decades.

*"When you feel overwhelmed by the weight of the world and its expectations, run to those who offer comfort. Let them whisper words of truth over you. Let them offer you rest and share their strength and remind you to set your eyes forward to a place of both healing and grace."*

## Firmly Planted - Good-bye to Summer – by Dina Cavazos

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This past Texas summer was milder than many (which translates to only a few days over 100!), but it was still hot and humid most of the time. Currently, October is hotter than normal. Any sane person would welcome fall right about now. But I'm somewhat conflicted.

Part of me anticipates cooler weather that energizes and motivates me to do more in the garden. Bigger projects, such as a small seating area in the back left corner, have been on hold for cooler "working weather". Jeans, flannels, and boots; the first fire in the woodstove; soups, firepit gatherings, walks in the crisp air—these are my favorite things about Fall, not to mention that for a few months between intense heat and intermittent freezes, plants are happy. It's a good time to plant certain things, and fall blooms are prolific. All this and more are what I love about fall. And yet...I'm reluctantly saying good-bye to summer.

Summer used to be intolerable for me until I got a stock tank pool, aka Cowboy Pool (it's Texas, y'all). The summer of 2020, on my birthday, my friend John installed it for me. (I wrote an article about it right after, FYI). This one thing changed my previously dreadful summer experience. In fact, the hotter it gets, the more I enjoy the pool. The water is easier to keep comfortable because night time temperatures are so warm. It feels absolutely wonderful—and I'm aware there are very few days left to enjoy it.

What else do I love about summer? Not much.

As I write this, sorting it out in my head, I'm a little surprised to realize it's all about the pool. Is it really that important to me? I could write quite a lot about it, enough to bore you completely, I'm sure. I could detail my "pool chores", how I manage the leaves, how my friend Mike gave me some of his homemade colloidal silver to use instead of chlorine (who knew? and yes, it works), my heater challenges and remedies...but I won't; instead, I will tell you why I love it so much, why it gives me joy.

In the summer, I get in the pool around 9 am with my coffee, books, and music. The birds come to eat around that time, descending out of nowhere to the feeders. I am quiet and still in the water, watching them fuss and fly to and fro. The sun hits the leaves just right and they shimmer like diamonds. The fountains gurgle and the chimes sing glorious praise. The water that holds me is indescribable...a miraculous substance that only God could conceive and use so spectacularly in so many ways. I'm captivated by the wonder around me. Though I don't do it as often, nights in the pool reveal different astonishments, but we'll leave it at that for now.

Pool time for me is often worship time, praying time, reading time. Other times I watch a movie or listen to a podcast. An hour or two in the pool cools me off for hours, especially if I put my clothes on over my damp bathing suit, which I often do. I then go about my business, refreshed and renewed, able to putter in the garden longer. Long summer days mean I can get in the pool twice if I have the time. The water, the peace, the resplendence of nature, the most perfect opportunity to be still and know He is God. This is what I reluctantly leave behind when I say good-bye to summer.

## **Under Pressure – One Four-Letter Response – by Debbie Haynes**

The word “amen.” Have you ever heard folks say it in a church setting, or have you exclaimed it yourself to a friend when in agreement with what he or she said?

In Nehemiah, we read about a guy named Ezra who opened the book and the people stood up. As Ezra blessed the Lord, “the great God,” all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands, bowing their heads and worshipping. Amen was a response as an honor to the reading of the Word, as an act of worship.

Next, we read that the people talked through the meaning of the words, and that they understood what they were hearing, and all the church again said, “Amen, Amen!” It was then declared that that day was a “holy day” – a day where the people were to weep no longer (because of captivity and trauma and sin) but instead rejoice and be responsive to a renewed relationship with God in their own country.

What a beautiful thing!

Nehemiah then told the people to eat and drink and to not be grieved, for the “joy of the Lord is your strength.” Again the people understood, and they were quiet in reverence because of the holy day. And in response to the word, they ate and they drank, and then they rejoiced and said, “Amen and amen!”

We too cry and mourn for our country, we ask God in faith to hear our prayers, and he does. He responds to us with grace and mercy, and our own response should always be to thank him for his words that he speaks and writes to us. We too can rejoice for his joy is our very strength, too!

Fast forward to the New Testament, where Jesus fulfilled all of the law, and we read in II Corinthians that God is faithful, and that all the promises of God find their yes in Jesus. And this is why it is through him that we utter “Amen” to God for his glory.

God establishes us in his son Jesus Christ, and has sealed us to himself.

We too, as his people, can respond with, “Amen, Amen!”

*This means surely this is the truth and certainly let it be so!*

## **Unearthly Thing - When You're Socially Awkward – by Angela Dolbear**

Periods of silence in a conversation can be almost painful, especially when you're socially awkward.

This happened to me recently, on a Zoom call no less. The host of the call was waiting for others to join, so a group of writers, probably most of whom were also struggling with socializing, stared at each other through their video screens—some with blurred backgrounds, which added to the strangeness. As the silence reached the ten-minute mark, the uneasiness became unbearable.

I felt myself slipping into observation mode, where I fade into the background and turn my attention to the sights and sounds around me. A helpful feature for someone who writes fiction, but not for someone desiring new contacts and friends in her field.

My social awkwardness has been troubling me for a few weeks now. I have an important writer's conference coming up, and I want to make new contacts and maybe even some friends. So, I had the bright idea to make an effort to be more personable and speak up during the call's silence.

"Does anyone else write fiction?" I blurted out. Instantly, I was mortified.

My question sounded competitive, as if I were laying down the gauntlet for a challenge. As if I were saying, "Does anyone else lay claim to my lands?" So NOT what I meant.

My goal was to break the ice, not obliterate it with a sledgehammer. I wanted to crawl under my desk and snuggle with my dog.

Now the uneasiness was due to my inquiry. I received silent stares, eyes blinking back at me, most of them behind eyeglasses.

Then, one lady shyly raised her hand, confessing, "I do." I tried to soften the situation by asking about her current work in progress. But the damage was already done. I stayed quiet for the rest of the call, which is my usual M.O., something I was trying to change.

I want to be kind and engaging. Not aggressive and competitive. I'd like to meet new writers, perhaps even make a few friends. I prayed about my lack of social skills, asking God for help. He gave me a unique idea.

Recently, I had been using ChatGPT to help with business tasks and marketing ideas, so I was familiar with writing prompts. So I asked, "How do I overcome being socially awkward in a business setting?"

The suggestions I got were surprisingly helpful. Here is the list of points I will practice before my writer's conference.

GPT: That's a great question—and a common one! Social awkwardness in business settings usually comes from a mix of nerves, self-consciousness, and not knowing how to read the situation. The good news is that it's a skill you can improve with practice. Here are some practical strategies:

### **1. Prepare Beforehand**

- Know your audience: If you're going into a meeting, learn the names, roles, or interests of the people there. This gives you conversation starters.
- Plan a few openers: Simple lines like "How's your week going?" or "What brings you to this event?" reduce pressure in the moment.
- Practice your self-intro: Have a concise, confident way to introduce yourself ("Hi, I'm Angela, I work in [X] and focus on [Y]").

### **2. Improve Nonverbal Confidence**

- Eye contact and posture: Sit or stand tall, shoulders relaxed, make eye contact (without staring).
- Smile naturally: It makes you seem approachable.
- Slow down: Nervous people tend to rush. A calm pace conveys confidence.

### **3. Shift the Focus**

- Instead of worrying about how you're coming across, focus on the other person. Ask thoughtful questions and listen actively. (*Author's note: this one's my favorite, because Jesus did this a lot in His ministry.*)
- People love talking about themselves, and you'll seem engaging just by being genuinely curious.

### **4. Practice Small Wins**

- Start with a low-pressure situation, like chatting with a barista or colleague in the hallway.
- Build up to networking events or big meetings. The more you practice, the more natural it feels.

### **5. Handle Awkward Moments Gracefully**

- If you blank out or stumble, laugh lightly at yourself and move on.
- A quick, "Sorry, lost my train of thought—what I meant was..." makes you relatable, not weak.

### **6. Long-Term Skills**

- Consider joining groups like Toastmasters to practice speaking in a safe environment.
- If anxiety is the main blocker, mindfulness or breathing techniques before social events can help calm your nerves.

 Key mindset: Most people aren't analyzing you as much as you think. They're usually focused on themselves. Confidence grows as you comprehend this.

These seem like simple strategies I can take with me to the conference. I also have a little cheat sheet to bring with me. But most importantly, I will continue to ask God for help, for *His* confidence. I know He will help. He is so good like that.

Blessings to you!

*Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories. Her latest release, The Mid-Century Breakfast Club, is the fourth book in The Garden Tales series. Her novels are available on [Amazon](#) in paperback, Kindle, and audiobook formats. Angela writes real, relatable, and reverent fiction. She loves reading, writing prose, and writing and recording music in her studio in Nashville, TN—listen to her latest album [STORMS](#) on your favorite music streaming service. Please drop by and sign up for news, read the latest stories, and hear new original music at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>.*

## An Adage a Day – Angel in Disguise – by Carole Gilbert

Have you ever heard the song, “Angels Among Us,” by Alabama or Jamey Johnson? Look it up and listen. I do believe there are angels among us.

When I was in high school, my boyfriend worked showing the kids movies at our small-town country club so their parents could play golf. Occasionally, I went with him. One Sunday, we headed to town on his lunch break in his old flat nose van. He hit some loose gravel driving around a curve and lost control and we flipped, landing back on the tires with the back bumper hooked on a barbed wire fence. I can still see the front windshield shatter underneath us as we rolled forward. Since this was before seat belts, we were thrown all around until the van stopped. When we came to a halt, I could feel blood running down my face and I could only see out of one eye. My boyfriend jumped out of the van and pulled me out. It was also before cell phones, so we looked left and right down the long country road and saw nothing or no one to help. He started kicking the van trying to get it off the fence so we could go to the hospital. Suddenly, out of nowhere, came a green car. Green was our favorite color. Remember young love? You have a favorite color, song, and just about anything else you can find in common that shows how you’re meant to be together.

Inside this green car was a small old man. He never said much but proceeded to help. How could we be so lucky in the middle of nowhere? I wondered if he was an angel in disguise. At that time, I didn’t know if I believed in angels. But somehow, the guys got the van off the fence and my boyfriend asked the man if he could follow us to take the van to a friend’s house (that was on the way to the hospital.) The little old man simply said, “”Yes.”

The van was in such bad shape. The top leaned to the right, but the car still moved. I remember riding in the man’s car that seemed as old as he was. When we got to the hospital, he walked in with us. The nurses immediately started tending to me, so he said goodbye and left. The funny thing is that after telling our story of what happened and about the little old man, no one in the hospital remembered seeing him. Being a small town, my family wanted to thank him. But even the sheriff couldn’t find him or a green car.

Was he an angel in disguise? Were we just lucky? “Heaven only knows.” What do you believe?

You hear this idiom “an angel in disguise” periodically, and it does have biblical origin. It refers to someone doing something helpful or giving something to someone in need. Many people fit into this description and are referred to as an angel in disguise. Could some actually *be* angels? The Old Testament tells of angels, and the New Testament does also, and we still speak of them today.

Hebrews 13:2

*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,  
for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*

I believe in my heart that this small old man in the green car was an angel in disguise, a total angel among us, and he came to render aid to us that day. This is November, the month of Thanksgiving. It's the month we are to be thankful and give to others, just like an angel in disguise. Happy Thanksgiving!

## **Moving Forward – The Courage to Heal – by Pam Charro**

One of my favorite people in the Bible is Joseph in the book of Genesis. I've felt a strong attachment to him ever since I learned that he walked through so much of his life with an intensely broken heart. Despite having the favor of God on his life, he still had to endure betrayal, abuse, and horrendously unfair treatment from many of the very people who should have defended and protected him. And while none of those issues were able to thwart God's good plan for his life, he still had to process all of that pain. His story so stirs my heart, and his courage so impresses me. He is truly one of my heroes in the faith.

I have been aware of the brokenness of my own heart for most of my adult life. I've been in therapy since grade school, and becoming a believer in my mid-twenties has brought a tremendous amount of wisdom and healing into my life. But I have felt a gentle nudging fairly recently that God wanted to go deeper with me. I would love to tell you that I was quick to obey, but I have actually resisted it for the past several years, keeping myself "too busy" and refusing to journal, even though I knew the Holy Spirit was telling me I should. I knew my heart needed surgery, and I squirmed.

But my need for the operation didn't go away just because I avoided it. He has been patient and kind, but I couldn't receive what he wanted to give until I obediently started journaling again. Once I did, old memories almost immediately came flooding back to me. Intensely painful ones that I wasn't sure I could face.

In Genesis, Joseph already has his high position when he is finally reunited with the brothers who betrayed him, but he didn't immediately tell them who he was. The Bible says he finally broke down and revealed that he was their brother, and that his wailing was so loud that the whole palace heard it. Then he forgave them and told them not to be afraid because he would take care of them all throughout the famine. He knew that God was in all of it and that it would ultimately be for good.

I see so many important keys here regarding my own healing and freedom.

1. I have to come in contact with the pain again in order to really let it go. I will never mentally figure it out, and dwelling on the injustice of it all will just make me mad. It won't be convenient or dignified, it has to be messy and painful and I will have ugly cry. But it won't last forever and I will eventually have the opportunity to let it go. But only when I'm brave enough to feel it again.
2. I must forgive my offender, no matter what. Not because they deserve it or I deserved the pain, but because I can't carry the poison around inside of me anymore. As my pastor said in today's sermon, "When you refuse to forgive your offender, you allow them to keep a piece of you," But when I let go of my need for my own definition of justice, I also let go of the power that the offense had in controlling me.
3. I must trust that, regardless of the reasons or motives my offender has for causing me such pain, God meant it for good. Every bit of it. He never rejected me, abandoned me, or betrayed me. He saw every minute of my pain, confusion and anger, and he knew those moments would eventually bring me to this one, where I'm sitting with him and becoming free. He has plans to shape all of it into a beautiful tomorrow if I will be brave enough to trust him and obey his instructions to not only forgive the one who deeply hurts me, but to also pray for him to be blessed. There was a day that I was someone else's offender, and I received mercy and total forgiveness from God when I needed it.

It feels like the most impossible thing in the world to face such a high wall of pain; that is why I need God's Word to get me through this process. He knows what happened. He cares about how I felt. He is the healer and bringer of life that I need now and for my tomorrows.

It's going to be good.



FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME – Create Shade – by Marcy Lytle**

We were leaving a very hot baseball game in late September, one no one wanted to sit in, because the sun was beating on our arms and faces...and we were just begging for a cloud and a breeze. As we were exiting the ballfield stadium and headed to our car, we said hello to another group just arriving for their kid's game. My husband said, "It's hot!" And the man replied, "When you have to create shade, you know it's too hot."

I smiled at his response and thought about it for days, actually. What he said is so true. When we're scrambling for shade in late September, when the calendar says the first day of fall, and we're still slathering on sunscreen, something's just not right with that scenario.

When we were watching the game, I had brought an umbrella, but it was too large and blocked the view of those behind me. Therefore, that shade didn't work so well. Clouds did cover the sun, but only so very briefly, until the warmth was unbearable again. And breezes? Well they were light and mostly non-existent. All of that found us trying to create some sort of shade, when we really had nothing to create that shade with. Even the cap my husband wore didn't shade the side of his face where the sun was coloring his cheeks red by the minute.

Finally, I got up and moved behind the bleachers and stood under a tree for the last part of the game. Others had placed their chairs under that tree, and I guess they enjoyed the shade they'd created for themselves the entire game. But we had placed ourselves in front of the bleachers for a better view. We had been shaded when the game started, but that didn't last long as the sun rose to where it was just in line with the side, almost as if to say, "You can't escape my heat. I'm gonna find you!"

Being out in the heat of the day with no shade is not healthy, it's more than uncomfortable, and it leaves its mark in dehydration, burned skin, and oh yeah...heat exhaustion. And when shade cannot be found or created, we just have to move. It was dumb for me to keep sitting there miserably trying to watch 10 year old Augie bat and run the bases.

When I finally moved behind the bleachers, stood up for a while, and created some shade for myself, I actually felt a breeze that was missing below. I wished I'd found that spot before the game and not during the heat of it all. And I envied those that had the foreknowledge to sit under the tree, while we opted for being out in the open.

I've found myself many times in the heat of the moment in life situations, trying to create "shade" for myself to no avail, all because I didn't think before I entered that moment. Here's a few things I thought of:

- Being among those that argue and disagree, I can choose to sit elsewhere, not in the heated words.
- Being tired and spiritually drained, leading to emotional exhaustion is not wise. I can rest and reset and refresh, and create shade.
- Being in the disappointment drag...when prayers go unanswered or friends are suffering...feels like being burned, for sure. I can create shade with the truth of His word, that He works all things, you know, together – for good.

- Being overwhelmed during the upcoming holidays can feel uncomfortable and reduce the joy that's supposed to be present. I can choose the secret place of the Almighty where he shades me under his wings and calls me to breathe...
- Being a non-observer of my surroundings is dangerous, when wisdom says take my time and look. And when I do...I can find the shade before the sun finds me.

"When you have to create shade, you know it's too hot." I like that piece of wisdom that that guy offered, and he didn't even know it. It's November now and it's cooler outside, but the heat of the day can rise in any season. It's up to me to recognize it and move to where the cool breezes blow...

## FRESH THYME – The Light – by Marcy Lytle

I have an app called Beauty Plus and when I use it, it makes me look so much better...just by adding light. It's amazing! I can look dark, tired, beaten down, etc. and depending on how much light I add, just one click and all of that sadness looks like joy. *It really is all about the light...*

I use reading glasses and have for years. But if I'm in the car, parked and reading somewhere, and the light is streaming in the window beside me – I can see! However, in the dark rooms at home, even with the blinds open, there's just not enough light for me to set aside my readers. *Light is everything...*

I have recently started saying, "Siri, turn on my torch" (torch is so much easier to say than flashlight). This helps tremendously when we arrive home late at night and can't see the key hole, in order to open the door. We don't leave on the porch light because that attracts bugs, but that torch on my phone is a life saver. We can clearly see to step up onto the porch and insert the key. *The torch is amazing...*

I light candles to create ambience in the living area, when we are home at night and snacking and cozied up watching a show, because the light is pretty. The candles smell great, the flicker just makes me happy, and the soft light brings us into the mood for fall. *Flickering lights change the atmosphere...*

I leave a light on over the stove at night. I have done this ever since my kids were little, as we often had to get meds at night, or water, or something from the kitchen. Leaving that light on illuminated my path as I dragged into the kitchen barely awake...and it still does now...when I am up early in the morning. *Light leads the way...*

I recently purchased a set of plug-in nightlights that come on when it's dark, and I have them all over the house, one in each room. We even take one of these lights on vacations, because it's great to light up a hotel or Airbnb with unfamiliar furniture at night, so we don't stumble and fall. *Lights create safety, don't they?*

I was just thinking a lot about light, especially after I started saying "torch" to Siri. I get a kick out of doing that! And I also thought about the verse we all know about His word being a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path.

This world is dark, and getting darker. It's hard to know what to read or who to listen to, because AI has taken over and people lie, and stories are misinterpreted, and frankly...everyone thinks what they saw or heard or read is the truth.

Sure, even the Word can be argued about, if folks want to argue.

But if we read the Word as the Light it's meant to be, the story of the Light of the World at creation, the Light of love permeating the generations with forgiveness and grace, the Light of the Word made manifest in the flesh, and the Light of His presence that is with us always...we won't have a problem. We won't lose our way, we won't fumble around in the dark, we will create safe spaces, and we'll sit and marvel at the Light that changes the room and the world around us.

The Light. Observe the practical ones you enjoy, then enjoy the Light in the way He wants you to, and calls you to.

And who knows. Friends might see our faces and think we've had something "done" when all we did was step into the light...

*Jesus, turn on the torch,  
light the fire,  
create a flicker in my heart,  
show the way...  
and may I be a reflection of your light.*

## **Fresh Thyme - The Unpopular Travel List – by Marcy Lytle**

I've written them, I've read them, and they're everywhere – tips on packing. From how to budget, when to book the best flights, whether to roll or fold your clothes, and all of the accessories that are must-haves. But I don't want to feel overwhelmed with all the options and on the day of actually packing and going, I just want to be done and go.

I decided that sometimes, peace of mind and letting go of the perfection and the pressure to save money –enables me to travel lightly, if you know what I mean. So here are my unpopular, or less talked about, tips if you're planning a trip:

Instead of cramming it all and worrying about the weight of the luggage, would it be so horrible to take an extra bag? Yes, there's a cost involved...but you're already spending big bucks on the trip. Just add the bag!

Instead of wondering where you'll place those souvenirs and treats you want to buy yourself, so you fret while you're out shopping...just take an extra bag for those, too! You can carry it on, or again – check it.

And while we're talking about checking bags, it seems so popular to take your bag on the plane so you don't have to wait at the baggage claim, or worry if your bags get lost. I know that happens sometimes, but if you need to check your bags, do it. And wait for your baggage. So, what? It's not that much extra time to stand there and see your bag roll around, grab it and be on your way.

I used to stress over getting all my liquids in small bottles, and fitting everything in the carry-on. Now, I bring what I want and it goes in my large suitcase, so there are no worries on the plane! Yes, sometimes I place bottles in plastic zipper bags in case the lids open, and I do opt for travel size items, but placing in your luggage you're checking on the plane lessens the worry and the load of the carryon.

All of the popular spots to travel are great, and go! Like the well-known beaches, or the islands where everyone goes. But if you like unique adventure, google "small town America" and visit some of those! They've been our favorites – like Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania and Galena, Illinois.

Don't forget to add some cash in your stash for tipping and markets. Tipping ends up being an expense you forget about, and really adds up if you're taking tours and heading to small-town venues.

I always carry a backpack and inside, I have a small crossbody bag. This way, the backpack is stuffed with things for the airplane, but when out and about, I can take out the small bag.

What's in my backpack for the plane, since I don't carry the toiletries? Reading material, hand sanitizer, puzzle books and a pen, my junk journal (a small book for clipping and snipping what we do and pasting inside) with Scotch tape, our cords and adapters, a small wrap if I get cold, tissues, our itinerary and paper tickets or maps (sometimes your phone doesn't work!), hair brush, extra reading glasses, and sometimes an extra pair of shoes.

I realize that traveling and adventuring without a plan is fun and thrilling, for sure. But for us, we don't want to be disappointed that something wasn't open or that tour wasn't offered on that day, so we plan. And we enjoy the planning so much! We check hours and call places (websites aren't always updated). We know that small towns are closed sometimes on Mondays or

Sundays, so we schedule those on other days. We use maps to plan our day so that we get the most in!

One thing that has worked for us for a week or more stay away is to grab an Airbnb centrally located between the towns we want to visit. We take day trips (1-2 hour drives) and then come back at night to the same place. It's so nice not moving our luggage and having a "home" each night. However, if we're in one big city and are gone from morning til night, we opt for a hotel because we're away so much.

Look up what's best for a souvenir where you're going, or what food they're known for, things unique like that – and try them all! Did you know gooey butter cake is a must-taste while in St. Louis? What about the California burrito in San Diego? It has fries in it! And maple creemees in Vermont!

There are so many ways to fold, and probably hundreds of toiletry bags to buy. I think I've tried them all! I've quit using packing cubes (except for small items) for my clothes. I find that if I fold my clothes once and lay them flat, back and forth, I like it better. And a big zipper pouch works for me for makeup, etc. A cute one, for sure. But I don't care for those hanging ones with a million compartments. Too hard to make each item fit where...

What about shoes? That stresses me out, because my feet are fickle from day to day. If we're doing a lot of walking, I opt for two pairs of sneakers, and one pair of cute low-heeled boots. And again, if they don't all fit, take an extra bag!

And finally, sleep noise and unwrinkled clothes. Is this an issue with you? It is for us. And we don't like the sleep noise from iphones. We found the cutest small fan that sits on our nightstand and makes enough noise for us to sleep, so we pack it! And...Downey wrinkle releaser works well if we pull out our clothes and unpack, spray them and let them hang. Not a fan of a steamer...

Oh my gosh, I could go on and on. But I'd love to hear your not-so-popular travel comments as well!