



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

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

2022



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

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

January 2022



TIPS

## **The Dressing – January Style – by Marcy Lytle**

The holiday season(s) are over. I feel like from the time Halloween arrives, it's a very fast blur of all the fun costumes, dressy outfits, ugly sweaters, sparkly sequins and more...and then January arrives and it's cold and bleak and we're indoors...so now what?

January is the time to dress in what feels good, makes us happy, and lifts our spirits! So here are some suggestions and ideas for you this winter season...

**Pins** – Did you know they're making a comeback? I have a couple of fabric pins and pinned them together and wore them as one, recently. It felt fun and cozy on a comfy sweater!

**That Shacket** – If you bought one, great. If you didn't, go snag one on sale. This plaid flannel type I'm wearing with jeans and love it so much. I love the color and the feel, and that makes me smile!

**A New Hat** – I have always worn mostly one style of hat, but I branched out and found a new style to wear because it's cute and...why not? Be brave and try something new, this new year!

**An Old Jacket** – Is there a jacket in your closet that you've forgotten about or haven't worn in years? Give it new life with a graphic tee underneath – play with what you have in your closet and see if you can design a new look with an old piece!

**Got Overalls?** I have a pair I found at Old Navy and I love wearing them on cozy days by the fire or out shopping or for those Christmas exchanges. If you don't have a pair, buy yourself some!

**Yes to Plaid** – Plaid isn't just for Christmas, as it can be worn all through the winter season. I love this pair of plaid pants I found at JCP. And all sorts of tops and colors go with plaid...you'd be surprised.

**A New Bag** – It's those after Christmas sales that are so fun to hit. And it's even more fun to buy a treat for yourself. My daughter gave me this backpack/purse from Target. It's a great color for the season and holds so much!

**A Good Time for White** – I love white sweaters, and January is a great time to wear them over all your outfits...any of the above! TJ Maxx is a good place to snag a white cardigan, or any of the discount stores.

What are you wearing this season? Enjoy the new year as you step out in new styles...



## Seven for You – Favorite Reads

Last year at this same time, we shared our favorite reads, and we're doing it again. I love hearing of a new book or some article or podcast, or something to read or listen to, so that I can look forward to settling into a new story or idea. Maybe you got a new book for Christmas, or maybe you didn't. You'll need some ideas for the year, either way. So here are a few of our faves:

I'm reading my second William Berry book in the Port William series. The audio books are gentle, flowing, and good companions during my evening walks. Berry's love for nature and sustainable living come through in his writing in a refreshing way. His main characters are strong moral people and the books encourage my faith in the human race. - Shelley

[https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0851HDRNQ?binding=kindle\\_edition&ref=db\\_s\\_ks\\_series\\_rwt\\_tkin&qid=1638452063&sr=1-1](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0851HDRNQ?binding=kindle_edition&ref=db_s_ks_series_rwt_tkin&qid=1638452063&sr=1-1)

I love my Billy Graham devotional book. It's crazy, but it seems like he alive and writing about stuff going on in today's world. That gives me hope because I realize that the world has been going downhill ever since Jesus rose from the dead! This book was especially comforting last year - I told my husband several times it is almost like we all experienced Covid 20 years ago or something like it. The book is titled *Hope for Each Day*.

I also read a book titled *Before We Were Yours* - it's based on a Tennessee adoption agency back in the early 1900's through the 1950's. It can be heavy at times reading about how children were stolen from their parents and then mistreated. Nothing real graphic, but you know what is going on. I hesitated to even mention this book, as it is so sad that something like this occurred...but it's a great read. I found it interesting because it was based on history. I like those kinds of books. I also love reading cooking magazines. – Melissa

I have been watching *The Voice* this season and have enjoyed listening to a trio of siblings called A Girl Named Tom. Wonderful harmony. I also have loved this devotional (I especially love the title!) and music by Ellie Holcomb. Lastly, this CD by Shane and Shane has been on constant replay for a few months – Beth

I really don't like to read. I did as a child, but over the years my reading habits changed. What I love to do is write and do research. Google amazes me! The way I can research a subject and all kinds of information is at my fingertips, literally. And what I like to listen to is my son's sermon every week. During Covid, his church started sharing their sermons online and it's a real treat to be able to watch my son this way. I also like listening to his podcast. At the end of his sermons, he has time, where he takes and answers a few questions that are anonymously sent in. And then he answers some of these questions on his podcast every week. The podcasts are only about six minutes long so they're short, sweet, and to the point. They're all about God and religious subjects and so easy to listen to. – Carole

<https://lamarbaptist.org/sermons/>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/ask-anything-w-pastor-ryan/id1523696296?i=1000542197603>

I read a lot, mostly at night before falling asleep. I have plowed through so many books. My current favorite is [The Lost Art of Reverie by Rae Walsh](#). The story was touching and memorable, the characters were interesting, and I really identified with the main character's struggle with anxiety and depression. There's some romance that's sweet and honorable. This is one of my favorite novels.

My husband and I have been reading the [Gospel of John in the Amplified Bible translation](#), together. I read it out loud for us, at night, before he falls asleep. It's been a huge blessing. We get a better glimpse of how God's love for us is so immense, eternal, and everlasting, in the Gospel of John.

Lyrics and music inspire me as well. My current favorite album is [Milk & Honey by Crowder](#). The songs are full of so much truth about Jesus. Some of the songs are upbeat, which I really need sometimes. – Angela

One book we read this year was *God of All Things* – the author Andrew Wilson explores glimpses of the sacred in created things...like figs, pigs and even honey. Each chapter is short but full of amazing revelation and enabled me to be amazed at God all over again and again...-

A friend gave me the book *102 Great Dates for Any Budget* and it's so fun to read and try out creative dates with my husband. I'm a big fan of making date night happen often, so my sweet friend knew I'd love this book! - Marcy

## **Three Moms – Independence – by The Cousins**

### Mom of 2

Our girls are ages 3 and 5 and definitely exploring their independence! The earliest things they started with were picking up toys and putting them back. And then, of course, dressing themselves was next. They are now able to dress themselves and they like to pick out their own clothes, too. This is great, but I loved picking out their outfits and now giving them that choice – it's hard! They like to pick the same outfit, same types of clothes, and they don't always pick the dresses or from their whole closet of outfits! I try to show them what matches and what to wear in seasons, so guiding them in their independence is definitely a challenge.

Another thing the girls do is make up their beds, which is not perfect – but they work at it. They also have a rule of putting a toy back before getting another out. A few months ago, Sadie – our 5 year old – woke up and said, "Mommy, come look," and she had cleaned the whole play room without us asking. She did it independently – which was an "Ah ha!" moment for Mom!

After dinner, the girls now bring their dishes from the table to the sink. They don't quite yet pack lunches, but they do grab their own snacks from the "snack bin." And of course, if we're outside and trying new things, they like to "do this by myself" – they don't want Mom's help! Like riding on their bikes - they don't want help. They both do gymnastics and they don't want assistance as they look at me and say, "No, I got this, Mom."

Sadie and Josie also love going to the grocery store and grabbing the "kids" cart and going to the self-checkout aisle and scanning the items. This is great, and I could do all of this quickly – but it's fun to see them enjoy. I love seeing them do these things, and there are other times I'd rather do it all and be done with the chore. It's a daily struggle to slow down, not be in a hurry, and allow them to grow in their independence.

### Mom of 3

Every one of our kids is different. Having a chore chart helps with all of the independence at home. However, sometimes it's just easier for me to do things when we're in a hurry. And I do. The things we do work on, we say, "The more responsible you are the bigger things you get." Our oldest had to keep his room six months straight before being allowed the gift of a pet turtle. Our daughter wants a dog now, because her brother got his turtle. So far, she's not doing so well with cleaning and gets super overwhelmed and is a collector – from A to Z! I usually have to sit in her room once every few weeks and talk about purging! We are still working on her independence in cleaning, as she struggles.

Another area is how the kids handle things with their friends outside riding bikes or walking. They now want to walk around the corner to a friend's house. My oldest could probably do this, but we don't have iPhones for our kids, and there are no house phones, we aren't sure that we can allow this type of leash. It's hard as a mom to let them be independent because I want to protect them from hurt, and it's hard to trust them to call if something is not right or inappropriate while at a neighbor's house.

Independence is great and important and there are lots of kids that run into being certain ages and not knowing how to take care of themselves and things – and even adults. So we definitely need to teach kids independence – but allow them to still be kids!

There are some days I just take care of the kids' chores and allow them to play. Then other days, their chores come first. Independence helps them grow in their confidence in abilities and skills. I wouldn't say independence in every kid is different and how they learn, so I've had to learn that as well, with the kids and they with each other.

We look for natural skills and obedience, and we as parents are learning to allow them to be independent. They don't always think and do like we do, so we have to pray and trust the Lord with our kiddos in this area (as all areas), too!

#### Mom of 4

We absolutely want our kids to be independent, but it's hard because we parents want it all to be done in a "certain way." Having four kids has taught me that it is impossible, no way, to keep up with all that's going on. Because of that, there has been no other option but to let them do things!

When we had three kids, we started letting our oldest help do everything from getting diapers, unloading the dishwasher, etc. By Pre-K and K the kids had learned to dress themselves and clean their rooms. However, making the beds doesn't really happen in our home (unless we're having company!)

Now, the four kids do a lot and we couldn't survive without their help!. Grace, our oldest in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, is now able to teach the younger. Anna who shares a room with our youngest Hope is a great example for her as well. They each help each other. Recently, Elijah (age 10) has been learning to mow and use the weed eater!

All in all, they are great helpers and fully participate in our home. Regarding their responsibilities at school and in their extra-curricular activities – they've learned that Mom and Dad can't keep up. The kids all remind us to keep things signed, etc. And as a mom, there is freedom in that.

I would not have arrived at this point without having so many kids! I naturally like to be in control and lead and have things a certain way. But with the amount of things to keep up with, I've HAD to let go and give them independence.

It's a work in progress, always!



## **In the Kitchen – Dips and Mixes – by Marcy Lytle**

Christmas is over; so is Thanksgiving, and perhaps if you have to find or make one more recipe or casserole or dessert – you're going to scream! One of my favorite things to buy at the markets during the Christmas season is dips and mixes, and I love to have these on hand for after the holidays, because they are great for snacks and so easy to use – and quite tasty! I'm going to share some of my favorites, in case you want to treat yourself and order some for your meal making this month:

### **Quattro Ranch**

Dip, soup and cracker mixes – they have so many! On their site they even share some recipe ideas for the mixes. You can use them as a spread on a taco! Cluck Norris and Hennifer Lopez are a couple of their soup mixes – how fun are those titles? And the cracker spice mixes are a hit if you're having friends over to sit by the fire and visit...

<https://quattroranch.com/dip-ideas>

### **Mad Dash Mixes**

I've written about this company before, and I can't say enough good things about their mixes! So many to choose from. Soups, pasta salads, and dips are my favorites. I haven't been disappointed with any of them. They even have dessert mixes, like cheesecake! The flavors are so good, and having a few of these pouches in your pantry will make January smooth sailing if you're weary from all the baking...

<https://www.maddashmixes.com/>

### **Bebas Salsa**

This is our favorite salsa to buy at the markets – the taste is so good – and ingredients are fresh. We have bought it over and over again because we love it, with chips! I like to stock up on their mild tomato and the tomatillo – both good choices. We love having salsa available for topping any Mexican dishes, baked potatoes, mixed in with cheese for a good queso, or atop mashed avocado, etc. A great winter staple!

<https://bebapfreshsalsa.com/>

### **Walker Honey Farm**

We visited this farm in person and purchased some of their honey and honey butters! I recently spread one on a peanut butter sandwich for my husband, added some nuts, and he said the sandwich was so tasty! Check out their wide array of products and grab some for your pantry. There are so many recipes and tasty meals that are just better with honey! You could have biscuit night where jams and honeys and bacon are all of the accessories for your warm biscuits right out of the oven!

<https://www.walkerhoneyfarm.com/>

## **Homemade Gourmet**

We purchased a few of these soup mixes from a fundraiser and I see they have a website. We were not disappointed at all. I loved the potato soup mix – two packs in one box. They even have bread and cobbler mixes. The taco soup was good, as well. It's so fun to look in your pantry and realize you have one of these, when you're tired and want something easy!

[https://shop.homemadegourmet.com/?gclid=Cj0KCQiA-qGNBhD3ARIsAO\\_o7ykkNO7224oC3O4yEclzSd7Y\\_G38fQ9msVeXhYRTqVjPNOzcNpjm8saAu3QEALw\\_wcB](https://shop.homemadegourmet.com/?gclid=Cj0KCQiA-qGNBhD3ARIsAO_o7ykkNO7224oC3O4yEclzSd7Y_G38fQ9msVeXhYRTqVjPNOzcNpjm8saAu3QEALw_wcB)

Just set aside some of your grocery budget to get some of these easy-fixes from boxes and pouches. And don't feel guilty about it, one bit. You deserve a break...

## **TRIED AND TRUE – LAST YEAR – BY MARCY LYTLE**

### REFLECTIONS ON WHAT I NOTED AND LEARNED IN 2021:

1. SITTING IN THE CAR AND READING, ON A WINTER DAY WITH THE SUN WARMING THE WINDOWS, IS AN AWESOME BREAK FROM A WORK ROUTINE. IT'S A MUST-TRY FOR THE NEW YEAR.
2. ONE CAN POP OUT THE AVOCADO SEED WITHOUT ANY GADGETS OR TOOLS, SIMPLY BY PRESSING THE BACK OF THE HALF...WHO KNEW? ALL THESE YEARS, THOSE GADGETS I HAD WERE NOT NECESSARY AT ALL.
3. TINTED MOISTURIZER WORKS BETTER AND PROVIDES COVERAGE AS WELL AS FOUNDATION. WHY NOT TRY SOMETHING NEW IN YOUR MAKEUP ARRAY THIS YEAR?
4. A STEP STOOL IS AN AWESOME THING TO HAVE IN MY CLOSET, FOR REACHING AND STACKING. I NOW CAN FOLD AND STACK MY HEAVY SWEATERS IN A NEAT PILE THAT WON'T TOPPLE.
5. ROOM CONFIGURATIONS ONCE THOUGHT IMPOSSIBLE WERE POSSIBLE, AFTER ALL. AFTER A COUPLE OF DECADES, WE'VE GOT OUR DINING TABLE BACK FOR WELL...DINING.
6. I CAN SWEEP AWAY BAD THOUGHTS, JUST LIKE I SWEEP LEAVES OF MY PORCH THAT SHOW UP DAILY, BUT THEY'RE NOT PART OF MY LANDSCAPE. THIS WAS A HUGE REVELATION TO ME ONE DAY WHILE WALKING AND CHATTING WITH HIM...
7. BOOKS CAN BE TURNED AROUND BACKWARDS (BINDING FACING INSIDE) FOR A CLEANER MONOCHROMATIC LOOK. SOMETIMES THE BINDINGS OF BOOKS ARE ALL DIFFERENT COLORS AND DON'T LOOK GREAT ALL TOGETHER, SO THIS NEW IDEA WORKS!
8. BOOKBAGS IN ALL SIZES, FABRICS AND PATTERNS MAKE ME HAPPY. BARNES AND NOBLE OFTEN HAS THEIRS ON SALE THIS TIME OF YEAR.
9. THE BEST FRIDGE CLEANOUT MEAL IS TO USE ALL THE THINGS ON A BOARD OR IN A BOWL OR GRILLED ATOP A BAKED POTATO – DINNER DONE.
10. MASKS AREN'T SO BAD AFTER ALL, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT'S COLD. KEEPS MY FACE WARM...SO I DON'T MIND THEM ONE BIT.
11. THERE'S A DARK CHOCOLATE BAR AT WORLD MARKET WITH HAZELNUTS THAT'S TO DIE FOR!
12. THE DOLLAR TREE SELLS THOSE CUTE KNOTTED HEADBANDS...YES, FOR A DOLLAR. AND I LOVE THEM SO MUCH.

## SUGAR + Spice – New Year, New Look - by Angela Dolbear

Welcome to **SUGAR + SPICE**, and everything nice in the world of beauty.

I am journeying outside my comfort zone...outside of my regular routine to try some new products.

**EYES:** Liquid eye shadow -- The liquid shadows I have tried in the past went on too dark, or blotchy. I am giving [Eloise's GLITTER JEWELS LIQUID EYE SHADOW](#) in Bronze, a try. The formula went on smooth, and I like the staying power. A little goes a long way, so that's economical. It was easy to blend with my fingers and a shadow brush.

**FACE:** Cream blush – Again, in the past, the cream blushes I have tried went on splotchy, and were uneven. It could be pilot error, but I don't like to look like I have a rash! I really like [MILK Makeup's Lip + Cheek Cream Blush stick](#) in the shade Werk. It's such a pretty warm rose color. The stick made for easy application of a few dots across the top of my cheek bones, and then a little blending with my fingertips. The formula also gives me a healthy glow. It's a little pricey at \$20 a stick, but it seems as if it will last a long time (even the sample size I have!)

**Cream Foundation in a Stick** -- I used to use a cream stick foundation, but it seemed to slide right off my face and onto my neck, blouse, etc. I tried [Trestique's Foundation stick in Paradise Island beige](#), \$30, and the formula was so smooth, and stay put all day. I love the easy of swipe on a few stripes, and blending then with a foundation brush. The applicator is refillable too.

**LIPS:** I have been a die-hard red lipstick wearer for years. Since I changed my hair color from black to red, I thought it might be time for some warmer tones. I applied [NYX retractable lip liner in Cocoa](#), \$5, and then I swiped on [Il Makiage Dirty Talk matte lip color](#) in a light warm rose shade called Elwa, \$26. The look was soft and warm, but I little too matte for me, so I dabbed on some [Too Faced Lip Injection lip gloss in Sugar Plum Fun](#) to add a tiny bit of shine.

**"Deserted Island" Product:** Not that I would wear makeup on a deserted island, but if I did, [Clinique's Lash Power Long Wearing mascara](#) in Black Onyx, \$21, would be on the bamboo dressing table in my hut. I have bionic tears since I had Lasik surgery, which melts even the most waterproof mascara. Except this one. I only apply it to my bottom lashes because the brush is so small, and that is where I need it the most.

I hope the New Year inspires a fabulous new look, as well as a fabulous new outlook. Blessings to you!

Angela Dolbear, Beauty Editor, is the author of contemporary spiritual novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series, and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on Amazon. She is also a self-proclaimed beauty junkie, and has been since long before her mother allowed her to start wearing makeup at the age of 14. She keeps UPS and the USPS busy delivering small boxes on a regular basis from Ulta, Sephora, Amazon, and many independent cosmetics companies to her home Nashville, TN. Please connect with her at [www.AngelaDolbear.com](http://www.AngelaDolbear.com) Blessings!





HOME

## **Practical Parenting – Delight over Duty** – by Marcy Lytle

Growing up in the church and now listening to the next generation, I often hear parents say they don't want to make their kids hate church or bible and prayer time, by "forcing" it on them. Bad memories from our own childhood perhaps make us nervous to try the same tactics on our own kids.

In my experience, going to extremes is never a good solution. In other words, allowing our kids to make all the decisions and decide whether or not they want to pray or read the Bible might be a trendy free-thinking way to parent, but kids need guidance. And leaving them be, to flounder in their faith, is not the solution. But neither is forcing them with a strong hand and a heavy load with no freedom or grace.

So let's tackle the things disciplines that are hard, when it comes to parenting and faith:

**Attending church** – This is such a controversial topic these days, with all the livestreaming available, the idea that church is community and not a building, and all the things. While never missing a Sunday can bleed into legalism, never going at all can leave us all wanting. Attending church somewhere with a body of believers is faith-building, worship-wondering, growth-spurring and so much more. Yes, there are problems in the church. But add to the solution by showing up, and loving others and loving Him.

**Prayer** – Do we teach our kids The Lord's Prayer, recite prayers at dinner, or pray before bedtime and give thanks, or what? Yes, to all of it. Prayer is communicating with God, but it's also exercising our faith. If we stumble in this area ourselves, we can seek help and learn more about what prayer is, and share it with our kiddos. Prayer moves mountains, our and kids need to know this!

**Bible study/devotions** – If we go to church, if we give our kids a children's bible, isn't that all we are required to do? "Required" might be the word that breaks our backs, because no one wants to read the bible out of duty, do we? Although none of us balks at a professor's direction to read this book to be ready for the test on Friday. The Bible is a manual, a life-giver, a solution book, and it's inspired to give hope, healing and all the things we all need to pass daily tests of discouragement and despair. So yes, however it works. Feed your kids in little increments with verses, then progress to stories, and share with them your favorite verses, and make the word come alive in your family!

**Giving** – Little kids don't have funds, so start them out with giving of their time and energy to the family. As they start receiving an allowance, share with them where blessings originate from and what a pleasure it is to share what we have with others because of love. Make giving a part of living, not something "extra" they "have" to do. Then when they start making money, hopefully they will have participated in giving so much as a family, it will be natural and joyful giving, not laborious and dutiful releasing of a clutched fist.

The point to the above is that we don't have to fear sharing our faith and disciplines with our kids, when we do it out of love for the Father and love for others. If we are careful to talk well of our friends that attend church with us and those that lead us, our kids will enjoy the experience.

If we pray often and praise and commune with God, and share His answers and his provision, kids will know the power behind prayer and follow suit. If the Word is present in guiding our path, they will note that and even if they stray...the path will be their light. And giving with a cheerful heart – well that's pure gold – to our children that will be of value to them throughout their lives.

Don't sweat that you're going to ruin your kids by offering them life through the disciplines that can be enjoyed as a believer of Jesus, just because you've seen them wrongfully used as punishment or with a spirit of gloom. And if you're still stuck in duty rather than delight, get out of that sticky quicksand as soon as you can by finding your delight in Him and His in you...

## **I Don't Do Teenagers – After Winter Break – by Marcy Lytle**

Back to school, and your teen is either excited or dreading that first day in the hallways again, with homework and schedules and all the things. Heck, we all feel a bit of depression when the hoopla and the happy bells of Christmas are no longer ringing and winter is settling in around most of us. It's nice to have teenagers that are perfect in every way, but I've not heard of many families that do! After all, they have imperfect parents like us!

Starting off a New Year with teens might be filled with sighs, frustrations, angst, worry, dread, and all sorts of emotions that we ourselves are dealing with...and we just don't have the bandwidth to deal with our hormonal offspring at the same time. We ourselves are tired and we have a mountain of Christmas lights to untangle, gifts to put away, a fridge to clean out, and a whole list of to-dos that only come as a result of the holidays...and we have to get back to work ourselves!

All of the above makes for tight tension that could result in huge blowups between our kids and ourselves; all because of our emotions and feelings that are all over the place, coupled with tired spirits and bodies!

Here are some practical ideas to help us all slide into the New Year on a sled with glee, instead of slipping on the ice and breaking our backs:

*Let go of the expectation* that January 1 all things have to be back to normal. Make realistic goals of tackling maybe one of those after-holiday chores a week, even if it takes til spring to complete.

*Leave time for January fun.* Make a couple of outings for the kids and for yourselves, put them on the calendar. Maybe he might want to have a couple friends over for a game night, or she might want to craft the night away with three girlfriends. Make sure that's on the calendar, so spirits are still high awaiting the fun.

*Live and let live.* What does that mean? It means play music, dance, eat picnic style on the floor, and hang loose with your kids this month, instead of being uptight over the mess. Easier said than done? Yes, it is, but do it.

*Listen to each other.* Have a family night where emotions and feelings are laid out on the table, snacks are enjoyed, and prayers are made, and hands are held. Healing will happen, and hope will emerge.

*Light candles.* December might be over, but candles are still for sale! Get the ones that smell like winter and continue the ambience of the season all month long. It will calm everyone's spirits and continue to make them bright.

*Learn something new.* Talk as a family about something new for the year – a new skill, a new recipe, a new look, a new verse – make that your focus this month to look for the new and the good!



*Lean on each other* – present your worries and your frustrations to each other as a family and ask for help. Give help, ask everyone to participate, and see what all gets accomplished!

## **An Adage A Day - On Guard – by Carole Gilbert**

I'm a country bumpkin at heart. I mean well, but I don't always get things quite right. Therefore, I'm guilty of the old saying, "Open mouth, insert foot." And I'm guilty not just in the past but also in the present. I admit it. I've been known to say the wrong thing at the wrong time, to use the correct word but mispronounce it where its meaning is something else and sometimes even inappropriate. My family forgives me but not everyone knows this about me, so I have found myself pleading that what I said was not what I meant. Have you ever done something like this?

This saying, "Open mouth, insert foot," has been around since about 1738 in some form and it refers to stepping somewhere someone should not step or speaking what one should not speak. A similar phrase started in the 1900's and was used for a livestock disease, "hoof in mouth." It's funny how these two phrases are connected. Could it somehow be in reference to our mouths causing afflictions? I wouldn't want the livestock I've known to have this, much less me or someone else. I try hard to watch what I say. I try to think before I speak. But it wasn't always this way. I have said things in the past I regret, and I will probably miscommunicate something in the future.

My grown children now like to tease me about certain words I say or have said, incorrectly. They try to trick me into saying these words so they can laugh. How funny is that? I really don't mind making them laugh. If they're happy, I'm happy. Besides, it is said that laughter is the best medicine. And as a mama, I love helping my kids feel better.

Do you remember the sitcom show *Home Improvement* from the 1990's with Tim the Tool Man Taylor? We loved that show! Tim the tool man could have learned from this saying, not only for what he said but also sometimes for what he did. He was always getting himself into trouble, especially with his wife and friends. Luckily and blessedly, he had a wise neighbor named Wilson, that always helped him out with as few words as possible but with all the words that were needed. The fun part about Wilson is that we never saw his mouth. He was always standing behind the fence or some other object that obstructed his mouth from view. I wonder if that's the key to maintaining our mouth, by keeping it confined, out of sight, to keep a tight grip on it.

I may be a country bumpkin and not very wise myself at times, but I'm blessed to have the Holy Spirit that takes my incorrect words and wording and the absence of words and fills in the gaps and makes my prayers and petitions perfect for God to hear. He speaks what's in my heart when I can't say it correctly.

Another nice way I am blessed about my words (which is extremely comforting) is that for the most part, a lot of my "foot in mouth" incidents I don't remember. Except for those words and their misuse or mispronunciation that my kids like to laugh about. And it's nice to not remember. Now, texting and posting is another story. I must be careful. I must double and triple check, because once it is written it is not forgotten.

God gives us lots of advice on this subject. We have many verses on how to tame our tongue, on evil speaking, and about lips that talk of trouble, but a favorite of mine is found in Proverbs 13:3,

*Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life;  
he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.*

Maybe that's what Wilson was doing, guarding his mouth. But this is January 2022. This is a good time for us to set some goals and boundaries. I'm going to try to be more like Wilson: to be on guard with my mouth, to keep it hidden, behind the fence, unused, except for a few wise words when asked, and to watch where I'm stepping. Will you join me?

## **Tiny Living – Casseroles and Cots – by Leyanne Enterline**

With my husband Brian back to work on the road, the kids and I have been traveling more and more with him! Leaving our tiny space in Texas, and trading it for a hotel room that is slightly larger, in some random state, has been what we've been up to! And our latest adventure was in Hawaii.

Being gone so much and eating out all the time is not the best option, especially when the boys eat more than men. The cost adds up! I remember when I was growing up and our family traveled, my mom always packed us pre-made casseroles. However, taking casseroles on an airplane isn't the best idea, so my mom recommended a one-pot mini burner. This is the best invention ever! Now all I do is travel with this mini burner, and put an order into Walmart. I can order all of our food, a cheap pot and a ladle and *Voila!* Cheap instant dinner! I packed this sucker on our recent trip to Hawaii and saved tons of money! We all know that Hawaii food is NOT cheap!

Let's talk more about Walmart. They have the cheapest prices on organic food and lots of options for us food allergy people. And they deliver! I used to hate this place and think it was pretty gross, but I've pretty much changed my mind! This store has been super helpful and affordable on all of our trips.

Living in hotel rooms means the boys have to share a bed, which they hate! So we try and reserve a room that has an extra fold-out sofa. But sometimes that's not an option, so my next idea I'm going to try is checking a cot as baggage. We fly Southwest Airlines, so baggage is always free. Eli loves sleeping on a cot, and it's pretty easy to pack. So hopefully, that will work out! We tried getting a cot at our last hotel and it was an extra \$100 per night! Who pays that? If I had been thinking clearly, I probably could've gone up to Walmart and picked up cot for under \$100, one-time fee. *Next time...*

We are so thankful Brian has work, but he leaves pretty much every Wednesday and comes back on a Monday. So the only way we can see him for a bit is to go with him! We are so thankful for the experiences we have been able to be a part of! We do see that his job is beyond exhausting, as it consists of super late nights, early mornings, and random eating times. It's so good for the boys to see what all goes into their dad's job. I don't think we ever realized what all goes into a performance!

When you go to a concert or visit a theater, remember all the countless hours and sleepless nights that make the production! It takes a lot. And we are so proud of all the hard work that Brian and the crew perform, especially when we get to tag along...

Now take me back to Honolulu!



## **A Night to Remember – On My Drum – by Marcy Lytle**

Christmas is over, and new toys are in their place (or not), and lingering lyrics of the carols we sang and heard still emerge in a hum from our lips this month...as we start a new year. One of the popular favorites is the *The Little Drummer Boy*, a song I revisited this past season and noted the humility of the little boy once again, as he carried his gift to play for the King. This month, the family will also play/use their gifts as the New Year begins...

Preparation: Just ask each person in the family to bring a favorite new toy/thing they got for Christmas to the living area, sit in a circle, and begin this fun devo together. Try to have a variety of things, like maybe a stuffed animal, a new item of clothing, a toy, a game, a tool, etc. Have *The Little Drummer Boy* queued up to play for all to listen, before you begin.

What was the little boy carrying? A drum! Maybe it was his favorite gift from his parents and he wanted to use it as he came to worship the newborn King. We all received gifts this Christmas and we too can present whatever we received to the King, to “play” for him, to bring him and others pleasure...

(Tweak this lesson according to the gifts your family brings...) Ask each one to carry their gift to the center of the room, and then talk about how that gift can be played for the King this year. Below are some suggestions, but feel free to think of your own to go with each gift that is brought.

As you read and consider, leave the gift in the center of the circle, until the end of the lesson.

**Game** – Talk about how the game is played and why it’s going to be such fun. How can we play that game for the King? (We can play honestly – no cheating, we can offer to go last, we can clean up the game when finished, and not get angry if we lose.) Showing the character of the King while playing any game at home or school is bringing the gift of honor.

**Tool** – What is this tool used for and why is it a cool gift? Any tool can be used for the King if we are building, fixing, lending a hand or cleaning, because we are doing a service for others. Isn’t a tool so cool? Using our tools is bringing the act of service to the ones we love.

**Clothing** – Model the new clothing we received and tell why we love it! New clothes make one feel loved and taken care of, and special. When we wear our new clothes we can enjoy the warmth and coziness and newness of the care of our heavenly Father. Wearing new clothes brings a heart of thanksgiving to the King.

**Stuffed animal** – Who doesn’t love stuffed animals? Why? Isn’t it because they’re so soft and lovable? They give us peace as we hold them and drift off to sleep. Bringing our stuffed animals to the King reminds us of his care over us as the Good Shepherd that cares for his sheep. Hugging a new stuffie brings joy to our King as he reminds us of his care.

**Doll** – A new doll just makes one happy, because often she can be dressed up, taken care of, put to bed, and strolled around. Dolls are fun! Bringing our doll to the King is bringing joy,

because new dolls bring times of laughter and fun, and the King loves to enjoy both with his children!

**Ball** – Why do kids love balls? Balls are awesome and can be kicked, thrown, caught, bounced and played with for hours! Balls are meant to be shared with a friend. Bringing a ball to the foot of the King says here ya go – play with me – and He will. As you offer your ball to the King, you're saying you're willing to be a friend to others.

**Candy** – Maybe your stocking had some goodies and sweets inside, and your favorites were there like chocolate or sour chewies. How can bringing candy to the King be a good thing to offer? Any time we offer what we've been given to eat, that which brings us life and satisfaction, we are offering thanks. Thanks in all things pleases our King. In fact, he says in everything we are to give thanks because that's his will for our lives!

Look at our pile of gifts in the center of our circle! We are a blessed family. And when we have been given much we are supposed to offer all of that back to the King because very good gift comes from his hands. Our things don't belong to us, but they are to be played or used or offered to Him in service to praise him for his blessings, and bless others so they see the love of God in our hands.

Listen to the *Little Drummer Boy* once more and imagine yourself placing the gifts you received at the feet of Jesus and seeing him place them back in your hands to be used for him.

## **Chipped China – A Clean Change – by Jennifer Lytle**

New Year's Resolutions are often geared around physical health, but this year I am considering other options-inward, outward, and upward.

Though it may seem counterintuitive, consider achieving a “B” as you work toward change. Make it easy to “win” so that momentum and encouragement naturally propel you along. Lastly, reward yourself; commit to taking yourself out for coffee or a new nail polish. And then, do it once you achieve your goal!

Inward

### **Clean Out Your Space**

One of my offices is inside a school. At the beginning of the school year, I created a beautiful display on the board outside my office. As the Christmas season rolled in, I had a difficult time turning the board into a seasonal spotlight because I liked my creation so much. After a week of sticking with my “old stuff,” I finally realized how much life I could bring to myself and those who pass by in the hallways with a fresh piece. Still, I had the thought that maybe I could simply slap the temporary decor atop my potentially permanent piece because my message, made to shine, was so stellar. After I dawdled with fresh butcher paper lying lifeless on the tabletop for hours; ultimately I laughed at the idea of keeping the old paper. It was ripped in more places than one and didn't quite cover the entire board. Some spots were even faded. Why was I holding onto it?

Here is a simple plan for cleaning out any space.

1. Pick the Space
2. Identify a Timeframe
3. Select a Reward
  1. New decorations for the space
  2. Specialty drink date
  3. Movie night
4. Consider a Plan
  1. [FlyLady](#) may offer helpful tips

Outward

### **Clean Up Your Community**

It's no secret the world is burning with chaos and conflict. Is there a service project or community action group you can serve alongside? I have committed one evening a month to serve with a group in my community. We have become connected by a shared concern and we routinely share information about issues in our community. There are action steps and because we have such a large group, I only commit to those times I am available. Is there a community service group you can join?

Here are a few options for Austinites.

- [Austin Disaster Relief Network](#)
- [Helping Hands](#)
- [Generation Serve](#)

Upward

### **Clean Up Your Conversation**

As I work with groups and individuals as a counselor, it becomes apparent that all ages can increase the capacity for healthy, productive communication. Potty mouths are not exclusive to expletives. Improved communication is a lifelong goal and skill with endless opportunity. Check out this [simple plan](#) to see if it might offer benefits for you and others.

As the new year starts, I pray that it will be a time of refreshing peace and contentment. May the Holy Spirit inspire and empower you to adjust those areas in life where you are called to grow and advance.



YOU

## **Inner Strength – We Can Do It** – by Michelle Lynn Schmitt

Have you ever wondered if you can really handle what God has put in your life? As the saying goes...*God doesn't give us more than we can handle*. Well, I've wondered about that saying plenty of times in my life and I bet I'm not the only one.

As a new writer for *A Bundle of THYME* magazine, I would first like to introduce myself. I am currently blessed to be a mom to two amazing, loving boys, Matthew who is 7 and Brendan who is 9. I love working with children and families. I tutor part-time for Sylvan Learning Center. I am the author of *Listen with Your Heart*, a children's book based on a true conversation between Brendan and me. It is about a young boy who misses his grandma and wants to say hi to her in heaven.

Speaking of heaven, I have lost many loved ones in my life including several whom I lost in the last couple of years. So, let's just say I have come to know grief well. That being said, my boys continue to teach me about ways to honor our lost loved ones. This has been healing in my grief process.

My passion has always been to do whatever it takes for the healthy emotional, social, physical, and educational development of children. I have left myself out of that, though – to make sure I do what it takes to protect my health as well. Over the years, I had people tell me to be sure and take care of myself. I slightly nodded my head but inside I questioned how on earth I was supposed to do that.

The following story illustrates a crucial time for me:

I got to the point where I didn't think I could do it all anymore and or even wanted to. My effort had to be with my kids so much that emotionally, mentally, and physically I felt like teaching wasn't a priority anymore. I was going through the worst year of my marriage. In fact, that spring my husband and I decided to separate. Thankfully, my mom offered us a place to live. It's important to know that during this time my oldest son was exhibiting signs of autism and my youngest had his own emotion regulation challenges.

While taking care of them, I was going through a divorce, working part time, and taking care of my mom who had COPD from smoking, which she continued to do until she was told that she would die a lot sooner if she didn't quit.

My day started as early as 5:30am and I hardly sat down until 10pm. I remember my mom was not happy that I couldn't watch television with her like she wanted. I tried hard to make it for a 9pm show she wanted to watch together, but when I had my boys, I often fell asleep in their room after story time because I was so exhausted.

When I didn't have the boys, I spent some evenings enjoying a show, but also doing my crafts to stay sane and take care of my own needs. Sometimes, I stayed up until 2am creating silk flower arrangements because it made me happy and allowed me brief freedom from the stress of my reality. I made a silk flower arrangement with an angel attached to the vase for my mom before she got too sick to enjoy it. She was so excited to get it, she was shaking. (While that was over four years ago, I still enjoy this hobby.)

That was only one of the ways I managed to "do it all." It must have been working, though. I will never forget feedback I received from my Uncle Bob when he came to visit after hearing my

mom's health was deteriorating. He said, "You're amazing. I don't know how you do it." He was referring to seeing my boys happy even though I was going through a divorce, working, being a nurse to my mom at times, and taking care of her house. I shook my head and almost frowned. I didn't want to have to be amazing. I just did what I did.

You know what, though? I didn't just do what I did. It was an exhausting fight to stay afloat and do what mattered most, and that was to take good care of my kids and my mom.

Most of my life has felt like a fight. But with help from friends, mentors, God, and the Holy Spirit, I am living more than I am fighting.

Yes!

And if I can do it, so can you!

Welcome to Inner Strength where I will share my struggles and how I came out stronger on the other side.



## **Life in a Nutshell – A New Spin – by Jill Montz**

This summer I spent several mornings a week walking over two miles with a dear sweet friend of mine. When she had a health issue that prevented her from walking with me I found the Peloton app that had several workout options on it including outdoor walks, strength training, yoga, meditation and more. I really enjoyed the app and all the instructors. It made working out fun and something I looked forward to instead of dreading. Plus, I just had to follow along and didn't have to go on Pinterest or search Google for workouts to do. So easy.

As fall approached, I started thinking about getting a Peloton bike for my house. I knew in the next couple of months I would be on my feet a lot for work (as in I average 15,000 steps a day in November and December) and I knew I needed some type of workout to get me off my overworked feet. The Peloton bike sure seemed like a great option. Many of my friends had one, but I just couldn't take the plunge. I kept thinking if I needed the bike then I would have a clear cut sign it was meant to be.

And this is how I know God has a sense of humor and uses social media.

Several times ads for Peloton bikes crossed my newsfeed. No surprise there! But I told God (and the weird people who listen to my conversations in my phone...you know that happens right?) I didn't need a brand new bike. That wasn't my sign. Then I saw several social media posts that were for Peloton bikes for sale, but I was leery to buy that expensive of a bike from a stranger. I told God that wasn't my sign either. Then, in late September, I saw a friend advertising on Facebook a practically brand new Peloton bike for sale (his wife didn't love it and had only used it a few times).

In His best Jeff Foxworthy voice God said, "Here's your sign."

I had a chuckle with God and told Him I saw what He did there. But I was still nervous.

The last time I took a spin class I was in my early 20s and my derriere still has some PTSD from the experience. The day I wrote the check and got the bike set up in my house I was close to my highest weight ever and had well over 100 pounds to lose. Dang it...I didn't even Google to see what was the max weight this bike could hold. But luckily I was under the max. I sat and stared at the new bike with its fancy screen that once I turned on was going to have Peloton instructors on it telling me to push myself...work harder...sweat more...say I can...believe in myself...and so on. It's like they were all my coaches from back when I played sports rolled into one but with better hair, cooler clothes and contoured makeup (those 80's and 90's looks were a bit rough for most of us.)

I started doing what many do when faced with a challenge; I turned to my phone for answers. I joined lots of social media groups for Peloton, watched YouTube videos multiple times on how to clip and unclip my shoes from the pedals, searched Amazon for all the high tech (and padded) gear, and Googled how long it would take for my posterior region to stop being sore...on average of course.

Then I hit up my friends who I knew had a bike. "Tell me the good, the bad and the ugly crying I am going to do on this thing," was pretty much the gist of my questioning. Some of my friends were using theirs as an expensive clothes drying rack. And some were on the proverbial fence as to how they felt. But some of my friends were addicted and loved it. And then some loved their Peloton like an 80's girl loved the boy band New Kids on the Block. They had the swag, all

the equipment, and full rooms decked out like a club with neon lights, glow in the dark decals, and music pumping out through all kinds of speakers. I had a feeling I might fall a little below this level of affection, but I was curious to see.

I will say I enjoyed most of the instructors. They were very motivating, encouraging, and made the rides and other workouts fun to pass the time. I found myself wanting to get another "blue dot" on my Peloton calendar to show I had worked out that day (accountability works and those blue dots were like the bell in Pavlov's dog experiment...I was drooling for more!) Plus, most of the beginner rides were only 20 minutes and I told myself that if I didn't have 20 minutes in a day to move my body then I was simply not being a good steward of my time (because trust me, I know I was on social media more than 20 minutes a day.)

I rolled through November and December on a bike that went nowhere. It was the first time ever I had consistently worked out during my busiest season at work. And it was a great way to jump start 2022! Now I know that my health doesn't have to take a backseat to my work schedule. I just needed to find something I love to do and that works for me.

What exercises do you love? What has kept you motivated to stay moving? I know lots of people commit to getting healthier every new year so let's help each other out. Post in the comments your favorite ways to exercise. Who knows what new exercise we all might find and try that soon becomes our new addiction? I mean, I loved step aerobics back in the day and if I can find my Scrunchie socks and Denise Austin VHS tape I might give that a whirl again too, this January!

## **Healthy Habits – Cease and Consider – by Marcy Lytle**

“For plants, dormancy declares when to prepare their soft tissues for freezing temperatures, dry weather, or water and nutrient shortage. Instead of exerting energy in an attempt to grow, they know to stop growing and conserve energy until mild weather returns,” is what I read on the internet when I posed the question about why plants go dormant in the winter.

My husband and I have been resting for the past few months from church “activity.” There was a time in my life, in younger years, when I would have been scolded for resting and told that there is no place for rest in God’s work. Thank goodness that is no longer the case, and we can totally rest from our work and breathe and go “dormant” just like the plants do, until “mild weather” returns.

Summer heat and lack of rain takes a toll on plants in my yard, and I always find it fascinating how once the winter arrives, the moisture stays in the soil, the plants just sit there, and the grass doesn’t need mowing. The lawn guy doesn’t come, because his activity isn’t needed...for this season.

There are a lot of healthy benefits in resting from things that are good activities, because even those can become laborious and lackluster if we grow weary in body and mind.

This January, consider how you can strengthen your inner self by lying dormant for a while, as you await the spring season:

- Giving is good, but it’s okay to sit and receive and soak in his goodness and grace to you. If you’re giving your time and energy in lots of groups and clubs and to too many people, maybe let one go...for a few months.
- Cooking meals for your family is great, but taking a break from the pressure of putting every meal on the table from scratch is one you can let go of, often, for your sanity! It won’t hurt to incorporate into the 2022 food calendar a night or two a week where you’re “off” and someone else is “on” – like the delivery service or a family member.
- Counseling or mentoring is a high calling but also draining when continual with no breaks. It’s okay to step down from all of that listening and giving for a while, so that you can hear His voice counsel and mentor you to be still, soak, and be silent.
- Showing up to serve at every call from a church, a school or a family is so nice of you! However, staying still and saying no and hibernating away for restored energy to return...is great and healthy...for a season.
- Even praying and interceding for others on a daily basis is sometimes heartbreaking and backbreaking when that activity becomes burdensome instead of a burden transfer to His shoulders. Don’t pray and ask God for anything for a full week – just smile at the sunrise and let the day’s light shine through your window while you stay silent.

Dormancy is necessary for plants, so why wouldn’t that translate to our activity of growth as well? Some of us have been in a hard season where the heat beat down on us a bit too intensely and for too long. It’s the beginning of a new year and a good time to evaluate where and for how long we need to conserve and cease all activity, and let our roots run deep once

again. And when spring arrives, we'll know when it's time to stir ourselves with activity once again, but this time a little wiser and a little stronger...for the good of all of those around us.

## **Life Right Now - Our Comforter - by Jennifer Stephens**

Plain, fuzzy black gloves. Certainly not the kind coveted by New York City's Fifth Avenue fashionistas. Just ordinary and inexpensive, and plucked from the one-size-fits-all dollar bin. Enough for every first grader in my class.

Teaching in a Title One school means many kids come from low-income families and don't have the simple things others might take for granted. And when that frosty Midwest winter arrives, kids come to school without hats, scarves, or gloves to keep them warm. So, every year, a set of twentyish unremarkable pairs of gloves find their way into my classroom.

All those gloves! One pair waiting on each desk for each kid. Gloves meant to warm their tiny, frozen fingers that had been left bare for every recess and bus stop wait. Gloves that God would use to offer a comfort and peace meant to last beyond that moment.

Have you ever really thought about the glory of gloves? Knitted or felted wool. Rubber or latex. Leather, Kevlar, or cloth. Each pair with a purpose. They protect from damage by chemical, disease, or dishwashing. They comfort against cold or heat. They serve as a guard for what a bare hand shouldn't touch.

When the kids received their gloves that day, their excitement was indescribable. Squeals, smiles, and giggles filled the classroom as they pushed their fingers inside.

Each hand immediately transformed. Comforted. Protected. Guarded.

I expected them to try on their new gloves then tuck them away until time for recess. But they didn't. They wouldn't let go. They proudly wore their comforted, protected, guarded hands as they marched off to lunch....and worked on math equations...and for the entire rest of the day.

Years later, I wonder...will they remember that pair of plain black gloves they wouldn't – couldn't – take off that day? Probably not. But I bet they do remember the love that filled each glove and covered each bare finger all the way to their hearts.

If we can receive the glory of God, who created each of us with *the finest thread*, in the same way those kids received the glory of an ordinary pair of fuzzy, black gloves, He will be our comforter, our protector, our guard. He will be our peace. His love will forever fill our hearts.

*I am the one who comforts you and gives you peace. Isaiah 51:12*

Maybe you know someone in your own life in need of comfort. Or maybe you pass a stranger on the street seeking a safeguard. Let's keep our eyes open and consider gifting an ordinary pair of gloves to someone today and pray that as hands fill gloves, God fills hearts.

## **Under Pressure – A New Thing** – by Debbie Haynes

There's this story in II Kings 7:1 where a man says to a group of hungry people that tomorrow, in 24 little hours, flour and barley rates are going to change drastically...and one of the responses from the king's assistant was a big "What?" In other words, "How could this be?" And the prophet that was speaking spoke directly to the man and said he would see it, but not get to enjoy the reality of it...

So what's the back story, here? The Israelites had been captured by the Syrians and were being literally starved to death. They had already eaten their animals and were now bartering for each other's children to eat them for food. God's people were completely entrapped and controlled by an enemy, with no way of escape.

But in the middle of the devastation, God's man for the hour – Elisha - gave the word written above that an abundance of food was coming in one day's time.

Elisha prayed that God would blind the enemy's army, and it was done. Then God made that same army hear a noise of chariots and horses. This blind army surmised that the King of Israel had nations and allies surrounding them, so the army fled in fear and left everything behind – including lots of food!

In other words, what the man of God told the people came to pass. But the guy who scoffed at the word was trampled at the gate by all of the hungry Israelites, and he died without a bite of food.

So what can we learn from this story about God's provision for us, his people, today?

In Isaiah 41:17-20 we read that when the poor and needy seek water and there is none...the Lord will hear them and not forsake them. It reads on to say that God will open rivers and fountains and make the wilderness a pool of water...and dry land will become springs of water! He's also going to plant all sorts of trees in the area.

And the reason is...

"...that they may see and know and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the Lord has done this...and created it."

Just a few verses after that in Isaiah 43:19 it says,

"Behold I am about to do something new – even now it is coming. Do you not see it? Indeed, I will make a way in the wilderness and streams in the desert."

God's word is the same now as it was then and it's still so clear that though we have enemies that taunt us all, there is a NEW THING coming. God's hand will pull in the lost – our own children and grandchildren – and there will be healing for the sick and provision for the needy.

The other night as I was getting ready for bed, I heard a loud noise outside that I could not identify. It sounded like it might be from an explosion or thunder directly over my house, but I

didn't see any signs of either outside my window. I stood there a minute and I heard Him whisper in my ear, "Don't worry. The Lord will take care of it, with just a flick of his finger."

*In just a swipe of a finger:*

God gave Moses the law on tables of stone,

he ordained the moon and the stars,

he opened the ears of the deaf,

he cast out demons,

he extended grace to a woman caught in adultery,

and he took down kings and kingdoms that threatened his people.

What looks hopeless and impossible in our eyes only requires His finger to bring about change – like he brought food to His starving children. It might be that we need justice, creativity, healing, deliverance or whatever...and it's all available from His hand in a moment's time.

Something new often dazzles our eyes with splendor, and that's what we can look forward to this New Year...from the God that loves his people and cares for them with his mighty hand.



MARRIAGE



## **In This Together – Full Permission – by Bekah Holland**

I'm going to go ahead and start by explaining that I do not, under almost any circumstance, make New Year's resolutions. And it's not just because I'm lazy, although that's definitely a factor.

Reason #1...because there are a few things in life that I am truly terrible at, like remembering to move the laundry from the washer to the dryer without having to wash it twice, making my bed unless royalty is coming over (or my mom), and using the spring lettuce mix I stubbornly buy each week before it smells like a compost pile.

Reason #2...trying to come up with goals that are both challenging but not so difficult that I give up before I start makes me want to spike my coffee. Like the year(s) I was going to get back to training for a half marathon. The closest I've gotten to that one in the last eight years is chasing the dog who stole my only remaining sock.

I could probably go on for days about all of the reasons New Year's resolutions and I are not compatible. But mostly, it's because I don't need any other reminders that I can't do it all. Life makes that pretty obvious all day-every day. So I don't want to add anything else to my plate that is going to make me feel like I'm not good enough.

Now don't get me wrong, goals are important! And some people thrive on the "I'm going to go to the gym two hours a day every day for the next 365," or "I'm going to give up sugar and caffeine and exist solely on carrots and coconut water," kind of goal setting. In an attempt not to end up on a future episode of any number of *True Crime* shows, I'm not the give-up-coffee kind of gal. You're welcome. But I do make lists. In fact, I make lists for my lists. And they have to be written down. And numbered. All so I can experience the pure and unadulterated joy of crossing them off one by one.

Granted, there are always the cheats on my lists. Like, feed dogs, make fresh coffee, remember to turn on robot vacuum before bed (which I never ever remember, but put down anyway, just to keep me grounded). These things that I write down that look and seem ridiculous actually motivate me to do the less easy things on my list. When I have four things crossed off by 9 a.m.? Bam! I am a magical unicorn! Given a crown and bottomless cup of coffee, I can rule the world! So when I get to email the kid's teacher, clean the bathroom, organize the Tupperware cabinet portion of my list, I already know I'm killing it. Making these daily lists are so much more attainable for me than trying to set some lofty year-long goals that make me cranky just by looking at them.

Now I'm not knocking anyone who makes resolutions. Or even sets them and then gives up. Or tries and fails. More power to you! In all of my 41 years on earth, I have set one NYR that I managed to complete. And it was saving enough money and fixing our credit enough to buy our first house. I didn't even remember it until we were packing to move to our forever home, and my husband found it. So, obviously, I cried. And also ignored the ever present "exercise more, run half marathon, don't hide in the closet crying" *goals* that were dismal failures.

So now that I am giving myself the kind of grace that I would give to anyone else, I'm giving you full permission to not hold yourself to any kind of standard list/goal making tradition, unless it sparks joy (not to *Marie Kondo* you or anything, but when she's right, what do you do?). You have permission to write whatever you want....take a walk, go to bed early, pretend the dishes

aren't dirty, take your meds, stop keeping track of when the teenagers last bathed and rely solely on how bad the car smells when the windows are up, eat something that resembles a vegetable, throw away the scale.

Now if you thrive off resolution goal setting, go live your best life! Give up caffeine, stop eating cupcakes for breakfast (although I do not support this particular plan), run 18 miles every morning. Do it! Own it! Make yourself proud. But also remember to be kind to yourself in the process. If you want to give up caffeine, that's great. Find something else that brings you some joy. Like chamomile tea, or (shudder) decaf.

Due to both my love of lists and inability to remember why I walked into the kitchen, I even made a list for my family two years ago. I HATE being asked what I want for gifts: I don't know. No idea. Maybe a nap. Or a night alone in a hotel with my phone turned off so no one can tell me that their sibling is staring at them or took the last Lunchable. So instead, I made a different kind of list. It was a list of things that make me happy. Things like hot coffee, sunshine, books, clean house (I mean, I'm assuming that would make me happy, although I haven't fully experienced it yet), flowers, candles, hugs. Now this was a LONG list. Some were things that weren't things at all. And some were. But doing that not only gave my family some ideas on what makes me tick, but also, reminded me about the things that truly bring me peace, even when things are closer to chaos than calm. And it helps guide me when I forget how to find my way back.

So while it's a new year, and a new chance at a clean slate, don't forget to remember the beauty in the old as well.

“Hey friend, don't you dare forget, as you're welcoming a new you,  
that there's a whole lot about the old you that's worth keeping.”

Toni Sorenson

## **Date Night Fun – Winter Wonder** – by Marcy Lytle

When's the last time you and your spouse wondered at the beauty of winter? Often we only see dead branches, perhaps slushy snow and ice, and the bleakness of the lack of color out our windows in our neighborhoods. Perhaps it's why so many want to fly away to the winter wonderland of hills covered in snow all white and pure, as we are awed by nature's winter wonder. But how can we have winter wonder in date night this month? Glad you asked!

**Wonder at Art** – This is a good time of year to visit museums. Pick all different kinds, not just ones you would “normally” visit. Or find the murals in your town and drive to see them all. Maybe there are sculptures or statues around your area that you haven't observed in a long time. Make it a date, and stop for dessert afterwards to order something decadent for two.

**Wonder at The Sunset** – Winter sunsets can be stunning on a clear night. Pack a charcuterie type dinner with a board, snacks, cloth napkins, dark chocolate and drinks of your choice. If it's warm enough, open the back of your car and eat and watch the sun go down. If it's cold, stay inside and enjoy the view. After the sun sets, head back home to start a new puzzle of the sunset...

**Wonder as you Walk** – Is there a trail you can take this winter that is full of wonder? Look at the vegetation that's dried up, and that which is still green. Compare. Take a paper bag to collect any cool finds on the grounds that you might be able to create with, once back home. Listen to any sounds of nature in the dead of winter. Wonder and talk about what you're wondering about. When you get home, take a piece of cardboard and create something wonderful with your picked up treasures from your walk.

**Wonder as you Wander** – Head out the car and wander through your town or another one nearby. Wander to a coffee shop, a cute bookstore, into a vintage shop, and over to a park or a new restaurant. Spend the day wandering around with no agenda but to discover each place you come to, with eyes and hearts open for adventure.

**Wonder at the Small and the Big** – Cuddle up by the fire and talk about all the small “coincidences” in the past week, small treats that came your way, or small things you noticed about each other or others. Then think about the big things that happened and note them, as well. Spend time praying about all the small and the big things that are on your prayer list. Pick a movie and have tiny bites like grapes and nuts, along with a big chunk of fresh bread and cheese!

## **After 40 Years – His Day – by Marcy Lytle**

His birthday arrives just a couple of weeks after Christmas, and I'm glad it does. It gives us both something to look forward to celebrating after the big Christmas events are over and done. And I rather enjoy planning a weekend of fun things for him. I decided it would be fun to just share some birthday planning ideas, in case you're already thinking ahead to your spouse's birthday and wondering what to do and where to go and how to have a blast with the one you love:

- Consider a night away. Sometimes we just book a BnB nearby (within an hour) for a night away – no plans except to eat in and enjoy the full ambience of the room, take a walk, and relax.
- Get tickets to a basketball game of his favorite college team, when they play at home. Place the tickets under his pillow, along with a chocolate mint on top, to surprise him with his fun outing. If you want to invite another couple, do that as well!
- Does he love board games? Make an entire evening where about four board games are set up around the house, with different snacks on each table or bed or tray, whatever surfaces you have free. Play each game about 30-45 minutes and see who has the most points/wins by the end of the night!
- If he's tired and stressed from work, plan a spa night at home just for him. Gather supplies and call him to the chair for a foot rub, a back massage, some lotions and potions, and then a cozy blanket while you both watch a movie of his choice on the television.
- Coffee is my husband's fave, so his birthday always includes a coffee shop. Take along a puzzle book, a card game, and order coffee and pastries and linger while you sip. A gift subscription to Atlas Coffee Club might make his day!
- Our kids like to have friends over for a grilled cheese night –where each couple brings cheese and they make the sandwiches together. Maybe he likes burgers, or steaks. Invite a few friends and surprise him with the meal and the company that he enjoys.
- If your husband loves to read, plan an afternoon at Barnes and Noble, and give him several gift cards for the rest of the day. One there at the bookstore, one at a candy store, one at a coffee shop, and one at a fast food restaurant. He picks the route and the order, and you tag along while he enjoys.

Whether you splurge or stay at home, invite others or just enjoy you two, it's fun to plan a birthday experience for him around the themes he loves. If he likes surprises, then great. But if not, let him in on your plans so he can anticipate with joy. Do it all, without worry or expectation, but just because you want to celebrate the man you love on his special day.

I'm working on my husband's birthday right now...and smiling as I think about how...

## **For Better or Worse - Scripture Resolutions – by Kaelin Scott**

Happy New Year!

I don't really make New Year's resolutions. Don't get me wrong, I do like to make goals for myself and list things I'd like to accomplish, but I don't necessarily label them as resolutions. I do, however, like to choose a few verses from Scripture at the beginning of the year, to focus on and try to live out throughout the coming months. I write these verses in the front pages of my planner in the hopes that I will remember them and meditate on them during the year.

This year, I think a great passage to integrate into daily life is Proverbs 31. I'm sure you're familiar with it but if not, it's basically a list of attributes a godly wife should have. No matter if you've been married a few months or a few decades, this chapter is always something useful to measure yourself against.

Here are a few important points that I want to try and focus on this year, and I welcome you to join me! (I may paraphrase them a little bit.)

- She brings her husband good, not harm.
- She works with eager hands; she sets about her work vigorously.
- She is clothed with strength and dignity.
- She can laugh at the days to come.
- She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy.
- She speaks with wisdom and faithful instruction.
- She does not eat the bread of idleness.
- She fears the Lord.

I know that seems like a lot, but maybe we can choose one or two of those areas to focus on and really try to put them into practice. Or maybe sharpen them. There's always room for improvement, I think. And our husbands and children are so blessed when we walk humbly in obedience to our Father.

Whatever your resolution or goal or hope for the coming year, remember that God created you with a beautiful purpose. Don't forget to talk to Him and spend time with Him. Serve your family as if Jesus is right beside you – because He is! He loves you so much, and He has wonderful things in store for you this year. God bless you and your family.



ENCOURAGEMENT

## Simple Truths – Not All – by Marcy Lytle

I get aggravated by sayings about “older” people. For example, one might say they’re wearing their granny glasses. Or perhaps, “She drives like a grandma.” *Excuse, me?* I’m of the opinion that slurs and generalizations about older people need to be noted and stopped, just like we are noting our inconsideration of other races, economic groups, those who are vaccinated or not, etc. For some reason, our society thinks it’s okay to generalize about those over a certain age... (or a certain gender – but that’s for another story!)

I wrote about my mom several years ago and how it bothered me when she got older when I would hear clerks call her “honey” or talk to her in a baby voice, as if she were a kid. Mom had a good mind, and I’m realizing as I age, that we all have our same minds and thoughts and dignity – all of which need to be acknowledged and deemed worthy of good treatment.

Assumptions I’ve seen and heard regarding the older generation are:

- We go to bed early
- We don’t like loud music
- We judge the younger generation
- We aren’t tolerant of others
- We dress dowdy
- We don’t work
- We aren’t of value when youngers are around

And I could go on and on. While some of the above might be true, I’d say it’s not for most of us! And we don’t like being categorized any more than those of a specific race or gender or appearance do! And I don’t know how to change it.

Yes, the older generation has hurt the younger ones with rampant divorce and choosing careers over family. I get that. But NOT ALL people are in the category! And even those that did fail at parenting or grandparenting did so because of reasons that might be understood or at least forgiven, were they given a chance to share.

I’ve just recently started to feel the fear of losing myself in society because of age. And all of us will encounter this, whether it’s due to age or something else, because life hits us all in different ways. I guess what I want to convey in this article is that judgment is judgment, and it doesn’t feel good to any group of people for whatever reason.

NOT ALL older people go to bed early. Some of us stay up and dance in the living room.

NOT ALL couples our age despise loud music – some of us like it!

NOT ALL of my generation judge the younger generation, and if we do – we should be praying instead of judging. So pray for us, if that attitude comes through!

NOT ALL of our generation becomes intolerant of those younger than us, we just sometimes feel left out of conversations or important topics about careers, etc. We still have jobs and we like to be asked about what we do!

NOT ALL of those over 60 dress dowdy, and so what if they do? Everyone should dress according to her own style and not be judged or labeled as “grandma wear...”

NOT ALL of our generation are retired. In fact, many of us still have jobs, volunteer, pray countless hours, give to our kids and grandchildren, and we stay busier than ever!

But I would say that MOST ALL of us start to feel the isolation and the pushback as we age, and start to wonder if we’re going to disappear in the masses of the crowds of the next generation...when we have so much love to give.

I see the aged couple at Target still holding hands, though one can barely walk, and I smile. I visit a nursing home and see a man stroking his wife’s head, although she doesn’t know who he is, and I cry. I observe an old veteran on a street corner with mental illness or a broken body, and wonder... And I watch as friends start to sit more than walk, and stay silent more than talk, and I feel sad.

We’re all on this timeline from birth to whatever age we’re given to live on this earth, and every single person – whether age 1 or 92 (or older!) has value. We have things to say, we have lives that are interesting, we have ears to bend to listen, and we have fun and want to be present in the world of those younger than us – not to judge – but to smile and encourage. And in turn, we’d like a little dignity returned to us as well, in appreciate of who we are as people with a purpose, not grandparents that are grumpy.

Maybe you feel isolated or misunderstood or labeled, for whatever reason, and you’re not 60, but you’re 30, or you’re any age at all. It happens, and it’s hurtful. I’ve been praying lately and I know for sure that God cares about loneliness, isolation and feeling like an outcast. One verse says he sets the lonely in families. He’s a God about family. So my prayer for you, and for me, and for all of us as we enter seasons of feeling unseen, that we know it’s not the truth. He sees all and knows all, and when we take our cares to him – he moves mountains and clouds – for us to see the sun...and the path that was obscure just moments ago...



Change is strange....sometimes it happens very slowly, sometimes as quickly as a flash. Last year's Big Freeze brought a quick change to my landscape, especially in my front yard. The one big ash tree that provided a beautiful green canopy of shade was decimated. I waited through the summer, but the dead branches remained dead. Leaves grew back in the middle of the tree and small renegade branches sprouted out everywhere. Long leafless branches encircled the entire tree like a misshapen crown. I didn't give up on the tree entirely, despite expert proclamations of death and doom, but I did have the dead branches removed. The tree is misshapen and its shade diminished, but I have hope. My hope isn't that it will become the tree it once was, but that it will live and grow in an unpredictable and surprising way that I'm ok with...because I really don't know what to expect.

I feel the same about the coming New Year—I don't know what to expect, but I feel hopeful. The last two years were *dense*--dense with events, with emotions, with loss, with questions, with disagreements and mistrust, with change. The heaviness of what we've been through feels like a lead blanket, but add *density*--unrelenting, continuous, one thing after another—it feels unbearable, and hopeless. What else is coming? How much worse can it get?

My first thought about the last two years is mostly negative, but my initial reaction is often not the best because it's "natural," it's conditioned by the world around me. If I think again, a little deeper, and let the super-natural renew my mind, I see things in a new light. Maybe it's not that black and white. Yes, there has been great pain and loss. My heart hurts for those who have suffered in any way. Yes, there is division, arguments, fear, lies, scandal, and more. Yes to the hard reality of all of it—yet, I'm hopeful. Why? It's not that the density and heaviness of the last two years has been "good", it's that I know *God is good*. I know that even though "The grass withers and the flowers fall...the word of our God endures forever." (Isaiah 40:8) I know that a story is unfolding—a great adventure story in which we all play a part. I'm hopeful because even though times are tough and trials and tribulations must come, I know how it ends, and it's good.

My hope for the coming year isn't that things will be like they once were. Like my tree, things will never be the same. My hope is that the dense and heavy things of the world will not weigh me down, but will teach me to trust and let Jesus carry them. My hope is that, no matter what comes, my faith will remain strong and I'll be true to myself and my Lord. I really don't know what to expect, but my hope is that I'll faithfully and joyfully fulfill my role in this great adventure story that can twist and turn in surprising and unexpected ways.

## **Moving Forward – Sacred Opportunities** – by Pam Charro

I have been a wholly committed follower of Jesus since 1988...but I didn't become aware of him sitting with me until many years later...

I had just moved back to Texas from Colorado in the fall of 2005 as a single mom with three small boys, and it was not a fun time. My ex-husband had found my apartment online, and it didn't turn out to be exactly as it was advertised. An entire wall in one of the bedrooms was spray painted over cockroaches. My neighbors partied outside my door and windows into all hours of the night. Dog droppings abundantly littered the back area where my sons should have been able to play outside.

I didn't have a job and wasn't sure what I was going to do, and making new friends was a challenge because I didn't yet have a regular routine. My apartment was partially underground and literally very dark, as was that season of my life. It was so very lonely and depressing.

*Yet, that was the very time that I felt Jesus' presence the strongest.*

I began to have tiny visuals of spiritual truth and encouragement, and I felt I knew exactly what he was saying to me. As I sat in that dark place feeling so alone, I felt him come in and sit right next to me.

It was then that I first began to realize that those periods of darkness were sacred. They weren't fun and they didn't last long, but they were rare opportunities for my Savior and me to get much closer to one another as he rode the storm out with me. Because I felt such emptiness and lack of fulfillment from other things, there was more room for him to be near.

*I was desperate, and I could either choose hopelessness  
or realize that hope was right there with me.*

I don't wish that time would come back, but I do look for extra closeness with him now whenever it's dark. I don't want to miss another sacred opportunity to be aware that he is right there with me when I need him most.

## **Rooted in Love - Perfectly Imperfect – by Kaelin Scott**

“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.” Romans 7:15

Can you ever relate to those words? Man, I know I can.

I'm so grateful for Paul's honesty in the letters he wrote to the early churches. He easily could have acted like he was high and mighty, bossing everyone around while failing to practice what he preached. But that's not what he did at all. He didn't act better than anyone. In fact, he considered himself the lowest and least worthy of Christ's love. Yet all he wanted was to preach the name of Jesus, whether he was worthy of the calling or not.

I'm grateful for this because it makes the Bible relatable. Paul struggled with sin just like I do. He wasn't perfect or sinless, and he didn't try to hide that fact. He was open about his struggles with the flesh, admitting that he fell short of the mark. He was frustrated with himself because he knew the right thing, yet sometimes he still did the wrong thing. I've definitely been there. Actually, it's something I experience all the time. And I'm sure I'm not the only one.

Paul understood that there is a raging battle between the desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit. He deeply wanted to please God by walking in obedience, yet sometimes he still stumbled. But God didn't define Paul by his mistakes, and He doesn't define me by mine either. Even though Paul was flawed, imperfect, and sinful, God still used Him for wonderfully glorious things.

It's important that we own up to our mistakes and shortcomings. Repentance is a vital aspect of our faith, but we don't have to carry the burden of our sin. After we give it to God, we don't have to hold onto the shame anymore. Paul is a beautiful picture of this. He made bad choices – turn to Acts 9 if you want to know more about that – but he wasn't defined by them. Yes, he was open and honest about his flaws, but they didn't stop him from serving God. Even though he wasn't perfect, he was perfect for the mission God gave him. And we're perfect for the mission God has given us.

Is it discouraging when temptation rears its ugly head and gets the best of us? Absolutely. It's hard fighting the same fleshly battles over and over again, but perfection isn't a prerequisite for glorifying God. We are called and chosen for a special purpose, just like Paul. Each of us have a beautiful reason for being on this earth. We can't let our shortcomings deter us from running the race.

Maybe you're struggling with sin, or with doubt or with fear. Maybe you feel like you'll never measure up. You'll never be good enough. Well, I'm here to tell you that you're right. You'll never be good enough on your own. But you're not defined by your own strength or lack thereof. You're defined by two nail scarred hands and an empty grave. Regardless of your struggles, God only sees you as redeemed. You have something beautiful to offer, so please keep going and shining and being a light. You never know whose life you could change.

## **Unearthly Thing – Against the Mess** – by Angela Dolbear

The late afternoon ray of sunlight spread across our dark hardwood floors, illuminating the dust and dog hair that lie dormant, untouched. It was like a spotlight on my current uselessness at housekeeping.

I had just arrived home from a week-long stay in the hospital, which included a total hysterectomy by way of a 12” incision down my stomach. I was looking at a recovery time of six weeks of total rest.

I felt helpless against the mess.

The dust seemed to multiply each day. I was too weak and drained to drag out the floor vacuum. Not to mention, it was against doctor’s orders to lift anything above five pounds.

I didn’t want to burden my husband with asking him to take care of the dust. We own our own business, and he was blessedly super busy with a couple films he was hired to mix the sound on, as well as many other projects that required his sound engineer expertise.

What made the situation 10 times worse for me is that I had guests coming into town for Thanksgiving in two days.

How was I going to clean the floors, bathrooms and change the bedding in the guest room, before my guests arrived?

My anxiety level was peaking. I was supposed to be resting from major surgery. But I was stressing, lying on the couch in my soft flannel jammies.

But I knew better than to let this stress run me over. This is not my first rodeo, as they say in Texas. I have been down the Anxiety Road before.

I laid aside my nagging thoughts. And I stopped staring at the dust on the floors, and on the shelves, ceiling fans, etc.

I had asked some good friends to pray for me on this topic, as well as healing from the surgery. I tried to let their encouraging words wash over me. And I started to pray.

“You have pride when it comes to this beautiful home I gave you,” God said in my heart. “It’s not good.”

He wasn’t talking about the good kind of pride, like one might have in a job well done. He was talking about my vanity. My people-pleasing vain egotism.

*OUCH!* It was not the incision that I was smarting from.

I asked for forgiveness, as well as the wisdom to clean out my pride. (Yes...more cleaning! And I’m miles away from being considered a neat-freak.)

The next day, I felt some peace, but I still couldn’t reconcile the thought of leaving my home “as is” for my guests. I kept praying, especially for wisdom and guidance.

This past year, my go-to Bible verse has been “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust God, and trust in Me,” Jesus says in John 14:1.

Yes! I gave this whole matter over to God.

He told me I could ask Him for strength to clean, and rely on Him to show me how to take of things carefully.

*Phew!* I thought. I progressed through my "To Do" list, moving slowly and cautiously. I stopped frequently to rest, mostly because I needed to.

The next day, we picked up our guest from the airport, and I was so grateful! Our house was clean, and I was extra grateful that God did it. I was plenty sore, and in some mild pain (incision and ego), so I made sure to rest as best I could, and for every day since, while I am in recovery mode.

A few days later it was Black Friday, and Amazon dutifully informed me of a super sale on iRobots Roombas. With two large dogs sharing our home with us, it would certainly help keep up with pet hair, especially while I still recover. So I put the Roomba in my cart, and prayed about purchasing it, making sure my motives were pure.

Now I am doubly grateful, not only for the beautiful original 1959 hardwood floors in my home that is God's gift to me, but also for the little robot who roams around my home, sucking up the mess.

I thank God that I can rest and recover on the couch, in my soft flannel jammies, with clean floors all around me. Amen!

*Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series, and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com). Angela writes real, relevant, relatable, and reverent fiction, with an aim toward spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, while hopefully inspiring readers to laugh and/or cry. She loves reading, writing prose, as well as writing and recording music with her husband Tim in their studio in Nashville, Tennessee. Please drop by and sign-up for news and to read new stories and hear new original music at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>. Blessings to you!*



FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME – Big and Small – by Marcy Lytle**

We all need to share big miracles with those in our lives, to build faith. Of course, we do! But what about those small miracles that if we don't take notice, they slip right by us? We had that kind of miracle this past Christmas season. I feel so loved and blessed and happy when I say silent prayers for small things in life, because I know he hears the big prayers as well as the little ones. And he cares about both! No, not every prayer is answered with a visible miracle of my selection, but I'm convinced that every prayer is heard and acted upon, whether I see it or not!

*Back to my story...*

We just remodeled our living area and had it painted, and rearranged all the furniture, and sat down and looked...and realized we hadn't really left a space for a big Christmas tree. And we didn't really want a big one, but rather a slender but tall, live Christmas tree (my husband loves the smell!) and I could only fit it in one space. We visited the tree lots, honestly with little hope, to find a slender tree for our space. Once you pick a tree and shake the branches loose, they often become so wide! However, we walked and walked and I was quite sad, because I was just sure we were going to have to opt for a potted tree to sit on a table, instead.

We were about to leave and saw some "skinny" trees still bound up in rope, and we saw one that looked like it might work. To our huge surprise, it was shaped perfectly, had a slender build, and was still tall! All of the ingredients we thought were going to be impossible to find! I whispered a little, "Thank you," as we loaded the tree in the car...

But that's not the full story! Our usual Christmas tree stand is huge and takes up a lot of floor space, which again we did not have this year. We needed a small tree stand for this slender tree, so that walking past the tree would be easy, not ornament-breaking! As we started to pay, we caught sight of small tree stands – I'd never seen them before! After purchasing one, I realized I had tossed my tree skirt last year and I didn't have one. Again, most tree skirts are huge and take up a lot of floor space under the tree...

All of this may sound like trivial things (and they are) but they were still desires, and I know that my Father cares about our desires as well as our needs! I thought I'd see if I could find a miniature tree skirt and decided to check out Walmart. Have you seen the barrel tree skirts that are so popular? Most of those are huge, but on one shelf there was a small barrel type skirt in gray felt that matched our décor perfectly! I wondered if it would work!

We got the tree up and positioned (it was a perfect fit) and I came home with this barrel type skirt I wasn't sure would be the correct circumference. And I actually gasped in glee as it fit perfectly, and our little area was complete.

Yes, I prayed and asked God to help as we looked, and I always ask him when I shop – for bargains and deals. It's a habit of mine, and his attention to my little desires, while he tends to the big needs of mine and those around me, just blows my mind at his goodness and love.

I'm always praying for big miracles, but also whispering for the small ones too, because my Father cares about both.

## **Little Roots...Deep Bitterness**

It would be nice if...

Your grown kids would stop by more often, but they're so busy.

Your husband would have gotten you the gift you wanted...but he forgot you mentioned it.

Your mother hadn't said that at Christmas because her job hurt your heart.

Your little kids had been more grateful for the many gifts they received and then discarded.

Your best friend would have invited you out to shop, when she included others and not you.

Your neighbor would have thanked you for the gift you left at his door, but he didn't.

Your co-worker would have given you credit for your part on that job.

Your boss would have noticed your hard work with a bonus.

Your in-laws would have complimented your house, instead of pointing out the flaws.

Your dad would have called this year or sent a gift or a card.

There are any number of little roots of disappointment that could have happened over the Christmas holidays, ones that if left to fester, will soon grow into a big tree that produces no fruit except bitterness. And let me tell you from experience, a bitter root that grows into a bitter tree is hard to cut down. However, all the little roots that were planted over the past few months can easily come loose if we pull them now.

Bitterness occurs when we feel unappreciated, unnoticed, unfairly treated or so many other of those "un" words. And we all have those feelings, because we're all human, and we live among a world of other humans that are imperfect, like we are. We forget our imperfections when we focus on the imperfections of others.

We think we'd never treat a friend the way she treated us, or we'd always compliment someone's home and say thank-you, and notice and show up, and give and invite. But truth be told, there are most likely many times that we have failed and didn't know it. We too are tired, have other things on our mind, or are just plain self-focused because life is so full that we forget and need forgiveness as well.

I think, at least for me, that pulling up bitter roots that showed up over the holidays are most easily pulled and tossed into the fire by a few actions, maybe not so simple, but few:

Remember that we must forgive, in order to be forgiven, regardless of why the act occurred.

Remember that grace and love covers a multitude of sins, even sins of omission and unfairness.

Remember that judgment on friends and family reaps nothing good.



Those are three things, like the three prongs of a garden tool that we can use to dig, pull up, and then toss.

Got any bitter roots? Get them while they're shallow. Because if we don't, when Christmas time arrives again this year, we'll have big ugly trees in your yard that produce nothing but showy leaves of pride and hatred...and not a thing to savor.

Instead, hope and pray that beauty shows up in the most unlike places from roots of joy, like a pair of old, shaggy boots...where seeds of kindness drop daily from your own gardening hands.

## **FRESH THYME – The Week – by Marcy Lytle**

I think it's cool how God finished creation in seven days, and we still work our lives around the increment of weeks...all these years later. Why seven days? What's so special about that number of days, those amounts of days, and is there any significance to them at all? I wondered...

The official establishment of a seven day week with Sunday being the first day was established in AD 321. And though there have been a few attempts to change the seven day week, it seems it's going to be with us perhaps forever.

As I was thinking, I realized there are so many things we do in our lives that revolve around the time period of a week. Just in my own life, and I'm betting in yours too, I organize and live my life around the span of a week:

I wash my bedding once a week.

We set out our trash cans weekly.

Our lawn is tended to at least once a week.

Plans and calendars are scheduled out at the beginning of each week.

I have a weekly to-do list.

We attend church with others once a week.

I wonder if God started creating and made a list of what he wanted to create and speak into existence before he started, and decided to do it all in seven days. However, I do know that he created one of those days as a day to rest, after a week of work.

Weeks fascinate me. Mondays seem to be the day people dread the most, because the fun weekend is over and work begins again. Tuesday might be that day that we've settled into the rhythm of work again and we're on our way with gusto and joy. Wednesday is often referred to as "hump day" and it reminds us that we've made it to mid-week. The weekend is in sight! Thursday is a hopeful day because it's Friday eve, and Friday is the day we work hard to end our week, so that the weekend fun can be had. Saturdays may involve day trips, visits, fun, or for some – catch up on cleaning and shopping and chores – and then there's Sunday again. Hopefully, Sunday includes some sort of rest.

I know many that don't have that sort of routine listed above. Their work week isn't Monday through Friday. It's seven days a week, or includes weekends with other days off. Some are showing up at hospitals or nursing homes to visit sick or elderly relatives and they have no idea what day of the week it is, because time is irrelevant – all that matters is to seek healing and hope. Still others have their weeks interrupted with joyful or sorrowful happenings – the birth of a child – or the death of a mom – and days of the week have no meaning. Everything's a blur.

But it seems that the weeks then return. They ground us. After the upheavals, when work is over, when there's something on the calendar called vacation, or all sorts of things, we settle back down and look at the calendar and there it is again...Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

I have a weekly calendar in the drawer of my desk that I open every morning. I really love writing in my schedule, my to-dos, and my lists of things I want to remember. And even better than that is when I get to cross off those things as I accomplish them, as that day goes by, or that event is over. I also have a hanging calendar on my fridge, and I absolutely love tearing off each month to reveal the next month's picture at the top of the page. I even had a calendar one year that had new recipes each month! I think it's a blast planning a week away during the year for vacation, and deciding where to go and what to do. And looking ahead to new weeks with new activities and new goals, is settling, so fun, and makes me smile.

I don't know why I thought about these seven days that we all work by during the course of each month for an entire year, after year, after year, but I did. He gave us all of creation in the period of a week; he made beauty of our darkness, brought color where there was none, breathed life into his children, and set the moon and stars in their places and called it all "good."

As you plan your weeks this year, enjoy it. Schedule in fun, relaxation, giving, vacation, shopping days, visits, and any sort of life-giving activities you can think of. Savor the flavor of each one of those seven days as you rise with the sun, and settle into sleep with the moon.

The week. What day is it? Do you even know? Write something in on the little square on your phone or on your fridge, and then cross it off tomorrow and see how good it feels to be alive and living, Sunday through Saturday with the blessings of order and time.

## **FRESH THYME – Worthy – by Marcy Lytle**

I've read a few times where the writer of the article is encouraging women to count their worth, not according to Instagram stories, but according to who they know themselves to be – apart from the pictures others post. If you follow any social media accounts, you know what I mean.

She posts her amazing huge house with snow falling just outside the window, while she sits and sips coffee in a luxurious robe, and every surface is decorated beautifully without a flaw...and we shuffle back to our bedroom where the walls need a coat of fresh paint, our closet's a wreck, and we aren't even opening our windows because there's nothing but the neighbor's side wall to see.

Instagram, for example, is full of "influencers" that have filters to use to make their photos beautiful, enhance their color and brush away their flaws, and they have travels and products and families and clothes that if we're not careful – we will lust after and drool over. I have one of those filters myself, it's an app called Beauty Plus. With the touch of my finger, I can enhance light, erase dark circles and even make my limbs appear thinner (I never use that one – it seems SO odd!) So in reality, much of what we see on social media isn't real life.

That's okay, if we see it and enjoy it, and move on. But it's not okay if we determine our own worth by the measurement of another.

I remember teaching my kids about measurement when they were young and how if you want to cut a board a certain length, you measure say 12 inches, cut the board, and you're done. And then if you want more boards of the same length, you don't use the board you just cut, but rather measure again and cut. If you use each board as a measurement instead of the true measuring tape, you'll end up with longer and longer boards and they won't fit whatever you're building! You always have to use the measuring tape as your guide!

It's no different for me, or for you. We cannot measure ourselves against her life or her story or her photos. We do it as little girls, at an early age, when we see what she has and we want it as our own. And if we don't deal with that envy or jealousy or lack of feeling "good enough," that feeling of unworthiness follows us into adulthood and beyond.

It's so easy to see with our eyes something we want or don't have, and then somehow what we do have seems drab and dreary, and we become discontented. And it's all because we've lost sight of the original measuring tape, and started using the ones other have cut for themselves.

The truth of the matter is that we are made worthy because of Him, and while most of us know that in our heads, we rarely live in out from our hearts.

It's so fun, in my opinion, to be inspired by Instagram stories or podcasts, or books we read or conferences we attend, or friends we visit or Facebook pages we frequent. I love seeing a good decorating idea, or a new item in the fashion world I want to try. But it's not fun to feel frustrated or less-than after browsing and sighing with despair that I don't have that or what she has, and probably never will have.

So how do we browse and be inspired, but then skip and smile at our own lives, after we close the app?

- We admire
- We give thanks
- We consider
- We change
- We give thanks some more
- We look elsewhere
- We give
- We give thank once more
- We smile
- We know

We are worthy to shine and be known to the world God has placed us in, just as we are. We admire what we see, and we give thanks for what we have. We consider what we can change and we do change, if we like. If not, we give thanks again for what we have, and we look elsewhere for our worth – like to His Word – where we are reminded that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. We give of ourselves to others and to Him, and we give thanks once more for his goodness to us and ours. We smile at that goodness, and we settle ourselves into knowing that He has granted us worth and value that can never be thwarted, stifled or erased but only sharpened, polished and presented to the world around us to see Jesus...not a girl with a perfect picture.



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

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

February 2022



TIPS



## **In the Kitchen – Romance at First Bite – by Marcy Lytle**

Valentine's Day doesn't have to be an expensive dinner out, unless you want it to be – then go for it! However, it can also be fun to create a meal of bites, international food, picnics on the floor, appetizers and more – together! I love going out to eat, but more than once lately it's been too cold, someone was sick, or the thought of forking out a lot of money wasn't appetizing. If you make these fun ideas at home, you can have a Valentine's celebration several nights this month, instead of one big one on the 14<sup>th</sup>! (Or both!)

### **Pretzel Bites**

These were interesting to make (I poured in the soda too quickly and made a mess!). But they came out nicely and tasted good with the onions and mustard – such a fun treat for two!

- 1/3 c baking soda
- 8 oz thawed pizza dough set at room temp 30 min
- 1 egg beaten
- Coarse sea salt
- Sliced scallions
- Coarse grain mustard

Heat oven to 450 degrees and line a sheet with parchment paper. Bring 5 cups water to a boil. Add the baking soda (slowly, or it will spill over!). Roll cherry sized dough balls and drop into boiling water in batches. Cook till slightly puffed, about one minute. Using slotted spoon, remove balls and place on paper towels; transfer then to the sheet about ½ in apart.

Brush dough with egg and sprinkle with coarse salt. Bake till deep golden brown, about 14 minutes. Sprinkle with scallions and serve with mustard!

### **Carrot Hummus**

This is so pretty and so tasty. We enjoy it with carrots, cucumbers and fresh pita bread or chips. A great snack while you watch a movie or play a game.

- ¼ c olive oil
- ¼ t ground cumin
- 1 large clove garlic crushed
- 1 lb carrots, cut into one inch pieces
- 1 ½ t kosher salt, divided
- 1/3 c well-stirred tahini
- ¼ c fresh lemon juice
- Fresh black pepper and paprika

Heat 1 T oil over medium heat in large deep skillet with tight fitting lid. Add cumin and cook, stirring, until fragrant, about one minute. Add garlic and cook, stirring, still sizzling, about 30



seconds. Add carrots and 1 tsp salt, stir to coat in oil. Add ¼ c water and cover with lid. Cook, shaking skillet occasionally, til carrots are tender, about 15 minutes. Let cool, uncovered, 5 minutes.

Transfer carrots to food processor. Add tahini, lemon juice, several grinds of pepper, and 3 T oil, and ½ t salt. Process about one minute til smooth. Transfer to serving bowl, and swirl around the top with a spoon, drizzle with oil, and sprinkle with paprika.

### **Zucchini Fries**

These were so very delicious, and would be a fun treat to make together. We had them with Salsa Ranch and they were the best snack! The crunch and the flavor – romantically tasty!

- Cooking spray
- 1/3 c flour
- 3 large egg whites
- 1 T water
- 1 cup panko breadcrumbs
- ¼ c grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 t chopped fresh rosemary
- ½ t salt
- ½ t ground pepper
- 1 lb zucchini cut into ½ by 4 inch sticks

Preheat oven to 425, line a rimmed baking sheet with foil, and place a wire rack on top. Coat with cooking spray.

Place flour in a shallow dish. Whisk egg whites and water in another shallow dish til foamy. Combine breadcrumbs, Parm, rosemary S&P in a third shallow dish. Working in batches, toss zucchini in flour to coat, dip in egg white and shake off excess. Then toss in breadcrumb mixture, pressing to adhere. Transfer to wire rack close together but not touching. Coat fries with cooking spray.

Bake until gold and crispy, turning halfway – about 20-25 minutes. Serve immediately.

### **Tray of Goodies**

Use a baking sheet, or a tray, and a bucket from the dollar store, and little bowls or containers you have - and set out all sorts of good and fun snacks - in a fun arrangement to enjoy.

- Grapes on toothpicks with cashews
- Tiny pickles with cheese and sausage on toothpicks
- Apples with peanut butter
- Chocolates
- Popcorn
- Guacamole and chips
- Cute paper napkins and plates

### **Cuban beans and rice**

Did you know you can buy Cuban beans in a pouch at World Market? I didn't, and they taste great and are easy to heat up.

Add brown rice at the bottom of a bowl, and the beans in the center. Around the circle of the bowl, include sliced avocado, cilantro, and bacon.

Top the beans with a little cheese and salsa – and you've got yourself a winner dinner for two!

### **Jiffy pop and chocolate**

Need a simple picnic by the fire? When's the last time you shook a pan of Jiffy Pop and watched it expand and listened to the pops? It's so fun.

Spread out a blanket by the fire.

Include cups with cashews and chunks of dark chocolate.

Find a new movie to watch and enjoy it together while you slit open that foil and watch the steam escape, as you reach in together for that first bite!

## **Seven for You – Gifts We Love – by our Panel of Women**

We did this last year and thought we'd do it again. We think back to Christmas and the gifts we gave and received, and we share our favorites with you. After all, it's February and the time to love and be loved, so why not spark some ideas for you in case you're treating yourself or another! Gift giving is hard, sometimes, and I personally love ideas and inspiration from others. Hope you enjoy our list!

Well, actually, my favorite gift is one I gave, not received. My mother had wanted an outdoor nativity set for years and my siblings and I were finally able to get one for her. She was so overcome with emotion. I videotaped the "reveal," which was a couple of weeks before Christmas, so my siblings out of state could share in the experience.

My children live in NYC and LA, so wasn't able to spend time with them, but my grandson flew in on Christmas Day! – Anita

The holidays were especially meaningful and hopeful for me this year. I had Covid Dec 2020 followed by other hospital admissions and illnesses. In July, my daughter, Alex had a stroke at age 27. She underwent brain surgery followed by 45 days of recovery and rehabilitation. Right after I returned home from helping her, I had to have the first of two major surgeries. I'm still recovering from the second one. Sometimes, the best gifts don't come in boxes with bows. You put things into perspective when you feel you might lose one of your children or may not make it out of surgery. Family, just their presence, is all you need. Having my family together for Christmas was all I wanted. My daughter was able to fly home and we were able to celebrate as a family. I wanted a photo of my two beautiful children to replace the one taken in the hospital together. Time with both of them and this photo – the best gift - family! – Cathy

My husband fills my stocking every Christmas with little goodies. This year he got me a coffee cup, among other things. The coffee cup is special to me because it says a message that I know came from his heart. It has Proverbs 31:29 written on it. I don't know if I believe this verse about me, but it was very touching that he did.

There was also a beautiful card with a sentimental note he wrote inside. And to top it off, he included a Ty beanie stuffed animal named Saffire. I was surprised he would get me this, but he said it just jumped out at him. And I love it! It is so cute! It must be my inner child coming out. I think I love it mostly because I know he was taking time to shop for just the right things for me. I think sometimes it's the fun little things that mean the most. – Carole

I got a new toaster oven – a silly thing to love but I do! I had kept the old one way too long, and this new one is simple, in a matte black finish, and looks so pretty on the counter. It was a gift long overdue! Also, this amazing robe from Uncommon Goods made from recycle saris is a fave as well. The colors, the comfort, the feel...it's one of my favorite robes ever. And finally, our kids gave me a basket of goodies for a cheeseboard night (with the basket, crackers, jam, etc.) and an invitation to brunch and a walk afterwards at a fancy hotel downtown. So thoughtful. – Marcy

Expensive sunshades - my husband and I splurge on this expensive gift for one another from time to time. They never last as long as we'd like; we're constantly in action so they fall, crack, and eventually break; but having expensive sunglasses is a nice treat we dote on one another

every couple of years. I got mine replaced this Christmas and may consider getting my honey's his for his birthday...maybe even Valentines!

Road trip shopping - My favorite Christmas find was an unexpected bakery while we were traveling from Missouri to Oklahoma. My favorite Little Debbie's snack is "Devil Squares" and I cannot find them at any store in Austin. We stopped at this bakery while we were traveling and I found a box of Devil Squares for only \$1!

A fun outing we enjoyed was at Wonder Works. We first saw this amusement park about a year ago in Florida and were able to go this Christmas. It was fun for all five of us and we went back twice in one day. - Jennifer

Spent time with family- tried a new recipe, "Smoked Mac 'N' Cheese," -- it was yummy. Learned a new card game Liverpool Rummy. Liverpool Rummy is a fast-paced game (using two decks of cards) that requires some strategy. It can be a bit aggravating. Created memories! – Edith  
<https://bushcooking.com/recipes/smoked-mac-n-cheese/>

Simple Human – a funny thing to love the most in the gift department. The reason I like the trash can is because it has a trash side and a recycling side. Such a great and practical combo, and it looks nice too! - Melissa

## **Sugar and Spice – Celebrating Black Owned Beauty Brands – by Angela Dolbear**

Welcome to **SUGAR + SPICE**, and everything nice in the world of beauty.

### ***Celebrating Black-owned Beauty Brands***

February is Black History Month so I am highlighting a few of my favorite eye shadow palettes from Black-owned beauty companies.

[Juvia's Place](#) – [The Tribe](#) and [The Zulu](#) palettes – Bright bold and highly pigmented eye shadow. I got “The Zulu” palette first, and I have to admit, the bright colors scared me a little bit. But they blended beautifully, and I reach for this palette often, especially when I want a dramatic summer or spring eye shadow color. The palettes are affordable, and Juvia's Place often has great sales.

[Beauty Bakerie](#) – [Breakfast In Bed](#) palette – I love the subtle and smoky shades of this palette. It contains both shimmers and matte colors that blend well together. I also have the [Face Flour Baking Powder](#) to set my foundation when my skin is on the oily side, or on a day that the humidity level is high.

[Ace Beauté](#) – [Paradise Fallen](#) and [Falling for You](#) palettes – These highly pigmented palettes, which contain my favorite collection of warm tones, and my personal fave—purples and violets. They blend so well, and the packaging is so lovely to display in my dressing room.

“Deserted Island” Product: Not that I would wear makeup on a deserted island, but if I did, I would need some [grapeseed oil](#) (organic preferably) to remove my eye makeup. Years ago, I read in a beauty magazine that make-up artists recommend using grapeseed oil to remove eye make-up because it does an excellent job, is not too oily, and it nourishes your lashes. I have been using grapeseed oil to remove my eye make-up for years, and I agree with the cosmetics experts.

I usually purchase the oil at the grocery store, and sometimes on Amazon. I keep a refillable 3 oz. flip-top squeeze bottle full of the oil in my bathroom, stored with my night-time beauty regimen products.

First, I douse my face with warm water. Next, I pour a little oily in my palm, and then gently press the oil into my lashes and eye area, ever so gently massage the mascara off. Lastly, I rinse with warm water, and all my eye make-up is gone!

Also, my lashes are still thick and strong, even after years of abusing them with glue-on false eyelashes.

I hope you have found some inspiration to try some new palettes. Blessings to you!

*Angela Dolbear, Beauty Editor, is the author of contemporary spiritual novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series, and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on Amazon. She is also a self-proclaimed beauty junkie, and has been since long before her mother allowed her to start wearing makeup at the age of 14. She keeps UPS and the USPS busy delivering small boxes on a regular basis from Ulta, Sephora, Amazon, and many independent cosmetics companies to her home Nashville, TN. Please connect with her at [www.AngelaDolbear.com](http://www.AngelaDolbear.com) Blessings!*



## **The Dressing – Dupes – by Marcy Lytle**

I hear everywhere and see pictures of influencers showing their “dupes” for the real thing...like a quilted bag for less instead of an expensive one for more. Or an incredibly fuzzy comfy blanket for mere dollars, compared to the plush ones that cost your month’s savings. I like hearing and seeing about the dupes, sometimes. But most of the time I don’t really care about those expensive brands, because often they aren’t even anything I’d care to own. But sometimes...it’s fun to compare.

I’m not a name brand shopper, and I haven’t found that discounted clothes are inferior. I do enjoy a good sale, a new way of styling something, or a great deal...because getting dressed is a creative outlet that’s just plain fun!

Here are my dupes...but not really...for the month of February...because they’re just fun shopping.

*A white sweater* – This is a closet staple, in my opinion. White makes me feel so fresh, and if it’s a cable knit, that makes it even more fun. Found this one at Ross.

*Waffle weave* – This red/pink combo is from Amazon and so great for winter/summer whiplash which is what we have here in Central Texas! Sometimes all in 24 hours!

*Colorful earrings* – This pair is from Zara, a place that has such cool earwear! I found them before Christmas and send the link to my husband, and he bought them.

*Hues of blue* – A great winter to spring color that can be worn with neutrals and browns now, and onto whites and pinks then! I think blue looks good on everyone!

*Red accessories* – Great for Valentine’s Day! Red glasses, a red scarf, red earrings – whatever you have or want to wear! Madewell has the best scarves, Amazon has fun packs of reading glasses, and red lanterns – this one is from Target!

*Pretty coat* – Do you have a colorful coat in your closet, or just black or brown? Now’s the time they’re sure to be on sale...so snag one that you’ll keep forever for those cloudy days that you need to smile.

*A new dress* – H&M is a good place to find dresses on sale – this one was about twenty bucks! It’s flowy, long, feminine and floral – all the pretty things for this time of year. I wore it at Christmas, and I’m wearing it again now.

Who needs a dupe when you can find all sorts of deals all around you, if you enjoy the thrill of the hunt. I do!

### **Three Moms – Showing Them – by the Cousins**

The question posed to the three moms was a little different for February. It wasn't about tips for raising the kiddos, but rather their thoughts on how they spend time with their husbands...in the middle of raising the kids. It's hard! We asked how they demonstrate a loving relationship in front of the kids, if they are purposeful in date night or showing affection, and if that too is a struggle. With Valentine's Day this month, do you celebrate with a special activity with the family or just him, or what? Here are their answers...

#### Mom of Two

To be honest, we haven't been big Valentine's Day people. I enjoy the flowers and the pampering but I enjoy both more when they are random and not expected. We usually do *something* in February, but with our hectic schedules it's not always on the actual *day* and that's okay. In this season of life, any date night, no matter what the day, is appreciated!

When it comes to showing our children our love for one another, we don't hesitate. We kiss, we hug, we hold hands, and we say we love each other in front of our kids. It is important. Just like they need our love, they need to see that their mommy and daddy love each other too. The way we love each other is one way we can show how Christ loves us and his church.

When we do get away for a date, my oldest daughter loves to see me get ready. She likes to help me pick out my outfit and says she can't wait to go on a date with Daddy too (which she does). Lord willing, one day (a LONG way from now) both our girls will date. I pray that we can show them what Christ's love is today so they can know what that looks like in a future spouse. We are far from perfect, and we show our girls that too, but with Christ's guidance, our love grows deeper through the years.

#### Mom of Three

Honestly, this was a hard question – not because we don't show affection – but we don't really “intentionally” think about date nights. We do hold hands and sit on the sofa next to each other, in front of the kids. We also do our best not to argue or fight in front of the kids, and that's an act of love. They do see us flirt with each other and be silly, but we don't overthink it – and that's a good thing. Being naturally loving in front of the kids is awesome. Their dad is such a servant and his acts of service is something they see, in how he loves me. I like to regularly remind the kids to thank their dad, and demonstrate acts of love to him...and he to me.

Date nights – we're not so good at it. We used to be in ministry so much that we felt like if we had free nights, we wanted to be together as a family. Date nights are important and there are seasons where we really needed them. But other seasons, we need free time to watch movies and hang out as a family – and we sit together – and enjoy that time. Maybe that's not the best, but this is how it works well for us.

We are together every day at home without the kids now, and the kids are all in school, so we are able to do day lunches or watch a show together. But intentional date nights we don't do a lot – maybe around Christmas or on our birthdays we will go out. We don't date based on a



holiday. I'd rather have date nights or random ones, or even surprise coffee dates – rather than big blowouts. I do love Valentine's Day but I'm more of an "in the moment" person – even playing a board game or sitting at home or even bowling or playing arcade games is fun (we are competitive!)

One day, we may have more consistent date nights when the kids are older, but right now we don't prefer babysitters and are in a season of family. I love this season. As far as Valentine's Day, we have a family thing (last year we were snowed in!) We have a fun dinner, small gifts, and make it memorable and special. Creating those family memories, to me, shows love between Mom and Dad and to the kids, as well. It's all good!

So, yes, our kids see how we love each other and serve each other, and it's just more of a natural flow doing life – being chill – and I'm so grateful for that. And when we do have date nights, it's great as well. Sometimes, we don't have a lot of money so walks, drives or coffees are our date experiences – and sometimes they're actually the best! The rest of our life is so scheduled that date night and spontaneity is often more appealing than a planned blowout on the calendar.

### Mom of Four

We do our best, but honestly life is chaotic and we struggle to make time for dates and yes, even Valentine's Day. But that doesn't mean we don't make time for each other or show affection...we just naturally fit it in, in the daily rhythm of life.

We get away together for mini dates in the evenings on a walk, go feed our kids' agriculture animals (I know our kids should be doing this!), or check in over the phone throughout the day to just say hi. No matter how busy we are, we always make time to connect daily even if we send the kids to the other room to watch a show or play outside so Mom and Dad can talk.

I do believe it is healthy to show our kids our affection for each other. Hugs, kisses, and romantic glances are things our kids see. And when we are met with an, "Ewww gross," we remind them how God celebrates the love we have in our marriage, and they will celebrate that too when they are married one day.

There is no plan or date on the calendar for Valentine's Day. We might go out or we might celebrate as a family, but we will make time to invest in our marriage in the small moments of everyday life. I do promise you that our next free evening that isn't full of kids activities, we will get away together for a nice dinner and grocery run.

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

I started this year with making this column all about a dozen things I learn/try/do each month. It keeps me noticing, looking for new things to try, and ever learning...which is a good thing! Then I get to pass on these things to you, in case you want to try as well. After all, what’s the point in living if we don’t share what we’re learning and enjoying?

Last month’s learning included:

1. Cuban Beans in a pouch from World Market – super tasty! I served them over brown rice, topped with avocado slices, bacon, cheese and cilantro. Easy and quick lunch!
2. Vintage/antique stores are a good place to shop for mantel mirrors – I found one for \$25 instead of paying hundreds on line!
3. My daughter told me about Texas Allergy Drops and I tried them, and they’re working against my horrible cedar allergies. I had no idea...
4. I discovered a YouTube workout video for people over 50 (I’m well over that, for sure...) that’s 30 minutes long and a 2-mile exercise that burns quite a few calories. And I like it! Just search for “workout over 50.”
5. Wire cutters are must in a girl’s toolbox. Cutting dried stems/flowers to fit small vases or insert in impromptu wreaths is impossible without them!
6. Yogurt works as a substitute for an egg in waffle mix – I learned this by accident. The waffles were a bit soft but very tasty!
7. One can go to sleep at night without looking at the television (both our TV’s went out and were out for days before we got them up and running again) and sleep well!
8. Surfer Girl mascara by Tarte is amazing – it’s my new favorite.
9. *Sisters First* by sisters Jenna and Barbara (Bush) is a nice read (I’m not finished, but will be soon.)
10. Those little initial candles in the dollar spot at Target that are only \$3 are the cutest and smell really nice. (I bought J, M, and L!)
11. The Dollar Spot at Target has the cutest home décor – including shelves for toiletries in the bathroom!
12. It’s okay to have dessert for dinner – pound cake, strawberries, whipped cream and chocolate chips layered in glass jars – to be exact.
13. I can still wash dishes! When the dishwasher went out, I found myself scrubbing and washing and it wasn’t so bad...
14. Have you watched a Sidney Poitier movie? *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* was delightful.
15. I didn’t know that car dealerships have a car accessory store inside the lobby...at least the Kia one does. Who knew?
16. Got leftover soup? Drain the liquid and use it to top Naan bread (spread with pesto if you wish) and grated cheese. Bake in the oven. You’ve got yourself a pizza!
17. Need a bit of Valentine’s Décor? Just pull out your red baskets, red candles, etc. from Christmas and set them out to enjoy.
18. Bee stings can cause a delayed reaction, even a week later. I learned this because it happened to me!

19. I was going to cover my plants with a plastic bag during the last hard freeze, but I read that's not good – the sun can actually burn the plants through the plastic! Maybe you knew that...



HOME

## **A Night to Remember – God Winks** – by Marcy Lytle

I think this is the tenth year I've now written a family devo to go with the month of love, February. God's love is paramount for our kids to know. The love of their family is the best for our kids to feel. True love and what it looks like is so important for our kids to learn. But so is love for the simple things in life, like dogs and candy. So here it is, a simple look at the lovely things in the month of love with your family and kiddos...and we'll call them *winks* from God.

Preparation: Hand your kids a list of three questions and if they're too little to read, then just ask them – What is your favorite candy? What is your favorite animal? What is your favorite book or show? Collect their answers (you can include the parents too if you wish!). For a Valentine's party of sorts, purchase their candies, try to find a stuffed animal for each (or even just a small bag of varied animals for fun from the Dollar Tree), and research a character or quote from their shows.

*Call the family together for a night to remember...*

Isn't it fun to learn to wink? How does it make you feel when Mom or Dad give you a little wink? A wink can be given across the room to signal affection and love, so that no one else sees but you!

We know that God loved us first because he gave us his only son, Jesus. That's the purest form of love. And that's the biggest wink of all!

We love each other as a family because of God's love for us, with forgiveness and acts of kindness and hugs. Let's practice winking at each other, now.

We love God and ourselves enough to love others well, too, because loving others is the best gift to give! Acts of kindness are winks, as well.

But did you know that God loves to give us little "winks" of love daily, as we go to school, play in our yards, or get a snack at a drive-through? It's true. God cares about every detail of our lives, even the amount of hairs on our heads!

- Hand each person their favorite candy.

How do you feel when you're allowed to eat your favorite sweet? It's only special because it's a treat. Sweets on a daily basis all day long would make us sick. But sweet treats, like winks, on occasion make us clap for joy!

God's Word reminds us of his big winks:

1. For I, the LORD your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, "Fear not, I am the one who helps you." **Isaiah 41:13** God cares when we are scared and offers his hand.
2. I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. **Psalms 32:8** God cares when we are lost and shows us the way.
3. The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. *He makes me lie down in green pastures.* He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of

righteousness for his name's sake. **Psalm 23.1-3** He gives us water when we are thirsty and rest when we are tired.

4. When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. **Psalm 34.17-18**. He knows when we're in trouble and hears our cries.
  5. A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. **Proverbs 18.24**. His name is Jesus!
- Hand out the animals (either a stuffed one for each, or a pack of little animals to open and share). God made all the animals and let man name them, and lets us enjoy them. What fun winks!

Valentine's Day is a day where we celebrate God winks and family winks and friend winks and sibling winks. Little acts of kindness that make us feel big arms of warmth and hugs. And sometimes we just enjoy chilling and watching and snuggling under a blanket to watch something that makes us feel happy.

- Share quotes or characters from favorite movies.

Let's snuggle now and watch something new and enjoy all the winks of love this Valentine's Day! Thank you God for all the big winks and small winks, that send us love from above.

Watch a movie together (Encanto might be a good pick!) And end the night with hugs for all!

## **An Adage a Day - A Tour of Love – by Carole Gilbert**

For a fun column I thought I'd take you on a tour of a kitchen. Especially since this is Valentine's month, and we all love our food. It's amazing how many sayings we have created from foods and drinks. *They say* the kitchen is the heart of the home. It's where we make many of our memories. So, for the spice of life, let's start our tour.

Usually, the first stop in a kitchen is the refrigerator. At least it always was for my boys. It's the stop that can butter someone up, especially if we've spent lots of bread and butter filling it up. We'll find "The taste worth waiting for," and many accessories for cooking or baking from the bottom of our hearts. My family always loved when I was cooking or baking. "Nothin' says lovin' like somethin' from the oven!"

And if what we want to cook isn't in the fridge, maybe it's in the freezer. We look, "Where's the beef?" Oh well, we need to "Eat mor chikin." "It's the taste that matters." I love everything I put in my freezer! And it is "the food that lasts longer." Everything there is "Great-tasting every time you make them. It's all righta." It's "Convenience at its best," "The taste worth waiting for."

Then as we enter the pantry, if we hustle and bustle, it's "Snap, crackle, pop." We also see "It's the real thing." And so many items are there, "sweet as honey," or "sour as vinegar." It's all "Ready when you are, and when you aren't." And that's where I hide all my favorites! "They're grrrrreat!" I also know from my pantry, and I don't mean the door, "It never sticks. It's perfect every time." It is always full. "Something good always comes from it." "Oh yeah!" And remember, "You're cooking deserves the best."

As our tour continues, we move to my stove and oven to prepare for cooking. My cooking doesn't always turn out. Unfortunately, "That's the way the cookie crumbles," but I try hard. And I love to cook. I love to think about God and the many spices He has given us and as we've heard from Him, "You are the salt of the earth," Matthew 5:13. And whether salty or sweet, it's always, "Success made simple," with Him, even if my cooking is not.

God also said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food," Genesis 1:29.

"Boy, this is good stuff."

Julia Childs tells us, "People who love to eat are always the best people."

But more importantly David tells us in Psalm 34:8,

*Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!  
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!*

There are so many fun sayings and slogans from our taste buds. "Variety is the spice of life." I encourage you to sit down and fix a "cup of Joe." "Got milk?" if you like it that way. "Mikey likes it." It's "Good to the last drop." And while you're relaxing, see which of these you remember as well as reminisce over your own favorites. Also, while you're enjoying that "Kickstart to the day," thank God for the love He gives us and how He provides us with "A taste of heaven" here on earth.

So, see the rainbow. Taste the rainbow. Believe the rainbow.  
"It doesn't get better than this."



## Chipped China - Keeper of My Heart – by Jennifer Lytle

Sometimes, as I begin to write from month to month, I believe my stories are all the same. A few months ago, I wrote about Jesus as Keeper of My Treasure. Before that, I shared, [Oh, How He Loves](#).

As I reflect on what I have written and what I want to write, it appears there is a single underlying message. But every one of my written pieces sings one glorious praise in a thousand harmonies, strung together through time and space, spanning relationships and seasons. Though each story varies with scene, setting, and characters, my pursuit is to refine the words so perfectly that the message is clear.

There have been moments where I feel slightly annoyed with the rosy spin on my narrations. If I allow inner criticism or self-doubt to mutter too long, I begin to question if I come across as phony or, worse, dishonest.

Yet, those questions can linger but for a few seconds.  
Only I know the other parts of the story. There are parts I do not share.

The moments where I sat with depression. There were days I cried more tears than a river could hold. If the dark side of the moon exists, I have been there. I lived there. I witnessed people build their lives there. Having walked through valleys propels me to preserve in the search for a more brightly lit lens. Those experiences lead me to persist in the sharing of His message. The message is Jesus. Hope, light, laughter, and joy fill my new stories because of Him. It is not even a question; I must share how Holy Spirit continues to come in and breathe new life all over everything I will yield. Sharing this lens and these stories is part of what will outlive me. And so, I must share another story.

A God story.  
A good story.  
One of His love and His abundant affection.

*Valentine's Day has become a resplendent celebration in our family. Our one and only little girl arrived on Valentine's Day. Her arrival, though predicted, was nonetheless a surprise as both of my sons (one older, one younger) were born past their due dates. I wanted her delivered on such a momentous day and I requested an induction. My obstetrician's query with the hospital, however, was politely declined. (I have speculated whether or not my obstetrician indeed asked. Our OB had been with us through two previous pregnancies and was acutely aware of my preference to wait things out and assume for the best possible outcome.) Her delivery was all the more remarkable after being told no - expected and unexpected at the same time. She arrives in a like manner still!*

The author of my stories is writing stories for you, too. That is why I share mine. So you can recognize your own love stories. For a long period of my life, I could not identify the love songs written for me; the affection doted on me; the attention given to my moods or thoughts or heart. So I share my God stories so you can hear yours more clearly.

## **I Don't Do Teens – A Taste of Chocolate – by Marcy Lytle**

One Christmas we purchased a long skinny box of chocolates from Trader Joe's and it was also a game to guess the flavors of each chocolate in the box. Some tasted amazing and others were, well, horrible – but it was great fun to guess them all. Maybe they have those boxes at Valentines as well, I don't know. But it would be easy to purchase a box of chocolates of any kind, and after family dinner one night this month have a tasting of sorts...and let your teen prepare the fun!

Provide a box of chocolates and a knife, so that each piece can be cut for tasting. Be sure to get an assortment of different kinds (with a lid that tells what they are.) As he/she cuts and shares and you all taste, talk with each other and affirm and offer love and smiles and good words. Let the teens in the family do the cutting and the sharing. And give them this printout, and let them run the tasting event...

Chocolate with nuts – If someone is allergic, that piece has to be avoided. Can those who taste guess the kind of nut inside? Who's the nuttiest (funniest) member of the family? Give thanks and affirm what you love about that person.

Chocolate with caramel – That creamy center, but it also gets stuck in your teeth. Who loves it, and who doesn't, and why? We are all different, so let's affirm our differences. Who here likes country music? Who likes to watch football? Who likes to shop?

Chocolate with a cream center – This is rich and gooey, do we all like it? What is the flavor? Sometimes, chocolates taste amazing and other times we spit them out. It's fun to try new things. What new things does the family want to try this year?

Chocolate wrapped in foil – If there's one of these in the box there's sure to be a liquid center, and that's why it's wrapped. Unwrap it and cut it and taste it. Texture is sometimes important when eating. Take a poll of texture tastes in the family – who likes mushy food, who likes crunch, who likes smooth.

Chocolate squares - Did you know that the shape of the chocolate indicates what's inside? Want to take a guess? (It's always a caramel or toffee inside.) So if you only want a caramel chocolate, go for the square! Who knew this fact?

Chocolates that are lumpy – Obviously, these have what in them? Nuts! Easy to avoid if we don't like nuts, so skip on over and choose another.

The box of chocolates is full of an assortment so that hopefully everyone around the table can find something they taste and love. What were your faves? Ask everyone to share.

Our family is like a box of chocolates. Some nutty, some smooth and creamy, some full of surprises, but all worth showing the love. Let's affirm each other as we finish off the box and give thanks for the love we share.

## **Practical Parenting – Heart Lessons – by Marcy Lytle**

We sign our kids up for piano lessons, tennis lesson, soccer teams, theater workshops and so many more activities so that they can expand their talents and knowledge – so fun! But what about heart lessons? Sure, life hands us those whether we want them or not. But if we focus on heart lessons with our kids that we've taught, maybe the hard ones that occur won't be so devastating. Heart lessons include sharing from the heart the things we've learned and know...telling them to the next generation.

1. Share over dinner a disappointment you had as a kid and what helped you through. It could be the divorce of a parent, a friend that moved away, or even making a really bad grade on a test.
2. Before bed, grab a piece of construction paper and you and your child can fold it and tear out a heart. Write "Jesus" on the heart and each of you sleep with that heart under your pillow, entrusting Him to care for every emotion and need you may have.
3. Next time your child lies or cheats or is hateful, grab them close and talk about the wandering heart and how Jesus forgives us always (Matthew 9). Teach them how repentance is a good thing and so healthy for the heart.
4. Take a family walk, a brisk one, in a park on a trail. Skip, move your arms, and pick up the pace. Add some talks about how a healthy heart is one that's pumping well and strong.
5. Share some conversation hearts from a Valentine's box and talk about the sayings on each, how to guard your heart and keep your heart reserved for Jesus until marriage.
6. II Corinthians 3 talks about our hearts being tablets. What is written in the hearts of your kids? Consider making hearts, writing affirmations of love from the Father, and hanging them in their rooms.
7. Has your child lost a grandparent or heard of people dying from disease, or begun to realize the sadness of death? Tell them that the heart that belongs to Jesus never dies!
8. A hard heart is one that stays angry a long time, and that makes for an unhealthy heart. Talk freely with your kids about anger issues among the siblings and friends, and pray with them.
9. Ephesians 5 talks about making music in your heart to the Lord. Sing songs of praise as a family before turning out the lights at night.
10. A cheerful heart is the best kind of heart when it comes to giving. Demonstrate to your kids the kind of giving to one another that expects nothing in return, except the joy that comes from blessing another.

Heart lessons – these can be taught and experienced over and over again with our kids while we still hold their hearts close to us at home. They're even more important than all the other lessons they learn on the field, at the workshops or seated behind an instrument. And they produce everlasting joy!

## **Tiny Living - Bloopers** – by Leyanne Enterline

When living tiny there is the constant battle of well...living tiny! There is NO ROOM!

Living tiny for five years, we have accumulated a lot of items! Though we do try and get rid of some things over time, I feel that as the boys grow, so does the stuff! Their sporting equipment that's needed grows, the laundry grows, the dogs grow, my craft section grows... With Brian on the road so much, he does not have time to go through a lot of his things - so they just pile up like everything else. And not to say that I am doomsday prepping, but I do want to be somewhat prepared in case *Snowmageddon* decides to make its ugly appearance this winter. Therefore, I have quite a stash of water bottles and canned items!

With collecting so much crap (I mean wonderful items that may become useful at any moment in time) there becomes an extreme shortage of space in 325 square feet of living space. Yes, 325 square feet!

Just tonight, I leaned over to tuck in bedding in the giant dog crate that's in our living area and hit my bum on the laundry bin, which caused me to catapult into the steel dog crate and hit my head! Ouch! The kids' bunk rooms were not made for almost six foot tall man-children! Asher has to sleep at an angle to fit into his bed, remotely. There is a bunk above him that is slightly larger that we might move him onto, but currently that is the collect-all spot! And again, we need to do some more decluttering!

There are cabinets above our bed and while making the bed I can't tell you how many times Brian and I have bonked our heads. There is a sliding door from the bathroom to our bedroom and somehow we have all flung the door off its hinges and have had to squeeze through it until someone can figure out how to get it back on track.

Eli has had his own set of issues, as well. He can't reach his piggy bank so he's supposed to ask for one of us to get it down for him. A time or two, he decided to try on his own spider crawl up the wall and, of course, either things from the shelf came flying down or he himself fell to a crash along with part of the particle board.

If we ever sell this thing we call home, we're going have a few "minor" repairs to get it back into shape!

We all have had our moments of being attacked by the tiny space that puts out so much love. We mostly cry and throw fits in the moment, but then can laugh about them later. We are just making memories. These are all things most wouldn't go through in a normal, spacious house.

However, we will NEVER forget these times together, the good, the bad and the ugly...because love grows best in tiny spaces.



YOU

## Healthy Habits – My Two Year List – by Marcy Lytle

By now, I'm thinking most of us have changed or developed some pretty hefty healthy habits to stave off all of the mutants that are rampant around us. Am I right? I mean, a couple of years ago we all purchased masks and hand sanitizer, thinking we were just in a phase that would last a few weeks or months, at most. But here we sit with another year marked off our calendars and we're still buying both of the above items.

So what have we learned, discarded, and continued throughout this pandemic and scare and frustration that life has rolled in like an unwelcome thunderstorm that won't let up? We may as well take note, and give thanks, for all of the above.

Here's my own list:

1. Masks keep my hands out of my mouth where I bite my fingernails.
2. Masks actually keep my face warm, on cold days, so I don't mind wearing them.
3. I've searched and found hand sanitizer that actually smells nice, a victory for sure!
4. Wiped carts at Target makes me feel better when I grab one to push for an hour or so.
5. I've actually noticed workers and empathized more than ever, so that's good.
6. I've sneezed into my elbow, like I was taught to, but I'm really doing it now.
7. I've got packs of wipes in my car, and they've proved to be so useful!
8. Doing without the instant gratification of Amazon Prime hasn't killed me.
9. The divisiveness of our nation has sent me to my knees, another good thing.
10. The unknown of the variants and the vaccines has prompted my heart to Trust.
11. Death and dying has reminded me to plan for living.
12. The healthcare workers are now on my list of heroes...alongside Superman!

What habits, thoughts, actions have you changed and noticed and appreciate more in the past two years...in the middle of the angst and the fear and the frustration and the sickness? It's good to write them down and consider the good in the all of the bad. It's a healthy thing to do, once in a while, any time life gets too overwhelming to handle. Making a list enables us to sigh, breathe a little deeper, and note the good and the growth where maybe we had not noticed before.

## **Inner Strength - A “Peace” of Nature – by Michelle Lynn Schmitt**

Imagine...bright green grass, rays of sunshine coming through the trees wrapped by the clear blue sky, a perfect shadow of a leaf casted on a log, two squirrels playfully chasing each other, sweet chirping of little birds, perfectly placed bird nests nestled high in the trees, bright yellow flowers saying hello and goodbye at the end of the path, dandelions waiting for their seeds to be spread by the breath of gentle wind, and a great white heron proudly taking command of the nature preserve.

This was the scene at my dad’s memorial garden in Dallas just outside UT Southwestern Medical Center.

In my last article I mentioned that I know grief well. Writing poetry has been a healthy outlet for me to process grief. I always end my poems with a sense of hope and encouragement. Writing poetry brings my right brain and left brain together which provides me calmness and peace.

### Grief

*You don’t have a face.*

*There’s no description that is right or wrong.*

*You can change at any time.*

*No one can dictate what you look like, where you go, or what you do.*

*Freedom like this is a blessing!*

*Live on, grief, for as long as you want or need to.*

### Emotions

*Roller coaster*

*slowing down*

*Loud on the other side*

*Feeling but not consuming*

*Loving, accepting*

*Calming smile*

*Peace within*

*I love you forever!*

*Amen*

I have learned that allowing oneself to experience grieving moments when they happen, your heart and mind are freer to enjoy life's next moment.

The most helpful messages I have received about grief include:

*There is no timeline on grief. If you've known the one you lost for 30 years, it may take you 30 years. – Chaplain at UT Southwestern Dallas*

*Triggers can come from anywhere at the most unexpected times.*

- *It's Ok You're Not Okay*

I was so close to my dad, that I dismissed the pain of loss for over 10 years. I missed him every day. It wasn't until the anniversary of his death last April that I couldn't help but experience the pain. It's like I had no control over what I was feeling. So, I let myself feel it. Once I did, it was like a switch had been turned off and I could move forward with grieving in different ways that were more manageable.

One's identity is shaped by loss, which is the theme of this next poem.

*Identity*

*Mold of clay*

*That never dries*

*Shaped like no one else*

*Molds and bends from pressures of the world*

*Created special by God*

*From beginning to end*

So, about that beautiful garden...I took one of the yellow flowers back to my boys, for they give me flowers from time to time.

My dad gave me a gift of a "peace" of nature.



## **Life in a Nutshell – Sonic and Sidewalk Love – by Jill Montz**

Love is a funny thing. I personally have fallen in love...and out of it. I have held love close...and thrown it away. I have craved love...and denied it. I have felt love and been warmed by it...and I have felt love and been smothered by it. I have been blinded by love...and it has opened my eyes. Love has given me wings...and roots. Love has been given to me...and been used against me. Love has dang near killed me...and love has saved me.

February is synonymous with love but love waits for no man, retailer, or strapped for cash bank account. Starting practically the day after Christmas, store shelves are lined with chocolate hearts, little and life-sized stuffed bears asking everyone to “be mine” and all things cupid himself would keep in his arsenal to lure even the hardest of hearts over to the seasonal store aisle. Being in the retail business for most of my life, I start thinking about Valentine’s Day while the Thanksgiving turkey is still thawing in the fridge. So by the time February rolls around my mind is not on love...it is on the lake and summer fun, 4<sup>th</sup> of July, and red, white, and booming ideas for our store.

Personally, I haven’t celebrated Valentine’s in well over a decade. My bathtub is not filled with rose petals but rather Epsom salt. I don’t pop anything chocolate onto my taste buds, just lots of Tylenol and Advil. And I only snuggle up to a heating pad in bed.

But that doesn’t mean my life is not full of love.

I am blessed to love many wonderful people and to be loved by them in return.

My greatest love God ever gave me comes in the form of my teenage daughter who has shown me what it means to love unconditionally. (I mean anyone with a teenager can shout *Amen* to that!) My immediate family loves me for who I was, who I am and who I will be. They have shown up on my happiest days, my saddest days, and all the days in between. God gave me some of the best when it comes to family.

My friends love me without obligation. These are the people who show up for me out of love and not because a birth certificate or a marriage license guilt them into it. They make me meals because they know I can’t cook. They fix things around my house because my pink tool set can only do so much. They come get any and all dead animals out of my attic, backyard, and dog’s mouth because they know my stomach can’t do it. They show up with Sonic drinks, extra blankets at cold ball games, to pick up my kid when I can’t, to all the celebrations and to all the events we don’t dare post on social media.

My friends love me on good hair days and bad hair days and pulling my hair out days. They love me when I forget to text them back, forget to bring the team snacks, and forget what I was going to tell them. They love me when I have a lot to say, nothing to say, and when I can’t say what I am thinking because the Good Lord will bring it up again one day. They love me well. And I love them, too.

My church family loves to be the hands and feet of Jesus. This group is only human and far from perfect, but they truly try to love like Jesus. They minister to my physical, emotional, and spiritual needs on a daily basis. They showed up to my house with an apple pie soon after we moved to Iowa Park and welcomed me and Dotty from the very beginning. My faith in God, His love, and His people have grown, thanks to this group. I am still trying to convince them they would have better luck with a pecan pie; but other than that, they are good people.

And of course the greatest love of all...Romans 5:8:

“But God demonstrated His own love for us in this:  
While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Can I get an Amen, and a hallelujah?

I look around my life and it is busting at the seams with people who truly care about me and who genuinely love me. I might not have anyone showing up at my front door with a life-sized stuffed bear but I have more than my fair share of folks I call, “Mine.”

Romantic love is great; and if you have it, then I hope you treasure it. But love comes in all kinds of forms and feeling loved is special in all the ways it is felt. So this February, if no one is sending you a dozen roses or taking you to a candlelight dinner, remember those who called you when you were sick, or swept your sidewalk when it snowed, or brought you a Sonic drink when you had a hard day. Then, maybe you can send them a text or drop them a note in the mail to say you love them, too. And if you wait until February 15<sup>th</sup> you can buy them (and yourself) some chocolates for half off retail price in the seasonal aisle. Go ahead and get yourself that bear, too. Bear hugs are the best...any day of the year.

## **Life Right Now - Not So Random** - by Jennifer Stephens

We've all heard of random acts of kindness. Encouraging others by randomly doing things meant to brighten a stranger's day, like leaving one dollar taped to a vending machine or paying for the person's order in the car behind you at the drive through.

These gestures ARE important and definitely shouldn't stop, but what if our kindness wasn't always random? What if we were intentional with our kindness? What if instead of just randomly sprinkling kindness onto people we'll never meet, we intentionally CHOOSE kindness when we're with our families at home. Even in those moments that make us want to scream. Like when the kids still aren't ready for school and the bus is pulling up. Or when our husbands leave their dirty clothes on the floor. Again. When it comes to the people in our home, we tend to react with anger, frustration, and eye rolls (that's not just me, is it?).

I know I'm guilty of offering grace to the people I work with, while tossing harsh words at the people in my own family. My coworker leaves a mess behind in the staff lunchroom, I don't bat a false eyelash, but my husband leaves a dirty dish on the counter - he faces the wrath of an angry wife! Shouldn't the people I share life with inside four walls be the very people I meet with an attitude of compassion?

In Ephesians 4:32, we read, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ forgave you." Kindness isn't a to-do list of various tasks to be checked off upon completion. It's a never-ending action. It's a way to be. And best of all? Giving kindness is FREE (Who doesn't love a good bargain?).

### *How to practice the art of kindness at home:*

1. Say thank you for the little things they do (and say please too)
2. Leave little encouraging notes for them to find
3. Put the iPad down and look at them when they're talking
4. Run errands for them
5. Do things around the house without being asked (wash dishes, take out garbage)
6. Be forgiving - and say sorry when you should
7. Let someone else control the remote (at least every once in a while)

Maybe choosing kindness comes easily to you; it's second nature. That's how it is for my husband. He's always running to the store to grab something I think I desperately need when I'm just too tired to go myself after teaching all day. And he's really good about leaving sweet little notes on the counter. But lots of us (Me!) must learn to become intentional when it comes to choosing kindness at home. I haven't mastered this yet - my family will attest to this - but I am working on it. Just like an artist or athlete practices their craft to refine their skills, I am trying to become mindful about choosing kindness. For example, when my husband brings me a steaming mug of freshly brewed coffee on Saturday morning, instead of just taking it from his hand, I'll make the effort to say thanks before tasting that first sip. And when he begins telling me about something that happened at work that day, I won't check my Instagram feed until AFTER he's finished talking. I'll try to share the remote control too - even if it means my Hallmark movies are replaced with whatever sport is on TV that night.

Depending on your current season of life, the people in your home could be kids, a spouse, your parents, or any combination in between. No matter who we share a space with, let's ALL remember to choose kindness (even when they're driving us crazy!).

## **Under Pressure – Every Fetter** – by Debbie Haynes

When's the last time you used the word "fetter" in a sentence? I haven't, except for years ago as I sang it in an old hymn. It says, "Jesus breaks every fetter..."

And just what is a fetter? It's something used to bind and restrain something or someone. There are both physical and spiritual fetters, and He breaks both kinds!

In Acts 2 it says Jesus broke the physical chains (fettters) of death because those chains couldn't hold him. Death has no grip on us or our flesh. We have hope because He conquered death, hell and the grave.

Colossians 2 says that Jesus blotted out (erased) everything that was condemning us, nailing it to the cross, having spoiled (defeated) all powers and put them to shame as he triumphed over them!

2 Peter says the Lord knows how to deliver his people out of temptation!

So whether we are bound by a fetter of any kind – physical or spiritual – Jesus breaks them all and sets us free. And because of that, we are so thankful! What love the Father has given us in that he died for us to give us freedom from all that restricts us from living life to the fullest.

Maybe you have friends or family who are bound and you see no way for them to walk free. Maybe you've struggled with something that restricts you, for years. Maybe you don't even know what to call the fetter or define what it is that keeping the chains locked. That doesn't matter. God knows, so just ask him to break them all.

There's another part to the old hymn, after singing "Jesus breaks every fetter." It says, "I will shout Hallelujah!" Hallelujah is an expression of worship or rejoicing that occurs when something awesome has happened. Maybe you shouted hallelujah when your team won, or you got that job, or the sun emerged from behind the clouds. When we shout hallelujah after praying for chains to be broken, we are praising him for the freedom that's on the horizon.

He nailed all of those things that chain us and bind us to the cross, and he conquered all of the enemies that did the binding.

Say it with me – *Jesus breaks every fetter.*

Shout it out loud – *Hallelujah.*

Then sit and watch as the fetters start falling off, and smile at this old word that has become alive and new, one you can pray about, sing about, and shout about when the chained are set free...and you too ride among them...free.



MARRIAGE

## **After 40 Years - There Must be 50 Ways to Woo Your Lover – by Marcy Lytle**

Do you know the old Paul Simon song, “50 Ways to Lose Your Lover?” It’s sure got a catchy tune, and easy to recall lyrics. But the message is about leaving and parting ways. After being married for over four decades, I’m thinking we need more catchy tunes and lists about how to woo our lover instead of leave him! Are you with me? So here’s a list for this February month of 50 ideas you can print out and keep handy, when you need an idea of how to woo instead of lose.

Some require planning, others require very little at all...but just to notice. Some necessitate forgiveness, and some spark the flame of love. It’s always better to give than receive, because we can leave the receiving up to HIM – and that frees us up to give a whole lot more!

1. Make breakfast in bed.
2. Buy him a new robe.
3. Affirm him before going to sleep.
4. Go to bed at the same time, and put away the phone.
5. Read aloud to him the Word.
6. Leave sticky notes on his steering wheel.
7. Have his car detailed.
8. Surprise him with a coffee gift card on his car seat.
9. Invite him for a country drive.
10. Stop at his favorite drive-through impromptu.
11. Add a pretty napkin to his lunchbox.
12. Plan a weekend getaway.
13. Reserve dinner at a steakhouse.
14. Play Frisbee golf or tennis or pickleball together.
15. Sit down and watch a game with him.
16. Do a chore that is normally his.
17. Make his favorite dessert and picnic on the floor.
18. Watch a movie of his choice.
19. Straighten his drawer or his side of the closet.
20. Purchase a greeting card and leave it in his briefcase or by his sink.
21. Dance after dinner.
22. Drive to watch the sunset and sit in silence.
23. Pray out loud for blessings on him.
24. Keep silent while he’s driving (this is the hardest for me!)
25. Hold his hand in the movies and wink once in a while.
26. Grab his hand while you walk.
27. Take him shopping for new sneakers.
28. Order a surprise delivery at home, like a new book he’d love.
29. Subscribe him to a monthly service (like a coffee club)
30. Walk the aisles of Home Depot with him, smiling.
31. Offer to rub his feet.
32. Make hot tea and shortbread, and enjoy with him.

33. Have a spa night just for him.
34. Let him pick the movie and the snack.
35. Purchase a surprise gift and hide it with clues to find...just because.
36. Surprise him with tickets to a game.
37. Invite a few friends over for board games.
38. Purchase Italian sodas from World Market – he'll like them!
39. Make his favorite meal on a weeknight for no special occasion.
40. Celebrate an accomplishment you've noticed with a party for two.
41. Text him a short poem you wrote.
42. Send him a song that made you think of him.
43. Play a game on your phones together.
44. Go shopping with him for tech accessories.
45. Leave him a voice mail of encouragement.
46. Ask him out on a date.
47. Give him an entire day of no eye rolls (another hard one!)
48. Kiss him and linger and hold him.
49. Reserve an overnight stay at a hotel.
50. Ask him what he'd like to do and say yes.



## **Date Night Fun – Wear It** – by Marcy Lytle

I was reading the verses about how we are clothed in garments of righteousness and crowns of beauty and garments of salvation in Isaiah 61...and I thought why not make date night with our husbands all about what we are wearing? After all, our relationship with him is to represent our relationship with Him! How fun will this month's time together be, as we dress accordingly (that rhymes!):

**The Robe** – Do you and he have nice robes? If yours is decades old, maybe it's time for new ones (Marshalls has great prices and choices). Arise early one weekend morning and have your date time together in your robes, as you make scones together (grab a mix from World Market), slice some oranges, and sip your favorite beverage as you do a crossword puzzle. So fun!

**The Shoes** – Dress up tonite in your heels and he in his finest shoes, and go out for dinner – it doesn't matter if it's fancy – you'll bring the fancy to wherever you go! Take along your walking shoes in the car for a stroll along the water somewhere – by a lake, a pond, a river – and observe the starry night. Then head home and change into your slippers and cozy up by the fire for Jiffy Pop you've made on the stove, because that's a classic that makes any date night fun. If you need some new comfy slippers, I just got a pair from Bombas for Christmas and they're awesome!

**The Cap or Hat** – Surely you both have a baseball cap, a Fedora, or some sort of beanie or headwear you can focus on for this date night out. If there's a basketball game you can attend together indoors, wear caps and order all the snacks and enjoy. If there's a play/theater you can attend, fancy up the top with your coolest headwear and your sweetest outfits. And if it's super cold, find those beanies and shop for new scarves (maybe they're on sale now!) and watch the sunset from the warmth of your car, as you listen to new tunes...and eat chocolates.

**The Jeans** – Look through the closet for your nicest jeans, or go shopping and purchase a new pair. Maybe you're in need of a new style, or he a new wash or hue. Shop your closet (both of you) for a new look with something old. Perhaps an old jacket with a flowy top or graphic tee underneath will be your choice, and he might wear a long-sleeved dress shirt open with a solid teen underneath. Emerge with a smile and hit the town for a movie, a few arcade games, and a late night coffee. Be sure to bring some trivia cards along for fun.

**The Coat** – I have a closet full of coats I've had for years, and so does he. Some we wear regularly and some we wear occasionally. It's fun to put on one of the coats we don't wear so often – maybe a plaid or corduroy – add a fun scarf – and venture out in the cold for an evening outdoors. Maybe a February picnic is doable on a day when it's still crisp but sunny. Take a blanket for the tablecloth, sit near a fire pit if possible, and enjoy the warmth and good food – with some sparkling pink sodas alongside. Take an extra blanket for wrapping up as you give thanks for the love you have for each other and for Him.

These ideas are so fun you can do them all this month!



## **For Better or Worse - Shark Fishing – by Kaelin Scott**

About eight years ago, my husband and I did something daring.

Along with his parents and sister, we went shark fishing. That would have been pretty daring on its own, but it gets better. We went at night, in the pitch black, on a tiny 30-foot boat, in the roughest waters our guides had seen all summer. It was an exhilarating, terrifying, nauseating (thank you, motion sickness) experience. One that I will never forget.

I ended up reeling in a 75-pound blacktip shark, which took me about 30 minutes of fighting. Meanwhile, the boat was tossing back and forth so violently, my husband had to hold onto my belt loops to keep me from falling overboard. Not only that, but the waves were so high that I was actually reeling UP TO THE SHARK. My family could literally see it swimming above me as I was fighting it. Talk about crazy!! By the time we got back to the dock at around 3 am, I was thankful to be on solid ground again.

I can't say I'd necessarily want to repeat this experience, but I'm sure glad we did it. It makes for a great story, and it's definitely a funny memory. I can't believe we were daring enough to go out and do something so wild. Thinking back on that night reminds me of the sense of adventure I've always felt around my husband, as well as the thrill of being alive.

Most people expect calm waters, smooth sailing, and no storms when they say their wedding vows, but marriage can sometimes be a lot like that fishing trip. Rough waters are bound to come, and so are dark nights. Maybe even a shark or two. Every couple faces storms, but it's up to us to decide how we handle them. The storms can tear us apart, or we can use them to make our relationship stronger. We can fight and argue, or we can stand together and get through it.

The good news is that the rough waters never last forever. Eventually, we will arrive safely back on shore. And we'll be able to look back at those stormy times with gratitude for the ways they helped us grow, even if we're glad they're over.

## **In This Together – From Start to Finish – by Marcy Lytle**

Marriage is like a puzzle. I'm sure you could come up with your own analogies of the pieces fitting together to make a pretty picture like two odd-shaped people fitting together to live happily ever after. But for the sake of this story for this month, I'm talking about the actual putting together of a puzzle. After all, over the past two years my husband and I have put together more puzzles than we have all of our long married life! I feel like we've learned so many new things about each other that really come to life while starting and finishing a jigsaw puzzle:

- We both agree on gathering the edge pieces out first and I want to make sure he helps me find them all before putting together the pieces. I feel a bit of competition from the moment we start. What's up with that?
- We next figured out that it's good to group the pieces by color, and make little piles. All of this is prep work (that isn't fun, by the way) before actually starting on the big picture.
- We do enjoy putting together a puzzle, but he likes it more than I do. I recall in our earlier years of married life that I didn't like doing puzzles with him because he obsessed over it. Maybe that's why we didn't do them for years...but he's matured now...and he quits when I quit (or we have this whole thing of me accusing him of trying to sneak in more pieces.)
- We listen to music while we work. I don't think there's anything else we do where we sit and have music playing in the background, and that's been nice. It provides ambience and calms my spirit, and it seems to have the same effect on him, as well. That's been fun to discover.
- We are territorial. We pick the sides and the scenes we want to each work on, and we leave the other one alone to work. If he reaches over to my side or I to his, there's this exchange of looks (and sometimes words.) Again, puzzles are like a game – competitive!
- We set a time limit. We actually communicate before we start about how long we're going to work on the puzzle, and we quit at that time. This makes me happy, and he likes it when I'm happy.
- We think puzzle working is stimulating and keeps our minds young. Who knows if that's true, but we feel like searching and fitting and organizing is all good for our brains. If we think it, it must be so!
- We don't squabble over placing the last piece, although I'm pretty sure we did back years ago. If he has it, then so be it. And if I have it, it's fine. And if there's a piece missing at the end (we recently were missing three pieces!), we both crawl on the floor to see if we can find it because...who wants to work all that time and not have a completed picture!
- We sigh a bit when we crumble up the pieces and place them back in the box, to be given away with the next donation. And we both wonder if it's worth all the time and effort to put together giant puzzles when we're just going to tear them apart.
- We both agree that it is.

So what does all of the above matter? It's been fun to find an activity to do when in quarantine, or a shut-down, or an ice event, or a cold evening, or when we need to unwind. It's a nice

escape to the garage where we have a table set up, and now have this cool puzzle board gifted to us by our kids, when we need to refocus, reset, and relax.

We've both matured over the years and I'm thankful and notice. Puzzle working isn't a source of friction now, but rather we've learned to compromise and give more than take...for the most part. There are the occasional remarks like, "That's my piece!" But that's when we both know it's time to quit and go to bed.

What have you found to do together that's challenging yet rewarding, fun and yet stimulating, and connecting and calming for the health of your marriage? It's worth searching for that missing piece and sitting down to work it all out into a picture you're both proud to say you worked on together.

And then it's even fun, in my opinion, to rip that puzzle apart and put it away. And maybe I'm weird for finding delight in that experience, but he knows I'm weird by now and he still loves me anyway.



ENCOURAGEMENT

## Firmly Planted - Courage to Live—Feb 2022

---

Sometimes I wonder if I have the courage to die. I'm in awe of the dedication and unwavering faith of martyrs, missionaries, and, especially "ordinary" people who have been imprisoned for what they believe. The thought of torture terrifies me, even though the chance of that happening is a small percentage of minuscule. To escape these morose and unreasonable fears, I reel in my thoughts: "Get real...this is never going to happen because you live too sheltered a life, and if, for some reason, you have to face this, he'll give you the grace to handle it." Truly, dying for my faith probably isn't something God will ask of me; however, inevitably, death will come, and I hope to face it with courage. But there is another kind of courage I've been thinking about—not the courage to die, but the courage to live.

The courage to live is an idea I recently read about in Gordon Smith's [Courage and Calling](#). What kind of courage is this? It's the courage to be my true self—the person God made me to be, without any pretense; it's the courage not to be ruled by anyone's expectations besides *his*; it's the courage to use the abilities he's given me and follow the voice I hear calling. It sounds easy enough. But how easy is it to know who I truly am, recognize my true abilities, and silence the "shoulds, oughts, and need-tos" so that I can follow the one voice that matters? It's like digging out of a ditch, but it's worth it.

Getting to know myself so I can *be* myself requires an honest look at my habits, what I do and why I do it. I have to distinguish between what I love doing and what I think I *should* love doing, what I'm good at and what I *want* to be good at. It requires a sometimes painful visit to the past—family history, bad choices, unfortunate events, and all the things that make me who I am. I've found that the process of peeling away layers to reveal what's true is also necessary for me to recognize the abilities and gifts God has given me. The things that bring joy and satisfaction, which are God's good gifts, are often buried under a ton of "baggage."

At my age, I feel like I'm "behind," like I should know this by now. Lucky are the few who figure it out sooner than later. My journey (perhaps like yours) has been up and down and all around, and life has often moved too fast to allow time to do anything but what was required for the day. But life changes--I have more time now, and it's never too late.

Several months ago I began asking and seeking (again, but at a deeper level): exactly what am I here for? My nagging nudges needed confirmation. I found out about a ministry called [Soulwell](#). Deep called to deep when I visited the website and read about the Soulwell Journey. Sitting there in my yellow velvet Goodwill chair, I looked over at the bookcase to my right and a title jumped out at me—*Courage and Calling*. The book had sat there in silence for months, waiting for just this moment, summing up in two words my heart-cry, and what Soulwell was all about. It's only one of several things that synced beautifully, with perfect timing, confirming that this was God's path, his chosen journey for me.

The last week-end is coming up, but I see it as a beginning, not an end. This brings me back to the point of the story. I've learned a lot about myself and I'm continually practicing filtering out the noise to hear the voice I hear best in silence—the voice that says, "*This is the way, walk in*

*it*". That *way* takes an immediate and adventurous kind of courage *to live*. It's courage that requires me to make a choice, to act, to get out of my rut. I will need courage to die in the future, whether it's tomorrow or in 20 years, but courage to live is here and now, today. I *want* this kind of courage. I *need* this kind of courage, and I'm *praying* for this kind of courage because it's what makes life meaningful and brings God glory.



## **Moving Forward – Too Much Love? – by Pam Charro**

Romans 13:8

*Let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love one another ..*

I once heard a friend say, "We broke up because she said I loved her too much." I have thought a lot about that statement and I am somewhat dubious as to whether too much love was really the issue.

Maybe you wonder why I would doubt that. I guess it's because most people I know are hoping to find more love and pushing love away is the last thing they would do. While I do understand that there are some folks with such trust issues or low self-esteem that they would be uncomfortable with receiving even the healthiest of love, I can't help but wonder about the quality of what is being offered when someone states it's just too much.

So, according to scripture, what is love? The famous portion of Corinthians tells us that it's patient, kind, humble and selfless. It wants what is best for the other person and is willing to sacrifice its own needs and desires for another's sake. In fact, one might argue that the biblical reference mentioned at the beginning of this article is claiming there is no such thing as too much healthy love.

It's understandably challenging to prove whether or not love that is being offered is genuinely selfless, but most people can tell. They know when someone is needy and selfish and trying to manipulate them to meet needs that God never meant to be put on them. And, in most cases, when they sense it, they will distance themselves accordingly.

It takes courage to go before God and ask him to test us in this area. To hold our love for others up to the light of God's word and presence and show us where we might be falling short. But God honors bravery and longs to transform us into selfless lovers when we ask. He understands that we need his love before we can love others well, and he's so glad when we ask for the opportunity to better experience his love. It's the only way we won't put too many expectations on others.

Then we can look forward to becoming better receivers of the love God is freely offering us, so that we can be better givers of the genuine love this world is so starved for. The truly satisfying love Jesus died to give each one of us.

## **Rooted in Love - 800 Feet Underground – by Kaelin Scott**

Have you ever witnessed something so grand and majestic that you felt small and insignificant in comparison?

My husband and I recently took our kids to Carlsbad Caverns National Park in New Mexico, and it was truly amazing. Honestly, I think everyone should go there at least once in their life. It was that magnificent.

Having been to other caverns before, I knew it would be cool, but I wasn't expecting the sheer magnitude of this underground world. We kept going down, down, down for what felt like ages before finally reaching the bottom. And then there were still miles of unexplored caves beyond that. There were so many beautiful rock formations, pools of water, and crystals. I've never seen anything so majestic before.

As we wandered through these enormous caverns, I was in complete awe of God. Even before a single human had stumbled upon this place, He knew every inch of it by heart. He knew exactly when it would be discovered and exactly who would discover it (which is a pretty cool story if you want to look it up). And He knew that one day, I would stand there with my family and enjoy the beauty of His creation.

As I contemplated all this, it made me feel insignificant at first. Like I'm so small compared to the vastness of the world. How could I possibly matter or make an impact? But the more I thought about it, it actually made me feel incredibly special. Because I know for certain that God loves and treasures me above all creation. In His eyes, I am so much more valuable than anything in those caverns, or above them, or beyond them in the whole world.

It was comforting to me, seeing all God is capable of, and yet knowing that He still cares for little old me. Nothing is too big for Him, but nothing is too small either. And realizing that made me feel so loved. Whether I'm 800 feet underground in a cave or high on a mountaintop, He sees me and knows me and loves me beyond compare. Even though I may be small in the grand scheme of things, I'm His beloved creation whom He sacrificed His Son for. And that's definitely something to be grateful for.

If you haven't been to the Carlsbad Caverns before, I highly encourage you to go. It's something you'll never forget. Also, if you're wondering if you matter – the answer is yes. You are beloved and treasured beyond all else. Never forget that!

## Simple Truths – Dollar Treasures – by Marcy Lytle

I have a small dried flower plant in a pot on my desk where I work. It's in the colors of bright orange, yellow and red and six-year old Augie gave it to me for Christmas. It's from the Dollar Tree. Of course, I have to set it out so he can see how much I "love" it, but guess what? I really do love it. It makes me smile every morning when I enter the kitchen and see it by my laptop. In fact, I've included this little potted plant in two stories this month!

Sometimes, the simpler things in life are the best, don't you agree? It's fun to live extravagantly for a day I suppose, but at the end of the day it's the joy of the moments that linger and enable us to crawl into bed at night with ease and good memories and peace.

I'm glad I didn't toss this gift or place it under a cabinet only to pull out when Augie came over. This terribly cheap potted plant has increased in value since it's been sitting there now for almost two months. I don't even know if Augie put thought into what he chose, but he did choose the colors that match my home décor. He's a pretty observant little boy, so I wouldn't be surprised if he didn't realize that.

In fact, all three of the kiddos gave us gifts this Christmas that are being used in my kitchen. A pretty saying on a piece of wood, some new tea towels, and this potted plant. These were some of my favorite gifts from the kids and it has been fun to watch their gift-giving evolve over the years as they age. They look and wait while we open our gifts, seeing what our reaction will be. I even caught 8 year old Ayla's look as she waited for her aunt "EE" to open her gift that Ayla so thoughtfully crafted for her.

These are simple things, but really priceless treasures. And it's not just because I'm a grandmother.

- Who isn't touched when a little kid picks one lone flower from a field and hands it to us?
- What wife isn't pleased when he rubs her tired feet?
- Who doesn't love a single red rose given out "for free" at restaurants this time of year?
- Why wouldn't we all be thrilled when that item on sale half-off on the day we need it?

I feel like for me personally, I can miss the simple things in life because I'm waiting out or hoping for those things I place value on like the next project in the house being completed, a faraway vacation around the corner, or next Christmas when we can decorate once again. I'm guilty of looking ahead to the next thing so much that I miss the present things in front of me, daily.

I can't miss this little plant. It's right in front of me on the corner of my desk. And when I open the blinds and the sun shines through, those fake flowers are illuminated so pretty! And through the blinds stands an expensive urn with real flowers that don't look any prettier.

The simplicity of a gift, the giver, the colors and the sun...all wrapped up in one.

Enjoy February, my friend...

## Extravagant Love

No coupon. No sale. My heart was pounding with the unfamiliarity of the situation.

But I had finally found the replacement wedding ring I had been searching for. It was for sale in a very swanky jewelry store, on the main drag of downtown Franklin, TN, which is storybook cute town, and super touristy.

The ring was art deco style, white gold, and modest sized diamonds. I'm not into the car-jacking-invitation bling, that's for sure.

But this was so not like my shopping habits. I never buy anything unless it is on sale, and/or I have a coupon code, and I am purchasing through a shopping portal like [Rakten](#), or [Swagbucks](#), so I can get the points from the purchase, which will add up to an eventual gift card of some kind.

It all seemed so extravagant.

There was that word again: extravagant. God has been showing me this characteristic of His love for several months now.

A few months back, I wrote here in THYME Magazine, about how God showed me His extravagant love by restoring my ability to eat my favorite foods, through providing a supplement that quelled my food allergy. So gracious! I didn't ask Him for it. He just gave it to me because His love is extravagant. I didn't realize that aspect of His love, even though as a worship leader, I frequent sing a song called "Your Love is Extravagant." Ouch, in my soul.

Buying this ring was another lesson about God's extravagant love, and for once, I understood it.

"Yeah me!" for not panicking when my husband and I were paying for the ring. We were spending close to \$1,500, which was a lot more money that I was carnally comfortable spending on a piece of jewelry. But I silenced my ignorant flesh. This was special.

This was the replacement wedding ring for my current damaged ring. A gift from the man who is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh for over 20 years, and who works really hard, and loves me with all of his heart.

Such a sweet and significant gift from him. And from my God.

Now, I am certainly all for being a good steward with the provision God gives us. As I mentioned, I try to save money whenever I can, and I try to pray for God's guidance before I buy anything. After all, all money is His. But I also recognize when God is taking me out of my comfort zone to teach me a deeper lesson, which I needed to learn.

God's love is part of who He is. In fact, the Bible says, God IS love (please see [1 John 4:7-21](#)). His love knows no bounds or conditions. Extravagant and empowering.

“There is no fear in love [dread does not exist], but full-grown (complete, perfect) love turns fear out of doors and expels every trace of terror!” says 1 John 4:18 (AMPC).

Wow! Such love. Certainly a verse I need to remember.

Last week in church, our pastor was [teaching about how God loves His people](#), even when they are being evil. A verse in [Jeremiah 31:20](#) describes God’s love and mercy for His people with a deep yearning, even in the midst of their disobedience. And then Pastor Lyle showed us in [Ephesians 2:4-6](#) how God is rich and mercy because of His GREAT and wonderful love with which He loves us. Such extravagant love.

I always tell my husband Tim what I am thinking and praying about writing in my next story for THYME. When I was explaining how grateful I am to God and to him for my new ring, he reminded me of something God spoke to me while I was praying, about four years ago.

God said, “There are gifts in everyday life waiting for us to unwrap them. They are proof—evidence—of His very real involvement in the lives of us, His creation.”

Such extravagant love the Creator has for His creatures. I am just beginning to grasp it.

A couple of days ago, this portion of Joyce Meyer’s daily devotional really helped me grab onto and apply the notion of God’s love. I saved it on the desktop on my computer, so I can readily reread it whenever I am struggling with any doubt or hopelessness. I am reposting it here, for you, and for me:

“When you feel unlovable, it is hard to get it through your head and down into your heart that God loves you perfectly—even though you are not perfect and never will be as long as you are on the earth.

There is only one thing you can do with a free gift: receive it and be grateful. I urge you to take a step of faith right now and say out loud, ‘God loves me unconditionally, and I receive His love!’ You may have to say it a hundred times a day, like I did for months, before it finally sinks in, but when it does it will be the happiest day of your life. To know that you are loved by someone you can trust is the best and most comforting feeling in the world. Prayer Starter: Father, I know You love me unconditionally and in the name of Jesus, I receive Your love, amen.”

Such sweet words. I really want to get a deeper grasp of God’s love for me. It’s so complete, so eternal, so extravagant. Amen.

*Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series, and THE TORMENTOR’S TALE, as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). Angela writes real, relevant, relatable, and reverent fiction, with an aim toward spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, while hopefully inspiring readers to laugh and/or cry. She loves reading, writing prose, as well as writing and recording music with her husband Tim in their*

*studio in Nashville, Tennessee. Please drop by and sign-up for news and to read new stories and hear new original music at <http://www.angeladobear.com/subscribe.htm>. Blessings to you!*

## **FRESH THYME – Back With Your Ex – by Marcy Lytle**

Catchy title made you look, right? I'm not writing about getting back with a former lover...but rather, I'm writing about those two little words used as a prefix "ex" and something I recently learned when my husband was reading to me one night before bed. We read the words *exalt* and *exult* in the same sentence. And then the next day I read the word *extol*.

It was then that we realized we didn't really know the difference between these words, these "lofty" words we'd heard and read in Bible verses all of our lives. Is there a difference, and would it be helpful to know the difference when spending time in praising the One that loves us so much? So, we did what any person does when they're curious...we asked Google.

The prefix "ex" means up or out...up in the case of exercising the privilege and honor of praising God.

To exalt means to view as high or superior. Exalt comes from the Latin word meaning "high."

To exult is to jump for joy, to rejoice. Exult comes from the Latin word "jump."

To extol is to raise or elevate or make high. Extol comes from the Latin word "raise."

One involves acknowledgement of His great worth, the second is to jump for joy over that realization, and the third is to do something with that knowledge – lift it up high.

Psalm 147 says,

*Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever.*

And then the rest of the chapter tells us how to exalt, exult and extol the Lord. These three words, in my experience, are rarely used except in the presence of scripture. Have you heard them used in any other context? They are really special words and worth nothing, if we are reminded to exercise praise daily.

The way to **exalt** the Lord is to tell of his mighty acts from one generation to another. We're supposed to share his wonderful works, to speak of them. This means when we eat around the dinner table, part of our conversation should be about what awesome things God showed up and did during that particular day. What a beautiful sunrise, amazing sunset, provision for this bill, meeting the need of that friend, and so on. This acknowledges God and his power; it speaks it out loud. so that others hear.

**Exulting** Him results in rejoicing and jumping for joy. It might erupt into joyful singing and celebration. One night recently, we were reading and a song from a long time ago popped into our heads, "Ah Lord God, thou has made the heavens and the earth by thy great power..." a really peppy joyful song. So we sang it in bed, in the dark, together. We then feel fast asleep, covered in peace. Exulting involves a response to the acknowledgement or exaltation of his greatness.

To **extol** the Lord means to actually raise and lift Him up high, to elevate his name. What are the aspects of his character? He's good, righteous, faithful and near. He watches, loves, and saves.

I'm pretty sure that we cannot really extol the Lord unless we have first exalted him – acknowledged his acts and appearances in our world, then exulted Him by responding to that realization that he's so present and available daily in our lives. Getting back with those two "exes" seems to precede the final "ex" of extolling.

Exalt, exult and extol. Three exes worth revisiting and getting to know better once again...or maybe for the first time...might be the best experience of love we can all hope to have this month. Read Psalm 145 and practice what it says, along with the writer. I know, I'm going to do it and I'm smiling already, as I think about getting back with these exes.





FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME – On the Floor – by Marcy Lytle**

A weird title for an article, I know... However, I was thinking about how many times it's just more fun to experience life on the floor and I thought I'd share, in case you need a new perspective as well!

Picnic – It's February and probably still too cold for outdoor picnics, but how about one inside – on the floor? Spread a blanket for a tablecloth, light a fire (or put on instrumental music) – or both – and grab your biggest tray. Fill it with either snacks or a full meal. You could totally do fajitas on a board – just separate all the parts into small bowls arranged together, and enjoy!

Prayer – Have you ever prayed while prostrate on the floor? Or when is the last time you even knelt on the floor to talk to Him? Position in prayer isn't a ritual or that which moves mountains, but sometimes position just shifts other parts of our being into submission and adoration a little bit more. Sometimes, kneeling on the floor or lying face down just brings a whole new perspective during a time of prayer.

Play – If you haven't played with a child on the floor in a while, you're missing out. Yes, it's hard to get up (if you're over a certain age), but getting on their level to play that board game, zoom those cars, or have that tea party is like nothing else. And when it's over; that little kid(s) can climb right into your lap, for level hugs.

Game night – Find a board game and play it. Sure, you can play it at the table, and that's probably way more comfortable. But playing on the floor is like being a kid again! Get yourself a pillow, lean on it to move your pieces, and enjoy moving those pieces and strategizing those moves!

Watch a show – Make pillow chairs that are butted up against the sofa, pop some popcorn, lower the lights, and pick a television movie or show to enjoy. Gather all the pillows from all the beds and create yourself a paradise on the "beach" and imagine...it will be fun. I promise!

Exercise – One funny exercise (according to my kids) I enjoy doing is scoots along the floor. I sit up and move my hips back and forth to scoot across the rug. I also lie on my side while watching a show and do leg lifts. Sometimes I do planks (from my elbows.) This often occurs while we're watching a show from the sofa, because I get tired of sitting.

Organize – Go ahead and grab that drawer or that box of old recipes, or whatever is a mess, and set yourself up a station on the floor. Put on some music or a Hallmark movie in the background, and spread out your categories and papers and all the things while you sort and shift and smile...at a job well done when everything's back in order.

Do you ever sit on the floor? It definitely gets harder as we age. But it sure is fun as long as we can stand it, because it somehow changes the view and the feel and the experience. And heck, you might even catch a glimpse of that grape you dropped a month ago that rolled under the sofa...out of sight.

## **FRESH THYME – Is It All Good? – by Marcy Lytle**

Knowledge. It's a good thing, right? We start training and teaching our kids how to talk, the proper way to hold a fork instead of using their fingers, to use the bathroom and wash their hands, and all the things one needs to know to grow up into adulthood. All of that is good. It's necessary.

Knowledge. It's a good thing, right? In school, we are taught that more learning and more achievement and more awards are the best route for a successful life. We place our kids in clubs, we encourage them to go to college, and we are so proud when they land a job using that knowledge they've learned. All of that is good. It's necessary.

Knowledge. It's a good thing, right? We want to know where our kids are and what they are doing at all times, to ensure their safety. We demand to know salaries and benefits and expectations before saying yes to a new position at work. We must know the workings behind our nation's leaders, the origin of viruses, the why's of the universe and how things work, and even the knowledge of what lies ahead...so we can be prepared. All of that is good? Is it necessary?

Of course, we know that knowledge is good and necessary. But is ALL of it good?

I recently read the story again of the 12 spies that went in to check out the land God had already given the people. 10 of those spies came back in fear because of the giants in the land, and only 2 came back with confidence that the land was good for the taking, and the giants could be overcome. Why? It was because God had told them to go and that He would go before them. Knowledge of the giants produced two different outcomes in the twelve that saw them, and fear overtook most.

As I read further, I saw those that were afraid to go into the promised land because of the knowledge that there were giants were called *arrogant*. That word and that description intrigued me, but as I read further what I discovered was this:

They wanted to know just how difficult the next step was going to be so they could fortify themselves and "fill their cabinets" to ensure they could take care of themselves in the battle. And while knowledge (like all the lists above) is a good thing, too much knowledge can bleed over into self-preservation and complete lack of trust in the WORD of God.

Here's what I realized, in my own life. I'd like to know what lies ahead, how long I am going to be on this earth, will my husband and I live to a ripe old age and avoid disease or sickness. Will my kids be successful and avoid tragedy and hardship? In other words, I'd like to see the giants, too. I want to go ahead and scope out what's before us. All for what? What would I do with that knowledge?

Knowledge, just like so many things in life, is awesome. But it's also deadly. Those folks that became fearful and went with the 10 spies' report weren't allowed to proceed to the land flowing with milk and honey. Their fear of the giants, and their knowledge of what was before them, caused them to tremble instead of trust. And that wasn't a good thing, in God's eyes.

I think it's hard to get up daily and walk in the promises of God – his goodness – his mercy – his everlasting love – his guidance and all of those things. And it's hard because there are at least a dozen giants that appear on the horizon daily – news of illness, one that died, another lost her job, still another's son has left his faith, and so on. All of that knowledge we acquire on a daily basis somehow overshadows the word that tells us to march forward and observe the sunrise, give thanks, and be strong and courageous in the knowledge that He is with us.

The bottom line is we'd rather have no giants and step forward loaded up with all the knowledge we've acquired and the fortifications we've made than to have His presence go before us and slay every giant we encounter with one fell swoop of His hand. We are afraid the giants are going to overtake us, and He will leave us lonely, destitute and afraid.

I've been haunted by this story since I read it again, because of my own demand and desire to have knowledge about the future steps that lie before me, because of the report of "giants" in the land.

I don't want to miss out on watching His hand fight and win battles for me, in favor of stumbling and falling as I fight with what's in my own arsenal. My weapons are plastic, and his are iron...I'm sure of that.

Knowledge. It's a good thing, right? It depends on what we really know in our heart of hearts.



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

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

March 2022



TIPS



## **The Dressing – Four Tops – by Marcy Lytle**

Instead of dressing ourselves this month, let's dress four surfaces! The mantel, the table, the shelf in our living space, and behind the stove are four easy places to start with a room décor makeover. And spring is a great time to do it! We recently repainted our living area walls, including the dark wood above our fireplace. I love the way it brought so much more light to our space. And then the decorating began, and still continues. Here are a few suggestions and ideas, in case you want to spruce up your place!

### The mantel:

Think of grouping tall and short, and outside the symmetrical box. I decided to include a mirror on my mantel, and I was happy to find one at an antique store for a fraction of the cost of a new one online. It sits nicely to provide a backdrop for what sits in front.

A plant, some light and some height are always good options. There are so many pretty plants in pots that look so real, so find one to fit your area. While you're at the antique or vintage store, look for a unique candle. I was happy to find this gold one that stands tall and elegant. Shop the dollar spot at Target for cool finds, as well! These short votive holders are a few of my faves. And finally, add something unique to your home. This tin initial L was my unique piece. Just place everything, arrange them, step back and look at them, and enjoy your new view!

### The shelf:

The shelf I needed to decorate was the top of a console table we had moved against a tall wall. It had been behind our sofa, previously. I knew I wanted something tall, and I wanted a grouping of three – so as not to make the space too crowded. I found this beautiful art piece on Amazon – a great buy! I love the way it brings together the other colors in the room. Light and a plant completed the look...for now. I love to have a candle burning, and with spring here – lots of plants and greenery are welcome in our spaces – real or fake.

[https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07ZNC88BF/ref=ppx\\_yo\\_dt\\_b\\_asin\\_title\\_o02\\_s01?ie=UTF8&psc=1](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07ZNC88BF/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_asin_title_o02_s01?ie=UTF8&psc=1)

A good friend that is an interior decorator once told me a large wall needs some light thrown in the upward direction! This cool modern globe lamp fit the bill, and seemed to complete the space. It's modern and chic, and looks so pretty when lit!

[https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B08LYZMSLM/ref=ppx\\_yo\\_dt\\_b\\_asin\\_title\\_o02\\_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B08LYZMSLM/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_asin_title_o02_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1)

### The table:

I've always had a table runner and changed out centerpieces throughout the year. But my table had been up against a wall, mainly for serving, not for sitting. With our new remodel, we moved the table out to where we can actually sit around it and dine! I had seen in a hotel a beautiful assortment of all kinds of vases sitting on their tables, and I wanted to copy the look.

Again, we shopped at a vintage/thrift store in a small town nearby and found all five of these vases of varying heights and yet all in the same color hues. Next, we went foraging on a walk and found berries and branches and grasses – how fun! The runner is actually from the dollar spot at Target, too!

One of my favorite buys to dress up our room was these chair covers. For under \$10 each these coverings fit tightly over our antique chairs and complete the look at the table, making it very dining room-worthy.

[https://www.specialfashion.store/products/waterproof-decorative-chair-slipcover?currency=USD&variant=31008223690830&utm\\_medium=cpc&utm\\_source=google&utm\\_campaign=Google%20Shopping&gclid=Cj0KCQiAjJOQBhCkARIsAEKMtO2FP-Ccpt2oFgj2mDIsDrbH5ycjQCxV1UaFDQ7uFlwcn9t4\\_ohm4EAaAsqMEALw\\_wcB](https://www.specialfashion.store/products/waterproof-decorative-chair-slipcover?currency=USD&variant=31008223690830&utm_medium=cpc&utm_source=google&utm_campaign=Google%20Shopping&gclid=Cj0KCQiAjJOQBhCkARIsAEKMtO2FP-Ccpt2oFgj2mDIsDrbH5ycjQCxV1UaFDQ7uFlwcn9t4_ohm4EAaAsqMEALw_wcB)

### The stove:

Dressing up the area behind your stove is sometimes a fun option, with simple trays or boards. Layer them, turn them so that they're all facing a different way, and add color and interest with textures!

Dress up your space this spring with what you have, with a little greenery and a lot of light. Consider a mirror and a new piece of art. Shop on line, at thrift stores and in your own backyard. Rearrange, step back, maybe add one more thing or take away one thing. And admire the dressing you've just created...



## **Seven for You – Hydration** – by panel of women

Hydration is so important, and we all know it. But drinking enough water seems to be a never ending problem for so many of us. From fancy water bottles to supplements to timers and more, I've read about all sorts of reminders and tricks and tips on getting enough water in our bodies, daily. Our panel of women is weighing in with their struggles and their tips for staying hydrated. After all, hydration keeps our skin, our health, and our digestive system in tip-top shape – just from drinking water! But it's hard for some of us, as you'll find out from reading below...

I drink tap water almost exclusively, other than my morning green tea with toasted rice. Once in a while, for a treat, I will have a mini soda. This isn't because I'm so good, so health conscious, or so anything. It's because I LIKE water and dislike so many other options. Ten years ago we installed a whole house water filtration system (not like a salt water softener) that uses a charcoal filter and produces unlimited, wonderful, drinkable water from every faucet in the house, even outdoors. It's made by Pelican and I'm so grateful for it. Since I'm a "connoisseur" of tap water (and I don't enjoy bottled water, either, but sometimes have no choice), I like trying other people's tap water, too. My son's is also really good water, but otherwise I have my own with me if I leave home, just in case! Sometimes in the summer, I will add a squeeze of lemon from our amazing Myer lemon tree in it, but isn't necessary for me to enjoy the water all by itself. – Debbie

The 7 months a year that are cooler, I stay hydrated with herbal tea. The rest of the warmer months I do not do a good job at all. I know it sounds crazy but I'm not thirsty and forget to drink. I've tried the cute water bottles, setting a giant container out to monitor my water through the day, etc. Nothing has become a habit. I will be looking forward to the replies you get to this question. Perhaps there will be a "trick" I can utilize and be successful with in the future. – Shelley

I have been in the habit of drinking 3-4 large Yeti-type containers a day. It helps me keep up with how much I'm drinking. I also, throw in hot tea coconut water, or sparkling water to add some zing. There are days that I forget, but not often. It's become a lifestyle. I know it's kept me healthy and hydrated. – Tanya

I'm not great at water drinking. One bottle in the morning, one in the afternoon and one at night - and Dasani is my choice! For additional hydration I drink BodyArmor Lyte - Peach Mango. It has no sugar added. - Sherril

When it comes to water I don't really think about it too much just because it's become a normal for me. I'm a college student so I'm ALWAYS on the go and part of my daily habits, and quite honestly necessities, is my 24 oz. water bottle that I carry around with me everywhere; whether in my backpack on my way to class, my purse at work, or even my hand while I take a trip into the grocery store it's always on me like a lifeline. It's honestly become such a habit that I don't even think about it anymore. It's the last thing I do before I grab my keys to leave my apartment and if I forget my bottle upstairs, I will definitely be running back up to get it! - Sofia

I have such a hard time staying hydrated! I have a water dispenser in my office, cups right next to it and a water bottle on my desk that if filled, it stays full for days! At one time I had a water bottle that was connected to my cell phone and would remind me when it was time to drink. I lost it somewhere! Looking forward to tips from others on staying hydrated! – Anita

I have not found the solution to this problem. Still trying to get myself to drink enough water. – Beth

I drink lots of water each day. I try to drink at least six to eight glasses but some days that's hard. I drink coffee and green tea, but I no longer drink soft drinks. I replaced these with water which makes it somewhat easier to get enough. I went on a diet about ten years ago called "The 17 Day Diet" by Dr. Mike Moreno. I lost weight and felt so much healthier from this diet. One of Dr. Moreno's main recommendations for good health is drinking lots of water, which is what I did. He refers to his diet as a healthy lifestyle plan. It's the kind of diet or healthy eating you can do for the rest of your life. And with ten grandkids to keep up with, I need to be healthy. – Carole

I drink water as my drink of choice for every meal. I started this change about 20 years ago and have stayed with it. I do have a coke or Slurpee once every week or so! However, for me, I'm not a drink-in-hand type of person, and I don't even drink coffee. So if I don't choose water as my drink with my meals, I for sure won't get enough. Making that choice also enabled me to lose weight. I do add lemon, but I'm not a fan of sparkling water or flavored waters. Just plain water. It took me a full year of the change to stop craving soda, but now I actually prefer water. I'm sure I should be using a cool bottle, but I still buy water bottles. Maybe that will be next year's resolution...- Marcy

When I first started drinking water, it was hard because I had been a Dr. Pepper drinker. I kept a gallon jug of water on my desk. When my glass was half full, I filled it up again and took lots of bathroom breaks. After about two weeks, my body began to adjust, and the bathroom breaks became less frequent. I noticed that the more water I drank, the more I wanted. My husband once read in a doctor's office that if you really love your spouse, the first thing you bring them in the morning is a bottle of water -- that is what he wakes me with now every morning. I keep this handy thermos bottle close by and drink about three a day. This is in addition to the 20 oz bottle I drink first thing in the morning. When I visit restaurants, or it's cold outside, I drink hot water with lemon and a little honey. It's good for the soul! – Edith

It's so hard to get the right amount of water. One of the reasons I ended up needing surgery was my bad habit of not drinking enough water. I never realized how important it was until it was too late. I used to put flavoring in my water. My favorite flavoring choice was by Mio. I stopped using water flavoring when I realized it was causing other problems from the artificial sugar. I now use lime or lemon juice. I love Santa Cruz pure lime juice. If I want my water a bit sweet, I can add real sugar to it.

My hospital stays always came with one of their large plastic water pitchers with measurements marked on them. I took them home with me and use them daily. They are easy to keep track of how much water I'm drinking a day. I did learn that other fluids and water found in foods count toward your water requirements but they should never be substituted for all your water needs. For me, drinking one of the pitchers of water is all I need each day. – Cathy

I drink water and that's it. I have two cups of coffee every morning and then its water until about 8 pm. I don't like sparkling water or flavored water. I quit drinking soft drinks about ten years ago but will admit to having one or two a month when we get a hamburger. Honestly, I just have a Yeti full of water while I work and try to make myself take a drink every time I think about it. Some days I do well and some days I don't drink enough. I should keep up with the exact amount, but I know I have at least four full glasses a day - maybe six! - Melissa

Staying hydrated is very important for me as a singer, and as someone who contends with Scleroderma, an autoimmune disease that zaps my health. I drink a full glass of water when I first wake up in the morning. Just plain filtered water dispensed from my refrigerator. Then I fill my [Bubba](#), and I try to drink all 32 ounces of water, and then refill it again and drink all that water. Bubba sits on my desk while I write, and he comes into the studio with me when I practice music or record. He is right next to me when I exercise on my elliptical for 30 minutes. Bubba is easy to clean, and is durable, since I have had him for over a year. I love my adult sippy cup, Bubba! – Angela

For many years I have struggled with making sure I was hydrated. Having a life-long love affair with Dr. Pepper has not been helpful because I would rather drink Dr. Pepper than water, of course. However, I have found a flavored water that has a very small amount of sugar. Bai Antioxidant Cocofusion has helped me eliminate Dr. Pepper. It is a coconut pineapple flavored antioxidant beverage. Sometimes I add a splash of orange juice. Pour this over crushed ice and I have a treat! Bai has many other flavor selections, but this is the one I prefer. - Gina

I like drinking water with various vitamin packets added (like Emergen-C or Elderberry immunity packets). Drinking enough water every day is very difficult and one thing that has helped me in the past is to carry around a water bottle (freebie from a company my husband works for) that has the time of day marked on the side. I fill the bottle up two times a day and try to drink the marked amount each hour. The times work well with my work hours, but I don't like having to hand wash the bottle, so sometimes it sits off to the side of the counter waiting for me to "feel like" washing it. Also, I have to start right away to keep up with the marked times on my bottle which sometimes is difficult because I like to ease into my morning activities. Some days, if I get too far behind the suggested amount, I have given up on trying, to keep drinking water. - Jennifer

### **Three Moms – YES Day – by The Cousins**

Have you and your kiddos seen the movie Yes Day? If you have, your kids may have tugged at your arm for weeks after...begging for their own “yes” days to happen. So we thought it would be fun, with spring break this month, to offer suggestions and ideas from our three moms on what a yes day might entail...whether you have money or not. And we hope it encourages you to start a YES day or week with your family (with limits, of course...) Who knows, you might want to have a YES day for yourself, as well!

#### Mom of Three

We loved the YES Day movie! I decided to include the kids in the answer to this question! Of course, everything was a splurge when they first answered! But honestly, with more free time in the past year or two, we’ve had lots of time to make a YES day.

First answer was *swimming!* If it’s warm enough, our family loves to swim. Even an indoor pool might be an option. It’s a fave for our family.

Parks – *different parks* – we love to explore the city, the neighborhood, etc. We like to explore the different playgrounds to see all of their amenities.

*Fast food/ice cream* – We love to try something different at each place, just for fun!

*The zoo* – There are a few close by that are fairly inexpensive. It’s a perfect spring activity, because kids love animals!

*Bubble parties* – In the backyard, we just go to town with bubbles, bubble machines, different bubble wands, etc!

Splurges – A baseball game is a fun family activity or another sporting event, and a concert! We recently took our kids to a college football game! There’s also a resort near us, so that would be a fun splurge – or a theme park or water park! Kalahari is a resort park near us.

As parents, we like to surprise the kids with ice cream runs at night, or shopping, too! We might give the kids each \$10 or go to the dollar store as a surprise. We buy one board game and return home to play! In spring break, we like doing something little each evening and then a splurge on the weekend – a YES week! Free days and spontaneous outings are wonderful moments to create, whether we have lots of funds or not!

#### Mom of Two

I wish every day could be a YES day!

My girls, at their ages, are pretty easy and “cheap” to please! I know this will change! But the five things they would choose are:

*The Factory* – It’s a *happy place* with lots of arcade games and a trampoline – a day there to jump and play and ride go karts, etc. This is more of a splurge. They also get tickets to obtain prizes at the end of the day.

*The park* – this is free! We have so many different ones in our area and a little bit of a drive away. We pack an easy lunch and go!

*A new restaurant* – even at McDonalds or wherever. They love ordering and sitting down, and maybe at a place that gives coloring pages or has a play area.

*The movies* – On Tuesdays it's half-off where we live, so the girls love to get a snack and watch a new story on the big screen!

*A nail salon* – This is something our girls love – to paint their nails – and it's not too much for polish and fun! They're definitely girly girls!

### Mom of Four

Some of our ideas for YES day actually ARE inspired by the fun movie of the same name.

Our kids love to do a makeover – dress Mom and do her makeup, and dress Dad – and make us both go out in public in whatever they have asked us to wear!

The kids would love to have one hour to parent us where they are they are the parents and we are the kids.

Another YES idea is that the kids want to prepare the meals for breakfast, lunch and dinner, which probably means sugar, sugar and more sugar!

One of our girls, Anna, would love to have a volleyball tournament outside with the family. She wants a competitive event, so that might include basketball as well! (And she wants to win.)

All of the kids would like to play and build a pillow fort and make messes that they don't have to clean up.

A splurge for YES day would be a water park like Great Wolf Lodge - or any local park with water!

## **In the Kitchen - Go, Green!** – by Marcy Lytle

We're all told to eat more greens. So March is a good month to think about the colors on our plates. And why not green, since we're also supposed to wear the color so we don't get pinched. Do you actually pinch people if they're not wearing green on St. Patrick's Day? I remember just panicking when I was a kid if I showed up at school without visible green in my outfit! It was a real thing that we took so seriously (and delightfully, I might add) as we looked for those we could pinch!

No pinches this month, just some good eating with the color green on your plate. Here are some fun recipes:

Greens in a bowl – When at the farmer's market, purchase some fresh greens and breads, and use them for salads – yes. But save some for topping a rice or pasta bowl, with all the other pretties, as well.

### **Pretty bowl lunch**

- Pasta or rice for the base
- Sliced ham
- Pepitas
- Cherry tomatoes
- Cucumbers
- Greens
- Black beans
- Fresh bread

Cook your pasta or rice, drain and arrange in the bottom of each bowl.

Fry the ham just a bit, slice the cukes, drain the beans, and slice the bread. Then arrange on top of the base in your bowl, and add a bit of your favorite dressing, and enjoy!

Greens in soup – Chicken tortilla soup isn't usually a "greens" soup, but we tasted one recently with zucchini and it was divine! We also tried Ally's Kitchen Italian sausage and kale soup, which we were able to use the leftovers later on a pizza!

<https://allyskitchen.com/quick-collards-and-potatoes-italian-soup/>

### **Chicken tortilla soup**

- 2 cups zucchini diced
- 2 cups frozen carrots and peas
- ½ c white onion diced
- 2 cups shredded chicken

Base:

- 1 32oz can diced tomatoes

- ½ c white onion roughly sliced
- 1 cup packed cilantro
- 2 large cloves garlic
- 2 cups chicken bone broth (one carton)
- Salt to taste

Toppings:

Tortilla chips, avocado, shredded cheese, cilantro, lime

In a processor, place the base ingredients except for the broth, and blend. Then add the broth. Pour this into a saucepan and bring to a boil. In a saute pan, melt butter and saute onion til fragrant, add carrots and peas, and cook 5 minutes. Add the zucchini and cook till veggies are tender. Transfer the veggies to the soup pot, and stir in the chicken. Reduce heat and simmer 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Taste and just flavor with salt.

Enjoy with your toppings!

Greens in a salad – Nancy’s Chopped Salad and Ultimate Winter Salad (I know, it’s March) are two great ones to try this month!

### **Ultimate Winter Salad**

- 6 oz shredded kale
- ½ small lemon juiced
- 1T olive oil
- 6oz shredded brussels, cabbage, carrots
- 2 med apples
- 1½ c candied pecans (pecans in a skillet with 1 T maple syrup and 1 T whole grain mustard – cook med low til sticky – let cool.)
- 4 oz crumbled goat cheese
- 1 ½ c butternut squash (put on baking sheet with 1 T avocado oil and pinch of sea salt – roast at 425 til browned and soft, about 15 minutes).
- ½ c pomegranate aril

Dressing:

- ½ c red wine vinegar
- 4 T Dijon mustard
- 4 T pure maple syrup
- ¼ t sea salt
- ¼ t pepper
- ½ olive oil

Put the kale in a very large salad bowl. Add lemon and olive oil, use your hands to massage into the greens, for about a minute. The greens should wilt and become deep green. Add the other shredded veggies, apple and pecans.

Make the dressing by adding the ingredients in a lidded glass jar, shake hard for 30 seconds, then pour over salad and mix well.

Add cheese, squash, and arils on top.

### **Nancy's Chopped Salad**

The dressing –

- 4 cloves garlic
- 2 T dried oregano
- 2 t kosher salt
- Fresh black pepper
- 2 T lemon juice
- ¼ c red wine vinegar
- ¼ cup olive oil

Salad and assembly –

- 1 15oz can chickpeas, drained
- 1 small red onion sliced thin
- ½ lb provolone cheese in ¼ ribbons
- ½ lb salami, cut into ¼ inch ribbons
- 4-8 pepperoncini sliced into rings
- ¾ lb cherry tomatoes
- Sea salt
- 1 head iceberg lettuce halved, into ½ inch ribbons
- 1 head radicchio, halved into ¼ inch ribbons
- 2 T dried oregano (optional)

Make the dressing – chop the garlic and add the oregano, salt and ½ t pepper. Make a grainy paste, transfer to a large salad bowl, then add the lemon and vinegar. Mix with a fork, allowing salt to dissolve, then add the oil and whisk til combined. It should be thick with garlic and oregano.

Assemble the salad – gently fold in the chickpeas, red onion, provolone, salami, pepperoncini into the dressing, one at a time. Halve the tomatoes lengthwise and season with 1 ½ t sea salt, set aside til serving.

To serve – gently add the tomatoes, lettuce and radicchio to the bowl, with a couple generous pinches of oregano, toss to combine. Adjust seasonings and serve immediately.



Green on a sandwich – We recently enjoyed a simple ham sandwich with pesto as our dressing, instead of the usual mayo or mustard. It tasted wonderful – on a wheat hamburger bun – how about that!

Here's a simple **pesto recipe** for your next sandwich –

- ½ c olive oil
- Juice from 1 lemon
- 3-4 garlic cloves
- 1 large handful salted roasted cashews
- 2 cups packed basil
- Salt and pepper
- Small handful of pine nuts

Combine all ingredients in a food processor or blender, and blend tili smooth. Add more lemon if you desire.

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

Pre-packaged salads are awesome – alone as a meal, or on top of tostadas or tacos or as part of bowl (especially the lime crunch one from HEB).

Have you heard of the Umbra battery operated soap pump? It’s awesome and so pretty in the kitchen!

Spring sweaters, why haven’t I thought of them before? They’re lightweight, in spring colors and are perfect in the season transition!

Do you know the word “drupe?” We were talking about nuts and discovered that many are drupes!

There are a few herbs that can grow indoors...so I’m told. We shall see. Stay tuned to see if this is still the same information next month!

Frozen pound cake, because it’s so dense, is perfect for cutting into cubes and dipping into chocolate fondue. When’s the last time you made fondue?

I heard the word “stirk” and neither my husband nor I knew it. Look it up!

Then watch *All Creatures Great and Small* on Masterpiece – that’s where we heard it – a delightful show!

There’s a great heartwarming drama on Netflix called *My Father’s Violin* – check it out – it’s the young actress’ debut film!

Sally Hansen quick-dry nail polish does really dry quickly – I like it! And I like doing my own nails...

Instead of buying throw pillows for outdoor furniture for each season, and finding a place to store them all, just buy pillow covers and change them out!

Same with a wreath – buy a big green full wreath and change out the picks/grass in the wreath for each season – it works!

Chicken orzo soup at Corner Bakery is delicious. If you have that restaurant near you, try this soup!

We also started watching *Around the World in 80 Days* on Masterpiece – it’s good so far- and the main actor is from the series Broadchurch.

El Nuevo, in the Austin area, has amazing food – it’s a small place we’d never been to before. So, trying a new restaurant was awesome!

My favorite cereal combo I’ve found is – Oats and More (HEB), mixed with homemade granola, and broken dark chocolate pieces (Lindt 70%) – it’s delicious!

See a dress you like, but it's way too short? Wear it as a top over your skinny – or baggy – jeans!

## **SUGAR + Spice – Take A Brow – by Angela Dolbear**

Welcome to **SUGAR + SPICE**, and everything nice in the world of beauty.

Eyebrows are proof of God's creation. They don't serve any purpose specific to survival. They are mere decorations for the face, unless you are one of those people who can express yourself by lifting only one brow, either in intrigue or disapproval.

When I was young, I had thick, bushy Italian eyebrows. I was constantly tweezing and taming my uni-brow. Now my arsenal of tweezers sits in a bathroom drawer, only to see the light of day to remove a splinter.

Nowadays, my eyebrows are almost non-existent due to hypothyroidism, or just plain age. I have had to learn the art of creating eyebrows. I have schooled myself through turning to YouTube to acquire tips and tricks. I have also amassed a variety of brow products. Here are my favorites...

[Anastasia Beverly Hills DIPBROW Pomade Waterproof Matte Brow Gel](#) (Ulta, \$21) in Auburn, has remained my go-to brow makeup. Pairing it with their [Brush 12 Dual-Ended Firm Angled Brow Brush](#) is a must. Treat yourself to this \$18 brush, because it does a phenomenal job creating a lovely brow, and it lasts for years. The pomade is easy to use, and stays put all day.

After I use the pomade, I go over my brows with a light layer of auburn brow powder, for extra smear protection. I am not a very tall person, and I don't want to leave an eyebrow on someone's shoulder after receiving a hug!

[Benefit](#) has a wide range of brow products to choose from. The [Brow Styler](#) (Ulta, \$34) is helpful in creating brows for people like me, with little to no eyebrows. The [Precisely, My Brow Pencil](#) (Ulta, \$14 mini) is excellent for filling brows in, and giving them some shape.

Three months ago, I jumped on the brow-regrowth wagon and purchased some [RapidBrow](#) (Ulta, \$39). I swipe the little wand across clean brows mornings and nights. Now I have twice as many eyebrow hairs as when I first started using RapidBrow. I still use brow pomade, but now I have a natural line to follow instead of a blank canvas!

### **DESERTED ISLAND product:**

Not that I would wear makeup on a deserted island, but if I was feeling like I wanted to look a little more presentable to the seagulls and giant tropical spiders, I would first reach for the [CeraVe AM Facial Moisturizing Lotion with SPF 30 and Hyaluronic Acid](#) (Amazon, \$12.49) off my bamboo dressing table in my hut. This SPF moisturizer works really well under makeup. It doesn't ball-up into gross little white goo balls when I start applying my foundation. It is affordable and available at just about any drugstore, or from Amazon. Since, Amazon delivers to my deserted island... Blessings to you!

*Angela Dolbear, Beauty Editor, is the author of contemporary spiritual novels, such as [THE GARDEN KEY](#) Series, and [THE TORMENTOR'S TALE](#), as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). She is also a self-proclaimed beauty junkie, and has been since long before her mother allowed her to start wearing makeup at the age of 14. She keeps UPS and the USPS busy delivering small boxes*

*on a regular basis from Ulta, Sephora, Amazon, and many independent cosmetics companies to her home Nashville, TN. Please connect with her at [www.AngelaDolbear.com](http://www.AngelaDolbear.com)*



HOME

## **Practical Parenting – Give Them Space**

Maybe you have one child and she has all the space she needs, or maybe you have four children and they're all on top of each other and you. Any amount of children requires space, and sometimes it's hard to find the space in the home where they can each thrive individually, and you as a parent can, too! However, there are some fun ways to give them space...so that you can enjoy your own, as well.

**A Big Box** – I was recently at my daughter's house and her 8 year old was sitting in a huge box she had packed with pillows and a blanket, and books. She informed me that it was her reading nook. So next time you have a large order delivered, keep the box and let her/him create a space to sit in the corner of the room, on the back porch, or in the garage. How fun!

**Clear a Shelf** – Floating shelves on the wall, shelves in the closet, a shelf in the bathroom...give the kids ONE shelf that is for display. Let them have their own space to create and change out, much like you do, when you redecorate for seasons. She might want to display her latest Lego creation and he might want a space for his latest artwork with a light and all. One shelf, small or big, that they can own. A game changer!

**Divide a Room** – If your kiddos share a room, consider one of those room dividers, or be creative and make one with a large bookshelf. This way each has their own space in the room to keep clean, keep off limits and keep to themselves. A folding room divider is a good option because it can be folded and put away when friends come to play.

**Hobby Bins** – Does she love to help you in the kitchen? Start her own bin full of her own cookware – like an apron, rolling pin, measuring cups, and more. Allow her to have her own collection of items she chooses that she can pull out when baking or making with you. Maybe he or she would like their own toolbox. Harbor Freight has some really cute roomy ones to start them with – and then let them start collecting a measuring tape, their own hammer, etc. Label the bin/box and let them own it, keep it, add to it, and use it!

**Hooked on Hooks** – Hooks on walls inside the closet, in the bathroom, and on their walls are amazing space savers – because they help get things up off the floor! Install hooks in the bathroom for their towels. Hooks in the closet for hanging hats and jewelry and anything else that can hang! Hooks near the back door for backpacks so they're not thrown on the floor. Hooks in the pantry for lunchboxes and more. Scour the house and see what's left on the floor and consider more hooks!

That's just five ideas. But it's worth taking time this spring to look at the house and see where you're all cramped. Maybe blankets and pillows drive you crazy when the kids carry them to the living space on the weekends. A huge basket near the sofa might be a good place to roll blankets for the living space, and bed blankets must be left on the bed! Perhaps all the games and where to store them is driving you all nuts! Clean out that closet this season and make an entire space just for games – organized, labeled, put together and nice. When one comes out, one goes back.

Space – we all need it. Our kids need it, too. And figuring out how to make that happen makes the whole family sigh and breathe and smile, together in sweet harmony!



## **I Don't Do Teenagers – Are They Ready? – by Marcy Lytle**

What's the timeline for unleashing our kids and letting them go? Is there one? There's a big difference between our 13 year old and our 18 year old. One is just beginning the teen years, and the other one is about to go off to college. Will we have taught them enough; are they ready, have we been a good example to them? Questions swirl in the minds of parents, especially when they wake up and realize their kids were once toddlers and now they're teens.

Let's look at a few things about your teens and the readiness scale....just to ease your minds and your spirits as you navigate these years!

**Seeing PG-13 movies:** Every kid is different, and every kid is affected differently by visuals. Just like some kids learn better academically through hands-on experiences rather than sitting at a desk, some teens take in stories they see with their eyes way more than others. Sex is not portrayed in a godly manner on the big screen, as most stories include sex before marriage. Talk about it, look up the synopsis of the movie, and talk about it after they've seen it, if you allow them to do so. Always err on the side of caution.

**Getting a driver's license:** Is your teen totally motivated to do the book work required, and is he obedient already to your directives at home? If not, it's a good bet that your teens won't be on the road, either. Don't push this one. Every teen matures at a different pace, and if the work and the obedience aren't present, they don't need to be behind a wheel.

**Dating:** What a big topic! I had friends that didn't allow one-on-one dating until their kids were 18! Others took their 13 year olds to the mall and let them experience a group date. Dating is a scary thing these days, and it's our job to protect our kids. Communication is HUGE on this one. Talk about boundaries, sex, respect and safety - all big prerequisites for dating. And once this one is let out of the bag, it's hard to stuff it back in!

**Getting a job:** If kids want a job; are responsible and show it with chores at home, they might be ready. But maybe your teen doesn't want a job at all, and only wants you to hand him/her the money when she wants it. Attitudes are something that need to be tamed, as kids seek out jobs. Respect must be given and received. And integrity has to be present. Start with giving the younger teens the job of cleaning the car, clearing the table, and see how they do. Talk about everything. Listen to everything. And pray about everything.

**Staying overnight at a friend's house:** Some kids do not want their parents asking questions and meeting the other parents, before staying the night. If that is the case, then that's a red flag. It's never a good thing to send your kid overnight to a home where you haven't met the parents, know nothing about older siblings, and are unaware of what the rules are in that house. Start with having that friend over to your house, and observe that kid's behavior. That will tell you a lot!

**Babysitting:** I think this is a scary situation, these days. But some kids love to play with kids, and it's a good first job in earning money. However, one big factor is how your teen does when asked to put away his phone and remove her ear pods. Neither of those can be a distraction

when watching kiddos. Maybe start with having the children at your house, so you can supervise while your teen babysits a few times, with you nearby.

**Managing a bank account:** It's SO GOOD for kids to learn to give, save, and spend. That's why it's so fun to buy the little kids those banks that total up the change as it's inserted and saved. Once your teen starts earning money or has an allowance, use that moment to teach her the importance of right order with dollars. Show them by example, of giving first, saving next, and spending last. This is a hard one!

In fact, everything about raising teens and navigating the dark waters with them is downright terrifying! Don't let what other parents do dictate how you manage your kids. Extend grace and communicate a lot. And slow down your own schedule so that nothing slips by, that you're aware, and that they know you care.

## **An Adage a Day – Attention!** – by Carole Gilbert

I have always been an “odd duck.” You may have heard me say that before. It's true. I have always been a little different, even as a child. I thought differently, played differently, and liked things differently from the other kids.

When I was in first grade, I got into trouble and my mother was called to join me in the principal's office all because I started a little business on the playground. I was selling plastic bugs and flowers I had made in my Mattel Creepy Crawler machine. I was such an entrepreneur even at six years old. I didn't think this was odd at the time even if the other kids weren't having businesses. I was making lots of money and trading for lots of cool little toys. And I didn't think of it as a distraction for the teachers, I had a lot of the kids' attention and was keeping them lined up being calm and quiet waiting for their turn to shop with me. But nonetheless, my business was shut down and I was thought of as somewhat of an odd duck.

It's curious how people are sometimes pegged by terms that include ducks. There's the odd duck, which refers to a person that is different or strange in some way. It is thought to have originated in the early 1800's by Hans Christian Andersen in his fairy tale of “The Ugly Duckling.” I love that story! Maybe that's why I don't mind being an odd duck.

Then there's the “lame duck.” This phrase was started in about the 1830's and it refers to someone, mostly to a politician, who was down on their luck. And that leads us to a “lucky duck.” This is the person who is lucky even without trying. It also is used in a political way at times.

It's fun to note here, that Austin, Texas has a restaurant named Odd Duck while Taylor, Texas, just thirty-three miles away, has a restaurant named Lucky Duck Cafe. They sound like wonderful restaurants if you're ever in that area. And they most definitely have interesting names.

I've always loved ducks or anything having to do with ducks like the childhood game, Duck, Duck, Goose. This is an energetic game that is supposed to help children learn to make decisions. I just always thought it was a lot of fun.

When my daughter was in high school, she participated in FFA, so we had goats and lambs along with the normal cats and dog. Her junior year she wanted to try ducks. She got two of the cutest little ducks. She fed them, took care of them, and watched them grow. We had a small children's pool for them to swim in.

One day, she and my husband were filling the pool with water and simply playing with the ducks when they noticed them having an odd habit. If my daughter sprayed the water in the air where it would shower the ducks, they would stand at attention facing the shower of water, and when my daughter stopped spraying, they would stop standing and go back to swimming around.

Again and again, "Attention!" And up straight and tall they would stand. It was such an odd sight. They truly were "Odd ducks!"

There's another phrase about ducks. It's about us being good at something. It refers to something coming easy or natural for you whereas it may not be for others. You take to that something like "a duck takes to water."

As we think about attention, I had my teacher's attention back in first grade and I really had my mama's at the principal's office. My daughter's ducks had ours especially upon the command, "Attention."

So where is most of our attention today? God wants our attention. Knowing Him can come naturally. Are we listening to Him? Are we taking to Him like a duck takes to water?

## **Tiny Living – Oh the Things! – by Brian Enterline**

*Baby, it was cold outside...*

Winter in a trailer was like living in a freezer one moment then in an oven the next. It was extremely hard to regulate the temperature. I have no idea why! But February has become the cold month of the year where we live and this year was no exception.

My guess for the flux in temps would be that's the trailer is not insulated properly. And one problem we have, with needing so much heat, is that we run out of propane quickly! A few weeks ago, it had been very difficult to even find available propane so we had to use what we had very sparingly.

We use propane for our heater, our shower, to wash dishes, to cook on the stove and oven...and it goes quickly. We have to rinse the dishes off in cold water; then use the hot water for the soap, and to really clean the plates.

We all try and take quick showers. We have space heaters so that we can attempt to keep the main heat off until we're absolutely freezing! I often use our George Foreman grill, and even the microwave, to prevent using the stove top and oven.

To travel into town and get propane for our trailer is almost an hour's drive each way to get the tank filled, so we have no choice but to try and use the propane as little as possible.

We try and stay dressed pretty warm, as well. Hats and socks on help a lot. And lots of layers. One would think we live in a frozen tundra, but it's Central Texas!

Oh the things we wouldn't need to worry about in a normal home! I guess if we're ever in a survival situation, we will have figured things out pretty well.

And thankfully, a new month is here when we will hopefully begin to thaw...

## **A Night to Remember – Rainbows and Gold – by Marcy Lytle**

St Patrick's Day is this month with all the "Luck o' the Irish" hoopla and pots of gold at the end of the rainbow! If one can find the pot of gold, believed to be at the end of the rainbow, it is believed among superstitious culture that one will have success and happiness. And furthermore, according to Irish folklore, there are little leprechauns that hide the pot of gold for mere mortals to find. It's a symbol of luck due to its connection to rainbows, which are considered to be magical and a sign of hope and prosperity.

Is any of that folklore and story and superstition true?

Preparation: Print and cut out large letters (in different colors if you wish) that spell RAINBOW. Count how many light switches are in the entire house. Read through the lesson and place your letters where they belong. Finally, purchase a bag of gold chocolate coins and have them ready for the last clue.

We're going to go on a search for the pot of gold at the end of a rainbow by finding the letters that spell rainbow, then putting them together to find the last clue to see what's really there!

**R** - First clue: Just inside the door of something that runs but has no legs is the first letter R in the word rainbow. (Hide the R inside the fridge door.)

*Who created the rainbow?*

Read Genesis 9:13 God set the rainbow in the cloud. There's nothing magical about its creation, but rather it's supernatural made by God himself!

**A** – Second clue: All around the house are light switches, can you guess how many? The one who guesses the closest can then find the letter A on one of these switches in the house. (Tape the letter A to one of the switches.)

*Why did God create the rainbow?*

Read Genesis 9:15-16 God set the rainbow in the sky as a promise, not a sign of luck. It was a promise made after Noah's ark and the long days of flooding rain that the earth would never be destroyed like that again.

**I** – Third clue: You can look out one of these each morning to see if there's a rainbow in the sky. (Set the letter I on a window sill in the house). Go find the I!

*How are rainbows formed in the sky?*

Rainbows don't just appear out of thin air, there's actually something scientific that happens to cause them to show up so that we can see them. Light strikes water droplets at a precise angle of 42 degrees and this beautiful multicolored arc appears. Isn't that cool?

**N** – Fourth clue: People stop to take pictures of rainbows when they appear because they don't show up all that often. And when they do, they're breathtaking! Open the front door and look beneath your feet for the letter N – then look out and tell us something beautiful you see today.

*What makes something breathtakingly beautiful?*

Read Ezekiel 1:28 This writer saw the glory of the Lord and described it as a rainbow-like glow. We often describe all the things we see in the sky as glorious – from sunrise to sunset – the handiwork of God!

**B** – Fifth clue: Big things make us look and observe, don't they? Like giant trees, huge monster trucks, and large sums of money! Find the biggest bed in the house for the letter B.

*Can we take a drive to find the end of a rainbow?*

Rainbows are huge! Can one really ever find the end of a rainbow? Have you tried? It's scientifically impossible because when you move toward the rainbow the angles change, so you never can come to the read end!

**O** – Sixth clue: Something green is what we wear on St. Patrick's Day, so look through the house for a green plant or two, until you find the letter O.

*Is the word "rainbow" anywhere else in the Bible?*

Yes! It's at the end, when we read of Jesus coming back to earth to take us all to heaven! Revelation 10:1 says "He was robed in a cloud, with a **rainbow** above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars." Close your eyes and imagine that!

**W** – Seventh clue: The last letter of the word is found in a pot of gold! Look on the counter in the kitchen! (Have a small bowl of gold covered chocolate coins for all to enjoy.)

Pots of gold are just candy in a bowl, eaten today and gone tomorrow. But the promises of God are written in the sky, forever and ever and ever, Amen.

## Chipped China – Wild and Free – by Jennifer Lytle

It's the weekend of the latest freeze. Most local schools have been closed for two days. A random text came in a mostly forgotten group chat for one of the kid's spring sports. It was a birthday party, and we were all invited.

"Ugh. I'm not sure about going." I thought in a mumble-tone to myself. "Saturday is supposed to be our day of rest."

I wonder how you would describe your faith? Conservative, careful, considerate? Those are appropriate adjectives for my faith around 70% of the time.

The kids and I went on a whim despite the weather and ickies going around. You know, that time of year and all.

Fortunately, we had been observing an informal Sabbath for the two previous days, unexpectedly, and it was time to get out and mingle.

"Let's do this! The kids will have fun. They haven't been to the theme park in over a year."

"Ugh. That place is pretty expensive. I could save this money for our upcoming birthday festivities." My thoughts argued in a frowny tone.

However I mustered up the courage to take all of my kiddos out sans Dad; I did it!

When we got there, I was so glad to have taken us out for the adventure. Our hosts were gracious. They were also grateful. No other family had come out, and our presence alone was a gift.

While I was standing near the ball pit ([Yes! That same one!](#)) I considered trying out the swinging ropes. I waited for an adventurer to traverse through them onto a giant, roped punching bag and then grabbed one of the ropes only to be swung forward hard due to my weight. I waited for less motion to try and catch the second row of swinging ropes so I could move through this section of the obstacle course, only to find that it was tough! I wanted to maneuver with more grace, but it was tricky. My legs swung asunder, and I tried to steady myself upright. Finally, I relented with a shimmy down to the ball pit and attempted to shorten my hang. I quickly got out of the ball pit and hoped no adult had been eyeing my unseemly plight through a three-rowed rope obstacle.

IMAGE Attached [Jumping In]

As I sat on the edge of the pit, I observed an energetic group bound through the ropes that had disgraced me. The two older girls quickly moved through the section, but the younger boy wanted to conquer the ropes. He let his legs careen at opposite ends with a massive grin on his face. He laughed as the ropes wrangled him, and it seemed his carefree spirit mastered that obstacle. His winning heart shone, and our two attitudes couldn't have been more juxtaposed.

IMAGE Attached [Swing Wild (foot in bar)]

I wondered about the beauty and innocence of childhood. How would children grow or learn without being oblivious to the preposterous positions they might find themselves in as they



discover any number of new and odd activities? Walking and even crawling come with falls and bumps and blips.

IMAGE Attached [More Than a Conquerer]

Is this why Jesus seemed to love little children so much? (Please see [Mark 10:13-16](#).) They will freely, wildly pursue their call?

I want my faith to be like that; when I face an obstacle squarely and with peace through unfettered joy at the opportunity. I pray that the next experience I have to live out my faith, I laugh and take hold of the metaphorical swinging rope. May I dive into the challenge with abandon, assured that though I may fall, I will get back up again. (Please see [Proverbs 24:16](#).)

Let the fear of my failure shrink and the concern over my appearance diminish. May I carry out my call in freedom to be who He called me to be, to do what He called me to do, to say what He called me to say, and to go where He called me to go.

I want to be wild and free like that little boy who wrestled with and conquered that rope obstacle.



YOU

## **Inner Strength - “Balloon Therapy” – by Michelle Lynn Schmitt**

Kids can get our attention in unhealthy and healthy ways. My oldest son Brendan, who is mildly autistic, is in his own world a lot and wants to play by himself - so it has been a challenge knowing how to bond and how he wants attention. I'm thankful that Brendan trusts me enough to be honest with me with his feelings. Recently, he came to me and expressed what kind of attention he would like. It was an exciting moment!

He wants time right before bed to talk and share. If it's too late and he needs to go to sleep, that might be difficult, so we talked about incorporating this during the day as well. He doesn't ask me to play with him or to snuggle like Matthew does, so it takes more of a conscious effort on my part.

This request really has challenged me to look at how we spend our time together as a family. As he's gotten older, Brendan thinks he can stay up later because he's not tired. We tested that theory. He goes from saying he's not tired, to being so tired that he crashes. He has a hard time letting himself wind down. Reading is usually the tool he uses to wind down but again reading by himself doesn't fill the need for mommy-son bonding time. Some books like *Piggy* and *Gerald* are great interactive books and we've had fun playing characters in other books as well like *Dogman*.

Brendan is a thinker, so the other way we have quality time together is when I ask him if he wants to tell me what he's thinking about. Then I listen. Listening is great bonding time.

Brendan's younger brother has a hard time seeing me give Brendan attention sometimes, so that's another challenge. It's been a time for a growth for all of us, but I believe that we can do it! There are always areas as a parent that that we can do differently or improve upon - that's part of being human-perfectly imperfect. I'm thankful that the one thing I don't have to worry about is the love that my boys and I have for each other.

As someone with autism, Brendan gets hyper-focused on things which can make emotion regulation tricky. To other parents out there that are struggling with emotional regulation of their kids, here are some phrases that I have been taught to ask...

*Is it a big problem or a little problem? Check your engine.  
Are you at red (angry) or blue (calm)?*

Spending quality time together helps with emotion regulation, too. In order to do that, though, Brendan has to be reminded that too much device time is not good for him. It causes sensory overload, so if he overreact to things then chances are that he's had more than his fair share. Yes, boundaries are set, but one unknown is how much time he spends on the computer while at school. When he's not allowed to be on a device, he says he's bored.

I've been told as a parent to let kids figure out for themselves what to do when they feel bored, but I have found that even that takes training for my boys. My son has Lego projects, a magnet

set, marble tower books etc. he can play with. When he says he's bored I get the feeling it's more that he's disappointed and having trouble transitioning to something not as stimulating as playing his favorite computer game.

Other emotion regulation techniques that I have learned are providing sensory outlets, like blowing bubbles - real or pretend - and my favorite pretending to blow up and release a balloon (unless you have the real thing of course). Blowing bubbles regulates breathing, which in turn helps regulate emotions. Here's how it works: First, make a fist, put the balloon up close to your mouth, take a deep breath in, and take all your worries and then blow through your hand like you're blowing up a balloon. Then you release your fist, and can make a noise that mimics a balloon spewing out air. It's both fun and therapeutic!

Kids are a challenge, for sure. Being a mom is exhausting, in every way. Quality time is a must, but obstacles arise. Being honest, talking things through, and finding outlets that work for both me and the boys is hard – but a lifesaver. With His help, we can do it, and you can, too.

## **Life in a Nutshell – Uncovered and Charming – by Jill Montz**

Are junk drawers with Chick-fil-a sauce packets, highlighters, batteries, loose change, takeout menus, and a screwdriver (among other things) just a southern thing or does everyone have a drawer like this? What about hall closets where everything from winter coats and mismatched gloves to board games with missing pieces and odd vacuum attachments get stashed away never to be seen again? Or, in my case, do people have “miscellaneous” rooms as I lovingly refer to the third bedroom in my home? This door remains closed for good reason. One needs to be updated with a tetanus shot to enter it. I am not a hoarder by any means, but I am also not that great at finding homes for all the “things,” so they usually end up in these three general areas (or my garage...let’s not even talk about it).

Thus, I am not a fan of more “stuff” coming into my home. So when my grandfather passed away this last fall and it was time to clean out my grandparent’s house, my mom and her siblings told all of us we could take whatever had meaning to us. I choose just a few things.

- A wooden tennis racket. I think I was well into my teen years before I could finally beat either grandparent in a match.
- A cigar box and one of Papa’s pocket knives.
- A jewelry box of my grandmother’s and an elephant figurine (we both loved elephants).
- A flower pot and a pair of gardening gloves. My love of gardening has roots with her.
- A few Pecan Shed caps my Papa had kept over the years. No doubt some of them were now back in style.

And that was all I needed or asked for.

As we were loading up the items in my vehicle and helping my aunts, uncle and cousin clean out more rooms, there were several pieces of furniture that were mentioned would be nice for someone in the family to keep.

I didn’t say a word. I just kept boxing and loading and trying to blend into the floral wall paper as much as possible.

The first piece of furniture lamented over was a pair of living room chairs. My mom loved them, but unfortunately she didn’t have room for them in her condo. My cousin offered to take one and I agreed to take the other so Mom could visit it at my house. Then I ended up with a marble end table since I had the matching one already given to me a few years back. A few throw pillows were thrown in just because, and before I knew it the back of my SUV was full.

For several weeks, my mom sent me pictures of furniture, photos, clothing, and other odds and ends. Each one brought up a memory. Each one had a story. Each one seemed too special to part with but all our cars and houses and storage units were beginning to bust at the seams.

Then mom sent me the picture of this antique sofa. It was beautiful but I couldn’t quite picture it in my grandparent’s house. Then Mom reminded me where it had been and how it had been covered up with a sheet for decades in order to protect it.

I fell in love with it and had to have it.

And then when it arrived, I had to arrange three rooms in my house to make it fit.

For weeks now, I have sat on or walked past this sofa and admired its beauty and charm. The funny thing is I probably sat on it hundreds of times at my grandparent's house but never noticed how truly unique it was. Covered in a pink and blue sheet, I had always assumed it was either ripped or horribly stained from years of kids, grandkids, pets, and other people.

But, no. It was almost spotless.

In talking with mom she made me promise never to cover up the sofa again. I guess she figured with a 14-year-old in the house and other 14-year-olds visiting on a regular basis she knew things got spilled from time to time. (One look at my carpet is also a good indicator of this fact.) But even with this knowledge, she asked me never to hide it away for the sake of keeping it clean.

And I agreed.

You see, I have my other grandmother's china and I use it almost every day. Some days it only has macaroni and cheese on it and some days just a sandwich and chips. But every time I use it, I think of her.

And I smile.

Since it arrived, I have sat on the sofa often. My cat, Rae, has slept away many winter days in the afternoon sun that streaks in the room's windows and shines across the sofa cushions. Dotty has flopped her dirty backpack and her smelly feet down on it. Each and every time I pass it I think of my grandparents.

And I smile.

How often do we hide away beautiful things to protect them from wear and tear or even breakage, yet we miss out on fully enjoying them while we have them? How often do we save things for a "special day" and forget that every day is special because it is another day God has given us to live this side of heaven?

Someday I am sure this sofa will have a spot or two on it. Someday it will look a little more worn and a little less pristine. Someday, when Dotty gets to decide to keep it or toss it, I hope she will just pause and remember how much I loved it. How much joy it brought me. How it brightened up our home and my heart. And I hope that whatever choice she makes, she will remember the sofa fondly, and I hope those memories will make her pause...think of me...

And smile.

## **Healthy Habits – Just Do That – by Marcy Lytle**

Our minds are usually full and running overtime (does that describe most of us?) and we don't know how to slow them down to a state of rest. And often, just the busyness and stress of the world causes our minds to suffer in the worst of ways. Either we just can't think clearly because there's no more space for thinking, or we feel the effects of days that are too full, or we just have this brain space that doesn't seem as sharp as usual...for whatever reason.

What are some healthy habits for keeping our minds at rest, fully sharp, active but with peaceful spaces, and more? Let's unpack a few suggestions together:

### **Exercising**

We know this activity is good for our bodies, but I've found it good for the mind, as well. Especially when I exercise outside. I also find that I have to discipline myself to stop thinking about my lists and people on it, and choose to look up at the sky, the clouds, the trees, and all the beauty around me so that I still my mind to hear and give it space to listen. It's harder than I realize some days, because I've gone for an entire walk and never noticed a thing before – with a full mind!

### **Sitting**

Yes, literally bending the body to sit down with feet up for a while to rest, read, do nothing, or hey – take a nap! I know some that don't even take time to sit down to eat, but choose to stand and chew up a health bar and dart out the door. We find ourselves cleaning, taking care of others, running errands, etc. and the only time we're actually sitting is when we're behind the wheel. Choosing to sit for a while, closing our eyes to imagine we're at the feet of Jesus, clears the mind and makes space for peace.

### **Puzzling**

Whether it's a jigsaw or an anacrostic; working a puzzle is good for the mind. Some don't enjoy this sort of thing, but finding an activity that works our brain is often good for our minds. It requires a refocus from all the things in the world to a task at hand – truly apart from everything else – that requires us to think mathematically, word-wise, spacing out things, etc. We are using a different part of our mind that then gives rest to the other part (the emotions.)

### **Learning**

When is the last time you challenged yourself to learn something new? March is a good month for reading up on gardening, trying out a décor idea for that room, listening to language tapes, creating new recipes, or whatever interests you! Visit a bookstore and see what piques your interest as you browse. You might see a juggling kit and decide to try that! Don't limit yourself, and don't chide yourself, just enjoy yourself.

## Renewing

We all have patterns in our minds that have been there for decades that need to be renewed. We know what they are, but it's too hard to change, so we just settle into old ways of thinking. Renewing might look like turning away from believing lots of lies about ourselves, others and even God. Renewal takes knowing the truth and then choosing to believe it. And one of those truths to believe is that God is good – it's his character – it's who he is. And if he's a good God, then he lavishes that goodness and love on us. Start with that!

Just five things are all I'm going to list, because if we choose to start with these five, our minds will come alive. My mind is really my worst enemy, and it's partly because mine runs way too fast for comfort. In order to slow down, realign, focus and rest, I have to purposefully choose to do so. It doesn't just happen automatically. And it's a discipline I have to constantly choose often, because a weary mind makes for bad days and nights and pure exhaustion.

Think about the state of your mind this March and choose to be mindful to target the fullness, the heaviness, the percentage of lies and the weakness...and start with one thing. After all, He said to love Him with all our heart, soul, strength and mind. It's an important part of our body, and when the mind's not right, this affects the other three.

Finally, if you don't know where to start but you know you need March mindness, just pour out your heart to Him and ask him to show you what to do – and do that one little thing. It might be to put on your shoes and step outside and look up...so just do that.



## Life Right Now - March Madness - By Jennifer Stephens

It's madness. March madness!

No, not the never-ending lineup of games with a twenty-two-ounce orange ball bouncing around between a bunch of sweaty college students (and don't get me started on the endless squeaky screech of shoes traveling across the hard maple floor). I don't mean THAT madness. I'm talking furrowed brows. Harsh words. Enraged attitudes. It seems like everybody lately is mad about something! Whether it's furious fingers typing negative comments on social media or aggravated airplane passengers attacking the flight crew, we've probably all witnessed somebody in the midst of an adult temper tantrum. As I sit here watching yet another news story about an otherwise stable person creating a scene with an infantile volcanic outburst, I have to ask, when did everyone become so A-N-G-R-Y?

Way back in the 1970's, before there were Marvel movies, there was a TV show called *The Incredible Hulk*. The main character looked and lived like an ordinary guy – the kind of guy we'd walk by without giving a second glance. He was quiet. Calm. But when he got mad, everybody knew it! His whole body changed. His voice was different. Everything about him transformed. He went from indistinguishable nerdy guy in a button-down shirt to a rage-filled gigantic green savage on a rampage. He had our attention now and it was obvious this was someone to avoid.

Before becoming mean and green, he was self-aware enough to warn his nemesis, "Don't make me angry. You wouldn't like me when I'm angry." But today, anger seems to come without warning.

Anger is a normal emotion, but one that can easily become destructive. We have to be careful with our anger. Especially when it's aimed towards the wrong person.

Because of the pandemic, our whole world is going through a traumatic experience and many people are mad about it and looking for someone to blame. What do we do when someone's anger is directed right at us? At the moment, teachers seem to be the target of much of that misplaced anger. Recently I received a very angry email from one of my student's parents. The parent misunderstood a situation. And her words were hurtful and unexpected. Doesn't she know how hard I'm working and how much I love my students? From our brief meeting at Back-To-School night earlier this year, she probably doesn't know those things. Would it have been constructive for me to respond defensively – rushing to tell MY side of the story? Oh, believe me, my initial thought was to *clickety-clack* a sharp reply through my keyboard. But what good would come from me responding in anger? Instead, I waited, found her phone number, and dialed. An angry voice answered. But I listened. I responded with compassion, humility and (I think) showed her I genuinely care for her child. During our conversation she broke down and cried. She shared with me things her family was going through that had nothing at all to do with me. And she admitted it wasn't me she was angry with - it was all the "stuff" going on right now.

People are going to get mad at us. That's just part of being human. There's not really anything we can do about that. But we CAN manage how we respond. If I would have replied to the angry parent with my own snarky email, we would likely never have come to an understanding. In fact, it would possibly have made things much worse.

*“My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.” James 1:19*

Let's all remember when anger is directed our way, to pause, breathe, and respond with compassion. Always.

## **Under Pressure – Waiting** – by Debbie Haynes

I'd say this is one of the hardest things for most of us to do...to wait for the answer to our prayers. It's a world of immediate satisfaction, from Amazon orders, to drive-thru food, to fast pay lines where we checkout without waiting on a clerk. And yet, when we pray we often have to wait – sometimes a long time – for the answer.

Maybe this is the most familiar scripture about waiting:

*They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength;*

*they shall mount up with wings as eagles;*

*they shall run, and not be weary;*

*and they shall walk, and not faint.*

Isaiah 40:31

We sing those words, we imagine ourselves soaring, and we breathe in deeply, so that our weariness subsides and our strength emerges. At least, that's how it's supposed to work, right?

But let's look at Psalm 27.

David is seeking God for URGENT answers to his prayer, and he's stating facts about God: he is my light, my salvation, the strength of my life...and therefore I need not fear! Prayer solves a big problem for all of us. It causes us to focus our faith on who the needy one is, and who the supplier is, of all our needs. What a good place to start, while we wait.

In verse four, David says there's one thing he's desired of God and that is what he will seek after – to dwell in the Lord's house all the days of his life, to behold his beauty and inquire in his temple! Why? It's because in times of trouble, God hides us under his shelter. He lifts us up on a rock. What great imagery of His protection while we wait, away from vultures that seek to destroy.

And then in verse 8 David responds to God's directive to seek his face by saying, "I will seek your face." And finally, David concludes by telling himself to WAIT on the Lord, to be of good courage and he will be strengthened. It's good sometimes to speak to our souls, out loud, where we can hear the truth we're speaking.

There are great questions to ask ourselves while we wait. What's driving us to wait (is it obedience?), what's motivating us to do his will, and what excites us when the waiting is over?

Waiting on God produces these benefits:

- Our hearts get strengthened
- Our courage increases
- We see the goodness of God
- Waiting clears fear and confusion

In the New Testament, in Acts chapter two, it says the promise of God came while the people were obediently, patiently, waiting on God.

Waiting might be a virtue that most of us don't want and don't have, because it requires patience. But like all good gifts from above, waiting produces the fulfillment of God's promises to us and our children after us. We all know that when our kids wait for that URGENT "need" by working, saving up their dollars, and being obedient to Mom and Dad...they are way more appreciative and aware of the blessing when it comes. It's the same with us...

And it's then that we give thanks with a grateful heart, which is his will for all of us as we wait.



MARRIAGE

## **In This Together – Choose Cheesecake** – by Bekah Holland

I don't think I ever really understood how much we all change over time. Unintentionally, sometimes. Without even realizing there was any shift in who we are and how we view the world.

One example would be the 30 extra pounds I've managed to find over the last two years. I was not looking for it. And didn't even notice until I decided I needed to put on real pants instead of my standard leggings/jogger uniform I've adopted since moving to working remotely full time. And let me tell you, I looked at those pants that were absolutely not going to button and wondered how in the world I managed to shrink them. And then I looked at them like they had betrayed me by not just doing what they're supposed to do and make me look like I still kind of have my life together.

After a lot of excuses and eating my feelings, because what else do you do in that situation, I had to take a long, literal look in the mirror. My pants didn't betray me (okay, I still kind of don't believe that part, but I'm working on it). My slow decline into both late-night snacking and also middle age probably had more to do with it.

Now there are several things you need to know about me. *Number one*, I hate to sweat. Yes, I live in Texas. No, I don't want to move. *Number two*, I will absolutely pile trash in the trash can until my husband can barely pull out the bag without everything falling out. I hate it when my kids do that. But I think I spent too much time playing Tetris as a kid and that's somehow translated into the leaning tower of trash. Am I better than this? No. I'm lazy. I don't want to take out the trash. It's a character flaw. Deal with it. *Number three*, and most importantly, I do not diet. Like, ever. Can't. Won't. Nope.

I tried to diet once in my life. I was probably about 22 and believe me when I say, I had no reason to diet, but I digress. And the South Beach Diet was all the rage. I mean, there were commercials and magazine ads, and huge displays in every bookstore. So obviously, that meant I should get on board. I convinced my roommate and best friend to join me on this journey of self-improvement and health. So we bought the book, made a promise and a plan.

Now for those of you too young to remember that particular diet craze, it was essentially no sugar for the first few weeks. I mean, none. No fruit. No creamer in my coffee. It was basically detox. But we were young and capable of anything. The world was ours to rule. Except I didn't know that I was severely allergic to dieting. I made it through day three, essentially living on chicken and Brussels sprouts and sad, depressing black coffee. It was supposed to start getting easier. Make it the first week, they said. Let your body detoxify and cleanse itself from all of the processed food and sugar, they said. Then it's all just about maintenance.

This is where my inability to diet became very clear, as I woke up at 2 a.m. in the morning having a very vivid dream about cheesecake, and was completely brokenhearted that it wasn't real, and I did not, in fact, have any cheesecake. I raided the kitchen, but we had cleared everything out to remove temptation. So I did what any other woman in my position would do. I stormed into my roommate's room, shaking her awake and dragging her to Jack in the Box and ordering enough potato skins, curly fries and cheesecake to feed a small country. I still have no regrets. I'll choose cheesecake over pants with a button any day.

What, exactly, does this have to do with anything, you might wonder. Especially given the whole marriage column thing I'm supposed to be writing. Well, stick with me just a little bit longer. Just like I didn't realize that I've been little by little been packing on a few pounds here and there by packing in a few extra treats, I've noticed, the older I get, as I start taking stock of my life and where I am and where I want to be, that I've changed so much, in little ways, too small and inconsequential to notice.

Some of those changes are good. Like when I stopped keeping every hotel-sized shampoo and conditioner and all of the goofy IPSY package products, just in case some day, I need them. Spoiler alert: I have never needed them. Also, I've figured out that my own beliefs don't have to match anyone else's. Not those of my parents, my kids, not even those belonging to my husband. We can agree to disagree, sometimes. And that doesn't mean we love each other any less.

Along with that, I've realized that I've fallen into some less than wonderful patterns, too. I used to be spunky. But I've become less spunk and more slump. I'll take the brunt of someone's anger and internalize it, searching for ways to make it better. And for someone who is TERRIBLE at internalizing, this one was killing me slowly. I need my village. I need to talk things through. But for some reason, little by little, one small step at a time, I started believing that the weight of the world was mine and mine alone to carry. The invisible labor I put in every day wore on my soul. It wore on my existence. I need to be seen. I didn't ever know this about myself. I was always happy running things in the background and happy that everyone else was happy.

When I strip everything else away, and get honest with myself, (and apparently I am the hardest person for me to be honest with) I realize that while how I take care of my husband, home, family is an act of love, because most of this work is the invisible kind, I often feel like I'm invisible instead. Most of my life, that seemed like a selfish thing to feel, so I did what I usually do when dealing with something that needs to be dealt with head on....I buried it and pretended it wasn't there. In case you were wondering, that is not a recommended course of action....because it never stays buried. It never disappears. But it does fester and grow until all of a sudden, I realized that I'd become resentful, frustrated and alone.

Just like I didn't fall into these patterns overnight, I can't fix them overnight, either. But I can be honest. I can be vulnerable with my family, friends, and my husband. Especially, my husband. Because in all of my attempts to protect him from more worry or stress, I've really shortchanged him and taken away the joy from supporting someone and loving them in a way that brings rest, and even some healing. He now calls me on my stubborn streak, and checks in to make sure I'm getting what I need to be who I want to be. He steps in places that I didn't trust him with in the past. Not intentionally, but that's exactly what my actions were telling him. Now we're both working - working to be real - working to love each other bigger and better. Working to carry each other so we can both rest, knowing that we aren't alone in this mess.

So regardless of how old you are, whether you are young, bright and shiny without the scuffs that come along with life, or whether you've got some experience under your belt and forgot what that shine feels like because life has come in and taken its toll...take a little time to start finding the ways that you've allowed to your peace and joy to be chipped away. And allow the people in your life to help you piece it back together. It will be worth it. Every bit of it. I promise. And know that I'll be working right along with you. You're never in it alone!

“Being lost isn’t always about missed direction. Sometimes you have to lose yourself to find the rest of who you are.” - Unknown



## **Date Night Fun – M-A-R-C-H – by Marcy Lytle**

I love acronyms, so I thought it would be fun to use one for this month and our date night themes! I always include five ideas, and March has five letters, so why not? Hopefully, the weather is not as cold, a few things are starting to bloom, and we're anxious to actually get out and be together away from the house! Using the five letters that spell the month of March...here we go:

**Move** – It can be dancing, walking, throwing a Frisbee, or anything that requires you both to get up and move. It can be at home with a YouTube video, or in a park, or walking at your place of choice. You pick his outfit, and let him pick yours, and plan to draw straws to see who gets to pick the food for your date night! You could check out a karaoke place or use your kids' karaoke machine, or purchase your own so that you can move to the beats.

**Affirm** – Prior to date night, think of five things you appreciate about each other. Write them down, and plan to share during your time together. Maybe you love that he rubs your feet, is full of integrity, cleans the car for you, hits balls with the kiddos, and texts you love notes often. This activity makes you both focus on the good. Make five stops during a day out, and share one at each stop. Stop for gas, stop for a Slurpee, stop for a movie, stop for a new plant for the garden, and stop for dessert. How fun!

**Reduce** – What if you incorporated date night into an activity of reducing your clutter? Doesn't sound romantic? Play music, decide to throw out at least 10 things each (including shoes, bags, clothes, scarves, etc.) and place it in a bag. Also, go through your phones and delete 100 photos each, reminiscing as you do. Finally, reduce your gas usage by going for a walk in your neighborhood. Reduce the waste as you do, picking up trash as you walk.

**Create** – Grab your bible, some white papers and markers, and head to a pretty place to sit, away from the chaos. Pick a chapter in the Bible, like Psalm 91, and draw it. Share as you draw. This might be a date you want to repeat over and over again. Pack colorful snacks like strawberries, grapes, dark chocolate, burnt peanuts, and sparkling drinks.

**Hunt** – Go on a city hunt for five things! Hunt for a new place to eat, people wearing green, emerging green on the trees/plants, a new book for each of you, and a billboard/sign that makes you laugh. You can totally add more to this list. Just scavenger hunting together can be SO fun!

That spells March! You could do this for April as well, and even May, June and July! It's gets a bit trickier after that. Let us know what you did and how fun it was, so we can share!

## **After 40 Years – Robots and Rhythms – by Marcy Lytle**

Surely, after 40 years of marriage there's a rhythm and a knowing and an in-sync type of relationship by now, right? Surely, we know each other's weaknesses and come alongside with a smile, we know each other's strengths and always notice and affirm, and we know what makes the other one feel good so we offer that often...

Maybe in a fairytale land!

What often happens when we become so familiar with another is we actually FAIL to take note, come alongside, and affirm...because we're settled into a routine, or I'd like to call it a rut!

For example, I know my husband doesn't hear well on shows on the television, as he often misunderstands what's being said and will even ask me what it was. He's always been this way; it's not just a product of "older" age. And I'm not always kind with my answer, but usually roll my eyes because I'm irritated that he interrupted the show to ask me.

For example, I know that my husband can fix anything! He recently installed our new dishwasher and this time I did notice his hard work and did thank him and affirm him. However, there have been plenty of times when I asked why it was taking so long and why didn't we just pay someone to do the task. Joyous comments, right?

For example, I know that he loves to stop for coffee first thing when we start out on road trips. There have been plenty of times when I wished he'd just forfeit that morning coffee so we could get on down the road, but I'm really trying to even suggest the stop before he does. I know he loves it so much!

*But, a rhythm?* I'd like to think that we have it all figured out, this marriage thing, and that communication is now of the perfect tone and words we use are never hurtful. I'd like to tell you that we never go to bed angry, and that he always knows just what to say when I'm sad or frustrated.

The fact of the matter is that even though we learn over the years, we also evolve and change. We are not robots. How about that! It's so helpful to learn and know each other's particulars and cater to those, but I also love to see how we both grow and change and become better people in so many areas, not just our marriage.

I guess that's the main focus of my writing this month. Rhythms are good, but it's okay to have a little extra drum beat or the tingle of a triangle, or even a space and a rest – in this marriage song we're living and playing. Routines are great, but it's okay if he or I change what we like or what we need. It means we're still alive and breathing. And I'm going to always struggle with tiredness and selfishness, and so will he, but that enables forgiveness to still be present in our daily living together.

Don't expect your marriage to suddenly one day be perfect and that you both will have no more hills to climb. Don't think that just because you thought he knew you or you knew him, that you're suddenly growing apart. You're human!

Just last night, he wanted to see part of a basketball game on television and I jumped up to clean the dishes, and told him to enjoy. Now, that was a score for me, because on another day I might have frowned and complained, and ruined his fun. It just happened to be a good night for both of us.

Yes, longevity brings with it knowledge and a knowing of one another. But those changes and those sudden hiccups in the steady rhythm make for a more interesting piece of the symphony, don't you think? After all, it's those times that wake us up to the fact that we've still got decades of growth to go. And how exciting is that, to grow together!



ENCOURAGEMENT

## **For Better or Worse - Nothing Nice To Say – by Kaelin Scott**

“If you don’t have something nice to say, don’t say anything at all.”

We’ve all heard that one a time or two...or a thousand. But it’s easier said than done, isn’t it? Especially in today’s day and age where everyone seems to have an opinion about everything. And everyone feels the need to declare those opinions loudly (and sometimes aggressively) on the internet. I guess we’ve forgotten that just because we *can* share our opinion on something, doesn’t mean we have to. By all means, we should stand up for what we feel is right, and we should be grateful for the right to free speech. But that doesn’t mean we have to say what we think about every single little thing, especially if it’s not exactly beneficial or uplifting to anyone.

I surely struggle in this area just as much as the next person, if not more. And I’ve come to realize that the area I struggle with it most is within my marriage. My husband tends to be on the receiving end of my not-so-kind opinions on quite a regular basis. A lot of times, I speak without thinking and say things I don’t even really mean. Because he’s around me the most and because I feel safest with him, I allow my venomous thoughts to take aim at him, often without realizing it until the words are already out of my mouth. Or maybe sometimes it’s muttered under my breath, but that still isn’t very nice, either.

I’m sure you can relate to this in some way, right? The people closest to us are the ones we’re most likely to hurt. But it doesn’t have to be that way. We can teach ourselves a different pattern of thinking and speaking. We don’t have to let the words running through our minds spew out of our mouths. Self-control isn’t an easy thing to master. Actually, I don’t think anyone can ever fully master it. But thinking before we speak, weighing our words to see if they’re actually worth saying, is a habit that could absolutely revolutionize our marriages – or any relationships for that matter.

Maybe we could take that simple saying I mentioned above, which reminds me of one of my favorite Bible verses, and let it be our filter. When the urge to make a snarky comment or snappy retort presents itself, we could consider keeping our mouths shut instead. Sure, it feels good for like half a second to get the last word or make that dig, but does it feel good ten minutes later? Usually not, if you’re anything like me. So perhaps we put the long run at the forefront of our minds, instead of doing (or in this case saying) what feels good in the moment.

I know it’s not easy. TRUST ME. I know. But changing the way we speak to others can radically alter not only our relationships, but our entire sense of joy and well-being. And it makes other people feel good too. I think that’s worth a shot, don’t you?

*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. Ephesians 4:29*

## Rooted in Love - Lessons for Mom – by Kaelin Scott

My daughter recently turned six. I'm not sure how the tiny baby in my arms became the little spitfire with missing front teeth who can read chapter books. It feels like all I did was blink, and she turned into a young lady. I'm scared to blink again, because then she'll be a teenager and today will be long gone, too.

I know I've made many mistakes as a mother, and I know I'll make thousands more. I'm learning just as much as I'm teaching, and sometimes that can be hard. It's tempting to feel like a failure or like I'm ruining my kids, but all I can do is pray for wisdom, do my best, and be open to change. I'm not above correction, and I'm constantly realizing things I could do better. Motherhood has taught me more about life than pretty much anything else ever has or will.

Looking back on the past six years, I've learned so many things. So I thought I'd share some of them with you.

- Kids are people, too. It sounds obvious, but as parents it's easy to forget that children have bad days sometimes, just like we do. They get sad, mad, lonely, scared, and a myriad of other feelings that are absolutely real. I've had to learn not to get frustrated when my children have a bad day, but to try to understand where they're coming from. (And I still have a lot of room to improve in this area.)
- Balance is key. Being productive is good, but it's also important to rest. Yes, I need to take care of the chores and homeschool and work and all the other things. But sometimes, I just need to sit down and play a game with the kids or watch a movie. Those are the things I'll remember in 20 years, not clean dishes or floors.
- Reading is magic. My daughter has always loved books, even as a baby. Now that she can read, it's so special to hear her exploring stories all on her own. But it's equally special to sit down and read out loud together. Recently, we read *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, and I loved hearing her reactions and thoughts on everything that happened. It felt like we were in the magical world together right alongside Lucy and her siblings.
- You're never too old to say sorry. Grown-ups mess up too, and parents aren't above apologizing. It's so important to be able to own up to my mistakes and seek forgiveness. It teaches my children a valuable lesson, and it also makes me more trustworthy.
- Take lots of pictures. Now, I don't want to live behind my phone and miss living in the moment, but I do enjoy documenting each stage of my children's lives. And I'm so grateful for phones with cameras on them which make it easy to snap a photo whenever I want. I love looking back at old pictures and videos and remembering what my kids used to look and sound like. Those memories are so precious.
- Don't let your storm get your kids wet. I heard that quote a while back, and I have to admit that this is a struggle for me. What I mean is that it's hard not to let them hear me talking about things I'm worried about, or scared of, or upset about. Don't get me wrong, it's good for them to know that adults have emotions too, but I don't want them to needlessly worry or be burdened by my personal struggles. As someone who struggles

with anxiety, it's really hard for me to protect my kids from seeing that or allowing it to rub off on them. I have to be very conscious of what I say in front of them, because I don't want my bad habits to become theirs. This is definitely something I still need to work on.

Those are just a few of the many lessons I've learned through being a mom. Lots of them apply to other areas of life, but they're magnified through raising little ones. As you read them and consider them, I'd love to hear your thoughts. What have you learned or experienced? Have your experiences led you to the same conclusions, or do you have a different point of view? Regardless of our varying walks of life, we're all learning and growing every day. I hope that today, you keep your heart open to change but also give yourself grace as you grow. You're doing an amazing job!

Who has seen the fantastic trilogy *Lord of the Rings*? Better yet, read the books! Maybe fantasy isn't your thing. It's not my favorite either, but this story has a lot of gold nuggets hidden (or not so hidden) along the way.

The main character, Frodo Baggins, is an unlikely hero. His mission is to take the evil ring of power to the mountain of Mordor and destroy it by casting it back into the fires from which it was made. Of course there are forces working against him through all kinds of hazards and creepy things that make you quake. It seems like a death mission—the mountain looms so high and far away and Frodo feels so alone. Only he can bear the dark weight of the ring. Fear rules the land. Does he have the courage to overcome?

Last month I wrote about the courage to live and my desire to have more of it. God is faithful. In fact, I had an “interesting” (for lack of a better word) personal experience that began in the middle of writing the story. I'm not sure that I can adequately describe it, but I'm going to try.

Each January, my church has a week of fasting and prayer to look back on what God has done, and look forward to what he's doing, personally and corporately. In conjunction with this, we schedule several times during the week to pray together. A few days in advance, an email was sent to the prayer team, of which I'm a part, asking for volunteers to lead an hour of prayer. The subject of the first slot, Monday, was “God's Word is a Seed.” *Seed...isn't that right up my gardener's alley?* I felt a nudge, but not being the “leader” type, I waited. *Me, lead? I don't think so.*

Awhile later, for a reason now forgotten, I began looking through a small pink spiral where I jot things down. I came to an entry from 2015:

### **“Seeds Starting, Seedlings Taking Root**

Reading Foster's book, [Prayer...](#)The idea of meditative prayer is to let God speak to us, especially through scripture. He's talking about meditating on a passage, or even a word, for a week, to allow it to “take root in us.” This can be illustrated through the analogy of letting seedlings take root—it takes water, sun, time. Disturbing the plants can keep them from rooting; roots grow, get established, etc. “

Wouldn't this seem like a “sign” to you? I took it as one and didn't hesitate to obey—I opened my laptop and signed up to lead Monday's hour of prayer. I prefer to stay in the background in just about all situations, but, in light of how God was moving in my life, I saw it as an opportunity to have “courage to live.” I felt a confidence that this small task was for me and a peaceful assurance that it would be a piece of cake. There were no instructions or guidelines, but I'd attended this sort of prayer before and knew what to expect. If there was anything I needed to know, I would be contacted.

Sure enough, Sunday afternoon I received a phone call and we discussed the basic order of things and my job as the leader: open, close, allow time for praying in small groups, monitor the time, etc.—simple, no big deal at all. A few hours later I sat down at my computer and typed out



a short agenda with a few scriptures I wanted to start with. As it happened, I was working on my February story “Courage to Live,” and so I went back to it. I don’t remember the words I was writing when I began to feel afraid. Thoughts of leading prayer suddenly loomed ominously before me. I began to see myself in the prayer room with a crowd of silent people, and I had to pray aloud all by myself to fill the silence. I felt the hour of prayer stretching out endlessly and imagined myself stumbling for words. Fear gripped my heart and I thought “*I can’t do this. This was a mistake.*”

At this point I felt like Frodo going to Mordor carrying the heavy weight of the ring. I actually said out loud, “*I don’t want to be courageous! I don’t want a crown! I just want to be comfortable and watch my movies and enjoy life!*” Ridiculous, I know, but unreasonable fear dominated my thoughts. For several hours I wrestled with thoughts of backing out until it was too late to call. I didn’t sleep well, so at 2 a.m. I made some hot chocolate and decided I would wait until the decent hour of 9 a.m. and cancel. Up to this point I was too busy wrestling with myself, or so I thought. Finally, I lay back down and prayed.

When I woke up I was just waiting for 9. Prayer was at 12 noon. I felt bad...who could lead on such short notice? But as I was getting dressed I realized I didn’t feel the fear and desperation of the night before. Putting on my make-up, I looked down at some scripture cards I had on the counter and began flipping through them:

*He sends his help from heaven and saves me. He disgraces the one who is harassing me. God sends his mercy and his truth. Ps. 57:3*

*In the day when I cried out, You answered me, and made me bold with strength in my soul Ps. 138:3*

*The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid? Ps. 27:1*

*Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:9*

Then it hit me. I had been under spiritual attack and God came to my rescue! The fear had lifted. *I can do this!* As I thought about the night before I realized how exaggerated my fears were. I really did feel like Frodo facing Mordor. How dark and gripping were my thoughts about this small thing of stepping up to lead prayer! That’s what the enemy of our souls does, but God is greater.

I’m happy to say I led prayer and none of the things I had imagined and feared happened. Am I a fearless leader? No, but I know the One who is.

## **Moving Forward - Expect Good** – by Pam Charro

Romans 8:28

*And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him...*

Proverbs 3:5

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.*

I have many sweet, well-meaning friends who are afraid to have faith for the things they are praying about. They share that they have been so terribly disappointed too many times, and they just don't dare put confidence in their prayers. It's become too scary to really try.

I can understand their dilemma. If God is good, why didn't he give me this good thing I asked for? Is it because there is something wrong with me or my prayer life? Is there some sin in my life I'm not aware of? Do I not even have a mustard seed of faith? If God is perfect and powerful, then what is wrong with ME? Or, even worse, maybe God can't really be trusted to always be good. Maybe he doesn't even see me.

I wondered all of these things for many years until I came to understand the difference between expectancy and expectations. *Expectancy* is knowing that good is coming; *expectations* are thinking I know exactly what that good should look like.

I've had to intentionally practice believing God when I was disappointed a LOT, lately. That sounds sad, but it has developed a beautiful trust and surrender so that I'm free to ask him for anything and stay in absolute peace, whatever the outcome.

Why? Because I have already made up my mind that I am through putting God on trial when life is hard or I don't get what I want. He is the only one who has all of the information regarding what is good for me and exactly when I should have it. So I know that when he says, "Yes," to a request, it is out of his kind generosity, and when he says, "No," or "Not yet," it is out of his wisdom. Either way, I can ask him for anything and trust in whatever happens.

Because he is undoubtedly, unreservedly good, I can always expect good. Always.

## **Simple Truths – Deadly Moves – by Marcy Lytle**

I remember all the angst and fear and frustration when I was teaching my kids to drive. I mean, there are a number of deadly moves one can make if one is not paying attention! I also recall that the instructions I used often reminded me, the parent, that if my kids mess up it's my fault...because I need to train them in every scenario that could happen on the road. That's a heavy load for a parent to carry! But I did follow the instructions, and my kids drove in inclement weather, through construction zones, and out in the country, as well in the city. I'm so glad those days are over!

However, the other day I was sitting at an intersection waiting to pull out into traffic, and there were so many cars coming. I saw a guy drive up behind me and for a second, I felt this pressure to pull out so he wouldn't honk. I don't like others honking at me! And then I remembered telling my kids that just because an approaching car has on their blinker, it doesn't mean they're going to turn, for sure. So waiting is the best option, to see if they indeed turn.

I waited, the guy didn't honk, and finally there was a break and I pulled out. No deadly move, but there sure could have been, had I succumbed to pressure from behind!

There are so many deadly moves we ponder and sometimes make, that perhaps don't kill us physically but destroy our self-image, our friendships and more. Just simple things we can be reminded of, so that we don't pull out due to pressure and get hit from behind:

*Comparing with others* – It's not just kids or young moms that compare. Older women do it too, with their skin and their weight, and their homes. But continuing to compare as we age is a deadly move because aging happens. To all of us. And we can either embrace it and do what we can aside from what she's doing, or we can destroy friendships by jealousy and envy.

*Never asking for help* – Imagine if our kids refused our instruction and never asked us what to do when they're on the road, or what the laws say, or what the consequences are, or what that sign means or that light. I think it's easy to cocoon ourselves as we age, thinking we don't need others' help or it's somehow beneath us to ask. That's a deadly move, because so many friends have so much life to share if we only open up and ask.

*Holding on to grudges* – This is hard, especially when someone has hurt us terribly, someone we trusted and loved. Forgiveness is easier talked about than done, and we cannot soften our hearts to forgive or let go without the help of HIM. Physical and mental defenses go up to protect ourselves, but in reality He is our defender, and we can let it go. Can't do it? Back up to the step above, and ask for help. Otherwise, deadly attitudes take over and destroy our joy.

*Working nonstop* – This seems to be a "trend" to have a calendar so full without a day off. Somehow we think that gives us status and the busier we are the more we can obtain. I'm probably guilty of this at times. I have a hard time sitting still to just read a few chapters in a book, meditate or pray, observe nature, etc. However, when I go days and days without stopping to renew myself, others around me suffer from the looks and words that come from a tired brain and body. Not cool.

*Impatient Honking* – I'm ending with this one, because maybe we're actually the one in the car behind another, honking to make them go. Maybe we're impatient on every turn with our spouse, our kids, our friends, and ourselves. We have lost our patience one too many times and let mean words fly from our lips that cause those around us to react in fear and then relationships are broken.

I suppose God speaks to me the most in everyday living, like seeing a car behind me and feeling the pressure to move, when I'm not ready and it's not safe. I don't like that feeling. It's not comfortable to be the one in a hurry, the one being honked at, or the one always fretting about at the expense of others.

Deadly moves. Let's keep them on the Chess board, because those are just plastic pieces. But let's keep the deadly moves out of our lives as we ask him to show us where we can change them into a lifestyle of thriving while we live and offer life to those around us...or in front of us...as we wait for traffic to clear.

## **Unearthly Thing - “Go East, Young Woman...” – by Angela Dolbear**

“Go to a place you do not know,” God said to Abraham. I got called to my new place, too. Unlike Abraham, I at least knew the city I was going to. But I didn’t *know* the place. It wasn’t my home.

March 2022 marks the third year my husband Tim and I have lived in Nashville, Tennessee. Every day I am grateful to God for moving us to such a lush green place, with seasons true to the calendar, and genuinely kind people. They don’t call Tennessee the “Volunteer State” for nothing. We are so thankful God called us to this place.

Until 2006, I had lived my whole life in various cities in Southern California. Year-round sunshine, beautiful beaches, frequent trips to Disneyland, and exceptionally delicious Mexican food were the norm for me. But I was stagnating spiritually. So it was time to go.

That is when God called us to move to Austin, Texas. It was exciting, and challenging.

Moving isn’t easy. It’s not just all the packing and cleaning out of stuff, or all the real estate paperwork. It’s the leaving behind what you know, and the people you love, that is hardest for me.

But hard stuff is good. I have learned in my 30-year relationship with God that when things get difficult, “school” is in. The lessons are happening, and I should make sure I am good and prayed up, and actively listening to what my Heavenly Teacher is showing me.

By a miracle of God (of course!) the self-employed Dolbears were able to buy their first house together in Austin. It was the perfect size for us, had a barn on the property to put our studio in, and it was right down the street from our new church. God is so good.

But it was a new place. A new culture I did not grow up in, nor did I fit into. And there were so many bugs! The ant bites burned like fire, and then itched for days. There were tree roaches as long as my thumb and they flew away when I tried to get rid of them.

On the positive side, Austin has good food. Best bar-b-que I had ever had. And God led us to really good authentic Mexican food.

More importantly, God fed us spiritually. The teaching at our new church was exceptional, and it was the place where God taught us how to pray, and how to pray without ceasing. We were used by God there, in so many ways, and in so many ministries. We gained relationships with people that we still treasure. I wrote my first three novels in my comfy, messy office, in our Austin home.

After 10 years, the winds of change started to churn in our souls. I started to get the sense that our season in Texas was drawing to a close. It hurt my heart. I didn’t want to leave my church, and my church family. I didn’t want to leave my “spiritual daughters” before I found good, godly husbands for them! I would have to trust that matter to God.

Nashville was on our radar. One of my brothers, and his family, live in Franklin, a town just outside of Nashville. So we had family in Tennessee. And we had business associates-turned-friends in Nashville, who kept telling us, “You should move here!” So Tim and I prayed about it. We prayed a lot.

Again, moving would mean change. Leaving what I knew, and cleaving even closer to God in the unknown...which is what He wants.

In November of 2018, on a road trip home from Houston after spending Thanksgiving with Tim's family, God told us, "If you want to go Nashville, go. I will be with you always."

By many miracles again, ones we can only attribute to the hand of God, we sold our home of 12 years to one of spiritual sons, and bought a beautiful and fully renovated 1959 home in the Bellshire Estates area of Nashville.

A mid-century home! Sweet! God gave this vintage-loving gal such a lovely "new" mid-century home. I'm grateful all over again just writing this. And we were so blessed with the real estate market, that I was able to decorate our home with mid-century flair. (Thankful again.)

Looking back on our anniversary of living in Nashville, I see that going to a place I did not know was scary and uncomfortable, but like everything else when God is in the driver's seat, it is good. All these changes in geography, cultures, and ways of life stretch me. I must learn and adjust, so God can use me wherever He wants me.

All these changes happen on Earth, but I am an Unearthly Thing. God's Unearthly Thing. Someday, instead of moving eastward, God will move me to Heaven, to the place He is preparing for me. Isn't that a glorious thought that moves you? And no packing will be necessary. Praise God!

*Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series, and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). Angela writes real, relevant, relatable, and reverent fiction, with an aim toward spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, while hopefully inspiring readers to laugh and/or cry. She loves reading, writing prose, as well as writing and recording music with her husband Tim in their studio in Nashville, Tennessee. Please drop by and sign-up for news and to read new stories and hear new original music at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>. Blessings to you!*



FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME – I'd Be Delighted** – by Marcy Lytle

Have you asked someone for a favor and the title of this article was their response? Maybe you ask a friend if she'd mind holding your bag for you while you go to the bathroom in a public place and she takes it and says, "I'd be delighted." It's a small thing you asked of her, but her willingness to help you out brings her delight, and it enables you to be relieved from an extra burden.

So what actually delights you? What brings you great pleasure or makes you so pleased?

Here's a list of things that delight me:

- Seeing my kids have fun
- Hearing of answers to prayer
- Going on trips and packing for them
- Making fun food and creating an equally fun atmosphere
- Finding a great deal when shopping

If you know me at all, you could probably have guessed those things I listed above. But I have another list of delights, a bit more personal and hidden, that I'll go ahead and share here:

- Having a day without fearful thoughts
- Receiving a text from a friend that's thinking of me
- God winks of provision for small things only He knew I needed
- The freedom to skip through the house or sing a song out loud
- Sitting in the car reading a book with the sun on my shoulder

The world is so heavy right now, and some days the word *delight* isn't even in my vocabulary or in the words of anyone I'm around. It's actually a word I rarely hear now, in conversation. But I think it's a word that just sounds cheerful even just to say it out loud. "I'd be delighted" is such a cool phrase to offer a friend in need; and so heartwarming to hear a friend say to us.

Finally, did you know that God takes delight in so many things regarding us? Since we all need to hear a little more delight, here's His list of what makes him so delighted, and the things about him in which we can find great delight:

*His deliverance is delightful*

*It's our delight to honor Him*

*His words bring delight*

*Our inheritance is delightful*

*I can delight in His salvation*

*We can actually drink from a river of delights!*



*I can delight in his great works*

*The path of his commands is where I find delight*

*He is delighted when we put our hope and trust in Him*

*He delights in his children, you and I, just because we are His*

*I am to delight in wisdom*

*He's delighted when we are trustworthy*

*His love is more delightful than wine*

Shall I type out more? I didn't even get through half of the Old Testament, reading all the verses about delight. It would take a while to read them all, but I'll leave you to do that on your own and me on mine. I sat and wept as I read just the ones I typed above, because of the overwhelming love of God that he delights in our simple trust and obedience, and lavishes his delight on us daily, in ways we don't even comprehend or know.

*Father, would you allow us to see how delightful we are to you, and grant us eyes and hearts to find our delight in you alone?*

*"I'd be delighted," He says...and I smile.*

## Of a Different Kind

Grief. We all experience it, there are share groups to get through it, it's been compared to ocean waves, and it's the hardest thing in life. We comfort those that are grieving from the loss of a loved one, as we should. And we need comfort when we are experiencing loss, as well. And yet there are all kinds of grieving, that I don't think some of realize we are in the middle of...and if we did...we might be able to move forward once it's identified.

Grief stifles, its causes tears to flow, it hinders our thoughts and completely depletes our energy. So if that's how we're feeling, instead of wondering if we're ill or something's "wrong" with us, it might be a good thing to consider if we're experiencing grief of a different kind:

Maybe the body you had before you had babies is gone...forever. It's okay to grieve what was lost. Even shedding tears over body changes does not mean you're a bad person. It means you're human.

Maybe your circle of friends has completely changed over the past decade, and you sit with that friend across the country, another friend divorced and remarried and moved on, and yet another friend that just disappeared...and you're completely devastated and lonely. That kind of grief is real, it hurts, and it takes time to heal.

Maybe your aging parent isn't the parent you once knew as a kid, or even as an adult, and you miss that parent...or wish the parent you see now would have been that pleasant when you were growing up. It's a loss, and it's no less grief than any other loss. It's okay to cry buckets, looking at your dad that you no longer recognize, nor he you.

Maybe your kids knocked down a mirror you had sitting on a shelf, a mirror that had sentimental value to you, and you are mourning the loss of a "thing" and you feel guilty. Don't do that to yourself. Things take hold in our hearts and minds, and it's okay to miss them.

## **FRESH THYME - Shopping Therapy** – by Marcy Lytle

I've heard friends speak it, and thought it myself, "I need to go shopping," on a day when we feel a little down, out of sorts, blue about this or that, or just plain bored. I have a few friends that don't care to shop, but those are definitely few. Shopping, for many of us, is so fun – especially if we have the funds to come home with something new. I mean, several bags in the back of the car with goodies to unpack and wear and arrange on that shelf or in that room make a girl happy. Am I right?

There was a time when I felt guilty for that desire to shop. And even guiltier for the giddy happy feeling I had when the shopping was done, and my money was spent. I wondered if I really needed that, or if I paid too much, or if I should have saved the money or given it, instead. And those thoughts have actually ruined the fun of the shopping outing!

Over the years, I realized something. I believe part of who we are as women is finding joy in taking care of our homes and ourselves. If we read that famous chapter in Proverbs that describes a godly woman, part of that description includes making wise purchases and decorating her home! And yes, so much more! But we don't have to feel guilt for enjoying a shopping spree!

If you have had that guilt backpack hanging on your own shoulders, hanging heavier than the pretty colorful bags on your arms, it's time to unpack it and throw it out!

Here are some things to consider when you're in need of a little shopping therapy:

- What amount of money CAN you spend? Take that, and give thanks. And spend it gleefully!
- Is this a substitute for dealing with whatever ails you? Go shopping, and enjoy yourself. But also ask for help with the frustration that sent you shopping.
- Is your motivation to look better or have more than she has? Probably need to take that item to Him and then shop for fun, and not for envy.
- Maybe you're just plain tired of the grind of work and need a break. Go and enjoy yourself!
- If you're an extravagant spender and can't trust yourself, take a friend that will speak up with wisdom!
- On a strict budget? No funds for new things, at all? Be creative and shop in nature! Pick up twigs, and snip some flowers, and arrange some branches.
- Shopping might just be a thrill of a time for you, so lay down the entire backpack and skip through the stores!

I've been in all seasons of shopping therapy in my six decades of life. We had times of low funds and I found pleasure in seeing how much I could get for so very little, and those shopping tricks have helped me out always. I've also had periods of time where I had a little more than I needed and have been able to share the shopping experience with my girls or others. That's a joyous time, as well! And just recently, we did shop through a trail and found lots of dried grasses and berries and branches for vases, that look amazing!

Guilt is always going to surface like unwanted dust in the room, and if we let it – it will fill up our senses and lay on our backs like a heavy weight. But I don't believe God sends guilt. He does send wisdom, and he gives us the good sense to distinguish between the two.

Read Proverbs 31 again, this time with eyes that notice the words that describe the joy this woman has in providing...which includes shopping...for herself and others. Then look at your calendar and carve out a shopping spree, figure out how much you can spend, go to the stores that you love and can afford, take a friend if you need help, or enjoy browsing all by yourself to your heart's content.

When you head home (whether you have one bag or many) skip a little skip at the delight that came from shopping without guilt - or any other heavy burden - that's not yours to carry.

**FRESH THYME – Some Days – by Marcy Lytle**

We all have days when we're on top of the world, things are going our way, and we feel like smiling and kicking up our heels. But I've noticed more now than ever, that so many of us don't have those happy-go-lucky feelings as often as we used to...because of Covid, loss of friendships, fear of relationship, working at home, heightened awareness of evil and so much more. I too have those bottom-of-the-cavern days, and sometimes it just helps to write out the rollercoaster ride from start to finish, and end up at the top of the incline where our perspective is high and we raise up our hands and scream. Scared to death, and yet thrilled at the same time, thankful that each descent has an ascent and a time when that particular ride is over.

*Some days I feel so put together on the outside,*

*But on the inside I'm a disheveled mess.*

*Some days what I eat is so satisfying,*

*And other days I'm disappointed with every taste.*

*Some days I'm mostly smiling, observing and giving thanks*

*Yet there are still days that clouds obscure the sun.*

*Some days what I have seems so much more than enough,*

*But other days I find myself wanting more.*

*Some days, busyness carries me through, from morning to night*

*And other days I'd rather do nothing on my list of to-do's.*

*Some days I'm optimistic about the future, my own and that of my kids*

*Yet other days I think too much and wonder about what-if.*

*Some days we're packing and heading on a trip so very excited,*

*Then a week later we're headed home, deflated and bummed.*

*Some days I've taken time to move, to read, and to breathe*

*And other days I've sat and worked, stressed and tense.*

*Some days I shop and I find a bargain and a deal and a steal*

*Yet other days I wander and see nothing and my bags are empty.*

*Some days the tomatoes and cukes sitting on the counter are fresh and firm*

*And a few days later they're wrinkled and crying, "Use me now!"*

*Some days the car is clean and swept and looking pristine,  
And too often it's full of grass, covered in dust and accumulated trash.*

*Some days I feel overwhelmed by the cares of others and myself  
But then other days I'm overwhelmed by the care of the Shepherd over all.*

*Some days I only see the decline and wonder if the brakes will hold  
And other days I raise my hands in surrender because they did, like I was told.*



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

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

April 2022



TIPS



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

Pastels are everywhere when Easter rolls around, in the plastic eggs, for table décor, and even hanging on the shelves for anything home and anything to wear! Sweaters are probably being put away by now, at least the heavy ones in the dark fall and winter hues like browns and oranges... However, pastel sweaters are great to have in your close this month to wear now, and even into early summer if you're lucky to live in a fairly cool climate. I found some that I love, along with a few other spring ideas to share with you!

Blue vintage – This blue sweater with vintage buttons in a pale blue color is a favorite. Adding pops of bright colors in a headscarf or a pin brings it into the spring season with flair. Sweater from Ross.

Green and white – It's not pastel, but the white daisies against the green speak soft fields of wildflowers, and this sweater is a fave! Open with a graphic tee is one option, but I even wore it buttoned up backwards one day. And check out all of lovelybydani earrings that are only \$5 each! Also from Ross!

Lavender blue – This pullover, super lightweight sweater is a great find. Wearing it now over a button up, and can be worn later alone, with high-waist jeans. Ross!

Pink and yellow – Easter colors, for sure! This pink corduroy hat is so fun, and I'm pairing it with a yellow sweatshirt (lightweight) from Walmart, on top of a plaid button up from Target. It works!

Purple waffle weave – I love a waffle weave shirt and this one is super lightweight, with cool sleeves. A great fun top from Walmart for spring. The color just sings!

Pinkish long vest – I've had this vest a long time, as it's a classic. Now, it's over a long sleeve tee, but it works well on into summer over crisp white short sleeves!

Vintage Scarf – Hit the vintage shops and find some scarves for spring! Wear them tied to the side, roll the windows down, and enjoy the ride!

Neutrals against black – That black dress hanging in your closet – wear it with a straw bag, wooden earrings, and neutral slides – and a stretchy belt slung at the hip. I got a pack of these belts from Amazon. A fun look, for sure!

Spring has arrived now, and flowers are blooming, temps are warming up, and we just want to be outside in something cute, cozy, comfy and crisp – for lunches, lounging, learning and enjoying life!

## **Seven for You – Spring Refresh – by Marcy Lytle**

Hopefully winter is in our rearview mirror by now, and nothing but fresh flowers and sunshine (with a few rain showers mixed in) ahead! We asked our panel of women to share with us ways that they bring this new view into their homes. Do they hang new dish towels, put out spring pillows, add plants, or what? We all need a little inspiration to bring color back to our homes, and fresh scents of all things new! Hope you enjoy, and are inspired too...

As the season comes to an end and I find myself longing for spring, (or summer, autumn, winter ) I begin to change little things mostly in my kitchen/living area where I spend the most time. I change out the flowers to something more seasonal. (No real plants because my cats eat them). I also put out seasonal kitchen towels. In my guest bath, I have a frame where I put pictures from old calendars that I love. I change these out by season too. Then I move on to a new wreath for the front door, and a seasonal doormat. I just put out bluebonnet items. I even bought a new bluebonnet doormat! - Beth

Spring for me means planting and happy colors. There's something about growing plants that reminds me of hope and possibilities. My plants are combined in my vintage planter collection. It's easy to add little decorative touches like this rare Brush/McCoy bumblebee to your planters. You can find butterflies, Easter bunnies, or eggs that they sell on sticks to add decor for the holidays or just because they make you smile looking at them.

I also replace my indoor and outdoor mats....starting new with a fresh happy rug is one inexpensive way to cheer up my front door. My rug was one I found at Target last year for 13.00. It was sold out and I waited until it finally came back in stock. I love the shape and the beautiful floral colors. I have one outside my front door and another as my entryway mat as well. – Cathy

Springtime feels like new beginnings - I like to declutter, open the blinds and let the sunshine in — winter is often gloomy — put new colored pillows at the firepit. My favorite is refreshing the flower beds and adding a little color. – Edith

I'm a college student so I don't necessarily have the space or funds to "refresh" a lot of things around my apartment however I do store seasonal candles throughout the year so after putting away all of my winter/valentines decor I definitely bring those out! I also tend to do a lot of DIY projects...usually I store all my used up candles throughout the year and then boil water and pour it into the jars so that the wax at the bottom melts and rises. I leave the water in the jars until it cools and the wax hardens at the top and then I use that wax in my wax warmers around my apartment. After this I clean the jars out and recycle the ones I don't want and then repurpose the clean ones...I recently discovered a local coffee shop in my city that sells very reasonably priced plants so I will definitely be making plans to go pick some up and repurpose my candle jars for plants! – Sofia

The year before my husband passed away we decided that we would work another year and put all our earnings into remodeling and updating the house. Flooring in some rooms, painting the entire inside of the house and remodeling a weird bathroom. When he got sick, all that got put aside and stayed put aside until this year...2.5 years later. So now, I have beautiful paint throughout, new hardwood floor in the family room (some things fixed that never were done

when he built the house 20 years, ago, etc.) and it looks amazing. My only problem is...now the fireplace looks outdated and needs to be redone, as do the kitchen cabinets. Will I be truly happy then? That's the question, but for now, I'm enjoying the newness of fresh paint and flooring. I'll plan for some future upgrades as well, but for now, I'll be thankful and content and say that God is so good! - Debbie

### **Three Moms – The Bathroom – by The Cousins**

The kids' bathroom might be room in the house that every mom hates to enter, to clean, to present, or to visit on any given day. From all the bathtub clutter, to toys, to dirty clothes, to toothpaste on the sink, and all the things...keeping this one particular room "pretty" might seem near to impossible. We asked our three moms to share their tips on bathroom cleanup, refresh, organizing, etc. They have some good tips!

#### Mom of Three

It seems that our guest/kids' bathroom has always been a priority. And being the guest bathroom as well as the kids' bathroom is frustrating. I want it to be "fun" but to always look nice for guests. This has called for creativity with storage so that the kids' "things" are not all over the counter, or a mess. So we clean often, especially with boys! And...we only have one small cabinet.

By the tub, I have three hooks where their towels hang, to keep them off the floor. We have a two-tiered tray in the corner on the counter for my daughter's hair products so that they are organized and off the counter. I love the two tiers! Also, under the sink each kid has a shower caddy – which they can pull out, use their things, and put them back. Inside is their toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, etc.

Of course, they don't always put things back! So we rotate chores in the house, and every Friday one kid has the bathroom as their chore. He/she cleans the counter, the floor, the toilet and the tub. We do help with the toilet! Taking care of their bathroom gives them ownership, so this happens weekly. We also make sure they put their individual things away before the cleaning takes place, so that the one who cleans can just clean. The caddy is my favorite thing, and keeps stuff off the counter.

We also have fresh towels, and a nice soap pump. Otherwise, the counter is clear and clean, with a little artwork on the walls. Easy storage (that suits them, not me!) has worked for easy storing and cleanup. This also reduces frustration among the kids! Our littlest was age 4 when he started, as he began with wiping down the counter!

Taking ownership, letting them clean, getting them organized, helps them and me, as their parent!

#### Mom of Two

Our bathroom is nothing special, and it's also our laundry room and our guest bathroom. Therefore, it's not decorated only for the girls. I have to be creative with storage and for practicality when guests visit!

The girls are ages three and five and love bath toys. We love these mesh bags that stick to the walls, which is great for when guests visit, so that they're not stepping on toys. The girls just use our towels and don't have their own, but they do have a rubber mat in the bathtub to keep them from slipping.



## **In the Kitchen – Salad and Soups – by Marcy Lytle**

Spring makes me want to make a picnic, so I can't wait for the first one in a park with basket in hand! Preparing for picnic days means searching out good sandwich and salad recipes that can be enjoyed at home or away, with your family or just for two! I've made all of the below recipes in the past month and they are all delicious! Enjoy...

### **Bacon Guacamole Sandwich**

I saw a picture of this sandwich my daughter had made, and she shared the recipe with me. So good!

#### Ingredients (per each sandwich)

- 2 slices bacon
- 2 slices sourdough bread
- 1 T butter room temp
- ½ cup jack and cheddar shredded
- 2 T guacamole
- 1 T crumbled tortilla chips

#### Directions

Cook the bacon and drain. Butter one side of each slice of bread and sprinkle half of the cheese onto one unbuttered side, followed by guac, bacon, chips, the remaining cheese. Then top with the other slice, buttered side up. Grill over med heat until golden brown and cheese melts, about 2-3 minutes per side.

### **Italian Orzo Salad**

This is a great spring salad, and tastes even better the next day or the next...

#### Ingredients

- 12 oz dry orzo
- ½ cup halved cherry tomatoes
- 2/3 c chickpeas drained and rinsed
- 1 med cucumber peeled and chopped
- 1 T fresh chopped basil
- ¼ red onion chopped
- ½ cup packed baby spinach
- 1 c Italian dressing (make your own or buy)

#### Directions

Place orzo in a pot, cover with water, and stir in ½ t salt...bring to a boil. Cook 8-9 minutes until tender, drain and rinse with cold water.

In a large bowl, combine orzo, tomatoes, chickpeas, cukes, basil, onions and spinach and toss.

Toss with dressing and serve immediately or cover tightly and chill, then toss with dressing just before serving.

### **Roast Pork Sandwiches in the Slow Cooker**

This sandwich is so darn good, so flavorful, and pretty.

#### Ingredients

2 lbs boneless pork shoulder cut into four chunks

1 T fennel seeds coarsely ground

1 small sprig rosemary

1 bay leaf

4 cloves garlic smashed

5 T olive oil

1 large loaf Italian bread

8 thin slices provolone cheese

1 c chopped giardiniera, plus brine for drizzling

8 jarred pepperoncini thinly sliced

2 cups baby arugula

#### Directions

Season the pork generously with salt and pepper and rub all over with fennel seeds. Transfer to 6-8 quart slow cooker and add rosemary, bay leaf, garlic and olive oil. Cover and cook about 7 hours til meat is browned in spots and tender.

Pull pork apart with 2 large forks and discard any chunks of fat, and the rosemary and bay leaf. Toss the meat in juices, season.

Cut the bread and split open. Toast if desired. Drive cheese among bottom halves, top with meat, leaving juice in the cooker. Top with giardiniera plus a drizzle of the brine, the pepperoncini and arugula.

Strain juices from the cooker and pour into small cups for dipping.

## **Philly Cheesesteak Sliders**

I recently made these for dinner when my son stopped by. They were so easy, so tasty and so so cute!

For a dozen...

- 1 large green pepper, sliced
- ½ large sweet onion, sliced
- 2 tsp olive oil
- 1 package Hawaiian sweet rolls
- ¾ lb sliced deli roast beef
- 6 slices provolone cheese
- 3 T butter
- 1 t minced dried onion
- 1 t Worcestershire sauce
- ½ t garlic powder

In a skillet, cook the peppers and onion over med high heat til tender, about 8-10 min.

Without separating the rolls, cut them in half horizontally and place the bottom half in a greased 8X8 baking pan. Layer the roast beef, pepper mixture and cheese, then place on the top half of the rolls.

In a saucepan, melt the butter, add in the dried onion, sauce and garlic powder...drizzle over the rolls. Cover and refrigerate 8 hours (I didn't do this – only an hour or so and they tasted great).

Preheat oven to 350, remove rolls from fridge 30 minutes before baking. Bake uncovered 15 minutes, then cover with foil and bake til cheese melts, another 10 minutes.

## **Chickpea Salad**

We packed this for a Sunday picnic with pita bread and avocado – adding lettuce and tomato too. It was so light and fresh and tasty!

Ingredients

- 1 can chickpeas drained and mashed
- 2 stalks chopped celery
- 1 small chopped onion
- ½ c diced yellow pepper
- 5 T mayo
- 3 T dill or sweet pickle relish
- 1 T brown mustard
- 1 T lemon juice
- 1 t paprika



- ¼ t cayenne (optional)

Add chopped veggies to mashed chickpeas, and the rest of the ingredients to mix. That's it!

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

*Every month, this column is for sharing what I've been learning – little tips and fun facts and life changing things, sometimes. It's so fun to share, I hope you find it so fun to read!*

Don't assume you know how to pronounce the names of small towns. Recently learned that New Ulm, Texas (which we had been rhyming with plum), is actually New Ulm!

When making apple cake or pie, use a variety of apples instead of just one – it enhances the flavor!

Tucking a long tee in your jeans? You can actually tuck a piece through your belt loop and tie it – this keeps the tee from riding up during the day!

Pretzel rods spread with peanut butter (on the top third) and rolled in chopped trail mix is such an easy, pretty and oh-so-tasty appetizer!

Cat 5 is not just a term for a bad hurricane; it's also a term for an Ethernet patch cable! (I am learning so much in our remodel!)

It's SO much fun to eat peanut M&M's slowly by biting off the end, then grabbing the peanut with your teeth to eat it, and then the bottom. I do this at the theater.

There are the cutest pocket folders in tie-dye hues with small tabs that are great for traveling and corralling all of your paperwork – at Target!

Divine knowledge...it's the kind that sinks into your deepest soul...all of the character of God...namely, that he is inherently GOOD.

Have you tasted halva? Google chocolate halva and try the recipe. Had it at a restaurant and it was so good!

The little candles in the Target dollar spot are the best – for decorating – for placing on your table to fancy it up – for gifts – and they switch them out often – and they're all so cute!

Those cute little serving retro dishes are really invalid cups for sick folks in hospitals that couldn't sit up to drink!

When getting carpet replaced, instead of removing all clothing from closets, just tie them up with garbage bags from the underneath to protect them from the dust. Tip from the installer!

There's a fun app called ToonArt that can take a photo and make that person a cartoon character – so fun!

Pickles, lemon juice and black pepper, mixed with mayo - makes the BEST tartar sauce!

When packing for a trip, snap a pic of all of your outfits (with shoes, accessories, etc.) and place them in a grid, and save. This makes getting dressed so easy while you're gone!

HEB (local grocery store here) has cinnamon sugar Churro almonds – so delish!

Crucible Coffee, according to my husband (who is a coffee connoisseur), is the best coffee around!

One can hang overalls on the wall for décor but...would one really want to?

## **Sugar and Spice – Green with Energy – by Angela Dolbear**

Welcome to **SUGAR + SPICE**, and everything nice in the world of beauty.

Not just because spring is in the air, but also because it is one of my favorite colors: green!

Whenever I am considering adding an eye shadow palette to my collection, I always scan the pans of color for a green...either matte or shimmer (not so much pressed glitter, as I am kind of over glitter at the moment. Get back to me on this as the holidays approach).

A dash of green eyeshadow, especially an olive with gold undertones is so flattering. It adds a vitality and healthy glow to the eyes. It also neutralizes any eye redness, which is a bonus for those of us who often contend with eye allergies.

My current favorite eyeshadow palettes that feature beautiful greens are both from [ColourPop](#); the Star Wars “[Mandalorian](#),” and “[The Child](#)” palettes. I was excited when these palettes came out, not only because I am a big Star Wars fan, but also because the color story of each palette is so beautiful and versatile, offering a variety of looks. And the greens are so lovely! The “Darth Vader” palette is due out soon, so stay tuned...

ColourPop is one of my favorite cosmetic companies. Their products are excellent and affordable. Since I am currently on a “cease fire” from purchasing eye shadow palettes (I have so many...I mean SOOO many), I don't feel bad for picking up one of their mini palettes like the Star Wars series, especially when they are on sale, and so cute!

[ColourPop lippie stix](#) are excellent lipsticks too. The colors are rich, and the formula is creamy. The lippies stix are long tubes of lipstick which provide a precise application, so I often swipe a color on without using lip liner first. Just blot with a tissue, and go!

### **DESERTED ISLAND product:**

Not that I would wear make up on a deserted island, not even for the cute side-walking crabs, or the mysterious mermen swimming in the sea just beyond the rocks off my island. But if I did, I would keep a tube of [Carmex](#) in the pocket of my sarong, so my lips would never be cracked or chapped when I was ready to apply some lipstick. In movies about people on deserted islands, their lips are always so chapped and flaky. I would want to prevent that. Blessings to you!

*Angela Dolbear, Beauty Editor, is the author of contemporary spiritual novels, such as [THE GARDEN KEY](#) Series, and [THE TORMENTOR'S TALE](#), as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). She is also a self-proclaimed beauty junkie, and has been since long before her mother allowed her to start wearing makeup at the age of 14. She keeps UPS and the USPS busy delivering small boxes on a regular basis from Ulta, Sephora, Amazon, and many independent cosmetics companies to her home Nashville, TN. Please connect with her at [www.AngelaDolbear.com](http://www.AngelaDolbear.com)*



HOME

## **Practical Parenting – Family Fun – by Marcy Lytle**

It's April, already. In a few short weeks, summer months will be looming and before we know, the kids will cry, "I'm bored," and we'll be frustrated again with what to do, how to do it, the funds to make it happen, and all the things. We thought it would be fun to put together an idea list for you to draw from, to make some family outings or experiences that won't break the bank, will be fun, and you'll be set so you can enjoy it all yourself...as the parent!

Plan a themed dinner – Find a movie for the family to watch (animated or not) and pick one that's perhaps set in another city or country, and have themed food to go with the movie! Let the older kids research and then take them to purchase the ingredients. For example, *Back to the Outback* is an Australian film. Think about baking Australian soda bread, and make a charcuterie tray to go with!

<https://www.hirokoliston.com/damper-australian-soda-bread/>

Plan a fancy dinner – make a list of the fancy things and let the kids set the table: candles, cloth napkins, all pieces of flatware, flowers in vases, music playing. Assign each kid one of these items. No cloth napkins? Purchase bandannas from the dollar store in different colors – they're great! No flowers? Let the kids cut small branches from bushes or take a wildflower drive and pick. The menu? It can be anything, because it all tastes good when it's fancy!

Puzzle night with snacks to delight - Set up say four areas with four 100-piece (or more) puzzles. Allow two people per table, then after 15 minutes, everyone moves spots. Provide four easy snacks like chips/dips, fruit kebabs, brownies, and little sliders. It will be so fun! When the puzzles are complete, snap photos and give high-fives for jobs well done!

Day trip away – Pack up snacks and a map and head out on a day trip with the family. Find a park, perhaps a museum or a historical site, an ice cream stop, maybe a zoo...include three to four stops on your way out and back in, and call it a vacation! Print out a map, give the kids a highlighter, and let them chart where you go each time! Heck, give them a notebook to store all the trips in, with receipts and photos!

Picnic near the water – Is there a lake within driving distance to your house? Pack a huge picnic, include some Frisbees and games, along with reading material and grab an early spot by the water. If there's room to roam, bring kites. Make this a regular thing that you do every two weeks, if you want! Make a list of all things picnic and let the kids help you gather and pack, each time. The Dollar Tree is great for cute plates/napkins to match, even pretty trays and plastic cups. Use a big blanket for your spread. Visit the library before you go!

Board games and baked potatoes – Like you did the puzzles above, set up four areas of board games – easy ones to play that you can visit while you move your piece. Examples might be Candyland, Checkers, Pass the Pig, etc. – whatever you have – or buy a new one for the mix! Have baked potatoes warmed and ready, and halfway through the night stop and top them with all the trimmings and enjoy. Employ the kiddos for ideas for toppers – cheese, bacon, brisket, black beans – so many options!

Those are just six ideas and they will keep you busy, for sure. Make a list of family outings and keep it in full view, so that when that day arrives on the calendar – everyone knows what's coming! Plan out these family events now, so that preparations can be made and anticipation can be enjoyed. Happy end of school year and soon to be summer!

## **I Don't Do Teens – Four Points – by Marcy Lytle**

On the news in our area is a story about a club formed at a local school, one where the kids are seeking out all of the books that were banned from the school library, in order to read them anyway. In other words, just because these kids were told not to read these books has piqued the kids' interest, and it makes the books all the more enticing to read. What is it that the adults are wanting the kids not to read?

While my initial reaction was "what is wrong with our kids today," I remember as a teen myself having this insatiable desire to know more and explore more and experience more of the things my parents banned from my life, as well. We had rules that made no sense to me, or my brother, and we bucked a few. In fact, I'm guessing most teens push the boundaries and want to know what it is their parents are keeping them from, and they don't like being told no to things that seem enticing.

But back to the book story. I recall being upset when my own son was in middle school and his required reading list included nothing but books with "problems," in my estimation. He had to choose a book from the school list, but after looking through them, all seemed to have issues and contain material we didn't want our son to be exposed to. A wise friend suggested we choose one and read the book with our son, discussing it and talking over the questionable material.

I suppose it's just bound up in our hearts, as humans, to want to explore, do what we're told not to do, and take risks, especially if there's someone telling us to stay put, abstain from this, or don't do that because it's dangerous. My kids never wanted to wear helmets while riding their bicycles, and you know what? They often missed out on fun rides because they chose to stay in, if they had to wear a helmet. We didn't budge on the rule, and they forfeited a nice ride.

One of the perks and privileges we have as a maturing adult is to finally realize that not all authority is out to stifle our fun; that many rules are set into place for our freedom and protection, and some things that we're told not to do provide life...not restriction. At least that's the hope...

Our parents told us to wait until marriage for sex. We have our own children now, and we know – either from experience or maturity or both – that this wisdom was indeed wise. We say the same to our kids.

Our parents told us to get enough sleep, eat healthy foods, and drink lots of water. And maybe they told us some other things that seemed just preference, and not truth. But as we matured, we realized that some of those basic foundational healthy habits were so important for living a healthy adult life. We no longer found ourselves able to party all night and go to work and function the next day. What they said about sleep was true!

I guess what makes me sad the most is the attitude behind why we all want to do what we're not supposed to do, and we can't seem to do that which is good for us. I think there's a verse in the bible about that somewhere...oh yes! Paul mentioned this same dilemma. Always in a quandary over sticking with lifegiving wisdom, or wandering off a cliff without a parachute.



What's the answer for this next generation that wants to read all the books that have been banned, or bend all the rules they've been given, or explore places and drive roads that are full of potholes and blinking lights?

It's the same answer Paul gave after he thought about his own frailty when it came to doing and making the best choices in life.

- He acknowledged the war within him.
- He voiced the inner delight he truly had in God.
- He realized he needed a rescue.
- He gave thanks for Jesus Christ.

Our best defense, our one and only hope of salvation for our kids and for ourselves is to truly know and be known by Jesus. When we take those four steps above, we surrender our misunderstandings, our wanderings, our desires to buck and run, and all of the things that hold us back or make us feel trapped. We surrender all of that in favor of a relationship with the Father that entrusts all of our shortcomings and failures to the One who guides us like a Shepherd into good places and green pastures.

Kids are going to always be intrigued by what we say no to, and we will always be on our knees praying for our kids to obey and be safe. Banned books might open the door to all sorts of evil, if our kids read them. Or there might be one they pick up that changes their lives. And we, as parents, can only do the best we know how to do when it comes to navigating the waters with teens in tow.

Our best is to teach them the best we know how, pray hard that they take delight in Jesus and knowing Him, and trust that the God who formed them before we even thought of them is able to keep them from falling into pits of darkness and despair. He's a faithful father that allows us to run from his house to the places where the pigs eat slop, but his arms are always open when we realize the provision in his house that awaits our return.

## An Adage A Day - Wishful Thinking – by Carole Gilbert

Springtime is a time of growth, hopefulness, and wishing. Everything is blossoming and coming out after the winter. Whether we like to travel, plant, or just enjoy the warmth and sunshine, we are all wishing for something. We have thoughts of what we would like to have during the warmer season. Is there something you are wishing for? I'm wishing for lots of good produce, especially after seeing a large major grocery store without bananas!

Have you ever wondered if God wishes? What in the world would He wish for? Maybe He's wishing we would do a little better taking care of His world, His creation. Do we wish for God's creation to be a better place?

“Wishful thinking” is an odd idiom. It started around the 1920's and, although the thought had already been around for some time, the idea was first put into words and communicated by Sigmund Freud.

“Wishful thinking” doesn't mean what you would think. It means that you wish for something to happen that is probably unlikely. You're hoping for a pipe dream, or you're on the way to never-never land. You're getting your hopes up for nothing. This idiom started with a negative meaning. I admit, I've used it this way a couple of times, myself, especially while raising my children. There were times they had wishful thinking over something that I knew was not going to happen and I told them so. They knew it too, but, as they would say back to me, “It never hurts to wish.”

So, do we use “wishful thinking” as it was intended, or do we put our own meaning to it? Do we think outside the box when using it? I hope I do! I hope I use it positively instead of negatively. I hope I use it as my cup's half full and not half empty.

My little granddaughter in the picture was thinking outside of the box, her brother's box shaped room that is, when she was having wishful thinking that day. Her mama found her sitting on her brother's little table in his room just staring out the window. But the window blinds were closed! She couldn't see outside! But she knew what was there, outside the window. It wasn't never-never land. It was obtainable. And she was having positive wishful thoughts about it.

That makes me think of God. We can't see Him, but we know He's there. And heaven is not a never-never land! It's obtainable. Our God doesn't really fit into the meaning of wishful thinking. We can have Him, positively, with no wishing. We only have to believe and have faith. A synonym for wishful is hopeful. There's no need for wishful thinking with God, all we need is His real, living, hope. Jesus is the living hope! And this hope is a sure-fire, done deal, no uncertainty, kind of hope. And that's a positive!

The Bible says, “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” (Hebrews 11:1 NIV)

A wish to our God can come true and He can fulfill our other wishes if we believe with confidence. I have a positive wishful thinking that the grass will be greener on my side. That there will be more than two peas in my pod. And that an apple a day WILL keep the Doctor away.

My granddaughter's wishful thinking of seeing the sun and sky, grass and trees, and everything else outside did come true that day, also. Her mama did open the blinds and I'm sure my granddaughter even got to go outside, later.

What are you wishing for?

Photo Allison Gilbert

## **Tiny Living – Random Adjustments – by Leyanne Enterline**

Hot, cold, hot, cold...that is the way I bounce back and forth in our tiny space! And I feel I need to write *again* about the temperature in our tiny space!

It has been very hard to regulate the temperature in the trailer with how random the weather has been this past season...and to still be able keep everyone in my family comfortable.

Since the winter was so cold this year we had to run the heater a lot more. With that came the possibility of running out of propane. While running, it heated up the place pretty well, so much that it started to turn our tiny home into a furnace! We did try to run these little plug-in heaters that work fine, but even that became tricky at night.

At night for bedtime, I put the plug-in heaters in the bedrooms and shut the doors. Well that makes the living area a freezer! So we have to turn the actual trailer heat down to 58 - that way it doesn't warm up the rooms too much when the heat kicks on. Whew! Who would have guessed so much was involved into keeping a trailer at a decent and comfortable temperature! Same goes for the summer, though we don't have to worry about running out of propane then, thank goodness! Especially, with how hard it's been to get the propane. Now we're told our tanks have to get an inspection before we fill them next time. I never knew they even had an expiration date.

*Oh, the things we have learned.*

In the summer, we just have to keep the air set to 68 and plug in fans, pretty much on our faces, at night to keep us comfortable. There are no ceiling fans, so mini fans are all over the place, and this does help. We have to keep the vent fans running as well, because for some reason bees can get into those and fly around! So with the fans running, the breeze keeps them away or cuts them up! I also try and keep bird feeders close to the trailer in hopes that the birds help keep a few of the bees away, as well.

Every day I feel like we learn something new or try to adjust to some random strange experience that can happen in a trailer! We are constantly adapting. One would think smaller space equals less problems. But it's really smaller space *in a not normal home* equals more adjustments.

There are so many things I could talk about, like our fridge leaking randomly or the freezer getting frost bite, or how we cannot plug the coffee pot and a heater into the same breaker area. I could write about the rubber lining in the kitchen popping off the floors or the shower cracking, or the blinds flying off the door... on and on. However, I'll save some of those stories for another month.

*Until then...*

*remember love grows best in tiny spaces.*

## **A Night to Remember – Two Bad Guys** - by Marcy Lytle

Luke 23 might be the most incredible story of forgiveness ever, and it's one our kiddos need to know. So why not tell it and demonstrate it to them this Easter season? It's found in verses 32-43, and it's a great read as we remember Jesus' death on the cross, but look at the events that took place just before that death. In fact, it won't only help the kids visualize and experience God's love; it might help renew the same for us, the parents!

Preparation: You'll need some toothpicks – three pairs tied together to form crosses, a blob of Play Dough, some teddy grahams and a bit of cake icing for “glue.”

It's almost time for Jesus to die on the cross, the very reason he came to earth, so that the perfect sacrifice can be made so that we who believe in Him can live forever. And he's about to be hung on a cross in a cruel death. However, there are three crosses on the hill where Jesus is being taken.

*Stretch out the playdough on a tray to make a base, and insert the three toothpick crosses.*

Why were there three crosses, instead of one?

It seems that two other guys were going to be hung on either side of Jesus, and these were really bad guys – criminals. These guys are observing Jesus and his walk toward the hill where he would be put to death.

The first thing they hear from Jesus is a prayer to his Father to forgive the people that are leading him to his death. Jesus had done no wrong, except obey his Father and love people, yet he was being killed by the evil rulers of the day. Yes, his love for these evil rulers caused Jesus to ask his Father to forgive them.

*Has anyone ever treated you badly? How did it make you feel about them?*

The second thing that happened, which these two criminals observed, is that these evil rulers were sneering at Jesus and mocking him. To sneer means to be very rude, and to mock means to laugh at someone meanly.

*How would you feel if someone were laughing at you, pointing at you, and making fun of you? What would you want to do to them?*

So these two guys and Jesus were then hung on the crosses, ready to die. Two for the horrible things they had done, and one because he was obeying the will of his Father to lay down his life for the world – including you and me.

*Hang the gummy bears on the crosses using the icing as the glue.*

One of the criminals next to Jesus joins in the mocking and demands that Jesus save them and himself if he is really Christ, the son of God. But look what the other criminal says. In verse 41 he realizes that he deserves to die because of all the horrible things he has done, and that Jesus has done nothing wrong and is dying right beside them.

Two criminals, both observing the same events, and yet reacting so differently. One is demanding that Jesus save them, and show his power...the other one is humbly realizing the beauty of what Jesus is doing and how he needs a savior.

*Do you know why we all need a savior? Because the bible says we have all sinned – done wrong – and need forgiveness in our lives. Have you ever disobeyed or done something wrong?*

The second criminal looked at Jesus and humbly asked to be remembered when Jesus' kingdom came – and guess what? Jesus gladly answered him with a big YES – and said the guy would be with him forever in paradise. Paradise is a perfect place free of death, sickness, pain and suffering. It's a place with God of peace, joy and love.

*Look at the three crosses and think about those two criminals on either side of Jesus. Remove one of them and go toss it in the trash. That's what the guy with the sneering, mocking attitude got – death without hope. Move the other cross right next to Jesus. This is what the humble guy received for observing Jesus' character and believing in who Jesus was, asking humbly for forgiveness – which Jesus gladly gave.*

This Easter season let's decide which guy we are most like. And let's decide to be like the one that observed Jesus' love for those that were against him and his humility as he hung on the cross, so that we might live.

Family prayer:

*Jesus, thank you for obeying your Father and dying for our sins. I too am a sinner, because I have done wrong things many times. I ask you to forgive me, and help me to forgive those that mock and sneer at me. Thank you for saving that bad guy, and all the bad guys in the world. I pray for them, that they would know your love and experience your grace. Thank you for dying, and then rising from the dead so that we can all live forever in peace, joy and love!*

## Chipped China - The Fog of Indecision – by Jennifer Lytle

Many years ago, I became fascinated with a couple of passages from Isaiah. One [passage](#) says,

*Awake, awake,  
Put on your strength, O Zion;  
Put on your beautiful garments,  
O Jerusalem, the holy city;  
For the uncircumcised and the unclean  
Will no longer come into you.  
Shake yourself from the dust, arise,  
O captive Jerusalem;  
Rid yourself of the chains around your neck,  
O captive Daughter of Zion.*

Another translation says that last stanza this way: loose the chains from your neck...The call here is to step into the freedom already available. The beautiful garments are already this daughter's possession. Her strength is already known. For whatever reason(s), she has remained passive.

Have you ever gone into a situation knowing it would be temporary? As I think through my answer, I recognize several such situations. I intended to reflect on one example in particular and only now identify this as a possible issue which regularly yields me ineffective . . . at least when viewed through this instance.

It's hard for me to tell this story. Primarily because I haven't seen the other side of my story. I'm going to try.

God opened a door for me. On the other side of the door was a duty, an opportunity, an assignment, and a gift (possibly, gifts, but please see the above paragraph to conceptualize my ambiguity). I knew my appointment time and approximate duration. As time went on, I became despondent about the assignment and the ongoing nature of the duties. I felt ineffective, pressed down, yet I also was contemplating extending my stay for various reasons which all seem perfectly logical and sensible, and in fact, downright appropriate. That was the start of the real trouble for me. I found myself a bit lost and foggy. It was difficult to understand why I was so groggy and I mostly accounted physical tiredness as the culprit. I was fussy and grumpy and snippy, but I have often struggled with these deficits in character.

A few weeks ago, I had a conversation with my husband. I talked about my logical conclusion of extending my assignment and he softly expressed a sincere concern for my well-being. The constant demand was already having an effect.

His comments gave me renewed clarity about my initial intention and I arrived at work without the daze and fog. I stepped on the proverbial (and yet, actual) scene to address a situation that had gone unchecked for months. The situation was perhaps like Apostle Paul's thorn in his side, only it was both personal and communal. Several of my colleagues had grumbled and complained and gasped at the scenario, though no one felt it was their duty, or no one was equipped to make the necessary changes.

In that instance of supernatural clarity (it could only be such as prior I too had grumbled, complained, and considered why the scenario was left openly inappropriate), I walked up to the problem, and with certainty and love, I told that problem it had all of today to remain, but it would never again cross the threshold of the campus. To be as clear as possible, I identified the consequence and walked away to follow up in writing with my expectation and commitment.

It was only after acting, did I realize how ineffective and disoriented I had been. It was only after going back to my original point of clarity and intention that I recognized the utter fog, almost stupor, I had been walking in previously.

Is there an area you are walking around in that renders you ineffective, emotionally "stuck," or disoriented? I wonder if it's time for you too to set your mind and [walk in the power and strength](#) freely offered to those who will?

*Father, we thank you for the ability to remove chains from ourselves. We recognize your complete provision and present help. We thank you for the promise of freedom and light burdens. We offer these cares, these yokes, and yield them to you. We thank you for purpose, strength, and clarity. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.*





YOU

## **Inner Strength – Finding Joy in Play – by Michelle**

Miracles happen all the time that make me smile. I am blessed to say that my boys have taught me how to appreciate our Creator's miracles and enjoy them.

If we slow down long enough, we can all recognize and appreciate each one.

Thanks to my kids, the following phrases they say bring a smile to my heart as I feel a new appreciation for God's miracles:

Look at the moon!

Look at the stars!

That cloud looks like a butterfly!

The moon and the sun are out at the same time!

The sky is orange!

It's raining leaves!

Look at all these crystals! (Tiny pieces of ice that haven't melted yet)

Listening to these phrases of innocence distracts me from thoughts and feelings that the only way to really relax requires getting away.

Not only is it appreciating God's miracles that my boys have taught me, but it's also learning how to find joy in play. God wants us to have joy in our lives. My kids show me how to do this if I'm open to learn. For example, building a castle using paper cups then looking down into the middle of it is so cool!

Baking a cake, freezing an object in water, making a rainbow out of blocks, playing delivery by hiding in a box...I could go on and on. These are all simple ways of getting joy out of life that my boys have taught me.

Sometimes I think,

"Do I really want to play? I'm tired. It's hard to get on the floor."

Once I do though, it's the best! In fact, sometimes I turn into the one that does not want to stop playing. Just the other night, my seven-year-old turned picking up one of his many balls into practicing soccer tricks, and he invited me to play soccer with him. It was too enticing to say no even though it was close to bedtime. (We play an abbreviated version, so we don't break anything indoors.)

With all the pressures we as parents sometimes face, I encourage us all to allow our kids to teach us how to appreciate God's daily miracles and find joy in play.

Thank goodness for the blessings of children - their innocence, open minds, vibrant expressions, and light in their eyes.

I will always be appreciative of the lessons that my kids teach me every day!

## **Life in a Nutshell – Hundreds Watching** – by Jill Montz

As I am writing this it feels like our world is a very scary place. But that is nothing new. That sentence could have been written two months ago...two years...two decades...or even two thousand years ago.

Ever since Adam and Eve first walked in the Garden this world has had evil lurking at every turn...tempting our thoughts, twisting the truth, telling bold lies, and just basically taking its best shot at turning souls against God.

We are told in 1 Peter 5:8...

“Be alert and of sober mind.  
Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion  
looking for someone to devour.”

Yes indeed...our world is a very scary place.

But we have hope. And God continues to remind us of that daily.

A few Sundays back I was asked to lead the scripture reading and prayer time with my dear friend, Cyndi, during our 8am worship service. We have two services on Sunday and I usually attend the 10:30am one but I agreed to come in early and do my part. Cyndi was going to read a scripture of her choice and I would pray.

The Saturday of our selected weekend, Cyndi sent me her verses and I agreed they were most appropriate. Neither of us is big on public speaking but we were encouraged that we would be standing together on the church stage the next morning.

Sunday morning rolled around and I got dressed for church. I was still a bit nervous but I prayed for God to calm my nerves and just give me the words He wanted me to say that day.

I met Cyndi before the service started and we agreed we were glad to be doing the 8am service. It isn't as full as the 10:30 service and the earlier service is not streamed live on Facebook or linked on the church website. Cyndi had her scripture ready to go and I was just hoping God would give me the words when I opened my mouth.

The service started. We stood to sing. Then the preacher got up and said he would be doing the scripture reading and prayer this morning.

Cyndi and I were a little confused but then...

He read the EXACT scripture Cyndi had planned to read.

Such a God thing!

Proof God wanted that scripture read...and that He has a sense of humor!

Later that morning, before Sunday school, our pastor came to our class and apologized he had gotten the information wrong about who was supposed to read in each service. The pair that

was supposed to do it in the 10:30 service had called to let him know they were sick and couldn't come. He just got the service times mixed up.

Then he asked, "Would y'all like to read and pray during the 10:30 service?"

My brain was screaming, "NOOOOOOOOOOOOO!"

But when I opened my mouth the Holy Spirit made me say, "Sure." (It had to be the Holy Spirit because the Good Lord knows my fleshly self was not up for that time slot!)

As the service drew closer, I was becoming more and more nervous. Hundreds of people would be in the pews. Several more would be watching online or would watch later via the website. I needed more than a prayer...I needed a miracle not to pass smooth out right there in front of the worship team, congregation, and God Himself. If that were to happen, I don't know who would have been more embarrassed...me or my 14-year-old daughter. (Probably her. Her embarrassment meter is quick to accelerate these days.)

When it was our turn, we walked up front and I scanned the crowd for friendly (and sympathetic faces). Then Cyndi read her verses...John 16:32-33

"A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home.  
You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.  
I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace.  
In this world you will have trouble.  
But take heart! I have overcome the world."

As Cyndi finished, I asked the congregation to bow their heads and pray with me. To be honest, I don't remember what I prayed that day. I do know my voice was a little shaky. I do know that when our worship leader, Brian, started playing low soft chords on his guitar as background music I was thankful for the accompaniment to my vibrato style prayer. I also do know that I did have peace just like the verse said.

*All I could think about was I could "take heart" because God was with me.*

He understood my uncomfortableness but He also understood my heart. While my "trouble" at the moment was a first world problem for sure, God still cared and I still felt His presence. And in that moment I knew this too...

God is there...as the people flee from the Ukraine or from any type of violence in this world.  
God is there...as those who are trying to help render aid to the victims.  
God is there...when the phone call comes in from the doctor's office with bad news.  
God is there...when the money is gone but the bills are not.  
God is there...when the new mother walks the floor at night with a crying baby.  
God is there...when family members hold the hands of their loved ones as they take their last breath.  
God is there...when the parents try to figure out where they went wrong with their kid who has taken the wrong path.  
God is there...when the mom smiles and waves as tears streak down her cheeks as her daughter drives off to college.  
God is there...when the pregnancy test is negative...again.

God is there...when the pregnancy test is positive...and unplanned.  
God is there...when the couple smiles and says I do.  
God is there...when the judge sighs and says the divorce is final.  
God is there...when everything is going right.  
God is there...when everything is going wrong.  
God is there...for everything.

He never leaves us or forsakes us. We truly can have peace knowing that while we will face trouble in this world, Jesus sits at the right hand of His Father because He overcame this world and death, and one day we will be with Him in Heaven.

Can I get an Amen?

## Healthy Habits – Just Plain Tired – by Marcy Lytle

Have you ever felt that way? You're just tired, you don't know why, but you're just done. You need a nap, you need a boost, and you need an escape from the doing. Because all of the doing has made you tired...or at least something has! Maybe it's a health issue, but more often than not we're just plain tired for reasons that we can do something about – little changes – to make ourselves feel spunky again!

If you're just plain tired, maybe consider these reasons and see if one of them might be *the* reason. Try asking yourself these questions, or reconsider the idea, and see if you find yourself ready to go instead of ready to crash!

How old is your mattress or your pillow? Maybe it's time for a new one.

What did you just eat? Did you overeat? I have a friend that places half of her meal in a to-go box before she starts eating. Smart lady!

Have you enjoyed the sunshine regularly? Missing vitamin D can affect so many things!

Are you feeling depressed or stressed? Talk to a friend and ask her to pray with you, or ask for help!

How much caffeine are you consuming? Read the results of drinking too much and how it can make you tired, instead of giving you energy!

Hard to maintain your hydration? Do something to change your habits – buy a new water bottle, set out bottled water on your desk, keep a log, stay accountable to someone.

How much do you sit? It's spring now, so change your habits and get off the sofa and out of the chair and move. Workout to a video, take daily walks – make moving a part of your daily routine.

Kids not sleeping? This makes for tired parents! It's not a crime to let them sleep with you if that helps them stay asleep. There's no guilt in asking your spouse to take turns with you, getting up. And there's no shame in taking a nap when they do, to catch up – if you can!

Worry got you wide-eyed? Imagine, picture it in your mind, placing each care – name them – at his feet. Read scripture. Set your mind on the truth as you nod off...instead of the latest news.

Weary from well-doing? It happens. Maybe you're a caretaker, you give of yourself and it takes a toll on your emotions, but you can't seem to get a break. ASK for help. Something hard to do...but do it.

There are all sorts of reasons for being tired, and sometimes we need a health checkup. But sometimes we just need to read a list like the one above, and stop at the one that screams "Yes!" that's you! Tired people make bad decisions, speak rudely, and are not fun to be around. So let's do us all a favor and see what's making us just plain tired, and do something to change our norm into something new and good.

## Life Right Now - Meant to Stand Out - By Jennifer Stephens

We've all seen her. Some of us might even be her. She's the one awkwardly standing off to the side, fussing with her shirt while trying to simultaneously disappear into the wall *and* capture the attention of someone, anyone, willing to start a conversation with her. Or she'll avoid people altogether, sitting on the floor, making friends with the dog at every social gathering. That's me. I gravitate to the furry guests. Every. Single. Time. Because...I don't fit in.

At least it feels that way. Sometimes. Most of the time. Watching everyone else effortlessly work the crowd, my mind becomes a tangled mess of memories. The one always picked last in junior high PE class. The one who never wore the "cool" clothes (I was the girl in the cheap jeans from Sears Surplus while the popular kids donned designer denim). Insecure. Awkward. Out of place.

It's not that I don't have friends. I do. Really good ones. Friends that I know will be there in times of crisis. Friends that will cheer for my successes and overlook my failures. But I've never really had a girl group. Never had my own squad or ever been on a girl's trip.

If my life were a TV show, I would be the "extra," the "friend of." When Monica, Rachel and the gang meet up at the coffee shop, they'd let me sit on the couch if I *happened* to show up, but they wouldn't think to call first. I don't have a lead role in the ensemble cast.

People tend to gather with others just like them – but where do I fit? Too old & childless for the young mom's group and too young for the ladies at the senior center.

What do we do when that dreaded feeling of not belonging creeps in? Even the most outgoing person wants to belong – we all do.

*"But you belong to God, my dear children. You have already won a victory over those people, because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world." 1 John 4:4*

Those of us oddballs, the "extras" in life, we actually DO fit in – we belong to God. He loves us. He invites us. When we feel like we don't belong in this world, well, we DON'T. We're not supposed to!

God didn't create us to be exactly the same. His desire is for us to be more like Him. He created us to be unique individuals meant to stand out. So, let's embrace it!

When it comes to getting dressed each day, I definitely don't fit in. Oh, I used to. Ten years ago, you'd find me wearing the latest trend and looking exactly like every other teacher at my school. Sometimes, to my chagrin, two or three of us would accidentally show up in the exact same outfit! Unlike my junior high self, who desperately wanted to look like everyone else in expensive Jordache jeans, dressing like everyone else now left me utterly lifeless. If I happened to be out somewhere and noticed someone in a fabulous vintage outfit, I'd longingly wish to be confident enough to dress that way. But I didn't dare. That desire to simply fit in was too great. Until it wasn't.

One day I decided to dip my toe into vintage style even if it meant looking "different." I figured I don't really fit in anyway, so I might as well stop trying to look like I do. Soon, I discovered a local shop that specialized in retro dresses that were new, but looked like they were from the 1950's. And I found the most adorable dress – light blue with pink and blue owls and atomic stars all over it! Of course, I had to get the petticoat to go under it, making it poufy, just like the

dresses of the '50's. This was a dress that just HAD to be twirled! I absolutely loved how it looked and I felt like a princess! And you know what? Some people stared. Some looked at me like I was nuts. But I honestly didn't care. Eventually, that one dress evolved into a closet full of kooky dresses, red lipstick, and an entire collection of vintage cat eye glasses.

Maybe I don't fit in and maybe I'll never find a girl group to go on trips with, but that's okay. I don't need to follow the crowd. Because, you know who else didn't fit in? Jesus. He wasn't concerned with being well-liked. He didn't yearn for a "guy group" to hang out with on the weekends. And he certainly didn't care if his clothing style was on trend!

As long as I know whose I am, I don't need to worry about whose group I do or don't fit into.



## **Under Pressure – Triple B** – by Debbie Haynes

Have you ever felt **betrayed**? It's not a good feeling, and it's one that causes great emotional pain.

Jesus was betrayed in the worst way, by his closest friends. In fact, back in Psalm 41:9 we read the foretelling of how a "familiar friend in whom I trusted" will betray the Lord. Then in the book of John, this event takes place where Judas betrays Jesus. The pain of the betrayal of his friend pierced the heart of Jesus. In fact, almost all of the disciples that had followed Jesus around for years and had seen amazing miracles – fled and hid, fearing for their own lives, that they too might be arrested and killed like Jesus was.

There's another familiar story found in John 17:15 where it says Jesus' heart was for his followers. He prayed for them, that his Father would keep them from the evil in the world, but not take them out of the world. In verse 20 he then prays that all would be saved through the truth and that all would be one in the Father – just like Jesus and the Father were one. What a beautiful prayer...for all of us! Jesus was preparing for his own death, but prayed for and cared for the well-being of those who followed Him.

It was then that Jesus took those friends with him to the garden to pray and these guys couldn't stay awake...at all. Jesus went to the cross alone, with those closest to him now deserting him, denied by Peter and betrayed by Judas. He was innocent, yet condemned to die for the guilty. And there again, on the cross, Jesus' heart was for on the ground those beneath him. And then he yielded his spirit and his soul from his body into the hands of his Father and died. Jesus was **buried**, the tomb was sealed, and guards were set to watch.

In John 20:1 we read that Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb where Jesus had been buried and the stone was not there, the stone that was placed to hold Jesus inside. She ran to Peter and John, to tell them. They looked inside the tomb and saw the cloths, but no body! And in Luke 24:6 we read of the angels' declaration – "He is not here, for he is risen!"

Jesus then showed up to eat with his friends and the scripture says, "Their eyes were opened." They realized he was alive and well. Jesus broke through bars of flesh and bone, conquered death, the grave and hell, and sent us the power of the resurrection.

About six weeks later, Jesus' followers marched into a massive crowd and boldly stated that Jesus who was crucified was raised up by God. Something happened during those six weeks – so dramatic that it confirmed their faith in Jesus – more than all of the miracles they had witnessed the previous years. They had seen Jesus heal the sick, open blind eyes, feed thousands, calm storms and walk on water. But it was Jesus' overcoming death, and their visual of the resurrected Christ, that caused the **breakthrough**.

It really is an unspeakable gift of love – to save a lost world – one in which you and I live. And it really is a reason to celebrate and love the One who first loved us...though he was betrayed and buried. Thank God, for the breakthrough and the power that resides in us, when we simply believe.



MARRIAGE

## **In This Together – Grace for Myself – by Bekah Holland**

I always love to write...almost as much as I love to read. And when I dream of being a writer, I picture myself in a big cushy chair, by a large window with sunlight streaming through the glass as I sip tea and masterfully put pen to paper. The reality of me writing at this very moment is at my desk in my home office, where I just shut the blinds because the sun is blinding me and I can't see my computer screen, with stacks of bills beside me, a cold cup of coffee, approximately 17 trillion open tabs and tasks on my computer, while fielding messages from people needing all the things. Not quite as glamorous and relaxing as the picture I carry with me in my head. One caveat, I am currently drinking a fabulous margarita that my husband brought to me so I would stop yelling at my computer like a maniac after another 14-hour day. So there are upsides to reality too, I guess.

And as I sit here, trying to focus while stomping down the ticker tape of to-dos running in my head...kids' dentist appointments, when did we last eat something that didn't come in a to-go container, how much dog food do we have left, how far can I stretch out my strike on dishes until I cave and do them myself...I add another worry to my already overflowing bag of worries. Which, as a "good Christian girl," is a no-no.

"We don't worry. We have Jesus. Worry is just a failure to trust and have faith."

I wish I made up those quotes, but unfortunately, that's a real, ongoing message in our churches. And not only is it a load of poo, all that unsolicited judgement does is make us feel even less than worthy of the forgiveness and peace we preach right alongside it. And this added to every other bit of crazy we're in right now, I find myself wishing I could just run away for a bit. Leave my phone off, lay in silence, read without feeling guilty about everything I *could* be doing, cook something that makes my soul as full as my belly without the joys of cooking for tweens/teens that would rather live on hot Cheetos and boba tea. But since running away is frowned upon, I'm trying to figure out how to take care of my needs while continuing to anticipate the needs of my family. Apparently, I struggle on the balance beam.

I don't tend to do things like normal people. If I'm in need of comfort food, I don't eat just a bit...no, I order the entire Taco Bell menu. And when I'm reading something I love, I can't hear anything other than the movie my brain is playing out while inhaling a story, especially things like the dogs scratching at the door or my teenager who wants a(nother) ride somewhere that requires me to both put on pants and shell out funds. When I'm working, well, that's where my superpowers end, I guess, because I am constantly and easily interrupted and distracted at work, which I suppose is why I feel like I'm always working.

*But where is this "balance" we hear some much about?*

*Is it real?*

Has anyone ACTUALLY figured this out? Because my version of balance, is, well, decidedly un-balanced. My husband is finding his own balance, both by participating in more "ticker-task" activities at home, while still finding time to do the things he enjoys and needs. I'm still a work in progress. I say yes when I should say no. Can I help with that project? Sure. Do I have time? Absolutely not, but we'll just make it work. Because saying no brings all of my least favorite things together into one perfect storm-feeling like I let someone down, confrontation, admitting my own struggles, and saying the actual word no. I'm terrible at all of those things! If I feel I've

let someone down, I've not only disappointed someone I care about, but also disappointed myself, and if I let my thoughts go unchecked that quickly spirals down into I've let everyone down, I can't keep this up, I don't want for anyone to see how weak I am, or that I'm really a mess and selfish and judgmental and ugly and wrinkled and lazy and inconsistent and, and, and, and.

See what I did there? I used to think I was a simple kind of person. I don't have big wants or needs, I'm pretty self-sufficient and just need someone to pet me and tell me I'm pretty every now and then. Turns out, I'm an idiot and not a plant, and I'm way more complicated than that. My poor husband has had to learn all of this and then wait for me to catch up since I have some kind of mental block when it comes to personal growth in myself. Now, I can help *you* grow any day, all day. I can tell you what's important, what you need to do to listen to yourself and take steps to grow and learn. I'm smart like that. However, taking my own advice is, well, challenging, mostly because my advice is annoying, especially when it hits too close to home or makes things uncomfortable. I know the right things. I know what I *should* be doing. But actually doing it? So freaking hard.

Was it Paul who said,

"I do what I don't want to and don't do what I should?"

He's almost calling out a Jekyll and Hyde side of our nature. And it's true! "Take up your cross" doesn't sound like a fun and easy team building task. It sounds awful. I know I should do some things, and shouldn't do others, but I don't always listen very well and do the wrong things any way.

But guess what?

This is where I am so thankful for grace.

And if the God of the Bible, the one who I put my faith in, who I fail over and over again, so freely offers me grace to cover the mess, how dare I offer any less? And I'm not talking about grace for others. I'm talking about grace for myself. It's so much easier to forgive the mistakes of others. But my own mistakes tend to play out over and over in my mind, like a loop. If all I've read and felt and believed is actually true, if the God of the universe offers me unconditional love, forgiveness and acceptance, and I'm supposed to try to be like Him, then shouldn't I emulate who he is?

My husband has gotten pretty proficient at seeing through my "it's fine, I'm fine, everything is fine" mantra and calling me on it. Mostly kindly, but I know some times he has to be stifling an eye roll as he reminds me, again, that I'm working hard, giving it my best. That I'm worthy of rest and peace and grace, and that those are not dependent on perfection. Those are free and without strings. He's awfully smart, and has grown so much in this area. He came from a family and upbringing much different than mine. And despite every struggle, uphill climb and battle scar, he keeps learning and softening and loving and reminding me that I'm capable, strong, valuable...not because of what I do for others, but just because I am. He's seen it. And he never stops pointing me to a better version of me, a more healed and self-accepting version.

This is partnership. It's what relationships should be. Loving each other into wholeness and supporting the work we do on becoming the person we are meant to be.

Find a partner, a friend, a family member. Support and love them. Watch what happens when they support and love all of you, and not just the parts that have been shined up to present to the world. Watch when they love you in all of your messy, ugly, painful, broken and embarrassing glory. Because that, folks, is where home is. The one in which your heart and soul find rest and a safe space to land.

*“For the two of us, home isn’t a place. It’s a person. And we are finally home.”*

Stephanie Perkins

## **Date Night Fun – Mondays and Rain – by Marcy Lytle**

There's a song that has the lyrics, "Rainy days and Mondays always get me down" – and I suppose a lot of people feel that way. So many people despise Mondays because it signals the end of the weekend and back to work and all the grind. And well, rainy days just ruin all of the outside fun we want to have! So this month...we're offering ideas for date nights on Mondays or on a rainy day! Pick one of the five to enjoy when the weekend is over, or if the sky is falling...and enjoy!

On a Monday – There are usually very few people in the theater on a Monday evening, so this is a great night to slip in and enjoy the big screen without the crowd! Consider mixing some nuts (like honey roasted peanuts, candied walnuts) and some dark chocolate in a bag with popped corn from home, for your snack. Tuck a blanket under your arm, for cozying up when the movie begins. Enjoy!

On a rainy day – If it's just a drizzle with no threatening weather, then grab the umbrella, put on your boots that can get wet, and go for a drizzly walk in the rain. If you don't have a big umbrella or rain boots, then go purchase some before your walk. That would be fun, as well! Walk for about 30-45 minutes enjoying the rain and the puddles, then return home to sit on the porch and observe the clouds and the rain some more. Share each other's play list and listen and comment on the lyrics.

On a Monday – Maybe you spent too much money on the weekend with the other outings you "had" to attend, like parties and family gatherings, and shopping for groceries, and all the things...so there's no funds for Monday night date surprise. No worries! It's light a little later now, so take a drive just outside of town, pack up a simple dinner, and watch the sun set. One the way back, stop and get an inexpensive cone from McDonalds and sit in your car and people watch while you enjoy.

On a rainy day – Maybe it's pouring outside, storms are brewing, and strolling in the rain is NOT an option. And you don't really want to drive in the storm, either. Shut all the blinds, grab the pillows and blankets off the beds, open the umbrella and lay it on the floor and set out snacks, games and books for a date night indoors. Place your snacks on trays under the open umbrella. Pick a movie or play a game, and even enjoy a fire – if it's still cool enough to do so – for one last time. No fireplace? Light lots of candles. Enjoy!

On a Monday - You're exhausted from the first workday of the week and you have no energy to plan a "date night." So here's the plan for you. Remove your shoes, and put on cozy socks. Order takeout to be delivered and eat it in the car, right in your driveway! Allow NO talk of work or woes, only sharing blessings and wows. Think over the past week of the goodness of each day and talk about it. Savor each bite. Lay back your seats and hold hands and look out the sky light in your car, or place your feet on the dash, and just hold hands in silence as you give thanks.

## **After 40 Years – The Seesaw** – by Marcy Lytle

When's the last time you and your spouse got on an old seesaw on a playground and enjoyed that playground fun? Have you ever? It's harder and harder to find these retro pieces of fun, as most have been removed from the modern playgrounds. Maybe it's because one too many kids got bonked in the head when stepping off their side...I don't know. However, we have stopped in small towns a few times just to swing or sit on a seesaw for fun.

I was thinking of how in my marriage I often spring up and down like a seesaw in the prayer department, concerning our relationship with one another. And when I do, I'm the one that gets bonked in the head when I finally step away...but it's a good bonk...like a reminder of sorts!

Here's what I mean...

I place my worries about life, my relationship with my husband, all the concerns of the day into the hands of my Father first thing in the morning and this enables me to push off the ground and soar high...for a second! 24 hours later (or sometimes an hour!) the other "thing" on the other side then pushes off and I crash to the ground hard! And that thing is fear.

Fear dares to sit on the other side of the seesaw with my emotions and plays havoc with me all day long. And when fear is sitting on the other side of the seesaw, it's like a huge imbalance, like when a large adult tries to seesaw with a toddler. It doesn't work! The large adult will hurt the child if he pushes too hard and the child will fly off, and hit the ground hard!

I often wake up and place my cares at his feet, like the Good Book says to do, and I get up from my desk and feel ready to conquer the day, like the seesaw is in perfect balance. His love sits on the other side and we gently enjoy the ride throughout the day as he and I gently move to the rhythm of our feet, my trust offering balance to his love.

However, maybe my husband walks in and gets in the way while I'm trying to unload the dishwasher (yes, something that trivial) or he talks too loudly on the phone, or forgets to do something I asked him to do, or isn't excited when I tell him my story, or any number of things - small or big. Those small things then turn into bigger ones throughout the day, and by nightfall I crawl into bed frustrated with the man I adored just 24 hours earlier. Have you had this happen?

Suddenly, the seesaw of trust/love with the Father has turned into a flying off/hitting hard ride with fear and frustration. And that's not a seesaw ride anyone wants to take!

Just this morning, I placed my cares once again in my Father's hands and purposed to leave them there, and invited him to be my partner for today's ride. He's gentle, kind, is aware of all surroundings, knows just how to move in rhythm and make today a good one. I realized that I had once again picked up every care I'd given him only a few days before and had started carrying them on my shoulders, causing me to be way off balance and heavier than usual. In doing so, I had invited fear to replace trust, and all of a sudden I flew off and landed hard.

The seesaw. It's a fun ride, but only if the partners are in good rhythm, gentle and kind, balanced and secure. And it's a scary one with injuries that result if the one seated on the other side is way too heavy.

I am totally grateful this morning for His love and patience with me as I dismount, unload, and invite him to take a seat with me on this seesaw called "today." And I'm also thankful for a husband that lets me fly off, land hard, and invites me to dance...when I've said, "I'm sorry."

Find a seesaw in a park somewhere, and sit on one side and invite Jesus to sit on the other. Visualize him balancing out the heaviness, lightening the load, so that the ride is one of glee and joy, like it should be for all who dare to ride...



## **For Better or Worse - Future Spouses – by Kaelin Scott**

Have you seen the *Redeeming Love* movie yet?? I went on opening night with one of my friends, and it was so much fun. I still love the book the most, but the movie stayed true to the storyline and was really enjoyable.

If you haven't read the book or seen the movie, *Redeeming Love* is a fictional retelling of the Biblical book of Hosea. Set during the California Gold Rush, it tells the story of Michael Hosea, a man of faith who God leads to marry a prostitute named Angel. Over the course of the story, Angel leaves him for her old life several times, while Michael remains steadfast in faith, prayer and forgiveness. I won't give away any more than that, but it's a really amazing story.

I remember being in eighth grade and reading it for the first time. I kept thinking, "I want to marry a man like Michael Hosea one day." Praise God for blessing me with a wonderful husband, whose qualities do match those of Michael in a lot of ways. I don't know if reading that story impacted my marriage or not, but it did help give me a framework for what type of man to marry.

Thinking about this, I realize how important it is to know what you're looking for in a spouse. My daughter is only six years old right now, but I want to teach her what true love looks like. I want her to have high standards when she gets old enough to date or get married. I want to make sure she knows what to look for in a husband and be confident her own worth as a wife. I also hope that she sees a good example of a godly wife when she looks at me. I know I'm not perfect – nowhere near it, actually – but I pray that I can use my mistakes as teaching moments for her. Along those same lines, I want my son to be a godly husband someday, and I'm so thankful that he has such a wonderful example in his daddy. He might only be three years old, but he's old enough to be a gentleman.

It's never too early to prepare the younger generation for healthy marriages in the future. Obviously, I'm not pressing the subject too hard right now since they're so little, but living by example goes a long way. (Not that I execute this well all the time. I'm still learning and growing too!) I've just been thinking about how important it is that young people know what to look for in a spouse, and they also need to have training in how to *be* a good spouse.

So where do we find the outline for this? The Bible, of course. There are so many wonderful passages that teach us about godliness in marriage. Proverbs 31 is the most popular, but Titus 2 is wonderful too. Some other good ones are 1 Corinthians 13, Ephesians 5, Genesis 2, and Song of Songs, just to name a few.

In a world where so many marriages are broken or severed, let's show the younger ones what true love looks like. Let's give them a reason to hope for lasting marriages, strong marriages, marriages that point others to Jesus. Let's teach them what marriage should be, and let us also *show* them. Oh, and we need to pray for them, too! Having a healthy idea about marriage from a young age is so important, and it's up to us to impart that wisdom to the next generation.

Also, if you haven't read or watched *Redeeming Love* yet, you really should! I promise you won't regret it.



ENCOURAGEMENT

## Rooted in Love - Tummy Trouble – by Kaelin Scott

I have a confession to make.

I've often dreamed of spending the whole day in bed, reading and writing and taking lots of naps.

Recently, I got my wish...only it wasn't a dream come true.

I was down for the count thanks to the stomach bug. It kept me in bed all day. I didn't have the energy to roll over, let alone read a book. I did, however, sleep away a good portion of the day. Thankfully, my kids didn't destroy the house while I was zonked out. Since my husband was out of town, I had to crawl to the kitchen to get food for them, because standing up made me sick. And my head felt like it had a jack hammer going crazy inside of it. Getting sick at 30 is way worse than I remember it as a kid!

Needless to say, my day spent in bed wasn't enjoyable, whatsoever. I would gladly take a redo – you know, without the crawling back and forth between bed and the toilet and sipping nasty Pedialyte.

It was a truly terrible day, one I hope not to repeat. But by the grace of God, we all survived. We made it to the next day, and I felt so much better. Isn't it amazing what God can do in a day?

While I was sitting on the bathroom floor, in that awful few minutes before you get sick when your stomach won't stop churning and your heart starts racing and your body overheats, there was only one thought in my mind.

“Please, Jesus, get me through this.”

And He did. He really and truly did.

No, that day wasn't fun. Not at all. But it served as a good reminder for me. A reminder that my own strength isn't enough. I need to cling to Jesus every day, whether I'm sick or busy or having fun or resting or working. He's the true reason why I make it through each day. His love is the only reason I'm even here. How foolish of me to ever forget just how much I need it.

I definitely don't want to go through that ordeal again, but I am grateful for what it showed me. I know it sounds strange to be thankful for a rough day, but that's exactly what we're urged to do in James 1:2-4. Even though it doesn't feel good at the time, our trials produce good fruit in our hearts. They remind us how much we need Jesus, and teach us not to take Him for granted.

Sometimes, when we're busy and life is good, it's easy to forget how good God is. We don't mean to, but we kind of let Him fade into the background. Sometimes it takes one of those nasty, awful, yucky days to bring our focus back to Him. And thankfully, those terrible days don't last forever. He always brings us through them, and He never leaves our side.

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

James 1:2-4

## Firmly Planted - Every Good Thing – by Dina Cavazos

---

As I write this, I'm sitting in my favorite papasan swing chair hanging from a beam on the patio. My view is a sad garden--sadly brown and sparse, waiting, I imagine, as eagerly as I am, for spring, when rain and warm sun will revive the dormant life residing in the roots and branches of plants that look dead, but are not. There is lots of work ahead: removing piles of leaves, cutting dead growth down to the ground, clipping, trimming, fertilizing, and replanting. It will require time and effort to get my garden flourishing again, effort that will be well worth it.

Pushing myself off the nearby cedar post to start a gentle swing, I think about the effort every worthwhile thing seems to require. Haven't we heard variations of "Anything worth doing requires effort" our whole lives? Noticing what's around me, I think about the effort it took to make the chair I'm sitting in. The chair is woven and wrapped with strips of polyethylene material made to look like rattan. The cushion is sewn from fabric and stuffed with poly-fill. Not simple processes when you think about it. I can't even trace all the steps the chair went through to get to me: the idea, people, materials, instructions, transport, advertising, and more. Without the effort of many, I wouldn't be enjoying the gentle soothing motion of a hanging chair. Ditto for the cedar post, the bird feeders, the bird seed, etc. etc.!

All these things that surround me and make my garden more enjoyable originate in some way from God-given materials. The cedar post came from a tree; the saw used to cut it is made from metal mined from the earth. Even polyethylene plastic is a carbon-hydrogen molecule. It's made up of ethylene molecules with 2 carbon and 4 hydrogen atoms. Mind-blowing isn't it?!

I am one who believes that there is no conflict between faith and science, because Truth is *true* and will line up in the end. There are ancient writings that contain truths we don't understand, and science, for all its astounding discoveries, often operates on theories because there is so much still unknown and undiscovered. I believe that as more of spiritual reality and scientific truth is revealed, they will be in agreement.

One thing we do know and can agree on is that the earth is rich with resources. Besides, the obvious plants, animals, water and air, there are precious metals and stones hidden in the depths. Without time and effort expended to bring them up and make them useful, they are inaccessible. Many medicines come from or use components of plants, and even animals. God has provided every good thing we need to live abundantly on this earth, but we have the responsibility to discover, retrieve, develop, and utilize them. God created a paradise for an earthly home; but how about our heavenly home—the place we live in Christ?

Ancient words in Ephesians 1:3 say this:

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

*who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.*

This truth is like a salve to my weary soul. Because Jesus lives in me and I in him, I have access to every spiritual blessing: forgiveness, freedom, wisdom, grace, and much more—every good thing I need to accomplish his purposes for me, to live life well, to love others, to remain hopeful when all seems lost, to live in Light rather than darkness. But, just like the materials God has provided in the earth don't construct themselves into chairs, I can't just expect spiritual blessings in the heavenly realms to materialize in my life without the work of prayer—diligent, faithful, believing prayer powered by the Life of Christ in me. This is my spiritual work, which, symbolically, can be very much like the work required to get my garden flourishing again.

## **Moving Forward – Start Small – by Pam Charro**

I heard a great quote:

*It is not the happy who are thankful, but the thankful who are happy.*

I don't know who came up with it, but the older I get, the more I agree. Thankfulness may not come naturally to most people, but it certainly is a discipline worth cultivating.

I'm not saying to ignore difficulties or discouragement. They absolutely must be dealt with and God wants us to bring them to him. I just find that I feel better when I don't camp out on them, and move on afterward to all that I am grateful for in my life.

So how do we get better at being thankful?

I think it can start very small.

Years ago, a woman said to me, "If you can't think of anything to be grateful for, start with the shaker of salt on your table, and then take it from there." That statement has stayed with me for over half of my life and has proven to be words of great wisdom.

Another way I become more thankful is simply by looking around. With springtime approaching, there is so much natural beauty to see and appreciate: New green leaves and grass, birds happily chirping, flowers, and beautiful temperatures. Just being outside for a few minutes, or even gazing at my daughter or my cat when I'm inside, reminds me that God has blessed me with so much good.

But I think the most important key to developing a thankful mind and heart is simply deciding to do it. It isn't really a sentimental feeling so much as a decision to be made, no matter what. Each of us has that power, we can decide to dwell on what we don't like or on all of the good we can find to celebrate in life.

The Bible says, "As a man thinks, so is he." (Proverbs 23:7).

Knowing that I have such say in my own happiness greatly motivates me to choose to focus on everything I can be grateful for. I'm here on earth for a little while so I might as well enjoy it. And that attitude makes me more attractive to others who feel the same way.

So many reasons to think and talk about all that is good in life...I want to do it every chance I get!

## **Simple Truth – An Adult Growth Chart – by Marcy Lytle**

Remember those growth charts that hang (if you have small children) or used to hang (if your children are grown) on your wall? You found great delight in measuring kids, and they squealed too, as they gained another inch and grew taller by the year. We even had pencil markings on the side of our pantry door that just recently got painted over! Growth charts are a big deal for kids and parents!

I was thinking lately how cool it would be to have a growth chart for ourselves, one that marks places we've grown – so that when we're down – we can look back and see the strides we've made. Too often our minds play tricks on us; little voices whisper that we're not making progress, or that we're less than everyone else. It's often not true, so making a growth chart might be a cool and wonderful thing to have where you can visibly read it when you need a boost of encouragement on any given day!

*Here's how to make one:*

Decide if it's going to be on a notepad, in your iphone notes, written on a piece of paper, or where you'd like to chart your growth – maybe in your planner!

Pick a scheduled time – say once a month – to record your growth over the past few weeks – until you have a full chart of encouragement.

Write a paragraph, bullet points, or just a phrase to signify your growth. Add your own questions. And if you don't see much growth, write down something really small and give thanks. It might be that you drank water instead of a coke. That's good!

If you feel like you're not growing, these questions are meant to encourage you to do so...so just pick an area and be kind to yourself.

*Get started...*

Ask yourself these questions in order to fill in your growth:

Has your anger at a certain person subsided because you've truly forgiven them? Write it down.

Did you pray about that hurt she caused, instead of telling a friend? What a good decision!

When he disappointed you again, did you talk it over without accusation? Give yourself a check!

Is your faith stronger now in a certain area than it used to be? Record it!

Are you making healthier choices when you eat out? Good for you!

Did you accomplish a cleaning task at home you'd been hoping to do? Yay!

Are you spending more daily time in prayer and meditation on His goodness? You're so wise.

Have you moved on from crying for days over what your kid said or did? You're amazing.

Is your calendar less full of to-do's and more filled in with fun? Now, that's growth!

These are just some questions to help you analyze your own growth, and you can think of more. Each month note the small...and the big. And when you read back over your growth, stretch your legs, stand tall, and give thanks that you're still alive and growing and things are looking up!



## **Unearthly Thing - Hysterectomy or Lobotomy...Or Both? – by Angela Dolbear**

I debated over whether or not to write about this topic. It seemed kind of whiny to me. And I like to write about encouraging topics.

But I was encouraged by a friend of mine. We will call her “Jane.”

Jane told me, “Women need to know they are not alone in this.” She had the same total hysterectomy surgery as I did, and she is battling ovarian cancer.

Reoccurring severe abdominal pains, with a low-grade fever, is how my hysterectomy journey started. I thought I had COVID, but I got tested, and the result was negative (Praise God!).

The pain was so bad one Sunday morning, I just sat on my couch praying, asking God to heal me, and to give me strength to get ready for church.

“Go to the ER,” God answered me, in my spirit.

As much as I don’t like going to the hospital, I learned to do as I am told when I hear the voice of God so loud and clear.

After a couple of hours of waiting in the emergency room, I was given a CT scan, and some morphine. The doctor rushed in with a much more serious face than when I first saw him, and updated me that I was immediately going to be taken by ambulance to the Oncology Gynecology emergency room, in downtown Nashville.

After a couple of days in the hospital, and so much blood drawn (sometimes at 3 AM! Really!), I was told I had a very large tumor in my uterus, and that all my lady bits needed to be surgically removed through a large incision in my abdomen.

I was watching the sun rise outside my hospital room window after the doctor left my room. Before fear started to set up camp in my spirit over my diagnosis, I heard God tell me (so softly and sweetly), “It’s not cancer.”

*Thank You, and praise You*, I told Him, inwardly.

The surgery went very well. The surgeon told my husband he removed a 3-pound fibroid that looked like it had a heart attack and died, and was making me very sick.

The 13-inch long incision that stretched from my new belly button down to my pubic bone has come together in three months and without any infection, which I am very grateful for. I am still healing in the inner most parts of my mid-section, but for the most part, I am physically healed from my hysterectomy.

But something has changed. I feel off. I am not me anymore.

No one tells you when you lose all estrogen production because both your ovaries are gone that you will also lose your mind.

I lost the desire to do the things I once enjoyed, especially writing fiction and short stories. Utter exhaustion had taken control of me, coupled with the worst insomnia I have ever had. Disinterest and un-motivation have moved into the space where my uterus, ovaries, and fallopian tubes used to be. Or so it feels like it.

Did I mention the hot flashes have been turned up to HIGH? Each flash begins with a mini panic attack, as if I feel like I'm going to explode out of my skin, and I can't get my sweater off fast enough. SO weird.

And the mood swings...about 10 times worse than when I still had a menstrual cycle. And I was not prepared for a daily battle with thick, heavy depression.

I tried to pray, but my mind was so foggy and full of negativity. I have trouble coming before the throne room of God to ask for help. I know God is always with me, but it felt like He was far, far away. So a deeper depression set in. I found it hard to care about anything, really. I was too tired to do anything about anything. And then, I just didn't care.

I periodically checked in with Jane (and still do). She was going through the same terribleness I was. She was also derailed with exhaustion, no motivation, and the "off-ness" feeling.

When women at my church asked me how I was doing, and I shared a little bit about what I was dealing with, those that had a hysterectomy gave me a knowing look, and nodded in agreement. They had experienced the same thing.

*What on earth?? Why doesn't anyone tell women about this?*

I thought getting a hysterectomy would be like getting my tonsils or appendix out. The body part that was sick gets removed, and then I would feel better, not totally different.

"Being a woman can suck sometimes. Sorry you're going through it, but I'm glad it's not just me," Jane wrote in one of her messages. "I was starting to feel a little crazy...it's things like this that women just don't talk about."

I reverted to my worldly way of gaining wisdom---I started doing research on the internet.

Bad idea. I read so much discussion about how a patient should keep one ovary for estrogen production (too late for me!), but I also read that it could cause ovarian cancer. The only positive thing I learned is that I might feel better in a year. A year. I have 3 months down, 9 more months to go.

Before I got too frustrated, I recognized the wall of "no progress" going up, so I stopped my research. I stilled my mind and heart. And then I heard God say, "I am with you, daughter. Trust Me."

I am trying to be patient. And learn a new deeper level of trust in my Heavenly Father.

A couple of weeks ago, I read in one of Joyce Meyer's daily devotional that whenever she is feeling negative or down, she tells her emotions that they "don't get a vote" on how she reacts to the day. I love that. And I immediately adopted it.

Whenever I feel depression start to press on me, which is usually right when I wake up in the morning, I tell my emotions, "YOU DON'T GET A VOTE!" And then I purposely turn my mind to prayer, especially for my "hyster-sister" Jane, who is still receiving chemotherapy to fight the cancer her ovaries left behind.

"It makes me feel so sad and frustrated that I 'lost' most of [Jane]," she wrote in another message. "I don't have the desire or motivation to do much of anything I once loved. I try to

force myself and I guess it helps, but I just miss myself. I don't laugh much, I physically don't feel well either (still healing) and just exhausted!"

I completely understand how she feels. And my heart breaks for her.

When I pray for her, I pray with the compassion and fervency only someone who is going through the same situation can.

Day by day, I am feeling better. God has me focusing on new things, and pursuing other avenues of creativity. I have a deeper dependency on Him. And focusing on someone else, like praying for Jane, lifts the fog and thick muck of depression. It also fuels me, and washes over me, filling me with peace.

God works in unimaginable and wondrous ways. *Praise Him.*

*Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series, and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). Angela writes real, relevant, relatable, and reverent fiction, with an aim toward spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, while hopefully inspiring readers to laugh and/or cry. She loves reading, writing prose, as well as writing and recording music with her husband Tim in their studio in Nashville, Tennessee. Please drop by and sign-up for news and to read new stories and hear new original music at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>. Blessings to you!*



FRESH THYME

## Got 5 Minutes?

I think I wrote an article on this years ago, but it's worth revisiting, because sometimes that's all we have – five minutes. Maybe our days are full, the kids are tugging at our sleeves, or time just gets away...but if we have a list of things we can accomplish in five – well that helps us all!

Here's my updated list for 2022:

1. Unsubscribe from five emails that have ended up in your inbox way too often.
2. Delete as many photos on your phone as you can in the allotted time, and smile.
3. Get tickets to the movie theater – have you been back, yet? Go!
4. Grab a handful of dark chocolate chips for a snack, with a few nuts.
5. Oh, you don't have dark chocolate chips? Write these on your fridge list to buy!
6. Oh, you don't have a notepad on the fridge? You need one – so place a cute seasonal one there – for all to use for grocery items – so you don't have to remember everything.
7. Sit down, rub your hands with lotion and put up your feet and breathe.
8. Read one story in *A Bundle of THYME* (you knew I'd throw this on the list!)
9. Step outside into the sunshine, sit on the front porch, and drink a full glass of water.
10. Text a friend, or two, just to see how they're doing and let them know they're on your mind.
11. Organize a shelf of your spices that have gotten disorganized over the weeks (or months).
12. Light a candle and sit by the flicker, and listen to one song of your choice.
13. Grab that nail polish and paint your toes!
14. Kneel by your bed and pray for a full five minutes for the world, your country, your city, your neighborhood and your family. Place all in His hands.
15. Go outside with a trash bag and clean out the car doors and the back.
16. Eat an apple. Sit by a window and watch people or cars go by.
17. Start a thanksgiving spot on your daily planner, or notepad. Start today and write down three things for which you are thankful!
18. Walk around your yard with snips or scissors. Cut a branch, or several small branches, and place them in a vase.
19. Make your bed.
20. Browse your favorite online store and order yourself a treat – you deserve it.

## **FRESH THYME – Three Words** – by Marcy Lytle

There's a very old film called D.O.A. and the premise is that a man has been poisoned, he has 24 hours to find out why and who poisoned him, or he dies. For some reason, the initials of this film popped in my mind early this morning. But those initials are also the title of a song from the 70's – and part of the lyrics say "it's a shame we have to die." Another line is "bet your life there's something killing you." So, in case you don't know, DOA stands for "dead on arrival," and it's used as a term for being hopeless from the start. A morbid way to start this article...I know.

As I was up early, feeling the weight of the world on my shoulders, I started to just pour out my heart to Him, as I often do. And three words I thought of were disappointed, odd, and ashamed. They've been three words I feel have defined me at different points in my life, and imagine my surprise when I realized they too can be abbreviated to DOA.

So let's break down these three words. I think they might be three words that a lot of us are dealing with at any moment in time, in any given week.

**Disappointed** in someone or something or some circumstance is a part of living, isn't it? Disappointed in an outcome is one thing, but carrying disappointment in people is another. Maybe a parent left our family, a promise was broken, friendships we thought were lifelong ended, or any number of disappointing relationships are now over and done with, and we're sad, lonely, and confused. Disappointment is a big deal, when we carry it with us for years.

We are definitely going to be disappointed weekly, or even maybe daily, in expectations being unfulfilled. We can't stop the disappointments from landing on our front porches, like leaves falling from strong winds. But we can keep that pile of leaves swept clean by not allowing disappointment to dominate. Grieve, ask and receive his strength, and take time to heal. Give yourself grace.

*Don't let disappointment dominate.*

Feeling **odd** is another thing women of all ages deal with, from being odd in our body shape, our marital status, whether or not we have children and if those children are successful, or just having "unpopular opinions" about popular ideas. I've always felt like odd and unique are twins, and that being unique is a good thing. But often, that can move on down the spectrum to feeling odd, left out, like no one understand, and then to thoughts like, "What is wrong with me?"

I once read, "Don't be afraid of being different, be afraid of being the same as everyone else." We know that we are fearfully and wonderfully made, yet when we feel different than the norm, we begin to despise our differences. Sure, there are reasons sometimes that we need to deal with, if our oddity is rooted in anger or something sinister like that. But if we just feel odd because we're different, we can give thanks.

*Giving thanks allows us to embrace who He made us to be.*

Finally, the A is for **ashamed**, and we don't have time to feel ashamed in this wonderful life we've been given! Maybe we feel ashamed for being disappointed and feeling odd for so long. Perhaps we're mostly disappointed in ourselves and our own shortcomings, failures and ways that we don't meet our own standards, or standards others have placed upon us. Ashamed is close to feeling guilty, and that's a heavy load we were never meant to carry.

Sometimes, I feel ashamed for my lack of trust in God, for the fears that surface too often, and for the time I waste with all of my "ungodly" feelings that a "good Christian" should not be feeling.

Psalm 34: 5 says this, "Those who look to him for help will be radiant with joy; no shadow of shame will darken their faces." Isn't that beautiful?

*Ask God for radiant joy so that shame is erased.*

I felt D.O.A. – dead on arrival – when I woke up this morning, because disappointment, feeling odd and carrying shame had filled my mind before the day ever began.

There's something about beginning a new day by emptying our minds before they start being filled once again, so that there's room for truth to expand and dominate our days instead of shuffling through another 24 hours in defeat. He is faithful, He never disappoints, He delights in his creation, and there is no shame because of the gift of Jesus Christ.

## **FRESH THYME – Jenga, Anyone? – by Marcy Lytle**

We were on the road on our recent vacation, and I turned to him and said,

“Life is like a game of Jenga.”

I then proceeded to describe what I meant, as he smiled and nodded and kept on driving. He knows my mind runs wild in weird directions, but he seems to enjoy listening to me and smiles anyway!

Have you ever played the game?

We all have this tower of blocks, let's say, that either stands tall or has a few pieces already missing, from birth. Maybe we're born into prosperity, have two parents that love us, never want for anything, and all things good happen for years...that would be a full stack! But perhaps we're born into poverty, one parent soon leaves or dies, we lack for so much, and it seems nothing but bad occurs...that would be the stack with several blocks already missing!

Life has a way of pulling out the blocks of which our particular tower is built, one day at a time. And we hope we don't topple over. I mean, that's the object of the game Jenga. If we pull out a block and the tower still stands, we breathe a sigh of relief and it's the next player's turn. No one wants to be the person that pulls out the block to make the entire tower tumble! That's a disaster, and the game is over!

So let's say we find ourselves at a certain age in life. Maybe we're a mom that's just had a miscarriage, or a dad that's lost his job. Or perhaps we just cannot recover after a severe economic loss or horrendous illness. We sit on the table with our tower full of holes, where block after block has been removed – but yet our core is intact – and still we stand.

Then that one block is taken out and we crash! Does that mean the game is over for us?

No, that's where the analogy ends. There's this Master Gamer that is skilled in putting fallen towers back together again, and his hands masterfully start building again. And this time, if we let him, he places every block in place with glue – glue, I say! It's the glue of his love and good plans so that if anyone or anything yanks and pulls or even jiggles a block loose – the core is super glued and will not tumble!

It's disastrous if you're the one that causes the Jenga tower to fall, but the cool thing about the game is it can be started over and over again, with each player removing blocks until the tower falls. There's skill involved, for sure, but sometimes there's nothing one can do but cause the tower to tumble because all loose blocks have already been removed.

I feel like my tower was pretty secure with no gaping holes when I was a kid. But over the decades, lots of blocks have been yanked loose – either by my own doing or by life itself. And sometimes I stand and look back and see a lot of unsightly holes where they were removed. There are days when I think one more removal might cause me to fall over...and then I recall that Jesus is my strong tower. Remember that verse? It says we can run to him and are safe. He is the core, the glue, the tower inside of me that cannot crumble or be destroyed.



And the fact of the matter is that his skilled hands are so good at building my life back to what it needs to be so that others see the goodness of God in my life and want to run to Him, as well.

Feel like one too many blocks have fallen in your game of life? I understand. Especially these days...we all have missing pieces. But God is true to who he says he is – the master builder, the planner of good and not evil, and our rock on which we can stand – and never fall. Even if all of the earth tries to shake us until we do.

Remember that. Play the game. Smile and laugh if you're the one that causes the tower to fall. And play it again, knowing that's where the analogy ends...

## **FRESH THYME – Thoughts on Justice – by Marcy Lytle**

I love that folks fight for justice, and it's heartwarming to see so many kids rise up in defense of the defenseless or the outcast or the "different." I remember thinking how cool it was that so many of my kids and their peers were searching out careers that involved helping special needs or children without homes or defending those in peril, or showing up to help people in need. It's so awesome to want justice for those who need it, and we need people that care about that.

However, something I've noticed is that there is a lot of justice rallying without any mention of Jesus.

Here's what justice without Jesus looks like:

*Protesting for rights without pointing to the Light*

*Standing up for the abused without introducing the Healer*

*Showing up to give aid without offering the Solution*

*Delivering speeches that stir without stirring listeners to Love*

*Participating in arguments over praying for politicians*

I guess I could continue an even longer list with statements of "without" and what kind of pictures we're painting when we fight for justice but leave out Jesus. I've often thought of that scripture that says it's kindness that leads people to repentance. And while kindness, standing up for others, hitting the streets to protest over injustice in the land is all good and admirable...if all of that doesn't lead folks to Jesus, what good are the demands we cry for? The same injustices will rear their ugly heads again, just in different spots, like moles popping up across a backyard to tear up a beautiful lawn.

I grew up in an era where sin was focused on more than the Savior, or at least it seemed so in my little eyes. My list of don'ts was way longer than the list of do's and I grew up thinking that being a follower of Christ meant mostly not having any fun at all. I also grew up with the main focus of spreading the Good News being in acts of leaving little papers on neighbors' doors or inviting others to church, with little emphasis on the relationship so vital in reaching others for Him.

So where's the balance? Focusing on a strict routine and formulas for helping others out of their misery when one lives in just another kind of religious misery, doesn't work. But neither does making signs and showing up and serving in soup lines, without mentioning the name of the One who can actually change hearts and move the minds and hearts of Kings.

I was just thinking the other day how every generation of believers, hopefully, observes the mistakes of their former generation and moves on to better actions and softer hearts in dealing with the injustices of this world. Turning a deaf ear, criticizing those who are unlike the "churched," and cocooning ourselves inside four walls doesn't result in justice. But neither does

offering a hand up or a hand out, if our kindness doesn't lead these friends somewhere to...deliverance and hope.

I don't have the answer, except I know who the answer is. And I don't know how to "witness" effectively in a world that still cries "Crucify Him" because He is so misunderstood and unknown. I'm thinking and hoping and praying that we can combine all of our efforts and spend more time praying and asking and obeying, so that when we show up and give and serve and stand firm for the "cause" (whatever it may be) that somewhere high and lifted up is the name of Jesus.

*At the name of Jesus, kingdoms fall.*

*At the name of Jesus, lame walk and deaf hear.*

*At the name of Jesus, light shines in the darkest of places.*

*At the name of Jesus, hard hearts turn to soft pliable clay.*

*At the name of Jesus, healing happens.*

While we raise a fist to fight for rights, I want to among the masses that have found a way to lift the broken and offer them solace and solutions, but then point them to the One that suffered, lost friends, was beaten and bruised and then defeated death - so that we all can live, experience freedom and love effectively as we pray and continue to stand for justice...with Jesus.

## **FRESH THYME – Not Your Story – by Marcy Lytle**

We all have different “bents” toward certain gifts in life. I have a friend that has a gift for praying during the night for those who are struggling in the darkness – like nurses and other caregivers or road workers or parents up with missing children. Another friend has the gift of making the cutest cards and treats to give people that just really brighten their days! Still another friend has the beautiful gift of sharing kind words from Him to others at the just the right time. And I’d say I have this gift (but it often doesn’t seem like a gift) of empathizing with others to the point of no return...

Here’s what I mean by that. If I see a friend get hurt physically, say she cuts her finger while slicing an onion, I physically feel pain in my body. When my husband suffered an electrical shock after we were newly married, I fainted when I saw him shaking from the electricity. I ended up on a stretcher right beside him! I feel others’ pain so much when they are going through hard times that I often hurt when I pray. Is that a *gift*?

I’m realizing that the gift we think we have is sometimes a burden, and we need knowledge and training on how to carry that gift, if that makes sense.

The gift of empathizing, for me, becomes a burden when I pray for that person but can’t let it go, and carry the burden on my shoulders until I too am weighed down. That gift becomes a burden when I think about what if that same tragedy happens to me, and the fear stifles me and hinders my faith. And finally, that gift becomes a burden when the pain of others consumes my time of prayer and I have no energy left for worship.

I was talking to a friend just a few weeks ago that was struggling with fear because she was going through something she’d seen others go through, and worried that her experience might end like theirs. And what I heard come out of my mouth to encourage her was,

“That’s not your story.”

I’ve been hearing those words myself, as I go through my day.

We all have stories. We all have gifts. We all have strengths and weaknesses. And we can barely handle our own story; much less someone else’s alongside! This truth has begun to help me so much!

At the moment, I am healthy and yet I have a friend fighting for his life. There are days I can barely stand to think of his story and I feel limp and weak, as I carry the concern for him and his family. But I’m told to cast my care on Him, and not carry it all by myself. He cares for my friend, that’s his story at the moment, and I can trust that God is in the middle of his story and writing the rest of it in his perfect timing and way.

At the moment, there are no bombs and gunfire being aimed at me and mine, but there is across the world at my friends I don’t know. I can barely watch the photos and images of wrecked buildings and bleeding bodies, but that’s not my story at the moment. He says I can

come to Him and find rest, and trust that He will give rest to the weary across the miles if I just pray and trust...not carry and bust!

There are days and moments where we need to tell ourselves, we who carry the pain of others deep inside and hurt with them, that their story is not ours. It's not callous and mean-spirited, but rather it's a truth we need to believe and receive, so that we pray – yes – but fall over – no.

I don't know what your gift may be, but I do think that often we are weighed down in whatever gift it may be, because we are pressured on every side, there's this lion that roars and lies into our ears, and there's nothing the evil one would like better than to snuff out all of our gifts like candles, in one big huff. And not only snuff us out, but toss us aside into the trash, never to burn brightly in our gifts again.

So if you can identify your gift (whether it's praying for others, giving, creating, serving, etc.) and you feel awkward, tired, worn out, and all the things when you're operating in that wonderful gift...consider this.

You have a story, and it's yours. The stories of others are not yours. You're not meant to carry the weight of either story – it's all HIS.

You are meant to shine brightly as you use your gift and then retreat to your home, and live your life, apart from the weight of the world.

And that's the truth...



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

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

May 2022



TIPS



## **The Dressing – Bags and Totes and Packs** – by Marcy Lytle

I love a new summer purse to dress up an outfit, a cloth bag for taking to the market or carrying books, and even packs or coolers for picnics and road trips. I'm a sucker for new bags of any kind! Even when I was a kid, I purchased some sort of purse or pouch on our family vacations as my souvenir of choice. I remember one cylinder shaped purse with a picture of the Smoky Mountains on the front. Can you imagine?

This month of May, with summer approaching, trips pending, and all sorts of fun outings on the calendar, we're going to need bags and totes and packs of all shapes and sizes. So here are a few of my favorites:

**New purse** – We recently stopped by a farmer's market and one of the tents was full of hanging purses – handmade – that looked so cute for summer. I picked this crossbody and I love it. Venture out on a weekend and see if you can support a local artisan, too!

**Local tote** – Marshall's has had local tote bags with the name of our city on them a couple of times. I love this cloth Austin bag for carrying books and more. They even had zipper pouches to match. Isn't Marshalls and TJ Maxx a great place to find something so cool for the new season?

**Crossbody leather** – This bag is also from Marshalls, and it's leather. It has so many zippers and compartments, and I carry it on trips or when I have a lot to carry or on long walks. It fits greatly, is comfortable slung across the front, and holds so much! It's cute, too.

**Backpack** – I love this Coleman insulated backpack for toting lunches and waters. It's been perfect for trips to the hospital to sit with my dad, it's great for picnics or walks, and the straps are padded. It's comfortable. I love the colors, too!

**A Book Bag** – This pretty orange and green tote is from Barnes and Noble, and it's great for books! Magazines, hardbound books, puzzles, any sort of reading – I have a stash every time we go out all day, for those times when we pull over to rest and then I pull out something to read...

**A hat** – Okay, it's not a bag, but it goes with the look of carrying a cute summer bag! I found this one at Charming Charlie (you can still buy from them online!). I love the colors in it, and it's great for sunny days at games or in the park, or just to feel sassy and smiley.

I'd love to know where you've found a cute bag or tote, so share with all of our readers in the comments! Enjoy each new one you find, as you head out in the city or the country...



## **Seven for You – May Pies – by our Panel of Women**

We asked our panel of women to share any pies that are their favorites, from savory to sweet. After all, May is a great month for getting the family together for Mom, having picnics outside with friends, or just enjoying a slice of something good on a weeknight or weekend – just because!

I love all of the pie recipes they shared, and I hope you do too!

This pie was my favorite growing up in the UK. Cornish Pasties have been around since the 13th century. Traditional hand-held Cornish Pasties are made with diced beef, sliced or diced potato, turnip (called swede in the UK), and onion. The recipe I'm sharing for these replaces the turnips with carrots.

These pies were a favorite of coal miners because they contained a full meal that could be eaten warm or cold. My grandad worked in the mines and loved them. We would then buy them from the "Chippy" on the corner and eat them walking around the shops.

### *History note:*

Side-crimped pasties gave rise to the suggestion that the miner might have eaten the pasty holding the thick edge of the pastry, which was later discarded, thereby ensuring that dirty fingers (possibly including traces of arsenic) did not touch the food or mouth. I never found out if the arsenic part was true, but Grandad did say that holding the side crimp of the pastry kept the pie clean from dirty fingers.

In England today, you can find them made with spicy curry, peas, and other non-traditional veggies. - Cathy

<https://www.serious-eats.com/cornish-pasty-british-meat-hand-pie-recipe>

I love pie! Just thinking about it makes me happy. . But I don't make pie. When I get a hankering' for pie, I head over to Marble Falls, Texas to the Blue Bonnet Cafe. It's always coconut cream for me. I've never eaten anything else there! - Beth

<https://www.bluebonnetcafe.net/>

I am most fond of pecan pie. However, a few years ago I ran across Tootie Pies in Dripping Springs, Texas. I had their peach pie -- it was crazy good. It ships cold in a box ready to be cooked. I can't say enough about this pie. This particular one is often sold out. <https://www.tootiepieco.com/Enjoy!> – Edith

I love pie!! I don't make them that often but my favorites to make are pumpkin, apple and pecan. I don't think peach cobbler is a pie, but I also love that! Tim, my son, loves the pumpkin pie and asks for it on his birthday instead of a cake. There is no secret family recipe - just the one on the back of the Libby's pumpkin can. My pecan pie is my favorite - of course it has the most calories but when I am eating pie, I just don't think about it! I could probably eat just about any flavor of pie. One of my favorite places to get pie is in Marble Falls at the Bluebonnet Cafe. And it's a must to have it warmed up with a scoop of Blue Bell ice cream on top.

And what about chicken pot pie! This is a favorite one just because you can make it and bake it in the same skillet. It's really good the next day, too!

<https://www.copymethat.com/r/pTmwN643G/skinnytaste-moms-chicken-pot-pie-from-on/>

– Melissa

I have used this recipe for 30 years and it is still a favorite in our family! It's even good for those family vacations since all the ingredients can be taken with you and then the pie can be made wherever you are. Just don't forget your pie server!

### Low fat Pie Recipe

1 ½ cups cold milk. I use 2%.  
1 (1ounce) package sugar-free instant pudding mix.  
1 prepared graham cracker crust.  
½-1 (8 ounce) container fat free Cool Whip.

Add milk and pudding mix into a large mixing bowl. Beat with wire whisk for 2 minutes. Spoon into pie crust and place in refrigerator to set. Once set, top with the amount of Cool Whip you prefer. Be sure to add chocolate sprinkles, shaved lemon peelings, or whatever you prefer on top. Store in the refrigerator.

This recipe can be used with any pudding flavor and sprinkles or topping. It's easy to make and easy to make in your own preferences. My kids grew up with me using chocolate pudding and sprinkles with this recipe. They didn't even realize it was low fat. You can also use a larger amount of pudding, just be sure to use an amount of milk that will thicken to pie consistency. – Carole

Apple pie is a favorite in our house, any time of year, not just in the fall. It's really the only pie I like! This particular recipe is called Easier than Apple Pie because it's simple and so tasty:

### Ingredients:

1 refrigerated pie crust  
¾ c sugar  
2 T cornstarch  
1 T ground cinnamon  
4 c peeled thinly sliced apples (4 medium)  
1 egg white slightly beaten  
1 t sugar for glaze

### Directions:

Prepare crust as directed on package. Place on foil lined baking sheet. Press out any folds.

Mix the sugar, cornstarch and cinnamon, toss with the apple. Spoon into center of crust spreading to 2 inches from the edge. Fold 2 inches of crust over the apples, pleating crust as needed. Brush crust with egg white, then sprinkle with 1 t sugar.

Bake in preheated oven 425 degrees – 20 minutes or until apples are tender. Cool slightly before serving. – Marcy

I am of the persuasion that [Impossible Pumpkin Pie](#) is not just for Thanksgiving, but for every day. If I had some in my refrigerator right now, I would be enjoying a slice of its creamy spicy good-ness, accompanied with a cup of fresh coffee. I make Impossible Pumpkin pie in a 9 x 13 glass baking dish, so there is plenty to serve my family...and have leftovers for snacking. It's a very easy dessert to make. I modify the recipe by using the larger can of pumpkin available at the store (or 2 regular cans), and I probably double the amount of pumpkin pie spice and vanilla, and I add about ½ cup of brown sugar, since those are some of my favorite flavors on the planet. Bon a petit! – Angela

I am not a huge fan of squash, but I am always trying to incorporate more vegetables into my diet. My Mother-in-law introduced this delicious dish to me years ago. It is similar to quiche, but uses much less egg and more vegetables. Who knew there were so many varieties of squash?

Ingredients:

4 cups thinly sliced zucchini	2 eggs
1/2 cup butter	
8 oz. shredded mozzarella cheese	
1 cup onion-chopped	1/2 tsp.
salt	
1/2 cup fresh chopped parsley (or 2 tbls dried)	1/2 tsp.
black pepper	
1/4 tsp. garlic powder	8 oz.
can crescent rolls	
1/4 tsp basil	
2 tsp. mustard	
Dash of oregano leaves	

Heat oven to 375 degrees. Saute onion and zucchini in butter until tender. Stir in parsley and seasonings. In a large bowl blend eggs and cheese. Stir in vegetable mixture. Separate dough into 8 triangles and place in 10" pie pan. Press over bottom and up sides to form crust. Pour vegetable mixture into crust. Bake 18-20 minutes at 375 degrees. Let stand 10 minutes then cut. Serves 6.

- Gina

## **Three Moms – Those Parties! – by Marcy Lytle**

We asked the cousins this month to weigh in on how to manage all the parties, once their kids start being invited to more and more. How do they afford the gifts? How do they manage the calendar? It definitely becomes more of an issue as the kids age, because parties become more frequent and gifts more expensive. And leaving them at the house of a stranger...is it safe?

So, what's a mom to do?

### Mom of Three

Parties my kids are invited to are a lot easier than doing our own parties. But that's for another month. When the kids were little, it was like a family event and we were all invited. But now, each kid is invited to individual parties from classmates. If we're close to the whole family, all of our kids get invited.

The boys don't want to go to a girl's party anyway, if their sister gets invited – it's no problem! And the two older kids now don't want to go to their younger brother's parties.

However, how many parties to attend can get out of hand and crazy! There are so many parties happening now that Covid is behind us. My daughter was invited to five parties in one month. That's crazy!

1. We always look at our calendar first. Family days or other events come first.
2. We look at our budget. I don't want my kids to not celebrate just because we don't have the best of funds. If we don't have the funds, the kids can sometimes draw the birthday friend a picture. I usually give them a budget of \$10, or I've been to parties where not every kid brings a gift. I try hard to budget in at least a little bit for gifts.
3. We look at whether or not parents or included or what type of party it is. Nothing has come up as being uncomfortable...yet. Thankful for that! Most include parents, so one of us stays. Also, sleepovers are starting with my daughter, and I must know the family and the parents.

Thankfully, we have good friends and families in our community. As we approach middle school...I might have a whole different answer!

### Mom of Four

When our kids were younger, we all went together and stayed at the party because parent supervision was first! Now that we have a middle schooler and the others are older, sometimes they go on their own!

We have to know the parents and family very well. We recently moved, so this is more difficult at the moment. We go with them first, to get to know the families.

If the other siblings want to go, we tell them they will have their parties and special times later.

One difficult party type is sleepovers and slumber parties at other homes. We try to have most of them at our house, which is very exhausting!

As far as gifts, with four kids we really just let the kids pick out candy, maybe draw something or craft something...and that's it. We might pick up a \$5 gift card to Sonic or Braun's, as well. This simplifies and lessens the burden of choosing something that breaks the budget.

### Mom of Two

Birthdays – I can't wait to hear the other two responses! Our girls are so young that most of our parties have been cousins or just a few friends – so we give an actual gift.

However, invitations are becoming more frequent now.

First of all, if we have no plans we try to make it to the party. But if something is going on, we just can't make the party. Our schedule is busy, so sometimes we cannot make it. We will have to make more decisions soon, I know!

Second, regarding gifts for all the parties, maybe our girls can start putting their allowance, etc. towards gifts. I have to think about this! I also have my girls make handwritten cards. And another thing is that we save our gifts bags. This is a great way to save on wrapping cost.

Affordable toys are pretty easy to find at the moment at Walmart, for little kids. They like anything. I'm sure that will change before long....

## **In the Kitchen – May Gatherings – by Marcy Lytle**

This month would be a great time to host a Mother's Day get together for a few moms, invite a few friends over to enjoy a visit, or just to have a family night with a fun spread. We recently had friends over and served the following fun recipes that filled the table. Enjoy!

### **Spinach Artichoke Dip**

We made this as one of our appetizers for watching the Oscars and really liked it. And I ate it during the week, as well. It's from a cute cookbook I found at Five Below called *Fabulous Food Boards* by Anna Helm Baxter.

- 8 oz softened cream cheese
- ½ c sour cream
- 2 cloves grated garlic
- ¼ t fresh ground black pepper
- ½ c finely grated Parmesan
- ½ c finely shredded white cheddar
- 1 can (14 oz) drained artichoke hearts, chopped
- 6 oz frozen spinach, thawed with excess liquid squeezed out

Preheat oven to 350 and lightly grease a 1 quart baking dish.

Combine the cream cheese, sour cream, garlic and black pepper in a medium mixing bowl. Add the Parm and cheddar, and mix. Fold in the artichokes and spinach, transfer to baking dish, and bake thoroughly – about 20 minutes. Serve warm. (Keep leftovers in fridge for up to a week.)

### **Sundae Bar**

Easy to put together, and this will be a hit with your next family gathering. Use a large tray for arranging, and little containers for all the toppings.

Ice Cream (small containers for a variety, or one big tub of vanilla)

Toppings: toffee bits, crumbled Oreos, strawberries, dark chocolate peanut butter cups, Snickers, cherries with stems, mini chocolate chips, sprinkles, and caramel and chocolate syrups.

Arrange your pints of ice cream in an ice filled metal pan to keep them cold. Set out all the toppings.

Include waffle bowls and tiny wooden spoons, if you like!

### **Flavored Popcorns**

Grab some pretty pastel bags and a wooden box for displaying these bags of four flavors of popcorn. Then set out little cups or bowls and scoops for serving.

- 12 cups popped corn
- 6 t olive oil
- Popcorn seasoning ideas: (use 1 T per each 2 cups of popcorn)
- Nutritional yeast
- Ranch seasoning
- Cheddar cheese powder
- Everything but the Bagel
- Cinnamon Sugar

In a large mixing bowl, toss 2 cups of popcorn with a t of olive oil and the seasonings of choice. Enjoy.

### **Mediterranean Board**

This was my favorite thing for our last table where we served friends. It tasted so good, was all store bought, so it was easy in a pinch to prepare.

- Tzatziki dip
- Hummus
- ¼ c olive oil
- 2 T mixed peppercorns
- Pinch paprika
- 1 cup chickpeas, drained
- 3 large radishes thinly sliced
- Tortilla chips
- Red bell pepper, cut into sticks
- Cucumber cut into sticks
- Carrot, cut into sticks
- Kalamata olives
- Green olives
- Tomatoes cut into wedges
- Shredded red cabbage
- Fresh herbs for garnish
- Lemon slices
- Pita bread

Combine olive oil with 1 t lightly crushed peppercorns in a shallow bowl. Drizzle some over the hummus and dust with paprika. Top with a few chickpeas. Set the hummus in the middle.

Drizzle more of that mixture over the tzatziki. Set this to the side.

Moving in a clockwise direction, surround the hummus with the veggies and olives, etc.

Sprinkle with fresh herbs.

Serve with lemon slices and pita bread.

## **Biscuits and Jam**

If you're having family for Mother's Day brunch or breakfast, a biscuit tray might be just the thing. This one was for the two of us, but it can be made for a big bunch!

- Buttermilk biscuits
- Butter
- Jam
- Strawberries
- Nuts
- Cheese
- Bacon

Make the biscuits (I just used canned) and then just arrange all of the items on pretty trays. Provide plates, napkins and juices for drinks. You're done!



## **Tried and True – Learning from last Month – by Marcy Lytle**

*Each month, I share little things to big things that I've observed or learned or taken in over the previous month's living. It's made me stop and realize that I'm learning and still growing, so I hope you are as well!*

It's okay and so fun mixing bedding – not buying a “set.” Target has so many cool textures and colors and prints! Just pick one and start mixing!

Five Below Store has this book table, and sometimes cool books are there waiting to be bought! Like *Fabulous Food Boards* by Anna Helm Baxter!

*Generous Women* – by Earl Hamner (the guy who wrote *The Waltons*) – is a great read for the month of May.

M&M's pretzels – have you tried them? He didn't like them, but I did – a lot. Instead of a peanut inside, it's a pretzel!

A Sunday afternoon sitting by a body of water relaxing and doing nothing on a pretty day does wonders for the soul.

Chick Fil A has a side salad, and when eaten with their waffle potato chips, it's a yummy meal!

Have you checked out Mixtiles? I sent in my photos from my phone, they made the set of tiles, and I love them!

If you don't have Dijon mustard for a recipe, just mix yellow with brown mustard and it tastes great (used in a pasta salad!)

The Dollar Tree now has a \$5 aisle with fun things! Have you seen it?

*CODA* – the film that won “best picture” at the Oscars – is worth seeing twice! You need to put this movie on your watch list.

Bags of flavored popcorn are great to have for snacks next time the family gathers...Ranch dressing, Everything but the Bagel, - just mix with a bit of olive oil and then toss with the popped corn. I've included the recipes on the In the Kitchen page!

Sitting in a fancy hotel lobby is fun, it's a great place to people watch, and it's relaxing on a Sunday evening after a busy weekend. Try it!

Keep a razor in your car because the best place to shave your legs is when sunlight is streaming in – seriously – you won't miss a hair!

My sister told me that adding ½ cup to 1 cup of baking soda to your load of towels when washing makes them smell and feel SO good. I tried it, and it works!

When you just have a couple chicken breasts, some leftover veggies and one lone baked potato, throw it all on a sheet pan, season, bake – and you've got yourself a meal!

## SUGAR + Spice

### **Whole in One**

I get excited when I find things that make life easier, even just a little bit.

One of my long-time favorite beauty company, [the Balm](#), recently had one of their 50% sales, which sent me browsing through their on-line store where I found [The Balmbina](#) palette.

This palette is a sort of best-of the Balm products. It includes matte and shimmer eyeshadows (yessss), 2 blushes, a bronzer, and a highlighter, all in one cute eco-friendly package!

Originally, I broke my current “NO MORE PALETTES!” rule by purchasing this palette, because I wanted the combo of blush-bronzer-highlighter...three products in one package. Nice. But the shadows are as lovely and flattering as the face products.

Now, for my simplified everyday makeup, I just reach for this palette. Easy-peazy! This palette will definitely fit on the bamboo vanity, in my hut on my Deserted Island. Speaking of...

### **DESERTED ISLAND product of the month:**

This month's highlighted product is a hair product that I use every day: [Suavecita Pomade](#). Not that I would do my hair if I lived on a deserted island, but really, who wants frizzy fly-away hair? I would want my beachy waves to be smooth, held back with a pink hibiscus flower tucked behind my ear...

Just a tiny dab on my fingertips tames the frizzy and flyaway hairs, however I style my hair. It's a medium hold pomade that adds shine, and has a lovely light scent. I also love that the Suavecito brand is an up-and-coming small business, who I like to support.

Blessings to you!

*Angela Dolbear, Beauty Editor, is the author of contemporary spiritual novels, such as [THE GARDEN KEY](#) Series, and [THE TORMENTOR'S TALE](#), as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). She is also a self-proclaimed beauty junkie, and has been since long before her mother allowed her to start wearing makeup at the age of 14. She keeps UPS and the USPS busy delivering small boxes on a regular basis from Ulta, Sephora, Amazon, and many independent cosmetics companies to her home Nashville, TN. Please connect with her at [www.AngelaDolbear.com](http://www.AngelaDolbear.com)*



HOME

## **Practical Parenting – Party in a Pinch – by Marcy Lytle**

We missed a couple of family birthday gatherings for the littles because they were sick. And then my dad was in the hospital, and life got chaotic. We finally found a small window on a Saturday afternoon to have a quick “dessert” picnic with outside games and fun in a park. We didn’t have time for a big blowout, and yet we wanted the time to be full of family fun. So throwing an impromptu party isn’t so bad. Here’s how:

### For the decorations:

Bandannas, as I’ve said before in other articles, are great for colored napkins and table décor, and they’re so cheap! Keep a drawer full, and pull them out for times like these...

Target has these cute plastic buckets with a stopper, great for packing in ice as a base for your cold food. And it looks great as a centerpiece.

Try stacking some of your food to give some height on the table, and use trays you have at home for the base.

Just pick up a Dollar Tree tablecloth and banner for the table.

### For the fun:

Visit the dollar store and just pick up all the random outdoor activities you can find, like water guns, balloon tennis (wooden spoons taped to paper plates and balloons), scavenger hunt by hiding toys or dinos or candy, jump ropes, bug hunts, etc. They even have a \$5 aisle now with other games like huge checkers or ladder ball.

### For the food:

Ask the birthday kids and adults their favorite desserts, and then have a tray full of options. The 8 year old likes cheesecake, and adults do too, so a frozen array of different kinds worked! The 7 year old and his brother asked for chocolate donuts. That’s so easy, as well! And finally, ice cream was a favorite, so that package of little individual cups was the easiest.

Use a cake stand or large tray to display the donuts, by making a pyramid.

Place the slices of cheesecake on a board.

Set the ice creams in a bowl of ice, to keep them cold.

Provide any toppings you like, cute wooden spoons, and you’re done!

We didn’t have a lot of time to prepare or even have the party, but it all worked. The table was colorful and inviting, the games were family connections, and the family time was needed and a blessing!

## **I Don't Do Teenagers – Their Responsibility – by Marcy Lytle**

Someone recently asked me if we made our kids pay for their insurance, once they got a car. And I honestly couldn't recall. I know some parents do require this of their teens, once they have a job and a steady income. Other parents cover this cost for them. Is either one the "right way" to give our teens responsibility and make it theirs? I'm not sure there is a "right way" when it comes to giving our teens responsibility, but there are some things to think about that will help us make the choice.

### Home Chores

My own parents felt like, when we were teens and studying hard in schoolwork, our home chores were minimal. However, when I married I did not know how to do very many things, and right away ruined a load of clothes with bleach! Other parents have their teens ready to manage and entire household by the time they graduate. The first option can leave a kid inept, and the second can be a heavy load.

Chores are good, healthy to learn, and great for kids to manage – but grace needs to be extended when their lives are full. Just like we need grace from time to time, so do they.

### Car Insurance and Gas

If our teens have a job they can manage and still be present with the family and get their school work done, then more power to them to pay for their insurance and gas. Of course, we want to teach them responsibility. And if they're old enough to drive a car, they're old enough to afford the upkeep. Yes! However, an occasional gift card for gas and a surprise payment from Mom and Dad are great rewards for jobs well done and responsibility well taken.

Car upkeep is expensive, and while teens need to become adults – they can do this slowly – rather than abruptly. If parents pay for gas and insurance, parents have leverage if cars aren't driven properly and used responsibly. That's something to think about, as well.

### Cleaning Rooms

Oh, how many parents can give a "high five" to the times you've had knockdown drag-outs with your kids over that messy place they call their room? Sometimes, parents have one kid that enjoys tidying up and there's no problem. But almost every family has one or more kid that cannot keep his/her room clean, no matter how many sticky notes, reminders, threats and punishments are made for not keeping that floor tidy, the room smelling clean, the bed made, and closets neat.

If your kid works well with a calendar, help him make one with days to clean, to tidy, etc. If your teen needs help because he doesn't know where to start, offer a hand once a week and model how to organize and clean. If your teen's room resembles the dump, sit and have a talk and make a plan and set boundaries until changes are made.

For us, clean rooms were non-negotiables because rooms are part of a house, in which the entire family lives and breathes...together.

## Homework

How much does a parent step in and help their teens with homework? I often sat with my kids late at night helping them finish math homework, or helping them outline a story, or gather materials for a project. I loved being involved because it allowed me to see what they were learning. And I was found coloring a map with my son, because I thought that quite a mundane homework assignment for a high schooler! But actually doing their homework for them teaches them nothing!

Some kids are just managers of time, papers and schedules...and others are not...just like adults. Use your own skills to help them with due dates, scheduling out how much to read per night in order to finish a book, and ways to keep their backpacks organized so they can find that assignment they know they completed.

I'm a big proponent of parents modeling behavior they want their kids to learn, even in the teen years. We may not think they're watching and still learning then, but they most definitely are. It will be exasperating and some of the skills we're so adept at, our kids won't ever get it. They're cut from the same cloth as we are, but often the way their patterns develop are different. And some things we give them responsibility for will never fully mature until they're long gone and have a home of their own.

Each teen is different, and we can only do our best. Talk to them, pray with them, lead and guide them, and learn to let go a little, pull back a little, and continue to walk beside them all of their lives. It's not easy...so give yourself some grace, too!

## **An Adage a Day - Just Fiddling Around – by Carole Gilbert**

I have always loved string instruments of all kinds. I played the drums but always wished I had learned to play a violin or guitar. I did try to teach myself the guitar and learned a few chords, but my favorite string instrument is the violin or viola, also known as fiddles. My daughter took viola lessons in fifth grade. And I will say learning to play requires determination, patience, and hard work. And that's for the ones listening, also!

It's interesting to note that the term "fiddle" refers to all stringed instruments. And this term evolved, in a round and about way, from the Roman goddess of joy and victory, Vitula. This helps us know how the term, fiddle, refers to feeling that all is well and good, or fit. Thus, along came the term, "fit as a fiddle."

And becoming fit as a fiddle is like learning to play one, or any instrument for that matter. It takes time and hard work. And the older you get, the harder it becomes unless you are one of those women who have never had a problem with being in shape, like one of our sweet writers that I won't name but whose initials are KS. I have never been one of those women. When I was nine, I weighed 130 pounds, not much less than I do now. But I have worked at being fit. I haven't had the victory of it yet, but I have felt the joy of trying.

This phrase is over 400 years old, starting in the 1600's in the British English language. "Fit as a fiddle" doesn't only mean to be in shape but to be well maintained, to be fresh as a daisy, not run down, or out of sorts, much like a musician keeps his instrument. When it first began, it was thought to have been used to describe a string instrument that had been tuned and kept in good shape for the sole purpose of being ready to play beautifully for those listening. Hence, the instrument was fit as a fiddle.

Ironically, my shape is pretty much like a fiddle, maybe even a guitar, but I know my physical state is not all that's important. My spiritual shape needs to be more fit as a fiddle, maintained every day to the fullest for joy and victory. I can't find a Bible verse that puts being fit along with string instruments together, but I can find lots of Bible verses about these two topics separately. This tells me that being "fit as a fiddle" is important to God. And we definitely know how important our joy and victory, through Jesus, are to Him.

Have you ever heard the song, "The Devil Went Down to Georgia" by The Charlie Daniels Band?

In the song, Johnny beats Satan in a fiddle playing duel. He wins Satan's golden fiddle and doesn't lose his soul. I'm sure Johnny had to be somewhat fit as a fiddle to outplay Satan and his fired-up fingertips. So, I'm encouraged by this song. And every time I hear it or just think about it, I want to jump to my feet and move around or dance! I may not play like Johnny, and my shape may look like a fiddle but I'm full of joy and victory because my determination and my soul belong to God.

## **Tiny Living – Dogs and Deer – by Leyanne Enterline**

*CAUTION...Beware animal lovers, a not so good ending...*

Living tiny with big dogs is a bit difficult at times. These high energy dogs must be let out and given opportunities to run quite a bit! One activity that the pups enjoy is unfortunately chasing deer. However, our pets are herding dogs and it's in their blood to "herd." Usually, they work together with each of them coming at a different angle to keep the group of deer together. The deer then often all jump over the fence and escape, and the dogs feel like they've declared their purpose in life by keeping us all safe from these intruders!

One normal night we let the pups out to have their fun, and things took a turn for the worse. There were two groups of deer on the property that night. One called axis to the left front, and the white tail in the middle. As the dogs started running to do their herding activity, I think they were confused at how many deer there actually were. All of a sudden, chaos took place! Deer started running from all directions, and one dog ducked as a deer leaped high into the air over him.

I was screaming, "Hide!"

I hid behind a cedar tree, the kids beside the car and tree. I felt like we were in a production of *The Lion King*, and Tucker, the one dog that was having a hay day running as fast as he could all over the place, was the lion, and the deer were the gazelles he was after.

Finally, the fiasco lessened and we couldn't find Tucker. All we could hear was the ear piercing scream of a dying animal. It was heartbreaking and terrifying. We didn't know exactly what had happened and which animal was harmed. We had to take the truck up to the front of the property and stay clear of whatever could be coming our way. As we yelled out for Tucker, we finally saw his tail waving in the bushes. These dogs have a funny skunk-like tail and it sort of pops back and forth. If they're happy to see us, it's more of a helicopter spin. This time it was different. It seemed as though he was okay, but definitely what he had experienced was not okay. We finally called him off the creature and realized Tucker was covered in blood. We quickly put him away and checked on what he had attacked.

In not so gruesome details, a beautiful young axis did not make it. We think it was too small to jump over our fence and catapulted backwards leaving an easy target for Tucker. From the looks of it, it looked like a normal dog just trying to grab hold of an animal that was an intruder on his space. I don't think it was actually going to be his meal, just more like,

"Look guys! I saved y'all!"

After checking Tucker thoroughly and washing him off, he was totally fine and ready to play as usual.

It was an extremely eventful night that I pray we never have to relive again. We have learned that allowing the pups to chase the deer is not the best idea and we will keep them apart as best we can. However, that hasn't stopped them from going after the ever so fast lizards, bunnies, and birds...

Remember love grows best in tiny spaces!



## **A Night to Remember – A Mom’s Blessing – by Marcy Lytle**

What better month of the year to affirm your kiddos than May, the month that celebrates motherhood! Yes, we love to be doted on with cards and gifts and food, but what if we moms doted on our children with the kind of affirmation found in the Word? SO FUN!

Preparation: Have a praise song you all know picked out for listening, a fresh loaf of bread for sharing, a bow and arrow from the dollar store if you can find one (if not, just print out one) or a game of darts for playing, and olives/cheese/toothpicks for snacking.

Psalm 8:2 *Through the praise of **children** and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.*

Did you know that when you kids praise the Lord this shuts the mouths of all your enemies, like fear or whispers of lies in your ears? What are some of your biggest fears?

- Play a praise song and sing it together with the kids.

Psalm 37:5 *I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their **children** begging bread.*

The righteous are those that believe and love the Lord. He promises that he will provide all that we need. And that he will never leave us.

- Share the bread with each child and give thanks.

Psalm 90:16 *May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their **children**.*

Splendor means magnificent. Like a beautiful sunset! What is magnificent to you in God’s creation?

- If possible, go outside and observe His splendor together.

Psalm 115:14 *May the LORD cause you to flourish, both you and your **children**.*

To flourish is to grow happily and healthily, to thrive! It’s only through a relationship with the Lord that we can be like a tree planted by a river with beautiful leaves that wave in the wind.

- Affirm each child in an area where you see growth.

Psalm 127:4 *Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are **children** born in one’s youth.*

Wow, you’re like arrows. That means you’re sharp, pointed in the right direction, and aimed at a target. But Mom/Dad have to guide you and keep you pointed in that direction. We love you and are pleased when you obey, and grow. It’s then that you will be like an arrow, aimed for the target! What is the target? You’ll learn as you grow.

- Give each child a bow and arrow, or demonstrate how to use. Or just play darts!

Psalm 128:3 *Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your **children** will be like olive shoots around your table.*

An olive tree has growth around the base...it's like you kids growing out of the base of your family tree...connected and rooted in the Truth of the Word...growing up and producing fruit. We pray for you daily that you will grow in the knowledge of how much God loves you and others!

- Share olives and cheese, with toothpicks, for a snack.

Mom's prayer:

*Dear God,*

*Thank you for my children, the best gift in life. I ask that they know you as their Father, the giver of all good things, and that they grow in their relationship with you. May they feel and know your love and protection, and offer that same love to those around them. And may they be like arrows and olive shoots, growing and sending forth your love to the world. Give them each day your daily bread, and may they always observe the sunrise and the sunset, the splendor of who you are. Thank you for my children and I trust them into your good hands. - Amen*

## Chipped China – Snail Face – by Jennifer Lytle

I recently visited a restroom in the building where there was a basket (or two) on the counter with multitudinous items for visitors. Everything from gum to pantyhose or hairspray had been purchased in mini sizes and set out.

“How nice!” I thought.

If I found myself in need of bobby pins, there were some! Among the various pieces, I noticed a foil, holographic package. The package was attractive. After reading the label, two thoughts occurred to me.

“Am I on candid camera?”

“I’d like to try this for my face.”

After that second thought, I wondered about my simple-minded attraction to this odd commodity. The lotion was called Snail Technology and though the packaging was possibly mesmerizing, it showcased a weird messaging. Ingredients included snail mucus. Snail mucus? Really? Am I so desperate for a new face lotion?

Maybe you've never been tempted to put snail mucus on your face, but have you ever found yourself following the most recent trend? Do you remember ever wearing a pair of overalls backward? Perhaps you teased and feverishly sprayed hairspray in your hair only to cry and cringe later, trying to brush out the tangles purposely pushed into your follicles.

These examples might be funny, but there is currently a vicious onslaught against feminine beauty.

Certainly, this isn't the first round of perverting what is pure and innocent in regards to women. My husband and I can recognize symptoms of the struggle that is currently brewing just beneath the surface and spilling out for some young girls because we have a daughter.

It's a difficult time to be female. The attacks are multitudinous.

Christians are instructed to "be transformed" and cautioned against "conform[ing] any longer to the pattern of this world" in [Romans 12:2](#). The New Living translation admonishes, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world."

May the Lord help you and your daughters navigate this world with true beauty and grace.

*Jesus, help me too!  
Amen.*



YOU

## **Inner Strength - Breathe... - by Michelle Wyatt**

Some say “just breathe” when we need to feel better. Well, there is no such thing as “just breathe,” because the word “just” makes it sound like breathing is easy and unimportant. Effective breathing is anything but. What is effective breathing?

Effective breathing can transcend us from faking a smile to sincerely smiling. (Faking a smile takes less energy than frowning and research has shown it increases serotonin in the brain. So, faking a smile is a good place to start.) Personally, effective breathing keeps my stress in check and protects my kids from unfairly getting the brunt of what’s not about them.

There are strategies to effective breathing that I have learned from various sources such as mentors, counselors, books, and even coaches.

*Box breathing:* Inhale for a count of four and hold for 2, exhale for a count of 4 and hold for 2. Repeat 4 times

*Diaphragm breathing:* Consciously inhale through your diaphragm (you should see it go up)

Deep breath, turn your head to the right, then exhale strong and quick over your shoulder.

*5 finger breathing:* This is a great one for kids that I learned from their coach. You hold up one of your hands and breathe as you trace your fingers with your other hand. More specifically, you inhale when you trace up and exhale when you trace down. That’s what keeps the pace of your breathing.

*Blowing into a pretend balloon:* Make a fist leaving a small opening. Take a deep breath in, put your mouth up to the hole, and blow out hard all the while envisioning your worries leaving you and opening your heart and mind to the blessings around us.

Now, since breathing is an involuntary motion that keeps alive, we seldom (at least I know I don’t) ask ourselves, “How am I breathing?” I’ve discovered that the more I do these breathing techniques, the more aware I get of how my breathing is when I start to feel stressed. This awareness leads to a more proactive approach to emotion regulation through effective breathing than to a reactive approach.

The heart gets tired and drained. When I find myself exhaling loudly, without inhaling in, that is my biggest cue that my heart and soul are out of balance i.e. I have thoughts and feelings that need attention. I am often unable to process those thoughts and feelings immediately, so I use a breathing technique to get me through. For example, when I want quiet time, but the boys are hungry, I breathe on my way to the kitchen and while in the kitchen, to get through that time of day until maybe in the evening I can journal, pray out loud, cry, etc.

I encourage all of us to reflect on the following questions...What is your biggest cue? When do you most find this coming up? What breathing technique will you do today? Most importantly, remember...

*The heart breathes deep to every moment that we follow Him.*

## **Life in a Nutshell – No More Missing Out – by Jill Montz**

I spend a lot of time alone in my car. Whether I am driving for work or waiting on my kid to get out of school or practice, I spend several hours a day on average behind the wheel. Several years ago, I decided to make the most of this opportunity, and I began to listen to audio books or podcasts any time I was alone in the car. While I still have not mastered a new language yet, I have learned many things in my SUV classroom.

Most of my selections fall into a few categories: Business, Health and Wellness, Personal Development, Spiritual Growth, and just a few Comedy and Fiction options thrown in for the days when my brain just needs a break.

One morning I had on a weight loss podcast, and the host was talking about how our minds are the first battleground for weight loss. Nothing new, there. I had heard that before. But then she interviewed a woman who had a family member fighting cancer, and the woman was saying how most days she just wants to drown her sorrows in wine and unhealthy food choices because she knows the struggles and difficulties this disease will bring.

The host went on to talk to the woman about “unnecessary suffering,” and how we as a society do a lot of “pre-mourning and pre-grieving” when we future cast doom and gloom situations in life. Our brains think they are protecting us by giving us all the worst case scenarios to prepare us for what MIGHT happen. But in reality, whether a person dies suddenly or the process is drawn out over time, we all “hurt equally when they are gone.”

This information made me have to pull my car over, dig around for a pen, and grab a drive-thru napkin to jot down some of these truth bombs. I was just shouting *yes, Yes, YES* in my car as traffic flew by at 75 mph. I wanted to plaster my napkin against my driver’s side window and get the attention of all those on the road that they needed to hear what was coming out of this woman’s mouth.

So often I have grieved for people, places, and things...WHILE I WAS STILL WITH THEM! So often I have missed out on the good stuff, while dreading the upcoming bad stuff. Guess what? The bad stuff still came, it still hurt, and it still brought me to my knees in agony. No amount of “pre-grieving” helped ease the pain when the time came to say goodbye, let go, walk away, give up, etc.

I know I do this with my daughter, Dotty. She is my one and only child and since the day I realized she would be my “first and last” of just about every major parenting event in my life I started “pre-mourning” the big milestones.

Her first day of school...was my last first day of school.

Her first softball practice...was my last first softball practice.

Her first school dance...was my last first school dance.

Her last day of elementary school...was my only last day of elementary school.

As she is wrapping up middle school...I too will never be the parent of a middle schooler again. As she gets ready for her high school days...I am facing four fast years and then high school is over for me as a parent.

I don’t get another shot at this parenting thing and the truth is I have been doing lots of it wrong by focusing on how sad it is, while it is flying by each day. I have joked with my staff for years

that I won't start crying the first day of Dotty's senior year...I will start the first day of her freshman year because I know I don't get to cry again over another child so I need to get all the tears in. It is sort of a joke...but sort of not.

With every milestone she reaches I can't help but clap with one hand as my other tries to hold her back (or at least hold onto her a little while longer). And the truth is clapping with one hand is not very loud or effective. I miss out on fully celebrating and enjoying the moments because I am also being sad about the future moments that aren't here yet.

I realize I can be happy and sad at the same time. I know those emotions are closely related. But I also know no matter how many hours I spend imagining how sad I will be the day I come home from dropping her off at college won't ease the pain on the actual day. On that day, I won't have stocked up enough tears to cry less. I won't have felt the hurt in my heart enough to feel lonely less. I won't have worried enough minutes to worry less. Those emotions will come and no prep ahead of time will slow down the waves that will wash over me.

Since I am writing this article in advance of its due date (because my daughter does live her best life and keeps me very busy in the spring), when this goes to print it will be the month of May. Dotty will be walking out of the halls of middle school and into the auditorium of high school for orientation. She will have participated in her last middle school sporting and extracurricular events. She will have taken her last middle school field trip. She will be making plans for the summer camps and time with friends and telling me all about her plans to get her learner's permit to drive SOON.

She will be excited about the events as they come and the events to come. And I pray I have learned to be excited, as well.

For it is written in Ecclesiastes 3:1 & 4:

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...a time to weep,  
and a time to laugh, a time to mourn, and a time to dance...”

I don't want to miss the laughing and the dancing because I am too busy weeping and mourning for the things to come. So I plan to live, love, laugh, and dance my way through all the great moments God blesses me with when it comes to Dotty. Because I know the sad times will come and there will be plenty of time to be sad when they do.

But until then...I hope I dance!

I know Dotty will be thrilled. She loves my dance moves like only an almost 15-year-old girl can!

## Health Habits – Cautionary Tales – by Marcy Lytle

Aging is a privilege and has so many perks. However, aging is definitely a challenge as the body gets older but it wants to do what it wants to do! I titled this article Cautionary Tales because I'm offering caution to those of you at any age, really, as you mature and grow older...and wiser. These are tales from living several decades on this earth, and I'm sure you have your own to add, as well!

*Walking upstairs* can be hard on the knees at times. I've found that placing my feet flat and pushing with my thighs, instead of feeling the climb with my knees, is so much better!

Dust collects over the years in places you'd never think to look! We recently remodeled and I think we had enough dust to create another Adam! *Check under and behind your beds*, above baseboards in closets, and other hidden places...and dust. It might be a healthy thing to do.

There's a verse in the Bible that says we are to *love His ways*. And I've found that despising God's ways (waiting to answer, saying no, etc.) is unhealthy in so many aspects. Learning to trust and love His ways, without understanding, now that's life-changing!

They tell us to bend our legs to lift, but I never heard to *bend straight-on* and not at an angle! I bent to lift a mattress to tuck a sheet, at an angle – and popped out my back! Lesson learned.

*Get rid of the mandoline*. Okay, maybe you're proficient at using that finger snapper, but I am not. And I tried buying one twice, several years apart, but never again. That slicer is a beast! (Never could figure out how to use the guard properly).

*Quit wearing pointed toe heels* when you start to feel the pain. I've found that pointed toe flats aren't nearly as bad, but the heels – they will do a number on your toes that might be painful AND irreversible. There are lots of cute sneakers and flats – learn to love them!

*Vary your workouts*. Youtube has great exercise (and dance) video options, sunny days call for walks in the neighborhood and parks, and listening to music is a great motivator to dance. Vary what you do, and do it daily.

Elderly people seem to suffer physically from dehydration and just refuse to drink water. So make it a habit NOW. It doesn't take long until you actually *prefer water over soft drinks* and other beverages. Lots of water, always. It cleanses and hydrates and just makes your body smile.

*When you're tired, rest*. It makes no one happy if you're running on low fuel and sputtering expletives and giving nasty looks, all because you're overworked and haven't stopped to take a break. You might need a friend to help you with this one...

I still see people doing it – looking at their phone while they're walking. *Don't do it*. Place it out of sight. That person can wait 60 seconds until you're safely across the street or parking lot, where you can stand still and text.



Those are just a few reminders of things I have to remind myself of, sometimes daily! It's wise to listen to our bodies, but also wise to listen to tales of others that have fallen and hurt themselves, and noted what caused them to fall.

Here's to a healthy month of new habits for all of us...ones that change our lives for the better.

## **Life Right Now - Fairy Tale Endings - by Jennifer Stephens**

Once upon a time, in a land far, far from perfect lived a little girl with caramel-colored ringlets flowing down the back of her frilly ruffled dress. The kind of dress with a teeny bell sewn into the hem that jingled when she twirled. Her days were spent mothering baby dolls, listening to her favorite fairy tales, and baking snickerdoodles with her mom. Throughout her early years she was often asked what she wanted to be when she grew up. The answer was always the same. She had one dream. To be a mom.

As each year slipped into the next, the little girl grew up, always keeping that dream tucked inside her heart.

One day the young girl set off to find a prince. Like many young girls, she had to kiss a few frogs before finally finding the prince meant for her. A lot of those frogs took a flying leap when they learned of her dream (frogs can be such scaredy cats), but this time it seemed she'd finally met the right one.

The prince and the girl married and lived in a charming home in the middle part of a midwestern town. They were busy enjoying life together, but as each month fell into the next without an announcement from the lovely couple, the townspeople (who were always digging their noses into everybody else's business) began to worry. Relax, they insisted (Maybe she could relax if everyone would stop bugging her all the time!). It'll happen when you stop trying, they suggested. Just adopt, they offered (there is no "just" in adopting). With each bit of unsolicited advice, the evil disappointment dragon emerged, attempting to break the girl's spirit. But she prayed. She prayed as she planned baby showers for friends. She prayed as tears rushed down her cheeks. She prayed as the year's ticked by, one after another. The reality of her dream coming true began to feel impossible. She still longed to be a mom. Even as she waited, she trusted in God's plan for her.

The years turned into decades when suddenly a fairy godmother (who must have been an angel sent straight from Heaven) appeared. The girl, now a middle-aged woman, was teaching the children's Sunday school class at church and this visitor, who'd never been seen there before and would never be seen there again, asked the exact same question everyone asked when meeting her for the very first time. This mysterious lady asked if she had any children. Slightly annoyed about being asked this question yet again, this time she didn't plaster a fake smile on her face or give an overly enthusiastic response about having two furry dogs. This time she uttered a disgruntled NO.

Then, without even a bibbidi-bobbidi-boo, this angel pulled her aside and immediately prayed that if God's answer to this prayer is no, that He remove this desire from her heart. And He did. Eventually. She felt something shift inside and she knew that letting go of this dream would free her heart to take hold of something new.

The ferocious dragon of defeat occasionally reared his ugly head, breathing his fiery breath. She learned to guard her heart against the ruthless dragon (he tended to show up at otherwise joyous occasions, which was quite troublesome). While his attempts to attack her steadfast trust in God's plan were fierce, she held tight to His promises. Even though she would never create snickerdoodle memories with her own kids, she fully accepted God had something more in store for her.

It wasn't the fairy-tale ending she'd anticipated, but with God in their hearts she and her prince (and their pups) lived together happily ever after...

*Moral of the story:*

It's easy to trust God when everything is going our way, but He wants our trust even when it isn't. God knows better than we do. When it feels like He isn't answering our prayers, it isn't that He's ignoring us, it might be that the answer is simply 'no.' Not because we've done something wrong or didn't pray hard enough, but because He sees beyond what we can see. His 'no' is a merciful no, even when it hurts.

*The other moral of the story:*

Be compassionate as we celebrate mothers on Mother's Day this year. This can be a difficult day for some - those that have lost their mothers, have difficult relationships with their mothers, are longing to be mothers and those never meant to be mothers.

## **Under Pressure - The Children's Bread – by Debbie Haynes**

There's a story in Matthew 15: 21-28 where Jesus had just been in Jerusalem trying to tell his followers and the religious people around him about their hypocritical ways. He spoke about how it's not what goes into a mouth that defiles a man, but rather what comes out of the mouth. The listeners just didn't get it!

Jesus then moves on to Greece, seeking out Jews lost in their sin – the ones he came to save first. And one humble Greek woman rushed to where Jesus was, because she was totally desperate. It seemed that her daughter was completely taken by some demonic power over which she had no control. This unnamed Greek woman had to cross some serious social barriers, stigmas and racial discrimination and place herself where she was clearly unwanted. We know this, because Jesus' followers were completely compassionless for this woman and displayed great disdain for her. They even told Jesus to get rid of her, because she was such a bother.

In spite of the obstacles, this mother pressed in, and because she fully recognized Jesus, her prayer and her actions completely contrasted the hypocrisy of those Jesus had just been speaking with. And her prayer was so different from the arrogant, agenda-driven prayers of the religious society.

- Her prayer was short
- Her prayer was not puffed up
- Her prayer was humble
- Her prayer was desperate
- Her prayer was respectful
- Her prayer was so worshipful she fell at Jesus' feet.
- Her prayer was full of understanding and faith

At first, Jesus answered her by telling her it wasn't proper for her to take the Children's Bread – that which was meant for the Jew, first. He was testing her faith by making this statement. Jews often referred to her kind as dogs, as that term was often used to identify by that culture unsavory things. But here, it was used to indicate someone outside of their "rights."

In Matthew 7:6 Jesus says...give not that (bread) which his holy bread to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine, unless they trample them...

The Bread represented all the Messiah came to bring – salvation, healing, deliverance, etc. And children had rights in that day – family rights of the firstborn, legal rights to inheritance, divine rights from covenant with God and redemptive rights. And this woman, knowing her position in the culture, that she did not qualify to receive the children's rights, did know her rights as a dog – a Gentile! She knew that she could scrape crumbs of bread from the floor and that bread would be enough for her daughter's healing, because they were from the Son of God.

*What faith!*

Jesus was moved by this mother's faith and marveled at her, and commended her, and gave her exactly what she asked for. The mother's daughter was healed that very moment.

When we believe strongly for something and we don't get what we believe for, it's hard. There's a verse in James 4 that says God gives more grace to the humble...like this mother. Her faith was tested. A little non-Jew, Greek lady expressed complete trust in Jesus.

Jesus' bread is all-encompassing; not a partial healing, but it covers our whole being for our needs – all of them – in this life and for eternity. The Children's Bread is ours – not just crumbs – the whole loaf for whatever we need.

Matthew 7 says if we ask it will be given to us. If we knock, it will be opened. And if we seek, we will find. And then Jesus states that if we know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will our Father give good gifts to those that ask?

Let's pray humbly, like this Grecian mom, as we offer faith that catches His attention. And let's recognize that Jesus' love, death and resurrection for us all gives us legal right to the Children's Bread...not just the crumbs.



MARRIAGE

## **In This Together – Taco Love** – by Bekah Holland

As I'm pretty sure everyone on the planet has heard someone talk about Love Languages, I'm about to add another for you. In case you're one of the four people who've managed to avoid these, I'll break them down into the most relatable terms.

1. Words of Affirmation: Your tacos are delicious
2. Acts of Service: I made you tacos
3. Receiving Gifts: Here's a taco
4. Quality Time: Let's go out for tacos together
5. Physical Touch: Let me hold you like a taco

Now, I'll be honest. I was embarrassingly far into adulthood before I figured out what my love language really is. What makes me feel seen and cared for. *Be better, y'all*. Thus, what emerged is the taco scenario that we can all identify with. I always thought that my love language was of the, "Your tacos are delicious" variety. Also maybe, "Let's go out for tacos together." Really, I thought I was (as my mother assumed I would be) a bit high maintenance and encompassed all of the love languages, both taco and otherwise.

It turns out, however, that it was a bit more likely that I just didn't know myself at all. I was a relatively emotionally aware kid. And I assumed I was as a grown up person. But getting married, having kids, epically failing at life, hitting some peaks, a few more epic failings, and I realized that what I assumed was neatly summed up in the wise words of Nitya Prakash, "Adulthood is like looking both ways before crossing the street and then getting hit by an airplane." So while the pandemic has been horrendous in most other ways, it did provide me with a desperation so overwhelming, that I had no choice but to figure out how to better fill my cup....or at least plug the hole that it seemed to be leaking through.

After a few (many) complete and utter breakdowns, I realized that while I love gifts and love giving them, what I really needed was "I made you tacos" kind of love. Even more importantly, "I saw you were having a rough day, so I did the dishes, vacuumed, fed the kids and poured you an adult beverage so maybe you can breathe" love. It turns out, a lot of my inability to manage the chaos of my emotions and feeling of dread thinking about anything at all really stemmed from misunderstanding myself and what I needed.

I feel seen when my husband sees something that needs to be done and just does it. He's always been great and telling me how much he appreciates me and all I do. And I need that, too. But when we both realized what I was really missing it was a game changer! Is it always perfect? No. Some proof being the dishes strike I've been on in an attempt to outwait my teenager, the basket of laundry that's been sitting on the floor waiting to be folded because, well, laundry is straight from the depths of hell, and I will claim that until Jesus comes. But because my partner in this crazy life is actively working to see me, and find ways to make me feel safe, loved and appreciated, everything else is just not as big of a deal.

I'm more in love with my husband than any other time in our relationship. It's because we are both striving to see each other, fill each other's love tank, give each other the attention and even space when that's what we need. And some days the dishes don't get done (okay, lots of days). Some days, we (I) forget about the vegetables we (I) bought and died a slow and smelly death in the crisper. Some days, we get it all done and enjoy it for the seven minutes it lasts before the pre and not so pre-teens start running steadily through our house again.

We feel lighter, because we aren't always running on empty any more. And when we are, we know we aren't alone, that we're more together, and that there is still sunshine peeking through in the form of the little things that matter to us both.

*And love.*

Knowing that this love keeps growing, and changing and filling the empty spaces, makes the dirty dishes and astronomical grocery bills and teenage angst a little bit easier to trudge through.

So, lean in. Lean in to find out what version of the taco love language makes you feel the best, makes you smile like only tacos can, fills your soul as much as your belly.

"Love is a two way street constantly under construction."

Carroll Bryant



## **Date Night Fun – Beautiful Walks – by Marcy Lytle**

This is the time of year to incorporate walks into date nights with him. Before the summer heat is on, after the chilly nights are gone, and while the month of May is here. Walking together can be one of the most intimate, thrilling, romantic activities to do with him. It doesn't have to be mundane or something to dread, but rather beautiful and calming and pleasant and all the things! Here are five different types of walks to encourage you to step out together and go:

Find a park – Search parks in your area that have trails. It doesn't have to be a super long trail, just a place where you can walk. Pack a lunch, and go. If there's a pond in the park and benches along the trail, that's even better. Stop and watch the ducks, skip rocks, look at people, and just observe. Parks are a great place to visit in the month of May where people abound and the sun shines. Talk about nothing, just breathe and hold hands, and enjoy the day and the food you've prepared.

Find a mall – an outdoor one, preferably. On this date, take a stroll through the entire mall (we like the outlets) and then on your second or third time around stop in a few stores. Maybe you'll get an Auntie Anne's pretzel, browse for a new shirt for him, or sandals for you. Be sure to drink lemonade with that pretzel! It might be fun to take in a movie on the way home...

Find a neighborhood – There's this subdivision near us that has a long walkway with pretty lights and landscaping that we enjoy walking, especially just before dark. Nearby that walkway is a small pond with a fountain and green grass besides. We have met another couple there a few times to walk and chat, to sit and snack. It's a great way to have a date night out to watch the stars as they appear, when the night goes dark.

Find a track – Is there a high school near you with a track on which you can walk? Step on the track and begin your walk, and talk about your own high school days. What did you like about high school, or dread? Who was your best friend? Your worst subject? It's easy to track your mileage when you're on a track, because four times around – and you've walked a mile. Sit in the stands, eat dark chocolate and nuts – sipping on cold tea from a thermos. Enjoy!

Find a lake – There are lots of lakes near us, and walking by the lake is a joy any time of the day. This time, take some reading material to enjoy after you walk, and some outdoor chairs. Pack a hat, too. Don't have one? Stop to buy one before you go! And even consider taking a kite to fly if there's an open field near the lake to run. Lake dates are the best.

Walking. It's good for the body, but it's also good for the two bodies, minds and souls, as well!

## **After 40 Years – The Farmers Market – by Marcy Lytle**

It's one of our favorite weekend activities if we're in town and the weather's nice...going to the Farmer's Markets. We choose different ones, depending on what we've got planned for the rest of the day. And we enjoy the outing, both of us for different reasons.

*I enjoy browsing the fresh vegetables for meals I might make next week.*

*He loves purchasing a cup of hot coffee to drink while he's walking around.*

*I like to see if any artisans have set up a booth with cute bags or jewelry.*

*He always gravitates toward the fresh honey booth, because he is always in need of more.*

*I love taking our cloth bags (if we remember) because that's just plain fun.*

*He likes packing the cooler to bring (if we remember) in case we buy refrigerated items.*

*I like walking outside in the sunshine among all the people and the goods.*

*He likes seeing how many tents there are, and talking to the vendors.*

What I'm saying is...we enjoy this same activity but for totally different reasons.

There might be some activity we think of doing with our spouses but we think he won't like to tag along, or will be bored. And while that's true some of the time, it's not true all of the time.

I enjoy the Farmer's Market, but especially with Jon. I also love the colors of the fresh produce piled up in rows, and discovering some new vegetable I've never used before. Micro Greens were a new discovery for me a few years ago. He loves trying out all of the local flavors of roasted coffee makers in our area, and I love watching him taste them all.

And then...after the Farmer's Market...on lazy Saturdays or Sunday afternoons, we often walk more. One particular market is in a park, so there's a nice trail to take after we've shopped. And if we've purchased other goodies, like homemade soap or a cool new purse, then we enjoy putting everything away.

I know lots of married couples that go their separate ways when out, maybe she goes shopping and he goes golfing. And that's great! But it's also great and fun to find things we love to do together...differently...and yet the same.

I'm not a fan of growing old and apart, but rather of growing together and closer. Any activity where we can hold hands, smile, enjoy the sun on our backs, and find lots of fun new things is a winner in my book.

The other place you'll find the two of us holding hands is at the movies! But that story is for another time...

Here's to weekends of Farmer's Markets and sunshine this month of May...

## **For Better or Worse – Two Are One – by Kaelin Scott**

Marriage isn't always noteworthy or extravagant,  
but it is always significant.

Some seasons of marriage may feel mundane or boring. Nothing more than surviving each day together and meeting our family's needs. But I think that's kind of the beauty of it. No matter the season of life, whether the dry ones or the bountiful ones, marriage is a partnership. It takes on many forms, morphing to whatever is needed at the time. It's an ever-growing partnership, able to withstand storms and adapt to life's struggles.

Even in the times that feel like nothing more than routine, marriage is still something to marvel at. There's no other partnership like it. It's really amazing when you think about everything a husband and wife go through together. Facing obstacles, taking turns holding each other up, celebrating one another, raising a family...the list goes on and on.

Whatever it is that comes our way, it affects both of us. We can't just decide we want to partner up with someone else to tackle a problem, nor do we choose to go it alone. We're in it together, for better or worse, and that's not something to take lightly. It's a really big, awesome, amazing commitment. It truly changes your life having that one person to face it all alongside.

I don't really have a point to all this. Simply reflecting on how wonderfully beautiful marriage is. Even in the seemingly boring times, sharing life with someone is nothing short of astounding. Two people becoming one flesh is one of the most sacred things on this earth. Thinking about it makes me so grateful for my husband, the one God designed for me, and the fact that I get to share my life with him. How amazing.

“So they are no longer two, but one flesh.”

Matthew 19:6



ENCOURAGEMENT

## **Rooted in Love - MAKING EXCUSES – by Kaelin Scott**

People are full of excuses, aren't they?

Politicians have all sorts of excuses for failing to deliver on their promises. Leaders can be full of excuses why they don't have to follow the rules. Friends make excuses why they don't show up to events. Families make excuses for each other's poor behavior. Parents make excuses for their children.

My kids' favorite excuse lately has been, "I forgot." And I'm not above this issue either, trust me. I'm full of my own lame excuses for lots of things, chief among them being, "I'm too tired," and "I don't have time."

But what do excuses do for us, other than hinder us from growing? Often, when we make an excuse, we ignore the real issue at hand. Sometimes we use an excuse to cover up the truth, or maybe to make the truth seem less harsh. But softening the truth doesn't equate to full honesty, does it?

I don't want to make excuses for myself. I want to be honest, even when it's hard. And I want to own up to my mistakes, rather than try to explain them away. Maturity and responsibility are gained through recognizing faults and working to correct them. It's definitely easier to come up with some reason why I messed up, and therefore make it okay. But the easy road usually isn't the best one, nor the healthiest.

My relationships with others and my inner peace would be much improved if I could stop making excuses and look at things truthfully. Sometimes, yes, I really don't have time to do something. Sometimes I really am exhausted. But other times, that's just an excuse to be lazy or procrastinate something that needs to be done. And you know... I realize that everyone forgets things sometimes. But when my child says it 13 times in one day, then the real issue isn't forgetfulness. We've talked about slowing down, thinking about what we're doing, and being mindful of our actions. Then it won't be as easy to forget.

I'm not assuming that you make excuses. Maybe you're the rare exception, and in that case, I commend you. If you are like me and have room to improve in this area, don't be discouraged. It's a natural tendency, I think, to deflect blame away from ourselves. I'm not saying we should fall on our sword every time we mess up. But I think honesty is highly undervalued these days, and dishonesty is disguised as subtle excuses.

The world could be so harmonious if people were straightforward and honest with each other. Imagine if nobody tried to hide the truth. Wouldn't that be so beautiful? Instead of spouting out lame excuses, what if we just gave a truthful answer, or even said nothing at all?

The Bible says that we should speak the truth in love. I think the truth part has been forgotten along the way, and the love part has been distorted. And, really, we can't have love without truth. Yet the truth is so offensive to people these days that it seems to be a foreign concept, and we're so quick to make excuses for everyone. The road to eternity isn't paved with excuses; it's paved with the truth. Being honest with someone could very well save their life. Instead of covering it up, we need to let the truth shine, starting with the small things. Owning up to our mistakes and being willing to try again.

Life's too short for excuses. Let's be intentional with our words and speak the truth in love. Even to ourselves.

“Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect  
the mature body of Him who is the head, that is, Christ.”

Ephesians 4:15

It was a sunny, cool, and windy Sunday morning. I decided to take an early walk to the nearby community garden to check on the raised bed my friend and I share. On the way, I had a little one-on-one time with God, listening to a psalm or two via ear buds that kept falling out of my ears.

*Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. You return man to dust and say, "Return, O children of man!" For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night...For we are brought to an end by your anger; by your wrath we are dismayed. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. (Ps. 90:1-4,7-8)*

I think about Moses, who wrote these insightful words more than 3000 years ago. Moses, alone in the desert, like I am at the gardens—Moses, who doesn't have the knowledge, the books, and the backdrop of history that I have, yet, he knew the important things: God is eternal, our physical lives will end, time is relative, we can't stand against God's anger, we can't hide. That all sounds kind of ominous to me. But then comes the part that gives me hope and reminds me God is good:

*Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom. (vs. 12)*

Moses, in the deep quiet of the desert, surrounded by a vast sky replete with stars, felt the compelling presence of God. He was very aware of God's "bigness" and his own "smallness." Maybe this is why he was so humble. I ask God to help me have the awareness of Moses, even in the midst of all the noise and star-blocking light of our present time, knowing my days are numbered, so that I can live each day to the full.

I'm guilty of wasting time too often, of doing my own thing before checking with God, of forgetting that each day is a gift and tomorrow may not come. My loving Father is faithful to discipline his children. He finds a way to remind me how few days I may have left, and I get serious. The importance of walking righteously before God is magnified and I'm acutely aware of the grace I've received through Christ-- and I'm so thankful. The work of God on Earth and my part in it, no matter how small, becomes more acutely important.

I think about what I need to do on my way home. Sundays are mostly reserved for rest, renewal, and fellowship, but I try not to hold anything too tightly and remain flexible. *Lord, help me to be attentive to your voice, to remember what you've called me to, and give me a heart of wisdom so that I please you in every way for all my numbered days.*

## Moving Forward – God With Us – by Pam Charro

Matthew 1:23

*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel*  
(which means God with us)

You may be familiar with the above scripture, and you may have heard it said that God is always with us. But what does that really mean?

If you have been a follower of Jesus for more than a few months, you probably know several things it *doesn't* mean. It doesn't necessarily mean you will always be happy or feel your very best physically. It doesn't mean your heart will never be broken or that you will succeed at everything you attempt to accomplish. It doesn't mean you will never lose your job or even your loved ones. Life is messy and often painful, even when God is with you.

So, if that's true, what's the point of God being with us?

The problem with that question is, it assumes that God's purpose in being with us is to make life here on earth easier and more comfortable for us. And, while the Holy Spirit often brings comfort and God gives many good gifts to his children, those aren't the only reasons God is with us.

God is with us so that we can know him and make him known, and that often means he becomes most visible when times seem darkest. If life were already perfect, he would not have the opportunity to show off the way he often does. And because we are his children, our hope in him shines out of us even when we don't undergo hardship perfectly. We have something others want and need, and, even as we struggle, they see it and are often drawn to it.

Another reason life is often so difficult even though God is with us is because God knows the beauty that is being carved in us, even as we suffer, and he knows that painful moment is making us ready for the next moment, which is making us ready for the moment after that, which will ultimately result in us becoming who he created us to be. And that version of ourselves is something we wouldn't want to miss out on, something that is beautiful beyond our current imagination; and it brings such glory to God. We become more like him as we are refined, and we shine more and more brightly in a world becoming otherwise increasingly dark.

For our light and momentary trials are creating an eternal glory  
for us that far outweighs them all.

2 Corinthians 4:17

So if, like me, you have sometimes felt that God being with us hasn't really done us much good, take heart. So much more good is coming from it than any of us realizes.

He really is trustworthy and knows what he's doing.

He really is bringing hope to a lost world, and allowing us to help do it!

He really is with us. And it's the best news ever.





## **Simple Truths – Moms of All Ages – by Marcy Lytle**

I've been a mom 35 years now, and I've observed new moms after me, older moms before me, and taken note of my own experiences as a mom. One thing I've realized is that moms of all ages need grace. Grace to be themselves, fail in motherhood, enjoy a candy bar, not cook if they're tired, say no just because it doesn't feel right, and dance in the kitchen on any given day. Yet it seems like we moms are the worst at offering ourselves grace.

### *New moms,*

You're going to love that baby like you've never loved anything before...and want to exit the house and not see that baby when he's crying for hours just a few months later.

You're going to frown at the lines and the bulges you have now that weren't there before, but it's okay. They're markers and trophies of the amazing life you've brought forth.

You're going to wish he did things like you do, but he won't, and the baby will have her dress on backwards when he dresses her...but let it be. Give thanks that he's helping.

You're going to want to hang out with other new moms, and then run from the same moms, when they say what they're baby is doing that yours is not. Who cares? Why do you want your baby to be like any other?

You're going to look lovingly at that nursery when the baby is small, and shut the door when friends are over when that toddler is crawling. New paint will be old, fresh sheets will smell bad, and toys will be the new décor. Laugh out loud. It will do your mind and soul some good.

### *Moms of teens,*

You're going to wonder how he grew up so fast and let go of your hand overnight. Just know that you're in his heart forever, and one day he'll write you a card saying so.

You're going to emerge with a cute outfit on (in your opinion) and she's going to comment that it's not, and it's going to hurt your feelings. Wear it anyway and smile. She's not your fashion designer.

You're going to stay up late waiting on him or her to make it home after you handed them the keys earlier, and you're going to worry with fear...but still your heart and pray...always. He's near.

You're going to walk past their rooms and gasp at the piles, the odor and the unmade beds, and you're going to demand a change. Just keep training and one day they'll get it or not...but your job will be over.

You're going to disagree with your spouse or some other adult in your teen's life about the letting go and the holding back, but stay true to your gut, ask Him, and He promises to guide you...and your children that are now teenagers.

### *Moms of grown children,*

You're going to cry at their weddings, bawl at their empty rooms, and wonder if life will ever be full of joy again. It will. I promise. Cling to Him and him, to friends, and to life.

You're going to observe them make decisions you wouldn't make, and you'll keep your lips closed, because they're adults now...and your heart will ache. This too, will pass...

You're going to hear them thank you for the things they hated you for at some point in their adulthood...because they'll get it...one day.

You're going to love seeing their lights coming as they drive up in your driveway, but if they have kids – you'll love to see the lights going at the end of the night – and give thanks those kids are gone.

You're going to pray more than ever for your grown kids and their kids, but you'll grow by leaps and bounds at placing cares at His feet and walking free of worry and fear...because again, he's near.

All moms need grace. And if you're not yet a mom, concerned that you'll never be allowed the blessing of being a mom or you've lost greatly as a mom, I'm praying for you as I write. God has a special place in his hearts for moms in all stages. Read again the story of how Jesus spoke about his own mother being cared for, as he was near death. And how God heard the cries of so many mothers in the bible, like Moses' mom, and took that baby that was meant for death and used him to lead others out of slavery.

Grace. Take it this month no matter where you are on the timeline of motherhood. And when Mother's Day arrives, don't be sad if your expectations aren't met, if the kids don't show their love like you wish they would, or if you feel lonelier than ever because your own mom is gone. Go ahead and shed those tears, and let them run down your cheeks freely. Crying is healing. Smiling is too. So do both. Thank God for His watchful eye over those kids...and over you, as well, and over every minute of today.

**QUICK UPDATE:** *Before I begin this month's story, I want to share an update from last month's story. My friend "Jane," who is really award-winning filmmaker Lindsey Willson-Stuart (she gave me permission to use her name), and who also had a hysterectomy about the same time I did, and who was contending with ovarian cancer, but who is now CANCER FREE!! Praise God!! God heals! Amen and amen. Now, on to our story...*

### **Unearthly Thing - Childless on Mother's Day – by Angeal Dolbear**

Flowers, candy, brunch...Mother's Day. My mother's birthday is close to Mother's Day, so I often shop for both of her gifts together. My mother-in-law's gift will have purchased and then delivered to her home in Houston (thank you, Amazon).

But Mother's Day is not a day for all women.

The U.S. Census Bureau cited on August 2021 that 15.2 million, nearly 1 in 6 (16.5%), adults age 55 and older are childless, and the levels of childlessness among older adults is expected to increase.

There are no gifts or celebration for me on this day. There is, however a twinge of grief in my heart.

I was never able to give birth to a child of my own.

My in-laws send me a sweet Mother's Day card, and I will get a text from my step-daughter, whom I love like my own flesh and blood.

I had a miscarriage when I was in my twenties, and I never got pregnant again. My husband and I never made a decisive effort to try to have children. I always thought if it happened, it happened. I think one child was enough for him, and I respected that.

Contending with an auto-immune disease for most of my adult life was not conducive to getting pregnant. Or being able to carry a child to full term.

My husband's child from a previous marriage got our full attention while she was growing up, and that was good for her. I believe that is what God wanted for us.

But, I have always felt like an outsider in the church among women who have children. Listening to war stories of childbirth at women's Bible studies has always made me feel outside the circle. Maybe even a little cursed.

There was always a little spark of hope in my heart when read stories in the Bible about Sarah, Hannah, and Elizabeth, who gave birth to children in otherwise barren circumstances. And in their advanced age. Of course that spark was snuffed out in November 2021 when I had a total hysterectomy.

But being a step-mother has been a great blessing. I got to do a lot of the mom things, like make Halloween costumes, help with homework, and give impromptu cooking lessons. But my step-daughter has a mother, and I knew early on it was not wise to try to take her place.

The lack of legacy is hard to swallow. I have no one to pass precious things down to. But then, they are just things. I try to remember to pass down to my adult stepchild the important things like praying, and keeping a close with God.

## But God...

After I wrote and published [The Garden Key Tales](#), God brought many young women into my life who needed a "Mother" figure to help them. These novels follow the main character, Maddy, through her adventures with romance, courtship and marriage. The first book, *The Garden Key*, focuses on the topic of searching for a mate and dating God's way. My spiritual daughters clung to this story. We even held a [Bible study](#) I wrote on it.

I believe God saw that these young women needed a mentor/mother figure to help guide them. And I was extremely blessed to take on the role.

Whenever they would come to me for advice, I had to make sure I prayed, asking God to make my words His words, and not my own, because they listened to what I said! And I was there to pray with them through many tears of longing, and tears of repentance.

A couple of my spiritual daughters have gone on to marry very godly men, which is a great answer to prayer. It makes me feel over-the-moon blessed.

If ever self-pity starts to creep in on Mother's Day, I remember these young women, and how God answered my prayers for them. And how I still pray for them, and their children. A verse that brings me comfort:

**"Sing, O barren one, you who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who did not travail with child! For the [spiritual] children of the desolate one will be more than the children of the married wife, says the Lord,"** [Isaiah 54:1](#) says. Such a promise!

God is good. He gave me a mother's heart for these women, and for any other young people that come into my life. Some I get to minister to with a close relationship, and some I pray for from a distance, and check in with periodically.

God is indeed good.

*Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series, and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). Angela writes real, relevant, relatable, and reverent fiction, with an aim toward spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, while hopefully inspiring readers to laugh and/or cry. She loves reading, writing prose, as well as writing and recording music with her husband Tim in their studio in Nashville, Tennessee. Please drop by and sign-up for news and to read new stories and hear new original music at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>. Blessings to you!*



FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME – All the Jewelry – by Marcy Lytle**

It was super early and I was wide awake, so I decided to get up and be productive. My counter by my sink and my jewelry stand, and my drawer, were driving me crazy. Random necklaces were dangling from a stand filled with watches and bangles. Loose earrings were among other things like a DQ gift card and a couple of nickels by the sink. And it was all driving me crazy! So I tackled the project of organizing.

Organizing is something I enjoy doing, especially when my mind is full. Somehow, taking a mess and making it neat physically helps rearrange my thoughts as well! Crazy, but it works.

*The first thing* I did was take everything off the stand and out of the drawer. Clearing out the entire space enabled me to see what I wanted to keep and what I wanted to discard. Not a bad start, mentally either. Clearing my head of fears was first in order, at 4:45 a.m. on a Thursday morning.

*The second thing* I did was sort and pair up all of the earrings, discarding ones that were broken, missing a match, or tarnished or just never worn. These went in another pile, apart from the pretties that were staying. I have a lot of thoughts just like these pieces, ones from the past, ones that don't match up with the Truth, and more. These too were tossed aside – no good – to be dumped in the trash.

*The third thing* was to then pair up all the earrings I adored by match, color and size. I enjoyed this activity, as I found some earrings I'd forgotten I had, a ring that belonged to Mom, and memories attached to so many items that made me smile. It was good for me to pair up my thoughts too, to the good that occurred just yesterday, his favor and his blessings in my life, and thoughts I wanted to keep close to mind.

*The fourth thing* in this early morning of organizing was to then sort and place the earrings and bracelets and necklaces and watches back where they were easily visible and accessible and neat. I have this cool sectioned rectangle for doing just that, as well as a stand that holds bigger pieces. They both had gotten cluttered and dusty from neglect. So had my mind. It was totally cluttered from a hard day yesterday, getting behind in things at home, and just being tired and weary and exhausted. Dusting that away is going to be a process for months to come...

*Finally*, everything was in place. The old stuff was gone, fancy earrings were together, artisan-made ones were in their section, gold and silver were separated, and each piece was organized with like kind, color and size, and it felt SO GOOD. I now will be able to actually wear and enjoy some pieces that had become hidden in the drawer or topped with a bigger piece, or forgotten behind the mess. I have some thoughts organized in my mind as well, now. A friend reminded me of a blessing yesterday, and it's in the forefront of my thoughts this morning, allowing me to see through the muck and give thanks.

Who knew that an early morning rise from a restless night would result in a productive hour of sorting everything out? I didn't. And I'll probably need a nap later today.

But for now...the mess is no longer an eyesore on my counter, in my drawer, and by my sink...and my mind feels rearranged as well, all things settled and in place. All the jewelry in its prettiness and shininess waits to be worn now, and I'm excited to do so. And a new day awaits me too, where the sun is about to rise, and my thoughts are lifted high.

I'm so grateful for all the jewelry that called me out of a deep sleep to observe and discard...or to keep.



## **FRESH THYME - Catch a Glimpse – by Marcy Lytle**

A couple of months ago, I wrote and shared a devo series on nights and days. I had been fascinated by how many times the Bible mentions nights coupled with days, not just the day's events. For example, Jesus fasted 40 days AND 40 nights. Why were the nights mentioned? It was a super interesting study, and I came away from it with the reassurance of His attentiveness to every detail of our lives. And to the steadfastness of his love that appears with the sunrise...to the sunset.

It's been a few weeks now since I ended that study and part of what I ingested while reading is staying with me big-time. And I'm so glad, because I've needed it while my dad has been slowly recovering (and regressing) in the hospital. Reading again about how faithful God is not only FROM sunrise to sunset, but in the reminders of his presence WITH the sun high in the sky.

There were many mornings that I drove in to the city to the hospital to sit with Dad and I saw the sun rise, over my shoulder, and it "followed" me all the way in. The warmth and the presence of His creation rising high in the sky out of the darkness of morning brought comfort to my soul, and I gave thanks.

There were several afternoons when I threw down my bags in the kitchen upon arriving home from the hospital visits, put on my walking shoes, and headed outside to stroll around the neighborhood so I could breathe. And there it was again, high in the sky...the sun. The warmth and the presence of this amazing ball of fire warmed my body and my soul, and I could hear him whisper, "I'm with you, always...."

There have been a few evenings where we both found time and space to head out together to walk before the sun set, because days are longer now...at least the daylight stays with us longer. As we walked on the trails near our house, I could see flickers of the sun through the trees as it lowered close to the horizon, before it disappeared. But it didn't really disappear...it only dropped...and the moon rose...to provide light in the night. This too, made me smile and breathe a little deeper, with the reminders of his love all around me.

I can't tell you how many times during this long ordeal with Dad that the presence of the sun, the faithfulness shown to the earth every 24 hours, brought peace to my unsteady soul.

Prior to this study, I feel pretty sure there were many drives, walks and sunset strolls where I missed the beauty of the glimpse of His presence. Either my head was hanging low, my thoughts crowded out any flickers of light, or my fears and worries obscured the faithfulness over my shoulder.

I'm thankful for the Word, for reminders of how he has set in motion sunrise to sunset, and this will never end. He has given us all a physical manifestation of his love and attention day and night, if we only catch a glimpse. And to do that, we have to look up, pause to feel the warmth, and stand astounded at the beauty.

Catch a glimpse today as you ride into work, take a lunch break on a bench, or step outside after dinner...and linger...and know.

## **FRESH THYME - Friends in Need – by Marcy Lytle**

I've been in need mode for the past weeks, with my dad. He's 96, he's had pneumonia, he's been in the hospital, and it's been hard to say the least. I've had friends in need, as well. We all do. And sometimes we don't know what that friend needs, so we just stay silent and pray. But I noticed during this time the very things I needed the most...and I thought I'd share. I had several friends just reach out in different ways, and I felt loved, safe, and covered.

Here's what they did for me, the friend in need:

**Texts** – I'd get a "ding" and a friend was just saying "How are you?" Three tiny words that invited me to spill on my feelings at that given moment, and for them to respond with another reply stating they'd been praying for me. That meant the world.

**Songs** – My sister and another friend sent me a song to listen to. It was nice to have those to click and play on any given day when I needed to breathe. Music lifts the soul.

**Presence** – One of our friends offered to sit with Dad so our entire family could have a birthday dinner. They took their time to drive in to the hospital, sit with a sick man, so that we could get away. I couldn't thank them enough.

**Comments** – I posted updates on Dad on Facebook, and floods of friends commented with their love for dad and my family, offering prayers and encouragement. That's the GOOD in social media!

**Thoughts** – I had one friend that just texted in the morning to say I was loved and they were praying. No questions, nothing else, just a reminder. I felt blessed.

**Ears** – My own daughter listened to my concerns and my fears, and even my tears, because she wanted to. She wanted to share in my concern for my dad, her papa. Others listened as well one morning, when I called to just let it all out, without judgment or religious platitudes being quoted back to me. They just listened, and I was grateful.

**Emails** – Many friends just wrote and said they were praying, I was in their thoughts, and they hoped Dad was getting better. Simple words that made me smile.

**Empathy** – I loved it when others said they were so sorry, or they knew it was hard. And I knew they'd been through the same. There was no suggestion, not even encouragement, but just acknowledgement of my pain.

All of those things together fed my soul. Some days, I needed a verse, other days the song was wonderful, and still other days I wanted nothing but an "I get it. So sorry." It was like a full meal to my weary body, mind and soul. And I'm forever grateful.

Don't ever think your text, your love, a simple verse, etc. is insignificant. If you think of it, do it, for a friend in need. Listen without judgment, and pray always. Let her know you're praying. It's what lifts up weak arms, strengthens feeble knees, and eases worrisome minds. And it's like nothing else, when that ding or message or picture or call comes through.



## **FRESH THYME – Trios in the House – by Marcy Lytle**

If you follow me on Instagram, you'll hear and see me share often the tip about decorating around the house in trios. Supposedly, setting out décor items in groups of three (or another odd number) is more pleasing and focusing to the eye than even numbered settings. I think it's true! I have several places in my home where items are grouped by three, so I thought I'd share a little inspiration for you to consider as you set up your home this spring/summer season:

By the bed – We recently purchased new nightstands for our newly remodeled bedroom. On the stand is a lamp, a plant and an item of interest – three things. The vase I found vintage shopping in Taylor, Texas and the greenery is just a branch from my yard! That twine is just fun to set out (and useful, too!) and our new lamps are from Walmart.

On a tray – I have a couple of trays I found in the patio section of a store – they're solid and so pretty – and they make a perfect base for a trio. A candle, fresh flowers, and something whimsical work on a tray. And it's easy to change out one thing for another, depending on your mood! Candles are always good options in a trio!

Atop a stand – If you have a stand you use for serving or a wooden Lazy Susan, you can use it for decorating as well. Use a piece of fruit as one of your trio pieces. A tiny vase from the dollar section at Target, and a huge three-wick candle from Kirklands are great options. They have such great smelling candles!

In a bowl – Do you have a large flat bowl, like a pasta bowl? Use it for décor. Fill it with oranges, then set a candle beside it. That's three items, if you count the bowl. A bowl of fruit is so picturesque and invites anyone near to grab a bite, too!

At the side of a bar – Target has cute little plant stands of different heights, so pick a couple, then set a tiny vase beside, for a trio of three. Insert real or fake plants, your choice. Be sure to vary the heights, as that brings a pleasing look, as well.

On the porch – Near your front door is a great place for a trio! Set a pretty plant in a basket, then consider a tray of succulents. There are so many choices, and some bloom so profusely and beautiful – and they require very little watering!

There are endless options of decorating with trios. On your shelves, above your bed, by the sink in the bathroom, etc. Try one of the ideas above or create your own, and consider just rearranging some of the items you already have spread out across your space.

Enjoy!



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

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

June 2022



TIPS

## **The Dressing – Feels Like Summer – by Marcy Lytle**

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

Here are some of my favorite summer ideas for you:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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



## **Seven for You – Insecure? Not Now – The Panel**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### 10 for a Dollar Girl

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

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

Cathy

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

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

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

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

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

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

This was very significant for me. - Tanya

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

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

## **Three Moms – Lying – by the Cousins**

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

We asked, and the moms answered...

### **Mom of Three**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Mom of Two**

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Mom of Four**

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **In the Kitchen - Easy Breezy – by Marcy Lytle**

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

### **Caramel pecan pie**

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

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

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

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

### **Canadian bacon croissant**

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

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

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

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

In same skillet, heat bacon, turning once.

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



## **Charro beans baked potato**

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

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

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

## **Vegetarian Pesto Bowl**

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

### Ingredients:

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

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

## **Black bean and corn salsa**

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

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

- Pickled jalapeno slices, optional

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

### **Peanut butter and strawberry bagel sandwich**

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

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

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

### **Energy boosting trail mix**

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

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

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

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

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

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

Here's what I learned last month:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **SUGAR + Spice - Sunny Shadows – by Angela Dolbear**

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

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

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

### **DESERTED ISLAND product of the month:**

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

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

Blessings to you!

*Angela Dolbear, Beauty Editor, is the author of contemporary spiritual novels, such as [THE GARDEN KEY](#) Series, and [THE TORMENTOR'S TALE](#), as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). She is also a self-proclaimed beauty junkie, and has been since long before her mother allowed her to start wearing makeup at the age of 14. She keeps UPS and the USPS busy delivering small boxes on a regular basis from Ulta, Sephora, Amazon, and many independent cosmetics companies to her home Nashville, TN. Please connect with her at [www.AngelaDolbear.com](#)*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



HOME

## **Practical Parenting – Their Aspirations – by Marcy Lytle**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"The best journey takes you home,"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Remember loves grows best in tiny spaces

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

God fills our hearts full with his sweetness!

Let's pray...

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

*Amen.*



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

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

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

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

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

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

"I hear the volume in your voice."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I feel scared when you throw things."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



YOU

## Inner Strength - The White Rose – by Michelle Wyatt

What is your favorite flower?

What is your favorite color?

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

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

What is my favorite flower? The white rose.

Why?

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

### *The White Rose*

*Water rippling, a white rose in the center*

*Petals drifting but still close*

*Dancing with the waves*

*Tears of compassion dripping off the edges*

*With specks of gold and silver*

*Shimmering like the stars*

*Radiating the beauty inside*

*Whether the tide rolls in or out*

*The beauty of the soul remains*

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

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

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

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

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

*Strength in Spirit*

*Strength in faith*

*Harmony in color*

*Music of the soul*

*Clarity of the mind*

*Uplifting of the spirit*

*Smile!*

## **Life in a Nutshell – Destination Unknown – by Jill Montz**

I love to travel.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Proverbs 2:8-9

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

## Healthy Habits – Daily, Do It – by Marcy Lytle

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."  
Matthew 11:28*

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

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

## **Under Pressure – The Father of Lights – by Debbie Haynes**

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

What does that even mean?

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

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

He said, "Let there be light."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness,

but will have the LIGHT OF LIFE."

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

"I have overcome the world!"

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

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

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

*Father, it's dark down here right now.*

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

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



MARRIAGE

## **In This Together – Becoming Me – by Bekah Holland**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*My version of protecting is actually impeding.*

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

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

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

"I see your pain and it's big.

I also see your courage and it's bigger.

You can do hard things."

Glennon Doyle

## **Date Night Fun – Old City – by Marcy Lytle**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



## **After 40 Years – All the Boxes –by Marcy Lytle**

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

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

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

And then there's my husband.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **For Better or Worse – Greener Grass – by Kaelin Scott**

*The grass is greener on the other side.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”

Ecclesiastes 4:12





ENCOURAGEMENT

## Rooted in Love – I Believe Him – by Kaelin Scott

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

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

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

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

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

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

Let me say it again. He loves you.

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

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

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

Romans 8:38-39

## Firmly Planted – Church as an Oasis – by Dina Cavazos

---

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



## **Moving Forward – This Moment – by Pam Charro**

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

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

*What about this moment?*

I paused and said, "This moment?"

*Yes, what is missing in this moment?*

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

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

I just let myself be in it.

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

So now I will be watching for them.

## Simple Truths - Say More – by Marcy Lytle

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

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

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

say more.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Unearthly Thing - Supporting Role – by Angela Dolbear**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series, and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). Angela writes real, relevant, relatable, and reverent fiction, with an aim toward spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, while hopefully inspiring readers to laugh and/or cry. She loves reading, writing prose, as well as writing and recording music with her husband Tim in their studio in Nashville, Tennessee. Please drop by and sign-up for news and to read new stories and hear new original music at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>. Blessings to you!*



FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME - All the Bridges – by Marcy Lytle**

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

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

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

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

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

They're amazing in front of a sunset.

The massive ones are breathtaking.

The covered ones are quaint and inviting.

The swinging ones are an adventure waiting.

The rickety ones are scary and fun.

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

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

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

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

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

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



## **FRESH THYME – I Shop Alone – by Marcy Lytle**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **FRESH THYME - Life Persists – by Marcy Lytle**

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

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

And then there's Dad.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **FRESH THYME - Summer Travels – by Marcy Lytle**

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

### Weekend away with the family:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Three-day fun for two:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Long vacation:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

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

July 2022





TIPS

## **The Dressing – Tablescapes on a Dime – by Marcy Lytle**

This column is usually reserved for fashion, but every so often I talk about dressing our tables or counters or shelves. This month it's all about summer tables inside or out, depending on where you choose to dine – or it could even be on the floor – or at the beach! I recently decided to shop for a collection of melamine plates and bowls, and I also keep a stash of paper plates and napkins that are fun, as well!

There's still a lot of summer eating left to enjoy, so why not make your experience colorful and inviting!

**Pretty Melamine** – Big Lots, Ross, and other places have melamine plates in all sorts of designs and patterns and colors – that are super affordable. Purchase several sets to change out, depending on your mood or what movie you're watching!

**Paper Plates and Napkins** – Check out Target's seasonal area, as well as Dollar Tree, and even Marshalls for sets to keep on hand for picnics and guests, or for travel. We recently went with our family to the river, and had a different plate setting for each meal! I love sunflower plates if I can find them!

**Tablecloths, yes!** – Maybe not indoors, but outdoors for sure! Keep your eating area clean AND pretty, whether it's in your yard or at the park. I found this pretty lemon tablecloth on the shelf at TJ Maxx! Red checked tablecloths are also a summer classic!

**Fun cups for fun drinks** – Dollar Tree has cute beverage cups with straws, and Target has some fun cups as well – ones we used for root beer floats. And be sure to pick up some cute umbrella toothpicks to hang over the side. We sat our fun drinks in a bucket of ice as part of the tablescape!

**The flatware** – It's fun to use colored forks and spoons to go with your table décor or cloths. Especially for travel – who wants to wash flatware? Not me! Keep these packages on hand.

**Summer trays** – These are great for charcuterie boards or just as a centerpiece for the table. Sometimes they are available to match your plates...or not. We took a few on our family trip and also used for taco salad fixings!

**Blankets and scarves** – These are great for spreading out under your dishes/food or just for arranging pretty on the table! Scour your stash and see how you can use them on your tables. The picture at the top shows one of my head scarves for July 4<sup>th</sup> as the cloth underneath the board and bowls. So fun!

**Chargers** – There are lots of round woven chargers (placemats) on the shelves at the discount stores, or square bamboo type. Both are great for stacking in a cabinet and pulling out to layer on your table!



## **Seven for You – Summer Stress – by our Panel of Women**

Summer brings with it all kinds of stress, maybe especially this year. Yes, Covid may be mostly behind us, but sad world news, worrisome world news, excessive temperatures, travel expenses and more settle upon us like a hot blanket in the middle of a desert! We need relief! We asked our panel to share their own experiences with summer stress and what they do to find that relief...

*My stress release is actually what leads to my stress, if that makes any sense. But it's worth it to me. What gives me the most stress is the health issue of inflammation. A few years ago, I suffered a foot injury which set off symptoms from this, like muscle stiffness, pain, and swelling. I fight this problem of inflammation by eating foods and using spices that help against this along with the occasional Advil.*

*Unfortunately, it is my favorite activity that leads to inflammation therefore leading to stress. What I love to do is work outside, hard, causing me to have what a friend and I call extreme glistening, which is just a nice way of saying sweat. I love to trim the mesquite trees in our pasture among other chores. Believe me, there is nothing like being 61 years old and still being able to start up a chainsaw and prune trees! But then I fight the inflammation. I consider it "my thorn" like Paul refers to in the Bible. I have learned to be more careful with what I do because of this and because I want to be able to get down on the floor and play with my grandchildren.*

*That leads me to another stress, speaking of grandchildren. It is from what I see, read, and hear about this world where they growing up. There are so many evils our children must endure, even at a young age. The only way I have found to deal with this is to give mine a loving, safe, place to come to and then I pray, pray, and pray so much more! - Carole*

A year ago in July 2021, my 27 year old daughter suffered a stroke. She was living by herself in California. It was that 1 am phone call that no parent wants to receive. The surgeon and her rehabilitation therapists all said that it was a miracle that she survived. It was also a miracle that she survived without cognitive damage and learned to walk again in less than a month.

Alex told me about the dream she had right before her brain surgery. There were three angels surrounding her in this bright light. Two she was able to identify as her great aunt and her grandmother. Both had passed on. They gave her peace - they told her that she would be okay. They laid their hands on her and told her she was loved. We believe they were there to comfort her.

When I returned from California after 45 days there taking care of my daughter, I knew I was facing two surgeries, I had been ill for months before my trip to take care of her. I faced both surgeries alone. No one was with me in the hospital, or so I thought. I remembered the dream, my daughter had. I remembered that in faith, we are never alone. It was faith that pushed me to recover. I was up and walking both times sooner than expected. I pushed myself to get better, thinking of my faith and my daughter's strength she had through her ordeal.

Alex and I have discussed her trauma and mine since both of our illnesses. She would get a headache and worry she was having another stroke. I would get a pain in my stomach and

worry that my disease was back. Any twinge would instill fear and anxiety. We would share our fears and we labeled them PTSD. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is not just for veterans of war, it is a diagnosis for anyone who has suffered a severe trauma of any kind. Talking about our fears with each other helped us. I explained that with faith and time, the anxiety would fade. As we moved forward with our lives, in time, the memory of the trauma will fade/soften.

Alex sent me a care package for Mother's Day this year. A rose quartz guardian angel was one of the things she sent me. The note she included in the box meant everything to me. "Resilience" is a perfect word to describe our journey.

Stay strong, lean on those you love, and have faith...always. - Cathy

*Brent and I have gotten to where the heat in Austin just stresses us out! When we realized we could work from anywhere that is when we bought the cabin in Ruidoso. Being able to go there in the summer and escape the heat is a blessing! We love taking our grandkids there and sharing with them the beauty of God's nature.*

*Now for one I don't have a solution for - the news and all of the bad things going on in the world. Sometimes I just turn it off. I really get nervous about the future for my grandkids - are they going to walk with the Lord? They are small now and they all love Him but will they stay the course? I know I should not worry or stress about that but I do. My only way to deal with it is to cry out to the Lord. I have been praying, "Come Lord Jesus" A LOT lately. I have to remind myself that God is in control even when there is so much bad going on - wars, shootings, high gas prices, etc. Turning on Christian music helps me, or I just start singing to myself. - Melissa*

In 2019 I had colon cancer, surgery, and 5 months of chemotherapy. I thank God that I have been cancer free since then. I love to give him glory because he was with me every step of the way.

The summer stress lies in dealing with the side effects of the chemo. I am still dealing with loss of stamina, fatigue, and partial neuropathy in my hands, lower legs and feet. Also, the neuropathy affects my balance, which was a bit iffy even before this battle. The oncologist offers no solutions or hope of healing. After all, chemo poisons your body to kill the cancer cells, but in the process kills some good cells.

Dealing with all this makes me want to hibernate in my house. But, I love life and my family and I still want to participate in family activities, church events and vacations with my husband. I am very social and love to be with friends. So, I push forward! I try to rest up before going out and limit the amount of activity I do in one day. It's annoying to have to rest or walk slower than the friends I am with, but people seem to be understanding. Limiting myself makes me feel old and a bit sad, but that's the only way I can still participate. Also, I am always on the lookout for therapies or treatments or medical advice on how to deal with this issue. I am currently having intensive therapy to help "wake-up" the nerves in my legs and feet. However, it is a slow process. I try to keep a positive outlook with God's help.

My additional summer stress is the heat. Although, I was raised in Texas I find that I am less

and less tolerant of the heat as the years go by. My solution to the heat is staying inside as much as possible. There are lots of inside activities such as museums, and movies to entertain. We also have adult children who live in cooler climates. Visiting them in the summer is an enormous relief from the blazing heat of the Texas summer. We visited Alaska in the summer of 2008. It was beautiful, and the climate was wonderfully cool. I would visit again in a heartbeat.

As with all stressful situations, I find myself turning to God and asking for his help to remain joyful, peaceful, and positive. - Gina

*The older I get, the more the summer heat can affect my attitude and activities. I try to do outside gardening and yard work early in the day. I hopefully get my errands done before noon. I absolutely love to take a little afternoon nap in the cool dark comfort of my cozy bed. When I wake up I have enough energy to face the rest of the day's heat. Hopefully, somewhere around 8-9pm, things will cool enough for an energetic walk with the dog. Otherwise, I just hang on tightly until September or October. – Shelley*

Summer heat aggravates me because it interrupts pleasant daily walks. So...we walk in malls, around stores, or wait until 8:00 and walk then. Walking just before sunset isn't so bad.

Summer heat also is the time of year where I enjoy lemonade so much! An Auntie Anne's pretzel with a large iced lemonade is just the thing to quench my thirst!

Summer heat also affects my pretty plants in the pots sitting in my yard. I try to keep them watered by watering early in the day, but sometimes they just wilt anyways. Each year I try to plant more and more drought tolerant choices, instead of trying to keep the tender ones alive.

And lastly, summer heat is no big deal when we enter the cool of the movie theater – especially on a weeknight where specials are to be had – check out your theaters! - Marcy

*Summer brings what I refer to as "Gift Season," which includes Mother's and Father's Day gifts, as all four of the birthdays of our parents. And what do you buy for people who have everything they need and want? It can be stressful to choose just the right gift.*

*Gift Season starts in May with Mother's Day, for both my mom, and my mother-in-law, whose gift will have to be mailed to Houston, so time of the essence when it comes to choosing, purchasing, and sending her gift.*

*Then June brings the birthdays of my father-in-law, and my mom (two days apart!), and then Father's Day gifts for my dad, and my father-in-law (again, to Houston). July brings a bit of a reprieve. And then in August there are birthday gifts for my dad, and my mother-in-law to shop for, again two days apart.*

*Gratitude helps me get through Gift Season (as well as Amazon and Bass Pro Shop e-gift cards). I remind myself to be grateful we are able to purchase nice gifts for our loved ones. Most of all, I am grateful that my husband and I both still have both our moms and dads in our lives to love and appreciate, and shower with gifts. - Angela*



### **Three Moms – Really Cute Rooms - by the Cousins**

Kids like to have their rooms look cute, just like we do. But amid the mess of the toys and the clothes and all of the kid living, it's sometimes to even tell that our kids have a bed in their room! However, once in a while we get something organized, paint that wall or purchase or make something special for them that makes us smile really big – because they love it! We asked the cousins to share cool pics from their kids' rooms, and what they shared is so fun!

#### **Mom of Two**

We live an old farmhouse that was built by my husband's great grandfather, who built it in 1960. It has a lot of character and has an old cabin feel, so all the walls are wood. We have limited space so the girls share a room, and there's no paint – just wood. I use gold accent frames to add a pop of color on the wall – a classy feel.

Each girl has the same bed, a toddler bed from Target. The covers are from Target, as well, with pops of gold and pink. Above each bed is their initial.

With the space, each has a dresser and then they share one closet. Their clothes hang on opposite sides, with a shoe organizer separating each girl's row. We had room for one storage bin, which stores most of their toys. But mostly, we leave their room for relaxation and sleeping and some books. They have a separate room for toys and arts and crafts. This keeps their room simple and cozy.

Where initials from and what's the thing at foot of bed? Tent? Pigs?

#### **Mom of Three**

We recently re-did all three kids' rooms, a Christmas gift from months ago...

One thing we did was purchase peg boards from IKEA, which are awesome. We can add clips and containers for right above their desks or in different spots. They are inexpensive and so helpful in keeping things organized.

Secondly, both boys have nerf guns with bullets. So I saw an idea online of a bucket – five gallon paint one – for putting all of their nerf guns and bullets inside when they're not being used. They're from Home Depot, about five bucks each!

My daughter's room is full of artwork and slime making and creating YouTube videos. We created a creative wall with artwork and knick knacks, with a desk we saw how to make on line DIY! It turned out so well, all her own space and so roomy! We basically took a shelving unit and added a tabletop and legs to create a desk. It works perfectly for her creative projects.

#### **Mom of Four**



We recently moved and were excited to set up the new kids' rooms. Our home is very old and was built in the 1920's and has original floors, etc. and each room has a small fireplace! This was a new thing to use in our décor.

What we ended up doing was going to an antique store to add a few pieces in addition to their furniture they already had. We looked for tall thin pieces for storage. Our oldest has a small skinny bookshelf. We added a nightstand from the antique store as well.

Next, we went to World Market for accent pieces – a moon and stars – and organizers for her jewelry and a gold lamp. Everything else was put together with pieces she already had.

She then picked out things to decorate her fireplace with black and white fabric that went with the curtains! We then finished with string lights across the curtains to add a plant feel to the area.

Grace, the 12 year old, has the room that is most together now – combined from World Market and the antique store – and what she already had - with gold accents for pop!

## **In the Kitchen – Family Good Eating – by Marcy Lytle**

Summer is for family fun, and that includes good eating! When traveling with the family, it's sometimes hard to think of easy and fun meals that all will enjoy, so we're offering some help this month. From easy to put together trays, to sit down meals, to snacks and more, it's all here. And if you skip on over to The Dressing on the TIPS page, you'll see some ideas on setting up your table! Happy summer eating!

### **Energy Boosting Mix**

An easy mix to pack in a plastic container for all to snack on, as they're done with swimming or just need a break to sit and chill.

#### Ingredients:

- 1 c unsweetened coconut flakes
- 1 c raw almonds
- 1 c raw walnuts
- 1 c cashews
- ½ c raw sunflower seeds
- 1 c dried cherries
- ¾ c dark chocolate chips

Place coconut flakes in small skillet on the stove and toast over med-low heat til lightly golden and fragrant, stirring often (2-3 min). Don't let it burn, and do let it cool.

Place toasted coconut and rest of ingredients in a large bowl and stir to mix. Store in an airtight container at room temperature.

### **Apple Nachos**

Each person can make an individual plate, or you can arrange multiple slices for the whole gang!

#### Ingredients:

- Green apples
- Mini chocolate chips
- Caramel sauce
- Nuts of your choice

Slice the apples and place on a plate. Drizzle with caramel sauce. Sprinkle on chocolate chips and nuts. Enjoy.

### **Macaroni and cheese pork sliders**

This is a great idea for a “casserole” that you can bake and keep warm for all, as they gather around the table. Add a big bowl of chips and dip to go alongside, with slices of watermelon for dessert.

Ingredients:

- 1 c uncooked cavatappi pasta
- 1 T butter
- 1 ½ t flour
- ¼ t pepper
- ½ cup 2% milk
- ¾ c shredded sharp cheddar
- 1 pkg Hawaiian sweet rolls
- 1 carton (16 oz) fully cooked shredded bbq pork, warmed
- 2 T melted butter
- 1 T honey
- ½ t ground mustard
- 1 jalapeno pepper (optional)

Preheat oven to 375, cook pasta according to directions. Meanwhile, in a small saucepan, melt butter and stir in flour and pepper until smooth, gradually whisk in the milk. Bring to boil stirring constantly, cook and stir til thickened. Stir in cheese til melted. Drain the pasta, and stir into the cheese sauce, and set aside.

Place roll bottoms in greased 13X9 dish, layer with pork, pasta mixture and roll tops.

Combine melted butter, honey and mustard, and brush over the roll tops.

Bake until tops are golden brown, about 10-12 minutes. If desired, top with jalapeno slices.

**Trays, trays, trays**

Dessert trays for movie watching, or snack trays for conversation, each kind of tray is simple to just open up what you have and make it pretty for fun eating.

Movie tray (fun snacks are at Trader Joe's!)

- Flavored popcorn
- Mini oreos
- Cheetos
- Gummies of all kinds
- Peanut butter pretzels
- Chocolate covered grahams
- Windmill cookies
- Rolled turkey
- Cheese

- Salami whips
- Hummus
- Pita chips

Just arrange on a large tray in little bowls, or just spread out where all items are touching, so as to cover the entire tray.

#### Snack Tray:

- Salami whips (these are at our local grocer)
- Whisps (cheese crisps)
- Assorted crackers
- Olives
- Cheese cubes
- Hummus
- Nuts
- Carrot sticks
- Assorted fruit

Just arrange on a large tray(s) and provide cute toothpicks for all!

#### **Peach Crumble**

Stop at a peach stand on your way out of town and grab a bundle, for peach compote one morning.

#### Ingredients:

- Granola bars – crumbled
- Cinnamon sugared pecans
- Peaches
- Maple syrup

Just crumble the granola bars, chop the sweet nuts, and add a bit of maple syrup. Drizzle all over top of peaches and bake until peaches are tender.

This turned out so well and tasty! Great over waffles...or ice cream!

## **Last Month's Learning**

Walmart has a dollar spot similar to the one at Target – did you know that? I did not.

You can mix seasonings, Parmesan cheese and more into Ranch dressing to make a dip.

I'm REALLY into Thrive mascara...have you tried it? It thickens and lengthens well!

Dollar Tree has round divided plastic trays that are pretty for picnics, stock up on them!

There's this cool laundry tote at Target that is GREAT for packing for road trips or weekends away – I just got one!

Barnes and Noble – check out their bargain shelves for craft boxes for the kids – just recently got a soap making one – so fun.

Toast the coconut in a pan until lightly golden before adding to your trail mix – and use coconut flakes – not shredded – makes a difference!

Those plastic pencil boxes work great for packing – I put my makeup in one and loved it.

If you run out of white flour when baking cookies, you can sub up to 50% of that with wheat flour – but no more. It worked, and I was relieved!

The river tubes at Walmart are \$7 and perfect for river fun for the kids – really great!

If your family hasn't watched Yes Day, watch it. Great laughs and a good lesson for all.

Adding a bit of butter to your olive oil when grilling veggies makes them have that charred look and taste!

California Pizza Kitchen's club pizza is delish – first time I tried it this month!

Chom Chom makes a great pet hair roller that really works! On Amazon.

Kirklands has cute outdoor décor, including this solar flower rustic garden stake – love it!

## **SUGAR + Spice - Super Shock and Awe--some! by Angela Dolbear**

I get excited to try new things, especially when it comes to makeup. I'm always on the lookout for a new product.

Since [ColourPop](#) is one of my favorite brands of cosmetics, I'm curious to try anything they come out with. The [Super Shock](#) shadow line actually came out a while ago, but I first thought the shadows were too glittery for me and my quiet, work-from-home life.

But the company kept coming out with more colors, each one more beautiful than the last. A couple of my favorite Youtube influencers were really loving the Super Shock shadows. So when ColourPop had a sale, I surfed their site, and purchased a few. At \$4 each (regular price \$6), there wasn't much of a risk.

Oh, how I love them! The formula is soft and powdery, and the product sticks after applied. I really love that you can apply just a soft swipe for just a hint of color and shimmer, or you can add more layers to intensify the look. And they blend beautifully.

I'm a big fan of duo tones, so [Moonwalk](#), a sort of green-gold tone, and [Rooftop Cocktails](#), a rusty blue-green, are my favorites, and I have been using them every day since they graced my mailbox!

### **DESERTED ISLAND product of the month:**

I need a good highlighter to compliment my imaginary golden tan I got from lying on my imaginary white sand beach on my imaginary island. ColourPop's Super Shock Cheek in [Flexitarian](#) (\$8) is my favorite highlighter at the moment. It gives me that soft healthy glow without looking sweaty, or blotchy. With my fingertips, I swipe a little product in a "C" pattern across the tops of my cheekbones, to arc above the top of my eyebrows. So lovely!

Blessings to you!

*Angela Dolbear, Beauty Editor, is the author of contemporary spiritual novels, such as [THE GARDEN KEY](#) Series, and [THE TORMENTOR'S TALE](#), as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). She is also a self-proclaimed beauty junkie, and has been since long before her mother allowed her to start wearing makeup at the age of 14. She keeps UPS and the USPS busy delivering small boxes on a regular basis from Ulta, Sephora, Amazon, and many independent cosmetics companies to her home Nashville, TN. Please connect with her at [www.AngelaDolbear.com](http://www.AngelaDolbear.com)*



HOME

## **Practical Parenting – Water Ways – by Marcy Lytle**

If your kids aren't in the water by now, you must live in another world. Summer is all about making our way to the water somewhere so that kids can play and get that energy out, as it seems all kids love the water. And usually, there are lots of choices for water fun, but also worries about safety while they're in the water.

Here are just some fun ideas and reminders for all of the family fun in pools of that clear cool liquid that makes everyone smile as we splash and play:

### At the neighborhood pool:

If there's no lifeguard, meet another mom. If you both want time to read, then let one mom be on watch while the other reads, and then take turns. But by no means take your eyes off those kids.

Swim with them. Play and make up games, dive for toys, toss a ball. Make memories.

Beach towels can be expensive. You can invest in a couple thick huge ones, or purchase several thinner and cheaper versions at places like Five Below. A nice stash of several is great, and the thinner ones dry quickly.

### At the river:

Walmart has great river tubes for only \$7.

Let the adults get in and check depth and swiftness and find places to play before the kids step in.

Have a parent in the river at ALL times to watch and catch kids that lift their legs and start drifting.

Watch the weather for pop up thunderstorms and don't be in the river when one is near.

### At the splash pad:

Go in the evening, so the kids can play and swing in the park, then cool off – back and forth.

Consider a family walk in the park, too, or a picnic!

Make it a treasure hunt, to find different splash pads across your city to try them all!

### In the backyard pool:

Whether you have an in-ground pool or above-ground, make it family time – never let the kids swim alone. Leaving an older sibling to watch the others is not a good idea.

Provide water toys – lots of them – from Dollar Tree or Target. Keep them in a big bin to bring out when it's pool time.



Consider laying out huge blankets over under the shade, and bring out lawn games, too.

Wherever you swim this summer, don't just hope the kids will swim and leave you alone. Make it time for you to exercise and play with them, as well. If both Mom and Dad are present, sure – give each other a turn in the pool – but let the kids see you both in there, as well! Put down your phones, step away from lists and to-dos and soak up some rays, shoot a water gun, tickle the kids' toes under water, and sneak a kiss with him when the kids aren't looking.

## **I Don't Do Teens – Say What? – by Marcy Lytle**

She left a note under our doorway several pages in length, on why she wanted to kiss a boy. She was 12. She had a bullet list with several valid points, and we read through each page of this well thought out argument for doing something we didn't want her to do ever...until she was married.

I don't even recall how we responded to that long dissertation on kissing a boy, but I do remember being in shock that our not-yet-teen daughter was even thinking such thoughts! Looking back now, I'm thankful she even asked us, before just proceeding to do it without ever telling us.

Our kids are going to ask, act, and acquire attitudes and actions before they ever hit the teen years that will really cause us to shake our heads as we mutter, "Say, what?"

He might ask to get behind the wheel and drive the car at age 10.

She might act like a drama queen and insist on wearing crop tops or eyeliner, at age 9.

They both might cop an attitude that we (the parents) are stupid and know nothing, and their friends know everything.

And they might just do something like vandalize a bathroom, smoke a joint, or cheat on a test when they fail to obey in the heat of temptation.

And this all might happen before "teen" is the second half word of their age!

If you're already a parent of teenagers, you probably witnessed this with your kids. And it may have scared you as you thought ahead to what else these devious creatures might do once they actually begin their teen years.

I once heard someone say that teens are going to act and acquire actions and attitudes that are rebellious, no matter what we do. That's it a hopeless situation.

And while our kids will test the limits and find themselves in situations where they are required to make wise choices, it's not a deep well of death with no rope available to pull them up to safety.

Quite the contrary!

I remember telling both of my teens that there were two areas where not even one mistake could be made – and that was driving and dating. One eye off the road could result in death, and one mistake in going too far could result in pregnancy.

By now, you're reading and rolling your eyes, because perhaps you have a pregnant teen or a reckless driver or child with an attitude that cannot be tamed.

It happens, even with the best of parenting.

But even if we mutter, "Say, what?" when we observe the actions of our teens, there is ALWAYS hope when we know the Father who loves our kids more than we do.

We can train them, teach them, and love them, but these children we love have choices to make...just like we did when we were their age.

In the Good Book,

we are told to instruct and bring up our children in the wisdom of the Lord.

we are told to cast all our anxiety on Him because he cares for us.

we are told if we lack wisdom, we can ask Him and he will grant it.

we are told not to grow weary in well doing for in due season we will reap!

Not all children will blatantly disobey and get into big trouble with the law or ruin their future, but some will. And even teens that don't do those obvious things will harbor wrong attitudes or unforgiveness, or hatred, or other killers of the soul.

The fact is that our children need a Savior, just like we needed Him. So when we see them do things that make us scratch our heads or hold our hearts or lift our eyes to cry out for help...

He hears us.

He sees them.

He loves them.

He pursues them.

We're all born into this world and the tug to be of this world is great, but the One who stands on the other end of the rope is stronger than the tug of a 1000 voices and strong tugs...and He will win. You will survive. And your teens will thrive.

## **An Adage a Day - Dog Days – by Carole Gilbert**

I love the show *Fantasy Island*. I always have. If you're familiar with the original show, then you know the quote, "De plane! De plane!" This is what the island's facilitator, Mr. Roarke's assistant, Tattoo, says as the airplane brings in the new fantasy seekers.

This last Christmas, the show had a two-hour special. In this show, one man's fantasy was to leave the rat race behind and live a quiet, comfortable, easy life. And for the completion of his fantasy, he remained on the island as a dog. Mr. Jones was his name. Later, in the show, his wife comes looking for him and he is reminded of their love for each other and that leaving the rat race behind had also included leaving his beautiful wife. He says to the new island facilitator, Elena Roarke, "I'm going back with my wife and leaving my *dog days* behind." Mr. Jones had good cause to use this phrase in an ironic kind of way, which made me wonder, also in an ironic kind of way, "Do we ever have cause to use this phrase?"

And so, of course, I had to look it up. As it turned out, the phrase "dog days" is quite interesting and appropriate for July.

Did you know that this phrase "dog days" is not about dogs at all? It is referring to the hot summer days like we're having. It was named after the dog star, Sirius. And it originated because the Romans, Greeks, and Egyptians believed that the sun and the Sirius dog star being close together, and us being close to both at a certain time of the year, is what causes us to have such heat in the summer. It takes place from about the early part of July to September and makes us feel sluggish and uncomfortable, like a dog does in the summer, along with other animals, which adds to why this phrase really isn't about dogs. It is also interesting to know that the dog star, Sirius, rises at the same time as the sun during the hottest part of the summer and is the brightest star in the sky.

So, what do we do to beat the dog days of summer besides looking at the stars in the cool of the night? Most of us probably go swimming. We might find a cool place inside like our home or a movie theatre. We might enjoy an iced drink, or a cold wet towel wrapped around our necks. And each of these ways to beat the heat are good for our dog friends, also. Well, except for the movie theatre.

Another way we can beat the dog days of summer is to focus on God's promise of Revelation 7:16-17.

*"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."*

Such a cool promise from God, pun intended. And if you double dog dared me to add to this irony, I would have to say that I came across the phrase "dog days" surrounding the hot days of July from a Christmas special surrounded by the snowy cold of winter as I was watching the

show on a hot summer day after I recorded it this last Christmas. I guess I was trying to beat the heat. Talk about Christmas in July! I bet we could all use a little relief from these dog days.

## **Tiny Living – Can You Hear Me? – by Leyanne Enterline**

One would think living in 325 square feet that one could talk normally without yelling and all would be able to hear just fine, right?

Wrong!

The most argued about situation in our trailer is the “I can’t hear you!” syndrome.

But how? We’re all so close!

Honestly, I can sit on my bed and see through to the bathroom, living room, kitchen, and into the boys’ room! Hearing someone talk shouldn’t be a problem. However, many things provide a barrier of sound for some reason.

The main barrier is the air-conditioning unit. There are two units, and in the summer both are running. They do turn off randomly, but each at different times. Most of the time, one unit is running. The sound is like a giant fan on extreme high. I think that noise itself is causing me to lose my hearing, which is also not helping our situation!

We have decided that if we need something from one another we are supposed to go directly to that person and look him/her them in the eyes and talk. But from time to time we forget to do that, and then the yelling begins. One becomes frustrated with the other thinking they are ignoring them, but when truly they can’t hear them above the air-conditioning whir!

Another factor in our “I can’t hear you” saga is that because it’s so hot outside, the boys keep fans running in their rooms. And one more reason we can’t hear could be that someone has headsets on, or is just plain not paying attention!

Who knows? We are still trying to figure this tiny living gig! We do not have it down, but we’re trying to at least hear one another better because...

love grows best in tiny spaces.

## **A Night to Remember – At the End of the Day – by Marcy Lytle**

It's summer, and the kids can hopefully stay up a bit later and see the sunset. So it's a great opportunity to have family time/devo time around a fire pit. Either your own in your backyard, or one you find on your vacation, or just one where wood is piled high on the beach – wherever you can create it safely and beautifully. Gather the family, provide a chair for each one, bring the ingredients for s'mores and settle in for a night of sharing songs and gifts...at the end of the day.

**Preparation:** *Ask each person to find their favorite Christian music/song and have them prepared to play. Perhaps have one person set them all up to play one right after the other. They are to come prepared to share why they chose that song, and then also share one good gift from the Father. It can be good health, an answered prayer for a job, or a good friend to play with at the pool – anything goes!*

The purpose of the devo is to share as a family, as the sun sets and the day ends, a worship experience and a thanksgiving "telling" that will encourage each one.

Why this devo?

Exodus 10:2 - God tells the Children of Israel to tell them of how he delivered them from the Egyptians. Why? So that the children will know that He is the Lord.

Psalms 78 is all about telling children and the next generation of all the deeds of the Lord. Why? So the children will trust the Lord.

Isaiah 38 says for parents to tell their children about His faithfulness. Why? Because how else will they know?

- So when the family arrives, have each one sit in a chair around the fire pit and make their s'mores.
- Ask the one with the songs to start them one by one, playing aloud under a starlit sky – and let that person tell why they picked the song.
- Next, ask the person to share a good gift from God (answered prayer, health, a toy, whatever they wish).
- Play the song and ask everyone to listen and worship.
- Go around the circle until all songs have been played.
- Enjoy the flicker of the flames against the dark of the night.

What a fun worship time, and what a great tradition to start with your family. At the end of the day, share and tell of the goodness of God in your lives. Then every so often, gather and share songs of worship and listen together.

This builds faith, knowledge, and trust in the loving Father that created the stars above and cares for his creation below, the Son that died for all of our sins and lives to give us eternal life, and the Spirit that breathes life and joy and comfort into our lives now and forever.

## **Chipped China – Friendship and Freedom in Friendship – by Jennifer Lytle**

A mom friend of mine is a professor at a prestigious university. Our lives couldn't be more different besides being in similar mom stages of life and marriage.

Yet, we have remained mutually respectful of one another. More than polite, our lives have intentionally crossed paths to bring our families together. These exchanges have enriched both of us, members of our family, and our community. We may disagree on topics such as personal liberty, personal responsibility, and how to demonstrate respect. Yet, we have been able to consider one another as a friend. We have not unrealistically presupposed a deep bond. Nor were our feelings hurt when we found enjoyment through other avenues and relationships.

I wonder if our friendship is a reflection of E Pluribus Unum. E Pluribus Unum is the unofficial motto for the United States. It means out of many, one. This line respects both the representation of individuality and the collective without either overtaking the other.

E Pluribus Unum wasn't a topic of study for me during grade school. However, it was certainly a lived-out experience. I am thankful for my continued culturally mixed experiences of today.

Curious about simple ways to both embrace your cultural roots while discovering others?

1. Visit a new church
2. Say hello to your neighbors
3. Go for a walk in a different neighborhood
4. Meet the owner of your favorite local shop
5. Poll someone new you meet
6. Visit a college campus in the fall
7. Volunteer as a reading mentor at the local elementary school
8. Visit a church from a different religion
9. Join the neighborhood school PTA (Did you know anyone can join local PTAs?)
10. Vote in local elections
11. Take your favorite cuckoo or wall clock for a check-up (There is a tiny shop in Smithville, Texas I highly recommend)
12. Go to a garage sale
13. Park in a different spot
14. Visit your oldest living relatives
15. Text a friend you haven't heard from this year

My heart is refreshed and enlivened with culturally mixed experiences. I am grateful to have friends who disagree with me, who may not understand me, but also who appreciate me and accept my individuality. These relationships enrich life.

This is a picture of my friend and me who sat on opposing sides of a local, heated discussion. Our ability to maintain the bridge between us has been the most wonderful gift.

Cheers to friendship and freedom in friendship!





YOU

## **Inner Strength – No Labels – by Michelle Lynn Schmitt**

How do we advocate for children with special needs? As parents and guardians, we run into a lot of barriers. Kids face them without realizing it sometimes and then other times it's written all over their face.

What do these barriers look like and or sound like? The following are ones that I have come across as a mom with a son with autism and even as a teacher.

- “He didn’t try his hardest”
- “That can’t be right” (When an assessment is done about the possible disability).
- “He rushed”
- “I don’t know what to do”
- See behaviors from disability as “bad”
- Focus on the negative instead of the positive
- Want our kids to fit inside a box
- Quick to pass judgment
- Won’t spend the time collaborating or asking for help from the special ed teachers

Do any of these sound familiar?

No Labels

Children are children

Amazing are they

Differences are to be expected

To be put in a box is not

No labels

Celebrate humanity

Humanity is diverse

How children think and learn

There is no right or wrong

No labels

Children are children

We love to watch them grow

Appreciation and acceptance

That’s what they need to know

## No labels

How do we cope and get past these barriers? Don't give up! Persist. My best friend is the mom of a student I taught who has an intellectual disability. Her mom was labeled as "one of those moms." It's because she advocated for her child. It can be exhausting, I know. It can also feel lonely.

We know it's worth it, though. Seeing our child smile more is the best gift. Our children can tell when we are advocating for them. It brings them a sense of comfort and hope.

If I can do, you can too!

## Life in a Nutshell - Mid-Summer Stroll – by Jill Montz

Rest sounds good to me.

My life seems to run at 100mph with zero whitespace in my calendar these days. I have every minute scheduled from the time my alarm goes off at 5am until I return home most nights after 8pm or later.

I live a very full life and I am forever grateful for it and all the people that make up my world on a daily basis, but I am tired! I have noticed I have a hard time *unwinding*. I go from a sprint to basically just passing out from sheer exhaustion each night. My Oura ring can testify to this. (For those interested, an Oura ring is a fun little gadget that checks my sleep and wake time activities, body temperature, restfulness, etc. sort of like a smart watch.) It has a feature that tracks how fast I fall asleep and many times it is less than three minutes. Clearly I am worn out!

I also find it hard to be idle during the day. If I have five minutes before I meet a friend for lunch I get on Facebook and make a post for work or see what others are posting. While waiting for Dotty at lessons I might start to read a book or listen to a podcast but those activities aren't *busy* enough for my brain so I either doze off or I find myself scrolling Instagram.

My mind seems to have forgotten how to *stroll* and has become a professional at the *scroll*. Many times I would rather mentally take the time and stroll through the day, minute, or moment but my mind has something akin to road rage and starts screaming things like, "Hurry it up, lady!" and then laying on the horn inside my head until I start to shift gears and speed up. My need for speed loving brain believes in two speeds...frantic and fast asleep. It's become a tiresome way to live.

Recently, God has been laying on my heart (in all the subtle and not so subtle ways He does) the topic of the Sabbath. I have always been interested in how people practice the Sabbath in today's world. Two years ago in 2020 we were all forced to slow way down and many of us (myself included) struggled with the sudden change in our daily routines. However, I often find myself looking at the April 2020 page I saved from the calendar that year and reminiscing about those days.

That month has literally nothing written on it. No school events, no practices or games, no meetings, no lunches, no parties, no church events. Not. One. Thing. In some ways it was a very hard and sad month but in other ways it was a very restorative and reflective time as well.

In Leviticus God tells Moses the Israelite people should work the ground for six years but they needed to let the ground rest on the seventh.

Leviticus 25:1-7

The Lord said to Moses at Mount Sinai, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a Sabbath to the Lord. For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of Sabbath rest, a Sabbath to the Lord. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. Whatever the land yields during the Sabbath year will be food for you - for yourself, your male and female servants, and the hired worker and temporary resident who live among you, as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your land. Whatever the land produces may be eaten.'"

God knew even land needed rest in order to produce good crops. We too need rest to produce good things in our lives.

One of my favorite podcasters is Annie F. Downs with the “That Sounds Fun” podcast. She is a big believer in practicing the Sabbath weekly but she has also often talked about taking a “Sabbath year.” She is planning both strategically and financially to take a full year off from work...and not just her. She wants her entire staff to do so as well and she wants to be able to pay them all their regular salary while they take the year off. That’s a big undertaking!

Since she is a public personality she has mentioned how she has to be confident that when she returns her audience will still be interested in her and her shows, books, platform and the niche she serves. To me all this sounds very brave (but Downs did write a book called *Let’s All Be Brave* which I love and highly recommend so that doesn’t at all surprise me about her!)

Speaking of brave, Brene Brown who is the author of such books as *Daring Greatly* and *Dare to Lead* posted on social media back in early May that she was taking three months away from social media and her own podcast to rest. Brown quoted from a speech by Michaela Coel (actress, screenwriter, producer, etc.) in her Facebook post saying, “Do not be afraid to disappear, from it, from us, for a while and see what comes to you in the silence.”

While I probably can’t talk my dad into closing down our two retail stores for a year or even a few months, I can shut off all personal and business social media for a month. So since July is the seventh month of the year, I have chosen to take that month off from all forms of social media. For 31 days I will not be on any type of any social media and I have also committed to not watching television shows or movies on my phone as well (although I rarely have time for that much these days but I will miss my Hallmark movies!)

I am hoping the *silence* that is left in the empty spots social media and TV once occupied will be filled with real time spent communicating with friends and family (not just liking or loving their posts). I plan to do a lot of reading, resting, and resetting my priorities in life. I am hoping this 31 day sabbatical from scrolling and constantly stimulating my brain will retrain it to enjoy going at a slower pace. By the end of July, I am hoping my brain begins to crave *strolling* and doesn’t seek to go back to *scrolling* my days away.

In Leviticus 25:6 it says “...whatever the land yields during the Sabbath will be food for you...” I am excited to see what this time away from social media yields for me and what sort of “food” I find to nourish my days, heart, and soul.

See you in August...maybe!

## Health Habits – List Making – by Marcy Lytle

Have you ever considered that making lists is good for your health? I find that when I get everything out of my head onto a list, I breathe deeper and fuller, and relax. Have you experienced that? Keeping our minds full makes us grumpy, edgy and snappy – none of which is good for relationships at home – or anywhere. It's like a full inbox with thousands of emails staring at us every morning, and we just hope none are important because the stress of scrolling through them all makes us sick. We need to make lists, hand lists over, and cross things off!

*When my kids were babies*, I made a list of diaper bag items to keep inside the bag. My sweet husband was always willing to help me pack the bag but it stressed me out telling him what to place inside, and I just thought I'd do it myself...until I made the list! I kept it tucked inside and he could just pull it out, read it, and fill the bag. Relieved my stress!

*Going to the grocery store* and forgetting those couple of things he told me to get frustrated him...and me. Until I hung a magnet notepad on the fridge and told him to write it there – whatever he needed. I then pulled that piece of paper and read it before going to the store, and there was no more, "Why did you forget it? I told you." The list helps so much!

*Mondays are the worst*, brain-wise, for me. I've played all weekend and the new week looms ahead of me with all these things to accomplish and do. I have a list in my desk drawer by day...and I jot down appointments, things to do, plans to make, ideas for fun, etc... - I empty my mind on paper before I start the week. I actually smile when I'm done!

*Since I write*, I have article/story ideas swirling, so I have a list under notes for stories. If I'm out and an idea pops into my head, I don't have to carry that idea and worry that I might forget it. I type it into my notes and there it lies...until I have time to sit at the computer and type.

Can you see that my mind is staying less-full and able to actually enjoy the moments in life? Let me go on...

*Meal planning* is so stressful for some of us. So I spend a good amount of time finding recipes and snacks and all the things...I make a list of the recipe title, where I found it, and print it out – lay it on my desk – to work from during the week. I love it, and no more – what's for dinner – spinning in my mind.

*Vacations and weekend getaways* are so relaxing, unless we have our minds full of to-dos and all the things. I have a few folders in my emails labeled trip ideas, or vacations by year, etc. and I even have a file folder on my desk for trip ideas. This way, when I read or hear about a place, get an email about events, come across ideas for a city that's awesome to visit, those ideas are filed – for later when we can actually go!

I LOVE list making. I suppose even that can become laborious, if we let it. But somehow making lists makes my steps lighter. It's like my mind is jumbled, then it gets sorted into lists, filed away...and I can take a walk in the neighborhood and actually see the trees, the sun, the

neighbors and the landscape! Instead of arriving back home with my head so full that I have no idea what I just saw while I walked!

Consider all the heaviness in your mind and where you can make lists to relieve. Maybe it's worries that weigh you down. Even a worry list can be made and tucked in your bible, to remind you to offer that list to him on a daily basis.

Here's to summer list-making, so that there can be lots more nap-taking, without heavy hearts and minds.

## Life Right Now - A Heart Thing - By Jennifer Stephens

It's a heart thing.

When it was announced that over one hundred beautifully decorated hearts would be sprinkled throughout our metro area for two months as part of the KC Heart Parade public arts experience, I KNEW I had to find them all. Years ago when the cow parade came to our town, I set out to find as many painted cows as I could. Cities all over America have been doing public art events like these for decades. I even heard of a town that decorated hogs for everyone to find! Cows, hogs, hearts...everyone enjoys the quest for something beautiful.

Every spare moment of every weekend, my husband and I filled up the gas tank, loaded the cooler with snacks, and ventured out to find one-hundred fifty-six 5 ½ foot tall fiberglass hearts. Now we couldn't just go without a plan, could we? Of course not! We printed a list of hearts with addresses for each one and let Google Maps direct our path. We found hearts embellished to look like an ice cream sundae and a chocolate covered strawberry. Hearts with exquisitely painted pictures. Hearts honoring fallen heroes. We found them all. 156 hearts!

With all this heart huntin' I couldn't help but think about all the people in our world on their own pursuit for...*something*. Something more. Something beautiful. Something to fulfill their own hearts.

Our world is brimming with lost people. Lonely people. Broken people. And they're searching to fill a void. But they're looking in all the wrong places. Alcohol. Drugs. Violent acts. Name the vice – that's what they're using to fill the emptiness inside. Filling their hearts and minds with the wrong things leads to a path of destruction.

*"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight." Proverbs 3:5-6*

When we open our hearts to allow Jesus in, He fills that space. He gives us peace. He takes the brokenness and makes us whole again. Always.

*"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." Ezekiel 36:26*

It's up to us to become the "Google Maps" for the lost souls we see in our world. It's up to us to lead them to the one who can fill their hearts. Let them see Jesus through our words and actions. Love the unlovable. Forgive. Listen and encourage. Speak kindly.

When we strive to live like Jesus, when we spend time talking to God, we become equipped to guide the way for the lost, lonely, and broken people who are seeking *something*...to find that missing something in the Lord.

*"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." Jeremiah 29:13*

Because it's a heart thing.



## **Under Pressure – The Majority (is not always right) – by Debbie Haynes**

In Numbers 14 there's this story about how "all" the congregation cried, "the people" wept, and "the whole" group said to their leaders that they wished they had died back when they were in slavery, before God set them free...or that they would die now in the wilderness. And then we read in verse 8-10 that "all the congregation" wanted to stone their leaders!

What a pitiful state of mind these people found themselves in, especially on this particular night. These folks had just been confronted with two very conflicting reports regarding the Promised Land they were supposed to enter. Only two of the twelve spies said, in agreement with God's promise, that "we are well able to take the land." The other 10, while they agreed that the land was flowing with milk and honey, became full of self and fell from faith...and then represented the true feelings of the whole congregation...the MAJORITY of them. They were in unity, but against God.

One thing to note here is that neither God nor Moses, their leader, sent the 12 spies. God had already told the people the land was theirs and he would drive out their enemies, but the people devised their own plan to see if what God said was true. There was no need for the spies, because God had already promised.

So...the listeners, the people, chose to believe the false report and felt defeated, and they began to weep bitterly that night.

*Here is the point of this story:*

God had assured them that he would be with them to drive out all the enemies, but the people chose to mourn. Why? It's because God required faith and trust, and the people resented God because he didn't do it "their way." Their mourning indicated that they blamed God for their predicament and denied that he was a faithful, loving Father. The mourning then turned to unbelief and fear, which led to sin and rebellion.

We've all been there, in similar times of stress and uncertainty – when we look to ourselves to find reasoning and logic – even when God has assured us of victory.

The terrible irony of this story is that in the prior chapters before this event, the same people were prepared, numbered, ordered, organized and set apart – ready to enter the Promised Land. They had remembered God's deliverance and cherished his presence. But by chapter 14, when God told them to go take possession of the land, they turned on him in rejection and unbelief.

The two spies with the good report told the people to not be afraid, to not rebel, and to not look back to when they were enslaved, but to push forward and take hold of the promise. This was good preaching, and good truth.

However, the pitiful mindset of the majority led to a plot against their leader. They had failed miserably in their test of faith. Had God done it their way and cleared out the enemy for them,

they would have happily marched in and set up shop. But that wasn't God's plan. He wanted faithful followers to his Word.

Moses then appealed to God's power and promise to his people and asked for pardon. God mentions this act of rebellion and unbelief throughout scripture, this fear of failure, the believing a false report, this reliance on self.

It's easy to fear and rebel, and cling to our past, and even easy to rely on ourselves to figure things out. It's easy to believe a false report, and to fall into bitterness and full-out rejection of God.

We are told in Matthew 7 to ask, seek and knock and we will receive, find, and doors will open. This implies faith in a good Father who is loving and generous to all of his children when they choose to lean on Him and his Word.

*Father God, You're so loving and kind and generous and full of good things for your children. I pray that you will help us to be mindful of how these things (unbelief) can creep in and cause separation from your glory. Help us to search our hearts and see that we take you at your word—every time; help us to lean on you, and not on our own understanding. And most of all, Lord, help us to know truth from lies. And to believe the true report. – Amen.*



MARRIAGE

## **In This Together – Wake Up the Next Day – by Bekah Holland**

I mostly always struggle to start these articles. Partially because writing a monthly column on marriage seems completely ridiculous to me. Not because we don't all need some wisdom, or encouragement or even more importantly to feel like we aren't the only ones who don't have a picture perfect, cookie cutter relationship. Because I'm need all of those things and I assume most other people are, too. But I mostly have a hard time, because as much as we all want to have someone to show us that we aren't alone in the crazy, I have no idea how I'm supposed to be someone who appears to know what she is doing. If you have followed along for the last few years, you have definitely seen that I have exactly nothing in my life together, and that my marriage is usually (always) a work in progress, and that we are winging it 98.7% of the time. So just in case you're new here, I have no idea what I'm talking about or doing most waking moments. So take all of this with a grain of salt. And I most definitely do not think I have any of this figured out enough to share little nuggets of wisdom. But, here we are anyway, so buckle up and hang on. I'm on my 3<sup>rd</sup> cup of coffee so there's no telling where this might go.

My husband and I are coming up on our 16<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. So we're in that weird in between phase, I think. We are far from newlyweds, but our marriage is barely even old enough to drive, so we're still figuring things out. For instance, I used to be a morning person. Also I used to be a people person, but that's probably a topic for another day. As you may or may not know, morning people tend to gravitate towards people who hate mornings and they get married. Completely true in our case. I could wake up and immediately fire up a conversation from the night before and chat away, smiling and all before my first cup of coffee. My husband, well, let's just say he did not appreciate this particular trait of mine. It took some time (years) for me to remember that this didn't tend to go well and shut my mouth while he took time to shake the cobwebs off and wake up enough to not hate everything. It wasn't immediate. And there were quite a few times that my early sunshine annoyed the ever loving fire out of him, mostly because I didn't seem to have an off button and he really *really* needed me to at least have a pause option. And then I would get my feelings hurt, because, well, feelings, then wash, rinse, repeat.

Thankfully, we've both adapted better than we had towards the beginning. I'm now perfectly happy not speaking to or being spoken to while I have a cup of coffee. And my grumpy morning hubby is now the early riser and no longer sets 14 alarms. So he's caffeinated and awake by the time I crawl downstairs to let the dogs out while I wonder how concerning it would be if I laid under the coffee machine, or, better yet, snorted coffee grounds off the counter. We have done quite the switch up. But, neither one of us are nearly as quick to have our feelings hurt with something trivial. We have become much more accepting of each other's, um, quirks. We don't let annoyances fester into needing a rage room to recover. We have both done a TON of work on ourselves, understanding and healing from our pasts, both before we met and from damage we did to each other after we were married and blindly fumbling through each day and night.

And we both did plenty of damage, believe me. I thought I was a good person. I thought I was self-aware and selfless. Turns out, I can be a real jerk. And I was talented enough to be able to be a jerk even when I was trying to be nice. I could even be a jerk when I thought I was being patient and loving. Survey says....definitely still jerky. And as the old adage goes, hurt people hurt people. And we have. But little by little, and through days and weeks and years, beautiful ones and ones that seemed determined to break us, we figured out how to love each other and ourselves better. And we're still learning and unlearning.

We've been able to slow down enough to dig deeper and look more inward to what and why we do things, or don't do them, say some things and not say others, instead of taking on hurt that was never intended for us to take on. Thankfully the learning curve is not quite as steep as it was in the beginning. It isn't quite as arduous a process most of the time. But, as I mentioned last month, I still have moments when I'm ready to throw the whole *fixing myself* thing down a dark deep hole and bury it. Because it is freaking hard. And uncomfortable. Did I mention really hard?

Looking inward to acknowledge the ugly stuff is so very painful. It leaves me feeling vulnerable, raw, scared, and probably some other things that I'm still working to identify. But it also makes me feel brave, and even strong. Because confronting tough stuff in someone else is one thing. But confronting that same stuff in yourself? That is climbing Everest hard. Or saying no to chips and queso hard. It takes patience, determination, grit, and a decent sense of humor so I don't crawl into a closet and never come out. I have to remember to be proud of myself for the messy work of real self-care. Not the pedicure, massage, spa day kind of self-care (although if anyone wants to offer me that version so I can test out which is better, I volunteer as tribute). No, I mean the self-care that is being aware of your struggles, being honest with yourself and your partner about what you need, finding time to do something that feeds your soul, and embracing each new self-discovery as a new adventure. Not a single one of these things is easy, if you ask me, but easy doesn't tend to help us grow.

And as I am working to learn to love me just for me and not what I can offer to others, I'm learning how to love my husband better at the same time. And my kids, and my friends. And I'm far from finished with this journey. I still lose it on my teenager because her tone and eye rolling pushed me over the proverbial edge, and I still answer texts from friends and family in my head and don't realize for days that it helps if I actually answer in real life so they don't think I've finally run off to that deserted beach that I've threatened to escape to for most of my adult life. And I still take a note from my daughter's playbook and roll my eyes at (okay, behind his back, I'm not a monster) my husband for loading the dishwasher wrong or snoring loudly on the couch. Trust me, he could give you a very long, very detailed list of things I do that annoy the life out of him. But we're trying. And we try to laugh through most of the days that we might have cried through before. And then we just wake up the next day and try to do things a little better than the day before.

I doubt there is ever an end to this kind of work. We'll be trying to be and do better today and all the way to the nursing home and beyond. So don't give up. Don't give up on yourself. Or your person. Just take the next right step and do the next right thing. And remember you aren't ever alone on this journey. Because we were made for communion and community. If you don't have a village, well, I'm your village now.

*"All marriages are happy. It's the living together afterward that causes all the trouble."*

*-Raymond Hull*

## **Date Night Fun – Stay Cool – by Marcy Lytle**

It's hot, even at night, here where I live. And doing something outside in the heat of the day is brutal...so not enticing. Walks have to be taken early morning or late evening, just before sunset. And even then, it's hot. But yet...date night and time away and fun with him...is still waiting to be had! There ARE ways to enjoy dates in the middle of the hot summer, even when we're baking...

**Movie Scramble** – Maybe you go to the same theater all the time, right by your house. Scramble it up one weekend. Go to a theater across town, or even in another city, or an artsy one you don't frequent. And pick a movie out of your genre. If you only like action, consider a period piece or a documentary. You might be pleasantly surprised! And pop some corn, toss in PB pretzels, M&Ms, candied pecans and more...for your snack.

**By the River** – Pack a lunch and sit in the cool shade by a source of water where you can place your toes, and “chill.” Even take your lawn chairs and sit them on the river's edge while you read and visit and snack. Then get in and swim with the otters...if you dare. (We saw river otters in Texas for the first time!)

**Museums Matter** – When's the last time you visited a museum of art, history, presidential, cultural or more? Find a few and set out on a date experience to visit them in the cool of the air-conditioning, in the heat of the day. Read and observe and contemplate, then discuss over a tasty gelato when you're through.

**Play in the Sprinkler** – It's not just for kids you know...having fun. Place a sprinkler in your yard and play. Wear your swimsuits. Make homemade ice cream. Invite another couple to sit in the spray and enjoy the day. Eat watermelon. Toss a beach ball. Why not play your troubles away?

**Breakfast for Two** – If you're an early riser, get up and watch the sun rise together atop a hill somewhere, then head on to breakfast out. Linger as you eat on a patio if it's not too hot, or inside if it is. Then head to Trader Joe's on the way home to get in a walk down the aisles, as you pick up some of the coolest snacks for a board later in the evening...dark chocolate PB cups, windmill cookies (my fave), chocolate covered grahams, and more. There's an endless supply there...try at least five!

## The Sweetness of God

It's summer...time for sweet tea, sweets like watermelon and sno cones, the sweetness of cold ice creams and gelatos, and all things that taste so delectable...those treats we reserve for special times on days when it's hot, we're tired, or just famished from the heat of the sun. Did you know there are lots of references to the word "sweet" in the Bible?

Come on in to the cool retreat from the heat this summer as we taste and see that the Lord is good...and sweet.

### **1. Taste and See**

I don't care for sweet tea, but I do love sweet watermelon. Nothing is better in the middle of summer than a plate full of that sweet watery goodness. My dad has always said he has a second stomach for dessert, a place reserved for something sweet after every meal. And yet, some of us shy away from anything sweet due to dietary concerns or fear of eating too many calories.

It is said that our brains are wired to enjoy things that taste good. Eating just even a bite or two of something sweet after a savory meal somehow makes us feel satisfied and happy. Sweets are mood enhancers, if eaten healthily and in moderation. Sweets are often more attractive in color, and people even dream about and salivate when thinking about them...

There's a verse in Psalm 34 that says Taste and see that the Lord is good. So maybe our start on this journey of sweetness begins by looking at how we develop our taste palate for the goodness of God, and how we learn to taste it. After all, taste is only experienced we digest something from that which is chewed to that which is swallowed...then we've truly tasted.

Prior to this verse of tasting and seeing that the Lord is good, we read these phrases:

He answered me and delivered me from my fears

Faces are never covered with shame

Saved out of all troubles

Then comes verse 8 to taste and see. In other words, the sweetness and goodness of the Lord is only realized out of the fears, the shame and the troubles of life. What? We all wish and long for a life without any of those, one with smooth sailing and no heartache. And yet, in the middle of those troubles we are invited to taste and see that He is good. And yet when many of us taste hard times we question the goodness of God.

Let's read further...

After we're invited to taste and see the Lord is good we read that

Those who fear him lack nothing

Those who seek him lack no good thing

His ears are attentive to our cries

He's close to the brokenhearted

He saves those crushed in spirit

And then in verse 19 we're told that the righteous will have many troubles. BUT the Lord will deliver them from all of the troubles! And all our foes will be condemned.

So in the middle of this chapter, flanked before and after, are all of these things we all experience once we take our first breath. We experience fear when a disaster happens and may even have night terrors from a traumatic experience. We cry at different times in our life over grief, hurt, pain and suffer. Our hearts get broken from relationships and disappointments. We even feel crushed at times and forsaken, or abandoned when we have lost much. And maybe the worst is the shame we carry when we have wronged another or made grave mistakes.

And yes, smack in the middle of trouble we are invited to taste and see how Good God is. It reminds me of the verse in Psalm 23 that says he prepares a table for us in the presence of our enemies. In other words, it's possible, and it's actually probable, that if we sit at His table – even in the darkness of the forest – we can taste his goodness.

Imagine with me the times you've attended a great feast. You've enjoyed the salad and the fruit as your first course. The meat and potatoes and veggies and bread were delicious. And then...you caught sight of the dessert table, piled high with colorful sweets - all available to take – as much as you want. Kids want to go straight for the dessert first – and leave all of the savory behind. But we know and we teach them that the savory comes first...then the dessert.

Could it be that tasting God's goodness is quite impossible without the savory of life? Savory foods are ones you consume to satisfy hunger, and sweets are then indulgences when the savory is eaten. And according to a culinary website, sweet and savory in the mouth are like a party! It's why we like salt and sweet.

Life is hard and we are told it will be. And whether or not we are able to taste the goodness of the Lord during the hard parts of life is how we know if we will grow to be bitter or better in our old age. Somewhere, in the middle of a forest of enemies around us – those that seek to do us harm through fear, disease and hardship – is a place where sweetness can be found and actually seen – that the Lord is Good.

The verse says taste and SEE that the Lord is good. He's not just a sweet treat to the tongue, but he's sweet to behold as well...and that's where we're going this summer.

Won't you come with me?



## 2. Manna, Anyone?

Exodus 16 is a familiar story, the one about manna coming down from heaven for the hungry wanderers in the desert. They were hungry and began to grumble against Moses, wishing they were back in slavery where at least they had “pots of meat” – the savory. They accused their leaders of bringing them out to the desert to die of starvation.

And then God answers them with this – I will rain down bread from heaven for you. And he gives very specific instructions for gathering that bread – just enough for each day – no hoarding or storing.

Moses tells the people – in the evening you know it was the Lord that brought you out of slavery, and in the morning you will see his glory.

Why would that be? In the evening they would have eaten the manna and feel satisfied, and in the morning the manna would be present again for that day – in all its glory – sweetness from heaven.

Later this chapter describes this fallen manna – and yes, it was sweet! It says in the morning when the dew fell on the ground it then dried into flakes like frost. The people were told to gather it....just what they needed for that day and not keep any for the next morning. Because God promised it would fall daily.

Many disobeyed and kept some anyone and guess what? The bread had maggots on it! Unfit to eat! And it smelled horrid!

In verse 31 the manna is described as being white and tasted like wafers made with honey. And God told Moses to keep some for generations to come so that they could see the bread given to the ancestors in the wilderness.

Let's stop here a second. I always thought of manna as being just wafer like blandness – like a dry piece of toast. It was anything but! And it was a daily treat from God's hand after a long day's work and journey in the wilderness. But the people obviously thought God might not continue his faithfulness, so they wanted to store up this sweetness. Only that sweetness – which was meant to be a daily blessing like morning dew – when stored in disobedience turned into something unfit to eat.

The Israelites then ate manna the entire time they were in the wilderness.

I find it interesting that we spend most of our days trying to store up the goodness of life, as a preservative against bad times. Saving is important, but saving out of fear is another. Fear drove these people to disobey God's directive to trust Him, and their own desire for self-preservation kicked in and caused many to disobey.

That which was meant to be tasted and enjoyed daily – sweet like honey – was to be noted as coming from His hand to satisfy their hunger in the middle of the desert. And they were to lie down at night

without worry about the next day's happenings because that manna would be there every single morning, after the darkness of the night gave way to light.

God didn't transform the wilderness into a garden of Eden, but rather he provided sweetness in the heat of the struggle – a sweetness that sustained those who obeyed.

A single mom friend of mine recently wrote an article about her daughter growing up, and how she ruined all of the special moments with her daughter for fear of when her daughter was going to be gone. She realized how many moments of sweetness were lost in the fear of the future. And I could totally relate with what she wrote!

I think it's very hard for most of us to look to God's daily provision instead of demanding that he show us our safety deposit box and give us the key, for withdrawal when we want it and demand it. He set up the process of looking back over the day as night drew near and realizing that we had eaten what he provided and it was good, and to lie down at night in rest and sleep knowing his provision would be there like the morning dew, when we wake up.

That's called peace. And it tastes like honey on a wafer of sweet bread. And it's from the good hand of our Father, in daily doses – daily bread.

Consider the manna you ate today and look for it tomorrow, while you struggle through today. And allow the taste of that sweetness to sustain you and be something you can tell to generations after you...of the sweetness of God in the wilderness of life.

### 3. Grief Turned Sweet

In Nehemiah 8 a large assembly of people were gathered to hear the law read to them...it says the crowd was made of men and women that understood what was being read to them. and the people began weeping as they were listening, for they realized their own sin – their own wrong doings against the Lord. It was a mournful response to the law of God being read, and it made the people sorrowful for their misdeeds. That wasn't a bad response, as we all have felt sorry at times for our own shortcomings of anger, hatred or other feelings and actions against others or against God, himself. This could be called repentance...a repentant heart much like a child hangs his head when he's been caught in a lie, and feels sorry that he's hurt his parent's trust.

But in verse 9, they people are instructed to stop mourning and to be joyful. They are instructed to enjoy food and "sweet" drinks and share it with others, and...to not grieve any longer but that the joy of the Lord would be their strength.

How sweet is that directive?

There's a time and a place for sorrow when we realize our need for forgiveness for our own wrongs, but there is a time after that for experiencing sweetness once again!

I read in a commentary that “even sorrow for sin must not hinder our joy in God, but rather lead us to it and prepare us for it.”

What? Sorrow and sin can lead us to joy and actually prepare us for it? Could it be that the sweet joy of life can only emerge from experiencing the mercy and grace from above?

Let’s review this scene. The people were being read the law, and their response was one of sorrow, because they fell short. They understood their inability to obey it all, and they understood what they were being read – we are told that a few times in this chapter. So when they first heard, they wept.

However, when they understood them, and when they were instructed to stop mourning and were called to prepare sweet drinks and find joy, they realized the promises that are made to those who repent.

Maybe repentance is a scary word to you, or maybe you never even think about the word. However, it’s a part of all of our lives, whether or not we listen to the Word or not. We desire repentant children when they’re caught in a lie, but of course we want them to feel loved in our arms when they’re sorry – as we restore them to joy. We are no different. When we realize we’ve wronged another person, we repent – if we want that relationship to be restored. But we aren’t to stay in our sorrow, but rather experience the sweetness of restoration!

Part of the sweetness of God is the movement from repentance toward fellowship, where celebration of joy occurs that is then shared with others!

In vs 12 it says Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.

If we wallow around in sorrow, hang our heads in shame for our past, continually weep and mourn, we are missing the story and the message of Christ. It says the people were able to celebrate with joy because “now they understood!” if we truly understand the love of God that calls us to repentance – not the whip of God that knocks us into place – we would truly weep but then prepare something sweet – and celebrate with joy.

Near the end of the chapter we read the joy of the people was very great.

Shame is not the end result of our own realization of any wrongs we’ve done. Shame is not from God. However, a repentant heart is always a reason to then experience the sweet joy that comes from hearing God’s word and turning toward him to ask for forgiveness and restoration.

Married couples offend one another, and their hearts are pricked as they realize their own selfishness. Parents and kids hurt each other with harsh words, disobedience, and mistrust – and

relationships are broken – sometimes for years. Even among siblings and friends, we realize we've hurt and been hurt and wounded and been wounded.

But the intent of hearing the Word of God that tells us to forgive, that love is patient and kind, that love covers all sin...is that we respond to it – yes perhaps with weeping as we repent. But definitely with sweetness in the aftermath.

There's nothing sweeter than a truly restored relationship with another, when both parties have forgiven and accepted the apology of another. And with God, he completely forgets our sin. And that is a reason to enter into sweet joy that comes out of sorrow and weeping.

Missing a bit of joy in your life? Everything tasting bitter? Lift up your head and respond to what you're hearing today – that God is calling you to stop weeping, respond to what you understand and hear, and prepare a sweet drink to be shared with others – where joy like nothing else will erupt and be yours.

#### 4. Better than Honey

Psalm 19:10 says this *They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.*

Psalm 119:103 says *How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!*

Have you ever wondered why God uses honey as the sweetness to describe his word? That's what these verses are referring to here – the word of God is sweet. More precious than gold. Sweeter than honey – from the honeycomb.

Honeycomb is said to be nature's great delicacy. Honey is mentioned about 60 times in the bible.

One reason the law of the Lord is so important for us to know is that it reveals God's character and attributes. We can read books, listen to podcasts, sit under great teachers that all expound on the word of God and all of those things can do us so much good. But reading about God's character and attributes on our own, in the private time we spend with him, in his Word and no place else...there's really nothing like it.

But back to the comparison to honey from the honeycomb. The honey we purchase in stores has been processed somehow, many times. The most pure form of honey is straight from the honeycomb. It's the freshest and sweetest form of honey. And that's the honey referred to when talking about the law of the Lord.

There's a story I heard of a Rabbi placing a bit of honey on a piece of wax paper, laid on top of the bible, as he presented it to a classroom of children. Cool visual!

And in David's day, there was no sweeter substance around than honey, and yet David said God's word was still sweeter.

So what words did David hear from the Lord that bought him to this realization that it was so sweet?

He was the youngest child in his family, was a shepherd boy and played the harp. In Psalm 19 we see that he observed the unspoken law of God written in the sky from morning til night. This spoke volumes to him about the perfectness of God. In vs 14 he called the Lord his Rock and his Redeemer. He tasted his strength and his forgiveness, as David often stated that he had "hidden faults."

He slayed a giant with a small stone – he had seen and tasted the sweetness of God as he rescued him from bears and lions as a shepherd, so when Goliath appeared – he had the confidence that he too could be killed. He had experienced danger and threats, but had tasted the sweetness of protection and provision from the hand of God, which spoke to him volumes about the character of God. How dare any giant threaten the God that protects?

I've referred to Ps 23 so many times, but again this chapter written by David, the one who says the Lord's words are sweeter than honey describes his life as a sheep, following the Good Shepherd. David himself was a shepherd but knew he needed to be guided by another. One that prepares feasts, and follows with goodness and mercy – still waters and restorative places. How sweet.

Those enemies he refers to – well he was pursued to be killed by Saul – so David's own life was threatened. But he still found God's ways and provision to be sweeter than anything in the real world that we can taste.

And...this great guy sinned even greater, by taking another man's wife and even plotted murder! Then he wrote Psalm 51 as his response to what he had done.

This guy found God's ways, his laws, his words written and spoken and unspoken to be that which was the sweetest thing in life, more to be desired than anything else.

I think one of the most distasteful things in life is to have someone try to tell us who God is, how to respond to God, or how to live for God...when that person has never experienced any sort of trouble of hardship or loss. It's not helpful to hear religious platitudes when we're in the middle of the greatest grief, from someone directing us to believe and rejoice...when that person has no idea what grief is.

But when someone has tasted of the sweetness of God through experiencing his forgiveness and his rescue from the bottom of the pit, we will all sit up and listen. Because that's truth we can ingest, swallow, chew on and taste.

Sweeter than honey – from the honeycomb – from the purest sweet spot in nature – his words.

I've found this to be true. I can hear a worship song, have someone encourage me the best they know how, but when I hear his voice from the pages of His book speak to the deepest part of my pain – sweetness is tasted.

And it's just like that manna we talked about last time. I need it every morning...like the dew on the ground. I need it over and over again, because I forget the taste, the sweetness, and the draw of the honeycomb when I'm climbing, falling and reaching. But it's there for the tasting, that word of Life.

Read Psalm 119, every verse, take a year if you have to. And taste and see that nothing's sweeter.

## 5. Sweet Sleep

Proverbs 3 says : My son, do not let wisdom and understanding out of your sight, preserve sound judgment and discretion; they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck. Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble. When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.

In other words, when wisdom and understanding are worn about your neck like an ornament, you can experience sweet sleep, unafraid of tomorrow.

There are SO many variables that cause us to sleep poorly from our diet, our sleep habits, caffeine, work schedules and so on. But diet is a big one. Caffeine can cause us to lie wide awake, or spicy foods might upset our stomachs, or eating too late can cause us to feel heavy and not rested so that we can fall asleep.

These verses indicate that there's a place in Him where our sleep can be sweet...and could it be that what we "eat" spiritually affects our rest, as well?

Vs 3 says love and faithfulness need to never leave us

Vs 5 says to trust in the Lord and our paths will be straight

Vs 7 we're told to fear Him and shun evil if we want strong bones

Vs 9 says God gets our very best from the blessings we've been given

Vs 12 reminds us to receive his discipline because He loves us

Then there are verses about the sweetness and value wisdom being more precious than gold, just like we read earlier how his words are the same. His word and wisdom are synonymous, one in the same. You want to be a wise person? Know his word. You want to taste something sweet? Read his word and wisdom will be on your tongue.

What does the sweetness of sleep look like for a person that chooses wisdom through his words?

I don't know, but I looked to see...

Getting enough sleep

Sleeping comfortably with bed and temperature

Stress is not an issue...peace is.

No bad foods or heavy foods before bedtime

Translate all of that into resting and sleeping sweetly, and it can only come from one thing – a body and mind at rest. And that can only happen when we choose wisdom and his words, as part of our daily intake.

Some people have mental exercises they perform at night in order to sleep well, including imagining each worry written on a piece of paper and tossing it in a fire or in a bag and handing it over to Him. Simple exercise, hard one to practice.

Some read scripture at night so that the truth of who God is the last thing they hear before nodding off to sleep, which is a great practice. A book by the bed of the sweetness of God is better than a glass of cookies and milk.

During sleep time, lots of things happen. Adam's rib was taken from him and Eve was formed. Dreams occur that sometimes change the world or change our lives for good (or for bad – if they're bad). Sleeping with another is sacred and holy and reserved for marriage. Perhaps one of the sweetest expressions of His love. Peaceful sleep occurs when fighting and wars cease – no sound of war. God himself never slumbers or sleep, yet invites us to sweet sleep knowing he is awake and watching over us. Jesus slept in the middle of a storm on a boat, and so can we.

A restless night's sleep affects the next day's mood, doesn't it?

We can take melatonin, add other sleep aids to our routine, cover our eyes with sleep masks, and leave on night lights to shoo away the darkness...but nothing will induce sweet sleep without the wisdom of God and the sweetness of His words being worn throughout the day and tasted on our lips...so that good sleep results.

I want sweet sleep. Do you?

## 6. Gracious Words

Prov 16:24 says Gracious words are a honeycomb,  
sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

There's that honeycomb again...and this time sweetness is described as words that are sweet to the soul and healing to the bones. We've already discussed how His Word is sweeter than the honeycomb...but so are the words we speak!

In fact, this entire chapter is all about words we speak!

The very first verse says from the Lord comes the proper answer of the tongue.

I don't know about you, but my tongue gets me into trouble more than anything else. When I'm tired, my tongue sends out snappy words, if I'm frustrated I can speak demeaning words, and words that are not "proper" end up being hurtful. And we all know that hurtful words can sometimes last a lifetime in the hearts of others...especially when spoken to children.

So let's see what kinds of words are sweet to the soul and healing to the bones...they obviously have to come from the sweetness of His words that already resides in our hearts. Maybe that's the issue.

Vs 2 speaks about motives and then we're told to commit our ways to Him.

So even though we often think in our minds that we have a "right" to say what we think, motives have to be checked and ways have to be committed to Him...

Vs 13 says honest lips speak what is right, and that King's delight in this kind of talk! Speaking what is right is preceded by checking those motives and committing our ways.

Vs 18 reminds us that pride goes before destruction and haughty spirit before a fall. Have we ever thought of that in regards to the words we speak? Pride that precipitates a cutting remark, or a haughty spirit that backs a quick retort – ends in a fallen relationship.



Vs 21 says gracious words promote instruction. Not pointing finger or harsh loud words..but gracious ones...words full of grace...quiet and humble and pure.

Vx 23 says hearts of the wise make their mouths prudent...which means full of good and careful judgment. Again, all characteristics of sweetness to the soul and healing to the bones.

The last half talks about the opposite of sweet words coming from the Father – and those are scorching fire, stirring up conflict, gossiping, leading others down wrong paths, plotting perversity and all sorts of evil.

And in vs 32 is maybe the summation or the def of sweetness or words – better is a patient person than a warrior, one with self control than one that takes a city.

Therein lies the secret to sweet words. Patience and self-control, neither of which we possess on our own unless we commit our ways to Him.

Think about the times when words have flown from your lips that you regret later. Either anger has risen up, impatience has occurred, or we've been tired and unable to control our emotions and we let it fly. I've done it and wept tears of sorrow later.

But then...think about the times when you've sat in His presence and heard his sweet words of mercy, goodness and grace spoken over your wandering, weary, worrisome soul. Its only then, when you've committed your ways to him and experienced the sweetness of your God as he speaks that you are then able to speak gracious words that are sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

No patience? No self-control? it's a serious thing to go even one day without hearing his sweet words before we speak a word when the sun rises and we start our day around others. otherwise, there's this avalanche effect that happens when we let one rock loose headed toward another, until we've injured and hurt everyone that rock stumbled over along the way down.

Gracious words are sweet to the soul and health to the bones.

## 7. Bitter turned sweet

Proverbs 27 One who is full loathes honey from the comb,  
but to the hungry even what is bitter tastes sweet.

We talked about honey from the comb and how it's the purest form of sweet and that His words are more desirable than even that sweetness. And here we read that those who are FULL loathe honey from the comb. We can read that literally that those who are satiated with sweets (eaten

too much) will be sickened by the sight of yet another sweet. Perhaps we've been there after Halloween or Christmas when we've dined on candy or dessert and we feel repulsed by the sight of another pie because we've overeaten. That's the picture presented here.

Then the second part of the verse says to the hungry even what is bitter tastes sweet.

So let's look at the story in the OT of bitter water being made sweet.

Let me set the scene for you. The entire camp of Israel had just been delivered by one of the greatest miracles cited in the bible – the crossing of the red sea – and all of their enemies that were pursuing them had been swallowed up and destroyed. This is in Exodus 15. The people are singing and dancing and giving praise to God for his right hand, his glorious power, the greatness of his majesty for they had been pursued and now they were safe! In verse 11 they even said who is like you oh God, so awesome and glorious and strong? And right after this fullness, this sweet presence of victory and a miracle of deliverance...they find themselves in the wilderness for three days.

I'd say that was a pretty sweet scene indeed, and their hearts were completely full and satiated and even running over with thanksgiving for the great victory they had just experienced. They were full, so to speak, as we read in proverbs 27...but it says the full despise honey from the comb.

They come to this place of water only it was bitter, and not fit to drink. And the people's immediate reaction was to grumble. No more remembering God's mighty arm, but raising up their own arm against God and accusing Him of not caring. God showed Moses their leader a log and told him to throw it in the water, and the bitter water then became sweet and the people drank.

After that God spoke to them a lesson and said if they listen, obey and do what's right they won't suffer disease and he will be their healer. And right after that they came to 12 springs of water where they camped.

The people were full of the blessings of God and dancing ensued and praise erupted and it seemed nothing could hinder their joy – they were full of the sweetness of God. But a few hours later when thirst occurred that sweetness now turned bitter, and they turned on the one that provided the sweetness.

It seems we live in a society like this where we prosper, we have food and drink more than we can consume, we go here and do this and life is sweet...we find it easy to praise Him and love Him and trust Him because he's been so good...and then dry land is under our feet and we grumble.

Grumbling is not looked up on with favor by God, nor by parents when kids grumble. Isn't it maddening when kids have played all day, swam in a cool pool, eaten ice cream, attended a friend's party, had an entire day of fun and then they grumble when they're told they have to take a bath and go to bed? What happened to all that fun that was just experienced?

It goes out the door when a door is closed, an answer is no, or rest is demanded. Little kids throw tantrums when they're told to take a nap and they want to continue with the sweetness and play of life.

So back to prov 27 – the second half. To the hungry...even that which is bitter tastes sweet.

Seasons of hunger...who wants those? No one. We like the sweetness, the victory, seeing our enemies fall behind us and we love dancing and experiencing his strong arm. But somehow all of that satiation turns into stagnation and selfishness and so there must be times of hunger once again. It's the cycle of life while here on this earth and each cycle is there for a season and a reason to prepare us for the next season of rebirth and life.

Have you ever had a bitter time in your life where your first reaction was "wow, even this bitter moment tastes so sweet?" this verse says the hungry will say that and experience that.

Some say the log Moses threw in the water represented the cross. Maybe so. Remember Jesus said for the joy set before him he endured the cross? He knew he was obeying his Father and bringing life to a dying world.

If life is bitter at the moment, taste and see the sweetness of God even in the bitter moments. If life is sweet and all sunshine at the moment, enjoy it...but remember to always listen to his voice and obey and remember that sweetness when the hard desert is under your feet in the next season.

Bitter turned sweet...if we're hungry for it.

## 8. Sweet light Eccl 11

Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun.

Wow, the sweetness and joy to see another day and wake up to a sunrise, over and over again. Light is indeed sweet and pleasing to the eyes.

I think it amusing and cool that God made the sun come up so early that in order to see it and appreciate it, one has to rise from his/her sleep early...no sleeping in. Yet, unless we are made

to get up for work or travel, many of us never see the sun rise and never see how sweet the light is.

It's also equally cool that God set the moon and the stars to shine after darkness fully settles in...they are not visible until all the daylight is gone. They are just as pleasing and sweet to behold but they don't appear unless darkness surrounds.

The two lights in the sky – neither to be observed and enjoyed at our discretion or our timing – but rather his – early in the morning or in the stillness of the dark – both lights reminding us of the sweetness of God.

When God told Moses to visit Pharaoh and tell him to let the people go, he was told to get up early in the morning. Could it be that observing the sweet light of the sunrise enabled Moses to go with boldness?

Dew is visible in early morning light and then it's gone, so if we want to see that glistening fall from the night we have to rise in the early sweet light of the day.

In Mark we read that Jesus rose early in the morning to pray. There's something about the first light of the day ushering us into the sweetness of his presence. Maybe that's why the psalmist says oh Lord in the morning will I direct my prayer and look up...to perhaps see the light?

It was early morning when the women arrived at the tomb to witness the resurrection! How sweet was that?

Light is sweet and it pleases the eyes to see the sun.

In Habakkuk it says this His glory covered the heavens and his praise filled the earth. His splendor was like the sunrise; rays flashed from his hand, where his power was hidden.

There's this place called the Painted Desert and we drove through it once on vacation with our kids. We first arrived and it was the dullest landscape ever...just brown and not anything to behold...until the clouds parted and the sun hit that dull landscape. The light moved across this desert and we all literally gasped at the color – the paint – the sweet picture before our eyes. This desert in Arizona is known for its brilliant and varied colors but only when the light sweeps across – the sweet light from above.

This is a description of the Painted Desert

Colorful sediments of bentonite clay and sandstone, stacked in elegant layers, feed off the setting Arizona sun in an ever-changing display of colorful splendor.

They "feed off" the sun – isn't that cool?

Light is sweet and it pleases the eyes to see the sun.

The sweetness of God – the sunrise of the day - mixes with the landscape of the earth where we live and plod along in our mundane lives – and that muddy clay earth on which we walk feeds off of that sweetness and provides gasping color pleasing to our eyes.

It's the reaction of the clay of the earth with the sun in the sky that causes drivers to pause and take pictures.

I love that!

Light is sweet and pleasing to the eye, yes when observed in its glory as it rises in early morning. But when that same light sweeps across the earth and interacts with the dullness below it to provide brilliance and colors that weren't there before...now that's sweet...the kind that is pleasing and satisfying and fulfilling to behold again and again.

## 9. Sweet Fruit

Summer fruit – is there anything better? What is your favorite? I'm thinking here in Texas it's the summer peach, and peach cobbler – with ice cream – are you salivating now?

Songs of Songs has this description of the Lover of our souls:

Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my beloved among the young men. I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste. Let him lead me to the banquet hall, and let his banner over me be love.

Have you ever sat underneath a fruit tree that has dropped so much fruit it's lying on the ground all around you? Where my sister lives in CA there are trees like that in folks' yards! We always marvel at them because the fruit is so plentiful, those who have them in their yards cannot eat it all!

That's the picture here of sitting under the shade of the One who loves us the most...and how it's a delight to sit in his shade and taste his sweet fruit.

One doesn't even have to reach up and pick the fruit, it just drops to those who are sitting under the shade of its branches. Now, that's an awesome picture. When we take refuge from the heat of the day and choose His presence as our dwelling place, his covering over us to shade us from the scorch of the day...fruit drops...sweet fruit. Not dry brittle leaves and seed pods that are hard and empty.

So what is the fruit that he drops?

Well, there are all the fruits that the Spirit offers us like love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance and faith. I learned all of those in a song when I was a kid and have never forgotten them! the first few in that list sound awesome like love joy and peace – but rest of them come from living on this earth and surrendering to his plans and purposes as he works in us the sweetness of his fruit. Longsuffering indicates there will be suffering but we will endure. Gentleness is required with unruly and difficult kids and people. And goodness can never be acquired on our own – we need Him! the list goes on, but these are some of the fruit evidence in our lives when we come aside and sit in his shade.

Pardon for sin is sweet, the hope of eternal life is sweet, assurance of his love is the sweetest.

Have you ever been walking on a trail – say around a small body of water – and it's really hot outside because there is no cloud cover? I have. The sun starts beating on my forehead and I need a place out of the sun, or I feel like I'm going to faint. I start looking for shade, because shade is everything. And if there was a fruit tree, well that would feel like paradise.

However, the next verse says there's even more...there's an entire table – a banquet table – where he leads us to and there's this banner over it – love. Is that sweet, or what? A banquet table – that language – indicates a feast. I imagine there's a fruit tray piled high with all sorts of fruit, not just one.

We recently had a big spread for our family and included a fruit tray. There's nothing more beautiful on a table than the colors of strawberries, blackberries, watermelon, oranges and more all laid together and ready for eating. It's seriously intoxicating to behold and to taste.

That's the picture here, when it says his fruit is sweet.

He knows just when to drop the fruit, so to speak, when it's ripe and the juiciest and the sweetest. But we might miss it's fall if we don't come aside from the heat to sit awhile.

Fruit requires lots of labor from the farmer, digging and planting and fertilizing and pruning. Then that fruit has to be picked and peeled and seeded and served. Life may not feel sweet at times, but it could be that the Farmer is in one of those stages of preparing the fruit – the sweetness from his hand. Our job is to let him do his work and then eat from His hand, aside from the heat overhead and guess what? If we sit still and eat of his fruit, we'll hear him say – as he does later in that chapter – that our voice is altogether sweet to him as well.

There's a prayer we often pray and that is let our voice be a sweet, sweet sound to his ears. It is. We are. Our faces are ever before him, held in his hands, while we eat of his sweet fruit under

the shade and away from the heat...with more fruit than we can eat dropping around us. Imagine it, experience it and taste it. His sweet fruit.

#### 10. Now That You've Tasted

We've been talking for weeks now about the sweetness of God in the heat of the summer of life. But once we've tasted his sweetness...then what? When we taste a fruity drink that we love, we share the recipe, right? My DIL recently told me about a drink of mixed frozen watermelon, with muddled fresh mint and lime...it made my mouth water and I tried it! Amazing!

I've heard most of my life the call to taste and see that the Lord is good, but I've not really read the rest of the verses around it. It's found in 1 Peter 2 and there's this call to do some things...now that we've tasted.

In other words, once we've tasted the goodness and the sweetness of God, there's a response we must give after the taste.

It involves getting rid of hatred, deceit, hypocrisy and envy..and slander of every kind.

After all, it says, it's time to grow up.

Later in the chapter we are reminded that we have received mercy. Maybe that's the sweetest gift of all from his hand, because it called us into relationship with him apart from the sin that separated us from him. Mercy and forgiveness, both sweet and lifechanging, once we taste and see that He is good.

And once we've tasted his mercy in our lives, we are called to offer that mercy to others. Sweet tasting requires sweet sharing.

We are to do good and silence ignorant talk.

We are to show respect, fear God.

We are to abstain from sinful desires.

And we are to live such good lives among those that haven't yet tasted that they may see our good deeds and glorify God – not us.

We are also called to bear up under unjust suffering.

It says in verse 20 if we suffer for good and endure it, this is commendable before God.

In other words, he has healed our wounds, forgiven our sins, prepared shade and a table of fruit for our enjoyment...so that we might then live and follow His example in our relationships with others.

Tasting and seeing the Lord is good is awesome. But there's something required after the taste, and it's a change that comes from the sweetness we've just tasted.

Changing our attitudes for good is growing up in our faith. It does not good to taste and see the Lord is good and sweet, if we are still foul and stinky in our relationships with others.

We train our kids to eat fruit, and include sweet fruit in their lunches and on our plates. We know the importance of eating natural sweetness from fruit instead of added sweetness and artificial sugars. And when fruit is consumed in its natural state, all kinds of goodness happens to our bodies and our skin.

We often think that tasting his goodness means having our prayers answered, lots of money in the bank, a healthy body and charming children. Those things are indeed nice to have, but they are not the sweetness we are to taste...the kind that changes us and provides growth.

Remember that list of the fruits of His spirit – they include so much more – inward changes toward outward stresses.

When we are pressed all around, we are to endure and love our oppressors.

When our prayers are not answered in our timely manner, we are to continue in the faith.

When money is gone or resources are low, we are to give thanks in everything.

When our bodies fail us, we look up and allow longsuffering to carry us, because He will.

When our children try us, we are to maintain gentle spirits that love them despite them...

That's the product of tasting and seeing that the Lord is good and his fruit is sweet. It's called growth, and it's what we want in our children, and it's what HE wants from his children.

Sitting under a the shade of a fruit tree filling our mouths with the fruit that's fallen on the ground might be tasty and a reprieve from the sun, but the track around the lake is still waiting for us to continue running. There are folks on the track with us that we will pass and will pass us by. They too will get hot and need a drink of cool water and a taste of sweet fruit. And we will know. We will show them that shade tree where we sat and offer them the same fruit...or else we have learned nothing at all.



We all know what dining on artificial sweets all the time without exercise or other nutrition looks like – lazy overweight and self-indulging. And none of us want that for our children. Neither does He. He invites us to his table spread and piled high with the goodness from his hand, but that goodness, that sweetness must be extended to those that have never tasted....else they too will fall from the scorching sun in the heat of the day.

Taste and see that the Lord is good...but then grow up and change to be the good in the world.

Ps 34: 8 taste and see that the Lord is good

Exo 16 manna tasted like wafers with honey

Grief turned Sweet Nehemiah 8

Psalm 19 Sweeter than Honey and 119

Proverbs 3 sweet sleep

Proverbs 16 gracious words

Prov 27 bitter turned sweet

Eccl 11 sweet light

Song of songs 2 his fruit is sweet

Song of songs his voice is sweet, mouth and lips are sweet

Hebrews 6 the goodness of the Word

I peter 2:3 tasted the Lord is good

My name across his lips (song a woman) speak what you see...the sweetness of your name across his lips. Mary Magdalene.

Rev 10 sweet as honey

## **For Better or Worse - Growing Together – by Kaelin Scott**

My husband and I celebrate our anniversary this month. Another year together! Life looks a lot different now than it did 11 years ago when we said, “I do.”

Back then, we were just two kids without a care in the world. All we wanted was to be together. Our apartment was bare and so were our pockets, but we didn’t care. We had it all because we had each other.

Fast forward 11 years. We’ve added two more people to our family – the two cutest people I know! We live on a beautiful ranch that my husband gets to manage. I get to homeschool our children while also writing and working from home. We have a lot more responsibility and a lot more on our plates. But we’re still so blessed to be together.

These days, we don’t get a lot of alone time as a couple, and sometimes that’s hard. But it’s the season we’re in, and we don’t usually mind. We’re cherishing these days of being overwhelmed and surrounded by Barbies and Legos. I know they’ll be gone before we know it, and it’ll just be the two of us again. Still grateful and happy to be together.

Not that our years have been void of trials. We’ve faced hardships together too. But those are the times when love can grow if we hold on tight. Through each difficult season, God brings us lessons about love and faith and so much more. I’m sure we’ll face more trials together over the coming years. But as long as we keep our eyes on Jesus, we’ll make it through together.

Love isn’t self-seeking, and it always perseveres. Those aren’t my words, but they’re words I want to live by. Sometimes love doesn’t come easy, and I don’t think it’s supposed to. Many times, it can feel like a battlefield. (Okay, now I have that song in my head.) But the harder we fight, the sweeter the victory.

I know I don’t have all the answers. I’m sure I’ll continue to learn more and more every year of my marriage. That’s kind of daunting, but it’s also beautiful. The fact that I get to face life side by side with the same person day after day, year after year, learning and growing together... that’s truly amazing.

I’m still just as thankful as I was 11 years ago in that empty apartment with no money in the bank. People thought we were crazy back then, and maybe we were. But I don’t regret a single moment of it. It’s brought us to today, and that’s something worth celebrating.



ENCOURAGEMENT

## **Rooted in Love - Midnight Memories – by Kaelin Scott**

There was supposed to be a meteor shower around midnight, and it was a clear night. My husband and I put the kids to bed at their normal time, but then we woke them up around 11:30 and took them outside. We all lay in the bed of our truck to stare up at the stars. It was a warm night with only a slight breeze, so we were nice and cozy all snuggled up. Ready to see some action in the sky.

Well, the action never came. We saw a few faint shooting stars here and there, but it wasn't nearly as dazzling as we were expecting. My husband and I did see one super bright and long one, but of course, the kids weren't looking when it happened. All in all, the meteor shower was a bust.

But the experience was one I'll never forget. While we were lying there in the darkness, the kids were pretty sleepy at first. So we started being silly and telling dumb jokes to keep them awake. By the time we went inside, all of us were cracking up at nothing in particular. That laughter is what I cherish most of all. The memory of those innocent little giggles. The feeling of having a smile spread across my face. The small, warm hands pressed into mine. That's what I'll remember.

Sometimes we plan fun or grand adventures, and then they don't pan out. Or maybe we get stuck in the mundane routine of life without ever getting a break. But our memories don't have to be big or spectacular to be wonderful. They can consist of little sparks of joy here and there. Shared laughs and smiles over inconsequential things. The simple act of being together.

I see so many moms who guilt themselves over not spending enough time with their kids. Actually, I do the same thing all the time. Which is crazy because I'm literally with them 24/7/365. Why do we do that? Why do we overlook all the amazing memories we make together and make ourselves feel bad?

Spending time with your kids (or loved ones in general) doesn't have to look like an adventure every day. It doesn't have to be a beach trip or a carnival or a day at the zoo. It doesn't have to be anything special at all. Because just spending time together is special when you look back. It can be as simple as reading a book and making silly voices. Having a picnic in the yard. Coloring together. Building blocks. Baking cookies.

Quality time doesn't have to be some well-planned or Pinterest-worthy thing. It's just doing life together. Every day has the potential for memories made. We just have to seize the opportunities. And if things don't go how we planned, we make lemonade out of lemons. Trust me, kids can find the fun in any situation. We just have to go with the flow and make the day our own.

Looking back in 20 years, I probably won't remember the shooting stars we saw. I might not even remember why we were lying outside in the middle of the night. But I will remember the laughter and the silliness and the joy of being together. Because love is what holds us together, and love is what I'll remember.

## **Firmly Planted - Beautiful Peace (Be Thyself rewritten) – by Dina Cavazos**

---

Have you noticed the incredible variety in the world of nature? It fascinates me. I want my garden to be a kaleidoscopic collection of color, texture, and diversity--not just because I love the plants, but because it reveals a little slice of who God is: Genius Creator, Designer Extraordinaire, Beauty Lover, Habitation of Peace. A beautiful garden evokes a feeling of peace and rest, but beauty usually only lasts a season. What about when the beauty fades—does the peace fade too? The question got me thinking...*what kind of beauty doesn't fade?* And remembering...

In my youth, I remember being influenced, like most young people, by magazines and movie stars. I wanted to be thin like Twiggy (ask your grandma) and have long board-straight hair like Cher. I had no curves, no calves, and no confidence. Unfortunately, there is a lot of emphasis on physical beauty in our culture--and it's always bothered me. It's an annoying, uncomfortable feeling--like having a pebble in your shoe. I wish I'd known Jesus back then. I wish I'd known the One who loves me as I am and looks past this outer body, deep into my soul. I might have still struggled with my image, but maybe not so much.

With age, maturity, and a more godly perspective on what truly matters, I've come to terms with my imperfections, such as the bump on my nose, and the fact that I'm no beauty queen. I've learned to be thankful for so many things, like good health, olive complexion, and relatively good teeth. Now, as the next stage of life rolls in, flabby skin, double chin, and drooping lids mock at the vestiges of vanity that remain. But vanity doesn't rule over me like it once did. There are far more important attributes than physical appearance, and I'm certain that God doesn't care about that at all. I'm a spiritual being in a human body that won't last forever, but the fruit of the Spirit is eternal. It's far more important to grow in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. This body will wither and fade, but those qualities will remain. My thoughts came back to the garden: *It certainly looks better some seasons more than others. The fall is best, but each of the other seasons has its own beauty if I look for it, and the peace isn't in the beauty.*

Each plant fits into the garden in its own special way, each has its own color, texture, size, and brings something of God's diversity. True peace and rest lasts through every season, even when beauty fades. As my true self—the person God made me to be—emerges more and more, I know I'm like a beautiful plant in God's garden—beautiful in every season because the eternal never fades. My peace and stability are not just skin deep, because I'm firmly planted in His love and care—that is where I find lasting peace.

*My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places...*

*Isaiah 32:18*

## **Moving Forward – Rebuilding – by Pam Charro**

I knew that life wasn't going to be easy when I moved into this apartment three years ago. I had experienced a divorce with children involved previously, and I knew how painful and difficult it was. But nothing could have prepared me for the past three years. Who could have predicted Covid and everything else that has happened recently?

We are all rebuilding, to some degree. Sickness, death, and the economy have taken a toll on all of us, and moving through and past our challenges doesn't seem to be happening very quickly. I am not even close to where I thought I would be by now. In fact, the entire playing field is unfamiliar.

I am glad for so many biblical examples of devastation and the need to rebuild. God knew we would need them.

Esther was orphaned as a young girl, raised by her cousin, and forced to spend a year preparing to spend the night with a man she didn't know. Joseph was betrayed by those who should have protected him, made to live in slavery and in dungeons when he hadn't done anything wrong, and forgotten by those who said they would remember him. Ruth and Naomi had to lose the men they loved most and be placed into a completely different way of life. And the book of Nehemiah, and even the entire Bible itself, are, in summary, about restoring what had been demolished. So often, it seems, we must be crushed before we can be made into God's intention for us.

But...God! In every story, an amazing turn of events no one except the Almighty could have predicted. And why would it be any different with me?

So, I keep waking up, I keep showing up, I try some more. Sometimes I get a little tired, and I struggle with having a dream or vision for my future. I wonder how much longer I will feel I'm just treading water.

Until I remember those who went before me, what God did with their lives, and how completely worth it the rebuilding must have been for them. And I realize that the fact that I have no idea what he is up to is probably what makes life the most exciting. Whatever he is making me ready for...I know it's going to be an amazing story of how he rebuilt my life.

## Simple Truths - Summer Picnics – by Marcy Lytle

Summer heat keeps most of us indoors in the summer, in Texas. We might venture out to the lake if we can find a huge shade tree before 10 am, before the sun is high and we start to feel the burn. So picnics, or the idea of a picnic, is long gone until maybe October, when the temps cool off a bit once more. HOWEVER, there are ways to still picnic in the summer – indoors and outdoors! To me, picnics are one of those activities that we need to make happen often, invite our children and friends to join, and pass down this tradition forever and ever...

Picnics are just that fun! And when you make them happen, something just makes your heart lighter and life seems altogether sweet.

Here are some ideas on how to keep the picnic blanket spread and full this summer, even in the heat:

Consider a breakfast picnic. Get up early and find a park where you can spread your blanket and enjoy the cool breezes just after the sun rises. Bagels and jams and other toppings are a great idea. Invite another couple and have morning discussions about the blessings in life. Or take the kids, and chat and tell jokes.

At the other end of the day, decide on a nighttime picnic on the hood of your car. When the stars emerge, spread a blanket atop the car and sit there with icebox cookies and peach tea, and watch the constellations appear. Kids would love this, too. Animal crackers might be their choice of cookie! Give thanks for the specifics of the day you just lived, and then just observe...and say nothing...while you enjoy you're the dark view overhead.

If you have a back patio and no ceiling fan, take out your box fan and plug it in for cool breezes while you picnic! It makes a difference! This way you can still picnic when it's hot. Use fun colorful plates/dishes from Dollar Tree, and pick them out ahead of time, then plan your food. A plate full of fruit, arranged in rows, with crackers and cheese on the side might be just the thing!

Indoor picnics are fun for all! On the floor on top of a large blanket, or put out your lawn chairs inside and picnic in a circle by the fireplace with candles lit inside. A red checkered tablecloth, plates and napkins (from the Dollar Tree) are perfect for a picnic anywhere, anytime. And for indoor fare, consider filling big bowls with different salads – maybe three – to choose from. Pasta salad, green salad, and fruit salad – so fun!

How about a picnic in the car! Turn on the AC, push your seats back, and park atop a hill somewhere with a view. Drive through DQ or some other fast food restaurant and grab your food, then spread it out on the dash over a table runner you've brought from home. Be sure to carry a thermos with you full of lemonade – to go with whatever food you choose! Bring books, and lay back and read or snooze after you've eaten.

You can probably take these ideas and run, and find some more ideas for picnic fun with your friends, your kids or just him and you – a picnic for two. I love planning a picnic. I love using different baskets and plates, and all sorts of fun food. The planning is just as fun as the picnic!

Will you try one of these ideas? Why not! After all, there's a lot more summer coming...and fun to be enjoyed.



## A Troubled Heart

It was still dark outside. I was wide awake, trying not to watch time tick by on my bedside clock.

My breaths came short and fast. And an acidic knot churned in my stomach. Tight pains constricted in my chest. But I know it's not my heart--not my physical heart anyway.

Anxiety gripped me when I was supposed to be resting.

The next morning, I read a [good devotional](#) about rest (Coincidence? I think not! God is good). It was about the kind of rest that is not just about ceasing work, and sitting and not doing anything, but about resting to allow the stillness that brings a time of reflection. It went further to talk about having and maintaining a peaceful state. An untroubled heart.

*I want that.*

I am grateful that my troubled mind is not fretting over finances, as it used to always be. I am well provided for, and I trust in God's faithfulness in that department. I am so grateful. Gratitude seems to ease up the squeeze on my heart.

I am anxious over making the right decoration choices in my guest room, and in time for my guests to arrive (*really? Really.*). I worry about the career change I have made, and how it overwhelms me and I can't seem to get a grip on it, even though I believe God will help me. And I worry about the rebellious, disobedient part of my heart that I cannot gain control of, which feels like it has become an idol. I worry that I un-wantingly practice idolatry before my Lord.

But the list of things that feed the anxious monster in my mind is not important. The contents usually change from day to day. The hamster wheel of worry keeps spinning no matter what the circumstances are.

It's the lack of rest, and the ability to simply rest that troubles me. It bothers me deeply.

Actually, it disgusts me.

I am a woman with faith in the eternal everlasting God for over 30 years. I have heard His voice many times, especially in times of distress, when His voice has been clear and strong in my spirit. His words of comfort are huge and encompassing, and seem like they stretch across the universe.

So, how can I not rest?

I have a worn, wrinkled, no-longer-sticky post-it note taped to bottom edge of my computer monitor with John 14:1 written on it. I have the verse memorized: "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in Me," Jesus said.

Why have I let my heart be troubled?

Why can't I trust in Him?

I think about that the man in the Bible who asked God to help his unbelief (please see [Mark 9:24](#)). And I ask for that, too. Because it is after all, the lack of trust that allows my heart to be troubled.

"Don't LET your hearts be troubled, TRUST in God and TRUST also in ME."

Trust. Where can I get it? How do I apply it? How I can I make it last?

Even as I write this, I have the finished product of a project I worried and stressed over for weeks, sitting—no resting—on my desk. I was so afraid it was not going to be done in time, and I stress-prayed (*is this a thing? It probably shouldn't be!*) over it, asking God to help me.

And He did. As He **always** does.

The project is done, and with weeks to spare.

I confess my lack of trust to God.

I look at that John 14:1 again. Jesus said to trust in Him. Is there a difference between trusting someone, which I do trust Jesus, and trusting IN someone? Is it a faith issue?

Again, I ask the Lord to help my unbelief.

In John 14:1, Jesus had just told His disciples that He is going where they cannot go, yet. And that they should not be troubled, but trust in Him. When they started to ask questions, He tells them "I AM the way, the truth, and the life."

How can I not trust IN Him, who is THE way, and THE truth, and THE life to me, and to everyone on this planet?

*Lord, help me rest in You, please. Fully trusting in You, and resting in You is a work in progress. I am so grateful for Your mercy and grace while I grow. Amen*

*Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series, and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](http://www.amazon.com). Angela writes real, relevant, relatable, and reverent fiction, with an aim toward spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, while hopefully inspiring readers to laugh and/or cry. She loves reading, writing prose, as well as writing and recording music with her husband Tim in their studio in Nashville, Tennessee. Please drop by and sign-up for news and to read new stories and hear new original music at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>. Blessings to you!*



FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME - Back to Reality – by Marcy Lytle**

We anticipate our trips/vacations/weekends away and enjoy planning them – every last detail – almost as much as we enjoy the actual experience. And planning our annual vacation with the kids is the one we most recently planned. Over a couple of months, we collected toys, games, recipes, and more, so that our family could have fun for a few days together.

We did have fun! But when we returned home and those few days were gone in a flash, we both felt nauseated. I know. I was as surprised as you are that he felt the same way, but my husband and I felt that way right when we arrived home, after the fun family time was over. I described it as a “sinking” feeling. It doesn’t last but a few hours, or maybe a day, and then it’s...

back to reality.

Do you ever feel that way? The anticipation of a trip is so much, the planning and thinking of all the fun things, the purchasing tickets and booking hotel rooms, etc. is so exciting. It takes weeks and months to plan for just a few days of fun. But we do it, over and over again.

I was really beating myself up for that sinking feeling, missing the kids and the family time, when we returned home. I don’t like that feeling at all, and began to give thanks for the fun we had, to stave off the sadness I felt.

And then he told me not to feel bad, he validated how I felt, and even said he felt the same way. He reminded me of how hard we worked, how we love the kids and how it’s all normal to feel the way we were feeling. We were sitting on the sofa as it was getting close to dark...and I said I needed to walk, to get outside and...

He went to get his shoes, grabbed my hand, and off we went. We walked outside and yes, it was hot. But it felt good to walk the neighborhood, move our bodies, give thanks again for the fun time we had, and hold hands as we got back into our routine.

Honestly, I also felt overwhelmed with thankfulness that the worries I had before we went didn’t turn out to be anything to worry about at all, as is the case all the time for me!

Getting back to reality after escaping that reality is hard. And I suppose it’s because the escape was so needed, so fun, so unexpectedly thrilling, and we want to just stay there. I enjoyed seeing the kids’ faces every morning, preparing the meals for my family to eat, and most of all watching them have fun in the water on a hot summer’s day, doing nothing but shrieking and swimming and smiling. All of those things flooded my heart with fullness and joy that I don’t experience on a regular daily basis in the grind of the day, the news at night, the cleaning of the house, and the work that has to be done.

So is it worth it, to spend weeks planning, experience the thrill of the getaway, feel warmed inside and settled and thankful...only to be ejected back into reality when it’s all over? YES, it is. And it helps to have another outing on the calendar to plan when we return home.

Coming back down from a high of any kind is like a crash landing at times. And there's really nothing to ease that initial nausea of a reality check that it's all over. But there are things to ease ourselves back to normalcy, like thanksgiving, walks outside, planning the next getaway, praying for friends who need an escape, breathing deeply, and did I say giving thanks? Oh yes, I did.

It's Monday now, those last four days seemed like a dream, and now I'm awake and clothes need to be washed, work is waiting to be done, and everyone is back home, back to routine...BUT the memories are with us all forever. I'm tearing up now, because I'm thankful, and still a bit nauseated...because I'll visit Dad today whose days of vacations are over, as he awaits his final trip. I can't even go there, but today too shall pass, and I'll see the sunset tonight as another day awaits tomorrow, and His goodness too...and mercy...every single morning.

And the true reality is that every day is a trip with Him, if we look up, look out, look around and love others as He loves us. I'm telling myself that truth right now, on a Monday morning, as I wash the river-soaked shoes and clothes we wore just a few hours ago...

## **FRESH THYME - Because I Said So – by Marcy Lytle**

There are only a few moments in my entire life where I remember almost hearing God's voice audibly. Usually, I hear him speak to my heart through his Word, through encouragement of a friend, through music or other things like that, but sometimes...I hear him loud and clear. Maybe it's because I'm really listening or he's really serious, or maybe both! But on this particular day, I heard him say the words that are the title to this story, "Because I said so."

I had been grumbling about prayer. I was asking God why we even need to pray when he knows everything, and he's going to do what he wants to, anyway. I was discouraged because his word requires faith and says so many, many times, but often the answer to our prayers is no – or so it seems. And I was also confused about how to pray, or does it matter how we pray. Do we need to formulate specific words or phrases to get God's hand to move.

I suppose God listened and listened and listened. And then I asked that question that caused him to speak up to where I heard his answer.

I asked, "Why do we even need to pray?"

He answered, "Because I said so."

Now, maybe you're thinking well that's a pitiful answer and not really an answer at all. But think with me...

As parents, there are times when we tell our children that very thing. And it's usually when they've constantly barraged us with the same question over and over again, and we've explained, we've instructed, and they still demand their own way...so we finally tell them it's because we said so.

Maybe he wants to eat ice cream for dinner, and we tell him that he must eat vegetables first. He stomps and says, "Why, daddy?" Perhaps he then says, "But ice cream is good!" And so Dad explains the ingredients and how sugar isn't the best choice for dinner, but veggies have nutrients and all good things. But the little boy doesn't understand these things, so he screams louder, as he swipes the veggies onto the floor.

Imagine Dad, now exhausted from his explanation and the little ears that refuse to hear and the understanding that is lacking. He prepares another plate of veggies and places it in front of the little boy with the ice cream safely tucked into the freezer for enjoyment later...after the boy obeys.

Once again, he screams, "I want ice cream. Why can't I have it?" And Dad finally replies, ending this conversation once and for all with a big, "Because I said so."

Why does Dad do that? He knows his son cannot understand, that his understanding is limited, and that he will continue to ask even though no answer will suffice, except to say yes to ice cream. The loving dad that he is isn't withholding the sweet, but only requiring the savory first. And he has to just put the little boy to the test by stating that Dad's word goes...and that's the final answer.

If the little boy would settle down and eat the bites set before him, he would be so happy to then realize that ice cream awaits him.

I think that's what God was saying to me that day. I think he was saying that my understanding will always be limited, while on this earth, and there has to come a time when I obey his directives because he says to do so...whether I get it or not.

That directive, that instruction, has stuck with me my entire life. Oh sure, I still wonder about prayer, but mostly I remember his words. And I consider prayer a privilege and an honor, when someone asks me to pray for him/her.

I'm thinking that when we hear his voice and rest in the assurance that "Father knows best," we relieve ourselves of all sorts of anxiety...and then we can obey without resist.

I was reminded of his words to me just the other day as I was praying in exasperation for miracles. And then I remembered the wisdom of a father that feeds veggies before ice cream, and my little girl heart smiled as I prayed simply and smiled...a moment in time of trust in His good character and will in my life.

Will I have to do this again? Yes, I will. Because I still question from time to time. But his Word still lingers for a lifetime.

## **FRESH THYME – Preparing for Rain – by Marcy Lytle**

It's hot. It's dry. And it's the season we barely get any rain, and yet we hope. We need it for our gardens, our grass, our swimming pools and our lakes. We don't think about umbrellas or rain boots, because the sky is clear and the temps are high, and we see no hope for rain on the forecast.

I have lots of friends that prepare for what is not, as though it is. They have storage bins in case of an earthquake – cabinets full of necessities to live and to share. Some are planting gardens and minimalizing their living space, in case we have to do without luxuries in life. Still others are stockpiling generators and heaters and flashlights in case another winter freeze stifles our way of life.

I'm thinking the only folks that truly prepare for rain are those that have lived through perhaps a hurricane or rising floodwaters. Disasters where we suffer loss remind us to be prepared next time, so we're ready to rise above the storm.

But back to rain...

By the time this is published, June will be over and it may be one of the hottest driest Junes on record where I live. It's sure showing signs of that now, just 10 days in. I'm discouraged at the forecast and can't believe that temps are already soaring over 100, and August hasn't even arrived. I am praying for rain, like many others, but I have nothing ready for rain should it come!

Here are practical suggestions I found when preparing for rain:

- Check gutters (this ensures rain won't collect on roofs and cause damage)
- Seal windows and doors (to keep the rain outside and not coming inside)
- Consider buying a generator (a power source!)
- Keep umbrellas and/or rain jackets/boots available for downpours (coverage and protection)

Those are just four things to consider if heavy rains are forecast. In other words, there's preparation when rain is coming. But yet we're praying for rain, expecting it to be nothing but hot and dry, because it's always that way in the summer...in Texas.

I thought about how many times I pray for all sorts of things and then do nothing to prepare myself for the answer. What if rains come...in the middle of the summer...a deluge of water? What if prayers begin to be answered for heaven's windows to open blessings down on the friends we've been praying for, for years?

Maybe preparation for rain of that kind looks like:

- Checking our hearts (for any clutter of unbelief)
- Sealing our minds' windows (to keep out lies that seep in)
- Realizing the true power source (and it's not our own strength)
- Keeping our umbrellas open in expectation for the deluge from above.



I'm excited to see what this summer holds, weather wise. Weather has been extreme the past few years, in every season. But most of all, I'm excited to start preparing for the things I'm praying for, things that might be out of season, but necessary in drought...because he said to pray and believe. And that means to be prepared for the answer.

Got your umbrellas handy? Rain boots on? Mouths open wide?

## **FRESH THYME - Shopping Horizontally – by Marcy Lytle**

We have this nice devotional book by Paul Tripp that we read nightly. One thing we read recently was this...

“It never works to ask people to do for you what only God can do.”

He then goes on to say we can't shop horizontally for what is only provided vertically.

I would say that many of us shop horizontally most of our lives, and then shop vertically if the horizontal “store” doesn't have what we need. But we have it so totally in reverse of the way it should be, and I would also say that's the reason we live in a frustrated state of mind most of the time.

- We want others to like us and approve of us, so we perform and follow others...as kids.
- We find out that others are fickle and approval wanes, so we become anxious adults.
  
- We want things and accomplishments to set us up for a secure future and prestige.
- We realize things burn and are lost, and accomplishments are forgotten. We sigh...
  
- We want great health, job security and nice kids so that we can say “life is good.”
- We then experience illness, loss and despair with our teens and life becomes unfair.

It's then that we hopefully empty our horizontal shopping cart of all the things we've filled it up with. I imagine it looking like a Dollar Tree cart that we've filled to overflowing with really cute gadgets and décor and crafts for the moment, but they are used up, broken and discarded before the week's end. (I love Dollar Tree, but you get the picture!)

God told us that nothing in this world would ever satisfy; that is, the horizontal.

He commanded us to love God, love others and our neighbors as ourselves. But we spend so much time loving ourselves, getting mad at others, and blaming God for our misfortunes...that here we sit with empty carts on the curb of life...wondering what happened.

That devotional stuck with me, because I needed the reminder that nothing horizontal is lasting. It's fleeting, just like the grass that grows today and tomorrow burns up in the heat (that's in the Good Book, too.) I needed to shift my focus upward in praise, adoration and give another look at the character of the God that loves me, loves those I love, and has an ultimate plan of good and not evil...no matter how empty my cart looks at the moment.

What would a shopping cart that strolled vertically look like? Well it wouldn't be a cart at all, because we are told that he gives and gives until we can't contain what he gives...and that means there's no “container” that can hold God's goodness and mercy poured out over us.

All I can imagine is that if we train our kids (and ourselves) to shop horizontally from the get-go we might not have to push around a cart of goodies at all. We would find ourselves skipping the aisles looking upward for the blessings we can share with others.

I don't know. It's just something to think about...vertical versus horizontal. It's something to think about often, don't you agree?



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

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

August 2022



TIPS

## **The Dressing – Just Put It On – by Marcy Lytle**

I don't know how we have survived the summer heat here, but we have...and summer is a long shot from being over. Many mornings I wake up and think, "How can I dress cool today?" When actually any clothes I choose are hot! I wore long pants some days, a dress or skirt another, and then my jean shorts on another. I just accepted the fact that I was going to be hot, and went with it... Sometimes, we just have to dress and go! I browsed my closet and put on whatever looked comfy and felt good for the day.

Here's what I've been wearing:

Green baseball tee with Walmart drawstring – See these pants? I have two pairs – one in this pretty summer green and another in light gray. They have been my staple pants for the season. Love them so much! And today I paired the green ones with a baseball tee from Kohls, found on clearance!

Same pants, stripe tee and crossbody in red – This striped tee from Target is so comfy and cool, and it goes with literally everything. I added this crossbody in a pop of red for outings when I wanted my hands to be free.

Old Navy neutral dress with tee over top – This dress was only \$15 at Old Navy and it's sleeveless, but I snagged it! This look is just a graphic tee tied in the middle with a hair tie, and tucked under. This is as comfortable as it looks!

Same dress with halftie under – Same dress from Old Navy, but this time I added a half tee (great for hot days – adds no bulk!) underneath. And look! I tied a scarf on the shoulder – so fun!

Knox Rose top with jeans – This gauze top from Target is one of my favorite summer purchases. I LOVE the stitching, and it was so fun to wear just tucked in my favorite pair of cropped denim. Knox Rose is a fun brand!

Knox Rose dress – Another of the same brand, this dress screamed, "Buy me!" and I did. Aren't the colors so pretty? It is worn with a cotton slip underneath that I got from Amazon - another favorite from summer purchases.

Stripe top and jean shorts – I got this shirt last year from Steinmart. It's somewhat dressy, but I've paired it here with jean shorts. I love to mix dressy with casual. Do you?

Shirt dress with tee and red bag – I found this button up sleeveless shirt dress on the H&M clearance rack for \$10 and I've had so much fun styling it! This time it's a tight tee over top and tucked, and a fun red bag my sister gifted me from SOCO in Austin.

I think cotton, loose fit clothing fits the bill for August...and lightweight pants if you wear them. There's just no escaping the fact that August is hot...but we all know that fall is coming soon (or at least, we hope it is.)

## Seven for You – Heartfelt Gifts – by the Panel of Women

Condolences come in the form of cards, plants, visits, calls, and so many other ways. They're so needed in hard times, and we asked our panel to share some of their most meaningful gifts they gave, or have received, when times were sad and difficult. Maybe you have a friend that's struggling. We hope these will give you an idea on ways to send your heartfelt thoughts in more ways than one.

Here are just some of the things my friend sent me during my two surgeries and for my birthday. I was facing my surgeries alone and these little gifts helped me so much. It's so easy nowadays to use Amazon to send little gifts of cheer and support. No packing, shipping and trips to the post office. The little jar is full of "hugs". I can keep them or give them to others who might need them. We need little bits of kindness these days. – Cathy

Our church ladies set up a 2-week meal train that meant so much to me at a time of loss. Their kindness was so humbling, and the surprise of a daily delivery of something wonderful and nourishing at a time that I couldn't think was really appreciated. I learned that even simple foods like beans and sandwich makings were so welcome. Also, I received several Door Dash gift cards, which were great because they don't expire, so I could use them whenever needed. Our ladies really sustained me during this time. Body and soul. – Debbie

Recently, a young, 30-something year old female family member passed away from breast cancer, leaving her mother and daughter. I bought them each an angel holding a candle that they could keep as a reminder that they now have an angel watching over them in heaven.

When my son died, I had his ashes blown into a glass heart ornament and gave each of those who loved him one of those glass ornaments. Also had paper weights made. – Anita

My dad passed recently and a friend left two orchids on my porch (via HEB delivery – didn't even know they did this!) and these orchids are now part of my tablescape. Another friend left a green plant and a card on my porch. And ...we were in the movies with friends when we got the call about my dad passing. We missed most of the movie, so our friends later sent us a gift card for the theater. *So very thoughtful.* Cards that people took time to write and send meant the world to me... - Marcy

My last hospital stay in November 2021 was pretty stressful because it took a few days to find out what was causing the pain and high white blood cell count, as well as what was the nature of the extremely large growth the CT scan showed in my uterus. During this scary time, I received so many texts and messages of prayers, as well as beautiful flower arrangements. When you are stuck in the hospital not knowing what is going on, it's heartening to know others are praying for you (at times, I could feel these prayers!). And having the sweet flowers to look at was a reassuring reminder that I was loved. – Angela

My dad passed away from lung cancer while I was in my late 30's. I had three kids, a job, several commitments at church and a home to run. My parents stayed with us often during my dad's treatment since they were from a smaller town that did not provide what he needed. My mom moved in with us the last three weeks of his life. I say this because I believe what a person needs is very specific to their situation. During my dad's final days I needed help with the kids!! I needed encouragement that I could handle all of this. I needed comfort so I could

comfort others. We needed food. I received all these things because of the amazing church body we were a part of at the time. Meals showed up at our door, people checked in on us, a dear friend dropped off a beautiful coffee mug filled with lip balm and special soap. I think the key is to try to evaluate what the person/family needs and just show up. So many times people will ask what we need but we don't want to inconvenience others so we say we are "fine" OR we perhaps we really don't know what we need, ourselves. My motto: We pray for God's leading and we show up. - Shelley



## **Three Moms – As School Starts – by the Cousins**

### Mom of Three

We are not the best at preparing for school or routine. We just sort of jump in every year! But as far as what we try to do to prepare for the new year is we do spend time praying over the kids, as we ask them what they would like us to pray for. It's important to have them bring their fears to the Lord and pray for them together, throughout the year.

As far as fear, I don't really start the school with fear. I do pray for safety and protection, that they have good teachers and wonderful friends – basic things. I'm very grateful for the area where we live and love our principal, and I trust that HE has them covered. Now, when my oldest starts middle school next year, check back with me – because I do have some fear there! I'm very grateful for our current circumstances.

As far as our routine, we try to start the beginning of August going to bed earlier and getting up earlier, making sure we are home for dinner together and praying together. We also make sure the supplies are ready and labeled, and backpacks are cleaned out, etc. I tend to do another room cleanout before school starts, to make sure their desks are cleaned and old stuff is thrown out. Back to sleep habits and chores works for us!

And the last thing, this summer was crazy in that there were things that happened out of our control like the passing of a family member – the unexpected. Our family plans were a little off. So we are trying to fit in water parks and other smaller experiences rather than one giant getaway. Lots of swimming!

The weekend before school starts we try to have a family fun day – having a last hooray before school starts. Nothing is on our calendar, and they get to pick a dinner out, etc.

From a mom's perspective, prayer is vital – praying over them and their teachers and their schools – a prayer warrior parent! Invite the kids into the prayer time in the evenings and allow them to talk to you, and also note answered prayers! Finally, give yourself grace, moms. We often worry about all the stress and routines and that doesn't help anyone. Pick one little thing and then add another, instead of trying to do it all at once! Enjoy school starting and all the excitement with grace for all! "Too blessed to be stressed," as my late papa would say.

### Mom of Two

Preparing for school...

Neither of my girls have been school age until this year, but this year our oldest starts kindergarten. I do have some fears, but I'm also very excited for her, as well. She is prepared and ready!

When I do have fears, I seek to ask God to alleviate my fears. I give them all to Him and let him hold those fears.

The more I know about what to expect, the less anxious I am. After orientation and getting prepared, this helped me as well.

Getting prepared doesn't require a lot of change for us, as the girls have already been in preschool all week all day (because we both work away from home), so they are used to getting ready and getting up early. No real "summer off" for them except for vacation.

One thing we will prepare for is dropping the girls off at two different schools, and they will miss each other so much! Who will drop off who will be a change in our routine, and something we will need to decide and be sensitive to each of our daughters, as we make this change.

One last thing we'd like to do before school starts is do some back to school shopping for new supplies and outfits. I did that with my parents as a kid, and I want to do the same now. That is going to be so fun! Maybe we'll also go to a water park and celebrate the end of summer, too. We want to enjoy company with each other before school starts up!

### Mom of Four

Back to school is just around the corner. Preparation has hit me, and I start thinking through the kids' clothes, as they have grown! I start budgeting for shopping and back to school...and then I start thinking about how fast summer has flown by!

Practically speaking, we organize clothes first. The kids go away to their grandmother's house for a week, and that week I sort through all their clothes. I make a list of what they need for school.

Back to school supplies and clothes cost a lot, and we've just had camps and vacation! Grandparents often help up with these things, which is a huge blessing. We also plan a few shopping days in August shopping and more vacation. We also try to get all the kids' appointments taken care of – eye doctor, dentist, well checkups, etc.

The biggest fear for me is how busy we will be. Our oldest starts 7<sup>th</sup> grade sports and band, we have one in football, and two in volleyball. Every fall is busy, but I am concerned about "blowing and going" and not just being tired, but missing quality family time!

Finally, before school actually begins...we try to be intentional with the kids these last few weeks, nothing extravagant, but one on one watching a show, or going on a walk, or getting nails done, enjoying a bike ride, etc. are all on the calendar. We might even have a sleepover. Any time together before the rush of school – we'll take it!

## **In the Kitchen – Cheese, Please – by Marcy Lytle**

Whether you like a lot of cheese or just a little, we're sharing some fun recipes that have cheese in them that are good for a weekend getaway, for friends that gather, or just for a night home watching a good movie! Each one has a little or a lot of cheese...you pick. Maybe you'll want to have entire night of nothing but cheese dishes. Enjoy!

### **Potato Rounds**

We made these on a weekend away, as the ingredients were easy to pack!

#### Ingredients:

- 3 large russet potatoes
- Grated cheddar (finely grated)
- Chives
- Cooked bacon
- Sour cream (if you like)
- Butter, salt and pepper

Bake the potatoes in the microwave, then slice into once inch rounds. Brush both sides with butter, salt and pepper and place on a grill rack placed on a sheet pan. Bake at 350 til the skin edges are crispy.

Meanwhile, cook the bacon, chop the fresh chives and grate the cheese.

When the potatoes are ready, just top with those three and serve. Similar to potato skins!

### **Taki Cheese Balls**

These are also great to pack for a weekend away or to make ahead for guests. And they're so cute on a tray, and tasty with the Taki chip!

#### Ingredients:

- 1 8oz pkg cream cheese softened
- 2 c shredded sharp Cheddar
- Paprika and toasted sesame seeds (or almonds)
- Rolled tortilla chips (Taki – fiesta or fajita flavor)

Combine cheeses in a bowl, shape into small balls, roll in seeds and sprinkle with paprika. Cover and refrigerate overnight. To serve, insert a Taki chip in each one!

### **Healthy Spinach Dip**

There's only a little bit of cheese in this alternate version of the loaded spinach dip recipes you find most places. And this one is just as good!

#### Ingredients:

- ½ c fat free plain yogurt
- 1 oz fat free cream cheese
- 2 t thinly sliced green onion
- 2 t (each) finely chopped yellow and red pepper
- 2 t Italian salad dressing mix
- 1/8 t ground nutmeg
- 1 cup frozen leaf spinach, thawed and squeezed dry
- Radishes and carrot sticks

Combine first seven ingredients, then stir in the spinach. Cover and refrigerate at least an hour, and serve with veggies or chips.

### **Sweet Corn Pizza**

This pizza was absolutely amazing and easy to put together. One of my favorite pizza recipes!

#### Ingredients:

- 3 ears sweet corn, husked and cut off cob
- Chili lime seasoning
- Olive oil
- 1 lb fresh or frozen pizza dough thawed
- ½ c mayo
- 1/3 c crumbled queso fresco
- 1/3 c fresh cilantro, divided
- 1 T lime juice
- ½ t chili powder
- 1/8 t pepper

Grill the corn (removed from the cob) in a bit of olive oil and butter in a skillet, seasoning with chili lime seasoning.

Press dough onto greased baking sheet into 15X10 oval and bake according to directions (8 min) before topping with the corn. Bake again as directed.

While the pizza is baking, add mayo, 3 T of the cheese, 3 T cilantro, lime juice, chili powder and pepper to a bowl. Then pour over warm pizza and corn.

Sprinkle with remaining cheese and cilantro.

### **Layered Hummus**

Such a pretty tasty dip for picnicking or for an appetizer when guests are over, or just to enjoy with pita chips for two!

#### Ingredients:

- 1 10 oz carton hummus
- ¼ c finely chopped red onion
- ½ c Greek olives chopped
- 2 large Roma tomatoes chopped
- 1 large English cucumber chopped
- 1 cup crumbled Feta (I don't like Feta so used queso fresco)
- Pita chips

Spread hummus into a shallow 10 in dish. Layer with all the toppings. Refrigerate til serving with the chips.

## **Last Month's Learning – by Marcy Lytle**

Did you know that HEB delivers gifts? They do! I recently got two orchids from a friend, left on my front porch with a sweet note.

Read the labels when you're shopping Target clearance. I recently came home with a maternity shirt and it didn't look good when I put it on...because it wasn't for me!

I didn't want jalapenos in my salsa recently and substituted green olives instead...tasted great!

After seeing the new Elvis movie, we looked up the actress that played his wife. She's also in *The Society* on Netflix – started watching it. Kind of eerie...stay tuned. (Okay, we've watched more and it's intriguing but you may want to fast forward through many unnecessary scenes!)

My sister says the canned lentil soup at Trader Joe's is amazing. Have you tried it?

Maybe you knew this, maybe it's not even true – but we read that the 21 gun salute is 21 because the 21 is the sum of the digits in 1776!

Taki chips – the fajita or fiesta kind – are great with cheese balls! It was my first time to try them.

My husband discovered a new brand of shoes to him – Huk Gear – and loves them – especially the style Overcast.

I found a cute bathroom organizer at Target that works in the kitchen! It's clear and has drawers, great for markers, tape, scissors and more...on that counter where things collect.

Sympathy cards might be an old-fashioned form of condolence, but they mean the world to those that receive them...such an act of kindness to take the time to write and mail!

I learned from the kiddos what a salp is, at the beach. Have you heard of this creature?

Never ever go to an aquarium in the early afternoon when daycares are there by the numbers! Wait until late afternoon, when they have all cleared.

The Icees at QT are really good...better than other places...I have no idea why.

Just tried Sister Shubert's cinnamon rolls – amazingly good – just like I'd heard they were!

Serving sliced apples? Squeeze lemon juice on the bottom of the dish, lay the slices face down.

Miracles still happen. My cousin's wife's body was shutting down from sepsis and overnight, she literally rose like Lazarus!

Have you tried Mad Dash Mixes? Great for now and...if you're shopping early for Christmas stockings...later.

Marshalls really has the BEST bags for cheap! Recently found a canvas bag, super roomy, with pockets inside to hold all the goodies at the market, or the movies!

You can wear “gratitude” tees any time of the year, not just at Thanksgiving. Yes, you can. And when I did, it made me feel grateful (I needed that change of attitude that day!)

## **SUGAR + *Spice Our Lips are Sealed* - by Angela Dolbear**

The famous song by the 80's pop group The Go-Go's is currently playing in my head, as I write about my favorite summer lip products...SO fun!

This summer, I have been more into glosses, balms and lip oils, and less into a full lip liner+lipstick look. I have so many favorites, it was hard to choose just a few to feature. Okay, so here we go.

### **#1 Favorite most-reached-for lip product: [Vaseline Lip Therapy in rosy lips](#)**

I LOVE this product! I have a feeling it's been around for years, but it's new to me. It's inexpensive, lasts a long time, moisturizes my lips, has a light pretty rosy tint and light shine, *and* I adore the little pink container that is small enough to slip into my pocket.

### **When I want a dressier lip color: [ColourPop Lux Lip Gloss](#), and [MAC Lip Glass](#)**

ColourPop Lux gloss is new to me. Most of the shades are more neutral but still add a light pop of color. The glosses are shiny without being sticky, and they stay on for a long time. The glosses are also inexpensive. I have deeper and brighter shades on my wish list for my next shopping trip to their website, or to Ulta.

MAC Lip Glass is a long-time favorite of mine. I will buy a tube whenever I see it on sale. It is high-end stuff at \$21 a tube, but it looks and acts high quality. It hugs your lips and provides shine and color for hours. It's so beautiful and worth the price. It's my favorite "treat yourself" product.

### **The classic I always have around: [Carmex Classic Lip Balm](#)**

I always have a tube of Carmex next to my bed, in my handbag, in my desk drawer, and in bathroom drawers. Carmex provides deep moisture and shine for hours. It also heals dry and chapped lips too. Carmex is inexpensive and available everywhere.

## **DESERTED ISLAND product of the month:**

I love to use my hands and fingers to apply cosmetics, even though I have more make-up brushes than I will need in my lifetime. And it's loads easier to wash my hands, than it is to wash make-up brushes.

To prevent product overload on my fingers, I wipe my fingertips on a washcloth I keep folded in thirds length wise, in front of my makeup mirror. I was running through tissues so much, and they tear easily, so I purchased a stack of [black washcloths at Target](#), which wash well and clean the makeup off my fingers more thoroughly. Fantastic!

Blessings to you!

*Angela Dolbear, Beauty Editor, is the author of contemporary spiritual novels, such as [THE GARDEN KEY](#) Series, and [THE TORMENTOR'S TALE](#), as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). And she loves writing and recording songs with her husband, Tim (listen on [Sound Cloud!](#)) She is also a self-proclaimed beauty junkie, and has been since long before her mother allowed her to start wearing makeup at the age of 14. She keeps UPS and the USPS busy delivering small boxes on a regular basis from*



*Ulta, Sephora, Amazon, and many independent cosmetics companies to her home Nashville, TN. Please connect with her at [www.AngelaDolbear.com](http://www.AngelaDolbear.com)*



HOME

## **Practical Parenting – Is It Vacation? – by Marcy Lytle**

I see a lot on Instagram and other social media platforms where moms post how it's not really a vacation if you take the kids. And I totally get that. Just packing alone makes for a tired mom when going away with kids – all of their clothes and toys and gear – it can result in exhaustion before we ever leave! And of course, the vacation has to be full of kid friendly activities because Mom and Dad can't just go off and leave the kids in the hotel! Maybe you experienced all of this, just these past couple of months!

Vacationing with kids certainly has its challenges, but we can enjoy it maybe a little more and actually call it a real vacation if we change our mindset.

Sometimes, parents only get away once a year and perhaps that's why they feel this need to have it be a real vacation with down time, reading time, alone time and fun adult time. So, of course, it's disappointing when that ONE vacation is only full of whining kids and water slides and chicken nuggets with fries.

- Get away more often! Yes, vacation costs money and maybe can only happen once a year, but nights away with him (even if it's in your own bedroom after the kids are asleep) can be seen as mini vacays throughout the year.

Sometimes, the vacation is so full of "family friendly" activities that we feel estranged from our husbands because the kids are in our beds and in our hotel room with us ALL THE TIME. How in the heck is that a vacation at all?

- Plan a date night for the weekend you return home, or an entire day – where the kids are away with friends or family. Put this in your vacation itinerary as an end to the fun time, and look forward to it.

Sometimes, we look at other couples on romantic getaways, on a cruise, away on an island and we long for that togetherness. Instead, sticky hands are ruining our one cute outfit that we packed – and he didn't notice anyway because he's corralling the kids one more time from stepping off that cliff they're not supposed to go near...

- Quit looking over there! Comparison and envy are joy killers for sure when traveling with your family. Romantic snapshots of other couples without their kids are cool, but they're not reality and they're not your life at the moment. Let them have their fun, and you choose to laugh and have yours.

Sometimes, we're just exhausted and it seems after a vacation at Disneyworld or the resort nearby just leaves us even more exhausted and we wonder why we went at all. Was it even worth it?

- Yes, vacationing with your kiddos in tow is just for a season and I promise they'll be gone before you know it – and then you'll wish they were with you! Go with the kids, let go of perfection and neatness requirements, and be in the moment in their mess...while you catch his eye and wink...and ENJOY.

Parents, be encouraged. Vacationing is expensive and yes, it seems the kids are with most of us – as we don't have nannies or grannies to keep our kids while we play. Some do, and that's great. But many don't! If only one vacation is on your calendar a year because of funds, give thanks for that one. And make personal memories with him every week – by marking it and making it happen. If the time with the kids is just TOO much to plan and handle, then just do day trips with them from time to time – you don't "have" to take two weeks away to show others that you vacationed! And finally, do what makes your family happy and works, letting go of what others think or what they're doing or what they seem to have together. Look at your own family and gaze at their sticky fingers, dirty feet and listen to their screams of delight and cuddle with them in the middle of the night.

I promise...they'll grow up and even become better travelers, and you'll have more time to yourselves, and you'll look back and laugh at what's making you cry now...

## **I Don't Do Teenagers – Who They Are – by Marcy Lytle**

Labels...names...they're changing everywhere...and our kids are growing up in a world where our daughters may no longer be defined as women, and our sons may no longer be called men. While many changes are wonderful, labels that have derogatory meanings behind the changes are confusing and could cause our children so much angst in identifying who in the heck they are.

Now, maybe more than ever, our kids need to know who HE says they are...especially as school begins another year. And whether they want to hear it or not, we need to speak it. I was thinking the other day how important it is for parents to remember that the seeds they plant might spring up fruit quickly...but more often than not...that fruit may not be seen for a long time. So that's why the seeds are so important!

One thing He says is that He is the vine and we are the branches. This is great for our kids' identity in Christ. From him flows all the life we need and it flows right out to us...freely and beautifully as we stay next to HIM.

Our kids are **branches** connected to great strength.

John 1:12 says our kids are children of God...this means they have access to everything the Father has for them – protection, salvation, grace, and even discipline – to bring them life.

Our kids are **children** to the most loving Father...God.

John 15:15 says he calls us friends. Jesus really loves hanging out with us and revealing to us his innermost character and love – he's a true friend.

Our kids are **Jesus' friends**...always.

Secure is another name we can place our kids' foreheads – because Jeremiah states he has a plan and a future for our kids of good and not evil.

Our kids are **secure** and no one and nothing can snatch them from the Father.

The bible also says we are his workmanship, created in his image, and that makes us valuable to our Creator.

Our kids are **valuable** to the highest degree to the One who made them.

We are also told that we are exceedingly loved by God in that while we were sinners (separated from God) he died for us so that we might be set free from the penalty of sin and death.

Our kids are **loved** and free to be who God created them to be – teens who inhabit His praise.

Branches, children, secure, valuable and loved...all labels they can wear and stand up tall and represent the God who calls them friends. It's a confusing time for teens, and if we speak the truth about who they are, it won't matter what others say they are or should be or cannot be.

## **An Adage a Day - Happy as a Lark – by Carole Gilbert**

We live in the country beside a lake and our little country town is a protected bird sanctuary. So, we have lots of birds of all kinds all around us. I love birds! I really do, but not on my back porch!

This last spring, I bought a couple of small decorative lanterns to replace my old ones. I hung them up beside my back porch table. A few mornings later I saw two small pretty birds trying to build nests inside them. They were so pretty with little yellow breasts, and I loved hearing them sing but I could not let them nest in my lanterns. I knew when their babies came, they would give us a mess and a hard time when we sat on our porch.

I watched as the male brought little twigs for the female to inspect before adding it to the beginning of the nest and I hated when I had to go pull it out! I did this as they started building not once, but twice! They were just as stubborn and determined as I was. After cleaning out my lanterns the second time, I put tape over the top to help keep the little birds out. They still came and tried to get inside but the tape stopped them. I felt so bad. I would go outside and tell them they couldn't nest on my back porch, try the neighbor's house. Funny thing is they would sit there on the top of my lanterns and listen to me. I guess they had gotten so familiar with me that I didn't scare them when I went outside to shoo them away. After that, they didn't come as often but on occasion they would, and they'd sit on my taped lanterns and look inside our window. They would sit there singing knowing it was only for a visit and that they couldn't stay. I loved seeing and hearing them. And I loved that they seemed content when they flew off to the nest that I'm sure they built somewhere else.

My grandmothers loved birds! And we lived in the country then, too. I grew up hearing idioms and old quotes from them along with my great grandmother. I can't remember all their phrases, but occasionally I will say one that's in the back of my mind in my everyday conversation. It's like remembering an old recipe. I think, "Oh Yeah! I haven't thought of that one in a long time." Idioms and old sayings used to be referred to in a lot of conversations, but now no one seems to have heard of them, especially younger people.

One day, I was talking, and I referred to a situation making me "happy as a lark." I hadn't thought of that one in many years. It made me wonder about the little birds. Were they as happy as a lark now somewhere else? Were they larks? So, what does this idiom mean?

"Happy as a lark" refers to being extremely happy and even carefree. It sounded like my little birds. This idiom started in the middle 1800's and is referring to the joyful melodious singing of the lark. Did you know larks come from a species of birds that includes over 50% of all birds and that larks can even sing while flying? Even in the Bible, larks represent hope, joyfulness, and laughter, which makes them an excellent example for a Christian woman to focus life on, and especially with how the larks love to perch and sing, happily, almost nonstop.

Is this feeling of being "happy as a lark" why the little birds were singing? The female was expecting. And her male was working on preparing them a home. Their singing was so

beautiful, and I wondered if the little birds were as happy as they sounded. It was definitely “music to my ears.” The little mama bird made me think of the mamas I know. And I know they’re like me feeling that all the time and anytime I get to be with my babies, no matter how old they may be, makes me “happy as a lark.” How about you?

## **Tiny Living - Alternative Lifestyle – by Leyanne Enterine**

Private jets, fancy hotels, limousines, fine dining, hanging out backstage, celebrities, after parties, extravagant vacations... yes, yes, I have to tell you, I have an alternative lifestyle. It's all because my husband is an audio engineer and the production manager for a comedian.

All the trailer talk is true, it is tiny, we do barely fit, but when we travel with my husband we live a lifestyle like no other. I suppose it's the best of both worlds. Both situations are pretty extreme. I feel like I'd like a happy medium, but this is the life we have right now and I will be grateful.

I'm sitting in business class in my chair that can lay down, with my warm blanket and pillow they gave me, being fed all the things – typing this while on my way to Maui. I mean one cannot complain for sure!

I was just sitting here watching *Cinderella* and thinking I feel the same as her, though the lifestyle keeps switching back and forth, back and forth for me. One day, I'm living in a tiny trailer barely fitting our new school books in it, because there's just no more room. To the next day, when I'm in a fancy plane headed to an extravagant vacation to meet for dinner with famous people! It's nuts! Though I don't fully desire either of these lifestyles, they both come with their advantages and disadvantages. I suppose it's good to see both sides of things!

The trailer life is simple, though squished, and it's *a trailer!*

The rich and famous life is exciting, but also exhausting with late nights and lots of smiling and talking with people I don't know. I know that sounds strange, but for an introvert it's physically and mentally a lot! I love our down time during the day to sleep in and recharge with the family.

I love to travel, so to have this experience is truly amazing and we'll always remember the fun family times that we've gotten to have together in new places! And I suppose it's taught us to get out of our shell and interact with another world that we would have never been a part of and hear their stories and their lives, and to connect. It's also good to see how maybe those who don't have as much still thrive. I have more compassion when I walk in their shoes.

Rich or poor, everyone has a story, everyone struggles at some point. I'm thankful to live in it all both/and - and be able to try and connect - no matter where someone is on their journey, as well.



## **A Night to Remember – Obey and Pray – by Marcy Lytle**

School is ramping up again and most likely teachers everywhere are feeling the stress of the preparation and even the safety of their classroom. It's good to pray with our kids for their own fears as they face a new school year, but what if we spent time as a family praying for the leaders at the schools? It might ease up everyone's stress, and the bible says so much about praying for our leaders!

Preparation: Have these items on a table ready to use as a prop – a book that one child can easily read, a pair of reading glasses (or any glasses), an apple, and about 10 sheets of scattered paper on the desk.

I Timothy 2:1-2 says, "I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority..."

What preparation do teachers have to do for the school year? They have to hang things on their walls, prepare lessons, get their papers and books and supplies ready, and it's a LOT of work! That can create a lot of stress, especially if they have their own children at home to take care of, as well.

*Ask one child to gather and stack the scattered paper.*

Imagine if you had 50 scattered papers every few hours you had to organize! It would drive you crazy!

Teachers are in authority at school, while kids are in their classroom. This doesn't mean we have to believe everything they tell us, but we do have to obey and respect them while they're teaching. This means we obey the rules like raising our hand before speaking and staying quiet when the teacher is talking.

*Ask one child to read a page from the book, while the rest of the family chatters and doesn't listen.*

How did you feel, while reading, when no one was listening? Not good, right? It felt like your listeners were being rude...and they were!

Teachers are people too, with families, children, homes to run, bills to pay, meals to cook and lots more. They need lots of prayer support for all of their personal pressures away from the school building.

*Ask one older child to take the apple and cut slices for all to enjoy.*

Did you know that the idea of giving a teacher an apple originated back when many people grew apple trees and had so much, they wanted to share out of their plenty with the teacher for his/her good work? It was a healthy snack offered in appreciation for a teacher's education.

Teachers have to read SO MUCH. They find books for the classroom to read, they read notices and bulletins from the principal, they read their own textbooks from which they teach, and they read the kids' papers that they turn in for a grade. That's a lot of reading!

*Ask one kid to put on the reading glasses and ask everyone to close their eyes, and then have that child lead in prayer for the hands, feet, and eyes of the teachers for the coming school year. For joy as they prepare, strength as they grow tired on their feet, and rest for their eyes as each day ends.*

Finally, that verse says to give thanks for those in charge. We will pray as a family for the teachers often, and remember to find things to be thankful for. Maybe she comforts us when we fall on the playground, perhaps he picks us when we raise our hand, or maybe our teachers keep order when one kid gets unruly in the classroom. All of those things are things to be thankful for.

Praying for others increases our own peace. And now that we've prayed for the teachers, let's pray for each other as we hold hands and give thanks...

*(Allow each child to express their fears or stresses about the school year – and offer them to God – wrapped in thanksgiving.)*

## Chipped China – In Between Both And – by Jennifer Lytle

August bridges the end of summer with the outset of fall. Despite the sweetness of ending one season while basking in the setting of the next scene, the between seasons can yield discomfort. I find insecurity crops up for me with the anticipation of unknowns.

As a family, we will be in between several stages this season. For this article, I was going to attempt and focus on one. But after sitting with a new friend who mentioned the word *transparent* a minimum of a dozen times . . . I'll consider her offer as inspiration and share the "balls in the air" the Lord has my family and me juggling.

This fall . . . my family might be moving. *Eeek*. Moving has been a both/and experience for me. It is both exciting and exhausting. We will have tons of square footage. Yay!? Can I keep up with the cleaning? Can I hire a housecleaner? It is both stressful and satisfying. What if the neighbors are horrible? What if there are rodents? It is both worrisome and wonderful. What if we lose our beautiful space for a busted one? What if the commute turns out to be a blessing?

Also this fall . . . my family will officially become a wholly homeschooled family . . . well, our youngest *technically* will not be school-age just yet. Oh, my gosh. School is such a personal and encompassing scenario. It is so emotionally and relationally sensitive in many ways. It is political. It is personal. It is expansive. Does it dominate the conversation of every conversation I have with other similar-stage families or those who have already passed that season? I am not even ready to talk about this yet with others outside of my immediate, immediate community. (Like, no one, really.)

This fall . . . I will forgo a traditional work position for self-employment. This is something people do when their financial lives are secure, no? This is something people do when they're able to check all of those boxes. Do I have three months of expenses saved? Do I have steady revenue? Do I have repeat customers? Have I replaced my income? No. No. Maybe. Not yet?

Do these opportunities indicate The Father's confidence in me? Is this affirmation of both advanced maturity and expanded capability? Does He trust me more? Is He growing me?

Will we be comfortable? Am I going to do it all well? Are my children going to thrive and have what they need for a good future? Am I enough? Do I even need to be enough?

These questions loom. If I was me 20 years ago, the questions would swallow me. Doubt could squash the possibilities of both laughing and leaping into my Father's loving, trustworthy plans. What is the worst that can happen? I have to find another job? Okay. Easy. What if we have to call pest control? Check. We did that before. He's got me. He's with my husband. He certainly has got my children. If Abraham could entrust a servant to find his son a wife, I can entrust both our school year and future learning to Jesus. If an angel rolled away the stone so Jesus could walk out of the grave, I can take steps away from traditional work and find freedom in something new. If a gold coin could come from the mouth of a fish for taxes, our new space can sing on key again.

*Father, thank you for changing seasons. Thank you for the opportunities to grow and build and prune back. I am looking to you and know I can be both unfamiliar with the terrain and cared for perfectly.*



YOU

## Inner Strength – Triggers – by Michelle Lynn

Have you ever had your thoughts and feelings become triggered by something else?

Until recently, I thought triggers were something that was robbing me of my inner strength. I've come to find out that identifying triggers leads to greater inner strength.

As I write this article, it triggers thoughts, questions and unresolved feelings about a past experience with a family member. I think to myself, "I've got to focus on writing my article. I'm frustrated that I can't focus." So I decide to journal about what's distracting me so that I can focus. Guess what? I triggered, not distracted.

One trigger that came up as I was writing has to do with my moving situation. My boys and I *have* to move. One place that is an option, and yet one that I don't want to consider, is moving to a place called Hutto. The reason I hesitate is that my boys and I lived in Hutto with my mom, about two years before she passed away. She was very helpful in supporting the boys and me, and then that turned into us helping her as she got sicker and sicker. We did eventually move out, but I continued to go by and visit her and take care of our house. I drove her to the hospital a few times. Eventually her health decreased so rapidly that she went into hospice and passed away a week later.

So, as much as I would like to move on from that experience I'm just not ready to do that, yet. I don't know if I'll ever be able to not be triggered by that memory, but I am open to exploring the question.

My boys have been amazing through all the moves. With each move, I prayed how to explain it to them. Honestly I don't remember the exact words I shared, but I know I was empathetic and positive.

That being said, the other emotions that moving triggers in me are the emotions and thoughts that arise while I'm placing my boys through all of this change.

How do I cope with all these triggers?

Aside from writing, I...

reflect,  
pray,  
share my thoughts with a friend or counselor,  
create art that expresses my feelings,  
read a book,  
etc.

This next journey is a process.

If you're in a season of triggers as well, praise yourself for every step you take, as small as you may think it is. And if I can do this, with His help, so can we both!

## Life in a Nutshell – Okay with Just Me – by Jill Montz

Rest. Much needed. Much enjoyed.

Genesis 2:2

“...so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.”

Exodus 23:10-11

“For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest your crops, but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused.”

Leviticus 25:4

“But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of Sabbath rest, a Sabbath to the Lord.”

If you read my July article, you might recall I decided to take the entire seventh month of the year off from all forms of social media. My mind, heart, and soul needed a rest from the constant “scroll.” During the time away, I learned some interesting things about myself, my tendencies, my strengths and my weaknesses, and what I really enjoyed and didn’t enjoy about social media. Here is what I discovered in the silence.

Before July rolled around, I started *practicing* stepping away from social media by putting time limits on the apps on my phone. This helped me start to ween myself off the distractions I so loved. However, I added “mind games” to my phone with the thought that I was helping my brain stay active. What I was really doing was using the games as a way to check out and decompress during the day. So I took those off my phone, too. I didn’t want to substitute one distraction for another.

When July first rolled around, I found myself checking my weather app quite often (surprise, surprise...still hot in Texas). I ordered a lot off Amazon (can you say “prime days?”) And I found myself googling all kinds of odd things (what’s going on in Burma these days?) I still turned to my phone for any kind of distraction.

When I had a difficult call to make at work, I swiped my phone on to escape.

When the line at Chick-fil-a was too long, I swiped my phone on to distract myself.

When I couldn’t sleep at night, I swiped my phone on to look up insomnia.

When I felt overwhelmed, I swiped my phone on to order something to fix it.

When I felt sad, I swiped my phone on to look at pictures that brought me joy.

I still used my phone as a way to escape from dealing with my thoughts and feelings. While social media used to be my “drug of choice” to escape me, I found myself using anything handy to still run from my inner self. But after about the fourth time of checking the weather in Burma (desperate times call for desperate measures,) I started to call myself out on what I was really doing and made myself start naming what I was feeling and thinking in those moments. It wasn’t as fun as ordering more shoes off my QVC app, but I think it was more gratifying for my soul.

On the bright side, without spending hours a day scrolling through my feeds I was actually able to get a wealth of things done I had put off because I was “too busy” before. I cleaned, I organized, and I donated lots of stuff. One day, while I was cleaning my living room shelves, I realized I had no physical pictures of Dotty (other than school pictures) since her preschool days. So I printed hundreds (literally hundreds!) of pictures off my phone and even framed a

few and put the rest in photo albums. I had been using Facebook as my online scrapbook, which is fine and something I will probably go back to I am sure, but it was nice to have some physical pictures to look at and flip through.

I also went to the library, checked out several books, and read to my heart's content. I spent hours with my nose in a book and lost all track of time. It was bliss! I had forgotten how much I loved to read for the joy of reading!

During July, several fun and happy things happened and I found myself wanting to post about them, but instead of sharing these events with the world I shared them with my closest circle of friends and family. While I love (and missed) seeing happy posts about my friends' kids, vacations, pets, and life events, I also realized that social media makes me feel closer to people than perhaps I really am. Sometimes I know so much about a person's life (and them about mine) that I actually feel connected to them when in reality I am not. To me this is a positive and a negative side for social media. In some ways I can connect with lots of people all at once, but in other ways it makes me be lazy about really connecting with those I am closest to.

A downside to being off social media is I did miss some great moments, posts, and events. I was so grateful to the friends who kept me in the loop when they noticed Dotty got invited to a party or when an event was coming up they knew I wouldn't want to miss (like food trucks in town...yum!) The truth is that social media is a part of our daily lives and can be a useful tool. This is one of the main reasons why I know I will go back to some form of social media use in the future. As a society, we use it as a primary tool of communication...and that's a great use for it.

I was also sad I missed loving and liking some posts by friends and family. Many had great life events to share such as kids getting baptized, celebrating another year of being cancer free, braces-free smiles and toothless grins holding a note for the tooth fairy, first jumps from the diving board with no floaties, trips to the lake, the beach, the mountains, and even the grocery store where no one had a meltdown in the candy aisle. I missed "hearting" all those fun moments, but again I was over the moon excited when I got a text message or a call to include me when my people realized I was off social media. My circle felt a little cozier in those moments.

But the craziest thing of all during my time off social media is...I swear time slowed down! I know for decades, or at least since Dotty was born, I have been begging the hands of time to turn slower. And for the entire month of July it felt like they did. I found myself looking back at the end of the day and not feeling like I had rushed through it. I didn't feel like I missed it. I felt like I was there for every second. Because I didn't have the option to "check out" of life with social media for minutes or hours at a time, I felt like I was living life looking up rather than looking down at my phone. It brought me such joy to feel like the days weren't flying by.

I know many might not feel the same way as I did during my month away from social media. Many might still feel rushed, or their lives might still be chaotic, but for me it was a much needed rest and restoration for my soul.

I still haven't decided how I will reenter the world of social media. I hope I don't jump back in cannon ball style and start swimming in the deep end of things. I hope I find just sticking my toes in every once in a while is enough to stay connected without going under. But, time will tell. Until then, if you want to know the weather in Burma or what is "today's special value" on QVC, I must say I really don't know. It took some time, but I finally found myself okay with

me...my thoughts and my feelings. I was able to sit and just be. In fact, some moments I was so content to sit and just be, I fell asleep. Just ask Dotty and the nail tech at the nail salon. They said I looked so peaceful (and only snored ever so softly). Another perk to no social media...I got in a few more naps in July!



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

Sometimes, we have the energy and motivation to stay healthy...and then we fall off the wagon...because of obstacles. Life happens, we grow weary or depressed, or all sorts of stumbling blocks make us lose our focus on what makes us feel good and stay good. It often helps to identify some of those obstacles so that they can then be removed, and we are back on the healthy habit road again...

**Guilt** – This is a biggie. We haven't walked in days, we aren't going to the gym like she does, and we don't enjoy swimming like they do. So we sit at home and feel guilty that we can't perform our healthy routines like someone else is doing. We all know that comparing is useless, so stop it! No guilt, when it comes to making healthy choices. Start with what you love, choose it, and do it. And lose the guilt.

**Shoes** – I get it. Feet hurt. And they hurt more and more as those years pile on. I've been out and wanted to take a walk, only to realize I'm wearing the wrong shoes. I've found that keeping my best walking shoes in the car works for me. My shoes are a pair I bought right when the pandemic hit and we began walking more. If these shoes are always there, I'm more apt to grab them and go.

**Time** – We wake up and our minds start turning, the lists get longer, and the sighs become louder...because we have so much to do. Time gets away from us throughout the day, and by evening we realize we've sat all day, made bad food choices, and it's then time for bed. It helps to have set times when we move. Maybe it's first thing when our feet hit the floor, or during lunch, or for me – it's about 4:30 when I like to head out for my walk. If healthy habits become routine, on the daily schedule, they're more likely to stay on the list.

**Taste** – Oh my gosh! It's hot outside and ice cream or anything cold and sweet is calling our name. That's okay! Remember we did away with guilt up above? We can still taste the sweetness of summer without indulging in the heaviness that goes with it. Portions are so important here. Share a dessert, instead of eating the whole thing. Order one scoop of ice cream, not three piled high with all the toppings. And try at least three healthy choices in your meals this month – maybe add one piece of fruit, more nuts daily, or a leafy green. Little choices and steps make big strides...

**Tiredness** – The heat has gotten to us and we're too tired to move. Life has been hard and we don't have the motivation to exercise or eat properly, so we do neither. One can be tired even if one sleeps, if the mind is full and the heart is heavy. Practice the art of laying your burdens down at his feet, where they belong. He really does care for you. This will lift the heaviness. Rest by still water, like He invites you to do – without guilt or shame. Drink from his goodness and eat at his table. Then rise in his strength. If you're too tired for good health, close your eyes and meditate on Psalm 23 – start there. He will give you rest, so much rest.

What obstacles keep you from good health? Identify them. Ask your friends or kids to tell you what they see. Write them down. Pray about them, and work on one at a time. Smile more. Give yourself grace. And start stepping forward...

## Life Right Now - August Pie - by Jennifer Stephens

So I made this pie the other day.

August Pie.

I read somewhere it's called August Pie because it's made using whatever summer berries or fruit you like. It's super easy to make. Just grab a bag or two of frozen fruit (yes, fresh would probably be better, but this is what I happened to have) and toss it into a ready-made pie crust (again, you *could* roll your own, but Pillsbury does such a nice job...). Top it with a mixture of cream, flour, sugar, and spices, then bake. Sometimes, I make it with just peaches or with peaches and blueberries.

But this time I threw in a bag of mixed berries with the bag of peaches. Oh.My.Word.

All those different flavors blended together...mmm, the deliciousness!

Peaches on their own are pretty tasty, but when mixed with the zing of the raspberry, the sweetness of the strawberry and the hearty strength of the blueberry, the creamy lusciousness of the peach just bursts forth! They're better together.

When it's growing, the peach doesn't look down disdainfully from its perch and profess to the strawberry, "I live the lush, high life in the branches of this sturdy tree, and you come from a simple, lowly plant." The raspberry doesn't criticize the peach knowing peaches face a personal struggle of separating their flesh from their pit. And the blueberry doesn't snub the scarlet strawberry because they're on different sides of the grocery isle.

Isn't that exactly like people? At least, how we should be. When we come together with people from different backgrounds with different perspectives and different life experiences, we are better. When we choose love over hate, peace over conflict, and act with gentleness over hostility, we are better. When we seek common ground before contradictions, we are better.

Now occasionally we'll unexpectedly take a bite of fruit that makes our mouth get all squishy and we're forced to spit out the sour culprit as quickly as possible. When that happens, do we say, "AlIIIIII blueberries are horrible and I'm never eating another one again!"? Of course not. We don't blame the actions of that one BAD blueberry on all the other GOOD blueberries.

We shouldn't do that with people either. We might encounter someone sour – but don't let that single sour soul leave a bad taste in your mouth.

Because just like mixing berries and peaches makes for a better fruit pie – tossing in a cup of kindness, a teaspoon of love, and a dash of self-control with a whole lot of patience creates the perfect recipe for we the people. And through the fruit of the spirit, WE are better...together.

*"But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another." Galatians 5:22-26*

**August Pie**

1 refrigerated pie crust  
1 pkg. frozen peaches  
1 pkg. frozen mixed berries  
1 cup heavy cream  
1 egg  
2/3 cup sugar  
1/4 cup flour  
1/2 t. cinnamon  
1/4 t. salt

1. Heat oven to 400
2. Put pie crust in pie dish and add fruit
3. Stir the other ingredients and pour over fruit
4. Bake for 50 minutes
5. Cool and eat! (It's also good warmed up and served with vanilla ice cream)

## **Under Pressure – Don't Damage the New – by Debbie Haynes**

There's this passage in Luke 5 about not placing a piece of new garment on an old one and not placing new wine into an old bottle. Maybe you've read it. I've read it many times, but the meaning behind the story was always vague to me. I sure didn't get the physical meaning of it because I've often taken new fabric pieces and mended old garments with them, and the patch held well. So obviously, I was missing the point.

I decided to research the meaning. It is saying that no one in their right mind would tear up a new garment (made with new cloth) and put that piece onto an old garment, because it would render the new garment damaged and unwearable. It's not about saving the old garment but rather about NOT damaging something new...making it unusable.

So what, then, is the spiritual application?

John's followers had come to Jesus to ask how they patch their old ways (regulations and rules under the law) with this new salvation Jesus was teaching. The old is all they had known. And Jesus' answer was no – you'd never cut a hole in a brand new garment to try to save something old. This made them realize that the law and the gospel could not be combined and made into one.

On another occasion, Jesus' followers asked why they had always fasted (according to law) but Jesus' disciples weren't fasting at all? Jesus replied with a wedding parable about the guests and the bridegroom and bride. He was great at telling stories those listening could understand.

As I read further, scholars said that since glass wasn't invented yet, the bottles used to hold liquids in that day were actually goat skins, tightly stitched together and treated with oil to form water-tight containers. Once the wine or liquid was used up, if the bags weren't refreshed, refilled and retreated like when they were new, they would become dry, brittle and cracked – and liquid would seep out. The bag would then become useless.

In other words, when we use up what fills us – if we don't maintain the container properly - then adding something new will destroy what's inside, plus the bottle! It's not a one-time fix, but a constant renewing of the heart, the container of God's spirit.

If we are a shriveled bottle, cracked and dry – holding on to past ways, hurts and rules – we can't hold "new wine." Our bottles have to be refreshed so that the wine AND the bottle are preserved.

We all tend to cling to the old. I suppose it's human nature. But when we stay at Jesus' feet and ask for grace, he prepares our bottles to be cleaned, refreshed and oiled to accept the new wine. The old may taste better and be familiar, but there is life in new things. Jesus told us we would do even greater works than he did...reach more people than he could...while on the earth.

70 times in scripture we read that God planted forests of majestic cedars and watered them from their roots up. The cedar wood was then used for cleaning and the wood for building. And

in Isaiah 43 it says God will do a new thing, to not look back to the hold or used shriveled wineskins. Instead, he says he will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert and never forsake his people!

Pray with me:

*Father, we come to sit at your feet to prepare our wineskins for new wine. We want the old to melt away and to clean and refreshed. We desire to let go of ideas of how things must be, but rather be open to renewal of how things will be...as you plant something new in our hearts.- Amen.*



MARRIAGE

## **In This Together – Sometimes, My Darlings – by Bekah Holland**

Just last month, I wrote all about how my husband and I have gotten so much better at communicating and not getting our undies in a bunch about little things. Which means, of course, that we got to take that little tidbit of information out for a test drive.

We had a house full of teenagers, which is apparently just our life now, and my husband questioned me on some things having to do with said house full of teenagers. Now, his words shouldn't have bothered me. He wasn't trying to be combative or hurtful. But, for whatever reason, my brain translated his opinions as - *he thinks I'm not doing anything right and I don't think I'm doing anything wrong and obviously he thinks I'm a bad mom, maybe human, how dare he, men, ugh, maybe I am a bad mom and a bad human* - and then descended down an impressive shame spiral. Now, I realize just how dumb this sounds. And it wasn't exactly the kind of moment I'd like mentioned in my eulogy. BUT, there were some good things that came out of this less than ideal moment.

First off, as a life long people pleaser, my immediate reaction to any and everything is, "I'm sorry. Let me fix it," regardless of whether or not it was mine to apologize for or fix. But this time, I didn't apologize. Probably, it's because I was plotting ways to smother him in his sleep. But still, it's progress, people! Second, I made myself sit with the uncomfortable feeling of having someone I love upset with me. This is not how I like to spend my time. I'd much rather ignore all the less than rainbows and sunshine issues and imagine myself frolicking through a field of flowers. The fact that I do not frolic and also have allergies and should not kick up a field full of pollen (and also, that this is Texas and we have had approximately 743 days of 105 degree temps; therefore, everything beautiful is dead) is completely beside the point.

I sat with the feeling and tried to figure out my role in it. Was I wrong? Was I being overly sensitive and creating a problem where there wasn't one? Was I right, and my husband better bring tacos along with an elaborate apology? And since I couldn't come up with a good answer to any of those questions, I didn't just shove it down like Bekah 1.0 would. Bekah 2.0 asked. Not to be difficult or start an argument, seeing as I'd been playing out this non-existent fight in my head for 24 hours, but to try to see from another lens. And maybe try to be less cray-cray.

Guess what happened? Nothing. Nothing happened. I brought it up. Said husband didn't think it was a big deal and was not upset, so all of the hours I gave to this not so epic Jerry Springer-like event, were a complete waste of my day as well as my serotonin and dopamine levels as I prepared for every possible way this "fight" could go. I have definitely been known to allow completely ridiculous scenarios to live rent free in my head. Ask me who that benefits? Not my husband, who has had to endure my morning aftermath of fury after committing some kind of atrocity in my dreams. Not my children, especially not my oldest, a teenage girl who is free spirited, strong willed, witty, brilliant, painfully sarcastic and is the world's most talented eye roller.

The things I allow to take up space in my mind never ever just stay there. They spill out into my actual real life and affect my actual real people. So I have to be really intentional about squashing the crazy before it starts seeping out into reality. Am I great at this? Nope. Do I still have to talk myself down off a ledge when my husband makes some unforgivable mistake in dreamland? Sometimes. I think that being a highly sensitive person leaves me vulnerable to taking on a lot of what other people are feeling. Which can be equal parts wonderful and terrible. If I'm taking care of myself and my needs are being met, being able to walk beside someone I

love and sit with them in their pain can be and has been incredibly beautiful to experience. Because mostly, we all just want to be seen and understood and accepted. But if I haven't been taking steps to ensure that I'm healthy both mentally and emotionally, I have been known to take on hurt feelings and pain of others and heaping it onto my own pile of big feelings and it doesn't take long for me to feel buried under an avalanche of other peoples issues. I'm not helping them. I'm not helping me. I'm just stuck and trying to figure a way out of that kind of quicksand is a whole thing...and not a whole fun thing.

Next, this usually requires more work, lots of extra time with my therapist, lots of peeling back layers of both real and imagined problems as well as really hard conversations with the people I love that almost always include my having to apologize for any number of things. Let me just tell you that as a person who is a recovering over-apologizer, it's WAY easier to apologize for things that aren't really your fault than to take ownership of stuff that most assuredly is. But I guess that's all part of this whole human experience, as well as figuring out a balance of strength and humility. Because if I don't find that balance, I will find plenty of opportunities to practice the humble thing.

Life is funny like that. And I've always thought God has a sense of humor and has to get a kick out of watching us backtrack when we make our messes after acting like a taller version of a toddler demanding to do it our way. But thankfully, despite all of the starts and stops and resets, God is always patiently waiting for me to try again the right way. And so are my people. And even more thankfully, they lovingly wait for me to pull up my big girl britches and take the next right step.

All of this rambling all boils down to one thing....don't quit. Don't quit messing up. Don't quit stepping out and stepping up. Sometimes you'll fall flat on your face. But sometimes, sometimes, my darlings, you fly.

*"If you can't fly, then run. If you can't run, then walk. If you can't walk, then crawl. But whatever you do, keep moving forward." Martin Luther King Jr.*



## **Date Night Fun – Not Just for Kids – by Marcy Lytle**

There are things kids do that look fun to me, so why not incorporate them into date night with him? I've often envied the kids' meals because they get a little toy or treat inside, and I also note that kiddos have fun laughing and squealing at the most simple of activities! It's August, the heat is on, and we need a bit more laughter and simplicity and childlike views of the complicated world...don't ya think?

### **Here are five ideas:**

Paint Rocks – Find a big shade tree by a river where you can set your chairs and enjoy some cold lemonade and shortbread cookies together. Search for and find some nice flat rocks. Pull out your paintbrushes and paints and design good words, pretty pictures and awesome color to leave behind for the next couple that arrives at your same spot. What a fun date!

Legos, Sure! – Have you put together the more difficult sets of Legos, lately? They're not for the faint of heart! There's a really cute Bonsai Lego set. Have you seen it? And even a flower bouquet. It would be fun to have "building" snacks as well...like graham crackers with strawberry cream cheese and fresh strawberries. Or check out the Windmill cookies from Trader Joe's. You might even want to display your creation in the house, when you're through!

Battleship or Bingo – These two games...do your kids have them...or something similar? If you choose bingo, invite another couple and make it a night of snacks and prizes. If you choose Battleship, make snacks together that one might eat on a big boat! Maybe a buffet of some sort, with cool drinks. Laugh, get competitive and pull out another kid's game too – like Go Fish!

Movie Madness – Choose a kids' movie, one you've missed in the theaters, or one you liked as a kid – both of you choose one! Find big blankets, crank up the AC, and cuddle in with snacks you enjoyed as a kid or ones you see the kids eating now that you'd like to enjoy. Was your favorite Skittles? And...of course...a big tub of popcorn. And why not some kidlike treats like sundaes in waffle bowls?

At the Pet Store and More – When's the last time you two visited a Pet Store to see all the cute animals and their antics? Kids also love aquariums, so consider visiting one nearby. And while trampolines might not be a safe option, you can still skip through a park and land on a swing, to push each other high. End the night with s'mores by the fire...

Why let the kids have all the fun? They're starting back to school this month, but you can start back to the basics with giggles and laughter when you copy their joy in all that you do together.

## **After 40 Years – Morning and Evening – by Marcy Lytle**

We've been living together over 40 years now and it would seem logical and normal that we have a few routines. And we do! I think these routines settle both of our souls before we start the day...and ease our minds before we go to sleep, and I love them both.

*I wake up super early and head to the kitchen for breakfast and to work on this magazine – I love writing in the early morning.*

*When he awakes he says, “Good morning!” from the bedroom so that I know he's up, in case I need to get lunches ready if he's leaving the house that day.*

*He makes the bed – ever so perfectly – first thing. He does this because he knows it makes me happy. And I appreciate it so much.*

*I make our lunches or start a load of laundry and I head to the bedroom where we hug and hold each other for as long as we like, because that physical touch sets the tone and actually lowers the blood pressure (at least it feels like it does.)*

*That's the simplicity of our morning, on any given weekday...and it's something I look forward to daily.*

---

*Late in the evening, we head to our bedroom to get ready for bed.*

*I am the first one to take a bath (yes, we both prefer baths not showers) and he catches up on a game on his phone or emails.*

*We make sure the News is on at 10:00 mainly to catch the forecast and the sports news. I like to hear the headlines, too.*

*I am in bed first, where I prop up my pillows just so and read a bit or scroll, while he often comments aloud while he gets ready for bed on a news story, or asks a question...and I answer.*

*When he crawls in next to me, he opens a devo book we're reading together, and with his glasses on he reads out loud to me – while I listen. He really is handsome while he reads...*

*This is my favorite pre-sleep activity because we read the truth about Him and our relationship with Him and others. It settles our souls, brings us hope and enlightens our spirits. It's a great way to end the day...*

*But then we turn on King of Queens because that couple, although absolutely horrible to each other, makes me laugh out loud. I need that before I sleep. And I handle the remote and scroll. He's just content.*

*He dozes off, I snuggle next to him, and soon we're both asleep.*

Simple routines, nothing spectacular, daily and unremarkable...but they're ours.

If life is too complicated for hugs, stories, a little light TV and making the bed...then life's too complicated.

Would you agree?

## For Better or Worse - Best Friends Forever – by Kaelin Scott

If I asked you who your best friend was, would you say your spouse?

I think that should be part of the marriage vows. “I promise to be your best friend.”

To some this may seem like common sense, while to others it might sound foreign. I don't claim to know it all, but I think that a successful marriage consists of two best friends. Because how can you thrive alongside someone – make a life and raise a family together – if you aren't also friends?

While we're talking about it, what exactly makes someone your best friend? Well, everyone might have a slightly different answer, but there are some traits I think we can all agree on.

Like *honesty*. Being truthful with each other, even when it's hard. Sometimes telling the truth means hurting each other's feelings, but it's also necessary to avoid bigger future hurts. Along with that is good *communication*. You can't build a friendship if you never talk or discuss things. Communication is key to a thriving relationship of any kind.

Another important one is *trust*. That means trusting the other while also being trustworthy. You can't have double standards here. If you want to be able to trust your best friend (or spouse), then you have to give them reason to trust you, too. Communication fits in with this as well.

Every good friendship also needs a healthy dose of *fun*. Nagging and whining and being grouchy all the time is a sure way to kill a friendship. If we want to maintain a friendship with our spouses, then we need to have fun together. For some that might mean regular date nights or weekends away together. For others, this might not be feasible. Like me and my husband, who live on a ranch out of town and have two little ones. But we still try to find fun by doing simple things together at home and especially outside. Creativity goes a long way. Just make your own fun!

I could go on listing attributes of a good best friend, but I'll leave the rest up to you. Whatever matters in friendship to you, those are the things you need to cultivate in your marriage. Being best friends with your spouse brings so much joy to every day and truly enriches marriage.

If you're already best friends, good for you! Keep it up and enjoy each other. If you've never considered this and don't know where to start, I suggest communicating to your spouse something important to you. Whatever is on your heart right now, go find your hubby and tell him about it. And then ask him to share something he cares about with you.

Friendship is key to marriage, a building block for everything else. And isn't it nice to have a best friend by your side? Who better than the one you share a bed with?



ENCOURAGEMENT

## **Rooted in Love - Cluttered Corners – by Kaelin Scott**

I have a sign in my house that says, “Memories last. Clean houses won’t.” I bought it because it’s so true, especially as a mom of young kids. Most of the time, I’m okay with having a messy house that’s full of love. I’m really not the neatest person anyway, and I’m pretty laid back about the house compared to most. But, every once in a while the mess causes me to have a mental breakdown.

Actually, if you want to know the truth, that just happened about two hours ago. I started noticing the clutter and messes in every corner, nook and cranny, and I just got overwhelmed. It’s hard to explain but sometimes, it feels like the walls are closing in on me.

*I can’t really relax because I’m surrounded by messes.*

Even if I spend an hour cleaning or organizing, there’s still always more. It can never possibly all get done, and it feels suffocating at times.

So in the middle of cooking dinner, I actually started crying. I know it probably sounds silly. In a way it is. But in that moment, I just felt defeated. Overwhelmed. Fed up with living in a pigsty. I was fine after a few minutes and after letting it out, but those feelings will likely burst out again sometime down the road when I get tired of the clutter again.

My reason for telling you this is because I’m guessing I’m not the only one. Actually, I know this for a fact because my friends at Bible study talk about similar struggles all the time. It’s something that seems to plague every young mother, whether she’s got a handful of toddlers running around or a couple of teenagers. Keeping up with all of it is hard. And despite what Instagram and Pinterest might have you believe, nobody’s home is perfect. It’s just not possible.

So mama, here’s what I want you to know today. It’s okay to have a messy house. It’s okay to be surrounded by clutter and junk and messes that are impossible to get rid of. That’s part of life with littles, and it’s okay. Don’t feel like a failure or a bad mom or a lazy wife or any other lie that might be running through your head. Success as a mother isn’t measured by how sparkly your countertops are – if that’s even a thing. I wouldn’t know because mine are usually dotted with drips of peanut butter and jelly.

And along with that, please remember that it’s okay to get overwhelmed. Getting frustrated and upset and even angry sometimes is totally normal, too. Just because we aren’t capable of having a spick and span home all the time, that doesn’t mean we don’t get fed up with it occasionally. There’s nothing wrong with getting upset or feeling overwhelmed. Everybody has those days.

Usually, when I get into one of those funks where everything in the house just makes me want to scream, I get it out and then get over it. It doesn’t do me any good to wallow on it. My strategy is to organize or tidy up one area and be satisfied with that. If I start trying to attain perfection, I will be sorely disappointed. And exhausted. And it will be a gigantic waste of my time, because another mess will pop up immediately after.

Cleaning and organizing are important and, of course, they have their place. But we can’t set unachievable standards for ourselves and our families. Knowing that little people inhabit my home, I can’t expect it to look like Joanna Gaines just came in and decorated. Kids are small,

but they make huge messes. And they don't tend to pick them up without some outside motivation. Accepting that makes it easier to face those messes when they arise.

There will come a day when my house is neat and tidy and everything is in its place, but today is not that day. And yes, sometimes that frustrates me to the point of tears. But that's when I just have to let it go and focus on what really matters. Because like my sign says, a clean house might not last, but the memories made there will.

## Firmly Planted – Still Quiet and Cool – by Dina Cavazos

---

Day after day of one hundred degrees, or more...is this a scheme of some hidden power of Texas to cause all but the most foolhardy to run back to the coolness of the North? Will this murderous climate be the solution to overcrowding? If I wasn't a native, if I didn't have deep roots here, if I didn't feel there's more to love than the climate, I would probably run. But I know that this extremely hot summer isn't the norm.

The last two summers were unusually cool for Texas. I remember because I have a thing for water. Only a few years ago, I began to desire to be *in* water—not necessarily swimming, but definitely floating, and I wanted to do it in my own backyard. An in-ground pool was not an option, but I found the perfect solution in a stock tank pool (look it up on Pinterest!) In late August of 2020 I had one installed. Summer was almost over and it seemed almost every day it rained or wasn't hot enough to heat up the water sufficiently. I was looking forward to the next summer—but, alas, it was cooler than normal! The shade in my backyard and temperate nights kept the water too cool for me. (I like warmish water—I can't stand the shock of cold on my skin, no matter how hot it is outside!) I used the pool several times during the summer, but it wasn't enough to satisfy that seemingly insatiable desire to be *in* water.

Not so this year. A daily dose of 100° and warm nights have kept the water just right. I get to submerge, float, kick back, and half-heartedly exercise multiple times a day. It's a joy to read, pray, ponder the garden, and even watch movies at night...all while reveling in the miraculous combination of molecules called H<sub>2</sub>O.

I used to dread summers because of the heat, but the pool has been a game changer for me. Getting wet brings my body temperature down—I'm able to raise the thermostat to 78 and still be comfortable inside, though I spend the majority of time outside. I usually start with a good soak in the morning. Being still in the water settles me, and my stillness invites the birds to descend. They flit back and forth from bird feeder to bird feeder. Some eat the spilled seed on the ground, and some sit in trees and watch. A squirrel drinks upside down from the lion fountain and I see an anole on the fence extending his beautiful red dewlap. The gently moving water creates a shimmering reflection on the plants around the pool. These things are easy to overlook if I'm focusing on gardening chores, not paying attention.

Every morning Jasper, my cat, and I walk around the garden doing the necessary watering, clipping, and pulling weeds. It's so easy to get distracted and start doing more. Before I know it the morning is gone, and quiet time with it. There's no end to work—gardening chores and projects, adding new design elements, even thinking about ideas can be “work.” When I get in the pool I'm physically removed from garden work and I'm able to be still and quiet, take notice of what's around me, and ponder the invisible behind it all.

Not everyone can have a pool to soak in—I'm overwhelmingly grateful that I do. It's added a new dimension to my life: an opportunity to enjoy God's gift of water, another avenue to stillness, and a way to cope with intolerable heat. Now, I actually enjoy and look forward to



summer—but I must confess that underneath my summer dress is a wet or damp tank top nearly every day all day, everywhere I go, with a very few exceptions.

*“Work in the invisible world at least as hard as you do in the visible.” Rumi*

## **Moving Forward – Surrendered – by Pam Charro**

Have you ever met someone who knew the Bible well, attended church regularly, and claimed to love Jesus, but something just didn't seem right? She just didn't seem very kind, happy or peaceful. All that the Bible claimed to offer to give him - he just didn't seem to be receiving. How could these friends be missing out on the benefits of such an amazing relationship with Jesus?

I call these people "head-knowledge Christians." They have done all that they can do to figure out where the answers are, and they are usually proud of their accomplishments. They win at all of the Bible trivia games and I had better not tell them they are wrong about any of their facts. What is the disconnect do you suppose, the reason that these people don't seem to be very godly?

My goal, for many years, was to be like them. Personally, I like it when life makes sense. If it has to be uncomfortable, or even painful, I can handle that as long as I can understand what is going on. I bet you can see where I'm going with this. The problem is that, sooner or later, it doesn't seem to make any sense. We all get to that place, eventually, in our walk with God. And that is when we have to choose:

*Will we believe him anyway, or become disillusioned?*

I have come to realize that I can only be transformed to the degree that I surrender my right to understand. No matter how painful and unfair everything looks, if I want peace, I must refuse to put God on trial and withstand the temptation to be offended. I have often had to take the long way around, but I always end up at the same fork in the road. God is God, and I am not. He either cannot be trusted or I will believe him.

It truly is that simple.

I can still become a "head-knowledge Christian" if I choose to. It wasn't all that long ago that I faced my own wall of ice that I had constructed between my heart and the God who wanted it so much because I just didn't understand why life turned out the way it had. But ultimately, I decided I wanted peace and trust even more than I wanted to understand. I got tired of going around the same mountain of doubt over and over. It was exhausting!

I pray that I have practiced surrender often enough to be quicker at it than I used to be, and that God continues to honor it the same as he has all these years. He is good, he deserves my trust, and I want to really, really believe. I want the resulting peace and transformation that makes it obvious my faith goes beyond head knowledge. No matter what.

## **Simple Truths - Metal in the Garden – by Marcy Lytle**

I was out watering my garden on a morning when it was already hot before 9am, the flowers were drooping and not even really blooming anymore, and the grass was crunchy as I walked to the back fence. Not much color was visible, except for the few hardy plants that bloom anyway...and I realized that the metal art in my yard was taking center stage.

I have an orange metal flower, a trio of tall metal leaves, and metal ladybugs in my herb box. They were looking so pretty against the failing landscape I had planted and watered...but now the heat had taken its toll.

I was just thinking how the artificial was outshining the real. And it was all because of the stress of the heat. Those metal floral and bug arrangements required no attention at all, all year long, as they didn't require soil or sun or rain to shine. They just stood there among the garden waiting to shine when it's their turn...and that would be the month of August here in Texas.

I happen to love metal art in the garden. I even love wandering through a metal art sculpture garden, which we've done a few times while traveling. Someone took the time to craft and design these beautiful "fake" garden items and it took a lot of labor and creativity and time. So, why not enjoy them?

One can spiritualize anything, I suppose. I began thinking how it's never good for the artificial to shine in our lives, because the reality of His goodness should be front and center. And that's real. But so is hardship, dry times, drought seasons, and hard beating heat...and it's during those times that other things have a chance to take center stage.

That orange metal flower in my garden, just because it's not rooted in the dirt, doesn't mean it's any less beautiful. It's the same with our lives. Yes, growth and goodness and all the cool things that come from being planted by the rivers of life are awesome when they're lush and green and life is good. But when life is hard, we just might need something crafted and created by someone else – that Master Gardener – that places his beauty around us that HE's made just for us to enjoy!

Someone makes those metal statues and wildlife and beauty, and they make them to ADD TO the beauty of the natural garden, both standing side by side.

Feeling a little parched and dry and crunchy these days? Needing a little extra watering time? It's okay, because He's got other beauties standing around you that he's crafted to shine while you drink deep. He never leaves us without color or shape...just because we're in the heat of the moment.

Got any metal art in your garden? Maybe August is the time to add something, to remind yourself that beauty is shaped and formed in every season to shine and be seen, at all times, by those who choose to notice.

## **Unearthly Thing - When Jesus is Your Everything – by Angela Dolbear** **Interview with an Interior Designer/Business Owner/Wife/Mom**

I love learning about other people and what they do, and what motivates them. Especially creative people of faith. I always come away encouraged and built up spiritually.

Recently, I was talking with interior designer Tanya Hembree, and I loved how she spoke about fusing her business and her faith. Tanya is a woman of strong faith. I know this first hand, because she also happens to be my sister-in-law, so I get to witness her walking out her faith within the growth of her business, as well as navigating motherhood of three children, all exceptional young adults (if I do say so, myself...love my precious nieces and nephew). After our discussion, I came away inspired. I hope you are, too.

Tanya owns and is the owner and principal designer of [Onyx + Alabaster](#), a design studio, amazing home goods store, and cozy artistic gourmet coffee lounge, located in the in the Hallmark-movie-like charming Public Square in Franklin, Tennessee, inside the town's historic fire house, which she recently purchased through "a series of miracles," she said.

### **What inspired you to start your business?**

I've always loved creating beautiful spaces for my family. So when I naturally got asked by friends and colleagues to help them, it seemed to be a natural way to make money. I did it on the side while I held a steady paying job never thinking it would be my primary. But I loved it, I was good at it, it had purpose and meaning for me. I wanted to help change people's lives through my creative talent, and I could do that in the intimacy of decorating a home. I have always loved people, creating, and business so it was a natural next step when the requests kept rolling in.

### **How do you incorporate your faith into your business?**

My faith is the primary cornerstone to my business. I purposefully start every day in God's word, pray about everything, and have created a culture that is God honoring. I often start days and meetings with prayer - asking for wisdom, creativity and peace for the day. I like to say, "We're a business of Christians not a Christian business."

### **How do you manage family and business?**

This is always a balancing act. Depending on the season, this has looked differently. When my kids were younger, I tried having stronger boundaries making myself more readily available and trying to be present for them when home. It's always been my goal above all else to be a good wife and mom over a business leader. Sometimes however, the business cries louder so it's a natural inclination to put time and effort there, so I've set personal boundaries to keep my focus on what matters most, Faith and Family. Some practical ways I've done this are by not checking emails or working at home. In the short seasons where I'm under-staffed or we have something huge going on, I have had to bend a little here, but generally speaking I unplug when I'm home.

### **How do you cope with the anxiety or struggles owning a business might bring?**

The weight of responsibility of leading 27 team members and a long list of clients is not light. However, that is why I start each day in God's word and prayer. Also, I've learned to rest on Him, rather than on myself. Striving only leads to negative outcomes and a worn body and spirit. Why in the world would I ever think I could do all of this in my own strength? When I've taken the passenger seat and prayerfully and calculatedly made decisions it's always worked out better than when I have strived. I stay focused on what matters whether that's the meeting I'm

in, or the client I'm seeing. I don't get overwhelmed with all that my day holds, I just take one thing at a time. When anxiety rises, which it comes at times, I have learned to take the Word seriously - taking up the Sword. Anxious times come for me in the evening while I sleep. I've learned to literally memorize scripture and quote it as though I'm thrusting a sword at the anxiousness that comes at me. Every time I do this, the anxiousness leaves me.

### **How do you balance being a firm boss and a good witness to employees?**

When it comes to keeping the balance of leading well and being firm, I try really hard to think through the lens of keeping a healthy culture for all, treating others the way I would want to be treated, and doing what is right for the business more than the individual. We have core values we lead by in our company and those help guide decision making. I also, prayerfully lead in difficult situations, and sometimes it's not as easy as it sounds. However, when I need to talk about challenging things, I call it "family talk." Like I would at home, sometimes I have to talk about difficult things or challenges, I always affirm my love doesn't change, but we have to talk about the hard things or how we can do something better next time.

### **What advice would you have for a woman who wants to start a business?**

Do something you love and something you're good at. Make a plan and learn all you can about starting a business (licensing, insurance, contracts, pricing, etc.). Most importantly, DON'T BE AFRAID. You don't have to be perfect or have it all together. Just prayerfully take one step at a time asking for wisdom as you take each step. Taking a step of faith is the opposite of fear. Fear and Faith are enemies and can't co-exist, so as long as you're fearful you'll never take that brave next step of faith. God shows up when we step out looking for Him along the way.

### **Anything else you would like to add?**

I think more than anything, whether you're leading at home, leading a team, or just starting a business, do everything for God's glory and purposes. I have built a brand and a culture that is God-fearing and focused on making a difference in the Kingdom of God. If I had focused on wanting to be the best, my own brand, or if I was looking for some sort of notoriety, I don't believe the outcomes would have been the same. In God's kingdom the opposite is true. If you humble yourself and serve others, He will lift you up. So as you prayerfully consider your next steps in this season, look for how you can expand the kingdom or help change someone's life, showing them Jesus through the craft of what you love doing. That's how you live an abundant life!

Tanya's Instagram says that she "loves creating experiences and spaces that speak peace and beauty into other's lives," and she describes herself as, "Jesus is my everything, proud wife + Mama, and Curator/Entrepreneur of [@onyxandalabaster](#) + [@theonyxhall](#), and the Black + White Sofa Podcast."

If you find yourself in the Nashville area, take a short trip down the highway to Franklin, and visit the Public Square (especially at Christmas time—so beautifully festive!), and stop into Onyx + Alabaster to browse the shop, and sip one of their signature lattes.

*Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series, and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). Angela writes real, relevant, relatable, and reverent fiction. She loves reading, writing prose, as well as writing and recording music with her husband Tim in their studio in Nashville, TN. Listen to their music on [Sound Cloud](#)! Please drop by and sign-up for news and to read new stories and hear new original music at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>. Blessings to you!*



FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME – A Dozen Ideas – by Marcy Lytle**

I know lots of folks and parents and kids want to get in that last bit of fun before school starts, or have back to school celebrations the first few weeks school gets going. And even if your kids are grown and gone, there's this sense of urgency to enjoy all the days of summer before they're gone. Even though it's hot!

So here's a list of a dozen ideas you might not have thought of...as the dog days come to an end:

1. Ice cream sundae bar with all the toppings for dinner.
2. Rent a paddle (pedal) boat if it's not too hot, or a canoe or kayak – as a family – or with a few friends.
3. Consider an evening in a fancy hotel lobby for appetizers, or out on their patio by the water.
4. Root beer floats, anyone? Make hot dogs to go with, and cuddle in for movie time.
5. Invite a neighborhood family over for s'mores in your backyard to get to know someone new.
6. Find a new park and go on a scavenger hunt for 10 items (make a list before you go).
7. Visit a drive-through safari (early morning before the heat of the day) and feed the animals.
8. Give each person a set amount of money and head to the mall! Be sure to include pretzels!
9. Set up the sprinklers in the backyard and run through them, lemonade on the side.
10. Build an amazing family room fort and beds and flashlights, and sleep together there!
11. Decorate sugar cookies and deliver to friends nearby as back to school treats.
12. Go out for pizza and then stargaze and eat brownies.

Whatever you do, keep a running list of ideas for the entire school year, so that when life gets tough...there's an idea list waiting...to make every one laugh and play.

## **FRESH THYME – Barricades Gone – by Marcy Lytle**

We live near a busy street that was repaved and completely redone a few years ago, and it was such a pain while the construction was happening. The cones and the one-way streets and the narrow lanes were a nightmare that seemed to last for a year – maybe it did! And when the construction was finally gone and the road was repaved and smooth once again, the entire neighborhood breathed a sigh of relief as we could then cruise at a normal speed on this street that took forever to repair.

And then...over a short period of time the road began to crack and buckle, and we found out the company didn't do the repair correctly! Once again our major exit from our neighborhood was coned off, trucks were present, and slow-downs and long lines of cars occurred. Maddening!

Just today, that road is open again and I smiled so big as I zoomed on fresh pavement that is (hopefully) made over correctly this time...made to last.

I wondered what the pavement/road might say if we could hear it talk:

"The heat and the wear and tire of life had really produced irreparable cracks in my surface. I was made as a foundation for others to ride, only my foundation was crumbling, and the breaks were visible...and causing harm to the cars above. I was completely broken, in need of repair.

Soon there were bright trucks and men in neon vests working on my surface, digging and filling and repairing every fault that was causing my neighbors so much angst. It took a long while, but I waited patiently because I had no way to repair those cracks on my own. So I let the fixers go to work.

It was a nice day when I thought my repairs were smooth, but deep inside I knew they hadn't dug deep enough or used the right tools, and I heard them talking – they were in a hurry to get the job done and leave. This kind of talk worried me, and I knew I needed a better surface and that in time I was going to crack again.

And I did...and the neighbors cursed...and they detoured another way...and I hurt their cars...because I was still so broken way down inside.

A bit of time passed, but this time different people showed up – a whole new company – with the right gear and the timeframe needed and the know-how to fix what truly was broken. They knew how to right all the wrongs from the previous "repair," so once again my patience was tried. It was months and months before the work was complete and the orange rubber things were removed, and the cars came through...

And that was today.

It feels different. The digging was deeper this time and the hands that dug were stronger and more skilled. I feel like my foundation is solid now and I'm ready for neighbors to drive, to visit, to sing as they soar along my lanes to where they're going....



No more cracks or bumps or breaks...only smooth surfaces and memories as I caught a glimpse of the master builder as he picked up his tools and reminded me that I was now made new, not the same as the old, and ready for service once again.”

I wanted to write this from the viewpoint of the road because haven't we all felt that way? We've been completely run over for years and time and circumstances have caused big breaks. We thought we were "fixed" with all the things we tried...only to realize how deep those breaks were. And then HE showed up and dug deep, called us away to rest, rebuilt us with skilled and loving arms, and set us up for service...when the time was right.

I'm not sure where I am in the process, but I don't fret about it anymore. I'm pretty sure I have some cracks that run deep that He's still repairing, and I know there are places where no traffic is coming because He's set out his cones so that I can rest.

And that's okay, because when the barricades are gone, I'll be ready for the path he wants me to run...and for those who will run it with me.

## **FRESH THYME – Cast, Don't Carry – by Marcy Lytle**

We carry, bring in, and lay our groceries down on a counter because they're so heavy, and we begin to unpack them one by one, placing each item where it belongs until our counter are clear and free.

We hand over our luggage to the airlines to carry for us, while we fly. We trust and hope that the baggage will arrive, where we will then pick it up and carry it again, until we arrive at our hotel where we lay it down and unpack it and enjoy our vacation.

We carry children that are tired, too small to walk, or need our assistance, and our backs grow sore and weary...so we set the children down. We place them in the crib or ask them to now walk, so we can have a rest...

We tote huge tents and backpacks when we go camping or hiking, and we carry them as we climb and walk, only to gladly lay them down at camp arrival. We then set them up to rest in, sleep in, and live in...until it's time to pack up and carry them out again.

We even carry huge shopping bags and purses as we hit the stores for things we need, gifts for others, and they're heavy, they hurt our backs, and we can't wait to lay them down. We unload them all and throw away the bags, sighing with relief as we put everything away.

And yet...we carry burdens on our shoulders day and night that we're not meant to carry. We lug around guilt and shame, we lift heavy weights of worry and fear and they make us weary, and we shuffle around with concerns we acquire daily until we can barely walk from the weight of it all.

I write this, because I do this!

He says to come to Him, if we're heavy burdened, and he will give us rest. He says to cast our cares on him because he cares for us. And he says we will not be in want, because He's our shepherd.

And yet I'd say this is one of the hardest parts of walking life with Him...not carrying all of these things like bags on our backs, luggage in our hands, and weights on our shoulders. We lay them down in prayer at night, but we pick them up with the next morning's light.

Moms are especially prone to carrying burdens, and somehow it's become a part of who we are...moms that worry. But I'm constantly praying and daily laying down my own personal pride...yes that's what I call my own issue...in order to walk in peace. What about you?

For me, it's just pride that I know what's best and it's possible that He will lead me somewhere awful and leave me, and that if I just think about things long enough, I might be able to come up with a solution OTHER THAN laying it all down and resting.

*Ouch.* That's the reality of carrying burdens we aren't meant to carry, and I'm the first one to raise my hand up high and say, "This is me!" I do this!

Maybe your reason for carrying instead of casting is that you've been hurt by others, disappointed in God, or you've had to pull up your bootstraps and carry on, one too many times. You're done with depending on anyone else, especially Him. We all have reasons we walk around with bags, when there is a place where we can deposit them for safekeeping.

Just this morning, my mind started swirling way too early about the what-ifs, and before I could even get up for the day, my backpack was full and heavy and already on my shoulders before I took a step to the kitchen.

If we can learn anything from all of our carrying scenarios mentioned above, it's that we are in a constant life mode of packing and unpacking. There's never going to be a time when we aren't packing something, whether it's a diaper bag, a book bag, or a piece of luggage for a wonderful trip. And there will always be the unloading of each of those said bags, because life is a series of loading and unloading.

Once we accept that fact, maybe it will be a little easier (and we will be a little easier on ourselves) to recognize the daily load, lay it open and poured out at his feet, smile and take His hand...and do it all over again tomorrow. And hopefully, over the years of walking and talking and laying and giving our burdens to Him, we will eventually pick up less and less each day because we will see the futility in the process and the freedom in the relationship with a God who said he'd carry it all, so that we don't have to.

I'm still in that daily movement of loading and unloading. Where are you? My first chore of the day is to load the washer with all the clothes we used over the weekend, so they can be washed, folded away and worn again...then washed again...rinse and repeat. I'm thankful for a place to lay them as they're soiled, and even more grateful for a huge tub where they can be washed...and entirely thankfully grateful that they come out clean every time.

Lay your burdens down, unpack your luggage, empty out that backpack, and spill out your produce...it's all too heavy for anyone to carry today. And when you do pick up that next heavy bag, remember there's a time and place to hand it over, set it down, and let it go...and walk free. And there's only one set of hands that are capable, strong enough and willing. And they're His.

And guess what? He's promised to carry us, as well. Now, that's a beautiful picture.

## **FRESH THYME – WE DEFINITELY SHOULD – BY Marcy Lytle**

I was watering one morning and saw that all of the bark was peeling off my crape myrtle tree, landing in thin strips on top of the potted plants at the base of the tree. Large pieces fell and littered the area, which happens every so often with this tree. Crape myrtles are gorgeous trees when in bloom, but this peeling of the bark is a mess! So...I looked up why this tree sheds its bark.

I found that the peeling bark is a natural process of a mature crape myrtle. Crape Myrtles bloom profusely here in Central Texas in the dead of heat, in the middle of summer – they're stunning. But then the peeling begins. That normal peeling is a sign of healthy growth!

The site where I read about this has this cool statement:

“It's something you should definitely enjoy rather than stress over.”

The process is called exfoliating bark, and other trees go through this process as well. Disease, pests and infections are gotten rid of through this process. And...the process doesn't happen until the tree is several years old.

I think trees are so interesting, and we can learn so much from observing all of them. But this particular morning I was observing my crape myrtle. I was thinking about the aging process in my own skin...or bark...so to speak. Exfoliation rids the bark of unwanted pests, so it's a necessary experience. And it only happens in maturity...which made me think further.

Maturing into older age is not fun, for the most part. I can think of lots of things I do not like about aging, especially after watching our four parents decline in all sorts of ways. Watching my parents start using a cane, or wearing a hearing aid, and then my dad losing so much weight he looked like a skeleton was depressing. Maybe you've observed these things as well with your own aging family members. It's left me with this panic that the years ahead are going to be nothing but peeling bark!

But everything in the bible says aging is blessing, wisdom comes with aging, children and families after you are a blessing, and yes...our bodies will fail and become weak...but there are things to enjoy about the “peeling” process that comes with maturity.

I have definitely stressed over the aging process, much more so after watching those before me. Looking in the mirror to see fine lines become not so fine anymore, and skin become less taut, and all the things, isn't fun. And then listening to young girls in their 30's talk about how they're getting Botox already has often made me sick to my stomach. Seriously?

Beauty fades. We are told this, but then we are also told that inward beauty is renewed daily and shines. I also saw this firsthand with my parents. It's not always the case, but I believe it is for those who love HIM.

As that bark falls to the ground on crape myrtles, it leaves the trunk in sort of a patchwork of color, and it's quite interesting to behold. The tree is not dying...it's actually thriving...when the natural process of peeling takes place.

I can certainly stress over the “what-ifs” of aging, if I let my mind wander into what might happen to me in my later years. We can all stress over what’s coming up tomorrow, if our minds go there. But what I really want to do is find the enjoyment of maturation, of more years that pile on so quickly I can’t even believe it. How could the movie *Men in Black* be 25 years old! (We just saw it as a *classic* in the theater.)

There are a few older people that I find fascinatingly beautiful inside...but also on the outside...even though they have lived way past their “prime” years of prettiness. They are the women I enjoy sitting with and talking over life with, those that continue to give and serve, and those that enjoy a good belly laugh as they sink into a comfy chair because they need to put up their feet.

Peeling bark? Aging skin? Droopy eyes? Exfoliation you didn’t see coming?

Enjoyment in life doesn’t come from how we look, although we live in that reality for a season. If we truly mature and allow the aging process to cause us to drink up the water and lean in toward the sun, we should definitely enjoy life and not stress over the years to come.

Believe me. I’m preaching these words of life to myself as I’m typing them for you to read as well.



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

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

September 2022





TIPS

## **The Dressing – What to Keep – by Marcy Lytle**

September is one of my favorite months because fall is near, but it's also one of my most frustrating months because it's still hot! However, hopefully we are looking at our closets to see what we might want to purchase, to revisit, to throw out, or whatever...so that we have a closet full of fall color and fun!

The photos this month are items you've been wearing this summer that you'll want to keep around for this next season...

**Graphic tees that are a bit too tight** – you can wear these under vests, jackets, and sweaters! This one with the airplane in the pattern is from Shein – a place where I love to order online!

**Anything gray** – like these drawstring pants from Walmart that I wore all summer, and this plaid yellow and gray button up. An oversized sweater would look amazing over this outfit, and summer pants can be worn on into the fall...until it gets really cold...just change out your sandals for boots!

**Head scarves and white tees** – Keep both of these handy. The scarves you wore on your head all summer now just slip around your neck, and a blazer over a white tee is great for the next season!

**Yes, to linen in the fall!** – If you have linen tops or gauzy type blouses, it's a-okay to wear them in early fall, especially if the sleeves are long. Add a head scarf in fall hues (add gray) and enjoy these flowy tops while temps are still warm.

**Jumpsuits** – These are a no-brainer, because they can be dressed up so many ways, especially by adding layers on top. That long vest can take this versatile piece right from summer into fall, no problem at all. This jumpsuit is from Earthbound!

**Those summer sweaters and fall hued slides** – If you have brown slides, keep wearing them. And if you've got lightweight sweaters, keep them on hand, too! The calendar says September and you'll want the colors of fall, even if it's still too warm for a coat! Sweater is from Versona.

**Those floral totes** – YES, if they're in darker colors, they can still be carried to the fall markets, on road trips, and more! This cute roomy bag with tons of pockets is from Marshalls! I've even carried it to the movies, and tooted my lunch on the go!

**Shirt dress** – If you've got a long shirt dress, keep it and wear it open with black underneath and denim, as an open vest! Grab your purse and go, looking and feeling great!

**Those wordy tees** – If you've got a tee that says fall, thankful, gratitude, or any seasonal words at all...go ahead and enjoy them now...why not?

In other words, take what you have and make it work for now...while you shop and look for a few new good pieces for the next season...and create looks for fall with what you have!



## Seven for You – Convenience, Yes – by Panel

We drive A LOT. Really, we drive a ridiculous amount. Our kiddos are in activities all over the greater Austin area and mostly, it's fine. Also, we ourselves have activities all over the greater Austin area. When we go from our home to one activity, it's only about 15 or 20-minutes, but multiply that by three or four times a day and it's a ton of driving we frequently do. So, one splurge that's worth it for me, especially when it's just me and the kids, and at the end of a long day, is to drive on the toll road. I like the idea of driving different routes to avoid the toll roads but it is worth it to get us all home even 10-minutes earlier by driving a toll.

Expensive hand soap is worth it to me. I experience sensitivity in my hands from time to time and I find that the type of hand soap I use has an impact. I do not mind splurging on high-end hand soap when I do the shopping.

Paying for a housekeeper is worth it to me as a busy mom of three. When I'm bogged down with housework, I am grumpy and struggle to be spiritually mature. As I write this, I'm sending an SOS to a new house cleaner and will ask for some help! Having a clean space is so worth the money of paying for help in the house. Interestingly, I also find having help in cleaning the house gives me an emotional lift and I feel more like tidying up. – Jennifer L.

When my husband passed away, I reduced everything I could. I dumped cable TV (because I never watched it, but he did). Except for Sirius XM radio. I enjoy it in the car so I continue to pay for it, although I'm really proud of myself for negotiating the price WAY down.

During my working years, I was fortunate to have a house cleaner clean my house two times a month. That brought me such joy and peace of mind. Now, in retirement I'm so blessed to be able to continue this!

Lastly, I don't indulge in many personal things, but I watch YouTube almost exclusively, which of course, is free. I, watch it to learn, laugh, entertain and pass time for myself so I splurge on the \$17.99/month no ads YouTube option. Don't judge me... - Debbie

The pandemic and my illness forced one convenience that I now can't stop using. I only use grocery pick up or delivery 99.% of the time. I can't imagine doing a week's worth of grocery shopping in the store now. My parents used to spend hours at the AF base commissary twice a month to buy food for our family of four. They hated the time wasted, the long lines, and the too "peoplely" crowds. The old adage of "time is money" is so true. I have better ways of spending my time these days. – Cathy

I love when I find an easier way to do something I don't enjoy. I am not a fan of cutting up peppers and onions. So, I often buy frozen bell peppers, sliced and ready to use. The same goes for dried or frozen onions.

Clean-up after cooking can also be unpleasant. I find that pre-cut parchment paper is good to protect baking sheets. Plus, they offer convenience. Also, if your assistant baker is very young, it is much easier for him/her to manage the pre-cut pieces rather than the whole roll.

Another convenience is the disposable crock-pot liner. I love a crock-pot meal, but clean-up can be daunting without the disposable liner. – Gina

Plant Nannies are one of my conveniences. A water-filled inverted wine or soda bottle fills the unglazed terra cotta spike. The spike is then pushed into the soil of my favorite potted plant. The plant then draws the water out as needed. It works wonderfully on my inside plants. I use it outside as well, but those plants still require supplemental water in a year of normal rainfall. But...this year everything has been out of sorts and burning up, so not even Plant Nannies were of much help. Don't purchase an off-brand, as I found they broke and crumbled after one season of use. - Shelley

I've had a garlic mincer, a fancy plate that grates the garlic and all sorts of gadgets to peel the garlic – but no more! I buy garlic already minced in a jar, and it's wonderful. Easy to get out what I need, and it stores for a LONG time in the fridge.

I often purchase from Mad Dash Mixes for convenient and quick dips, soups and pasta to have on hand in my pantry. Every single one I've tried is so tasty. These also make great gifts! And they're awesome to take when traveling, if you have a kitchen in your Airbnb.

This might sound odd, but faux succulents/plants are a convenience in my book. They save on having to water and baby plants and place them near a window, and all that jazz. I look for ones that look as real as can be, place them where I want them and smile.

We belong to a car wash monthly service – its about \$19.99 for Wash n Roll and it's SO nice to be able to wash the car as often as we like for that cost. If it's dusty, we roll in. If we just went through mud, we roll in. And it's that fixed price for the entire month! – Marcy

Using Shipt to deliver goods from Target is my current favorite convenience. I paid a yearly fee (discounted on my first year's subscription), but I can have most anything sold at Target delivered to my home in an hour! It has saved the day on a number of occasions. A few months back, my husband and I had a country band from Idaho recording in our studio. Several of the band members were big coffee drinkers and brought their own gourmet coffee grounds for brewing. So, before they arrived at the studio for day two of recording, I jumped on Target.com and ordered a small coffee maker, and cute disposable coffee cups (and lids! Oh yes...), and all arrived and were set up in the studio ready to brew fresh coffee before the band arrived. Fabulous business relations thanks to Target.

Another convenience I cherish involves house cleaning. I'm not a fan of cleaning. Honestly, I would rather be doing something (anything, really) else. Cleaning the shower is so low on the list of cleaning jobs. But then I came across the electric cordless Spin Scrubber on Amazon, and it makes cleaning the shower waaaay easier, does a much better job than just me manually, and is a little bit fun to use! Win, win, win!- Angela

One of my conveniences is very simple and maybe not much more costly. Instead of using liquid makeup remover I use the makeup remover towelettes. I used to buy special liquid soap for taking off my makeup and used the towelettes for traveling, but then I got lazy and started using them all the time.

Another convenience I have is with chicken when I'm cooking. For us or just our family, I will buy the one-pound packs of already cooked and cut rotisserie chicken. But if I'm cooking for large groups that requires a roaster pan or two full of my chicken spaghetti or another casserole, I

won't do that. I didn't realize the difference in cost until the beginning of this summer when I cooked for the staff at our local Baptist church camp. I needed about eight pounds of chicken. The already cooked and cut chicken was going to cost me about \$96.00 whereas I could cook and cut the same amount myself for about \$22.00. I chose the inconvenient way for that occasion.

My third convenience is my Instant Vortex Plus, or Instant Pot. At my age, I really wasn't ready to learn how to use a new kitchen appliance. My crock pot was still sufficient. But for the shorter amount of time it takes to have food ready, it's really great. And I've decided that anything I can use to cook a full meal and not heat up my kitchen is wonderful. – Carole

My conveniences are in the kitchen. I buy a rotisserie chicken and shred it to add to salads, soups, or pasta. I also buy cut stalks of celery, and cut cauliflower that are ready to use. (I hate all those little pieces of cauliflower that get everywhere when you cut it yourself!) – Beth

I recently started using K pods for coffee instead of brewing a whole pot. As a matter of fact, what I would do is make the one cup while I am pouring the water for the full pot! That way, I can have a cup of coffee before the pot is done. Convenience, at a cost! I also have a housekeeper that I hired to come in once a month for heavy cleaning since I work full-time now – Anita.

## **THREE MOMS – Pets and Chores – by The Cousins**

When school starts, it's most likely chaotic in most homes...and all of the summer chores the kids had the time to do are now included with being gone all day and all the activities and homework at night. Especially, taking care of the pets! How do families manage? Here's a peek into three moms' homes and how they do it.

### **Mom of Four**

We always had dogs growing up, little dogs. When my husband and I first married we also had a small dog. Our current dog we have, Zeke, we did have to potty train!

However, recently we had received two animals I'm not so happy about. Mojo is our miniature Aussie we got a year and a half ago, and she's been such a chore! She needs a LOT of attention and care, and our kids have fallen in love with her. But for me, I'd gladly give her to another family! I recently made it clear that if we keep Mojo that she has to act differently, and the kids must train her! She is slowly getting better and older, which helps. She has to have a walk daily, and the kids do this. However, when we all get busy, that responsibility will fall to me! I must work with my own bitter heart toward this dog!

We also rescued a little kitten born in our shed, as the mom abandoned it. We fed the kitten and took care of this kitty, although we had no time! But sometimes, life brings us gifts to teach us! The kids love it too, and thankfully it's mostly an outdoor cat. Again, the kids make efforts to take care of all the animals...

but ultimately Mom picks up the slack!

### **Mom of Three**

Who would have thought that we would have three kids, three dogs and a turtle? It's chaos, but our home is full of love! We have Heismann, who's almost 14, named yes – after the football trophy. We rescued Luna about 5 years ago and have her, along with our dachshund. Luna is a gentle giant Great Dane. We also have a dachshund/chihuahua mix Pixxy, a puppy! And finally, we have a turtle, about 3 inches in diameter, and his name is Tank. He's super fun with personality.

Each kid wants their "own pet" but each kids has daily and weekly chores, and we have a command center. They used to split the chores with water and food, when we just had two dogs. We've also taught them how to clean up the backyard from the dog poop! They take a bag, gloves and scoopers and get the job done. We also rotated walking the dogs.

But now the turtle...and Pixxy. Our oldest "owns" the turtle, which he got when he turned 9. He had to keep his room clean and do his chores, and he did it. Tank is almost 2 years old, and our oldest feeds him every morning and evening, he and Dad clean out the tank. He takes care of his turtle – even through a freeze, power outages and more – and he's still here!

This year our daughter turned 9 and wanted another dog. Of course, at first we said no way. However, we gave her the same rules of keeping her room clean and chores – which is a

challenge with this creative child! It took longer, but she did it. And we had to keep our word. So here we are with feisty Pixxy, she likes to chew and play – and she's so fun! She is fully Ayla's responsibility, as Pixxy is in her room.

We are getting there...the dogs are starting to accept one another...and the house is starting to settle. I'm wondering how it's going to go once school starts. We will take care of them as a family. We've had to chip in for each other when sick or gone.

Pet chores – the kids all help. Teaching the kids responsibilities of caring for life has been great. They can even start with a plant, if no pet is present. They do get tired and exhausted, and do help them. It's a joy as parents to see them grow and learn, though, in the middle of the chaos. The command center helps as well, where they can check off what they do. It's also where their backpacks hang, and it's there for them to see visually.

### **Mom of Two**

We have been married for about 11 years and have talked about getting a dog at some point, as I had dogs as I grew up and even into college! My last dog passed away from cancer, and my husband didn't have any dogs as a child. After we married, we went into full-time work and he into dental school, we lived in a tiny apartment, and didn't feel we had the time or commitment for a pet.

We then moved to Nebraska for his residency, then to Alaska when we started having kids. We thought maybe when the kids get older we'll get a pet, when we have a home. Now, we do have a home and we're settled and have started talking about pets. We live on a big farm and have thought about having an outdoor cat to keep the rodents away, and my husband has thought of having a dog to take hunting!

We've gone back and forth on "when's a good time" (we're now expecting baby #3). In all reality, just as when you're having kids, there's never a "perfect" time to bring on a pet. Life is always busy!

We are currently *somewhat* looking for a pet. Our oldest daughter, almost 6 years old, is terrified of dogs. We have tried to talk to different people about whether or not a puppy is the best way to start, or what to do. But we might just push out having a pet a bit more, as we even have family members that are allergic to dogs! Some breeds also don't shed as much, so we're looking into that...

We are not in a hurry, we enjoy being able to travel and not worry about boarding or getting someone to care for our pets. At the same time, we know pets bring joy. We are waiting for that moment to take on that responsibility, as dogs are awesome for kids and families. We hope one day to bring a sweet puppy on board!

Until then, it's petting the friendly animals we see elsewhere...

## **In the Kitchen – A Week’s Worth – by Marcy Lytle**

Sometimes, we all need a little help thinking of what to make on weeknights. Some want just veggies, there might be a picky kid at the table, maybe you want to create some color on the plate, or any number of particulars on any given night! We’ve got meal ideas for all of the above and more. It’s September, school’s in session, fall is near, and so enjoy and try any or all of these:

**Chili with Broccoli Cornbread** – Mad Dash Mixes has an amazing chili seasoning pouch, so I used that for the chili. But you could make any chili you like. The broccoli cornbread is the recipe below, which was amazing. This is great for the night when you want to feel cozy and comforted, even if the weather is still hot and humid...

- 1 8.5 oz corn muffin mix
- 1 10oz frozen broccoli thawed
- 1 cup shredded Cheddar
- 1 small chopped onion
- 2 large eggs
- ½ c butter melted

Combine first four ingredients in a large bowl and make a well in the center. Stir the eggs and butter, blending well, then add to broccoli mixture, stir til moistened. Spoon into lightly greased muffin pans.

Bake at 325 for 15-20 minutes til golden. Let stand 2-3 minutes before removing from the pan.

Enjoy with your chili!

**Open Philly** – I really meant to make an open-faced Philly on bread, but somehow curbside sent me frozen eggplant steaks. So...I used them for the base and piled the Philly toppings on, and it turned out delish! Mine was vegetarian, and he got the meat. The eggplant and steakums cook so fast, this is great for a night when speed is the need...

- Frozen eggplant steaks
- Steak Ums (frozen Philly meat)
- Green pepper, sliced
- White onion, sliced
- Provolone cheese

Grill the peppers and onions, then melt provolone on top.

Read the directions and cook the eggplant and steakums, then just start piling and serve!

This was SO GOOD – you can add a bit of marinara if you like – which tastes amazing.

**Rio Ramen** – We made this years ago, and I had forgotten about it. We had a 7-year old at our table that requested Ramen Soup, so we jazzed up ours and we were all happy.

- Ramen noodles (beef) – one pkg per person
- Ground meat
- Lettuce
- Tomato
- Cheese
- Avocado
- Salsa

Cook the noodles according to the directions and drain. The kids can just have the noodles in a bowl with the seasoning packet mixed in. For the adults, place the seasoning packets in the meat and cook til browned, and drain. This goes on top of the noodles, in a bowl. Top with the rest, and you're done! Serve with tortilla chips.

**Spaghetti Revisited** – I like spaghetti, but I wanted it jazzed up a bit. I had a package of Italian seasonings and had read that one can place several tablespoons of the seasoning in a skillet with olive oil, then place in the spaghetti and give the pasta so added pizzazz. It worked. This recipe was also partly for us, and partly for the kid. Delicious meal with greens on top.

- Spaghetti noodles
- Ground meat and favorite pasta sauce
- Italian seasonings (a mix of all kinds) – 5 T
- Broccoli (the kind you steam in the microwave)

Cook the meat and the spaghetti in two separate pans. Cook the broccoli. After the meat browns, remove and set aside in a bowl. Add the seasonings into the same skillet with olive oil and cook for just a minute to bring out the flavors, then toss in the drained and cooked spaghetti. Stir to coat the pasta with the seasonings. Meanwhile mix your sauce in with meat, and heat.

Assemble in bowls with spaghetti, the meat sauce, and the buttery broccoli on top.

**Chicago Hot Dog** – I'm not hot dog fan, really. But it's not all about me all the time, imagine that! The boys wanted hot dogs, so I like toppings – so a Chicago dog it was! Great for an easy weeknight meal for the boys...and for you.

- Franks (I like Nathan's brand)
- Tomatoes
- Pickles
- Onions
- Mustard
- Ketchup
- Hot dog buns
- Grated cheese

Cook the franks however you want to – I cooked mine in a skillet. Meanwhile, slice pickles longwise, grill the onions if you want, slice the tomatoes and prepare the buns. I sliced my frank in half lengthwise. Just tastes better that way, to me. Top the dog for those that want the pile, and make it plain for those that don't.

**Chef Salad with Lillian** – I recently bought Lillian's Salad Dressing and oh my goodness, it's amazing. It's the star of this show. It was a night I wanted something healthy and refreshing, while we watched a lighthearted movie on TV. With homemade croutons on top!

- Lillian's Salad Dressing
- Grain bread cut into cubes
- Salad greens and fresh spinach
- Thinly sliced turkey
- Grated cheese
- Cucumber
- Olives
- Avocado
- Nuts and dried cranberries

Using a large salad bowl, toss in the greens and spinach. Top with all of the salad toppings, except the bread. In a skillet, grill the cubes of bread in butter until browned and crispy. Pour in the dressing and toss the salad. Then sprinkle the croutons on top. The best ever...

**Snack Box** – If you're up to an outdoor picnic in the evening in a park, this idea is for you. We purchased these craft boxes from Michaels – this big one – and a couple of small ones. This big one is what we used for listening to music on the green, and we just placed the dividers inside, so that we had eight sections. Then we filled 'er up...

- Strawberries
- Blackberries
- Dark chocolate
- Dips
- Nuts
- Carrots
- Cucumbers
- Olives

Just slice and place each item in a space in the box (place paper towel under anything that might be juicy, and place little cups for dips). Add a picnic blanket and pita chips and tortilla chips, and you're done! Oh, and cute paper plates...



## **Last Month's Learning**

What I've learned, experienced, observed or been amazed at this last month...enjoy!

Did you know a pack of zebras is called a dazzle? Apparently, because of the dazzle effect created by them when they're running!

Taco Deli (if you have one in your city) has delicious queso – the one with everything in it – try it!

Mix mayo with olive tapenade for a delicious sandwich spread – with ham or turkey – and Gouda bacon cheese – it's delish!

I saw a guy making French Toast by melting ice cream in a pan and dipping the bread in that, before grilling in a pan – I haven't tried it yet but I want to!

Target has cute fake plants in a white pots for five bucks – they look so pretty in little basket pots! Especially if you have a spot where no sunlight would keep a real plant alive!

Saving aside funds/cash/gift cards to use with grandkids/nieces/any kids makes life grand (no pun intended). We spent dollars on their activities this summer, but it was worth it!

If it's still hot outside this month, you can plug in a fan on the porch and blow it across your body...it's okay to do that! Just saying...because we did it.

There's an amazing arcade game console available on QVC that is awesome for the kids (and you.) It has 10-12 old games on it, sits up or can be mounted on a wall, and is GREAT fun for a playroom.

There's an AMAZING salad dressing called Lillian's that really is so tasty. We had it on a chef salad and today it's going in pasta salad. Worth ordering!

*The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* – it's an old John Wayne/Jimmy Stewart movie and we just saw it in the classic summer film series. It's good! Find it and see it, if you can.

I recently attended a baby shower where a bagel bar was the food idea – and it was great. Easy to set up, easy to bring and prepare, and looked amazing on the counter!

There are these amazing makeup remover cloths by Vintage Cosmetics I recently bought to take on vacation. Where have these been all my life?

Have you tried placing pampas grass in your vintage vases? You can order a bundle on Amazon, and they are so pretty for early fall décor...

Garage Sale Mysteries, if you enjoy the Hallmark Channel, are a fun watch when you want something after a busy, tedious day...

There are these stretchy bowl covers – 100 in a pack – that I got recently. They fit all sizes, and are GREAT instead of having to tear off glad wrap or foil for coverings...

Ever thought about shopping for clothes at Earthbound? Do it – they have some really cute fall tops and sweaters... Earthbound is in our malls, here.

## **SUGAR + Spice - Hack Jobs – by Angela Dolbear**

Since I was rescued recently by the Amazon Sea Plane captain from my (imaginary) deserted island, the “DESERTED ISLAND product of the month” section is closed! But a new section, “Hack Job” will take its place starting this month, where I will describe my favorite beauty tips and tricks.

In honor of the new section, here are a few of my favorite beauty “hacks”:

- ❖ Mascara – rotate the mascara wand in the tube to pick up product, never pump it. Pumping the wand adds air and bacteria inside the tube (ewwww...).
- ❖ Nail polish – having trouble opening a bottle of nail polish? Wrap a rubber band (the thicker the better) around the wand, and twist to open. The rubber band gives your hands a good grip.
- ❖ Foundation and concealer – Apply foundation (my current fave is [Yensa Super Serum](#) foundation) first, and then concealer (current fave is [Letup Complex Culture concealer](#)). The concealer will blend better, especially in the under-eye area. Dab with your ring finger or use a slightly damp makeup sponge to blend the concealer into the skin. Magic coverage!

### **“Hack Job”:**

Speaking of mascara, I recently tried a sample of [Kat Von D’s “Go Big or Go Home” mascara](#), and I fell in love with it. It amplified my lashes while keeping them looking natural, all day! No flaking or smearing. So, I actually purchased a full-size tube.

To keep mascara fresh, wipe off the outside of the tube with a tissue before returning the wand to the tube at the completion of application. This will keep the seal on the tube tight making your mascara last longer. Immediately toss the tissue out! Don’t try to use it again! You WILL get mascara in places you don’t want it. Trust me. I have done it. More than once (\*shaking my head....\*).

The beauty of blessings to you!

*Angela Dolbear, Beauty Editor, is the author of contemporary spiritual novels, such as [THE GARDEN KEY](#) Series, and [THE TORMENTOR’S TALE](#), as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). And she loves writing and recording songs with her husband, Tim (listen on [Sound Cloud!](#)) She is also a self-proclaimed beauty junkie and has been since long before her mother allowed her to start wearing makeup at the age of 14. She keeps UPS and the USPS busy delivering small boxes on a regular basis from Ulta, Sephora, Amazon, and many independent cosmetics companies to her home Nashville, TN. Please connect with her at [www.AngelaDolbear.com](http://www.AngelaDolbear.com)*



HOME

## **Practical Parenting – Poses and Pictures- by Marcy Lytle**

We took the kiddos to the Austin Aquarium a few weeks ago, and there were lots of opportunities there for pictures! Lots of photo props. Ayla, 9 years old, wanted me to snap quite a few poses of her on one particular prop, and I acquiesced. And then she asked that I place these photos in the magazine! I laughed, and thought – what story can I write to go with these photos – and I came up with one! And once the boys saw her posing, they wanted in on the action, as well.

Photo props can be so fun at the kids' parties, at family gatherings, and at amusement places like aquariums. Haven't you been to a wedding before where there's a photo booth, or props set out on the table for using in your own photos? It's so fun to make funny faces, hold up fingers like horns on an unsuspecting friend, or stick out your tongues as the camera clicks.

It's also fun for kids to play "dress up" at all ages, stand in front of mirrors as they twirl and pretend and imagine themselves as a character in a play. Kids love experimenting with makeup, lipstick, nail polish and more.

Since it is the fall season, and Christmas will be here before we know it, why not think about these things for gifts, experiences, or just to have on hand, for the kids to enjoy as they pose and pretend and play?

Here are some great ideas for gifts or parties or any kind of family fun now, or over the holidays:

- A Polaroid camera might be a fun gift for the kids, so they can see their snapshots right away after they take them!
- Consider going through your closets; and instead of donating this season, make a huge box of dress-up clothes or clear out a drawer just for these! Include ties, scarves, shoes, bags, sweaters and more...and surprise the kids at their next party at the house...or as a fun treat anytime at all.
- A spa night might be fun for the entire family, with lotions and scents and warm cloths and more. Consider photo props like masks and hair turbans and slippers from the dollar store, and take pictures of each person as they're receiving the "treatment."
- A fun outing might be to think of five stops for the family where cool shots can be taken with props, like we did at the Aquarium. Maybe there's a cool mural in your town, a beautiful garden or a unique slide or feature in a park. Stop for dessert at a specialty ice cream store where you create your own treat, and take pictures of each one.
- Does your family enjoy sketching and coloring? Create your own masks, cut them out, add string or elastic, and then put them on and snap photos! Google some templates if you need some to print out!
- Give the kids a word like – under, over, red, car, tree, etc. – and give them the camera to take photos of each other using those words, and then let them create a collage of them all. How fun would that be?
- Finally, pose with the kids. Let them see their parents making funny faces and acting silly and laughing. It will do the entire family a lot of good!

## **I Don't Do Teens - Open or Closed? – by Marcy Lytle**

I remember this topic when our kids were at home, and I still see this in the movies and on television...the decision on whether or not to allow teens to shut their doors when they're at home with the family, other than when they're dressing. Even in the classic movie *Sleepless in Seattle*, which we watched recently (it's almost 30 years old!), the little 9 year old son in the story has a girl in his room, they're in a chair together, and they have the door shut to the bedroom. I was taken aback by that scene, as I didn't remember it when we watched the film the first time.

Teens want privacy, especially if they have little siblings that interrupt and invade. They also want to be able to talk to their friends without others listening, and it seems natural that they would want to close their bedroom doors at times. But as parents, we know that sometimes there are reasons they want to close their doors that could pose huge problems, if we allow them to do so.

Here are some guidelines, should you be in the throes of "I need privacy!" pleas from your teens:

No closed doors with a date, in the bedroom. This is a huge parenting decision, one that needs to be an emphatic "No." Dates can stay in the family room. Many state that if teens want to "do something" they'll find a way somewhere anyway, but why should we the parents encourage that by allowing them behind closed doors, in our house?

What about closing doors to keep out the littles? That would require a locked door. And it might be best to teach all the kids to knock before entering, even if the door is open! No crossing the line without permission.

Most kids text these days, instead of actual talking, so there's no need for closed doors when chatting with friends. Listening to our kids chat out loud used to provide parents with so much information, but now it's silent talk on the phones. That's a whole other issue, but bedroom doors don't need to be shut for chatting.

Popular opinion these days is that it's a-okay and normal for teens to close and lock their bedroom doors, and until that trust is broken, we are to say yes. However, it might be worth having a conversation with our teens to ask why they want their doors closed.

If a two-story house is where you live, and you the parents are never upstairs where your teens hang out, there might be trouble. If your house is small and rooms are visible everywhere, teens know this. I recall requiring our teens to stay visible in the house with the rest of the family, and we encouraged them to stay visible when on a date, as well. In other words, there's safety in other eyes.

We all close our bedroom doors at times. At age 7, she might want her door shut to keep out the nasty boys from entering girl space. At age 9, he might want his door shut to play a game in peace, without little brother pestering him. So every reason, every day, every situation is different.

The problems occur when the door is shut always, when the teen won't let anyone in his/her space, and starts isolating from the family. If trust is broken, and things are found in the room that are not acceptable, or the teen isn't doing his/her share of contributing to the family, these are issues that need to be dealt with sooner...rather than later.

We can't protect our teens from every bad decision, especially once they start to drive and exit our home to places where we aren't with them constantly. But we can protect them in our own homes, where they exist as a part of a family unit when they're present. And house rules are fine given by the house parents. But relationship is always important, as we keep the "door" of communication open with our teens at all times.

Good luck, parents. But, know this. Under your roof, where you pay, and they live, and they play...open doors are a good idea.

## **An Adage a Day - In the Nick of Time – by Carole Gilbert**

In the nick of time, God parted the Red Sea.  
In the nick of time, the donkey spoke.  
In the nick of time, the sun stood still, and the moon did not move.  
In the nick of time, the handwriting appeared on the wall.  
In the nick of time, God sent Jesus.  
In the nick of time, Jesus turned the water to wine.  
In the nick of time, Jesus fed 5000.  
In the nick of time, Jesus walked on the water.  
In the nick of time, Jesus restored Malthus' ear.  
In the nick of time, Jesus arose for you and me.

God still does his miracles, in the nick of time.

When we decided to move 22 years ago, we knew what we wanted in a home for our family of five. We made a list with five different options we would like any combination of, and we started to pray. During the couple of months that we were looking for a house, so much happened, mostly my husband's father passed away. This put our searching on hold. Soon after we started to look again, it took about two weeks for our realtor to call. She said that she had a house for us to look at but to keep an open mind, it would need work.

As we drove toward the house in the country, we started to notice the items on our list. One, two, three, we counted off. Wow God, thank you! But He didn't stop there. As we turned onto the long more secluded road where the kids could ride their bikes - that was number four! Then as we approached the house, we could see it! The lake behind our house, number five! I still get tears every time I recall how God worked this out for us. But He wasn't done. Within two weeks, we were in contract and my work was just beginning. To make a long story shorter, I did most of the renovations myself, at least all I could do. And I sold our house in the city myself. I had so many *nicks of time* going back and forth between painting and appointments to show our home and taking care of our family. It was exhausting but such a blessing.

I worked for about four months with my family pitching in when they could. One day after I had taken the kids to school, I went to try to complete my last job on our new house. I only hoped to get it done. About one o'clock, I laid down my paintbrush, walked through the house and said, "God, it is finished. I am done, right?" I praised Him and thanked Him over and over in those next few moments.

About thirty minutes after I put down my paintbrush the phone rang. We were in contract on our old house. God helped me finish the renovations just in the nick of time!

This idiom, "in the nick of time" is very old starting in the 1500's and evolved from the word, nick, that referred to a critical moment. And then in the 1600's its meaning evolved to referring to a critical time, which began the phrase as we know it today. Put it all together and it means that something happened at just the last possible moment in time.



David puts his trust in God and knew everything he had and would endure were in God's hand, as he said in Psalm 31:15, "My times are in your hand." David also knew God had everything timed to His perfection, a perfect timetable that David, himself, could never obtain without God. Do we know God like David did? Do we let God's timing prevail or do we try to fix everything ourselves? God hasn't stopped.

On June 25, 2022, our son bought a "new to him" truck. He had a truck when he was younger and always wanted one again even though he had driven a car for a while. Trucks come in handy for so many reasons. One and a half weeks later, this same son bought a new house. It was not something they were looking for or planning but they had in the back of their minds that someday they would need a bigger home. This home had everything they wanted. And the truck is coming in handy.

These two life changing purchases were not planned. Coincidence, in the nick of time, or in the nick of God's time? This is how God works. By July 31, only three weeks later, my son was in negotiations on his old house, all just in the nick of God's time.

Photo courtesy of Carla Rogers.

## Tiny Living - Through it All – by Leyanne Enterline

“Through it All” was the sappy love song my dad played in ICU while my mom was in there for many days, when we literally prayed every second for a miracle. One really finds out who one’s friends are when going through a tragic event. The amount of love and prayers, calls, texts, food, flowers... we felt it all. Thank the Lord, we got a miracle and my mom is now recovering at home after almost a month in the hospital.

Mom is truly a miracle. My dad calls her the modern day Lazarus. She literally rose from the dead on the 5th day. I won’t go into detail, but just about everything was failing in her body, she was blown up with 40 pounds of fluids, on a ventilator and connected to every machine they possibly had in the hospital. I couldn’t even count all the machines! We were not able to talk with her because she was basically in a coma so she wouldn’t pull out the breathing tube. On the 5th day they decided to take her off the vent and see how she did on her own, and only by God she turned around! She started talking and asked to eat and drink! Everything took time, but after that day we got good reports daily! Her ER nurse came in to see her and couldn’t believe she had made it through the first night.

Dad and I slept in the waiting area the first two nights and everyone was so sweet. The nurses brought us pillows and blankets, the security guard brought us extra waters. When you go through something it truly makes you more compassionate when others do. My trailer feels like a mansion compared to the hard hospital chair and floor!

We met three other families in that hospital and joined them in prayer for their loved ones and every single one of them has made a complete recovery! We prayed with them, we loved on them, we checked on each other; we became a family in that hospital. The boys and hubby were on their own for quite some time while I was up at the hospital, but with this heat they all remained inside in our tiny space and were just thankful for air-conditioning.

On the fourth night, after a long night of prayers and visiting with our friends, a lady came over and said she wanted to make sure we knew that the Holy Spirit was moving on our behalf! That lady had just lost a loved one and in the middle of her grieving her loss she listened to the Lord to tell us that?! It was so moving, and gave us all a glimmer of hope! It was that next day the miracle took place!

The song “Through it All” is significant because we all will face trials at some point. But through it all, the Lord is with us no matter what the outcome. He hears our prayers! And through it all, it teaches us to have compassion for others! Though a lot of times I want to complain about my tiny living space, going through health scares made me realize what’s truly important! Material things will all fade away, but family and friends are priceless!

Remember love grows best in tiny spaces...

## **A Night to Remember – Seven Days a Week – by Marcy Lytle**

Rather than offer you one devo for printing and enjoying this month, I'm offering you a week's worth of nighttime ideas for mini devos with the kids...to touch every aspect of their walk with Christ. It's something you can print out and hang on the fridge, to work from weekly, if you like. An outline, if you will. I thought it might be great to have something like this instead of the usual. It's patterned after the Lord's Prayer. Hope you like it:

**Sunday** – The weekend's over, tomorrow is school, and it's a good time to reestablish our relationship with the Father.

"Our Father, in heaven..."

Just before lights out, let's remind ourselves that our heavenly father is the definition of GOOD. He's with us every day of the week, he provides for all of our needs, and He loves us ALL the time.

Hugs are the action tonite – so everyone gets big bear hugs that hold tight – as we say goodnite.

**Monday** – First day back at school and our ears have heard a lot, haven't they? Maybe kids spoke God's name in anger, or other foul language. Why do people use God's name to curse? They don't know the Father. His name is to be hallowed, or honored, so let's pray that others know the Father.

"...hallowed be thy name."

Let's all name a character of God that we love, before the lights go out.

**Tuesday** – Maybe at school we learn about the heavens – the moon, stars, and the sun. That's a whole galaxy up there! Maybe we learn about the earth, the trees, and the rivers – that's where we live down here. We can observe the order in the sky (morning, noon, night, seasons, dark and light) and KNOW that God is in control.

"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Let's open our hands and receive the peace that God has for us, and let us pray for peace on earth.

**Wednesday** – What did everyone have for lunch today? Did anyone not have food to eat? Do we have food for tomorrow? God has promised us that he will provide and feed us and lead us.

"Give us this day, our daily bread."

Let's take communion together around the table. We will pass the juice and the bread and give thanks for daily provision of salvation and food and all we need to live!

**Thursday** – Did anyone get their feelings hurt today? What happened? Did anyone hurt someone else with their words or disobedience?

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

Isn't it cool how we can confess (say out loud) when we're feeling hurt or when we've hurt someone else. That's what we just did. And God forgives us, so we then can forgive others. Let's pray for God to help us forgive those that hurt us today.

**Friday** – Who knows what “tempted” means? Who was the first person in the Bible to be tempted to disobey? Was anyone tempted today at school or work to do something wrong like lie, disobey, steal, or anything else that felt wrong?

“Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil”

Turn out all the lights and sit for a minute in complete darkness. It's easy to stumble when we try to walk in a room without light. But when we are tempted, God's light in our hearts shows us a way out – to do the right thing. Turn on the light and smile!

**Saturday** – Which super hero has the best powers? I bet we all pick someone different. If you could have a super power, what would it be? To be invisible or fly? God has the super powers to love, forgive, and do the impossible. What a mighty God we serve!

“For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever amen.”

Let's praise the bigness of God by singing – who has a song? (Sing a song everyone knows).



YOU

## **Inner Strength - The Rainbow of Forgiveness – by Michelle Wyatt**

Forgiveness is a beautiful thing but forgiving someone, including ourselves, can be difficult to do. While it comes naturally to God, it is a process for us. Just the other day, I facilitated and witnessed this process with my boys. To understand the significance of this moment, it's important to know the following.

When one of my boys says I'm sorry to the other, the response is usually, "That's okay." I have told them that instead of "that's ok" the healthy response is "I forgive you," because the behavior was not okay. My boys have repeated behaviors that they continue to say they are sorry for and while we all do, I realized that their understanding of forgiveness hasn't run deep enough like God forgives us. How can they understand at such a young age without our help? Even adults (such as myself) struggle with truly forgiving someone. We had a beautiful conversation about it.

I reminded the boys that God not only wants us to forgive each other but also ourselves. Just as it says in Psalm 86:5,

“You, Lord, are forgiving and good,  
abounding in love to all who call to you.”  
Psalm 86:5

The steps in the process of saying "I'm sorry" that the boys and I went over (some of them I simplified the language) are:

- Humble ourselves (the key to that is humility-open our arms to God's grace)
- Be vulnerable (acknowledge imperfection and trust in God's forgiveness as we share)
- Name the act (be specific, including the words "to you" so as to claim responsibility)
- Respectful posture (facing towards the person we are speaking to)

Respectful posture is the practical step that the boys struggle with. It's not easy to admit when we've wronged someone, especially for children. My boys want to please others and God, so they act shy.

The steps in forgiving another are similar:

- Embrace God's grace, open our arms to the other person-literally or symbolically
- Acknowledge our imperfectness and trust in God's desire for us to forgive
- Respectful posture (facing towards the person who is speaking to us)
- And the bible says it best,

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other,  
just as in Christ God forgave you.”  
Ephesians 4:32

At the end of the boys' process of forgiving, their affect changed. They were no longer in a state of anger and resentment. They were in a state of humility and calmness.

It was beautiful, like a rainbow that appears after a storm.

## Life in a Nutshell – Robot Reflections – by Jill Montz

I will be the first to admit I am not on the cutting edge when it comes to anything to do with technology. My email addresses for personal and work are both AOL. I still own VHS tapes (although my VHS player bit the dust some years ago.) I was even sad when my current car didn't come with a CD player. I gave up wearing my Smart Watch because, let's face it, I didn't appreciate something smarter than me talking to me all day long in her snooty voice claiming loudly to all around that she didn't understand my Texan slang...even though I wasn't even talking to her! I mean if the truth were told I would still use a flip phone if my teenage daughter, Dotty, wouldn't be completely mortified.

However, while on my social media break, I developed the bad habit of shopping online (dang those apps on the phone...another reason to go back to the flip phone!) While shopping, I decided I needed to up my tech game. I made several purchases for my home, especially. I bought a home security system, dusk to dawn outdoor lighting, an Echo Dot, and a robot vacuum cleaner. My neighbor even helped me out with the purchase (and installation) of an automatic thermostat and a programmable light switch for my front porch. By the end of June, I was expecting George and Jane Jetson to show up on my doorstep or at the very least Rosie to swing by to give my robot vacuum cleaner a once over.

While all of these purchases have brought me joy and satisfaction, the robot vacuum cleaner has also brought some humor and introspection into my world. To begin, just turning it on sent my cat, Rae, up into the rafters. I seriously have never seen our cat move so fast and it took a good hour for me to find her hiding spot (after I finally stopped laughing.) Even after several weeks of cohabitating, Rae is still not a fan of the little spaceship that runs around our house beeping and sweeping as it goes.

One night when I was still media free and decided to give my credit card a break, I chose to enjoy just resting in the boredom of the evening. It was too hot to do anything outside (by the way Texas weather...there are temps below 100 if you would like to revisit those someday soon) and I was tired of reading, so I sat in my chair and watched the robot vacuum cleaner do its job. Now my device is not the highest end of the makes and models when it comes to robotic vacuum cleaners, but is about middle of the road, I would say. Still I noticed several things that caught my interest...

1. It bumps into a lot of things often and repeatedly.
2. It picks up everything in its path and pulls it inside.
3. It likes to get stuck in weird places.
4. It needs to be cleaned out when it gets full or the filter gets clogged from all the cat hair (Rae seems to be shedding more these days...possibly from stress.)
5. It needs to recharge after use.

As I sat there amused, and dare I say critical, of the machine that had been entertaining my thoughts for probably longer than it should have, I realized I also suffer from these issues as well.

### Bumping Along:

I too bump into things on a regular basis. Not necessarily physically like the vacuum (although my 2am trips to the bathroom have left a few bruises) but rather metaphorically speaking. I know there are issues, people, and events I just can't seem to avoid no matter how impassable they may be. I continue to run into them time and time again in hopes, I guess, my experience

will be different...but often it is not. Instead of just avoiding it all together, I find myself headed straight for what I know will be the same result...bump...bump...bump. The truth of the matter is the only thing I can change is me...or the path I take. And another truth is, in most of the situations when it comes to the impact of the bump, I am the only one who feels it. So why do I continue to bump into it all? Good question. Maybe I can consult my internal owner's manual and get some insight.

#### Clean Sweep:

When I noticed the vacuum cleaner picked up everything in its path, I realized how I pick up things that I don't really need to keep inside me. Things like...other people's opinions or actions, the past that finds ways to sneak into the present, my 15-year-old's attitude, the weather, the test results, the future, etc. So much of this and more I know I will "roll over" in a day, but so much of it I can just "roll past" without letting it get inside me and affect me. All of these are things beyond my control to an extent and taking them in just to worry about them serves me no purpose...and probably clogs a filter like an artery, too!

#### Help! I'm Stuck:

One night I heard the vacuum beeping but couldn't find it anywhere. I looked under beds, couches, and chairs. I looked behind tables and lamps and all the shoes piled up on Dotty's bedroom floor. Finally, I noticed Dotty's bathroom door was shut. When I went to open it the door was stuck. With some effort to push it open without breaking it, I noticed a rug and a stool were pushed up against the door and sink cabinets. This was all odd since I was home alone and had not been in the bathroom. But then I heard the beep. Without breaking the door down, I managed to push everything back enough to squeeze in the door opening and thus retrieve the vacuum and put everything back where it belonged. This made me wonder how often I barricade myself in isolation from friends and family. I am an introvert at heart, but also I tend to push people away when I get hurt or feel too vulnerable. It is easier for me to hide away than it is to face my feelings or difficult conversations and I can get stuck there if I let myself. I forget I don't have a noticeable "beep" to let people know I am stuck...or do I?

#### Dumping Allowed:

My month long social media break did my mind, heart, and soul some good. I discovered I was so inundated with information all day long as a result of my mindless scrolling through Facebook and Instagram that I often had no room left for the things I valued the most. What I realized is I need to occasionally "clean out" my schedule and feeds and subsequently "dump" some things that are just "clogging" my brain and emotional bandwidth. It's healthy and good to get rid of anything bogging me down. Plus, if the makers of social media apps had the bright ideas to make buttons like "unfollow," "snooze for 30 days," and "take a break" as options, I feel confident they fully expected us to use them. Even the "unfriend" button is my new friend! And I have yet to have anyone upset (or even realize much less care) how I have personally dumped things in my social media world.

#### Low Batteries:

Just like the robot vacuum, my batteries get worn down on a regular basis. I need sleep and all matters of rest to be ready to go again to face new days, challenges, and opportunities. Often I have been known to push through exhaustion to get the job done. I have let my mental and physical health suffer in an effort to get to the end of a project or season at work. Usually the result is I don't do myself or others any favors when I do this. I know my attitude is subpar in these situations but also my output is as well. And most times I end up crashing at some point in the waiting room of a sick time office when my body has just had enough and starts to shut down. Prioritizing rest is so important. As I head into the busiest time of my work seasons I



hope I remember to power down when my batteries get low. If not, I hope I know where my health insurance card is.

It's funny how so many life lessons can be learned from a tiny robot vacuum. Or maybe I am just funny in how I look at things. Either way, every time I turn on my robot vacuum it reminds me to pause and reflect. It also makes me ask the question, "Where's Rae?" I have no doubts she too has some insights on the new vacuum. Rae is not as appreciative of the tech upgrades as I am...cats are like that.

## **Healthy Habits – Give and Get – by Marcy Lytle**

Have you ever thought about how giving can be a healthy habit? And I'm not just referring to giving money, although we know that's something that's always a blessing! For the sake of this month's suggestion, I'm referring to giving in lots of other ways that enables us to look out from our own shortcomings or situations we don't love...into the lives of others and make sure they know they're awesome and wonderful. When we are down, there's nothing better than looking around to make sure others are up.

*Give a free compliment* – While you're standing in line to pay at a store, look up and notice her shoes or her outfit or her hair – and tell her how pretty or how you like it. Make that person smile, as she exits the store a bit lighter on her feet because someone told her she looked sweet!

*Give a prayer* – If you see on FB or hear through a friend that someone is about to have surgery, or is not feeling well – take time to text and offer a verse or a prayer to encourage them. Don't expect anything back, either. Give a prayer because it's an honor and privilege to do so!

*Give support* – If a friend has started a new venture, or had to leave a job for some reason, or has a difficult child, then offer encouragement. It might be a plant left on the porch, a text with kind words, or a card sent in the mail. I LOVED getting cards when my parents passed...it meant so much.

*Give him a surprise* – Maybe he's been working hard or just doing life with you, but he could use a boost. Purchase his favorite candy bar and leave it by his sink in the morning, or sneak it in his lunch box with a sweet note. Or buy him tickets to a favorite game coming up!

*Give yourself grace* – This is healthy, too! Take time to sit with your feet up and read, or leave that chore undone, or cry buckets of tears for no particular reason, or shop till your feet drop, or watch that movie you like that no one else does. Grace is good for the soul, even yours.

*Give a kid a smile* – It's so easy and good for all of us to offer smiles, especially to those little kids in strollers that are being pushed around in stores. Sometimes, a kid's whole face lights up when an adult smiles at him/her – so do it. Notice the kids, smile, wave, and tell that mom how cute the kid is, too.

*Give the elderly a hand* – Open the door, grab that item on the high shelf, compliment her or ask how she's doing, stop by and visit, offer to take her for coffee or run an errand. The older get forgotten, even by their families. Noticing them can make their day.

Giving to others and expecting nothing in return, we hear that's the best and highest form of giving. But it can also be one of the healthiest things we can do this fall for ourselves, our families, and others. Giving is part of the fabric of living the best life, and when we give as if we're giving to HIM, we are never disappointed. Because he notes it, he provides right back for us, and he is pleased. And that makes any heart feel and pump better and healthier and stronger.

## **Life Right Now - Forever and Ever - By Jennifer Stephens**

There's always that one day. When the air has that just right touch of crispness. When digging out tall boots and a cardigan creates the perfect outfit for tackling the to-do list. No longer hot and humid but not yet bitter and chilled. That one day when the atmosphere tastes cold and fresh and dry all at once. Stepping outside for an autumn stroll on that one perfect day, my nose is instantly filled with a tornado of scents – the lingering smoky aroma of last night's backyard fire pit intertwined with the musky sweetness of a newly raked leaf pile. Oh, the leaves! Rich reds and vibrant golds falling from branches as they dance through the air, creating a crunchy blanket brushing my feet with each step. It's that one day when the past and the present collide in an explosion of senses. But the next day is different – it doesn't feel the same, the leaves are lifeless, and there's an unpleasant staleness in the air. That one perfect autumn day doesn't last forever.

Then there's the pie. Pumpkin. My husband begs for it all year long. It's his favorite. But I think it tastes better during the "ber" months. Pulling the freshly baked pumpkin pie from the oven and placing it on the counter to cool stirs up the fragrance of fall as cinnamon and nutmeg float through the whole house until mouths are watering. His is smeared with Cool Whip all over the top. Mine is buried under so much whipped topping you might wonder if there's even any pie on the plate! Some people like it plain. And others drop a dollop of cream precisely in the middle. It's so scrumptious that before long every plate is bare, and the pie pan is left empty. Not even one nibbling crumb remains. That delicious pumpkin pie doesn't last forever.

It's the time of year when five-foot wide dirt paths cut through a field of tall, green stalks can only mean one thing. The corn maze. This maze isn't solved with a pencil, it's a life size trail filled with people - us -winding our way through the acres and acres of rustling corn. We turn this way and that, sometimes backtracking, and often wondering if we've already been on this path - before hitting another dead end. Surrounded by walls of corn. Eventually discovering a bridge, we climb the steps to the lookout to see the maze's design and hopefully grab a hint to help us make our escape. It takes a couple hours, but we finally make it out! It's such a satisfying autumn experience, but if we wait too late to go, the corn will be trampled and the path too muddy. That fabulous fall adventure doesn't last forever.

Perfect autumn days, freshly baked pumpkin pies, and carefully designed corn mazes DON'T last forever. Most things on earth aren't meant to last forever. Sometimes we can become discouraged by the fleeting nature of the things we enjoy. We want those things we're fond of to go on and on. But there is something that DOES last. Forever. God's love for us. No matter what we do. Or don't do.

Despite how much I want to always do the things I know I should do as a Christian, sometimes I just...don't. Tired or busy or lazy. Sometimes we, er, I, let life get in the way. When we don't spend time serving and connecting with others, life can become lifeless and stale - like the air outside on the day after the perfect autumn day. Letting our Bibles collect dust can leave us feeling empty inside, like the barren remains of the pie plate. And leaving Jesus out of our thoughts and forgetting to go to God in prayer leaves us feeling trampled on. Our path gets muddy – just like the corn maze. But guess what? Those lifeless, stale, empty feelings don't

have to last forever. Even if we let life sometimes get in our way, we are ALWAYS welcome to come to the Lord. Psalm 136 tells us,

“His love endures forever.” Forever and ever. That is a love that  
is lasting. Permanent. His love for us will never end...

“He remembered us in our low estate

His love endures forever.

And freed us from our enemies

His love endures forever.

He gives food to every creature.

His love endures forever.

Give thanks to the God of heaven.

His love endures forever.”

Psalm 136:23-26

## **Under Pressure - The Mulberry Trees – by Debbie Haynes**

There's a story in II Samuel 5 where David is anointed king and it says he was only 30 years old, and then he was king for 40 years! However, there was a problem because the land was still inhabited by a group of mountain-dwelling people that had a propensity to war. These people began to taunt King David, telling him they were stronger than he and his people.

We then read that David did take the city, renamed it Jerusalem, Zion, the City of David – and David went on to grow great, and God was with him.

As this king grew in kingdom and kingly stature, there were some giants that came to seek David and kill him. David inquired of God as to what to do, and God told David to go and that these enemies would be delivered into David's hands. Again, David smites the enemy, and again the enemy shows up to come against David.

This is where this story gets interesting. This time, when David inquired of God as to what to do, God tells him of a different plan. He tells David to come upon the enemy over against "the mulberry trees." And when David hears a sound in the tops of the trees, then he is to stir himself, God will show up, and this giant will be defeated. David obeyed; the giant was felled.

Notice God's direction this time to not attack until he heard the sounds in the tops of the trees! So, what was the sound? The sound was of a marching army – complete with horses' hooves pounding the ground. It was a sound of sure victory, in the middle of an otherwise sure slaughter by the giants, if David hadn't obeyed.

The giants heard this sound of a mighty marching army and thought surely David and his men had enlisted other armies to help them fight, and we read that the giants then fled!

I love this story, because it says to us that read it – be not afraid! God has strategies for victory that we know nothing of, a grove of "mulberry trees" so to speak, already planted for his own purposes. He can create distractions, sounds, armies at exactly the time he designates.

Maybe giants loom in our own land, possible defeat all around, and overwhelming odds are stacked against us. When we ask God for direction, he might tell us to face the giants head-on, OR he might tell us to wait until we hear the "sound."

It was after David heard the sound, then he stirred himself to move.

*Dear Father, help us to hear the sound and know when to move forward in your name, knowing all enemies are defeated by your hand. We are listening, we have prayed, and yet we are surrounded, and now we wait. We wait on the sound...for the execution of your strategy to begin for a sure win.*



MARRIAGE

## **In This Together – No Nuts, Please** - by Bekah Holland

Okay , I'm about to bring up some very controversial topics, so go ahead and do some deep breathing to prepare yourself. I'll wait.

First off, feel free to disagree, but just know that I don't care. Because sometimes I just need to take a stand. That being said, mayonnaise is disgusting. There are only two exceptions to this rule, and those are my momma's potato salad and with tuna for a sandwich. That's it. Period. Now, I grew up in a house where my parents obviously had some kind of psychopathic tendencies, because they loved tomato sandwiches (which, by the way, consist of only sliced tomato, bread, and mayo.) Nope. *All the nopes.*

So while I'm ruffling feathers, let me add that there is no such thing as too much garlic, center brownies are way better than the edge pieces, and nuts do not, under any circumstances, belong in chocolate, candy or ice cream.

At this point, I'm assuming that I have managed to offend just about everyone. You're welcome. You can come at me all you want over these particular topics. I'm completely dug in and will defend my opinion (facts) to the death.

*Now what, pray tell, does this have to do with marriage?*

*Well, nothing really, but hear me out.*

While these things don't have anything to do with our actual relationship, they do require us to choose a side. Sometimes, we can just agree to disagree. Not on the mayonnaise thing, but most everything else. And sometimes disagreeing works out for everyone. Like with the brownies. While my husband is an equal opportunity brownie eater and doesn't care about center vs edge pieces, and I've made my feelings on the subject pretty clear, sharing a plate of brownies without having to eat fast enough to get all the best parts is a beautiful thing. If everything in marriage were this easy, there would be a major shift in the field of marriage counseling. But, most of the time, there is a lot more to different viewpoints that ensuring that almonds and peanuts are not included in anything I plan on putting in my face hole. The best way to manage finances, buying versus renting, anything related to parenting, whose job it is to put a new bag in after your partner takes out the garbage (because I'd rather throw myself down a flight of stairs than take out the trash) and a whole slew of other things that will come up over and over. And once our marriage isn't all shiny and new anymore, those differences of opinions can end up snowballing into resentment if we let them. Because anyone who has been married for more than 5 minutes knows that before we're really all 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 365 long days a year, we have no idea that someone's chewing could make us homicidal or that there is, in fact, a wrong way to load the dishwasher. How do we manage someone else's chewing? No idea, but now that my son is the world's loudest chewer, I am on a mission to find a way. I'll let you know.

Until then, we all have to make some concessions. Like if my husband washes the dishes, I've learned to accept this bit of love in action and not rage and organize the plates and bowls before turning on the dishwasher. And when I feel chatty in the morning and my husband is looking at me like I have two heads because I can't stop talking about the weird dream I had, before he's had enough coffee to work his way through my particular brand of crazy, he's stopped walking

away and slamming a door (that's not true, I think he normally closed it semi quietly) and instead has perfected his *I'm totally listening face* and tries to nod in the right places. Don't get me wrong. There are times when we have had much more intense and important disagreements. There were times that we yelled and screamed and said things that we never should have said. And sometimes, we just have to take turns on being right or picking the least terrible path forward.

Learning to deal with the more mundane issues has helped us to work through the tougher ones. Because we're learning to assume the best, to listen to hear and not to respond, and to be open to trying something that might not line up with what we want. *Unless it's mayo*. And instead of demanding our own way, we try to not only hear what the other is saying, but also recognize the things that are left unsaid, right under the surface. It's all give and take. Sometimes I'm great at it and he's cranky. And sometimes he's right on the money and I have to figure out how to stop twitching and (not so) gracefully concede he was right. But through the hard choices like parenting and finances, as well as the easy ones like who gets to pick takeout for family night, we keep trying, and sometimes failing, and trying again to find some humor, grace and common ground. Not only is this important for us, but it's also even more important for our kids to watch how we choose to deal with issues big and small. We haven't always been a good example of that. But we keep waking up, getting up and trying again. And if nothing else, our kids will see what it looks like to not give up on your people, how to love big, and finding ways to laugh through the struggles.

So, don't stop trying. Don't ever stop laughing. And never ever forget to ask about nuts in chocolate chip cookies before channeling your inner Martha Stewart.

"We both said 'I do' and we haven't agreed on a single thing since."

*So I Married an Axe Murderer*



## **Date Night Fun – Go to the Games – by Marcy Lytle**

Fall is near, football is happening, kids are playing games (even just in the parks), and stadiums are filling up. So...why not incorporate this season into your date night time together? We are hoping to attend a high school game in the new stadium near our home, even though we know no one on the team – it's the high school stadium where our kids went years ago! Games are great for fun food, people watching, cheering and clapping, and holding hands and laughing...so go!

High school football – Find one that interests you. One time we went to a six-man game in a small town, so do that if you want! Sometimes, the best foods are at the games! Plan a Friday night game together or even invite another couple, and go.

Little kids on the field – If you have littles in your life find out the schedules for their games and try to attend one game, or two. Often, these games are on Saturday mornings, so make it a breakfast date and then show up to cheer them on. Afterwards, take a walk at the park where they played.

A sport you'd never watch – Is there an event you've never attended or watched? We once went to a Roller Derby event and loved it. Sat by a guy that told us all about the rules. Or stay at home for date night and watch a sporting event, with all the fun food, together. You pick one game, he picks the next. Of course there's football, but pick something new!

Cricket in the park – We often take walks in the park and see teams playing cricket. That's not a sport we are familiar with but we enjoy watching. There are even some Bollywood films about cricket, worth watching. Or maybe there's another sport going on in your park – soccer, for example. Pack a picnic and sit on the sidelines and learn, and chat about the game.

A splurge at a stadium – We have Austin FC in our town, the Texas Longhorns, and more. Tickets aren't cheap, but going to one of the games is so fun once in a while, so save up and go! Get into the fan noise, the snacks you can buy at the stands, and yell until you can't talk. Dress up in team colors, if you enjoy that sort of thing. Make it a date night to remember...

What games are your favorites to watch? Have you thought of calling it a date night, by dressing up, snuggling close, enjoying good food and chatting about the plays, the scores, the miscalls, and those around you? We have attended ultimate Frisbee games the past two summers and loved it...it was a regular date night. Who knew we'd enjoy such a thing?

## **After 40 Years – It's An Honor – by Marcy Lytle**

Maybe it's this way with every married couple, where one is stronger than the other in some area. For example, my husband makes the bed precisely and succinctly, he cleans the kitchen til it's in pristine shape, he can fix anything that's broken, and so much more! He's way better than I am at so many things. So I let him do those things...and try to make sure and thank him.

One particular area where I admire him and wish I was like him is in the area of his faith. He's so settled, never gets ruffled or worried, and truly rests in his relationship with his Father like no other person I know. For that, I'm truly grateful and glean from him so much. In fact, I often lean on him for strength so much that I wonder if I'll topple him over!

I was thinking about this lately because I've been sad because of my father's passing and some other losses we've experienced in the last year, and my husband has been my rock. He has often assured me that all is well.

But who assures him? I'm so used to him being up and smiling and strong and secure, that I don't often remember to encourage him!

I know he gets tired from work, as his job is super tedious and time consuming. I know he's sleepy and needs a nap when we're going so much. I know he must grow weary and not say anything, for fear of being a burden to me. Or, maybe he doesn't. But instead of always sitting over here waiting for him to pour into me, I can step up and pour into him. It should be my honor to do so!

I'm not a server like he is, so it doesn't come natural to me. So, in my thinking I've come up with some ways I can honor him by strengthening his walk, holding his hand, and making him smile:

- I can pray for him. Seems like a no-brainer, but he's always doing so well I forget to!
- I can make sure his delights are mine. I don't care for coffee, but when he wants one, I can sit and chat and let him linger as he sips instead of hurrying on...
- I can leave encouraging notes on his desks of affection, verses, or just a smiley face.
- I can text him to say how proud and thankful I am for him.
- I can do one of his chores when I see he's tired and busy, like take out the trash.
- I can thank him more often for the way he holds my hand during a movie.
- I can admire a job well done of any kind that he does, small or big.
- I can pray for him again. Encircling him in prayer for health, strength and faith.

I know not everyone has a spouse full of faith. Maybe you're the one always pulling up the family with your strong walk with God. And you're the one who needs a hand up. I'm praying for you right now and giving thanks for anyone in a family that stands strong in faith for the others. It's hard sometimes, to always be the rock and the foundation and the security for those around us who are floundering all the time. Sometimes, the strong ones need a boost and lots of love coming their way, too, even if they don't ask, say they don't need it, and seem to soar all the time. They do need it, and it's an honor and a privilege to bless and be blessed.

If your husband carries you most of the time, make your own list of ways to honor him. If you're the one that carries him, then I pray that he notices or that you can find solace and strength in the One who carries us all and feel his arms under yours every single minute of every single day. He delights in those he loves, and that includes you.

## **For Better or Worse - Build Him Up – by Kaelin Scott**

Something I admire about my husband is his humility. He chooses to glorify God instead of himself, and I love that. When people find out he works for one of the most famous people in Texas, their first question is usually, “How did you land that job?” Britton could talk about his qualifications or his education or his experience, but he doesn’t. He always says the same thing. “It was a God thing.”

Truly, it was God’s divine intervention that led us here. It was absolutely His plan, regardless of Britton’s achievements or preparedness. But Britton doesn’t have to say that. He could easily go on about how awesome he is and puff himself up to make people admire him or be jealous of him. Still, he doesn’t do that. He gives credit where credit is due and chooses to glorify God.

I was going to write this article about humility in marriage, but I realized something else I needed to address instead. Since my husband doesn’t like to brag on himself, it gives me plenty of chances to do it for him. But here’s the problem...I often don’t.

It’s not that I’m not proud of him or grateful for him or any of that. I guess I’m just a scaredy pants when it comes to talking up my husband. I could list all of his positive attributes here on pen and paper (or you know, keyboard), but when it comes to face-to-face interactions, I fall pretty flat. And I don’t think I’m the only one.

Actually, most women these days are so quick to bash their husbands to their friends. To complain and tear them down. It runs rampant in the online mom groups I’ve joined over the years. In fact, some pretty terrible things have been said about ladies’ husbands online for all to see. For some reason, women tend to use each other to verbally desecrate their husbands. It’s pretty sad.

I can’t speak for men, but to me, it seems like guys aren’t doing this nearly as much when they get together as women are. They talk about fishing or sports or whatever it is they’re into. Correct me if I’m wrong on this, but in general, men don’t seem to be sitting around tearing their wives apart with their words.

So why do women do it? Why aren’t we out there building our husbands up and making them look good? Why do we want to make them look bad? I don’t know the answer to that, and I’m not assuming everyone does this all the time. I’m just pointing out a trend I’ve seen among women in general.

Narrowing it down to just me again...I know I’ve wasted opportunities to say good things about Britton when he wasn’t around, or even when he was. Maybe I wasn’t bashing him or complaining about him (although I’m sure I’ve done that a time or two, sorry babe). But so many times, when I could brag about my hubby and verbally build him up, I fall short. I don’t say anything. Or I say the wrong thing. (It’s a running joke in our house that I have foot in mouth syndrome and I’m very socially awkward.)

I think a lot of this has to do with confidence. I’m not the most confident person. Bragging doesn’t come naturally to me, either. But encouragement does, so maybe I should look at it as public encouragement. I need to publicly encourage my husband, whether he’s there to hear it or not. It’s my job as his partner and his best friend to speak positive and uplifting things about him. There are enough negative voices in the world around us. He doesn’t need mine to be another.

Maybe we can challenge ourselves over the next month to only speak positively about our husbands. No, I don't mean we can't express frustration or hurt or any of that. But we can do that to his face, and only to him. Outside of our homes, let's be our husbands' champions. Their cheerleaders. Their number one fans. Let's use every opportunity to build them up, and then let's watch what happens. Who knows, it might strengthen our marriage and bring us closer together. At the very least, there will be less negativity floating around. At the very most, God will be glorified by our speech. Sounds like a worthwhile cause, right?



ENCOURAGEMENT

## **Rooted in Love - Light of the World – by Kaelin Scott**

Times have been kind of crazy for the past few years. Actually, things in this world are always pretty crazy, aren't they? It seems like we get past one major event and another soon follows. There really is no "normal" when it comes to life.

I think a lot of people today get caught up in certain things that are happening, so much so that they forget what really matters. And I don't think a lot of the things we get so worked up about really matter that much in the grand scheme of things.

When we get so wrapped up in current events and the news, we lose sight of what's really important. I'm not saying those things aren't important, but they aren't the end-all be-all. Sure, current events and local news impact us, but the health of our souls is what really matters. In the end, Jesus is the only thing that really and truly matters.

So when the world seems like it's falling apart...again...what do we do? How do we keep our eyes on Jesus?

We need to have a heart of prayer. We need to spread kindness instead of anger. We need to really listen and understand others, but we also need to be bold enough to stand up for what's right. We need to have discernment. We need to be rooted in the truth of God's Word. We need to defend those who can't defend themselves. We need to speak the name of Jesus every chance we get.

We can't let fear be our motivator. If we're acting out of fear, then we can't possibly act out of love. Fear and love cannot coexist, because perfect love casts out fear. Being afraid of what the world thinks means we can't truly love others. The devil knows this, and that's why he tries to make us afraid. But it doesn't matter what the world thinks. It matters how we represent our Savior, whether it matches with what's popular or acceptable in society or not.

When things get crazy that's when the world needs Jesus the most. And that means we need to put on the full armor of God. We need to be ready to defend our faith. And we need to speak the truth in love. If we're too afraid to speak up, then the truth will never be heard. So many people are in desperate need of love and grace, and all they need is someone to show them the way.

The world needs us, sisters in Christ. It needs to hear the truth, and it needs to feel God's love. We can't let it fall to someone else. Each one of us must be bold in our faith, and we must stand together. The more voices telling the truth, the more people will hear and understand.

We can't hide our light; we have to let it shine. Together. Now more than ever. The darkness is closing in, but it won't have the last say. The light will win. The question is, how many people can we love and serve until the trumpet sounds?

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden...  
In the same way, let your light shine before others."  
Matthew 5:14, 16

## Firmly Planted – The Adventurous Path – by Dina Cavazos

---

Sometimes life just plods along like an old horse, weary of carrying people on its back, the only excitement being a (hopefully) tasty morsel at the end of it. Sometimes it feels like there is no real purpose to the plodding, day after day. Some lucky horses have more adventurous lives; but a horse probably doesn't even think about it, it simply experiences, moment to moment, drudgery, hunger, pleasure, excitement, or whatever else the day brings.

Thankfully, I, being human, am able to think beyond today. I have a spiritual dimension that longs to connect with its source, who is God. Since childhood, the questions "Who am I?," "Why am I here?" and "What am I supposed to do?" have tugged and pulled and stirred. These questions have caused me to seek in places high and low. These questions dangled themselves in front of my lostness, and led me into the pathless forest of life, looking for a way through. I was looking for meaning, truth, adventure—there had to be *something* worth living for. I didn't know it at the time, but I wasn't lost in the dark all alone.

Feeling lost is lonely: the lack of direction, the lack of connection, carrying the dead weight of troubles and unanswered questions, just like an old tired horse. But something kept me going, and, fortunately, unlike a horse, my searching spirit was met by its Source, pursuing and waiting for me to come home. I finally did. I finally found the path home through the forest. When I realized that the path is a Person who called himself the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and not a path of my own making, everything changed.

It wasn't easy; at first I was assailed by doubts. Could I believe the incredulous gospel story? Could it be true? In my lostness, I was inclined to believe far-out notions that sounded like sci-fi. Why shouldn't I believe this story that was rooted in history and had endured for thousands of years? I decided to make a choice. It was tenuous at first, but my conviction grew stronger as I exercised faith. Over the years, there were ups and downs and I meandered away from the Path a few times, but I always came back, and I can say my feet are now "firmly planted" in Him.

Now I know who I am, why I'm here, and what I'm supposed to do. I am not merely plodding through life for a tasty morsel at the end. He provides a well of living water to drink from each day, and he himself is the bread of life. In the story where Jesus turns water into wine, Mary, his mother said something very wise and very pointed: "Whatever he says, do it." That's the way I want to live my life. There is nothing more satisfying, rewarding, or adventurous. In part 2, I'll share one of my adventures with God you won't want to miss!



## **Moving Forward – Remember – by Pam Charro**

Part of my time with God this morning was about remembering what I was delivered from when I came to know Christ. As the years go by, it's so easy to forget that I haven't always been right with God. This particular devotional today was short, but powerful enough to bring tears to my eyes.

I realize that not everyone has experienced a horrible past such as mine, and not everyone had a strong awareness at a young age of how dark the world could be before they accepted Jesus as their Savior. I had a nightmare childhood, and by the time I was in my early 20s, I was angry, insecure, abusive to others, and self-destructive. After years of therapy and anti-depressants, I knew I needed something; but the more things I tried in order to find fulfillment, the more I began to suspect that maybe there was no answer. The bubble I lived in that suggested that hope was "out there somewhere" was becoming precariously thin and on the verge of popping.

I was running out of ideas by the time I was 23. I had moved from Montana to Massachusetts to try and know my dad and make it as a singer, and, so far, trying to have a relationship with my dad had turned out disastrous. I had tried drugs, multiple boyfriends, every weight loss diet known to woman, voice lessons, and had auditioned for bands. The solution which I had believed most of my life would finally prove my value - becoming a famous singer who was loved by all - was becoming less and less likely. And if becoming famous and thin wasn't the answer...what was left? I couldn't find love or significance anywhere, and I was beginning to lose all hope.

But God knew exactly when to reveal himself to me, right at the time I would have run out of places to turn. Right at the time when becoming a Christian was the last thing that appealed to me. He let me try the world just long enough to learn that it didn't work, and not a minute longer, and then he showed me everything I needed to know. It was THE turning point that he and I had waited for my entire life. How blessed I was to not have to spend more than 24 years in my search! My life, while still far from easy, has never been empty since. And, regardless of how many mistakes I've made, he has always been there for me.

I am so thankful for my story. It has incredible meaning for me, and I love remembering where I was and how it felt to be lost, and then found. I hope you also will have the opportunity to share your story with someone today. There will always be such power in our remembering...and in our sharing.

## **Simple Truths - Different is So Good- by Marcy Lytle**

I remember when my kids were small they wanted us to have friends that had children the same ages as our kids. Well, what a wish that was, because it was almost impossible to find another set of parents our age with a boy and a girl, the same ages as our kids. And besides that, who knew if our kids would have similar interests?

Now that I'm much older, I realize that having friends with similar interests is so nice, but having friends that are different is so good, as well! So good!

I have a friend that early on when I met her, she showed up to a meeting with a bowling bag as a purse! I knew right away we'd be friends, because this lady was an individual and thought outside the box. And we are still friends, even though she now lives far away.

I have a friend who loves cats, as much as she loves her kids. I don't care for cats, but I love that she does! And it's fun to hear her tales of the cats and their love for her, as well.

I have a friend that likes only happy-ending movies and she won't go see any films at all, unless they end well! This means we rarely see movies together, but she's a best friend because I love HER!

I have multiple friends that go to different churches than I do, worship in different ways, and focus on things maybe I'm not so focused on. This makes for good conversation, and all of these friends are prayer warriors, so I'll take more!

I have a friend that shops in places I'd never enter. We just have different interests in clothes and even home décor. But she's delightful in every way, and has a huge personality. She's so fun!

I have a friend that's way younger than I am, but she and I connect on in so many ways. I love hearing about her life, and she's always interested and asks about mine. That's so cool, and so is she.

I have another friend that's a young mom, and I'm not, but we connected right away when she moved here. We could talk and talk, and we had this mother/daughter love then...and now...though she too has moved away.

My point in recounting all of those friends is that none of them is exactly like me, and for that I'm grateful. I've noticed that when I'm just like someone else, sometimes competition can creep in, because we like the same things. And I'm not interested anymore in my life in competing. It also requires me to be tolerant of differences, even embrace them, and to notice others and welcome and take interest in how they ARE different from me. It's much more fun!

Of course, we do have lots of things in common, which is nice. But those differences, rather than being a point of contention or avoidance, are actually points I've come to love.

Maybe this school year, this new season, in new places where we find ourselves, we can look for new friends of any kind, color, economic status, or whatever...and be open to enjoying all people. It widens our horizon, extends our arms, and creates a welcome at our doors.

And our friend list grows longer...and longer...and our kids see it's not the same that's so important, it's just the friend that is...

## Unearthly Thing - The School of Suffering – by Angela Dolbear

I squeeze out the last creamy blob from the tube of Aquaphor Healing lotion. As I rub it on the long, thin line of light pink raised skin that stretches from an inch above my belly button, all the way down to my pubic bone, I think about suffering.

I don't mind the hysterectomy scar so much. I'm not one to wear bikinis. Never have been. My husband Tim is the only other person to see the scar. Whenever he sees it, I can see in his face that he is praising God that there was no cancer, and that the tumor didn't explode and kill me. All healed-up well. And I join him in praising God.

Can suffering be a good thing? A terrible emergency now leads us to moments of praise and gratitude.

Is suffering like a school that teaches us a deeper sense of gratitude, and praise to a God with faithful, unfailing love?

I have loads of medical adventures, some serious, and each one has a testimony of about God—how He spoke words of comfort and encouragement to me. I will forever testify to His goodness.

Would I have such a strong testimony if I had not been made to become a connoisseur of emergency rooms and hospital food? Would my conviction and authenticity of God's goodness be so strong?

I wouldn't pause to say no. I have drawn closer to my Lord because He has drawn closer to me, especially in my times of need.

The school of suffering has taught me many valuable lessons. Here are a few:

- Deeper prayer – the need to pray more, and my desire to pray has increased, too.
- Awareness that God is always with me – sometimes it's just His presence, but most often His words that He speaks to me in my spirit are with me. I have a yearning to hear His voice and His words; it almost feels like an insatiable addiction.
- Psalm 119:67 puts suffering into action (I LOVE THIS!) – “Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now Your word do I keep [hearing, receiving, loving, and obeying it].” - Psalm 119:67 Amplified Bible, Classic Edition (AMPC)

Pain and suffering are imperative aspects of life. They are used by God to communicate with us, and change us, and even stir us to action. One of my favorite quotes from C.S. Lewis describes this concept:

“We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”  
C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*

Hindsight is 50/50, I say. We can either become bitter after suffering or become stronger. I will gladly and unflinchingly tell anyone about the goodness of God after experiencing His goodness firsthand. His existence and ever-present help are now my confident convictions. And His voice is music to my soul, which I long to hear.

God is good. I will say it again and again.

*Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series, and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). Angela writes real, relevant, relatable, and reverent fiction. She loves reading, writing prose, as well as writing and recording music with her husband Tim in their studio in Nashville, TN. Listen to their music on [Sound Cloud](#)! Please drop by and sign-up for news and to read new stories and hear new original music at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>. Blessings to you!*



FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME - Beware – by Marcy Lytle**

There are times I wish I'd noticed the "Beware" signs before I stepped forward, and there are still times now when I wish there were beware signs that we all see and notice and heed...before doing the deed. Beware signs are pinned to fences so that we know there are vicious dogs behind the posts, but there are so many places in every walk of life when a Beware sign would have been so nice...but no one pinned one up.

So here are the Beware signs I'd pin up if given the chance:

1. Beware of your children saying they're too fat or dressing to please their peers. They're getting their kudos from the wrong places, so observe where those places are and steer them away.
2. Beware of teachings that leave out Jesus and the work He did on the cross, and our need for a Savior, in favor of stating we are all inherently good. In other words, beware of those "worship" centers that contradict the Word.
3. Beware of scams in your emails, on your phone, and at your door. Don't click, don't answer, and don't open. Ever.
4. Beware of placing your trust in theology instead of Jesus. Theology is a good outline, but Jesus is the body of life...when the outline shifts.
5. Beware of what you say in front of little ears that aren't mature enough to process what you're saying...like judgment, gossip, fear and other loads they're not meant to carry. You'll break them.
6. Beware thinking that plants will thrive and live when they aren't watered daily and often, and placed in good soil, and tended to...much like your children. Learn from your garden.
7. Beware of the fact that friendships change and bitterness will try to settle in like a bird's nest on your head, blocking your vision of all that's good in life. Give thanks instead of growing bitter.
8. Beware that change can occur overnight, in literally seconds, and if your foundation is sand, you might wash away and need a lifeboat. But if that foundation is the Rock, you'll fall, but you the One under you will catch you.
9. Beware of eating poorly and thinking it will never adversely affect your health. It will. It will.
10. Beware of watching social media and chasing after what others have, instead of reveling in what you possess.
11. Beware of looking for a sign in order to feel God's approval. He's already approved of you. Go and enjoy life.
12. Beware of walking too close to the edge of uneven sidewalks in heels or sad shoes, because trips and falls will occur. Look where you're walking.
13. Beware of hoping and pining for friends when you, yourself, are not friendly. Be a friend.
14. Beware of giving with a motive to get, which leaves you totally dissatisfied every time. Give and expect nothing in return except the smile that comes from sharing what you've received.

15. Beware of the brevity of life, yet the longevity of love, and offer it freely to all you meet, in every place you greet...

What "beware" signs would you write and paint and hang on your fence for all to see?



## **FRESH THYME - Forgetful, We Are – by Marcy Lytle**

We were sitting in worship and the girl leading us mentioned how that we are a *forgetful people*. That stuck with me all day, because I am a *forgetful girl*. What I mean is that when problems arise, or fears lurk, I see the present panic and forget the past provision!

Of course, we know the people of God that wandered around for 40 years constantly forgot his care and provision, his deliverance, and everything he did time and time again! He killed an army of pursuers, by drowning them in the sea that he had just parted for his people to cross to safety. And then later, his people were thirsty and hungry, and they forgot about that mighty act from his hand...and they grumbled.

So yes, I think a forgetful people, we all are.

In Deuteronomy it says, "...do not **forget** the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them."

So perhaps one way we can become people that remember is by sharing our stories with the next generation. We've been doing that lately, with our kids. By speaking of His faithfulness, we hear it again and it encourages us, and they hear it for the first time and it sustains them!

There are so many examples in the Word about folks that experienced great exploits with God only to find them under a shade tree whining in the heat of the day...when times get tough.

When we are blessed (I really don't like the way we use that word) with things and health and family, etc. we revel in his goodness...but I'm not sure we take note of it. If we then come to a hurdle in this race we call life, we have this choice to remember those benefits we reveled in...or forget them and fear that the hurdle will be our demise.

Psalms 103 tells to not forget his benefits.

Here's what forgetting his promises produces:

- Ungratefulness
- Fear
- Selfishness
- Attitude
- Folly

We become ungrateful like toddlers that stomp their feet demanding a new toy, when there's a closet at home they haven't even touched. We raise a fist in fear and wonder why God would dare leave us alone, when in reality he is with us always...we've just forgotten that promise. Selfishness reigns because we pick up the lie again that it's up to us to make it through this next dark place...when the Light goes before us. Attitude raises its ugly head when we forget the Maker of the sunrise and the sunset, in favor of fearing the light of what each day might bring. And finally, folly takes place because we then act out of our forgetfulness. If we had remembered, we would have laid it all down and acted in wisdom, resting in His peace.

I'm writing about this because I am one that tends to forget in favor of picking up the glasses called fear and seeing through them darkly, wishing and wondering where God is. I'm so thankful for his patient endurance with his people...of which I am one. And I'm so grateful indeed for his daily reminders written in our hearts, our minds, in the sky and beneath our feet...that we are loved and cared for ALWAYS.

Even when a hurdle is right there on the path we're running. And even if we miss this one and we stumble and fall, no worries at all. We remind ourselves that His arms are always open, His hand always available, and He will lift us to run again...this time remembering His strong arm.

I recall today that I've seen his goodness in the land of the living...so why shouldn't I continue to see it today...in the heat of the moment?

## **Fresh Thyme – Hairtitude - by Marcy Lytle**

I realize that over the decades, the way I've worn my hair has coincided with my attitude at the time. I'm not saying everyone is like this, because I have no idea, but it occurred to me that I styled my hair certain ways that sort of paired with the season of my life. Isn't that interesting? I'm calling it *hairtitude*, and here's how it played out for me.

As a teen, I wore my hair long and wavy, coloring it in the summer with "Sun In" (even though it looked orange instead of blonde) and I kept with the trends. Because after all, what teen doesn't want to "fit in" with her peers? I certainly did!

After I was married a while, my hair got shorter and shorter and more of a severe cut. It made me look sophisticated and tough, and I was all about asserting myself as a woman. I didn't like being pregnant (because my husband didn't have to get fat) and I was bitter against men in so many areas, so my hair cut exhibited sass! And class!

I had colored my hair darker, but then decided to go back to my natural color – a cool blond – as my kids matured and grew. Everyone in my family was blonde but me, so I wanted to match them. And my hair was wavier and softer, but still short. I was maturing, becoming less judgmental toward others, wanting to appear more loving rather than stiff and hard-nosed. Thus, my hair spoke "volumes" with its tousles and curls.

This current decade I'm going gray, and allowing my hair to grow out some. I remember noticing older women in ads and on the big screen and realizing that I want to portray an older woman that's kind, gentle and loving always...no matter whom I'm near or with. And longer hair speaks that, for me.

So by now, maybe you're reading and thinking about your own hair. I'm just saying I've noticed this for me...and me alone. But I think even the clothes we wear, the way we carry ourselves, and how we style our homes reflects the different phases we go through as women over the years.

I would never wear now some of the outfits I wore in the 80's! And my kitchen was a bright lime green and yellow in our first house – can you believe it?

Who knew hair could carry with it such attitude...thus the name of this story...*hairtitude*. But for me, it certainly did. Think about some of the actresses you've watched on the big screen and look at their hair changes with their characters. It's for sure a thing to create softness or hardness, fitting in or standing out, or even speaking and crying for attention.

It's interesting to think about what we wear or show on the outside and how it reflects all the inside frustrations...isn't it? *Hairtitude*. I'm pretty sure I've had some other "tudes" with the way I've presented myself to others over the years. And I hope that I'm always working on improving all of the attitudes that don't reflect Him.

At the present, I'm using texture sea spray for soft waves, hair serum for improved growth, and a great shampoo and conditioner for health and volume...because my hair is aging. Oh the joy

of aging. And these products might work a few wonders to improve the look of my hair, but the expressions on my face underneath the hair – well, I'm still working on those.

## **FRESH THYME - The Now List – by Marcy Lytle**

It's September. I think about this every single fall...what to purchase now so that Christmas spending isn't stressful. There are so many last-minute items we buy near the holidays that add up, even though they are small things! So here's my list of things I like to purchase now, so that when the holidays arrive, I'm just enjoying the music and the candles and the family...at least, that's the plan.

**Batteries** – These are a killer, aren't they? If you have lots of kids' toys on your list, batteries can be an expense all to themselves! Look for them on sale and stock up now on all sizes – place in a bucket – and have them ready to go on Christmas morning.

**Paper plates and napkins** – the pretty ones – Marshalls and TJ Maxx and other discount stores often have pretty seasonal plates and napkins. Purchase several sets, and quit washing all those other plates. Make it simple and pretty for yourself and everyone else.

**Easy dips and mixes** – Mad Dash Mixes are amazing. I mentioned them over on Seven for You as a convenience, and I'm writing about them here again, as a necessity! They really taste so good, and they're great to have on hand for those gatherings you're asked to attend, to bring something tasty, or for your own family get-togethers. Keep a stash in your pantry.

**Nuts** – These can get pricey! I hear Costco has the best nuts, but I also love to buy from the farmer's markets. I keep them in clear boxes in the fridge – at least four different kinds. Have them on hand for all the baking you'll do, or trail mix, or to just continue to stay healthy during the holidays.

**Wrapping paper, tape, sacks** – You know, these are outrageous if you have to purchase a lot. Last year, I wrapped everything in newspaper because we take the paper, and I thought why not – it saved me a bundle and looked cute! So think now if you have something already on hand to use and start saving it, like even scraps of material are great or buy red and green bandannas for small gifts – they're only a dollar each (cheaper than a bag!). If you do buy, consider ordering it all now on line, so you have what you need when it's time to wrap things up!

**Stocking gifts** – I've waited on these before and then they add up quickly to lots of expense right before Christmas. I know some have done away with stockings, but we haven't! I've now started buying them way before Christmas, a few each week, so they don't budge the budget. I look for something in EVERY store I enter – from Target to vintage to discount – all of them. I look for a variety of things from jewelry to soap to cute gadgets to small toys and more. I keep them hanging in bags in my closet until time to stuff the stockings.

**Candles** – Doesn't everyone like the holiday scents burning at Christmas? Candles are so expensive! I often buy them from the shelves of Ross and Marshalls, looking for brands I know smell good and burn long. Paddy Wax is a fave. I look for sales. Sometimes Bath and Body has a great sale. And markets are great places – so look now for your local city's list of holiday markets coming up this month and in October, and look for the scents you love and get them now.

I'm sure I could keep writing more and more things to buy early, but that's enough for now. You probably have your own list. I'd love to know what else you buy early. I love to have the month of December open for outings and romantic fires (if it's cool enough outside!) and sipping hot cider, instead of worrying about the dollars and cents.

Stock up now, and smile later...



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

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

October 2022





TIPS



## **The Dressing – Fall is for Jackets – by Marcy Lytle**

I haven't really been that fond of jackets, at least all of them. In fact, I don't own a jean jacket, because I find them uncomfortable. However, this year I've found a few jackets I like and they're perfect for the beginning of fall. I can have a couple hanging by the front door and grab one to go with any outfit, should the cool winds start to blow. They're also great to take to the theater, where it's always chilly. And they really dress up an otherwise casual look!

I have seven jackets this fall that I'm wearing, and I mostly shopped my closet with what I had to make outfits to go underneath them. A couple jackets were old ones I've had, and a few were new ones I just bought!

The long black jacket – This one is from Old Navy and really well-made and comfortable, and quite cozy. I love the length of the sleeves and the jacket itself. I love a retro button up underneath (from Marshall) in shades of green or even lavender. And a pop of red, too!

A wild print – I've had this jacket for years, and while it's a challenge to find something go underneath, it's so fun when I do! This muted gray tee is from Aeropostale and looks great underneath the bold gold.

Caramel houndstooth – I just found this one on the rack at a discount store, another long jacket in a great color for fall. Graphic tees are my favorite underneath this one. Shades of dark gray in the background, or fun words in fall hues, work great.

Short brown corduroy – This jacket was hanging in a vintage store and I grabbed it, because it was ten bucks! I really love the collar and the fitted look! Another retro button up with lavender and brown, with a red pin, is a fun look with this one...or just a leaf pin. Pins are a fun find at a vintage shop!

A simple gray jacket – This too is a staple in my closet, because gray is like a neutral – it goes with everything! It too looks great with all the graphic tees in your drawers, as well as over a white tee – which supposedly is a fall trend for 2022.

Navy dress-length jacket – Another oldie, but goodie. It really dresses up an outfit, worn over a fall dress with booties. The dress is from Latitude Staunton. It's a great fall piece for cool nights, over any outfit at all really!

Sleeveless gray shacket – Also worn over a dress, this is such a fun surprise piece I found somewhere...I can't recall! It's like a jean jacket, only no sleeves. It's a fun item over long sleeves when it gets cooler, and now over short sleeves.

Revisit your own closet to see what jackets you have and how you can wear them as an updated look, and then maybe purchase one or two, and wear them all month – with pins, scarves, over graphic tees, or white tanks...whatever you please!

## Seven for You – Holiday Savings

It's not holiday season YET...but it's so close...and tensions rise as money flies! We asked our panel of women contributors to weigh in on their ways to save money when purchasing gifts at Christmas. It's helpful to hear from each other and see if there are new habits we can pick up, as well! Gifts are costly, but we love to give...so how do we do so, without the stress? Hope you find some help in our hints...

I try to do all my Christmas shopping on Amazon on Black Friday. There are usually really good sales, and it saves me from having to go to the post office, since I have to ship most of my gifts to various regions of the U.S. It's helpful to set-up a "Gifts" Shopping List on Amazon, so anytime I see something I think someone might like, I save it to that shopping list. So handy! – Angela

I start shopping early, especially buying stocking gifts way before Christmas, so that extra expense is taken care of.

I wrap gifts with newspaper (which we subscribe to daily) and decorate with pretty ribbon – no wrapping paper expense! If you don't take the paper, you can wrap in all sorts of things – even bandannas are only a buck – much cheaper than paper and/or bags!

I have a budget for each person...it helps as I select the gifts...to stay in line. I record what I buy and how much it cost, to keep me in line. – Marcy

I set an overall budget. Sometimes I hand-make practical gifts and then give gift cards for the grown kids. I like this best. I've already had requests this Christmas for larger bowl cozies, which will be fun.

As for the younger kids, they all love pjs, and they like handmade ones, too.

Then I add a game or book. I try not to give money to the younger kids, but they really do like gift cards as well!

I totally stay away from clothes now, even though I enjoy buying for the kids. Their likes and sizes are a challenge that negates the pleasure. – Debbie

Years ago my grown kids decided they didn't want me to be bothered with buying them gifts. They only wanted the cash. But that's not as fun, so I still fill their stockings and have fun doing that. I watch the Walmart clearance aisle and if one talks of some little something they want, I get all of them the same. The girls get for girls and the guys get for guys. For example, one year I got all the guys folding camping stools because one wanted it. It was a fun gift. They all loved it and the stools were very inexpensive at Walmart.

I also every year include toothbrushes and lotion or bath gel from Bed, Bath, and Beyond. And they always have coupons and sales going on. [https://www.bathandbodyworks.com/p/white-citrus-shower-gel-021980239.html?ef\\_id=CjwKCAjwsMGYBhAEEiwAGUXJaWx6u163Z1aRXynurNpLwzBGwldiDvuZOmKQVNVU8LaH54Xoda69MRoCKFMQAvD\\_BwE:G:s&&cm\\_mmc=googlepmax\\_-paid-](https://www.bathandbodyworks.com/p/white-citrus-shower-gel-021980239.html?ef_id=CjwKCAjwsMGYBhAEEiwAGUXJaWx6u163Z1aRXynurNpLwzBGwldiDvuZOmKQVNVU8LaH54Xoda69MRoCKFMQAvD_BwE:G:s&&cm_mmc=googlepmax_-paid-)

[search- -](#)

[Bodycare&gclid=CjwKCAjwsMGYBhAEEiwAGUXJaWx6u163Z1aRXynurNpLwzBGwldiDvuZOmKQVNVU8LaH54Xoda69MRoCKFMQAvD\\_BwE&qclsrc=aw.ds](#)

I usually get too much to fit in their stockings so part of my fun is finding bags or creative containers for everything. One Christmas I bought Buccée's portable cooler bags to use. That one was a big hit!

Knowing that I'm buying fun items for stockings only allows me to shop all year for bargains. Last year I bought a fun little item and after hiding it, I forgot all about it. I got one for everybody but I can't tell you what it is. They're all getting it this year! – Carole

I have been thinking about how to answer this question. First, I always set a budget for each person (family). I try my best to stick to it. If I start buying items early (like the summer) I have to keep a notebook with each person's name and write down what I bought and how much I spent so I won't go over my budget. I don't really count stocking stuffers for the kids as part of my budget since I get most of those at the dollar store or the dollar spot at Target.

I love bargains and specials. I shop the clearance aisles early and often and I even got a few things on Prime Day. Walmart has wonderful clearance isles! I have already gotten some Lego sets at 50% off which is incredible for Legos. I will say if a person has asked for something they really want if I can't find it on sale, I will go ahead and just buy. With the way things have been this past year I worry it will sell out and I won't be able to get it. I think things are getting better though!

I also use coupons and if shopping online I always try and sign up for the discount by giving them my email or text. I can always opt out of the text once I receive the discount. Target has a great way of giving coupons and a percentage back of what I buy just by typing my phone number in at the register. Christmas is my favorite time of the year - I think it's because we get to give gifts. I have to remind myself that Christmas was our greatest gift from God that He sent His Son to be born! – Melissa

Christmas and the holidays is stressful in so many areas, but budgeting and spending can be fun if we let it be. Even gifts like words of encouragement, written out in a card, mean so much! If you have time to bake, then bake away and give just that warm plate of cookies or a few bars wrapped up in a pretty box. Most of all, lay aside comparison on what you give compared to what they give. Pray about what to give, what to spend, then enjoy doing it. And if there are no funds for spending, then put on your creative hat and don't spend funds. People say they like gifts from the heart or handmade ones the most, and I think it's true! Enjoy the holidays without breaking your budget for once, this year, and sigh at the joy He gives to us all...freely!

## **Three Moms – Book Faves – by The Cousins**

It's that time of year again when we start thinking ahead to Christmas and what to get the kids. What better gift than a gift of a book! And it helps to know what other moms/kids found delightful, so that we can then make choices for our kids. Below, the moms share book ideas for kids from ages 3 to 12. Hope it helps you shop and find just the right ones for your kiddos!

### **Mom of Two**

My girls love books and usually always read before bed or in the morning on the weekends. They love to grab a book and try to read by themselves.

The Jesus Storybook Bible by Sally Lloyd Jones – it's a great illustration of the main points and stories in the bible that's so relatable to kids. The girls love it. Each story is wrapped in Jesus' love for us. How cool is that?

Love You, Forever by Robert Mooch – The girls can recite this book! I even made up a song that goes with the love you forever section of the book. As parents, this brings tears to our eyes because it has such a good meaning behind it!

The Adventures of the Sea Kids – a Christian book series by Leyane Manchini – a friend introduced us to these. There is also a DVD series to watch. Each book has an underlying meaning of some sort of good, moral story of how you should act and all of the sea creatures are seen praying in the book. Also, every page has a hidden bible or Jesus fish, so as the kids read they find those on each page.

The Usborne Books – these have to be bought through a consultant who sells them – one of my good friends sells them. These are interactive books with lift the flaps, themes of learning about the body, about science or the outdoors. There is an alphabet book or even ones with erasable markers. I love that it's not just words, but the kids are involved in action. There's even a flashlight series where you find hidden pictures – the girls love.

We love to sit down, relax and let the worries of the day fade away while we read...

### **Mom of Three**

I will be honest, my kids are not the biggest fan of reading (unfortunately, they take after their parents). We are not really readers. That being said, we have in place 15 minutes of reading time every day after school and have really worked on helping them find books they enjoy.

Augie, who is 7, has really enjoyed the *Magic Treehouse* books lately. These books follow two kids who go on missions and adventures via a magical treehouse. They are similar to the Narnia series, but a bit easier to read as they are more for young readers. If you know Augie, he loves adventure, creativity and anything that gets his imagination stirred up.

Ayla, she is 9, has finally found a series she enjoys called *Dork Diaries*. The books are written in diary format so it includes drawings, photos, snippets, and different ways of writing that depict the daily life of a 15 year old girl. Ayla likes the drama and stories of the girl's life and how the book is written.

Our oldest, Gideon (who will be 11 in November), is really only into one thing - football - so we have had to find books centered on that. His favorite author is Tim Green, a former NFL football player, who now writes fiction books based around football & other sports stories. Gideon focuses on all the football ones, his favorite being *Left Out*. He likes this book because the story is about a kid who plays linebacker (like Gideon plays for his team), and is also deaf (which intrigues Gideon after all of his ear issues, growing up). Even though Gideon can hear, he has had his ears tested quite a bit over the years and so Gideon finds a thread of relation to the story. He is excited to read more of these books.

## **Mom of Four**

Our four kids are old enough to share with us this month about their own of their favorite books and why, so they responded this month with what they like. From ages 12 down to 7, here are their faves:

Harry Potter is definitely a favorite series of the oldest, and *Goblet of Fire* is her fave...because every chapter ends with a cliffhanger – so she sometimes catches herself reading late into the night! It's also an action packed story until the very end. She likes the way the author J.K. Rowling keeps you on the “edge of your feet” with a “good-scared feeling” no matter how many times you read the book.

Elijah is 11 and his favorite books are the *Who Was* series and he cannot choose a favorite because they are all good! He likes the covers of the books because they have big heads on them, and he likes the facts inside the book because they are interesting. There are also great pictures inside.

Anna's favorite book is *Bean & Ivy* because of the pictures and how it's so easy to understand what's going on in the story. It's a chapter book, and Anny says it's funny, too.

The youngest is Hope, age 7, and she likes the *Grumpy Unicorn* because he's a mad character but he's really funny. He makes her giggle and laugh, and he's the opposite of what one might think a unicorn might act like.

## **In the Kitchen – Bars, Boards and Bowls – by Marcy Lytle**

This season, where we have family gather, friends stop by, or just cozy nights at home in front of the TV, it's nice to have simple meals, yet fun and elegant, no matter how many are eating. Even if it's just for one! Whether we spread out the food across the bar or counter, make pretty bowls, or pull out wooden or plastic trays or boards...food prep and eating it can be such a delight! Enjoy one of these ideas this season:

**Breakfast for One** – I love getting up before sunrise and enjoying my breakfast laid out on a small cutting board. My daughter-in-law gave me a set of three, and I love them as a plate!

- Bagel (I like Everything but the Bagel)
- Fresh strawberries or fruit of your choice
- Peanut butter

Toast the bagel, then cut it into four sticks, and place in a small cup. Slice the fruit, then put a dollop of peanut butter in a tiny dish. Arrange on a board and enjoy.

**Veggie Bowls** – I have a couple of sunflower bowls I picked up at Marshalls, the shallow kind. They're perfect for veggies with rice, or alone, or any kind of bowl...really.

- Potatoes
- Carrots
- Broccoli
- Cauliflower
- Onions
- Franks or sausage
- Bacon
- Grated cheese (optional)

Slice all veggies to be about the same thickness and size, so they'll cook quickly and evenly. Toss in your seasonings for flavor. In a skillet fry bacon, and leave the grease (a couple tablespoons) for the veggies. Cook the potatoes, carrots and franks first, as they take longer to get tender. Add in the other veggies and cook, until all are tender. You can add a pat of butter if you wish.

Serve it up hot, crumble the bacon and sprinkle the cheese, and you've got yourself a hearty meal.

**Chips and Dips Platters** – I found these awesome chips/dip plates at Lakeside Collections and I got two, so that we could have our own when enjoying chips with any sorts of dips. We used these just today for the first time, and they were awesome!

Guacamole – avocado, lime juice, diced red onion, green salsa, cilantro, diced cucumber, and Mexican seasonings

Bean corn salsa – Grill some frozen corn in a pan, add in diced green peppers, drained black beans, salsa and anything else you have left in your fridge! Dot with grated cheese and let it melt.

Place the two dips in the area for dips. Then add chips in the large area: lime tortilla chips, veggie chips and Elotes corn chips (from Trader Joe's).

What a fun and tasty lunch!

**Snacks on a Board** – I found this board on clearance 75% off, after my sister called to tell me about the sale! It's so pretty, so one night we just wanted snacks for dinner. They looked amazing on the new board, and made me enjoy my food so much!

On the board:

- Veggie chips
- Black olives
- Carrots
- Dip (of your choice)
- Slice cukes
- Cashews
- Dark chocolate

Really, presentation, can really make a meal!

**Grilled Cheese, Please** – I have a long cutting board that's small, but it's perfect for slicing a sandwich to serve!

- French bread
- Heavy skillet and another for grilling
- Cheddar cheese
- Gouda cheese
- Long pickle slices

Cut the French bread in half and create a sandwich the size you want. Layer the cheese (go light on the Gouda if you don't want that strong taste) and add lots of those long pickle slices. Lay the sandwich in melted butter in a skillet, then top it with a heavy cast iron, to press it and cook it. Flip and do the same on the other side. Or...You can grill them both open faced and then put your sandwich together. YUM.

**Rice Bar for the Family** – We had the kids over and a rice bar was so easy to put together, everyone could build their own bowl, and kids and adults alike found items they liked!

- Huge bowl of rice
- Black beans
- Roasted veggies
- Olives (black and green)

- Lime slices
- Tomatoes
- Avocado slices
- Grilled corn
- Chopped spinach leaves
- Sauces (chimichurri or tahini, whatever you like)

Provide bowls for each guest, and let them build their meal, one at a time. The bar is pretty, they can choose their ingredients, and the food is scrumptious. You can purchase shallow bowls at the discount stores, they don't have to all match either. That's the fun of it!



## **Last Month's Learnin'- by Marcy Lytle**

If you don't have a window above your sink, trying placing a mirror. We saw one in an Airbnb and it looked fabulous!

When's the last time you purchased unshelled peanuts? They taste so good...I had forgotten...and they're great to grab for a snack.

Did you know that collard greens and French fries taste good together, as a meal?

And have you tried dipping popcorn into bbq sauce? It's tasty! I tried it at a theater recently.

Have you heard of the Moravians? If you haven't, google them, and read about their star and their history. So interesting!

Wilbur's Chocolates have these "buds" they sell that are divine. We are ordering some for Christmas. Check them out.

When's the last time you purchased a meal at a food truck or somewhere fresh, found a shade tree, and sat under it – on the grass – and ate? It's time you do it...

Not everyone calls them speed "bumps." Some places call them speed "tables."

There are some cities in the U.S. that leave flags out all the time, not just at patriotic holidays. It's pretty cool!

OMG – I had forgotten how good a tuna melt tasted. We stopped in an ordered one, and it was delish. Use good tuna, add cheese and tomato, then grill like you would a grilled cheese. Eat with pickles!

Next time you serve taco salad in one of those crispy tortilla bowls, turn it on its side and let the salad spill out onto the plate. Looks so pretty, and tastes just as good!

Did you know that at Hershey's Chocolate World the street lights are shaped like Hershey's kisses? Read about Mr. Hershey and find out what his middle name was...it's a good and interesting story!

There's such a tree as the weeping cedar. I did not know that...

You can make a charcuterie plate out of almost any snacks you have in your kitchen...use what you have and make it look pretty. Place popcorn in wine glasses!

A long time ago...women crimped the bottom of their skirts with a crimping iron to make ruffles!

*The Wedding Dress Sewing Circle* – I thoroughly enjoyed this historical fiction book – a great read!

Big Lots is the BEST place for finding outdoor tablecloths for your picnic tables – I just got a nice plaid fabric one for fall for \$10.99!

A rice bowl bar – it's so easy to put together – just make your rice and provide in a huge bowl. Then line up your toppings like black beans, bacon, tomatoes, cucumbers, olives, cheese, sauces (chimichurri or tahini). That's it. Let folks build their own! (See more on in In the Kitchen).

I don't know if every grocery store floral department has these, but fresh flowers now come in plastic cups with water, and these fit in your cup holder in the car! No more awkward spills or "where to put the flowers" anymore!

Just watched a limited series called "Deep Breathing" and heard an actor say the Hebrew word for forgiveness also means dance. I looked it up and found this: **Forgiveness is a dance**, and God is our partner. In other words we transform the distance we feel because of sin into a circle dance of acceptance with Him. Now, isn't that beautiful?

## **SUGAR + Spice - Spooky Palettes – by Angela Dolbear**

In honor of October, I pulled of a couple of fun Halloween inspired palettes from my vast and ever-growing eye shadow palette collection. Both are from ColourPop, one of my favorite cosmetics brands--quality products at affordable prices!

- The Nightmare Before Christmas palette – It's an NBC product—I had to get it! This palette has a great color story with a good mix of matte and shimmer colors which all blend together well. I have had fun playing with this palette.
- Disney's "Hocus Pocus" palette – I'm not a super fan of this film, but I picked up this palette because the color story is full of rich autumn hues of olives and magentas, my favorite colors.

Both palettes are discontinued, sadly, but there are online shops where they can be purchase them, like Glambot, Poshmark, or Mercari.

### **“Hack Job” Tip**

If you have purchased a used eye shadow palette, you can sanitize it by first, scraping off its very top layer by quickly rubbing the surface with a tissue. After skimming the top off, spritz the palette with a little bit of rubbing alcohol in a small spray bottle and then let it dry. Voila! It's new again!

The beauty of blessings to you!

*Angela Dolbear, Beauty Editor, is the author of contemporary spiritual novels, such as [THE GARDEN KEY](#) Series, and [THE TORMENTOR'S TALE](#), as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). And she loves writing and recording songs with her husband, Tim --listen on [Sound Cloud](#). She is also a self-proclaimed beauty junkie and has been since long before her mother allowed her to start wearing makeup at the age of 14. She keeps UPS and the USPS busy delivering small boxes on a regular basis from Ulta, Sephora, Amazon, and many independent cosmetics companies to her home Nashville, TN. Please connect with her at [www.AngelaDolbear.com](http://www.AngelaDolbear.com)*



HOME

## Practical Parenting – Picky Eaters – by Marcy Lytle

I had one child that ate everything offered at the table, and another that sneered and only wanted chicken and fries...until he was about 20! And an occasional brownie earthquake from Dairy Queen. And when my kids were little, there was really no talk of allergies, gluten free, or any real focus on a super healthy diet, at least among my circle of friends. I'm sure the trend toward healthier eating was there, but I never really stressed over it. I kept offering fruit and veggies, in some way or another, but didn't push it.

I honestly look on parents today and listen to conversations and overhear kids talking, and I wonder how in the world parents navigate picky eaters. Some influencers that are chefs say if you give kids healthy foods as toddlers, they'll learn to eat what's given them. I'm not sure I believe that works all the time. Neither does it work to treat all of our kids the same, as each one has a different taste palette! I remember making my son sit at the table for maybe an hour until he agreed to take those "five bites!" (Why was it always five?)

Guess what? My kids are now grown and they eat good food. They eat lots of kinds of food. They finally learned to do it on their own. I did the best I could, I tried not to make them totally separate meals, but I did try to make sure something on the table was appealing. I didn't have a "formula" for turning out carrot stick and hummus eating teens (that wasn't even a thing, either)!

Today, there are SO MANY issues with diet and allergies that feeding kids well appears to be overwhelming. Food has become more processed and full of harmful ingredients, so parents are reading labels and really trying to serve the good! Kudos to you all!

But here are a few hints to lighten your load, for the kids that don't require a special diet:

- It's still okay to send a sandwich on bread with your kids, instead of wrapped in lettuce. Just buy fresh bread at the market, or make your own (teach the kids and let them make it!)
- Cookies are delicious and a treat, maybe not from a box, but bake them together at home with oats and enjoy! Never giving them a cookie is just not an option!
- Drive-through food won't hurt a kid once in a while. Maybe not every night, but in a pinch, it's fun and okay. Always saying no just makes a kid want it more, doesn't it?
- Find out what dips your kids love, let them make them, then include them with their veggies in their lunches!
- So maybe they don't like everything you're making for dinner. Pull out what they DO like, and ask them to taste what they don't. Maybe they only like the spaghetti but not the sauce, so give them the noodles, and ask them to taste the sauce...over and over...just a bite here and there.
- Color is always good. Take them to the store and let them pick fruit and veggies of color that they WILL eat, and teach them ways to eat both! Sometimes, just the way it's presented on the plate makes a kid smile!
- Sodas are NOT good, for sure. But at the movies, with popcorn, once a month or so is fun! Just make sure you go early and not too late, before bedtime. And skip the extra butter!

Personally, life is hard enough without scolding and withholding every single food item that gets a bad rap. Bad habits are more the key, rather than never getting to taste ice cream. And not eating to gain comfort is another biggie. Teaching them habits to follow and modeling them is always best. So if you're going to have that block of dark chocolate from your desk drawer, then include a Hershey's kiss in their seat when you get in the car for the ride to school.

Eating should be fun, healthy, and oh so yummy – all wrapped up in color and smiles.

## **I Don't Do Teenagers – Don't Take it Personally – by Marcy Lytle**

I remember when my son suddenly got too old to hold my hand when we were walking into a store. It hurt my heart, but how silly would it be for me to take that personally, right? He was growing up and it made perfect sense that he'd not want to be seen in public holding his mom's hand! I also recall shopping with my daughter when she told me if I purchased a particular coat, she would not be seen with me. Now, that made me chuckle, and I for sure bought the coat!

However, there are things our teens do that are hard to not take personally. What does that phrase mean, anyway, when we say, "Don't take it personally?" It means to not be upset or offended when someone does something. But here's a way of describing it that I really like:

*Don't think of this as a failure that represents your value and worth as a person.*

Really often, moms hear teenage daughters say, "I hate you!" and feel like a complete failure as a mom, if the daughter isn't her best friend. Teenage daughters are growing and experiencing conflicting emotions of trying to be an adult and yet staying small as a child. And when those two things collide, all sorts of hurt spurts out of their mouths! Obviously, we need to check to make sure we've not hurt our daughters with our words or actions, but if we've done our best and she's just mouthing hateful verbs our way, we need tell ourselves, "Don't take it personally," and walk away.

Other times, parents observe teenage sons rolling their eyes constantly at everything we say, and behind that eye roll is a "You're so stupid" look. We can tell our kids the same advice their friends give them, and yet we get an eye roll, and the friend might get a response of, "That's cool. Thanks!" Teen boys are asserting independence and trying to appear tough, and listening to parents isn't part of that thought process. So again, we can repeat, "Don't take it personally," and walk away.

And then...there are times when we cannot help but take it personally, when our kids are downright mean. Maybe they start slinging adjectives our way like "old, fat, dumb" and it hurts to the bone. Perhaps we've planned a special family outing and they sulk and don't want to go or be with any of the family, and it sends us to our rooms in tears because we feel complete rejected by these humans we birthed.

Some teens may outgrow this phase of rudeness, others may go back and forth between hugs and slander, and still others may leave the home and reject us totally...in every way possible.

How in the world can we not take THAT personally?

Here are some reasons for why teens attack us personally, just to name a few:

- Brain development
- Need for control
- Struggling to feel accepted
- Seeking attention
- Overbearing parents

- Hormones

And sometimes their behavior isn't "normal" but needs attention:

- If they're aggressive
- If the rudeness is constant
- If neglect is present
- If there's substance abuse

Whether the reasons are temporal or more deep seated, we as parents need to realize that it's part of normal growth, even if perhaps we never went through the phase, ourselves. And EVEN IF we realize perhaps that we HAVE been part of the problem – maybe we're working too much or we've been rude with our own words – we can take action without feeling like a failure.

If we've searched our hearts, asked our teens and listened, and there's nothing we know of that's causing their outbursts, we can shake our hands and raise them high, and ask God to deal. He will...in his way...and we can let go of the thoughts and fears that we've failed. If we've searched our hearts and realized our own hurts we've placed on our kids, we can repent, ask forgiveness and seek help. And we can STILL lay aside feelings of failure, because there's ALWAYS hope in HIM.

So, you see, we don't have to take it personally for any reason at all, because just like our teens are human...so are we. We can do our very best and she'll still stomp her feet in anger. We can make a mistake and he may react so rudely. But the worth and value of parent/teen never changes in the middle of the years when tensions build and burst.

Validate your teen. Validate yourself. Realize the worth of your children. Realize your own worth.

And don't let the hurting words and gestures land on your shoulders and weigh you down. Do your best, and let God take care of the rest. Sounds too simplistic, but it's the best simple advice around.



## **An Adage a Day- Cat's In the Bag – by Carole Gilbert**

When I was a little girl, I had the cutest little Barbie doll dress my momma made for me. We were very poor, so she made all my Barbie's clothes. This little dress was lacy and had elastic at the waist. Along with my Barbies, I also had several little kittens.

A Barbie doll is much smaller than a kitten, especially at the waist. But in my childish mind's eye, they looked like the same size. I knew better than to try the dress on a kitten, but the dress and my kittens looked so cute separately, they just had to be put together.

One day, as I played, I put the dress on one of the little kittens and the elastic waist tightened at her stomach, way too much! The kitten started to frantically go around and around, in a circular motion, hissing and screaming a kitten's cry trying to gnaw at the dress. Momma came rushing in from the other room after hearing all the commotion.

"Carole, what's going on?" she exclaimed as she saw the poor little kitten in its frenzy!

She saw the little dress on the kitten and exclaimed again, "What have you done?! It's way too tight!"

My poor sweet momma knew what she had to do. Through the kitten scratching and pawing and trying to bite, my momma grabbed her up and yanked the dress off! The kitten was okay, but she never came close to me again.

The moral of the story is to never "let the cat out of the bag" by never putting the cat in the bag, or in this case a dress. What I was doing (unknown to my momma and that I wasn't supposed to do) became known in a big way when Momma heard the excruciating cries of the little kitten.

This idiom, "let the cat out of the bag" means to disclose a secret unintentionally. It started from a deceitful practice in the 1500's. A vendor at market sold a pig to a customer and then, unknown to the customer, the vendor placed a cat in the bag instead of the pig. Cats weren't worth as much as a pig back then. And this is how the phrase "Cat in the bag" became "Let the cat out of the bag." What is meant as a secret is then made known.

I didn't mean for Momma to know what I had done but with the loud frantic meows from the kitten, my secret was out! I really didn't think I had done anything wrong until the kitten went berserk. Then I knew I was going to be in trouble if Momma found out.

Have you ever let the cat out of the bag? Have you ever PUT a cat in the bag? Or is it that the cat got your tongue?

I was very blessed growing up! Even after all the scratches and bites from the little kitten, my momma hugged me. She told me to never do that again and she also told me that it was okay. That time, and after every time I got into trouble, she told me she loved me. Through my sobs

and tears that day I knew that Momma loved me unconditionally. I knew nothing would ever change her love for me.

Aren't we so glad that God loves us unconditionally even when we sin or when our "curiosity killed the cat," or in the case of me and the kitten, almost? Do we stop and realize how unconditional His love is for us? I hope we do. His Word tells us how much He loves us. And that's something we can all let the cat out of the bag about!

Romans 8:38-39 says,

*For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Arinne Borstad. photo

## Tiny Living – A Touchy Subject – by Leyanne Enterline

Let's talk about the bano (*bathroom, that is.*) Not that it should be that interesting, but for some reason in a trailer a lot goes on in there! It is the tiniest space in our place but it is the pass-through to our room, so it gets the most action! Usually one person is trying to get out while another is coming through to the bedroom and some weird dance moves go on in there, while each person is trying to navigate in their own direction. Lots of yelling and bumping and rolling of the eyes happens. If one person is in the bathroom too long, also some hollering takes place!

Bathroom space is a touchy subject and each one thinks the other is taking way too much time! We have started to set a timer for the boys because we are on propane and we don't want to run out. It's such a pain to switch over and, of course, running low happens late at night and no one wants to go outside to swap the tanks! Plus, with four people to access one toilet and shower, we've got to keep things rolling!

Another space issue is the actual shower. I cannot wash my hair and shave my legs in the same night as I get claustrophobic and can't be in that tiny space too long! And again, the propane issue! I don't want to run out of hot water from being in there too long. Unfortunately, I had to learn that the hard way. The space is tiny! We do have two small built-in shelves that came with the shower so that helps some with the products we have in there. But we all only get one item each of shower gel, shampoo and conditioner. That's it! No more room! We can't hang those cute little baskets in there either, because the shower head will fall off the wall from the weight. And we can't use sticky things to hold a basket/shelf. Due to the humidity, items don't stick to the wall very well. So, we are limited on the products!

There is a sink obviously, but with almost zero counter space. I have just enough room to keep the soap and a tiny, slender container on the counter that holds toothbrushes and toothpaste. That's about it! Luckily, we have a cabinet underneath the sink to keep all the other products like extra shampoos and soap, brushes and some of *my* things! And there is mirror that opens with a medicine cabinet where Brian can keep some of his personal items.

We are very limited on the space so we must stay somewhat organized! There are two more small cabinets in the bathroom that help store Band-aids and items that go with wound care, and Brian and I each have a small section for some our personals, but it is all so tight! I have to purge quite often to make sure we stay in order and can find things.

It is not the easiest, all fitting into one tiny area, but we make it work even in the ole' bano! And it's not an outhouse...and for that I'm grateful.

Remember love grows best in tiny spaces!

## **A Night to Remember – Candy Corn Sweetness – by Marcy Lytle**

Did you know candy corn has existed for over 100 years, and it was first called chicken feed with the saying, “Something worth crowing for!” And in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was known as “penny candy” because kids could buy it in bulk for very little money. Then around the 1950s when candy was more and more associated with Halloween, candy corn advertised like crazy.

And guess what else? People either love candy corn or they hate it, much like people love or hate cilantro. Folks enjoy it by the handful or avoid it altogether. I really like it, but only the Brach’s brand! And the three colors in the candy made it a huge hit, because it was eye-catching!

Another interesting note about candy corn is how people eat it. Some just pop it in their mouths and chew, while others eat it layer by layer. According to a survey done, it’s about half and half. So how do you eat it? And there are some chefs out there that fry it or add it to the top of a pizza!

So why in the world are we learning all these interesting things about candy corn in our family devo?

Preparation: *You’ll need a bag of candy corn, pretzels, nuts, chocolate pieces, yogurt or plain raisins, and any other things you’d like in your fall trail mix, all set out in the middle of the table or floor, where you gather. Give each one his/her own sack or bowl to fill.*

There’s a verse in Psalm 139 that says we are fearfully and wonderfully made. I’m sure the inventor of candy corn took time to especially create his perfect treat, as well!

Let’s read it, verse 14:

*I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.*

Think about how much time and creativity it took to make these little orange, white and yellow pyramids that we enjoy this time of year... But wait? Do we all enjoy them?

Who likes the candy corn, and who doesn’t? Tell why!

We’re also not going to be liked by everyone we meet. Some kids just won’t get our uniqueness, others may even bully us, and still others just won’t connect with us. But that’s okay, because it doesn’t take away from our value and what a treasure we are to HIM!

Deuteronomy 14:2 says we are a treasured possession to God!

Let’s start our trail mix. In your bowl pick your first favorite ingredient out of the mix before you. Some may choose candy corn, others pretzels, or still others chocolate! And some may avoid the nuts because of allergies.

Some say the colors in candy corn represent harvest time, another reason we eat it at Halloween. Orange pumpkins are around, and yellow corn, and white mums or pansies this time of year.

Genesis 8:22 says

As long as the earth endures, seedtime and **harvest**, cold and heat,  
summer and winter, day and night will never cease.

This makes us know that seasons were created by God and bring us hope for change and newness and life.

Add another ingredient to your mix. How many of the family have already picked candy corn?

One can still get a lot of this fun treat, candy corn, for not much dollars. It's pretty accessible to most of us. And it's still eye-catching and pretty in a bowl!

The Bible tells us in Romans 6 that there's this FREE gift from God called eternal life! In other words, the sweetness of living forever is offered to us when we believe. We don't even have to spend pennies for it – it's free!

Finish your bowl or sack and enjoy your trail mix. What's your favorite part? How do you eat the candy corn, one layer at a time? How do you enjoy your pretzels, all at once or in little bites?

We're all different, but thankfully we are loved by God no matter our shape, color, size or how we're received by others. He receives us all with arms wide open and hands that give, always.

Enjoy this season of harvest, this time to get spooky, and all the sweets coming to fill your bags!

## Chipped China - BTS Stress Less – by Jennifer Lytle

Back to school has a way of pulling the family in ten different directions. While many parents joke about their fervor for a return to quieter days, I have experienced the return to school days as a bit of a mirage. They promise one thing while, at times, delivering emptiness.

I remember moving into our neighborhood with one preschool-aged child and one barely school-aged child. When I learned about the sports schedule a nearby momma held for her two children, I cringed in judgment. No less than three years later, I was managing my own overpacked after school sports schedule and arguing about it with my husband. When the great slowdown (my term for the pandemic) turned outside life off, I experienced a beautiful peace and fulfilling reconnection with both myself and my family. Recently, I have considered ways to maintain that experience. These are a few ideas to alleviate stress and build in staples for the family.

### Family dinners

It may sound like a broken record, but mealtime is a nucleus for families. It may be the only time your entire family sees one another at once. If you can only make a simple egg sandwich dinner, get everyone around the table for mealtime at minimum once a day. Even family snack time counts! For some families, breakfast time might be the only time both parents can be present. Whether you're in the home or sitting at a local cafe, prioritize family meal time.

Communicate with your spouse ahead of time your desire to be together for one meal and carve it out as frequently as possible. If it helps to make this time more manageable, [use paper plates](#).

### Family Work Time

Already working in family mealtime? Find jobs your child/ren can partake in to aid in mealtime. Family chore time is a beautiful illustration of working together in community and can increase appreciation for what may otherwise be behind the scenes labor in addition to supporting communication. Can you hear it now?

“I need to sweep under the table. Do tell me when you have wiped it down?”  
“Have you finished eating? I would like to clear the dishes from the table.”

If after-meal time is a bit too harried to create chore routines around, consider other opportunities such as:

- cleaning out the car
- yard work
- helping an elderly family member with grocery shopping or house cleaning
- decluttering sections of the home
- serving at a local food pantry

### Fewer Extracurricular Activities

Children and adults alike require [unstructured time](#) to tap into their natural creativity and curiosity. While professional basketball lessons and choir practice may have future benefits, consider postponing these exciting opportunities to the summer, or during the break weeks, or later when your child is older. Traditional school days are typically filled with constant structure, expectations, and performance evaluations. Busy weeks call for a reprieve. How are you building rest into the weekly schedule?

### Family Friends

When contemplating time away from the home, are there ways to village build as a family? These opportunities may provide the space to create relationships sought through extracurricular activities. Family friends with similar ages and stages of life are Godsend. Still, consider relationships with other generations whom the entire family can gather around. Family friends allow for village building without taking from family time.

Family dinners, family work, fewer extracurricular activities, and family friends are a few ideas to consider in order to decrease the stress of back to school schedules. As a parent and caregiver, you are the expert in the needs of your children and conductor for family life. When you manage the schedule, what do you prioritize? Drop a comment below!

*Jennifer Lytle is the founder of Joyful Journeys Counseling. She works with couples, parents, and children. Check out Joyful Journeys Counseling blog, services, or sign up for the newsletter at [joyfuljourneycounseling.com](http://joyfuljourneycounseling.com).*



YOU



## **Inner Strength – The Struggle of No – by Michelle Wyatt**

*No* is a powerful words for kids. What's more powerful are the words that come next. Why is that? The following are scenarios that illustrate why.

### Scenario 1

Matthew loves to do card tricks. Cards scatter everywhere! Unfortunately, he doesn't pick them up once he's done playing with them. When I ask him to pick them up, he says, "No I'm not going to pick them up." Instead of getting upset, I asked him, "Why are you saying no?" He says, "It's a lot." I remind him he's responsible for picking the cards up, but instead of picking up the whole stack at once, I give him the choice of picking which section to pick up first. Once he cleans up that section, I praise him for it and remind him that he is expected to pick up the next section he chooses. He's not happy about it, but he does pick them up.

In this situation, I was honoring his ability to communicate with me honestly and effectively, so that he is comfortable elaborating in the future without me having to ask why.

### Scenario 2

I was in the car with the boys. Brendan told Matthew, "Look, it's over there." Matthew responded with "No." Brendan responded back with, "Yes, it is." Thus, this back and forth was only going to get worse if I didn't say something. So I asked Matthew, "What do you mean, no?" To which he replied, "I can't see it over there." Talk about an enlightening moment.

I've found that if I wait a few seconds after he says no, he will continue to communicate. If I react right away, I'm not giving him that chance. I celebrated his ability to speak up for himself. It reminds me to do the same.

Lessons I've learned through these experiences...

Making assumptions and jumping to conclusions that the word no from children to adults is a sign of disrespect can lead to miscommunication. It's imperative to encourage children to elaborate what they are thinking and guide them if they struggle.

I pray that the boys and I continue to communicate what we think and feel with sincerity and have patience to hear and understand each other. I pray too for all of you going through similar struggles.

If I can do it, so can you!

## **Life in a Nutshell – Down Memory Lane – by Jill Montz**

After my divorce I bought a house in Wichita Falls. Dotty and I lived there for seven years until we moved to be closer to her school in Iowa Park. I remember when we were packing up my Wichita Falls house, I had a couple of boxes in the garage that had never been opened since they were packed up seven years prior. My plans were just to toss them in a dumpster without even looking inside.

My mom was not on board with this idea. She wanted to open each box and make sure it wasn't filled with anything worth keeping. My point was if I hadn't needed it or even really known what existed inside those boxes for seven years, I highly doubted I would ever need it or miss any of it going forward.

But you know what daughters do who have their moms help them move in Texas...in July?

The daughters open boxes just so their moms can sleep at night.

One box was full of gift bags from Dotty's baby shower. One was full of empty old frames and broken trinkets I had bought to furnish my apartments before I got married. Clearly, all treasures worth saving. To the dumpster they went...but Mom could now sleep...so all was well.

I am not a saver of things. I don't attach sentimental meaning to many objects. And I love to clean out a house, garage, closet, drawer, and on a fairly regular occasion...my purse. Now things might still be cluttered, but I can assure you I have trashed some things.

Over the years I have given or thrown away carloads and sidewalks full of STUFF! Somehow my love to clean does not quite yet rival my love of shopping (especially the "add to cart" online version kind!) But nevertheless, I still enjoy an afternoon or a weekend waist deep in piles of things about to find new homes.

However, one night I discovered what I do treasure and hold onto most...my memories...especially of Dotty. Dot and I found ourselves looking through old videos and pictures on my Facebook account and that trip down memory lane got my cheeks wet from some tears, caused more than a few howls of laughter, and did my heart so much good.

I loved listening to Dotty's little girl voice talk to the camera as she put on her nightly shows in the living room. I giggled at her outfit choices when her sense of fashion had a flair for the dramatic and unmatched variety. I bit my bottom lip and forced a tight smile as I saw pictures of Dotty with dear friends who are no longer with us.

Dotty, in pure teenage form, was horrified at some of her antics and wardrobe choices. She often asked, "Mom, why did you dress me like that?" To which I replied, "You dressed yourself and I was picking my battles that day." Dotty also couldn't believe how silly some of the videos of her were and how bad her dance moves were "back then" (clearly thanks to TikTok she is much improved now.) But all I saw was my sweet baby girl who didn't stay little near long enough.

After an hour or so, Dotty had lost interest in my videos and was looking at her own on her phone. Then after a bit she decided to get up and see if she remembered an old dance from her Defining Moments Dance School days (Ms. Chelsea will be thrilled to know she did in fact

still know most of the moves!) Internally I laughed every time Dotty would request, "Okay Mom...watch this."

Some things never change.

That night I lay in bed and looked through a few of the videos and pictures on my phone. Most had not made it to Facebook, but all still brought me joy. Then I Googled how to make sure my phone was backed up properly to "the cloud"...whatever that is (if you recall from last month's article...I am not very tech savvy.) I may not hold onto many things in life, but I pray I hold onto my memories as long as possible.

## **Healthy Habits – Don't Forfeit Peace – by Marcy Lytle**

My dad loved the hymn “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” and there’s a line in it that says “Oh, what peace we often forfeit,” which I have always thought about. Forfeiting something is giving it up to the other team, as a win for them. Not showing up, or just giving up. And while peace is often hard to come by when life’s waves are drowning us, there are some days it’s more available than we realize. So come with me this month, as we hold on to peace in healthy ways...

*Pray about everything* – There are days when I complain most of the day about actions or inactions of others. It’s exhausting. But when I remember to just take those complaints and frustrations to Him, it transfers the burden, and I walk lighter.

*Sit down* – Put up your feet, read a book, take a nap, do nothing, even if it’s just 15 minutes. There’s no medal or award being handed out for standing on our feet all day to slave and serve. And yet we live as if there is...

*Organize one thing* – Maybe your life feels out of control. Take one drawer, one part of your closet, or any area of your home or car or work space and organize it. Start small. Smile at the accomplishment. Sigh...in peace.

*Give thanks* – I must have written these two words a hundred times over the course of writing in this magazine. It’s because I must continually remind myself how much peace this daily activity offers, when we choose to do it. Just as we feel compelled to walk so many steps to help our heart...so should we feel compelled to give thanks for so many things.

*Step away* – If there’s drama, leave it. If there’s gossip, walk in the opposite direction. Where there’s friction, bow out. We often stay in something too long until we feel dirty, stepped on, abused, and torn up. That’s forfeiting peace.

*Drive in silence* – With kids, this is hard. But if you can, take a drive in silence or a walk without talking on the phone. Observe the sky, the leaves blowing, feel the wind against your skin, see the sun and feel its warmth and tune in...and listen to Him as He loves you and whispers His care over you.

*Pursue it* – Peace isn’t always waiting our doorsteps knocking to enter our rooms. We sometimes have to chase after it, run for it, and go after it. Now that doesn’t sound like the rest mentioned above. I think it just means make it a goal to seek the peace in each day, or it will be covered up and invisible, like that lost sock beneath a pile of clothes. We sometimes have to put away all of the pile, before the lost thing is revealed. Go after peace, as much as you go after gut health, a strong heart, and good skin.

*Find a bench* – On a path, near a creek, outside a store, wherever you see one...take it and sit down and observe. Look at the foliage, listen to the sounds, observe what people are wearing, breathe and wait...but sit and soak in peace.

Peace. Don't forfeit it, because it's good living to experience it daily.

## Life Right Now - The (Not-So) Scary Tale of an Introvert at Church – by Jennifer Stephens

They are everywhere. We don't always notice them, but they're there. At the store. In the workplace. Even at church on Sunday morning. There might even be one in your home! They don't *look* different than other folks. But they ARE different. What are they? Introverts.

Introverts are one of the most misunderstood groups of people around. I know because I am one.

We're not aloof, stuck up, or necessarily shy. We just prefer to get away from the noise every now and then. Especially when life gets too *peopley*. What exactly is an introvert? While there's no one-size-fits-all definition, introverts tend to be quiet, reserved, and prefer socializing with one or two close friends. On the other hand, extroverts are often the loud, outgoing, life-of-the-party personalities. Like an animal adapting to its habitat, we introverts have learned to adjust in order to maintain our sanity in this ebullient world we live in. We've become really good at blending into our surroundings – avoiding scrutiny, because thrusting an ounce of unwanted attention onto an introvert is a HUGE no-no. We change who we are so often to fit into an extroverted world, sometimes we don't even realize that's what we're doing. But what if we suddenly decided to embrace who we are and just BE our authentic introverted selves? What is a quiet, reserved person who loves Jesus to do when it comes to expressing her faith?

For an introvert, the church experience can sometimes be a little...scary. The church seems to send an unintentional message that equates being faithful to God to being LOUD about God. Somewhere along the way, we've gotten the message that the ideal Christian is an extrovert – one that can openly share their faith with strangers, greet everyone with over-the-top-in-your-face enthusiasm, and immediately shout an ear-piercing, "Yes!" when asked to lead in this way or that. These qualities are needed (obviously, or God wouldn't have created people that encompass them), but it's important to note that He created introverts with our own unique qualities too!

*Psalm 139:14*

*"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made..."*

We can probably all agree that serving, connecting, and sharing are some of the main ingredients in a church-goer's diet. To an extrovert, boldly approaching a stranger or passionately sharing testimony to the masses are pursuits to run toward. Introverts will agree that everything from "turn to the person next to you and shake hands" to "share your testimony from the stage" are the things that send us scurrying away (or at least taking a well-timed restroom break). So, how can we, as introverts, survive at church? Or rather, how can the church support us - the introverts?

**Step 1:** Allow the introvert to serve quietly. Behind the scenes, if you will. Serving food at a fellowship meal, putting together treat bags for the children's ministry, and decorating before a big event are a few possibilities. Interestingly, introverts can make excellent door greeters – there's not that pressure for a long awkward conversation. It's especially helpful when there's some type of flyer to give someone as they enter. A quick hello with a purpose is a painless way for introverts to welcome others inside (this is especially important when welcoming a fellow introvert into Sunday services, as a loud, overly exuberant greeting can be...unnerving).

**Step 2:** Encourage the introvert to connect with others in a non-threatening way. Recently our women's ministry started daily devotionals using Max Lucado books. They needed volunteers to write about the daily reading and respond/encourage others – and it was all done online. This was a perfect way for an introvert like me to engage with others. I signed up without hesitation! By connecting online, I was able to share and support others in a way I wouldn't have been able to do in person.

**Step 3:** Give introverts time to reflect and gather our thoughts. I've been in Bible studies before where the leader thought I was disengaged or daydreaming because I didn't offer immediate commentary. Nothing could be further from the truth. When an introvert doesn't jump into the conversation right away it's often because we're deep in thought. Pushed to speak too soon and we'll stumble into a steaming pile of jumbled word soup, but when given time to observe and freedom to pause, we can - and will - contribute a thoughtful response.

**Step 4:** Don't force the introvert to share over the loudspeaker. We just might drown in a puddle of our own sweat if asked to share our testimony in front of the crowd at Sunday services. But we *might* share it in a pre-recorded video. We'll definitely share with the individuals we've built a relationship with over the years.

**Step 5:** Appreciate the introverts' unique qualities and stop (I'm begging here – STAWWP!) trying to make us into extroverts. There isn't anything wrong with us. And we don't love Jesus any less because we love quietly. We are introspective, empathetic and will thrive when allowed to do things in our own introverted way.

Remember, introverts may approach things differently than our extroverted friends, but that's how God made us. Of course we should listen to those God-sized nudges that challenge us to stretch and grow our faith in a fresh way, but we need our extroverted pals to understand that God knew our subtle approach would be a valued asset to the community as we serve, connect, and share our faith with others. Especially when reaching out to other introverts, who may run away from the blazing flames of a roaring, fiery extrovert - but will draw near to the smoldering, glowing light of an introverted, Jesus following friend.

*1 Peter 4:11 "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace..."*

## **Under Pressure – A Simple Challenge – by Debbie Haynes**

There's a verse in Proverbs 4:7 that says wisdom is the main thing – get it – with all your getting – get understanding.

“Understanding of what?” you might ask.

We need to understand God's word, his character, and his love for us!

We all can agree that there are times we need forgiveness, when we're thankful that we've been forgiven, or times when we need to pour out our hearts to God and recognize the need to draw closer to Him. And I often say that it's not about us and our gifts and talents, but rather it's about connecting with Him and accepting His great love for us.

There's a great hymn called “Cleanse Me” based on this scripture, and the story of the hymn is quite unique and interesting. J. Edwin Orr is the writer, and he was born in 1912 in Belfast, Ireland. His education included doctorates from universities in four countries! Dr. Orr also served as chaplain in the U.S. Air Force from 1943-1946. But in all of his extensive travels to 150 countries, preaching and accomplishing so much, this author is probably remembered best for this simple, challenging hymn.

Dr. Orr recalls writing “Cleanse Me” in 1936 after a great move of God in New Zealand. He says that after leaving New Zealand, four Maori girls approached him and sang a beautiful song of farewell. And Dr. Orr stated there were many outstanding miracles performed while there. Just getting to New Zealand was quite a story in itself! He recounts how many thousands came to faith, and how many attendees could not stop worshiping so meetings sometimes lasted all night. Can you imagine? But when he had to leave, these four girls sang in their native language a beautiful song that touched him. As a musician himself, he filed away the tune and then shortly after, penned “Cleanse Me.”

That song has been used as a call to repentance ever since, as each verse tells a story of the journey from sinner to saint, that walk from needing forgiveness, giving thanks for it, and finally grasping His great love for us! It's truly a picture of the journey each of us walks with Him.

Below are the lyrics. As you read them, pray for understanding and wisdom to stand still and be searched, cleansed, filled and surrendered to His great love as you too, humbly plead.

### Cleanse Me

*Search me, O God,  
And know my heart today;  
Try me, O Savior,  
Know my thoughts, I pray.  
See if there be  
Some wicked way in me;  
Cleanse me from every sin  
And set me free.*

*I praise Thee, Lord,  
For cleansing me from sin;  
Fulfill Thy Word,  
And make me pure within.  
Fill me with fire  
Where once I burned with shame;  
Grant my desire  
To magnify Thy Name.*

*Lord, take my life,  
And make it wholly Thine;  
Fill my poor heart  
With Thy great love divine.  
Take all my will,  
My passion, self and pride;  
I now surrender, Lord  
In me abide.*

*O Holy Ghost,  
Revival comes from Thee;  
Send a revival,  
Start the work in me.  
Thy Word declares  
Thou wilt supply our need;  
For blessings now,  
O Lord, I humbly plead.*





MARRIAGE

## **In This Together – Surrounded - by Bekah Holland**

Sometimes, no matter what you do, how great things are and how hard you work, things still go to “hell in a handbasket.” Things are moving along swimmingly, everyone is happy and healthy. The dogs haven’t eaten anyone’s shoes in a while. You almost have life under control. And then BAM! The bottom drops out and you’re wondering what end is up.

I’m going to operate under the assumption that I’m not the only person this happens to and continue on with my story. I’ve lived some periods of my life that were in a constant state of disaster. Like just quit and move to a hut on a deserted beach in Mexico kind of bad. And I’ve lived periods where things were sunshiny and relatively drama free. And honestly, there are things that are good about both.

Now, you may be thinking I have completely lost the small shred of decency and sanity I’ve been holding on by. Which is a fair assumption, and probably a foregone conclusion of a future version of me, but I digress. So obviously when life is good, things kind of float along without many waves to knock you back in the water. No idea why I’m running with the water metaphor, but we’re just going to see where the current takes us (see what I did there?)

Where was I? Oh yeah, life, *easy peasy, yada yada*. We know the ease that comes with those days. But what can you possibly appreciate during a dumpster fire that once resembled a good life? Well, get comfy and I’m going to lay it out for you. I’ve come to realize, that in some ways, life being in a constant state of chaos and pain, is easier to maneuver. Mostly because, when you’re already in a mess, you’re a little more prepared for the other shoe to eventually drop. You’re well versed in the pain and struggle and, as heavy and hard as that is, you almost get used to it. You know it’s hard. You know (okay, pretend to know) how to trudge through until you can find your way back to the surface. And when more difficult things come, it’s just one more thing, and you can figure out just one more thing. But when things have been easy, good, peaceful, we (I) have a tendency to ignore signs that things might not be headed in the right direction. And in case you were wondering, that is a terrible plan of action. Because eventually, those signs turn into red lights and red flags and then before you know it, you’re driving full speed toward a construction sign blinking “road closed” without enough pavement to stop and faulty brakes. And those days are really, really hard. Especially in marriage. Because for most women, we grew up with fairy tales of being rescued, and then movies and books that gloss over those silly little hiccups like job losses, death, mental illness, and somehow, everything works out okay in the end.

And while lots of times, everything does in fact work out okay in the end, when there isn’t an end in sight, it can take us all on quite the rollercoaster ride. Unlike basically every Hallmark movie plot, we don’t always know how to take the next step or see into an unsure future. Marriage is hard all on its own, y’all. Heaping on circumstances determined to break us just feels insurmountable at times. But we tend to forget the important part of making it through this wild life. We are not alone. We have our partners, which is great. However, sometimes, we just need more.

We need friendships that hold us up when we can’t stand on our own. Friendships in which, when everything hits the proverbial fan, show up without being asked (most often with wine and comfort food in tow). These people are the ones who know better than to ask what they can do to help. They just help. They show up in messy buns and 20 year old t-shirts and dive in. It could be washing dishes, taking out the trash, making meals or taking our kids so we can cry on

the floor with a jar of Nutella without anyone asking for a snack. These relationships....they are just as important as our marriage. Because guess what? We can't do it all. Shocking, I know. And we can't even get everything we need from our partner.

I believe that God made us for communion and community. And that means filling our village with people who all show up and just do what needs to be done. Sometimes that's coming in jammies, prepared with a slew of junk food for a sob fest of movies we save for when we just can't do real life anymore. And just like the church was designed to be, they all have different strengths that soothe different parts of our spirit when it's broken.

I have been blessed with the most amazing of tribes. My people run the gauntlet of gifts, from allowing me a safe space to scream and rage, to people of action who just appear like magic, cleaning and picking up without my completely realizing they were even there, to people who listen and are able to encourage me in ways that no one else can, as well as those who provide comic relief to allow me to escape reality for just a little while. They come in every shape, size, color, background, location and viewpoint, and each one is as essential to my life as breathing. I've known some for a lifetime, and others much less. Each one speaks a language that is life giving and healing, in her own unique way. And without them, I don't know that I would be the wife, mom, daughter, friend, human than I'm working to become.

My husband understands, loves and supports these women, because he knows how much they bring to my life. To our life. He isn't jealous of the value they bring, because he's witnessed who I can be when I'm surrounded with people who know just how to love in a way that lights my path forward and will even give me a not so gentle push in the right direction when I'm too stubborn to listen. I remember hearing, especially in church, that your partner in life should be your best friend. And I believe that's true. However, I have other best friends who are just as much a part of my life as he is. In some ways, they can give me things he can't. And that's great. That isn't a failure on anyone's part. I can't be his everything, either. But with family, both the ones we are born into as well as the ones we choose, we can become so much more together. We can give and receive, pour out and be filled up.

This little village of mine is the key to my peace. It's the key to my husband's peace, and my kids' peace, which allows them to be that key for others. So please, no matter how dark your days happen to be, don't forget that God didn't create us to be little wind-up toys to go it alone until our battery runs out. He provides His peace that is far above what we can even begin to grasp. And He also provides others to walk in front of us, behind us and beside us, no matter the situation. It's because, together, we are so, so much more.

*"Friendships between women, as any woman will tell you, are built of a thousand small kindnesses....swapped back and forth and over again." Michelle Obama*

## **Date Night Fun – Music for Two – by Marcy Lytle**

We have a turntable and lots of old records we've been collecting, and once in a while we put them on and take a listen. It's funny how albums and turntables are popular once again. But it makes sense, because music is life, isn't it? It can even be part of the life of our marriages...as we plan October date nights together!

Here are some albums you might enjoy, as you listen and mark your calendars to set aside time to listen and love...

*Greatest Love Songs* by Frank Sinatra – If you're an old soul and like his music, Sinatra is the choice for you. Dress up in black and white attire, eat by candlelight, and play this music in the background...and then dance.

Elvis Presley *Love Songs* – If you haven't seen the new Elvis movie yet, see it, or watch it again. Or watch one of his old movies, then put on the songs from this album. Make a peanut butter and banana sandwich, add a side of dark chocolate, and swing your hips from side to side to work off what you just ate!

*Don't Cry Now* by Linda Ronstadt – Do you like her voice, or have you even heard of her? There's a movie about her life too, if you can find it – *The Sound of My Voice*. It's good! Perhaps listen to the album while parked atop a lookout in your city, then go home and watch the movie. Enjoy peanuts and a coke.

*Love Song – Love Song* – that's the name of the group and the album. They were probably the first contemporary Christian artists to become well known, and their songs are awesome. Chuck Girard and the lyrics he put to song are heart-changing. Listen together. Stop at Goodwill and grab a 70's shirt, and go out for appetizers.

Celine Dion – *Let's Talk about Love* – The Titanic song is on this one! Surely, you know a lot of the words, so sing along as you listen! Rent a boat, or go on a sunset cruise. Hold each other close, and enjoy the love you've been given. Then make a list of 10 things you love about each other and say them aloud.

## **After 40 Years – Home Alone – by Marcy Lytle**

We have LOTS, and I mean LOTS, of nights at home by ourselves, lots of weekend excursions just the two of us, and lots of time together watching a show or dining – just the two of us! When we had kids at home, as with all parents, the time alone was valued and precious and rare, because children were under feet ALL THE TIME. But when the kids are gone, they're busy, they have their lives, other friends don't call as often...and if we have some big life changes (like changing churches), well the time alone together is sometimes too much!

I prefer to be alone with my husband than to be with anyone else, and we have the best of times together, but sometimes we do enjoy the company of another couple. Then other times, we prefer to be alone and like it just fine.

Tonight, on a Friday evening, we are home alone and he's not feeling so good, so I'm sitting on the sofa next to him while he rests. The house is eerily silent, whereas last night was full and loud because the kids were here! Young parents long for silence, and we older parents are sometimes deafened by it.

For those who are homebodies, perhaps being home night after night is no big deal. But I'm definitely not a homebody. I like to be gone. I don't mind maybe a night or two staying in by the fire and watching a show, but mostly I want to be on the go. And I don't want to be "stuck" at home trying to think of what to watch on Netflix or any other non-activity that only requires sitting on the sofa. That's SO not me!

So here we sit tonight, home alone, he's resting and I'm writing this story. The only sound is the whir of the AC unit still running, because it's only early September. We had a fun charcuterie board while we watched a thriller, and it was enjoyable. The house is clean, and I like that, because it means the weekend is free to play. I don't want to do a craft, put together a puzzle or even read. I really start to panic when there's too much of at-home play...when I'd rather be gone.

So what is the point of this ramble about nights at home alone? I have to rethink and retrain my brain to refrain from griping and whining when there's nothing to do and no one to see. And it's not easy for me, but here are a few things that help:

- I keep a plan always in front of me – for an outing tomorrow, a day trip next weekend, a vacation soon, a visit or call to another couple for dinner, or an event this weekend. Looking forward makes me smile.
- I lay aside the guilt I feel for sitting on the sofa and watching a show – because I often feel guilty if I'm not productive. There's nothing wrong with chilling out and being escorted away into the story on the screen when a night at home is on the calendar.
- I do NOT in any way do chores or housework at night (a privilege that comes from having kids out of the house.) Nighttime is for anything BUT housework. If I'm at home, I might read a magazine or a book, or we might play a board game (if I can sit still long enough!).

- I think and pause and reflect and give thanks, things I'm prone to skip right over because I'm constantly on the go. We each sometimes scroll on our phones or listen to music on YouTube to pass the time, and it's okay some nights to do this! He plays a game and I look at cool videos, like teenage kids.
- I ask him and he always says yes, and we get in the car with no particular place to go...but we go...if the silence is too strong. We might get a tiny blizzard and watch the sun set out the front window of the car, or we might walk the aisles of Target and purchase a treat – but it's okay to go, too!

Sometimes, the shorter days means we're all at home a bit more at night and some of us love it, and some of us hate it. I'm among the haters. Thankfully, I have a patient husband that knows this and is ready if I need to go, here to play if we have to stay, and rubs my feet if the sofa is our spot.

Do you like to stay home most nights, or are you like me and love to go? I think it's best to learn to be content with either/or...whatever the season may bring.

## **For Better or Worse - Two Become One – by Kaelin Scott**

When we marry someone, chances are we don't come from identical backgrounds. Usually, the person we choose to spend our lives with is pretty different than we are, or at least not exactly the same. How boring would it be if we married a carbon copy of ourselves? Becoming one flesh is partly melding our two backgrounds together into a completely new system.

A beautiful blended creation.

Sometimes, it can be hard to reconcile different lifestyles into something cohesive and fluid. Depending on how different our backgrounds are, it can be quite a challenge. It takes a lot of sifting to see what works for our marriage unit, and a lot of it is trial and error. That's the beauty of marriage, though. There isn't one perfect answer, and it isn't one size fits all.

We can make it what we want it to be.

Raising kids is another challenge when combining different upbringings from each spouse. We have to take the parenting styles we're accustomed to and somehow form them into something we feel will work well for our own family. This takes compromise and a willingness to learn together. But once again, it's such a beautiful thing. We can take what we liked about our childhood and continue those traditions with our own children. Conversely, we can recognize things that didn't work or maybe weren't healthy, and we can choose not to pass them on.

Coming together in marriage isn't supposed to be two lives fitting into one space.

It's the creation of one new life together, a beautifully blended masterpiece. Maybe our spouses were raised in a pretty similar way to the way we were raised, or maybe we're basically from different planets. The amazing and challenging and totally beautiful thing is putting those pieces together to create one big picture.

And whatever that picture looks like is totally up to us!



ENCOURAGEMENT



## Encouragement - Time In A Day – by Kaelin Scott

People often ask me how I have enough time in a day. The answer is that I truly don't know. Actually, a better answer is that I *don't* have enough time in a day. That's why I have a running to-do list with things that have been on it for months. That's just how it is sometimes.

Between homeschooling my kiddos, working part-time from home, writing, and all the other housework and cleaning that goes along with being a mom...well, it can really leave me feeling stretched thin. But I've learned to be grateful for the time I have in a day instead of wishing I had more. Being a good steward of my time means celebrating the things I get done, not fretting over the things I still need to do. God has given me a certain amount of time in each day, and how I fill it can either be pleasing to Him or not. It's my choice how to use that time.

Another thing I've learned is this that being busy doesn't equate fulfillment. Sometimes it's necessary to have a full day and work hard. But it can be equally important to sit down and soak in the day. Some days we just need to enjoy God's creation and the blessings all around us. Work is good, but so is rest. Even God rested after all His hard work, right?

Sometimes it feels like I'll never catch up with everything I need and want to do, and I honestly probably won't. Because there's always more work to be done, mouths to be fed, clothes to wash, and little ones to entertain. Every time something gets crossed off the list, three more get added on. But that's the beauty of life. Each day gives us the opportunity to choose how we spend our time. Maybe some days aren't fun, but they're needed to take care of business. Maybe some days aren't productive, but they're refreshing for our souls.

Most of my articles seem to come back to this lesson, but balance is key. I'm in a season of life where most of my time revolves around my kids, but I still have to find time to care for my wellbeing, too. Reading my Bible, going for a run, reading a book on the porch...these are all simple ways to ensure I get the rest and spiritual nourishment I need in the midst of my busy life.

If you feel like there's too much to do and not enough time in a day, I can absolutely relate. But I don't think we're truly meant to get everything done in a day. Life happens one step at a time. Some steps are big, some are small, and some feel like going backwards, but we can find joy in each season. We can rejoice in knowing we spent our time well, whatever that may look like. For me today, that means doing school lessons, going for a walk with my kids, making food and folding laundry (and writing this story!) Tomorrow, it will be a trek into town to run errands and perhaps a stop at the park.

Managing our time doesn't have to be complicated or stressful. It simply means doing what we can with grateful hearts and good attitudes. The rest will happen in time, so we don't need to worry ourselves to death. Instead of wishing we had more time in a day, let's choose to be thankful for the twenty-four hours we're given and use them the best we can.

## Firmly Planted - The Adventurous Path, Part 2 – by Dina Cavazos

---

An adventure is an exciting or unusual experience, as opposed to the hum-drum of ordinary life. I'm not really the adventurous sort, but I love living vicariously by watching mountain climbing and survival movies. That's enough earthly adventure for me.

Heavenly adventures are something else. Heavenly adventures get the "plodding horse" moving. Heavenly adventures make the old horse perk up and step higher. They inspire, bring purpose, and make the ordinary extraordinary. That's because they are God-directed. Life often does plod along and nothing much seems to be happening; but once in awhile an adventure comes along that reminds me I'm not just living an earthly life. I'm living a heavenly life, right now.

Whispers in my inner ear about the prayer garden in my backyard, and writing, have stirred my soul for some time. The prayer garden is now real, but I've never been sure of its purpose. A childhood dream of writing was buried under the debris of a problematic life, until, in 2014, on a whim, I sent a story to THYME magazine. As God would have it, there was a vacancy and I've been writing a monthly story ever since. But I still didn't consider myself "a writer." When a dear friend sent me a poem he had written, my buried love of poetry was resurrected, and I began writing poetry again. We shared and discussed our poems and stories, and his encouragement suggested that maybe writing was something I should pursue.

It's hard to pinpoint the beginning of this adventure story. Was it twelve years ago when I began the prayer garden? Eight years ago when I began writing for THYME magazine? Or was it more recent: when I was encouraged by my friend Jack, or decided to go on the [Soulwell Journey](#)? You can decide after reading the rest of the story.

The last two years, the question of purpose became heavier on my heart. Why the prayer garden? Did God really give me a desire and ability to write? These two things called my name; but sometimes I'm a little slow to hear, and doubt what I'm hearing. Then small, yet extraordinary, things happened.

First, I began reading a book called [Emotionally Healthy Christianity](#) by Peter Scazzero. Soon after, an acquaintance posted about a retreat called "The Soulwell Journey". Since all was not well with my soul, it got my attention. I looked at the website and it was *exactly* what I was looking for! I still remember the moment: sitting in my yellow velvet Goodwill chair, the website on my computer in front of me, I turned toward the bookcase. [Courage and Calling](#) by Gordon T. Smith. There it was, summing up what my heart was crying for, waiting for just the right time to be read. Was this a signpost on my Path?

I applied to go on this Journey and was accepted. The first email arrived with the first weekend's reading list. What a surprise to find [Emotionally Healthy Christianity](#) on the list. There was no doubt that God was in this.

The Journey was comprised of three powerful, love-filled, healing weekends. Through the Enneagram work we did (I'm a 9 with a 1 wing), I learned to appreciate my strengths and

identify some things that were holding me back. By the end of the Journey, God confirmed that I was hearing rightly: the prayer garden and writing are gifts I would be amiss not to use. I came away committed to move forward, somehow, perhaps join a writer's group.

About one month later, my friend Jeannie and I took a day trip to Belton, Texas. In line to pay for our treasures at an antique shop, Jeannie pointed to a flyer taped to the front of the counter. "Is that something you'd be interested in?" I had totally missed it, but I'm glad she didn't!

### **The Writerly House Fellowship--Email for more information**

The response to my inquiry confirmed it was God moving again. Jeannie's invitation, the trip, the antique store...all these little pieces came together to point me to this wonderful group of fellow writers who now encourage, inspire, and motivate me.

The adventurous path isn't always so clear, but this particular season of my life God has graciously and definitely pointed the way. The story is still unfolding. I have an idea for a book that incorporates my prayer garden with God-stories. Now it's up to me to write it.

## **Moving Forward – Rejected – by Pam Charro**

Everyone eventually feels rejected at some point in life, no matter who they are. If we are honest, we can accept that it hurts. Even Jesus was familiar with rejection, and he was perfect. So, while we know it makes sense that we will experience rejection, processing the pain can take time and effort. I'm currently feeling rejected by many people at once and it's not fun. But it is causing me to really examine myself so that I can understand why. I always believed everything was my fault when I was a kid, and, while I now know that isn't always true, I don't want to miss an opportunity to grow. Here is what I am learning about rejection so far:

-- Sometimes I won't really get an explanation for why I feel rejected and all I will be able to do is give tons of grace to the situation, make sure I have loved well, and let the person choose to reject me. That is what God does, and I want to be like him, even when it hurts.

-- As Jesus said, "If they hated me, they will hate you." If I am truly living a righteous life, it will cause discomfort to many around me who are not. It is a valid consideration that my godliness is keeping certain people at a distance. And that's okay.

-- Sometimes I am attempting to befriend someone who is unable to trust my motives. Maybe they don't see what they have to offer, or they haven't healed from trusting others. That is outside of my control, and if that person feels safer passing up my friendship, I need to accept it.

-- At times, even when both parties are loving and authentic, personalities and preferences do not align, and friendship just doesn't happen. This is not wrong, simply a fact of life, and no one has failed as long as there is no animosity.

-- Finally, I must be open to the possibility that I may have failed in some way, either by a mistake or an ulterior motive in the relationship. It can be difficult to have that degree of honesty with myself, but it is the only path to understanding the truth and growing.

Whatever the reason when I feel rejected, the one who created me and has invested the most in me loves me beyond my comprehension and will never leave or forsake me. I am learning to bring my sad, wounded heart to him when others don't seem to value what I have to offer, and to find my joy and hope in his acceptance of me, even as I become more and more impressed with the person he is making me into. In all of this, there is victory and freedom, even in something that initially only seems painful. I can withstand rejection from people when I remember that these trials are temporary, but God's healing, accepting love is always here for me, and it will last forever.

## **Simple Truth – A Full Life – by Marcy Lytle**

It's a known fact that so many girls want to be thin. It doesn't help that the models and actresses our little girls watch and aspire to be are super thin and tiny and all the things, so the word "thin" becomes synonymous with the good life. But I'm here to remind us that "thin" isn't so good in so many areas. Let me tell you, and then maybe if you're one who longs to be thin, you'll let it go and be happy with who you are!

As we age, our lips become thin, not full – like they were when we were young. Thin lips are not pretty, so we're told.

Thinning hair is a thing after kids, after menopause, and after decades of life. And thinning hair isn't full and luscious like we see on the young ones...so we pine and we whine and search for products that thicken.

Fine, thin lines that appear at the corners of our eyes and mouths are to be erased, so we're told, as well. Fillers and cosmetics are sold by the thousands so that the thinness is gone.

You see, ladies, being thin is not so appealing after all, is it? Thin lips, thin hair, thin lines are to be avoided like the plague! Let's keep going...

A lot of places start to thin out, and our middle is not one of them. However, ear lobes are thin and droopy.

Fingers and toes start to thin out, and knobby bones and knuckles appear instead of smooth and silky hands and feet. (I personally thought my mom's thin hands were beautiful.)

Drooping eyelids are a thing, and they cause our once almond shaped eyes to become thin slits through which we look, as we powder our lids a certain way to hide the droop.

You see, ladies, the thinning process DOES take place over time, that process we long for when we're young, but emerges in older age in places where we don't want it!

What if...we taught and demonstrated to those younger behind us that being thin should never be a goal of any kind at any stage in life, but rather living a full life should be our desire?

Some are born wafer thin, they can eat all they want, and never gain a pound. Other girls can just look at a brownie and gain 10 pounds. Life is full of both kinds of girls. And yet there's this wall of shame behind which the bigger girls live, while they wish for the life the thinner girls have.

Thinning will happen, but it won't be like we wanted it, and it will show up sooner than we ever imagined it.

A full life is now my desire, with all the thinning of my hair, the lines on my face and the pursed lips on my face. I was discussing with a friend how older women often have a thin frown with tight lips because they've become bitter instead of better. But then there are a few older women, which are unfortunately hard to find, that are full on laughter, joy, and peace because

they gave up the pursuit to be thin, accepted the thinness they never wanted, and relished the fact that they have always been beautifully and wonderfully made.

Botox at age 30. Girls that envy the skinny. And moms that are still searching for beauty on the outside. That's the society in which we live, and I can't help but wonder why...when He came to give us all life, and that to the fullest...thin lips and all.

## **Unearthly Thing - Confessions of a Christian Halloween Fan – by Angela Dolbear**

I love Halloween. The decorating, the cooler weather, the dressing up, the parties, and of course, the candy! Oh yeah--and carving pumpkins, and then roasting the pumpkin seeds after cleaning them out of the pumpkin guts. It all makes me smile inside.

That's teenage me in the picture, dressed as Pippi Longstocking for Halloween, at my job at the Chino Music Plus store, circa 1988. Ha! I had really long hair, and classic pewter braces on my teeth.

Halloween also means fall is in the air. The heat of summer must give way to cooler temps. Ahhh...sweater weather! My favorite.

BUT (there's always a big "but"), church sermons and blogs tell me I shouldn't like Halloween. That Halloween is a time for evil.

So, I have guilt and condemnation over the joy that Halloween brings me.

I have done some research and read sermons and blog posts over the years. Nothing has provided conclusive Biblical proof that I must carve out the enjoyment of Halloween from my life.

I don't see any evil in the seasonal aisles in Michaels and other craft stores. Candy and black cats are two of my favorite things, both of which I have near me in my office as I write. (Well, only one black cat, my Maddy, my sweet writing muse, a gift from God who I suspect may be some sort of angel considering all I have seen and felt, but that's a story for another time).

I have seen real evil. It is not seasonal. I have encountered demon possessed people. And it wasn't on Halloween. In fact, all my encounters with the demonic happened in church. On worship teams.

Think about it...if you were a demon, where could you be the most effective in destroying believers in Christ? Inside the church, especially in the leadership. Infiltrating God's ranks. Disrupting the worship of God. (SIDE NOTE: If this topic piques your interest, I highly recommend reading ["The Screwtape Letters"](#), by C.S. Lewis, and ["A Tormentor's Tale"](#) by Angela Dolbear. It's good to know the tactics of your enemy).

Little pumpkins and jangly skeletons are fun and festive. I witnessed a church deacon's wife screaming at people, and then crying and mumbling, and then screaming again. All the while her face seemed distorted, almost pixelated. For real. No joking. It was not fun or festive.

But it wasn't scary either. I know where that behavior came from (you could almost smell sulfur in the air). It wasn't scary because I have nothing to fear as a child of the Most High God. I admit, the incident stuck with me, and is something I will never forget. But I was not scared.

Maybe scary Halloween masks and haunted houses are not good for some people. Having just read all of I Corinthians in the Bible, I try to be mindful of things that might drag other people down. If that is you, it's okay. Stay away from Halloween if it bothers you.

But we should also be mindful of setting something up to be feared that should not be feared. Something that has no power over us.

And we should be wary of setting up our opinions as fact, in the name of righteousness. Especially, if the chief goal is to shame others, which is a Biblically noted goal of the devil. And he doesn't need our help in tearing down believers in Christ.

So, I will celebrate Halloween by excitedly purchasing "Day of the Dead" decorations when they become available at the Dollar Tree because I love the colors and textures (I love Mexican culture, a by-product of growing up in Southern California). And I will keep loving Jack Skellington, the Pumpkin King, mostly because God spoke to me through the film, "A Nightmare Before Christmas." That's a story I wrote about in THYME some months ago.

And I will fear nothing, except the lack of wisdom to see God as the Almighty God over everything. He is my Heavenly Father who has unfailing love for you and for me. So, there is nothing to fear.

And I will take the opportunity while celebrating fun Halloween events with others to not point out the perceived woes and dangers of Halloween, but I will freely talk about my Heavenly Father who loves me and cares for me. No matter what the time of year is.

*Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series, and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). Angela writes real, relevant, relatable, and reverent fiction. She loves reading, writing prose, as well as writing and recording music with her husband Tim in their studio in Nashville, TN--listen to their music on [Sound Cloud](#). Please drop by and sign-up for news and to read new stories and hear new original music at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>. Blessings to you!*





FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME – Even at Our Best – by Marcy Lytle**

“Do your best!” we say, as they enter the school building.

“Just do the best you can,” son, as he goes for the new job interview.

“Do the best with what you have...” my dad said, often, when preaching or talking to others.

And yet...we all know that even at our best, sometimes we have a sorry day, we don't get the job, and we fail at trying anything with what we have.

I was thinking about this the other day and I realized that even at our very best, we still need help.

Even when we get the best score on a test with no mistakes, we need help to not boast, to keep up the good grades, and to never belittle someone else that performed poorly.

Even when we land that job, receive accolades and raises, and all things seem to come up roses, we need help maintaining that level – because others are vying for the job we got. Others are placing excessive duties on our shoulders, and we're tired and need a break from all the greatness!

Even when we do the best with what we have and maybe we plant the perfect seeds and the rains fall, and the sun shines, and we yield a harvest of the prettiest vegetables we've ever grown, we need the continuation of good weather, no pests, and SO MUCH MORE.

So even at our best, we are dependent on HIM.

We need God to be free of the pressures, the opinions and the burdens that this world brings with all of the success we might achieve.

We need God to experience peace at night, when all is well with our families and jobs, but fear whispers “what if you lose it all” as we try to go to sleep.

We need God's forgiveness when pride does seep in and we take a fall, or when we realize we've stepped on the toes of others, and we've caused hurt....deep hurt.

We need God to give us identity apart from all of those “best” things in life, because they will attach themselves to us like glue and close our fists, and cause us heaviness. So we need to know who we are, apart from “even at our best.”

We need God to satisfy our deepest longings and desires, because the best that we experience now won't be the best we want tomorrow, and the next year, and the next... Only He can satisfy.

I'm so glad that when we're down and out and things go wrong, we have a Savior. But I'm equally as thankful that we have that same Savior when things are looking up, so that when they shift, we don't shift with them.

Even at our best, we need Jesus, and he's always there...

## **FRESH TIME – Five for Fall – by Marcy Lytle**

As I was decorating my house, I realized that in the past I've placed this "burden" of sorts on myself to decorate wisely so that what I place and use can last a lifetime. While there's wisdom in being frugal in spending, there's also some freedom that some of us need to experience about the reality and beauty of seasons! They come, and then they go! None of the four seasons last forever. They show up when they're supposed to (well, somewhat), they give way to the next season, and they all show off their own colors and breezes and scents!

Here it is fall again, and I'm guessing most of you have already started decorating. Or maybe you don't decorate for seasons. But I just can't pass up a pumpkin spice candle or a new pillow cover with leaves on it, or a table setting with orange plaid...and more! And in a few weeks of time I'll be replacing it all with evergreen and cedar scents, pillows that say "Merry Christmas" and table settings that are festive and sparkly.

And guess what? It's okay and normal and healthy and good to enjoy each season and its different feeling and ambience that it brings, without guilt!

If you're one of the ones that hears that whispering imp on your shoulder all the time, the one that tries to zap all of the fun of life right out of you, don't listen to it this fall. In fact, turn and knock it right off your shoulders and consider some easy, affordable ways to change out five things in your house each season.

**Tea towels** – These are inexpensive at places like Marshalls and Ross, so grab seasonal ones and hang one on the stove, or near the sink, and admire it. Or buy a pack, and do this each season! Yes, use them, get them dirty, and then buy new ones next season.

**Candles** – Okay, these can be expensive. But don't buy the ones that cost \$30 and up. Again, hit the shelves of the discount stores and smell them and get a few, and burn them. Burn them often, and use them up each season, and then buy new ones for the next! One for the kitchen, living area, and your room (in a jar, for safety!)

**Pillows** – Opt for a couple of pillows and then purchase the covers to switch out for seasons. This saves space and dollars – and they're so affordable on Amazon. Place on the front porch or back porch chair/bench, one or two on your sofa, and toss one on your bed! Why not?

**Gourds** – Visit the dollar store, or buy a pack of them at Hobby Lobby, and then set gourds near some of your décor that you already have out. Remember to place in groups of three, so set a gourd or two by a lamp, or atop a stack of books, or on a shelf by a photo. They'll look great! Buy fake ones or real ones.

**Cups** – Find ones in fall colors at the dollar stores, place on a shelf, use one for a vase for short flowers or greenery, set one on the counter in the kitchen and USE it for hot tea or coffee or cocoa, whatever you sip! Use one as part of a trio on a wooden board, perhaps with a pumpkin and a vase of stems you've cut from your yard, or herbs.

Set aside one shelf or two in a cabinet or in the garage to store seasonal items, keep a few and replace a few every time the wind blows a different direction and you yearn for a new aroma in the house, and most of all - enjoy!

## **FRESH THYME – What’s in Your Bag? – by Marcy Lytle**

I have been smiling for weeks now, and will be smiling even wider, by the time this story is published. It’s all because my son and his wife are expecting their first child in just a few days, and the entire family is giddy with excitement as we wait for the news! But another thing that made me smile was hearing that they have their bag packed and ready to go, once the baby comes. All parents do this, and hopefully they’re packed early enough that everything’s there to grab and rush out the door, once the movement starts! It’s one of the most exciting things in life, to await the birth of a new family member.

The things in parents’ bags always include an outfit (for the baby to come home in), maybe reading material for while they wait, and even some snacks. There also needs to be a comfy outfit for Mom to wear. I’m thinking there will be toiletries and phone charging cords, so that family members can be kept up to date on the birth. Maybe even gum for the nervous dad!

I absolutely LOVE to pack bags of all kinds, so when my kids told me their bag was packed, it made me happy to think this is really it – the baby is coming! And after this bag, will be the diaper bag, and then when the baby gets older it will be a backpack or book tote, and also little suitcases for the kids as they travel. SO many bags, for all stages in life of our kids, and for us!

So maybe by the time this actually is published, I’ll tell you at the end of this story our newborn news!

Until then, let’s keep chatting about bags! I have several I’d like to share, bags of my own that make me happy this fall season:

- Large bags from Lakeshore Collection hang in my guest bedroom closet, as I shop and fill them with Christmas gifts. It’s one of my favorite things to organize once September/October arrives. I also collect those dollar bags in the checkout lanes from Marshalls or Ross, to hold small gifts, as well. Bags that help organize are the best!
- Book bags, of which I have several, are folded in a drawer by our front door to grab and go for road trips or even just a day out. Inside we place a puzzle book, something to read, perhaps a cap if we go for a walk, and some walking shoes, etc. We keep a book bag in the car always. Sometimes, we take a nice cloth one from Barnes and Noble, and sometimes just a tote.
- Movie bags are a must for us, because we do carry in our own snacks. No one ever checks, and we often still buy something at the theater, but I have a few in which I place water bottles and nuts/dark chocolate, and sometimes our own popped corn! I carry it as a handbag, it’s not too large, and it works!
- Backpacks are the best when traveling, I’ve found. Carrying one leaves my hands free and makes for better distribution of weight, instead of slinging a regular bag on one shoulder. I have one I purchased for \$7.99 years ago at a kiosk in a mall, and I use it all the time. It’s awesome.
- Road trip bag – This is a favorite purchase because it actually says “road trip” on the front, and it’s so fun to pack it when we hit the road for a day trip or a weekend. I stuff it

full of all the goodies we might need in the car, from Kleenex to pins to books to snacks and more!

So where in the world do I store these bags? I have a huge one in the bottom of a closet in which I have many others folded and placed inside. By the front door is a hall tree with drawers, and some bags are folded and placed in there. Then finally, a hook on the back of the bedroom door is where we hang a few others.

We all carry bags, and I personally have no need for a hospital bag for newborns any more, but it's so fun hearing that my son has his packed. I don't know what we'd all do without all the cute bags to carry the things we need to fun places and new adventures. And I can barely stand to pass up the chance to buy a new one, quite often!

Enjoy packing your bags, wherever you're headed this fall...



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

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

November 2022





TIPS

## **The Dressing – Fall Sweaters – by Marcy Lytle**

I'm so hoping that by the time this is published, fall temps are really here in Central Texas. We definitely have had fall breezes and cooler temps, but I want more! And while we are still just pre-winter in season, sweaters are the favorites for fall. Long cardigans, short and cropped, sweater tops and more. I find a good selection at places like TJ Maxx and Ross, for a fraction of the price elsewhere, and even at H&M! So shop around and grab several, hang by the front door, and enjoy when you step out for November gatherings...

The Sweater Top – I absolutely love this sweater top I'm wearing in the photo to the left. It's from Target, and they have a few colors, but the buttons, the sleeves, and the feel is just perfection. It's great with those high-waisted jeans, too!

An Interesting Sleeve – I found this button sweater with sleeves that have little cut-outs on them. My mom always told me to look for unique features on clothes, and these sleeves caught my eye. And check out the vintage buttons – so cute!

Charcoal Gray – This long cardigan was mentioned by a friend on Instagram as being so soft and cozy, and it is! It's from H&M, has no buttons, and is a great color – I mean great! I love anything charcoal gray, don't you?

Poncho – I found this mustard poncho with gray threads running through on vacation this summer. I love the fringe and straight-edge hem, too. Ponchos are everywhere, this season. They're thick and super cozy, or light and warm, whatever you need for your weather.

A Sweater Vest – I have a couple of these, this season, sweater vests with no sleeves. This green one is a fave, with the drawstring at the waist. It can be worn over a half-tee, or with long sleeves, when winter arrives. The green is so pretty!

Stripes on the Sleeve – I found this at The Loft, and I'm pretty sure it was a late spring sweater from last year, but it works for fall because of the color. Add a scarf, and it really works, and looks so pretty with the shorter sleeve, where your longer sleeves can peek out the bottom!

Orange is Good – For fall, anything orange is a great addition to your wardrobe. This was found at a discount store and I love it over a tee, with a belt underneath, and the coziness is off the charts. Isn't the color so rich?

## Seven for You – Holiday Traditions! – by the Panel of Women

Traditions. They're great over the holidays, aren't they? They make great memories and provide something to be counted on, with the children. Maybe your family sets out milk and cookies for Santa. Perhaps you unwrap one gift on Christmas Eve. And maybe you always have a particular dish on the table. We asked our panel to share some of their own traditions, in case you want to add a new one this year!

My family has historically rotated holidays between the family members with larger homes because we typically would EASILY have 30 people or more. The cooking responsibility was shared by all, with the host home providing the turkey and gravy and everyone else bringing everything else, from paper plates and utensils to drinks and rolls, plus everyone (except the host) brought a dessert. That way, there was PLENTY of food, and a multitude of yummy desserts to sample. After dinner, **doggie bags** are prepared so everyone gets to take home some leftovers.

Several years ago, some family members started moving away from the core area (meaning moving further than 2 hours away), making it more difficult to get together at holidays, both from a space standpoint and also just sheer distance, because overnight stays were required. I said all that to say this, it's now become IMPERATIVE that we get together! It no longer matters where, whose house is larger, etc., but that we make a very intentional effort to be together. It means even so much more, now that we've lost precious elders. I have a feeling it won't matter what we do or don't do at each gathering, because just being there is *enough*. We've played a **few games** in the past, Left Right Center, 10,000 dice game, Monopoly, etc., and in more recent years, after losing loved ones, we've enjoyed **looking through family photos**. *Remember this one? Oh, I love that one! I remember how much fun that was!* Very, very nostalgic and meaningful. I also have a confession. In some of those past years, I made the suggestion to my husband that we go away for some of the holidays. Believe me, when I say that he was NEVER in favor of that option. Never, once. Now that he and others are gone, I GET it. So, you can be sure I will be here, or there, wherever my loved ones are, eating the same old turkey and dressing till nobody wants to or can come anymore. I think it's really, really important, because we need each other. No matter what or where you are, I hope you have a wonderful celebration with those you love - Debbie

We **make tamales**! Although we are Mexican American, we didn't grow up making tamales. This might have to do with the fact that my father was in the Air Force and we were not always in a part of the country that sold the ingredients necessary to make the tamales. Only recently as we children became adults, did we encourage our mother to show us how to make tamales. Now it is a family tradition! - Anita

This was taken back several years ago. My Mom was born and raised in the UK. I was raised there for the first five years of my life. One of the traditions we've kept all these years is having **Christmas Crackers** at the table.

When you hear Christmas Crackers, you might think of food. It's actually a cardboard roll with a paper crown, a toy, and a piece of paper with three sill jokes or facts written on it that require an answer/ You grab one end and someone else grabs the other of a cracker and you pull. There's a strip of card inside that has a small smear of gunpowder coated on it. When you pull the cracker the friction causes a loud popping sound. The paper crown stays on during the meal and then after the meal, everyone takes turns reading a joke for the group to answer. We always have so much fun, trading toys, making funny faces, and reading corny jokes. – Cathy

My father in law passed down the tradition making **Christmas peanut brittle**. Each year my husband spends a day and makes many, many batches of brittle. We then enjoy sharing it with family, friends, and business clients. Here's a YouTube link if you'd like to watch and learn! – Shelley

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RAedUtVE-Bc&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RAedUtVE-Bc&feature=emb_logo)

Our family is mostly excited for the time we have when we can get together during the holidays. We all love spending the time playing with the children and babies since we don't get to be together very often throughout the year. We don't really have any traditions that we've done for a long time. The last few years we have started **Secret Santa** for the adult kids and those gifts have been so creative, some sentimental and some funny. Last year at Christmas we did a **piñata**. Now that was crazy fun!

There is one thing I have been doing that is becoming somewhat of a tradition when we have our holiday meal at my house. Some in our family are very picky eaters but there is one dish everyone loves, and I don't have to make it! That dish is **fried rice** from our local Samurai of Tokyo restaurant. I get **individual take out cartons** for everyone! And if there are to be other foods they like and don't eat their fried rice at the meal, they get to take it home with them for later. It's then like a party favor.

I wish you a Happy Holidays! Enjoy whatever you do, whether it's a tradition or something new!  
– Carole

Sometimes, in the month of December, my husband and I try to **do something "Christmassy" each day** until Christmas eve. It can be baking cookies, looking at lights, sipping cider in a park, watching a Christmas movie, or whatever. I usually make the list before December begins, and then we mark it off as we have the fun!

Our kids gather with us for a full day of Christmas celebration, but **not on Christmas Day**. It's usually the Sunday before, and we start with breakfast, opening gifts one at a time, perhaps a walk to the park, fun foods all day, and we end with stockings in the evening. This enables us to spend an entire day without everyone having to leave to go somewhere else, and they get to spend the actual Christmas Day at home making their own traditions. And we always **take a photo** of the kids in front of the pile of presents before opening.

We often put together a **holiday jigsaw puzzle** on cold nights at home. It's fun to have an activity to do as a mind-breather, feet rest, conversation starter...when the days are busy. – Marcy

When I worked in an office I enjoyed **"Secret Santa"** where once a month I would secretly leave a treat for a coworker whose name I had drawn. Then at Christmas time we would get together and reveal whose name we had for the yearlong treats. It was just a fun way to celebrate all year long.

At Christmas time specifically, I enjoy **attending choir, dance, or other musical performances**. It is also fun, **touring homes** decorated inside and out with lights and

Christmas decor. If I'm lucky I find old homes that display decor from a different time. At the very least, it is just fun driving through fancy neighborhoods and seeing extravagant displays.

And, we can't forget all the **holiday movies and holiday themed TV shows** that are viewed over and over. With every year that passes, I enjoy getting together with loved ones, eating special food, exchanging gifts, and remembering that Jesus was born to save us.

### **THREE MOMS – Minding Manners by The Cousins**

#### Mom of Two (and one on the way!)

With our girls being ages 6 and 4, we do teach manners more in the form of how they treat others and being respectful – especially with words. We teach them to say, “Please” and “Thank you,” and even Mr. and Mrs. to teachers or older folks in the community. We also try to teach manners when at others’ homes when eating dinner, being courteous to those who are serving us, etc. We try our best to instill that manners consist of being respectful!

We aren’t so much on manners in sitting still when eating, napkin on the lap, to use the “proper” fork, etc. We have not taught our children that, but we do try to get them to stay in the chair during meal time! This is hard when they’re young, because it may be hard to eat a full meal in one sitting. Hopefully, that will get better as they age, and can then help put things away!

At the table, if their mouth is full, we do insist that they finish chewing first. And we also teach the girls certain etiquette on how to sit when wearing dresses. We still have them wear shorts underneath, and show them how to “properly” sit and be respectful to their own bodies.

It’s mainly respect and attitudes, and not being rude that we focus on. We talk about that instead of the “traditional” manners of do this and don’t do that.

#### Mom of Four (as shared by Grace, the oldest)

My parents aren’t very strict on manners but one of the major manners that my mom and dad want us to do is to keep eye contact with the person we are talking to. My parents think this is very important to do. They have always reminded us to keep eye contact, and that have reminded us so many times it has stuck. In my opinion, this is pretty easy to do. But for some of my siblings, it is a little more difficult.

Another manner that we practice in our house is saying yes ma’am, no ma’am, yes sir, no sir. My parents have taught us this because it shows respect and is polite. I think it is easy because I have done it over and over again so many times.

One of our table manners is not talking with food in our mouths, because first of all – it’s gross if you do. But it’s polite if you don’t. My parents teach me this by example. I am pretty good at this most of the time, but sometimes I think I have something important to say and forget I have food in my mouth.

The next manner we have been taught is “ladies first.” This manner is mainly for my brother. My parents have taught my brother that it is respectful to put ladies first. Like letting them go in front of you, holding open the door, and just being really polite. My brother is really good at this manner!

The final manner is “no elbows on the table.” My parents are not really strict on this manner, but they can be. They have taught us how polite and important it is to have good table manners. I really struggle with this one, because I think it’s more comfortable to put my elbows on the table.

Although I'm not perfect at all of the manners, I strive to work on them constantly. Now you know some of our household manners...

### Mom of Three

We do think that manners matter. We do more of modeling and instruction as we go along, rather than setting up a list of rules.

Regarding yes ma'am or yes sir, we have not necessarily taught these. However, we have taught them to say yes, not yeah. And we often say "Yes ma'am?" as a question when we want them to hear us and listen. It's asking for an intentional response. We absolutely teach them to say yes, or no thank you, or yes \_\_\_\_\_ (insert adult name here.) We try to introduce people that way, so they hear it. We want them to be polite and kind.

One of our biggest manners we've talked about is looking someone into the face and responding, even if they don't want to talk to someone. At church, we have greeters and the kids aren't always awake when we arrive. An older gentleman there likes to give high-fives and the kids at first just walked by. So we talked about saying "good morning" and smiling and making eye contact or responding, so that others are acknowledged. We teach them to be aware when others are being kind to them. Our daughter prefers a fist bump! But the kids aren't allowed to glare and walk away. As the kids have gotten older, we've had to remind them more!

Be nice, be polite, be aware, open the door, make contact, say thank you, all of these things...we enforce. They are good at saying thank you and giving a hug. But, of course, they sometimes forget. We often work on being honest in the right context, and not being rude!

As far as table manners, like napkins in laps – we don't require that. However they do always have a napkin no matter where we are sitting. We do talk about using the napkin, because kids forget! They only see cloth napkins in restaurants, as we don't use cloth at home! We do work on wiping hands, cleaning up after they eat, etc.

We do teach kindness, but not necessarily "old school" manners, so to speak. We work more on the attitude of the heart, so that kindness comes out. Heart issues. We teach more along the lines of fruit of the Spirit, so that they act kindly toward others. *Proper* at our home? Probably not. But a *grateful heart*? Yes, we do work on that.

The kids are also learning at church about walking with the Lord and producing the fruit of the Spirit – so it's more what's in their heart and that comes out of their mouths...rather than a set of rules.

## **In the Kitchen – For the Family – by Marcy Lytle**

You're going to need some easy, tasty, fun snacks for all the family and kids that will gather this month and over the holidays. These are easy to make, nice to have on hand, and so pretty and yummy to serve to the family for late night snacking, treats for during the movies, or just because everyone's a little hungry in between all the busyness. Enjoy.

**Pigs in a Blanket** – Maybe these are the most mundane and pitiful food items you think you could offer to guests, but honestly – if you add one thing – it elevates the dish and makes everyone notice and enjoy in a new way!

- Tube of crescent rolls
- Mini franks
- Everything but the Bagel seasoning
- One beaten egg
- Mustard

Cut each triangle of dough into three long strips, and wrap each strip around a cocktail frank. Press to seal and arrange seam side down on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Brush with a beaten egg, and sprinkle the seasoning on top. Bake at 375 degrees until golden, about 15 minutes. Serve with mustard.

**Apple Nachos** – These are great for snacking around the fire, while playing games, in the evening during a movie, or whenever. And they're so easy, and look pretty on the platter, as well!

- Apple slices
- Caramel sauce
- Mini chocolate chips

Slice the apples and fan them out on a large tray. Drizzle caramel sauce over the top, and then sprinkle with the chips. Voila! You're done!

**Smoked Almond Hummus** – This is great to have in the fridge as a healthy snack, amid all the unhealthy comfort food eating this time of the year. And the almonds, well, they just add a new flavor to hummus for sure – and a good one!

- 15 oz canned chickpeas, with liquid
- 2 garlic cloves
- 2 T Tahini
- 3 oz smoked almonds
- ¼ c fresh lemon juice
- 1 T kosher salt

Combine all in a chopper or food processor. Hold down on low speed for one minute, then scrape down sides and press for another 2 minutes, til hummus is smooth. Drizzle with olive oil



and chopped almonds. (I found I needed to add a few more almonds to get the consistency I wanted).

**Peanut Butter Bites** – Make a batch of these and keep out for snacking, for all the family. They're so tasty and good – the kids love them!

- 12/ c semisweet chocolate chips
- 4 peanut butter cups (3/4 oz each) chopped (I used the dark chocolate ones)
- 1 1/3 c creamy peanut butter
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup light corn syrup
- 1/8 t salt
- 4 cups Rice Krispies
- 1 c broken pretzels

Freeze the chocolate chips and pb cups for about 15 minutes. Meanwhile, in a saucepan combine the PB, sugar, corn syrup and salt. Cook and stir over low heat til blended. Remove from heat and stir in Rice Krispies and pretzels til just coated. Let stand 5 minutes.

Gently fold in chocolate chips and PB cups til combined. Drop by spoonfuls on waxed paper and let stand till set. (Makes a lot)

**Snack boxes** – If you're headed to the movies over the Thanksgiving weekend or holidays, pack snack boxes and save money and calories – and the family will love! The boxes are craft boxes found at Michaels.

- Grapes
- Cheese – brie and sliced
- Crackers
- Jam
- Nuts
- Salami
- Brownie or cookie

Just place your dividers in the boxes (they're movable!) to fit your snack inserts. Fill and enjoy. If anything is juicy (like if you include pickles, or other fruit) place a paper towel under to absorb, so the juice won't run under and ruin the other snacks.

**Rollups** – Leftover turkey is great for this, or even just thinly sliced turkey from the deli – and this isn't a new idea – just one maybe you've forgotten.

- Tortillas
- Guacamole or avocado
- Salsa
- Turkey
- Shredded cheese

Just place the ingredients in the tortillas and roll up, slice and serve. They're pretty, they're tasty, and they're easy!

**Pepita Guacamole** – Make this, set out the chips, and let the family devour!

- 3 large avocados
- ¼ small white onion finely chopped
- ¼ c fresh cilantro chopped
- 1 small jalapeno, chopped (I used pepperoncini!)
- 1/3 c roasted pepitas finely chopped, plus more whole ones for garnish
- ¼ c fresh lime juice
- Kosher salt
- Chips

In bowl, combine avocado, onion, cilantro, jalapeno or pepperoncini, lime juice and ½ t salt (I found it needed more). Mash to desired consistency. Top with pepitas and serve.

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

Every month, I'm amazed at what I learn when I observe and just live. I love hearing what others learn, so I hope you can find something in this list you might try or sigh or wink an eye at, when you discover with me!

Dark chocolate covered almond clusters, in the bulk food section of your grocery store, are the best snack!

Leftover pinto beans and leftover rice and be heated (with a bit of salsa mixed in) and placed in a thermos, for lunch. Just include some grated cheese and sliced green onions – absolutely delish.

Throat Coat herbal tea (I bought at Target) is a great addition to your cold/flu-time arsenal – helps soothe and heal!

Have a cozy little corner in your kitchen? Add a tray, three jars filled with goodies, a tiny vase and a couple of other small pieces of décor. Cute!

If you have larger serving dishes that take up too much room in your kitchen cabinets, move them to the living area and place out for décor – and use them as needed from there!

It's unique, entertaining, has great characters, heartwarming and all the things – *The Beautiful Fantastic* – on Amazon Prime – my favorite movie lately!

A trackhoe is different than a backhoe – I was informed of this just yesterday!

Seven Sundays is a brand of cereal I was just introduced too – clean and healthy ingredients – and crunchy. Not FULL of flavor, but it grows on you...and is great for a snack.

Check out the jewelry at World Market – some of their earrings and necklaces and accessories are SO cute – great ideas for Christmas.

I recently purchased porch jewelry, handmade by The Hummingbird and the Beagle creator Jenna – and it makes such a beautiful addition to an outside area.

½ cup of baking soda mixed in with white towels in the washer, and your detergent, keeps those towels soft and fluffy! My sister told me this, and it works!

Do you have a round wooden Lazy Susan? It's a great décor piece for a corner, to decorate this season!

When decorating, try focusing on one aspect of a piece of art, then set that same image out in front of the piece – it looks cool!

Need a gift for a guy? Pick up a couple of French or Italian sodas, along with shortbread cookies, from World Market. Purchase one of their to-go wine bags, and the sodas and cookies fit perfectly inside! He'll love it...

It's fall, so head out to a park you've never been before. Enjoy a sculpture park, one with giant swings or beckoning benches, and cool trails. It's an easy, cheap date idea. Go.

If you shop at Marshalls, look for the brand Hippie Rose in the Juniors section – they have the cutest sweaters!

## **SUGAR + Spice A Solid Foundation –by Angela Dolbear**

The weather is turning cold, which means dryer air. Time to revisit my foundation choice...a product with more moisture for sure. My mid-century skin is prone to dryness even without the cooler weather.

Since my skin procedures (please see my story under the ENCOURAGEMENT tab this month), I need less coverage. I used to be full coverage only gal, but thank God that has changed. And dry skin makes full coverage foundation look cakey. Yuck. Cake is for birthdays and weddings...not for face makeup.

Currently, a tinted moisturizer is my favorite. And if it has a SPF in it, then that's even better.

My favorite (\$\$\$ -- I only buy it on sale): [GinZing SPF 40 Energy-Boosting Tinted Moisturizer - Origins](#)

This moisturizer is so creamy and blends so evenly. I add a little concealer under my eyes and then a dusting of setting powder and face makeup is done.

My everyday product (\$\$): [Purlisse PERFECT GLOW BB CREAM SPF 30](#). I get a bit more coverage from this BB cream, but it's still light and never cakey.

For special occasions, I may reach for a regular foundation makeup. I like stick foundations, but I also like powder foundations during the warmer months. I can swipe a powder foundation right over a tinted moisturizer with a large bristle brush or dab it with a damp makeup sponge. It provides a more finished look.

There are so many options when it comes to foundations. And there are excellent drugstore foundations as well as prestige brands. And there are so many ways to apply it...with a brush, sponge, or the good ol' fingers, which is my favorite.

### **“Hack Job” Tip**

Foundation will always look better if you exfoliate first. Depending on the strength of your exfoliator, every 2-3 days will give you a smooth canvas to apply your makeup onto. Follow the foundation application with a concealer, then a dusting of setting powder. Your skin will look its best.

SECRET HACK: applying a face oil or serum on your cheek bones, center of your forehead, and down the bridge of your nose BEFORE applying foundation will give you a healthy inside-out glow. Dewey primers work well too.

The beauty of blessings to you!

*Angela Dolbear, Beauty Editor, is the author of contemporary spiritual novels, such as [THE GARDEN KEY](#) Series, and [THE TORMENTOR'S TALE](#), as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). And she loves writing and recording songs with her husband, Tim --listen on [Sound Cloud](#). She is also a self-proclaimed beauty junkie and has been since long before her mother allowed her to start wearing makeup at the age of 14. She keeps UPS and the USPS busy delivering small boxes on a regular basis from Ulta, Sephora, Amazon, and many independent cosmetics companies to her home Nashville, TN. Please connect with her at [www.AngelaDolbear.com](http://www.AngelaDolbear.com)*

## **Practical Parenting – What Can They Do? – by Marcy Lytle**

There are lots of opportunities for chaos and boredom, all in the same day, over the next couple of months as we bake, have family gather, shop and wrap gifts, prepare for special times, and all that goes with the holiday season. Kids under foot are not one of the things we enjoy dealing with, but there they are...out of school...making messes and fighting and wanting something to do.

So, what if we think of ways we can put the kids' talents and hands and minds to good use, while we prepare, and work together, instead of separately, to make the holidays happy and fun? Is it possible? I don't know, but here are a few ideas of what they can do to pitch in:

*Ask them to make placecards for the table.* There are many sites that offer free, printable ones you can color and add names to, so for the crafty ones in your family, give them this task!

*Ask them to plan activities for the kids that might be coming to visit.* If cousins are arriving, ask your oldest to put together a list of games, craft, activities inside and out, and make a poster board to set against a wall in their bedroom, for the kids to work from. (Approve it first, of course!)

Ask kids that can handle the kitchen knives to *cut and chop all the things you're going to need*, ahead of time, to save you time and energy. Let them chop the nuts, the veggies, and place in baggies, for using later.

Ask the TV lovers to *find some films and shows for the family to watch* over the holidays, checking the listings and content and presenting you a list of say 10 options. This will save family angst when choosing! Make sure they include films each person likes.

Ask the kids to *go through their toys/games* and place discards or broken in a large box, for donation. They can also go through their coats for giveaways, as well, or other clothing that is too small to wear.

Ask the kids to *design a tablescape using things in and around the house*. Allow them to gather branches, candles, cloths, lights, etc. to create something beautiful for the buffet table, or the sitting table.

Ask the kiddos what they like to read, then take them to the library or the neighborhood yard libraries, and *gather a tote for each one of at least five books to dive into*, over the holidays, when you need quiet while you prepare.

Those are just seven ideas. Think of you and your family and what stresses you out during the holidays. Is it not enough time? Is it the messes they make? Is it the constant, "I'm bored" complaint? Then compile some ideas of your own for each of the kids and present it to them, as their contribution to the holiday family season. They might even have a few ideas of their own! Do this now, write it all down, and display it in orderly way, so that it's there, done and everyone can see it, without having to ask you again what it is they're supposed to do.

Hope it works! Because those little kiddos of yours, they can do a lot when given the chance.



HOME

## **I Don't Do Teens – Is It Too Late? – by Marcy Lytle**

There are teens in the house, and all of a sudden you wake up and panic at night about the things you wish you'd emphasized more, before they grew up so fast. Or perhaps there are things you wish you'd downplayed, because you often made mountains out of molehills. Maybe you observed your daughter or son saying or doing something and gasped, "Is it too late to fix this?"

She received a gift from a grandparent and the words "Thank you" never exited her mouth.

He pushed his younger brother and a disallowed expletive did exit his mouth.

We've all had it happen, when our teens suddenly look like these young adults and we wonder if we missed the mark or messed them up or muffled up this thing called parenting when they were younger.

It's never too late, with teens, or even your adult kids. We can always address issues, ask forgiveness, pray for them, talk to them, and all the things. Of course, it was never too late with ourselves...when God found us and loved us and changed us from the inside out. And if you're like me, you're still going through that change daily...as you submit to His ways and tender graces that come your way.

I've always said the best teacher is by example. If we want our kids to be kind, then we need to show kindness. If we want them to look in the mirror and like what they see, they need to not hear us complain about our weight. If we want them to be givers, we need to model giving without complaint. If we want them to be grateful, we must work on our own grateful hearts.

*Sounds like a lot of pressure on the parents, doesn't it?*

And truth be told, we all fail. We say unkind words and maybe curse in front of our kids, because they drive us bonkers. We do look in the mirror and gasp at those extra pounds or fine lines and say something out loud, and they hear. We give and sometimes begrudgingly, because finances are tight. And being grateful in all things? Well, sometimes that's hard as well.

But just like He offers grace and mercy daily to us, we need to extend that grace to our kids...and to ourselves. If we know we've failed in certain areas, it doesn't hurt to confess it and talk with our teens about it, and try better. It's a good time to converse about repentance, heart attitudes, how He loves us and is always at work in us, to enable us to reflect His son in everything we do.

And we, and our teens, are going to mess up and fail in doing all things well. We're all human. But time after time in the bible, we read about folks that continue to walk away and curse their God, exhibit impulsive and rude behavior, and completely forget the God they love in their actions against others. And his mercy is new every morning, like the fall dew on the grass. And his compassion never fails, even when we fail miserably.



So if your teens are not acting so kindly, mercifully, thankfully, or sweetly...talk to them. Confess your own shortcomings. Pray together and lean into Him and on Him. It's never too late to correct wrongs, to ask for forgiveness, and to continue to grow in this walk called life.

And then look up and notice the things those teens DO say and do, and commend them for those.

## **An Adage a Day - May I Have a Word? – by Carole Gilbert**

Hello. Come. Please. Ready?

Hush. Quiet. Listen.

Focus. Inspire. Trust.

We use these words daily.

Do you ever use the word, “Whatever?” No? Maybe.

Sure. I do. And one day it made me think about sentences we say with just one word. Interesting? Absolutely. We use these words with all kinds of emotions. Happy. Sad. Sometimes sarcastic. I use “whatever” in a sarcastic way and usually say it under my breath. Oops. Sorry. I shouldn’t do this, and I’ll try to do better. Promise.

When I was growing up I would on occasion hear my momma or a grandparent say to me, “May I have a word?” I knew this phrase meant it would not be a pleasant word but something I wouldn’t want to hear. Nevertheless, I always had to listen and if it was accompanied by my name, especially including my middle name, I knew I was in big trouble. It wasn’t a long sentence, but it said a lot to me. Maybe that’s when I started to use “whatever” under my breath.

The question, “May I have a word?” can come in different forms. “Can I have a word?” “Could we have a word?” “May I have a word with you?”

It means to converse with someone, usually briefly, and might include advice or discipline. And on occasion it can come on a cheerful note with instructions instead of discipline. This idiom originated in the late 1400’s. People have been *having words* for a long time!

This phrase intrigued me about words, all kinds of words, and it intrigued me about “a word,” sentences with just one word. I started researching and much to my surprise, one-word sentences are actually a thing. It’s called a “sentence word” and means that the one word has a full sentence meaning within itself. Crazy? Definitely.

And then my mind started wondering what the shortest sentences were in the Bible. Could there be sentence words there? I couldn’t find any, but I knew the most important shortest verse was only two words. It’s John 11:35, “Jesus wept.” Wow! Heartbreaking. Humbling. Powerful! Our Jesus wept.

We read in 1 Thessalonians 16-18, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

Rejoice. Pray. Hallelujah!

And there's this verse, that's just three words, in Luke 17:32: "Remember Lot's wife." Luke refers to this story from Genesis 19. It tells of Lot's wife turning to a pillar of salt after looking back at Sodom when it was being destroyed by God. They had been told to not look back and she disobeyed God's instruction. Incredible? Indeed! Spooky? Yes!

Everyday. Always. Thanks.  
Why? Stop. Adjust.  
Remember. Obey. Go.  
Wherever. Wait. Praise.

Our words are so important. They are important to our spouses, our children and grandchildren, and our friends. They're important to the people we meet in our everyday lives and to those who just happen to be close enough to hear us. Why wait, don't wait, if you have words to mend in your life? Whatever? No! Whenever? Now!

Whatever words you use, use them for God and His Kingdom.

Seek. Commit. Believe. Hear. Shout.

Father. Lord. Emmanuel.

Amen.

## Tiny Living – We Must! – by Leyanne Enterline

Life is busy!

With the new school year underway, all the kids' activities and our own work schedules are becoming quite hectic. And with all of this movement and busyness comes an extremely messy trailer! Can you hear me roar?

I hate all the things in our home being unorganized and not in their proper place! With only so much room, one would think everything would *have* to be put in its particular spot, but that doesn't always happen. And the busier we are the more of a wreck everything is! I like having a schedule and being on the go, but I also feel we need to take the time to tidy up. We must! Does anyone hear me?

We don't have a designated clean-up day, but perhaps we should. I feel like we let things go until my head pops and I blurt out, "Everyone better get to cleaning or I'm going to lose my mind!"

As I look around right now, even my own area of the bedroom is a crazy mess. Since the weather is now finally cooler, I bring out more sweatshirts and jackets. However, they really just don't fit in our tiny space. So things sort of just get shoved wherever there is a little bit of room.

I truly have days of, "Why Lord, are we living so tiny? I truly can't handle it." I have a good cry and then move on, knowing this is where God has us for now and I will be thankful for the roof over my head.

We were actually starting the building process of a new home, but with the cost of materials being so high right now, that has been put on hold *again*. I know this is all for a reason and we will have more space one day.

But for now, we live tiny. And yes! We must begin the process of pre-holiday organizing, today. They have to hear me!

Remember, love grows best in tiny spaces. Even when tiny is crowded, and organization is impossible...

## **A Night to Remember - With a Grateful Heart – by Marcy Lytle**

We used to sing a song with a line in it that always made me think. It said to give thanks with a grateful heart. As we sang, I often wondered how one could give thanks without a grateful heart. Weren't they one in the same? Apparently, not. And if you have children, you know what I mean. Just like saying, "Sorry," with a tone doesn't mean he's really repentant for what he's done, so saying "Thank you," can be as flippant as can be, without a grateful feeling at all.

So how in the world do we cultivate a grateful heart, to go along with the thank-you words that come out of our mouths?

For this month's devo, we're going to try!

Preparation: Grab one of your potted plants and a watering can, if you have it. Invite the family pet as part of the devo time. Provide paper and pencils for all. Find something dark pink and place it on the table or near all, to see.

Write down three things you want for Christmas. Now to the side, write down three things you already have for which you are thankful. We can always think of what else we want or need or must have, but it takes focus on what we do have to **cultivate** a grateful heart. We have a lot, and we need to notice and write down the blessings we've been given, so we remember. That's the way we grow. Just like the watering can is used to help this potted plant to grow, so is remembering the good. It's like our own watering can for our heart!

Think of something nice someone has done for you or said to you lately, and share it with us. We have to **train** ourselves to think of the good and focus on it, as it's part of our "grateful training." Just like we've had to train our dog to pee outside, to not bark, and to not jump on people, we have to train ourselves to focus on the good in our lives, and not the bad. (Talk about how you train a pet and how sometimes it takes a while and lots of work!)

Right now, look around the room, or shut your eyes, or look out the window, and give thanks out loud for a blessing you've been given from God. It can be something in nature, a family member, a need that's been met, etc. Share it. **Live in the moment**, and our hearts will grow ten sizes bigger. Each little moment of the day, when we feel frustrated, we can stop and focus on the good, the gifts from His hand, and give thanks.

Did you know that dark pink has been a color to symbolize gratefulness? Maybe you don't like dark pink, or maybe you do. But having a color in front of us as a reminder to give thanks is a good thing! So what's your favorite color? **Pick a color**, and every time you see it, remember to give thanks. Anything that reminds us to be grateful is so good!

**Turn** the negative into positive. How do we do that? Think of something that's frustrating you right now. Was a friend mean? Do you feel tired? Are you hungry, or does something hurt you? (Let the kids share.) Think of the opposite and something good, instead. What friend was nice to you? You have a comfy bed on which to sleep. Food is in the pantry, and prayer is always available to take our needs to God. He cares, and we can leave the negative with him, and think on the positive.

So, let's think about what we just did. We can say "Thank You" all day long to people, by saying the words. But that doesn't really mean we're grateful. I can thank someone because it's polite to do so, yet be angry with them in my heart.

Being grateful is appreciating what we have, instead of always looking for what we want.

Psalm 147: 7 says to sing to the Lord with grateful praise.

We can sing all day long, because we like a tune. But when we sing with a grateful heart, our mood actually changes and we enjoy our lives, and we bless the Lord.

Being grateful takes training, training takes time and focus, and the outcome is not only a grateful heart, but a happy one, as well!

Let's pray:

*Dear Father, thank you for all of your blessings to our family. We thank you with a grateful heart, as we notice the beauty outside, the blessings inside, and the goodness from your hand. We ask you to remind us daily of your goodness, so that we will then offer thanks with a grateful heart.*

## **In Each Room - Candle Safety – by Marcy Lytle**

This is a brand new column, where we will visit a different room of the house each month with some practical advice, inspiration, organization and more! Hope you enjoy!

It's October, candles are burning in every room, the scents of cinnamon, vanilla, nutmeg and pumpkin (and soon cedar and peppermint) waft through the house...and we sit and sigh at the realization that fall is really here and we love it! However, every year when candles become a house staple, I think about safety and fire hazards and all things related to keeping the candles burning and not anything else! My mom would not burn candles at all, unless they were the electric kind, because of this very fear.

It doesn't hurt to review some safety reminders when lighting and smelling this season of fall:

Make sure every candle that's burning is in a jar. This way, if on the off-chance one is forgotten to be blown out, the flame is safely contained inside.

Don't burn candles where little hands can reach or be in danger. A candle in the bathroom is pretty and smells great, but not if guests are over and little ones might dry their hands and throw the towel on the counter near the flame!

Always let another family member know that you've lit a candle. Sometimes my husband lights a candle in the kitchen. But if I don't know it, he might leave and then I leave later, and it may still be burning!

Be careful blowing out candles, so that wax doesn't splatter on your wood surfaces or even worse, on a piece of artwork behind! (Yes, we had that happen!)

Place candles on stable surfaces. For example, if the candle has a lid and you place the candle atop the lid, it may slide off. Jars set on anything precarious, where the candle may move, are dangerous.

Think twice before lighting a candle right by your bed before you go to sleep. Just be safe, and don't do it.

I read that over half of candle fires at home are caused by their placement too close to combustible material. Next to a plant, or a lamp, or under a hanging towel...things like that...are risky.

Remember...the wax is hot after burning. Keep little kids away from even the temptation of picking up the jar to sniff or look.

Don't place a candle under a shelf and light it. Seems like a no-brainer, but the heat rises pretty high and can ruin a surface or start a fire!

I hope these tips help and remind us all to be safe when lighting candles this season. Pampas grass is pretty in vases, but not near a flame! And perhaps we might even consider a fridge

magnet or reminder that says “extinguish” before we leave the house or go to bed! Is there such a magnet? There should be...





YOU

## Inner Strength – The Best Response – by Marcy Lytle

The writer of this column has had a rough month with illness and other things that life throws at all of us, and she asked if I could sub for her this time...and I'm happy to do so. As I thought on what to write, I looked at the title she gave this column "Inner Strength." We can define that as so many things, like having the willpower to buck up and make it through the hard times, or putting on our big girl pants and walking through mud like a power woman on a mission. But what if we realize that inner strength is sometimes manifested in the strongest of ways when we ask for help?

Most women apologize before they ask for help with, "I'm sorry to ask but..." and then we feel so ashamed that we can't do it all, we're weak and tired, or we aren't able to multi-task like *she* does, or we conjure up a number of false pictures of what it looks like to be a strong woman.

I remember a woman named Hannah in the bible who was weak from being without child, and she cried to the Lord. That was a strong response to an inner need, and the best response she could have made. Crying out to our Father is an indication that we get it. He's strong when we are weak, and He's willing and able to offer us that arm on which to lean.

Another woman was so worried about her son Moses, that he might be killed because of the edict made against little boys in the land. This mom, in her most vulnerable moment, placed her baby in a basket and left him while she watched, and God came to his rescue and made that little boy a mighty deliverer.

What about the woman that was standing at a well, ashamed and dejected because of her lifestyle of many husbands and yet no successful marriages? She stood there alone and afraid, as this strange Man spoke to her and offered her living water. Weakness made strong.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, must have felt weak in the knees when she became pregnant and not yet married to her fiancé Joseph, as she wondered what the villagers might say or think about her. Could she stand and carry this child she'd been given by God? In her weakness, the son of God was born.

There's no shame in asking for help when we're at our weakest. There's no apology that needs to precede our request, and we should not feel "less than" because we couldn't perform to our best abilities on any given day. Admitting our weakness is a sign of strength in the strongest of women...like you and me.

Whatever your weakness is today, ask for help. Maybe your kids are out of control, your husband is gone all the time, you feel like crying constantly, or life has just beaten you up and you're bruised. At the very least, cry out to Him first and He has promised to hear and make a way and lead you to still waters where you can drink to your heart's content. Those still waters might be a friend, His word, or His strong arm. Grab it and let it hold you close...as you grow stronger because you were weak.

## **Healthy Habits – For Your Feet – by Marcy Lytle**

My feet hurt a lot. It's part of the aging process, I get that. But I see and hear people of all ages talk about their feet and the aches, the pains, the rough heels and the tired arches, and so much more. I'm no foot doctor, but I have figured out a few things that help specific annoyances with my feet to make them feel a bit more happy.

For the heels – I swear by Nuskin's Epoch heel cream, if used consistently. It's the best thing I've found to completely rid my heels of the roughness that so many of us deal with, all year long.

For the bunions – I found some pads that help on the bone of your foot to ease the pain, and I've also realized that going up a ½ size in a shoe gives a bit more width, and less pain! I'd love your ideas, as well!

For the tiredness – Have you tried lotion with peppermint? JR Watkins has one that I love, and the tingly feeling of the peppermint (and the scent is great, too) refreshes my weary soles...

For the coldness – Bomba sock/shoes for the cooler months are so cozy, they're not shoes so they don't press on any sore points, and they're so pretty. I got a pair last year for Christmas and love them.

For the toes – Be sure to rub that heel cream on your toes as well, to cover dry cuticles around the toenails. And use winter to let your toenails breathe, with no polish. At least sometimes...

For the achy breakies – Find a person in your family that loves to give foot rubs, and place your feet on their laps while watching a movie. Seriously, this is the best. If you don't have that person, then rub your own, give yourself some tender spa care, just for your feet.

For the tightness – Are your boots too tight in the winter? Don't know what kind of shoes to buy that will feel good and look good? Cushionaire and Black Rivet, if you can find them, are two brands I've found to feel good and still look cute.

For the height – If you insist on a heel, common sense says to wear them for a short period of time...and carry a pair of comfy shoes in your bag, to change. If you're going to a dressy affair, only wear the heels at the event. If you're walking a few blocks, or there's an opportunity to remove the heels and wear the flats, to give your feet a rest – do it. Or...find yourself a cute pair of ballet flats (they're in again!) and wear them with your dressiest outfit and smile...and dance the night away.

We don't have time for tired feet this season, as we will be on them a lot while we bake and shop and run around. So be good to them, and start now with a plan to keep your feet skipping while you smile.

## **Life in a Nutshell – Still, I Am Grateful – by Jill Montz**

Several years ago I once heard Oprah Winfrey talking about a gratitude journal and how each day she wrote down (if memory serves me right) five things she was grateful for that day. She commented that it changed her perspective on the day and it caused her to actively look for things to be grateful for...especially on difficult days. After that interview, I kept a gratitude journal for well over a year. I enjoyed it but, like many things, it got lost in the shuffle of life. And to be honest I can no longer even find the notebook I used for the exercise. Nevertheless, the practice of looking for things to be grateful for...especially during difficult seasons...has been engrained in me.

Over the last several months it seems like many I know have faced difficult days and life changing situations. Loved ones have been ill and some have even passed. Dear friends have felt called to change jobs and move away. Other friends have faced some not so friendly situations in school, at work, and in life. Work has had its challenges which comes with any job but seems to be more highlighted in a small family-owned one. I have read some of the saddest text messages and social media posts, I have taken calls in the middle of the night by friends on the brink of utter despair, and I have sat silent with loved ones because I simply didn't have the words to offer any kind of comfort and I hoped my presence alone was enough.

It seems like the last several months have held a lot of difficult days. But still, I am grateful.

When we got word of young friends facing unknown medical conditions...I was grateful for the doctors and nurses that were committed to helping them. I was grateful for the jobs the parents had that allowed them to stay with their children. I was grateful for the community I live in that rallied behind and supported others financially, emotionally, physically and spiritually.

When our beloved preacher announced he was taking a position at a church in another city...I was grateful for the years he served faithfully in our congregation. I was grateful for my fellow church members who were sad to see him go but celebrated and loved him and his family even as we all wiped away tears. I was grateful that he was a man who listened to that still small voice and obeyed even when it was not the easy choice.

When a dear sweet friend turned ill and passed away before her family and friends were ready to say goodbye...I was grateful that God had blessed me with her for the 13 years I had this side of heaven. I was grateful I got to laugh and learn from such an amazing woman. I was grateful for her influence, her strength, her character, and her unwavering faith that were evident to all she knew, even up to the very end. I was grateful to love and be loved by her and my life is forever changed because I knew her.

Just because I can find ways to be grateful doesn't mean I don't still have questions for God. I still shed a million tears and I still cry out "WHY" into the silence of my prayer time. I don't have any answers and yet even for that, I am grateful.

I am grateful God can handle all my questions, sadness, and anger. I am grateful He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. I am grateful He never leaves or forsakes me or my friends or you. I am grateful that He can still perform miracles and that He still brings beauty from ashes. I am grateful that God is still in control and that the One who holds my eternity also holds the here and now as well.

And most of all, I am grateful God is in the details. He brought my little family of two to Iowa Park so Dotty and I could make sweet friends with people we now pray for regularly to be healed. He brought us to a church where we found a home with people who are strong in their faith and love for God and for others. He had my best friend rent an apartment by a sweet lady named Ginger who would prove to be a guiding light for me as I faced some hard days early on as a single mom. These and countless other examples show me daily that God cares so deeply about all of us that He doesn't miss a single detail.

And for that...I am grateful.

Colossians 3:15

*And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,  
since as members of one body you were called to peace.  
And be thankful.*

## Life Right Now – Thankful - By Jennifer Stephens

Staring at the blank screen. Immovable fingers hovering over the keyboard. Jumbled thoughts spinning like a hurricane in my mind. The article is due, but I'm stuck. Trapped in a storm of mental and emotional chaos – unable to string letters into words into sentences. My thoughts cast on the ground like a pile of twisted debris.

I'd planned to write a November article about thankfulness. But the words won't come.

Except for one. And it has nothing to do with being thankful.

Overwhelmed.

I am one hundred percent categorically overwhelmed. Overcome with emotion because it's all just TOO MUCH. I won't go into the nitty-gritty. It's basically the typical work/life combo of stress we all feel from time to time. And my time is now. Lost in a murky fog of endless information, expectations, and overlooked emails. Scolded. A recovering perfectionist pulled in so many different directions it feels like I might shatter. Racing thoughts lead to sleepless nights that grow into irritable afternoons.

I know what I'm supposed to do when the greedy stress monster looms nearby. But I don't. At least not right away. Instead I cry. Complain. I'm held captive by emotions. Resentful. Bitter. I forget what I'm supposed to do – what God yearns for me to do. And if I'm not careful, I'll end up riding the relentless Ferris wheel of negativity. Be careful – if you get too close, I might drag you along for a spin on this perpetual circle of doom.

Jesus shows us what to do in Matthew 26:38 when, "Jesus said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and watch with me." The night before he went to the cross, He went to the Garden of Gethsemane. Facing unimaginable stress, He got away. And He prayed. But He didn't go alone, He gathered His friends with Him.

Jesus models for all of us exactly what to do before it all becomes too much. Get away. Pray. And get together. He handled the pressure with peace. I want to be like that. I want to handle whatever storms life throws my way with grace. With thanksgiving.

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,  
since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful."  
Colossians 3:15

This column is called "Life Right Now" and, well, life right now is...overwhelming. So I'm going to get away. Pray. And then I'll get together with friends and family. Just like Jesus. And for His example I am eternally thankful.

## **Under Pressure – The Reminder – by Debbie Haynes**

There are verses in Colossians 3 that say to let the peace of God rule in our hearts...and to be thankful. In fact, they go further to say that in whatever we do, in word or deed, we are to give thanks to God. We've probably all heard those verses, and we for sure know it's good to be thankful. And besides that, it's the month of Thanksgiving!

Here's a little background of what was going on when these verses were penned. There was a rather small town called Colosse and when Paul was under house arrest, he was visited often by member of the church in this town. Paul had never been to this church in person but had been aware of the struggles the people there were facing, so he'd grown to love them and prayed for them daily.

One of the struggles the new Christians had there was that they were unable to separate truth from fiction. The Colossians highly respected intellect and they had allowed false teachers in to the Church who were teaching Greek Mythology and the worship of angels, and mixing that all up with the truth of the Word. So, Paul felt like he could help them, even from the confines of prison.

A couple of chapters before Colossians 3, Paul reminded these folks of the creative power of Christ and his utter dominion over all things – angelic or demonic – and he encouraged them to recognize Christ's redemptive power. Paul even reminded the people of the deity of Christ and how the Father takes such pleasure in his Son. And he told them that they needed to "remain grounded in the faith" and to not move away from the hope of the gospel which is "Christ in you!" He says don't go back, but stay rooted and built up in Him, established in your faith...just like when you first received Christ and were so THANKFUL.

Back when they first had their eyes and hearts opened to the love of Christ, they had been so thankful. But now, they had allowed false teachings which resulted in them no longer being thankful, but rather...scared and confused.

*If what we are taught in the world around us, in the name of education and intellect, does not line up with the simple truth of Christ and who he is, we must turn away from it.*

One of my grandchildren is studying Greek philosophy in school, and I actually studied that as well. But just because it's taught at school doesn't make it truth. It can be part of a curriculum, but it doesn't have to be part of our belief system. He said he knew that, and I was thankful!

In order to know the truth, we must know the Bible. These people weren't bad people; they knew Christ. But in these few verses they are reminded to cultivate thankfulness and to let the Word of Christ have the run of the house. In every detail – singing and thanking God along the way!

Thanksgiving has to be a way of life, if we want to get the prize. Whenever we are confused or feeling ineffective, we can play music that reminds us of who Christ is, and immediately our hearts can be lightened, and we start giving thanks for what He's done for us. I know this works for me!

Returning to thankful hearts, the kind we had when we first heard the Good News, is the way to walk. There are times when we won't feel thankful, but we can always be thankful for Him, who makes it possible for us to then be thankful in all things. He gives us a song to sing when we don't have one. He gives us strength when our own heart fails. And He gives us hope...because we have Christ. Christ in us. If we can't find anything else to be thankful for at times, we have Christ. We have relationship with the Son, and we have eternal life.

*Thank you Father, for such love.*





MARRIAGE

## **In This Together – Say What You Need – by Bekah Holland**

When I lay in bed at night, I tend to take inventory of my day. I worked in the service industry for somewhere in the neighborhood of seven lifetimes (we count them like dog years) and I would wake up in the middle of the night in a complete panic, dreaming about a side of Ranch I forgot to take to a table. Now, my dreams aren't usually about forgetting dressings. However, they've been replaced with things like realizing I forgot to text a friend back because I only answered in my head, and as wonderful as my people are, they haven't yet conquered mind reading, and did I give the dogs their medicines, did I put that appointment in my calendar? Wait, did I miss it already? Shocking that I have a hard time sleeping, right?

But sometimes, I can calm my mind enough to think about the things that really matter. Like have I been engaged enough in the lives of those that depend on me? Have I shown up for my kids in a way that makes them feel safe, heard and loved? When was the last time I did something to show my husband how much I love and appreciate him? These things are top of my list. And most of the time, it's just a reminder that I need to keep trying harder. But other times, when I've allowed circumstances, worries, everyday life that just seems to never slow down, I find myself overwhelmed and feel like I'm failing. And you know what? Sometimes I am failing!

As a recovering life-long people pleaser, this one is really, really tough to take on. Because when I allow those failures to cloud everything else, I can find myself buried under the weight of my own unrealistic expectations. I am also one who finds joy in helping others, but somehow, I can't apply that same reasoning to my own life. If I have managed to actually ask for help, it's usually in response to having tried to juggle it all on my own for a ridiculously long time and having not only dropped all the balls I was juggling, but I've lost a few, too. I'll even try to hide this from my husband. The same man who not only promised to love me and protect me through all the things life throws at us, but also who's held my hair back when I'm sick, who's searched high and low for my favorite drink and still loves me when I dance badly to 90's music blaring through the house or drive like a grandma, with bed head and all. He *wants* to help me. He doesn't, however always know how.

For some reason, I have a hard time admitting when I'm in over my head until it's too late. Or it feels too late, anyway. And not one time when I've finally come to him, has he ever made me feel ashamed or not good enough. Even when I've eaten every single garbage thing in my house (because stress eating is a thing) and he then listens to me complain about my pants not fitting. Even when I've had a panic attack while driving and he had to search all over to find me sitting in a parking lot without my shoes sobbing like a baby (I'd love to tell you that's just a made up story, but alas, it was only about a week ago). He holds me and reminds me that I'm not alone. That I'm loved and valued and seen.

So why do I keep trying to take on the weight of the world and carry it alone? Great question. One I'm sure my therapist would love me to be able to answer as well. Because after all the ups and downs and all the stuff in between, we've still been in it all together. And there have been days, months and years that I had to bear the brunt of that weight. But that doesn't mean I should continue to hold onto it like a security blanket. It does mean, however, that I need to take ownership of my own ego or stubbornness or...whatever. That I need to be as open and honest about my failures as I am about my regular everyday messes. At this point, I'm sure everyone knows I'm a lukewarm mess on a good day. Even more importantly though, I need to

remember to ask for help, preferably prior to the failing, and debilitating anxiety takes over. But baby steps.

So this is me, telling you (and my husband since he reads these stories, too) that I'm going to try to pay closer attention to the never ending ticker tape in my head tallying up all my to-do lists. Not only to make sure I'm not forgetting to pick up my kids or that we're out of coffee, but how I'm choosing to respond to the chaos. I'm going to remember to be honest when someone who cares about me asks, "How are you?" We tend to just flippantly answer those questions, don't we? "Oh good, how are you?" But are we good? Or are we struggling and trying to paint a picture to share with the world of someone who has taken a shower and never ever goes to bed with dishes in the sink?

Maybe you can find something to be real about. Whether it's telling your partner that you need a couple of hours of silence locked in a room with a hot cup of coffee that you actually get to drink while it's still hot, or texting a friend to tell them you're struggling with your kids. And guess what? You get to say what you need! "Hi friend, my kid is acting like a jerk and I'd like to run away to a beach somewhere without extradition. I could use a funny video, or a coffee date, advice, or even please come sit on my couch and watch *Friends* reruns for the 1000<sup>th</sup> time and pat my head and tell me I'm pretty."

Our friends, our family, our people, they want to show up for us. Sometimes it's pride that keeps us from asking for what we need. Maybe it's embarrassment. And sometimes, just maybe, we don't actually *know* what it is we need. That's when we need our partners, friends and family to have the opportunity to just step up and empty a trash can or take our kids for a few hours so we don't consider selling them on Etsy, or to bring dinner, or anything at all! Those things that seem so meaningless to us when we're doing them for someone else can be the difference between being able to hold up our heads and keep moving forward or sinking deeper and deeper until we can't see a way to the surface.

Be that difference for your husband or wife. Be that difference for your kid even when he or she is impossible. Be that difference to the person on the street corner who may just need one bit of kindness to continue to put one foot in front of the other. And I'll work on that one foot in front of the other thing, too. One step, one honest answer, one deep breath at a time.

*"Rather than being afraid to ask for help, remember this: When you ask someone to help you, you're actually doing them a tremendous favor by giving them the opportunity to feel needed."*

*Richard Carlson*

*"Be strong enough to stand alone, smart enough to know when you need help, and brave enough to ask for it."*

*Ziad K. Abdelnour*

## **Date Night Fun – Find a Bench – by Marcy Lytle**

Last month, I wrote about not forfeiting peace and the photo I chose was one of a bench under a huge willow tree where I recently sat, in a beautiful garden. I kept thinking about that bench and thought that date nights could be enjoyed on benches all over the city...even in November...why not? So enjoy the options below, and choose one or choose all five as you give thanks this month, before Christmas begins.

**Bench in a Park** – They're everywhere aren't they? They're on long trails, to offer walkers a sit when they're tired, so find one and take it. Pack a warm thermos of your favorite fall beverage and go for an autumn walk, and find a bench, or two. Pause and sit and just observe the other walkers, say hello, and look at nature. Talk about the colors, the change of seasons, and just enjoy the peace of a quiet bench on a long walk, and rest...together...and smile.

**Bench at a busy Mall** – Take date night to the mall, inside or outside, depending on your weather! There are benches scattered around, especially right near Auntie Anne's if your mall has one of these...so grab a pretzel and sit. Or maybe you prefer a chocolate chip cookie and milk, or another fun food you can enjoy together on a bench while you people watch. Observe the teenagers that are there to hang out, giggle and flirt – and pray for them. Reminisce about your teen years, and give thanks that you survived. Then get up and shop a bit, and then find another bench if you like!

**Bench downtown** – If you live in a large city or a small one, there are benches downtown along the busy streets, or on the town square near the courthouse. But these benches are in the center of town, where law and order takes place. So head out to dinner at the restaurant of your choice in the center of town, then take a bench outside. Maybe go to lunch, if nights are already too cold. Sit and talk about your city and pray for your officials. Consider printing out a history of some of the historical buildings and read about them while you sit. What a fun time!

**Bench in a church** – Okay, maybe your church doesn't have benches anymore, many don't! But find a place to sit near or in your church and make it part of your date night. Many churches do have a bench or two outside on the grounds, or near the front door. Pack a fall picnic of nuts and cheeses and olives, and eat it on the bench, while you pray together for the leaders, those that attend, and those that stay away. And determine, as a couple to be a light...

**Bench on a Field** – Is there a football field near your house where the benches are available to sit? Take a brisk walk around the field for exercise, maybe even run, and then take a bench. Pray for the students, the players that show up on the field, and the coaches. Football season is probably over by now, but that's okay. A lot takes place when players are "on the bench." Talk about your own experiences with sports, what you played, how you felt. Get up and walk some more, cuddle up in a blanket, play a game, but take a bench and enjoy...

Maybe these date ideas are a bit unusual, especially for the month of November. They're probably doable in the south, but may be hard in the north. So be creative and look for benches around your city, indoors and outdoors, and find a few for date night where you can rest, pray, share, eat, and all the things one does...on a bench.

## **After 40 Years – All the Things – by Marcy Lytle**

It's November, when we are reminded to give thanks for all things. And it's good to do this in our marriage, as well. I have to pause and give thanks for my husband, especially when life is busy and sometimes tensions rise among the busyness. Pausing to notice all the things he does makes my heart settle, flutter, and fall in love over and over again.

Just recently, I purchased a new phone charger cord, a really long one for behind the bed that was a bit hard to plug in. The plug was in the center of the wall behind the bed, and there was very little space, so to plug it in required lying on the floor and reaching and even using a flashlight to see! I came home one afternoon, and he had plugged it in for me. I saw it by the bed, where I charge my phone nightly and I was so thankful! He said nothing. He just did it. And I was so glad I noticed.

Another day, I was out shopping and saw a fall mug that said "Fall in Love" and it was a pretty caramel color with leaves etched on it. My husband LOVES mugs and I'm not particularly fond of how many he has...but I know he loves them. So I got one and placed it on a little shelf in the kitchen. He was so thankful at that little thing (I think it cost a dollar or two) and it makes us both smile as we enter the kitchen daily.

My husband is better about doing "all the things" for me, because he's servant-hearted. I have to work at remembering to do them. He does so many little things that if I'm not careful, I'll be so busy with life or wishing for the bigger things, that I miss them. He's not great at planning events for us, but he's amazingly wonderful at grabbing a bag from my hand to carry it when we're out. He might not be the best at creating romantic moments, but he's awesome at taking my foot and rubbing it all during a movie, on a cozy night at home.

All of these little things add up to huge things because they make me feel noticed and love...and that's how he speaks to me of his love. He notices, he serves, he acts, and for that I'm grateful.

I have spent times wishing for the grander things in life that I wish he'd do and plan, but I'm better at planning those, and he appreciates it and loves it when I mention a trip or an elaborate night out. He loves those things!

So while we're giving thanks this month for turkey, family, health and life...we can also notice all the things to give thanks for that are little, might go unnoticed, or unappreciated because our sight is focused elsewhere.

He just went outside to turn on our sprinkler system (because it's STILL so dry) and I'm so thankful he remembers to water our yard. I'll go back in the bedroom and the bed will be made, because he knows it's important to me...and he does it daily without complaint. I often leave my cereal bowl sitting out for a bit, only to find he's rinsed it and put it away for me. And I'm praying that I have eyes to see more of "all the things" he does, because when I do...

Well he just looks more handsome than ever to me. So funny how all the things can do that...

## **For Better or Worse - Don't Sweat It – by Kaelin Scott**

Think back to the last big argument or disagreement you had with your husband. Do you remember what started it?

I don't know about you, but it seems to me that most of the arguments between me and my husband start over something little and then escalate until we're arguing about something else entirely. Or maybe something small sets us off, and then it ruins our mood toward each other for the rest of the day.

It's kind of sad how those little things have the ability to cause greater disagreements, but I think there's a way we can avoid this. Now, I know it's easier said than done, but hear me out. What if we stopped sweating the small stuff?

For real. What if we actively decided to let it go when our husbands do something irritating or frustrating? Instead of snapping or getting annoyed, we could just take a few breaths and move on. Sound silly? Maybe it is, but I truly think it could prevent a lot of discord. And along those same lines, maybe we could try not to do things we know annoy our husbands.

For example, I know it drives my husband nuts when I leave all the cabinet doors open while I'm cooking. So one step I can take to prevent an argument is simply closing the cabinet doors. I know, not exactly an Einstein level idea. But I've actually been trying this over the past couple weeks, and he hasn't gotten annoyed about open cabinets because I've been shutting them as I go. And less annoyance means less arguing. See what I mean?

Does it annoy you when your husband leaves his socks on the floor? How about leaving the shower curtain open? Insert any of your complaints here. Now, I know that these are trivial things and not exactly Dr. Phil material. So what's the big deal if you nag him about them? Well, just as I pointed out, these are trivial things. They're not worth getting upset over. They're not worth igniting a bigger argument. It may be easy and feel temporarily great to vent our steam and let our frustration loose. But it's actually easier and feels better to let these things go and avoid causing a disagreement.

Our husbands aren't perfect. They're bound to do things that annoy us, just like we're bound to do things that annoy them. But marriage isn't meant to be a constant battlefield. If we let the little things get to us, then the bigger things will break us. Letting go of those little things may seem like a tiny step, but it can have a great impact on the health of our relationships. Less bickering equals a happier life. What could be better than that?



ENCOURAGEMENT

## **Rooted in Love - Through My Daughter's Eyes – by Kaelin Scott**

“Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight.” Psalm 19:14 KJV

Something I've been convicted of so many times as a mother is talking negatively about myself in front of my kids, especially my daughter. Because how can I teach kindness if I'm not kind to myself, and how can I teach confidence if I don't have any?

To tell you the truth, confidence has always been a struggle for me. Even as a teenager and in my twenties, self-esteem wasn't something I had a whole lot of. I've always been the first to criticize or tear myself down. Only over the past few years have I been able to look in the mirror and see the beauty there, rather than just the flaws. I still struggle with that, but I'm working on it. I'm learning to see myself through the eyes of my Creator, which isn't always easy.

A lot of times, I verbally berate myself over silly things. Forgetting something at the store that I needed to make dinner. Leaving the garlic bread in the oven too long and letting it get black. Saying something awkward or embarrassing that I wish I hadn't said. You know, it's okay to recognize my mistakes and learn from them, but there's a fine line between doing that and beating myself up over little things. Unfortunately, I tend to lean toward the latter.

But I'm really working on being careful of the way I speak about myself in front of my daughter, because the way I treat myself is the biggest example she has of how she's supposed to treat herself. I want her to grow up knowing who she is and having confidence in that. I don't want her thinking or speaking negatively about herself or doubting her beauty. So if I want those things for her, I first need to work on them for myself.

If I want my daughter to see herself in a positive light, it helps for her to see me in a positive light. Which means I need to be able to see myself that way, too. If I want her to be confident, then I need to exhibit confidence. It's so glaringly obvious that I'm a leader and role model for her in this area, yet it's so hard to get it right.

Thankfully, I don't have to be perfect all the time. There's room for errors, and those are the moments we use to learn. Those are the opportunities to talk about kindness and forgiveness and beauty and love. Those are the moments when we can open our Bibles together and talk about the way God sees us.

I'm human, and I'm not perfect. I don't want my daughter to think that I am. I just want her to see me as a beautiful, treasured, adored daughter of God. And I want her to see herself that way too. So it starts with me seeing myself that way, and I'm working on it day by day.



I'm reading *Beginning to Pray* by Anthony Bloom, again. It's one of those books that needs digesting over time, chewing a mouthful of deep thought deliberately, savoring the flavor and richness. Slowing down the swallow as much as I can, I ask God to send the nourishment of it into every cell of my being.

*First thing when you wake up, thank God for the day, even if you don't feel particularly happy about it. "This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be grateful for it." Give yourself time to realize the truth of what you're saying and really mean it. Come to God with two convictions: you are God's own, and this day is also God's. It has never existed before. Then ask God to bless this day, that everything in it should be blessed and ruled by Him. Then you must take it seriously—not like the prodigal son who took all his goods to a strange country to live a riotous life. (paraphrased)*

It's so easy to be a prodigal. Every day beckons with its distractions. Every day I'm tempted to hit the ground running to the things I desire. As soon as it's daylight I want to go outside and work in the garden, and tackle my projects. Beyond the desire to do what I love, it's a practical matter. There is so much to do, and only me to do it!!

Right now, there are weeds (always weeds!) to pull, leaves to rake, fountains to clean and keep filled, plants to clip and move, and new things to get in the ground. Two new projects are hovering over me as well: a tree trunk I'm installing in my living room (yes, that's right!), and an old fountain a friend gave me I'm converting into a succulent garden. I can't wait to see how they'll turn out!

How do I fit God in? Thirty minutes first thing in the morning? An hour, even two hours? Can I get the Word in me, praise and thank him, examine myself, confess, recommit, petition and then wrap it all up with an Amen in a generous two hours? I have found I can't. I must take him with me into the day.

*Hmm...something doesn't seem quite right about that. Am I to take, or be taken?*

*God, I cry, take me! I am yours, and this day is yours, whatever it brings. I thank you for it. Thank you for another sunrise, sunset, and the time in between to try and fail, to forgive and be forgiven, to know your constant, unconditional love. Help me to receive it, to give it, to live it, as I stumble along following you on my crooked path, praying without ceasing in broken breaths.*

## **Moving Forward - Safe and Loved – by Pam Charro**

Sometimes, the world seems anything but safe.

I have suffered with anxiety most of my life, due to several traumatic events that began even when I was just a small child. Most of you can probably relate, at least to some degree. Life can feel harsh, overwhelming and exhausting.

I often think about Jesus' disciple, John, and how comfortable and safe he must have felt with his Lord. It must have been such a rare and wonderful thing to have laid his head on Jesus' breast with complete abandon and ease. While I so greatly desire that type of intimacy with God, too many other messages in my head seem to be at war with it: "Hurry up!" "No rest for the weary!" "Get it right the first time!" "Rent's due tomorrow!" Everything needs to be done well, and done NOW, or else!

But some know better. While Jesus loves all of us equally, John referred to himself as "the disciple Jesus loved" because he was uniquely able to receive it. He wasn't afraid to even be physically close and still with his beloved Savior.

I wonder, if I had the opportunity today,  
if I would be able to do that,  
or if it would just be too weird,  
too vulnerable for me.

I know that God wants and deserves all of me. He created me to feel safe with him, to be able to let my walls completely down and enjoy relaxing with him. And, each time I feel completely beaten up and exhausted by life's disappointments and impossible pace, I drag my tired heart back to him, and I like to believe that all of that practice is making me a little better at it each time.

He sure is patient with me!

Hopefully one day I will know that I, too, am the disciple Jesus loves, to the degree of trust, comfort and vulnerability that John knew that he was.

## **Simple Truths – It's Good that It's Hard** – by Marcy Lytle

As I've gotten older, and even some when I was younger, I've heard friends talk about how they eventually quit giving gifts at Christmas, and just make it all about the kids. I don't like that. At all. And while it saves on the budget, and I get that, there are all sorts of things that are wrong about just stopping gifts among family members, spouses, and friends. It may be an unpopular opinion, and it probably is, but I think gift giving should be something we continue to do...for SO MANY reasons.

If the kids only get gifts, what does that teach them? It's good for them to see the adults give and receive, graciously give thanks, and be delighted in the giving, isn't it? If the kids are the only ones opening the presents, all they see is the tearing at the paper and the whining and the chaos, and no observation of how to be grateful...by watching their parents.

If we say it's too hard to think of what to get one another, then we should think harder. Either we're putting way too much pressure on ourselves (by trying to figure out the "perfect" gift), or we've placed this amount we need to spend in our head and that makes us sweat. But what if we just loved our friends and noticed them, how they like gardening, and how she loves to bake, or he enjoys baseball...and we just thoughtfully got them a new tea towel, or gardening gloves or a bag of peanuts – simple and sweet!

If we also think it's too hard to buy for our spouse, then we need to think again. It's good for gift giving to be hard, sometimes! My brother-in-law notices his family throughout the year and makes notes of their likes, their comments, things they need (when he visits their home), so that he has a running list of options. I love that! But an older couple giving NO gifts because they don't "need" anything? NO. We need to think of the hard things, go beyond our comfort zone, and find that little treasure to delight them. And if they're not delighted? Then that's their problem, and they need to sit among a crowd of those that do...and learn.

If the funds are low and we stop gift giving because of it, this is truly perhaps wise...for the budget. But then again, we can do the hard thing and still give. We can give of our time, if that's more plentiful, we can write a personal card (with a pen!) and send it, we can set a bag of cookies on their porch. Gift giving does NOT have to be about breaking the bank. And if it seems we're too busy, then we're too busy. Not giving anything is never an option.

By now, maybe you're already screaming back at this article and disagreeing with this idea that it's good that it's hard. That's okay. It's just my opinion. But for me, when gift giving becomes stressful it's because I've made it that way. Pressure to spend a certain amount, or get the perfect thing, hinders the joy of simply giving. And it doesn't have to be multiple gifts, it can be just one. One little thing that took you a bit of noticing and caring and hard thinking...to make or buy or put together for them.

It's not hard to buy a bag of chips and salsa, place them in a sack with a bow, and give to the Mexican snack lover – if that's your husband or a friend.

It is hard to think of what to get that person who has it all – so take five minutes and write them a card of three things you love about them – and wish them a "Merry Christmas."

It's sometimes difficult to give to those teens that only want expensive items you can't afford. If the funds aren't there, sit down and have a talk. And as a family, agree on alternatives for gift giving this year and give THANKS...

Maybe you just can't give him a gift, because he never gives you anything. Maybe there's tension there. Talk to him, or even make him a list of things you love...from which he can buy. It's hard for our spouses, sometimes, so help them out. And love what they give...

Whatever you do, consider giving SOMETHING to those on your list, in your family, at your gatherings...young AND old. And by all means, do not compare what you gave with what they gave...that's never a good thing to do.

And guess what? She may toss that card in the trash after she reads it, he may place that tool you thought he needed in the garage and never use it, and that family may let the bread you baked ruin before they eat it. But...

You saw the good in the hard and you gave, and that's what He saw and that's enough. And those kids you had in tow when you bought, wrapped, baked and gave...they saw it with their little eyes and will never forget that it's good that's it's hard...to give...but we always give.

## **Unearthly Thing - Restoration – by Angela Dolbear through Lasers and Lip Filler**

I never would have done this sort of thing on my own.

I would have reasoned that it was frivolous, or selfish, and not needed.

Did I want to do it? Oh yes. Like a distant dream that might someday come true.

But God had other plans. For which I am so grateful. His good plans included healing (praise HIM), and then restoration (praise HIM again) through laser treatments and lip filler injections.

Sounds vain, right? Keep reading...

I see my rheumatologist every six months so he can monitor the autoimmune disease that plagues me called scleroderma or systemic sclerosis. It can be a fatal disease since it attacks the major organs of the body, turning their healthy tissues to lifeless scar tissue. Sooo bad for lungs, heart, kidneys and the liver.

At my last 6-month check-up, Dr. Byrd proclaimed that after watching my prognosis for a year, he was officially down-grading the scleroderma diagnosis to CREST Syndrome, which is not fatal since it doesn't mess with the internal organs!

Dr. Byrd said this does not normally happen. At which, I promptly said, "We have been praying for healing." Fortunately, this is not lost on him.

So, my husband Tim and I praised God. And we are still praising God.

Scleroderma had left me with many angry red spots on my face, each about the size of a pencil eraser. It also gave me wrinkled puckered lips because of the tightening of my skin from the extra scar-tissue-like collagen production.

"I wonder..." I said to myself in the mirror many times since my diagnosis upgrade, "If these red spots could be removed. And if my lips could be fixed. I wonder..."

At this time, Tim had an appointment with a dermatologist to remove a possibly troubling mole. (It wasn't. Praise God again.) And I also had an appointment to see if the red spots could be removed. (Dr. Byrd gave me a referral. He's the best!)

A month later, I had started laser treatments for the red spots, got lip filler injections to bring my lips back. And because of a sale on the lip filler, I also got a little Botox to get rid of the scowl line between my brows, undoubtedly created from grimacing from the pain of the disease, mostly.

After 3 months, almost all the red spots are gone, and I have fuller lips again, and I don't look angry or upset since the scowl line is gone!

Praise God. Yes, highest praise indeed.

I never would have done all these procedures if I had time to think about it. God arranged it so it just happened. I didn't have time to overthink it and get in the way of the blessing He wanted to give me.

Not just a blessing—a restoration. Everyday those red spots made me sad. So sad. And they couldn't be covered with make-up because the texture of the skin was so tight and too smooth for the concealer to stick. As they increased in number, my heart would grieve for my health. I always thought about what the disease might be doing to the inside of my body that I could not see.

But GOD.

He healed me from a terrible disease and brought restoration to me physically, and emotionally. I can feel that God continues to heal me inside and out.

I think about the verses in the Bible where the prophet Joel said, "So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten...Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel: I am the Lord your God and there is no other." (Joel 2:25-27)

And I do know that He is my God. More than ever. He is restoring me physically, as well as strengthening my faith in Him.

God is so good. I will say it again and again.

*Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series, and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). Angela writes real, relevant, relatable, and reverent fiction. She loves reading, writing prose, as well as writing and recording music with her husband Tim in their studio in Nashville, TN--listen to their music on [Sound Cloud](#). Please drop by and sign-up for news and to read new stories and hear new original music at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>. Blessings to you!*



FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME – 10 Ideas to Save – by Marcy Lytle**

It's the month before Christmas and I would guess that most of us are thinking about the cost of gift-giving, decorating, tree trimming, the food for guests, and all the things that empty our accounts this time of year. And while we budget and plan, and set aside and save, there are still lots of little things that add up that drain our funds as the holidays approach.

Here's a list of 10 practical ways to save over the next couple of months, that perhaps you haven't thought of:

- Eat less meat. I have friends that say their husbands have to have meat. However, I once made a veggie burger with black beans and my husband and son didn't even realize it wasn't beef! Beans are inexpensive and can be used in SO many dishes, even for company. Beans on nachos, in soups, mashed into dips, or yes, made into burgers...and beans are a lot less in cost than meat.
- Skip name tags and buy bags cheap. Use a thick marker in green, red, or black, to write on the gift. This saves on having to purchase gift tags, and time in taping them on! If you use ONE marker on all the gifts, it actually looks pretty on the packages all stacked up and neat! Bags are expensive, so only buy them at the dollar store. Well, they're \$1.25 now. But that's cheap.
- Bring the outdoors in. If décor for your house is expensive, and you still want something new and festive, consider bringing in branches and pine cones, from the outdoors. Spray paint the branches if you wish, or just place them in a large vase, and glue on or hang tiny ornaments for a centerpiece. Wrap a few evergreen branches together with wide ribbon and hang on your front door! Use small pieces of leafy evergreens to place on your packages instead of bows. They're so pretty!
- Dress up and go. Perhaps funds aren't available for holiday shows or fancy dinners, and this makes you sad, because you love to dress up. Dress up and go anyway, to the places you can afford. Dress up and go to the movies (Tuesdays are half price nights at Cinemark!). Dress up and arrive at a picnic on the floor to watch a festive movie at home. Dress up and go for a drive to look at lights, stopping for a few photos along the way.
- Give great, and small. Nothing speaks love in a gift more than giving something cozy and practical. Target sells the cutest little candles all year in the dollar spot for \$3. Bake some cookies at home, several dozen. World Market has an end cap of the cutest earrings for \$4.99. Michaels has some really cute pens up near the register, around Christmas time. Journals are the cutest, from the shelves at Marshalls. Grab one, two or three of these and you've got gifts under \$10 that anyone would love!
- DIY tablescape. Maybe you just want your dining table to look splendid for the Christmas family gathering. Mix and match your plates, all the ones you have! Bring everything together with green, again from outside. Use the vases you have tucked away in a cabinet, bring them out of every height. Use fresh fruit as place settings, consider pears or oranges. Lay a tiny strand of lights down the table. Scour your cabinets and shelves, gather things of like color, and be creative with what you have!



- Look for free events. Search the internet, Facebook, and your own local neighborhood for events that are free this time of year, and make each one a big deal. Look at lights, attend holidays services at churches other than your own, invite friends to a bonfire in your backyard and play Christmas music, stroll an outdoor mall and observe shoppers, go on winter picnics in the car under the stars, just make a list of at least five – place them on the calendar – and enjoy!
- Have super fun giving. Make some homemade salsa, purchase a big bag of tortilla chips and a large bag from the dollar store. Fill with tissue and a sweet note, and leave on the porch of a few friends to surprise them. You'll have fun making the salsa (a big box of mason jars is not expensive!) or if funds are there, purchase salsas from farmers' markets. The total cost isn't much, and the fun in giving is priceless.
- Consider a toy swap. If you have friends with kids, email them all – lots of them – and see if they might want to meet for a toy swap. Each family brings say 7 toys in good condition, and then you can go home with 7 from the swap. This is a great idea if you can gather ten families or so that have children!
- Pray about everything. This seems like a no-brainer, but stop and pray about the expenses that Christmas brings. Ask Him to give you what you need, bring creative ideas to your mind, release you from the pressure to perform, and open opportunities to give AND receive, and to give thanks. Then breathe...and start be amazed at the cool "God winks" that come your way.

## **FRESH THYME – Be On Your Way – by Marcy Lytle**

What hurts your feelings these days?

It changes with every age, doesn't it? And one would think that by adulthood, we'd learn to master the art of letting things go, but that's rarely the case.

My grandkids get their feelings hurt when one of their siblings takes something from them, or cheats when playing a game. But thankfully, forgiveness is quick, and they are all back playing together in a flash.

Teens get their feelings hurt at parents, for sure, because of rules and parents not trusting them, and all sorts of perceived boundaries and "not fair" situations at home, as they struggle to grow up and out.

Newly married couples start out in this amazing love relationship, only to find one of them sleeping in the other room due to a harsh word spoken, or an action taken that led to deep hurt.

Fast forward to those in my age bracket...the sixth decade of life...and we're still experiencing hurt. Hurts among siblings, hurts unresolved when parents pass, hurts with fellow believers, and hurts at our grown children. There are possibly the most opportunities for hurt as we age!

I'm not one to easily let something go, without speaking. And sometimes, when I speak, that just fuels the hurt, and then there's this fire of rage that burns and just won't stop.

So for the sake of this story, let's just refer to hurt feelings over petty things, because honestly that's a good chunk of the reason we suffer in painful hurts. Those big hurts are for another time, and another writer...not me.

Here are some examples of hurts I can choose to let go, and I'll tell you at the end why:

- My husband shows up at home and I hope he will ask how I am, because I called him crying earlier in the day, but he doesn't.
- My friend never reciprocates an invitation to dinner and I feel hurt, thinking she doesn't want to spend time with me.
- My parents never were like those fun parents over there, and I always felt like I was missing something in life because of it.
- My kids have other friends and a life to live, which doesn't include me, so I feel neglected and left out.

Those are just a few of the hurts I've sometimes allowed to fester, and cause me pain and tears.

Lately, I've been reminded of how we can take everything to God and let him take care of our feelings, their actions, and our hurts. He can deal with those that aren't treating us right, and He can deal with us when we're imagining attitudes that aren't really there. He's big enough!

When I stop and realize this truth, it lessens the burden, because I'm really just choosing to carry the hurt instead of trusting him to help me through it. If the hurt is founded and real and

that person wronged me, it's not up to me to correct their behavior. He can. If the hurt is just perceived due to my own thoughts running amuck, I can ask him to correct my stinking thinking and love and believe the best, instead.

This works! But only if we remember to take the hurts to Him before we take them to bed, around with us all day, and lug them behind us and limp along...

Feeling hurt? Tell Him about the hurt, sit and listen, lay it down, let Him deal, and be on your way.

With a little skip in your step.

## **FRESH THYME – The Dance – by Marcy Lytle**

We watched a show on Netflix called *Deep Breathing*, about a young lady that was a sole survivor in a plane crash. Throughout the show, she had flashbacks of her life with her dad, her boyfriend, friends and more, and she drew from her relationships with them...in order to survive.

In one particular scene, she was talking to her boyfriend about her dad, a dad she was very hurt at and was unable to forgive. The actor playing the boyfriend spoke to her and told her that the Hebrew word for forgiveness was similar to the word for dance. And that caught my attention, because I'd never heard that before and wondered if it was just a line in a show, or the truth.

The Hebrew word for dance is *mechilah*. It is said over and over in Yom Kippur prayers. It is related to the word *machol*, which means to dance in a circle.

Think of it like this...

When we are forgiven of all that we've done wrong, we feel this immediate love and connection – an intimacy – with Christ. We are close, like an intimate dance, with our head on his, held close.

But when we sin, or act in a manner that causes us to feel ashamed, we back off out of the circle of his arms and distance ourselves from that intimacy. If we feel unforgiven, we back off even further, and the circle of dance with our maker is broken, and we feel distant.

It was the same in the show we were watching. There was no connection with the girl and her father because trust was broken and she was wounded; therefore, the daughter/father dance was no more.

Think of intimacy in a marriage, when all is right and trust is tight. We are in each other's arms and when one invites the other to the dance floor, we get up and we move in sync. But when unforgiveness comes, due to hurt or mistrust, that circle is broken and the dance interrupted, and we leave the floor.

God never sends us away from his arms, but we often back away due to shame. The prodigal son left the Father's house and squandered his inheritance and stayed away for a while due to shame. But the picture of forgiveness/dance is there in that story as well, as the son returned home to the father's embrace and a celebration was planned.

I've not forgotten this picture, of the dance of forgiveness. It's got to be the dance of all dances, when we realize that we too are forgiven, over and over again, and never have to leave the dance floor. We mess up, we back off because of fear and shame, we repent, and He's there in the same spot where we left Him.

Love covers a multitude of sin. That love is His arms holding us close in a father/daughter embrace while we move our feet together in rhythm, and forgiveness is the music.

Feeling distant from your Father? Just ask him to forgive you, and walk back into his arms and dance.

## **FRESH THYME – You're So Pretty – by Marcy Lytle**

We recently walked through a park in our city where peacocks roam freely. There's nothing so beautiful as a peacock spreading its feathers, when you least expect it. What else is like it? The color is stunning. And while they're so pretty and gorgeous and people flock (no pun intended) to observe them, apparently peacocks don't realize their beauty and worth.

My husband and I walked past a large bush under which a peacock was sitting as if he was trying to hide, to camouflage himself, so we couldn't spot him.

My husband commented, "How do you hide when you're so pretty?"

And the answer is, "You can't."

We could easily see him because his color and his beauty stood out among all the flora of the park. Nothing else was like it, so obviously the peacock was seen!

However, he wasn't aware of his beauty, nor that he was not really hiding even though he thought he was. So funny.

As we left the park, I thought of that kids' song we all sang "This Little Light of Mine" and how one line says – hide it under a bushel? No! I'm gonna let it shine – referring to the light of Christ inside our hearts.

I thought how if we truly reflect his love, we really can't hide, just like the peacock. How can we hide something so pretty and attractive?

Last Sunday at church, one of the teachers posed the question that many have wondered about the Crusades, and how people could be killed like that, in the name of God, when those actions were so ugly. Not pretty, one bit.

Sometimes, we miss the love of Christ altogether when we favor self, rules, law and so many other things than the simple and amazingly beautiful spread of the Father's love through his Son.

Those peacocks were made pretty. And while lots of the time they walked around with wings closed, they often spread them wide and the beauty became evident. And to think a peacock could hide under a bush was funny, actually. He just sat there completely still, as we walked by and still saw him.

I wonder sometimes if wouldn't have to worry about being a "witness" or how to win others over, if we just took what we inherently received when we first believed – His Great Love – and just spread that around. One feather, at a time.

We forgive a friend that's hurt us – that's a feather.

We give when we have nothing to give – that's a feather.

We love when we feel nothing but hatred – that's another feather.

We pray when faith is weak – there's another.

And one by one, the love the Father spread into our hearts begins to spread in our actions and there's this beautiful array of color that we cannot possibly hide, no matter where we sit. The color is visible to all who walk by as they wonder, get close, and snap a picture.

Maybe instead of praying to God and asking HOW we can let our little light shine, we need to just take the light we've been given and spread it...simply and lovingly...the way he spread his light into our dark world and brought color.

Hide it under a bush(el)? No! How can we hide when we're so pretty?



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

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

December 2022



TIPS



## **The Dressing – Ready for the Season – by Marcy Lytle**

We're back to "normal" I guess you'd say, now that the pandemic is over... So hopefully, we're dressing up again, out of our sweats and sneakers and into our boots and colors! I, for one, am happy that shows are opening, concerts are happening, and scheduling is back on the calendar. Are you? What are you wearing this season?

**Plaid is Perfect** – for the holidays! I paired this plaid jacket with some new loafers from Emery Rose – so comfy and festive. Add a suede bag, and you're good to go to family gatherings or dinners with friends.

**Lavender and Gray** – for a cold dreary day! These are summer pants, but I've added a waffle weave (my winter fave) and a waffle weave scarf, as well. Dressed up for holiday shopping and running about town!

**Bold color** – to make everyone smile. I LOVE this new sweater from Azzlee – follow them in Instagram! It's a super cozy find, has those fun thumb holes, and brightens up an outfit. Add your tote bag to fill with goodies while you hit all the markets for those stocking stuffers and tasty jars of goodness.

**Cable knit** – for classic coziness. Another Azzlee sweater – thick and comfy – in a beautiful navy color. I've added a cross-body for hands-free movement around town, looking for bargains, or for nights at home by the fire...

**Snowy dreams** – hoping and waiting! We hope for snow here in the winter, and this shirt screams a snow shower, doesn't it? Worn under a gray cardigan, and a tie-dye scarf on my head, I'm ready should those flakes start falling. Another find from Azzlee.

**Layers and layers** – for blustery days. I love this chunky sweater from Forever 21 – paired with stripes and scarves and oh – it's so comfortable! Comfort is key in the middle of winter!

**Corduroy in pink** – why not? I love this hat, and I've added a blush hue in a long textured sweater – I have a lot of these. Layered with another crisp white sweater underneath. This could be worn anywhere, don't you think?

**Dressed up in heels** – These flowy sweatpants with pockets from Target are all the rage in my closet right now. I have a gray pair as well. I am dressing them up here with heels, and two cardigans, over a pretty tee. Hair is up, and I'm ready for date night in December.

## **Seven for You – Those Wrappings – by the Panel**

We asked the panel this month to share where they find wrapping paper, or do they buy bags instead. Do they have special hacks when it comes to gift wrapping? We wanted to know. I love to get new ideas from others, so we hope you do as well!

Gift bags and cute tissue paper from the Dollar Tree are my go-to for gift wrapping. As soon as the holiday items come in stock, I visit my local Dollar Tree stores and stock up on different sized bags and tissue paper. The good stuff sells out fast. Sometimes, I will use a wiry garland as the bow on the bag, so I look through all the Christmas decorations to see what I can use to spruce up the gift bags. Stick-on tags are a must! They don't fall off the bags, so everyone receives the right gifts. I have purchased beautiful ribbon in the past, as well. Never tie knots in the ribbon holding the handles of the gift bag together – so frustrating for the gift recipient to unwrap their gift! A simple bow, with maybe some long pieces of curled ribbon, works great. Merry Christmas! - Angela

I love to wrap presents! I try to find fun wrapping paper for the kids that are close to a theme they like. I normally buy most of my wrapping paper at Target. I do love cute sacks too, just to mix it up. I always put bows and a tag on the package. I use to get really fancy but realized it all just mostly goes in the trash. I store my gift wrap in two hanging storage organizers and a large box in one of my closets. That way I always know where to look for stuff. I do try and buy some of my wrapping after Christmas just because it's always on sale, but I do look at the new ones each season just to see what is different. – Melissa

I try to do something each year. One year every gift was wrapped in newspaper and pretty ribbon (I bought in bulk at Michaels). But...we don't take the newspaper anymore! One year I printed out the face of each family member, and those were the gift tags! It was fun looking for our faces among the pile. And sometimes each person gets their unique paper – that too is a fun way to find gifts – and no tags needed! We just made a poster of what wrapping paper belonged to what person. Since the kids are gone, I have an entire section of a closet dedicated to wrapping paper and bags! Another idea for decorating a gift is using twigs or herbs from the garden, tied with twine. Still thinking about what I will do this year... - Marcy

When the grandkids were little I used to buy one wrapping per child and wrap each of their gifts in that same gift wrap. But as they grew, the volume and cost of the presents seemed to change and I started using one big gift bag per child. Either I rescued and reused them (which I love to do!) Or, Dollar Tree. Also, I prefer the shape of bags that are wide at the bottom rather than narrow and tall. I put everything for that child in the one gift bag and line the bags up under the tree, sealed and with their names on them. It suits me and them. – Debbie

I am a firm believer of the tradition that a Christmas tree should have gifts under it. I'm not very good at wrapping, but I do it anyway. I have to or I'd have a closet full of paper. I have been buying wrapping paper from school fundraisers for about 30 years. So, since I have wrapping paper, I wrap.

When I can get by without wrapping, I prefer to use decorative Christmas bags. To me, bags are less expensive and recyclable. We sometimes use the same bags for several years before they need to be thrown away. I will use the same bag for a family member that already has their name on it for two or three years. It's gotten to be somewhat of a family joke. Someone will say, "I remember this bag!" Or they'll look inside the bag jokingly to see if they left something from the year before. And about the tissue paper for the bags... My family knows not to wad up the tissue paper. It's recyclable for a time or two, also. My family loves to pitch the tissue paper at me so I can fold it up to be used again and maybe again. I so love Christmas with all it's decorating, and gifts, and all the ways you can save money. – Carole

I love gift wrap. I find so many design varieties. Some are beautiful, some not so much. I find gift wrap at discount stores and crafts stores and even grocery stores, but beware. The cheaper brands are sometimes thin and therefore don't cover any writing that may be printed on the box you are using. But, I can usually find a design that matches my decor.

Some people like to wrap all their gifts in the same paper bringing a somewhat orderly design to their tree. On the other hand, some like an explosion of designs with as many different types as possible under their tree. I remember a Christmas from my teen years that we were spending our holiday out-of-town at an aunt's house. When we arrived at her house I noticed that all the presents under the tree were wrapped in blue and were embellished with a bit of spray on snowflakes. It's not a look that I would repeat today, but it made my aunt's house look even more elegant and beautiful. That same look can be accomplished today with all gifts wrapped in brown butcher paper and embellished with twine and maybe holly or rosemary twigs. While one is rustic and one is not, they both bring an orderly "put together" look. Matching bags can also be placed among my gifts to enhance the look of my tree and to hold gifts that are not boxed. Happy decorating! - Gina

### Three Moms - Traditions – by The Cousins

Traditions are what make Christmas special, it seems. Those things we look forward to each year that ground us, bring us together, warm our hearts and make us smile. We asked the moms what traditions they have started and continue with their littles. It's fun to hear what everyone does and to consider picking up new traditions to add with our old ones!

#### Mom of Three

Traditions in the holidays are my favorite! We always have the chocolate advent calendars. I did that as a kid, so we keep it up with ours. We also have a really wooden tree I purchase several years ago at a market. It's the family tree of Jesus, and we read the story of each person each night, leading up to the birth of Christ. It's a great tradition to read the word and learn about Christ and the lineage! It's great because they seem to want to know more as they get older. We also get our tree together and put up our decorations the weekend after Thanksgiving. We visit the Elgin Christmas Tree and cut it down – a tradition we do rain or shine, cold or warm weather. It's one of my favorite things as the first part of the season, then we also watch a Christmas movie, and the kids pick out an ornament for the year. We do events with our extended family, we love to add new Christmas events. Finally, on Christmas Eve we have pajamas, hot cocoa and treats and go for a *looking at lights* ride, through a trail or neighborhoods, etc. On Christmas morning, we enjoy waking up at home to open presents and relax with the kids all day. I do usually make homemade waffles on Christmas morning in the waffle iron, or cinnamon rolls, something easy...or a charcuterie style boards. Oh, we also attend a Christmas Eve service as a family! My husband I also pick a day to do all of our Amazon shopping and then go out on a date to finish, then a night of wrapping it all up!

#### Mom of Two

I would start off by saying our traditions have changed over the years from when I was a kid to traditions with my grandparents and my mom and dad, to college being away from family, to being married without kids, to now having kids! The chocolate advent calendar is a tradition that was started with my Aunt Raetta, so I continue this tradition with my kids – just a fun way starting on December 1 to countdown to Christmas. Second tradition is a fairly new one. We make a birthday cake for Jesus on Christmas Day. This is fun and brings back the message of why we celebrate the holiday, and we sing Him happy birthday. A third tradition is attending a candlelit service, where we receive a special message of stillness and reflection on the meaning of Christmas and the birth of Jesus. A final tradition is that on Christmas Day we usually have a family brunch, this was done on my husband's side of the family – his papaw used to cook a breakfast. So other family members have stepped up to cook now that he's gone, after we have our personal family time on Christmas morning. We have an extended "country cooking" Christmas brunch.

#### Mom of Four

For Christmas traditions, our family has a few.

First of all, to start the holiday season, right after Thanksgiving we buy a real Christmas tree and as a family, we decorate it that night. It's so much fun picking out a tree at the Christmas Tree Farm, because hot cocoa is the drink of choice there!

When Christmas Eve finally arrives, we attend a Christmas Eve service as a family at the church. This time is so special. And when Grandmother Mimi arrives, the kids help her make homemade Christmas cookies to leave out for Santa. The favorite? It's mint chocolate, of course!

When we all awake on Christmas morning, we are read the entire Christmas story by Dad before opening the gifts. And, we're all decked out in matching pajamas we bought at Target.

## **In the Kitchen – Almost Winter – by Marcy Lytle**

I think fall transitioning into winter is my favorite time of all for cooking meals, because of the aromas and the flavors. We have enjoyed each one of the following recipes, and I think you will as well. Try one, or two, or all of them, and let us know what you think. After all, apples and cinnamon and squash and bacon and bread...what's not to like?

### Skillet apple cake

We had this with our kids, and everyone loved it! It's from *Real Simple Magazine*, and it was really easy to put together and bake – right in the cast iron skillet!

- 1 ¼ cups (2 1/2 sticks) unsalted butter, divided
- 4 Honeycrisp or Gala apples (about 2 lb.), thinly sliced
- 2 cups packed light brown sugar, divided
- 1 ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon, divided, plus more for topping
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 2 large eggs
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- Vanilla ice cream, for serving

Preheat oven to 350°F. Melt 1/4 cup butter in a 10-inch cast-iron.. Stir in apples, 1/2 cup sugar, and 1 teaspoon cinnamon. Cook over medium-high, stirring often, until apples are tender and syrup begins to thicken, about 15 minutes. Transfer to a medium bowl. (Do not wipe skillet clean.)

Melt remaining 1 cup butter in microwave or on stove. Whisk in vanilla and remaining 1 1/2 cups sugar and 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon until well combined. Whisk in eggs until smooth. Whisk in flour, baking powder, and salt until just combined. Fold in 1 1/2 cups cooked apples, reserving remaining apples and syrup in bowl. Pour batter into skillet.

Bake until a wooden pick inserted in center of cake comes out clean, 25 to 30 minutes. Top with remaining cooked apples and syrup. Dust with more cinnamon and serve with ice cream.

### Pesto Pull Apart Bread

This was found in *Taste of Home Magazine*, and it's pretty and festive in color, and so delicious – and easy as well! Great for your gathering...

- 1 tube (16.3oz) large refrigerated buttermilk biscuits
- ¼ c olive oil
- 2 T prepared pesto
- ¼ c sun dried tomatoes not packed in oil
- ¼ c roasted sweet red peppers, drained and diced
- ¼ c sliced ripe olives
- 1 c mozzarella and provolone blend

Preheat oven to 350, and cut each biscuit into four pieces. Combine olive oil and pesto. Dip biscuit pieces into the mixture until coated, and place in an 8-in round pie pan. Top with sun dried tomatoes, red peppers and olives.

Bake til golden brown, about 25 minutes. Sprinkle with cheese and return to oven. Bake another 5 minutes. Pull apart and enjoy.

### Croissants to Die For

I was gifted a box of croissants from Ballerina Farm – a great Christmas gift idea! After baking them according to directions, we just added these ingredients and the flavor was amazing.

- Croissants
- Bacon
- Honey
- Brie

Bake croissants or heat them. Cut open and spread on Brie, and add cooked and drained bacon slices. Drizzle with honey. Your kids and family will drool...

### Potato Skins Wheel

This simple appetizer (we ate it for dinner) is great and pretty for the holidays. It's sort of a twist on the potato skin recipe we all know and love...

- Potatoes, cut into large wedges
- Cooked bacon
- Scallions
- Grated cheddar
- Sour cream if you like

Bake the wedges in the oven until crisp and browned, and tender

Lay in a circle around a large plate then top with the cheese and bacon – heat back in the oven for cheese to melt. Sprinkle with scallions. SO GOOD.

### BBQ Sausage Wraps

If you are tired of turkey or want something different for the family, try these! We even took the ingredients and made them on a weekend trip away...in our Airbnb.

- 1 T canola oil
- 1 small sweet onion sliced very thin
- 1 med red pepper sliced very thin
- 8 jalapeno cheddar franks or linke
- 8 Mixia tortillas (flour/corn)

- ½ c BBQ sauce

Heat a skillet and add oil, onions and peppers, stir and cook til softened a bit, about 4 minutes. Push onions and peppers to the side of the pan and add sausages, cook on all sides till brown, about 10 minutes. (add ¼ water halfway through cooking to deglaze the pan.)

Heat tortillas in another dry skillet (or I just heated them on an open flame on low). Keep warm until time to eat.

Assemble the wraps with the sausage, onion mix, then drizzle with BBQ sauce...garnish with cilantro.

### Honeynut Squash Bowl

This is somewhat fancy and beautiful, but great for two or a family...and it looks so amazing when you're ready to sit down and put a fork in it...

- 1 large honeynut squash (per two people), halved and seeded
- ½ ground meat (or other preference like turkey, bison, chicken, etc.)
- 1 T olive oil
- ½ large yellow onion chipped
- 2 stalks celery chopped
- 2 cloves garlic minced
- ½ large tart apple chopped
- 2 T minced fresh rosemary
- Salt and pepper
- 2 T chopped pecans

While squash is roasting, prepare filling. Add ground meat and cook in a pan over med-hi heat, drain if necessary. Add olive oil, onion, celery and garlic over med heat and cook till starts to soften. Add the chopped apples and rosemary and cook 3-4 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.

When squash is roasted, remove from oven and let cool a bit. Scoop out of some of the flesh and leave perimeter intact for the bowl. Add the meat mixture to the flesh and mix, season. Spoon back into the halves, and top with chopped pecan. Place in oven for 5 minutes.

Garnish with rosemary and serve warm.



## **Tried and True – Last Month’s Learning – Dec**

Next time you make guacamole, try a few chopped pepperoncini instead of jalapenos, and try chopped pepitas in the mix as well!

Emery Rose – check out their shoes – they’re unique and arrive quickly. And read the size comments before you order. So fun.

If you haven’t tried Party Cracker Seasoning, you must for the holidays! Easy to mix, and so tasty – lots of flavors to choose from!

Bentgo – it’s a company that makes bento boxes – and if you aren’t using them, you need to add to your Christmas list, quick!

There’s a packet of 24 wrapping papers in a book with the tags, at Anthropologie – I love it so much! Check it out – that’s \$2 per package for wrapping – cheaper than a bag – and SO pretty.

Trader Joe’s always has such great seasonal options for food. Just browse the aisles for an hour and pick up the Christmas goodies – I plan to do so!

Just tried honeynut and delicatta squash this season. Googled how to roast and prepare each. Great for your holiday side dishes!

Ford and Fossil – found them recently at a festival, and on line. The cutest jewelry and handbags. I got one of each!

Got an old baker’s rack somewhere in your garage? It makes a great plant stand for your porch! You can decorate each shelf!

I bought several Dollar Tree candles (see them on the baker’s rack) and keep them on the porch to scatter and light, when we have a party or friends over. They look pretty.

If you’re local and shop HEB, they have a cute set of prep cups/bowls that I love for individual dips when serving, or for condiments or all sorts of things – and they’re so pretty! Cocinaware.

Have you heard of Cast Iron plant or Gold Mop? I planted both recently, and hoping they last – I hear good things about both!

A good way to store gifts while shopping and collecting is in bags hung on two hangers each, in a closet!

Did you know that shoofly originated from these panels that hung above tables, that were pulled back and forth over the dinner to shoo away the flies?

Tillys – a store we’d never thought to shop in for jeans for him – has some great ones! Fit him like a glove, and so comfy. Jon got straight slim.

Big Lots is the best place (and most affordable) for buying those holiday tablecloths!

Got some pretty candle jars you've used up? Place them on your counter and hang earrings over the side – looks so cute!

## ***Sugar and Spice - 2022 Favorites – by Angela Dolbear***

I prefer to use term “Favorites” over “best of” because skin and makeup products are personal. What might be my “Holy Grail” product might be a “meh” for someone else. With that, I have picked out a few of my favorites. Some are new to me, and some are tried and true staples.

[Winky Lux Setting Powder](#): I am a fan of all Winky Lux products, but I use this powder every day, all over my makeup—even on my eyebrows. It keeps everything in place without looking chalky.

[Cianté Dewy Skin Vitamin C Glass Glow Primer](#): I have a basket full of primers, but this makes my skin look natural and healthy. I use just a dab on my cheekbones and middle of my forehead.

[ColourPop Super Shock Shadows](#): I use one of these shadows pretty much every day. They stay put and look fresh all day and are easy to apply with a brush or fingertips (my favorite). I have hit pan with “Moonwalk”, a duo tone green gold, and “Rooftop Cocktails,” a silvery/green/gold multitone. At \$6 each, you can try several different colors easily.

[Kat Von D Go Big or Go Home Mascara](#): I just started using this mascara. It was a bit thick and overwhelming at first, but I have learned to apply it sparingly. My lashes look thick and long, and there is no breakdown or flaking for the whole day.

[Benefit Brow Styler](#): As someone with almost nonexistent eyebrows, this is an everyday staple for me. One side has a creamy angled pencil, and the other side has a brow powder that sets my brows while adding softness. I stock up whenever I see this product on sale.

[Too Faced Lip Injection Lip Gloss](#): I’ve been primarily using lip gloss this year, so I was excited to try this new lip product. It has a gentle plumping effect which seems to last for an hour or so and provides good color coverage without being sticky. And the gloss lasts longer than most lip glosses.

[Urban Decay Perversion Waterproof Fine-point Eye Pen](#): I have been using this eyeliner for years. The formula gets changed every few years, but it’s still my favorite. It goes on smoothly, dries quickly, and stays put all day. I like that it is matte as well.

### **“Hack Job” Tip**

Speaking of eyeliner, I am a firm believer that eyeliner should only be applied to the upper eyelid lash lines. Lined lower lash lines looks hard, and ages the wearer. Instead of eyeliner, apply eyeshadow with a brush to the lower lash line. Light shimmer shades in gold or green hues compliments and brightens the eyes. Then go over that shade with a little darker shade, shimmer or matte, near the outer corner of the eyes to add dimension, and a touch of glamour.

**BONUS Hack:** I have purchased (or received) all these products through a monthly subscription box service, such as Boxycharm and/or Ipsy. When I choose the items for the month’s box, I shop the site for other products to purchase at a deep discount.

There are a few products I use that I will need to purchase outside of the subscription sites. I pick one store to shop and sign-up for their rewards program. Ulta is my favorite since they give you “cash” you have earned through the rewards points that you can use on whatever you are

purchasing. I must shop online at Ulta.com, since the nearest store is not close to my home. But that's okay! The Ulta app often has extra deals and freebie stuff. Fun!

The beauty of blessings to you!

*Angela Dolbear, Beauty Editor, is the author of contemporary spiritual novels, such as [THE GARDEN KEY](#) Series, and [THE TORMENTOR'S TALE](#), as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). And she loves writing and recording songs with her husband, Tim --listen on [Sound Cloud](#). She is also a self-proclaimed beauty junkie and has been since long before her mother allowed her to start wearing makeup at the age of 14. She keeps UPS and the USPS busy delivering small boxes on a regular basis from Ulta, Sephora, Amazon, and many independent cosmetics companies to her home Nashville, TN. Please connect with her at [www.AngelaDolbear.com](http://www.AngelaDolbear.com)*



HOME

## Practical Parenting – Those Stockings – by Marcy Lytle

I LOVE stockings. And I LOVE filling them. I know that some parents do away with them, and yet some families only do stockings, because kids get so many gifts elsewhere. I start buying stocking gifts way early so that they don't end up being so costly all at once. Sometimes, the stocking presents don't fit in an actual stocking, so gift bags are a good choice as well.

I've been buying all sorts of things for the kiddos, so I thought I'd share some ideas for you parents as you look and shop and think for stocking ideas for the little ones in your family, some from Amazon and some just out and about while you look around for ideas.

20 ideas:

1. Slap watches are fun. Lots of options to go with your kids and what they like in color and character!
2. Gel pens – for the artist in the family.
3. Any pop-it bracelets or fidgets. I don't get why these are so popular, but the kids love them.
4. Same with squishies. You can get a bundle in a pack and divide among the littles.
5. Michaels has little things near the checkout line, including a tiny office set, for the kids that like to play like they're working.
6. Did you know World Market has cute little necklaces? I found an elephant one I think our 9 year old will love.
7. What about a book light – there are some at Dollar Tree – for the kids that love to read.
8. Speaking of books, a bookmark is a fun gift – something colorful – or the magnetic kind!
9. Dollar General, and Target too, have unpainted wood pieces, again for the creators in the bunch.
10. If you get the wood, then add a set of paintbrushes of different sizes.
11. Opt for that retro Pez candy – the kids always love these!
12. For the older kids, they might love a card game or just a pack of cards. Teach them how to play War!
13. Give them the gift of a magazine subscription (*Ranger Rick*, or *National Geographic Kids*) I can hook you up with these!
14. Kids LOVE cash, so roll up some dollar bills and watch them scream with delight.
15. Big Lots always has an end cap of the retro candy from way back when, like taffy! Grab a few.
16. Usually, you can find a cute ornament for each kid for not much funds...give them each a new one.
17. How about a Slinky?
18. Kids might like a back scratcher! It might be their favorite stocking stuffer! Amazon has a pack of four.
19. You can also get a pack of several windup toys, and who doesn't love those? I even do!
20. Visit Ulta, as they usually have little samples of lotions, nail polish, a mirror and more.

Kids love the idea of pulling something out of a stocking and being surprised at what they find, and I personally think it's one of the favorite activities on Christmas Day. Enjoy.

## **I Don't Do Teens – Inspired or Pressured? – by Marcy Lytle**

It's hard raising teens, and when they start middle school and high schools, parents' anxiety rises, as they know all of the temptation out there to do wrong...go astray...and get into trouble. It happens to us as adults, and we are supposed to know better, but we get sucked into being pressured to buy this, spend that, or all sorts of things as Christmas nears. But what about our teens and their peers?

Maybe, it might be a good idea over the holidays at some point to have a family meeting that's actually fun but has a good point to it – about being inspired by what we see and observe and listen to – but not pressured.

It might be fun to take time to ask the kids or look and see what accounts they follow on Tik Tok, what music they listen to, and who they like to look at on Instagram, or whatever platforms they frequent. Hopefully, as parents, we know what accounts these are and are monitoring them. Ask the kids to bring two or three of their faves, and the parents can do this as well, and then everyone share why they like what they watch. No judgment or “omg” faces or pointing fingers, just a good share about likes around the room.

For example, I follow an account called Ballerina Farm on Instagram and the reason I enjoy it is because it's so DIFFERENT from my life – it's fun to see someone with seven kids on a farm making bread and all the things. That's why I'm attracted. So maybe your kids have an account they follow too, because it's so different. Then talk about DIFFERENT and how it might be attractive, but do we then envy and become discontent with our life because we want to be like that person?

Maybe your teen listens to Taylor Swift for example, as she has a new album out, and your daughter loves the way Taylor Swift dresses, or maybe he has a crush on her, or perhaps the lyrics stir something in your teens because they're curious about love (my 9 year old granddaughter told me that's what Taylor sings about...) So it might be an ATTRACTION to a style or lyrics or a person.

If both parents and teens are sharing, this also allows great family connection as we learn what makes the others in the family interested, and we can even start to share videos and talks and so many other things. Perhaps Dad listens to a podcast on the way to work about something related to a hobby he enjoys, and he LEARNS something new every time he tunes in.

If parents share, then maybe the teens will share, and everyone can talk about whether or not what they listen to and watch INSPIRES them or PRESSURES them.

Ask each one this question:

After you watch or listen or observe, do you feel discontent or anxious that you're not good enough or your life stinks?

After you watch or listen or observe, do you feel stronger in your faith, more confident in who you are, or happy and peaceful after you've finished?

It might be fun to have this family get together once a quarter, to fill each other in on new finds and new shares...and learn to really think about what we choose to focus on and spend our time on...and become more selective in choosing the next follow.

It's worth a try, and it might be a family night each one looks forward to, as everyone shares without pointing fingers but with love and connection and thinking...



## **Tiny Living – Smaller Space Blessings – by Leyanne Enterline**

Even in chaos, small quarters can be a blessing.

Living tiny, with husband traveling, keeping up with work, homeschooling kids and their activities, and parents in and out of the hospital, has been a bit crazy!

For the past three years my mom has had some health scares that have put her in and out of the hospital multiple times. This past week both of my parents decided to go into the ER and scare us all! Praise the Lord; they are back home and doing well again. However, I have been trying to go over to my parents' place and help as much I can while still schooling the kiddos, being their Uber driver and all the things, while my husband travels five days a week.

It has been a bit chaotic to say the least!

I am grateful, though, for a tiny space that takes minutes to do a quick clean-up and slightly longer for a deep clean! We have minimal amount of items that can stay in the trailer, so things go into their proper space pretty quickly. I've definitely had to use more paper items than normal this week to eliminate hand washing and drying time. I've had to rely others to help get kiddos to their activities, and the boys have had to become a bit more responsible at their at home chores and school work.

It takes a village, and I am so grateful for my friends and family, and my parents' friends that have helped out in so many ways!

Living tiny has so many of its own challenges, but the smaller the space the less "stuff" we can have to get in our way when we're in crazy times and situations. We just don't have much time to deal with a larger area and all the things that come with taking care of a house.

I hope to be a blessing to others when trials come their way. I didn't realize how much people go through until now that I'm going through hard times, myself.

Remember, love grows best in tiny spaces .

## **An Adage a Day - Cross My Heart – by Carole Gilbert**

I said, “Cross my heart” so much throughout my childhood. It’s an expression that tells someone that I want to keep my word, to do good with what I’m willing to do for them, and that I promise to do this, so much so that I, “Cross my heart.”

This idiom began in the early 1900’s and is thought to have started from the sign of the cross being made in front of a person’s breast. It’s of Christian origin but this practice is not found in the New Testament. Some Christians, and especially Catholics, still use the sign of crossing their hearts today.

The phrase “Cross my heart” is also part of a popular childhood poem and is in reference to keeping a promise. It is the phrase from the poem mostly used. As children we make promises we can’t keep, but at that time in our childish mind, we think we can and will.

I have a cousin that was more like a sister to me when we were kids. We lived an hour away from each other so we weren’t together often; but when we were’ it was like we’d never been apart. We’d spend weeks together in the summer at our grandparents’ house. There was a spot outside we made into a playhouse and we played in it for hours. We had so much joy and laughter together with not a care in the world! And when we’d leave, we’d make those promises, “Until next time. Cross my heart.”

As we grew up, life’s situations and distance separated us even more and those times together became fewer and farther in between. We may not have been able to keep our promises but our hearts never became uncrossed. I’ve prayed for her. I’ve missed her. Being apart is something neither of us ever wanted.

Psalm 139:23-24 tells us,

*“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!*

*And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”*

The verse says, “Search me and know my heart.” It goes on to say, “Lead me in the way everlasting.” Search me and lead me, Lord. I love you. Cross my heart.

When I think of everlasting, I think of the playhouse my cousin and I built together, and the hours spent filled with joy and laughter. Jesus has prepared a house for me to be together with Him. The distance may seem far away now, but one day I’ll be with Him there spending eternity in joy and laughter like I had with my cousin. And Jesus is waiting there for me. And you. I promise. Cross my heart.

The verse also says, “And Lord, see if there is any grievous way in me.” God knows my grievous ways. He knows all the feelings in my heart. Even though I don’t spend the time with Him that I should, He’s still with me. And when I do go to God it’s like we were never apart, just like with my cousin.

For my cousin and I now, when we do see each other, unfortunately and usually, it's at a funeral. But we can still look into each other's eyes and they twinkle immediately as the memories come. We remember the joy and laughter we had at Grandma's house if only for a moment. And we know we will not have only a moment but an eternity with Jesus and God with our eyes twinkling filled with joy and laughter.

"Try me and know my thoughts." I pray this part of the verse to God. My cousin and I always knew each other's thoughts. We could finish each other's sentences. God knows our thoughts. He knows our hearts and sees when we have a twinkle or a tear in our eyes. He is there in our every remembrance. My cousin and I may know each other well but God knows us all thoroughly and He always will! I promise. Cross my heart.

Happy Holidays.

Happy Birthday Jesus.

## **A Night to Remember – Hot Cocoa Chats – by Marcy Lytle**

I recently purchased a cute tin of hot cocoa to place in my daughter's stocking, as she and her daughter often have mom/daughter hot cocoa chats. I've always thought it was so cool that the two of them do this, and I thought what a great way to train our kids to have personal chats with their Father, as well. It will help them learn how to converse, praise, and listen when the Father is present with them, by the fire and near lights, in a personal way. And then I learned that they have chats with other drinks, as well!

Preparation: Prepare hot cocoa and donuts for the family, gather around the fire or some other cozy spot – perhaps by the tree – and wrap up or sit on blankets while you sip and dine with Jesus.

1 Peter 5:7 “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”

Do you know what anxiety means? When we feel nervous about something, we often feel anxious. So let's begin by talking about what makes us nervous. (Parent starts and models...kids follow suit). Everyone pretend you've got a fishing pole and cast out your line. That's what it means to cast – to throw. So let's throw our anxieties on to the shoulders of Jesus, because He said he would carry our burdens. (Pray together and ask each one to ask Jesus to take the nervousness they have.)

This is a good way to begin our fireside chats with Jesus, because anxiety makes it hard to pray or chat with the Father. But now that we've cast our cares on Him, let's keep going...

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

It's the time of giving and receiving, and it's of utmost importance that we are thankful for all that we have...before we receive. (Why do you think that is? Ask the kids.) Let's take turns giving thanks for something in our lives, either a toy, or a blessing, or a friend...or whatever.

One of the best ways to experience friendship with God is to acknowledge that all good things come from his hands, and it's good to give thanks and rejoice. Let's clap together to God!

1 John 5:14 “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.”

Remember how you kids like to ask for specific things for Christmas? Parents like to know what their child wants, and parents also know what their child needs, so that's good! What if a little toddler asked for a pocket knife? A good parent would know not to give that, but would gladly share other good things with that child.

It's okay to ask God for things when you chat with him, and this verse assures us that he hears us. So let's pray together and ask him for the things we want or need and then trust that he will answer with what is the very best for us!

Finally, a good part of a conversation or chat always includes hugs and a listening ear, and affirmation. God loves to listen but he also loves to affirm us, or assure us of his love.

Let's sing "Jesus Loves Me" together...

Now, let's pause and close our eyes and listen to His voice and see if we hear a word or see anything in our minds of his great love toward us. (Let kids share).

This is how to have a fireside chat with the Lord...it's so simple. We let go of our worries, give thanks, pray and ask for answers, and sit back and feel the warmth of His love. His love makes us warm inside, flickers like the lights on the tree that shine and make us smile, and holds us close like a blanket wrapping us up tight!

Merry Christmas, and Good Night!

## **In Each Room – A Space for Giving – by Marcy Lytle**

Since we shared gift wrap ideas in another column this month, I thought it would be fun to talk about storing all of that wrap and ribbon and bows and tape, and boxes – I mean who doesn't want all of that stuff organized and ready to use? Maybe you've already wrapped all your gifts, and maybe you haven't, but organizing it all can be very daunting when we're finished, or when we've just begun. So let's tackle the room/closet/space where you keep your giftwrap for giving!

First of all, take off your shoes, put on some Christmas music and dance a little...because you're about to work hard!

Do you prefer bags or paper? OR a mix of both? You'll need a large bin for the rolls of paper, and perhaps a hanging organizer for all the bags. Both of these fit nicely in a closet and don't take up TOO much space.

Think about the tape, scissors, ribbons and tags. There are great bins at Michaels that work for storing these smaller items, and they're easy to remove and use, then put back in place.

Are you a coordinator of color and style, or is your array of gifts a medley of all sorts of shapes, patterns and color? If you like coordinating, group your bags and paper according to color, and size. Also, you'll need a place for all the birthday wrap, and a separate place for all of the holiday – that makes things much easier to keep it together.

Once you've decided on all the parts then lay them out in piles, to see what you have, what you need, and what storage you'll use. For me, this is the most important step of all! If I can't see what I have, I'll purchase things I don't need.

Now it's time to start stacking, placing, and filling your bins. Label if you want, or if you chose clear bins, you won't need labels.

You're going to be tired, so take time to sip some tea and enjoy a shortbread cookie or two, afterwards, as you stare at this space in your room that you created as your little spot for wrapping all things beautiful.

I'll include some links here for organizers I like, if you want to start fresh and new!

For hanging on a closet rod, I love this one.

[https://www.amazon.com/Simple-Houseware-Double-Sided-Hanging-Organizer/dp/B096SZ6MN3/ref=sr\\_1\\_6?crd=23ZIB6O4D90V1&keywords=gift+wrap+organizer&qid=1668433298&sprefix=giftwrap+or%2Caps%2C297&sr=8-6](https://www.amazon.com/Simple-Houseware-Double-Sided-Hanging-Organizer/dp/B096SZ6MN3/ref=sr_1_6?crd=23ZIB6O4D90V1&keywords=gift+wrap+organizer&qid=1668433298&sprefix=giftwrap+or%2Caps%2C297&sr=8-6)

These are great for housing scissors, tape, bows and tags.

[https://www.amazon.com/Simple-Houseware-Double-Sided-Hanging-Organizer/dp/B096SZ6MN3/ref=sr\\_1\\_6?crd=23ZIB6O4D90V1&keywords=gift+wrap+organizer&qid=1668433298&sprefix=giftwrap+or%2Caps%2C297&sr=8-6](https://www.amazon.com/Simple-Houseware-Double-Sided-Hanging-Organizer/dp/B096SZ6MN3/ref=sr_1_6?crd=23ZIB6O4D90V1&keywords=gift+wrap+organizer&qid=1668433298&sprefix=giftwrap+or%2Caps%2C297&sr=8-6)

And a large bucket on the floor in the corner of a closet is great for stacking rolls of paper.

I've tried lots of special gadgets and ribbon boxes and other more specific organizers, but I always come back to these three general organizers – that work for me.



YOU



## **Under Pressure – What a Love Story! – by Debbie Haynes**

Is it important to believe in the virgin birth of Christ that we tell our children, in the Christmas story?

In Luke 1 it says an angel Gabriel visited a virgin named Mary who was about to be married to Joseph. The angel spoke to Mary and called her favored and blessed, and told her not to fear. She would conceive and birth a son named Jesus – he would be great and called the Son of God. Of course, Mary asked, “How can this be, seeing I know not a man?” And the angel told her the Holy Spirit would empower Mary to give birth, because nothing is impossible with God. And Mary’s response was, “...be it unto me according to your word.” And the angel left.

Back in those days, an espousal or betrothal was the legally binding part of the marriage. It’s also believed that when Mary was espoused to Joseph, she was very young and possibly about age 14 when she was visited by the angel. The espousal period was usually between 6 to 24 months, and when that period was over the bride could then “go home” with the husband and live as his wife. It was during this espousal period that Gabriel visited Mary and she was found with child.

Can we stop for a moment and appreciate the human emotions that both Joseph and Mary must have felt? Before Joseph was then visited by the angel, he must have felt betrayed that the wife of his dreams wasn’t who she appeared to be. And how must Mary have felt, having to face the families and explain what happened to her? God was so good to send the angel to Mary for assurance, and then to Joseph for confirmation.

This event, giving birth to the Son of God, was nothing any other woman had ever done, before or since! Joseph was to be a father to a baby that wasn’t his, and he didn’t name the child. It all must have looked and felt so strange...from the human side. And yet, the very humanity of Mary and Joseph is such a critical fact of the virgin birth. It’s what gives it credibility! Humans could not pull off such a feat – this had to be God!

Matthew 1 tells us a virgin shall be with child, bring forth a son and call his name Emmanuel, *God with us*. We also read that Joseph was also visited by the angel and that he knew not his wife until she birthed her son – Jesus.

Though Joseph was a righteous man, he wasn’t sinless. Had he sought his own way and not submitted to the word of God but planted Joseph’s own seed...that would have contaminated the holy seed, which was destined to be the Savior of the World.

This isn’t just a love story about a sweet couple, but it’s the greatest love story ever told! A righteous God, full of wisdom, superseded the boundaries of humanity to bring about his perfect plan. A plan of salvation! A child, born of a virgin mother, raised by an earthly father, to redeem this dark and sinful world.

No wonder we love to sing, “Joy to the World! The Lord has come!”

We must believe that the virgin birth is completely true, just as it's written. It's the very foundation of our belief in Jesus, that while here on earth he was fully man and fully God. God had preserved the bloodlines traced back to Adam. And without these facts about the virgin birth, without the perfect choice of such willing parents, without the preservation of pure blood lines, there would not have been a sinless, worthy lamb that could pay the ultimate price of his holy life for the redemption of an unholy world.

Oh, what a love story! God the Father sent his only begotten Son to be our Redeemer.

I John 4:9

*By this, the love of God was manifested in us,  
that God has sent His only begotten Son into the  
world so that we might live through Him.*

## **Inner Strength - 2 Hours - by Michelle Wyatt**

When you have a block of two hours with your kids, how do you make the most of it?

The following scenario is how my boys often spend their time. My 10-year-old is completely content having screen time for the full two hours; whereas, my 8-year-old has a hard time sitting still long enough to even watch his favorite video. Matthew gets upset when he wants to play and Brendan doesn't want to get off his device. To manage this, I set the expectation of when screen time is allowed and when it's play time.

Generally, Matthew plays by himself first. He loves performing card tricks, something he has picked up from watching YouTube videos. Then, he asks me to watch him. I love cheering him on! Then, he asks his brother Brendan to watch. Brendan may not think it's enough to watch. He may even hide under the covers, which, of course upsets Matthew and for good reason. I quietly remind Brendan to be a supportive big brother.

We then all chime in! Here is what that looks like...a foam cup, table, and cards. Matthew takes the teacher role.

"Watch Mommy, this is how you do it."

I wish it was that easy. Matthew is gifted at learning by observing. I, on the other hand, miss over and over again. Matthew doesn't mind. He's happy that we are all having quality time together. I am so blessed to have a son that is understanding.

"It's okay, Mom. You can try again."

Then, comes the, "I don't want to do this anymore." Once Brendan starts to whine, I get creative and start a tickle war or a pillow fight, for example. I rough and tumble with the boys.

*The sound of laughter is the best!*

Brendan and Matthew instigate the tickle war, sometimes. Have you ever seen that look in your child's eye? You know, the one that speaks, "Watch out!?" It makes me smile. Then, I ask myself, "Do I give in or make it equal?" It's more like we take turns winning.

Before we know it, the two hours have passed. Winding down is the hardest part because we want to keep the momentum going.

We end our time with a big hug and look forward to the next time we have two hours to spend together.

## Healthy Habits – The Gift of Encouragement – by Marcy Lytle

We all know that it's good to give of our blessings to others. We are told it's even better to give than receive! And just why is that? Could it be that it's healthy, as well? Could it be that there are huge benefits to giving, not just in being obedient to give, but in healthy returns for our body, soul and spirit? I think there are! And for our health this month of December – the time we all start fretting over finding that perfect gift – we're going to focus on the gift of encouragement. And I'm thinking we will find ourselves encouraged, as well!

Here are seven ways to give the gift of encouragement this season, that can cost very little of our resources, time or effort – but grant huge returns in the ways of peace, joy and love because we gave.

1. Text a friend on Christmas Day, one that is alone without a spouse or another family member that's missing this year. Just say you're thinking of them, and offer a kind word. There's no pressure to say the "right words" but rather to just say a word of kindness.
2. When you're reading in your quiet time, if a verse leaps off the page to you, ask Him to share with you a friend's name that might also need that verse, then email or text it to them. Done. You've encouraged a friend.
3. Actually hand-write a Christmas card and mail to a friend that lives far away, with an encouraging word at the bottom, maybe a phrase that's meant a lot to you. That's it. It can be as simple as "God loves you." That's the truth, and it's powerful.
4. If you have a friend who is struggling in her health, it's often hard to know what to say. Don't say anything except that you're praying for her and you love her. Make it a point to tell her often during this month, maybe every week, if her illness has been long and hard.
5. Build up a friend that's always feeling down about themselves with a compliment. Note her outfit, encourage her creativity, or compliment her on a job well done. Yours might be the only affirmation she gets this season!
6. Do you know a mom that's having a hard time, either from a miscarriage, or she struggles with her children, or she's just exhausted? Don't try to think of solutions or the "right thing" to say, but rather offer a hug and sit with her in silence. Or bring her a coffee in the middle of the day. That's it!
7. If there's a friend that's sitting with an aging parent and you've done the same – or if you've experienced any hard time like another – remember how you felt and pray for that person. Tell them they're a good son/daughter and that God is pleased with their love and care. Simple words. Simple encouragement.

I know that sometimes I say nothing and do nothing because I talk myself out of it, thinking I don't have the right words or know what to do. But often, a thought pops into my head and I do act and obey. Just recently, I texted a friend to thank her for her kind words to me decades ago that I still remember! I felt good after I did it, because I obeyed. And it took me less than five minutes. It's a good thing to take our big bag of blessings and open them to spill out on others, because even blessings can be a load to carry. We're not meant to carry them all but to share them – and that lightens our step, causes us to break out in a smile, and elevates our thinking to ones of thanksgiving. And that's healthy for us all, this Christmas season.



## Life in Nutshell – Ready to Celebrate? – by Jill Montz

A few weeks back we had a visiting preacher at my church that used Exodus chapters 14 & 15 in his sermon. If you recall, leading up to these chapters, the Israelites had been slaves in Egypt for over 400 years and according to God it was now time for them to move on. However, Pharaoh thought losing free labor seemed like a bad idea, so he refused to let the Israelites leave. Even though Moses (after some persuasion by God and with the help of Aaron as a sidekick) told Pharaoh that God was going to send plagues on Egypt, the Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he refused to let the Israelites pack up and head out.

It only took ten plagues for Pharaoh and all the Egyptians to gladly see the Israelite community exit Egypt. If you recall, the Egyptians even gave the Israelites parting gifts as they made their way to the borders and beyond. It seemed like a win-win for both people groups. (For all my Bible trivia buffs out there can you name all ten of them? Bonus points for naming them in order.)

But that Pharaoh...he is a fickle ruler. This is where we pick up in Exodus 14. Pharaoh changes his mind and commands his army to pursue the Israelites. Now Pharaoh might not be able to make up his mind on freeing people, but when he sends out an army, he likes to make a statement to the people he is trying to recapture. I am talking he commanded every chariot in Egypt to go after the Israelites (now that's a lot of horses y'all, even by a Texan's standard).

At first glance of Pharaoh's approaching army, the people of Israel were quick to take on a defeatist attitude with a flair for the dramatic. Exodus 14:11 "They said to Moses, 'Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die?'"

Oh ye of little faith.

Now my response to the situation would not have been something that could have been written in the Bible. It might have been something that started with "Little ones...cover your ears." But Moses is a hero of faith for good reason (and I am not...also for good reason). He said in Exodus 14:14, "The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still."

Then we get to the fun part (or at least fun for the Israelites...not so much for the Egyptians). Moses stretches out his hand and the Red Sea parts. The Israelites walk across on dry ground (DRY ground...that still amazes me!) safely to the other shore. As the Egyptian army followed the Israelites, God threw them into confusion and wracked all kinds of havoc. Then He had Moses stretch out his hand again and the waters swept over the entire army...killing all. The Israelites are saved.

Let the party begin!

In Exodus 15:20 Miriam (Aaron's sister) got out her tambourine. In fact, it says, "...and all the women followed her, with timbrels (tambourines) and dancing." Then Miriam sang to the Lord. The preacher's point was that Miriam (and all the women) had just packed up a lifetime's worth of all their belongings, had been traveling for some time, and had also been in hot pursuit by some mad Egyptians...yet their tambourines were at the ready!

They didn't have to dig through the contents loaded on multiple camels or donkeys. They didn't need to check their packing list to see where "musical instruments" were located in the caravan.

They didn't even have to swipe their kids' toy tambourine. No...these women were ready to celebrate and praise God for his blessings.

The preacher asked us, "Where do you keep your tambourine?"

I glanced down into my small luggage size purse and mentally ticked off its contents: wallet, makeup, tissues, aspirin, gum, checkbook (yes I still carry one), car keys, gift cards to various stores, air pods, phone charger, band aids, pair of socks that my kid threw in and then didn't need, sunglasses, a post-it to not forget my grocery list (that was still on my counter at home...where I forgot it), extra pens, a hotel key I didn't turn back in, and some various wrappers from Halloween candy.

But no tambourine.

So often I forget to be prepared...ready...expecting...of God's blessings and goodness. So often I am not looking for ways to celebrate God and all his glory. So often I am the Israelites on the other shoreline just seeing the Egyptian army and complaining to Moses about no graves back in Egypt. Most of the time, I too have a flair for the dramatic when it comes to life in general.

I don't know if Miriam was nervous, scared, or complaining on the other shore. But what the Bible does tell me is when the sea settled and all was well for the Israelite nation, Miriam had her tambourine handy!

I want to go through life knowing where my tambourine is. I want to be looking for ways to celebrate all the good God has done in my life. The hard days are sure to come...we live in a fallen world...but I want to be ready to sing God's praises after the hard days have passed. And perhaps maybe even during the hard days.

After church that Sunday, I hopped on to my good friend Amazon, and bought me some tambourines. I wanted a physical reminder to be ready to rejoice. I now keep one handy in my purse (and I even cleaned out the Halloween wrappers while I was at it).

Some days it's hard to find the joy...but it's there, and a tambourine is a great way to celebrate all kinds of joy. As I was telling my daughter Dotty about my reasoning for the tambourine (15-year-olds think their parents are odd in general but going for gum and finding a tambourine in my purse warranted a few questions from her) she thought I was more of a cow bell kind of girl. Many sports events have warranted a cow bell for Dotty and her teammates as motivation from me and other mommas, so this did not surprise me.

While I agree with the *Saturday Night Live* skit that the world does in fact "need more cow bell," I think God doesn't have much preference. He knows our hearts and so whether we are shaking a cow bell or a tambourine or maybe even our booties (depending on your denomination...but it does say the ladies were dancing too...sooooo interpret that as you see fit) as long as we are doing so in a way to praise and give glory and honor to Him, I think God enjoys the celebration!

So shake what God, Amazon, or your momma gave ya!

For anyone still trying to count the plagues but missing one...or two (I always forget the flies or gnats because they both drive me nuts and I forget they were two separate plagues)...here they are in order...

1. Water in Nile turns to blood
2. Frogs
3. Gnats
4. Flies
5. Livestock dying
6. Boils on people and animals
7. Hail
8. Locust
9. Darkness
10. Death of firstborn (Hence the Passover)



## Life Right Now - The List - By Jennifer Stephens

While the Thanksgiving turkey, taters, and rolls are still dancing in my belly, I've already begun scurrying around gathering cards, pens, stamps, and...the list. It's always been my (weird) personal goal to have all my Christmas cards signed, addressed, and ready to drop at the post office so they'll arrive in each recipient's mailbox promptly on December 1<sup>st</sup>. The one year my cards *didn't* make it out on time (by my own made-up due date, that is) I had friends calling to make sure everything was okay since their card from me hadn't arrived yet!

Sending Christmas cards to family and friends has always been one of my favorite holiday traditions. It all started when I was a kid going with my mom to help her select the just right set of cards (always purchased at the Hallmark after-Christmas sale and stuffed in a closet until next year). Receiving cards was just as exciting! As each week fell into the next, the collection of Christmas cards arriving in our mailbox grew and grew – the tabletop sleigh overflowing with a heap of cards from near and far.

Not everybody sends Christmas cards (fewer and fewer lately because of the rising cost of stamps...), but those of us that do have developed our own style of Christmas card – the store-bought boxed variety, the lengthy holiday letter, the intricately designed handmade card, or the perfectly posed family photo card. Lately we've settled on a version of the latter at our house. Hours are spent in front of the screen, painstakingly creating the perfect blend of words, font choice, and an arrangement of candid snapshots showcasing that year's highlights of husband, dogs, and self. We even make a special trip to the post office for the coordinating Christmas stamps before sending each card to its final destination. Venturing outside to the mailbox in December means sifting through the pile of bills and junk mail to find those special handwritten envelopes, knowing season's greetings are waiting inside. Collecting the cards as they arrive from here and there, each one invited to hang on display for all to see.

But as the years go by, I'm starting to notice something. When I sit down with my address book and pen to personalize each card – the list of names...it's getting smaller. When I flip past each alphabetized page, I see names that will forever live in my heart. But the addresses on the page – addresses attached to houses that hold memories of homemade cinnamon rolls, visions of presents topped with curling ribbon bows mingled with the piles of people stuffed into all the nooks & crannies, and the sweet sounds of you-had-to-be-there belly laughs from Christmases past – they all belong to strangers now. And the names? The names belonging to the people on that list - they each have a new address in Heaven.

Loss brings pain. Grief. When we suffer terrible losses it's hard. And the holidays – the gatherings, the parties, even the Christmas cards – amplify the agony, making each moment seem impossible. Not only is it important to be cognitive of those in the midst of grief, but if we're the ones grieving, we need to allow ourselves time to mourn. In John 11 we read about Jesus coming to the home of Mary and Martha after Lazarus died. He could see their grief. While He knew what would happen next – He would raise Lazarus from the dead – scripture gives us one of the most freeing verses in the Bible: "Jesus wept." (John 11:38). In two words Jesus models for us the normal response to grief. Tears. God *gave* us tears. Tears meant to flow as a physical outpouring of our pain. Sometimes we want to bottle it up and hide our sorrow, but this verse is our reminder that it's okay to allow the tears to fall. It's okay to sob

when the act of sending the meager stack of sealed envelopes to their final destinations becomes a reflection of the hole in our heart.

We don't have to be alone in our suffering. God wraps His loving arms around us and comforts us if we let Him. In Psalm 147:3 we read, "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds." Healing from loss takes time. It's a process. Lean on Him. He can bind up the brokenness and heal the hurt.

Our mailboxes might be a little emptier than last year, but God can fill the emptiness that lingers inside our heart. And the list of names left on the pages of an address book will become a list of unforgettable memories connecting us to our lost loved ones. A list that will remain in our hearts forever...



MARRIAGE

## **In This Together – A Perfectly Imperfect Christmas – by Bekah Hollad**

It's the most wonderful time of the year! And I say that with as little sarcasm as I can muster.

Now, I don't want to come off like Mr. Scrooge or any of the many versions of the Grinch. I do love the holidays! I love having family around and the food (especially pie!). I love the smell of a Christmas tree and watching my kids still take turns putting the star on the top. I love Christmas movies and even some Christmas music (although working in retail in my teens made me despise any and all holiday music because I heard it on repeat 8 hours a day for 55 days straight). I even love finding just the right gift for someone I love, despite having to wander through crowded stores with actual people in them.

Growing up, our Christmases were gloriously simple. We didn't do a tree or even give gifts. We cooked for days and ate and made a birthday cake for Jesus and loved the people around us. We sat around the piano while my mom played "Away in a Manger" and sang like an angel. And while I didn't see it then, this shaped how I view life and the world. My parents gave us the gift of love, appreciation and a family built around Christ. Eventually, we did do the "normal" holiday things like trees and gifts, but not until I was probably 10 or 11.

So when my husband and I had our first Christmas together, I had already watched enough Hallmark movies to know exactly how our future holidays should go. A perfectly symmetrical, deliciously scented real tree, with matching ornaments, all set up with joy and mistletoe and magic. Which worked for about 5 minutes. Don't get me wrong, I loved our first Christmas together and all of the ones after. And we did manage the fancy tree for a year or two. But then kids and jobs and Cheerios that managed to hide under couches for longer than I'm willing to admit to, and a million other things, changed those quiet days into something equally beautiful and exhausting.

Somewhere in there, social media broke onto the scene and I'd start seeing friends and family posting things they were thankful for and sharing pictures that looked like the one I had in my mind early on. The kind that show a perfectly decorated tree and clean floors and smiling children. And before I knew it, discontentment crept in. We had small trees and homemade decorations and probably more Cheerios on the floor. We had gifts and family and food and all the things that matter. But I couldn't always see that. I only saw that I couldn't measure up to anyone else's pretty picture. We carried on the traditions of birthday cake for Jesus and even the little plastic nativity scene that sat on top of it every single year since I can remember and now has more missing than intact pieces. And as our kids grew and jobs got better and we could afford to do more, I thought that our picture would be closer to the ones I couldn't ever quite manage.

News flash! Bigger does not equal better. Expensive gifts don't mean more than the drawings my kids gave me when they were little or the homemade presents that were made with more love than I deserve. In fact, the gift my husband and daughter gave me somewhere around 2009 is still the one that I hold most dear. It was a simple handmade card, with messy handwriting and cut-outs of words and a recording of "I Love You" in more languages than I knew existed. Also, it was for Valentine's Day and not Christmas, but still, if you were to ask me what my favorite gift was, it wouldn't be jewelry or anything fancy (Babe, if you're reading, I still really really love jewelry, so maybe don't stop that one). It would be the that recording of I love you, and the picture my daughter drew from our wedding photo, and the ornament my son made that no one would guess is a treasure, and the fact that no one in my house can stand to wait to give any gifts because they get too excited, and so many other things that might not matter to

anyone else, but that hold a very special place in my heart, and even more importantly, my life story.

When I find myself wandering back in the direction of comparison, I remember those things. I remember making bags of food and gifts and driving around for hours with my children finding people to share them with. I think of the tiny handprints painted and placed on a simple piece of paper, and seeing my family all together, reading the story of the greatest gift of all time, and remembering just how precious each of those moments and memories are. Those are the things that I wouldn't trade for a thousand picture perfect mornings or social media "worthy" photos. Because they're real, and messy, and ours. And just like the life we've lived and the family we've built and every memory we've made, ours is my very favorite.

So here's to your less than perfect holiday season and all the magic that those messy moments bring. May you see the beauty in the chaos and peace in all you're creating. Because it's perfectly imperfect, just like us.

*"Blessed is the season which engages the whole world in a conspiracy of love."  
Hamilton Wright Mabie*

## **Date Night Fun – Look, Find and Go – by Marcy Lytle**

We recently visited Huntsville, Texas and had a delightful three day weekend there, doing all sorts of things! We stayed in an Airbnb near the Sam Houston Cemetery and it was the cutest and sat on a large lot on a road lined with old street lamps and huge trees. We loved it! When visiting a museum there, the cashier asked us why we were in Huntsville and we then told her about the Airbnb, to which she commented, “We have Airbnb’s in this town?” We chuckled as we left that this lady didn’t know her own town. So...for date night fun this December...get to know your surroundings!

- Is there a museum you haven’t visited? I bet there is. It might not be one you’d think of visiting, but do it anyway and make it a date. Maybe it’s a small museum across town, so look for a coffee shop nearby to discuss what you learned and saw after your visit. And make it a point to remember some of the new history you just read about together.
- Is there a restaurant you’ve never stepped inside? I bet there is. Maybe it’s a clean bowl café, or Cuban food, or another type venue of eating you haven’t tried because it’s “different.” Dress up in your holiday outfits and find this place and go. Order new things from the menu and taste. Leave a nice tip for the server and be blessed. Then sit in the parking lot and watch others come and go, and listen to music.
- Is there an event nearby you’re unaware of? Maybe a park is having a celebration, or there’s a market selling artisan wares, or a performance with a walk-through nativity. Don’t let the month pass by, the month of all months with all things festive! Look on FB for events near you, and GO. Invite another couple to join you for the stroll or the fun, and be glad that you did!
- Is there a neighborhood near you with amazing lights? Sometimes these are published in the local news, if you search. But at the very least, pack a thermos and some snacks and go for a drive to look at the lights that adorn the houses. See how many you can find that have a blow-up in their yard! There are usually a lot! Or look for specific items like candy canes. Make it a hunt of sorts, for you – yes you. Kids don’t have to have all the fun. We can!
- Is there a bookstore in your town you’ve not been in, in a while? Maybe pick two or three, and go browse. Look for travel books, cookbooks, novels and more...and share with each other. Sit and sip and read if they allow. Or just walk and browse, hand in hand. Find bookstores that are small, not huge and popular, and step inside. Find a hidden treasure to read together at night, something short and sweet. And do it.

That lady didn’t know that her town hosted out of town guests in Airbnb’s, how funny that was. But I’m betting we all don’t know many things about our own areas in which we live, and date night fun is just waiting to be had this holiday season if we just look, find and go.

## **After 40 Years – Traveling Differences – by Marcy Lytle**

Are you traveling this holiday season? I bet you're either going to see family, or you have a trip on the horizon, to rest after it's all over and you're exhausted! Or maybe you're just getting away for a weekend. If you're like us, we travel differently, and we've learned over the years (and are still learning) to go with the flow, accommodate the other one, and enjoy instead of fume...over what he likes and I don't.

He likes to sleep in, and I'm an early riser, no matter where we go. Sometimes, I'm up for two hours before he gets out of bed. I have learned to take books and projects and puzzles to work on while I'm awake and he's not. I find a quiet spot and enjoy the solace, while he enjoys a few more winks...

He loves eating breakfast out, and breakfast is my least favorite meal. In fact, I'm not a fan of eggs, and they're in almost every menu selection in the morning. Unless it's a pastry, and I'm not a fan of those either. So we do go out to breakfast, because he loves it. And I find something to eat and try not to complain. I love seeing him enjoy breakfast so much, and I love the smell of his coffee (although I dislike that beverage, too.)

He always stops and gets a Dr. Pepper and a bag of peanuts. Now, I don't mind that snack, but I prefer an Iced and no peanuts. And this works, because most of the time the places where we stop have both of what we want! But guess what? If they don't, he's always so nice to find me a spot that has what I like. He's so nice...

He reads every single word on every single display...in museums. I skim, unless I find it fascinating and then I read. So I'm always to the end of the tour before he is. I find a bench, sit and wait, and observe people. It creates patience in me that I don't really have much of, so it's a good exercise. And sometimes, I miss some interesting facts because I move too fast...

He likes to do the driving (and I'm fine with that) and I do the navigating (because I'm good at it). However, sometimes we argue. My navigation skills might lead us astray due to misinformation through the maps app, or just my own error. And sometimes he doesn't stop or turn when I say to, and sometimes...we get frustrated. We've been working on breathing, watching our words, and enjoying the ride...even if we're off course at times.

He knows I love to shop for souvenirs, clothes, and gifts. And he's learned to enjoy it as well. He doesn't mind and he observes how the store is built, the displays set up, etc. I think he enjoys watching me enjoy this pastime, and he's also learned to be content. I have a lot to learn from him...still. As contentment is not my strong suit.

We've traveled before and spent half the day arguing over trivial things and wasting precious time...back in the day. How silly it was. But thankfully, with age, comes some wisdom I hope...and still more to come...when we travel differently and yet the same.

And porch swings? Well, if the Airbnb has one, we both agree that's the place to be.

Happy holidays, wherever you journey...together.





## **For Better or Worse - Dictators and Doormats – by Kaelin Scott**

Everyone has heard the verse in the Bible that says, “As the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.” (Ephesians 5:24) For some reason, this seems to be a point of contention among many Christian women. Why should we have to submit to our husbands? It’s not fair that they get to do whatever they want and make all the decisions, while we just have to sit back and do whatever they say.

But these complaints stem from a lack of full context. Whenever this verse is quoted, people seem to forget about the verse that follows it. Ephesians 5:25 says, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” Verse 28 goes on to say that “husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies.”

Now that doesn’t sound so bad, does it? I don’t know why this second part gets lost while the first verse is highly recognized. They’re supposed to be an inseparable pair – a system that works together seamlessly.

God didn’t design marriage to be a dictatorship with the man in control, and He didn’t create women to be doormats. Yes, He tells us that the husband has authority, but He also instructs husbands to use their authority to love, cherish and lead their wives humbly and gently. It’s not about women being subjected to the power of men. It’s not about being bossed around or oppressed. It’s actually a loving design intended to honor women.

Personally, I find it liberating to depend on my husband – to be protected and provided for and cherished. I can’t imagine how burdensome it must be to have the responsibility of being the head of the family, but I’m so grateful that God gave men that duty. He equipped and designed them to carry out that responsibility, but they have to walk with Him in order to do it well.

In the same way, He equipped and designed me to carry out the responsibility of respecting and submitting to my husband. That means honoring the fact that God made him the leader of my home. If you still think that’s unfair, look at the verses again. Husbands are supposed to love their wives as they love themselves. If a husband is following these God-given instructions, then he won’t be bossing his wife around or looking down on her. He will cherish her and hold her in high regard. He will value her opinion and make her feel treasured and loved. He will be willing to give himself up for her sake, just like Jesus did for all of us.

Being a submissive wife was never supposed to be a heated issue or an offensive suggestion. It was supposed to be a role of honor within the home. Obviously, there are times when husbands fail their wives, and there are also times when wives fail their husbands. None of us are perfect, but God’s design definitely is. Submissive wives and loving husbands are exactly what He had in mind when He created the covenant of marriage. And that’s something we should all strive to obtain.



ENCOURAGEMENT

## Firmly Planted - Heart Check—December 2022

---

Diligence is not a word I hear too often. It's not a "fun" word, a popular word, a "now" word. When I think of diligence, I think of some poor soul behind a plow, suffering for survival. I think of women sewing quilts from flour sacks, or Depression era scrimping and saving; however, this is a distorted idea, probably rooted in my human aversion to effort and work. Diligence defined is: *constant in effort to accomplish something; attentive and persistent in doing anything.*

Let's apply this word to something enjoyable:

I love buying things for my prayer garden. Plants, pots, and garden décor are my favorite things to shop for, and I look for them diligently. My favorite thrift store has an outdoor section that's very popular. All kinds of treasures await those who diligently look for them, sometimes multiple times a day, as new treasures are put out randomly until closing. Not me! I limit myself to once a day (most days)—although it's tempting to camp out there, waiting. Diligently. Besides my favorite shop, there are a few others that provide plenty of opportunity for diligent treasure hunting. If I choose to be extra diligent, I can make the rounds in just a few hours.

An admirable characteristic can turn sour if not practiced correctly. Heart Check: am I being diligent in the right things? Is that a wise use of my time? It's an ongoing struggle for me, to balance looking for garden treasures with actual working in the garden, doing both with a "pray without ceasing" mindset.

Gardening is one of my passions. Planting new things, moving things around, strategically placing meaningful poetry and art in the prayer garden—these things bring me joy and fulfillment because they help me achieve a purpose: to create a sanctuary for the God-yearning soul. Would I be as impassioned if I was simply gardening, without a purpose? Probably not. Purpose fires my passion, and diligence. I'm so very grateful that my purpose melds with what I love doing. It's easy to be diligent to do something I love. Heart Check: *What do I love more? Shopping for treasures, doing the work, or fulfilling my God-given purpose?*

The last few days I've been meditating on **Hosea 6:3**:

*May you diligently seek to know the Lord and know that  
he will come as certain as the morning.  
May he come to you like rain,  
like the spring rains that water the earth.*

I keep it with me throughout the day and look at it often, trying to memorize it. I pray it. Whether I'm diligently thrifting, or diligently working in the garden, or (let's say it) diligently reveling in all things Christmas, from time to time I must do a Heart Check: *Am I, with all my heart, mind, and soul, diligently seeking to know the Lord?*

## **Moving Forward - Infinite Possibilities – by Pam Charro**

I was in my weekly coaching session with my manager last week, and she said something that really got me thinking. We were talking about where we might ultimately be heading in the company, and she said, "I don't believe my future position has even been created yet. The logical thing for me would be to aspire toward so-and-so's position as a top lead here. But our company is not just growing upward, but also outward, and I think positions are going to open up that we haven't even thought of yet."

I like the way she thinks! Not just because it gets me excited about the possibilities that may open up for me now that I finally have found permanent employment. But it also seems to be the way God wants us to view life overall. As scripture says:

*No eye has seen, no ear has heard,  
and no mind has imagined what  
God has prepared for those who love him.  
-- 1 Corinthians 2:9*

When I was a child, some especially positive memories seemed "magical" at the time. But as I became an adult, I felt the "magic" was fading; my amazement with life started to dim, and I began to lose my ability to be excited about the future. What new and awesome thing could possibly happen? I felt I had seen it all, and the good was over.

But as I have grown in my walk with God, I have come to realize that what I used to view as magical was just God's creative ability to bring good to me. He hasn't run out of ideas in that department at all. In fact, he has barely even started warming up! So now I know that I'm never too old to be excited about what is next, because as I ascend with God, the possibilities always become broader as well. Endless prospects for my future good exist no matter how long I am here.

And that makes life exciting! I honestly can't wait to see what God will do next because of all of the infinite possibilities. Onward and upward!

## Simple Truths – Expectations – by Marcy Lytle

I don't know about you, but I have expectations when it comes to Christmastime. I expect my kids to want to come be at our house for opening of gifts and spending the day together. I expect to go somewhere nice during the holidays, to get dressed up and be festive. I expect my husband to have me a few gifts under the tree, because he knows I love gifts. I've come to expect things, and I don't know if it's right or wrong, but there they are...expectations.

Expectation differs from hope, doesn't it? Or not? I think expectations are a bit stronger than hopes. For example, I hope every year for snow on Christmas Day, but it's never happened where I live. Therefore, my expectations are low. However, every single year our family has gathered, so my expectations are high.

I've found that I've had expectations in lots of other areas in my life, as well. In friendship, I have this expectation that friendships will last a lifetime, and I've realized that they do not. At least not like I expected. In following Christ, I've expected that if I give and follow the rules, then I can expect good things in life. But I've realized that my definition of good things isn't always what is really good. And I've had expectations of new things like houses and cars, thinking they will always satisfy...but they don't. They become old and used, and then I want another...so there are all of these unfulfilled expectations.

But let's go back to Christmastime. I expect that many of us have lost hope in some areas regarding the holiday season. Relationships are strained, broken or at best fractured, and what we expect to happen is likely not to...because life has faltered. I expect that funds are tight for some, and gifts won't really be that fantastic, but maybe cards will be all that we get...and we're going to experience some sort of disappointment for our kids...or even for ourselves. And I expect that somewhere that perfect meal and scene we create to look like a Christmas postcard will be tainted with arguments and spills and words not so fitly spoken, as family gather.

I think part of the reason we all have a "let down" after the holidays are over is that we do have all of these expectations. When the snow falls, the dinner is perfect, and the gifts are surprisingly wonderful, and family love is present – we're sad when it all ends. I mean, who wouldn't want that scene to continue forever? And if those expectations are all unfulfilled and we end up disappointed after the last gift is opened (or not), we just want the season to end and the new year to begin, so we can put those disappointments behind us and move on.

I bet Mary expected her son to be received as the King, but instead he died a horrible death on the cross, due to rejection. I'm thinking none of the followers of Christ expected to lose their lives because of that follow, but they did. And did Peter expect that he'd be so weak as to deny his Savior right after he pledged his allegiance?

Expectations, misplaced, can cause a huge drop in our mood during the holiday season. Is there a way to stave off that disappointment and sinking stomach feeling?

I don't know of a formula, but I do think there are three things that can help us this season as we start expecting and waiting for the perfection that Christmas offers in the way of peace and goodwill:

We can give thanks for the good, the bad and the ugly. After all, Mary's son did die, but he rose again!

We can remember that in losing ourselves in Christ we gain relationship that sustains, even in death.

We can acknowledge that in our weakness He is made strong, as he forgives and offers daily mercy.

I'm the world's worst at expecting something way too amazing only to set myself up for a fall. I want it all – the snow, the twinkly lights, the family gathered in love, and the peace and silent night as the candles flicker by the fire.

I'm getting better (little by little) at looking up instead of down, laying it down instead of carrying it around, and leaning into Him instead of holding up a fist. And it all helps, as we surrender to the Maker of the sun, the moon, and the stars and remember that he rules, he governs, and he knows us all by name...when we're elated or disappointed...and he's with us to bring joy as we acknowledge His name.

## **Unearthly Thing - God Loves You – by Angela Dolbear**

Some years I find it difficult to get into the holiday spirit. I almost envy the people who are chomping at the bit to put up their Christmas trees and then snuggle in with a cup of cocoa and a Hallmark holiday movie.

Last year, I was recovering from major surgery. I didn't have the physical strength (or desire) to put up my new white Christmas tree I purchased the year before at a post-Christmas sale. We had a mini-Christmas tree set-up on the bar separating the kitchen from the dining room. That was all.

So this year, to spark my spirit, I revisited Luke 2 in the Bible. Reading about the birth of Christ gets my brain going in a positive direction. And it begins to inspire me to celebrate the season.

When I get to Heaven someday, I hope God has a "rewind" where He will show us points in history. I would humbly ask to see (and hear) the events of Jesus' birth.

I was struggling to paraphrase this story here and do it justice, so I thought it best to simply quote it. Luke 2:8-20 (from the New Living Translation):

*That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them.*

*"Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize Him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."*

*Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, "Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."*

*When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."*

*They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. After seeing Him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.*

Imagine the glory of God surrounding you! And a multitude of angels, an angelic army, praising God! It must have been beautiful.

I can only imagine the majestic and glorious sound of the angelic voices. Amazing and frightening. I love how the shepherds were terrified, but then chose to go seek out the Divine Baby the angel told them about.

Such joy at the birth of the precious Child! Our Savior! Also, our Savior...

Fast forward 30+ years. Such pain and destruction. Crucifixion sounds so horrible. Such a sacrifice.

God gave His only begotten Son because He loved us. Jesus gave Himself up for us so we could be saved.

Such love. Unfathomable love.

After meditating on God's love and sacrifice, I don't have any trouble celebrating Christmas. I am in fact, excited to celebrate the true meaning of Christmas.

I will put out the ceramic nativity scene that my grandmother painted and fired from greenware. It's simple and beautiful.

Unfortunately, the baby Jesus has fallen off the manger and onto the hardwood floor (pulled down once by my sweet Golden Retriever puppy who was curious about the hay the manger scene was resting on). He broke into pieces and had to be glued back together. Several times.

His little body has been broken. Sadly, appropriate.

"But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed," says Isaiah 53:5.

By His torturous death, I am healed. For all eternity.

Such love the Father has for us, that He gave His only Son, for us. And while we were still unrepentant sinners. Who does that??

God does. Because He loves you. And me.

So, I hope you have a verry merry Christmas. I know I will.

*Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series, and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). Angela writes real, relevant, relatable, and reverent fiction. She loves reading, writing prose, as well as writing and recording music with her husband Tim in their studio in Nashville, TN--listen to their music on [Sound Cloud](#). Please drop by and sign-up for news and to read new stories and hear new original music at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>. Blessings to you!*





FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME – A Hard Prayer – by Marcy Lytle**

I think it's hard to be in this world but not of it. And what I mean is that we're inundated with insurance and investments and assurances knocking down our doors wanting us to sign this, consider that and look at these options so that while we're in this world we feel secure. "Secured investments," is what we're to seek!

I looked up that verse in the bible that tells us to be in the world but not of it, and it doesn't even mean what we mostly consider it to mean, or at least what I've thought it means. But before I go into that, let me move further into my frustration of living in the world but not of it, as I have thought of it.

Fear seems to be the backing behind so many decisions we make, and one could say rightly so, because the world is a fearful place. Death comes unexpectedly, loss happens, tragedy occurs, sickness falls, and everyone wants to be ready to stave off grief, hold on to what we have and make it grow, somehow protect ourselves against harm, and boost our system so that we're never sick. And all of that is exhausting!

In fact, trying to hold up this sign and that one, take this pill and that pill, run this lap and that one, invest in this or that, is such a juggling act that the very skill it requires to keep all of those balls in the air can cause a set of maladies all its own!

So being in the world but not of it seems impossible, in light of what we think it means, that we're supposed to live in this world full of all these terrible things but not be of it, but rather rise above and live on top of all the things that plague "others."

Somehow, we think those that *believe* should be able to find a formula of living or giving or doing that staves off all of the things that the "world" has to experience, and that we are supposed to learn to live spiritually and rise above all the things concerning this world because "greater is He that is in us than He that is in the world."

Can you see how that would create a pompous set of people?

Now...I just read a commentary on the verse about being in the world but not of it, and what Jesus meant in context is not what we carry with us in our heads. It might be more like we are not of this world but are sent INTO the world to do what? Well, it's certainly not to point fingers and tell others if they follow us and do what we do they won't have trouble. We are to be IN the world as a light in the darkness. And that light doesn't illuminate over our heads and say, "Look at us," but rather that light shines as we experience with the world...

the losses, the tragedies, the death experiences, and the sicknesses.

We are to be in the world, among them, suffering like they do, and yet not of the world, only because we have HOPE in Jesus, not in the things I mentioned at the top of the page.

We've personally been signing documents and papers and dealing with lawyers and brokers, regarding my dad's estate after his passing. Lucky for us, we're also at the age where Medicare is available so there we have more documents and more papers and more people telling us

what we need for critical care should this or that happen. Then the brokers say we need to secure our future and our retirement. And as you age, there is this test and that test “they” want to do, to ensure that you live the longest and healthiest and happiest life ever...because all of that you own in this world is placed where it needs to be.

It's quite maddening, and it's made me want to scream and fly off this merry-go-round globe called the earth and leave it all today. Or at least fly away to the snow and sit on a mountain and marvel. Some days, it's been overwhelming because it feels like being in the world has become this heavy blanket of darkness that's holding my feet secure HERE and it's making me forget that I'm not part OF this world, and I'm forgetting why I'm here in the first place.

Jesus was sent into the world not to be of it but to be in it, among the people, to love them and demonstrate the love of the Father. He did that by eating with them, seeing their needs and meeting them, and living among them while they fished, suffered and yes...even died. He brought life wherever he went. He lived in the world but not of it.

I don't have the answers to any of my swirling questions, because I'm sure Medicare and investments and assets and vitamins and pills and exercise and securities are all good things...in perspective. But when all of that weight prohibits me from stepping outside my door to observe the sun cast its light on the leaves across the street as it rises in its brilliance, or when the fear of what I might lose keeps me from giving what I might gain, then I've lost the meaning of the entire Word of the gospel.

God, help me to be in the world where you've placed me to be among friends and neighbors, loved ones and strangers, and to not be of the rat race that scampers for every piece of cheese in every corner to secure my place. But rather, let me learn to be of your world where peace reigns and hope is eternal and love wins.

## **FRESH THYME – Christmas Morning Chaos – by Marcy Lytle**

It's early, the kids got up way before you had hoped, and they're tearing into the gifts...it lasts about a minute, and then the whirlwind is over...and you're left with the aftermath much like a tornado has just run through your beautiful family room where you had everything decorated and cleaned. Now, paper is everywhere, kids want help putting together this and that, and oh yeah...everyone is hungry! Geez...what are parents to do?

### **Handling the paper mess:**

Provide large trash sacks and have them hanging on the corner of a chair, and let each person wad up and toss – make it a game. It helps with the floor mess!

Provide a plastic bin for the sacks to be folded and placed in a row, so that's done for you as well, when all the gifts are open.

If you used bows and ribbons, have a place for those, too.

Having a little row of bins and a big sack somewhere off to the side (much like we see recycle and trash bins) will help keep the papers off the floor, and parents less stressed.

### **Handling the toy assembly:**

While you're wrapping, before Christmas morning, make a list of toys that need batteries, toys that need to be assembled. Consider assembling a few and just placing them under the tree with a small throw over top, instead of wrapping!

Use a tin or a box for all the batteries, screwdrivers and scissors that will be needed for opening and assembling. This is the best idea ever!

Mark on the package a big "A" which indicates assembly required, and save those for last...(so the kids won't whine to put it together the rest of gift-opening time).

### **Handling the hunger:**

If you have older kids, let them take care of one of the meals - maybe a charcuterie board – and they can go assemble it for lunch while the younger ones play.

Plan way ahead of time for the food, and make what you can to freeze...if you like to do that!

Have a table set up with snacks for the hunger pains between meals. Maybe granola bars, cuties, raisins and more...with little paper cups for each one. That makes snacking fun.

Soups in a slow cooker are awesome, if you have a recipe that's just dump and cook. Look for them now, purchase the ingredients, and that can be your meal for dinner.

### **Handling the chaos that shows up anyway:**

No matter what you organize and do, there will a spilled drink, a kid that's unhappy, arguments or all sorts of things that might make your "perfect" day less than perfect. Have your partner or parent be the designated comforter when things go south. And learn to laugh on Christmas Day when we celebrate the joyous occasion of our Savior's birth. Laughter, after all, does a heap of good like a medicine...for the craziest of Christmases ever.

## **FRESH THYME - The End of the Year – by Marcy Lytle**

You're going to have all sorts of emotions after Christmas Day is past. Some will be so glad, because family dynamics made the holidays not enjoyable. Others will be so sad, because loved ones came and already left, and they won't come for another year or more... And all of the excitement and anticipation, once it's past, is a huge let down for many...as the end of the year approaches.

I've personally found that having plans for January helps SO MUCH and these plans don't have to be expensive or elaborate, but they're just there – on the calendar – waiting to be enjoyed after the lights come down.

- Plan a weekend away. It can be in an Airbnb or just a couple of day trips to state parks or a little town, or anywhere – just plan it!
- If you enjoy the after-Christmas sales, mark a day on the calendar and go. Plan now what your budget will be, grab an empty bin and use it for the new things for next year. What fun!
- The kids will be home a few more days, so plan family time at home if the weather is cold, and you're stuck inside. Make sure there are puzzles, board games, new video games and movies you've picked out ahead of time. Even hang this list and let the kids pick each day what they want to do!
- Rest. If you start putting away decorations right away, but it stresses you out and makes you tired, then leave it until whenever you get to it. It's okay! Enjoy those lights as long as you wish!
- Look at the New Year movies coming out at the theater, and pick one or two for the family to see, if the funds are there.
- You're most likely not going to want to bake or cook or anything at all for a few days! Head to Trader Joe's or your favorite store and pick up frozen meals – the best ones – and snacks and all sorts of easy meals and have them on hand for a few days until you're rested. It's normal to be tired!
- If Christmas was a big flop and you're mourning and crying, phone a friend, spend time in His presence, play uplifting music and read His word. You don't have to be all cheers, if cheer was nowhere to be found.
- New Year's Eve is on the calendar, and if you can plan a date – do it. Or plan a family date at home. Google family ideas for New Year's Eve and do the simplest thing – and delegate the plans. Let one person plan the food, another one the game, another the movie, etc. and write it out for all to look forward to, once December 31 appears.
- Shop for a new calendar for 2023. I love doing this. And head into Barnes and Noble and check out their bargain tables – so fun! Get coffee, observe people coming and going, or sit by the fire and everyone just read!
- Didn't get to mailing or emailing Christmas cards? It's okay if you skip it, but it's totally okay to wait until the new year, as well. I have a friend that does that, and I love receiving her card in the mail, in January!
- Nowhere to stash the kids' new stuff? Spend one day tossing and cleaning, asking for help (always ask for help) and go together to donate – a great thing for your kids to see!

- Make hot cider or hot cocoa and wrap up in blankets while you observe the night stars in the middle of winter, if there's a night where the wind is still and the skies are clear...

I love having lists and ideas made, as it relaxes my mind and sets things in order...at least that's the hope. Have a lovely December and remember...2023 is a fresh start for us all!

## **FRESH THYME – Interrupted – by Marcy Lytle**

Someone calls and needs you, now. Your plans are interrupted.

Your calendar is full with a trip for the weekend. A child gets sick and plans are interrupted.

The baby that you were told would be late arrives three weeks early. Life is interrupted.

The new car you purchased is a lemon and breaks down. Life is interrupted.

Picnic food and blankets were ready and then it rained. Fun is interrupted.

It was a nice climb up the mountain but you fell at the bottom. Fun is interrupted.

The garden was planted and rodents invaded. Provision interrupted.

That new home was a blessing until it was a burden. Provision interrupted.

You could add your own statement about interruptions from your own life in the way of plans, life, fun and provision, and more. Life is absolutely full of interruptions. And I didn't even include death. That's the biggest interruption of all, isn't it?

It's the post-Covid era now, at least we're not staying at home and closing down businesses, but that time in all our lives proved to be a huge interruption of business, travel, and even shopping and dining out. That interruption made many folks angry. We also experienced a storm like no other here where I live, where ice and snow shut down our city and many were without power for days. What an interruption! And just today there's a hurricane pummeling the coast of Florida that I'm sure interrupted weddings, family gatherings and events of all kinds.

I suppose one of the lessons we are to learn in life is how to respond to interruptions. And the better we become at responding, the less likely the interruptions are to wreak such havoc in our lives.

"Living in the moment" is really something quite impossible for me, but yet I hear that suggestion often, and it's even offered in the Word when we're told to give thanks for our daily bread, and to take no thought for tomorrow, but rather rest, to lay it all down, and let him carry our load.

And way back in that story about the manna, the provision from heaven, it was only dropped daily. Anyone that hoarded it saw it turn sour and it became inedible. All because the order was to enjoy it for the day, and trust for tomorrow.

That's the root of the discontent isn't it? We make these plans, we line out our lives, we decide where and when...and then life is interrupted and we become upset. But what do we do, after the initial disappointment?

I've had disappointments with effects that have lasted me a lifetime. I'd say I haven't "gotten over" them yet. And other disappointments I've been able to move past, move on, and even give thanks. And that latter response is always the best.



It's hard to deal with life interrupted. But maybe we're looking too far ahead for comfort, when peace is available today. We aren't promised tomorrow, but He is with us today. And that's supposed to be enough. But we never realize this or live it or breathe it. Instead, we stomp and yell and push back, when life's interruptions fall.

I haven't learned this lesson, but I'm still working on it. Gratitude was the season we just exited as we walked into the Christmas season, and it would do us all a world of good to carry that gratitude with us all year long. Grateful for every little blessing of every single day. Then when something on our agenda is interrupted, maybe we won't panic but rather rest in knowing that His grace is really all we need for today...and tomorrow comes, if it does. Then tomorrow we'll celebrate whenever that interruption is over...until another one arrives.

## FRESH THYME – The List

Isn't it fun to hear what all kids want for Christmas? When they're young, they want everything they see! Then as they approach the teenage years, their lists become more refined with more expensive items. And then as adults, the list includes household and yard stuff...as well as a nice wardrobe addition of something pretty they've seen someone else wearing. Most parents love to work from a list...I know I do. I want to get the kids the things they need and want, and then I'll throw in a surprise or two.

I remember when we lost our custom-built home decades ago, I prayed and gave God a list of what I wanted in a house...when we were forced to move. I really wanted a nicely landscaped yard, a fence, and a fireplace. Yes, our house has all three, but when we moved in, I remember being a little disappointed in the size – it is small! However, it's where we raised our kids in close quarters together, and we have great memories. And I have thanked God often, for giving me what I asked for.

I suppose prayer is a list of sorts, quite often. We have sick friends, financial needs, kids that are wandering away from us, and perhaps our jobs are less than ideal. So we go through this list as we pray, hoping God will look at it, check it off, and supply each thing...until something else pops up on our list!

Sometimes....when I pray with a list, I feel exhausted when I'm done. Have you ever experienced that? God said to ask, so it's totally a good thing to ask Him for what we need. He also said he hears, so we can rest assured that our calling out of the list is taken to heart when we plead.

I was just thinking how different our prayer life might be if we just imagine rolling up our long lists into a wad and placing them at his feet, and then spend the time in prayer just in acknowledgement of his greatness, power and love. We then move into thanksgiving for all of his blessings in our lives. And we spend some time just sitting still and listening as He speaks word of life into our weary souls.

Going through the list is good, but maybe it's the time we spend on the list that weighs us down. Jesus said to cast our cares on Him because he cares for us, and that act of casting implies letting go. It's hard. Maybe we think he won't do anything unless we beg, or if he hears how sincerely we need or want our request to be granted, He will move.

Remember Jesus' prayer in the garden? He was about take on all the sins of the world and he was heavy-hearted and he definitely submitted to his Father a request to let the cup he was about to drink pass from him. It was painful. But then he said "not my will but yours be done."

I don't understand how it could be God's will to not grant a mom the healing for her son, or withhold that job that pays so much, or answer us with silence when we so desperately need an answer. But I heard recently that *God gives us himself, first*. That's what satisfies every need on our list, and that is too much to comprehend, but it's the truth.

I definitely have a list this Christmas from my family, one I'm checking off, deciding what to buy, etc. And some things won't be purchased because I have a limited budget. My daughter had to look at her kids' lists because some things on there weren't age appropriate or a "good thing" to have. Mom knows best. And I've definitely given God a list of things I'd like him to do for us and others.

Christmas morning is only pleasant if the receivers of the gifts are genuinely thankful for whatever it is they open, realizing that every good gift is from above, and they don't compare or whine or wish for what they did not get. Kids aren't so good at this. They might show a crestfallen face when the big box under the tree wasn't the huge racetrack they wanted.

We are all learning, and it takes a lifetime, I'm convinced, to trust that the list we offer is heard, looked through and decided upon by the Master Giver. He knows the hidden places in our hearts that we can't even see, and He knows what we need...and he always supplies.

Be encouraged this Christmas if your list is long, but His hand seems short. His hand is not short, He never grows weary, and He's the giver of life...and that life sustains every one of us. It might be a good exercise to write your list, roll it up, and place it in a corner of a drawer somewhere, so that it's gone and out of sight. And your eyes are then open to the sunrise, the sunset, the moon and the stars that are there every day...speaking volumes about a faithful God who is charge of what concerns us...and He KNOWS the times and seasons for planting and reaping. We just have to rest on His big earth beneath our feet, lie down at night...and sleep in heavenly peace.