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TIPS

Bookstore - Poetry With a View – by Carole Gilbert

Poetry has always been my passion. Even as a little girl I loved writing poetry. My first poem that I remember, I wrote when I was about 4 years old and I continued writing throughout my life. So, after I started publishing books, I decided to put lots of my poetry together in a memorable way. In this book, *Poetry With a View*, I also included photos, most of which are as memorable to me as the poems.

When I write poetry, it mostly comes spontaneously. I don't just sit down to write but when a verse does come to my mind, I grab a pencil and paper and start writing. Poems can be sentimental or silly and fun. Most of mine are sentimental. And a lot of my poetry is about God and His creation around us, like my poem "Oddities." The picture for this poem is one of the biggest walking sticks I've ever seen at our house. I find these insects and so many other things fascinating, so a lot of these things become the subject of my poems.

Not everybody is a fan of poetry, but much of the time poetic verse comes from deep down inside the heart and soul of the author. It gives their innermost thoughts and feelings in a special poetic way, which is how a lot of my poems are written. An example would be my poem "A Mom's Discourse", which is about my first son getting married, and the picture is from his wedding day. I have the best daughter-in-law, and there's something very sentimental about your baby boy taking a wife.

Poetry With a View is divided into four sections, "God," "Family," "Life," and "Life 2020." 2020 was a good time for writing poetry or just writing in general for me, although this book didn't come out until 2023.

I wrote *Poetry With a View* mostly so my family and others would know some of my innermost thoughts and so they could understand more about how I feel about certain things. And because I just love to write poetry. I know I'm an odd duck and I've always had deeper thoughts than most. I guess that comes from being a romantic at heart.

If you like to read poetry, I hope you'll look at my book. You can see more about it at the bookstore link at the top of this page. And, at The Bookstore on my website, [The Bookstore – Unraveled Encouragement](#)

Cousin Moms – Overwhelmed, But... - by Charissa and Kamrin

Parenting causes exhaustion, moms and dads feel overwhelmed, and all of us run to something to help relieve the chaos...but what is it? What causes that overwhelming feeling and where should we run to, for hope and peace? We asked, and the cousin moms answered...

Charissa

It is amazing how much our culture is always on the go. There are so many commitments and so much to do, lots of pressure from social media, and it can all be very overwhelming. As a mom of three little girls, it adds a complexity to all the responsibilities of motherhood, being a wife and employee, and provider, etc.

Three things I do when I feel heavy and overwhelmed:

First, the thing that gives me peace, is being still with God. Without that, anxiety and pressure creeps back up. But if I take a few minutes to open my Bible and read, I feel lighter. This is where I always start, in prayer and submission to Him and His Word.

Secondly, I talk with my husband. It may not be until 10pm when catch our breath, but when on the sofa rubbing each other's feet, and unwinding, I often pour out myself. I let my husband know what's on my heart. Other weeks, there is no time for that, so we do try to schedule it. When this is missing, I feel the pressures again. Conversation helps.

Thirdly, exercise and being mobile and out there is a priority for me. The physical and spiritual, I try to take care of both. When I don't get a walk in, I don't feel good. Even just a brisk five minute walk, outside, and moving my body, makes my brain and attitude elevated.

I think Erica Kirk said it so amazingly in her memorial to all women, and that is, "We are the guardians, we are the encouragers, we are the preservers. Guard your heart. Everything you do flows from it." Sometimes, we do put a lot of pressure on ourselves, as women. But our strength is found in His design for us. Spending time with Him enables us to fulfill our roles better.

We had a lady's night of worship last night, and we heard that another role we often take on is that "we" are the ones to carry things through. But we aren't enough in ourselves. God provides enough for us. He is our strength and guides when we are overwhelmed.

Kamrin

A lot of prayer

A lot of seeking for wisdom

A lot of letting go

A lot of the Word

A group of friends

This season of life is very different. Every season of having kids is exhausting. Our three kids are ages 10-13 and we have what I call "praying" scenarios. Of course, we pray over our kids at

every age, but at the ages of our kids we are already “releasing” our kids in certain areas. We want them to be independent in their relationship with Christ and in life, when they exit our homes.

Our kids are starting to be involved in events, on sports teams, with friends, etc. and away from our present care. We do a lot of praying! Our exhaustion level and where I get overwhelmed the most is worrying that my kids will get hurt, or end up in a situation they didn't mean to be, or they will fail...and Mom won't be there! They may have to make hard decisions that aren't black and white, and that's overwhelming emotionally. We're not physically doing what we did when they were younger, but we are full of emotions as parents!

While we are jam-packed with activities, it's the emotional part of parenting that creates exhaustion. Each of our kids is different, and the things they experience are different. They all handle things differently, too. Our two oldest are only 17 months apart and handle the same things in very different ways, and that's overwhelming, as these things happen all at the same time.

That's not just in worry about kids, I get overwhelmed about my own capabilities as a mom – did I parent well, put too much pressure, or am I doing too much, am I trying to fix it all, etc. It's hard to let go and to be okay if my kids fail. I just hate to see their heartbreak. Of course, we want the kids to know we are here for them, but they need to hear God and read the Word personally. Calendars are full, but it's emotional watching my kids as they grow towards the teen years. We have deep and wonderful conversations, and we pray over their minds and ask God to speak to the kids, personally.

I find the most strength, when I am overwhelmed, in worship and prayer, to be intentional about it. Sometimes worries that haven't even happened yet come to mind. But it's amazing how God works and grows us as parents, and grows our kids. Sometimes, I wish I had half the confidence my kids have!

Of course, there are a few Instagram accounts that I appreciate their encouragement – Her True Worth, Proverbs 31 Woman, etc. But my strength, comfort and peace do not come from podcasts and books. We were recently challenged to see what the first thing we go to is – before we open the Word. It should be mostly the Word and not an app. Those snippets bring brief encouragement, but not peace. I've been sitting in Philippians again – the peace that passes all understanding – because raising my kids is hard, and they ask hard questions!

I have some wonderful friends and we each have very different lifestyles, and maybe we only visit once a quarter. However, we Marco Polo daily and encourage each other as we talk and pray over things together. I have been so grateful for friends that walk through mud and on top of the mountains with me.

In the Kitchen – Mexican Blend – by Marcy Lytle

We love Mexican food and could eat it daily, but we don't. However, when we do, we love all the flavors and seasonings and deliciousness that Mexican flavors bring. So that's our food fare this month, to warm your plate and your stomach...

Breakfast Tacos – We recently had a weekend away with friends, and enjoyed breakfast tacos on the patio one morning. She brought some ingredients and I did too, and the combo was delish!

- Refried beans
- Breakfast sausage
- Potatoes (I used a frozen skillet mix)
- Taco Deli queso (if your store has it in the produce section)
- Grated cheese
- Tortillas
- Matio's salsa (store bought)
- Eggs

Cook the sausage until done, and cook the eggs as you like. Also, cook your potatoes. Meanwhile open the beans and add a huge dollop of butter before heating in the microwave. Heat the tortillas in a skillet or on open flame. Heat the queso. It's a lot of prep, but worth it!

Using little dishes or platters, lay out everything for building the best tacos ever.

Street Tacos – These are easy and tasty and pretty darn quick. You can always add more, but sometimes less is best.

- Cilantro
- Limes
- White flour tortillas
- Avocado
- Pork Carnitas

Cook the pork according to directions. Slice the avocado and sprinkle with salt. Heat tortillas and chop fresh cilantro. Divide the filling among the tortillas. Add cilantro, avocado, and a squeeze of fresh lime.

Skillet Nachos – These are so, so good, and can be made according to your liking, for sure. I like to add black beans.

- 1 lb Ground beef
- 1 Can of diced tomatoes, undrained
- 1 cup Corn
- ½ c water
- ¾ c uncooked instant rice
- 1 envelope Taco seasoning
- ½ t salt
- 1 cup shredded Colby Jack cheese

- Tortilla chips
- Toppings like lettuce, cilantro, jalapenos, and avocado

Using a cast iron skillet, if you have it, brown the ground beef and drain. Stir in the diced tomatoes undrained, the rice and the corn, water, seasoning and salt. Bring to a boil, then simmer covered about 8-10 minutes til rice is tender. Remove from heat and add cheese and all the toppings. Serve tortilla chips on a plate or in a bowl. Top with mix, or eat on the side...

Sweet Potato Stuffed

I love a stuffed sweet potato, especially when it's baked and opened and filled...with the goodness of flavor.

- Black Beans
- Zucchini
- Onion
- Grated cheddar
- Cilantro
- Lime
- Sweet Potato

While you bake the sweet potatoes in the microwave, heat some olive oil in a skillet. Add in diced zucchini and yellow onion and cook til tender, then add in some drained and rinsed beans until warmed.

Open the sweet potato and add some butter and salt and pepper, then top with the bean mix. Add the grated cheddar and top with cilantro. Add salsa if you like!

Seven for You – Organized Spaces! – by the Panel

We asked our panel to share tips and photos of the cool things they use to organize their spaces, whether little or big, something simple or more complicated. Who doesn't love organization, and as the holidays approach, we need to shape up our spaces – and declutter! Here are their answers:

In my kitchen I have a piece of furniture that I call a sideboard. I call it that, but it actually started as a dresser someone threw out beside a trash dumpster in Groom, Texas. We were on a weekend trip when we found it. My husband thought I was nuts for wanting it, but I threw away the two drawers it still had and took off the back and top. I made it colorful with crown molding pieces for the shelves and a beautiful, finished piece of wood for the top. It holds a lot of my serving dishes among other things. I also have baskets of cloth napkins and one basket with my mosquito bracelets and popsicle holders for all the grands. It's one of my favorite pieces of furniture and is so functional. And I enjoyed making it. I'm a firm believer that everything can be repurposed. Well, almost everything. – Carole

I enjoy doing crafts and playing games or working puzzles with my grandchildren. As they get older I am trying to allow them to initiate fun activities. However, my craft/game closet tends to become a "catch-all" space. And, sometimes I buy duplicate craft supplies not realizing that I already have enough crayons, or playdoh, or craft paper. So, I have been on a mission to organize this closet so that the older kids can go in there and help themselves. I purchased a bundle of clear, shoebox-sized containers from Amazon. They are small enough for kids to handle and clear for some visual hint as to their contents. I have also added labels to identify what items go in each box. This closet is a work in progress but this first phase has been helpful.

Another helpful organizer I have used is a bank of plastic drawers on the top shelf in my closet. The drawers are slightly frosted and mostly contain items that are rarely used, but that I don't want to discard just yet. This container is lightweight and the height takes advantage of space in the top of the closet that is often unused. – Gina

We purchased this Baker's Rack m that has an electrical outlet and made ourselves a cute Coffee Bar. We live in a 750 square foot rental home with very little storage places and we had to get CREATIVE! - Pam

Living in an RV, you must become creative in your organizational skills. Some ideas and gadgets work, and some get tossed after a season. One item I purchased in 2021 has worked great for me. I found it on Amazon; stackable clear shoe storage boxes. They work perfectly in my slide-out drawer in the kitchen pantry. I can stack food items up to the top of the box and see what's inside. And best of all, I know the food will stay in place as we travel down the road to our next destination. - Gloria

I purchased some boxes at the Dollar Tree a few years ago, to organize our drawers in our dresser...and years later I'm still loving them. They have made a world of difference from a messy drawer where I can't find a thing...to an organized system with everything in place.

I spotted what I think is a vegetable bin for the kitchen, but I realized it would work in my closet to house my flats and summer sandals - oh my gosh - what a game changer. And it's cute, too!

This is so simple, but I found a really cute tote that I sit right by my desk to catch those extras that I don't have time to put away but look messy on my desk. Then, when the tote is full, I know it's organizing time. I love the tote! It's from Ten Thousand Villages. - Marcy

I am not an organizer, but the only thing I have is this:

I collect McCoy pottery and keep my McCoy identification books handy.

After my Libby passed away, I was gifted this Dachshund tote in memory of her.

My books look so much better in this cute tote.

I like cute/quirky things and if they have another purpose, that's a bonus.

The pink monster is most likely for kids for Halloween. I haven't bought it yet, but once I figure out how to use it for more than just candy, it will be mine! - Cathy

We have a lot of kitchen gadgets in our home; this is the way I keep semi-order in the drawer. I honestly wish I had another drawer just like it. My other drawer that is this size is full of spices. We cook at home a lot to save money and feed all of the hungry people around here. We also like many different cuisines so that makes for lots of gadgets and lots of spices! - Laura

I love that this cabinet is so functional and aesthetically pleasing. I really could fit into any style, depending on how you decorate it. I also love that it's so versatile and can be used in any room in the house. This cabinet gives me options for visual décor and storage, and there's even hidden storage in the drawers. It's a great display cabinet, but also beautiful in texture of design with its curved edges. I found it on Wayfair! - Kamrin

The Dressing – October Cozy – by Marcy Lytle

It's October. Can you believe it? It's the time to start sweater weather, and all things fall...not the false fall of last month. I began finding sweaters back in late summer, and different fall items, and now I can share them and the ideas with you!

Cozy and green – Have you ever shopped at Earthbound Trading Company? When we visit the mall, we always step inside and I walk back to the clearance section. That's where this sweater was, and I grabbed it! You can shop this store online, as well.

Another green sweater – Cider has been a fun site to shop for me, and this oversized cozy green sweater is great for fall and on into winter. It can be worn over denim with a white tee underneath, or as a layer of warmth when those cold fronts roll in.

Gray and green – Is green my theme? Maybe... I love this gray sweater with a lime green collar, and I'm wearing it with some fun trousers I found on Amazon. The sweater is from Cider. I love it!

Three looks - Do you have a dress you love but it's a little chilly worn alone? Try three ways to cover and stay warm! A denim jacket (found at a discount store), a ribbed coat sweater (Loft) or a cardigan (discount store) and pick your layer, depending on the weather!

Taupe – I LOVE taupe, paired with brown and gold. I don't recall where I got this pull over sweater, but it's a fun one to have this fall. And the necklace is Amazon. Taupe can be a base, or an accent, with all those rich hues of fall like burgundy, red, orange and chocolate brown!

Oh, I love blue – This blue sweater is actually a part of a two-piece loungewear set, but I've paired it with a maxi skirt I have in my closet. Then I grabbed a brown purse I found last year at J. Crew Factory. Did I say that I love blue? Oh, I do!

The summer shirt dress – Wear it open as a jacket. If it's black, even better. Grab a deep red purse and wear your denim. This purse was a purchase from Marshalls and it's a favorite for this season.

While you're shopping, look for rich colors, for layers, different ways to pair what you're buying with what you have, and grab a pop of color in a new bag. Shop at the thrift stores, the discount stores, or the clearance racks. Save bucks, and feel like a million. Happy fall!

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

Oh, how fun it is to learn and note and observe and share! Here’s what I’ve learned in the past month...

Do you know the term “fourth wall” when referring to acting? We are watching a good crime drama called *Annika*, and the main character talks to the screen...or the viewing audience...sometimes during the episodes. That’s breaking the fourth wall!

Did you know there is a “meteorological” fall and then there’s an “astronomical” fall? September through November is the meteorological fall – three set months – for statistical purposes. But the fall that starts around September 22ish is the astronomical fall – more in line with the Earth’s position! So interesting!

Sometimes I want cookies, but I don’t want a batch of two dozen. I want enough for just the two of us. You can google “small batch cookies” and find a recipe. I found this one that made nine cookies – so perfect!

I love the way In and Out gives you a paper placemat for your food. I recently ate just their fries for lunch!

I found the best makeup brushes and the silicone cleaner mitt to go with! Check them out at Skinbae!

Camp, age almost 3, always wants his “own” cabinet of games for kids. My son found this game (and there are others) that is perfect for his age. It was fun to play! (Read the directions before you open it or the kid will grow impatient...just saying...)

We saw a really good movie, *The Carpenter’s Prayer*. A great family film, or just for whoever wants a good story on a fall evening at home...

This was really good: an ice cream sandwich cubed in a bowl, dark chocolate chips on top, and dulce de leche on top...with pecans if you want! SO delish.

At first I didn’t love these organizer zipper boxes because they were flimsy. But all filled up, they’re so great – and hold a lot – for those out of season set of clothes you’ve put away til next spring!

We tried these Trader Joe’s graham crackers – and they taste homemade – I even like them better than the Honey Maid standard ones! Spread a little strawberry cream cheese, add sliced strawberries on top, and you’ve got a snack to die for.

I had a plaid flannel scarf in my stash of winter scarves, and it was long and had the colors that matched my bedding and pillows. So... it’s on the bed now as a throw at the foot...and I like it!

If you haven’t seen *The Blind*, the story of the Duck Dynasty guy Phil Roberson, you need to. It’s a good film, as well!

There’s a game called Cover Your Assets – we played it with friends last weekend – and it’s fun. Check it out!

Trader Joe’s has the cutest small coolers, just perfect for taking water or snacks on a fall day trip for two...



HOME

Homesteading – Quizzing Myself - by Leyanne Enterline

I decided to submit a little questionnaire to myself about building a home...

-Would you build a home again?

Yes, now that I know more of how things work, I think I would build again, over buying, if I had my choice.

-Was it easy to build?

No. This was our first time ever to build a custom home. We made a ton of mistakes and wished we would have known more before we started.

-Was it hard to find a builder?

Yes! It actually took years. Mainly because we had to wait longer due to fact that the costs to build had sky rocketed astronomically. We interviewed a few builders and finally, when we found one that could build what we wanted in our price range, we went and looked at some of the homes he had built and talked to the homeowners. All had wonderful reviews!

-What would you change?

Hmmm I think I would make the master bedroom smaller so I could make the living area a bit larger. I would also like to have one more small bedroom or small office area.

-What was the hardest part?

Finding a builder, a bank and picking out tile and paint colors! Who knew there were so many options? I had my Pinterest board going for sure, but in real life view those colors do not look the same on a wall! And also, all family members had many opinions!

-How would you rate the building process on a scale of 1-10?

The building process went pretty smoothly, I'd say a 7. When it was time to close out on the loan, that process was a -10. Anything and everything went wrong and somehow by the grace of God we were able to close!

I would build again, though. And now I have learned so much through the process and would love to help others if I can, if they have any questions!

"Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share,"
I Timothy 6:18 NKJV

I believe this is not just referring to material things but sharing in knowledge and wisdom of what we have watched, walked through, and learned.

I Don't Do Teenagers – In a Hurry – by Marcy Lytle

I hear so often from young moms and older moms alike, “Time flies by so fast.” Young moms on social media show their babies going off to kindergarten and comment, “I am unwell,” indicating they cannot believe their infant is now in school. I remember when I was teaching a student came to me and said, “Mrs. Lytle, is the earth spinning faster?” And I quite think it might be!

I was thinking about how all of life is in a hurry, and how fast the weeks fly past, and how quickly teens grow up and leave the house. However, I know that while parents are in the throes of parenting those said teens, moms and dads feel like those years drone on and drain the bank account! But with this hurried world we live in, where parents send children to daycare before they can walk, kids are in competitive sports before they understand the game, and teens are behind the wheel way before they're ready, we all need a reminder of the dangers of being in a hurry.

Practically speaking, here are a few pitfalls of hurrying, just in everyday life:

- Hurrying causes trips and falls, because we're not looking where we're going.
- Hurrying makes us forget things we really need, and show up without the important.
- Hurrying results in missing the beauty, wonder and pause that comes from resting.
- Hurrying while eating can cause an upset stomach and long-term issues.
- Hurrying when driving can cause injury and death if we're not quickly slowed down.

We all know those things in that list but yet we still hurry. Parents have to hurry and get dinner on the table so kids can get out the door to practices. Moms and dads are hurrying home to make events, and hurrying with their work so they can be present when they do get home.

So...how do we slow down with our teens, as we raise them and care for them in this fast-paced world that we are all caged inside? Here are some reminders:

- Our teens will not be behind if we wait on driving and dating. There's no hurry to do either.
- Our teens don't gain anything from watching us spin on the hamster wheel. Nothing.
- Our teens scarfing down food will never enjoy the beauty of the dinner table at leisure.
- Our teens on the run here and there will then drive as if they're in a race, and they're not.
- Our teens will miss the joy in life of sunsets and fall leaves if they're too exhausted to notice.

That being said, it's not easy getting off the hamster wheel, and keeping that wheel out of sight of our kids. We can start by not comparing our teens with others, letting go of the strife of making our teens successful human beings by the time they're of a certain age, and learning to slow down and breathe against His chest as we listen for His voice of how to find those still waters He leads us to lay beside...

Life got you in a hurry all the time, with the kids in tow, and schedules filled and running over? Ask, and you shall receive, little steps you can learn to take instead of hurried steps that cause injuries from falls. And all it might require is stopping to consider the beauty of the rhythm of the 24-hour days we've given to observe and enjoy, with our kids, while we still have them at home.

In Each Room – Pumpkins a Plenty – by Marcy Lytle

I started placing pumpkins around my house late August, because I wanted it to be decorated for fall by September 1. Why? I just love fall most of all, and before we can blink – November will be here and it will be time for Christmas. Maybe you already have pumpkins out, or maybe you're just starting to place them, or perhaps you're not even interested! However, it sure is fun finding places to put those pumpkins a plenty...for now, for Halloween, and on through Thanksgiving.

On the mantel above the fireplace, I have several pumpkins, but my favorite is a large piece of art I found for \$20 at Pop Shelf! I emulated that image with two little stacked pumpkins on one end of the mantel, and a plaid fabric one on the other. This is my favorite arrangement to gaze at, while we're watching a show on the television or reading a book, or just sitting on the sofa.

I have another plaid pumpkin that I love, just sitting alone on a shelf in the corner in the kitchen. Plaid pumpkins were everywhere when I was looking, and these plaid ones came from the Dollar Tree! If you get green or gold, you can keep them out on through the holiday season!

We have a little sofa table up against a wall in the back of the living area that I love to decorate for the seasons. A little "pumpkin patch" is nestled against the base of some candles, and I love it. Again...from Dollar Tree.

If you're like me and you love the pumpkin scent, Kirklands has great candles that go on sale often. And even though lots of the store fronts have closed, Kirklands is still on line. But if you can't get candles there, check out your discount stores like Marshalls and TJ Maxx and spend a while on the candle aisle, until you find a few candles you love!

I found the cutest two-tiered stand at the Dollar tree with a pumpkin at the top, and it makes for a great display in the corner by the sink, in the bathroom. A rolled up hand towel, a candle, some small pumpkins, whatever...and it makes for a pretty setting.

Pumpkins come in different textures and sizes. Find them in wood, fabric, painted or straw, ceramic, and lighted even! Practice arranging them to make a trio with other pieces, and bring life to all of your spaces this season.

And while you're at it, gather some real pumpkins and place them around your flower beds or in a wheelbarrow or set them on your porch by your door. So fun!

Practical Parenting – When You Don’t Know – by Marcy Lytle

Sometimes, we think we know exactly what to pray for our kids – for good friends, excellent teachers, protection, and a relationship with God that’s real – all good and perfect things to pray. However, it isn’t long before we don’t really know what to pray because we don’t know what’s best! And then we spend our wheels begging, pleading, crying and worrying and fretting over the sad but true fact – we just don’t know what to pray!

When she’s deciding which class to take, what sport to choose, and she’s too busy already but you want the best – you can pray and ask God for wisdom. If you hear an answer clearly that brings peace, walk in that. If no answer is given, choose what you think is best and rest. Paths can always be changed...

When he’s worried that he will have no friends and he’s anxious about the way he’s performing on the field and you’re wondering if he should have ever joined the team – you can pray and ask God to speak. To him. Our children can hear from God, too. And while we speak the truth of who they are, love them the way Jesus loves us, He can clearly answer our prayers directly to them. It’s amazing to see.

When finances are low, you’ve prayed for a raise, your car is a mess, and you’ve begged and you’ve pleaded but no funds are falling – you can pray for provision. Provision doesn’t always look like what we think it does in the way of raises and funds. But he does provide. So wait for the provision in peace, and look for His hand in the little things as you wait.

When your kids are stumbling, making bad choices and pushing you away, and it hurts to your core because you wanted so much more – you can pray for encounters. The real change that happens with our kids is when they encounter His love on their own. And God is always pursuing them with goodness and mercy, whether we can see it or not. Pray and ask, then place them in His hands.

When the whole family seems tired, stressed, stretched and is arguing, and you’re ready to run but you know that’s not the answer – you can pray for order. God is the best at creating order out of chaos, just read the Creation story again. One thing at a time he may put his finger on, and we can listen and see and obey what He says as we find that rest is available when He’s at the wheel.

Wisdom, His voice, provision, encounters, and order. Those are five simple things that are yours, as ones that believe in His mercy, grace and love. These things he freely gives, without our begging and demanding. We can ask, and receive. We can come to him weary and worn, and He will give us rest. And we don’t have to say the right words, pray the correct amount of time, or be perfect before we come.

It’s not easy to just ask simply and rest. That’s why whispers fly in the dark, thoughts swirl in the rain, and words tumble in the storm. But practicing the art of simple prayers with sighs of relief as we get up and live, turns into a life of peace that endures.

Rooted in Love - Jelly Builds Character – by Kaelin Scott

Something my son and I enjoy doing together is making Texas persimmon jelly. If you don't know what Texas persimmons are, don't worry! I had never heard of them until a few years ago either. They're dark brownish-blackish berries that grow in the summer on bushes all around the ranch where we live. They're pretty hideous looking, to be honest, and they are filled with lots of seeds, so eating them isn't that pleasant. But picking them is a lot of fun (especially for my 7-year-old country boy), and they actually make really yummy jelly.

We like to go out with a big bowl and pick as many berries as we can, usually gathering a couple liters in less than an hour. Then comes the work of making juice, which is super messy, and we have to be careful because the dark brown liquid stains whatever it splashes on. In fact, this juice has been used historically as dye. Smushing up the berries and straining them into juice typically takes us about an hour. Then we usually wait a day and tackle the even bigger job of turning the juice into jelly. A lot goes into it, from boiling to canning, and it takes us half a day to finish the job. Most of the time, we end up with a bunch of jars full of delicious (albeit ugly) wild Texas persimmon jelly.

Now, recently, I was talking with the kids about how the Bible tells us (in Romans 5:3-5) that perseverance produces character. How facing trials helps us to grow and rely on God's strength. How we learn to trust Him through the way we handle obstacles. And in a brilliant display of God's providential timing, I was gifted with a real life opportunity to live this out that very same day.

We had just made a batch of our persimmon jelly, coming up with 10 jars full of the yummy stuff. Between picking the berries, making the juice, and then making the jelly, it had taken us the better part of two days. Then, after waiting a day for the jelly to set, I was ready to label the jars and put them up for later. But as I was looking at them, I noticed the jelly looked a little too sloshy in the jars. Not good. Then I realized one of the jars didn't seal properly, so I went ahead and opened it to see how the jelly turned out. Well, it was just as I had feared. It wasn't even jelly. It was just a thick liquid that poured right out of the jar.

I was annoyed. Disappointed. Frustrated. What a waste of our time, energy, and resources! What a pain in the rear. Not to mention, my son was disappointed too. We'd done everything the same as usual, except I'd bought a different type of pectin than usual, which apparently wasn't compatible with our recipe.

I have to admit, this put me in somewhat of a sour mood. It was tempting to throw my hands up and say, "Whatever! I quit!" Because who wants to do all that work for nothing? But our conversation about perseverance echoed through my mind, and I knew we had to try again. We couldn't let one bad batch take the fun out of something we enjoy.

So I added "canning jar lids" and "pectin" to my grocery list for next time we went to town. And then we got our bowl and headed outside to pick persimmons. And guess what? It was hot and steamy outside, and I was still upset about our ruined jelly, but it was quality time with my son as we walked and talked and picked. As we were tromping around filling our bowl, I smiled at him and said, "Well bubba, on the bright side, we get to spend two days together making jelly again." And he looked up at me with a big grin, because spending time together is all that really matters to him. The jelly is just a bonus.

Sometimes perseverance means going through major life changes or pushing through difficult circumstances. Other times it simply means making another batch of jelly even though you have a thousand other things to do. Whatever the case, it produces character, and character produces hope. And hope is a beautiful thing.



YOU

A Hopeful Heart - Lessons from the Hummingbird – by Christina Oberon

A close friend recently sent me an unexpected message:

"Something came to mind while I was watching a hummingbird. You remind me of that bird with your energy, and the flowers are women. Just as the hummingbird moves from flower to flower, you go from lady to lady, pollinating wisdom and kindness."

That sweet compliment made me stop and think about why hummingbirds have always captivated me.

If there's one creature that never fails to stir my heart, it's the hummingbird. Years ago, when someone asked why I loved them, I explained, "They move from flower to flower, sipping the sweetest nectar and always pressing forward. That's how I try to live my life." These tiny jewels of the sky carry a beauty and vitality that mesmerize. Beyond their dazzling feathers and lightning-fast wings, they have much to teach us about hope, resilience, and living fully.

From my kitchen window, I often watch them at the feeder. Their wings beat up to 80 times per second, blurring the air around them. They hover gracefully, darting with their own rhythm. Watching them, I often think about how life doesn't always have to be rushed, but it does reward persistence, even when challenges feel overwhelming.

And oh, their colors! Hummingbirds don't actually have pigments that make them glow. Instead, their feathers reflect light, scattering it like prisms. Isn't that cool? In the right sunlight, they transform into flying gemstones.

They're also incredible travelers. Some species migrate up to 3,000 miles, crossing mountains and oceans, tiny hearts pounding tirelessly toward places of sustenance and new life. What a hopeful image that even the smallest among us can undertake monumental journeys, fueled by instinct, faith, and perseverance.

But my favorite lesson from hummingbirds is that they remind us to savor sweetness. These little creatures drink up to twice their body weight in nectar each day, fueling their boundless energy. They teach me to pause, to sip deeply from the beauty God has placed all around us, and to let it sustain me.

So next time a hummingbird flashes across your path, pause and watch. See its fearless flight, its radiant colors, its tiny, relentless heart. May it remind you that hope can come in small forms, beauty can shine in brief moments, and even the smallest life can carry mighty lessons about how to live with joy.

Tiny though they are, hummingbirds embody resilience, wonder, and delight. If they can carry so much in their fragile frames, surely we can carry a little hope in our hearts too.

Healthy Habits – The Fun List – by Marcy Lytle

Sometimes, I hear from others that they don't ask friends to do anything because they themselves don't know what there is to do that's fun! There are so many that also sit in front of the television night after night, especially as it gets cold, and they don't move...because what else is more fun than an evening on the sofa? And kids too, often complain throughout their lives at home that they're bored, and parents scratch their heads trying...but failing...at fun outings for the family.

None of that is awful, but sometimes we get stuck in a rut of not moving, not smiling, not enjoying, not being creative, not trying new things...and it affects our spirit and our health.

Here's your fall list of fun, should you need it for a reference. I'll live a spot up top for you to click and print out to keep on your desk, or attached to your fridge!

Asking others:

Meet up for coffee and snacks, and play a game (doesn't always have to be a meal!)

Invite them over for fire pit chats and music (you don't have to cook dinner!)

If you love the symphony, maybe they do, too. Ask!

Have a breakfast meetup and then walk a trail (easy, fun, and healthy movement)

Set out a 300 piece puzzle, invite a couple people, and put it together in one sitting.

Other than television:

Grab a good study book and listen to Youtube music after. Do this together or alone!

Those paper magazines no one buys...go to B&N one evening and thumb through...with a pastry, too.

Michaels has great craft kits – how long has it been since you painted and glued? (since preschool?)

Bake some bread, or cookies, or pies – prepare them for sharing – then leave on a porch!

Play charades with whoever is home. Just google charade ideas and go!

When the kids are bored:

Load up the car and go on a fast food dinner outing – picking three stops. Set a budget. Take waters.

Set up chairs outside and stargaze, tell stories, and drink apple cider.

Have an ice cream social with all the toppings, then play a game of Simon Says.

Set up floor pillows, have a read and share. Everyone reads a book for 15 minutes, shares. Repeat.

Find a Youtube dance video, clear the floor, and dance as a family. Enjoy treats after.

Did you know you can search “what to do when I’m bored,” “what to do in the winter inside,” “creative date ideas,” or whatever you need...and you’ll have lists of ideas to choose from!

Get moving, don’t allow the B-word to be spoken, and ask those friends out for fun. If they don’t like it, that’s their loss. You’ll enjoy it!

Life Right Now - Through The Fog By Jennifer Stephens

It's hazy. And murky. There's a heavy mist in the air and I can barely see the wind sculptures that typically greet me when I pass by. The lake that usually splashes against the rocks is seemingly nonexistent. A mysterious silence blankets the blurry sky.

There's something remarkable about a foggy day. It's eerily beautiful and a tad scary at the same time. What we think is supposed to be, suddenly becomes unclear. Visibility is low. It's difficult to see what lies ahead. Driving through the fog on this familiar road made me think about the times in life when we find ourselves navigating uncertain and confusing situations. Proceeding with caution is the only safe route when things are fuzzy and don't make sense.

Sometimes God doesn't make sense. Here on Earth, we don't always understand why some people go hungry while others feast. Things like war, disease, illness, abuse, and natural disasters leave us wondering why. We may wonder why He answered our prayer with "No" when He could've easily said "Yes." Why? Why do bad things happen?

1 Corinthians 13 is part of the "Love Chapter" we commonly hear at weddings. We're all familiar with the "Love is patient, love is kind..." verses. But if we keep reading there's another verse that reminds us it's possible to steer through the fog:

"Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely."

1 Corinthians 13:12

This verse reminds us that while we might be limited in what we can see now, with God we will one day see clearly. We aren't promised a life free of heartache and disappointment, but we are promised a path through the fog. God will lead the way. Those terrible things that happen in life will one day make sense. Right now, our understanding is incomplete, but one day we will have complete understanding. Isn't that cool? We don't have to stay stuck in the fog, puzzled by life's brutal realities.

Sometimes it takes a foggy day to remind us that while we may not see clearly now, we have comfort in knowing one day it will all make sense. Until then, we lean on our God and we pray.

Because when the fog lifts, we have clear blue skies. A clear sky allows light to pass through. We're standing in the same spot, but with the fog out of the way, we can finally see what lies ahead. It's no longer hazy and murky. Once again, we see the wind sculptures greeting us and the lake's ripples splashing against the rocks. An unmistakable clarity covers the crystal sky. And God's light shines through the fog.



MARRIAGE

In Unison - An Irish-South African & a Native Texan – by Terri Barnes

I remember a specific, quiet night.
A moment of soft reflection.
I realized something, love was near.

Chris and I met in a fellowship group
I was 25 and he was 21.
I'm an Irish-South African and he's a native Texan.

His energy and guitar tunes caught my attention.
I sparked his curiosity with my mysterious nature.
Who is she? He had to know.

When God whispers, it's powerful.
Sometimes there is a shout, just as powerful.
Chris heard a shout, ask her out.
Then, he was determined.

Excellent timing occurred, as when wind meets fire.
The two of us walked out of fellowship group.
Nobody around, the path was made, he asked me out.

Our first date was a Starbucks meet-up, friendly and relaxed.
Chris had never stepped foot in a Starbucks.
I found out he did not drink coffee – wasn't a deal breaker.
Now, we enjoy sipping coffee or any beverage together.

We dated for some months.
Chris knew, make it official.
The proposal was special.
I was serenaded with his guitar tunes.
He crafted a photo scrapbook of the two of us.
I was impressed by his intentionality and effort.
I said, "Yes!"

We were married on May 16, 2009.
The ceremony was planned to take place in my mother's garden.
However, rain came, so it was held inside.
We said vows under a beautiful arch, including an elegant unity sand ceremony.
The rain ceased for gorgeous photos & joyful dancing.
It's a wonder still today, how an Irish-South African & a native Texan found each other.

After 40 Years – Pot of Gold – by Marcy Lytle

I've talked before about wishing my husband were more "spiritual" in our early years of marriage and how I judged him if he didn't show his spiritual self like I thought he ought to. Geez, I wasted so much time being irritated. And it's taken us years to create a rhythm, which I've also shared, of enjoying time at night to study and pray together. But here's the thing: it's become so refreshing now that I'm learning to *enjoy* God, rather than make God-time laborious.

We have a book that we study from together, and none of the lessons take more than 20-30 minutes. Is it a deep-dive? Probably not, but it's perfect for evenings after work when we've both had long days.

We have learned to take turns reading the book aloud, or looking up verses, depending on who feels the most awake.

I've learned to quit judging prayer time on length or words. Sometimes, his five sentence prayer is packed with more faith and peace than my long one that includes all the burdens that have buried me in the day.

There are nights when it just doesn't work, and we don't want to do it, so we go to bed. That too, is spiritual and wise, on nights when tiredness of the body would just wipe out any brain diving into a book.

We don't always have the same response to what we read, and that's okay. Remember how we all had different learning styles in school? We do in reading the Bible, as well.

Ending the study time with a song is the most fun. We just scroll "new Christian music" and listen to what pops up or move on to another. We have found so many new artists we've come to love!

A few times we've argued, because we should have put the book down and gone to bed, instead of taxing our weary heads.

Some nights have been so special as we grabbed each other's hands and cried together and wept over one lone prayer request that we needed to ask for and believe.

That guest room where we sit has now become a sanctuary for three (him, me and Him) and more often than not we can't wait to flip on the light, settle into our chairs and read and share.

It's really been one of the highlights of being this age and finally getting it, that time with Him, together. It can be so relaxing, romantic, fulfilling and the best part of the day. And while young parents may not be able to do this, and other families may be gone all evening and chores have to be done when the kids go to bed...it's something to think about. I wish we'd grabbed this routine years ago, but here we are now...46 years married...and we've found gold.

Thankful.

Date Night Fun – Weather Weary? – Marcy Lytle

We recently packed a picnic lunch and then when it was time to enjoy, the rain was falling. This made me think of all the times the weather doesn't cooperate when we've already planned a fun date night together, and how it "could" spoil our fun. However, that doesn't have to be so!

When it rains on your picnic – Find a pretty spot where you can enjoy the drops on the windshield, or under a tree if it's raining hard, and turn on the music in the car. Get out the plates and the snacks and enjoy the picnic anyway...rain or shine.

When you have a fall festival planned – if it's barely raining, still go! We stopped at one the same day as the rainy picnic, and were still able to enjoy some of the displays with umbrella in hand. It was nice!

When it's cold and you don't see any blockbuster movies available on Fandango to see, visit one of your artsy theaters and see something unusual, unique or fun. Enjoy a different genre of movie!

When it's warmer than you'd like in the supposed-to-be fall season, head on over to your nearest Auntie Anne's, order some lemonade and a pretzel, eat outside and enjoy the unwelcome warmth with a cool snack.

When it's storming outside and you cannot leave the house, stay at home and watch *The Carpenter's Prayer* – a great film. Make a few snacks together, and cozy up by candlelight.

When it's just right outside, make reservations for Mexican food with friends, then find a fire pit to sit around and enjoy...at home or elsewhere. Some resorts have them, as well as some city parks!

When the mornings are nippy but not too cold, take breakfast outside on the patio. Light candles, sip hot drinks, and observe the morning together before you plan your day.

When the weather is just right, pack up your lawn chairs and drive to a pretty park with lots of trees and a trail. Take magazines or puzzle books, and a snack. Make it an afternoon to remember.

When the rain has just ended, hop in the car and go for a drive in the country before sunset. You might see a rainbow. Stop somewhere for coffee or grab dessert. Give thanks together for the rain.

When the weather is whatever...find your local and favorite ice cream stop. For us, it's DQ and we now have to drive to find one! Make it ice cream for dinner, then stop at your favorite box store and browse the aisles, or Trader Joe's for all the fall things to taste, and load up.

There's a list of 10 things for you, when the weather is fickle, like it is this time of year. Keep date nights going no matter the downpour or the sunshine, or the cold breezes or the too-warm afternoons...together.



ENCOURAGEMENT

A Day in the Life – Created for More - by Bekah Holland

In case you're new here, I am not what you would call an outdoor kind of girl. I don't love bugs. Snakes have the very real likelihood of causing me to have a stroke. I don't like the cold, which is fine since I live in Texas. However, I also hate to sweat, which is only a problem like 10 out of 12 months here. Weirdly enough, I actually love nature, or I do when I can convince myself I'm not being stalked by a danger noodle. And I need sunshine to function, so I'm basically a house plant. I'm better labeled *indoorsy* with a chance of drinking my coffee on the patio or taking a walk.

So, as a somewhat self-aware human, how, in the name of all things good and holy, did I end up (*voluntarily*) at a weeklong camp with a bunch of teenagers in the middle of nowhere, without cell service and acting as adult supervision? I've been asking myself this question, with the only answer being that I'm a relapsed people pleaser who also forgets that she is not the cool, crunchy granola, drink enough water kind of human. So when my son's youth leader sent out a "please help, we need volunteers" message, I experienced temporary memory loss, causing my proverbial hand to raise.

I kid you not that I had people desperately trying to talk sense into me before it was too late because I was either going to die or, more likely, cry until my husband had to make an 8-hour round trip to come save me (both being fair concerns). Not to mention that either of those possibilities would leave the kids without enough chaperones. Some additional things you should know about me before I move on: When I say I'm a people pleaser, that also means when I've done something dumb, I tend to double down, because I can't go back on what I said, as this would send me into an "are they mad at me cycle" that goes nowhere. And also, I love my kids. I even love some other people's kids. However, I am a much better little kid mom than big kid mom. The tween/teen years have aged me approximately 943 years, and the thought of being surrounded by 75 high schoolers I don't know was like a fever dream full of my own worst teenage mean girl experiences all over again....the experience itself was only half as traumatic as the first time.

Given that I am not writing this from the grave, I obviously survived. Mostly. But I also learned some things about myself:

- I'm stronger than I give myself credit for.
- Packing like a normal person is not a life skill I possess – three people could survive for a month on what I brought with me for a five-day trip.
- God has a sense of humor.
- Nature has some incredible healing properties (even when your brain is overriding your good sense by insisting you are going to be eaten by an anaconda if you give in to the Texas heat and follow everyone into the river).

To be honest, despite (over)preparing for this little adventure, I didn't anticipate that I would have some bigger things to unpack than my dirty laundry...beginning with the fact that I was furious. I knew I was struggling and that my grief was still really fresh after losing my dad. I knew that the loss left me heartbroken, but the anger? That was a surprise. I was angry at myself for not being home when he died and for missing his last phone call. I was angry at my dad for leaving us, along with a host of other complicated emotions that go along with loving another human being.

And most of all, I was angry at God for taking the person who had bandaged my scraped knees and broken hearts, saw beauty in my ashes, and still loved me so completely. If I'm being completely transparent, I still am. But my dad was the one who taught me that God can handle our anger, so I'm testing that theory. Is it easy? No. Have I worked through it like a "good Christian girl" should? Sorry to disappoint you, but that's not usually my process. Have I learned some important lessons through this ongoing search for something I can't quite name? Abso-freaking-lutely.

Now here's a bit of insight into my particular brand of crazy...I have a laugh-in-the-most-inopportune-moments reputation. I'll bring levity into almost any situation. But sometimes, our tears can't be dammed. One of the most life-changing lessons I'm still learning in this season is that my feelings, even the ugly, dirty, unspeakable ones I'd rather hide from the world, don't scare the one who made me. So I keep choosing, day after day, to carry on my dad's legacy by not giving up, even on the worst days. Not on you. Not on me. Not on the good I still believe is in the world, no matter how well it hides. Not on my faith that sometimes seems just out of reach, because I know, even when I can't feel it, it's still bigger than my fears and my doubts. And when I listen, it speaks loudly to my soul...

*When the weight of life presses in,
When heartbreak, struggle, and anger feel too heavy to carry,
We remember, we were not made for a fragile existence.*

*We were created with intention,
Strengthened in the fire,
Fortified through every storm already weathered
Prepared for what's yet to come.*

*We're not hardened into stone,
but shaped like water.
Fluid. Powerful. Unbroken.
Unyielding as the world dares to dam our path, carving new channels,
Forging life where there was none.*

*And throughout the journey, we remember:
That nothing on this side of heaven or hell,
Can silence His current within us
Or lessen the power we contain.*

*We are the river.
Endlessly moving, endlessly alive.
Created for more.*

An Adage a Day - Passed to Me – by Carole Gilbert

Growing up, I always heard, "Two heads are better than one." This idiom originated from Ecclesiastes 4:9 and means it's better for two people to work together than one working alone. So, as I grew up with my great grandparents, two sets of grandparents, and my mom telling me this and giving me other tidbits of advice in almost every sentence, I knew to listen. Besides, it was a time where long learned adages, or idioms, and sayings were prevalent everywhere. And as a creative, imaginative, yet feisty, and mischievous child, I heard these all day, every day. I feel like my childhood was one big adage and I did take them all with a grain of salt. But they were a good thing because I needed them. These adages have been proven tried and true and are helpful in our everyday lives. It saddens me that they are fast becoming long lost pieces of our past.

Many adages are frilly and fun; many are not. Some are even convicting. Some are God given; some are man-made. Some have been around since biblical days, and some came about years later. But they all have a purpose for us. They help us live better, and act better. They go deeper in meaning as we grow with them and understand them more. And even though some may seem unpleasant, they are there for a reason, for us to be better. It's time to review some of these more challenging idioms. "Sorry, not sorry." Actually, "Sorry doesn't cut it." It's easy to say sorry but it's not always easy to mean it, like me saying it here.

So, after all that, and in honor of this month being October and Halloween, I'm listing some of these old phrases that are less desirable or less favorable, and maybe even a little eerie. But they all still give us some kind of advice. And they're all good for all of us. You already know, "What's good for the goose is good for the gander."

For our knowledge and to pass it on, we must get down to the nitty gritty and spill the beans. In this world where our kids say, "Yes Mom, I know that" it's still good to let them know what we know, especially when it was passed down to us. No need to make waves, just express how "Every cloud has a silver lining."

And since "Honesty is the best policy," I tell you, "Do as I say, not as I do" because "Actions speak louder than words." Remember, "Beauty is as beauty does." Even when you "Can't see the forest for the trees."

Each of us must also remember to "Practice what you preach" and "Never say never." It is "Better to be safe than sorry." Because "Two wrongs don't make a right." And like all of us, "People who live in glass houses should not throw stones."

Finally, even though "A leopard can't change his spots," like Jeremiah 13:23 says, "*Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil.*" Remember, "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade."

Firmly Planted - There and Back Again – by Dina Cavazos

Last month I shared my perspective on traveling--more specifically, leaving “the nest I call home,” as my story was titled. My friend Jeannie and I both had milestone birthdays (June and August), so we decided to go somewhere special. She loves going places, I don't; but because it was an occasion, I agreed. The closer it got, the more mixed my feelings were: excitement to see old friends in new places, and, yet, angst about leaving home. If you read the story, maybe you're wondering how it turned out?

After lining up care for my plants, cat, and birds, I decided to leave worry behind and trust they were being cared for. I said good-bye to my cozy nest and we flew to Albuquerque NM. The flight was short, only an hour and a half.

When we arrived, we rented a car and headed toward the historic district. It was a slow weekday, and early, so many stores were still closed, but we came to a little café that was open. We walked in to a tiny space with about four tables but were soon led into an expansive dining room with glass windows looking out to a beautiful plant filled patio. Then I remembered.... several years ago, the kids and I went to see their paternal grandfather who lived in that area. We spent the night in Albuquerque, and ate at that same restaurant. I remember enjoying the garden and fountain with my then 6 year old grandson. That was a happy coincidence.

Eager to get to Santa Fe, we headed out for the hour-long drive. First stop was Loretto Chapel, located in the middle of the historic tourist district. The main attraction was a “miraculous staircase.” It took longer to find parking than to tour the chapel. The narrow spiral staircase was hand made of beautiful wood, protected so no one can climb on it. We had fun with each other in the old-fashioned confessionals.

From there we walked to shops selling beautiful things, some handmade, some imported. Streets are narrow, and many are lined with charming and old adobe buildings, crowded together and extending far back behind gated entrances. We didn't buy much, but one shop had gorgeous glassware made in the “holy land.” Jeannie bought me a wine glass for my birthday, a really nice memento. Then we drove to the nearby art district to find [Dominique Boisjoli Fine Art](#) where my friend Sandy Preston displays her art. What a feast for the eyes! I wish we'd had more time to spend at the galleries—it would have been more enjoyable than shopping (mostly looking).

We stayed the night at Sandy's small community near Santa Fe. Her adobe style home overlooks an expansive view in a quiet, peaceful setting—very relaxing. Beauty in both home and garden reflect her artistry. Sandy graciously made us breakfast and offered to take us to the best thrift stores, our last adventure in Santa Fe, so fun! My best find was a sleeveless embroidered turquoise lounging dress for \$10 (I'm wearing it as I write this!)

It was time for the two-hour drive north to our mutual friends' cabin near Mora. We took the scenic High Road to Taos, interesting and historical. There were run-down looking buildings along the way that seemed abandoned. We stopped at a few places looking for chips to snack

on but there were none—imagine that! The landscape was rolling hills and mountains in the distance, sparsely populated.

We arrived at Steve and Vickie's remote cabin set in a valley surrounded by pine trees—polar opposite of the deserts of Santa Fe. Despite signs of a devastating fire five years ago—burned trees and piles of dead wood—it was a serene and delightful place. These dear friends were wonderful hosts, driving us around to see more beautiful country, tiny spread-out communities, and abandoned adobe sites. Vickie served up her magical food, we hiked a little, and Steve kept us entertained with stories of local life. Each morning I sat on the deck overlooking the valley enjoying coffee and silence with God as the sun came up over the mountains. I made it a point to see the truly black night sky with more stars than I'd seen since childhood growing up in south Texas. It was exquisite.

The last night Steve played his guitar, singing songs he wrote that stirred my heart. It was a perfect end to a wonderful trip, the best part being spending time with friends: Sandy, Vickie, Steve, and of course my traveling partner Jeannie. Both the desert and the mountains had their unforgettable charms.

I could write much more, but it's time to end the story. The last two days Jeannie had symptoms that felt like allergies. When we got back, she tested positive for Covid and symptoms started for me the next day. It was my first time to get Covid and it was pretty miserable. Thankfully, it didn't hit hard during the trip. My plants and cat survived, the birds were still here, and all was well. It was good to be back among my plants, prisms, and pet kitty.

Am I glad I went? Yes.

Would I have gone if I knew I'd get Covid? No.

Am I ready to leave my nest again? Not for a while....a long while.

Moving Forward – I Wasn't Fat – by Pam Charro

All of my life, I have believed I was a fat kid. I've been hearing about my fondness for food ever since I can remember: "You have always liked your food." "Fat and Skinny went to bed, Fat rolled over and Skinny was dead!" "Give Pam your leftovers, she is our family garbage disposal." And that was just in my own household! Once the kids at school found out how I felt about my body, a new onslaught of teasing began.

To be fair, it would have totally made sense if I had been overweight. Mom tells me that, even as I baby, I never seemed to know when I had been fed enough, and would keep crying for more, no matter how much she gave me. And in elementary school, I remember being completely obsessed with food. Almost every word reminded me of one of my favorite dishes. I would often stuff myself until I was sick, needing to lie down for a while until I felt better. Had I not been several inches taller than the other kids, I'm sure that these habits would have shown as extra weight on my body. I never doubted for a minute that I was fat.

But the pictures don't lie. It simply wasn't true.

It got me wondering ..

*why, for all of these years,
have I been so convinced of
something about myself that was a lie?*

I'm sure that part of the reason was the common stigma in the 70s that many of us felt as girls, that if you weren't thin, you were fat. I'm so glad that my own daughter isn't shackled with that hurtful idea.

But I'm also coming to grips with another reason I held so tightly to the belief that my body was ugly: The idea that I was fat was the perfect scapegoat for all of the hurt and rejection I had experienced. Of course no one loved or liked me - who can love a fat kid, especially one with so much potential to be beautiful? Every obsession and weakness was my own fault, something to be ashamed of. And all of the responsibility to "fix" myself was on me. It made perfect sense in my subconscious mind: If I can look like a beautiful person, the world will treat me like one. But no matter how I struggled, I could never look "good enough" for long. And the most likely reason was because then I would no longer have my convenient excuse for all of the hurt.

So now I am at a huge turning point in how I view myself, despite all of the years of therapy I have already had in trying to accept that all of the pain and rejection wasn't my fault. Even if I had been overweight...or selfish...or ugly...or a hothead...or too hyper...or annoying...I still should have been loved.

But I have physical proof in photos right in front of me, showing that something I believed about myself all of those years wasn't true.

There is something powerful about finally knowing that, and it is leading me into a greater truth. I wasn't a lot of things that I was led to believe I was. And maybe now that I can see the lies for myself, I can get them out of the way so that there will be room for what actually happened. Room for who I really was, and all of the grace and truth needed so that I can finally heal.

Under Pressure – The Prayer – by Debbie Haynes

Do our prayers really matter? How should we pray, anyway? Does God even hear us?

Solomon prayed an earnest prayer, with a humble spirit, with his hands toward heaven. It wasn't a wishy-washy, shot-in-the-dark, wish list type of prayer. It was a heartfelt, sobbing, targeted prayer, specific, and full of faith to the only God who could possibly forgive an incredibly long list of sins committed by God's people.

Hannah, a barren woman, prayed the same way when petitioning God for a child. No words would come from her mouth; only groaning, deep from within – pleading her case for a child.

There were also two men in the bible, Ezekiel and Isaiah, who were given the job of being spiritual watchmen on the wall of Jerusalem.

And God also gives us the same job to pray important prayers of supplication over our loved ones, and to plead for their souls to Christ.

So what does a prayer of supplication entail? We can look closer at the prayer of Solomon to see:

- “There is no God like you, in heaven above or earth beneath...” is a good way to begin.
- “O Lord my God, listen to the cry and the prayer your servant prays this day” is a plea He hears.
- “We want your presence here in this place we’ve built for your name” acknowledges our need and the answer.
- “I ask you to have mercy, and forgive us” with hands lifted high is heartfelt, humble and sincere.

The next part of the story is God's response to this prayer of supplication. God says he hears the prayer, will place his name there forever, and his eyes and his heart will be there for all time. Then he holds Solomon accountable as the leader for following God with integrity and devotion.

Maybe we feel a bit like Solomon, Ezekiel or even Hannah, as we plead for the spiritual well-being of others out of our deepest heartfelt needs. We desire and plead for God to talk with us, to heal us, to teach us and to forgive us and give us abundant life in Him.

Philippians 4 owns a familiar verse – telling us to not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication – with thanksgiving – letting our requests be made known to God. And when we do...the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

We aren't given all the answers about the twists and turns of life ahead. But we can have a peace that's too big to even understand because our hearts and minds are guarded. Maybe our families have been overcome by lies, intruders and peace-breakers. But our prayers of supplication can cover our families, disarm the lies, and keep us all from spiritual damage.

We should never ridicule ourselves and blame our weaknesses for unanswered prayers, or because we haven't prayed “enough.” Answered prayers are not within our hands, but bringing God our needs in faith with pleading, is what is within our hands. We bring them to the all-powerful, all-knowing God that knows our hearts and hears our cries. We are just watchmen and

watchwomen asking in humility and faith, with thankful hearts, and we leave the answers up to Him.

Unearthly Thing - The Miracle I Take for Granted – by Angela Dolbear

Every day, I experience a miracle I take for granted—the miracle of healing. Whether it's an injury, damage to my body from chronic illness, or my spirit is being repaired from hurt. God is constantly healing me (and you).

It's a daily miracle. It's all God. I do nothing but ask.

Recently, a dented can of soda started falling out of its cardboard container in our refrigerator. I tried to catch it before it hit the floor, but the dent had a sharp edge, which sliced a deep crescent-shaped cut into my pinky finger. It bled for a good five minutes. I had to wear Neosporin and a Band-Aid for two weeks while the deep cut healed.

But now I look at my finger, and there is only a faint mark where blood once gushed. The skin closed up, and my booboo is nearly gone—such a miracle.

Yeah, I prayed for healing. And God did it. He designed our bodies to heal from injury, allowing us to carry on with life.

The entire premise of surgery is based on the assumption that the body will heal after it is cut open and the bad stuff is removed.

How does this happen? I'm no doctor, nor do I play one on TV, but curiosity had me googling, "How does the body heal?"

Here's what Google AI told me, which I found fascinating, so I'm passing it on. A cut finger heals in four phases: hemostasis, inflammation, proliferation, and remodeling.

Here's a simple description of each stage:

1. Hemostasis (Immediate phase)

Immediately after the cut, platelets gather to form a blood clot that works to stop the bleeding.

2. Inflammation (Days 1–4)

White blood cells move to the wound site to clear away dead cells, bacteria, and debris. During this period pain, redness, swelling, warmth, and functional loss in the area may occur.

3. Proliferation (Days 4–21)

New tissue is built from the edges of the wound. New blood vessels grow, and cells called fibroblasts create collagen, which is important for the new tissue to form. The wound also starts to contract.

4. Remodeling (Maturation) (Day 21 – up to 2 years)

The new tissue strengthens and reorganizes. This process increases the strength of the tissue, but this tissue will not be as strong and flexible as the original skin. A scar forms, which may look red and shiny at first and gradually fades.

This healing process is designed to automatically go to work once an injury occurs. We don't have to do anything. It's like a built-in miracle.

Is it just me, or does the healing process seem like an intelligent design, like *Someone* build it into us when He created us? Such a blessing.

So, healing just happens. But that doesn't mean I should take it for granted, right? Now, when I experience healing, I will be grateful.

Two days ago, I cut my middle finger on my left hand with the metal cap on a balsamic vinegar bottle. As I watch it heal, I think about the process that is taking place in my finger, and it sparks gratitude. And whenever I see the long scar on my abdomen from two surgeries I had, I will be thankful.

Now I will stop, and be grateful for the gift of healing, given by God, so I can be healthy, and carry on with the purpose He has for me. He is so good.

Blessings to you!

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



FRESH THYME

FRESH THYME - Well-Seasoned – by Marcy Lytle

I'd say that anyone that's lived more than a few decades of life can call themselves well-seasoned. They've seen life change a lot, they've been thrown a few curve balls by now, and they've emerged on the other side with hopefully some wisdom and fun knowledge that is worth sharing to those a few decades behind them. And while I've shared spiritual insight and perhaps tidbits of wisdom before for younger women, this month I decided to share some practical things I've learned in my almost 68 years of life. I'd say I'm well-seasoned and hope to sprinkle some of that on your plate as you read. I hope it adds some good flavor to your life!

- Bobby pins are everything. You need a stash of them, for pinning those loose hairs, holding a tight bun around the edges, and even hooking a bracelet together.
- The iron is best. I mean, if you want that lived in look that's crumpled and wrinkled, you can get by with a steamer. But taking time to stand and iron out wrinkles is not only a good discipline, but lots of music can be listened to, and you can have chats with yourself about those thoughts you need to tame. And your shirt will look pristine when you're done.
- Food is meant to be eaten. Diets, fads, supplements, they're going to evidently be around and scream at us on every social media platform there is, but food is enjoyable – all of it – in moderation (unless you have health issues, of course.) Trying to look or be like her is a waste of energy, if that's your motivation to eat this or not eat that.
- Your bedroom is one spot you need to decorate and not ignore until your kids are grown. Make it a haven, make it inviting, and make it pretty – so that you and your kids smile instead of run to shut the door when guests arrive. You'll be glad you did, if you make your bedroom a priority.
- Cynicism isn't a pretty accessory to wear. Overcome it with celebration. (I didn't make that up, I heard it, and loved it) And it's true!
- Let that child have chicken and fries, and ice cream, too. Not all of life is about dried fruit and vitamins. (Sorry, that makes two comments on food now...)
- Grow herbs. If you only have one pot, plant the three herbs you love the most, and grow them. They're easy to care for, your kids can learn to water with you, and you will sigh and breathe and relax when you snip and use these greens atop salads, on veggies and more.
- Finances get the best of all of us. Budgets are great. But sometimes even budgets get busted. Life will go on, He will provide, and you'll find ways to find joy with a picnic and sandwiches in the backyard, gazing at the stars. And it will be just as fun as big bucks at Sea World.
- Don't keep thinking one day you'll sleep, when kids are grown. There are ALWAYS worries with your kids no matter their age that can keep you awake at night. Learn early that your Father loves your kids more than you do, and you can place them in His hands before midnight...and sleep.
- Friends are hard to keep. Some are seasonal, some are fickle, and some are wonderful. Never let the fickle and seasonal keep you from enjoying the wonderful. And be friendly. Whether friends reciprocate or not. He will.
- Balance is overrated. There will be days when all you can do is sigh and scream and wonder why you're a mom or adult at all. Then other days you'll hug those kids tight and all will seem right. The kitchen, the drawer, the floors...they'll be sticky and need cleaning

way too often. But tip that scale often in the right direction – TIME with your kids – and laugh at the chaos. LAUGHTER is the best medicine, seriously.

- Asking for help is not weakness. But who to ask, you say? The WORD is definitely a path finder. Older women that have walked before you can empathize, and your children and husband and friends are usually willing to listen and lend a hand. But they can't read your minds.
- Expensive appliances are cool and all, but don't break the bank to have one that you'll only use once a year. A hand mixer if you don't bake is great. A frying pan will work if you don't have space on your counter for an air fryer, if you don't fry much. And a counter ice maker? I guess...if you have the space...
- Planning meals is a challenge, but lists really do help. Talk to friends and gather about 25 meal ideas. Make them simple and easy. Sandwiches, wraps and bowls are your friend, always.
- Look up. That may sound silly, but always digging in your bag, comparing yourselves with others beside you, and hanging your head in shame for some reason keeps you from the view up there – the sun, the moon, the leaves on the trees, the clouds and the rainbows.

Hope this helps those of you that are drowning in the sea of adulthood and motherhood and feel as though you're on a kayak in a storm, about to tip over. I've been there. And you need to hear that He is enough, He cares, and practical wisdom is yours...if you just ask.

FRESH THYME - But It Won't – by Marcy Lytle

I was looking at the calendar and realizing there were only a few days left until the new month would arrive, and I was wishing time would slow down...but it won't. That prompted this whole line of thinking that led to these lines of writing:

On vacation, in towns far away, with beauty and peace and play...I want time to stop

But it won't

When kids are here and family is near, and all is well as we sip and dine...I want time to linger

But it won't

Out on the patio with early sunrise, the birds are singing and the world is mine...I want time to pause

But it won't

Walking with him, hand in hand, when he's 2 and he looks up and smiles...I want time to halt

But it won't

When holidays are near and all the good cheers rings in the streets, I want time to stay

But it won't

It seems we all want to command time, to order it to move fast or slow down at will, to command it to stop or be still...but it won't. Only One controls the time, orders the sunrise and the sunset, moves the pace of things in space and we wish he'd just relinquish some of that control to us...but He won't.

And as we think and look up and blink, at time that just passed and another month is calling us in, we can look forward and think again:

On the other side, where family and friends await us, that space and that peace could end as well...

But it won't

When the table is set, we're dining with Him, there's no pain or sorrow...that time could be over...

But it won't

Out of our tired bodies, into those new ones, tears erased and only joy remains, it might disappear...

But it won't

Walking with Him, hand in hand, forever with the Everlasting God, the Creator...it might halt...

But it won't

When all is well, evil is erased, streets are full of those once lame who walk again...it might go away...

But it won't

I smiled as I looked again at the calendar and how I wish time would slow down in the quiet places and the beautiful times and the closeness of others and the littles nearby...it won't.

And that's a very good thing that we know the One who commands the moments, the hours and the days, because His ways are perfect and His timing is good, and we belong to Him and He to us...even when we worry life will pass us by too quickly...

It won't

FRESH THYME – Made Me Smile – by Marcy Lytle

Batteries are expensive, and I use a lot of them for lamps and lanterns all over the house. I do have several lights that are charged by USB but I don't like those! It's a pain to keep recharging...so I buy more batteries. But guess what I realized this morning?

Sometimes, I replace old batteries with new ones and then I'm careful to not use those items because I don't want the batteries to run down. Therefore, the cute home décor I absolutely love to enjoy – it sits unlit because I don't want to expire the batteries and have to get new ones.

Let me insert a note here – of course – if batteries are breaking my budget, I need to be mindful. But, if they're not? I'm just missing out on the beauty of something I love when all I have to do is flip the switch and enjoy the light.

I thought again about my upbringing (which I do so often) and how fun and faith just weren't a mix, really. It seemed to me that all the fun things were associated with sin, so I think I developed this caution of enjoying life!

This morning I turned on the wreath in my kitchen that I have so carefully woven with tiny lights, when I first walked in the kitchen. I had forgotten the lights were on the wreath, because I hadn't been using them. Oh my goodness. The ambience and sigh of relief that came over me before the sun came up, as that wreath lit my kitchen and made me smile. I mean, I really smiled.

Stovetop potpourri ingredients are not cheap, either...especially the fall kind. Whole cloves, a whole orange, some maple extract and a cinnamon stick. If I enjoy this mix often, it's going to be a lot of ingredients I'll need. But again, it's not that big of a deal for me and so I buy them, and there they sit in the spice cabinet unused, because I'm "saving" them for a "special" occasion.

This morning, the same morning mentioned above, I mixed those things together with water and I turned on the stove, under that lit wreath, and in minutes the kitchen smelled just like fall. I breathed in deep, and I again smiled as the sun came up and the day started...and the smell entered every room of the house.

Lots of us spend high dollars on massages, manis and pedis, gym memberships and spas, which is totally great if that's your thing. But if you want to spend dollars on some home therapy, try filling lanterns and lamps and those little boxes on the end of tiny lights with lots of batteries you buy and store up, for mornings when you need a smile. Order those spices and keep a stash of all things potpourri, available for creating and mixing and smelling.

A smile, a merry heart...it does a body good...maybe more so than a walk and a fresh coat of paint. At least for this weary woman on a Friday morning when she needed to lighten her steps. Those batteries and those ingredients did the trick.

I'm still smiling...and the sun is up and the day is busy...but the light is still shining and the smells are still wafting...

FRESH THYME – Uncertainty – by Marcy Lytle

I told God one more time this morning (I've said it so many times) that I don't like uncertainty in life...especially with it comes to dying. I don't know what I really want, because do I really desire to know the time of everyone's death, including my own? Probably not. I just don't like uncertainty, and yet we have to live with it...and we're told to rejoice in all things. This got me thinking about some of the stories in the bible where uncertainty was present.

Abraham was told to leave his country and go, and he was told to take his son as a sacrifice. Now, we've all heard about Abraham, but the uncertainty of where to go, or if his son would be spared, it's just too much to ask, isn't it? In both of those circumstances, the going and the obeying resulted in Abraham being the father of many nations, and in his son being spared. Two great outcomes!

Just this past weekend, we heard good teaching, and one thing was said that I really thought about. If God takes something away, then he has something better for you. "Is that true?" I almost thought out loud. So...if he takes away certainty in life, then there must be something amazing in the not knowing.

Remember the story in the New Testament about Mary and the wedding, and how she ran out of wine? She was uncertain how she was going to supply the needs of her guests, and then Jesus showed up and performed his first miracle! The followers of Christ that were fishing ran into a huge storm. They were uncertain if they were going to make it to shore, and again Jesus showed up and spoke peace to the winds and the waves. More stories of good outcomes to uncertainty!

Something else I heard or read the other day said this, "What if something great happens today?" But most of us, with the uncertainty of life, often wonder what and worry about what might happen that's awful. It's so hard, with uncertainty in the wind, to hear anything but whispers of the "what-ifs" with scary outcomes, instead of the idea that rings louder and more true – that God is working something great for you!

Now, back to my own thoughts of uncertainty. I was thinking of vacation coming up. I often have fear that something bad will happen to ruin it. I also experience heightened fear during holidays, with loud whispers of what if someone dies. And I don't like these intrusive thoughts at all, but I've toyed with them so long they've become part of the fabric of my head space. And the heart of the matter is that I want to be certain that my plans and my wishes and my hopes are fulfilled, because surely they are the best.

However, everything I read in scripture screams loudly that God's ways are best, he makes streams in the desert, sets us in secure places, gives the lonely housing and families, heals the brokenhearted, and lifts up those that are hanging their heads low. He does not promise to tell us his secrets or his future for us, because our finite minds couldn't handle it.

Back to that statement that if God takes away something, he always has something better...what if we believed that? What if those fears of losing and sorrow and tragedy are covered and swallowed up in the certainty that He will provide, protect and renew and replenish everything this tacky evil world robs from us?

We can't really handle certainty, which is what we wish for, because we don't know the future or what's best for any of us in any situation. We really don't. But he does. And while I wish he'd show me the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow before I take his hand and start walking toward

the light...He just asks me to believe, assures me that He's got me tight against his heart, and He heads forward to the beautiful life he's creating for me and for all who believe...that "something great" that's coming. Always.

I doubt that I won't ever be frustrated with uncertainty again, but I will continue to train my mind with daily exercises to grab hold of this love that's freely offered to me, one I can't even comprehend or understand, but one that's freely mine because Jesus loves me...this I know. Just look at the rainbow...