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THYME
For Every Season

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TIPS

The Dressing – Dress It Up – by Marcy Lytle

I know. It's August and who feels like dressing up...in the heat. We just want to sip lemonade by the pool in the fewest clothes possible! However, dressing up just lifts one's attitude and makes one feel like smiling, because taking an outfit and elevating in just a small way is easy and oh, so fun.

Black and White – This is a dressy color combo and so easy to pull together from your closet. I found these pants on Amazon and they're so comfy and pretty. I just topped them with a tiny checked black and white top I grabbed from a discount store. A perfect outfit for date night out. And black denim with a dressy white top – can't be beat!

Knit Is It – Have you discovered the online store, Cider? They have the cutest knit tops in bright colors and they dress up denim in the best way possible. And they run sales a lot!

Maxi skirts – Whether it's a denim one, or a pretty solid color with pockets, a maxi skirt just looks elevated, no matter what top you pair with it. Grab a cute bag too, and you just feel good. Blue is a good neutral to pair with all the colors of summer...on into fall.

A Khaki Dress – Neutrals, in khaki or green or any solid color really...they're so easy to dress up with just a bag and your shoes...and of course, something around your neck if you wish! Just look in your closet and grab a neutral and enjoy putting together an outfit...then go somewhere to enjoy it.

An Elevated Tee or A Silky Blouse – Dressy pants with a cute graphic tee is one of my favorite go-to outfits that can look so chic when it all comes together. Add even pearls or dressing earrings if you want. It's a great look. Or...go all the way with a full dressy combo by adding a silky type blouse on top of any pant, really!

Tshirt Dress – Do you have one? These are anything but boring, and they're all over Amazon. They're great to have for travel, but also to dress up even on into the next season, with a sweater over top. I love this striped one from Amazon.

A Vest – I grabbed a couple of these lately, one is a longer denim vest, and the other is a white linen one with ties. Both are fun to play with, and just pull together a top and bottom, as the third piece for a cute dressed up look!

Next time you get dressed in a casual outfit and think, "I'd like to dress this up a bit," look at your bags and your jewelry and add a pretty piece. Or change just the top, or just the bottom. Or...put on those cute shoes you hardly wear. Dress it up, this August, and sit in the AC somewhere and smile at how nice you look and feel.

Seven For You – Watch This! – by our Panel

It's the hottest days of summer, and we're all inside watching something...but we don't know what to watch next! When we meet friends for dinner, we both ask, "What have you been watching lately?" and then we share our favorites. After all, it's fun in the late summer to sit back after a long, hot day and put up our feet, grab a cold drink and snacks, and watching something GOOD. Here's what our panel of women had to share:

We watch so little TV that we actually turn off streaming services in the summer and then re-subscribe in the fall to watch our favorite football team, the Kansas City Chiefs. BUT, we always have Amazon Prime, so I can enthusiastically recommend House of David. It's based on the life of King David in the Bible. Only one season has been released, and the season ends with David killing Goliath, so that gives you an idea of what to expect. The imagination and creativity that God gives humans to make such shows astounds me. They really bring to life the family of Saul, the giants of the time period, etc. Definitely worth the watch. Season 2 comes out this fall! Whoop! Can't wait to break out the popcorn! – Laura

My list of television programs is short. My husband likes shows that are easier to watch. Nothing over PG13. So, we like to watch Tracker, Elsbeth, Matlock, and Sherlock. For reality shows, we watch Survivor, AGT, and American Ninja Warrior. For me, I prefer more dramatic, thrill seeking, and even horror-filled shows or movies. A few months ago, my D-I-L told me about Tubi, and I love it! It has FREE movies and shows to fit everyone's desires, even and especially my sinister loving self.- Carole

We really enjoyed the film *Green and Gold*. It was a good surprise find and a great story. Good acting, too. It's on Prime. Another delightful movie was *The Ballad of Wallis Island*, starring Carey Mulligan, one of my favorite actresses. The setting, the story, the humor...it was a thumbs up, for sure! Also, on Prime. *Rosemary and Thyme* is one of those series that's a fun watch, pretty scenery, and a good murder mystery. The two women in it are horticulturists and help folks on estates with gardens...and then there's a mysterious death! We enjoy this as a go-to fun watch. If you haven't seen *The Life List*...it's a good movie over on Netflix. And if you want a good limited series mystery/thriller watch *Survivors*. - Marcy

I watch mostly British shows. Many of them are much calmer than our American shows. Many are mysteries, and some involve murder, but they are never graphic or vulgar in nature. Some of their reality shows are good, too. My daughter and I loved watching the Great British Bake Off show. She said the show was "kinder" than our versions. It is! Here's a list of some of my favorites:

Great British Bake Off
Grantchester
Father Brown
Sister Boniface Mysteries
Beyond Paradise

Call the Midwife (my very favorite). I love how the show progresses in time with each new season. They show what life in Poplar, London, was like for mothers-to-be and the social norms of the time.

Being a "Half-Brit", these shows remind me of home in the UK - Cathy

After my husband passed away, I cancelled all means of costly cable-type TV and have watched only free YouTube videos (although I pay \$22/ month to Google for ad-free content) and sometimes Amazon Prime content that comes with my Amazon membership. I can get marvelous old movies on YouTube, as well as favorite sitcoms like Leave it to Beaver, Andy Griffith, etc.! There is no limit to what I learn, enjoy, and better myself from, by watching YouTube--for free!

YouTube has unlimited videos posted by individual content providers on subjects that I love watching. My chosen genres are varied and change frequently--Such as, homesteading--most have a dozen kids (not exaggeration!), cows, pigs, chickens, etc., and while none of that is true in my own life, I've learned so much from them! I also LOVE to watch sailing videos--did you know that there are families who've raised their children living full time on a catamaran sailboat, homeschooling them, teaching them business, finance, technical skills and even mechanics, and meeting up with other families with kids for social events, ALL OVER THE WORLD! I enjoy watching videos of remodeling old houses, cooking from other countries--Turkey, Mexico, Azerbaijan, Iran (I've made three amazing dishes from Iran!). I also LOVE watching people TRY to launch their boats at boat docks. OH MY GOODNESS!!! There is a boat dock in Florida that has a RESIDENT CROCODILE that lives at the BOAT DOCK! And, of course, there are many, many preachers and spiritual podcasters I like to watch.

Lately, I've started watching live court proceedings. Judge Boyd. Man, oh man. NO NONSENSE! Never been in a courthouse in my life, except for a 3-day jury duty 30 years ago. This has brought some sadness, too. The condition of SO MANY young people who are addicted to drugs is staggering. And then there are the often related high speed police chases (both court and police chases are public record--who knew!), and the famous PIT maneuver--Arkansas Troopers Byrd and Escamilla are pros at this!! And, probably my favorite right now are the K9 canine take downs! These dogs are American heroes. You can hear them in the back of the squad car literally 'screaming' with excitement to perform their jobs, whether it's drug smelling or criminal chasing--and they're so perfectly trained! In one episode I recently saw, the policeman literally busted out the driver's side window and picked up the dog and stuck him through the window because the guy tried to pull a weapon!! The criminal tried to gouge out the eye of the dog (thankfully, there was no harm done to the dog!) but that amazing hero never let go of his bite on the criminal! And the criminal was CHARGED with harming a law enforcement agent--the dog! It's comforting that the police are always careful to send the criminal to the hospital to get those bites cared for, before they escort them to jail! Who knows what will strike my fancy next! - Debbie

One of my favorite shows to recommend would be "Down to Earth with Zac Efron." It's a travel docuseries where Zac teams up with wellness expert Darin Olien to explore sustainable living around the world with each episode depicting the scenery, global cultures, and eco-friendly innovations of every location. It's a light, uplifting, and insightful watch and you definitely get to see a different side of Zac Efron! – Sofia

I love period shows. Maybe this is because times were simpler. But, I love to see how people navigated social issues in a different time or place.

MISS AUSTEN, on PBS Masterpiece is written from the perspective of Jane's sister Cassandra Austen. It highlights their loving, sisterly relationship. It is one season with 4 episodes.

Another enjoyable watch is ALL CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL. The 2021 version of this show is found on PBS Masterpiece also. It showcases the life of a rural British veterinarian. Animal lovers would especially enjoy this show.

Lastly, I recommend the ongoing series called HOMETOWN. It is found on HGTV. It is a reality show about a young couple who is gifted in renovating old homes in their small town while preserving the character of those homes.

I hope you enjoy these shows about things from the past. - Gina

In the Kitchen – Meal Time Formula – by Marcy Lytle

I see “formulas” crafted everywhere, especially in the fashion industry. So I thought, why not a formula for meal time to use when grocery shopping? I know busy moms and dads, as well as couples with grown children, or anyone at all that shops for meals finds it maddening at times to put together a list of lunches and dinners. It can be daunting, with all the choices out there, all the recipes and yet we don’t know where to begin. Maybe this shopping list will help you as you plan your meals, and make it all a bit easier.

Things to have on hand for easy meals:

- Fruit – Pick a couple you love, wash them, and store them so that they last more than a few days.
- Veggies – Have either frozen or fresh or packaged, whatever works for your lifestyle. But have at least three varieties...
- Avocados, lemons and tomatoes – These three are the holy grail for making meals sing.
- Cucumbers, carrots, olives, hummus pita chips – If you have these in your fridge, you can pull together a meal in no time.
- Herbs like parsley and cilantro and any others you love, along with salad greens – a must-have! Any time you make a salad, add all the herbs, a tasty dressing, and it’s a winner!
- Protein for your meals like beans or chickpeas and bacon – to use instead of expensive meats and chicken all the time.
- Ingredients for sandwiches – whatever is not listed above...your deli meat, cheeses, breads.
- Nut butters and jams and biscuits and bacon – yes to all these.
- Pesto – Buy it or make it – and use it. It’s delicious.
- Brown rice – this one staple can be the base for SO MANY meals, topped with whatever you create for a delicious bowl of goodness.
- Something crunchy – this satisfies most everyone – whether it’s healthy chips (Siete) or nuts of all kinds, or crackers. And granola – homemade of course!

Ideas for putting these things together:

BLT – or any sandwich – If you have sandwich ingredients on hand, you can pull together a meal quickly that’s easy and tasty. Consider these thin wheat rounds instead of thick bread, and set out all your things – and let the family build.

Pizzas – These don’t have to be boring, and they can include toppings other than pepperoni and red sauce! Use that pesto, your leftover chicken, some of those roasted veggies, and create a masterpiece! Buy premade Naan bread for the base!

Frito Pie (revisited) – It doesn’t have to be fritos topped with chili and cheese, although that’s amazing. But consider adding all those veggies on top for a mountain of goodness! We recently added tomatoes and avocados and cucumbers!

Rice Bowls – Whether you add ground meat and greens, with other tasty things...or you put together a medley of all the veggies you have in the fridge, you can set out the rice and let the family put together their own meal.

Jazz it Up – If you want potato salad, for instance, but you don't want to peel and bake...add store bought potato salad and add some fresh dill, cooked and crumbled bacon and red onion. Stir it in, and it's delicious. I took this to a party and no one knew it was pre-made!

Little trios – If you have some crackers, pickles and cheese...you can make easy and yummy snacks for the kids, and you! Layer a Ritz with a pickle slice (pat it dry) and a square of cheese (we used Havarti), then sprinkle with something from your spices that you like. Bake until cheese melts.

Look at that list above and just make sure you have all those each week. Then decide if you want:

A bowl

A pizza

A pile up

A trio

A sandwich

A jazzed up prepared meal

A leftover creation

Grab from your stocked pantry and fridge, and create different combos with all that fresh goodness. And if all else fails, make canned biscuits and put out the jellies and jams, meats and cheeses, and let everyone make their own biscuit supper.

And let fruit be the dessert. Grab some grapes, or cut up an apple, or set out the strawberries. Include a caramel drizzle or some dark chocolate to go with.

Hope this helps!

In the Kitchen – You Need Easy – by Marcy Lytle

You need easy...this month. You need tasty...this month. You are at the end of summer and no time or effort is what you need. These snacks/meals are it. Enjoy.

Easy Appetizer – I actually saw this idea on Instagram and then tried it. We loved it, it was easy, and a great snack to add to a simple meal for late summer.

- Ritz Crackers
- Havarti Cheese
- Pickle Slices (patted dry)
- Everything but the bagel seasoning

Place crackers on a baking sheet. Top with a pickle slice, and a square of Havarti cheese. Sprinkle with seasoning. Bake until the cheese melts at 350. Enjoy

Frito Pie Revisited – I love Frito pie, but I mostly love it at home...not at ballgame concession stands or at food trucks. I like making it at home to ensure crispy chips, the toppings I want, and the cheese I like.

- Small Fritos
- Ground meat
- Black Beans
- Grated cheese
- Taco seasoning
- Cucumbers
- Tomatoes
- Avocadoes
- Pickled jalapenos

Cook your ground meat, with Mexican seasonings, until browned, and then drain. Stir in a can of black beans and heat til warmed on low.

Meanwhile, slice cucumbers and chop tomatoes and avocadoes.

Using a shallow bowl or boat, fill with Fritos. Using a slotted spoon, scoop the meat mix on top. Top with cheese, and then the rest of the toppings. This is really good!

Potato Salad – Jazzed Up – I don't like to peel potatoes and that chore alone often keeps me from making potato salad. So...I visited Trader Joe's, bought their potato salad and jazzed it up with three ingredients:

- Red onion
- Fresh dill
- Bacon

Cook the bacon, remove to paper towels to drain. Chop the red onion and the fresh dill. Scoop the store bought potato salad into a large bowl so that you can then mix in the three ingredients. Make it look pretty by then sprinkling on top a bit of smoked paprika if you have it.

Salad To Go – Dollar Tree has a plastic hardware box that's awesome for salad to go ingredients. And a store bought salad mix is the perfect base. It's pretty, and tasty, and great to transport.

- Bag of Asian Salad mix (in produce section)

Toppings:

- Apples
- Cucumbers
- Avocado
- Chickpeas (drained and rinsed – and baked for crunch if you like!)
- Seeds – sunflower, pepita
- Carrots
- The packet of toppings from the mix bag

Place the salad mix in a bowl. Chop and fit all the toppings in the sections of your box, including the dressings. Pack it to go, for that outdoor concert, a picnic, or just sitting in the car under a shade tree looking at nature...

Easy Hoppin' John – If you haven't had this fun classic dish, you're missing out! It's so easy and so yummy. You'll want to make it often.

- 1 can of black-eyed peas, rinsed and drained
- Rice (I use white instant rice for this)
- Green onions – chopped
- Bacon, cooked, drained and broken up

Prepare the rice, season it and add some butter for flavor. This is the base of your bowls. Top with the peas, bacon and scallions. That's it. You can always add a dollop of salsa if you wish!

Fried Cabbage – I love The Stay at Home Chef, and she has a miracle story! Her recipes are always spot on, and this one is a fave because it's easy AND delicious.

- 6 thick cut bacon slices diced
- 1/3 c diced yellow onion
- 1/2 head green cabbage shredded (I bought this premade)
- 1 T brown sugar
- 1/4 t salt
- 1/4 t black pepper
- 1/4 t smoked paprika

In a large skillet over medium heat, cook the diced bacon until crisp, about 10 minutes. Remove the bacon and place it on a paper towel-lined plate. Do not discard the bacon grease.

In the same skillet, add 1/3 cup diced yellow onion. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the onion begins to turn translucent, about 5 minutes.

Roughly chop or shred 1/2 head green cabbage and add it to the skillet with the onion. Stir in 1 tablespoon brown sugar, 1/4 teaspoon salt, 1/4 teaspoon black pepper, and 1/4 teaspoon smoked paprika. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the cabbage is tender, about 7 to 10 minutes.

Return the cooked bacon to the skillet, stirring to combine with the cabbage mixture. Serve hot.

(We had this with corn on the cob and rosemary sourdough – so good).

Cousin Moms – School Talk – by Kamrin and Charissa

Back to school talk has changed since our kids have been growing. We spend an evening before the first week of school, where we talk about last year and goals and things they loved. Then we also look back at our index cards we made before the last school year, to see how things went regarding goals, prayer requests, etc. I'm so excited to do that.

We spend time praying about what the kids want and what they're looking forward to. It's powerful to pray over each child for their requests. It used to be simple things like doing well in school and having good friendships. However, we are encouraging them to go deeper – maybe pick a character trait to grow. We want to pray for opportunities for growth.

We also pray over the school, the classroom, the hallways and the teachers. And we pray for opportunities for them to share about the Lord.

As their mom, I don't really fear about a new year with school, and I'm thankful for that. I don't think too far into the future, I just take each day as it comes. However, when something comes up, I can have a broken heart in the moment if the kids struggle.

So, at the beginning we pray foundation prayers, then we ask questions as the year progresses, paying attention to the kids' demeanor and emotions.

I don't want to "plant" worry in my kids or even any fears I have. It might be my own experience or thoughts that I struggled with as a kid, and I find out my kids aren't struggling the same, and that my assuming wasn't helpful. It's definitely harder now that they're older, with friendships and protection over our kids. Now, next year I might feel completely different, as teenagers and high school approach! And kids driving is definitely a fear of mine.

I, as a parent, want to learn to trust God with my kids in the right timing and spaces to grow who they are created to be. I often struggle with failure and hate failing, and I struggle with approval. So sometimes, I worry about that with my kids and may tend to "helicopter" over them. Our oldest will be 14 this year, our daughter will be 13, and our youngest will be 11. Every season is an opportunity to trust more and teach more, and know the Lord is with them and with us...as their parents. That's the hardest part for me! No parent wants their children to be hurt...

So...maybe I do have fears! Normal ones, for sure. We want to hold on longer...in the scary waters of growing up and starting a new school year. But we include prayers for wisdom, especially as the chapter of elementary school begins to close. God is faithful every year.

August Book – Scissors - by Jennifer Stephens

Have you ever finished reading a book, but you wanted, needed, the story to go on? Maybe there was something about the story that felt unfinished, or maybe it was a particular character that grabbed your heart and as a reader you just wanted MORE! That's how the book, *Scissors*, came to be.

As a teacher/author, I had the opportunity to visit each k-5 class in my school after publishing my first book, *Bottle and Stick*. During the visit we talked about the writing process and the kids asked lots of questions. One topic that came up again and again, from kindergarteners all the way to fifth graders, was about Scissors. She's one of the characters in *Bottle and Stick* and the kids wanted MORE! They loved her cat-eye glasses, red lipstick smile, and vintage style. They were the first ones to point out Scissors looked a bit like...me. Ha! Not intentional, but I see the resemblance. They were *begggging* me to write Scissors' story. So, I did.

Just like we teach our students how to read, write, and do math, it's important to teach them how to use school supplies safely. And a book is a fantastic way to kickstart a conversation. So, find a cozy spot, curl up and give it a read. Scissors is feeling bored. Life seems dull. She sees her friend Pencil traveling all over the classroom and thinks she wants to be like him. With humor, Scissors shows us to embrace our uniqueness and to believe in ourselves, all while showing how to use scissors safely.

After reading, build fine motor skills with a fun cutting activity. Something as simple as snipping scrap paper over a large tub is an excellent way to build motor skills.

This book makes a wonderful Back to School gift. Preschoolers and elementary students will love reading with parents, grandparents, and teachers.



HOME

Practical Parenting – Ask Before You Do – by Marcy Lytle

Usually, this column is for the parents of littles, to encourage as you raise those kids! However, this month, this column is for parents of the bigger...the ones who are now raising their own littles...as you interact with all of them. Being a parent of a child who is a parent brings with it a whole set of dividers...if we aren't careful. So if your kids are now grown and have kids of their own, here are some suggestions to keep communication and love alive...

If you're out shopping and see something you want to give your kids' kids and you're unsure if it fits their family ideals...ASK. For instance, if they don't do Disney characters, then don't buy toys or outfits with Bluey plastered all over the box or shirt. Let them do parenting their way, and be content with that.

If you see a deal on snacks and it includes items you know your kids don't allow their kids to eat, don't buy it! HONOR the wishes of your grown kids that you raised to be the parents they now are, whether or not you agree with their choices. If chips aren't allowed, then buy what is allowed, and smile when you share.

If your kids are parenting in a manner, in front of you, that you want to roll your eyes "out loud" at in disapproval, STOP and rethink again. Parenting changes over the generations. We did things that were different from our own parents. If your kids use blackout curtains, then so be it. If they wrap them in sleep sacks, you follow the rules. When in their house do as they do, and pray if you think it's absurd, and keep your lips (and eyes) still and quiet.

If your grown kids don't invite you to this or that thing that they're out with their own kids doing, LAY ASIDE any offense. They're creating family memories of their own, the kind you created with them. And be blessed, and smile, that they want to be with their kids. When they do invite you, go with pleasure. But when they don't, be interested and commend them for the fun they're having.

If your kids' kids run amuck, throw a tantrum, or act out in ways that make you wonder...REMEMBER...it's hard parenting these days, our kids need lots of prayer more than they need our correction, and your own kids hit you and stomped off, too. You've just forgotten. Remember, too, that God hears, and we can pray, and only offer advice when asked...and even then be careful. Let them learn on their own.

If your grown kids are working hard, tired and weary, sleepy and downcast from the weight or the world, APPLAUD them for being parents and loving their kids. Bring them treats, take them out to dinner, place some cash in their hand, or just send a text of encouragement. Our grown kids are in a world different from ours, and they need all the high fives we can give them, and often.

It's hard being parents of grown kids, because we think we know how it's done...this parenting thing. But we didn't, and we don't, and we learned, and we made mistakes. PRAYER does wonders, and that might often be the best offering we can give the next generation, and a willing hand to help when they need it, but a closed mouth when they don't.

Got grown kids?

They now have kids?

Give thanks.

And enjoy your life with...and apart from...their busy lives, as you live yours and thrive with Him.

I Don't Do Teens – Fickle and Fabulous – by Marcy Lytle

Do you remember...as a teen yourself...how you could not wait to shave your legs? I do! I thought it was so cool and asked my mom, and I felt like such an adult when I got my first razor and shaved my hairy legs to reveal that smooth silky feeling. It was so fabulous! My mom had warned me that it wasn't all fun and glamorous, but I thought it was...until I realized those hairs grew back! And then I had to shave again. Then...I wanted nothing to do with shaving!

If there ever were a term synonymous with teen it's fickle. They like this one day, and this the next, and it's maddening to the parents. And yet...it can be quite fabulous too.

- One day he will want to hold your hand while you're watching a show on television and your heart will soar, and the next day he may shy away from that kiss you want to place on his cheek. It's okay, he still loves you.
- One afternoon, she'll run in from school and want to chat about her entire day and you'll love it and want to hear more. But the next day she might go straight to her room to be alone for a while, before exiting to your presence. It's okay, she needs space.
- One evening, she'll ask for your advice on how to wear her hair or what shoes look good with that outfit, and you'll love it that she listened to your advice. The next time, she may argue about the length of her shorts and how you're so impossible. It's okay, she needs your boundaries.
- One weekend, while practicing baseball in the park, he'll listen to how you say to stand and swing and catch and throw. The next weekend, he may want to try new things and have you not say a word. It's okay, just watch and enjoy as he learns and grows.
- One night she'll jump on your bed after a night out with friends, and you'll be tired but you will want to listen to every chatty word string she says without taking a breath, because you love her. But another night, she may walk away when you ask how it was, or what did she do and was it fun...because she's...well, a fickle teen.
- One morning, he will walk down the stairs with his blanket he still sleeps with and he'll eat his breakfast completely, and you'll adore this young son so much, because he's fabulous. But overnight, the next morning, he may show up with a lower voice and no blanket and ask if he can have the keys to the car.

The point is, that these fickle teens that are in between childhood and adulthood are going to try us in the worst of ways and wrench our hearts to the core. However, these same teens are fabulous to watch and love as they mature and grow, bouncing back and forth in their emotions and desires. They are both fickle...and fabulous...and we have to tell ourselves this often.

We can be there then they need us, give them space when they don't, and always love them either way. We may go to our own rooms and shed a few tears when they push us away, or we may wonder if these clingy teens will ever grow up and leave us alone. Oh wait, we're fickle too! But we're also pretty fabulous parents to have teens in our home for the short time they are, to raise, to praise, to love and to instruct...in the best ways we know how...and leave the rest up to Him.

Be encouraged. Your fickle teens will settle in at some point. She will continue to shave those legs...or not...and she will be okay. He will soon take those keys and drive off alone, without us beside him, and it will be hard. But it will be fabulous, too. And both are part of raising teens, and it's all good and we aren't alone...ever. He is always near.

Rooted in Love - Seeing Isn't Believing – by Kaelin Scott

One thing I know for certain is that God is good. It's so obvious to me when I look at all His beautiful creation that He is all-powerful and majestic. And when I look back at all He's done in my life, I know without a doubt that He is loving and kind. But there are some things about Him that are hard for my human mind to wrap itself around. One of those mysterious attributes is the fact that He's not bound by time.

When we were sitting around the dinner table not too long ago, we were talking about this. It's crazy to think that God made everything, but no one made God. He's just always been there. He had no beginning and He has no end. It's unfathomable to even try to understand that, isn't it?

But as we were talking about it with our kids, my husband came up with a great analogy. He said that we're like fish. Now, if you know my husband, you know his mind is pretty much always occupied with fishing. So at first I laughed a little bit when he said that. But then I stopped and thought about it, and my mind was blown by this picture. It's really the perfect way to describe it.

Fish can't see what's above the surface. Their whole world consists of what's underwater. That's their entire reality. Nothing else exists to them. But you and I know that there is actually so much more to the world than what the fish see. And just because they don't see it, that doesn't mean it's not real.

So when it comes to the spiritual realm, we're like the fish. We can't see what's above the surface – or in our case, what's in the heavens. We can only see our world, our version of reality. But that doesn't mean that's all there is. God sees a much clearer picture than we do. He's not limited by our limitations. He is over and above all we see in this life.

Just because we can't see, that doesn't mean we shouldn't believe.

Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen
(Hebrews 11:1)

We don't believe because we know and understand every single thing. We don't believe because we have it all figured out. No, we believe because we realize that God is so much bigger than anything we could imagine. We trust that He is good, even when we don't understand. We acknowledge our weakness and rely on His strength. We humbly bow before Him, knowing that He is greater than anything else we desire. And one day, through our belief in His Son, we will get to taste and experience everything He has to offer.

You don't have to be able to fully understand God in order to believe in His sovereignty. That, my friends, is the beauty of faith. Because, as said by Judy in *The Santa Clause*,

“Seeing isn't believing; believing is seeing.”

A Night to Remember – Different Battles – by Marcy Lytle

Kids (and we, as their parents) need to realize at an early age that every one of their friends is fighting a different battle than they are, and we are all needed to link arms and fight together, to win at this battle called life. And we have the Helper of all Helpers, Jesus.

Preparation – Bring out the toy figures you have, of all sizes and shapes and colors.

What is a battle? (Let kids answer). While a battle might be a war where people fight, some people fight battles with themselves or in their own homes, daily. A battle can just be a struggle, a hard time, or a fight within...and we all have them.

Let's act out some common battles we might have, or our friends might have, using our figures.

Divorced Parents – What kind of battle is this? It's a hard one, isn't it? Going to different homes, wondering if Mom and Dad are fighting or friendly? Missing the family unit. It's a battle of loneliness and fear, sometimes. (Let the kids act out and talk as if they are in a divorced home, even if they are, and express their battles.)

Jesus says he never leaves us, and he can be with us when we feel afraid or lonely.

Hebrews 13:5

Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you

Sickness – What kind of battle is this? Maybe a friend is in a wheelchair, or another friend is always in the hospital. Maybe she has a skin disorder, or he is suffering with allergies so bad that he's sick a lot. Health battles are not fun, and these kids might battle weariness. (Let kids share different types of illnesses they've seen in friends, as they talk as one of their toy figures)

Jesus heals us all, and holds us while we are sick. He also is our strength.

Psalms 28:7

The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped.

Different – Little tiny kids want to be tall, and overweight kids sometimes are embarrassed. Skinny kids are teased, and kids of color or from another country may feel like they don't fit in. Looking around at how we are all different can be a battle of comparison and make us feel like an outsider, and that's a battle that's hard. (Pick figures of all sizes and shapes and lay them out together.)

Comparison is a thief. It robs us of joy. How can we learn to be happy with who we are?

Psalms 139:14

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made

Poor or Rich? – Which kind of family are we, or do we know or care? Families are rich when they know Jesus and have his love, whether or not there's extra money in the bank. Not having money can create a battle of feeling less than others, while having lots of money can create a battle of power and greed. (Act out kids fighting over what they have or have not.)

Things are nice, but they don't satisfy. They break, they get old, and we want more. Only Jesus satisfies.

Psalm 107:9

For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.

Learning Disabilities – Some kids learn a new skill just like that, and others struggle and have a battle learning new things and remembering them. It's a battle they face every single day, and it's hard, and other kids can be so mean. It's not a fun battle that anyone wants to struggle with. (Act out making fun of kids and how it's hurtful.)

What things are easy to learn? Hard? Everyone learns in a different way and at a different pace, and neither is better than the other.

What kind of battle do you feel like you have, sometimes? (Ask kids to share).

Pray together as a family:

Jesus, you fight all of our battles, so we don't have to. And you are the winner, and so are we. Help us to love others as you have loved us, and to love ourselves, because you love us, too. Thank you for being our helper, our maker, and our savior. Amen.

Homesteading - My Vegetables – by Marcy Lytle

The writer of this column is taking off this month, as she lost a friend in the devastating Texas floods last month. I'm filling in for her this month, but please pray for Leyanne and her family and their friends...

We recently stayed at an Airbnb that had this garden that caught our eye every time we sat by the pool, because this garden was enclosed in a fenced area and housed about 10 big box gardens on the grounds, and this garden was FULL.

Gardening is something, I suppose, that anyone that is homesteading hopes to do and enjoy and harvest. I know, I do. I have one small herb garden, and I have tomatoes and cucumbers as well, but my garden – well it pales in comparison to this huge garden that we enjoyed so much with the kids.

Let me tell you more about it, and why it was awesome. Several of the boxes had huge stalks of wildflowers, all available for snipping and arranging in a vase. And we did this. The little vase of different colored blooms made us happy at every meal. This garden also had herbs tucked in several of the boxes, including rosemary and parsley and mint, which we snipped to enjoy atop our salad later that weekend. We even found tomatoes and jalapenos, which we also harvested and enjoyed.

But here's the best part of homesteading that includes gardening. It's the little hands that can go with you to harvest. I invited our two youngest in the family, ages 2 ¾ and 10, and they brought along a little basket as we hunted and looked for the goods, ripe for the picking. Let me tell you that they ran from box to box, looking for produce that was ready to harvest. The tomatoes were so fun to spot and pick and place in their bags. As I uncovered the herbs, they also pulled the leaves (we didn't even have snips!) and placed them in their baskets. Their discovery and enjoyment made me so happy, and I too had a blast.

I realized again, the beauty of garden boxes. And while mine at home is small, I too squeal with delight as I call to my husband, "Look! There's another cucumber!" or "Hey, the basil has gone wild!" My boxes aren't even really boxes. They're pots and a small rectangular planter, and they're overflowing with the leaves I enjoy in the kitchen. And while homesteading wouldn't be an adjective to describe my personal life, my garden area is definitely a small part of it.

As we headed back to the big house to share with the others what the boys found and picked, they both ran excitedly, the older one obviously reaching the steps first. I was behind the youngest as he had his basket in hand and walked in front of me, and I heard him say aloud, "My vegetables..." so proudly as we then shared with everyone what we discovered.

That experience in that huge garden area was one of my favorites of the weekend. My experience in my own small garden area is another favorite of life. Somehow growing and picking and eating what we've grown is not only healthy, but beautiful and fun.

Homesteading. We don't have to do it all, but any little part of sustainable living we can add to our chaotic and busy lives really does usher in peace and produce worth harvesting...with little hands alongside, as well.

In Each Room – Doorknobs and Doors – by Marcy Lytle

Funny title for a story, right? However, I was walking through my house recently and realized just how my doors and my doorknobs have become so useful for me, and they both make me happy, when it comes to filling and decorating my home! How so? You might ask. Well, let me tell you.

I'm one for using every inch of space to its fullest potential, and often we overlook our doorknobs and doors. While both of these can become cluttered and a mess, they can then become practical and pretty.

Bags for Décor - My front guest room has mixed prints, lots of baskets, and some woven texture as part of the décor. And recently, when we purchased some items at a home store, we were given a really pretty bag that just fits perfectly with the décor in that room! So, it hangs on the doorknob and it can be used by any guests that come to stay, or we can use it too, as a tote when leaving the house. I like it!

Bag for Markets – We have another pretty bag hanging on a doorknob of our coat closet by the front door. It's a beautiful large market bag for shopping on weekends, and I love hanging it there to be grabbed (so we don't forget it), but also because it's just beautiful.

Shelves – On the back of the door, in another room, we have this amazing hanging shelf system that holds SO MUCH. It's great for those extra things that just need a place to land, or even small toys if it's in a kids' room, or socks, or anything at all. It really is so roomy, you might want one in every room of the house.

Caps – For years, my husband had his caps all over – in boxes in the closet, by the front door, in drawers, etc. and they were out of sight...so not worn much. But now, we use our own closet door for hanging them all, so they're in plain sight. And guess what? I sometimes pick a cap and wear one of his now, too!

Ironing board – I've used all kinds of steamers because I was influenced by others, but I've now returned to the iron! But who wants to store a bulky ironing board? Not me! One that hangs over the door in our bathroom is perfect for me, because it's right by the closet for easy ironing and then hanging back up.

Hooks – In our guest room, on the back of the door is a row of hooks. Probably a common hanging piece on many doors. But when my sister came to visit recently, I placed several hangers on those hooks, for her to use for anything she wanted to remove from her luggage and hang. Yes, I could have made space in that closet for her clothes, but that closet was full, and she only had a few things, and it was easy and nice to just hang them on the door. It worked, and they're still there for the next time! And I even have a row of hooks on my own bedroom door for those long cardigans that take up so much closet space! I can see them and grab one when needed.

Shelves/bins – Our pantry door is one where we have a shelf system from Container Store hanging, for extra storage. Our pantry is not large, so having these shelves makes for so much more space for those bigger items or extra cans, or boxes of trash bags, etc. It's the best!

Look around your house at your doors and doorknobs. What could you hang or install that's pretty and yet practical? Do it! And have fun, while you do.



YOU

Life Right Now - The Meanest Girl I Ever Knew - By Jennifer Stephens

She is mean. She is hateful. And I wish she would just go away! She doesn't hit or cause physical harm, but oh, she is definitely the meanest girl I ever knew. Her words are venom. Sometimes I look at her and shout, "LEAVE ME ALONE!" Her words might stay silent for a moment, but she always reappears with her nasty commentary. Pointing her judgmental finger my way. Saying the most horrible, awful things. Words that grind my soul to shreds. Words that erase every ounce of confidence.

Ugly.

Worthless.

Stupid.

She's crafty with her criticism. When it's just the two of us she'll sneer in disgust, noticing every line, extra pound, and newly sprouted silver strand. Because she sees every magnified flaw. When other people see her, they think she's wonderful. They say she's nice and sweet and even pretty. But they don't see the side of her I see. The side that spits vile thoughts into my fractured heart. She's nice to everybody else. With them she pours compliments like waterfalls, but when she talks to me? She rarely speaks a kind word. Even on the days I feel almost lovely, she'll notice the tiniest flaw and convince me the whole world can see it too. When she's around, tears fall. Mascara bleeds. She is so mean!

Who is she? Who is the meanest girl I ever knew? Is she the kid from grade school that called me names? The girl in high school that egged my house making each day miserable? Maybe she's the former coworker who dismissed my ideas while telling everyone in the room I'm "old" and therefore invalid. Or is it somebody else. Somebody meaner. Someone I see every single day.

The meanest girl I ever knew? She's the girl in the mirror.

Maybe she visits you too. She'll look you in the eye and tell you you're not enough. Not pretty enough, not smart enough, not skinny enough...

But here's the thing about this mean girl. She's a liar.

Next time she shows up with a malicious heart, tell her to leave. Tell her God doesn't see us that way. He doesn't see us the way she does. In God's eyes we ARE enough. Make that mean girl go away. Because she's no longer welcome here.

"So do not throw away your confidence, it will be richly rewarded." Hebrews 10:35

"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me." 2 Corinthians 12:9

"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made..." Psalm 139:14

Inner Strength – Those Questions – by Michelle Wyatt

Which way is up? What came first-the chicken or the egg? These are phrases we ask ourselves to make sense of a world that often doesn't make sense. They are questions that no one seems to truly have an answer to. We sure have fun debating them, don't we though? My boys recently brought those questions up to me.

Discussing those questions didn't last long and it wasn't hard. Did we come up with an answer? No. Oddly enough, though, that didn't bother me but for just a few seconds. Questions that seem bigger than our own little world seem easier to let go unsolved than the more relevant questions.

For example, how do I make life fair for my boys? Is there even such a thing as fair? In last month's article, I wrote about the Serenity Prayer. I believe this concept relates to that. By wanting life to be fair for our children, we seek to have control over parts of life we don't have control over. Well, one thing I do know is that we have control over our thoughts regarding what kind of parent we are and what kind of parent we want to be.

For example, I have been told lots of times what kind of parent I am, but those comments don't change what I think when my boys are arguing because of something that I believe comes from the part of their life that I have no control over. So, because of that, how can I best parent? Talk about a big question, right? If you ask yourself that question, let us lift that up to God and pray for the Holy Spirit to give us guidance and most importantly, that we listen and obey.

The last time I wondered if I was doing right by parenting involved setting boundaries with my children. The thing is, though, to me setting boundaries is one way that maybe I can control how "fair" life is at least while they are in my care. But what do those boundaries look like? How can I set those boundaries so that I'm not overcompensating for what I can't control, which is what happens when they are with their dad. This specific situation has to do with device time. Setting a timer, saying when they can or can't use devices, it seems so simple in writing. I have used both of these. There isn't anything simple about how they've been treated though. It makes it so hard to set boundaries without letting my emotions get involved. My emotions get involved when I see their reactions and wonder how much of their reaction is based on the part of life that hasn't been fair or is it because it's normal for kids to push back when faced with a boundary they may not like at the time. So what is the answer? Well, believe it or not, my youngest son reminded me of one of those boundaries I set, shortly after he pushed it. He told me to remind him the next time it comes up. I was humbled in that moment.

As hard as it is, we can be the strong parent, the one that trusts God, and holds onto boundaries that really is in the best interest of children and ourselves.

So...which do you think came first-the chicken or the egg? I've decided that instead of feeling happy because the boys brought it up to me by surprise, I will, instead, embrace the feeling of happiness. Asking questions shows me the boys are learning about this world we call life and I get to not only witness it, but be the best parent I can be to them. Life may not be fair, but life is a miracle.

I challenge myself to recognize life's God given miracles every day. If I can do it, so can you!

Healthy Habits – Slow the Race – by Marcy Lytle

Do you ever wake up during the night and your mind is racing? I do, once in a while. And often, no matter what I do I can't stop it, so I just get up and do something because I don't want to waste time lying there wide awake, for hours. However, I need my sleep. So there are other times that I slow the race by a series of quieting my entire body, one little step at a time. Try it and see if it works for you, for a better night's sleep:

- My mind – I quiet it by imagining a picture of the calmest sight I enjoying looking at. For me, it's a covered bridge or a quiet walkway near dusk with lampposts lit...maybe by a stream.
- My ears – I quiet my ears by listening (in my head) to a song I love to sing, one with great lyrics of peace – often "I've got peace like a river..." – I sang this to my son as a child.
- My mouth – I quiet my mouth by speaking (silently into the dark) the truth about who God is and who I am, in our relationship. He is Savior and Comforter and Protector and I am his child.
- My nose – I quiet my sense of smell by thinking of the herbs in my garden, especially basil and rosemary. Oh my goodness, those smell divine.

Now sometimes, this is all it takes to settle my mind and I'm off to sleep. But other times, it takes longer:

- My back – I quiet my back by asking for one those wonderful back rubs my husband gives me or I use a long handled back scratcher I have because it feels SO GOOD.
- My hands – I physically open my fists and raise my hands, surrendering the tight-fisted grasp I have on this life. My life is in his hands and that's the perfect place to be.
- My lungs – I breathe in deep and release, over and over again until the sighing and the sorrow subside, or whatever angst I'm feeling.
- My shoulders – I can do shoulder rolls in bed to release tension as I remind myself that He carries my loads, the ones that are too heavy for me to shoulder. And he will give me rest.
- My legs – Restless and tired from the day, I imagine myself sitting on a rock on a long arduous and steep hike up a mountain as I take sips and gulps of living water that tastes so refreshing. And I sit for a long while.
- My feet – I wiggle my toes and giggle quietly at the bottom of my body that takes the most abuse during the day, and I imagine dipping those toes in that cool stream I saw with my mind at the beginning of this exercise to fall asleep.

It's interesting how our bodies get in knots, our minds tank up and spill over, and we carry the weight of the world by the time our weary heads hit the pillow at night. And it's really cool how we have command through our relationship with Him to tell all of our parts to be still and slow the race...and hope that they listen and do.

Sleep is sweet, so don't let life rob you of it. Try this exercise, and I'll be praying for you...

A Hopeful Heart - Love Always Hopes – by Christina Oberon

Motherhood is one of the most sacred callings a woman can carry. Wrapped in its joys and challenges is a beautiful responsibility to shape hearts, nurture minds, and guide tiny souls toward their future. But maybe one of the most powerful gifts we can give our children is hope, an optimism that anchors them in an ever-changing world.

Hope is not a naive wish that life will always be easy. I view it as the firm belief that even when life gets hard, good can still be found. As mothers, we become the first voice of this hope for our children. From the moment they are placed in our arms, they look to us for comfort, reassurance, and perspective. How we respond to life's ups and downs teaches them how to navigate their own.

In an uncertain world filled with headlines that can breed fear or division, we have the special privilege of offering our children something different - a foundation of faith, kindness, and resilience. We show them that while we cannot control everything that happens around us, we can choose how we respond. When we model grace in disappointment, gratitude in abundance, and trust in the unknown, we are planting seeds of hope in their hearts.

Practical ways to instill optimism in our children can start with the smallest moments. We speak words of encouragement over their dreams. We help them see mistakes as opportunities to learn. We invite them into conversations about what's good in the world like, the helpers, the healers, the beauty that can go unnoticed. We remind them that their choices matter and that even small acts of kindness can create meaningful change.

Our hope as mothers is not just for their happiness but for their character; that they become adults who carry hope into every space they enter. We want them to stand strong when life feels uncertain, to extend grace when others fall short, and to believe that good can emerge from the darkest seasons.

And at the heart of all this is love. A love that believes, protects, and endures. Love and hope are inseparably connected. As Scripture reminds us, "Love always hopes." When we love our children well, we fill their hearts with the courage to face the world with firm hope.

Motherhood is not about being perfect. It's about being present, consistent, and rooted in something bigger than ourselves. And when we raise our children with hopeful hearts, we give them a gift that lasts far beyond childhood. A mother's hope can outlive her voice, her presence, even her lifetime. That is a force we should never underestimate.



MARRIAGE

For Better or Worse - Be Present – by Kaelin Scott

When my husband and I were first dating, I was going to school in California and he was in Texas. Dating long distance was hard, but it was the only thing we knew. Back then, all we wanted was to be together. I remember one time we stayed up talking until three in the morning my time, which was five in the morning for him! Which was a pretty big deal because my hubby is not a night person at all. He would only stay up that late for somebody he really, really liked.

Something I've noticed nowadays (and I'm sure you've noticed it too) is the *disconnect* caused by smart phones. When people are together, they're not really together. They're glued to their phone screens, ignoring the people around them.

Don't get me wrong, modern technology is awesome. I've made lots of friends through social media who I never would have met in real life. It's fun to keep up with what people are doing and watch their families grow. But it shouldn't replace our real-life relationships with the people right in front of us.

And that's especially poignant when it comes to marriage. We can't let our spouses take the back burner while we stare at a screen. We have to put our phones away and spend time together without distractions. We have to make sure we connect with each other face-to-face and invest in our relationships. What a tragedy it would be if our marriages suffered because of a tiny box we hold in our hands.

Social media is great. Phones are great. Staying connected with the world is great. But not at the expense of real life. Not if it costs us valuable time with people we love. It's all about balance and moderation.

Instead of obsessing over our phones, let's be present with the ones we love. Because that's what really matters.

After 40 Years – A New Perspective – by Marcy Lytle

We are grandparents. We've been grandparents for 13 years, now, and I can hardly believe it. I remember when we were told our daughter was pregnant thinking, "I'm too young to be a grandmother!" I was excited for sure, but all of sudden I felt very old. Funny how we think, sometimes. Many people can't wait to be parents and grandparents, but I struggled with the start of both!

What does this have to do with marriage? Well, I'll tell you.

Being grandparents give you as a couple a whole new perspective on each other, maybe one you may have lost over the years that you were a couple and then parenting your own kids. There's this next level of falling in love that occurs when those littles start hanging with you and your spouse.

This photo at the top was taken when Camp, our next to the youngest grandchild, climbed on my husband and looked at him adoringly, and Mister (my husband's grandparent name – don't ask...) looked at Camp the same way. There's this connection these two have, when they play together.

I fell in love with the man that loves our grandkids, all over again.

Recently, Mister was playing on the floor with Camp and showing him how to move a toy wooden crane, back and forth, teaching Camp about the "boom" that swings. Camp listened intently, as he loves to learn, and Mister is full of interesting information.

I fell in love with the man that loves our grandkids, all over again.

When our oldest granddaughter was small, she had a plastic tea set that she loved to play with. She and Mister were on the floor in our family room, and the teapot was full of water. She and Mister poured back and forth. Mister pretended to stir in sugar, and the two of them had the cutest tea party, ever.

I fell in love with the man that loves our grandkids, all over again.

After a baseball game last weekend, Augie had lost yet another game, and it was disappointing for all of us. Mister grabbed Augie and gave him a huge hug and told him he loved him, patting him on the head, with no words of condemnation or criticism of the team or the game. Mister has done the same with Gideon, after a loss or a disappointing game, as well.

I fell in love with the man that loves our grandkids, all over again.

And finally, our youngest isn't even one year old yet, and Mister asks to see videos of her when I get home from watching the two littles on Thursdays. It's absolutely the highlight of his day, to sit and watch the kids talk and do new things, and smile.

I fell in love with the man that loves our grandkids, all over again.

And the coolest part is he has shown me over the years, by his love for the kiddos, and for me, what it's liked to be loved by a good Father...which then translates to healing me as I struggle to receive my Father's love. A new perspective, one that comes with the years, is a good one for sure.

And how could I not fall in love with the man God gave me, who loves so purely and simply and happily, all those that are given to us? It points me always back to HIM, and I find myself so grateful.

There are perks to growing old together, and this is one of the best and the biggest...

Date Night – Make It a Double – by Marcy Lytle

We don't double date a lot, but we do sometimes, and it's quite fun. Do folks even call it "double dating" these days? I don't know. And often, we rob ourselves of double dating fun, waiting for others to initiate the date. If you're the one that likes to go out, you love to find new places to share, then why not invite the couples you know to join you? There are lots of reasons not to go on double dates, but there are plenty of good reasons to enjoy.

Here are some ideas for double dates, and how to enjoy them?

Visit a new theater – If you've heard of a new theater, find a movie to see, invite another couple, and go! To make it even more fun...ride together...just like you did when you were dating as young adventurous kids! *Tip:* Ask them to park at your place, or offer to pick them up. It's a good excuse to clean your car!

Try a new restaurant – Maybe you have friends that are foodies like you are, and you've discovered a cool place to eat. Or...you've heard of a new place that sounds interesting and good! Invite that couple to meet you there and enjoy the new cuisine. *Tip:* Make sure to say to your friends you're just meeting them, and then ask the waiter to split the bill. OR, make sure you've communicated that you're picking up the tab, and enjoy doing that. Either way is perfectly fine to do!

Meet up for coffee – Maybe you've only got an hour or two in the evening or on a Saturday morning, and you'd love to meet and visit with another couple. Why not invite a couple in your family? Your kids, your in-laws, your parents? Make it breakfast, and you've got yourself a fun date. *Tip:* Take a game, or conversation cards, to stimulate the conversation.

Listen to music – We have friends that love listening to live music outdoors, so they're always our choice for this date night. Even indoors, there are fun places that offer live music. Find out the scoop, and send the list of choices, and let the other couple decide. *Tip:* If the music is free, or if it costs, be sure to communicate that. And consider dessert, after!

Day Trips if You Dare – We only have one couple that enjoys day trips as much as we do, and they enjoy anything and everything. These kind of friends are one in a million, for sure. If there's a small town you've been wanting to explore, get it on the calendar, and invite another couple to join. *Tip:* Give them ample time, tell them what you're doing, how long you'll be gone, before you go. This keeps your friends informed before they say yes.

Now, aren't those fun ideas? Dating with your spouse alone is good and healthy and romantic. But dating with another couple is a great alternative once in a while. Keep the conversation flowing, don't bicker in front of your friends, and give them grace if they're not just like you....and thank goodness they're not!

Worth Repeating – Patterns – by Marcy Lytle

“They” say old habits and patterns are hard to break. Being married for decades, patterns certainly can become predictable and well...boring. But it doesn't have to be that way at all. It only takes a bit of creativity and vision, which I believe we all have.

When I was young, my mom made me the most fascinating clothes. I know if she had wanted to, she could have been a famous designer. She could take a simple pattern of a plain shift dress, and put together pieces from the more high fashion patterns (like Vogue) and create me an outfit that was unique, stunning, and so fun to wear. I loved my mom's eye for fashion and how she could see ahead of time how the pieces would fit together, and how she was able to create a masterpiece I was proud to wear.

So what does this have to do with marriage?

We get married, we have kids, the kids grow up, and here we are – stuck in patterns that perhaps are old and “out of style” now. It's easy to literally fall into a couple of chairs, remote in hand, and sit – night after night – while we think about what used to be. And sometimes, falling into familiar patterns such as this lead to a lackluster marriage, not a masterpiece at all! In fact, many couples divorce after the kids are gone because they don't know what to do with all their newfound togetherness. This is because the pattern was...kids first...the marriage last.

Vision

My mom had an eye (and she still does) for color, shape, and beauty in dress making. She knew what sleeves would jazz up the dress, which color and fabric would create movement, and what added little touch would make the dress stand out above the norm.

You can pray for vision for your marriage. With the kids gone, the house empty, and the washing less time consuming, your future may look plain and simple, with the excitement and chatter gone from the house. However, it's time to look for new patterns that will fit with the ones that already work for you. For example, ask God to renew your love for your husband like it was when you first met. Instead of seeing the “two of you” as a bad thing, consider it time to look at him with pride, new eyes of adoration, and love that's withstood time. This will renew your vision. Pray for ministries where you can both experience movement in your spirit, and look for people and ways that you can touch with the wisdom you've been given over the years of growing together. Your newfound purpose will still be familiar, yet you'll be wearing new pieces that fit perfectly and look so good – you'll attract the attention of those around you.

Creativity

My mom wasn't afraid to try something new in her creation. She had confidence that the pieces she was putting together would fit me and look pretty. She had me in mind when she made the outfits, because she loved me and wanted to clothe me well. And that she did!

Remember the dreams you had before the kids came along? They got smothered in the dirty diapers, carpooling, and endless hours of homework and projects, along with recitals and sporting

events. You may have forgotten the creative ideas you once had, together as a couple, or even separately as individuals. Sit down and talk about your dreams then, and now, and if they've changed or if they're still gurgling beneath the surface. It's not too late to try something new...or that which was forgotten. Encourage each other so that you can both step out in confidence, enabling the other one to shine. Think of him, pray for him, and help him fulfill what it is he wants to do. Clothe each other well in kindness, honor, and prayer. And see if the creativity that comes together doesn't surprise you in its beauty and fit!

Shine

Patterns are useful and necessary for a seamstress to get started with her creations. But the real designer who makes her mark is one who knows how to piece the old with the new and come up with a whole new outfit that shines on the runway!

Don't let your pattern of marriage become old, faded, and easily torn. Take it out, look at it, pray over it, and look around and see if something awesome doesn't catch your eye! In fact, it might be the wink of His eye as he's looking back at you, while you pray for vision and creativity for decades to come!



ENCOURAGEMENT

A Day in the life – The People – by Bekah Holland

If you are reading this now, it's August. Now, I realize that in most parts of the world, this isn't a life-altering announcement. However, if you live in Texas like I do, August is like a tiny window into what my feeble mind imagines hell to be like. We're usually hanging out somewhere in the 106-degree days that last for no less than 12 eternities. And this is not normal heat, mind you. This is 98% humidity, dripping sweat before you've even shut the front door, legs melting to your car seats, bake cookies on the dashboard kind of heat, making you question every decision you've ever made that led to your choice to live here.

August is also the start of the bat-crap-crazy marathon of back-to-school season. I've managed to retain my sanity in previous years. I guess I'm playing it fast and loose with the term "sanity," but I said what I said. Because while my kids are brilliant, they don't tend to be the joiners of all the things. I've watched my friends juggling an impossible load of their kids' schedules, volunteering at school events, while somehow their houses always stay clean and their kids have regular haircuts. I'll start by saying that I am in awe of these women, and I believe with my whole heart that given a cape and tiara, they could, without question, rule the world. I'll follow that by saying that I've been secretly happy that my kids haven't been interested in too many outside of the normal level of crazy extras, leaving my life (while still resembling an unsteady Jenga tower that depends on obscene amounts of caffeine) somewhere in the realm of achievable.

Fast forward to my current situation, as I sit on my couch after spending the last two hours adding my upcoming high school freshman's activity schedule into my calendar, feeling my blood pressure skyrocketing past "consider dialing 911" levels, and by mid-September calendar entries, have opened a bottle of wine and broken out the in-case-of-emergency chocolate. Because this, my friends, definitely qualifies as an emergency.

I'm relatively sure I've entered a stage of grief of the death of a dream-my motivation to survive...the 9 AM school start time! Which has now been replaced by daily 6 AM practices, after-school practices, games, weekend performances, and required parent volunteering (I'd like to mention the requirement negates the volunteer aspect, but I digress), until I die. Somewhere in there, he's supposed to go to actual school, learn things and remember to do homework that I'm completely unequipped to help him with unless I develop a deep bond with ChatGPT. Oh and I have a husband, and another child, a full-time job, four dogs, a cat, a (Lord willing) temporary bunny and there's probably a partridge in a pear tree somewhere. Obviously, I'm going to have to be cloned a few times, but seriously, how have you all been doing this? I'm in full blown I-can't-do-this-I'm-going-to-fail-and-my-kid-is-going-to-end-up-with-face-tattoos-because-of-aforementioned-epic-failure mommy meltdown mode.

It's fine, though. We're fine. Everything is on fire, but totally fine. Will my house still be standing? Who knows. Are my human people going to be living on whatever food is microwavable or Uber eats-able for the next four years? Likely. Am I going to scream-cry in my car more often? Abso-freaking-lutely. Will there be more wine and emergency chocolate stashes? Check and check.

But you know what I've decided, while wallowing in the depths of despair and staring at the bottom of my chocolate jar? We are going to make it. How? No idea. Have I experienced one of those Highway to Heaven, light shining down from the sky with God's perfect roadmap to navigate this

new “adventure?” I wish, but nope. However, I do know that it’s possible because I’ve had years of witnessing others succeed. Because the village of women I’ve chosen to surround myself with, and who’ve chosen me as well (for no good reason that I can think of other than comic relief and an epic queso recipe) have paved the way, and are well versed in Olympic level talking-Bekah-off-a-ledge encouragement, and won’t let me fail...or at least not fail alone. These are our people. Whoever those people are, wherever they came from, who support us in superhero fashion, whether they’ve been “yours” for a year or a few decades...your circle is your lifeline. They are your strength when you run out, your mirror when you’ve forgotten who you are, your flashlight when you find yourself lost in the darkness again.

God didn’t create us for solitude. He created us for connection. And while it’s scary making grown-up friends (seriously, like terrifying), when you pick the right ones, and you let the right ones pick you too, this circle...this village? It’s a gift I’ve taken for granted too often. But if you ever find yourself in a tailspin and feel like you’re all alone, remember the ones who’ve shown up, big, small, invisible, and every way in between. Then watch them move mountains to show up again. Your people are the inspiration that will see you through every fire, sit with you in every valley, push you to every mountain top, and will always point you to the Son.

“I can’t stop the downpour, but I will always join you for a walk in the rain.”

Dr. Sukhraj Dhillon

An Adage a Day - Got the T-shirt? – by Carole Gilbert

We've all been there, done that, and maybe even gotten the T-shirt. We have also put off until tomorrow what we could've done today. So, with that in mind, ladies, I'm asking you, what do you wish you'd done differently?

It's August. Summer is coming to an end. Our schedules are geared now toward that time of the year instead of summertime activities, we're starting our routines of work or school. And I'm always on the fence about getting back in the swing of things. As that time approaches, I wonder, what am I putting off until tomorrow that I could've done today? Have I eaten all the summertime foods that I wanted? Have I gone to all the places that I wanted to travel to? I think where have I been, what have I done, and did I get the T-shirt?

I look back on the family trips we took while our kids were growing up. Our big thing was to get a souvenir for every destination we traveled to, usually a T-shirt. And the places we made sure we got a T-shirt from weren't always vacations. Sometimes it was from sports, maybe games we traveled to or from our own home team. Then, after my kids graduated, I made each of them a quilt using their T-shirts. These quilts are such fun mementos and definitely a blast from the past. I also made quilts for my husband and me.

This phrase "Been there, done that, got the T-shirt" is a way for us to express that something mentioned or thought about is something we have done before. The first part of it began in the early 19th century in America with the shirt part added in 1991, thought to be because of the T-shirt as a souvenir craze. I know we jumped on board and got T-shirts, many T-shirts! It is fun and important to get these or other souvenirs. They remind us of fond memories. But more importantly, are the things we say.

We must ask ourselves:

Have I said all that I need to say?

Have I given that child the most needed advice and encouragement?

Have I given my spouse or close friend that compliment?

Have I given my family all I need to?

Have I praised God for all He's done and is doing?

To me, our T-shirt quilts are special. And they have many colors. Joseph, in the Bible, had a coat of many colors from his dad. His coat is not believed to be quilted but it held fond memories. And later in his life he had reason to look back when approached by his brothers to reminisce about that day he lost his coat. That was the day his brothers sold him into slavery. And when he saw them again, years later, they were asking for him to help them. Joseph had gone through so many events leading up to him being the second in command behind Pharaoh in Egypt. I wonder if he might've looked at his brothers and thinking about the events in his life thought, "Been there, done that." And instead of a T-shirt thought "had the coat." But, like we should do, he embraced the moment and took hold of what God was leading him to do in his heart.

So, as summertime fun starts to end and our other schedules begin, let's be sure we haven't put off until tomorrow what we could've done today. It's so much better to be able to say, "Been there, done that, got the T-shirt," than to look back and wish we had.

Firmly Planted - Where is God? – by Dina Cavazos

Do you sometimes ask the question *Where is God?*

I do. When tragedy happens, when people hurt through no fault of their own, when I hear of the evil things going on in the world...I ask *Where are you God?* I never ask when something good happens. When something good happens I thank him and go on, expectant for the next good thing, hoping no evil befalls me or mine. But at my core, I know that my foundation needs to be strong enough to bear the weight of tribulation.

Recent tragic events stirred up some sobering questions: Do I expect that only good things should come my way? Do I believe that God is only in the good times and not the bad? Do I believe that he “lets” bad things happen and is indifferent to pain? Why doesn’t he stop bad things from happening? These questions I wrestle with from time to time. Even though I believe God is good, has a plan, and I can, ultimately, trust him, the answers to these unsettling questions are never crystal clear. They reside in the nebulous territory into which I “look through a glass darkly” But sometimes I get a glimpse of the other side--a flash of insight or understanding, a metaphoric moment that answers all questions at once.

With these questions hovering over me,
in one moment of stooping over with a small raking tool in hand,

I saw it.

The aftermath of heavy rains requires some garden clean-up. A few low spots, mostly along the granite path, collect water. It drains off quickly but leaves a mess behind. Whirls of debris such as leaves, sticks, and birdseed shells are strewn across the path or pile up against rocks, edging, and anything that acts as a barrier. With rakes large and small, I gather up the debris and scoop it into a container. Stoop, scoop, repeat.

A few days ago I spent some time doing this. The worship music I was listening to stirred my spirit and brought me close. My body was working, but my mind and heart were asking the questions...*Why? Where are you in this?* Unexpectedly, inexplicably, as my hand reached out with a small rake, I saw my hand as God’s hand.

God is in the midst. He doesn’t cause tragedy any more than I caused the heavy rain to wreak havoc in my garden. He is working to restore order and beauty, just as I am. He is healing where there is brokenness, just as I walk about picking things up and setting things right. I love my garden and care about every broken stem, every wilting flower, through highs and lows, in every season. So it is with God.

It’s difficult to see, especially when my heart is hurting and my mind is reeling. And when I can’t see, it’s hard to believe. That’s why I keep pressing into Jesus, pursuing connection. Because one moment, one glimpse, restores my faith that he’s got me, and all my cares, in his hand. Among the many mysteries of the Christian faith, is the risen, very present Jesus who said *In this world you will have tribulation, but I have overcome the world and will never leave you or forsake you,*

I pray for all suffering pain and loss, that the loving presence of the God of all comfort will unexpectedly, inexplicably surround you as you press in to him.

Under Pressure – Connected and Centered – by Debbie Haynes

I once worked for a manager that was well-credentialed on paper, but she had some quirks. Every day on her lunch hour, she shut the door to her office, closed the blinds, turned out the lights, crossed her legs...and just sat there. This was her private time, but her quirk irritated our director. It happened several times and my director asked me to find out why this manager did this.

My response was, "What does it matter?" But one day, I dutifully just asked this woman why she sat in the dark during her lunch hour. Her answer surprised me when she said, "I do it because it centers me." And of course, the director quizzed me again and I told him. His response was that he couldn't work with someone that has to center herself in a dark office, and he stated he would fire her!

He then asked, "Debbie, have you ever centered yourself?" And my answer was, "Well...maybe not in the same way, but that's what happens when I go to God in prayer and read the Word, every single time. And it's because doing this keeps me aware that I'm connected to God and that keeps me in perspective of *who* I am and *whose* I am." And then I left his office.

The very next week, the lady that sat in the dark resigned...out of the blue. She realized the company philosophy didn't align with hers, she found another position elsewhere, and she was leaving in two weeks! And yes, my boss was ecstatic. He also never let go of the line she used about centering herself and talked about it for years!

I've never forgotten that story and I even am reminded at times to center myself. I often read the verses about how we are the branches, and how Jesus is the vine...and we are connected to Him. In other words, we are centered in him, the true vine. And when we are centered and connected...we produce fruit. And that fruit looks like "changed character" to look more like Christ.

Want to find yourself?

Do you try to center your being?

Are you always trying to stay happy?

Jesus said our joy can be full. And this only happens as we are centered and connected to the True Vine. Happiness is ours, and we find ourselves only when we lose ourselves in Him.

Moving Forward – In a Flash – by Pam Charro

Are you in a season of waiting for God to bring about change? Boy, can I relate!

Seven months may not seem like a long time to you, but they were very long for me because I had to face the oppression almost daily. Many of my friends and family members were also praying for me these past seven months. Throughout this time, I was able to connect with others who were also suffering with me, and I shared with them that I knew it would suddenly change, in the blink of an eye. And, praise God, it did!

How did I know it would? I'm not really 100% sure, but I did have past experiences where God had come through for me in a similar way. Scripture also supports that God often *suddenly* rescues us from oppression and suffering.

Isaiah 48:3 says,

"I have declared the former things from the beginning,
and they went forth out of my mouth, and I showed them;
I did them suddenly, and they came to pass."

In Acts 16:25-26, Paul and Silas were in prison when,

"suddenly there was a great earthquake,
the foundations of the prison were shaken,
and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened."

In Psalm 18, David wrote about God delighting in him and rescuing him from his foes, who were too strong for him. It seemed impossible during the oppression, but God showed up, and David was praising and dancing again.

There are so many other verses about God rescuing those he loves, often very suddenly.

If you're in the middle of a trial that seems to be lasting forever, something that seems hopeless, please know that it will pass. He sees you, he loves you, and he will come through for you again, just as he has before. Take heart that he is working in ways none of us can possibly know, and all of this pain will be in your rear view mirror at just the right time.

In a flash, it can all be different.
Hold on, beloved.

Unearthly Thing - Joy: What Is It Exactly? – by Angela Dolbear

I've encountered the term "Joy" several times lately, and it's not even Christmas time, so it made me wonder, what is joy exactly?

SO many "joy" references....Joy to the World, joy comes in the morning, the Joy of the Lord, "sparking joy," and Joy, even as a girl's name.

Joy is everywhere: on cute signs to hang on the wall, on jewelry, and coffee mugs. Especially at Christmas time. You can purchase a four-foot-high light-up sign to put on your lawn that simply says "JOY."

And if you didn't get joy the first time, you can always "rejoice!"

Webster's Dictionary defines joy as the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune, or by the prospect of possessing what one desires; and also, delight, the expression or exhibition of such emotion; gaiety. Another definition is a state of happiness or felicity, or bliss. A third definition lists joy as a source or cause of delight.

Since joy is so prevalent in songs, holidays, and especially in the Bible, I get the feeling that there is more to it than just a feeling or an emotion.

After Googling to find more about joy, I learned that I am not alone in seeking a deeper understanding of its definition. I found great articles from some of my favorite teachers and speakers, such as John Piper, Josh McDowell, and Francis Chan. There were pages and pages of books on Amazon about joy.

As far as I can surmise, joy is more than an emotion or a feeling; it is a state of being, deep within the soul.

John Piper described joy as, "Christian joy is a good feeling in the soul, produced by the Holy Spirit, as he causes us to see the beauty of Christ in the word and in the world."

I can see the beauty of Christ in the Word of God, but I think I have to squint a little to see it in the world unless I recognize the beauty in the blessings God gives me in my world. That brings me joy for sure. I am surrounded by it, and I feel a deep sense of gratitude for it.

So, I'm making a short list of the things that bring me joy:

5. My dogs and my cat. They are always happy to see me, and the feel of their fur in my hands brings a lightness to my heart.

4. The special pieces of décor around my home. I was recently inspired by a divine idea to search for a buffet cabinet to provide extra storage in our kitchen. I prayed for the right one, with the right style (always Mid-Century for me) at the right price, and I found it. It looks perfect and functions just as I needed it to. It was a gift from God, for sure. Every time I see it, I feel blessed and loved because it was a gift from my God.

3. All the things God brings me that He knows I will like. Whether it's the perfect red cardigan, flowers for the front porch, or the above-mentioned buffet cabinet, I can see God's "fingerprints" on the things that He has brought to me. They bring me so much joy.

2. Answered prayers. Talk about joy! Recently, I prayed for a dog sitter for a short trip I'm taking next month, and today, God brought me the right person. And at the right price.

1. God's voice. His voice is usually still and quiet, and I know it's Him. In much the same way, a child knows their mother's voice, it's self-authenticating. He speaks to me in my soul and sometimes through a teaching that I have taken the time to listen to.

I try to keep a journal of these blessings (I have a digital prayer journal on my phone that works great for this). It's so encouraging to look back through the entries and reflect on all the times God has been with me, helping me, comforting me, and giving me personalized gifts. It truly brings me joy.

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 and will be released in the Summer of 2025. 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 with her husband, Tim, in their studio in Nashville, TN—listen to her new 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 – Leaving the House – by Marcy Lytle

Have you ever left the house and wondered if you locked the front door or left that candle burning? Of course, you have! And it's not just an "old age" thing, either. We even sometimes wonder if we turned off the stove. Just this weekend, one of us left the fridge door open – ugh! I was thinking about this and decided to make a checklist of things we've done lately to help us with staying safer and stronger...when we leave the home for a day or a week or more!

At night and before we leave the house for trips, we do check the candles. Both of us! Because there have been times when I left one burning and he saw it. Thankful.

For sure, our bed is made when we leave. And is that a good thing? Well, it keeps the sheets fresh, makes us both happy when we return home, and looks pleasing to the eye...and that settles our souls...doesn't it?

When we're leaving for vacation, we use a packing list to help us not forget one single thing. There are lists you can print from the web and then make them your own, or you can just create one. I keep it in my notes and print out before we pack and leave, every single time. It helps!

If you've got a great neighbor, let them know that you're leaving on a trip, just so they know. If you have a friend coming to water your yard, let the neighbor know that. Neighbors that watch out for each other are pure gold.

Yep, that stove. I don't even cook the night before a trip, because I just don't want to clean the kitchen or make a mess, and I can check then to make sure all burners are OFF!

Grab samples for your trips, from those bins at the pharmacy or Target. Keep them in a drawer just for travel and then grab those when you're ready to pack, and you won't have to panic.

Leave blinds shut when you leave home, especially if you're leaving a light on in the home. You don't want peepers into your private space! Shut blinds also help keep the house a bit cooler.

We used to leave our porch light or garage light on when leaving for a trip, but no more. We do, however, leave a light on in the hallway inside. We don't leave outside lights on when at home, so turning them on when we leave seems to alert passerby's that we are gone...

Don't forget those plants. Here in Texas, they can't go without watering for very long, so we do have a neighbor who graciously waters if we're gone a while. And we always pay her and bring her back a treat!

On your packing list, make sure to have the reminder to take your license and any other ID's with you! You never know that one time when he might forget his wallet, or you may have removed yours when changing purses!

Take out the trash. Okay, this is a no brainer, but there will be one person that throws away food in the can when you asked them not to, and that will not be a pleasant odor when you return home!

When you finally are in the car headed out or to the airport, etc. ask that question – did you lock the door? – and then turn around and look at your home to see that the garage door is indeed down and the front door is closed.

FRESH THYME - Off the Grid – by Marcy Lytle

I have always heard that it's good to go off the grid, sometimes. To put away our cell phones, disconnect, and even take a trip away from life as we know it...for solitude and renewal. And I bet that IS good for many, at times, in the right circumstances...perhaps. But in our state last month, there were hundreds of campers on the river, and many were off the grid...and it was disastrous.

- Some may have been off the grid because the place was remote, and there just wasn't good service.
- Children were off the grid, because they were with camp counselors and guardians, so why would they need connection?
- Maybe some went off the grid to get away from loss or heartache, or to connect with family, so they put away all their devices.

We will never know who was off grid or who was on, but then the unthinkable happened. A flash flood, one that was not expected in such proportions, hit like a bomb. That's what some called it, a rain bomb. And so many were caught unaware, because there was no communication granted them, or they had cut it off, or they were just off the grid because of location.

I started thinking about that phrase "off the grid" and how we all do this, spiritually, as well. There are times when we just don't want to think about God, for all sorts of reasons, so we disconnect. I know I've been there in times when life doesn't make sense, when death is too familiar, and when disappointments are all we can see. We decide we want to take a break and disconnect from any lifelines we have that are connected to "religion" or even God, himself. And I do believe that taking breaks from "religion" and analyzing what we believe are necessary in life, and resting from doing and doing is healthy and wise. However, I'm not referring to that at all...here.

Here's what perhaps an unhealthy and dangerous "off the grid" experience might look like, as a Christian...with dire consequences and maybe even loss of "life" if we're not careful:

- Quitting all connections with other believers because we deem them hypocrites.
- Judging church and everything connected with it, because of a few bad experiences.
- Allowing bitterness to take root while we're disconnecting, so deep that we can't see the good.
- Laying aside worship and reading the Word, because it's just too painful to sing of God's goodness when we're hurting.
- Seeking respite in other sources such as astrology, witchcraft, or alternate sources other than a relationship with God.

We all go off the grid for a short time or season, when hurts occur, which is natural. But staying off the grid, just like going camping or on a hike on a mountain, or leaving the city for rural life for days and days...without connection...creates a vulnerable space, physically. And sudden "flash floods" can occur. And we can be swept away...

All of us were devastated at the loss of lives during this unprecedented event, and there was so much finger pointing, theories, judgment, etc., which didn't help anyone. No one knew this would happen, and there are so many trying to make sure it won't happen again, installing sirens, getting better weather forecasting technology, and more...to avoid loss of life...next time.

I participated in some of those dangerous reactions to pain in my list above, at least I toyed with many of them. I judged others, I disliked church, and I was bitter. Thankfully, worship and the Word stayed the course and helped me. But had I continued “off the grid” I think I may have lost the joy of life, of relationship, and of the beauty of gathering with others. I’m thankful for connections and know that they are necessary, although I can still push back at times.

It’s something for all of us to think about, if we are “off the grid” and in danger of a “flash flood” due to our own choosing or not. Life is certainly hard, for everyone, at one time or another. Rest and disconnect are sometimes absolutely necessary and even good. But it’s what happens over time as we are away from the good things that we couldn’t see during the bad things. And that’s where being “off the grid” can be a loss that’s hard to recover from.

Just my thoughts, and I process by writing, and I’d love to know your thoughts...as well.

FRESH THYME - What a Drag – by Marcy Lytle

Anyone else dragging, today? My hand is up. I'm dragging because I'm tired of having the same old feelings and thoughts over and over again. I'm already weary of the summer heat and there is a lot more to go. I'm having trouble with fear...yet again. And I flubbed up today and hated myself. Yes, *hated* is a strong word, but it's how I felt for a bit...

Days like this happen sometimes out of nowhere, when we were perfectly fine earlier, don't they? We wake up in a good mood, get things done and crossed off our checklist, make and enjoy a great meal, and then...all of a sudden our feet are shuffling, our minds are well...dragging.

I figure if I have days like this, then you must, as well. Because we're not all that different you know, we as women. So many things play into our emotions and this then affects our day. It could be the way our child looked at us or the way he spoke to us, or even the way she cut us off on a text. It could be that our room looks drab and is in need of a makeover, or that we ate too much at lunch - or that we thought about the future and it scared us and we felt frozen in our tracks. Then from that moment forward, the day felt like a drag.

I don't like dragging for any of the above reasons, and I'm really hard on myself. I don't like it when my thoughts spiral out of control, when that sarcastic cut slips off my tongue, or when I gravitate towards complaining instead of giving thanks. And I usually don't let myself drag for very long, because it doesn't feel good, at all!

So...as I'm doing it right now...here's how I quit the drag:

1. I tell myself that those negative thoughts are just that...thoughts...and not part of me. They're just clouds covering the sun and they soon will pass.
2. I ask forgiveness if I've done wrong, as I realize I might not really be sorry. But it's a start, isn't it?
3. I ask for help from HIM, because he says he loves me like crazy and I'm his daughter and he's not a father that turns away or withholds, but rather gives more compassion and mercy...every single day.
4. I remember that I'm weak, and He is strong.
5. I look out the window and see that the literal clouds have passed by and the sun is shining, always there even when I can't see it.
6. I get up and skip to the bedroom, because skipping defeats dragging.
7. I do something different, something I enjoy, and I lay aside any guilt for doing it, because that's heavy and that makes me drag.

That's seven little things we can all do today together, if we're all dragging at any moment.

"What a drag," by definition, means we are disappointed, frustrated, bored, negative or find life tedious or even dull at the moment.

I recently heard a teaching on the power of the name of God, and two descriptions of who He is are compassionate (like that's WHO he is) and that he's "long in the nostrils" (a literal translation of a verse) which means he doesn't flare his nostrils in anger. Now that made me smile, because when I'm dragging, I sometimes think God must be so tired of me, in the same way that I'm tired of life. But the opposite is true of the God we serve. He's amazingly patient and ready to help lift our weary heads and hands and feet, any time we ask and sigh with a, "What a drag."