

A BUNDLE OF

TH  ME

JANUARY 2019

TIPS

Seven 4 You – A little R and R and R... – by Marcy Lytle

January is here and we're either glad the hoopla of the holidays is past, or we're completely saddened that all of the joy is gone and we're stuck now in the cold...and feel alone and forlorn. I feel like I'm usually on the sad side, because Christmas comes and goes so fast that I feel sad when the lights and shows and parties and celebration decline. I thrive on that stuff!

Come the New Year, I like to have plans in place to relax and get back in the groove, but not so quickly that it's an abrupt change back to normalcy. I love having a few plans to sit back and read, relax, and refigure so that life feels fresh and new, like the calendar claims it is!

Here are seven ways to refresh and renew, if you're feeling blue:

1. **Read.** Hopefully, you have a few new magazines maybe you haven't read yet (I recommend *Magnolia Journal*), or a cookbook (*Pull up a Chair*) you've only used but not read the stories inside, or a new book you received under the tree. If you don't have something to read, let me recommend a book club! My husband gave me this for Christmas, and I already got my first book! I get one every month. It's not very much money per month, and what a joy to receive something new to read every 30 days!
2. **Relax.** Carve out time to relax. That may sound funny that we have to "carve out time," but we often do. Look at your calendar and leave room for nights by the fire, watching a show or sipping hot cocoa or cider, or for a Saturday or Sunday morning for breakfast out, where you linger and chat with your spouse or a friend.
3. **Refresh.** Consider perhaps one area in your house or closet that needs a refresh, and tackle it. Organizational type boxes and folders are usually on sale this time of year, so take one mess and make it beautiful again. It will cause you to sigh in relief that you've done something so refreshing!
4. **Renew.** Maybe emotions ran high over the holidays and you became angry again at that relative, or disappointed once more at his gifts or the lack thereof, or you were just plain lonely and despondent over the holiday season. It's all over now, and don't carry those hurts into the New Year. Instead, spend a little time with your Father and pour out your heart to him – lay down those burdens at his feet. Do this often, as much as you need to, in order to breathe deeply.
5. **Recall.** Think about 2018 and recall God's blessings to you and yours. Make a list of at least 10 and type them into a pretty font, print out the list, and hang it on your fridge or board somewhere in your house. The list might include a new job, healing when you were sick, your kid making a team, a friend got a new house, etc. You don't have to stop at 10! Just make the list and recall his faithfulness; and that will boost your faith to expect more in 2019.
6. **Relay.** Make it a point this month to relay to others your appreciation and love for them. Perhaps buy a set of notecards to send by snail mail, or sit down at your computer and send an email, or type out a daily text to one friend a day. Relay your love, your encouragement, and anything else positive to a friend...expecting nothing in return.
7. **Roast.** Consider eating more veggies this year. Roast them at the start of the week, and use them in all sorts of dishes. Cup up bite size pieces of six or seven of your

favorite veggies, drizzle with olive oil and season. Bake at 375 degrees for 15-20 minutes, flip or stir around, and bake another 15-20 minutes until tender. Use them to top greens, in a quesadilla, or on a bed of fried rice with a few peanuts sprinkled on top.

There you go! Aren't you feeling better already? What other R could you add to the list?

Have a happy New Year!

The Dressing – Keeping it Warm – by Marcy Lytle

January is cold. And I love it. But it's because our cold doesn't last long when it comes. Our hot is our unwelcome visitor that stays way too long. But the cold is the time we all hunker down and get cozy in all of the fabrics that make us feel loved and warm. From hats, to gloves, to blankets, to pajamas, keeping warm is definitely the task of the month for most of us. And usually, the sales on warm wear are great, because bathing suits are hanging up soon for those early spring break planners!

Geez...

Until then, here are some great warm and cozy ideas to keep you covered...

Thermal Pj's – I just bought these right before Christmas and they're my favorite! Super soft, super comfy, and there were lots of choices. I got this navy blue pair with tiny stars, and I also bought a gray pair. I hope they're still on sale for you, because they are wonderful for sleeping and then lounging in on a weekend morning at home. And they're from Target.

<https://www.target.com/p/women-s-star-print-thermal-pajama-set-gilligan-o-malley-153-blue/-/A-53868905?preselect=53763302#ink=sameta>

The Robe: I also bought myself this robe before Christmas, just for me, as a treat! It was on sale, and when I felt it in the store, I couldn't resist the softness. It's a great length and even has a hood, should you want to wrap up completely while watching a show. It's super warm and one of the softest robes I've ever owned. It's from World Market.

<https://www.worldmarket.com/product/green-paisley-fleece-robe.do?sortby=ourPicks&from=fn>

Travel Wrap: Check this out from World Market! It's a travel wrap! You can take it with you on a plane trip, a road trip or just when you're out and about in town! I love the gray color, and you get a hat and a drawstring bag too! This is worth spending some of that Christmas money on, for sure. It's a nice gray color that will go with everything and keep you cozy!

<https://www.worldmarket.com/product/gray-plaid-travel-wrap-3-piece-gift-set.do?sortby=ourPicks&from=fn>

Loafing Around: When's the last time you wore a pair of penny loafers? Target has these really cute suede ones in several colors from which to choose. I particularly like this pink hue, and find that this color goes with everything from black, to gray, and even brown! Keep your feet cozy and warm and styling, too!

<https://www.target.com/p/women-s-aa-nae-suede-closed-back-loafers-universal-thread-153/-/A-53662548?preselect=53468280#ink=sameta>

Cozy Coat: I bought a different Sherpa jacket than the one pictured here, but it's been so fun to have this season. This pink hue will match your suede loafers, and keep you cozy right through Valentine's Day next month when you're wearing red! NOW is the time to buy coats – they should be on sale! And I love the length of this one, too!

<https://www.target.com/p/women-s-sherpa-jacket-wild-fable-153/-/A-53741676?preselect=53716001#ink=sameta>

Reversible Sweater: I also bought this sweater one night when I couldn't sleep, on line from Urban Outfitters, at a great clearance price! It is SO comfortable, and you can wear it with the V in the front OR the back! It's a little slouchy, just the right amount, so it's not snug and uncomfortably tight. It comes in several colors, and looks great over a turtleneck. Isn't this so pretty? You could even wear it over one of your dresses or skirts, with tights to cover your legs!

<https://www.urbanoutfitters.com/shop/uo-coconut-reversible-v-neck-tunic-sweater?category=womens-winter-sale&color=073&quantity=1&type=REGULAR>

Glory Gloves: That's what I'm calling these chenille lined gloves. I think those gloves with cute tips and open fingers and all of that extra stuff are cute, but when it's cold, I just want a soft and warm pair of gloves to cover my hands. These also come in several hues and they are just what your dry cold hands need. This grey multi hue will go with whatever coat you're sporting this cold season of the year! They too are from UO.

<https://www.urbanoutfitters.com/shop/flat-knit-chenille-lined-glove2?category=womens-gloves&color=024>

What are you wearing this January to keep you cozy and warm? I hope you're enjoying the season, sipping on warm or hot tea, and sitting by the fire as you relax after Christmas is over. Those chores and cleaning can wait, while you snuggle and smile...can't they?

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In the Kitchen – Little Bites – by Marcy Lytle

My husband's birthday is in the second week of January, and it's often the coldest month in the year, and of course it's a new year, so there's a reason to celebrate all month long. After all of the holiday eating, it's fun to sit back and just enjoy little bites when you're having guests over, or if you're just staying in to watch a show by the fire. In fact, little bites are my favorite type of meal to put together. I love snacking on lots of different options, whether it be from a cheese array, a cold cut board, or just bowls of different things to snack on.

Here are some fun snacking options for offering up little bites this month to you and yours:

Homemade Granola

I know granola is typically eaten layered in between rows of yogurt and fruit, and that's certainly a great option. But I love just setting out a container of this homemade crunch for snacking, as an alternative to popcorn!

- 3 cups old fashioned oats
- 3 T flour
- 1 cup almonds/cashews (or your choice of nut)
- 1 cup dried cherries
- ½ cup maple syrup
- 1/3 cup canola oil
- 1 t vanilla extract
- 1 t cinnamon
- ¼ t fine sea salt

Preheat oven to 325 and line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Toss together oats, flour, nuts and cherries. In another bowl, whisk together syrup, oil, vanilla, cinnamon, and salt. Add the liquid mix to the dry and stir well.

Spread mixture on prepared sheet and bake, stirring occasionally, til browned and fragrant, 30-40 minutes. Allow it to cool before storing in an airtight container.

Apple Sweet Potato and Rosemary Flatbread

This is a great appetizer to make and then cut into small squares for eating. It's colorful and so tasty, and includes a combo of ingredients I'd never thought of putting together. But it certainly works!

- 1 lb pizza dough
- Cornmeal and flour for dusting
- 1 ½ cups gruyere or extra sharp cheddar
- 1 large Honeycrisp apple
- 1 small sweet potato peeled and thinly sliced

- ½ small red onion, thinly sliced
- 2 T olive oil
- 2 T fresh chopped rosemary
- Kosher salt and pepper

Heat oven to 425, dust a baking sheet with cornmeal.

On a lightly floured surface, shape pizza dough into a large rectangle (14 in long or more) and place on prepared sheet, and sprinkle with half the cheese.

Thinly slice apple into rounds, discarding any seeds. In a bowl, toss sweet potato and onion with oil, rosemary, and ¼ t each of salt and pepper. Add apple and remaining cheese and toss. Scatter over dough.

Bake until potatoes are tender and crust is golden, about 20 minutes.

Mini Sausage Tarts

Easy to make and they look so pretty, as they are tiny and colorful and just the right size for a little bite dinner entrée! Everyone will love these, and will want to eat several!

Heat oven to 350.

- 1 lb ground pork sausage, browned and drained
- 1 8oz pkg shredded Mexican cheese blend
- ¾ cup Ranch dressing
- 2 T chopped black olives
- 4 15-count frozen mini phyllo cups
- Diced red pepper and more diced black olives

Combine sausage, cheese, salad dressing and olives, blending well. Divide among the phyllo cups and arrange on ungreased baking sheets. Sprinkle with diced pepper and black olives.

Bake at 350 for 10-12 minutes!

Crackers and Cheese

We had this dip alongside crackers at one of our holiday parties. The spice on the crackers combined with the creamy nutty cheese was a delicious bite for sure! This is great to bring to a gathering of friends and family this new year.

<https://www.amazon.com/Savory-Saltine-Seasoning-Classic-Original/dp/B00B6DJ7OK?th=1>

The crackers:

You'll need to purchase packs of the seasoning mix. You can find them on Amazon, and we find them in small towns at festivals and home stores. If you buy, buy several. This seasoning is addicting! Just read the directions on the package!

Basically you add the mix, along with oil, and crackers in ziplock bags and shake!

The cheese:

- 8 oz sharp cheddar cheese
- 4 oz cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup butter, softened
- 1 ½ cup chopped toasted pecans
- 1 t minced roasted garlic

Mix the cheeses and butter. Add in the nuts and garlic and combine.

Serve in a cute pot nestled in the center of the crackers and enjoy.

(This cheese hardens in the fridge, so set it out a bit to soften so that it spreads, before serving.)

Tiny Muffalettas

We love these olive salad sandwiches, and usually they are ordered off a deli menu, and they're large! So these small bites are perfect for setting out for guests or enjoying with your family. And the best part is they can be made one day ahead of time. The flavor is only better the next day!

The sandwich:

28 crusty bakery rolls

28 thin slices genoa salami

¼ very thinly sliced deli ham

28 slices provolone cheese

The olive salad:

1 12oz jar roasted red peppers undrained

1 13oz jar pimiento stuffed green olives drained

1 6oz pitted black olives, drained

½ c coarsely chopped red onion

¾ cup pepperoncini chopped peppers

3 garlic cloves, halved

2 t dried Italian seasonin

¼ c olive oil

¼ t fresh ground pepper

Drain the peppers, reserving 1 T liquid. Pulse all ingredients with that liquid in a food processor until coarsely chopped.

To assemble the sandwiches: Spoon 1 T olive salad on bottom of roll, layer salami, ham and cheese over salad, and spoon another 1 T salad on top of the cheese. Cover with the top of the roll. Cut in half and secure with wooden picks and an olive, if desired.

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Selah's Style – Amazing Augie

Selah's little cousin Augie is 3 ½ years old and he has his own style and way of dressing that suits him just fine. He's a precocious little guy that loves to climb and build, fall down and tear down, and play zoo and put together puzzles. Featuring Augie's style this month, as the new year begins, is so fun and playful. He models his favorites for you to enjoy...

Long sleeve Henley – Augie loves these soft long-sleeved henleys from Target. He absolutely loves buttons on shirts so that he can unbutton them! And if there's a pair of sunglasses left unattended, he just might pick them up and wear them. Look at the sun on Augie's hair – angelic!

<https://www.target.com/p/toddler-boys-long-sleeve-striped-henley-cat-jack-153-navy/-/A-53606853?preselect=53585155#lnk=sametab>

Wrapped in a blanket – Just like Augie's dog Heismann loves a snuggly wrap in a blanket, so does Augie. These blankets are found on line and are the softest, cutest blankets around – and they can be personalized! Augie and his brother and sister both have a blanket for snuggles from blankets2!

<https://blankets2.com/>

Footie pajamas – These pajamas with feet in them are Augie's favorite type of sleepwear. In fact, he loves to linger in them almost til noon as he plays with his toys and builds villages and helps the sick animals in the zoo. He wears these all year long from season to season!

<https://www.target.com/c/footie-pajamas-union-suits-robos-boys-clothing-kids/-/N-4xnwi>

Tattoos and Tennis Shoes – This little guy is active! Here he's sitting on a fence in a button down shirt with cute tennis shoes ready for more climbing. If Augie finds markers or pens, he's sure to design something for wear on his hands or legs. After all, why not?

<https://www.target.com/c/sneakers-boys-shoes/-/N-55k0a>

Plaids with a Cap – Augie's dad wears plaid button-down shirts, and Augie loves to copy his father. What a great thing for a little guy to do! If there's a cap nearby, he'll set it on top of his head too, just to complete the outfit! We love these little plaid shirts from Old Navy.

<https://oldnavy.gap.com/browse/search.do?searchText=toddler+plaid+boys>

Augie loves to play outside, even when it's cold. He's thoughtful and playful, and on any given day when he's tired or ready to chill, he might sink into an empty chair somewhere and relax with a couple of fingers in his mouth while he rests. He loves getting haircuts from his dad, snuggles from his mom, and playtime from his two older siblings, Ayla and Gideon.

His fashion advice? Leave a few buttons undone, copy your father, and pick up a marker and draw...and try not to get caught...

Tried and True – A View from the Fridge – by Marcy Lytle

I was sitting at my laptop working, not wanting to be disturbed. I work in the kitchen at a high table on a stool, while I have a lovely view outside.

He walked in and opened the refrigerator door and I grimaced, because there was this foul odor that wafted over in front of my nostrils and I exclaimed, “That does it. I’m cleaning the fridge!”

I’m not good at maintaining a sparkling clean fridge, and I admit it now – I wait until it’s unbearable and then I clean it. Today was that day.

As usual, my Father spoke to me while cleaning and scrubbing, and I tried to listen and learn...as I learn best from these object lessons he so nicely uses to instruct me and help me.

Hard stuff required scrubbing: I had a warm sponge for wiping down the shelves but in the back, where food spills had hardened, I had to get out a scrubber. I had to use a lot of arm strength to loosen up those frozen pieces of nasty food that were stuck. And, of course, I thought right then of some of the hard places in my heart that don’t come loose with a quick prayer and a nod toward heaven. I have to sit still and let him apply a little pressure in order to loosen them and set me free. Ouch.

Expired things needed to be tossed: This is a no-brainer, right? But sometimes I only partially clean and leave some of those bottles in the back forever! Once I got rid of the expired bottles, I felt elated, and yet a bit irritated at myself for not using those sauces and spreads before their time for good flavor was gone. Okay, lesson #2 was to take inventory often of my talents and treasures and to use them when I feel prompted.

Check your stock before you buy: I had 3 jars of roasted red peppers! What? I made a mental note to make my menu next week using these red slivers to make colorful and tasty, some of our meals! I’m sure I was in a hurry to leave and didn’t think to look what I had before I shopped, and if I had, I would have saved money. Sometimes I have just what I need and I don’t need to go looking for more of what I already have...

I could go on with the cleaning lessons, but I’ll spare you the details. It was just cool to be doing this mundane task of cleaning out my fridge and hearing his sweet voice as he taught me practical lessons along the way. He wasn’t harsh, he was conversational. And some lessons I just learned from my own observation, like how if I don’t move some things out of the way, I’ll never see that shriveled up grape near the back, all black and nasty...

For a few practical tips, here are my favorite fridge organizational conclusions:

- Nuts are best corralled in boxes and need to be eaten often, in trail mix, atop fried rice, or as an accompaniment to popcorn!
- A lazy Susan is great for tiny jars.
- I love two more big, slide-in organizational plastic containers to house breads and extra veggies that won’t fit in the crisper. These keep my shelves looking nice and they’re easy to remove and hose down under the faucet.

- Small colanders (from the dollar store) are great to place inside veggie and fruit drawers for keeping order and making them pretty.

As I was typing this story, I realized I forgot to clean the cheese/meat drawer! So up I popped to do so, and when I opened it, that was the place where the stinky smell was residing!

Last lesson...

Make sure you clean every spot and leave nothing stinky to ruin the fragrant.

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HOME

Practical Parenting – The Best and Worst – by Marcy Lytle

We were standing and talking with friends when a little boy, that my friend had previously been a nanny to, ran by.

“Hey, you!” she said, smiling and pointing at him, expecting him to run up and give her a hug.

Instead, he ran off and didn’t give her the time of day.

“And I used to keep him,” she said, laughing. “But you’d think he doesn’t even know me.”

We laughed about that, and I commented on the fickleness of children. One day we are their favorite, and the next day we’re a stranger. Kids are so like that, aren’t they? They want to crawl up in our laps and love on us, which warms our hearts. But if something better comes along, or a friend calls them to play, we’re toast!

Parenting brings with it so many “best and worst” moments, and we do just have to learn to laugh and roll with the punches, or we’ll be crying in the trenches:

- The best is when they fall asleep in our arms and look like angels as they sleep.
- The worst is when they wipe chocolate on those same arms, covered in pretty sleeves.
- The best is when they draw us a picture and hand it to us, so proudly.
- The worst is when that picture depicts us as a large overgrown potato head with a few sprigs of hair.
- The best is when they look so cute in that outfit we picked out and they actually liked.
- The worst is when they only want to wear that outfit, every day, in every place, at every event.
- The best is when they want to help us in the kitchen, or ask to set the table.
- The worst is the cleanup after they help us in the kitchen, or they throw confetti on all plates and in all cups.
- The best is when they ask us to read a book to them, as they sweetly listen and turn the pages.
- The worst is when they only want that book night after night, and we can’t bear the story one more time.
- The best is when they choose to run into our arms when spotted in a crowd of people.
- The worst is when they won’t get out of our arms and want to be carried on a mile-long hike.
- The best is when they bring home that paper with a mark stating they did so well.
- The worst is when they bring home that note with a meeting scheduled, because they need to sit still.
- The best is when they clean their rooms and make their beds and do their chores, with a smile.
- The worst is that the above best never happens.

I’m sure you could add best/worst statements to make that list several pages long, as a parent. There are best days when our kids behave, our spouses help, our houses feel somewhat put

together, and our energy level is high. But more than likely, right after the holidays is not one of those days. It may feel like the worst time, because Christmas décor has to be put away, the kids' rooms are now full of toys that need batteries that will break our budgets, school and routine is about to begin, and our house is absolute chaos.

On the best days, it's so wonderful to sit down and relax and smile and sip a cup of hot tea, while watching the children play while we do nothing.

So make these worst days of post-holiday madness one of those best days and still sit down and relax and smile with a cup of hot tea anyway, while ignoring the piles and the dirty floors and the screaming kids...at least for a moment.

After all, we're only promised today, and today's a good one to focus on the best...even if the worst is all you see.

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A Night to Remember – Show and Tell – by Marcy Lytle

We mentioned Show and Tell over on the MARRIAGE page as a date night out idea, so we thought we'd use it here as well, as an activity for the entire family! Showing and telling is something we're instructed to do in the bible, once we know Jesus. We are told to show others his love by our actions of kindness, and to tell of what He's done for us through his forgiveness and mercy. So why not have a little fun showing and telling as the family comes together?

Preparation: *Ask each family member to bring 3 items to the family room that they got for Christmas, and lay them all out in a pile in the middle as the family sits around (Look at list below for suggestions.)*

As you take turns sharing your items and saying why you like it so much, ask these questions and discuss with these possible items that are shared:

Item #1 – a toy

Maybe this item is so well liked because it was something we wished for, and now it's ours. Talk about how we all wish for a best friend and how Jesus because that for us, when we asked him into our hearts. Give thanks for Jesus granting your wish to be loved. (Read Proverbs 18:24)

Item #2 – an item of clothing

Perhaps one of you received a new coat or outfit and you love it. It's fun to look good when we go out, and to have something nice to wear! Talk about how Jesus covers us with righteousness because he forgives all our sins, and he gives us a clean heart and smile to wear every day - without any stain or wrinkle! (Read Isaiah 61:10)

Item #3 – a new game

If someone shares a game they received, maybe they like it because it's so fun to play. Talk about how God enjoys our laughter, tells us relax, and even leads as a good shepherd to water and green grass. (Read Psalm 23)

Item #4 – a personal item (toiletry, perfume, lotion, etc.)

Getting something personal, like a fragrance or a lotion, or even cologne or a new hairbrush, feels so special, doesn't it? We all like different smells and feels, and to have our own makes us feel good about ourselves! Talk about how God is attentive to our every need, so much that he's aware of how many hairs are on our heads! (Read Matthew 10:30)

Item #5 – a book

A new book opens a whole world of wonder, doesn't it? There are adventures in the book, characters to meet, and beautiful illustrations or wonderful conversations to read! Let each person tell their favorite kind of book to read. Then talk about the Good Book and about all of

the wonderful things it brings to our lives: comfort, joy, instruction, forgiveness, peace, and hope. It's a book that endures and has stories to last a lifetime!

Continue sharing and comparing each item to what God has for us, because he is the great Gift Giver. He gave his son Jesus for us! And he loves it that we enjoy the gifts we receive here on earth, and loves it when we have thankful hearts for each one of them.

Pray together and give thanks for the Christmas gifts and for the gift of Jesus.

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I Don't Do Teenagers – Make it or Break It – by Marcy Lytle

January comes, and school starts up again, and we're back into routine with getting the kids up and out, driving them around, or letting them drive themselves, and pretty soon those bad habits they have, and we have, surface again. There are so many things we start up with our kids that are hard to break, once they become normalcy in our homes. And there are also great things we've let go that we need to start up again, or new things we need to try! The beginning of a New Year is a great time to begin again...

Here are a few habits to break:

Being so busy we don't listen to our kids talk: Take time to look at your schedules and see if there's plenty of conversation time with your teens around the table, in the car, or just family time together out having dinner or playing a game at home, or even doing a jigsaw together when it's cold and dark outside. If we're too busy for any of that, we can break that habit by cutting out an activity or two.

Being so hard, our kids can't breathe: Rules are great, but if they're rules we just dole out to be mean, or because that's the way we were raised, or because we don't like our kids, we need to rethink them. Think about the rules and why you've made them, and see if you can't loosen up or at least explain and discuss, as your kids start a new year under your thumb.

Allowing unhealthy habits: Yes, teens are out of our sight sometimes and we don't know what they're doing at friends' houses or even at school. But at home, we can make sure we have healthy snacks, healthy and uplifting music, and healthy conversations full of love and acceptance and encouragement. If we're not healthy ourselves, then we can ask for help and start paving the way toward a new year for the entire family.

Here a few habits to start:

Teen dates: They might say no, and they might frown, but make it a point at least once a month this year to take your teen on a date. Let them choose the restaurant or activity (within reason – moneywise) and don't let other obligations interrupt. Make the evening all about them, with little kids in tow too, or with just you and your spouse, or with just one of you. Listen to your teens. Buy them a treat. Hug them. Even if they resist all of the above, do it.

Teen responsibility: Your teens might be on sports teams and in all sort of school clubs, but they need some responsibilities at home. Give them a chore that suits their interests. For example, have them make dinner one night, or put together a family outing. Allow them to organize a drawer. Give them one bathroom they are to keep clean. Teach them to wash their own clothes and dry them, and put them away. Require these things, as your teens are part of a family, and need to contribute. Be firm. They don't go out if these things are done. And if they're too busy to be responsible at home, then they're too busy. Reconsider your calendars.

Teen activities: Your teens will want to go to movies without you, hang out with friends at their house, and play games without you hovering. It's part of normal emergence into adulthood to want to be on your own. However, communicate. Be aware. And be the parent. Look up

movie synopses WITH your teens and let them read the gore or the filth, and ask them if they really want to see that. And say no, but give an alternative. Ask to meet the friends' parents, even if your teen frowns when you do. There's no price too big to pay for safety and wisdom. And insist on studying the game before they play, and give parameters around time spent on the game, or any other activity. Encourage movement, the outdoors, reading, and playing with siblings, and showing up for family night. In fact, make sure your teens' activities are healthy and wise, and things that help and don't harm.

What habits could you and your teenagers break this new year? And what habits could you possibly start up, ones that would make family life together more pleasant and peaceful? Take the time to think and pray and make the changes, now...before December gets here so fast again and you wonder where the time went...while your teens slipped further away.

The Family Practice – Intuition – by Brandi Oman

As a mom, I have faced many different trials and tribulations big and small for the past eight years. All these include having to make big and small decisions. I want to share a very personal experience that some of you may relate to.

My son, for the past two years, has displayed some behavior issues that I have attempted to address with him. For a short period of time things improved, but it was as if he forgot the lesson I just taught him. This year in school he has an amazing, in-tune teacher (thank the Lord) and she is not afraid to tell me her concerns. Together, we have really tag-teamed on getting Caiden on the right track. However, again it appeared he just did not remember what he was supposed to be doing. He is not a bad, disrespectful, or mean kid...he just seems to be forgetful.

I was very frustrated with him and asked him questions such as, "Do you care about school?" "Why aren't you doing your work?" "Why don't listen to me and do what you are told?" I realized how harsh and unfair these questions were becoming, as every time they carelessly flew out of my mouth I watched his innocent eyes well up, his head sink down, and he quietly replied, "I don't know Mommy."

Finally, I took a new approach and asked him to tell me what he's thinking about, when he makes X.Z decision, and his answer stopped me in my tracks. "Mommy I never think about one thing, I feel like I have a million thoughts all at the same time and I do not know how to control them! I can't control myself because my mind is EVERYWHERE!" I began asking around and reading about ADHD and all of the symptoms it listed were exactly what he was experiencing, and what I was witnessing out of my sweet boy.

I immediately requested to see his pediatrician. This was the worst experience Caiden and I would have had with a healthcare professional. I asked my mom to join as my mother has always been a great support system in my life. The doctor walked into the room and said, "I am not going to touch this. Caiden has high blood pressure. You need to take him to a behavior specialist and work on him at home. Make him a chart and make sure you are on top of him behavior-wise." She then turned to my mom and asked her questions that she should have been asking me, Caiden's mother. My mom told the doctor, "I don't even live with these two so you might want to ask your questions to Brandi." The doctor and I exchanged a few words and I had enough. I left feeling hopeless, judged, and without answers. It was a really awful feeling because I still had no answers.

It took me a day to decompress, and I began to pray for God to show me what to do. I needed answers and I knew that that doctor was not who Caiden was meant to receive medical care from. I went to the wonderful world of "People of Round Rock Facebook Page" and made a request for a pediatrician. I scheduled Caiden an appointment with his now AMAZING pediatrician. It turns out he specializes in ADHD and the medicines that affect Caiden's blood pressure. Caiden was diagnosed with ADHD and has been medicated for two weeks. He is behaving better at home and school. He is getting his school work and homework done. He is a calmer, less stressed out kid.

The way I was treated by the first pediatrician really had placed some self-doubt in me. I didn't know if I was as big of a failure as a mother as she had implied I was. By grace and my motherly intuition, I tackled a beast and showed my son I am always on his side. He makes comments on how he feels better and he is smiling more.

As parents, we face so many choices, judgements, and uncertainties. I say go with your God-given intuition and gut feelings for your babies!

God gave us our children and we are responsible for making sure they are all right!

Heeding our God-given intuition, we move forward in the way that seems wisest, trusting that the Lord is directing our steps ([Psalm 37:23](#)).

Tiny Living – No Complaints Here – by Leyanne Enterline

Wow! 2018 has already come and gone! It's hard to believe I was asked one year ago to start writing these articles!

I feel like so much has happened, and yet at the same time no progress has been made, with our land. The plans or timing we had made were not in God's plan, yet. So we wait as patiently as we can and enjoy the journey. By this time, we had expected to be building or in our new home. However, if that were the case then I probably wouldn't still be writing these articles! So tiny living it is! I can't complain though.

We have been able to travel a lot more with Brian on his work trips and not feel the pressures of a house payment, large air-conditioning bills, or just plain maintenance. There, of course, is some ongoing clearing of the property, which I feel will always be a work in progress. And there is the tiny amount of maintenance to keep the trailer working properly. For instance, the poop tank (not sure of the formal name for this) needs to be cleaned once a week, and we change the air filters often (for some reason an insane amount of dust comes in.) And like in any normal home, there is the mundane vacuuming, sanitizing, wiping down...that list goes on and on. However, in 325 square feet, the cleaning goes by much quicker! In a tiny space, decorating for Christmas posed some challenges.

Last year we tried a real tiny Christmas tree, but we found out we're allergic, so after a week of sneezing the tree went outside! We just decorated the tiny tree outside and then several larger ones on the property and had a whole festive outdoor arrangement! I took a while to start decorating this past Christmas, but thought of buying a tiny fake tree. The only spot for the tree is between the kitchen island and the wall, and this is a very tight space, so the tree had to be super skinny.

My husband always wants to get a real tree with the roots still attached and plant it after Christmas. He wants to do that every year so we have a new tradition and new trees! I loved that idea and couldn't wait to get started. I did try to add a few more tiny festive decorations...a mini wooden nativity scene, festive hands towels, ribbon to hang Christmas cards on, and a mini tree and sign on the restroom counter. I'm not lying when I say there is no room in our inn! We definitely had to get creative!

Even with all of the challenges that come with tiny living, we feel blessed beyond measure and the boys will remember this time we had together for a life time! We laugh about how we truly can't escape each other and must solve disputes quickly. It's so funny how if someone is in the restroom he can still be included in the conversation in the living room!

Again, this is not how we thought things would be right now, but we know God has our back and we will trust and let Him guide us through this strange adventure we are on!

Love grows best in tiny spaces.

YOU

Strengthening Your Core – They Told me Not to Cry – by Marcy Lytite

I know that in years past, many little boys were told it wasn't manly to cry. Little girls are often seen as criers, and they too are told to stop it, squelch it, and put on a happy face. Crying is seen as weakness, something only the faint of heart do, and certainly not pretty on the face when it occurs. Women try to keep back the tears so their makeup won't smear, and our grown men don't even consider crying because they're tough and staunch. Our teenagers shut themselves behind closed doors when they need to cry, hoping none of their friends realize their brokenness and shame while the tears flow.

However, (one of my favorite words in the English language because it offers an alternative and a hope!) crying can be something that instead of weakening us actually strengthens us!

Scientifically speaking, crying does a lot of good for our bodies, according to several articles you can read if you google the benefits of crying. It releases toxins out of our bodies when we cry, releasing all of those impurities, so that we feel healthier after a good release of tears! It releases stress and hurtful emotions when we cry. Sometimes we don't even know why we're crying, but we feel so much better after we do, because our emotions are released and let go. A long cry helps us as we grieve, not to move on and forget, but rather to remember and release.

But what about spiritually speaking? Is it okay, or good to cry, even when we've been told not to let the waterworks flow?

Genesis 21:17 tells us that God heard a little boy crying. He hears all of our wailings and verbal sorrow expressed through crying. And that brings comfort, to know that he hears us.

Exodus 3:7 reads that God heard his people's cries when they were being hurt through slavery, and he came to their rescue and brought deliverance.

2 Samuel 22:7 says that in distress he hears our cries.

Psalms 3:4 says that God heard the writer's cry and answered him.

Psalms 34:17 says this, "*The righteous cry*, and the LORD hears And delivers them out of all their troubles."

What a promise for those who cry!

Psalms 147:9 says he hears the ravens cry for food and provides for their hunger.

Mark 10 talks of a man in need who was told to be quiet, but he cried out all the more to Jesus.

Mark 15:37 says Jesus cried a loud cry just as he died on the cross.

Hebrews 5 says that Jesus prayed and cried loudly with tears to his Father to save him from death, and it says his father heard him. But he had to die, so that we might live.

There are so many verses and so many stories of people, and Jesus, crying and weeping and even wailing over all sorts of losses and hopes for the future and pain and sorrow.

We have eyes that have tear ducts, and we all know that stopped up tear ducts cause infection and have to be treated. So do stopped up tear ducts that are not flowing because of false directives that have told us not to cry.

No one likes to hear a toddler cry in order to manipulate and fake tears to get their way. However, one will scoop up a toddler that's crying tears of pain and hurt, because we want to comfort and heal.

God doesn't shame us for crying. He actually hears our cries and answers. And he even sent his Holy Spirit to comfort us because he knew there would be days for tears and sorrow.

Finally,

Psalm 126:5 says that those who sow in tears will reap with joyful shouting.

Crying over your children?

Crying because of loss?

Crying in your pain?

All of that crying doesn't go unnoticed by him. In fact, it's quite the contrary. He hears, just like we hear when our children cry. And he knows if we need to be left alone, to be scooped up and cuddled, to be alleviated of that which is causing the tears, or if those tears just need to water the ground on which we stand...until joy emerges.

Go ahead and cry, and cry loud. Release it all, and be healed. Let the tears flow, and sow.

You are now told to cry.

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Under the Influence – Probabilities and Percentage – by Marcy Lytle

One day I was thinking about probability and percentages.

We often say, “I wish it would snow,” here in Central Texas. And the probability of that happening is very low. In fact, we have no snow plows here where I live, and if that snow does happen, everything shuts down. The probability of the event is just too low.

When we realize the percentage of interest we are paying for a new car, or on a credit card, we ache in pain at the reality of what we’re actually paying at the end of our payment term. Those percentages are killers. At the same time, when interest falls in the lending area, we are excited to find and purchase a new home, hopeful that our payments will be affordable.

Probability and percentages are staples in our lives, and they affect our moods, our future, our plans, and our spending.

I remember studying probability in school, and then when I became a math teacher, I taught probability. You know the deal, when you figure out the chances of landing your penny on heads or tails, it’s 50%. That’s because there are only two sides on which to land, both of them equally probable. I remember having my class toss a penny 100 times and then marvel at how close it was to the same number of heads as tails. Probability is fascinatingly interesting.

What about percentages? I love figuring the discounts when I go shopping, and I gasp with joy when I see 70% sign at Target, and I hope for a great find. When the weatherman forecasts 70% chance of rain, we all prepare for the event with umbrellas out and cancelled outdoor plans. Doctors give us predictions in percentages when we undergo some sort of treatment after a diagnosis, and those percentages either bring hope or immense fear.

As I was thinking about both of these, I thought about how we place these same probabilities and percentages on God and our relationship to him, especially in the area of prayer. When we pray for something huge, like a miracle of healing or a large sum of money we need, we think the probability is very low that God will answer that kind of prayer. So we mostly pray for little answers, like for our runny noses to subside or our kids to win a game. That way, if loss occurs, we aren’t so devastated. It’s not very probable, we think, for God to part seas and stop the sun, like he did in stories in the Bible.

We even think God is sort of like the department store where we shop, offering us goods for the day at a certain discount, if we’ve been praying and attending church regularly and “deserve” a deal from heaven. However, if we’ve failed miserably, we think that if we want his mercies and grace, there’s a sign nearby that says there’s a 10% chance of receiving that!

God is not a father that deals with us in probabilities and percentages, based upon the number of equally probable chances, or on the atmosphere of our surroundings and economy. He’s a God that deals with us in love.

- It’s probable that we will fail and disappoint ourselves, but it’s a sure thing that he will forgive us when we ask.

- It's probable that our faith will be weak at times, but it's a sure thing that when we are weak he will be strong.
- It's probable that fear will raise its ugly face, but it's a sure thing that His perfect love will put legs on that face and send it running.
- There's a zero percent chance that God will ever leave us or forsake us.
- There's a zero percent chance that we will be left in a heap of ashes after a burn, when we call on Him.
- There's 100% chance of rain of his mercy and compassion...every single day.
- There's 100% chance of increase in our relationship with Him as He pursues us and we relax.

What numbers and ideas and probabilities and hopes are floating around in your mind? Where have you set God and all things spiritual in your relationship with him, along the number line from zero to 100?

It's good to consider probabilities and percentages sometimes, and to leave them where they belong – in forecasts and on sale signs.

It's good to consider the sureties and certainties of our Father and his love toward us, at all times, forever and ever...Amen.

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Healthy Habits – Defying Gravity – by Marcy Lytle

Gravity is a body killer, isn't it? As we age, the skin which was one taut and firm now sags and droops. Something is just pulling it down and away from our bones! We all know that we cannot defy gravity in the natural realm, say if we choose to jump from a building. Gravity will most certainly bring us crashing down hard. But gravity that pulls on us from age, from hardship, from cares and the life we live can be defied, all to the benefit of our health. At least we can try...and the trying often helps defy that which wants to leave us on the ground.

Smile. It seems that as we age we find more to frown about, and that often our default is a frown. Our lips start to thin and turn downward. But smiling is so healthy and does wonders for the look on our faces! Those fine lines around our mouths disappear when we smile! Train yourself to smile as you drift off to sleep and then again first thing in the morning, as you remember his goodness to you and yours this new year.

Lift. Body shapers can do wonders for our bodies, as they lift and smooth that saggy stomach and droopy breasts. I love them. However, some days I need a lift of a different kind. I look in the mirror and feel saggy in my attitude and emotions, or rather quite down about myself and my life, as time moves forward. The best way to create a lift of the spirit is through truth. The verse in the bible that says to gird our loins with truth is the original reference to a body shaper, my friends! Truth that God loves us and cares for us at all ages gives us the lift we need to look pounds lighter in spirit!

Raise. According to yoga instructions, raised arms can improve digestion and stretch the muscles of our abdomen. It can also increase our lung capacity. But did you know that the Bible often tells us to raise our arms, as well? We are told to lift up holy hands and to lift up the arms of the weak beside us. And raising our arms indicates surrender to His ways and His will. Raise those arms up high – your own – and those of your friends who are tired and weary. Defy gravity!

Look. I have not had an eye lift, but I often add a bit of light shadow under my brow to make my eyes look a bit brighter and less darkened from the droop! There are many times in His Word that we are told to lift our eyes up – to where our help comes from – and realize that it comes from the Lord! Pretty cool that we are told to look up. Looking down can become a way of life that often coincides with a sad shuffle of the feet. But look up, away from the ground, with arms raised and a smile on your face.

Stand. Gravity pulls at our bodies and makes us want to sit when we're tired, and that's a good thing. But sitting all day can be bad for our health, especially if that sitting is coupled with eating and watching shows on television or even reading to escape others around us for days on end. Stand up, walk around, lift your knees and skip down the street. Standing is important spiritually, as we stand against fear and discouragement. And sometimes standing can only occur when we link arms with those who are standing beside us.

How can you purpose to defy gravity in 2019? Think of all the things that pull you down, make you frown, and keep you low. Then one by one, smile, lift, raise, look, and stand up tall, defying the odds that want to bring you crashing down to leave you unrecognizable to those you love.

Happy New Year – as we defy gravity together – and soar!

Life Right Now – Gentle Conviction – by Bethany Gomez

When a new year begins instead of looking forward, I usually look back on the past year (which Facebook fully supports by the way with their time hop reminders and the like), but does God support my tendency? I think He does just as long as I don't get stuck in the past, begrudge the things that I wanted to happen but didn't, or refuse to move forward and continue growing. I try to look back over the past year to see where I've seen God provide, where I've seen Him answer prayers.

“Recalling God's faithfulness in our past fuels our faith for our future.” - Lynn Cowell

Recently, God convicted me. While examining the past year, I thought that I had definitely done a lot of growing, so surely I was done for a while, right?

“No,” is basically what God said.

This past year brought a significant change in my life - a new job. I now work in a PPCD - TWC classroom at an elementary school in Round Rock, Texas. It's a preschool program for children with disabilities combined with teaching preschool children. They are the cutest children I've ever seen and together we do the cutest activities with them. For instance, we do what is called adaptive P.E. It's P.E. just for our little class where the activities are tailored to suit our students. They love it and so do I, but there is one other thing I enjoy and love even more, and that is our visits to the library almost every Friday. We take our class to the large library in the center of the school. Our librarian is amazing. She reads one children's book which is always accompanied by a song that goes along with the book; a song that was written and sung by an adorable young lady that has her very own Youtube channel dedicated to writing children's songs based off children's books.

One Friday during our library visit, as the librarian began reading the book to the students, I was only half paying attention because I was trying to make sure the children were paying attention. As we got to the song portion of our visit I became completely engrossed and I got this feeling of conviction in my heart.

Is God really trying to get my attention with a children's book and song?

It makes sense though, because I spend the majority of my time with children, so it's obvious that God would use something like this to get my attention.

I bet your wondering now what the book and song was all about? It was about a little tree that didn't want to drop its leaves and change with the seasons. This stunted his growth and while the other trees around him grew strong and tall, he remained the same, short, skinny, with brown leaves on his little branches. Then the song began and its message hit my heart like an arrow to its target.

Basically, it went something like this,

“If you want to grow up tall, sometimes you've got to let the old leaves fall. It's easy to stay the same, don't make a change at all, but deep down you know you've got to let go.”

That's definitely the season that I've been in for quite some time. I find myself not wanting to move forward, to not "make a change at all" like the little tree in the book and song because it's easier that way, right? What's the point?

The point is that it's not all about me. It's about growing in the love of Jesus, so that others will notice and find the only One who can save them.

I can't help but be thankful for God's gentle convictions in my life, even though it's difficult sometimes to do what He wants. It reminds me of His promise that He is always with me and will always be there when I need help.

*Lord, thank you for gently convicting me.
I trust that when you are ready to move me to the next season of my life that you will,
but while I'm waiting I want to learn what you want me to learn and
continue to "grow up tall" in the knowledge of you,
so that I can reflect your heart and love for others.*

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Created for Life – Roots – by Ginny Hurley

Upon discovering some old newspaper clippings and old pictures from the past, I have thanked my Father in heaven for such lovely ancestors and ancient relatives. Truly He has blessed me with a precious family and He has blessed you, too!

“Hear O Israel, The Lord our God is, the Lord is One! You shall love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you this day shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.”

Deuteronomy 6:4-7

When we teach our children and families the goodness and love of God, blessings abound for generations. Deuteronomy 7 and 28 define the blessings that will overtake us and our children. They are awesome! Deuteronomy 7 also tells us that He gives these blessings because He loves us. He chooses to be with us. Deuteronomy 28 verse 12 says that the Lord will open His good treasure, the heavens, to give us more than we need! I could make a list of these amazing things He will do for us because He loves us. Each parent, sibling, relative of any kind can receive a great inheritance from us!

“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

Deuteronomy 29:29

And then...

“God reveals the revelation of His word in the hiding place of His glory. But the honor of kings is revealed by how they thoroughly search out the deeper meaning of all that God says.”

Proverbs 25:2

God says He will reveal His secrets to us and reveal who He is, to those who search for Him. In Christ Jesus God tells us that WE are His chosen treasure, priests and kings in His spiritual kingdom! I Peter 2:9! It's not about keeping the law, as Jesus is the fulfillment of the law. It's about being kingly sons and daughters who search His word for a revealing of His majesty and magnificence! He shares His secrets with His family and then releases all the blessings of heaven!

You may think, *What if I am the first member of my family to know God or walk with Him? I haven't received all these foundational teachings and blessings from those before me...*

I have good news! EVERYTHING He has begins with you! You are the first to extend all of these blessings to your family.

The curses listed in Deuteronomy are broken when we come to the Lord. Everything accomplished on the cross removed every curse that was passed down from past generations. If I still feel cursed but am in Christ, then I ask God if I opened a door to sin or believed a lie about what happened on the cross. Maybe, I am in a training time or He is revealing mysteries to me. Some of these trials come with no understanding or revelation, but I put my trust in His word and what He has said, not in what I am experiencing. And this is for sure...the blessings never end!

I am ever so thankful for my grandparents, parents, and for my husband's grandparents and parents! We had all eight of our grandparents when we married and I adored them all! Our families are special and I receive all the good blessings from each. Every curse or blemish from the past I place at the cross!

MARRIAGE

In This Together – The Road Ahead – by Charissa Corbin

We all have encountered different seasons of life. Some that bring immeasurable joy or heart wrenching sadness, and others that push us to our limits, test our strength, and redefine us. Not all seasons have to be met with some extreme emotion... sometimes we have seasons in life that are meant to grow and prepare us for the next!

It is January in Alaska and we are entering our final months here. It is currently -15 degrees, my pellet stove is running, my children are sound asleep, my husband is at a work event, and I'm soaking in the stillness of the night. A stillness that is rare but much needed as I reflect on our time in Alaska and prepare for the road ahead.

My husband and I are in a season of preparation. We are preparing for our upcoming move, preparing to become business owners, and preparing to make our dreams a reality. As I look at the list of preparations to be made, it dawns on me that the most important item to prepare for this upcoming season is our marriage!

In Ephesians 6 it states,

“So stand ready, with truth as a belt tight around your waist.
With righteousness as your breastplate,
and as your shoes the readiness to announce the Good News of peace.
At all times carry faith as a shield;
for with it you will be able to put out all the burning arrows shot by the Evil One.
And accept salvation as a helmet, and the word of God
as the sword which the Spirit gives you.
Do all this in prayer, asking for God's help.
Pray on every occasion, as the Spirit leads.
For this reason, keep alert and never give up;
pray always for God's people.”

We are about to enter a really busy season of first-time business owners that I'm sure will be faced with many challenges, frustrations, and stress. It is important that we continue to grow in our love for one another, strengthen our faith in Christ, and prepare our marriage for the challenges ahead.

How do we prepare our marriage?

PRAYER – Intentional prayer for our marriage, our future, and our children.

SCRIPTURE – Studying God's word together, writing it on our hearts, so that when challenges occur we are armed with the Word of God.

TIME – Planning time for ourselves, without our kids, to grow in love.

By doing this we will be able to “stand ready” for whatever season comes next!

Date Night Fun – Couple Goals – by Marcy Lytle

It's January and by now, if you make resolutions, you're in the process or have already made them. Perhaps you don't make resolutions because they're too hard to keep. However, resolution and goals can be a wonderful thing to make quite often, as a couple. It's healthy and wise to sit down and make a plan for date night, and the best time is to start at the beginning of the year and make it a habit! Maybe you will pick each Tuesday of the week, or Saturday morning, or Sunday night...whatever fits with your schedule.

We are here to offer ideas each month. Did you know there are plenty more in the archives here in A Bundle of THYME? There are enough ideas to keep you enjoying each other for years to come!

Here are our ideas for January and they are all double dates, so that you'll encourage another couple to experience date nights as well:

Cold night in: Invite another couple over for just desserts and drinks. Lay out a jigsaw puzzle and put it together as you talk about life and hope together, encouraging each other. There's this pecan cobbler that we just had with friends that was super delicious! Add in some hot apple cider, and that's all you need! You could totally start this date after the kids go to bed, and ask the couple to spend the night as well! Pick a 250 piece puzzle that you can finish in one sitting! Here's one for the new year!

<https://www.asweetpeachef.com/easy-hot-apple-cider-recipe/>

<https://www.tasteofhome.com/recipes/pecan-pie-cobbler/>

Warm walk and talk: Bundle up and go for a walk in the winter wonderland where you live. Even if it's not cold, or even if it's frigid, find a place to walk. It can be indoors if weather is too bad, or it can be in a park if the weather is mild. Pick a topic of conversation and questions to discuss as you walk, and talk together, getting to know each other. When you've walked about an hour, stop at a coffee house for pastries and warm drinks, and this time play a game. Old-fashioned Yahtzee is a great date night game, because it allows for conversation in between rolls. We found this fun one after Christmas one year, on sale!

<https://www.amazon.com/Library-Yahtzee-Vintage-Book-Game/dp/B000AFESJE>

Cozy movie and then discuss: Find a movie that you all agree on to see, and book a seat. Show up and enjoy. Go for a drive and park where there's a beautiful view, and discuss the movie from start to finish. Ask each other, "If you were to pick an actress/actor to play you in a biographical movie, who would it be and why?" Don't squabble over the movie. Just let the girls or the guys pick this one, then vice-versa the next one. And be sure you don't pout if your movie doesn't get picked. End the evening with ice cream in January. Why not? (One suggestion for the movie is Second Act).

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2126357/>

Musical evening: Catch a concert together, listen to live music in a restaurant or even sit around and make your own music, if you're so inclined. One of you needs to do the browsing to find out where tunes are happening or to gather tunes if they're happening at home. You could even bring your favorite playlists and share different genres throughout the night while snacking on nuts and chocolate! Check out this array you can put together for this fun date night!

<http://www.thecreativebite.com/healthy-fruit-chocolate-party-tray/>

Show and Tell: Invite two others couples, and the six of you meet up in one person's home and bring three items each that you got for Christmas, in a bag, to show and tell. Take one out at a time and take turns talking about the item, sharing what it is, and telling why you like it. Also, require each person to wear some cool socks (they can be funky or cozy or colorful!) to the gathering, and ask everyone to remove their shoes upon entering your home. Sit by the fire and enjoy an array of cheeses and meats and breads, asking each couple to bring one of those items. Sip on the drinks of your choice and you're going to have a blast!

<https://thisbeautifuldayblog.com/diy-cheese-meat-board/>

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After 30 Years – Try Again – by Marcy Lytle

If I've heard it once I've heard it a dozen times.

"I want to see that movie, but he won't go with me," she says.

She is referring to a romantic film that she knows she'll have to see with her girlfriends because he won't go with her.

When we hear others make those statements, we both sigh. We absolutely love movies, and we love going together. I love going to the ones he likes and I don't particularly love, and he enjoys going to the ones I like and he thinks are just okay. I don't recall there ever being a time when he refused to go see a romantic film with me. And I don't think it's just because he's this awesomely romantic guy (although he is pretty awesome...)

It's January, and it's time to try some new things, right? So my idea is to try new things in our marriage. We do it every year. We have good intentions of trying something new and sometimes those intentions don't stick...but sometimes they do.

If you're in that marriage where he won't go with you to that movie, consider trying again to ask him. Consider trying all sorts of new things this year in your marriage, praying about them before you ask, checking your attitude and tone before you suggest, and expecting nothing but trusting Him, before you speak. That last one is a hard one, and I'm still learning it after all these years...to ask and then trust HIM to speak to him, so I don't have to keep at it.

Here are a few things we try over and over again, even though we slip and fail at times, but we keep trying. It's a new year, and a great time to consider these new things to liven up our marriages and make life fun:

- Ask him to the movies, and suggest one of his liking, and both of you go with good attitudes to be with the other and enjoy the popcorn, whether or not you like the film.
- Sit down and talk about a prayer/devo time that you could both benefit from, perhaps using a book you go together and purchase at the bookstore. Instead of demanding one or the other initiate the time, put it on the calendar, say Sunday evenings, or Friday mornings. Make it a 15 minute slot to read and pray together.
- Make plans for weekend getaways and mark them on the calendar. Make at least one per quarter. Each of you can choose a destination.
- Schedule marriage talks where you affirm each other and communicate, not in accusatory terms, but in ways to better your communication and time together.
- Shop for a calendar together, one of those ones that hangs on the wall or fridge, where you both can write in and see what's happening and what's coming up, for your fun times together.
- Talk over goals for the New Year and pray together for those goals...regarding children, house stuff, aging parents, spiritual growth, volunteering at church, giving to others, etc.

- Reflect over the past year and give thanks to each other for at least three qualities you love about each other, or things you appreciate. Do this often. And smile at him. Kiss him.
- Purpose to go to bed together instead of apart, to linger in each other's arms in the morning before you both start your day, and to text and call during the day just to say "I love you."

What else can you add to your new list of new things to try?

Even when we get discouraged because he's not being attentive or caring or daring to try new things with us, we can try again, ask again and trust Him. God made this institution called marriage and it's high on his answer list, when we ask. He can speak to our spouses louder and more effectively than we ever can. And he can also adjust our attitudes so that we love stronger, so that he can't help but respond...

Happy New Year!

ENCOURAGEMENT

Simple Truths - Life by Design – by Erica Simmons

There comes a time when you have to stop living life by default and start living it by design. This is a message God gave to me October 20, 2013. It was just over a year of going through the hardest thing ever in my life which, unfortunately, coincided with what should have been one of the happiest times of my life: the purchase of our home. My heart was still very heavy and I remember constantly questioning God about not protecting us from this terrible hurt. You see, I didn't come from the happiest of childhoods, but I felt God's presence in my life at an early stage and His presence was my hope, my protection. I wanted to know why when I gave my boys a better situation they had not received the same protection and the same safe place I had received in Him.

The following dream is a message He gave me on December 3, 2018. I had a garden with what to me looked like a cucumber vine, but in this case the cucumber was growing inside yellow sieves. There was this one cucumber that one of my former co-workers (who happened to be in the dream) focused on, even though it was not the biggest. She decided to pull off the sieves and the fruit inside was dying; not producing as the healthy outer skin suggested. When she grabbed for it, I noticed that it was actually detached from the vine. No life was actually flowing to the fruit.

This dream is the PERFECT example of how life can be lived by defaults and not by design.

Most of my Christian life, it had been a pitfall of mine to hit my knees in prayer when things got bad. After I went through a tough situation through that famous *hindsight* I would see the signs that I ignored or poor choices I made that led to where I was. I was living life by default, and I was living with a false sense of security. Then when the inevitable crisis hit, I called on God in a panic driven prayer. That's what happened the summer of 2012. I was caught up in going back to school on line while working, and my life got hectic and I was hit with the worse crisis of my life. To top it off, I got angry with God for not stopping that crisis from happening. You see, human nature has to blame someone so I chose God because when my parents failed He surrounded me. At that time, I felt He should have covered them more. From those ashes emerged my simple truth and that experience was instrumental in my continuing journey to live life by design.

The truth of the matter is it was so much easier for me in my childhood to hear God. I was in a small town during the 70's and 80's at a time when the majority of our country still lived by a very similar moral character. Now is a different story, as there are so many layers to our country's morality, many of which do not align with God, and His voice and presence can be so easily drowned out. I didn't realize this in a timely manner and the result was a rash of crisis moments that will forever impact my boys' lives. But like always, it is not the end of the story. I learned to lean into Him, spend time with Him in His presence and in His word, and to pray protection over my children. Most importantly, I learned to live my life according to His promises, His word...by the design He created for us.

I have to look past the outside of the lives of my now graduated sons and not let the appearance of them doing well lull me into a false narrative. This will only continue to lead to crisis situations when they need me. I have to start being deliberate in addressing the areas in their lives of

weakness and simply share the truth of God's word. I don't have to fix it all. I just have to stay in prayer about it and trust that God's word will not return void, that it will accomplish that which is was sent out to do (Isaiah 55:11).

Even though the example shared revolved around my children and the events that triggered God's words to me, they are never truer than now. As I move into this next season of my life and learn to parent adult children, I also have to craft a life that does not revolve around them. Being Mom to them helped to block out some of the old desires of my heart and help me bury them. I have a lot of life out in front of me and I can make decisions about what that life will be or I can let that life happen by default and wake up day after day with regrets about the things I never had or did. I can continue to count the number years it has been since I _____. So many things can go into that blank or I can count the number of years it has been since I found/got/did _____. The problem is that I have lived the vast majority of my life for someone else. It is hard to start living it for me, but I will take my own advice and lean into my Heavenly Father, and His grace will be all I need.

I ran into this Lauren Daigle song earlier this week and it is very befitting for my moving forward. He will give me everything I need. I just have to trust in Him.

[Everything](#)

Moving Forward – A Daughter Heart – Pam Charro

I've been focusing a lot lately on discovering the Father's heart for me, but only recently did it occur to me that it is my responsibility to have the heart of a daughter.

It was about four or five years ago that I heard a faint whisper at church,

"You don't know how to be a daughter."

This convicted me and broke my heart but I didn't know I could do anything about it. After all, how can I help it if I don't know how to do something?

The good news is, it isn't hard to learn how to have a daughter (or son) heart if I look at scripture. Jesus was a perfect son to a perfect Father, but he was also known as the Son of Man as well as the son of David. So even though my parents were not perfect, I can still learn how to have a daughter heart.

The first question I must ask myself is,

"Have I truly forgiven my parents for their shortcomings?"

It may be unnatural and even painful, but the Spirit within me will help me to do it. I want my parents to experience the same grace that I've been given, and I don't want any bitterness to keep me from experiencing the Father's love.

Other traits of a daughter heart are loyalty and trust. Am I willing to give my heart back to my parents, even with their weaknesses? If they are not safe people, is there a spiritual father or mother, or a godly group of people that I am willing to fully invest my heart in? If I am always standoffish, I will probably always have a spirit of being orphaned.

The willingness to give my heart as a trusting daughter
is a vital part of receiving the Father's heart for me.

I am the only one who can make the choice to desire the heart of a daughter.

Dear Lord, create that heart in me so that you and I can be close! I don't want to miss out on any of your Father heart for me.

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Firmly Planted – Transformation – by Dina Cavazos

Reflecting on the past year, several things stand out that would take pages to write and most likely wouldn't be too interesting to read. The beauty of poetry is that it can express the deep and complex in a few words. Each reader can fill in the gaps with their own interpretation as they relate to what the words stir up. So this month I share my thoughts in a different form...perhaps you can relate in some way to my poetic meandering, pizza slices (so to speak) of personal transformation served up in no particular order.

Walk

Time moves forward, time past is gone...only dust of words spoke or unspoken, things done or undone, faith walked or unwalked, remains underfoot.

Can I shake the dust from my feet, renew my step, undo defeat?

Forgive the cloud that hid Your way, my eye is more clear today.

Then comes the answer resting near..."Call out in truth, agree with me. I renew and make the way."

Surrender

My heart is full of love for you...kind and gracious or rough and raw. Within my circle, constant and firm, God presses His life as leaking oil, from me to you.

Do I say I love, or do I turn away?

Oh let the words of my mouth be true and high and gold and pray

Then comes the answer resting near..."I in you and you in me, abiding is the only way."

Engage

The room is full of brother-sister strangers, the conversation hums. I hear the question going round but I don't make a sound.

Why should I bare my soul to these, do they even care?

Help me be known, Life is to give, as you give me, as I give you,.

Then comes the answer resting near..."This is my body, take your place—hand or foot, or hair."

Change

Joyful place, now hurting place; fullness turned to emptiness. Things once held so tightly and brightly slip from clasping and grasping.

Do I pry off the fingers that hold and wrestle my way to freedom?

Show me how to loose the grip and cling only to things worth winning.

Then comes the answer resting near..."I am your all in all I say, enter in the Kingdom.

Knowing

Mysterious, miraculous, indefinable, incomprehensible, substance of wondrous beauty that surrounds and abounds amid the dark and suffering

Is it stupidity or blind belief that denies knowing the unknowable or wisdom and certainty that transcends it?

Grant me courage to accept the truth and speak it, live it, love it—with love, in love, for love, through love—Yours of course, not mine.

Then comes the answer resting near...” *Through a glass darkly you see now, but press on my love; My love I give, My love you live, forever I am thine.*”

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Bits and Pieces – The Hope – by Debbie Haynes

I survived the hub-bub of the Christmas season; I hope you did, too! There is always so much to do, to prepare for, anticipate and then, finally, the experience seems to fly by in the snap of a finger! So quickly it's over and time to clean up.

As soon as Christmas dinner has passed, and my guests have gone home, I like to put on my PJ's and start tearing down the tree and all the decorations. I package them so carefully and store them all away. The beautiful decorations we made, the bows, the candles and lights, all of it gets re-packaged and stored for another year. And then, oh my, the clean-up begins! Where does all that GLITTER come from?

I like to finish the season this way so that I can spend the remainder of my vacation days relaxing and focusing ahead on the New Year instead of looking back at the leftovers of what was. Somehow, quickly storing items away and cleaning up the mess frees my mind to look ahead.

I think life is like that sometimes. Things can get very cluttered and cloudy and we have to clear out the cobwebs to see the light clearly. Not triviality, but important, hard things, like enduring physical pain, contending with emotional hurts, dealing with fear. These can all completely obscure our hope for the future. Hope literally must fight its way to the top of our minds.

Colossians 1:20 talks about us being aliens and enemies in our MINDS yet, through re-birth in Christ, we have been reconciled to Him. Verse 23 admonishes us to REMAIN grounded and settled in our faith in Him, and not to move away from *the hope of the gospel*, and Proverbs 10:28 tells us that the hope of the righteous is gladness!

The gospel, or good news, is a complete story, from the beginning, to the birth of Christ, to the end with His death on the cross, to the NEW beginning, His resurrection! This is what gives us the hope to plod on through the maze of this life, and even traverse the minefield of our own mind. It's what He came for!

Happy New Year to all of you.

I pray that you can look forward with hope in your heart.

Real Stories – Grammy Yo’s Story – by Sarah Yoder

Nine years after the Great Depression, I was born into a hard-working Amish family; the fourth of seven children. My mother especially helped me learn to work and not give up. But most of all I learned about the love Jesus had for me and invited Him into my life as a young child.

Because we were poor, we raised most of the vegetables and meat that we ate and our meals were repetitive. Many would consider our food odd; however, I still crave and sometimes cook these dishes for my family. For breakfast we had pancakes or fried corn mush. This we topped with honey or sorghum molasses (that we raised, processed and marketed).

Our mother always served tomato gravy; stewed tomatoes thickened with flour along with cooked oatmeal sweetened with a little brown sugar, honey or sorghum molasses, with cream or milk in it. Canned or fresh fruit was a common treat and a syrup substitute. In the summer, we had fresh tomatoes diced fine with a little brown sugar or honey, finished with thick sweet cream to dip over the pancakes. (Now, I use mayo instead of sweet cream.) That sweet cream is still my favorite.

Our dad bought things in bulk, so in the winter we often had large bags of oranges and grapefruit, and in the fall we canned bushels of apples, peaches and any other fruit he purchased cheaply. As autumn approached, we butchered poultry, beef and pork.

I do not remember much of our lunch or evening meals. I remember having vegetable soup in the winter that was made in a big cake pan with biscuit dough over top and baked. We’d have pot pies, graham pudding baked in a tube pan, roasted turkey or chicken with vegetables; all raised in our garden and truck patches. In the summer it was fresh fruit, mulberries, blackberries, peaches, etc.

Since they were costly, we seldom had noodles to cook. So my mother used 1 cup of flour, salt to taste and a large egg. She then took two forks to cut through the flour and eggs to make little rivels (small crumbs the size of peas) and pour it in hot chicken broth with left over chicken to make it stretch for the family. When we didn’t have chicken with broth she thickened milk and made a milk soup. Milk needed to be watched carefully so it would not scorch.

We moved from Missouri to Iowa soon after my 12 birthday. I got married when I was 35 and we have two married girls and one son. They are now grown and we have three grandchildren. I am a homemaker and love hospitality. Family and friends are always welcome

So how did I learn to cook? When I was around 17 I was taken to a home with two children to be the nanny. I cleaned, did laundry and cooked. I always had a menu with recipes written out and followed directions. That was my introduction to stepping out of the “same over and over cooking box.”

When I was in my 20’s, I worked more nanny jobs where I learned different kinds of cooking and learned how to have fancy tea parties. It sparked interest in my life to try new recipes. Later I got my first apartment, then my first house. I loved to have friends over for Sunday dinner and my favorite meal to cook was roast with potatoes and carrots. I’d get a big roast and put in way more potatoes and carrots than needed for lunch in order to make my much-loved vegetable soup later. I’d make noodles and gravy with the broth, then serve coleslaw, homemade bread, and, of course, I had to have dessert of chocolate cake and ice cream.

Below are three recipes (without definite measurements) from Grammy Yo. Grammy Yo comes from being a grandma and the Yo is short for Yoder!

Grammy Yo's Sunday Roast

1 Large (3-4 lbs) beef roast. Flour it all over, then brown in a hot iron skillet with plenty of coconut oil to give it a nice crust all around and put in a roaster pan.

Season with salt and Morton's nature seasoning. Rub all over.

Add a coarsely chopped onion over top of the roast

Add ½ to 1 cup of water for broth.

Bake at 300° covered for 3 -3.5 hours

Grammy Yo's Veggie Soup (used with leftover roast – my favorite!)

Left over roast, potatoes and carrots

1 ½ to 2 lbs. frozen mixed veggies

1 quart stewed tomatoes.

Chop beef, potatoes and carrots into ½ inch cubes. Set aside.

Boil the veggies till done.

Add the tomatoes, beef, carrots and potatoes and any leftover gravy and onions.

Season to taste.

Grammy Yo's Fast Potato Soup (my second favorite!)

3-4 big potatoes peeled and diced into 1" cubes.

Add water just to cover. Cook till done.

While potatoes are boiling, sauté 1 diced onions & 1 to 2 stalk of diced celery (more or less to your taste.)

When potatoes are soft (do not drain), use a wire potato masher and slightly mash.

Add 1 can cream of mushroom soup, onion and celery and ½ to 1 can of milk (depends on your desire of thickness.)

Warm through and serve with a pat of butter, grated cheese and crackers.

Grammy Yo's Homemade Bread

This recipe yields 5 -1 ½ lb. loaves.

Turn on the oven light. It heats the oven to help raise the bread.

In your bread dough mixer (I have a Bosh) combine:

5 cups of very warm tap water

4 scant teaspoons of salt (I like the pink salt)

1/3 cup of sugar

1/3 cup of oil (I prefer avocado oil)

Add:

4 cups of fresh ground whole wheat flour

Let set 10-15 min.

Add 2 Tablespoons yeast. Stir in, let set till bubbly.

Add 5-6 cups of all-purpose flour. Knead in and add more flour as needed.

Add flour so it is damp but not sticky where it sticks to your hand when you press it between your fingers.

Divide and shape the dough into loaves; placing them into 5 sprayed pans. Put in the warm oven. Cover with a lightweight tea towel till almost raised. Remove bread dough and preheat oven to 350°. Bake uncovered for approximately 35-40 minutes; knowing that oven temperatures vary.

How do I test bread for doneness? First it needs to be nice and brown, than I tap on the top of the bread and remove if it sounds hollow.

After removing the bread from the oven I take a cold stick of butter, peel back the paper from one end and butter the top of each loaf and then let it cool around 3-4 minutes. It is then removed from the pans and put in Baggie Brand baggies. The loaves fit very nicely. The bread is put in the bags before completely cooled to keep the steam locked in and the bread stays moist when frozen.

Of course the end-product must be taste-tested, so I eat a crust of the first loaf and put 4 loaves in the freezer or share with a friend.

GF Potato Pizza in a Skillet - By Sarah Yoder

This is a fast and easy meal once you get the steps. My family loves it and it is gluten free.

You decide how many potatoes & vegetables you like.

For my down-sized family of three adults, I used vie med-small potatoes. Grate like hash browns, soak in cold water (this helps to remove the starch) while you fry up 1 lb. of hamburger meat, seasoned to your liking. Keep warm. While the hamburger is browning, boil one small pack of mixed frozen vegetables (do not overcook.) In another sauce pan put two cups of stewed tomatoes, thickened and seasoned to taste. Add water as needed to make a sauce. I ended up with around 3 cups of sauce. When all three of those things are done; keep everything warm. Swish the potatoes in the water and drain. (I put them in my lettuce spinner to dry them.) Brown in a 10"skillet with butter and coconut oil, or whatever you choose, on high-med heat.

When they are golden on one side turn them over and pat them flat for the crust. Pour the tomatoes sauce over top of the potatoes, then the hamburger followed by the mixed veggies. Load the top with grated cheese. Turn heat down to med. Pop a lid on & let it melt while the potatoes brown on the bottom. Serve hot from the skillet with a side of salad.

Sarah's Stuffed Meatloaf

You'll need 1 lb. hamburger and ½ chicken breast, thinly sliced across the grain. It helps to have it partially frozen for thinner slices. Put in a glass bowl and stir with ¼ cup salsa and let it sit while mixing the meatloaf. Use your favorite recipe, or mine is by guess, a dip & a dash - 1 lb. hamburger. 2 med-lg. eggs ½ cup processed Garlic and onion croutons, Nature seasoning to taste and 1/3-1/2 C of salsa and thoroughly mix. Have a prepared Jelly-roll pan with parchment paper to cover the bottom of the pan and pat the meat loaf to the edges of the paper. Then carefully lay the thin slices of chicken over the hamburger. We enjoy onions so I sliced some paper thin and layer randomly over top. A little pepper Jack cheese is good. After the toppings are on, use the parchment to help roll it length wise lifting the paper, rolling it then pulling the paper away from the meat till you have it all wrapped with the seam on the bottom. I left the paper under the meat to help with clean up, but did cut off the big part that was used to roll it.

Bake 1 hour at 350.

In the last 15 min I covered it with a sauce made of catchup mustard & Brown sugar. We served it with mashed potatoes, gravy, peas, salad and homemade bread.

Happy Eating! I'm happy to answer any questions you have from the comments below!

My name is Sarah Yoder; born the middle child of 7, into an Amish family. I live with my husband Anthony, of 35 years, in Joetown; a small country town of Iowa. We have two married daughters and a 23 year old son and three grandchildren. I very much enjoy hospitality, cooking, spending time with my family doing child care, etc. I am also involved with our church Sunday school and AWANA programs. Family and friends are my favorite with fellowship, food and games.

FRESH THYME

FRESH THYME – Maybe Next Time – by Marcy Lytle

We prayed. In fact, thousands prayed.

We groaned. In fact, all who knew them groaned.

We begged. In fact, we implored and pleaded.

And still our prayers weren't answered as we asked, when we prayed for our friend's little boy to live here on this earth with us all, with a whole and healthy heart.

"Maybe next time," I remember thinking. "Maybe next time, God will come through," I thought as I got up off my knees after hearing the news that baby Ben had passed, and our friends had lost their son.

Prayer is one of those mysteries, isn't it? It's one of the greatest privileges and honors as a Christian to be invited to come boldly to God to make our requests and petitions known to him. He is holy and we are not, yet because of his son Jesus we are made holy and pure and righteous, and yes – invited – to sit in his presence and lay out our needs before his feet. However, we know that some answers might be yes and immediate. And other answers might be no, and never seen here on this earth. And yet other replies might be to wait a while, a long while...

I've known those who pray a prayer, don't get an answer, and their faith is weakened. They don't think that maybe next time they'll get their desire. They instead think that God doesn't care, he doesn't answer prayer, and he's certainly not a good father. How can he be good, when he didn't care enough to heal our sick and our broken?

There's this passage in Ephesians 6 that uses great imagery as we are reminded to put on this full suit of armor so that we can stand against all kinds of struggles – like doubt and disappointment and despair. And it reminds us that our struggle is against spiritual forces, not necessarily physical ones. And it talks about standing our ground, after we've done everything else. We have to buckle on truth, cover our hearts with His righteousness, keep shoes on our feet that are ready to move, and above all of those things carry a shield of faith.

And just what will that shield of faith do? The words say that the shield will extinguish flaming arrows that seek to penetrate the very center of our hearts and burn us for good.

Our minds have to be covered with the helmet of salvation, and the sword with which we fight has to be the word of God.

Then...we are to keep praying "on all occasions" with "all kinds of prayers and requests" for "all the Lord's people."

That's a tall order for us, when we're in this battle of flaming arrows being thrown at us daily, as we live here on earth and encounter the pull of discouragement when prayers are not answered as we asked.

Pat phrases, encouragement that one day we will understand, scriptures that tell us everything works together for good, and reminders that “God knows best” don’t really seem to comfort or strengthen any of us right after a devastating loss.

For my friends, I don’t want to just shrug and say “maybe next time” God will get it, and I’ll figure out how to manipulate Him to answer properly, and hope for a better outcome. I want to keep on my knees for them now, after their family is gone, while the memories still linger and the pain still stings and sorrow still sings its woeful song. I want to put on that full armor myself and pray that they too will find strength to carry their faith again, while we all move forward together across the enemy lines where flames are burning.

I want to keep praying for every need presented to me with full faith and fervency in expectation that God will answer, that He cares, and that He most certainly is good.

It’s really the only choice, the right choice, and the best one, to make when we want to quit and throw up our hands in God’s face and ask, “Really? Don’t you get that this prayer would have been nice to answer?”

We can’t do it alone. That’s why we need each other, “all the Lord’s people,” to stand firm with us, beside us, and throughout the entire course of a lifetime, so that when we’ve done all we’re still standing in the land of the living...together...with Him on the other side of the darkness in which we could not see.

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FRESH THYME – No Flipping Allowed – by Marcy Lytle

Have you ever started reading a mystery novel and once you've met all the characters, your curiosity gets the best of you? So you flip on through to the last chapter of the book to see who committed the crime? I have done this. Guilty. I think I only did it once or twice, and it was years ago. The experience was completely a downer, because I ruined the book completely. I only read the beginning, fast-forwarded to the end, and knew nothing of the story in between! If the author knew I'd done that, on my, I'm sure he/she would be mad at me.

It's quite absurd, if you think about it, to do such a thing. After all, reading a book is exhilarating and like time travel, as you read through each chapter, meeting the players, imagining their next move, and visualizing all of the scenes as the writer brings them to life. You keep reading, if and only if there is a conflict brewing so that you get to stay attached to the story, to see how indeed this impossible situation is going to play out. And then as you've read all of the chapters, over a period of time, you read the conclusion.

It's then that you're satisfied tremendously and you then marvel at the author...or you place that book aside as rubbish and vow to never recommend it to anyone at all.

However, I just thought the other day that most of us want our life, that open book that takes years to read, to be a book that we can skip to the end and see how it turns out. We want to know if our kids are going to be okay, experience successful marriages and jobs, and have lots of healthy children. We want to know if we're going to have good health and no mishaps as we age. And we for sure want to know that all we're working for and believing in is going to pay off in the end. And that conflict that makes a good book so good? We don't want any of that...at all.

In The Lord's Prayer, he tells to make this petition, "Give us this day our daily bread." This means we are to read this day only, without flipping forward to what might happen later. He wants us to get all of the adjectives, the descriptive scenery, and meet more players, before we move forward another chapter. He doesn't want us to miss one beautiful piece of information that might be the hinge on that door that opens in future chapters to come.

And just like I was disappointed when I flipped to the end of that book, realizing I'd wasted good money in purchasing a book I now was not going to read, and ruined the anticipation and even lost the longing to hear the story because I now knew the ending, we would be so disappointed if we knew the future.

We look back at 2018 and we might summarize it by saying it was a good year indeed, or one we never want to repeat again. We learn from our mistakes and we ask God to heal our hurts, and meet our needs that cropped up over the last 12 months.

But as we stand on the horizon of a new year, we can only see so far, because we are not tall enough to see over the trees that surround us or high enough to soar to places that lay far away from us. And that's okay.

Today he's given us this page to read. The sun rises and we have our chores to do. We give thanks for our blessings and we pray for the bread we need today. Then we worship him in all that we do, as we work, cook, bathe, sleep and play, all the while aware of His presence near us and in us. It's in that slow page turning and eyes focused on every word that we actually enjoy the book of our life. It's not found in flipping through quickly to the end, skipping all of the middle in between...including the conflict.

They say every good book has a conflict, and it's true. There's nothing more boring than reading a story with characters that live, breathe, and die with no lessons learned or consequences served. None of those stories make the best seller list. The ones with intrigue, adventure, and amazement do.

Join with me as we enjoy our daily bread, our one page we've been given today, and let's anticipate the story that unfolds tomorrow...and read it when tomorrow comes.

FRESH THYME – The Process – by Marcy Lytle

One of my favorite electronic devices for the kitchen is my food processor. I have several friends that don't have one or haven't ever used one. But for me, that little appliance works wonders for me as I prepare meals. I'm sure there are all sorts of processors with attachments and arrays of buttons for all sorts of purposes, but mine (with very few bells and whistles) has taught me some great lessons.

Transformation. I can place carrots, cucumbers, tomatoes, onions, cilantro and jalapenos inside the bowl as chunks, then push a button, and they transform into fine pieces to make salsa. Individually they were one flavor, but together they make a whole new flavor – one that is a favorite in our house!

Tempering. That jalapeno mentioned above would never touch my lips alone, or without being cut and the seeds removed. However, placed into the processor with lots of other ingredients, that green pepper flavors the salsa to just the right temperature that is pleasurable when I eat it. Amazing!

Sharpness. I've put the processor in place, set the bowl on top, tossed in all of the ingredients and pushed the button, only to realize I forgot to insert the chopping blade! The processor is of no use whatsoever without that blade. I have to dump out everything into a bowl, insert the blade, and try it again.

Blending. The items I choose to place in that processor would never work if I just tossed them into a bowl. Imagine tossing in a large carrot, a whole cucumber, a big bunch of cilantro and a whole jalapeno, and asking my guests to eat that salad with a fork. No way! The chopping process makes the ingredients not only transform into smaller pieces, but as they whirl away, they blend together so that something flavorful and easy to eat is produced.

There are so many more things a processor can do, but these four things reminded me of the "process" we go through as we live, allowing Him to take all that we are and all that we give him and transform it, temper it, refine it sharply and blend it with others to make us presentable on the table around which we sit with other friends and neighbors.

I've offered up hardness and bitterness, and his loving hands have chopped both of those into love and forgiveness. I've also had huge chunks of hot anger or disappointment that have left a terrible burned taste in my heart, only to have him temper all of that down and use what the enemy meant for evil into something actually palatable and tasty. Many times, I've avoided the sharpness of the Word, wanting to be processed or transformed into his image without obeying it, only to realize I must have it. Just like that blade is necessary in the processor, so is His word necessary in my heart. And finally, when I want to be the star player, front and center, because I want to feel more important than others...he pushes the blend button. I am only a part of a larger body and although the role I play is an important one, I'm only good in the blend!

That blend after the processing is a transformation that is then poured into a bowl, set in the fridge for the flavors to meld, and then served on the table as a tasty dip for chips.

Next time you're chopping up veggies to make something tasty for you and yours, think about the process it takes to get those big garden items transformed into a dish where all flavors come together to make those who taste say, "That's delicious!" And then give thanks that you have a Father that isn't content to leave you in the ground, or alone in a crisper drawer, but rather draws you out into the process of being remade into His image. And that process, although painful at times, produces the best kind of offering to a hungry world.

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