



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

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

February 2023



TIPS

## **The Dressing – Add Red – by Marcy Lytle**

Every February, red hearts and bags and tableware and all sorts of things line the shelves, even days before the New Year begins, and we are just beckoned and called to purchase something red! I realized that I don't have a lot of red in my closet, so this year I decided to add a few pieces. Nothing big, just accessories and things that add a pop to the outfit – so fun! So shop and find something red, it can be small but bright, and wear it this month just because...

Bracelet – This bracelet was found on a table for \$5 at vintage shop and it's been my favorite piece of jewelry for the past few months. It dresses up so many outfits!

Bag – I have two red bags. One is from a market and the other was a gift from my sister. Red bags might not be common all the time, but I'm betting they are right now. Pick up one and wear it now, in the spring, and summer!

Boots – Oh, these boots. I didn't want to pay much because I won't wear these much, and I found them at DD's Fashions for under \$20 – suede in red! What a fun pair of boots to have!

Shirt – Just a tee shirt in red can go under jackets, with jeans, dressed up or casual. I can't recall where I got this one...maybe Target! Or Old Navy. And I'm wearing it under a pair of overalls.

Glasses – Well, red glasses are a no-brainer. Look on Amazon and order you a pair. Nothing says more fun is happening in your day than this pair of spectacles atop your nose, whether you need them or not!

Pin – Another vintage find, this pin is a favorite on a lapel, worn on a scarf, pinned at the waist or the collar...isn't it cute?

Coat – It's that time of year when coats are on sale. I've had this coat for years, it's like a tweed fabric, red and white, so it almost looks pinkish. It's a fave and I pull it out to wear on special occasions...or whenever I feel like it!

An awesome dress – My daughter-in-law wore this dress to a fancy function she and my son attended, and I found it stunning! She said it's from Target. And I'm wearing a red dress I got during the holidays, but good for February, as well – it's from Ross!

What's stopping you from wearing red? Not your color? Just wear an accessory. You love red, but have forgotten about it? Now's the time to remember to go for it – love yourself and what you wear – because it's fun.

## **Seven for You – Our Annual Faves!**

Each year in February, we list our favorite gifts we either gave or received at Christmas...in case you want ideas for your loves or yourselves this month of more giving! It's fun to hear what others have enjoyed to inspire us to try it, as well. So read through and see what our panel has loved, as you pamper and love someone or yourself!

My most favorite gift, I must admit, is one any and every woman would love to receive! I have gotten this gift from my husband only a few times. That way he can make it a surprise! It's a scavenger hunt! I have received it on different holidays, Easter, Mother's Day, Valentine's Day, my birthday, and this last Christmas. He'll buy very meaningful cards, write something special and sentimental inside, and then hide them around the house. One holiday, he put clues in each as to where the next card was. This Christmas he simply used the fun game of telling me, "You're getting warmer," and "You're as cold as can be."

It's so fun and so special! This Christmas I had nine cards! And of course, there's always a little something inside\$\$! That's why I know every woman would love this gift! And probably men would too!

Other gifts my husband and I have received that meant so much were our Willow Tree figurines from our daughter-in-law and son. One is a grandfather with a child and the other is a grandmother with a child. Then, this year, since our family has grown so much, my husband decided we needed some more of the figurines of grandchildren. So, he got me two. I love them! But for the size of our family, we're going to need several more!?! – Carole

All the lights, decorations, bobbles and snowman are put away for another 11 months. The memories of the season are still fresh in my mind, and more importantly, in my heart. I think of the gifts I received.

As older adults, with children and grandchildren living 1,200 miles away, exchanging gifts is usually giving gift cards. I remember years ago when it was considered impersonal to give a gift card to a store, rather than shop & buy a gift (that often was the wrong size, color, style) for your loved one. Yet, I think gift cards are the way to go in this day and age. Especially, since we don't live nearby or don't know exactly their wants and likes.

Every gift I received has meaning. It means someone took time to plan, order, wrap, ship, deliver a gift. I guess I'm touched, this year, by the gifts I received locally. You know; the ones that surprise you, ones you weren't expecting. We volunteer/live at a living history museum in Florida. We not only received a small check from the director, but each volunteer received a small gift of a box of candy. The neat thing was mine came in a cake pan! You see; one of the programs we do for school field trips is teach kids how to bake a cake. It's called a Lassie Cake, kind of tastes like a cinnamon coffee cake, but, oh, so much better! Everyone knows how much I love Lassie Cake, and I'm forbid from stealing pieces meant for the school group!

So, imagine my wonderful surprise when I open the cake pan and there was a full pan of Lassie Cake – just for me! The director had baked me a Lassie Cake for Christmas. A gift that was

designed for me. A gift that was exclusive to me. Needless to say, that Lassie Cake was enjoyed throughout the holiday season. - Gloria

My favorite gift was the same one I received last year. Our family had another year of challenges. My son's divorce (one he didn't want) was finalized in November. That same month, my daughter was driving from California to Texas for Thanksgiving and someone hit her car and took off. Her car can't be driven and we're still working with the California police to get their help. We didn't expect to see her for Christmas but we managed to get her a flight home. My son had his girls for Christmas, Alex came home and my Mom is in good health. These gifts, the gifts of family and health, matter more to me than anything. – Thankful Mom

My favorite gift this season was my 'Everything Pot' from my daughter & family! It takes the place of 8 pots and I love it! I'm so excited to try using it for baking & steaming. It replaces a stockpot, Dutch oven, saucepot, roasting rack, steamer, strainer, etc. And I can boil, crisp, bake, braise, roast, steam, strain, pour, serve, store...– Pam

My favorite gifts to give and to receive are handmade. This year, I was requested to make more microwave bowl cozies, in bigger sizes, so I did and everyone loved them.

Due to a bunch of circumstances we couldn't control, my sister and I had to postpone our get together until the week after Christmas. They live in a cedar home in the mountains in Northern California among a forest. I was stunned when my brother in law carried these beauties in from the garage and set them before me. Handmade by my very talented nephew from trees felled on their property. By far, my favorite gift! – Debbie

I had a couple of favorite gifts, and one that we have been giving for a couple of years, now. My favorite gifts were the coziest robe ever, and new pots and pans, on a hanging rack! The robe was actually a men's robe, but I LOVED it when I first saw it – at World Market. The pots and pans are from Amazon and the rack, as well. This gave me more cabinet space, because my pans are now on the wall!

The gift we started giving last year is a box of our faves, to our kids, that we collect all year long. It's usually about 10 items in a cool box – my husband gave his in a metal box for the guys. Mine included Mexican vanilla, a small candle from Target, my favorite bowl covers from Amazon, new dish towels I love, etc. It's fun putting it together during the months leading up to Christmas...and I always tuck a few of my favorite recipes in there, as well. – Marcy (robe pic in wrong place, goes here – not tried and true). – Marcy

For our household to survive the cedar fever and winter months, we must consume a lot of hot tea. I am in love with my electric tea kettle. It is so fast and efficient. How did I ever survive without it? – Shelley

One of the best Christmas gifts I've ever received is an AeroGarden Hydroponic plant growing system. It comes with a tank that holds water, a light that acts as the sun, seed pods, and plant food. I love to garden! Thankfully I live in the great state of Texas, where gardening is almost a year-round hobby. For the couple of months that it is too cold to grow plants outdoors, the AeroGarden keeps fresh herbs at my fingertips. I use basil the most out of all herbs, so that is what I like to grow in my AeroGarden; but, I have grown all kinds of herbs in it. It is so easy to grow fresh food with this system. I am a practical person, so I tend to give practical gifts. My daughter is crafty and thoughtful, so she makes homemade gifts that are meaningful. I need to

get better at giving meaningful gifts. Until then, I will continue to be known in my family for giving things like backpacks, computer chargers, and Chapstick! - Laura



## **THREE MOMS – DADDIES AND DAUGHTERS – BY THE COUSINS**

Daddy/daughter time is the best, isn't it? It's great for the moms to have some space, and it's great for the girls to be with their dad to feel special and loved one-on-one! We asked the cousins to share specific ways the dads spend time with the daughters, and why it's important that this wonderful experience takes place!

### Mom of Three

Dates with dad – so fun! It was actually my husband's idea to do a daddy/daughter date with the girls, and it takes place on their half-birthday. He started when they were 1 ½! Throughout the year, he takes the girls individually and connects with them, but the special date is a time for our girls to understand and know what it's like to be pursued by a Christian man, and how God sees all women as special, that we are beautiful inside and out. They dress up, wear makeup, fix their hair, etc. and Dad dresses up as well! It sets an example of what to look for in a future husband, to be loved and served well.

The girls get to choose where to go, so they have gone to Chick Fil A, the Factory (a game place). They will probably choose something more fancy as they grow! One specific memory is when Sadie (our oldest) said after her date, "Mommy, I want to marry Daddy." What a confirmation that the date nights are working!

It's a special date once a year, but Dad is involved all year long. This year's date night is coming up soon!

### Mom of Four

We have a big family, three girls and one boy. It's become (especially now that they're older) very busy with sports and activities, so one-on-one time or a "date" is hard. My husband – their dad – has found sports to be really one of the best ways to connect with his kids, specifically our daughters. They're already at practices and games, so Dad tries to coach every team. He coaches multiple teams at the same time.

This means their dad has been involved in basketball, volleyball, t-ball, flag football, etc. This allows him to be involved driving them in the car and present at the games, and things like that! It's great daddy/daughter time!

### Mom of Two (and a new one just born!)

I love this question, and having now three girls, it was actually Matt's idea (their dad) to do daddy/daughter dates. These always take place on the girls' half-birthday. He started this when our first daughter turned 1 ½. Throughout the year, Dad takes the girls to do things individually, but the reason for the special date is a time for our girls to see what it's like to be pursued, and by a Christian man. It also teaches them how God sees women as special and beautiful, inside and out. The girls get to dress up, wear makeup, have their hair done, etc. Daddy gets dressed up as well, and is a gentleman to them! This also sets an example of what to look for in a future husband, to be loved and served well.

The girls get to choose where to go. One chose Chick-Fil-A and another chose The Factory, a game place. Even McDonald's was chosen once! I'm sure the places will be fancier as they age! It's always their favorite place that they pick for date night.

I remember once that Sadie told me, "Mommy, I want to marry Daddy." This was a confirmation that the girls love these date nights with Daddy. Once a year, and all year, is so important for dads to be part of the things the girls are doing. A date night is coming up soon, so we will start planning for that!

### Mom of Three

For dads and daughters...one thing our daughter Ayla said she loves is that Dad puts her to bed at night. He holds her hand or sings and stays in there as she falls asleep, and it makes her feel safe! Another thing they do together is draw. Tyler and Ayla will draw on the floor, draw at the island, or anywhere in the house, and they enjoy it together.

Also, our daughter has a YouTube channel where she dances, so she wanted to do one in the fall and her daddy did it with her. It was so cute, and he will be silly with her at any time. He learned the dance!

One thing I want to say is that at Disneyworld it was hard to get Ayla to drink enough water, and she was worn out and sleepy. She needed a nap but we needed to keep moving. She took a 15 minute nap on her dad's shoulder. He also rotated between her and the youngest, holding them up to see the fireworks. I love seen the daddy/daughter moments where she shows on her face of how much she loves her dad.

I hate sushi, but Ayla really wanted to try sushi really badly. My husband took her on a date night to try it, and she didn't like it, after all. But she did dress up and enjoyed the date night to try something new. What a memory!

Little moments, not big "date nights" necessarily, but dancing or drawing or building something (he's building a Lego table), or holding her hand, makes Ayla's day!



## **In the Kitchen – Tea Party? Yes! – by Marcy Lytle**

Just before Christmas, a few friends gathered with me at my house, and we had a tea party. I had just purchased a new teapot and the cutest tea cups (wooden), and we had a spread of goodies and activities that would be so fun for February, as well. Invite a few friends, or set this up for you and him, however you want to enjoy!

For the table, I always include height, texture, light and color. White paper doilies under your candles work great (from the dollar store). Tiered serving trays work for height, and any greenery (or anything red this month!) will add color. Light some candles and you've got yourself a setting!

Below are the recipes and a couple of suggestions, should you decide to throw your own tea party this month – why not?

### Berry fruit salad

I loved how easy this salad was to make, and the dressing on it – so simple – was so good! It's very pretty in a bowl, as well.

- 1 lb fresh strawberries
- 8 oz fresh blueberries
- 4 oz fresh raspberries
- 4 oz fresh blackberries
- 2 c fresh cherries, pitted
- Zest of 1 small lime
- 1 T lime juice
- 1 T honey

Wash and gently dry berries and cherries, place in a large bowl. In a small bowl, whisk lime zest, juice and honey. Pour over fruit and toss gently. Refrigerate til ready to serve. Best served the same day...or the second.

### Tuna tea sandwiches

These tasted so good, and elevated a simple tuna sandwich into a delicious treat! The ingredients came together so well.

- 1 can light water-packed tuna, drained and flaked
- 1-2 T mayo
- ¼ t lemon pepper seasoning
- 4 T crumbled goat cheese
- 4 slices multigrain bread, crusts removed
- 4 large basil leaves

In small bowl combine tuna, mayo and lemon pepper. Spread 1 T goat cheese on each slice of bread. Spread two slices with tuna mixture, top with basil leaves and remaining bread. Cut in half or how you wish.

### Cucumber sandwiches

I suppose these are typical tea party sandwiches, so they must be included! They just taste crisp and good, with a little crunch!

- 16 slices high-quality soft white sandwich bread (about 1 loaf), crusts removed
- 1 English cucumber
- 8 ounces cream cheese , softened
- 1/4 cup mayonnaise
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh dill
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh chives
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
- Cracked black pepper , to taste

Peel the cucumber in stripes and cut into 1/8-inch thin slices using a mandolin or sharp knife. Place the slices on paper towels and sprinkle with coarse salt. Let rest for 15-30 minutes to extract moisture. Pat dry with clean paper towels.

In a medium bowl, using a handheld mixer, blend together the softened cream cheese, mayo, dill, chives, lemon juice, garlic powder, and salt.

Spread one side of each slice of bread with the herbed cream cheese. Layer cucumber slices over half of the bread slices. Season with fresh cracked black pepper, to taste. Top with remaining bread slices, cream cheese mixture down. (At this point, you'll have 8 full sandwiches.)

Using a sharp knife, cut each sandwich into quarters, pushing through the bread down to the bottom. So you have 32 tea sandwiches. Serve right away and enjoy! (recipe from Belly Full)

### Apple pie bites

These are so cute and tasty, and look pretty on a plate. They don't take long to make, at all.

- 1 pie crust
- 4 T unsalted butter
- 6 granny smith apples, cored and diced
- 1/2 c light brown sugar
- 1/2 T lemon, zested
- 2 T cornstarch
- 1 T ground nutmeg
- 8 milk caramels, chopped

Preheat oven to 350. Spray a muffin tin with nonstick spray. Roll out the pie dough and cut 12 pieces with a large round cookie cutter and place in muffin tins. In large saute pan, combine butter, apples, sugar, lemon zest, cornstarch and nutmeg. Cook til apples soften and liquid thickens. Spoon into individual muffin tins and top with chopped caramels. Bake for 30 minutes. Allow to cool before serving.

### Wilbur's chocolates

We ordered boxes of these for Christmas, and they're worth ordering all year long! These add decadence and amazing taste to any table, and look pretty in any of your small bowls! The buds are the best, a mix of dark and milk chocolate bite-size morsels. Oh my gosh, they're good! You might want a box for yourself, for Valentine's Day!

### Granola

I made a big batch of granola beforehand for party favors, for the girls to take home with them. Jars from the dollar store, and ribbons from my stash of giftwrap box. This recipe is one of my faves, from Alton Brown:

- 3 c rolled oats
- 1 c slivered almonds
- 1 c cashews
- $\frac{3}{4}$  c shredded sweet coconut
- $\frac{1}{4}$  c plus 2 T dark brown sugar
- $\frac{1}{4}$  c plus 2 T maple syrup
- $\frac{1}{4}$  c vegetable oil
- $\frac{3}{4}$  t salt
- 1 c raisins

Preheat oven to 250 degrees. In a large bowl combine oats, nuts, coconut and brown sugar. In a separate bowl, combine syrup, oil and salt. Combine both mixtures and pour onto two sheet pans. Cook for 1 hour and 15 minutes, stirring every 15 minutes for even color. Remove and transfer to a large bowl, add in the raisins and mix.

Finally, we had bags for each guest with the granola inside, and a scarf. We then had scarf tying instructions and had fun adorning our bags, our necks and even our heads – the scarf was a party favor. An entire pack of scarves from Amazon is not much at all!

February 2023

### **Last Month's Learnin'**

February is a good time to have a romantic tea with him, a get together with the girls, or just for you! It can be as simple as cheese and crackers with an olive on top, or fancy tuna tea sandwiches (see "In the Kitchen").

My daughter found the cutest long desk for two, at Ikea. In case you're still working at home...

If you're having charcuterie in February, cut hope bell pepper halves and use to hold your dips!

Ever heard of Kat Edmonson? We heard her this Christmas in concert, a unique sound and great songwriter!

We STILL have a chiminea, after all of the new fire pits available. And we STILL love it. Look for one at a garden center for your yard.

Maybe it's still too cold to plant flowers, but what about birds? We found some cute metal ones for pots nestled among whatever is still alive...

Did you know World Market has loungewear? I got the coziest robe from there, I mean the coziest.

Rain and spring will be just around the corner...so why not get a new umbrella? Have you seen the inverted ones? They open backwards, so you don't get wet entering and exiting your car!.

Use a bit of dark eyeshadow as eyeliner...for a softer and still dramatic look!

Naps in the car, with the winter sun just barely warming the windows, are divine. Try them!

Snip branches from your bushes, place in a vase, and set on a table. Winter décor!

Those tall skinny plastic glasses from The Dollar Tree or the Dollar Spot at Target make great little candy dessert cups for movie night. Fill with flavored popcorn, M&Ms, Jr Mints, nuts, mini PB cups, and any tiny treats. Tie a bow and you've got yourself something pretty and delish! Picture is on the HOME page under "Practical Parenting."

My husband was curious about the DELL logo with the E sideways. He learned that Michael Dell said he wanted to turn the world on its ear, so the designer turned the E. Cool story!

Claw clips are back, friends. Yes, claw clips. And I'm wearing them...

Did you know that baking sheets work well as "drawers" in your kitchen cabinets? Try them as a base for your other dishes, pull them out, choose what you need, and push them back in.

If you don't journal, consider doing so. Barnes and Noble has the best selection of pretty ones with space for writing just a few thoughts and thanks, each day.

I'm using Bend Peppermint soap lately, and loving the scent AND the feel...

Marshall's always has the cutest home décor, and I recently found this cute wooden heart stand...I'll use or just look at it!

## **SUGAR + Spice - Read Between the Eyeliners – by Angela Dolbear**

I love a vintage eye look. It's flattering and glamorous. I sported the cat-eye eyeliner look for years, until time dragged down too much skin at the corner of my eyes, so a cute little flip of eyeliner at the outer corners became undoable. I had to find something new.

I started collecting vintage and vintage reproduction Barbie dolls a while back. I love the sassy side-eye looks some of the dolls have. And their makeup! Beautiful retro eye looks.

I studied the eyeliner on the Barbies. Then, I tried to reproduce the thin-to-thick line on myself. I'm still trying to perfect the look, but I'm liking how it looks. And it's so easy to do.

### **Tip about the tip**

There are pencil eyeliners, liquid liners, and felt-tip brush-like liners. The latter is my favorite.

I have several favorite brands. What I'm using depends on what I have on hand. What I shop for:

[Roller Liner Matte Liquid Eyeliner from benefit](#) (\$\$) This liner has a long smooth ultra-fine tip, that is like a felt-tip marker. It goes on so smoothly and stays put all day. I stock up whenever I see it on sale.

A more budget-friendly liner I use occasionally is the [Epic Ink Vegan Waterproof Liquid Eyeliner from NYX](#) (\$). This liner goes smoothly and lasts, but it doesn't have the clean crisp lines the benefit liner has.

Vintage Barbie Eye Technique:

The key to a smooth line is a steady stroke that does not stop. I start in the inner corner of my eye, sweeping a thin straight line at the base of my lashes, moving toward the center of my eye. As I approach my pupil, I start to angle the line upward, toward the crease at the outer edge of my eye. Then I carefully fill in the area between the line I just drew and the base of my lashes. This method takes some patience and practice, but it looks fetchingly retro, especially with light eyeshadow tones (NOTE: put on your eye shadow first before your eyeliner).

The beauty of blessings to you!

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



HOME



## **Practical Parenting – Serve it Up Fun – by Marcy Lytle**

We recently served some candies in a tall skinny plastic glass set I got in the Dollar Spot at Target. I thought how fun to serve up food in different ways that make the kids squeal with delight, and might even make you squeal, too. After all, serving up dinner can become boring, but if it's plated in different ways, the whole family might even eat the bites they normally refuse!

- Tall skinny glasses – for piling candies but it keeps proportion in check.
- Popcorn bags – at the dollar store, to set out on the table for movie night, so cute and fun
- Paper cups – for fruit. Have a bowl of cut up fruit, and let them fill their cups and eat with toothpicks.
- Individual boards – You can get a set of these, and placing cheese and crackers on them is so fun!
- Paper plates with matching napkins – stock up at the dollar store and let the kids set the table!
- French fry cups – order from Amazon and fill with charcuterie, fruit, or fries! These are a blast!
- Skewers with a twist – Just slide on a cube of cheese, folded turkey, and an olive or pickle! World Market has these.
- Chips in a bucket – Dollar store has aluminum plant buckets, but they're great for chips of all kinds!
- Paper-lined baskets – you know the old-fashioned kind – great for sandwiches or hot dogs. Also at World Market.
- Condiment cups – portion out dips or mustard or ketchup, and add to their plates
- Plastic shake cups – These are SO FUN to fill with homemade shakes from a blender! And a straw!
- Pretty platters – great idea for sliced apples drizzled with caramel sauce, chocolates chips and nuts!

Those are just a dozen ideas and it's so fun to have a designated shelf or cabinet for fun presentations for you and the kids. Dinner can be on the floor on a blanket, around the table, or even in the car if you want! Let the kids help fill the popcorn bags, or pick out the plates and napkins, etc. Make the kiddos a part of the preparation, make it pretty and fun, and make dinner personal.

## **I Don't Do Teens – Love Songs Playlist – by Marcy Lytle**

Valentine's Day is here and kids either notice, or they don't. They wish they had a boyfriend/girlfriend, or they don't. They listen to love songs and pine for their one true love...or they don't. But probably, you have a teen that does listen to love songs and the lyrics probably don't present true love AT ALL. Maybe they only talk of physical love, or revenge love, or love that comes and goes.

So...what if you put together – with your teens – a love song playlist of all sorts of good tunes and lyrics that speak of His love, pure love, and the kind of love that makes the heart sing? Play the songs in the house, in the background at dinner, and even grab that teen (to their dismay, perhaps) and swing them around for a few laps in the living area of your house, when no one is looking!

Here is a playlist of 8 songs for your consideration:

I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles) – The Proclaimers – Great lyrics and melody, about faithful love!

Wonderful World by Sam Cooke – fun for students because it talks about the subjects in school – a great oldie but goodie.

I Say a Little Prayer – Aretha Franklin – Old song but if you talk about the lyrics with your teens you can tell them that prayer really is the best thing you can do for anyone you like that even doesn't like you. He listens.

Brother – Need to Breathe – what a great love song for friend to friend!

Only Hope – Switchfoot – belong only to HIM – the best kind of love.

Hold Me – Jamie Grace – great lyrics from the writer to the Writer of our lives – good for the kids!

I Believe in Love – Barlow Girl – strengthens belief in the one true love – from God our father.

Love Has a Name – Jesus Culture – the best name – Jesus.

If your kids have their own loves songs they enjoy, listen to them with the kids. Talk about the lyrics and discuss why they mean so much. In fact, have a family music night where each one shares a love song and why they love it. End the night in praying for the love of Jesus to fill aching hearts, to spread to others, and to satisfy like no love on earth can.

## **An Adage A Day - Figs for February – by Carole Gilbert**

It's February! The love month! What makes your sweetness of the love month complete? Is it something to eat, someone you hug, or maybe it's something as sweet as a rose? We all have something we love, and this is the month to enjoy it!

Some people love to be fresh as a daisy, meaning to be healthy, and full of energy. I love this too! Some prefer life as a wallflower, shy and quiet. And then there are those, like me, who are always ready to gild the lily, putting their effort into making a wonderful situation even better. But no matter how you come up roses, or take root, this is a good month to do it in, and especially with someone you love.

I love many things! I love many plants and flowers! I love receiving flowers but more than that, I love the Bible and receiving from God about His love. Many plants and flowers are mentioned in the Bible in many ways, but one really stands out with me. Maybe that's because Jesus, himself, refers to this plant and even uses it as an idiom! I was reminded of this as I studied my Sunday school lesson one day recently. And since I love this idiom and this is the love month, I thought why not put it all together.

*In John 1:48, Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."*

"Under the fig tree" refers to being in a peaceful place. It is a symbol for happiness, and prosperity. When I was growing up there were two blossoming bushes that I loved. One was a wisteria bush in one grandparent's yard and the other was a fig tree in another's. I would sit under the wisteria bush and read for hours with bumble bees flying all around me. I know, I was an odd child. And the fig tree was more like a bush. It was filled with branches that were so thick and low to the ground and its leaves were so big, I couldn't sit under it. The reason I loved it was because I loved fig preserves that my grandmother would make. So, when I saw the fig tree blossoming its fruit, I would get so excited knowing what was to come. Did you know that the flower blossom of a fig is inside the fruit? Talk about God working from the inside out.

When I was at that grandmother's house, I came in from playing outside and she asked me, "Have you been sitting under the fig tree?"

I pondered about this since I was unable to sit under it with all its leaves and branches. At that time, as a child, I didn't know it was an idiom. I didn't know this phrase was even in the Bible. So, when I read it in my Sunday school lesson, I wondered, is that where my grandmother got that phrase? Was she simply asking me all those times if I had been sitting in my calm and peaceful place outside and not literally meaning under the fig bush that I loved?

It's so funny how we think of something as a child and then as an adult we see that same something in a totally new light. I know this is God helping me to understand it, even 50 years later. Do we see Jesus this way? As children we have thoughts of Him. And now, as adults,

have our thoughts grown? Do our thoughts toward Jesus and God make us peaceful, calm, and happy? Do we gild the lily, put down roots, and sit under the fig tree with Him? I believe if we do, then we will have everything coming up roses.

## **Tiny Living...undergoes freezing temps - by Leyanne Enterline**

I may have touched on this subject before, but extreme temperature changes in a trailer are not the most fun!

This winter we had an early freeze and were not quite prepared. We thought we were, but our trailer said otherwise. We knew the cold temps were coming so we covered pipes (which our dog ripped off right away and we had to go buy more quickly), dripped the water, put a heat lamp in the well house...it all seemed good enough to us!

However, after a holiday visit with family, we came back to no water! The pipes had frozen up! We had "extra" water prepared in our holding tank to the trailer, but apparently water had frozen in the pipes under the trailer and wouldn't allow but only a drop of freezing water to come out for a bit.

This meant no showers, no water to brush teeth, and no cooking because there was no way to clean up! And the list goes on and on of why need we need water, especially hot water!

We were out of water for three days, and luckily we were elsewhere a lot for the holidays. Family helped us out so much! And we could use bottled water to brush our teeth. We did have to use the bottles as well to fill water in the toilet, so we survived for a bit!

This was not my favorite thing to deal with, but things could have been much worse! During last year's freeze we were out of town and came home to a leaky pipe from our toilet bursting so we had to replace that!

I'm praying that we don't go through this again, but I think we learn as we go and we have some more preparations put into place. One would think almost seven years into tiny living we would have seen it all, but the trailer just keeps on giving us new surprises!

Remember love grows best in tiny spaces...

## **A Night to Remember – The Fascinating Heart – by Marcy Lytle**

It's Valentine's Day, the one day a year where we give heart cards, boxes of chocolate hearts, and eat candy hearts. But what about that real heart that beats inside your chest? How do we give that heart without breaking, share our heart without being embarrassed, and nourish our heart so that it beats strong and healthy?

Preparation: Cut out a huge heart of red construction paper for each child participating. Then cut that heart into five pieces (writing their initials on the back of each piece). Hide those pieces in the living area where you will be together for the lesson.

We all have hearts, and they beat and that's why we are still alive. God made our hearts, and sometimes in life we get our hearts broken, or we have hearts that hurt because of someone mistreating us, or maybe we're just worried and our hearts feel heavy. The Bible has a lot to say about hearts that are broken and need Jesus. Let's find our broken hearts and put them together again!

Facts about the heart are fascinating, and what His word says is just as interesting and good! As we read a verse, find a piece of your heart and then put together the puzzle and know you are loved!

How many times does your heart beat in a day? (Let kids guess and then find a piece of their heart). Your heart beats 100,000 times a day! That's a lot of beats! Proverbs 12:25 *Anxiety weighs down the **heart**, but a kind word cheers it up.* Have you ever been hurt by an unkind word? His word to you is that you are loved, and his kindness is always with you.

How much blood does your heart beat in a minute? (Let kids guess and find a piece of their heart.) Your heart pumps 1.5 gallons of blood every minute – what? Psalm 28:7 *my **heart** trusts in him, and he helps me.* This means when we trust in God, he helps our heart stay strong.

Whose heart beats faster, men or women? (Let kids guess and find a piece of their heart.) A woman's heart beats about 8 times faster than the heart of a man. Proverbs 4:23 *guard your **heart**, for everything you do flows from it.* How do we guard our hearts? We keep them pure from any wrong thinking or doing.

About how big is an adult's heart? Size of fist, a watermelon, or a golf ball? (Let kids guess and find a piece of their heart.) An adult's heart is about the size of your fist. Psalm 44:21 *he knows the secrets of the **heart**.* This means he knows when we are sad, even when no one else understands.

What insect has the smallest heart? (Let kids guess and find a piece of their heart.) The fairy fly, about the size of a wasp, has the smallest heart. Psalm 90:12 *that we may gain a **heart** of wisdom.* God gives us a wise heart when we ask.

Which animal has the largest heart? (Let kids guess and find a piece of their heart.) Whales have the largest heart of any mammal. Psalm 51:10 *Create in me a pure **heart**, O God.* Only God can make our hearts clean and pure, without hatred or envy or jealousy.

What's something good we can do for our hearts? (Let kids guess and find a piece of their heart.) Laughing is good for the heart and reduces stress. Psalm 16:9 *Therefore my **heart** is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure.*

Let's all laugh out loud, and see who can laugh the longest!

Now that we've collected the pieces of our hearts, let's put them together to form a complete heart, whole and perfect. Isn't God good that he makes our hearts sing and live and beat for Him? He cares about everything that hurts us, and always make us well and strong again.



## **In Each Room – My Favorite Organizers – by Marcy Lytle**

I absolutely love to organize, and I change the way I organize often. Unless, I find something I really love, and then I stick with it. I love watching reels on Instagram of how others organize, and I gain so much info there! And finally, I love shopping for organizers, filling up bins and boxes and baskets, and placing them on shelves or pantries. I love arranging and fixing and sorting, so all is neat and clean.

Here are a few of my favorites in each room:

*In the closet* – I shared this method of using shower hooks to hang jeans a while back and I'm still using it! It's the best! Just hang the hooks on your closet rod, then take a belt loop and hang over the hook, fold the pants, and tuck side by side.

*Clear containers in the pantry* – These have been awesome! I empty cardboard boxes and plastic bags of their contents into these bins each time I buy groceries. I cut the expiration date label and place inside. I can see what I have, and my shelves stay neat and everything is visible!

*New baskets on top of the fridge* – You know, that place where stuff collects and looks messy – on top of your fridge. I found these bins at Big Lots and one holds plastic containers, another my husband's stash of coffee, and larger to-go boxes in the third.

*Baskets under the sofa table* – This is my newest organizer and I love these baskets for storing blankets or even extra napkins and plates for eating in front of the television and watching a movie. They're from Marshalls.

*Bins in dresser drawers* – Can you believe these are from the Dollar Tree? They've kept our socks and underwear sorted for months, now! They work!

*A vintage picnic basket* – This looks pretty on the floor in a guest bedroom, but inside is a large folded picnic blanket and picnic ware, ready for warmer temps and eating outside!

*In the washroom* – I LOVE these tin buckets I found them on clearance at Michaels and I use them to hold cleaners, swiffers, dryer sheets, stain remover, etc. They look pretty, too.

*Just a tin box* – I love having tea lights available to use for nights at home by the fire, or just to create ambience. So this box sits on a shelf in the living area and serves two purposes – to look nice and to hold the candles!

Got any organizing tips or tricks to share? Leave them below...



YOU

## **Inner Strength - The Name “Mom” – by Michelle Wyatt**

Have you ever heard your child say your name, “Mom,” and it made you tired? I have a feeling a lot of moms out there are saying yes, whether we want to admit it or not.

I am happy to say that now I look forward to the sound of my name regardless of the tone.

By tone, I mean the “mom” that lasts several seconds, usually followed by “He did \_\_\_ to me.” or “Can I have your phone?” or “Where are we going today?” Children making demands of us parents can be draining. So, how do we replenish ourselves? Our kids can help us if we let them.

It’s about balancing what we think and how we react. For example, when I hear one of my boys say, call, and or even yell out, “Mom!” I feel a sense of gratitude and love. So, instead of thinking “What does he need?” I think how much of a gift it is that I have the opportunity to love, nurture, guide, and take care of my boys.

I will admit, the boys have made it pretty easy, especially recently, for me to love and appreciate being a mom and being replenished. Here are just a few of the acts of kindness my boys have and continue to do that have contributed to this:

- When we are hanging out on the couch, Matthew brings me a blanket in addition to his. I never get tired of hearing “Here Mom, this one’s for you.”
- When it’s snack time, my son moves his bowl of fruit where I can reach it too and tell me that we can share.
- Brendan wraps his arm around me and says compassionate words like, “I’m sorry you have had a rough day.” (Now, it’s important I share that I don’t even have to say I had a rough day. Brendan is very intuitive as I am).
- Brendan out of the blue tells me that he loves me. Both boys will, actually.

One of the best examples goes back to when I hear my name, “Mom.” Matthew will say, “Mom?” like it’s a question following it with his arms open wide to say, “I want a hug.” To me, I’m not just giving him a hug, but we are giving and receiving the gift of love between a mother and son.

It’s the best is when my name “Mom” is called because being a mom to my boys is a never-ending gift from God that I intend to be grateful for no matter what!

If I can do it, so can you!

## **A Hopeful Heart - Worthy of Love – by Christina Oberon**

"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

Love has been at the center of so much of who I am and how I show up in life. I'm a daydreamer and a romantic. However, a reasonable number of my past romantic relationships have not always been reflective of that. Rather than love, some of my past relationships were fueled, involving verbal and physical abuse, unfaithfulness and heartbreak. It often felt like a battle of the titans. What characterized my past relationships often made me question my worthiness, hence the question, "Am I worthy?"

*Am I worthy of someone who thinks I'm too important to lose?*

*Am I worthy of peace?*

*Am I worthy of love?*

There is a Japanese art technique called Kintsugi. It involves repairing broken pottery with precious metals like gold, silver or platinum. The purpose is to highlight the breakage, rather than disguise it. There is so much strength in being able to bare our scars and see beauty, rather than pain, in them. Most importantly, to accept these markings as part of a worthy journey.

Rejection helped me accept myself. Experiences I gained from love lost were necessary for me to accept my fragileness, build strength and resilience, and take pride in my imperfections. Although difficult, when things do not work out, this is how we grow, learn, and change. The tears shed can water the soil that will grow the love we desire. What a privilege it is to have the opportunity to try and fail. Failure allows us to try again, do better and get it right.

Fearfully and wonderfully made is how we all enter this world until our experiences convince us otherwise. We are worthy of fulfilling love, sincere communication and deep commitment. Although our worth isn't found in people or things, there is no denying the joy and fulfillment that comes with experiencing a worthy love.

There came a time when I began to live with an open and expectant heart; my belief in love grew strong, and when I met the man who was later to become my husband, I felt within me that I had found the one whom my soul loves. I had no doubt that his love for me was and is second to none. I've often said that I feel like my husband loves me as close to how I imagine God loves me; unconditionally, but not devoid of fault, mistakes and imperfections. When I look into his eyes, I can see that I am valued.

*I am loved.*

*I am worthy.*

*And I have come to realize that I always was.*

## Healthy Habits – Nighttime Routines – by Marcy Lytle

What do you do to unwind at night and fall asleep so that you can rest well? I know for each person, it's so different. Some refuse to have televisions in their bedrooms, and others need the TV on to fall asleep. Some enjoy a bit of reading before bedtime, and others fall asleep in two seconds so why bother cracking a book? Whatever you do, it's important to find what suits you best and causes you to rest well...because rest is everything.

Here are some suggestions:

If you read, **include the Word**. I don't have a specific devotional to recommend, but it can be as simple as a verse a night from a chapter you love, or a devotional with truths about His love. Keep it simple, so that your mind is at rest, not stirred up in confusion.

**Scroll through Instagram**. If you follow some inspirational accounts, this is a fun thing to do as you unwind. So many good accounts offer encouraging words or even pictures of kids and families, and hope and faith. Ann Voskamp is a good follow. Search for good stories, not sensational nonsense.

Do **watch television if it helps**. I have a couple of shows I enjoy that make me laugh because they're simple. Dick Van Dyke is one of them. Old-school, maybe. But the old shows are uncluttered with today's problems, and make life look happy and light.

**Thumb through magazines**. It seems everything is on line, these days. But a good magazine with pages to feel and stories to read is awesome. *Magnolia Journal* is a good one. As well as any food magazines. Both are great reads.

**Read trivia cards** with him. Sometimes, we take several cards from a box and read trivia questions. We always have fun and we always get sleepy, and always go to sleep quickly, after.

**Lay your burdens down**. Take your burdens and envision them in a large sack, and just confess to Him that you don't even know how to pray for the solutions, because you've run out of requests. This is a good thing. Let Him solve, let go of your worries, and rest. Come unto Him. That's the best place to lay your head...on His lap.

**Ask for a back rub**. I bet He won't mind. Or pamper yourself with a foot massage, or a soak with nice bath additions that smell good and feel good. Try a new shampoo or conditioner, or moisturizer. Find products you love that relax you and feel wonderful.

Wear comfy and **cute night clothes**. I recently purchased some pajama "sets" – one from World Market. I absolutely feel like royalty wearing them to bed, and they make me smile. One doesn't have to sleep in torn t-shirts, one can have nice lingerie...

**Go to bed earlier**. Leave time to spend talking with him, loving him, being with him, TOGETHER.

Going to bed at separate times might work sometimes, but don't let it be all times. Make sure you linger in each other's arms often.

Take time to figure out what it is that keeps you from sleeping well. It might be practical, like you need a new pillow. Or it might be spiritual, because your soul is in turmoil. And it could be just life, with all its burdens and busyness. Try new things, but make the bedtime routine something you look forward to every night, with your last thoughts being completely emptied and at rest as you offer praise to the One who never sleeps, but keeps watch while we do.

## Life Right Now - Well, THAT Didn't Go as Planned - By Jennifer Stephens

As a first-grade teacher there are certain duties required of me. Things like greet the students each morning, take attendance, and create engaging lesson plans designed to meet district and state objectives. These tasks (and so much more) are expected to occur each and every day. Doing each of these things is so ingrained into my daily routine, I do them without even thinking about it (except maybe taking attendance; the secretary still calls my room at least once a month to remind me – oops!).

But sometimes the school day doesn't go at all like I'd planned, despite the hours of preparation. There was one particular day, several years ago, when I, shall we say...*strayed* from the district objective.

Now anyone who has spent any time in an elementary school knows things can go awry for any number of reasons. Unexpected all-school assembly. Birthday cupcakes arrive. The dreaded "full moon effect." But this day started off like any other school day. I mean, as normal as the day can be when it's February 14<sup>th</sup> and kids are arriving with cards, candy, and boxes shaped like unicorns, Pokémon, and gigantic Hershey's kisses. Needless to say, there WAS an audible level of excitement in the air. As any seasoned teacher will tell you, it's not the Pinterest worthy boxes that catch our attention. We scan the arriving students with a trained eye, seeking out the few kids with slumped shoulders and empty hands.

And there she was.

Once the class had settled down (and I remembered to turn in attendance!), it was time for our reading lesson. But I couldn't take my eyes off her. She wilted into her chair like the deflated recess balls left outside on the playground. So, I did what all teachers do on February 14<sup>th</sup> - gathered stickers, markers, construction paper, and glue. And after I busied the rest of the class, this deflated six-year-old sat with me and we began cutting, gluing, and creating her very own Valentine's box and a class set of cards for her to pass out. As we chatted and worked together, she bloomed! And that day she (and the rest of the class) learned something so much more important than the reading lesson I had planned. That SHE mattered. That THEY mattered. Because sometimes we must veer away from the plan, depending on an individual student's needs. I'd planned on teaching reading that day, but I could see that's not what this student needed in that moment.

Isn't that just like our relationship with God? We make our plans. We prepare. We expect things to go a certain way. We make big plans such as when we'll get married, how many kids we'll have, or what we'll do for a living and we make small plans, like if we'll make dinner or just grab takeout. We fill our calendars with future activities. Some people even have their own five-year or ten-year plan. Their whole life is mapped out.

But sometimes God looks at us with a trained eye and sees what we can't see. In fact, He sees BEYOND what we see. God has His own plan designed for each of us to fit our own individual needs. And those plans we made? When those plans don't match His plans? Well, then what?



I know my life hasn't gone at all the way I planned when I was a young college student daydreaming about life. I was positive I'd be married at 25, have a houseful of kids by the time I was 30, and spend my days juggling carpool, P.T.A. meetings, and life as a stay-at-home mom. Well, THAT didn't go as planned. Here I am sliding down that infamous hill we all find ourselves going over at a certain age, with no children to call my own, staring at the finish line of a 30-year career in education. I did snag a guy to marry (albeit later than planned) and we have two very spoiled dogs! It's a good life – a great life; but not the one that 20-something me planned. I don't know why my plan didn't fall in line with God's plan for me, but it didn't. I could live in a perpetual state of bitterness, filled with anger, hurt, and resentment towards God for not following MY plan. But why? For one thing, no one wants to be around someone with a sour stance. But most of all, we are called to TRUST God.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”  
Jeremiah 29:11

I may never know the WHY that would explain God's direction for my life and that's okay. Sure, I still have moments of sadness because my plan didn't pan out, but I know God had His reasons. Good reasons. So often we hear testimony from people praising Jesus for answering their prayers with a yes. But for some of us, our stories didn't go as planned. Yet we continue to praise Jesus. We still trust God to lead us. Even when His plan for our lives looks different than our own expectations.

“Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.”  
Proverbs 19:21

## **Under Pressure – Those Two Arms – by Debbie Haynes**

Isn't the month of love all about wrapping ourselves up in the arms of someone we love? And it's so nice when those arms are strong and make us feel secure.

Did you know that the Bible speaks quite a bit about God's arms and hands? It's interesting to look at the arm of the Lord this season and ask to be held, because in his arms is a safe place to rest.

In John 1:1 we read that in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. This is referring to Jesus, God's son who was present then in creation, and is with us now. In Exodus we read of God using Moses' arms as extensions of God's own arms in leading the people out of bondage. God even had Moses' brother and sons hold up Moses' arms when they grew weary in battle. And in Deuteronomy we read that God has a mighty and outstretched arm that saves. And by the time we read further, we see that Jesus is the very extension of the arms of God!

After all, it was Jesus' two arms that were nailed to the cross. It was at the cross that the Father's arms were extended through the Son where sin was judged and sentenced, and salvation was accomplished and completed.

There's no greater message of love, or picture of strong arms, than that of Jesus' arms reaching out to the entire world, to anyone who accepts that love and sacrifice from Jesus.

Talk about being wrapped and held secure by the One who loves us!

All through scripture we see the strong arm of the Lord as it moves in battle and offers victory, sustains the weary, and extends wide open to the entire world – to judge sin and then offer life and love.

There's a great prayer that we can pray this month of February, the month of love, as we pray for ourselves and others:

*Father, you are the giver of life and salvation. You are the sender of life, and you are the one with extended arms. We cry out for your love, that your light will shine in the darkness, and that we will all be held in the shelter of your arms – safe, well, and healthy in every day to come. Especially, bless our children. Let them feel your arms around them and never lose sight of your words – more precious than gold.*



MARRIAGE

## **In This Together – Sometimes, It's Hard – by Bekah Holland**

If I could give you one piece of advice, I'd tell you to love yourself a little bit more. And that's partly because I'm working on this myself. And also because I'm much better at giving advice than taking my own, so there's that. What does this have to do with marriage and Valentine's Day and all of the *lovie dovie* stuff we're bombarded with this month? I'm not completely sure, but maybe we'll figure it out together.

I tend to be the kind of person who does not internalize things well. When I was younger, I HAD to talk things out. I couldn't seem to make sense of my thoughts if I left them bumping around in my head. As I've gotten older, I've become more introspective and while I still have to verbally vomit big issues to be able to make some kind of sense of them, I've become more reserved in sharing what I'm feeling. That's not all bad, but for me, it's not always that good either. Because I'm pretty good at loving other people in the ways they need to feel loved.

However, I've noticed that I don't offer that same thing to myself. I grew up believing that to be a good Christian girl I had to meet certain requirements. Putting myself dead last was one I managed to hold onto long after I understood that perfection wasn't attainable and that my shortcomings weren't going to scare God away or banish me to a fiery eternity. But after 16+ years of marriage and 40+ years of living, I know that not acknowledging my own needs causes more problems than it solves.

As women, and even more so as moms, we tend to be the first and last lines of defense, the kisser of skinned knees, the healer of broken hearts and the holder of all of the pain and struggle. But how often do we allow ourselves to put that down and hold space for our own baggage? Or accept our partners' attempts to carry the heavy stuff for a while? Maybe you're better at that than I am. Because honestly, I'm terrible at it. I've gotten way too used to being the proverbial clean-up crew for every struggle, every suffering and every challenge that my children and family and husband face. Why? Probably some residual left over confused idea of what a wife and mom is supposed to be. And more than a little stubbornness. But I am also starting to realize that there's some pride involved, too. Not that I think that I'm amazing and capable of solving, well, anything really. Because I don't. But my actions say otherwise, since I don't easily trust anyone else to do that kind of heavy lifting.

Once again, I'm sure you're wondering what this has to do with a healthy (or trying to be healthy) marriage. I am, too. If I really stop and think about it, and get really honest with myself, I know where this has caused problems in my relationship with my husband. And after a while, we all forget that we don't have to be the gatekeeper of every single thing all alone. "Mom will remember, so no big deal if I forget. My wife will do that, because she always does. My friend will be there, because she's always shown up." And I forget, too. I forget that my people are very capable and smart and can figure out their own stuff sometimes. I forget that if I hold on to everything for every one, I can't carry myself. I can't rest. I can't find the strength to add me to my to-do lists. And if I want to serve others, I need to serve myself as well.

How do I serve myself? Great question. I'm still trying to figure that one out. I do know that while I am strong and capable and other things I don't usually give myself credit for, I am also deserving of being cared for, lifted up and protected as well. But un-learning years of "training and belief systems" isn't exactly a quick and painless process. And I have to make room for others to remind me that God didn't create me to be an island. He didn't create me to only be a safe space for others. He didn't create me to carry all of this weight on my shoulders.

It takes a lot of work to make real and lasting changes. Helping others deal with their stuff is so much easier. I can be compassionate and empathetic with my husband. I can see the struggles and know that there is still light at the end of this particular tunnel. My own tunnel, however, doesn't even have a flashlight much less an end, so I act as if I ignore it long enough, it will just magically disappear...like all of the matching socks that never find their way out of the dryer. In case you haven't guessed it, that doesn't happen. The socks or the magic tunnel. But if I sit and listen, to my heart and to the people who love me best, I can start to make out some light seeping in through the cracks of my brokenness. My husband wants to shine light into my darkness when it creeps in. I just have to let him. I have to believe him when he lists the things he sees in me. I have to let him stand for me when I don't have it in me to do it on my own. I have to trust him with the ugly parts of me that I don't like to show anyone.

Marriage is a partnership. It takes all of both parties to work. Loving someone just as they are isn't always easy or pretty. Sometimes it looks like bringing dinner to bed while they try to find enough will to keep breathing. Sometimes it looks like picking up dishes that everyone assumes will get cleaned up on their own by magical pixies or a maid we don't have. And sometimes it even looks like talking about the hard stuff when sweeping it under the rug and leaving it for a future therapist to deal with would be much easier. But if we keep taking the next right step, doing the next best thing, we can keep moving toward the brighter places and toward each other. And we can remember to stop putting ourselves in last place, so that we can keep showing up and showing out for our people. And little by little, and step by step, we may just find some of the peace and joy that we're all searching for. Together.

*"We are all a little broken. That's how the light gets in." E. Hemmingway*

## **Date Night Fun – Something Simple – by Marcy Lytle**

If you've read the story from Angela this month, with answers from other women on what romance looks like, you'll read that it's not often the super romantic Hallmark type moments with a room full of twinkly lights and the kiss on the tiptoes, but rather romance is found in the mundane of the every day. Read that story on the ENCOURAGEMENT page, then come back here for simple February love gestures for your date ideas this month:

*Puzzle with Music* – Maybe jigsaws aren't your thing, but perhaps you both enjoy a crossword or anacrostic, or whatever kind of puzzle you wish. Play some pretty songs from your playlists that you've put together, and enjoy peanuts and a coke while you do.

*Trivia, Anyone?* - I bet you have an old trivia game somewhere, or you can purchase just a box of trivia cards. Grab your robes, put up your feet (on each other) and read the cards. If one answers correctly, they get another question. Keep going until all cards are gone, and the one finished the first wins. Finish before bedtime with a footrub and a backrub, with some great-scented lotions.

*How about mini golf?* Is there one day this month that's warm enough to head outside for this game? I honestly not crazy about mini golf, but once I start playing, it's fun. We recently forgot to grab a scorecard and just decided to see who won each hole. It was easy to keep score and a fun alternative to the other traditional scoring. Make sure you have a good book in the car, and after golf, lean your seats back and read...somewhere with a pretty view in front.

*Just outside town* – Pick a small town less than 30 minutes away and drive there for coffee. Just to get away. Pack a game, if you wish. Order a Danish, if you want. Take a walk around the square, if you can. Hold hands, for sure. Take your time and talk about nothing but what shape the clouds are forming, or how cool that building's architecture is that you just passed. Read historical markers. Forget your city, and enjoy another...

*Make snacks together* – Just browse your pantry and fridge and come up with three snack ideas, both of you together. Then check your dishes and paper goods and candles and any décor you have to create a picnic on the floor with your new food creations. Build a fire, and watch a documentary – yes, a documentary.

These are all simple ideas that allow for you to be spontaneous and loving and they're all relaxing, as well. Make new memories this month as you romance each other away from the busy restaurants and downtown happenings dressed in heels...unless you want to do that too, of course!

## **After 40 Years – Morning Dance – by Marcy Lytle**

We haven't always done this. But we've been doing it now for a while. The first thing we do when we're both awake is dance in the bathroom.

Let me back up. Mornings are busy around here. I'm up first, way before him, and I have an agenda. I have lists and things to do and stories to write, and rooms to clean. So I'm in the thick of busyness when he awakes. But when I hear him up, I've started getting up from the computer and heading back to the bedroom.

He's made the bed by the time I arrive because that's the first thing he does, in the dark, before getting ready for the day. He's at his sink, and I sneak up behind him and hug him.

It's then that the morning dance takes place. I lay my head on his shoulder and we waltz on the small floor of the bathroom to any tune we hum in our heads. He might start it, or I will.

It's a silly little display, this morning dance, but it sets the tone for a good day.

Oh, there were many days that I stayed at my computer, he entered the room to eat his breakfast, and I didn't even want to be bothered with a "hello" from him. He'd get busy, grab his keys, run out the door, and I'd keep working.

But more often than not, I wished I had stopped and gotten up and spent a minute with him before he left.

So this I do, now. Most days of the week.

Neither of us are dancers, although I wish I'd learned to dance, so many times I wish it. And besides, where is there to go dancing now, for folks our age? I don't know of a dance floor where we'd want to go and dance with others.

So we've created this morning routine all our own. Sometimes, we do it again at night. And it's not even the length or the melody, but it's the embrace and the pause that connects our hearts and settles our souls.

This morning there was no morning dance because I was miffed about something, and I'm sorry, but some days we still experience disagreements that cause distance for a moment. But I already regret not grabbing him from behind with a kiss, and missing out on that morning dance.

Do you have a routine that connects you with him? Or are you too busy, like I've been before, and don't even notice when he exits the door?

The morning dance. I'm just smiling now as I think of it, me in my robe and he barely dressed, just dancing the tiles away on the cold floor without any shoes, just at the light of day...

## For Better or Worse - Battle of the Sexes – by Kaelin Scott

Does it ever feel like arguments with your spouse come at the exact times you least expect them? On the way to church, or while playing with the kids, or simply sitting on the couch talking about your day? One miscommunication or poorly timed joke and *WHAM!* All of a sudden, it's like a war breaking out. Okay, maybe not a war. But a very inconvenient (and often pointless) disagreement.

So, what is up with that?? Why do we do this? It's my opinion that the devil sees these times as perfect opportunities to sow discord within our homes. And he succeeds so easily, doesn't he? Even when we don't want to argue, we just have to have the last word. Or we take something personally that we could choose to let go. We may not intend to be argumentative or hurtful, but it just happens sometimes. And before we know it, everyone is either angry or upset and no one is having fun.

I'm guessing you know what I'm talking about, because I think it happens to everyone. So how on earth can we combat this? How can we avoid letting family time or everyday life escalate into Battle of the Sexes?

First and foremost is *thinking before we speak*. I know. So obvious, so cliché. But putting it into practice isn't as easy as it seems. Because in the heat of the moment, we just want to spout off the first good comeback that pops into our heads. We want to argue, we want to fire back. But does it ever help anything? Nope. It usually makes things worse. I know this for a fact because I'm really bad about it (just ask my husband...) But I also know that the few times I've actually had the self-control to hold my tongue instead of lashing out, the argument fizzled out fairly quickly instead of getting worse. Saying that sarcastic comment might feel good for a second; but swallowing it down feels a lot better, later on.

What else can we do to stay away from these trivial arguments? Well, *how about praying?* I know, another Sunday school answer, right? But I'm serious. Praying over ourselves and our family in those tense moments can work miracles. Instead of giving in to the desire of our flesh to pick a fight, we can choose to give it over to Jesus. Another thing that's easier said than done, but also so helpful. Another reason this works is because it takes our focus off ourselves and our feelings and helps shift our perspective. Plus, we can't hurt God's feelings. He already knows exactly how we feel, so there's no harm in pouring it all out to Him. It sure beats raging on our spouse and children, doesn't it? A quick silent prayer is often the best way to end a fight, especially combined with our other tactic of holding our tongue.

I think the other way to fight this yucky cycle is to *simply be aware of it*. If there are certain times when we are more prone to argue – like on road trips, for instance – then we have to be extra mindful of the way we speak to each other during those times. Decide ahead of time to pay attention to our own words and actions. Self-awareness is a great weapon against silly arguments because, once again, it shifts our focus. Instead of only worrying about how we feel, we're also considerate of how we make others feel. Great way to avoid disaster, right?

Obviously, arguments are bound to arise regularly throughout a marriage. We can't spend our entire life with someone and never disagree. But it is possible to cut down on the amount of needless verbal spats if we really try. Nobody is perfect, but there's always room to improve. And trust me, sister, I still have A LOT of improving to do. So I know how daunting it can seem. But the good news is that we never have to operate out of our own strength. Give it to the Lord,



and watch Him move in mighty ways. We might be surprised how much we grow when we get out of the way.

I'm in this with you. Let's kick those silly arguments to the curb and cultivate happier, healthier marriages.

"In your anger do not sin...do not give the devil a foothold." Ephesians 4:26-27



ENCOURAGEMENT

## **Rooted in Love - The Treasure of Motherhood – by Kaelin Scott**

Have you ever thought about how different parenting is for humans than for any other creature?

Almost every animal is born able to walk or learns to walk shortly after. That's so crazy! And animal mamas don't need a bunch of bells and whistles and gadgets to go along with their baby. They just need their own body and whatever resources their habitat provides. Sometimes being a human mother can be so overwhelming. You can doubt every single decision and wonder if you're doing things right. But animals just trust their instincts and do what they're programmed to do.

Motherhood is so much different in the animal kingdom than it is for us. Animal mamas don't have to deal with dirty diapers or sleep regressions or teething toddlers. They don't have to plan out a nap schedule or worry over which type of baby food to buy. They don't have to plan doctor visits and playdates or lug around a huge bag of snacks and supplies.

A lot of things are unique to humans when it comes to motherhood, but one stands out as the most important. Animal mamas don't get to experience the incredible amount of love we humans feel for our babies. Sure, they care for them and protect them and provide for them. But the mother-child relationship is so much more significant and special for people.

Animals don't feel the swell of pride at watching their nearly one-year-old take his first steps. They don't experience the joy of hearing the word "mama" for the first time or treasure the sound of little giggles. They don't get nostalgic and emotional watching their children grow and change, nor do they get to mark the passage of time by celebrating birthdays.

Being a mom is such a unique and special role. There are so many challenges, so many hardships, so many triumphs and joys. It's a lifelong rollercoaster of highs and lows, sprinkled with bouts of confidence and self-doubt. No two days are the same, just as no two mothers and no two children are the same. There's nothing in the world that compares to life as a mom. It's such a wonderful journey, one that shapes and molds not only the children, but the mother as well.

While there are many parts of motherhood that are far from glamorous, I'm sure most mamas would agree that we wouldn't change a single thing. All those sleepless nights, every runny nose, each Band-Aid and tear-soaked pillowcase are all reminders of the precious, priceless, wonderful gift we've been given. The gift of our children. The little people we love before we even get to see them. The ones we would give our own lives for.

There's nothing like being a mama, and I'm so grateful I get to experience every single part of it.

Martyrs, healing of a blind girl, pagan rituals, love letters written during bird-mating season—these are the fact or fiction beginnings of Valentine’s Day which can be traced back centuries. Industrialization brought mass-production of cards and chocolates, advertising jumped on it, and here we are. Modern day Valentine’s Day has morphed into a celebration of romance, and a lot of people feel left out.

I remember eagerly reading my grade school valentines to see if anyone was sweet on me, indicated by anything vaguely kind. Then, in middle and high school, the disappointment when there was no one to celebrate with, the elation when there was. Self-image and self-esteem hinged on being “liked” and every cultural message indicated that finding a marriage partner was a primary goal of life. Remaining single didn’t occur to me as an option. But, if I was the person I am now back then, I might have chosen it.

I’ll be very honest and transparent: my life has been complicated and messy, most of it my own doing. I’ve been married twice and neither marriage worked out as I would have liked. That’s an understatement. Neither worked out as I deeply desired and longed for. The reasons are complex of course, interwoven into the lives of imperfect human beings. I’m much healthier now, which could make relationship success much more likely, but do I want that?

I’ve lived the single life for many years and, at first, it was an adjustment. The loneliness of an empty house, no one to share the joys and pains of life with, no one to say if the picture is hung straight, the trouble of cooking for one—just a few downsides of singleness. My desire to have someone to pray with and discern God’s direction wasn’t fulfilled by either marriage. That hope still lingered, but, after thinking of the complexities of blended families and the baggage we carry; my independent, self-sufficient nature; and the many benefits of singleness, I decided to focus on my relationship with God, my family, and myself. It was a wise choice.

Even though I had lots of friends, I felt lonely. What I wanted and needed was a soul-mate. After some healthy lamenting over that, I came to some life-changing realizations:

- 1) There is only one soul-mate who is completely trustworthy, who knows me intimately, loves my kids more than I do...and he isn’t human.
- 2) My loneliness was an indication something was missing within me.
- 3) This was an opportunity and invitation to drink more deeply from the water that would satisfy my thirst.

And so I began to press in to the loneliness and become more aware of God’s presence everywhere--especially with me. I began to talk to him more and just be still and know. He answered my prayers for a neighborhood friend (and then more came!), as I’ve written in past stories, which helped.

I’ve also come to appreciate the many benefits of single life. I won’t go into detail, but basically there are many “don’t have tos.” Maybe I’m too selfish and set in my ways now. One of the best things is the freedom to serve God without having to consider the needs of another person, as the apostle Paul pragmatically pointed out.

If it’s God’s plan to join me together with someone this late in life (and it’s happened for many) I would do it, but it would have to be *crystal clear* that we could serve him better together. I don’t see it happening. First he would probably implant a desire for marriage, which I don’t have. I’m so *very* content in my singleness. My children, friends, gardening, and writing make my life full, and my little home and prayer garden is perfect for one.

...Well, me and *the one my soul loves*.

## Moving Forward – Unfamiliar – by Pam Charro

"Growth and comfort do not coexist." - Ginni Rometty, IBM CEO

"And we know, in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." - Romans 8:28

I know and believe that God is good, and that he has good things in store for me, but that hasn't prevented the past year from being difficult. Just in my work environment alone, so little has seemed to make any sense. A year ago today, I began working in downtown Austin, making less than I had at the previous job, with a not-so-pleasant trainer at a dead-end job. I was grateful to have work, but it was hard to understand why I was there. So I started sending out my resume again, and somehow it ended up on someone's desk at a temp agency in New Jersey, who was excited to recommend me for a long-term position that was also in downtown Austin, but making substantially more than I was currently making (or had ever made, for that matter). I applied and was interviewed, very excited for the opportunity. Then ... crickets. After several weeks of silence, I concluded that I hadn't been chosen for the position, but the next thing you know, I was notified that I got the job. How exciting! Until the job started and I found myself sitting in a closed office (due to Covid, it was still closed, but I had been told during my interview there were plans to reopen soon) all day long by myself. Even the manager who had hired me was never there. No one seemed to have any time or the proper knowledge to teach me my job. Then my co-worker got a new position in the company and my manager quit. What on earth was I doing there?

*Here I am, an outgoing people person with such a heart for God,  
wanting to spread my light and ready to change the world.  
Just sitting.*

I spent the majority of that 10 months trying so hard to get out of there, but God graciously provided a long-distance interim manager who had a heart to promote me, and she began setting me up to be noticed by the higher-ups in the company. Today, nearly a year after starting as a temp in my company, I have not only become a permanent employee, but many of the top supervisors know my name because of the work my temporary manager assigned to me, and I've received three different recognitions in the past month. I also have amazing benefits and the opportunity to be in a different position later this year. I'm hoping it will be more people-facing and I will feel that I have found my groove.

I'm sharing all of this so that, if anyone reading feels that life currently doesn't make any sense, you will know you are not alone. The quotes at the beginning of this writing are true, and I clung to them steadfastly (particularly the scripture) throughout the past year, but no amount of knowing them would have given me the story I had to walk out. There is still so much that I don't understand, and I'm far from comfortable with what appears to lie ahead of me this year. But I'm more excited now than I have been in a long time, because I never could have gotten myself here; it had to be God because so much of my current life wasn't even on my radar. I wasn't interested in retirement plans or stocks and bonds, but God knew what he was doing with me the entire time. And even though I have been stretched and discouraged, he has faithfully brought me to a spacious beginning that is full of promise. My great big God has used so much of what appears to make no sense to not only prove his faithfulness to me, but to also broaden my awareness of what is possible.

So if your life feels strange and unfamiliar, take heart. He is also about to show up for you.

## **Simple Truths – The Unlit Tree – by Marcy Lytle**

We took a walk through a small park that had a big Christmas tree in the center with lighted wrapped poles around it, only we took our walk during the late afternoon...and a week after Christmas was over. I did see the tree and the lights and wished they had been on, but it wasn't dark, so they weren't lit. Several things crossed my mind as we walked around this unlit tree multiple times to get in our steps:

Just a passerby wouldn't even notice the tree because the lights were off. We only saw them because we came near, and they weren't brilliant at all – just off.

The lights would be show stoppers and cars passing by would most certainly pause to look at the lights, if they were on.

It's only darkness that makes the tree shine bright...the light of day does nothing but obscure the light, even if they had been turned on.

I hear and read often that in the darkness of times our lights shine brighter, but when we're the ones in the dark times that truth isn't really encouraging. We'd rather be standing in the light of day, obscured, still illuminated, and we are just fine being unseen to anyone passing by. I know. I've felt that way often. Who cares if no one sees my little light shine? I don't want any kind of darkness to settle in, in life, in my days, or ever...to be honest.

It's curious to me that in Psalm 23 we read that he prepares a table for us, but it's not out in the light...it's in the presence of our enemies. A table that invites us to eat, dine, and shine...even with beady eyes lurking around us in the dark. Could you enjoy a dinner on a picnic table with noises and darkness within feet away? Not sure that I could...

So there's this mystery, completely incomprehensible, that the Light within us, the Peace given to us, and the Joy unspeakable, are lights that shine best in the darkness! I'm not referring to dark times of depression or evil. I'm referring to dark times where we feel hope might not be present any more, when we feel like a failure and a flop, when we sit in silence and wait...it's there in those places where the light shines and the table is full.

In other words, when the Light is shining in the darkness, much like when that Christmas tree was lit and brilliant, it attracts others, it stands tall, it does its thing just because of the Light that's on – in spite of the darkness that settles in around it.

Many of us have dark days from time to time, and some have dark months and years, where life is just super hard and we have no strength to shine and we'd rather sit alone and be unnoticed while walkers do their thing around us, squirrels scurry up and down, and day and night cycles back and forth.

But really, all we have to do is stand there and allow the Light to be our source, and let Him keep us plugged into his goodness, and that's it. All we have to do is show up, sit down and enjoy what He's prepared, in the middle of the darkness.

How in the heck do we do that?

Just yesterday I had a dark day, for reasons unknown I felt ambushed and defeated. And really all I could do was remember the truth of who I am and whose I am. That was it. I didn't want to muster up faith, turn on my "lights" or even figure out how and why the darkness fell. But it did, and I felt just like that tree in the park, unlit, obscured, and lonely...just waiting to be stripped and put away for another time and place.

That tree will be gone shortly, and the light erased until next year. But the thought I had while walking around it and noticing it unlit will stay with me. The Light never goes out, but it only burns brighter on the darkest of days. And that's not our doing, it's His doing, all we have to do is come and rest when we are the weariest, the most tired, and exhausted behind description.

And somehow, when we least expect it, the Light, the Source, becomes stronger and brighter when midnight falls, and our world is lit up again all bright and beautiful for those passing by, and for the beauty of the One who grounds us, sustains us, and never puts us away...but rather stays and makes sure not one bulb falls to the ground and breaks.

It's the second month of the year, and I'm still thinking about that unlit tree...

## **Unearthly Thing - What Does Romance Look Like? – by Angela Dolbear**

Heart-shaped boxes filled with chocolate treats, flowers, candle-lit dinners...common signs of Valentine's Day. The day we celebrate romance.

What does romance truly mean?

I could recount the history behind St. Valentine and his adventures, but we could so easily Google that. I'm more interested in why Valentine's Day is a lasting, well-celebrated holiday.

My first guess would be a date to celebrate romance. But what is romance really?

On my mission to get a fresh look at romance, I asked my man who I have shared the last 25 years of my life with, my husband Tim.

Without hesitating, here are my husband's responses about romance:

"When you spend three days without electricity, and still have a fun time with that person (This happened to us a few years back). And living with someone who makes you laugh." And then I told him, "When someone goes with you to every doctor's appointment, even when there are many, like you do for me."

Tim suggested I also ask my fellow THYME writers. Brilliant! They are a wisdom-filled group of people.

Debbie Haynes, author of the "Under Pressure," column wrote:

"I lost my husband of 46 years, three years ago. He was a very romantic guy from our wedding day till his death parted us. Always, always thinking of me and our family before himself.

After getting married, as we were finding our places and roles, I insisted, thinking ours would be a traditional home like mine was, that I would take care of all things cooking and homemaking, even though I worked full time. Soon, it became apparent that this didn't make sense from a time perspective, but it was him and his reasoning for changing it that I found so romantic.

One evening he came to me in the kitchen, put his arms around me from behind and whispered in my ear that, you know, if he helped me with all the house things, he could spend more time with me doing things he was 'really interested in.' Wink, wink.

It taught me so much! Both about me, and him.

From that day forward, it was always his choice, whenever possible, to be with me whether I was cooking, cleaning, or whatever, and in doing so, we had more time to do 'what he was really interested in.' I sure miss that romantic guy."

Marcy Lytle, THYME's Editor-in-chief, wrote:



“Romance is candles and music at a table with conversation and a long dinner. That’s the practical. Romance is turning down the lights and deciding to dance before bedtime. That’s the magical. Romance is giving undivided attention to your wife and loving her during that time. That’s my husband’s answer.”

Jennifer Stephens, the author of the “Life Right Now” column, wrote:

“Romance isn’t the obvious grand gesture. It’s when he spends two hours in the frigid cold shoveling my side of the driveway. Or unexpectedly ordering my ‘hair stuff’ from Amazon when I can’t find it at ANY of the stores. Romance is found in the mundane.”

Bekah Holland, author of the “In This Together” column, wrote:

“I’m guessing after 16 years of marriage I might not have the most normal answers. But to me, when my husband notices something that needs to be done and just does it, is better than any romance novel. Lol. Or little things like grabbing my favorite drink or making me coffee before I wake up rank pretty high on my list. The most romantic thing my completely non-romantic-thinking husband has ever done happened very early in our marriage. We had a 2-year-old and whatever less than no money is, so he looked up I love you in more languages than I knew existed, printed them and glued them in a handmade card, along with a recording of quite a few of them so I could hear what those words sounded like all over the world. It will always be my favorite gift above any jewelry or fancy gifts.”

Marcel Proust (not a writer for THYME but he might have been if the timing was right) said, “Let us be grateful to the people who make us happy. They are the charming gardeners who make our soul blossom.”

I love that quote. It reminds me of my first novel, [THE GARDEN KEY](#), which tells story of a young single woman who yearns for her “charming gardener.” The novel follows the couple as they learn to date and court each other in the way God intended. It’s an excellent novel/resource for those who are not yet married.

So, what does God say about romance? (Is romance in the Bible? Of course, it is!) The Song of Solomon is a beautiful poetic book in the Bible that teems with romantic language. It is thick with cultural references, so a good study guide is handy. For several years, Tim and I hosted study groups in our home on Tommy Nelson’s video study on the Song of Solomon. It is sooo good. One section of the study is called “The Art of Romance,” where Pastor Nelson talks about admiring and respecting the person you are dating and courting, or married to.

It seems romance is rooted in doing good and generous deeds for someone you love. Being kind to them with intentional actions. Like God does for us.

So, are we taking on a characteristic of God when we do romantic gestures? Hmmmm...

Afterall, God is love ( please see [1 John 4:8](#)). And His loving kindness is everlasting...on Valentine’s Day and on every day.

*Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series, and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories. Her novels are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). Angela writes real, relatable, and reverent fiction. She loves reading, writing prose, as well as writing and recording music with her husband Tim in their studio in Nashville, TN--listen to their music on [Sound Cloud](#). Please drop by and sign-up for news and to read new stories and hear new original music at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>. Blessings to you!*



FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME – Favor Rest – by Marcy Lytle**

I heard someone speak recently about the pride of presumption. Now, I know that I have pride in so many areas, but I'd never heard about the pride of presumption. The speaker explained that when we presume to know what's best for us and therefore we make certain that all we do is geared toward preserving what's best for us, we have to be careful that we're not guilty of the pride of presumption.

In other words, we have these plans for success in our jobs, goals for our families, routines that ensure good health and happiness and a future of plenty of money in the bank, etc. because those are the things we presume we need for the good life. There was a story in the bible where the people presumed their leader (Moses) had forgotten about them when he ascended the mountain, so they set about to ensure their happiness without him. It didn't matter that he had told them he'd be returning with words of life spoken from the mouth of God. The people grew tired of waiting and took it into their own hands to set up other gods out of the gold from their own stash.

I know that I personally have in my mind how the good life of a believer ought to go. Sure, we will have a few heartaches here and there because we live in this world full of them, but our heartaches should be minimal – like a fender bender sort of mentality. It's okay if life dents my fender, but don't let it crush my entire backend! And sure, disappointments like our kids losing a game here and there is good for all of us to keep us humble, but because we love God we should not have to endure disappointments like a failed marriage or a huge break in friendships. I know that I've thought that following Christ staves off the worst, because he only wants the best for us, right?

So when we presume we know the plans of God for our life, to prosper and never fail (so we think), we set about making boundaries just in case that plan fails. Just in case God doesn't provide, we will provide our own cushion of financial safety. Just in case good health evades us, we'll have the best insurance and long-term care affordable. Just in case our plans for success aren't air-tight, we'll make them so with all of the security measures we can take.

Is planning and securing ourselves a bad thing? Of course, not. But the pride of presumption comes in when we then see our planning and securing as being that which sustains us and we forget about God. We begin to take pride in what we've done and accomplished and pretty soon it's our own doing and climbing and goal-setting that ensures our footsteps, and we no longer rely on Him. We have this safety net we've built under our proverbial high wire walk across this world, so that if we fall, we fall softly and are "safe."

Where I see this pride of presumption in myself is observing heartaches and hard times in my own life and the lives of my friends, and wondering why God "allowed" such a thing. I mean, isn't there some sort of protection offered to those that believe that protects us from such disasters? If there's not, then God must be messed up, or doesn't care, or isn't the loving God I was taught that he was. If a friend is dying of cancer and he's eaten well, exercised, lived a full life of giving and serving, we presume that God will cover that friend (and us) from the evils of sickness and death.

I'm still reeling from that phrase, the pride of presumption. Because the speaker ended with reminding us to move toward the grace of God, and realizing that it is his Good Hand that does tend us – the Good Shepherd's hand. He leads us and calls us to still waters, prepares a table for us in the presence of our enemies, a table of provisions in the MIDDLE of the darkness.

It's hard to understand God's ways, and as humans our minds wonder and ponder and try to figure him out, much like we do a math problem. The danger is presuming that we know better than he does on how to tend our lives, and that he has somehow missed the mark when our lives don't go as we planned.

Maybe it's time to revisit our own hearts and make sure we haven't grown tired of waiting, or we haven't forgotten the words of truth that Jesus loves us – this we know - for the Bible tells us so. And that's the final word. He loves us. He knows. And Father knows best. There's a lot of rest that comes from letting go of presumption in favor of that rest that comes, when pride falls.

## **FRESH THYME - Give Where It Fits – by Marcy Lytle**

I've always had anxiety over giving, as an adult. Am I giving enough? Who should I give to and how often? Is God pleased with how much I give? Does giving of my time count or should it always be money I dole out? I'm an over thinker, in so many areas...and this is one of them.

I've always been taught to give, but that giving has been redefined over the years. One time at church, a speaker asked us to give up something we owned and I gave away a watch my mom had given me. Probably not a good choice, and even worse I told her about it. She was not pleased. But I was caught up in the teaching of someone, and in the moment with others.

Another time, I felt *guilted* into giving, so I gave a certain amount to stave off that guilt, and gave no more. That didn't feel so good, and when I gave out of compulsion like that, I had nothing left to give out of compassion when I felt the prompt to do so. In other words, the ritual became labor, and then giving was no longer fun, but a chore.

Then there were the lean years, when we absolutely barely made ends meet. I remember wishing and dreaming of going to the mailbox in hopes that someone had sent me a money gift so I could buy clothes or something fun, but that never happened. Ever. And I remember thinking if we ever came out of that slump, I wanted to remember to notice those in need and give.

So there are all sorts of teachings on giving, out there. Money-hungry ministers have ruined giving by their showy pleas for funds on television over the years. Big churches have led fundraisers to build bigger buildings, and drained the pockets of many who didn't have enough funds for their kids' braces on their teeth.

I'd say in the past few years, I've finally come into my own in the area of giving. I don't calculate to see if it's a certain percentage, and I try to not get sucked into giving to everyone everywhere. It's overwhelming when we get email after email and plea after plea to give to this cause and that one. And sometimes I give nothing, because I don't know who to give to and where to trust what!

We recently had some money given to us and I had a certain amount I wanted to give to others, but once again I didn't know where to give. My husband affirmed me when he said, "Give where you enjoy giving, to the things you enjoy." So we gave some in planning a World Christmas for the kiddos, I gave some to a friend for a shopping spree, and other practical giving options – not to churches or buildings or even organizations – but to people in my life that I loved. That fits me. It suits me. And I believe it suits who I am in Him.

If our life experiences don't form us into something good and useful and giving, then what are they for? Those lean years taught me to depend on him, and to remember to notice others when they have lean years as well.

Wherever you love to give, do it. Maybe funds are low, but you love to bake. Give food. That's pleasing to Him. Perhaps you have a heart for the foster children, so give to homes that foster kiddos. Maybe you once were very ill and are now healthy and well, so give to find a cure for a

sickness or disease. Or maybe you're like me, and you just enjoy offering a hand up to someone as a surprise blessing.

Giving, of course, is a no-brainer as a follower of Christ. But coercion and guilt are not the motivation, but rather love. Give out of where you've been loved on the most, and see if the true joy of giving doesn't return.

## **FRESH THYME – That One Woman – by Marcy Lytle**

We recently attended a choir concert and it was an inclusive women's choir, where there was a lady in a wheelchair, one who was blind, some pretty old in age, and others quite young, a few that were tall and stood above the rest, and some very small and tiny, all sorts and shapes and kinds of women – but they all could sing!

Every time we attend a concert of any kind that involves lots of participants, it seems I'm drawn to watch certain people. If my daughter's kids are in the performance, well he/she is the only one I watch. But if I don't know the people, like this particular time, I found myself drawn to one particular lady more than the others.

She was tall and she had this expression when she sang as if singing was the passion of her life! I found myself watching her more than the rest of the singers. I did notice that one woman had a special dog near her, and didn't realize until later that one lady was in a wheelchair, as the chair was obscured from my viewpoint.

And then I wondered if I were in the choir, would anyone be drawn to my expression? Or what about in the choir of life? Is my passion showing?

I've been in choirs and groups where I sang, often. Church choir was the first experience and I did love it, and often had solos, I think because I had a strong voice. I was also in a band that traveled a bit around Texas, where I sang and played the piano. It was fun, and I was allowed to sing songs that I wrote, but it also was hard, because performance was *key*. Then I sang in worship bands for decades. And I know for a fact that there were times when I was not passionate, but rather very downcast, and it showed.

One particular time, our leader asked me what was wrong, and almost asked me to step down from singing until I worked through whatever was bugging me. You see, my countenance showed how I felt inside, even though I was still singing on the outside.

So back to this lady in the chorus... Her eyes lit up, her mouth opened wide, and though she had gray hair and was probably the oldest in the bunch, she seemed to be enjoying herself the most! Perhaps, singing was her passion, and it showed! I had no idea if her life was going well or not, but at the time she was singing, she was singing to me, making me smile and enjoy the music.

After I left that concert we attended with friends, I thought of that lady. I can still see her face in my mind and it's been weeks since the concert. I don't remember anyone else's face. I want to be a face like that in the choir in which I sing, in this life. I want to sing with expression because I know the one I'm singing for, and about, and I'm convinced that what I'm singing is truth.

Music is one of the most powerful expressions in life that I love so much. I listen to albums on a turntable now, something we used to do, then didn't do forever, and now we're doing again. I'm not in a choir or band now, but I sing in the car. I sing with my grandkids. I sing over the babies. I sing to Him, and my husband I sing and dance together.



Singing frees the soul to open wide and echo what's deep inside – the passion for Life.

I don't know that woman's name, and probably never will, but I'm thankful she was in the choir that afternoon, because I noticed, I listened, and I heard...

## **FRESH THYME - What Did You Miss?**

Back last month when I was removing all the lights and ornaments from the tree, I remembered how every single year when I think I've removed everything, I look again. And sometimes, more than once. There it is, almost every single time, that lone ornament I missed...that's still hanging there waiting to be removed. If I left it, it would be thrown out with the tree (we have a living tree) and that would be tragic, especially if the ornament has sentimental meaning.

This time, it was one of my pine cone picks, so I removed it and then saw one more in the back, and removed it as well. All done, nothing else missing, and the tree was then tossed out.

That whole process of taking down the tree and looking one more time for what might be missing made me think about the things I miss because I'm in a hurry:

the sun shining high, when my only goal is to make my destination and mark off my to-do list,  
the sound of kids laughing in a park, when I'm just walking fast to get in my steps,  
the hands of my husband that reach to hold mine, but I shoo them away because I'm irritable,  
the book sitting on my nightstand begging to be read, but I never stop to do so,  
the still voice beckoning me to sit at His feet and listen and be loved but my own voice is loud,  
the peace from knowing that all is well, when all I see is that all is turmoil,  
the text she sent that needs a response, only I forgot and she's left wondering if I'm alive...

You get the picture. That tree was a process and it took me time to remove every strand of lights, to take off all of the ornaments and carefully store them away, and to roll up the ribbons and gather the picks, for safekeeping until Christmas arrives again. I had to take it slowly, look carefully, and make sure nothing was missing...not one single thing...so that I could then move on.

I miss things all the time because of hurriedness, selfishness, pride, and just being lost in worrisome thoughts. Mostly, I miss the rest. And rest doesn't come easy, it's often found among the prickly needles, it's the last thing left at the end of the day, and sometimes it gets tossed out with the garbage because we never take it and hold it and keep it for safekeeping.

One of my goals this year is to read more, and that requires sitting down and concentrating on the words on the pages, instead of wondering what else I need to get done. I want to finish books, not just start them. I want to linger in the story, be refreshed by the words, and continue to be inspired to write my own...

What are you missing? Look again before you toss out that proverbial tree and grab hold of what's dear and near, and then move on...ever so slowly as you enjoy life to the fullest...every little moment...and every little ornament hanging there to grab.