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January 2024



TIPS

## **The Dressing – Date Night Attire – by Marcy Lytle**

Every month we publish date night fun ideas, but what about date night outfits? It's January, the temptation is perhaps to stay in. And that's totally cool. But whether you stay in, go out, or just hop over to the theater, it's fun to dress up any way! And it's sweater and hat and scarf season...all the layers...so why not put together ensembles you love! Here are a few suggestions:

A New Hat – I found this one at World Market and have enjoyed it this season. A hat just tops off a date night outfit, doesn't it? This look is black with brown. The coat I found this season as well, at one of the discount stores. And the boots are from Wild Honey. This look might be great for an indoor play or dinner out with friends. Add gold accessories and grab his hand and go!

Faux Leather Blazer – Isn't this so cute? It's a long faux leather brown jacket, and though this photo was taken in the fall, faux leather is good throughout the winter season. Change out the shirts you wear underneath, depending on where you're going. Green looks pretty under brown!

Suede and Wicker – What a combo. The purse is vintage and was a gift, and the suede jacket I purchased on line. Suede is so fun, when paired with other textures from other seasons. And it's so warm and cozy. If you're about town with him, shopping after Christmas sales, then headed to a show...this is a great look.

Plaid Flannel – Flannel is a classic. And this shirt was found on clearance at Urban Outfitters. Make a date and go shopping there, then head for a walk indoors or outdoors, depending on your weather this month. I love the length in the back and that little blue piping around the bottom edge.

Cozy Sweater – This might be my favorite purchase this winter season, and it's from Amazon. An oversized fit, and the sweater is the softest thing...can be dressed up or down. I added fake pearl earrings and a brown bag (also from Amazon) with jeans. Invite friends over for dinner, and ask everyone to wear pearls with a sweater. A fun idea!

J Crew Stripe – I've mixed green and blue with dark and light grays and brown boots – a cozy combo for sure. J Crew has the prettiest and most classic sweaters, a great addition to your wardrobe you'll wear year after year. The crossbody bag is great for hitting the markets. Are there any markets in January? I don't know! But I'm going to find out.

A Ski Sweater – Every closet needs one. The ski sweater for the coldest months. Add a cap, and you're off. Going to the movies in January? This is a cozy yet cute look. And this sweater is so versatile to be worn with jeans, faux leather pants or a cute skirt and boots!

Faux Leather Pants and NY – I've worn these faux leather pants from Old Navy so much this season. A graphic tee (Old Navy men's dept) that says New York, and a silky scarf and a long card creates a put-together look. Throw up your hair, and set out on a weekend adventure around town. Visit a neighborhood you've not frequented and find their coffee shop and bookstore, and enjoy.

Cozy wear is great, but getting dressed up to go out – even on a cold and blustery day – is fun as well! Hope you've been inspired to try some of these looks. Tell us which ones!

## **Seven for You – Faves and Forward – by the Panel**

It's always a good thing to reflect on the past year as we enter a new one, and we're doing that a lot in this January issue. We asked our panel to share some of their faves with us, so that we might all share and maybe pick up a new faves to try! Here are ours. And read to the end to see what we're looking forward to as the year rolls on...

### **Favorite reads:**

Boundaries by Cloud and Townsen

All The Light We Cannot See. (Now that I have my new glasses, I'll be reading more.)

Hello Stranger by Katherine Center (very interesting and different!)

Be the Gift (Ann Voskamp)

### **Favorite new recipes:**

Smash burger – made in cast iron flat top griddle. Using 85% beef, I make a 2oz ball and put on the preheated top. Next, I lay parchment on top and use my cast iron tortilla warmer to smash the beef very flat for a few minutes. I flip, season and cook a few minutes more. I top with cheese and invert a metal bowl over top to melt. We top and enjoy with baked beans. These are best for those that like thin burger patties – they have a nice caramelized crust and make me happy. (I cover the rest of the stovetop with foil while cooking bc of the grease – easy cleanup!)

Apple nachos (sliced apples fanned out with drizzled caramel and dark chocolate chips)

Sausage avocado toast (cooked crispy sausage, with avo mixed with green onions and lime juice, placed on toast and garnished with queso al fresco) A little salsa too, if you want!

### **Favorite music artists:**

Jeremy Riddle and Brandon Lake (Gratitude is an awesome song!)

Maverick City Music, Red Rocks Worship

Phil Wickham

Matthew West

### **Favorite podcasts:**

Garden Answer and Pasta Grannies (both on YouTube)

THE BIBLE RECAP with Tara Leigh Cobble

The Glorious in the Mundane by host Christy Nockels

**Favorite home purchase:**

Dehydrator - I grow lots of peppers and herbs. My family also loves dried fruit, especially mango, pineapple, and apples. The picture included is of grapes that are turning into raisins. Don't you hate it when you have those handful of grapes that are past their prime and no one will eat them? They are perfect for raisins and I no longer feel bad about wasting money on expensive grapes.

A wall hanging I purchased on our way to the beach this last summer. I got it at Lake Marble Falls, and I love it! The only problem is I have nowhere to hang it.

A new picnic table that seats our whole family! Now if the weather will just cooperate...

An extra seating option in our den, love it so much, from Wayfair. Just the right color and space and comfort!

**Favorite trip taken:**

Maui (for our 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary)

Disney World with the kids and family in January 2023

To San Francisco to spend time with daughter

Alaska trip to Juneau with all the kids – memories made!

**Favorite surprise:**

Having almost all my kids at my house for Thanksgiving. I was surprised one of my sons came with his wife and four children, one being only six weeks old.

**Favorite scripture:**

“This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

Joshua 1:9 NLT

[\(Romans 12:9-13; 1 John 3:11-24\)](#)

**31**Therefore, when he was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. **32**If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him. **33**Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you. **34**A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. **35**By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

My favorite verse is Matthew 6:33. It is my life verse.

**Favorite treat for me:**

Shania Twain concert t-shirt!

Vintage green McCoy poodle. Our first dog was a poodle, a German one.

New metal cabinet in the garage for all my seasonal tableware – makes me happy.

Broadway Musical – always fun to dress up, be swept away, and enjoy the tunes. I want to get season tickets this year!

**Favorite scent:**

Pumpkin Spice

Flowerbomb (the original version)

Tobacco Patchouli

Grapefruit anything

Since we're headed in to a new year, we thought we'd also share a few things we also look forward to, and plan for, and anticipate.

Packing up the decorations and getting our homes back to "normal" feels good. There are other special occasions to plan for, as well as Valentine's Day in February, or a wedding anniversary in March for two of our writers! Lots of family birthdays keep the celebrations going. One family has a tradition of all meeting for a fun time at a lodge to celebrate several birthdays all at once! And of course, there are summer vacations to start planning for now!

One writer saves all of her magazines that come in the mail for January to read after December ends. She also loves shopping and purchasing a new paper calendar for the fridge, with spaces to fill in with events and fun. And one does NOT organize all the Christmas décor and wrap until July...it just sits in the closets until then!

And finally, I love what one of our writers shared. She doesn't make resolutions or goals to lose weight, because she can never keep those. But she loves the newness of a new year, and how we get to start things all over again...

Laura, Erin, Cathy, Carole, Marcy

## **The Cousin Moms – Reflection – by Kamrin and Charissa**

January is a great time to reflect and think back on the last year and how we've grown as individuals and as families. It's always good to consider, ponder, realize, and then prepare to move forward to new things. Here are the reflections from 2023 for us, and we encourage you to think about your year...as the calendar changes once again!

### **Charissa (mom to three little girls)**

2023 has been a year that we will mark as a year of a lot of changes, for many reasons. It's been great but challenging.

We had our third baby and she rocked our world, and it's definitely been an adjustment going through the baby stage again. Added to that change, we brought on a new provider at my husband's dental office, so we had renovations at the office to outfit and make room for him. On top of that, we purchased and renovated our first home. Renovations at work and home!

With the girls, our middle daughter started a new school with her sister. And our oldest daughter is changing in her emotions and becoming more of a young lady, understanding and recognizing more of what it means to be beautiful inside. We've had deep conversations with her.

With all of that, we also lost my last grandparent, Papa Johnson.

All of these have been exciting in regards to growth and change, but stress came with the changes, and the loss.

I'm looking forward to a year of less chaos. Of course, we all hope for that, but life is never still! As we reflect on 2023, we are very thankful and are looking forward to a new year with more growth.

Having changes and teaching moments, we always do try to center on God and his provision and give thanks for the challenging times and the good times, as he has a plan for it all. These moments grow us...and will carry us into 2024!

### **Kamrin**

2023 brought quite a few changes for our family!

Our oldest graduated from 5<sup>th</sup> grade and we entered into our very first year of middle school. That has definitely been a challenge with more homework, time management, etc. and it has brought us a lot of opportunity to practice the fruit of the spirit. It has challenged our relationship with a preteen! It's been hard. We've had long nights of conversations and tears and frustration. However, after the first semester we have pushed through and our son has learned hard lessons about work, that mom/dad can't hold his hand all the time, and responsibility is key.



In 2023, our daughter was in an intensive and exciting performance – 10 weeks of rehearsal (on top of sports for the boys). It was a challenge, to say the least, in so many ways. It was a huge growth opportunity for her too, to learn responsibility and learn lines. We are so grateful for the group she was with CYT (Christian Youth Theater) as they teach character on and off the stage. We were exhausted but would do it all again, because she grew so much, and seeing her passion was amazing. She has been patient while her brothers have played sports, and we are so grateful she has found her thing this year.

The last big change is I went back to work! I've only been in a month, but we had been talking about making this transition. However, an opportunity opened for me in the P.E. Department and we need the extra money, so it's been a huge blessing. I'm still running my Nuskin services, as it's a part of who I am...I've been at it six years and love my community. But after being at home working, I felt drawn to get back into an area ministering to children. It seemed like the right door to walk through.

Middle school parenting, busyness with kids and now I'm back at work – wow. The biggest obstacle with all of this has been managing our time, especially finding time to sit with the Lord together. It has been hard, as we moved out of church where we served for over 15 years. It's been difficult being at a new church, and making new connections. Lots of emotional healing has had to take place in our family. We've had lots of long talks with our kids.

Going into 2024 we are hoping to shift back to refocus some things. For us, balancing our kids' passion and desires with being involved in a church community is hard. We were overly involved maybe when the kids were little, and now we are on the other side where we just "go." We want to find the right rhythm for us in this new year.

Be encouraged that no family is perfect, and stressing ourselves to "do this and that" spiritually is exhausting. Facing new challenges with our kids, we are looking for quality time with the kids to focus on the family, read the bible, talk, etc. And what works for me might not work for you. My husband talks to the kids in the car on the way to school – a good 20 minutes with our oldest! I have time after school with the two younger ones.

My word for 2024 is to be *intentional* to talk about the Word and invest in my kids' walk with Christ, as it works for our family and our life. It's hard. Balancing church community and the busyness of the kids is our goal, making sure first things are first...to enjoy our life as a family together. We want our kids to see the Lord as our first priority! And we want to change ourselves, as we expect change in our kids.

God is with us always, and will fill us and be present in the big and the little. He will be our JOY.

## **In the Kitchen – Time to Restock**

How often do you clean out and toss your old spice jars? It might need to be one of your new year's activities if it's been a while, and it can be quite fun. And you might shudder when you find that cinnamon jar that expired five years ago, or longer! So while we clean out and restock, here are a few new spices/seasonings you might want to consider adding and trying this year:

Everything But the Bagel Seasoning – This taste everywhere out there but did you know it's available in a jar to sprinkle on hummus or avocado toast, or whatever you like?

Better Vanilla – I love this particular vanilla for baking. Sometimes, it's hard to find, but search for the good vanilla and buy a big bottle, and bake some more in January.

Farm Dust Seasoning – We found this at a little Amish store, but you can buy it on line. It's the best versatile seasoning for everything and flavors so well! Thanks to my niece for sharing it with me!

Lemon pepper – Maybe you have this already, but maybe not. Try it on your next tuna sandwich!

Tarragon – this seasoning is so good in chicken salad. It's a flavor often overlooked or forgotten about!

Coarse ground black pepper – Yes, the fine is good. But this is so much better on everything, from salads to avocados and more!

Cajun seasoning – it's good on almost everything. Tony Chachere's is a good brand!

Greek Table Seasoning from Spice Tree Organics – a great mix of Mediterranean flavors for kabobs and salads!

Penzey's frozen pizza seasoning – taste good on garlic bread and other Italian dishes, too – really brightens the flavor!

Watkins Organic Steak Seasoning – I love a good rub on steaks or when cooking burgers. A Great seasoning to add to your shelf!

Seasoned salt – I've had this staple for years – and it's so great for everything – especially chicken or pasta salad that needs those flavors mixed in!

Old Bay Seasoning – have you tried this on fries? It's good sprinkled over corn or cauliflower, too!

Go through your spices and maybe organize them according to flavors. Keep them together like: Mexican, Salts, Italian, Baking, etc. It helps so much when looking for the one you need! And be sure to find the best organizing bins or shelves that suit your kitchen. Happy organizing!

## **SUGAR + Spice Perming My Lashes! – by Angela Dolbear**

### Another At-home DIY Adventure

I have long wanted to perm my eyelashes, ever since I heard that it's a treatment that can be done. My long eyelashes grow straight out from my eyelids like mini visors over my eyes. If only I could curl them up, they would look so lovely!

I use an eyelash curler every day, but my stubborn lashes don't stay curled all day. I thought it would be kind of risky to perm my own lashes at home, but after researching it, and reading many reviews, I was game to give it a try.

Amazon listed a highly-rated lash perming kit, [Lash Lift Eyelash Perming Kit](#) that was part of their Black Friday sale. So, I snapped it up. I watched a few videos from users to get tips before I proceeded. That was helpful.

When I was feeling brave to take on this new beauty treatment, I spread everything in the box out on my bathroom counter and read the directions carefully.

One of the kit's users suggested curling your eyelashes before you start to make it easier to glue them to the lifting pad. That was a good tip, especially since my lashes are long and grow straight out.

At first, I was a little afraid of getting the perming solution in my eyes, so I was super careful. A little did run into my eye, but I did my best to gently dab it out with a moist tissue. It didn't burn or cause any damage.

The procedure basically involves gluing the silicone lifting pads to your eyelids, then gluing your upper lashes on top of the pads. Then apply the perming solution for 8-12 minutes (10 minutes worked for me). Then clean off the perming solution, and apply the fixing solution, for another 8-12 minutes (again, 10 minutes worked for me). Following with the cleaning solution and a nutrition solution. It's pretty simple. But it's something I will need to practice to become more proficient at it.

It's been three days, and my lashes are still curled! Nice! There is enough product left in the kit to perm my lashes at least two or three more times.

Some notes for next time:

- Trim the lifting pads to fit my eyelid. I used the smallest pad, but it still poked off my eyelid, making it difficult to smooth my lashes up onto the pad with the glue.
- Make sure the lifting pad is securely glued to my eyelid, at the very base of my lashes. The kit comes with eyelash glue. Removing the pads is easy. It just peels right off when you are done.
- Go slow and take my time gluing my lashes up onto the pad, making sure they are separated and not lying on top of each other. The lashes on my right eye look so much better because I went slower and was more careful. I started to get impatient and frustrated with the pad on my left eye.
- Don't get impatient and frustrated. 😊

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)*

## **Tried and True – Last Month’s Learning**

It’s a new year, but so much good stuff happened in the last month, I have to share the fun! Always learning, always growing, always experiencing the new...why not?

Got leftover candle jars from Christmas that you burned and are now consider discarding? Don’t! Place a little tree or hang earrings on the side, or use for your remotes. Or set them in a window sill...so fun!

We recently had macaroni and cheese topped with pulled pork and/or brisket – a great combo – try it!

I have this amazing checklist spiral I keep in my desk and use every year, to plan out each week, every Monday morning with all the notes. It’s a favorite treat to myself from Ruff House.

Over the holidays, I heard about the USB lighter for candles. It’s amazing! Keep lighting candles through January, and consider this new sleek tool for doing so!

Need a new book this year? Consider one of the three for sale in our THYME store. A family devo, a personal study, or a good read!

I recently placed three plastic cute trash cans (got at the grocery store) in my closet – one for clothes to give away, one for clothes to mend or attend to, and one for a catchall till I have time to put away. Then once a week I empty them – so cool!

Now is the time to place a spinner in your yard to bring you winter joy! We found such a pretty windspinner recently. Hanging them on a branch of a tree where the leaves are gone for winter sparks beauty in your drab winter yard!

If you can find Jr Mints on the shelves leftover from the holidays, the peppermint ones, try them with popcorn. So good!

Love this quote that popped up – Just for today, be as happy as a bird with a French Fry!

Find a craft, spend the winter creating, revisit something you used to do and love. I made a mobile from what I had and also am creating a garland from gift tags!

Walmart has the coziest pajama sets with matching socks – under \$20 – Joyspun brand!

A friend gave me a book called *The God I Never Knew* – and I’m hoping to read it this year – she said it’s awesome!

WE found the cutest felt garland to hang on our headboard for Christmas, and we’re going to leave it up – why not? Light it up at night, and let it be in the day!

Favorite purchase for ourselves and others is Psalms, a great coffee table book that is illustrated and beauty...and Alabaster bible found on Amazon. We have ours by our bed and window.





HOME

## **Practical Parenting – Now What? – by Marcy Lytle**

The kids all have their new stuff, hopefully you've cleaned out the old before the new came in, and life is going back to the regular routine of school, no Christmas fanfare, and no more big parties and family and all the fun. So, now what is a parent to do once the Christmas hoopla is over?

It's a good time of year to sit down and have a good talk about how to take care of and be grateful for what we've just been given. A good lesson for the mom and dad, and the kids! It might just be revisiting some old, and starting some new, etiquette learning for the family:

- Have the kids write thank-you notes to the givers.
- Take photos of you and/or kids using your new gifts and share with family that gave.
- Give thanks together before bedtime for what you've received, and ask how you can use what you have to bless others.
- Have a chat about caring for the new things we've received, careful to not break or destroy, but take care of and cherish.
- Talk now about disappointment, if it's present among the kids. Did she not get what she asked for? Talk about it. Practice gratitude.
- Did envy pop up at Christmas? Maybe a friend got way more than our kids did. Discuss envy and how it's not healthy to turn green with it.
- Mark on the calendar for a time later in the year to call the grandparents and tell them how much the toys are being enjoyed.
- If it seems the kids got too much, consider sharing or donating, or putting away some of the toys to bring out later in the year.
- If it was a sparse year, give thanks for all things anyway, and make lemonade out of lemons! Actually, make lemonade and enjoy cookies together!
- Kids sad that the decorations have to come down? Why do they? Keep them up a bit longer.
- Give thanks each night at bed for something other than toys and things, for the entire month of January.

It's hard on us as parents to get back to normal after the holidays sometimes. We're sad because family is not here or didn't even get to come this year. Or we loved the music and the scents, and now winter cold has settled in, or any number of reasons. So it stands to reason that our kids might be sad, too. Cultivating an atmosphere in the home of gratefulness and joy after the lights quit twinkling in the yards might just light up your home all year long!



## **I Don't Do Teens – Bathroom Time – by Marcy Lytle**

In the bathroom, teens usually make a mess of things. And we as parents make a big deal out of it and instruct and plead and warn and all the things, for them to keep that bathroom neat! The start of a new calendar year might be a good time to help them go through all the things, talk about healthy habits, and get them organized so they know where everything goes. While they're still off school, take a day and just do it...or use a weekend if there's one free.

Go through every drawer and toss all the old, wipe out the insides and see what's left. Once you organize all of the below items, then decide what drawers, what cabinets and what shelves to place them.

Makeup – Clear zipper pouches, or little boxes with labels, or acrylic organizers that have sections for all the things might work just fine. Look for sales or shop the discount stores to see what you can find to help with corralling all the things.

Toiletries – deodorant, perfume and cologne – need a place to sit. Or a nice toiletry bag for his and for hers, to keep them separate.

Toothbrushes and toothpaste – There are really cute hangers for these to place inside a cabinet door if you want them out of sight. Ones that sit by the sink usually get muck and grime pretty quickly.

Private things – designate one particular bin for each person that shares this bathroom, and use letter stickers to place their names on these boxes. Personal creams for hygiene, or monthly necessities, or items that are just so personal they need their own space.

Shaving – Set all of these things together, including the shaver, the creams, the lotions, etc., and keep them aside until you're ready to place.

Jewelry – Try to keep the jewelry out of the bathroom if multiple teens use it. There are so many cute jewelry organizers on Amazon – ones that hang in a closet – ones that sit on a counter. Last resort, use a nice egg carton in a drawer to hold all of the tiny studs and earrings that don't hang.

Lotions and shampoos – You know, those caddies for bathrooms that have a handle? They're great for this. Each teen has their own, for pulling out when bathing or showering, and replacing for the next person to use theirs.

Hair stuff – This can be a lot if there are clips, dryers, irons, ties, and more! Even caps can get strewn across the counters. Throw out the old and place the rest in a divided tray, place hooks for hanging the things that plug in, etc.

Nail polish, etc. – These might be all over the house – the bottles of color and the remover and the stickers and the nails, etc. – in their bags or purses, etc. Gather them all and pick a place for these things to stay. Did you know even old mason jars can hold a few bottles of nail polish and look so cute!? Make the container clear so the colors are visible.

Whatever else the kids have, organize it and look around the house to see what you already have that might work. If you have a label maker, use it. How fun. And what you don't have; plan an afternoon to go to the discount stores, or even the dollar stores, for bins to store all the things.

Figure out what drawers and cabinets will belong to each person, then start placing and setting.

If the teens are involved, and they get to help choose all the things, it helps and gives them ownership. Color code, if they want! Use stickers to decorate!

Finally, give your teens instructions and boundaries. Maybe three rules:

- Counter is cleaned off nightly and each morning before leaving.
- Items are put away in their place, and discarded of when used up.
- Towels and clothes are off the floor...always. In the bins or hanging up.

Good Luck. Time gets away; our teens have busy schedules, so reorganizing once a month may keep the chaos at bay this year.

## **In Each Room – The Bedside Table – by Marcy Lytle**

We both have a bedside table, nightstand, whatever you call it – but ours has two drawers that have collected all the things the past year. It's time to discard, clean out, decide what really needs to be in those drawers and give ourselves a fresh start. And on the top of the table, we both have décor and a lamp.

So first...clean out the drawers. Dump everything out and throw away, decide what you want to keep, and think about what you want to add. Then clean up the top.

### In the drawers:

A nightly devo book – We started this a few years ago and we love pulling out a small book with a scripture or story to read before we nod off. Last year we read the VOM booklet and a devo by Tim Keller. Any small and short something to read is great. Then pray, and drift off to sleep feeling light as a feather, because our cares are on Him.

Tissues – This is a given. It seems the minute we lie down, we sneeze, or we have those winter hacking coughs or stuffed noses. Tissues can be pretty to sit out, but we prefer to keep them tucked away out of sight.

Another book – His is a puzzle book and a pen. He loves filling in anacrostics. I prefer fiction. So we both have our own book to pull out, on the off chance that we're not sleepy and we need to get sleepy. Can you relate?

Notepad and pen – I don't know about you, but ideas flood my head at night, as well as things to do the next day. If there's a notepad and I write it down (yes, you can do this on your phone but notepads are so cute!), then I'm able to clear my mind and rest.

Maybe a magazine – If you subscribe to magazines via snail mail, then have one by your bed to browse before bedtime. I get some of my most fun ideas to try when reading the seasonal recipes and DIY décor and more. I love magazines! *Magnolia Journal* is a good one, as well as a travel magazine for your area.

Scent Chips – We have an amazing tap melting warmer situation in our room, and I keep extra chips in the drawers. They smell divine, there's no candle flame, and there are lots of chips to choose from. And jackets for the warmer. They're so pretty.

Booklight – Maybe you read on your Kindle or other Ipad or other device, so keep it tucked in a drawer. But if you're like me and you enjoy holding a bound book with actual pages, you might enjoy a booklight. Maybe your bed has a sconce nearby. But a booklight...it's so personal and fun to own.

Slippers or socks – If you get up early, or in the middle of the night, or wear socks to bed and then get hot, then you might enjoy having these in a drawer beside you, instead of going to the closet and fumbling around trying to find them.

Trivia Cards – We love pulling these out to read to each other as a game sometimes, just for fun. We pull out 10 cards, and if we get the answer correct, we get to go to the next card. First person to finish their stack wins.

Cords – Keep all those extra cords for your phone, etc. tucked away beside the bed. Keep them all in one place, so when you need new ones, or those USB cords, or all the many connections...they're there...in your drawers.

Leave room for adding his things and yours, to your own preference...

As for the top:

Hopefully you have a nice lamp. A small plant is great, as well. A candle or a book that matches the room décor...and you're done.

Looking for new bedside tables? We love these and found them at Living Spaces. I've seen people use old small tables by their beds, too. And they don't have to match on each side.

Take a little January time to start with your bedroom and make that little table personal and functional, clean and tidy...and full of nighttime pleasures.

## **An Adage A Day - A Flexible Flow – by Carole Gilbert**

Life is a funny thing. It's a flexible flow, meaning it's going to flow so you need to be flexible. You never know what to expect next, but you can definitely expect it to change, again and again. That's never ending. Nothing is guaranteed on this earth.

And something happened again in our family that's bittersweet. The one of our three kids that had moved back to our small town, moved away again. All three of our kids have moved to other areas but this one came back. His move is different this time because his three babies, my grandbabies, went with him and his wife. They moved to fulfill some specific needs their family had plus they moved to a bigger house and I'm totally onboard for them with their reasons. I just really enjoyed having them so close by and getting to keep the children often. It feels like an empty nest all over again.

One day, as they were planning their move and we were with them having lunch, my son reminded me that they say, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." Absence actually makes my heart more longing. It doesn't want to be fonder, it wants to have more, more time with them, and more often. But it's not my choice. I'll get to see them just like my other kids and grandkids. And each time I'm with any of them I long for the next time before the present time even ends. So yes, absence does make the heart grow fonder. Although, I missed them before they ever left.

We got to be there with our grandchildren when they saw their new home for the first time. They were so excited and loved it. It made me even more pleased for them. And I know they'll all be just fine without me around as often. I'm very blessed with the wonderful, loving, spouses my children have. I've always said about my kids, "If they're happy, I'm happy." So, I'm happy for them in their new home and for all my kids with their families. And as longing as my heart was for them you would've thought they moved a lot farther than eleven miles away.

This phrase, *Absence makes the heart grow fonder*, and its different forms have been around for an extremely long time. The first was from a Roman poet named Sextus Propertius in about 15BC. He phrased it a little differently but with the same meaning that when we're away from a friend or loved one, we long to see them more. I don't think this phrase always works for God. We can be away from Him but He's never away from us. And sometimes, with God, when we are absent from Him, our hearts aren't always longing for Him more. But the heart of the matter tells us the more we long for something, the more we realize that only God can truly fill our longings, our desires, and everything we feel we are missing.

Psalms 107:9 says, *For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.*

This should be so comforting to us. Whenever we feel our hearts aren't growing fonder of God because of any distance that may be separating us, we must turn to Him and let Him fill our

souls as only He can do. He should be the one our hearts long for most. We may need to be flexible when life flows, but we also need to remember God's love for us is firmly fixed.

## A Night to Remember – Memorize It – by Marcy Lytle

During our advent leading up to Christmas, we read and were reminded of some ways to memorize scripture. I haven't purposely memorized scripture in years! There was one particular verse we were to know by heart and recite it each day. I was reminded again of how important this practice is, especially for the kids. They have to memorize how to spell, how to work math formulas, and dates in history. Their minds are ripe for remembering!

Memorizing scripture doesn't have to be boring. It can come alive, if we let it...

Preparation: Have a pretty card or sheet of paper and a pen/pencil for each member that can write. You could even use leftover Christmas cards or ones you received in the mail – cut off just the cover – and write on the back! Provide colored pencils or markers, too.

Have a simple array of apple slices, caramel sauce for dipping and chocolate chips for sprinkling, as you memorize this verse together as a family and learn some practices of knowing the word this new year. Sit around the table and begin...

It's fun to have a verse for the new year, for the entire family to know and breathe and love. Here's one for 2024.

Psalms 16:11

*You make known to me the path of life;  
in your presence there is fullness of joy;  
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

1. Write out the verse – ask each person to write the verse on their card.
2. Recite it together out loud, a few times...including the book, chapter and verse.
3. Who is "you" in this verse? How many times is a version of "you" used in the verse? Which word jumps out to you the most?
4. There are three things God grants those he loves in this verse. Underline them. (path of life, fullness of joy, pleasures forevermore.)
5. Draw one of these things under your verse (they can draw a path, a joyful expression, or something that brings pleasure)
6. Can someone make a song out of this verse? Let that someone do this and the rest of the family learn and sing it together!
7. Decorate around your verse using your pencils or markers.
8. Turn the card over, and try to recite the verse without looking.
9. Where is fullness of joy? (in your presence)
10. How can we as a family practice His presence this year? (Sing, pray, serve...)
11. How can we use this verse when we're feeling nervous? Sad? Bored?
12. Say the verse aloud to the children, and have them say it aloud to the parents.

Pray the verse together as a family for the new year:

*Dear Lord, thank you that you are a personal God that leads*

*us in paths of life and that in your presence is fullness of joy.*

*Help us to practice your presence daily.*

*And thank you that your hand offers eternal pleasures.*

*May those pleasures be found in time spent with you.*

*Thank you for loving us so well.*



## **Tiny Living – It Tastes So Good – by Leyanne Enterline**

Living tiny means tiny appliances. As I mentioned before, my oven and fridge are itty bitty! But right now I'm really into trying to play as if I live in the "little house on the prairie" and start making my own food from - for real - scratch! However, I have encountered some problems with trying to do this in my "Suzy Bake" kitchen.

My latest try-hard is making gluten free sourdough bread. If you don't know much about sourdough, none of this may make much sense, but I find it super intriguing to learn how to make this complex bread! I received my "starter" from my sister last week, who had received hers from another family, and so on. I'm not exactly sure who even started the starter?!

Step one is to get a "starter." Next, you have to "feed" the bread before you bake with it. Feeding means adding your flour and water to it; mixing it, and leaving that out for 6-12 hours before placing back in fridge. This all would be much easier in a normal sized kitchen. I am limited on counter space so I have found that it's best for me to "feed" my starter at night and leave on the counter through the night. That way everyone is out of its way and all the meals have been made before the "starter" comes out.

The next morning I take out what I will use to make my bread; then place the "starter" back in the fridge. I truly don't have room for this so I've been limiting what I buy at the store and now go at least twice a week for meals, just so I can fit this bowl of bread in the fridge! This bread making is a two to three day event! It's probably not the brightest idea I've had, to make bread in a tiny space, but it tastes so good. It's worth it!

Next, I get out an even larger bowl and start to add more ingredients to make the bread. I must then leave that out on the counter and knead it several times in the day. Unfortunately, this large bowl is in the way, so it gets moved around a lot to make room for the meals that are being made throughout the day. And since I have my "starter" already in the fridge, there is for sure no room for the other bowl. So...I have to go ahead and make my bread that evening. I think typically one would put it back in the fridge and make it on the third day, but I cannot do that.

Thankfully the bread has turned out wonderful! I feel so Laura Ingalls Wilder/Betty Crocker-ish making this bread! It's so rewarding! I'd send out the recipe but it's two pages long with an insane amount of steps, so you're best just looking it up on Pinterest!

Happy Baking!

*Remember love grows best in tiny spaces*



YOU

## **Under Pressure - To Be Like Jesus – by Debbie Haynes**

Philippians 2 gives us instruction to continue to work out, cultivate, bring into full effect our salvation...with fear and trembling...for God is at work in us to strengthen and energize and create his good pleasure. We're also to not complain, to be blameless and guileless, uncontaminated and without blemish in the middle of a perverse world...to be seen as bright lights.

A tall order, right? The writer is talking about working out the details of our salvation so that we grow in Christlikeness. We all know that we can work as hard as we can, but it is God that works through us to accomplish this wonderful transformation, and that he has a purpose for it. The writer also tells us that this process may have to be repeated over and over again, as it requires our continue partnership with Him.

Becoming like Jesus might sound doable until we think about and compare his life to our own:

- He was ever obedient, laying down his will, always doing the will of the Father.
- He was clothed in humility, and became a servant of man on this earth.
- He was motivated by love – always. That love led him to die on a cross to purchase our salvation.

So our lives simply cannot compare. However, there is a vast potential for transformation.

We aren't working to ATTAIN salvation but rather working through mountains and valleys our personal walk with God. We are still us – our own nature, personality and uniqueness – in our own reflection of him. He leaves it up to us, who we are, to yield to the Holy Spirit so that He can do the changing work inside us...as we are still us...yet like Him! And this is not a license to do things "our own way" but rather ask ourselves, "Is this producing Christlikeness?" or "Is this producing Us likeness?"

Aren't you glad we aren't left to do this on our own? It's God who works in us and it gives him pleasure to do so!

Once I had a dream that a group of people and I were helping an older lady clean her yard. We cleared stones and weeds and dead plants, and some sod that was dry and dead. Basically, everything in the yard needed to be removed. One of the men had a flatbed truck, and the debris was then loaded up and driven to be dumped later. It sat there unattended for a few weeks. After some time, I saw something that astonished me. I saw that the end of the bed was FULL of mustard greens and salad greens, tomatoes, cucumbers and squash. They were lush and beautiful. Perfectly manicured, ready to be picked and eaten. I called all those that helped clean the yard to see. And I heard God say,

"Just give me something to work with, yield to me something of yourself, even if it's dead and useless, and I will return it to you, transformed, healthy and good for use."

That's just like God, to give such a great visual of this awesome message of transformation. It's his business and his pleasure. And we will stand and marvel at what God has done, to make us more like Christ...light in a dark world.

## **Inner Strength – The Fort – by Michelle Wyatt**

What comes to mind when you hear the words, “Mom, let’s build a fort!” Maybe a blanket over the edge of the bed...or two beds? Not too long ago, I saw an advertisement for a fort built by connectible pvp pipe. It seems like the market is taking away kids’ imaginations. And last month, I wrote about how my son Matthew turned the household item of an old mattress into a game of Wall Ball.

This month, Matthew took an even more extravagant approach to using something in the house, and he built something amazing!

First, we had a contest for the best fort, and then it soon turned into Matthew stating, “I’m not finished...I’m still not finished!” As soon as I began saying, “What if \_\_\_” Matthew then replied, “I got this!”

Matthew began problem solving and had fun the entire time, as I could see by the smile on his face. He used things he found around the house and soon invited me to look. He then brought in his computer and invited his brother to join in the fun. Smiles continued, and Brendan was speechless at what his brother built! He even exclaimed, “Wow!” as he looked with amazement on the fort.

Not once did Matthew compare his fort to his brother’s. Matthew used all sorts of items, including my shoes (which I got a “kick” out of). It was tempting for me to tell him what things to use and what not to use, but I couldn’t bear to put a limit on his creativity. However, I did bring out a few things, like stuffed animals, and just added to the fun process, which we all enjoyed. One was a stuffed animal that was just the right size, and if it wasn’t, he used others to support the fort.

Since it was the holiday season, Matthew incorporated some of our ornaments and other decoration boxes. But the biggest item he used was the toy chest. He put finishing touches on it with sparkly garland and another round of Christmas lights that, of course, we were very careful with.

By the time he was finished, a third of our living room floor was covered.

On our way out, Matthew very adamantly instructed us, “No one touch my fort!” He was so proud of the work he’d done, and as Matthew’s mom, I took great pride as well in seeing my son’s imagination and determination light up our home!

## Healthy Habits – Every Day – by Marcy Lytle

Oh my goodness. If I miss even one day of rubbing in my heel cream I'm sorry the next. Those heels are a nightmare for so many of us, right? If we aren't diligent to care for our feet daily, we see the effects of missing the routine! There's a reason for daily applications on our body, to keep away dryness, to clean ourselves, and all the things. So it stands to reason that there must be something so healthy about that every day application.

*Every day I wash my face.* The cold water splashed on my eyes and skin wakes me up like nothing else. Every single morning. So doesn't it make sense that first thing in the morning our prayer is lifted upward for a fresh dose of his mercies? After all, they're new with every sunrise!

*Every day I eat food.* I'm not one that ever forgets or skips a meal. I can't even imagine that! I look forward to the next meal, and I get hungry every day, and I feed myself. It makes sense, then, that we need to feed daily on the truth. Without that daily dose of who He is and who we are in Him, we succumb to lies...and that makes for *hangry* hearts.

*Every day I clean my space.* Clutter occurs on a daily basis, and trash has to be tossed out. If it's not, it doesn't take long for an unpleasant odor to occur. Have you ever left an unrinsed milk carton in the trash for days? Not good. It makes sense that each night I can empty my heavy heart of the junk I've picked up by just living in the world and being. It feels so good to toss the trash in the can of his forgiveness, doesn't it?

*Every day I drink water.* I think more than ever we are a society that carries water bottles of all kinds and colors, and we make sure we get in our hydration. We've been told and we've experienced what it's like to be dehydrated, and we know it's dangerous. It makes sense to drink in his goodness daily. Big gulps of his love. Submersed in and satisfied with knowing Him. Drinking that living water – well it's the difference between life and death on any given day.

*Every day I move.* If my husband sits all day at his desk, his back and neck hurt. His body aches when he gets up. And so, we both move. We walk, we dance, we do something to move this still body so that the heart pumps a bit faster and stronger. It makes sense to move spiritually. Don't get stuck in bitterness or hurt or all the things that cause us to want to sit down and quit. Let's move toward Him because he's always there for us, waiting. Reach out, lift up our hands, walk in faith...all the exercises that do a body and a soul so much good.

Think of all the daily routines you do and think about how you can apply those things to your heart, as well. There's a reason our body responds to daily care. We'd never think of eating one meal, having one drink, washing our face one time...and trying to live the rest of our life full of strength. Then it makes sense to consider the everyday routines we need in other areas so that we thrive in both body and soul.

## **Life Right Now - The Next 365 - By Jennifer Stephens**

New Year's resolutions have never been my thing. Resolving to start doing this or stop doing that just because the calendar flips from December 31 to January 1 seems silly. Contrived. Maybe it's because as a teacher I became accustomed to a new year beginning every August, each with its own slew of out-of-reach goals. Or maybe it's the overwhelming pressure to come up with a grand life-changing goal – the kind that comes with a 365-day deadline to accomplish it. Gosh, it could be due to a fear of failure. Because chances are there will be little follow through - despite the best of intentions. Whatever the reason, I WILL NOT be making any fantastical resolutions slated to begin the moment the crowd belts out Auld Lang Syne!

It's not that I'm against self-improvement or trying new things. Of course, we should always strive to be better. But what if we focus on doing better all year long? What if we spent each of our 365 days with a willingness to try new things?

Since retiring in May, I've tried all kinds of new things! When a friend asked me to join her for a yoga class, I went. In that first class I was a confuzzled mess of flailing arms and legs as I wobbled my way into each pose. I've since joined water aerobics and Pilates classes too, and several months later I've developed strength and flexibility that didn't exist before (And no more flailing!). Another friend invited me to tag along to a painting class. Following the instructor's step-by-step directions, I walked away with an identifiable, but very beginner-level, piece of work. That class ignited a creative light that led me to dipping my brush into watercolors. While I'm no Bob Ross, and probably never will be, I am enjoying the struggle of learning a new craft! Had I made "get in shape" or "become a painter" official resolutions on January 1st, the pressure to achieve may have deterred my route to success. I would've stopped before I started. But living each day with a willingness to try gave me permission to do just that...try.

In Isaiah 43: 18-19, the Lord says, "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."

Just as our Lord excitedly does a new thing, so can we! We don't need to wait for the new year to decide to try something new (and we shouldn't feel like a failure if it's already January 31st and we haven't started yet...). We are gifted 365 days. And it doesn't matter WHICH day we start that new thing; we just need to be willing to start. Without pressure. Without fear. Without dwelling on our past failings. As we go through the next 365, let's be ready to make a way in the wilderness of life and do a new thing...

## **A Hopeful Heart - Ask. Believe. Receive. – by Christina Oberon**

Are you someone who claims a word for the new year? I am. I usually pray, seeking God to unveil a meaningful word to me in His own timing. In 2023, my chosen word was "Receive," but the reality of it turned out quite differently than I imagined.

While I've always given generously—time, resources, support—I struggled with receiving. Over the past few years, I've worked on understanding that the love and respect shown to others should also include myself, to live with an open and receptive heart. I believed that by learning to receive, I could give more to others.

When contemplating receiving, it prompted images of embracing an offer or gift, a notion of welcoming what is extended to me. The act of taking in or getting something that is offered or sent felt like a concept I would warmly embrace—the word 'receive' resonating with a sense of welcome.

My plan for 2023 was to soften my independent streak and adopt a more receptive mindset, without guilt. However, God's plan often diverges from our expectations. Throughout the year, I found myself receiving unexpected gifts in the form of lessons and wisdom from strained relationships, and clarity on priorities through health challenges.

God's method of teaching me to receive was necessary, though not easy. The journey was heartbreaking, challenging, and stretched me beyond my expectations. Yet, looking back, I'm filled with gratitude for His guidance, acknowledging that sometimes what we need differs from what we think we want. It's a part of the process—accepting what God knows is essential for our journey. This realization transformed my perspective on receiving.

Thank you, Lord, for helping me receive what I didn't even know I needed, preparing me to grow into a more purposeful version of myself. The irony is not lost on me that receiving, as it turned out, was a reciprocal act—welcoming the positive while letting go of the detrimental. It meant shedding what didn't serve me, making room for newfound confidence and clarity. In embracing the act of receiving, I also discovered the power of releasing.

Now, as I eagerly await my 2024 word, I'm reminded that God's ways are often unexpected but purposeful. The twists and turns of 2023 were not just detours; they were part of a plan guiding me towards growth. I will keep trusting that God's unexpected ways will continue to lead me towards purpose and fulfillment.





MARRIAGE

## **In This Together – Seven Steps Closer – by Marcy Lytle**

I'm substituting for our usual writer of this column for this month, and I was looking at the title, at the word "together." I think the usual progression of things in this world in marriages is "together" at the start, then as the years go by...it's more "apart." We sink into rhythms and find out he doesn't really like to shop or watch romantic movies, and we don't really want to golf all day or throw the football. So, it could be "In This Apart" after not so many years of being "together!"

As the new year begins, I've been reevaluating myself and my own part in my marriage, as I do often. It's not always him with the issues; it's so often me! And I've also thought about how many things are so much better together, but I shut him out or deem him inept, because I can do it "better." But then that leads to disdain, and we all know that disdain in marriage is a slippery rock on which to stand.

So why not look at a list for 2024 of things that we're really better off together, than apart, and focus on those as we enter another year with our spouse. Of course, we all need time apart. But for the sake of this article, I'm talking about the times we drift apart, push each other apart, and end up apart...missing out on the beauty of being together.

- Together at the movies is so nice when holding hands, so why not take turns seeing what he likes...and then what you like...because we'll miss that togetherness if we're only at the movies with the girls.
- Together planning the next trip or weekend getaway gets you both excited, instead of you doing it ALL and ending up resenting that he did nothing except load the car...or step on the plane.
- Together making the meals provides time to toss a little flour on his nose, or he can snuggle up for a hug around your apron (okay, so maybe you don't wear an apron), but you get the picture. So what if he cleans differently, wipes down the counter too meticulously, or places a cup on the wrong shelf. Invite him in, or enter with him (if he's the usual cook) and enjoy creating your dinner as two...not one.
- Together in prayer invites each other in to the intimate space with HIM. If one of you prefers silent prayers, then kneel together and pray silently, again grabbing his hand. Or if you pray aloud, include prayers that bless the one you love.
- Together in healthy habits this year. No, not every single time. Maybe he likes to ride, and you like to walk. But at least some of the time, exercise together. Take walks, or ride bikes with him, or visit a zoo and walk together through there! Zoos aren't just for kids!
- Together at the stores. Go with him to the sporting goods section as he looks for yet another fishing pole or whatever floats his boat. Invite him to shop for that next birthday gift for a friend or one of the kids. Observe his giddiness as he gets something new, and invite him in to the process of what you do! No complaining allowed.
- Together in bed. Perhaps you go to bed way later than he does or vice-versa. Make an effort to retire at the same time every so often, for snuggles and love. Or if you're an

early riser and he lingers on the weekends, go back in there when he awakes and cuddle before the day begins.

Just take a look at all the things you now do apart and consider doing them together...once in a while...in 2024. It will take an effort, because we settle into doing things our way or he does his way, which is okay. But not *a/ways*...

Sometimes, that togetherness we thrived on in the early days after "I do" needs to be considered again, because drifting apart is much easier than drawing near. But the rewards of the effort? Priceless...

## **Date Night Fun - Holiday Leftovers – by Marcy Lytle**

December and all the Christmas fanfare is over...but wait! There are ideas and fun to be had with some of what's leftover, on sale, or still around for January! My husband's birthday is in January and we always grab some of the sale items to celebrate. And there is plenty of fun to extend on into the new year, for date night!

The Snacks – The snacks go on sale big time after Christmas, so gather up some to make a giant charcuterie board, and invite another couple over to play a game. Maybe you got a new one for Christmas, or maybe it's time purchase one. We just got Shut the Box – have you played it? Don't make it a big deal. Just invite them for hot chocolate and that spread of snacks, and play the night away.

The Clothes – Don't put away your glitter and glam just yet. And don't worry if you were too tired to go out on NY Eve. Whatever you have that's glitzy and glam, keep it out to get dressed up for a nice meal in a big hotel. Or even consider booking a one night stay. You can always eat happy hour half-off specials to save the dollars. Sit in the lobby by the fire, all cozy and warm, and people watch. The best night ever.

The New – What did you get for Christmas from the kids, relatives, or each other? Spend one night using them! If new kitchen things, bake something together. New books? Read one evening by the fire. No fireplace? Find a fire scene on YouTube and play it, along with your playlist of music in the background, and stay in and enjoy all the new treats, and give thanks. Wear your loungewear, sip on hot cider, and eat shortbread cookies – the ones from World Market – the Scottie Dogs. So Fun.

The Lights – If you have some winter candles (get some if you don't!), have a candle lit dinner for two or four, depending on your mood. If there's a strand of lights you haven't put away, use them to give ambience to your dinner space. Make it a soup night. With fine and delicious bread. And serve all of your leftover goodies for dessert on a pretty tray. Ask everyone, or just you two, to dress in white and have a delicious winter's night date night in.

The Sales – Hit the mall and go in every store, looking for those big clearance items. Make a list of what you need for next year, and purchase things like: bags and wrap and bows, stocking stuffers for next year, winter pjs, etc. Set a budget and go and enjoy. Get a pretzel at the mall when you're tired, and then hit some more stores. Enjoy the thrill of the hunt, and get your steps in too, by walking fast. And be sure to throw in your bags a treat for yourselves to enjoy after the shopping is done.

See? January doesn't have to be dull or boring. It can be so fun with all the leftovers from the holidays! Let us know which one you try!

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

My husband's hands are one of my favorite things to observe on his entire body...seriously. They're rugged, they're aging now, and his fingers are always warm and his grip firm. I've always loved his hands.

As the new year begins, it might be a great thing to observe your husband's features and stare at them, give thanks, and tell him how much you love them.

For example:

His feet might be ones that get up to serve and go there to run errands or jump high with the kids.

His eyes might pierce your heart with love as he looks across the room. Geez, I love it when we catch each other's look!

His hair might be thinning, or it might be full. Whichever it is, give thanks for that head on his shoulders.

His mouth might be so sweet each morning as you each kiss goodbye or greet hello at the end of the day. Tell him so!

His arms might be full of muscles that make you feel safe or they just look cool...or maybe he's not into that and his arms are just slender and cute...they belong to you...so love them!

His legs might look so awesome in those jeans and you love it – so say it!

His ears might stick out or lay close, but they hear you, they hear Him, they listen in and love. Give thanks.

As you can see, we can find parts of our husband to love. But it's really easier, as we age, to observe the parts that aren't quite like they were. We don't even like our own body parts we see in the mirror!

I've read so many verses about gray hair and growing older that should make us feel full of grace, but we usually don't. I've looked at my husband's stomach before, or his face when he needs to shave, or his toenails he needs to trim and I've been turned off in a moment. It's normal!

But when I quit looking with just my eyes (and remember that I too have equally aging parts!) and look at the years and the stamina and the love and all the things on that body that have served us both so well, it makes him look attractive once more.

So this past week, my husband took my hand in the cold theater, and his fingers were warm. I brought his hand up to my face and could smell his cologne. And I looked at his "tubby" fingers as I like to call them, and squeezed tight.

Oh, they're been times I've pushed his hand away in irritation because I just didn't want to be touched.

But that night, when we slid our fingers together in an embrace, it felt good. All felt right with the world. And it was oh so nice to be his, and for him to be mine.

## **For Better or Worse - Beach Camping – by Kaelin Scott**

What has three rows, four pillows, and is completely covered in sand?

The answer is...our car.

A few months ago, my husband wanted to camp on the beach in the back of our car. He was so excited about this idea, so sure that it would be lots of fun. In my head, all I could see was how cramped we were going to be and how much work it would be. But he wanted to do it, so I agreed to try.

We drove five hours to the beach, then we drove another 30 miles down the shoreline before we stopped for the night. We were all alone out there, and it was a beautiful clear night with a full moon. Lovely, really. But then we had to figure out sleeping arrangements for four people in the back of a car. As I had imagined, it was cramped and uncomfortable. I couldn't move an inch either way because I was so squished. Plus, the trunk of a car isn't exactly a mattress, so my hips were screaming in protest. And our daughter got sick, so we ended up driving home after only one night instead of two.

Don't get me wrong, there were highs to the trip. Like waking up and watching the sunrise, and finding giant seashells, and hearing my children giggle in the backseat. But overall, it doesn't rank high up there on my list of favorite experiences. My husband, on the other hand, constantly talks about how much fun it was and how he wants to do it again. I think that was actually one of his favorite memories from this past year.

So you know what? I think I see another car camping trip in my future. And I fully intend to make the most of it – maybe with an air mattress, or a tent I can pitch on the sand for myself while the rest of them squeeze into the car like sardines. Whatever makes it doable. Because my husband loves it, so that makes it important to me.

Sometimes that's what marriage is. Choosing your spouse over your own comfort. Doing something you don't particularly enjoy because you know it makes them happy. Being willing to try something, even when it doesn't sound like your cup of tea. That's how we make memories together, and it's how we grow as a couple.

To tell you the truth, I'm glad my husband pushes me to do crazy and impulsive things sometimes. If he didn't, I'd just sit at home and read all the time. It's good that we're not exactly alike, because we broaden each other's horizons. Now maybe I can convince him to stay in his PJs all day and have a reading marathon with me. Wish me luck! ☺



ENCOURAGEMENT



Spinning my wheels, not going anywhere, not accomplishing anything...

Sometimes I feel that way. There are days when I seem to spend all my time looking for something: a tool, a lost item, something I just had in my hand and now it's disappeared. Or maybe I'll "run to the store real quick" only to find the item isn't there; so on to the next store, and the next. Some days everything I try to do fizzles out to wasted time and effort.

Day before yesterday I finally decided I would mount the Staghorn Fern I bought a few weeks ago. I gathered all the supplies: a mounting board, special soil I mixed, sphagnum moss (now soaking in rainwater), small tacks, a hammer. The last item was fishing line to wrap around the moss to hold the fern to the board. I had bought a new roll not that long ago and saw that I had two, so I knew I had some. There are only so many places I put things. After two days of looking for this elusive essential item, I gave up and went to Walmart to buy another one. After all, it's less than \$3. But it's the principle of the thing—I don't want three of anything! Once I saw it, I realized I had been looking for a different shaped item (how limited and restrictive my vision can be!) Of course, as I told myself on the way home, I will now find it, and I did. Now I will have to return the other one because even one roll is enough to last a lifetime. In the end, I mounted the Staghorn Fern and was able to find the hardware to hang it on the wall.

You know I spend a lot of time on the garden. Gardeners must. The Chinese Pistachio has put on a gorgeous display this year. Leaves have been steadily dropping, but yesterday was the final day. The breeze came through and it rained beautiful yellows until nearly every leaf was on the ground. I do my own leaves because leaf blowers are noisy, blow leaves where I don't want them, and even though I complain sometimes, I enjoy it. I gathered up a few bagfuls the other day. Now I'll do it again. And the hanging baskets I had on the patio last summer: I will bring some into the garage when it freezes, but many of the annuals won't make it and I'll have to replant.

I love working outside, nurturing the birds and plants, and I enjoy the many projects I undertake to make my soul-nourishing retreat more beautiful, more relaxing, more inspiring, more welcoming. But as the year comes to a close, I've been asking myself a question, or maybe God is asking me (can that be the same thing?)

*What will remain? Am I doing anything that has eternal value?*

*"Do whatever He tells you,"* said Mary at the wedding banquet. This, I believe, says it as completely and simply as anyone can. I'm meditating on this during these last days of 2023. I want to do what he tells me, and in my heart I believe he's already said some things I've placed too far down the list. *Forgive me, Lord, and empower me to do what you've told me. Help me to make determined and intentional choices this coming year to accomplish what will last forever—your will in my life.*

Happy New Year Everyone!

*If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames. 1Cor.12-15*

## **Moving Forward – Refreshing – by Pam Charro**

God's word says that his mercies are new every morning, but there's something about a brand new year that makes it so much easier to believe in a fresh start. And if your year has been anything like mine, you're ready for a new one! As expectant as I was that this year would finally be less painful than the previous three or four, 2023 turned out to be very difficult.

A big batch of new would be very nice.

I'm not saying 2023 was all bad; in fact, many amazing and positive changes occurred in my life. It's just that the year also contained new disappointments and heartaches that I am concerned I have not recovered from yet. I don't want to bring that pain into my future, as it might prevent me from a refreshing new year.

*Refreshing.* That's a great word. One of the definitions I found was "imparting vitality and energy." That sure does sound like something I need in the upcoming year. In fact, maybe I don't really need that much brand new at all, but just to be refreshed from what I've already been through. But how?

Zephaniah 3:17 " .. he will refresh your life with his love "

Psalm 23:3 " .. he (the Lord) refreshes my soul."

Acts 3:19 ".. times of refreshing may come from the Lord."

So it's pretty clear that being in God's presence is where I will find refreshing, not necessarily just in all things being new.

It isn't that I haven't been spending time with God - I have - but I think I need to keep specifically asking to be healed and recover from the past few years. Maybe make a little extra time to just sit and wait, instead of being in such a mad rush. Because I seem to have a "disappointment buildup" from unprocessed hurt that is stubbornly clinging to me. The good news is that I know he is willing to remove it. But I suspect I may need to go after it more diligently. More discipline, more prayers, more determination to be free of grief. Just more of him, letting him see into me and recharge my batteries with his loving presence...to fully restore me.

Ecclesiastes says there is a season for everything. I suspect some of us need our next season to be one of healing and refreshment. I'll be praying for all of us.

## Rooted in Love - A Fresh Start – by Kaelin Scott

Everybody loves a fresh start, and January always seems like a great time for it. New Years resolutions are so popular, and it's awesome to want to make goals.

For some reason, the most common New Year's resolutions I see have to do with fitness or health. A lot of them also have to do with family – spending more time together and less time on devices. Personally, I don't really make resolutions. I shared with you all a couple years ago how I decided to use Scripture as my resolutions. To meditate on certain verses all year and try to live them out.

The problem with New Year's resolutions is that they don't last. We get all excited about them during January, and maybe even into February, but a lot of the time we forget about them after that. Now, maybe you actually stick with your resolutions, and that's so great if you do. I'm not knocking people for making resolutions, at all.

To be honest, I make a list of goals for myself in my planner at the start of every year, and I also make smaller goals for every month. They're things I want to accomplish by the time another year passes. Some of them are easy, like organizing a closet or something. Others are more difficult, and some of them I know probably won't happen. But I enjoy marking my progress so I can look back and be satisfied with my work.

Here's the thing about New Year's resolutions. I don't think we should wait for January 1 to start working toward something we want to achieve. We can start any day, anytime we want. And we can start over again, as many times as we need to. There are no rules about having goals or dreams or things we aspire to. There's no timeline we have to follow, no boxes we have to fit inside.

If making a resolution helps you do something you've otherwise been lacking the motivation to do, then I'm all for that. I support you, and I applaud your efforts. Go for it, whatever it is. Follow that dream you've always had. Chase that career you've been hoping for. Start that fitness routine you've been putting off. Learn that new skill you've wanted to try.

Those are all amazing things, and I love that a new year gives us a chance to reset. A fresh start and a blank slate. It truly is a good feeling.

But just know that if you mess up on your resolution or if you fall behind – even if you're not sure *what* you're working toward right now – it's okay. You don't have to wait until the calendar reaches January again to start over. You can try again every month, every week, every day. And you can tweak your goals as you go along. The only rules for your timeline are the ones you give yourself. Don't worry about fitting into any particular box. Big dreams often don't like to color inside the lines.

Whatever you're hoping to achieve, I hope you find the motivation to try it. Whether that's on January 1 or any other day, the important thing is that you get out there and give it your best. And I know you're gonna do great!

## Simple Truths – A Dozen Reminders – by Marcy Lytle

How often do you think about your age? Oh. My. Gosh. It has consumed my thoughts as of late. Hitting age 60 was a big deal, but now I'm over the 65 mark, both of my parents are gone, and I have one uncle left alive. I'm now in the "older generation" of my family, and honestly it bothers me! I look in the mirror and see thinning hair, I turn sideways and see a very less than flat stomach, and I get up off the floor and my bones creak! Yikes!

This feeling of panic over aging can actually hit multiple times as the decades pile on. I remember 40 being a big milestone, because menopause also happened and I had a six year old! What? It took me years to adjust to the 40's and like overnight, I was 50. And then a grandparent. And now...

Well, it's a new year, and I'm sharing a list with you of all the perks of aging and being in the oldest generation in your family...and I'm going to remind myself of these things on a daily basis. We all need reminders, don't we? After all, the timeclock is not going to stop clicking. I hope you find some of these humorous (laughing is good!) and some sobering and all of them helpful!

1. We can go out on a date any time we want, any day of the week, for any length of time because no one is waiting up for us, wondering where we are, or even cares!
2. We can remember that periods and shaving our legs are no more and haven't been for a while! Except for those pesky stray hairs on our legs. I've found shaving those off in the car with the sun streaming in the window is best – because they're hard to see!
3. We can try out any sort of new fashion we want, dress up any time we want, because no one's really looking at us for fashion ideas. So go for it! Wear what you want! And enjoy...
4. We can exit the house and take a walk without kids tagging along, with or without a pet, at any pace we desire, and stop in a park to swing if we want...or gather branches for a vase.
5. We can feel lonely...or we can visit a friend, text a friend, facetime a friend, email a friend, shop with a friend...my gosh there are so many options now! Choose one!
6. We can let go of disappointment and bitterness because we're now wiser, aren't we? Those things are heavy and make us slouch and shuffle...and create frowns and wrinkles. He knows about those people, that thing that happened, and the hurts that run deep...let Him deal...and let it go.
7. We can pick the movie WE want to watch. It can be Hallmark, a murder mystery, a documentary, or whatever we choose because we own the remote now...and forever.
8. We can eat in nibbles all day (better for us anyway) instead of creating big meals to please those in our house.
9. We can worship and dance like no one's around or listening, because they aren't! Some days might be heavy due to loneliness or worry or those pesky thoughts that swirl, but lifting our hands in an impromptu surrendering dance with Him...well, there's nothing like it!

10. We can realize that there's a special place in his heart for those with gray hair. In fact, we're crowned. Go on, look up the verses and give thanks, and know that He is near.
11. We can pack our pillows, take a fan, load up extra clothes, fill a bag with snacks and good reads...when we go on road trips...because the car has room, lots of room, now!
12. We can watch all the young kids and feel sad that we're not young anymore, or take joy in knowing they too will be our age before they know it. Is that even right? I don't know, but I've thought it before.

Make your own list of a dozen things to note and give thanks for as you age. Of course, aches and pains and illnesses take their toll on the best of us at times. This is why we need to SURROUND ourselves with good friends, music, fun food, stir up grateful hearts, and sing at the of our lungs...and ENJOY that daily bread, instead of worrying about tomorrow.

It's hard some days, but it's good to be reminded...so I'm reminding myself and all of us in 2024.

## **Unearthly Thing – Legacy – by Angela Dolbear**

I love scouting eBay, Etsy, and thrift stores for vintage necklace and earring sets, particularly for anything with rhinestones. The styles of vintage jewelry are so glamorous and yet wearable, and fun.

Fortunately, my vintage glam hobby isn't expensive. My latest purchase from eBay came in under \$20 including shipping. The cute little gift box with the 1950's era rhinestone necklace and earrings set sat open on the top of my desk for a few days, reminding me to leave positive feedback for the seller. I wondered about its original owner many times.

Were the lovely rhinestone and faux pearl necklace and earrings a gift from a special someone? Was it for a special occasion, say, to be worn with a dress for a New Year's Eve Party? My fiction-writer's mind runs wild with the details of the dress, shoes, evening bag, and of course gloves and wrap!

The jewelry is in excellent condition for possibly being 60-70 years old. Did the set live in a velvet silk-lined jewelry case? Maybe tucked away inside a bureau or a jewelry armoire, only to be brought out on holidays, date nights, or dinners with dancing and cocktails (of course!)? Again, the novelist in me envisions all sorts of fabulous settings.

I would venture to guess the lady who wore this jewelry never imagined her precious possession would one day fall into the hands of an eBay seller in Indiana. And then be purchased by a vintage-loving writer of novels and songs, who would wear her jewels to church with a simple dress and denim jacket, in Nashville, Tennessee.

It makes me think about all I will leave behind one day. Not only my jewelry, shoes, and handbags, but my life's work comprised of books, stories, and songs. Will they bring joy to others long after I have relocated to Heaven?

As a writer, I feel extremely blessed that God gave me novels which illustrate His unfailing goodness and saving grace through the various characters and plotlines in the books. And these books have been distributed all over the world.

In 2016, I connected with several readers through Instagram who wanted to read my novels. Some of these readers did not have access to online stores like Amazon where they lived. So, I shipped off paperback copies of my first novel, [\*The Garden Key\*](#), to readers in the United Kingdom, Greece, South Africa, and several copies to different cities in Afghanistan. Since each one of my novels contains the good news of Jesus Christ, it was a pretty exciting trip to the post office!

Everyone leaves behind a legacy. What we did, or said, what we believed in, what we stood for, or how we helped and loved others, all shapes our legacy.

There are so many examples of good and bad legacies in the Bible. My personal favorite is the legacy of the Apostle Peter. He messed up so many times and had a real problem with Open-mouth-insert-foot Disease. I can relate to him in so many ways. Yet God used him mightily. He was a major driving force in the growth of the early Church, and the first Pope to Catholic believers. That's quite a legacy.

I love Jesus with all my heart. It's my constant prayer that I remain true to His calling on me to show this love and how He loves me, through stories and songs. I also pray God uses my fondness for fashion and style to bless others in ways only He knows of.

I always try to walk in love. I pray that gets passed on, too. If God can use a zealous fisherman like Peter, He can certainly use a fond of vintage glam and socially awkward writer like me to bring glory to Himself and expand His kingdom. He is good.

God is so good. I will say it again and again.

*Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series, and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories. 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 - Hit Publish – by Marcy Lytle**

Editing this magazine is tedious and takes a lot of time, and there are so many details, as I place the photos, the text, align things and brighten pages, etc. And the way the editor works is that until I hit the PUBLISH button, the old text stays there, and the new is not seen.

So, for example, as I replace last month's stories with the new ones, I have to make sure that after I've placed all of the new...the PUBLISH button is hit. Otherwise, you readers will see and read last month's submissions again...and miss all the new.

I was thinking about this recently and how we all experience changes in our lives...for good. We often focus on the bad, but there are lots of good changes as well! For me, I've developed some better habits when it comes to my thought processes as I more quickly corral thoughts that cause me to spiral downward instead of upward. Practically speaking, I've organized some areas of the house that bring me happiness and make things flow so much better! So, we all have things or habits or attitudes or even body images or products we use that make our lives better.

But what good is better if we don't share?

What good are texts if we forget to hit SEND? What good is social media if we don't SHARE? We have access to all of these buttons to use with our fingers to let others in on the good news in our lives, but oftentimes we keep it all to ourselves.

This year I purpose to TELL my kids more about what God's doing in my heart. That's a way of publishing the good and getting it out there, removing the old and sharing the new.

This year I hope to MESSAGE others more of answered prayers (instead of just texting when I need an answer), the good and the joyful I see around me, and more...to ENCOURAGE.

This year I plan to speak out to the dark places and the darkness that surrounds me sometimes, and COMMAND it all to go, as I settle my soul in the goodness of Jesus.

This year I am excited to not just make changes but to CELEBRATE the changes that turn my hard heart toward Him, and toward him, and toward peace and not fear.

Every month when it's time to share our new issue of *A Bundle of THYME*, it's so exciting to hit the PUBLISH button. All of the changes have been made, the new has replaced the old, the current stories are now ready to be read by our subscribers, and it's a true PLEASURE to share.

2024 is here, wow. I remember when we hit the year 2000 and we thought we needed to store up because catastrophe was sure to happen and we needed to be ready. And here we are, still breathing and writing and living and changing 24 years later.

Make changes this year and note them. Ask God to give you wisdom as you change for the better. Look for the new and plan to celebrate. And when you see the changes take place, don't forget to hit the PUBLISH button to encourage those around you that there's a new you, a

new and better version, as you've lived through another hard time, you've breathed in his goodness, and experienced his love.

Happy 2024.

## **FRESH THYME - In Everything – by Marcy Lytle**

It's a new year, and there's an old verse that tells us how to have a joyful life free of anxiety. We've read it a million times, maybe. But let's read it again.

It's from Philippians 4:6-7 and it starts out by telling us to be anxious for nothing, to pray with thanksgiving, and this peace will come and guard our minds.

*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

But hey, I've often missed the two key words (at least for me) "in everything."

Just this past year, I've become more intentional on praying about everything, not just the sick and the needy, although of course I pray for those. But I've begun praying for all the little things too, even asking for parking spaces when we're shopping. Sounds silly, I suppose, and maybe trite. But I've been including God in all the tiny things of my everyday life and it's caused me to notice more of the tiny things. In noticing those, I begin giving thanks, and then it bleeds over into peace for the bigger things. Funny, how that works.

For example, we have arrived many times to a crowded parking lot – most recently at a Christmas festival – and began to feel anxious at the thought of parking far away and walking for blocks in the cold. Not a big prayer in the scope of world needs, but I just whispered and asked for a space to open up and for a settled spirit (mostly in my husband as he was driving!) and there it was...a spot up close. It warms my heart when little things come together.

We also were shopping and found a cute ornament we thought our grandson might like – a Texas longhorn championship one – and he later texted that he really wanted it. However, we had left the store. We went back and it was gone, nowhere to be found. I whispered a prayer, googled the ornament by description, and found the exact one on eBay!

Now you may be thinking...does God grant you the "wishes" every time? Of course, we pray often and don't get what we demand or ask for. It's not about that. It's about including Him "in everything" from losing my keys, to rain stopping when I need to drive, etc. It's not about telling God or demanding him to perform, but rather a mindset of recognizing his presence in the little...to the big.

Oh, I want him to answer the big prayers I pray daily, those ones that weigh down my heart and make me anxious and cause me grief...as the verse says. But when I realize that he's with me from sunrise to sunset, as I step my feet on the cold floor and pour my cereal and open the blinds...there's this incredible sense of His presence that's with me and it's calming...somehow.

Part of that verse reminds us to give thanks, as well, and it's not just thanking him when he says yes, today, here's the solution. It's thanks for being near, present, close, big, amazing and loving to me, your child.

I haven't figured it all out, pretty sure I won't ever, but I'm thankful that "in everything" He is with us. And when we see Him in everything, the big things we focused on before somehow blend in with all of the little things in the course of a day, and we know that he's in control of those needs as well.

Every vacation we go on, we pray for opportunities to be a blessing, and most of the time they're little things that occur, that make our hearts swell in amazement at how big our God really is.

## **FRESH THYME – Morning Light – by Marcy Lytle**

One of my favorite things to do is wake up, enter the dark living area, light a candle, and turn on a light. Then when the sun comes up, I really enjoy opening all the blinds in the house. I can't stand a dark house. This is a morning ritual for me, one I look forward to every single day.

This particular morning, I read something in my inbox that made me cry...tears of joy...not sadness. It was this...

"...God has good in store for me TODAY. Not 10 years from now. But TODAY."

The message was how we can wait and wait for God to do this or that tomorrow or next year, or wonder when he will show up and heal and deliver and meet the needs of those we pray for. And that waiting sometimes causes us to grow weary, so weary.

But today, I was reminded to look for evidence of his goodness and faithfulness. It's what I alluded to at the top. Turning on a light to dispel the darkness of the night. Lighting a candle to fill the room with winter aromas. Noticing the sunrise out the window, and the light that streams in once the sun is up. It's memorizing a verse about His presence, his mercies, and his grace.

There is daily evidence of God's goodness to all of us, today.

This morning, I'm sitting in my kitchen having just eaten the most delicious bites of chocolate peppermint granola mixed in with my homemade mix. It is delicious.

It's cold outside, but I'm cozy in my green fluffy robe that fits me oh so snugly and reaches to the bottom of my ankles and keeps me warm.

There's food in my pantry and in my fridge, waiting to be taken out and enjoyed and shared and chewed and swallowed.

I have shelves of books, albums of photos, closets of clothes, and my home is filled to the brim with blessings I can barely contain.

I hear my husband with his morning sneeze and cough, and I give thanks for another day with him.

My back doesn't hurt, my legs work, my hands can type really fast, and my eyes can look out and see all of this daily goodness every single morning.

My gosh. I think I could keep writing for hours of the daily goodness right here in front of my face.

My prayer for 2024 is that I will notice his goodness in my life, right now. And rest in the fact that once I've cast my cares on him, I don't need to pine and wonder about his goodness in the future. It's with me today. His presence is here. He's near.

Look for the evidence today of his goodness in your life. Even in the middle of the pain that blinds us to all that is good. It can be the flicker of a candle, the snowflakes that are falling, or the sound of the heater, as it comes on to warm our homes.

I don't want to get caught up in the worries of tomorrow, but I want to wallow in the wonder of today. And it starts with the morning light...

## **FRESH THYME – Sisters on a Bench – by Marcy Lytle**

One thing I started doing before the end of 2023 was intentionally putting my phone away when standing in line, sitting near people, or being around someone new...so that I could be aware and care. I guess that's how to put it, in a nutshell. When I've got my head down scrolling, I'm completely unaware of what might be happening right beside me, and I wanted to stop that. Just a personal change I wanted to make.

Three cool stories from this weekend made me realize that this habit change is a good one:

We were at a packed house for the Broadway musical *My Fair Lady*, and a single young woman slipped in beside me, all alone. I put away my phone and said hello. She replied and began a conversation that lasted the full 15 minutes we were waiting for the show to start. She also revealed that she had cancer and was just recovering after surgery. *Just, wow.* I was able to listen and tell her I would pray for her. Nothing big, just something I'd never known had I not put that rectangle away in my bag.

I was in one of those long lines for the women's restrooms (why don't they make more stalls for women? Sigh...) and again I placed my phone in my pocket and looked up. The lady in front of me began talking to me, because our wait was going to be a while. From the few minutes we conversed, we learned that we live two blocks from each other, and she was a teacher at my kids' high school while they were there! Crazy! She walks her dog, and I walk with Jon, so we said we'd look for each other!

And the last story of the weekend was at a food truck park, where we sat at a picnic table. I was enjoying my pulled pork sandwich (best ever) and started to scroll, but laid down my phone. There were two women at the other end of the table talking, and I noted one of their voices was quite interesting, and I began wondering if they were friends, what they were doing at this market, etc. They spoke about the food, and then that opened a conversation with us. We found out that they were sisters, here from California for a wedding. And as we finished our food and walked away, they said they were so happy to have met us – friendly people from Texas!

My heart felt full that weekend, as I now had a new person to pray for, a neighbor to look for, and two sisters on a bench to think about...all of which I would have missed had I been looking through Instagram or Facebook, or Amazon.

Don't get me wrong. I love to do all of those things, but I've realized that I also love connecting with people. And the two don't coincide with each other.

So here's to more bench conversations, line discoveries and people listening as my phone stays tucked away until I'm alone and there's no one else around.