

A BUNDLE OF

TH  ME

**FEBRUARY 2019**

# TIPS

## **The Dressing – Those Lips** – by Marcy Lytle

I'm not a person that wears lipstick all the time, at all. However, I do enjoy having the option in my purse, for brightening up my dull face later in the day...and lip gloss or lipstick does just that! I've tried lots of different brands and hues, and I am by no means an expert on lips. However, in the past year or so, I've found some that I like and keep on hand for adding a little color to my lips! Others I've just read about and want to try. Here they are...

**Sephora almond lip balm** – This won't add color to your lips but it will soften and make your lips feel grand, when you apply it by itself or on top of a lip color that has left your lips dry! I absolutely love the scent and the feel.

<https://www.amazon.com/Sephora-Collection-Nurtures-Moisturizes-Authentic/dp/B01MZF2ONR>

**Powerlips fluid** – My daughter Kamrin Wolfe sells these powerlips in so many colorful hues. They are super rich in color and coverage and make your lips feel fuller, too! Like mentioned above, some rich colors and make lips a speck dry, so just apply that balm above and you're good to go! My favorite color in this line is Promotion. You can order through Kamrin!

[https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=oh%20the%20joy!%20by%20kamrin%20wolfe&epa=SEARCH\\_BOX](https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=oh%20the%20joy!%20by%20kamrin%20wolfe&epa=SEARCH_BOX)

**Superstay lips** – A friend suggested this to me, because it's lipstick and balm in one tube! You apply the color, let it dry, and then apply the balm. But instead of having two different tubes in your makeup bag, it's all in one! Check out this product by Maybelline.

<https://www.maybelline.com/lip-makeup/lipstick/superstay-24-liquid-lipstick>

**Triple threat** – Have you heard of Thrive Causemetics? This triple threat color stick is so cool because it can be used on body, lips and cheeks! I have one of these sticks and I enjoy having it in my purse as well, for touchups. If the cheeks and lips are brightened late in the day, you're ready for the night!

<https://thrivecausemetics.com/collections/all/products/triple-threat-color-stick>

**Pure red** – NYX lipstick is super inexpensive and even made the top 25 list of best lipsticks, according to a list put out last year! Since Valentine's Day is this month, and some of us rarely wear a bold red hue, this option is great for date night out!

[https://www.ulta.com/matte-lipstick?productId=xlsImpprod4141597&sku=2297471&nrtv\\_cid=bd05e2c963bae6c65eb7c25c84bb11dfb24c215a7e467eb486d937f8da56315a&utm\\_source=bam&utm\\_medium=cpc&utm\\_campaign=bam\\_premium\\_editorial&utm\\_content=nymag&irgwc=1&AID=313779&PID=376373&CID=af\\_313779\\_376373\\_&clickId=3VrRady9CSj90Pfy0-WHW38dUkgTThwhr3XFSg0](https://www.ulta.com/matte-lipstick?productId=xlsImpprod4141597&sku=2297471&nrtv_cid=bd05e2c963bae6c65eb7c25c84bb11dfb24c215a7e467eb486d937f8da56315a&utm_source=bam&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=bam_premium_editorial&utm_content=nymag&irgwc=1&AID=313779&PID=376373&CID=af_313779_376373_&clickId=3VrRady9CSj90Pfy0-WHW38dUkgTThwhr3XFSg0)

**Catsuit Lipstick** – Wet and Wild is another super inexpensive line of makeup and their lipstick made the grade, according to USA Today. It's lightweight and smooth. Have you tried a purple hue? I love that for February!

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/reviewedcom/2018/07/26/best-lipsticks-2018/37126555/>

**Chubby Stick** – This is by Clinique and it's a moisturizing lip balm. It has a pencil style applicator and comes in a huge array of colors. Try it, you might like it!

<https://www.clinique.co.uk/product/1605/15520/makeup/lipsticks/chubby-sticktm-moisturizing-lip-colour-balm>

If you're like me, so many days you forget to color your lips because it's too much trouble to keep up! However, sometimes I pass a mirror in a store and realize how sullen and dull my face looks. I add just a touch of color to my lips and it makes me smile! Maybe it will you, too!

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## **Seven for You – Gifts to Love – by Marcy Lytle**

We're into the second month of 2019 already and we've either been delighted and are enjoying the gifts we received for Christmas, or some of them have already found their way to the drawer of items we will re-gift or give away. It happens to all of us. We receive a gift that someone else thought was really cool, only to realize it's too hard to use, not practical, or it doesn't fit or look just right.

For February, the month we love to give again to those we love, I thought it would be fun to share with you my favorite gifts from Christmas – ones I love and am using and that bring me great delight! If you're out shopping for him/her or for yourself, maybe you'll want to snag one of these as well from the reviews I'm giving it below:

**Initial Necklace** – I never got in on the craze of wearing initials in jewelry way back when it first started, but I saw this one by Kate Spade and it captured my attention. It's a round pendant on a gold chain with a cute charm up by the clasp. It also has a saying on the back of the disk "One in a million." It's a perfect length and goes with everything from t-shirts to dresses to jackets and all pieces of my wardrobe! It's from Nordstrom and will set you back \$58.00.

<https://shop.nordstrom.com/s/kate-spade-new-york-one-in-a-million-initial-pendant-necklace/3628637>

**Book Club** – It's \$14.99 a month and I receive an email with five choices of books. I choose one and then it arrives in a cool box. It's a hard cover, and it's a new read, and it motivates me to slow down and relax. One book a month comes to my door, and helps me complete my goal of reading for the year! How fantastic is that! This is the book I got for January and it was delightful!

**Mismatched earrings** – This is one of my favorite pair of earrings, even though I have several that I love! I posted a picture of these the very next day after opening them, because I love them so much! One is a flight of birds, and the other is a single bird. I also got another pair where one is a moon, and the other is a star. Visit the Etsy shop for Jamber Jewels and check out these unique pairs of earrings and get yourself a pair!

[https://www.etsy.com/shop/JamberJewels?search\\_query=birds](https://www.etsy.com/shop/JamberJewels?search_query=birds)

**Tshirt for traveling** – We absolutely love taking road trips, and I got this really cute tshirt that says "Road Trippin" on the front. The Etsy shop has lots of other choices like "Beach Please" and "World Traveler" as choices. My shirt is really cute and I plan to wear it underneath a cardigan for these cooler days still ahead.

[https://www.etsy.com/listing/628863457/road-trippin-shirt-road-tripping-road?ga\\_order=most\\_relevant&ga\\_search\\_type=all&ga\\_view\\_type=gallery&ga\\_search\\_query=road+trippin+shirt&ref=sc\\_gallery-1-1&plkey=ccf614cbd5160e7396fb5d1e7661235c27db6245%3A628863457&col=1](https://www.etsy.com/listing/628863457/road-trippin-shirt-road-tripping-road?ga_order=most_relevant&ga_search_type=all&ga_view_type=gallery&ga_search_query=road+trippin+shirt&ref=sc_gallery-1-1&plkey=ccf614cbd5160e7396fb5d1e7661235c27db6245%3A628863457&col=1)

**Letter board** – My kids got me that for using with this magazine for posts! But look at how cute this letter board is! The words and quotes and inspiration can be changed weekly, monthly, or however often I'd like to change them. And the board looks so cute nestled in between a vase and a plant! I am enjoying this gift.

<https://www.target.com/p/new-view-12-x12-black-letter-board-with-gray-trim/-/A-52929437>

**Signature Set** – I wanted a small compact that included all of the refreshers needed for my face when I'm gone all day long, into the evening. I used to carry my blush and lip gloss and powder from my bathroom, but then I had to remember to put it back when I arrived back home. This is a small compact that's great for touch-ups and I can leave it in my purse!

<https://www.sephora.com/product/signature-set-mod-collection-P419210>

**Candle in a jar** – Who doesn't love a good candle, and one that looks pretty while it's burning? I buy lots of candles during the year, and this one by Magnolia Hearth & Hand – the leather and tobacco scent – is one of my faves. It comes in this dark teal jar, but they have so many other options as well and wonderful scents! Check them out!

<https://www.target.com/p/container-candle-leather-tobacco-hearth-hand-153-with-magnolia/-/A-53607797>

I hope these ideas inspire you to find something special this month as a gift for that special person in your life, or just for you! Treat yourself to something new and different, or give it away to someone you love.

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## **Selah's Style – Room Reno – by Ayla Wolfe**

Ayla is Selah's 5 year old (soon to be 6!) cousin; and she recently did a room renovation, decorating with all of her favorite things and styles. She loves jewelry, makeup, and art – and she needed to have places for things that were out of reach of her little brother's curious hands! She had ideas of just what to do in her personal space to brighten and organize, which all began with a new bunk bed – mattress on the top – and lots of space underneath.

Enjoy Ayla's room reno, and see if you don't come away with a few ideas for your kids' rooms, as well!

**Shelf and Hooks** – Ayla has lots of bags and purses, and needed a place to hang them. She also has a few special gifts that needed a place to be displayed! These cute hooks from Hobby Lobby were just the thing and made her wall look so pretty – while organizing the bags and beauties!

<https://www.hobbylobby.com/search/?text=flower+hooks>

**Cubbies with labels** – These super cute polka-dot cubbies hold all of Ayla's special toys. Her mom helped her with the labels that include a picture and words, because Ayla is definitely learning to read in kindergarten this year. She now knows just where to stash things when Mom instructs, "Clean your room, Ayla!"

**The Vanity** – This might be Ayla's favorite piece of furniture in her room. It too is from Hobby Lobby and was a great price, so her parents snatched it right up for her. She loves to sit and get ready, as she picks out just the right piece of jewelry (or pieces!) for her outfit each day. She also includes a bit of lip color, as her mom allows...

<https://www.hobbylobby.com/search/?text=white+vanity&quickview=80738377>

**The Stands** – It seems that once Ayla's extended family realized how much she likes jewelry, they all bought her some – especially chokers and dangly earrings! Ayla recently got her ears pierced, and is so excited to be able to wear all sorts of colors and shapes now, to coordinate her choice of dress for the day! Check out these cute stands!

<https://www.hobbylobby.com/search/?text=jewelry+stands>

**Caboodle, Yes!** – Ayla's mom saw this caboodle at Target and remembered how cool they were back in the day, so she picked up one for Ayla. Inside goes her makeup and brushes, so that Augie doesn't end up painting the walls with color – where it doesn't belong! Ayla LOVES the color blue, so blue her caboodle is!

<https://www.target.com/p/caboodles-classic-caboodles-on-the-go-girl-case-millennial-pink/-/A-53510261>

**Bag it up** – This pretty, teal bag hangs on the back of Ayla's closet door and hold her shoes. She does need a little help in storing the ones up top, but those can be for the shoes that are

out of season. Recently, Ella (her grandmother) bought Ayla several new pairs from Target, all on clearance, of course!

**Hamper basket** – On the floor of Ayla’s closet sits this cute basket/metal hamper where Ayla can toss her clothes, instead of leaving them on the floor. This helps her mom when it’s laundry time, and the basket itself is really pretty (even though it holds really stinky clothes.)

<https://www.target.com/p/extra-large-round-wire-decorative-storage-bin-antique-pewter-with-copper-handle-threshold-153/-/A-16251828>

**Atmosphere cove** – Under Ayla’s bed is this room area by the window. Lights are strung, and this cool gray chair (where Ayla and her friend Madeline can both fit) is just waiting for someone to open a book and read an adventure out loud. Ayla loves a good story!

<https://www.target.com/p/kids-double-dish-chair-gray-pillowfort-153/-/A-52924901>

This room reno didn’t happen overnight, because Ayla’s parents had to save up and buy each little thing one at a time. That made it all the more fun, to see each item nailed to the wall or organized and neat. Having two brothers that sleep across the hall, Ayla enjoys having her own space with all things Barbie and fashion, without a hint of smelly boys anywhere around...

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## **In the Kitchen – Soups and Sauces – by Marcy Lytle**

February is still cold in most places, and it's that month of romance where we see all things red everywhere! This month we are combining those two things into sharing recipes of soups for warming up those chilly nights, and red sauces for brightening up those dull evening meals! I love a good soup, one with flavor and texture. I love a good sauce that's rich in that red hue of ripe tomatoes. Don't you?

Here's what we're eating:

### **Creamy Lentil Soup**

You'll need:

- 1 large onion
- 1 cup lentils
- 2 ½ c water
- 2 t salt
- ¼ t pepper
- 1 clove minced garlic
- ¼ c tomato sauce
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 ½ c milk

Finely chop onion, rinse lentils and drain. Place in saucepan, add onion and next 6 ingredients. Cover and simmer one hour. Remove bay leaf. Blend in blender (careful, it's hot) til pureed and return to saucepan. Add milk, heat and stir til hot and blended. (We ate with spicy crackers and added more pepper to the soup.)

### **Chicken Trio**

You'll need:

- 1 lb chicken tenders
- 4 cups pico de gallo (or one container premade)
- ½ cup green olives
- 2 T capers
- Lime
- Tortillas

Salt and pepper the chicken and cook until browned on both sides. Toss in pico, olives and capers and simmer until chicken is tender and sauce thickens. Grill a few tortillas in the pan, then serve up the dish with lime wedges on the side! Easy and oh, so tasty!

### **Pasta Fagioli Soup**

- 1 T olive oil

- 2 oz diced pancetta
- 1 onion chopped
- 2 carrots chopped
- 2 celery stalks chopped
- 2 garlic cloves finely chopped
- 6 c low sodium chicken broth
- 1 15oz can no salt added cannellini beans drained and rinsed
- 1 c no salt added crushed tomatoes
- 1 t minced fresh rosemary
- ½ t salt
- 6 oz small pasta (I used spinach fusilli from Gourmet Texas Pasta)
- Shaved Parm
- Oregano leaves for garnish

Heat olive oil over med heat in large pot. Add pancetta and cook about 5 min. Add onion, carrots, celery and cook stirring occasionally til onion starts to soften, about 5 min. Add garlic and cook, stirring, 1 minute.

Add broth, beans, tomatoes, rosemary and salt and bring to boil. reduce to simmer, cover and cook 15 min. Remove one coup of mixture to blender and puree, then return to pot and add the pasta. Cook, til pasta is tender.

Top each bowl with shaved Parm and oregano leaves.

### **Stir Fry with Lemony Soy Sauce**

#### For the sauce:

¼ soy sauce

¼ c water

2 T brown sugar

2 T lemon juice

Mix these together and set aside.

#### For the veggies:

1 garlic clove minced

Mushrooms, carrots, zucchini, red pepper, green pepper, green onions (all sliced thin)

2 c cooked brown rice

1 can (8oz) sliced water chestnuts, drained

½ c honey roasted cashews

In a large skillet stir fry garlic in olive oil for 1 minute, then the veggies til crisp-tender, about 8 minutes longer. Stir in sauce, bring to a boil. Then add the rice and water chestnuts, heat through. Top with cashews.

### **Texas Chowder**

- 1 large onion chopped
- 1 red pepper chopped
- 1 green pepper chopped
- ½ c butter
- 1 can cream of potato soup
- 2 ½ c milk
- 1 T Worcestershire sauce
- 1 T chicken seasoning
- ½-1 lb cooked and crumbled bacon
- 2 cans cream style corn
- 2 c shredded Cheddar
- ¼ c chopped cilantro

Saute the onion and peppers in the butter until tender. Add all of the other ingredients and simmer until the cheese is melted, stirring often.

This tastes great with savory crackers.

## **Tried and True – Love Hacks – by Marcy Lytle**

“Love hurts” is part of the lyrics of an old song, and I suppose it’s true. We love and we get hurt, for sure, because we’re all human and we make mistakes. Even when we love our kids, we get hurt, because they are fickle in their love and their actions. And loving in the romantic kind of way can be exhilarating or devastating, depending on whether or not the love is returned...

This month we are reminded to love and to show love. Since there are always lists and lists of kitchen hacks, cleaning hacks, etc., why not list some love hacks? Maybe you’re short on time or creativity. These are simple ways to show that special someone that you think they’re awesome. So instead of saying, “Love hurts,” we’re saying here are some “Love Hacks!”

- Write it on his mirror (use your lipstick).
- Leave a sticky note on his car window before they leave for work.
- Print out a photo from your phone of the two of you and frame it, and give it to him.
- Slip in a cloth napkin and a heart-shaped chocolate in his lunchbox.
- Buy tickets to see that movie he wants to see but you don’t, and go with him.
- Take him bowling or to play mini golf, even if you detest both.
- Text him a little poem you write that doesn’t rhyme but it says how you feel.
- Leave a cold drink he loves in the fridge with his name on it.
- Send him an email with just an image inserted of a beating heart.
- Give *him* a box of chocolates...
- Go to a coffee shop and bring a game to play while you both sip.
- Purchase a new game for the two of you to play by the fire.
- Whisk him away on a trip across your city, stopping at three of favorite places.
- Let him roam Home Depot and give him a wad of cash to spend.
- Do one of his chores for him.

That’s 15 hacks to do all on one day or to spread out this month, while you’re sharing your love. I bet you can think of even more.

He might not reciprocate, he may not notice, and he may not care. Or...he might be inspired to think of you, he may notice and stand amazed, and he may thank you profusely. Either way, you’ve loved and given and shared with him a piece of your heart. And even if it hurts, God knows you did it and He will love you back like no one else can...

And if there’s no man in your life to hack, do these for your kiddos or best friends!

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**HOME**

## Practical Parenting – Twist and Bake – by Marcy Lytle

We recently made Auntie Anne's pretzels in the kitchen with three littles, ages 7, 5 and 3. It started out with the 5-year old and by the end of the process, all three were in the kitchen pulling and rolling and stretching out the dough to twist and then flipping onto the baking sheet to wait for that delicious treat!

Baking with kids is so fun, but it's messy and takes planning. Here's what we did and learned in that one experience in the kitchen with them:

- **Wash their hands.** I told them they could not help with dirty hands. So that made them willing to wash before baking. And boy, were their hands and nails dirty!
- **Planning helps.** Having the bowls and utensils and ingredients out on the counter works wonders in keeping them attentive. If I had to stop and find something or make her get down off her stool, it only delayed and frustrated both of us.
- **Stools are essential.** Speaking of stools, get one that's safe and let the child stand on the same level as you are, so he can work at the counter without reaching. We have a two-step stool that works great.
- **Read the recipe ahead of time.** Once you start baking with littles, your mind will be all sorts of full and you won't remember what comes next. Reading the recipe and knowing what steps to take ahead of time works wonders!
- **Let them do.** If there's a package to open, you cut it and let them pour it out into the bowl. Let them start the stirring and you can finish with arm power. Let her get down and go preheat the oven, showing her the numbers and when to stop. Model, and then let them try shaping the dough.
- **Use sprinkles.** Kids love to sprinkle! These pretzels came with a cinnamon sugar packet and a salt packet, so they were poured into tiny bowls before we sprinkled. This was their favorite part, aside from the actual twisting and forming of the pretzel.
- **Clean while you bake.** If there's a baking time (ours was 15 minutes) let them start rinsing and wiping the counter, to prepare for the end product. No bites after baking, until the counter is clean!
- **Eat and enjoy.** Get out cute plates and napkins and let each child have a piece of their baking presentation! Take them all, including yourself, into the other room to sit down and enjoy every bite.

Have you baked with your kids? It's a chore for sure, and it's quite a mess, and when three want to have their hands in the process, it's quite a challenge! Pretzels are a good start, because they require several hands to shape and form and sprinkle. You can buy the Auntie Anne's Pretzel kits that come with everything inside that you need to get started!

<https://www.walmart.com/ip/Auntie-Annes-Auntie-Annes-Pretzels-More-Baking-Mix-1-99-lb/40685372>

Happy baking and making memories together!

## **I Don't Do Teens – Just One Song – by Marcy Lytle**

Music and teens stick together and go together like peanut butter and jelly. Our teens just love music of all kinds and they want to listen to music all the time. Music is one of those things that lifts the soul, lightens the spirit and renews hope...if the music is uplifting and the lyrics speak truth. And if that's not the case, what our teens are listening to can damage their souls, their minds, and their relationships with parents, friends, and Him.

I'm not for banning all secular music from teens, but rather training and teaching them on how to select their music. There are some really good songs out there of all genres, and there are also some really bad selections of songs out there. The goal isn't to just ban our kids from all that is bad, but rather to talk about it and set guidelines and tell why certain music and lyrics are not a good choice. Yes, we can set rules for them to follow, but those rules should include thinking and making choices that are wise, not just setting up rules for rules sake.

There's a popular song called "Thank U, Next" by Ariana Grande. It talks about a list of boyfriends and breakups. There's foul language in it, and there's an attitude of being done with boys and looking for the next, etc. as if they're a piece of trash to be discarded.

<https://www.google.com/search?q=thank+u+next+lyrics&oq=thank+u+next+lyrics&ags=chrome.0.016.3770j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

It might be a good idea to take a song that's popular that our kids are drawn to and listen to the lyrics with them. Talking to our sons and daughters, and asking what draws them to the song is a good and healthy activity, if we listen and learn what makes our kids' interested. Maybe our daughter likes a boy that doesn't like her. Maybe our son thinks Ariana Grande is hot.

It's important in training kids to be adults that we offer them tools on how to make wise choices and how to guard their minds against wrong and destructive thinking.

Just that one song mentioned above could spark so many cool conversations like:

- Dating multiple people before marriage...is that a good thing? Why or why not?
- Getting back at friends that hurt you with hateful words...is that helpful? What else could you do instead?
- Treating people badly and writing them off...is that kind and loving?
- The F-word. Is it offensive or normal language today?

Teens might respond that they just like the music, or the beat, or that the song's lyrics aren't what attracts them to listen. They might argue that we just don't understand how they feel.

As parents, it's our job to be aware of and instruct and train our kids until they leave home. And if we don't take the time to observe what it is they're listening to, take time to understand why they've chosen that particular music, or how that music makes them feel and act, then we're missing a big part of that training.

I love some secular songs. There's one by Avril Lavigne about keeping her head above water in a hard time, and it's got awesome lyrics and a great sound. I have secular artists from my own teen years that I really loved to listen to. So banning all secular music from our kids might just make them run to it, later.

<https://www.google.com/search?q=avril+keep+my+head+above+water+lyrics&oq=avril+keep+&ags=chrome.2.0j69i57j0l4.5300j0j9&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

Sit down and watch the music awards shows with teenagers, ask them to share their playlist with you, and take interest in their life. Listen without judgment, but offer guidelines and prayer. Then explain why they are to choose life and not death...literally sometimes...in the lyrics that rise in volume into their ears and then seep into their hearts.

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## **A Night to Remember – Broken Hearts – by Marcy Lytle**

We always hear adult lessons on how to heal broken hearts, by pouring our hearts out to Jesus and asking him to heal our wounds, etc. But what about little broken hearts, in our children? They too experience brokenness when puppies die, grandparents pass away, a favorite stuffed animal is lost, or friends move away. Broken hearts don't just happen in adulthood!

This month is going to be about broken hearts with a lesson on how they heal.

**Preparation:** You'll need lots of red construction paper and scissors, and some heart-shaped cookies or candies to enjoy at the end of the lesson.

Either provide or allow those who can use scissors to cut out three hearts for each person. They can be small or large, misshapen or perfectly made.

We're going to talk about broken hearts. When we are happy and feel safe and warm our hearts feel full and whole and pretty and red. (Ask everyone to hold up their three hearts for display!)

However, sometimes things happen in life that causes our hearts to break in to pieces. Has anything happened in your lives that made your heart hurt? (Perhaps suggest to them some of the above scenarios or let them think of some of their own.)

### **Let's read these stories and follow along:**

Pete got a new puppy for his birthday and named him Lucky. Pete and Lucky were best of friends and played outside together, and at night Lucky even had a bed right beside Pete's bed! One day Lucky got sick and had to go to the doctor where Lucky stayed and never came home. Pete was super sad at the loss of his best friend. (Ask the kids to tear one of their hearts into two pieces)

It wasn't until months later that Pete's parents took him to find a new puppy, a big black lab, and Pete's heart was full again.

- Talk about how Jesus is the mender of broken hearts, and when we feel sad He loves to bring us joy again to make us joyful. (Read Psalm 147:3)

Sarah had an outfit on for school that she absolutely loved, because it included a special necklace her grandmother had given her. On that necklace was a little locket that opened, and inside was a picture of her grandmother that Sarah loved so much. On the playground that day, Sarah played hard swinging and sliding and running, and when she got home she exclaimed to her mom, "My locket! It's gone!" The locket had somehow come off during recess at school. (Ask the kids to tear off a big corner of their second heart)

Mom and Sarah went to the school and searched and searched, and guess what? There it was underneath the bench where Sarah had sat to rest for a few minutes. They took it home and reattached it to the chain, and all was well.

- Talk about how Jesus always cares about loss and sorrow, and he is always searching to find that and those who are lost. He loves us all so much. (Read Luke 19:10)

Terry and Tobin were best friends. They had been best friends since they were two years old and now they were in second grade! They played every day after school together, they spent the night at each other's houses for sleepovers, and their parents went on trips together, too! One weekend, Terry's parents got a call that Tobin's family was going to move far away to another state. Terry was heartbroken and went to his room and sobbed, crying, "I don't want Tobin to move!" (Ask kids to shred up their third heart.)

Tobin moved, Terry cried a lot, but they were able to connect and continue to be friends, seeing each other once a year. And Terry made lots of new friends at school.

- Talk about how people move and lives change, but Jesus is a friend that never leaves us or forsakes us, AND he brings new friends into our lives when we are friendly to others. (Read Proverbs 18:24)

Look at our three hearts – all broken and torn!

There is no way we can fix these hearts. We can tape them up, glue them together, and even try to just make new ones, but nothing can restore them back to their original beauty.

Jesus can! He can take all of our brokenness and heal our hearts to pump just like new!

Pray this prayer together:

*Jesus, we give you our broken hearts and sadness,*

*and we ask you to comfort us and heal us.*

*Thank you that you are the healer of broken hearts.*

Enjoy some Valentine heart cookies or candies together.

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## The Family Practice - What Now? – by Brandi Oman

The holiday season brought joy, memories, and lots of out of the ordinary events to do with our kiddos. We cooked and shopped for the best things until we couldn't stand anymore. We laughed until we cried. We saw and then our missed families when they returned home! We enjoyed lights and went caroling. We have since bundled up in our coziest pajamas and watched all the best movies Netflix has to offer!

So what do we do when the holidays are over, January is already gone, and February is here?

Caiden and I decided to kick the year off with enjoying a day of fishing! As I have shared before, this activity is his favorite! He received some Christmas money and so we went shopping. He has been eyeballing a pair of boots for over a year and I told him when I feel like he is ready, we would get them for him. He purchased them himself! He was overjoyed with excitement! His next goal is to buy spurs for his boots (I am not ready for that yet...) I made plans to take him on a date and we went to Taco Bell. That too is one of his favorites!

The most important thing we can do to make the wintry holiday spirit stay with us all year long is to love on our babies!

As a mother of youngster, I want to keep having fun and stay active. Our kids stay young for such a short amount of time, so the time we spend with them when they are little matters so much when they are older.

Here are five inexpensive ideas of things to do with your kids that may leave an everlasting impression:

- Take them fishing at the local pond and talk about what nature is around.
- Take them on a walk and race them...they love winning!
- Take them on piggy back rides (if you can!) or join them on the jungle gym at the local playground.
- Take them to the zoo or the aquarium (Groupon always has discounts!)
- Take them to a park and pitch balls while they practice their swing.

Being present, loving, and able means the world to our babies!

*Psalm 127:3*

*Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.*

Our Father asks us to take care of the gifts he graciously gives us! In my opinion, our children are the highest, most pure, rare, and beautiful possessions we may ever receive.

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## **Tiny Living – Elves, Please** – by Leyanne Enterline

The holidays came and went so quickly, as I always feel they do. I wasn't prepared again for the ridiculous amount of gifts that we are trying to shove into such a tiny space, and we didn't clean out before the new things arrived at our home. Maybe we didn't really receive that much, but in 350 square feet, it feels like we received Santa's workshop!

"Out with the old and in with new," has become a bit easier for me, but to 10 and 11 year old boys, that's not what they want to hear. Everything is super special and "may come in handy at some point," so they say. Though they have their own space, mom guilt still comes in and lets them keep half of which I know is junk, because I feel like they don't truly have a place to call their own. I mean it's a camper! So with two sets of bunk beds and a tiny bench table to do their work on in their room, there really isn't that much space for all their extras.

As I've mentioned before, I try to add a bit of organization to the chaos, but in such a tiny space any type of extra drawers or book cases take up too much room and things begin to get shoved wherever they can. I can't stand clutter, so going into their room gives me anxiety, but maybe the Lord is trying to teach me to take a *chill pill* and let them have their stuff that they think is so amazing. Not everyone is like me and that's okay!

Thanks for the therapy. I guess writing this story is helping me get that off my chest!

*And another thing...*

Living tiny, one would think there are smaller problems when dealing with the house maintenance. Yes, everything is smaller, but when something under the bathroom sink breaks (because everything is so tiny) we need to grab an elf from the North Pole to help get under there! Brian and I worked for hours under our bathroom sink because it decided to only drip the water out. Brian thought perhaps calcium from our well was built up in the pipes. Since we are not elves, it was extra difficult to get up into this tiny space to disconnect and reconnect everything back. At one point, I was literally praying for God to give us strength and power and might to get through this task without ripping the entire sink out or anyone's head off! We've had to apologize many times to our children for our bad attitudes when dealing with stuff made for Barbies!

Luckily, my prayers worked and the bathroom sink is also working again!

I'll save the kitchen saga for next month...

Remember, love grows best in tiny spaces!

**YOU**

## **Strengthening Your Core – Gone for Good – by Marcy Lytle**

There are feelings we have in this life that we just can't explain, but they're there. There are people we want to like and enjoy, but we don't. There are places we go where we feel something isn't right, but we can't explain what it is. And then there are times we feel so guilty about the way we experience or look at a certain situation or person, and we just don't know what to do about it.

Let me explain.

I lost my mother and my mother-in-law in the past year and a half. Both of these ladies left a legacy of faith and love like no other. They were wonderful women that loved their families and showed it in every way. I loved them both. However, like lots of daughters and daughters-in-law, I got irritated often with both of them.

On occasion, something my mom said to me cut to the bone, and it hurt deeply. I found out in later years why my mom had some of the insecurities and habits that she did, and that helped me a little to understand her. However, we didn't have the relationship I wanted, one where I could share my heart and be heard, without judgment or criticism. We did have a great time shopping together and doing family activities, but I missed the connection I always desired. For that, I often felt guilty for getting upset at her or not wanting to be around her.

On occasion, a visit to my see my mother-in-law wasn't so fun, as she talked an awful lot, and she worried even more. It wasn't so inspiring to sit and listen to her go on and on, and I often found myself dreading those visits, because they weren't fun for me. And I also never connected with her either, in an intimate way. She was my husband's mom, and that was it. There were times I felt guilty for those feelings, and shamed myself for not wanting to be around her more.

I think all of us have parents that frustrate us, or kids that annoy us at times, and we leave their presence weighed down with guilt at what should have been a pleasant experience but it turned out to be something we had to endure...not enjoy.

As my mom and mother-in-law aged and I watched them deal with that gracefully and with dignity, I grew to respect both of them more, and enjoyed them more. But in the back of my mind, I wondered if when they were gone the guilt that hovered over my mind would crush me. It always bugged me that these ladies got under my skin at times, and I felt so bad about it.

They are both gone now, and I have grieved and am still grieving. And the beautiful thing about His grace is that I don't feel one ounce of guilt. I'm able to put that behind me and enjoy the pleasant memories and love these ladies for who they were inside, not for their shortcomings that hurt my feelings. I too have shortcomings that hurt others, even when I'm unaware.

I cannot explain the relief I felt when I realized that the guilt I had carried left me and is no longer there, even after these beautiful women have left this earth.

We all have experiences in our lives that leave us with scars that cause us to say and act certain ways, some of which are not pleasant to others or to ourselves. And we all feel a twinge of guilt, especially if it's a parent that's driving us crazy. Aging parents are not easy to deal with, when their filters go, their tempers flare, and their own weariness sets in. And we will at times wish for that pain to be over and for them to go...for their sake and ours.

We're not bad people for feeling annoyed or guilty. It happens. It's reality.

I just wanted to share that the guilt I felt I feel no more, and I'm elated and relieved to know that God forgives me, helps me, and heals me, while at the same time he carries those with whom I struggle – as we all move on in this life.

There's hope for all of us. Even on days when the ones we love annoy the heck out of us or we annoy them. Love is crazy like that. And guilt doesn't have to ride us forever...

## **Under the Influence - Diseases of the Heart – by Marcy Lytle**

February is the month of red, the month of hearts, the month of love. The color red started appearing on shelves and even on dish towels in the form of little hearts and cupid arrows way back at the first of the year. There's this day on the 14<sup>th</sup> where hearts are supposed to be thrilled with proposals, made happy with expressions of love, and delighted with boxes of chocolates.

However, there are most likely many hearts that are broken and only more so this month, when all of that gooey lovely expression just makes those broken hearts ache all the more, because of loss, wounds and disappointments. I remember when I lost my mom and entered the stores near Mother's Day and saw all of the cute sayings and cards about moms, it was hard to experience. It's the same for some in the month of February.

It's hard to experience the joy of a season when sadness looms instead.

Psalm 147:3 says,

*He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.*

Psalm 103: 3-5 says,

*He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases.*

*He redeems me from death and crowns me with love and tender mercies.*

*He fills my life with good things.*

*My youth is renewed like the eagle's!*

We all long to love and be loved, but it's so hard when our hearts are full of disease from the experience of life.

For example,

The disease of bitterness taints a heart that was once sweet into an angry red.

The disease of hatred destroys a heart that was once tender and leaves it hard.

The disease of disappointment leaves an always expectant heart shivering in the dark.

The disease of brokenness rips apart a complete heart into shreds.

We all know that heart disease is a killer if changes are not made in our physical bodies. We have to eat healthy, undergo repairs of blockages and tears and leaks. Time is necessary after surgeries take place, in order for hearts to heal. And sometimes, nothing heals except a heart transplant when the heart of another once healthy individual is placed in the space where our diseased heart resides.

I think all of us, whether we're madly in love this month or not, have areas of brokenness and disease in our hearts. If we've lived more than five minutes, we've experienced disappointment of some kind. Even a newborn baby cries when it's not fed on demand, not receiving that which is expected.

I love all of the reminders in His Word about his goodness to me and mine. It's so helpful to read about the character and power of God to heal and restore. Just those two verses up above are enough to bring healing to hurting hearts ridden with disease.

Where are you this month? Pumping fast and strong, healthy and whole? Or do you find yourself just a little heartsick over the last blow that left you low?

He heals hearts that are diseased and he mends broken hearts. It's what he does, it's why he came, and this restoration is ours for the asking.

Just sit back and imagine walking into a room full of red hearts lining the shelves, stuffed with sweets too sweet to imagine and finding one in particular with your name on it. Grab it, open it, sit in a cozy corner and indulge in every piece of His goodness. Savor the flavor, release the anger and bitterness, and allow the sweetness of the Giver to perform radical surgery of the most extreme kind so that you can skip with your hand in his...with no more heart disease or gaping wounds.

He heals ALL our diseases...even those of the heart.

## Healthy Habits – Step Away – by Marcy Lytle

Editing a magazine is no small feat. And it doesn't matter how many times I read through an article, if I'm reading when I'm tired I'm going to miss something. I remember when I published my first book *Catching Fireflies* I didn't think I needed an editor, because I had read the entire book over and over, and just assumed I had caught every error. Imagine my dismay when the book was published, and there were several errors that I missed!

We cannot and will never be able to see every little thing we need to correct when we are constantly doing and reading and going...unless we step away for a while...ask for help...and revisit and rewrite.

How does that translate into healthy living?

- When you're under a heap of laundry day after day and can't see the light, step away and enlist help from your family or friends. Don't be a martyr to housework. Little kids can fold, husbands and put away, friends can come alongside on busy weeks, and guess what else? Laundry doesn't have to be folded at all if that's your life right now! Give yourself a break!
- When you're thinking nothing but negative thoughts about all of your friends and family because you've been around people SO MUCH; just step away for a bit. Say no to that next gathering or meeting or party, and rest by yourself away from the noise and the crowds. It's okay to do that. You're allowed.
- When the to-do list lengthens and the chores never end and life just gets busier and busier, step away on a weekend getaway or day trip and enjoy. Leave the lists and the notes and the schedules behind and do nothing but ride and observe and look and breathe. Take a friend or go alone...but go.
- When sadness and despondency are your only friends day after day and loneliness is more than you can stand, step away from those dark corners of your house where you've retreated. Call up a friend, volunteer and give, or show up at church and greet. Give away your gift of friendship, even if there are no gifts on your doorstep at this time.
- When parents are demanding, kids are pulling, spouses are waiting and the entire world is calling, step away and voice your needs loud and clear. Communicate your need to chill, to retreat, to relax and refresh. They don't know if you don't tell them. And you won't go if you don't speak up and realize that it's good for your health to do so.

There are millions of tiny things in life that become huge heavy weights over time and space, if we aren't cognizant of the fact that we cannot do it all. We were not made to live under stress, but rather under peace.

With my second book, I hired an editor and she caught every mistake my tired eyes could not see. She was awesome. I was relieved. And so very grateful.

Tired eyes, weary bodies and exhausted minds cannot and will not catch the snafus present on the pages of our life that will result in a less than stellar read. Stepping away from that which

tires us out is necessary and healthy and good, and results in clear vision and corrective instruction that makes for a great story to tell.

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## **Life Right Now – Perfect Timing – by Bethany Gomez**

Currently, I live with two of my very best friends. One of them is my older sister, Miranda, and the other is my childhood best friend, Abby. We have lived together for a combined total of about six years now. I have no doubt in my mind and heart that God brought us together for this season of our lives. If finding a total of two amazing rental homes and the timing of both of these is not proof enough, I don't know what is.

For instance, over five years ago we all found ourselves in the same boat. We were three young, single girls living with our parents. One day we began to talk about the possibility of all three of us living together. Where would we live, how could we make this work, was the main topic of conversation between all three of us and God. Thankfully, we didn't have to wait long before God opened a door wide open. Abby's aunt just so happened to own a rental property that (low and behold) was soon to be empty and it was within our budget.

Our time spent together in that small, cozy home was one of the happiest times of my life. We quickly made the space our own and began doing life together with ease, to make it another indication that God meant for us to live together. Even all three of our pets got along. Also, funny enough, our home even got nicknamed, "Angel house," which ultimately made it easier to RSVP for events that all three of us were attending without having to type out all our names. We had so much fun! We celebrated birthdays and holidays, had game nights and started all sorts of new traditions together. We hosted countless events including, but not limited to, movie nights, baby showers, a wedding shower, a bachelorette party, and one epic "parents night out" with all our friends' children. Even more, we held countless ladies bible study nights which, for me, truly were some of my most favorite and memorable moments spent in that home.

About two years in to us becoming roommates, Abby's aunt told us she was going to sell her rental house and move to another state. Around that same time, Abby's older sister was going to have her first baby and she asked Abby to move to Dallas to be their nanny for about the first year of their daughter's life. We were of course sad to no longer live together, but we all had a peace about it because Abby had mentioned that she would move back after she was done being a nanny to her niece. We were hopeful that maybe, just maybe, we could find another place to all live together again. At the time, we didn't really think about the fact that Abby could potentially find her husband up in Dallas or even one of us could find our husbands. God had other plans, though.

When Abby's nanny job was coming to an end and my and my sister's living arrangement was drawing to a close, we got the go-ahead to try and find another rental home. This time around we had a few specific criteria for the next place where we wanted to live. To others it was probably silly little things, but it wasn't silly to God. While Miranda was going around town trying to find a property with a property management agent, she came across a house that had been available for quite some time. Miranda went in, expecting something to be seriously wrong with this place, but it was within our budget and location criteria, so she checked it out. She told us the moment she saw the house she knew this was the one. It had everything we wanted down to the criteria of a larger sink.

It has been almost four years spent in our "practically perfect" second home together and if I had to choose one word to describe our time spent living together, it would have to be the word "compatible," which by its definition between two people or in our case three people, it means "able to have a harmonious relationship; well suited." This is not to say we haven't had our

disagreements over the years, but for the most part we have maintained a peaceful home, been willing to compromise, and quick to make things right.

*Why all the reminiscing, you might ask?*

Well, it was bound to happen eventually. I am so happy to report that Abby is engaged! It was an adorable New Year's Eve proposal. I couldn't be more excited for her even if I tried, but try as I might, I can't help but be sad that our time as roommates is officially coming to an end.

Their story has given me hope. I think it is simply the sweetest, coolest story out there and of course - uniquely theirs. It is a great testimony of how God's timing is perfect.

I am beyond thankful for the time we have had as roommates, and I wouldn't trade it for the world. Rest assured, I will savor and cherish these next several months we have left together as we plan a wedding!

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## **Created for Life - Never Satisfied, yet Content** – by Ginny Hurley

Longing for more of God is a constant in my life as I observe my world and those around me. I want to see sadness wiped out and for violence to cease. I cry out for healing to those in dark situations when I know it is God's heart to heal. I am passionate about our foster system and children in trauma. Teaching school has given me a picture of God's heart for education. Yet I see classrooms overtaken by bullies and out of control students. I long to bring justice in situations, that are in crisis. My heart yearns for those lost without Jesus that don't know His goodness. I cry out when people believe the lies of the enemy and persecute those in truth.

Yet, I have encountered the One who answers every prayer and hears every cry. He loves every single person and grieves with me for each of these situations. He loves like no other and offers hope every time. He loves to heal bodies and hearts too. His plan is for everyone to know His joy and peace, salvation and love.

*“God of Heaven’s Armies, you find so much beauty in your people. They’re like lovely sanctuaries of your presence. Deep within me are these lovesick longings, desires and daydreams of living in union with you. When I’m near you my Heart and my soul will sing and worship with my joyful songs of you, my true source and spring of life!”*

### Psalm 84:1-2 Passion

Our church has a healing ministry for the physically sick, and for the soul and spirit. We minister to people daily and I personally have seen many healed and even more set free from bondage and evil. I have watched faces transform as they realize how loved they are. I have witnessed transformed lives as the enemy's lies have fallen to the ground, replaced with truth and wisdom. Families have been restored and addictions have been broken. I've seen it myself. I love it! I crave it! There is nothing like observing our great big God moving and being uncontainable. *Yet, I long for more.* I applaud the testimonies and dance about when He shows up, but I want to KNOW Him more and be like Him. I realize that when I don't see healing and someone goes home disappointed I long for more of Him. He never disappoints, so I await His promise. He never leaves me. He never lets me down. I cannot answer the things I don't understand, but I choose to trust Him. I am lovesick without His voice. I want more...

*“We are like common clay jars that carry this glorious treasure within, so that the extraordinary overflow of power will be seen as God’s, not ours. Though we experience every kind of pressure, we’re not crushed. At times we don’t know what to do, but quitting is not an option.”*

### 2 Corinthians 4:7-8

Then I realize that the veil has been removed! We've had a permanent impartation of the Holy Spirit. The glory of God living within us is mindboggling. How can this be true?

*“But the moment one turns to the Lord with an open heart, the veil is lifted and they see. Now the Lord I’m referring to is the Holy Spirit, and wherever He is Lord, there is freedom.”*

### 2 Corinthians 3:6-17

Every single time Jesus showed up in His earthly ministry, something happened. He never did things the same way, nor did He do the things His disciples thought He should do. He did what He saw His Father do in heaven and always listened to His voice. And that is what I want to do. I want an abandonment to God that attracts Him. I desire to know him without needing to control, explain, or understand Him. I really do believe Him and I completely know that He is good.

Therefore, I choose to live in this tension of wanting more, yet content in His goodness and overwhelming blessings! I can stand my watch upon the wall with eager eyes and full assurance that He will bring MORE of Himself to my world. He has captured my heart and I want to rest in Him without an agenda. It doesn't make sense that my hunger is content, but the tension between these two words is rest.

As the deer pants for water, so my soul longs for Him.

I will receive a long drink; then thirst again for MORE!

**MARRIAGE**

## **In This Together - Layering Your Marriage – by Charissa Corbin**

Growing up in Texas, all I needed for the winter was maybe a fleece coat. Rarely would the weather require me to have thermal underwear or even multiple layers of clothes. Some winters I spent in flip flops and shorts!

Living in Interior Alaska is a completely different story. Our winter nights have been as cold as 50 below zero and subzero temps can last for weeks at a time. Not only do I have to prepare myself with layers of clothing, -50 rated boots, and thick gloves but I also have to prepare my 2-year old and 4-month old (not an easy task). Layers are key! With temperatures so cold, we can get frostbite quickly if we are not dressed appropriately. Most of the time we are going from the car to some place inside, but even that one-minute walk can chill us all to the bone.

At the beginning of the winter season, I always feel overwhelmed as I'm preparing myself and our family for the day. Don't forget gloves! Or the parka! Do I have foot and hand warmers in case of an emergency? Did I put warm socks on the girls? After several weeks, it starts to become routine and we are prepared to face the day.

Just as I layer my physical body to protect it from the cold, I can't help but think how I can layer my marriage to protect it from the wickedness of this world. Marriages fail every day because - let's face it - marriage is HARD. Our culture has become self-serving and it is no longer about how I can best serve my spouse but rather how I can serve myself. It's important that we layer our marriages every day so that we are ready to face the day together, no matter what comes our way.

Our basic layer should always be God. Keep him at the forefront of our marriages, pray daily for protection, love, and growth. Without Him it would be nearly impossible to keep our marriages warm.

The next layer is communication. Not just, "Hey honey, how was your day?" but deep, engaging conversation. We should always be honest, humble, and consistently patient. As we grow in years, so does our conversation. We can learn how our spouse communicates best and SPEAK that.

If you're looking for a good read on this, I've personally enjoyed the classic book *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman.

Our outer layer should consist of love and service. This is what people see, this is what our children see, and it's important that we act in love and service to one another. Even when it is hard to serve our spouse, we do it. We definitely didn't deserve Jesus' servitude, but He served anyway because He loved us. To love our spouses is to serve them.

Each layer builds on one another.

Work on each one, starting with God and build from there.

Layer your marriage daily because it is precious, it needs protection, and it CAN last against any winter blast...

## **Date Night Fun – Simple and Sweet** – by Marcy Lytle

Sometimes date night doesn't occur because we think it has to be a big production with tickets to some event, a romantic dinner for two atop white tablecloths, as we are both all dressed up in our finest. And that doesn't happen regularly because of finances, time, or just plain weariness from working and kids and well...life. However, date night doesn't always have to be a huge fanfare or a big fuss. Yes, those kinds of dates are fun. But so are dates that are simple and sweet!

Here are five ideas for you and that special someone this month, if funds are low and bodies and minds are tired:

**Peanuts and Popcorn** – A friend gave us two oversized mugs, hot chocolate and marshmallows for Christmas, and we have a large bag of unshelled peanuts in our pantry (in a cute burlap bag), as well. Then we got a new cookbook that has a recipe for salted caramel popcorn. There's the date right there! All we need is a movie on Netflix, a comfy blanket for two, and we have our snacks ready to enjoy. Simple and sweet.

[https://www.samsclub.com/sams/in-shell-peanuts-48-3-oz/prod21363371.ip?&source=ifpla&CAWELAID=730010300001902054&pid=CSE Google P LA 1013572015&wl0=&wl1=g&wl2=c&wl3=260269145953&wl4=pla-414270867050&wl5=9028263&wl6=&wl7=&wl9=pla&wl10=1247713&wl11=online&wl12={productid}&wl13=&wl15=57612602048&wl17=1o2&veh=sem&kclid=241a6dbb-eacb-47c1-931f-fb062051f17a&qclid=EAlaIqobChMIquD3tv\\_d3wIVC0RpCh3iZqtZEAkYAiABEqLyGPD\\_BwE](https://www.samsclub.com/sams/in-shell-peanuts-48-3-oz/prod21363371.ip?&source=ifpla&CAWELAID=730010300001902054&pid=CSE Google P LA 1013572015&wl0=&wl1=g&wl2=c&wl3=260269145953&wl4=pla-414270867050&wl5=9028263&wl6=&wl7=&wl9=pla&wl10=1247713&wl11=online&wl12={productid}&wl13=&wl15=57612602048&wl17=1o2&veh=sem&kclid=241a6dbb-eacb-47c1-931f-fb062051f17a&qclid=EAlaIqobChMIquD3tv_d3wIVC0RpCh3iZqtZEAkYAiABEqLyGPD_BwE)

<https://www.amazon.com/Pull-Up-Chair-Recipes-Family-ebook/dp/B0789JSNRY>

**Coziness and Cuteness** - Surely you have some cozy or cute socks. If you don't, you can find some at the dollar store. For a date night in, require the cozy socks and then set up a cute box. Use a plastic tub, a large plastic popcorn bowl, or even a fun tote and fill it with all things simple and sweet. Include some snacks from World Market that maybe you haven't tried before, a deck of cards for game playing, some cute plates and napkins, and set it in the middle of the floor as you enjoy your evening together.

<https://www.target.com/s/casual+cozy+socks>

<https://www.target.com/p/west-bend-medium-popcorn-bucket/-/A-14224733>

**Mints and Magazines** – Find a place that has mint ice cream, either with chocolate chunks mixed in or peppermint candies crushed and stirred. It can be a gelato shop or a drive-thru like Dairy Queen. Next, either bring unread magazines from home or pick up a couple at your local stores, one that each of you likes. Include highlighters. Enjoy your sweet treats as you each read, highlighting words or pictures or stories of interest. Do this for a bit, and then share what you read. A great night of connecting, simply and sweetly!

<https://www.amazon.com/Trusted-Media-Brands-Inc-Handyman/dp/B00005N7Q1>

<https://www.amazon.com/Meredith-Corporation-Real-Simple/dp/B002PWX1IE>

**Crimson and Clover** – These two words are part of an old song – take a listen! Crimson is a deep red found everywhere this month, so incorporate that into date night. Gather the ingredients to make this crimson drink together and serve in sweet delicate glasses. Don't have any? There are plastic versions at the dollar store! Print out this recipe for cloverleaf dinner rolls and make them together, as well. Add a few other things like cheeses and meats, if you like, and you have a simply sweet date night all ready to enjoy!

<https://aseasyasapplepie.com/cloverleaf-dinner-rolls/>

<https://www.geniuskitchen.com/recipe/crimson-drink-355068>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GpGEeneO-t0>

**Drink and Drive** – No, not the drinking until drunk and the driving recklessly – but rather going for a pleasure ride and enjoying sips along the way! Make this an afternoon date while the sun is still up and line out a nice drive away from town, perhaps an hour out and an hour back. Find three drive-through stops for different three different drinks along the way. There might be choices like sodas, milkshakes, and stopping for flavored waters or slushes. Since you're drinking so much, just provide nuts for snacking with your sips. Simply fun, sweet, and special!

<http://digg.com/2018/we-tried-every-hint-water-flavor-these-are-the-10-best>

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## **After 30 Years – All Toned Up** – by Marcy Lytle

I know that millions of women on January 1 decidedly made goals to be more fit this year, to tone up those legs and arms and abs, because they felt they overate during the holidays and needed to start new. I'm sure that's a good thing for all of us to, to stay toned and tight, by exercising and eating right! However, this article is not about that kind of toning up. It's about the tone of our voices!

Here's the scene:

"Whatcha doing?" she says, as she lovingly caresses his neck and peers over his shoulder to see what it is he's reading at the table.

He pauses and gazes into her eyes and replies, "Nothing important," as he holds her near and asks what it is she needs him to do.

*Is that the normal scene at your house?*

Some days, mine looks more like this:

"WHAT are you doing?" I query, as I realize he's propped in front of his laptop and I need him to get up and get moving on my to-do list I handed him an hour ago. I say it with emphasis on the what, with a tone that is accusatory, and with an eye that is evil.

He doesn't pause, he gives me a look, and his tone is stern as he replies, "Can I answer an urgent work email? Geez!"

That tone with emphasis on the *WHAT* instead of lightly on the *whatcha* makes all the difference in the world! One is curiously interested, and the other is determinedly condemning.

I'm really good at ugly tones when I'm tired, have too much on my plate, or when I'm irritated and unforgiving about something else totally unrelated to the matter at hand.

One of my goals this year (and every year, sigh...) is to work on my tone of voice, even more than my toned legs and arms.

Tone can reveal a loving sound that invites a sweet response.

Tone can reveal an ugly snarl that evokes a rise and a ruckus.

So how do we tone up our voices and our sounds?

For me, I have to do several things, and I have to do these things daily, not just once and be done:

- I need to rest
- I need to let go
- I need to pray for him
- I need to realize he has things to do

- I need to stop and think before I speak

If I take a pause and do these things, it helps me question in a tone of curiosity seeking an answer, rather than a tone of shame seeking retribution.

And that, my friend, makes all the difference in the world as to whether or not we have a good and fun day after he closes out his window and I close my mouth.

**ENCOURAGEMENT**

## Simple Truths - Football and Promises – by Erica Simmons

God can use the things we care about to teach us some of our most important lessons...

### The Dallas Cowboys

This is the team I used to love to cheer against, until three years ago when Dak Prescott was drafted by them. You see, Dak was the quarterback at Mississippi State where I went to college. It is funny how one person has made me personally invest in this team. I started following people on Twitter who reported on the Dallas Cowboys, I tracked training camp progress and even watch the draft in its entirety this past year. I was surrounded by Dallas Cowboy fans at work, who love to talk the game of football, and it was great until the losing started. This year, when they were 3 and 3, I had a gut feeling they would go 10 and 6. To get my prediction on record, I told one of my co-workers so that I could brag later when it came true. To cap such a statement, I rattled off which games they would win and which ones they would lose. In the end, God used something that I cared a lot about to teach me a lesson about my life following Him.

As the season began to unfold, this month's story began to grow. Right out of the gate they lost two games in a row. They are now 3 and 5 and can only lose one more game out of the 8 remaining games, games I stated they would lose. Immediately doubt started to creep in. What was I thinking! As a former Dallas Cowboys anti-fan, these were the games I used to love to watch. Now they are the ones that frustrate me, just like the decades-old Cowboy fans. Then I watch a 5 game win streak, winning two games I said they would lose. The games were close and filled with really good moments, really frustrating moments, but in the end were victories. They were 8 and 5 and only had to win 1 more game to win their division and claim a spot in the playoffs. They lost the next week, but won the final two, to win the division and make the playoffs. Their final record? 10 and 6. *So I was right, right?*

Not exactly, but I did win something more valuable than the right to gloat about having the final record correct.

Around week 13, a light of knowledge began to glow in this situation. As I was watching the Saints game (one which I had them losing by the way), thoughts began to form on the parallels of my prediction and my life of faith. Hear me out on this. Jesus used parables in His time walking the earth, not because He liked telling stories. Telling stories allowed Him to take things the people knew and understood and connect them to the lesson He wanted to teach them. I will go out on a limb and say the Holy Spirit did the same thing here. Point in case, I never got a gut feeling about which games the Cowboys would win, but nevertheless I chose which games I thought they could win. This is important, because how many times has God told us something was going to happen and the next thing we know we are mapping a course of action as to how this will come about? For me that answer is *way too many times*.

A few months ago, I shared a story in one of my columns about my friend at work whose husband was diagnosed with cancer and how I was led by God to declare his healing. For me that was the end of it. I thought that he would get nothing but good news from that point on. You see, I mapped how God was going to make his healing complete. The truth of the matter he has been going through treatment and life has not been the easiest on them. Does that make what God told me to do and the fact that he is healed wrong? No, God gave me a command and the faith to stand on what He has told me to be truth. I don't get to map the way to the truth. It is the

same thing I did with the Cowboys' record. I had a feeling of the final outcome, but that was not enough. I had to be in control of how they got to 10 and 6.

*Ah, Erica, that is just you and your fanciful thinking.*

Well let's go to the ultimate authority, the Bible.

### Abraham and Sara

What did God tell them? He told them they would have a son. That was truth God tells us in His word, that He is not a liar (Numbers 23:19). Same thing happened to Abraham and Sara as it did to me. They were not content with holding on in faith to the truth that God gave them. *Hogwash Erica, how could you know that?* It is evident in their behavior, which finally led to Sara offering up her servant to "help" God with His promise. Ever wonder why God didn't just walk away from them after that fiasco? He couldn't because He said He would give them a son and remember - He can't lie. So even when we don't deserve it, God is ever so faithful to us. This week in our women's discipleship meeting, our leader talked about how we don't get a glimpse into the back story of the Bible. Even though we don't, I can't imagine that Abraham and Sara wouldn't have learned more than how to trust God. I know I did.

- I learned that I picked out the path of what I thought was the easiest. What I was reminded of was that "All things are possible for those who believe." (Mark 9:23) This happened when the Cowboys beat the New Orleans Saints in week 13. No one gave them a chance to win that game. It was awesome.
- I learned that even though no matter what the situation looks like, I can hold fast to my faith (Hebrews 10:23). This happened times two in the Giants game. They were down by seven and it was 4<sup>th</sup> and 20. They won the game and that gave them the final record at 10 and 6. The Dallas Cowboys' season record holds no consequences in the big picture of life, but this lesson God taught me with something that was important to me does.

These are lessons I have and will continue to apply to the promises God has given me, like the promises about my boys' lives. As a parent, the biggest thing I want to do is map my young men's lives. This lesson has taught me that if I could, I would deprive them of oh so many lessons their Heavenly Father wants to teach them. They would miss out on the joy of watching the impossible become possible, they would miss out on watching their darkest hour turn to light, and they would miss out on developing and establishing their relationship with their Heavenly Father.

Knowing this, I can easily step out of the way.

## Firmly Planted - Spark of Joy – by Dina Cavazos

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It's hard to believe we're in the second month of the New Year already! This year, 2019, I'm expecting the mission I've been on to simplify and de-clutter will become Mission Accomplished. The gentle prods—which are becoming more like shoves—are enough, but a new Netflix series is helping to motivate and inspire me to complete my goal. The sweet, soft-spoken Asian hostess has developed a method; one of the key things being to keep only what gives a “spark of joy”. That resonates with me. Finally, after many years, I'm getting it, and I'm excited about where this will lead...because everything we do leads somewhere, right?

My nature is to be frugal, to save, recycle, repurpose, etc. ad nauseum—to the point of washing and reusing plastic bags, and recovering items thrown away in my adult kids' trash. (Yes, I confess to having done this!) This, and other hazards of being human, has brought me to the place I've been moving away from for a few years...years, because it takes time to realize some things, because it takes time to change ingrained habits, because life changes...because God is gracious like that. But he's also serious about business and I have to admit I've dilly-dallied a bit. That explains the shoves.

Going through my closet, there's not a lot that gives me joy. Flannel shirts, boots and sandals, jeans and comfy sweats, and a very few recently purchased tops— I'm sizzling with joy! But my waste-not nature makes it hard to cull out the downers. I realize that I've bought a lot of things haphazardly because of price and appeal without a thought to coordination. I've settled for things that aren't really comfortable because they were more affordable, and bought things that weren't really “me”; consequently, they sit in my closet unworn, receipt long gone or out of date. What a waste and what a shame! Of course I give them to someone or donate, but still...I want to be a better steward of my resources. You clothes people out there—no judgment, but I also realize I don't really need as many clothes as I have—I wear pretty much the same things and my social world is mostly the creatures in the garden.

Through this process of simplifying I'm learning a lot about myself: my habits, my wrong thinking, my misplaced values, what I really value, who I really am, and what I really love. I'm getting on track to run on my rail and it feels good. That “spark of joy” is an affirmation that I'm going the right direction.

So what's the ultimate value of this? It's not to have fewer clothes in my closet or to have everything neatly folded. That has earthly value, but what's the eternal value? For me, it's of eternal value to be who God made me to be; it's of eternal value to follow his direction because he knows what's best for me; it's of eternal value to be mindful of what I'm doing and why I'm doing it; it's of eternal value to use the resources he's given me wisely. The “spark of joy” ignites the flame of my true self—the part of me that connects to God and is at peace and rest there. I think it's so kind of God to want us to be who we are—to have made us each unique and to be able to reflect that in our tastes, our desires, our gifts, our personalities.

My life isn't your life—God is doing something unique and important in each of us. I share my experience to encourage you in whatever place you're in right now. Whatever it is, if you **love**

**and seek what is true and right and good—which is God**—he’s working to move you from that place to another because he wants the best and is always working to get us there. Believe it, look for it, listen to your inner longings, and find the “spark of joy” that brings you peace.

## **Moving Forward - What Do You Want? – by Pam Charro**

It's a question I believe the Lord has asked me several times throughout my life, and it always brings mixed feelings:

Joy that he is speaking to me,  
Hesitation because I don't have a quick answer,  
And the tiniest bit of apprehension because I realize he wants me to give a responsible answer.

See, if someone not fond of me asks that question, I know I probably want to end the interaction fairly quickly. And if a magic genie were to ask, I might say that I'd like a million dollars or endless dark chocolate. But when God asks, it's different; I know he really wants me to think about it, because he's the one friend who loves me perfectly, but is also capable of bringing about what I want.

The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 3:21-23 that in Christ we are given all things. So if Father is asking me what I want, I suppose another way he might word it would be,

"What kind of faith do you have in who I am,  
who I say you are,  
and the kind of life that is available to you?"

The question gently implies that I have dreams I am not yet living. So I must ask myself why.

I believe that God is glorified when I live the life that he put me here to live, and that many of my gifts and desires are seeds that he planted in order to make himself known. But those seeds will never grow into anything if I don't have the faith and courage to live out those dreams. And it's scary. What if I fail?

I heard a quote recently that I really like:

"If you think you are capable of God's plan for your life, then you have no idea how big it is."

I'm convinced that when God asks me what I want, it's a challenge to dream bigger. But it's also an invitation to watch him do what only he can do so that those dreams come true.

So I must think, pray, and carefully consider my response. And then be prepared to put my whole heart into living what I say I believe.

So ... what do I want?

#

## **Bits and Pieces – A Fun Follow – by Marcy Lytle**

“I love your makeup...tell us all about it!”

This was a comment I saw on an Instagram feed from a celebrity, and actually I see it a lot on all sorts of feeds of those who are high profile faces on social media. Perhaps a person is high profile because of their food expertise and gain followers because of that. All of a sudden women desire to be like that person, to own the same kitchen tools, to be creative with leftovers...and then to wear what she wears and shop where she shops, etc. Joanna Gaines is a high-profile face on social media, and many want to copy her style in clothing and decorating.

I too think it's fun to follow others and what they're doing for inspiration and creativity. It's great to try out new styles and recipes and gadgets and gifts. It's a good thing to see a beautiful wreath, for example, made by someone on social media and to then copy that inspiration for one to fit our own home! It's also great to try out new makeup products that are promoted as being anti-aging, or ones that give that smoky eye we want to try...

But, wait!

This following and idolizing and adoring these other women who have what we don't have can become an obsession. Just take a few moments and read the comments below one of these people's posts. Women ask personal questions like how to become “zero waste” during their periods, to asking advice on how to raise their children to be planet-conscious, to how to slim down and tone up so they can look as good as the person they're following and so on...

If that's you, or if that's me, following and desiring and adoring and wanting to be like someone else, it's okay as long as...that's not our passion and identity!

I long for the day when I see on someone's feed this question,

“I love your heart and compassion...where did you get that?”

We are a society that wants all sorts of material things, possessions that give us order and youth, and ways to make us eternally young and intellectual. Women everywhere want to look good and feel good about themselves. I do too! Don't you?

I'm realizing, however, that if I'm not careful I will focus too much on what I see in the mirror and in my kitchen and on my body and forget to see what's in my heart. I want to realize the mess in the corner of my heart that hates instead of loves. I want to make that area of my mind that's cluttered with fear and guilt more organized with thoughts of peace and His love. And I definitely want to clean the windows of my soul so that I can look out and see others instead of the dust on my own curtains!

I'm on social media, I follow all sorts of interesting people, and I can get caught in the stream of reading and wishing and desiring to be like someone else if I'm not careful. I love to copy a good organizing tip or try out a suggested recipe or purchase the latest mascara that fills my lashes. However, I hope to this year follow quotes that talk about His goodness to my neighbor and ways of showing kindness to the unkind. I hope that someone's selfless act of love inspires

me to do the same, and that I can read and grow in giving and living outside the confines of my home that I'm decorating and the closets that I'm filling.

There's nothing wrong with a fun follow and a question of interest. It's exhilaratingly fun. But there's something so right about a fun follow with an answer of hope and love. That's exhilaratingly fun, as well!

## **Real Stories - A Diamond in the Mud - by Vivian Nichols**

It was one of those fantastic summer days when all seemed well with the world. Spending the day with our 22 year-old son Jared and two teenagers, Crystal and Seth, out on Lake Palestine and riding Jared's Sea-Doo was an absolute thrill. The weather was remarkable, as if we'd special-ordered it from above. Water temperatures were perfect, and we made the most of it all: the fellowship with our kids, the beautiful lake setting, and the clean, fresh air. We were living our dream!

Late that afternoon, we loaded up and headed home in order to clean up for a family get-together that evening at my sister's. Because we were in a rush when we reached the house, we quickly took baths, changed clothes, grabbed a bite to eat, and left the dishes in the sink. Then it was off to Deborah's house.

The whole family was there, my parents, my sisters' families, my brother, and all of the grandkids and great-grandkids of my parents. There was quite a crew. I remember getting down on the floor and playing with my niece's baby and small children. Suddenly, as I raked my hand across the carpet, my wedding ring prong caught in the carpet fibers, and I was stunned to realize that my large diamond was missing! This was the wedding ring that I had worn for twenty-five years.

Frantically, down on my hands and knees, I began searching the breadth and width of the floor, assuming it had to be there. It wasn't. I was devastated. It took only a few minutes for us to comb the entire house, unfortunately, with no success.

My heart sank because deep down inside, I knew it was covered in mud at the bottom of Lake Palestine. Despondent, I rode quietly home with my husband, Gary, and the kids. All I could think about was that diamond. "Why, oh why did I wear my ring to the lake? Why was I so stupid?" My mind was on rewind and replay modes, but I also knew I had hardly taken it off in the 25 years we had been married, not even to bathe.

Arriving home without an ounce of gumption, I drug myself to the kitchen and forced myself to wash the dishes. There was nothing at all I could do to change the situation. I knew this for a fact. As I stood there washing, I decided that I would just leave it in God's hands. There was nothing else I could do, so why torture myself? With this thought, I drew in a deep breath of air and my shoulders relaxed. "I need to just trust...I need to just..." I thought. "I need to...I need to pee!"

The next thing I knew, I was in the bathroom. You know, there's something very humbling about sitting on the toilet. What better place to just open up and let it all out there, just bare your soul? I bowed my head, leaned down to my lap, closed my eyes and began to pray. "Lord, it's not the material value of the diamond; although, you know we can't possibly afford to buy another one, but it's the sentimental value. Even if we could afford to buy another one, it wouldn't be the same. Please, please let me find it."

Still in a prostrated position and slowly opening my eyes, I was face-to-face with this brilliant, sparkling stone. There it lay, next to my bath towel. Apparently, when I had taken a bath earlier that evening, the towel had caught the loose stone and pulled it out.

During my life, I have had many prayers answered, but this was undoubtedly the fastest one ever answered. My soul soared to new heights that night. In my excitement to show my husband, I nearly dropped it. Then I would have kicked myself. I know that a diamond is only a compressed piece of coal, but what it symbolizes means more and will last through the ages, even after we're gone.

#

**FRESH THYME**

## **FRESH THYME – Annoyed at the Table – by Marcy Lytle**

It was New Year's Eve and we (four of us) had started a puzzle about 10:30 pm hoping to finish it by midnight. I'd say we had about 50 pieces left to place, when a stranger walked up to our table and started commenting on where to place this and that. She hovered over our shoulders and said things about how she's a very good puzzle worker, she told us how to sort and organize, and began picking up our pieces and telling us where they went!

Needless to say, she was annoying!

We all were nice to this woman, but I think we were all relieved when she got a call and had to exit the coffee shop.

I realized that I do not like strangers hovering and honing in on my space! I especially do not like strangers who think they know it all and proceed to talk about that knowledge...

One of the goals of the church where I attend is to reach those outside the church through kindness and intentional acts of love. After all, that's what loving Christ is all about – loving others. I really have to work at loving others, at least those who are annoying (in my estimation.)

When that lady hovered over our table, she introduced herself, she was friendly, and I'm certain she meant no harm. Each of us told her our names and that only encouraged her to stand near us longer! I honestly at one point wanted to slap her hand away when she picked up a piece and had the audacity to instruct on puzzle-working!

One of the things I've learned over the years is that while others certainly are annoying sometimes, I can be annoying myself. I may not hover and spout of knowledge, but I can get on a soap box about issues, I can easily become irritated when I'm tired, and I can certainly be annoying if I'm not having a good time somewhere!

We all have annoyances. And yet...we're told to love others as we love ourselves.

It shouldn't be a hard task, but it is sometimes. I wanted to shoo that lady away, but none of did that. We talked to her and conversed and even thanked her for placing a few pieces of the puzzle. And yes, some of that nicety was forced and not genuine at all.

I'm thinking that if I learn to practice kindness this month, the month of love, it will soon be something I enjoying offering instead of grimacing when it's not comfortable. Or maybe, it will still be hard to be kind to some people, those that grate on my nerves.

Are there annoying people hovering around your table? Are they putting their hands into something you've been creating and messing up the picture you had in mind?

Join me in a quest to be intentionally kind, especially to the annoying ones. And join me in giving thanks that He is kind to us every day, when we are annoyingly doubting, mistrusting and disobeying...for no good reason at all.

## **FRESH THYME – Capture the Moments – by Marcy Lytle**

I was waiting on my husband to arrive home so that we could slip out to a movie, when he opened the front door and called to me, “Come outside.” That was not the usual way he arrived home, and I ran to the front of the house expecting to see something odd or unusual in our yard or on the porch. I stepped outside and he pointed across the street where the sun was setting behind the houses. The view was breathtakingly beautiful, with the fiery reds and oranges and yellows in the sky, so much amazement that I had to take this photo.

Immediately, I posted this picture on Facebook so that all of my friends could see, in case they hadn’t stepped out and observed the beauty of this day’s sunset. A winter sunset like that doesn’t happen that often, not one with those vibrant colors that blanket the entire sky. So I posted and we went to the movies.

As we were going to bed, I scrolled through Facebook and saw that multiple people captured that sunset and although all photos were similar in color, every one of them was a bit different as they captured a different second or minute of the sun setting in their particular neighborhood.

I told my husband, “It was there. And then it was gone.”

The sunset takes place and we have to capture it, or within just a few minutes it’s completely gone and darkness settles in, in its place.

There’s got to be a lesson learned just from capturing the moments of the sun setting. There’s got to be some encouragement and wonder and awe and faith that take place after witnessing such a wonderful view.

- The sun rises and sets every day, without fail, and so do his mercies.
- The beauty of the sunset is often missed, when we don’t step out to see it. We must open our doors.
- The spectacular handiwork in the sky needs to be shared so that others and awe and wonder, too.
- The colors of the sunset cannot be replicated or caught in a bottle, but must be enjoyed when seen.
- The sunset happens just before darkness, but then the moon appears to light the dark sky.
- The reminders in the sky of a power that is greater than any other are comforting and faith-building.

When is the last time you were called to observe the beauty of the sky, or stepped out your front door to witness a sunset, or used your phone to capture creation?

I was stunned and in awe of that beauty, and apparently people were everywhere in our city, as photos of that miraculous moment were on the news just before bedtime. His reminders of His power and creativity in color in the skies are there, if we just observe them and breathe deeply at his care over this world and over us.

Capture the moments, call others to see them too, and do it quickly...before darkness settles in. And then do it again and again as the sun rises and sets, establishing his faithfulness to the world that He loves.

#

## **FRESH THYME - Counting Comments** – by Marcy Lytle

It seems we have become a world, at least for a good majority, of people who look at social media to see if anyone commented or liked our last post. Because of the type of business *A Bundle of THYME* is, social media is important in getting the word out of a new article and obtaining followers and readers. Therefore, we post often on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. And very often I'm asked how many followers and readers we have.

There are days when I get on these social media platforms to see if there has been any interaction on our posts, and sometimes there is and sometimes there isn't. There are all sorts of ways to post things that make them more visible, like using good quality photos, adding proper hashtags, and then there's always the content, too. We can see the accounts of others, especially on Instagram, and observe that they get tens of thousands of likes compared to our tens of likes.

It's really mind-boggling, exhausting, and quite impossible to stay afloat with counting comments and likes in the social media world without being consumed with that world.

Recently, I thought about how much time is spent by so many looking for comments and affirmation on what is posted or shared. I realized that we don't spend near as much time looking for that affirmation and for those comments from the only ONE who really matters.

Our self-worth doesn't come from what others say about us, how often they affirm us, or even if they notice and like our latest recipe, words of wisdom, or photos of our adorable dog.

Here are some incredible affirmations found in his Word:

Psalm 139:17, 18

How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them!  
If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand.  
When I awake, I am still with You.

Psalm 40:5

Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders which You have done,  
And Your thoughts toward us;  
There is none to compare with You.  
If I would declare and speak of them,  
They would be too numerous to count.

Romans 5:7,8

For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Psalm 149:1

The LORD called Me from the womb;  
From the body of My mother He named Me.

All we have to do is search His words for countless affirmations and likes and comments towards us, his children, those he loves and cares for.

February is a month where people count comments and look for affirmation and love from those in their lives, they hope for the one they love to pour out their love and affection in gifts and experiences, and they pine and long for the love their heart desires. We're made to be loved, and it's normal to seek to be loved.

However, counting comments on social media is not the place to receive that affirmation. Those comments can be bought, sometimes our posts are not even seen, and what we post and share with strangers behind a screen is not what makes us or breaks us.

I decided a long time ago to not subscribe to statistic counting features for this magazine. I feel as though this magazine is an act of obedience to share encouragement with women, and the affirmation that comes from obedience is the best affirmation to have.

God loves you, and He loves me, with a love like no other. He comments about it often, and all we have to do is believe it and receive it.

Go on. Count His comments above and search His word for more. Then just enjoy social media for what it is, and post that picture of your adorable pet for the pure pleasure of sharing...whether anyone likes with a cute emoji face or not.

## **FRESH THYME – Neither Does Joy – by Marcy Lytle**

Sadness arrives at our doorsteps uninvited, doesn't it? If we just sit in the theater week after week, we watch stories of sadness of the most depressing kind. We recently watched *Beautiful Boy*, a film about a young man and his dad, and the struggles of addiction. Another movie called *Ben is Back* is another tale of a mother's love for her son struggling with the same thing...addiction. We also saw the film *Shoplifters*, a tale of a very poor family struggling to make ends meet, and how all of their "baggage" catches up with them, even though they love and are loved...

Sadness is on the television screen, in the newspapers, and on our screens. The main stories are not ones that uplift, but rather ones that scare, hype and sadden the very core of our hearts. Another shooting has occurred, a child has gone missing, or a new type of disease is killing children. Most of the sitcoms we watch are stories about families with only one parent, because that's the norm now – one parent families. If we watch and read constantly, we carry around a heavy heart at all of the sadness in the world.

Yes, sadness waits for no one. It shows up without an invitation and stays in our homes too long, after devastation has occurred. Floods come and we lose our things, disease ravages and we watch our families suffer, and then loss of relationship happens and our hearts ache.

But, wait!

There's a flip side – there's joy!

Joy arrives, too, if we take time to notice it, and it too arrives at our doorsteps daily and minute by minute, if we dare to open the door and let it in. In fact, joy is more intrusive, more impacting, and has more longevity than sadness!

- We can consider trials and count it joy – so that means joy can supersede sadness of the saddest kind. (James 1: 2,3)
- Those who love Him have an eternal outcome of joy, but it's not so with those who don't. (Proverbs 10:28)
- There's a joy that awaits us that is inexplicable and glorious. I want that! (1 Peter 1: 8,9)
- All of heaven rejoices when one person says, "I believe," and we can rejoice too! (Luke 15:7)
- When we are weak, his joy gives us strength. (Nehemiah 8:10)
- Gladness and joy overtake us and send sadness and sighing away! (Isaiah 35:10)
- NO ONE can steal our joy. (John 16:22)

Sadness doesn't wait and doesn't stay away while we're here on this earth, but neither does joy! It's ours for the asking, for the leaping, and for the long-haul...forever and ever. Sorrow might last for a night, but joy comes with the morning light...

If sadness is your visitor at this time, take time to mourn and express sorrow. That's healthy. But never forget that joy is relentless and yours. And though sadness sometimes seems it won't let go...neither will joy! It's here to stay and it sends sadness away...