

A BUNDLE OF
THYME
For Every Season

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TIPS

Seven for You – Indulgence in the Drive-Thru – by the Panel

There are times when we all (well at least I think we all) grab fast food somewhere because it's easy, tastes good and fills that spot for comfort even if it's not the "best" choice. And I think that's a-okay! So we asked our Panel, "What's your favorite fast food, the place, the order, and why? And any story or how you enjoy it?" Fast food is there because it's just that...it's fast, fun, convenient and (usually) way cheaper than restaurant fare. And it's there for the enjoyment...at least once in a while.

My one treat is Taco Bell. I don't eat meat these days, but in my mind, tacos don't count...lol. Taco Bell reminds me of my senior year in high school. We were allowed to leave campus for lunch, finally! We didn't have much money, so I could only go once or twice a month. We would walk (run) down the hill to the Taco Bell and get our 25-cent treats. It was a simple memory of feeling like an adult, with \$2.00 to spend with my friends. It was one of the rites of passage, I remember fondly.

When I treat myself at Taco Bell now, it is still special as I only do it once a year. Lots of memories in a simple taco. I wish they would bring back the Bell Beefer; that would be marvelous! – Cathy

My favorite fast food is Tony C's pizza. They make a New York style pizza that is delicious! On Tuesdays, they offer buy one, get one free pizzas. They also offer pizza by the slice and have excellent salads. This is where I am celebrating my birthday on the 5th! Whoop!

I also enjoy Taco Palenque. Their charro beans....oh my goodness! Drool! I also like that they have a salsa bar to doctor up your tacos. I usually choose a plate that has steak and guacamole on the tacos, then add all the yummys from the salsa bar. I will say, however, that it's always too hot in that store. They need some shades for their windows!

Lastly, when I feel I need a salad, I think Chick-fil-A's side salad is the perfect size. I also get a 5 piece fried nuggets to add to my salad (gotta balance out all that healthy lettuce!). – Laura

Fast Food! Well, I've had my share over the years..I love a Whataburger breakfast. If we are leaving in the morning, on a road trip, we often drive through Whataburger on our way out of town. Their taquito is so yummy with just the right ratio of tortilla and filling. I also love their biscuits and gravy. Another Whataburger favorite is their variety of milkshakes, Dr Pepper shake being my favorite. -

If going to McDonalds, I would like a Filet-O-Fish and Mocha Frappe, please. I'm not a huge fan of French fries. But, I think theirs are the best fast food fries.I also like a Subway BLT or a Thundercloud Avocado Sub. But, my favorite fast food is...Starbucks Grande Caramel Frappuccino with extra caramel drizzle. In the past I've been accused of being addicted to them. - Gina

I'm not much for fast food, but not long ago it was Whataburger and Schlotzsky's...two restaurants I missed terribly when living in California. Two restaurants I grew up with in Texas. Back then, I had the regular large Whataburger and the large original Schlotzsky sandwich and ate every bit of both of them! Now, on the rare occasion that I have a hamburger or sandwich, it's a Whataburger Jr and a small original Schlotzsky's. Age does that to one, doesn't it? We can't seem to eat as much as we used to! – Anita

Tacos and salad with meat on it are my favorite go-to's! So, in our town, we have a very mediocre Taco Bell, but all is not lost because we have a long-time, family-owned Taco Bravo! An independent, 2-store establishment since the 70's, which my kids (now in their 40's) practically lived at when they were teens. We used to joke that they had refried beans in their veins instead of blood. You'll get a very full, flavorful taco of nothing but REAL chopped up ground beef, tons of real grated cheese and lettuce, in a crispy shell. Thursdays are \$1.29 taco days! I asked the owner how many tacos they sell on Thursdays and he said about 4000! Whew, that's a LOT of tacos!

My second go-to is a nice salad with protein on it. Beef, chicken or shrimp. Those are harder to find at a fast-food place, so I usually have to go to a sit-down restaurant for a good one of those. ONCE in a great while, if I'm in a pinch, I will order a fish sandwich at McDonald's, but they've shrunk the fish patty so much over the years it's become hard to find the fish on the bun! WHAT? - Debbie

My favorite fast food is McDonalds, for sure. I order a small cheeseburger, a small fry, and a small coke with extra ice. And I pull over and park in the shade and eat in the car, and scroll or read. Another favorite is Chick Fil A's ice cream (tastes homemade to me), and I share my husband's waffle fries. We grab this treat sometimes on a weeknight for dinner, when we're tired from the day. And then we walk at the mall (to make ourselves feel better.) I've been known to down a small Schlotzky's original with a bag of jalapeno chips. The best. As for my husband, he loves the DQ peanut buster parfait. Have you had one? We're so sad that the DQ nearest our house closed! – Marcy

My husband and I don't eat fast food much. He has health issues that stop us from doing that, although I love a good Chick-fil-A chicken nugget, or a taco from anywhere. We mostly order from restaurants about once a week when our kids are here, but we eat as healthy as possible, like salmon and broccoli. But what I have gotten into and get every week when I go to town is Smoothie King! I love the Slim-N-Trim 20-ounce chocolate smoothie with the enhancer, Immune Support and Vitamin D. It serves as my lunch while I'm running around doing my shopping and I know I'm eating healthily. – Carole

The new Chipotle in our neighborhood has an option to order from the app and drive through to pick it up. It's lightning fast. Several of the restaurants feel like fast food restaurants if you can use the app and it's ready when you get there. Our favorites would be Chipotle, Chick-fil-A, Hop Doddy's, or Smoky MO's BBQ. - Shelley

In the Kitchen – Meal Time Formula – by Marcy Lytle

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

Things to have on hand for easy meals:

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

Ideas for putting these things together:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A bowl

A pizza

A pile up

A trio

A sandwich

A jazzed up prepared meal

A leftover creation

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

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

Hope this helps!

Cousin Moms – Here and There (Saving and Spending) – by Charissa and Kamrin

It's a huge topic for families – saving and spending – and how to do both. We are hitting this hard because it's a hard life for so many parents and kids, as they navigate all the expenses that come with raising a family. And yet, life goes on, and we eat and we drink and we have fun – somehow. We asked the cousin moms how they manage finances and save here and there, or if they do, and their honest answers are the best.

Charissa

The cost of living has dramatically increased over the years! My husband and I were traveling on vacation with the kids last week, and went through Chick-Fil-A (which we love), and it was nearly \$50 for us all to eat. It was an "aha" moment of realizing how much the cost of everything has increased. Even owning a dental practice, all of our supplies, vendors, etc. have increased their fees. Here are a few small ways we try and save when we can:

- **Shopping @ Aldi.** We recently got an Aldi in our town and the prices are a lot more affordable than some of the bigger name grocery stores - especially for meat & produce. They even have some unique gifts/home decor - new every week. Snack items for the kids are great here too! You won't find too many name brand items, so if you are looking for a particular brand, you should stick with the main grocery store.
- **Limit Eating Out:** With a family of 5, even with younger kiddos, meals are expensive! It does take time & effort to plan out meals for the week based on our schedule, but I find that if I set aside time to do this, it saves me money from running through a drive through, and the mental load of worrying what to do for dinner.
- **Splitting Meals:** When we do eat out, I try to have the kids split meal items (as our little girls don't each much!), and sticking with water as a drink (which is generally free). You may want to check into KIDS EAT FREE nights at restaurants. A lot of restaurants offer this service, or a discounted meal certain days of the week.
- **Personal Gel Nail Kit:** With three girls, we are always asked if they can go get their nails done. There are times we may treat them to this for special occasions but in the in-between times, I have loved my own gel-nail kit! Some friends & family gifted me with it for my birthday last year, and it has saved us a lot of money at the nail salon! If buying it yourself, it is a little bit of an investment but in the long run it saves you.
- **Clothing:** Kids SHARE clothes! A perk of having the same gender of kids, is they can pass down their clothes. We try to do this as much as possible. Also, Walmart has really stepped-up their fashion with Wonder Nation brand - fairly good quality, cute, and cheap! If you haven't checked them out, definitely do.
- **Free Activities:** There are so many ways you can adventure with your kids and not break the bank. We live in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park - with a ton of available hikes, we love to just pick up and go explore. Free activity, good exercise, and gets us outdoors. Also, our local library usually provides plenty of free activities to partake in!

Living life is expensive, but just remember you don't have to have a lot to make amazing memories.

Kamrin

I will be honest. This is a hard topic, because I do not like talking about finances. It has been a point of frustration for years, even before all of the inflation! I have learned quite a bit about myself – I'm terrible at saving money.

In our marriage, we have to work on things together. My husband is not really a spender. I am a spender and it's the way I show my heart to people – I love to give gifts to others, my family, friends, etc. However, I do this sometimes to the detriment of our own finances. However, with things being so expensive, I need to be a good steward of my money. Not sure I can answer this well, as it's a constant daily discipline I struggle with.

I think it's important to save for my children, their legacy, and I wouldn't be where I am without my grandparents and my parents be there in our corner, for us. Finances have been really hard for us since my husband lost his job and shifted several years ago. Even with raises, we don't stay up with inflation, and we are counting pennies.

It's hard with three kids and one main income. I try hard to stay home, fully invested. I know many work outside the home full-time, but I'm not made for that. Coming home to all the activities at night with three kids, I mentally and in every way cannot manage. I can't pour out all day long and give at night. On paper, though, one income is not easy.

There are days when I don't know how we're paying this or doing this. So now, I'm substitute teaching, and have an affiliate marketing business. It's hard to juggle these flexible jobs, but enables me to be a present mom. The cost of gas and groceries and living is hard. Some days, I want to cry.

In the middle of all this, God has been present. On days when I don't know how we are going to pay, we get an escrow payment or an increase in my business, or lots of little things that give us what we need. That's what keeps me going. But YES, I need to be better at saving, and do I struggle with spending? YES. I want to take the kids to get a drink, and we have a roof over our heads, we have food and my kids get to do a lot. I don't know how, because it doesn't add up.

I'm grateful for God, as he is with me especially at the grocery store. I try to make cuts, but I'm not sure how in some areas! However, we are grateful and blessed in these struggles.

So while I'm not good at saving, cutting, etc. I admit it. I often live in the moment, and I need to find a balance, and it's not easy. I'm still growing and I'm grateful that he meets us where we are. Even when I make mistakes, He has been there. Unexpected ways of provision have come, every time, more than enough. And we still have opportunities to give.

So no matter where you are, with lots of kids or none, every family is different and values different things. Whatever it is for you, to save and learn and grow, pray over your finances and talk to the kids about where to spend and save. At the end of the day, asking Him and be faithful - and he will provide what you need – in grace and love.

The Dressing – Keep and Wear – by Marcy Lytle

I did a whole series during the month of August on my Instagram page of what to keep from the summer, and how to transition it into the fall. I thought it would be fun to share those ideas for our September issue, while we stand in our closet and yearn for autumn, but realize that outside summer won't let go.

Summer dresses:

A floral dress from summer can be kept and worn this fall just by adding a sweater over top. In this dress, I chose deep brown and tossed it over, added a scarf, and was done. Easy peasy.

A solid t-shirt type dress in any color can be brought into fall as well, just by adding a long cardigan over the top and a belt added over the dress. This green t-shirt dress is a fave and goes great with gray!

Crochet:

Crochet tops were a thing this summer, so wear them in the fall, too! Just add another textured sweater over the crochet, a neck scarf in a mixed print, and those layers are perfection.

Long denim jacket:

Do you have one? I can be your new trench coat for the fall. Wear it over your collared polos, and then remove it if the afternoon is still warm. Grab some suede mules for the upcoming change in season.

Denim on denim:

Did you wear this trend this summer? I did. I rolled up my sleeves, added a trendy scarf as a belt, and stepped out in sandals. Unroll the sleeves, move the scarf to the neck, and add suede mules...for fall 2025.

Overalls:

Do you have a pair? They're great for...well...every occasion! Early fall with just a tee underneath, later with a cozy sweater on top, and you've got yourself the cutest look.

Chocolate Brown:

It's a staple color for autumn, so wear your summer cotton blouses right on into September, grab a crossbody, and step out in the still warm air...but look completely ready for the winds to change.

As you transition to fall, shop your closet for pieces you might be able to wear with your autumn items you're realizing you still love, as well. Then...when you shop, you'll shop smart and only buy what you need (well, and maybe a few things you want, too!)

Mind Over Madeleine

Book 2 in The Garden Key Tales series

My first novel, THE GARDEN KEY, inspired a single women's ministry where readers wanted to get together to talk about how they can learn relationship skills God's way, as seen between Peter and Maddy in the book. I was so humbled and excited to be a part of that. But I wasn't sure what the next step in my writing journey would be. I wrote a few short stories until inspiration struck, leading to a sequel to the first book.

MIND OVER MADELEINE, a contemporary women's fiction genre book like its predecessor, came to me during a three-hour car ride to Houston from Austin, Texas, where I was living at the time. I love books where the main characters develop and grow, so this book is about being a new wife and cohabitating with the human being you love most in the world.

I love writing about the characters in this series. I never know what they are going to do next! Maddy and Peter love God with all their hearts. Their story reflects that relationship, as they navigate a world that is less than perfect.

Fear is on Maddy's mind: fear of not being a good enough wife to Peter, her attractive musician husband of less than one year; fear of not being pretty enough for him; and fear of another woman taking her place, particularly by one of the supermodel-esque groupies who hang around the band.

While Maddy is on tour with Peter's band, she tries to maintain her sanity with humor, faith, and prayer, but inside she is shaking in her black and white creepers.

When Peter is called away to record in Nashville, thousands of miles away from their cozy home in Southern California, Maddy's fears grow and feed off her loneliness.

While Peter is gone, the opportunity to fulfill one of her greatest dreams arises—to write and publish a book! But the publishing project comes with a beguiling temptation, exactly when Maddy is the most vulnerable.

Will Maddy survive this longing and come away with her life intact? Will she be able to endure the unimaginable event that could take Peter, the love of her life, away from her forever?

MIND OVER MADELEINE, the second novel of THE GARDEN KEY TALES series, is a story of fear and forgiveness, in which the one perfect love casts out all fear.

Tried and True – Last Month’s Learning – by Marcy Lytle

I feel like every day is a blank slate and then by nightfall, it’s full of all the things we took in and observed, soaked in and loved, or experienced and disliked, or all sorts of things – called living! And to note what we learn and see and feel, well it’s pure gold. Here’s my learnin’ from last month.

Have you heard of the word *meritorious*? I had not! But what a great word meaning deserving of reward or praise. I want to use it more often!

I hadn’t ever bought prepared mashed potatoes from the store, but I tried the Bob Evans brand and they were good! In case you need a family tub in a pinch, try them!

We recently had a mashed potato bowl night with the family! It was easy. Just mashed potatoes for everyone, and then all the toppings: nuggets, green onions, gravy, pinto beans, bacon, BBQ sauce, cheese – whatever you like! Everyone built their own.

Have you listened yet to “Let It Be A Hallelujah” – by Lauren Daigle? It’s a good one.

Maybe you’ve heard of this – Duckpin Bowling. But if you haven’t, look it up and find a place and go and enjoy! Smaller version of bowling, great for kids...and families.

How could we have missed this? You don’t need a cutting board or plate when grating cheese. Just turn the grater on its side and grate. Keep the cheese in the grater, then tap it out into a bowl!

Need a good encouraging 52-week devo book? *Revive* is a good one. Good words to say and live by. Read and enjoy alone or with a friend.

I love new organizers, and I found this one for my bathroom counter. It’s from Amazon, it’s pretty, and it holds a lot!

If you like a good thriller series, we enjoyed *Untamed* with Eric Bana.

Got a pretty tote that you only pull out of the closet for special trips or occasions? Set it at the foot of a bed for décor...why not?

A friend told me about growing micro greens in a jar – she bought on Amazon. It only requires a rinse a couple times a day and you get a jar full of these healthy greens to enjoy on every dish!

I share this every year. Those dollar bags at the checkout at Marshalls work great for hanging in closets to hold gifts as you purchase from now til Christmas. Keeps them off the floor too.

Chicken and Waffles – you can make these on skewers at home for fun. Cook waffles, cut into fourths. Cook frozen chicken tenders (breaded) and cut into thirds. Skewer with a pickle, waffle, chicken. Serve with honey or syrup to drizzle.

The Not so Quiet Quiet Time – The Gospel of John – it’s different and unique. Appeals to all senses. There’s even a code for a song to listen to with each lesson. Grab one for you, for a gift.

One word charades are a fun game to play with the littles. Just print out a dozen to two dozen words, let them draw from a bowl, and act. It’s a good school night de-stresser for the whole family. (i.e. dancing, fishing, dizzy, turtle) – nouns and verbs!

Have you ever listened to the group Porter's Gate? I like their music.

The Twilly. It's a skinny silk scarf. And they're oh, so cute. Have a few on hand for fall!



HOME

Practical Parenting – Older and Younger – by Marcy Lytle

If you have a family with kids of all ages, consider yourself lucky. It's so fun to watch the older kids play with their younger siblings, as the younger one admires and look up to their older brother/sister. But often, parents are in the throes of raising tiny toddlers...or their kids are older now...and they lose that connection of younger to older.

Here's what I mean.

If you hang out with other families who have kids only your kids' ages, that's great, and needed, and fun. But consider hanging out with families that are different from yours. Let the older kids (and teach them to) learn to play with the littles. You can have talks about how to hold babies, how little kids can't be left alone, how to listen and interact and what activities to do. And for sure, discuss how little kids copy older kids, so warn yours to be on their best behavior.

For example, if you invite a family over with younger kiddos, prepare ahead of time with your older kids:

- Gather some toys they've outgrown, to play with
- Let them make a fun snack to share ahead of time
- Maybe they could make a dress up box from old clothes
- Have them make a list of activities – coloring, drawing, making forts, and prepare a place to play

Teaching the older kids and providing them for a place to practice that teaching, is so great and fun!

If you have younger children and think parents with older kids won't want to come visit, think again. And talk to your littles about who's coming over. If your kids are babies, look forward to another family interacting and loving on your kids.

For example, if your kids are tiny and you invite a family over with older kids, prepare like this:

- Think of ways to invite the older kids to interact with your youngers by asking if they want to feed them, throw a ball with them, etc.
- Grab a few books and ask the older kids if they want to read to the toddlers or babies.
- If your babies are napping when the guests arrive with their olders, use that time to talk and get to know these new kids.
- Engage both families in music that you love, by choosing some tunes to play and dance to, for all.

There are good reasons to hang with other families with kids who are different ages than our own, and not always looking for kids to "match" ours. Both sets of children will enjoy and learn and grow, and eventually know the beauty of connecting with other ages and generations...

In fact, consider inviting a couple over whose kids are grown. That couple too will get a kick and a smile out of interacting with your kids, more than you think!

I Don't Do Teens – Those Questions – by Marcy Lytle

We ask questions and wonder about life, so it stands to reason that our teens have questions that bother them at night, as well. Even from the time our kids start talking, one of their first nagging words is, "Why?" And we, as parents, grow so tired of answering the why questions of this and that. And when these toddlers grow into teens, their why questions are no longer about why they can't have a cookie. They're now about serious matters.

I can't tell you specific answers to give your teens because every home is different, every child learns and receives differently, and every teen hears and grows differently. But what I can tell you are some guidelines and encouragement on answering those questions that pop up in their heads, come out of their mouths, and keep you awake at night worrying.

I recently talked to a 13 year old boy, and he just out of the blue asked me, "What's your biggest fear?" I was honest and answered that I suppose it was losing my family through death. He then confessed that he can't sleep at night for fear of death, freaking out at the fact that he could be here one minute and gone the next. And that little conversation started me thinking...

I wasn't sure exactly how to answer him, because I had just told him I too feared death of my family. But I did tell him that it was okay to have questions. And that then led to this encouragement:

It's okay for your teens to ask questions, and it's normal. Once we realize that, it removes some of the fear that our teens are not okay if they're asking questions. That's how we all learn! It's in our DNA! But what we do with those questions is how we grow as parents. We affirm our kids and their questions so that they know it's okay and that they are heard.

It's okay for you to not know how to answer, exactly. I tried to encourage this young man, but at one point he told me, "I'm just human." And he was saying (I think) that it's hard as a human to wrap your mind around things that are supernatural, i.e. heaven. Is it real? Where is it? And there are certainly questions we live with that are unanswered as well. So we don't have to give exact scientific answers to satisfy quizzical minds. We can reply that we will help them understand the best we know how, but some things come through faith. There's nothing wrong with examining our faith and placing it the One who does know. I did hear once, though, the analogy of the mermaid in *Little Mermaid*. She never knew there was a whole world above where she lived, because she'd never seen it. But that didn't mean it didn't exist!

It's okay for you to share your faith and your struggles. Teens don't always need to be preached at or offered pat solutions or be given instructions to stop wondering. What if we too were transparent and told stories of our own faith journeys, offered to pray with our kids, passed no judgment but only love? We all struggle and wonder about life and after life, and death and disease, etc. These things are curiosities and struggles. But it's also good to continue to read the Word and pray, and take these struggles to the One who promised to be with us, carry our burdens, and be our Good Shepherd all the days of our lives. So share. Pray. Confess together.

It's okay to let it go, and rest, yourself. The tendency as a parent is to go to bed after teens ask these questions and then worry that our children are straying. Questions don't mean that at all! But carrying the load of then questioning if our child is headed away from God because they're asking about him is not ours to carry. Guess what? God can handle their questions (and ours) better than we can. He will place people, words, songs, scriptures, groups in their lives when we

give our concern to him. And it will be amazing to watch him move and carry our kids from questioning to faith and rest, along with us.

Those questions. They're like bubbles coming out of a bubble machine, aren't they? They're too many, we try to chase them and pop them and manage them as they bubble out and by. Instead, let's enjoy the pretty rainbow colors that emerge as these thought bubbles glimmer in the sunlight. And let the bubbles pop as they may, as they fly away...

In Each Room – One Little Stand – by Marcy Lytle

I was walking through Hobby Lobby looking for something (I don't recall what that something was) when there it was...this little wooden stand with feet...and it was only eight bucks. I knew I could find a place for it, as I love elevating and lifting little pieces of décor up off the table. I don't know why, I just do. And this stand has been one of my favorite décor pieces all summer. It can be a great piece for fall, too. I mean...those little black feet...so cute.

Under a Plant

On a shelf, under a tiny plant, this stand brings attention to an otherwise lost little bit of greenery you had sitting by itself. Isn't this cute?

We have a vintage type turntable in our guest room and it needed a little something on top of it. Again, this little stand sat here for a while under a plant, by a lamp. That's a trio that's so pretty, when you walk into a room...

Right by the kitchen is a counter, and this little stand looks great with a plant and some of those late season tomatoes from the vine.

Under a Lamp

Right by our sofa is a little USB charged lamp that's gold, that I love, but it's small. Elevating it just a few inches atop this wooden stand with the black feet – well – it makes me happy. How about you?

Under an Orb

Do you have an orb? Or another piece of décor sitting somewhere that looks lost? Place it atop this little stand and near a piece of art and you've got yourself a whole look. It's elegant and inviting.

Under a Candle

Now this is perfect for fall...placing a pretty candle on top of this little stand with black feet, and enjoying the ambience it brings for the room where you sit as the new season arrives.

It doesn't take a lot of money or pieces to add a little "something" to your décor. Think in trios when you set a scene. Add a little height with a little stand...with feet. And if you then introduce a little light, then you're on your way to a pretty autumn season, now aren't you?

Here's the link for this little square stand (and it's on sale)

https://www.hobbylobby.com/fall-thanksgiving/fall-thanksgiving-decorations/fall-table-decor/square-wood-riser/p/81034145?srsId=AfmBOoqFGaSDACcb9jQ3CqtttZ89Nwe2nbF_c_Yk7f3DfkHt-AWIXxQJ

Homesteading - Frugal Times – by Leyanne Enterline

I'm trying to stay as frugal as I can, as Brian still has not found consistent work! We are thankful for the work he does get and I am still working - so that all helps. However, the inconsistency has been rough!

The unknown each month of how to pay the bills has been truly all faith and trusting the Lord. We are trying to stay debt free (besides the house payment) but it has been tough. At times, the day before the credit bill is due I do not know how it will get paid in full. But for the past eight months, all *has* been paid in full! Even with little mini vacays (that the Lord knew we needed) provision has come through! Praise be to the Lord!

I do not like living in the financial unknown; but for whatever reason, this is where the Lord has us and we will trust this is where we need to be. And we will manage the money the Lord has blessed us with as best we can!

Some frugal living that's been going on for us:

1. Apply for homestead exemption! Why do you just *have* to know to do this? I don't know! But we are so thankful that a client mentioned it to me. We haven't owned a home in eight years, so we forgot about that kind of stuff. Thankfully and apparently, this will help on tax payments.
2. Another way I try to save is to shut off all the lights and turn up AC during the day. We have plenty of windows and they let in lots of light. No need to have the lights on all day! Even though it's starting to get hot, I try and get everyone to go outside. We have a big fan in the garage and there's plenty of games and toys out there to play with; plus, the doggies get to see us more and when we're outside, they can hang out with us! Someone in the family is typically working everyday as well, so that helps keep inside the house shut off.
3. Eat at home! We rarely eat out. And if the kids want to eat out; they now work, so they can pay for their own food and activities away from the house. I try and grow a lot of food we'll use and then buy from local farmers markets. That helps save on the grocery bill. It's also healthier and tastes better! I love picking fresh okra and tomatoes off the vine as my snack. Everything tastes so much better fresh!

There are so many ways to save. If you have any ideas please leave a comment! I'd love any extra advice! Feeling broke is no joke and I want to steward what we have been given to the best of my ability. I want to be faithful in what the Lord has given me...

“Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.”
1 Corinthians 4:2 NKJV

Rooted in Love - Glow in the Dark – by Kaelin Scott

Over the summer I had the privilege of going to kids' camp with a group of elementary school students from our church. We spent three days playing and having fun, but most of all, we learned a lot about Jesus.

The theme for the week was GLOW – which stood for grace, love, obedience, and worship. It was all about how these four principles help us to “glow” for Jesus in our everyday lives. It was amazing watching the kids praise God and grow in their faith, and it was even more special for me because both of my kids were there and I got to witness their absolute joy.

The best part about camp was definitely seeing the kids have such an amazing experience. But the second best part was the work that it did in *me*. I was just as blessed by the teaching and preaching and worship during that week. The lessons may have been taught in a kid friendly way, but I still benefited from them just as much, if not more than the kids did.

We can all use a refresher in our faith sometimes. A reminder that living for Jesus means putting Him first in everything. That loving others is itself an act of worship. That obedience to His Word might be uncomfortable or unpopular, but it is an expression of our love for Him. That His grace is greater than any of our mistakes, no matter how many we make.

When the pastor wrapped up the final morning worship time, he told the kids this: In order to keep glowing, you have to keep growing.

And that's what I brought home with me. It's not just the kids that need to continue to grow. It's all of us. It doesn't matter how many times we've read the Bible. It doesn't matter that we've prayed a million times. It doesn't even matter if you have a seminary education. There is always room to grow.

How do we continue to grow? We devote daily time to reading the Bible. We spend time in prayer. We make a habit of worshiping every day – and no, worship doesn't just mean singing songs at church. We focus each and every aspect of our lives on Him, even when we don't feel like it, even when it's hard. We choose to make Him #1 in our hearts, regardless of what it might cost us.

We live in a very dark world, friends. People all around us feel lost and hopeless. That's why it's so important for us to GLOW. When we ignite our light and let it shine, we illuminate the path to Jesus, and who knows how many lives that could change.

A Night to Remember – The Wordsmith – by Marcy Lytle

Do your kids know what a wordsmith is? I bet you have some little wordsmiths in your home – those that are skilled in the use of their words. But do your kids know the Wordsmith of all wordsmiths? That's the topic of this family devo for the month of September. And it's going to be a fun one to enjoy.

Preparation: Print out about 10-20 one word actions or verbs, to use for charades at the end of this study. Examples: turtle, dizzy, happy, fishing, kangaroo, etc. As the kids act these out and guess out loud, give thanks for the power and the beauty of words.

A wordsmith is someone very skilled at using words. And God is the OG of wordsmiths. In the beginning, we read in Genesis, God created with his powerful words.

In chapter one, God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. He then spoke into existence everything we see around us. Pretty cool that God did that with words, right? Animals, people, trees, the stars and the moon – God spoke into existence.

Let there be light – (ask one child to turn on a light switch to create light, then turn it off to take it away). That's how God's words were so powerful – they created light. And we create light in our homes with a switch.

- Question: How can we create light in a dark world with our words? (Let kids answer as they switch the light on with each answer).

In Proverbs 12 we read that the tongue of the wise brings healing. Often, our tongues and what we say bring sadness. What if someone hurts our feelings? What are some mean things that sometimes come out of our mouths? (let kids answer – like stupid, dummy, all sorts of name calling). But what if we were hurt and we offered kind words, instead? When Jesus was mistreated, he still loved those that were treating him badly.

- Question: How can our words be used for healing instead of hurt? (Let kids act this out)

In Proverbs 15 we read that we are to give gentle words and not harsh words. And sometimes, the tone of our voices can be harsh even when we aren't using harsh words. Gentle words are soft, kind, and nice. Harsh words and tones are often used in screaming, with mean looks, and very unkind. Has anyone ever spoken a harsh word to you? How did it make you feel?

- Question: How can we practice gentleness with our words? (Ask God to change our hearts, so that we love others even when we don't feel loved by them.)

Words are powerful. Especially the words that come from God. If he can speak the whole world into creation with his words, then he can certainly take care of us every day with his kind words of light, healing and gentleness. After all, we are the sheep of the Good Shepherd!

We're going to play charades with one words answers, to show the fun and the power and the greatness of the words God has given us to know and use and enjoy in this life.

- Draw from the bowl the one word charades, act them out, and have a blast.

Family Prayer: *Dear God, thank you for being the ultimate Wordsmith. You speak and all the world respond. Help us to respond to your kind words over us of love. You first loved us and you spoke of your love through your son, Jesus. Your words are powerful, and may our words be just*

like yours. May we create light, love and life when we spoke your words over us, and over those around us. Amen.



YOU

Healthy Habits – Always – by Marcy Lytle

No, it's not Thanksgiving month. And that's the point of this month's healthy habits. We don't have to wait until November to create a list of things we're thankful for. We can do it all year, even in September. And while November seems to be the time to give thanks for the big things like family, faith and provision...let's give thanks for the things we might not notice, sometimes.

It's a list of the little things we always have with us, things that we often forget to stop and note:

- Give thanks for new calendars, both the paper and the digital kind. It means you're alive to live another day...
- Give thanks for that bowl of fruit sitting in the fridge waiting to be enjoyed by those in your family, or by you alone. The colors of fruit are amazing. Note them.
- Give thanks for the car you drive, whether it's old or new. Clean it, spruce it up, buy an air-freshener, and smile as you drive.
- Give thanks for the jewelry you wear. Maybe it's an heirloom, or a gift, or something you got on a trip. Note it, and breathe a sigh of thanksgiving. In September.
- Give thanks for socks. It's soon to be cozy weather, and you surely have a favorite pair of warm socks that you love.
- Give thanks for patios. Yours may not be big or beautiful, or maybe it is. Pause to sit there again and reflect, and refresh and be thankful.
- Give thanks for salt and pepper. I mean, seriously, these two minute particles of black and white add so much flavor to what you eat. How awesome...like grains of sand.
- Give thanks for lamps. I bet you have tall ones and short ones, ones that are cute and ones that are more practical. But they light your space. In September.
- Give thanks for doors. Ones that open and close, and lock. Doors that hide unseen clutter. Doors that one can hide behind when one wants to be alone. Doors are a blessing.
- Give thanks for purses. Do you have one or two, or too many? Big or small, we carry in these bags our personals, our money, our keys...all the essentials to having a good day.
- Give thanks for that one tree or bush or plant in your yard that you love and tend to and care for. Open the window and look at it, go outside and observe it, and smile that it's there just for you.
- Give thanks for mercy. We forget how often we need it and how little we offer it. Remind yourself of the merciful God that loves you every single day. In September.

That's my dozen "always" give thanks in everything list for this month, the month that's not quite the month of giving thanks. And yes, I'm smiling because I gave thanks for those things as I listed them out here. I hope you smile, as well.

Inner Strength – Strong Strides – by Michelle Wyatt

*Sun's rays hitting the water
Shimmering like the stars
Bright as a sunny day
Waves rolling with tears of compassion
Radiating the beauty inside
Whether the tide rolls in or out
The beautiful soul remains*

Sounds beautiful, doesn't it? Don't we all need a break from the stress of life? We may not be able to literally see the images is of this poem, but I find that if we close our eyes and take a breath and imagine what our own particular safe beautiful place would look like, it would be amazing. Or what just a few seconds there, or staying for a while, like a full meditation can do to provide us inner strength - to get through the challenges up ahead. It's also a reminder to be grateful for God's creation He has designed for us.

When I do feel overwhelmed, I ask myself, "What have I forgotten to incorporate in my life that brings me a moment of peace?" For me, it's taking photographs of nature with my phone and also drawing. My favorite nature photographs to take are of flowers, the moon, colorful skies, and interesting plants with different shades of green.

I can relate photography to making life more manageable. Imagine when I take a picture of a flower and all I want to focus on are the colorful petals. I can zoom in and capture just what I want and hopefully that will put a smile on my (and your) face. Life can be that way, too.

They say what we focus on determines our mood and state of mind and the direction that we move in. Looking through the lens of my phone, I ask myself, "Does this image bring a smile to my face?" If it's not healthy looking, for example the weeds in the grass or a building or something that's just not pleasing to the eye, I am very quick to either zoom in or crop it out. Cropping out a picture to me is like a way to declutter our life. It's tough, but it's important to remove obstacles from our life, as in unhealthy influences or activities that aren't feeding our soul.

You may be thinking...*that's easier said than done*. It's easier said than done to me as well, which is why I don't try to do it alone. I have been through a 12-step healing program from a past mentor of mine. I have found a church community of friends that I can talk to about different things. I'm keeping a grateful journal. (Yes, sometimes I forget to write in it.) One theme of my grateful journal is nature, so that reminds me to take pictures. I make a mental note when I'm taking a walk outside to do my best to stay out of my head and be present in my environment.

I hope this offers a few ideas to you, even if it's just one thing that you try. I definitely encourage you to try! I've seen this lessen the result of stress on my body and have made strong strides in improving my self-care over the years. I am honored to write and share what has helped me in hopes that it can help someone reading this.

I know that if I can do it so can you!

Life Right Now - Miss Understood? By: Jennifer Stephens

She said what? About who? But I thought they were friends...

Girl drama. Ugh. It's the worst. And just when we think the theatrics were reserved for the high school hallways we no longer travel, we find ourselves starring in our very own grown-up production. Life is a stage and we're the performers.

The movie begins with an all-female cast scrunched close, sitting shoulder to shoulder in the noisy restaurant. Amazing, successful, confident women. She was thrilled to be included among these leading ladies as they sat together. Laughing, eating, sharing secrets. It felt like the opening scene of a classically cheesy rom-com.

New to the group, she'd finally begun to crawl out of her shell. A timid turtle among fierce lionesses. They had no idea that beneath her carefully coordinated outfit rumbled a bundle of shy girl nerves as she awkwardly answered questions. She thought she could safely share about a rocky situation with a mutual friend. But her delivery was all wrong. And she didn't know it at the time, but her anxiety was mistaken for irritation. Her sarcastic commentary mistaken for meanness.

She thought they understood her character. She believed they knew she's the kind of person filled with humility and compassion. She is far from perfect, but she's reliable, she keeps her word, and she's honest. Maybe a little too honest. She thought they knew her heart. But in an instant the script flipped and, in their eyes, the virtuous woman became the villain.

Now what? Does she defend herself and explain the words they think to be true isn't what she meant to say at all? Does she tell her side of the story? Or does she wipe her tears and quietly remind herself there was somebody else at the table that day? God saw everything. He doesn't question her intent. He knows her heart.

Sometimes in life we're going to be misunderstood. Our words murky. Our actions overlooked. Sometimes we'll encounter people who just don't "get" us. It stings when people misjudge our motives. We could get mad or cause a scene. Scream until they see it our way! Or...we could give them what we wish they'd given us. A little understanding. Maybe they heard snippy irritation in our voice because of the hurt and pain they brought to the table that day.

Life doesn't come with a carefully written screenplay to guide our words. We're going to mess up and say things we didn't mean. And we can't always avoid the drama, but we can try to understand others. When we're misunderstood maybe that's when we need to understand. When we strive to understand others, we can move forward even when our efforts to be Miss Understood are misunderstood.

"So, in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you..." Matthew 7:12

A Hopeful Heart - Finishing What I Started – by Christina Oberon

Starting something new often feels exciting, but finishing it can be a real challenge. I dive in with enthusiasm, fueled by fresh ideas and big dreams, but somewhere along the way, life happens. Distractions pop up, obstacles arise, and the initial spark fades. Before I know it, what once inspired me is collecting dust, sometimes literally.

I've been there more times than I can count. A new habit I was sure I'd keep forever. A project I swore I'd finish "soon." Even simple tasks like organizing a closet can start with gusto and end with me walking away halfway through, promising to "come back later."

But there's something deeply rewarding and even healing about finishing what we start. It's not just about checking a box or crossing something off a list. It's about building trust with ourselves, growing in character, and discovering unexpected blessings along the way.

Persistence is a muscle. The more we exercise it, the stronger it gets. And persistence doesn't mean perfection, it simply means we keep showing up, even when the feelings aren't there. Sometimes the smallest, most ordinary acts of showing up can have the biggest impact.

In scripture, Paul talks about "running the race" and pressing on toward the goal (Philippians 3:14). That picture of perseverance reminds me that finishing what I start isn't just a matter of discipline. It's also an act of faith. It's trusting that the effort I put in will bear fruit, even if I can't see the results yet.

I've also learned that the enemy of persistence is often comparison. We see someone else finishing faster, doing it better, or making it look effortless, and we convince ourselves it's not worth continuing. But God isn't measuring our progress against someone else's race. He's looking at our faithfulness in the one He's given us to run.

When I think of the times I've pushed through to the finish, whether it was a book I wrote and published, a hard season I prayed through like infertility, or even a workout I didn't want to do, I realize it wasn't just about the end result. It was about who I became in the process. And I definitely BECAME. I learned resilience. I learned patience. And I learned to rely on God's strength when my own was running on fumes.

If you're in the middle of something right now, whether it's a dream you've been chasing, a challenge you're walking through, or simply a task you've been putting off, please don't give up. Take the next small step. You don't have to finish it all today, but you can finish faithfully by moving forward one choice at a time.

One of the most hope-filled truths I've clung to is this, God finishes what He starts (Philippians 1:6). If He has begun a good work in you, He will see it through to completion. And if the Creator of the universe models that kind of faithfulness, then surely we can follow His lead in our own small, imperfect ways.

Let's be people who don't just start well, but finish well. People who keep showing up, even when the excitement fades. People who believe that what God starts, whether in us, through us, or around us, is always worth seeing through to the end.

Finishing what we start isn't just about reaching the finish line. It's about growing in faith, hope, and perseverance along the way. And that's a race worth running every time.



MARRIAGE

For Better or Worse - 20 Things – by Kaelin Scott

Being married teaches you a lot. Many of the lessons are valuable not only in your spousal relationship, but in life in general as well. So for this month, I thought I'd share some things marriage has taught me.

1. Good communication means listening more than you speak.
2. The more you compromise, the easier it gets.
3. Growth is never comfortable.
4. Sometimes the little things are the big things, and the big things are actually little things.
5. Being content doesn't mean you always feel happy. It means you choose to be at peace.
6. Getting what you want isn't as important as being kind.
7. Disagreeing isn't the end of the world – sometimes people have different opinions, and that's okay.
8. Getting the last word feels good in the moment, but biting your tongue feels better in the long run.
9. Small acts of kindness go a long way.
10. Investing in people means caring about what they care about.
11. Say what you mean and mean what you say – no one can read your mind.
12. The way you treat people matters, so treat them how you want to be treated.
13. One rude remark can cancel out nine compliments.
14. Relationships aren't 50/50 – they require two people who both give 100%.
15. No matter how much you have, it's easy to always want more. Learn to be joyful in times of plenty as well as in times of need.
16. Even if you're right, you don't always have to prove it.
17. Don't let stress cause you to lash out at the people you love. Find another outlet for your frustration.
18. If someone cares about you, they won't have to say it. You'll know by the way they treat you.
19. If it won't matter five days from now, it's not worth arguing about right now.
20. Life is too short to be grouchy. Lighten up and have some fun!

Date Night Fun – The Power Walk – by Marcy Lytle

I'm not talking about the kind of power walk that comes from walking fast to burn calories, although those are great. I'm referring to the power of the walk that happens when we hold hands, step out, and go...fast or slow. And it's that time of year to step outdoors while you enjoy each other. Maybe you don't know where to go. There are lots of choices to choose from:

Bridges – Search and find some bridges in your area. Often they're in parks and often they have benches on or nearby. Find two or three! Make this part of your date together, and pack a picnic for two. Snap photos of the bridges you enjoy and frame them, then hang them.

Parks – There are so many choices of parks. There are huge ones with lots of people, and there are tiny tucked away parks that hardly anyone knows of. You choose the park, and enjoy every aspect of it...together. Walk, swing, watch people, throw a Frisbee, sit on a blanket...the choices and the joy are endless.

Fields – Sometimes, big parks have big fields. There are usually big trees, too. Sometimes, it's nice to take two lawn chairs and park them in these big fields, under a tree to just sit. And read. And hold hands. And dream. And pray. Did you know there's a verse in the bible about joy in the field? Psalm 96:12.

Trails – There are neighborhood trails and there are serious hiking trails. You do you. If you want to hike and explore and climb, then head for the trails prepared and ready for adventure, together. If smaller parks with trails are your jam, then enjoy. Find ones with lights to walk at night, or go early in the morning before more people arrive. Trails are often lined with pretty trees and foliage. Enjoy and look up, in silence, at least part of the time.

By the water – Walks beside creeks or rivers are just refreshing, that's all. If you live in a town with a boardwalk, walk there. If your neighborhood has a trail by a creek, walk there and pause to throw stones or watch fish or observe the ripples in the water. If you live near a big river with boat rides available, take one. Do it often.

There's power in walking, more than getting your heart rate up. It also elevates your hearts towards each other and towards Him. What could be better than that?

After 40 Years – A Dancing Oasis – by Marcy Lytle

Aging older together has its perks, for sure. And yet there are lots of frustrations that come with thriving as a couple, including the need for intimacy in new and different ways. In fact, this need exists all throughout marriage. Intimacy, if it only includes what happens in the bedroom, is missing the depth that comes from being together in other ways. And while separating more as a couple might be the norm for some, we would rather come closer.

Recently, we saw that a resort near our house has free live music outdoors, so we opted on a Friday night to check it out. We had so much fun that we decided we may frequent this place once a week! I know there's not a resort available everywhere, or free live music, but I bet there are hidden gems like this somewhere near all of us. A place where we can enjoy the sunset, maybe sit by a fire pit, eat good food and people watch, and even dance to a tune if we feel like it. We had found the place!

We arrived to find a section of the resort was an outdoor music venue with African wares being sold at booths around the perimeter, large stone rocks to sit on, and tables with umbrellas. And there was a band playing, and lots of families and couples enjoying. So we decided to stroll a bit before we settled in.

We were hungry, so we chose one of the restaurants there, Mexican food, and it was delish. Outside that area were fire pits and corn hole games, just for the choosing and enjoying by ourselves...or...we'd love to take another couple sometime. The moon was out, it was a warm night, but there was a soft breeze.

And then...we went back to the music area and we sat down. And the band was a nice rock-ish type band that played old and new music, easy to dance to. There were several kids, couples, families, singles and couples up dancing and no one was bothered or looking – it was just lovely. We decided we wanted to get up and dance, as well.

I must tell you that neither of us grew up dancing, don't really know how to dance well, but we did it anyway, in the back – away from those up front.

We enjoyed slow dancing, dancing separately when the beat sped up, and Jon really has the moves. And what I found was a new way to be intimate in the best of ways! It was romantic to be so close, it was outdoors in the moonlight, and we could move slowly or fast, it didn't matter. We were in our own little closed-in world, even though there were people all around. They were all enjoying the same thing.

Was it a spiritual connection? Sort of. We were grateful to be moving and to be together. Was it a physical connection? Well, yes. I put my head on his shoulder, he had his hand at my waist, and we lingered as we looked at each other. Was it tiring? No, not at all. Quite the opposite. It was exercise, it was fun, and it was a release of tensions from the day.

When we got in the car, we both smiled at this new place we'd found to frequent often, when we need a night of closeness, good food, the moonlight and an escape from the world.

I smiled when I got home, thankful that God knew we needed that and there it was, unknown before, but right near us now. We're going to go again and again, because it was that fun.

Worth Repeating - Pick Your Battles – by Marcy Lytle

If you want to test out your communication skills in your marriage from time to time, just plan a day for cleaning out your garage. It's a sure-fire way to stir up more than dust. Garages become catchalls for everything from sports equipment, tools, games, projects that could have been, and home décor that someday might be. And somehow two people working together to decide what to toss, where to place things, and how to place them brings out the worst...

"Here, you can throw this away," I said, as I handed him a game of checkers (you know, the checkerboard rug with giant plastic pieces.)

"I'm not throwing that away," he snapped. "I'm going to play that." (I roll my eyes, stating that he hasn't played it in 20 years).

I'll organize this big tub over here with our lawn chairs, I think to myself, and mention it to him, as he starts a pile in the driveway of discards. Only, as soon as I get the chairs in the tub, he is behind me rearranging them to make room for his golf clubs.

"Dust these things off, first," he instructs me, as he sees me just placing some things back hurriedly, because I am getting hungry for lunch. I take a wet rag and start wiping, thinking this is going to be an all-day affair if I don't speed things along.

Does any of this sound familiar? Before too long, we are arguing over what is valuable to him/me and he's asking, "Where did this come from?" and "Are you really throwing away this?" and I'm tossing, hoping he won't notice this, and pointing to that particular area where he's placed his tools that have been there for decades, as I again roll my eyes at the pain they've become.

Eventually, a morning of togetherness reminiscing over fun finds on our garage shelves, turns into one of us going inside while the other one finishes, or we both learn to quit battling over a mug he wants to keep that says "Grand Canyon" on the side, and a box of Christmas items I want to keep that we might use "one year."

Is it really **that** important to wage a war over this stuff?

As we were cleaning, we came across a pile of games and jigsaw puzzles. It seems we did agree on tossing many of the games and most of the puzzles, as we both realized their time was over and gone. We also smiled at a couple of games, including a cool battery-operated train track that we could now play with our grandson, so it went back on the shelf. And I opened my eyes and shut my mouth when I saw how clean everything looked after he insisted on dusting before replacing. He was so gracious to pile the discards into the back of his pick-up to take to the dumpster next week, and fill up boxes to take to Salvation Army later that day. I felt grateful.

We finally, after our original skirmishes, decided to cease fire and enjoy the process, noting the end product – a clean garage – and feeling good about accomplishing a task together. So what if an extra game stayed on the shelf? Did it really matter that he rearranged what I had just arranged, or did it just hurt my pride?

I think we will pick our battles, but make sure they're mostly on a game board with pawns to move, rather than in our house with each other to spurn. And I'd much rather enjoy a knotted pretzel with a tall glass of lemonade with him, than knots in my stomach from a silly battle in the garage we were trying to clean.



ENCOURAGEMENT

A Day in the Life – Permission Granted – by Bekah Holland

I realize that most normal humans celebrate their birthdays and move on with their lives. But, since I've never fallen in the "normal" category, I've obviously made my own birthday requirements a *little* differently than most.

Now I'll start by saying that I'm bringing up birthdays because September is birthday month for ME! I've been incredibly blessed, lucky, or whatever you want to call it, to have a few friends who have been in my life since 5th grade! My longest relationship is with my friend of 34 years, my college roommate, my person, my kids' godmother (mostly because she loves me enough to suffer through my children if something happens to my hubby and me, and likely won't be planning an afterlife revenge strategy – although, she may already have one ready even without taking on teenagers). Our story basically begins with a very hyper, sugar-overloaded 11-year-old me, seeing the new girl in youth group, literally licking her and claiming her as mine. She was too scared to do anything but agree, and by the time she came to her senses, it was too late to back out. We have a billion stories and what feels like a few lifetimes full of core memories and adventures together... including quite a few that we mostly keep under wraps, solely because if we share them, the other knows WAY too many humiliating moments that we'd rather roll around in an ant pile than ever allow another human being to know about. But I digress....

My friend is brilliant, and also firmly believes that birthdays, especially ours, for obvious reasons, should be a full month of celebration, gifts, pinatas (what can I say, she loves beating a swinging container of candy with a bat and she's brought me over to the dark side). Also, and this is paramount to our belief system, birthday month calories DO NOT COUNT. It's science. Don't argue. And it's acceptable to eat cupcakes for breakfast because cupcakes are made with eggs, eggs are a source of protein and sit firmly in the breakfast food category, so making cupcakes is a healthy choice to start your day with (this one was brought to by yours truly because I can justify just about anything food related. What can I say? It's a gift). I mean, who am I to argue with her brilliant logic? Especially when it gloriously benefits me too! Therefore, we have stuck by said tradition for multiple decades, even though by our age, most of us would like to forget the number that comes with a new year. But, as you can tell, again, no one would call us normal, and we've reached an age where we're now celebrating the 10th anniversary of our 35th birthdays, because it feels right. Also, this aging thing has brought us gracefully into our "I don't care what you think" era, which is my favorite!

I'll be honest, especially as I have gotten older, and life gets harder, and my knees crack like popcorn when I walk up or down the stairs, I tend to put my own needs, wants, dreams, and everything in between somewhere further away than a back burner....more like my mom friends' back burners, which exist like 1.3 miles away from me. Life happens, work, family, losses, freaking teenagers happen, all of which make it hard for me to remember that making time for myself isn't selfish. It is, however, a necessity that I haven't seen as such in the last 18 years or so.

If you're Gen Xish or Gen X adjacent, society has been telling us that putting ourselves last is our biggest gift...need less, be less loud, less opinionated, just less in general. That if we are too much, we won't be valued or loved. If you grew up in church in the 80s and 90s, you can

exponentially increase that guilt-ridden load because most of us were essentially taught that our goal in this life was to be a doormat, though they fluffed it up with much prettier packaging so we bought it, hook, line, and sinker.

Now you can un-clutch your pearls, ladies...because I'm not saying that being kind, compassionate, or giving of your time is a bad thing. But being anyone's doormat, to allow them to use and abuse your gentleness and selfless heart, isn't love; it's neglect and misguided attempts to earn someone's love and affection. If you have to earn love, then it isn't actually love, because real love is free...free of demands, it always shows up, always tries, and never fails. Love is both gentle and tough, usually bearing scars of difficult times that were fought through and won. It doesn't require a 50/50 split, because if you've ever loved anyone, whether it's love of romance, blood family or chosen family, it's a 100/100....sometimes it's 80/20 because one of you is struggling and can't give as much and the other gives extra while they need to and I promise it will switch up again soon, because...life.

So just in case you need it, consider this permission to give yourself the same love and grace that you show others. Celebrate your birthday for a week or a month or whatever brings you joy. Take yourself out to dinner or drive all by your beautiful self to the coffee shop without a car full of kids, or to the freaking library (also sans minions). You don't even have to wait until your birthday! Celebrate Wednesday or, as I started doing in the last 10 years, I take a day off of work on the first day of school (which I completely understand is a huge privilege), and enjoy the glorious silence of my neighborhood pool with a book, a breakfast smoothie (fine, more likely a mimosa, but it has orange juice, which has vitamin C so it's basically a healthy juice cleanse), and I lay like broccoli until I've cooked long enough to warrant a nice nap in even nicer AC.

Do something just for yourself because you deserve it.

You deserve time, attention, things that refresh your heavy soul, and a chance to enjoy putting yourself first. We all need the joy that comes with doing something for ourselves and not carrying a single bit of guilt about it, because as women, we tend to give more than we get. And that means our time, carved out just for us, is all the more important and beautiful to revel in.

"Keep taking time for yourself until you find you again."

Lalah Delia

An Adage a Day - A Brush With Death – by Carole Gilbert

I recently had a brush with death. We had so much rain my husband was having a hard time keeping up with the mowing of our five acres. So, one afternoon we were both working outside and I offered to help mow. After all, we have two riding mowers. I had used them before but still wasn't overly experienced. But I was determined to help.

As I was mowing along the fence, the roll bar on the lawn mower above me caught the top of a tree limb and it was stuck in the bar. The limb broke but was still attached to the tree. So, the top of the limb was caught in the bar and the bottom was hanging on to the tree with me in between. And the limb was getting tighter across my neck. I couldn't stop the mower from rolling forward because the top of the limb had that part of the handle blocked. That's when I had a brush with death. I know that's what it was because of all the things that quickly flashed into my mind.

In that split second, I realized I couldn't get to my phone for help. My mind flashed to my family and how my husband would find me. Then, in the other half of that split second, I knew what to do!

“Heavenly Father God, HELP! Get me out of this PLEASE!
Whatever or however you want! I need YOU!”

Without even thinking, my body started sliding down in the lawn mower seat all the way to where I was lying flat in the seat. My head tilted backwards to allow the limb to brush across it, taking my cap and partially my glasses. My right arm was pushing up on the limb to get it off my neck. I know it was God and His strength pushing the limb. My left arm was still trying to bring the lawn mower to a stop. The limb slowly passed over. I have no doubt; our great Heavenly Father saved my life that day!

I then was able to stop, and I sat there looking at the limb. It felt like I was bleeding from my forehead and neck where the limb scraped across until I was free. I got the limb off the mower and went to look for my husband. He was mowing in the other pasture and never saw any of it. I hollered at him and asked if I was bleeding. But he was too far away to tell. I went to my house to tend to my wounds, but there basically was none. I couldn't believe it. The limb scraping across me had really hurt, but I only had a slight scratch on my neck and nothing on my forehead. And the scratch on my neck was completely gone the next morning. I ask you, who do we call on first in times of desperation, or of hurt or need? I thought of my phone, but I had no time to call anyone. There was only one I needed anyway.

This idiom, brush with death, means exactly what it says. It describes a time when someone has a close situation with a life-threatening experience. It started in the mid-20th century, although the word brush used in this way dates back to the 1400's.

Actually, we all have a brush with death until we decide to follow Jesus. That's what Jesus meant by His words He spoke to Martha in John 11:25-26.

"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."

I hope you never have a brush with death. But if you do, I hope you already know, as they ask in the movies, "Who you gonna call?"

Most people I know love to travel. They are either looking, or have looked, forward to traveling--seeing places never seen before, experiencing interesting foods and cultures, enjoying chore-free vacations, and other special benefits. Traveling can be exciting, stimulating, educational, and eye-opening—all good things. But for me, it feels burdensome, worrisome, and a disruption of my peace.

First of all, but not necessarily the most important, the preparation required for me to leave is burdensome. Yesterday I got my drip irrigation working again and installed a second cat door into the garage. Today I'll make sure all the patio plants and other potted plants around the place are watered. I'll also make sure the bird feeders are full. I'll bring in the staghorn ferns because they're temperamental. I'll run the pool pump so the water is stirred. My cat has a rare disease he needs medication for at least once/day. Have you ever tried to give cats pills they don't want? I have an arsenal of supplies and techniques that require detailed instructions. This morning the person I hired to water came for instructions, a couple days ago it was bird feeding 101. Then there is packing—what if it's cold, what if it's hot? What's the minimum I can't take for body/hair care?

Second, leaving the loving routine care of my plants, cat, and the garden birds to others is worrisome. You're probably thinking *Well, if you weren't so particular about it.* And, yes, it might be overkill. Especially the cat care box with instructions. And the birds live in the wild without birdseed...*can they not go without being fed for a few days?!* The plants? I'm just asking to keep them alive (it is Texas summer after all, even though it's relatively mild, which translates to very few 100 degree days.) I'm not asking anyone to pull weeds, clip, deadhead, or do other garden tasks. Just the bare minimum, which pains me. I so love walking the garden and babying every living thing in it.

I'm a home-body, no doubt about it. My world is small, but it's a world I love and enjoy. It wasn't always so, due to life circumstances I'm grateful are behind me. All the more reason to relish every moment. I've created an environment both outdoors and indoors that gives me joy, peace, and lots of God-time. Listening to beautiful, stirring music as I walk about a mini garden of Eden, seeing rainbows in the mister, chimes gently sounding, birds flying about and lizards lolling in their hiding places. Inside, rainbows are cast about the kitchen as the sun shines through the sun catchers in the window.

Why would I want to leave? But tomorrow morning at 8 am I'll be leaving on a jet plane. I will enjoy friends and sights and give thanks for cooler weather and mountains. Leaving the nest I call home disrupts my peace, but Jesus is with me wherever I go. We will go into the bigger world together and I will leave burdens and worry behind.



Under Pressure – Heart Transplants – by Debbie Haynes

There's a prophet in the Old Testament named Jeremiah that stated he was extremely weary and weak. He wanted to quit what he was doing, and in chapter 15:10 he complains that everyone hates him. Of course, he had been pronouncing famine, sword, pestilence and death – so maybe that was why he wasn't so well-liked! Besides that, there were others who were pronouncing the exact opposite of Jeremiah's message to the people. That's what the people wanted to hear, so that they could remain in their sinful ways.

In chapter 18, God took Jeremiah to a potter's house and showed Jeremiah a marred, broken and useless clay vessel. But in the hands of the master potter, that broken vessel was transformed and remade into a beautiful, clean and useable vessel. And God asked, "...can I not do the same with you as the potter?"

However, by the end of this same chapter, Jeremiah himself feels broken, tired and hurt by the people. He cries for God to help him, and then he asks God to just abandon the people to famine and sword, because Jeremiah was upset at the pit he was in.

So what was the sin that these people had committed? In chapter 19 we read that the people had forsaken God and offered their allegiance to false gods. And God has brought Jeremiah's voice to warn the people. Oh, Jeremiah tried to stuff the words away and not even care about the people, and didn't even want to mention God's name. But the more he tried to stuff it, the more he said this.

"...the message inside me felt as though my heart and bones were caught on fire and I thought I would explode with God's warning to this people who've gone so far astray from him."

Jeremiah also knew; however, that this message was in actuality God's love for the people, and his offer was to restore them if they would listen to the strong warning. And in Jeremiah's weakest moments, he was made strong by God.

Sometimes, we too carry a heavy weight for others and don't understand how they can be so blind to God's light and grace. And we also become weak as we pray, just as Jeremiah did.

In later chapters, after God confirmed that he would restore his people, even after all the destruction – he promised to bring them back to him. And then Jeremiah pronounced that God would turn the people's mourning into joy and offer them a heart transplant, of sorts. Not rules and laws that were impossible to keep, but a genuine heart change away from darkness...and toward the light of God.

This is what we all need, it's what our families and friends need, all over the world. And it's the prayer we can pray and know that he hears, and our children and their children will come to know God's wonderful light. The Light that dispels the darkness.

Unearthly Thing - Recipe From Love – by Angela Dolbear

This spring, I planted a garden for the first time in my life. It was amazing to watch seeds I pushed into the soil sprout tiny stalks and delicate leaves. And then watch those seedlings grow into plants, then produce fruits and vegetables I could cook up and serve for dinner!

I felt like a junior farmer. I have a lot to learn, like next year I have to get a “cucumber trellis” for better health for the cucumber plants.

Roma tomatoes are my favorite, so I picked up a couple of sad little plants in the sale section at our local Lowe's. I replanted them in large pots with good soil and placed them in direct sunlight on my back patio. A few weeks of watering and sunny days later, I had to order garden stakes from Amazon to support the large plants blooming with many little yellow flowers. It was astonishing to watch these little flowers transform into shiny, light green balls, elongate, and finally ripen into bright, juicy tomatoes.

Gardening has taught me a lot about God's love. Like a plant, if I stay in His light and presence, I will flourish. He provides everything I need to live and grow. I don't need to strive for anything.

He waters me with His word. The more time I spend with Him, reading it and taking it in, the more I grow and bear much fruit. Beautiful, useful fruit I can use to serve others (like writing!).

With my bounty of beautiful tomatoes, I created a dish to enjoy their sweet, tangy flavor.

Roasted Romas With Pasta

6-8 ripe Roma tomatoes

10 fresh sweet basil leaves (also from my garden — Praise God!)

2 Tbsp. olive oil

1 tsp garlic powder

Salt and pepper to taste

6 oz. pasta of your choice (my fave is Rao's Linguine), save a ½ cup of pasta water

4 oz. Grated Parmesan cheese

2 pats of butter (optional, they make the sauce more creamy)

2 Tbsp, white wine (optional)

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees. Cube the tomatoes and toss them in the olive oil. Add 4-5 basil leaves, and add salt and pepper to taste. Pour the tomato mixture into a roasting pan or cast-iron skillet. Bake in the oven for 30 minutes.

Boil 6 cups of water. Drizzle olive oil in the water and sprinkle with salt to enhance the pasta's flavor and prevent it from sticking together.

Pour the roasted tomato mixture into a skillet. Scoop pasta into skillet, save ½ cup of pasta water. Cook for 10 minutes on low. Add butter and wine. Slowly add in Parmesan cheese, stirring continuously. Add pasta water until the sauce is the desired consistency.

Serve pasta and sprinkle each dish with fresh sweet basil leaves.

Since I like to make a meal of this dish, I add a pork loin I had cooked in the crock pot in a mixture of Better Than Bouillon Italian Herbs and my favorite spices. I also served this dish with garlic bread. So yummy!

Fortunately, the spiritual lessons contained in gardening were not lost on me. It makes me want to pay closer attention to the things going on around me, which I might take for granted or not realize contain lessons from God inherent in them. God's love is everywhere. He's good like that.

Blessings to you!

Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories. Her latest release, The Mid-Century Breakfast Club, is the fourth book in The Garden Tales series. Her novels are available on [Amazon](#) in paperback, Kindle, and audiobook formats. Angela writes real, relatable, and reverent fiction. She loves reading, writing prose, and writing and recording music in her studio in Nashville, TN—listen to her latest album [STORMS](#) on your favorite music streaming service. Please drop by and sign up for news, read the latest stories, and hear new original music at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>.

Moving Forward - Let Him Be Near – by Pam Charro

We all are probably familiar with some of the scriptures that speak of God's desire to be close to us when we're feeling down:

1 Peter 5:7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Psalms 55:22 Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken.

Isaiah 41:13 For I, the Lord, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, "Fear not, I will help you."

Jeremiah 29:12 Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you.

Psalms 145:18 The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth.

Psalms 34:18 The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

These are just a handful of the many Bible verses that speak of God's longing to be near us when we are feeling sad or overwhelmed, and I have known them well for years. I have also spent many years sitting with him and his Word, processing life and my feelings. He has sent me "flashes" of understanding his desire for deep intimacy, both with pictures and innate knowledge. You would think that, after 37 years of doing this, I would be an expert at knowing how he loves me and desires closeness when I'm at my worst.

But I'm not.

Like most of us, I still have a tendency to pull inward when I'm hurting, stumbling along with my heavy burden, trying to keep it all to myself. Why? I can list several reasons.

Past rejection? Check.

Distracted? Most likely.

A lingering orphan mentality, even after all that God has done in my life? Unfortunately, yes.

I continually have to practice dependency on him and believing that he not only tolerates it, but actually relishes my leaning on him. Even when I'm my least desirable.

I remember a particular time when he really drove this truth home for me. My daughter had a very sensitive stomach when she was little, and would often become violently ill for hours or days on end, vomiting long after there was anything left in her stomach. It was such a difficult thing to watch her go through, and I would sit or lie with her, praying for her to have relief. During those time, all she wanted was to hold onto me. It wasn't pretty at all. We were both exhausted from lack of sleep, dirty and smelly with stringy hair. Not something anyone would wish for. But for the treasure of being near, of enduring this unpleasant situation with the deeply loved people underneath the yucky ... it was beautiful and bonding. And I understood what God was saying to me in those moments, that no matter how ugly and sick and stinky I get, he just wants to be near and hold me in those most vulnerable moments, just as I wanted to hold my precious daughter. I was the only one who needed to learn how to let him do it, because he was just waiting.

He deserves so much more of me than I have yet learned to give him, even after all these years. But I keep practicing, and I'm so grateful for his loving patience as I grow in it.



FRESH THYME

FRESH THYME – Neighboring – by Marcy Lytle

We like to watch reruns of *King of Queens*. There's one particular episode where a storm blows down a fence between two neighbors. The one couple wants to leave the fence down, built a gazebo and share the space. The other neighbor wants the fence back up...pronto! Who's right? Well, both! But it's good to stop and consider what kind of neighbors we are, and find a healthy balance, isn't it? Of course, we need our space. But also of course, we need open spaces.

Don't be that neighbor that drives in your garage and closes the door, and fails to see the neighbor next door waving at you.

Don't be that neighbor that lets your trees grow and hang over the next door neighbor's yard. Keep yours trimmed.

Don't be that neighbor that doesn't even know the names of those neighbors...

Don't be that neighbor doesn't maintain your yard, inviting pests to rest and then move on in to your neighbor's yard as well.

Don't be that neighbor that sits inside on your phone on a pretty evening, instead of sitting outside to see others that walk by.

Don't be that neighbor that judges when a new neighbor moves in, one that looks or acts differently from you do.

Don't be that neighbor that avoids, but instead be that neighbor that prays.

Don't be that neighbor that's too noisy for comfort...for anyone and everyone.

Do be the neighbor that waves regularly, and observes and cares.

Do be the neighbor that has boundaries that are practical, but open doors for giving.

Do be the neighbor that shares cookies at Christmas.

Do be the neighbor that sees the disabled, the different, and the marginal...and welcomes.

Do be the neighbor that picks up after your dog, on walks.

Do be the neighbor that keeps that same dog as quiet, as possible.

Do be the neighbor that prays for the families on your street.

Do be the neighbor that invites other kids to play, to show them love today.

Do be the neighbor that watches out for other neighbors, because that's what neighbors do.

FRESH THYME - Fall Preparations – by Marcy Lytle

It's still warm in Texas; in fact it's still hot, in September. But the fall décor has been out in the stores since late July and it's just calling us to think ahead to the autumn hues and scents and all that the next season brings. But before it's really here, it helps to prepare so that we can actually enjoy it before it flies by. Early September is just the time to do this:

Take out your boxes and bags. Open your cabinets and closets. And look at what you already have in the way of décor: tea towels, pumpkins, garland, candles, etc. Make a list of what you'd like to purchase that you don't have. This way you don't make random purchases that don't go with what you already have.

Think of a color of fall you love most. Is it orange, purple, yellow, or brown? Let that one color be your backdrop this year, and go with it. If you choose brown, then maybe you'll want some neutrals to go with...with a pop of dark red. If you love purple, you're in luck. Purple is supposed to be the fall color this year. Orange is easy, it's everywhere. Picking one color helps you decorate every space.

Clean and organize. Don't wait until later, because you know that October is full, November you feel the crunch, and December is the fastest month of the year! Go through your blankets, your linen closets, your wrapping paper, your drawers and toss, toss, toss. It will feel so good to have some extra space as the next season approaches.

Make a calendar. Paper ones are always the most fun, in my opinion. Print one out of the fall weekends and start now, writing in activities and fun. Maybe a pumpkin patch, a day trip, a weekend away, or a special date with the kids. Whatever you really want to do this fall season, make a space for it NOW, and block it in. Yes, kids and family will be busy as well, so mark those things now, so you can fill in rest and relaxation in between. You'll thank me later for this planning ahead.

Batteries, wrap, and stockings. These three things can send you over the edge come Christmas. Buy the batteries now. Assess your wrapping needs now. And start buying those stocking gifts. Then when December arrives, you can actually enjoy the process of getting it all together and pretty, ready for giving.

Consider a new study. We just enjoyed *Not So Quiet Quiet Time*, and a book called *Revive* before that. Having one study or book that just takes 20 minutes or so each evening or morning, really sets the pace for all the fast racing that happens come fall. Having a new Bible study book to open either together with him, alone with Him, or with your kiddos is anchor that will hold you together when life is pulling you apart.

Fill your home with fragrance and light. Buy your favorite candles, now. Or use a candle warmer, if you don't like burning candles. Search and enjoy all the fall stovetop potpourri recipes available on the internet. Heck, try them all. Every day, fill the home with a fall scent. Add light, too. There are so many cool candles that have timers. Place them on the porch, on the window ledge, atop a table, and more. It's fun to have these come on at night just as the sun sets, to invite you into the season of fall.

That's all, for now. I bet you can think of more "to do" items that cause you pain when you don't handle them early. All the ways you need to actually enjoy autumn (I just love the word autumn) are important for your health. Play autumn music, find time to play in the leaves, and start enjoying

the cooler nights when they arrive as you take that walk...because you made the fall preparations before...

FRESH THYME – The Pivot – by Marcy Lytle

I remember when I taught my kids to drive, it was important to get the pivot spot correct, when they were parking. And I often share this with my husband when he parks and ends up crooked in the parking space. Not sure he likes my critique of his parking, but I do it to myself as well. There's a spot on your car that needs to align with the back rear corner of the vehicle you're pulling in beside. Did you know that? And if you get that pivot right, you're parked straight.

It also applies when parallel parking, something I love to do...because of the pivot. If you back your car and align the middle of it with the back rear corner of the car in the space, and then you turn...you end up being able to parallel park so nicely. But if that pivot is off, you'll be the car going forward and backward, and then maybe giving up altogether on that parallel parking space. It's very mathematical, isn't it? Geometric, even...

I was thinking about pivoting after my husband and I discussed the value of it, when parking. And we all know that pivot means to change direction, often in response to circumstances. And when we don't pivot, we end up crooked...so to speak.

I think the main thing I was noting is how I remember when teaching my kids to drive, they either listened to my instructions from the driver's manual or they didn't. They either argued about doing it "their" way or they tried it the way that works. And I also recall a time or two telling them we'd go home if they didn't listen and obey behind the wheel. Not pivoting when parking might not be a life or death situation, but sitting crooked affects all the people after you...when they park. Never learning to parallel park because of the pivot, maybe not knowing it, or being in a hurry and skipping it, results in total frustration on the part of the driver.

Many of my friends and my kids' friends definitely had to pivot back when Covid took over the country. It just wasn't possible to keep business as usual, when nothing in the world was usual. Pivoting took place, workers set up offices at home, and some businesses closed altogether for lack of funds coming in...and changes happened. But those that didn't pivot, or change with the circumstances...often ended up bitter and angry at the world, the government, and at the changes forced upon them.

Refusal to pivot in life's circumstances can end up zapping the life right of us.

I personally had a big pivotal moment or pivotal years where I had been sitting crooked spiritually, and it had affected those around me, and made me frustrated in my walk with God. Little truths I'd set up for myself involving religion, rules and laws I thought ensured a happy life were challenged. I kept trying to park my mind and heart in the same way it had sat all my life, but that parking was no longer straight...but certainly askew and unsightly in my actions and attitudes. I believe that some of life's hardships that came my way caused me to pivot, as my "instructor" taught me a better way to park my heart in way that kept it soft and pliable, gentle and kind. If I hadn't pivoted, I may have left my faith altogether.

Refusal to pivot when religion takes its place above relationship is sure death.

That's just two little examples of the need to pivot, so that we can move forward instead of being stuck in a back and forth motion, or ending up across the painted line...into other folks' space.

I think of pivoting every time I park and when I do, it always works. Like I said, it's a mathematical angle that works when parking. And when we learn it and practice it, it makes driving and parking so much more fun and easy. And it's the same with life.

A woman Martha in the bible had to pivot when she was upset with her sister Mary for not helping her. Jesus instructed Martha to pivot from being so busy that she missed the rest offered to her...and she noted it...and listened.

I want to listen, too, and learn always...in my life. Pivoting is just one lesson. And we learn so many more when learning to drive that apply to learning to live. I'm thankful we serve the One who knows the spots we're looking for, realizes that sometimes it's a tight squeeze, or that we just can't make things straight. And he calls us to pivot, to trust him, lean into his arms, turn this way or that, so that we park oh, so pretty. And those around us have space to be near us, as well.