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TIPS

Bookstore: A TORMENTOR'S TALE – by Angela Dolbear

The first book I bought as a new Christian back in 1991 was *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis. I became fascinated by the spiritual warfare that goes on in the “second heaven,” as the Bible calls it, the place behind the veil that separates our world and the supernatural. I learned I had a very cunning enemy at work to hinder my life. I also learned that the battle belongs to the Lord, and I should never be afraid.

Years later, my fascination inspired an idea for a novel. I prayed for guidance, and God gave me A TORMENTOR'S TALE.

This novel provides a biblically researched peek behind the veil separating the physical and spiritual worlds, to the eye-opening spiritual warfare that affects our lives.

Roaming the earth for centuries, seeking souls to torment and devour, has lost its appeal for Nacham. He wants it all to end. He longs to return to his previous role as a servant in unbroken devotion to his Creator. But that life is gone forever.

Nacham's failed tormenting assignments earned him the punishment of being bound to the descendants of the Hemlock family, to be passed down a long line of wicked, narcissistic, and murderous women.

After the death of Wynter Hemlock from breast cancer, her young adult daughter Willow becomes Nacham's new subject.

But Willow Hemlock is kind and compassionate, just as her father prayed she would be, since before her birth. She seeks to find authentic love in her relationships. And she possesses holy traits of Heaven, which Nacham is drawn to and longs to experience again.

Willow is hope to Nacham. The salvation of her soul would break his binding to her and the Hemlock family line, bringing freedom for him, as well as an end to the incessant evil deeds he is asked to perform.

When Willow faces a crisis of faith, Nacham is granted an unusual mission from the Throne room of Heaven. He is allowed to venture to the other side of the veil that separates the physical and spiritual worlds, take on a human-like form, and communicate with Willow.

Will his tale of torment save Willow from losing her faith?

I hope I sparked your interest in spiritual warfare. God's Word tells us to be alert to the schemes of the enemy and dress in His full armor daily. Remember, though, we fight from victory!

If you are interested in acquiring a copy of THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, please visit the Bookstore page or email me at angela@angeladolbear.com to purchase a signed copy.

Blessings to you!

Cousin Moms – Friends or Foes? – by Charissa and Kamrin

Siblings aren't always close friends just because they belong to the same parents or family! And sometimes the fights between siblings are just the worst! We asked the Cousin Moms to share their frustrations and tactics on how to deal with sibling rivalry and fights, among brothers and sisters of all ages. Feel free to chime in with your comments at the end.

Charissa

This topic hits close to home! Having three girls, there are lots of emotions that run from silly fights over a toy, or bigger fights because of something being said that was mean, or...jealousy! As parents, it's hard to figure out how to discipline or go through this. The girls are sometimes best of friends and sometimes they don't want to be with each other.

Some tactics we use are:

Taking away something that's important like television, or a toy. For example, our older two were at each other all day over silly things from someone not sharing or "she took my apple" and maybe 10 minutes later, it's a fight over songs and music. I had given time out and taken away things... The last straw was taking all of their dumplings (the most popular toy!) away and put them in the trash. They lost it and bawled. They apologized. We talked about respect, and how serious this is...when they don't listen and do the right thing. After that, they responded and I put the dumplings away in the closet. This was a shocker to them, to cause a change in their actions.

I've even done something like, "Touch your noses together," and when they do, the girls start laughing. So we all laugh and move on.

Sometimes we write out bible verses, even ones about sisterhood, or the fruit of the Spirit. We talk about what comes out of our mouths should bring joy, or we don't need to say it. We pause and think before we speak, we ask if we are being patient, kind and full of self-control...

Other times, if the girls have been inside too much I'll send them outside to run or figure things out, a physical exercise. This works!

And finally, quiet time or time out or sitting in their rooms separately, where they walk away and take time.

And of course, I too lose my patience and have to practice self-control and ask God for his help. It's also helpful to talk to the girls afterwards, and move forward together.

Kamrin

Our three kids are pretty close in age, the two oldest are 17 months apart, and the youngest is 2 years younger than his sister. And of course, they do fight! With the boys, there is a lot of competition in athletics and academics. They can boss each other around to show that they are better than the other person. But they can push each other to grow by working out and doing sports together. And I think they are best friends, but they would never say that! But then again they do need their space.

As the boys have gotten older, sometimes the youngest goes off to play video games, or the oldest says he wants to chill. We don't really send them to their rooms now, when they do

fight...except sometimes. One time when they were small, they were in their rooms apart, and they had these dartboards. We could hear them fighting about who could win on their boards...yelling through their doors!

We often have conversations and ask questions like, "Was that necessary?" We also sometimes wait and let them work it out and solve conflicts as they can. Once in a blue moon, the fight will turn personal and one may say a hurtful comment, and we step in. We talk about our hearts and understanding and compromise.

Our daughter spends a lot of time with friends and her own things, and she probably gets along best with her youngest brother, but not the older one, so much. They also compete and he might say something bossy, and she doesn't like it. And they do not understand each other...girl/boy stuff. They are quicker to "throw stones" and hurt each other.

We recently talked about character and relationship with siblings, and biblical principles, and how they need to spend time together. Then we do see glimpses of that. He might see that her bag is heavy and he carries it for her and he supports her in her theater. She cheers the boys in their sports too, as she can. And sometimes, they all play a game together.

We don't force them to hang out, as young teens, but we do have weekends where we have family time together. And we encourage them to do things together, and they do for the most part. But of course, they like to win and be the best!

When we discipline it's usually taking away screen time or a phone, and requiring them to converse with each other. And listening to each other. All with a good heart...

In the Kitchen – Four Meals – by Marcy Lytle

These recipes were a fave in the past few weeks, and they were all easy to put together. That's the criteria isn't it? Tasty AND easy? It is for fall, for sure, when busyness kicks in and life gets crazy.

Easy Green Chicken Enchiladas

We had these on a weekend trip with the family and they were super easy and delish...so I'm sharing with you!

- 1 t olive oil
- 2 c shredded cooked chicken
- Six 8 inch flour tortillas or corn
- 2 c green chile enchilada sauce or salsa verde (15-16oz can)
- 2 garlic cloves minced
- ½ c sour cream
- ¼ c chopped cilantro
- 1 c shredded cheddar cheese or Monterey Jack

Heat oven to 350 and grease a 2 quart baking dish. Heat the oil in a skillet over medium heat. Add garlic about 1 minute, stir in the sauce and cook for 1 minute. Remove from heat. Stir in sour cream and cilantro. Taste and adjust taste with S&P. (You can add more sour cream if it's too spicy.)

Remove 1 c of the sauce from skillet and set aside. Stir the chicken and half the cheese into the skillet with the remaining sauce. Spread half of the reserved 1 c sauce over the bottom of baking dish.

Place 1/3 c of chicken in center of each tortilla and roll, arranging seam side down, in the dish. Spread reserved sauce over top and scatter remaining cheese on top.

Cover with foil and bake 15 minutes. Remove foil and bake til cheese is bubbly, about 10 minutes. Allow to cool 5-10 minutes, then scatter more cilantro on top.

Ravioli Lasagna

Another family favorite and oh, so easy, for lasagna lovers that don't like the toil of making the traditional kind:

- 1 lb ground Italian sausage
- 24 oz pasta sauce
- 25 oz frozen cheese ravioli square shaped (no need to thaw)
- 1 ½ c shredded mozzarella
- ½ Italian seasoning
- ¼ t garlic powder
- ½ dried oregano

Preheat oven to 350. In medium skillet, crumble and brown the sausage completely, drain the fat, and mix in seasoning and garlic powder after draining.

Reserve $\frac{3}{4}$ of the pasta sauce and set aside. Add remaining sauce to skillet with the meat and stir well. Simmer 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Spread $\frac{1}{4}$ c of the reserve sauce on bottom of 9X13 glass baking dish. Arrange a third of the ravioli in a single layer, top with half the sausage mixture, then $\frac{1}{2}$ c of shredded cheese.

Place another third of the frozen ravioli on top and the remaining sauce, sprinkle with rest of cheese.

Place final third of ravioli on top and add rest of sauce and rest of cheese.

Cover with foil and bake for 20-30 minutes remove foil and bake 10 minutes more til cheese begins to bubble. Allow to rest 15 minutes before slicing.

Serve with Parmesan cheese. And if you want fresh basil.

Burritos

An easy weeknight meal for the family, just five ingredients!

- A package of large flour tortillas (10)
- 1 lb ground meat
- 1 can refried beans
- 1 jar of salsa
- Grated cheddar cheese

Cook the ground beef completely, and drain the fat. Add in the bean, and the salsa, and combine.

Assemble by placing the beef mixture on the tortilla, with cheese, and roll up as you fold the sides in.

In a skillet, toast the burritos seam side down and then flip to the others, and on all sides until crispy.

Serve with avocado if you wish!

Fall Salad

This is the best salad and you can eat it for days... (found it on Ally's Kitchen)

- 1 bunch celery chopped
- 1 large honey crisp apple diced
- 1 large cucumber diced
- 1 bunch fresh parsley chopped fine
- Handful micro greens
- 8-10 pitted medjul dates, chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$ c chopped pecans

Dressing –

- 1 ½ c shaved Parmesan
- 1 bunch freshly chopped dill
- 2-3 large lemons juiced
- ½ c mayo
- ¼ c avocado oil (olive oil works)
- 1 t salt, 1 t pepper
- 2 cloves garlic minced
- 2 t maple syrup

Add all salad ingredients to bowl. Mix all dressing ingredients in another bowl til smooth. Pour over salad and toss.

Seven for You – Skincare? Yes! – by the Panel

We see so much about skincare lately everywhere. Skin ages, it weathers the elements, and it's just the part of us that goes with us all the time! We asked our panel to share their favorite body lotion, face moisturizer, any morning or night cleansers, and any other skincare products (soap?) that they use and the WHY. After all, it helps to hear what others say that works for them, when we need a little boost ourselves!

Skin. It's the largest organ in our bodies, so it makes sense that we'd want to care of it! I've been slathering mine with basically the same products I've used since I was 15 years old. Every morning and evening I wash with Ivory soap followed by Oil of Olay to moisturize my face and neck. Because that's what my mom always used. Both are reasonably priced and easy to find at places like Walmart and Target. With the recent onset of fine lines around the eyes, I've added Roden & Fields Redefine Eye Cream to my routine – and it HAS made a difference!

After a trip to Hawaii several years ago, I discovered Bubble Shack Hawaii Coconut Volcano body lotion and shower gel. Not only do they leave my skin soft, it leaves my skin with that distinct island time fragrance all day long. Every few months a huge box arrives from Hawaii with a fresh supply! With these simple skincare routines, I'm able to keep my skin moisturized and healthy and maybe, just maybe, slow down the aging process a tad... - Jennifer

My skincare products change slightly, but my routine mostly stays the same. I wash my face at least twice a day, in the morning and at night before I go to bed. I wish I was doing that when I was a teenager. In the morning, I use a gentle cleanser by RoC just to get the night moisturizer and natural oils off my face, then a gentle toner by Oil of Olay. I'm almost out of my RoC cleanser so will probably go back to my oil of Olay cleanser.

Before makeup, and yes, I wear makeup every day, I use a light under eye moisturizer by RoC and a light face moisturizer. I recently bought a very expensive "face tightener" that I'm not sure is worth the money but I am also using a moisturizer by Clinique. I was told that this Clinique moisturizer was compatible with my foundation. Not sure I believe that either!

At night, I wash my face with Oil of Olay's citrus exfoliator. I've been using it for years and love the smell and the way my skin feels afterwards! I then use an under eye "glycolic eye cream" by Mario Badescu, then that expensive face tightener, and a moisturizer.

My moisturizer varies from night to night depending on what I feel like using! Recently, I've been using that Terra Lotus "beef tallow" that has been advertised on social media. I must say I do like it! It is very thick, so I only use a little bit. But if I don't use the beef tallow, I will use a creamy vitamin C night cream with high hyaluronic acid, probiotics, and rooibos by Derma E. I buy that from my vitamin supplement store.

I stopped having facials, and quite frankly have noticed the difference, so will probably start going back for regular treatments. I guess it's always good to treat yourself anyway, isn't it? - Anita

My mom always said to clean my face at night and never go to bed with makeup on - and I always adhere to that advice! But besides that practice, I do have a few products I love and have used for _____ years.

There's a trio I use that I found at Gruene Witch Apothecary and I love all three - the coffee cleansing bar for morning, the witch hazel toner (smells amazing and feels like a fresh spring

water wake-up!) and the anti-aging moisturizer. They all smell wonderful and feel great on my face.

I also love JR Watkins peppermint body lotion. I order it through Amazon. It smells great and feels like it refreshes my whole body so well...it even tingles...maybe it's the peppermint?

Finally, heel lotion is a must for me and I order it through Nuskin, a product my daughter Kamrin Wolfe sells. It's been a game changer for my heels - smooth now, and not cracked! – Marcy

Regarding my skin care...I should do better but this is all I have:

I can only use unscented products. I use Cetaphil creams and lotions. I use a thick cream on my face and thinner ones to shave my legs and as a body wash.

This is going to sound odd, but my doctor gave me some estrogen cream, and I mix a bit of it into my face cream. It seems to help fend off aging just a smidge. – Cathy

One thing I use that I love is goat milk soap. Caprine Artisan Soaps is the only one I use. They use quality ingredients and have several natural scents. I even use it on my hair sometimes. I don't like to spend a lot of money on products and I'm not sure expensive = better. I use different facial moisturizers-Loreal Collagen for about a year now, but I'm ready to try something else. For general body moisturizing I use Dermasil (buy at the dollar store for \$1.25!) It absorbs well and doesn't feel greasy. I use Udderly Smooth for hands and feet--I buy it at Ace Hardware and it works great when I use it. - Dina

Unfortunately, I do not have a skin care routine. I have rosacea; I have tried everything the dermatologist has given me. None of it has worked outside of antibiotics and I cannot stay on antibiotics. The sun makes rosacea worse, and I will not quit the sun because I love to garden. Getting hot from exercise also makes it worse. It seems I'm allergic to being hot! I have also historically not had a budget to buy nice skin care products, so I do not even know what products are good! – Laura

I'm an older woman with allergies so I have to be careful about what skin products I use. Some name brand lotions will break me out with hives. So, I only use what I know is safe for me. My routine consists of No.7 Lift and Luminate Fragrance Free Day Cream in the morning and No.7 Future Renew Night Cream at night on my face. I also use No.7 Line Correcting Serum around my eyes. For the rest of my body, I use olive oil. Recently, I have started to use CeraVe lotion when I travel. It's easier to pack. I really like olive oil because it's what they used way back in the biblical days. I feel like if God gave it, it must be good. For my achy knees I use Frankincense & Myrrh Pain Relief Rubbing Oil, another God given remedy which is also good for the skin. And its smell is as soothing to me as its medicinal purposes are. – Carole

Maintaining healthy skin is a challenge for me. I have rosacea on my face and very dry skin everywhere else.

For my face, my dermatologist recommended adding a whole bottle of Afrin to a bottle of CeraVe SPF 30 daily moisturizer to minimize the redness by shrinking blood vessels. It works!

Before the CeraVe mixture, I apply an aging skin regimen from The Ordinary:

1. I start with their Glycolic Acid 7% Exfoliating and Brightening Daily Toner
2. Then apply Hyaluronic Acid 2% + B5 Hydrating Serum with Ceramides
3. Next, apply the 100% Organic Cold-Pressed Rose Hip Seed Oil for Skin

Elasticity

All of The Ordinary products can be purchased at Target (some might have to be ordered online), on Amazon, or at Ulta. Also, I don't use soap on my face, ever! It's too drying and irritating for my sensitive skin. I remove all makeup and cleanse my skin with organic Grapeseed oil. For the rest of my skin, I use Dove Serum Body Wash Hydration Boost with Hyaluronic Acid, which nourishes my skin and smells so good, with an exfoliating sponge to slough off dead skin. I finish with a Bath & Body Works lotion. "In the Stars" is my favorite fragrance. - Angela

The Dressing – Cute Stuff! – by Marcy Lytle

It's September again and I can hardly believe it, and I am again wishing for cool temps but they just don't arrive at my bidding. And yet, I hope every year that it will be different! But while we wait and the breezes do start to trend towards the new season, we can step out in something cute that makes us feel alive and hopeful.

Scarves – They made their appearance so strong this past spring and summer, so let's keep wearing them! I recently found a vintage one I love, a magnetic scarf that is so fun, and then a larger retro-looking print I find goes with so much! Wear the scarf. It just makes one feel so elevated and happy...

One Color – If you haven't gone with a monochromatic look in a while, look and see if you have a top, a bag, and a bottom in the same color family but maybe different shades...and wear them all! I love green any time, any season...do you?

A Versatile Skirt – Old Navy has some great elastic waist skirts, and I love the khaki/light brown one for fall. It can be worn with light sweaters...and then chunky ones later...as the temps fall. You can wear open toes or a cute belt, and then add boots in October!

A New Brand – Oxknit is a new brand of clothing to me, just in the past few months, and I love it so much. The sweaters and tops are unique and bold and great for fall. I have two of them and recommend them for sure!

Plaid – It's in for the fall. Maybe you like it in a shirt, or a dress, but I love it in a coat! I found this one on clearance at Urban Outfitters, on line. It even pairs nicely with a striped tee. Who knew! I can't wait to actually have a reason to wear it!

Chocolate Brown – I found the cutest suede bag in chocolate brown at Marshalls and I can carry it now, paired with a button up shirt (it has tiny sunflowers on it!) and a skinny long scarf called a Twilly. Grab some suede accessories in chocolate brown and enjoy them all season...on into winter.

Check out the trends and pick the ones you like, shop to find items to go with what you already have and like, and start the transition into the next season as you enjoy so much cute stuff...

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

Every month, so much to observe and learn, everywhere we look. Here's what I tried and learned...what about you? Share something in the comments!

I saw these cute plant solar stands on Amazon and placed them on the patio – Two in the order!

When's the last time you had a banana split night with the family? Set out the toppings and let them indulge!

Look at this cute movie themed phone cover? Pebble and Caramel – check out all the options and how they're made!

If you need an easy bed option for travel, this one is great, and you can tell the kids it's their own cave bed! Soooo cozy.

Poetry for Neanderthals – have you heard of this game? You need it for fall family fun. You get to whack each other with an inflatable bat.

Charlie the Lonesome Cougar – it's an old Disney movie – no AI – real animals! The kids will love it, and you will too.

Do you ever shop at J Crew Factory for earrings? You should... And if there's a store near you, they often have a huge clearance area where you can snag GREAT deals.

I bought a basil plant and have been growing it indoors and it's surviving, so far. Trader Joe's has so many herbs...grab them...they're a great price point!

Have you seen Julia Roberts' first movie *Mystic Pizza*? I had not. But then I watched it with a friend and we made pizza. Fun idea!

I got these pant/skirt hangers that hang perpendicular to your closet wall, allowing more space. I like them!

Ever eaten a popover, or made one? We enjoyed some at a restaurant recently, and apparently they're not widely popular in America. Find a recipe and enjoy!

Have you tried placing a vase of fresh flowers in your fridge? Oh my gosh, the joy. Every time I open the door.

Ever heard of sunchokes? They're a particular kind of artichoke, meant to be eaten with others as an appetizer. Bu don't eat an entire plate alone. You'll be sick. I was...

An easy table décor for September is to toss a huge scarf diagonally across your table, add a plant on a stand, and a cute gold lamp. Done!

I found the cutest set of readers on Amazon, with different colored frames from the arms. Great for a new look!

Fun info from the teens in our family...middle school kids can't "normalize" feet – they have to wear socks. Showing their feet is just wrong. *What?*

Need a place to hang your chunky necklaces? This cute expandable hook situation from Michaels works!

I found a Wrinkle Spray at the Dollar Tree that I like better than Downy. It's called just that. Wrinkle Spray.



HOME

A Night to Remember – Bruises – by Marcy Lytle

I remember when I read that bruises go away by being absorbed into the blood, I was so intrigued! And wowed! You bump into something that causes this nasty looking wound...and over time, that big blob of hurt is absorbed back into the blood, and the skin looks new again. So why not talk about this with the kids as there are such good applications to this knowledge!

Preparation: Lay out a few bandages or Band-Aids. And maybe a bit of concealer. That's it! This devo is for kids to just show up, share and listen, and give thanks. If you have a bruised banana, great! Let the kids see it.

How many have ever had a bruise? Does anyone have one now that they can show us? What happened? Bruises are caused from some sort of injury. Maybe we bump into a table or we get hit by a ball and then we see it – the dark and purple spot on our skin! Who likes to get a bruise? No one! (If anyone has a bruise, let them tell about it – or about one they had before.)

Did you know we can get an unseen bruise on our heart when someone is not nice to us and it hurts our feelings? When we, or someone else, says unkind words it bruises our heart. It hurts. And we need a way to heal those kinds of bruises, too. Has anyone here ever been bruised or hurt by words someone else has said? (Share)

Do BandAids help bruises? No! Why not? (Let the kids answer). Bruises don't cut the skin or cause bleeding, because the blood is underneath the skin and it needs time to heal. Sometimes, parts of our body don't need bandages, but rather time and natural healing. That's the way God made our bodies to work! (Ask the kids about the BandAids and why they don't help bruises.)

How can we avoid getting bruised and bruising others? We are going to get bruised in our bodies because we live in a world of things to bump into! And we will get bruised from others and we will end up bruising (hurting) others, because we make mistakes! But as we become aware of our surroundings and see others with love, bruises will happen less! (Ask the kids to share how they get bruised the most.)

That's why we all need the blood...the blood in our bodies to heal our bruises...and the blood of Jesus to heal our hearts! And our bodies!

Did you know that Jesus was bruised and broken? Isaiah 53:5 says that He was bruised for our iniquities – all the wrongful and sinful things in this world. And then we read that by his stripes we are healed. In other words, Jesus took all the hate and evil and hurt in the world upon himself in his body and soul...and sacrificed his life so that we could experience healing, inside and out!

When you get a bruise, do you try to hide it? Some people do, because they feel a bruise is ugly. People use makeup or refuse to wear clothes that reveal their bruise. We don't like the way bruises look...or feel. (Show the kids how concealer can hide but not remove...only Jesus can heal us completely.)

Have we been bruised or have we bruised anyone this week? (Spend time sharing).

Let's pray together and give thanks for the way the blood of Jesus absorbed and took all of our pain, so that we can have healing...if not here on earth...then forever with Him!

Jesus, forgive us if we have ever bruised or hurt someone with our words.

And please forgive those who have hurt us, and heal our bruised hearts.

*We also ask for healing for physical bruising when we get hurt,
and thank you for your blood that you shed on the cross...for our healing.*

Amen.

Homesteading – I Don't Know – by Leyanne Enterline

I used to be way into making sure our checkbook was balanced by Saturday night. I'd make we had enough in checking and move into savings if needed and make sure we had the tithe check ready for Sunday's offering. However, with my husband's current job situation, even just looking at the checkbook or online banking has been just depressing.

I decided to look back and see when was the last time I had even thought to balance the checkbook, and it was back in March! I had been so rigid with it for forever! Even back when we got married, I remember being in complete shock that my hubby had never balanced his checkbook. He just thought whatever the statements showed were to be true.

But what if they were wrong?
What if the bank made a mistake?
How do you add up your funds for tithing?
How do you make sure there's enough in checking?

I am very type A and want to do everything by the rule book and the right way. I do not understand how anyone would not want to...

Our boys are funny. One is like me and the other like Brian. Care free, it'll all work out, is one son's attitude, and the other is very orderly, always wanting to know the plan for the day. One has all his clothes hung in color order and all facing the same direction in his closet. The other one's closet looks like a tornado hit it.

Is one right and the other wrong? I don't know.

I feel like I'm being taught to maybe take a chill pill and let the Lord work it out. But sometimes I think that's called lazy... I really don't know the answers, but I'm trying to learn something in this mess that I feel like we're in. There must be a reason for it and a lesson to be learned! I'm constantly trying to pray and ask God in all situations to guide me.

Depending on work and finances to work out, and bills to get paid, is truly an act of faith. I feel like we have prayed all the prayers, cried all the tears, searched for any type of work, taken on the most random jobs just to try and make ends meet.

There are times, though, we must just let God work. (Actually all the time we should let God work!) And I am trying to do that.

I'm not so good at "letting God," but aren't we all a work in progress?

I Don't Do Teens – Grace to You – by Marcy Lytle

I've observed that oftentimes teens don't offer much grace to themselves...or others...and especially not to siblings. And sometimes, parents don't offer much grace, either.

We sometimes forget that our teens are growing up in their bodies and have these incredible mood swings, and they're dealing with peer pressure, drama with friends, homework loads, all the while working out their own salvation and what they believe. It's a lot! And while parents need grace, too, that's for another article...

Do your teens know what grace is? With God, we are offered his mercy and love and help, because we belong to him, not because of what we do to earn his favor. And grace is also strength given to us from God to overcome and live a good life. It's something we all need, and receive from God, on a daily basis. So we can begin by telling our teens about God's grace offered to us in that while we were sinners (rebellious against Him), Jesus died for us. This is always the foundation of grace.

When teens are battling self-image and performance in sports or academics, they are often their own worst critic. They may look in the mirror and see that they are "less than" her or him. Comparison is a big issue with teenagers, and too many times they feel they come up short. Lots of affirmation offered to our kids is needed! If we too are comparing adults and never feel like we look "good" either, it will come across in looks and digs towards our kids. We know that we are to love others as we love ourselves, but if we hate ourselves in the way we look...or in the way we perform...we have no grace for ourselves.

When teens are dealing with others, for example, on the playing field they sometimes blame their teammates for that loss or poor performance on the field. Or maybe they have a friend that lied or talked about them behind their back, or just ghosted them altogether, and it hurts. But truly, our teens also make mistakes when they're playing and sometimes don't treat their friends like they'd like to be treated. Grace is needed! This doesn't mean they are to be a doormat, but they can learn to realize that they don't know what's going on in their friends' homes and behind the scenes, and grace and prayer can be offered. This enables them to keep loving, and yes – set boundaries - but not carry bitterness. Grace for themselves, and others, enables them to forgive and look for the good.

When there are siblings involved, it seems there is less grace here than anywhere! "Shut up!" might be heard at home among a sister and brother, when he teases her incessantly. Or perhaps multiple interruptions when one is telling a story, as the other sibling thinks they're telling it all wrong. Maybe it's his turn to do a chore and he doesn't do it correctly, and the other teen is aggravated because she always does it perfectly. Siblings just get on each other's nerves. Of course, we remember that ourselves from when we teens! But grace...it goes a long way...when we learn to receive it and offer it in our families. Grace is loving our family members, praying for them, offering a hand-up, and remembering that we too need grace on a daily basis.

The best way for our teens to learn to receive grace and offer grace is to receive it and offer it ourselves. They need to hear positive words come out of our mouths as we talk to others and to ourselves, and to our kids. Words of grace and affirmation, always topping any instruction and criticism. And they need to hear us pray, in family time, offering thanksgiving to the Grace Giver, always...

Grace. It's just a word that sounds so soft and smooth when we say it...and when we offer it.
And receive it.

In Each Room – Fall Bedroom – by Marcy Lytle

Do you change your décor in your bedroom for the different seasons? I do it twice a year, just by changing a few things...not the whole bedding! If you have a neutral comforter and a few layers, you can easily change the look with some accessories. And shopping around for sales is the most fun of all...

I wanted to put away the summer hues of light green and I really had it in my head that I wanted to add brown and red to pull out some colors in a photo hung above my bed. So start with that. Pick a color scheme you want, and snap some photos of your bed as it is...so you have it when shopping.

I decided I wanted a new throw, some new throw pillows, and maybe some stems for a vase. That was it. And I envisioned what I wanted before I shopped. And I shopped. I looked on Amazon...but nothing. Finally, it was Target for the win...with one pillow from guess where? The Dollar Tree!

I saw a red leaf pillow at the Dollar Tree on that aisle where things are like \$5 and \$7. So I think this pillow was \$5 – such a deal. That's the piece I began with!

After much looking, I was walking through the home area of Target and spotted these plaid pillows on sale. I love plaid! And they had the colors I wanted...the red and brown...plus navy. Would that work? I wasn't sure, so I pulled out my phone and looked at the photo of my room and the answer was yes! I placed two of these in my cart.

Next, I looked at the throws. I had seen a plush dark brown one in the Dollar Spot near the front of the store, and I kept thinking of it...while I looked in the home area. There it was...a pretty navy throw in a different texture from my two comforters...which was perfect. Adding layers of different textures is good! And of course, I went back to the Dollar Spot and grabbed the brown one too. It was just five bucks! And the navy one was on sale.

So happy...I was about to leave and saw some fall stems for a dollar each, so I grabbed a few for a vase on my bedside table.

After I went home, I played with where to place everything. I saw that a "contemporary" way to place a throw on a bed is to tuck it under where you fold back your comforter – so I tried that. The old way was at the foot of the bed. I placed the pillows and loved the look.

I took the brown throw and the other plaid pillow, and added a large tote for a pretty trio on the bench nearby. And then the stems were placed in the vase.

I'm done...for now...until I see another sale or another idea pops into my head!

Practical Parenting – Creative Boxes – by Marcy Lytle

I recently found a snap-shut box at the Dollar Tree that was big enough to hold lots of small things, for a to-do box for the littles... I decided to pack it often with new ideas all from the Dollar Tree, because their shelves and products are always changing. There are so many ideas, and the box can be repacked over and over again, for those days when everyone's at home, and the kids need something to do...inside!

Twine – String this across the room as if lasers are being shot and have the kids crawl through without touching.

Face stickers – These books are fun, as they include blank faces with pages of stickers to create expressions. There are eyebrows, lips, eyes, hats and more...and the kids have a blast using them all!

Wash tubs – These can be filled partway with water and the kids can wash their toy cars, or small toys after they've gotten them "dirty" with baking soda "snow!"

Tongs and a muffin tin – In the kitchen area grab some tongs. Place small toys in muffin tins and have the kids "rescue" them with the tongs!

Feeling envelopes – Get a box of envelopes that seal and inside place just random house things like a straw, a quarter, a spoon, etc. Make at least 15. Have the kids guess what's sealed inside before tearing open the envelope to reveal!

Painter's tape – Use this to map a city block on the floor before filling with cars and little figures. Or tape little figures to the walls and let the kids find and take the animals back to their homes (the toy box!)

Sponge paint – Grab sponge paintbrushes or cut up kitchen sponges and fill the tub with water, and let them "paint" the garage door with water!

New Books – There are always books at the dollar tree, and oftentimes Snoopy ones! Get several!

Card games – I saw one called Go Farm where after they match the animals, they make the animal sounds!

Balloon Volleyball – Blow up balloons, place string between two chairs, and play volleyball.

Super big – Look on the color books aisle and they often have those huge coloring pads – like really big! These are fun for the toddlers to sit and color together because there's so much room.

Stamp time – Often this time of year there are pumpkin or holiday stamps. Be sure to get an ink pad, and give the kids blank paper and let them create.

Every week there are new ideas to be found on the aisles...and you can keep this box full and have it on hand so there's always fun to be had.

Rooted in Love - Bright Spots – by Kaelin Scott

There's something I've noticed during my time volunteering in children's ministry. Whether it's on Wednesday nights with the preschoolers, at kids' camp with the elementary students, or at home with my own two kids, there's one thing that always rings true.

Kids just want someone to care about them.

They want someone to show up and be there for them. Someone who listens to them and truly cares about what they have to say. Someone they can trust and rely on in a world full of chaos.

Looking back on my own time in youth group, I can echo this exact sentiment. I can probably only tell you a few lessons that were taught, but I can vividly remember the leaders. Why? Because they gave their time and energy to pour into me and a bunch of other rowdy kids every single week. They pointed us to Christ because they loved us and wanted us to know Him. They cared about us and prayed for us and made us feel seen.

Isn't that really what all of us want? To be known and loved and cared about? From children up to senior adults, that's what it all boils down to.

We just want someone to care.

So maybe we can make it our mission today, this week, the rest of this year, to make sure people feel cared about. Maybe it's the cashier in the grocery store or the mailman. Maybe it's a teacher or a coach. Maybe it's your husband or your kids. Each day we cross paths with someone we can be a source of light to. A shoulder to lean on. A hand to hold. A bright spot in an otherwise gloomy day.

Sometimes all it takes is a smile to make someone feel seen. Sometimes it might be a hug. A card or a note just to say hi. A few dollars to help with a hard time. A meal during a stressful season. Or maybe just sitting and listening while they talk, not to tell them what to do, but simply to show that you care.

Being a light in the darkness might sound like a daunting responsibility, but it's really as simple as spreading kindness to the people around you. And that's something all of us can do.



YOU

A Hopeful Heart - Nine Words, One Mirror – by Christina Oberon

I've always believed that character is revealed less by what we say about ourselves and more by how we consistently show up. Someone may describe themselves as patient, kind or gentle, but over time, it's often their actions that tell us who they are. One of the ways I think about character is through the fruit of the Spirit - Love. Joy. Peace. Patience. Kindness. Goodness. Faithfulness. Gentleness. Self-control.

Nine words from Galatians 5 that I've read many times and genuinely want reflected in my life. I don't see them as a checklist for expecting perfection from anyone. We all have bad days, difficult seasons and moments when we don't show up as our best selves. I believe deeply in giving people grace. But I have had a thought that convicted me a little. If I'm looking at the fruit in someone else's life, how often am I looking for those same things in myself?

Was I patient with my child today, especially when I was tired and running out of patience by 4 pm? Was I gentle in a difficult conversation, or was I more concerned with being right? Did I show kindness to someone who frustrated me? Did I have self-control in the way I responded? Those questions are a lot less comfortable.

September is harvest season, which makes me think about the word fruit in a different way. Fruit doesn't appear overnight. It grows slowly. It needs healthy roots, nourishment, time and the right conditions. There's something important in that. They aren't called the achievements of the Spirit. They're called the fruit of the Spirit. They're evidence of what God is growing in us.

I do think there is value in paying attention to fruit. After all, Jesus taught that we would know people by their fruit. There is a place for discernment, especially when someone's actions consistently don't align with their words. But discernment and judgment aren't the same thing. We can recognize what someone's actions are showing us while still extending grace and remembering that we don't know everything God may be working on in their heart.

And there's another part of discernment we don't talk about as much which is turning it inward. Is she being kind? Is he being patient? Are they showing love? Those may sometimes be fair questions. But I should also be asking, "Am I?"

I can't control what is growing in someone else's life. I don't know what happened five minutes before I encountered them, what they're carrying, or what season they're walking through. I can only pay attention to what God is growing in me. Sometimes another person's behavior may even reveal something in me that still needs work. That doesn't mean excusing hurtful behavior or abandoning discernment. It means remembering that someone else's behavior can sometimes become an opportunity to examine my own. So lately, when I notice something in someone else, I'm trying to remember to turn the question around, too.

What is my reaction showing me about myself?

None of us produces perfect fruit all of the time. We're all still being shaped, pruned and grown in different ways and in different seasons. The fruit of the Spirit can help us discern what we see around us, but maybe they're also meant to turn our attention inward. Maybe they're meant to be a mirror.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." Galatians 5:22–23

This September, as we move into a season of harvest, my prayer is that I continue to give others grace, practice discernment when it's needed, and remain just as willing to look at the fruit God is growing in me.

Inner Strength – Paws on the Cold Floor – by Michelle Wyatt

One day, as I lay melancholy in my hospital bed, here he comes wagging tail and all, prancing and smiling as if he knew who he was there to see. “Yeah!” I don’t know if I said that out loud or just thought it; but regardless, my spirit soared with a smile!

Many of us have experienced the comfort of a loving pet and how they become members of our family, but the bond between people and animals goes beyond personal experience. Professionals have long recognized the healing effects of this relationship. In fact, there is an entire field known as animal-assisted therapy, where specially trained animals work alongside healthcare and education professionals to help reduce anxiety, encourage communication, and support healing. Therapy animals visit hospitals, schools, and rehabilitation centers, while service animals and emotional support animals help individuals in different ways.

So while I usually write from the perspective of an adult, this time I reflect back to my childhood and how the bond of an animal gave me inner strength and moments of joy during a painful time.

I spent a lot of time at Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Children in Dallas, both inpatient and outpatient. When I was 15 months old, I was diagnosed with juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. Fast forward to when I was an older child, I spent so much time at TSRHC it was like my second home. And it was not always fun, of course. However, I do not want to dwell on the details of my JRA, as it progressed...

Thank God, literally, that TSRHC had an amazing child life department filled with peers to play games with, art supplies to create with, volunteers to bond with, and the blessing of therapy dogs. The days the dogs came in, I could feel the shift of the room. Instead of different kids doing different activities until we had to go back to our hospital rooms, it was a group of kids being lifted up by the joyful sweet presence of furry animals.

The therapy dog I bonded with the most was not just at the child life center. My furry friend that came prancing in my hospital room was my favorite schnauzer from the Child Life Center. I forgot that I was in a hospital as I loved on him. (I wish I could remember his name).

First, I heard the door open, then the clicking of his paws on the cold hard floor. I peered around the curtain and sure enough here he came! Everyone else in the room disappeared. It was just me and my furry friend. Of course, those visits went by too fast. Saying goodbye was gut-wrenching at first. It was like someone let the air out of my tires and then squeezed them. Saying goodbye became less gut-wrenching as time went on, as our visits became part of my routine.

I know now more than ever why I have missed the love and support of a furry friend in my life. It is unmistakable how the bond with animals can impact a person’s life, no matter their age and no matter how short or long period of time. While I know not everyone has personally had a special bond with an animal, I do hope this sheds some light on what is out professionally and personally to fill up one’s cup of inner strength.

Life Right Now - What a Difference a Year Makes - By Jennifer Stephens

Four ugly evergreens. Well, it was five, but one had already withered away. Thank goodness. There I was staring at the four remaining shrubs. And I despised them. Such a dull, uninteresting "garden." When we moved in, they were there - along the side of the house, closest to the street, for all the world to see. This row of unsightly shrubs. And I wanted them G-O-N-E. After years of daydreaming about what this space could become, I finally convinced my husband it was time for them to go (maybe it was the bagworm infestation that actually persuaded him to reach for the chainsaw). Whatever the reason, it was time. With a sputtering engine and a *brahp-brahp-brahp*, it was done. What once held five tall evergreens was now an empty void in the landscape.

But I had plans for this blank space. Perennials! Pollinators! A garden painted with every color of the rainbow.

What a difference a year makes! These two pictures were taken exactly one year apart. 365 days. From a brown vacant patch to a lush colorful pollinator haven filled with daisies, zinnias, moonflowers, Black-eyed Susan, coneflowers, cleome, sunflowers, and milkweed. And bees. And butterflies. So many butterflies - like monarchs and silver-spotted skippers! It's even more beautiful than I'd imagined.

But it took time. Patience. Giving a passing glance to that brown empty space, one would assume growth had reached a standstill. Isn't that how it goes? We're stuck in the brown empty doldrums of life and it seems like nothing is ever going to change. But it does. We adapt. Evolve. We keep going even when it's hard. Even when it seems impossible. The seeds are planted. And we wait.

Maybe the idea of waiting a year seems too far away. But a day. A day is possible. What a difference a day makes. 24 hours. Maybe it's a rotten, lonely day. A brokenhearted, rainy, gray sky, chilly air kind of day. We may not see it today, but tomorrow, the sun shines brighter and it's hot. Almost too hot. But it's no longer gray.

Maybe it's one hour at a time. What a difference an hour makes. 60 minutes. It's the paralyzing fear of the dreaded dentist appointment kind of day. If we remind ourselves after just one hour the buzz of glaring lights and din of scraping teeth will be finished - and we can treat ourselves with something special, like a shopping spree - we can muster the courage to walk inside the door.

When life feels empty, dreary, or dreadful, stick around because it can, it will, all change, like a brown, barren garden space becoming a pollinator's paradise. With God we can be certain He is at work filling the emptiness, restoring the broken, and removing the fear. It might take an hour, a day, or even a year, but it WILL get better.

"But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience." Romans 8:25

Healthy Habits – Organization – by Marcy Lytle

Did you know...that staying or becoming organized in the chaotic messes of your life...can be health to your mind and soul? I know that for me it's true. When there are piles and messes around me, I too feel piled up and messy in my mind, and it weighs on me! There are some things I've learned over the years to help with organization that might help you too...just little practical ways to create order where there is none. Not in every corner, because that's overwhelming, but in little spaces one at a time...

Messy bathroom counter – It's frustrating when it's time to get ready and our counters are full of clutter and chaos, and when it get too full – we just throw up our hands and give up. However, taking time to organize and grab containers and drawer boxes really helps the day start out right, and therefore we feel good.

Go through every item and toss things that are out of date, empty or you haven't used and won't. (It will be a lot!). Empty and wipe out every drawer. You will already feel better when this is done.

Place in piles or groups your morning routine and makeup, your evening products, your hair things, all the categories of the stuff you have left.

Using organizers doesn't have to be expensive. Old candle jars can corral makeup brushes and tubes and spritzers of perfume. And they look pretty! Drawer dividers are affordable and they can organize so well! You can use mason jars, or...buy an organizer if you wish...in a color that makes you smile.

Now start filling and sorting. And soon it will be actually a pretty sight to behold. And you'll feel elated, you'll smile, and you'll feel a sense of accomplishment. All good things for your body!

Messy lingerie drawer – If your socks, your sleepwear, and your underwear are stuffed in a drawer all together, and you have to dig to find what you need – empty that drawer completely!

The Dollar Tree has bins that will fit in most drawers. Get some! I've used the same bins from the Dollar Tree for years, and they work great. Fill the drawer. Place socks in one, underwear in another, and fold and stack your sleepwear on its side like folders. Or however you wish!

Write on your calendar once a month to reorganize; and again, the drawer will be a fun thing to open instead of a jack-in-the box where you never know what will pop out!

Messy car – My hand is up! One would think that when your kids are grown your car would be clean all the time. Not so! I've found that routine is the key.

Again, we can use our calendar to mark a day a week to actually get the car washed and vacuumed. Oh. The. Joy.

Place small trash bags in your door, and fill one at least once a week with all the gunk and paper and cups, and remove it all.

If you've carried and toted and taken all week, chances are your car has bits and pieces of those things still on the seat, on the floor or in the back. Again, once a week, take it all in and put it where it belongs.

Then...go for a drive, maybe for an Icee, and enjoy your clean car.

Messy pantry – This is my favorite thing to organize and it makes me feel a sense of joy the most, more than other places in the house. Bags with clips, cardboard boxes and sacks – be gone! If the pantry is happy, so is the pantry keeper!

Take it all out, toss and then sort. This is a pattern we repeat!

If you have bins, use them. If not, get some. Again...they don't have to be expensive. Or just purchase a few at a time:

Place chips, cereal and anything else in bags into clear bins. You can cut off the expiration label and just place it inside the bin.

Ingredients in boxed items or small sacks or plastic boxes can also be placed in smaller bins: raisins, rice, coconut flakes, lentils, all of these things – throw the bags away and opt for bins!

Gather all of your foil, wraps and rolls or paper and turn them on their ends in a plastic bin, or place them in a drawer, OUT of the pantry.

This organization is best done every time you go to the grocery store. And believe me, the 10 minutes it takes is worth it. You'll want to open the pantry door and stare at the beauty, and you'll feel your blood pressure drop immediately.

These are just a few areas that are actually healthy to keep uncluttered. And once you've established a habit in one of these areas, move to the other. A little at a time. It's honestly soothing and satisfying, like nothing else. And you can then take a bath, read a book...and relax....



MARRIAGE

After 40 Years – The Beneficiary – by Marcy Lytle

It seems odd to still be writing my marriage column, when my husband has now been gone four months. Hard to believe, and it still hurts...deeply. I'm sure it always will. However, as long as I have stories to share about this man that loved me so well, I'll keep going. This month I'm realizing the benefits that are mine, even though he's no longer here...

When my parents passed, we kids received the benefits left us by our parents in lots of ways. They left us an inheritance, we had their house and the items in it, and of course had the heritage of faith and any other good things our parents possessed...just because we bore their name and belonged to them.

When Jon left this earth (still hard for me to believe he's gone), I had to also go through the process of receiving the benefits that were mine because we were married. And over these past few months, the paperwork has now been processed, and all the monies and funds are settled and I receive them monthly. Such a blessing!

In addition to physical benefits, I'm realizing that Jon also deposited so many things into my spirit and soul and mind that are mine – *mine!* At first, I felt completely lost because Jon was my rock, both spiritually and mentally. He could call me back to life when my mind soared off in a million destructive directions. He could calm my wounded spirit and remind me of God's unconditional love and acceptance for who I am. And when life was chaotic, he could note the beauty of a leaf, and call me to wonder at creation with him.

So when he was no longer by my side, fear crept in that I was going to end in disaster without my right arm, the love of my life, and the holder of my hand. And it's been hard...to say the least.

But I have been reminded that I'm the beneficiary of not only the funds, but the faith that Jon deposited into our "joint account" because we were one. I'm believing and expecting that those benefits are now mine, and I can draw them out as needed.

Jon was a gift to me. A true gift. And his contentment and unwavering faith made him my resource of help, which are both still available to me – because I bear his name. That makes total sense to me! I don't know how it will show up, but I am hoping for daily withdrawals from this huge account that Jon left for me in my heart, soul and mind. This gift from God, my husband, who knew God in a simplistic way that brought joy to our lives.

I've fumbled, stumbled, cried and sobbed, because I want Jon here by my side. But I'm believing that what he deposited in me is there...deep and wide...and it will surface. A friend told me that there's a spring of life way beneath the brooding sea of sorrow, and that spring is still bubbling. And I know that there's truth and joy I experienced with Jon that is mine...*mine*...forever...even though he's not physically here to remind me.

We are all beneficiaries of our husbands and what they bring to our marriage. And if we don't have a husband yet or even if our husbands seemingly give nothing to us...I'm learning that the promise that our Maker is our husband also gives us the benefits of life that we need to not just survive...but thrive.

What a thought...

Date Night Fun – Pre-fall Picnics – by Marcy Lytle

I think picnics are one of my favorite date ideas...ever. It's always cozy, romantic, and you can pack and decide on lots of different foods and activities. So here are five for the month of September when (hopefully) the temps are cooling off a wee bit and calling you outside. Prepare beforehand by having cute paper plates and napkins (Marshall is the best) and maybe some cool foods from World Market.

Morning – Make it a picnic outside on your patio in the morning. Get up and make your food in your robes and slippers, together. Do this before the kids get up (if they're older) or if you don't have kids at home...this is perfect. Decide on your menu the night before so you anticipate the flavors. Set the table on the patio with cute plates and napkins and add some breakfast jazz music for background. You can make scones...or purchase your goodies beforehand. The key is to connect before your busy weekend ahead...

Afternoon – If the weather's great, a lunchtime picnic is so cool. What's your favorite sandwich? Make it gourmet and wrap them in parchment paper tied with twine. Fold a napkin over and insert a cookie. Grab a bowl of fruit and your favorite sparkling waters, and maybe some chips and a dip (how about pickle dip from Target?) If you have a picnic blanket, take it. If not, use a big sheet or whatever you have...or visit a park where you know there are picnic tables. Take a frisbee, or crossword puzzle book, but...put all of that away in favor of swinging together on the playground. You could also opt for a long walk after you've eaten.

Evening – The sun is setting earlier now, so plan this picnic before sunset but where you can end by watching the sun go down! Invite another couple and decide where you're going to have this date, picnic style. Think lights and romance. If your yard has lights and you have a setting, invite the couple over. Perhaps, visit a small town and grab a spot in their city park, these are usually quaint and picturesque. Do a little searching on line to find the right one! Dress up just a little, and pack candles and this time slow dancing music. For food, make it gourmet charcuterie with cheeses, olives, the freshest bread, and decadent dark chocolate. You can get these at a market! Dance after you eat, hold each other close and watch the sun set before you pack up for home.

Don't those all sound perfect? I think so!

In Unison – Sacred Space – by Terri Barnes

Life gets busy, so it's important for married couples to create sacred space for grounding and fun connection.

Intentional time set apart for enjoyment and emotional reconnection.

Sacred space for undivided attention—a living part of the relationship that helps couples keep drawing near through a combined effort.

One evening, as we sat at our dining room table with drinks and a meal, we created a sacred space for us both.

There, Chris shared the music he had been listening to—Christian worship songs from years ago.

He played some songs on Spotify, and I recognized them right away.

The memories came rushing back.

Maybe you remember these, too...

I'm Trading My Sorrows — Darrell Evans

"His joy comes with the morning."

Your Love Is Extravagant — Casting Crowns

"I feel like moving to the rhythm of your grace."

I Am Free — Newsboys

"Through You, all hearts will praise."

We shared a joyful moment, listening to clips of rarely heard songs that are still so good.

We talked about how some Christian songs, like fashion trends, deserve a comeback.

A simple music connection can carry deep meaning into sacred space.

It can unfold naturally, feel engaging, and draw attention toward one another.

I feel present with Chris as he shares his thoughts about older music.

His excitement brings the moment to life for me, too.

As in worship, remove anything that might distract from your sacred time together.

Start by listening and following each other's lead.

Put aside everyday distractions.

Sit face-to-face and ease out of busy mode.

Treat it as a priority in your marriage.



ENCOURAGEMENT

A Day in the Life – Just Come – by Bekah Holland

Life is full of seasons. Every human on this planet goes through ups and downs and all of the in-between moments. Sometimes joy comes easy, things are going smoothly, and even the little hiccups life throws our way don't throw us off course. Other times, the season we're living through, well, it honestly sucks. When it feels like every single day brings with it another weight on a scale that seems to be stacked against us, and we're trying to learn to breathe underwater. And then there are the everywhere-in-between times, where things are okay-adjacent. We're surviving and managing and mostly functioning, and while nothing is great, it also doesn't feel like we're in the middle of a dumpster fire either.

I'm one of the "lucky" ones. I know we like to say "blessed," and I undoubtedly am. However, we have turned that word into such a cliché that most people cringe (Fine, me. I'm most people) and stop listening as soon as it comes out of someone's mouth, they read it in an article, or see it on a meme with a Southern lady wearing a T-shirt with "Too Blessed to Be Stressed" printed across it. And honestly, just typing that out made my eyes immediately roll back in my head.

So call it whatever you want, but I'm beyond grateful for this gift I was given long before I had any idea just how profoundly it would affect my life.

I grew up with parents who loved me, and it wasn't something I ever once had to question. They told me, showed me, and proved it over and over again, even when I didn't deserve it. I learned how to pray and memorized Bible verses around the same time I learned how to walk and talk.

Don't get me wrong, if you were to run across the novel version of our story, it would not read anything like a fairytale. Some chapters would read more like a nightmare-inducing Stephen King book, minus the clowns, thankfully. But through every single chapter of our lives, my parents, our village of "aunts and uncles," and family both blood and chosen, all lived their faith out loud and taught us to do the same.

Have I always followed their example? No.

But did I always remember the lessons I learned or put the wisdom I was surrounded by into practice?

Unfortunately, also no.

Sometimes I don't learn lessons the first time. Or the third. Apparently, occasionally I need the lesson presented in several different formats, preferably accompanied by a flashing neon sign.

So when I talk with people who didn't grow up going to a church that showed them all about God's love, singing songs that taught them to worship with their whole heart, I realize how much I took for granted.

Because through all of the highs and lows in my life, even when I was busy making a mess of things or ignoring the little voice in my head trying to keep me from digging a deeper hole for myself, I still knew that no matter how far I ran away, God was only a whisper away.

Prayer has always been just a conversation to me. Not that I took it lightly, or at least not consciously, but it was so baked into my earliest core memories that my relationship with God as an adult is, in some respects, very simple, connected, and uncomplicated because it's so deeply rooted in a childlike faith in His love and faithfulness.

I talk to God like He's sitting right there, because I believe He is. I find joy and peace in worship because I believe music creates a unique connection all on its own, one that ties our spirits to something much bigger than ourselves and has the power to move even the heart of our Creator.

For some people, that's such a foreign or abstract concept that it can feel like something just out of their reach. Those feelings can alienate people from the church - and by church I mean the people, not just a building full of people with a pretty sign out front.

So many of us make our relationship with Jesus look easy, like something that just comes naturally. Or we try to explain it to someone and don't have the right words, unintentionally driving home the idea that they won't ever quite measure up.

I know I've done it.

Trying to find the right way to describe something that can't possibly be captured or contained by mere words, I wonder how many times I've been a deterrent. How many times have I made someone feel further away from the one thing they were desperate to find instead of being the light that pointed them directly into His arms?

Obviously, I am not in the running as the poster child for a good Christian girl. I have made a very, very long list of bad decisions, many of which I knew full well were bad decisions while I was in the middle of making them. I have ignored what I knew I should be doing because I was selfish or scared or cared more about people liking me than doing what was right. I've failed in a thousand different ways - not being who I was meant to be out of fear, or laziness, or sometimes just plain willful ignorance.

But I do know some important truths.

- I know that faith isn't the absence of doubt.
- I know that loving Jesus doesn't magically make life easy.
- I know that prayer doesn't always change circumstances in the way we desperately want it to, and sometimes the answer we get is one we would very much like to send back with the receipt.
- I know there have been seasons when I have prayed with complete confidence and seasons when my prayers have been little more than, "God, I don't even know what to say."
- And I know He was there for both.

Maybe that's one of the things we get wrong when we try so hard to explain faith to other people. We think we need to give them answers when sometimes what they really need is permission to come without any.

Without the right words. Without knowing the songs. Without understanding Scripture. Without having their life cleaned up first. Without being certain of anything except maybe the tiniest hope that there could be Someone listening.

Because if I strip away all the church language, the theology I've learned, the verses I've memorized, and the years of experiences that have shaped my faith, what remains is surprisingly simple:

I have never had to earn my way back to God.

Not when I wandered. Not when I screwed up. Not when I knew better and did it anyway. Not when I was angry with Him, confused by Him, disappointed, exhausted, or barely holding myself together.

He was still only a whisper away.

And maybe living our faith out loud isn't about having the perfect words to explain why we believe what we believe. Maybe it's less about convincing people that we have found all the answers and more about showing them what it looks like to be loved while we're still figuring things out ourselves.

Maybe being a light doesn't mean shining so brightly that everyone notices us.

Maybe it simply means making it a little easier for someone else to see Him.

Because seasons change. The easy ones eventually become hard, and the ones that feel impossibly heavy eventually give way to something else. We will celebrate and grieve, get things right and spectacularly wrong, feel close to God and sometimes wonder where He went.

But the gift I was given so many years ago wasn't a life untouched by hard seasons.

It was knowing I would never have to walk through one alone.

And if there is anything worthwhile I can do with that gift now, I hope it's not to make faith look effortless.

I hope it's to leave the door open behind me.

"Grace is something you can never get but can only be given." Frederick Buechner

An Adage a Day - To Give or Not to Give – by Carole Gilbert

Wow! Have you heard this phrase? “To whom much is given, much is expected.” I’ve heard it at times during my life, but I never thought about it deeply, until I heard a preacher on the radio talking about it. It originated from Luke 12:48 so it is scriptural. It basically means that for those of us that are gifted in some way, it is expected, or obligated, for us to share it with others. The gift isn’t just of monetary means but also means of talents, knowledge, and anything that we have abundance of.

It refers to what God has given us, and we can read more about this proverb from parables in the Bible, like the parable of the master, servants, and talents found in Matthew 25:14-30. We also know that what we give from our heart is what is most important to God, like we read in the parable of the widow lady who didn’t have much but still gave what she had. After all, no matter what we have, whether it’s a little or an abundance, it’s still a lot since it comes from God.

Always remember, a cheerful heart is good medicine. And with a healthy heart, the beat goes on. So, do we always give with a cheerful heart?

There have been times and still are when I’m asked for things I don’t want to give up, like my time helping somewhere or doing something out of my comfort zone. But every time I do, I’m very rewarded. For example, my son played trumpet throughout his school years. He was really good, even making first chair All-State band his senior year. He was also in the jazz band in High School. I’m a very sentimental woman and I still have my kid’s trophies, medals, t-shirts from various activities, football helmets, and trinkets they were given for special occasions. I’m not a hoarder but you get the picture. The jazz band my son was in had specially made button-up shirts as their uniforms. After he graduated, I kept the shirt. It was very sentimental to me. A couple of years later, when my younger son was a senior, he told me about a guy he knew that made the jazz band but wasn’t able to afford a shirt. I didn’t want to, but I felt my heart tugging with emotion. So, I ended up giving him my son’s shirt. He was so excited and wore it so proudly. That made me proud. This young man is now a professional saxophone player. And thanks to God, I feel a special sentimental connection to him.

More quotes about giving include:

"It is possible to give without loving, but it is impossible to love without giving."

- Richard Braunstein

"No person was ever honored for what he received. He was honored for what he gave."

-" Calvin Coolidge

"Make all you can, save all you can, give all you can."

- John Wesley

And the best one of all is from Jesus Himself;

Acts 20:35

‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

It’s getting close to the holiday season. Let’s remember these quotes and verses as we share this year.

Firmly Planted - Prayer in Silence – by Dina Cavazos

Where shall the Word be found, where will the word resound? Not here, there is not enough silence...

These words, written by T.S. Elliot in his poem *Ash-Wednesday*, speak to me loudly. Solitude and silence are as vital to my well-being as air and water. Nature sounds--birds chirping, water bubbling--do not disturb the silence; rather, they enhance it. They plug me into the natural world where God's splendor rests in every leaf stirred by the wind, and when I'm plugged in, I'm called to pray.

Complete silence is rare, at least where I live. The world around us is filled with noise: mowers and weed-eaters, revving motorcycles, a passing airplane, someone's loud music, the incessant television. Some noise we can shut off; some we have no control over. Early in the morning before the noise of the work-day begins is my favorite. It beckons me to rise, to listen and pray. The Word, the quiet Word that lights my way, is more easily heard in silence.

Walking the garden in the low morning light, I wonder: *What is the purpose of this prayer garden? Is it simply a meeting place for us, God? Surely, it's meant to be shared?* I've offered it up over and over, asking him to have his way and give me clear signs. I've learned to wait, to trust more, and to pray—to be instead of do. In his time, in his way, not mine. Truthfully, my introversion is an obstacle that he will have to work around, like Moses' reluctance to speak. That's why spending time with him is so important and why I'm drawn to prayer—our means of communion and communication.

I've collected many thought-provoking quotes on prayer. Here is just a sampling:

- Prayer is the living interactive relationship we have with God about what He and I are working on together. (Richard Foster)
- Prayer is not a means of removing the unknown and unpredictable elements in life, but rather a way of including the unknown and unpredictable in the outworking of God's grace in our lives. (Ray Anderson)
- Prayer is keeping company with God. (Philip Yancey)
- A man prayed, and at first, he thought that prayer was talking. But he became more and more quiet until in the end he realized that prayer is listening. (Soren Kierkegaard)

That was just an appetizer. Chew slowly and savor.

The real meat is the Word of truth the Lord has ordained for you, obtained through prayer. It will become a part of your being. I have been transformed by spending time with God in prayer. Even so, it often feels like I'm not praying "right," or "enough," or I'm not fully attentive and engaged. I'm distracted by trivialities, my thoughts wander, I start a prayer and then my mind goes somewhere else. But as my pastor friend Jack suggests, I pray as I can, not as I can't. God does the work. One of my favorite theologians says there is no prayer in heaven. There will be no need because we'll be in his presence. Here, the Kingdom of Heaven is present, yet hidden, and so we must pray. There is no perfect way to pray, no right way to pray. So "pray as you can, not as you can't."

As I move about the garden working, wondering, or just gazing, things come to mind and I hold them up before Jesus. Names and situations are spoken out from the depths. Sometimes I don't have the words; I let the Spirit pray. In silence my heart cries out, and in silence the Word resounds.

Moving Forward – He is Here – by Pam Charro

I have been feeling overwhelmed and insecure lately, which isn't a rare thing when life feels out of control. Despite all of the years I have walked with God and all of the times he has proven himself faithful to me, I seem to always revert back to feeling lost and alone when I don't feel on top of things.

Am I the only one who struggles with this?

I know that my remedy will be found in stillness, but there is so much to do! I don't see the end in sight, and slowing down right now is the polar opposite of what my brain tells me to do.

Yet I know that God is masterful at restoring order to my chaos. He knows shortcuts that my mind won't possibly come up with. He just is reminding me to stay connected to him and to remember life's priorities:

1) I am his. He has got this! I can't possibly mess this up beyond his ability to fix it. He is good and has trusted me with stewardship over many things because stewardship is an opportunity for me to both show responsibility and depend on him. It's going to be okay.

2) I need to make lists. None of this is nearly as big as it seems once I get it all on paper. And if any of it has been forgotten, the world won't explode.

3) Eat the elephant one bite at a time. God is on my side with this and isn't asking me to do anything I'm not capable of. Just calm down and begin.

I know that this is a season of preparation for me. I can feel the drum roll of good that is on the way! Now is the time for me to let God help me get my life in order before all of the new arrives.

*He understands that sometimes I feel overwhelmed,
and he is patient, able, and delighted to be here for me.*

Unearthly Things - Simple Things – by Angela Dolbear

Last month, in The Seven for You column of this magazine, which is comprised of a panel of seven writers answering the same question, we looked at the things that bring us joy, which we call “joy-jumpers.”

Considering this topic inspired me to think about the different gifts God gives me that bring me joy. I’m so blessed by all the everyday simple things He gives me, and that alone increases my joy.

Joy is important. God wants us to enjoy our lives, even in the midst of difficult circumstances. After all, the joy of the Lord is our strength.

I started making a list of all the things that bring me joy (see below). The more I compiled my list, the more I started to feel grateful. I have so much to be thankful for.

After expressing my gratitude to God, I became enveloped in His peace. The kind of peace that exceeds anything I can understand. His peace that guards my heart and mind as I live in Christ Jesus (see Philippians 4). He is so good.

Simple joy-jumpers lead to gratitude, which brings on peace. How wonderful!

Please enjoy my list of joys. I hope they inspire you!

The Big Jumpers

- **Writing ideas:** When God brings me a writing idea, it feels like Christmas. I get excited to unwrap His instruction. Just like this article. I was going to write about something totally different, but a rush of ideas came, and I felt like I could hardly type fast enough to get them all down. But if I missed one, God will remind me, and I’ll make a note and put it into my story. He’s good like that.

God also gives me ideas when I’m writing my novels. He’s so good with plot twists and character actions and reactions. He gives me ideas that would never come from my brain. I’m careful to stay out of His divine way when He gives me something while I write. Writing is a gift he has given me, and while I work hard to improve my craft, I know He gave me this gift for a reason, which needs to be fulfilled for His purpose.

- **Healing:** Right now I am typing without any Band-Aids on my fingers. Rejoice! Digital ulcers are, unfortunately, a part of life with an autoimmune disease. Sometimes they get infected, and I have to take a course antibiotics. The bandages hold antibiotic ointment and provide protection. The ulcers take several months to heal because the wound develops from the inside out due to a lack of circulation. So having healthy fingers, as I do right now, something I regularly pray for, brings me a beautiful blend of joy and gratitude.
- **God’s voice:** His voice is usually still, quiet, and self-authenticating. I know it’s Him. In much the same way a child knows their mother’s voice. He speaks to me in my soul and

sometimes through a teaching that I have taken the time to listen to. I try to keep a journal of these blessings. I have a digital prayer journal on my phone that works great for this. The voice-to-text feature helps me express my thoughts. It's so encouraging to look back through the entries at all the times God has been with me, helping me and comforting me. It brings me joy.

Everyday Simple Things

- **A Daily Special Treat:** I love pouring chocolate milk instead of regular milk or cream into my Dunkin Donuts Cinnamon coffee in the morning. It reminds me of Mexican hot chocolate, which is so delicious. It's like having a special treat on a regular morning.
- **Appliance Joy:** My KitchenAid small appliances are so awesome! Not only do they work incredibly well, but both the blender and mixer are in their signature color, "Aqua Sky," which is my favorite. I use one or the other appliance more often than I thought I would.
- **Devotion Time:** My daily devotion and prayer time is so important to me. Maybe this belongs in the "big things" section, but every day I start the day with at least thirty minutes of quiet prayer and meditation time during which God often speaks to me.

I need to begin my day with God, and it has become my joy to do so. After my pets are fed, I settle into my reclining loveseat with a blanket covering me, red light therapy on my hands, and a heated eye mask over my eyes (helps with dry eyes so much!).

In the quiet of the early morning, I come before God with everything. I ask my heavenly Father to be there in my living room with me. I tell Him about things I did or said that I don't feel right about. I ask Him for help with difficult matters, especially when my heart is broken, and I'm sad. He never fails to give me wisdom when I ask for it.

And I ask Him for help, healing, and/or comfort for a list of people who are on my heart daily. I come away from my time with Him refreshed and strengthened. And with a greater joy that wasn't in me before.

He's so good like that.

ANGELA DOLBEAR Angela writes real, relatable, and reverent fiction and non-fiction. She is the author of four contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories. All her novels are available on [Amazon](#) in paperback, Kindle, and audiobook formats. She is the president of the Nashville Chapter of Word Weavers International. Please visit the THYME Magazine Bookstore for more information. Drop by Angela's website and sign up for news, read the latest stories, and hear new original music at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>.

Unprepared – Aging Parents – by Marcy Lytle

My parents have both been gone now for nine and four years, respectively, Mom and then Dad. And I will say that watching them as they got older, going through their deaths, and all the emotions connected with this experience were some of the hardest times. I now still have so many friends who are just now going through this, and they too are struggling. One is never prepared for their parents' decline and final exit from this world.

My mom was healthy, sharp, and still working when she went in the hospital for a simple gall stone and then gall bladder removal. That went wrong, a hole was inadvertently made in her bile duct, and she had to have an emergency re-routings of her stomach. And on the day she started to improve, a mere three weeks later, she died. Another mistake had been made. And of course, our family was devastated.

Anger, disbelief and shock and then the worst sadness and grief that would pop up in the store, the car, in bed at night, became my way of life for a long while. But that story was one of many. Others have parents that decline over time and don't have the sudden loss. And that's what we had with Dad...

After Mom died, he began his decline into dementia and odd behavior (I even looked it up, his behavior was ODD.) He wandered around driving and there was disagreement between us siblings on when to take Dad's keys. He became forgetful and wasn't eating properly, and you can guess it...he declined over time and didn't know us. He wasn't mean. But watching him lose his memory, not eat, act all kinds of odd ways, made me sick to my stomach and I didn't even want to see him, at times. It was hard, and all sorts of emotions as his daughter came up, hurtful ones! And after a few years, he too left this world while in the hospital, so skinny and frail, and tired of this life.

Once again grief set in, and then all the work of the house and the inheritance and working with my siblings over the incredible amount of work that's left when parents are gone. Not to mention the feeling of being orphaned, because I now had no living parents.

That's my story. But you have a different one. Either your parents haven't hit the old-age decline yet, or you're in the thick of it, or you too are done. Or maybe you lost connection or lost your parents early on, through disease or tragedy. No one and nothing prepares you for parental loss of the dementia kind, or the illness kind. Your parents are just there one day...and gone tomorrow.

It's sadness and sorrow maybe for the first time, so deep, that you've experienced so close to home. All sorts of feelings may surface from being sad they're gone, to unresolved issues you had with them, to even relief that they're gone if they were ill for a long time. There might be guilt alongside the grief. Memories of your own will flood your mind, especially as holidays come and go....every year...and they're not present.

First of all, you're seen. We all go through this. But most importantly, you're seen by Him. You can experience His nearness and His compassion as you lean into your relationship with God more than you ever thought needed...or possible. Verses you'd only heard before will become your lifeline, if you read them and listen to the Word that's full of hope...always. You can and will experience healing if there are parent/child hurts and wounds, as Jesus steps in and forgives and sets your heart on Him and begins to hold your hand now, as you let go of theirs. And friends

and the cards and love they share will become your lifeline as you those you maybe barely know show up in love and care. Receive it, and give thanks for it.

And lastly, you'll start to hold others dear, like your spouse and your kids and your friends you've yet to meet, because that knowledge you had that life is short has now become your reality. As it will for all of us.

Sadness and sorrow in losing parents is hard, and we will not understand the how and the why of the ways our parents exit this world. And we won't even be able to grasp heaven and what it is they're doing "up there" but we will wonder... And that wonder will soon be turned upward as we look toward the sun and the moon and all of creation that our God put into order around us to surround us with his arms of love every single day. And thanksgiving will overtake us in the most amazing ways and begin to heal...

You are loved and seen, and prayed for, today...



FRESH THYME

FRESH THYME - All in a Day – by Marcy Lytle

I'm still grieving. And it's still hard. And a lot of people tell me it will eventually get lighter, or some say it will always hurt. Still others offer verses and scripture and songs. And all of it HELPS tremendously, as people text me daily. I cannot say how much it helps...so much.

And yet...when night falls and morning comes again...I need help and peace and hope as if I'd never gotten any the day before. Much like manna, I suppose, when God gave it daily to his children when they were in the wilderness, instructing them not to store it up...but rather, He'd supply it daily.

This is hard for me. Daily manna. Because I do want to place some in my purse, among my items in my pantry and on the shelves of my refrigerator for safekeeping and draw out when I need it or want it. But what would probably happen is I'd go for other things instead of that manna, when I was hungry, and I'd never be satisfied. That's what I'm thinking, anyway...

I thought I would share what a typical day looks like, here at five months since that fateful day in April when the love of my life disappeared off this earth, so suddenly. When I'm super busy or gone all day, I am distracted a tiny amount from the grief...but when I'm home to tend to things and work...grief hangs over me in gloom that sticks like glue and won't let go.

Crawling out of bed is hard, and I use the word *crawling*, because that's what it's like. I don't leap up to talk to my husband or go to the kitchen and hear his coffee beans grinding. I literally crawl and am so sad and heavy as here it is again...another day alone. And tears start to well up in my eyes, as I make my way to the kitchen for something to eat. And then I get dressed.

Getting dressed is a big part of emerging into life and moving. There's something about washing my face and spraying on a fresh scent and creating a look from my closet for the day that feels fresh and alive. And while I get dressed...

I listen to the app SING. Have you heard of it? It's a 15 min devo of encouraging word with song. The host invites people to sing their way into the truth of who God is for them, in their lives. And this has been a lifesaver, hearing the truth every single morning while I dress. If the grief were a weight of say 50 pounds on my back, now that I'm dressed and I've heard...the weight has diminished to 40.

Oh, I wish it were gone completely, but it's not. And then...

I go for a walk, if I can, outside, and soak in the rays of the sun, I observe the trees and feel the breeze...even if it's hot. It feels good to be surrounded by the creation of the Creator. The One who holds it all together as we are reminded so well in the last few chapters of Job. And this truth brings comfort as I walk, and cry, and return back home. A few pounds lighter, once more, but still not free of the weight.

And after those three things, getting dressed, hearing the truth, and observing creation...I can breathe a bit and move forward with the day.

Let me just say that while I'm doing all three, I'm crying and asking God for mercy and begging him to erase the pain and set me on a path right now so that I'm not hurting any more. But that last part I'm asking for hasn't come yet. It's only coming in small doses, daily.

And while I don't like it one bit, I'm trying to brace myself for the profound truth that the God of all creation that calls out the stars, carries the clouds, pulls waves and out and stores up rain and snow and ice at his bidding...is well able to care for me and set me in motion and hold me, as well. And it's because I am made in his image and mean so much more to Him than his creation. I belong to Him.

A friend texted me this morning that she just knows that God is writing a "unique" way just for me through this path of darkness. And her text was another nibble of manna that enabled me to keep walking as the morning progressed...all in a day.

FRESH THYME – Little Trios – by Marcy Lytle

I have always heard to decorate shelves in trios, as it's pleasing to the eyes to look at groups of three. I've found that little trios work in so many areas to please the psyche, the body, the spirit, and the soul. Here are a few of mine I encourage you to try, when you're wondering how to get out of your foul mood or sour disposition at any time of the day:

1. Pack a lunch, get in the car and find a shade tree, near a pretty view...and enjoy all three.
2. Light a candle, grab a piece of fruit, look out the window...and chill.
3. Find a comfy chair, open a book, read out loud to yourself for at least 15 minutes.
4. Take a walk, put away your phone, and look up and around at creation.
5. Call a friend, invite them to an event, and put it on the calendar.
6. Buy a paper calendar, place it on the fridge, fill in the squares.
7. Search in photos for the next month (October), delete photos you don't need, do this again next month...and the next.
8. Visit the Dollar Tree, purchase five organizers, go home and use them.
9. Eat a toasted bagel, some nut butter and dark chocolate.
10. Slice strawberries, and spread strawberry cream cheese on graham crackers. Delish.
11. Find a pretty space or pot, plant some herbs, label them with markers...and indulge.
12. Pick a fall color, paint your own nails, and rub lotion into your dry hands.
13. Place a couple of books, a small plant, and a candle in several spots in your house.
14. Grab a cookbook, read it and enjoy it, then make one of the recipes.
15. Visit a bookstore, browse the sale section, and purchase one item under \$10.
16. Browse your closet, put together outfits, snap a photo.
17. Start a journal, write three thanks in it daily, while sipping your favorite tea...with lemon.
18. Find an audible book to listen to, clean a drawer, and dance when done.
19. Go on a personal fast food date, an appetizer at one, entrée at the next, and dessert at the last.
20. Add three little treats in your car: an air freshener, a pair of sneakers for walk, and a sweater in case...

FRESH THYME – September Starters – by Marcy Lytle

I love September...sort of. September “means” fall is near, but often it’s still so warm where I live that we just put out fall décor and pretend fall is here until it really arrives! I actually set out fall décor in my kitchen during the month of August! With September comes all the busyness of the fall season, especially if kids are involved. And the fun of the summer can get squished out quickly. And the daunting arrival of the holidays can loom over us!

So why not have a little list to work from, to incorporate fun this season into whatever we’re doing? So that you don’t have to dream up your own list, here’s ours!

1. Fall picnic – Just stop by Trader Joe’s or your local store and bag up snacks, pack a blanket, a Frisbee, and head to a park on the weekend for fun – with no plans but to eat, laugh and play.
2. Outdoor dining – That patio you missed all summer – find it and go there with friends or family and linger on the patio with just a dinner of all appetizers. Fun!
3. Mini golf – We don’t do this during the summer because it’s too hot. But September is a great time to head outdoors for mini golf, then stop for ice cream on the way home. After all, you just walked so you can indulge...
4. The Outlets – School’s already in session, and you spent those dollars on the kids, now it’s your turn. Ask a friend and head to the outlets to stroll, to find a new item or two, to see what’s new, and try on just for fun.
5. That herb garden – Mine was unattended all summer, but I’m excited to plant again and tend and even place cute markers in my herb garden. If you have a friend doing the same, help each other and make a day of it!
6. Themed movie night – After a hard week of school and work, plan a themed movie night with the kids or with friends. We recently watched the movie *Tortilla Soup* and had tortilla soup – for the adults. Just search for a movie (family friendly or adult) about food – then make your food to match! It’s fun!
7. Afternoon drive – Pack up the car with friends or kids and head out for a few hours, outside of town. Look for unusual sightings, or cool photo shots, perhaps a small town dive to stop and eat, and a thrift store or two. Map it out...and go. Make memories.
8. Fries pile-up – Grab your favorite frozen fries and make tons of them for a huge pile...then place out all sorts of toppings – cheese, green onions, chili, tomatoes, ground meat, whatever you like – and give everyone a bowl to fill and pile up. Watch funny videos on YouTube and laugh.
9. Redecorate – Remove the clutter from your kitchen, every surface. Use Chat GPT or your own ideas and decide on what you want to do...then go out and shop. Make a budget, and stick to it. Head home to redo!
10. That Closet – If you have a place where your giftwrap and holiday “stuff” is awaiting the holidays, go through it now! Enlist the help of a friend or kid. Empty it all out, organize, make a list of what you need. This can actually be fun if you put on music and dance and snack your way through the process! And you’ll be glad you did...come December.
11. Visit a Zoo – take kids...or not. You can have fun as adults, too! Enjoy animal crackers for a snack the night before, as you plan your day at the zoo. And maybe an In-and-Out animal style burger on the way home?
12. The Market – The farmers markets are going to be full now. Grab your cute tote and go with no plans but to fill your bag with produce and goodies to then come home and put together for the evening meal. Delightful! If you only get veggies and sourdough...there’s your dinner!
13. Photo Walk – Pick a neighborhood or a trail or a park and plan out a long walk, looking for Nature’s best, and snap photos on your phones...each one on the walk. Then compare and enjoy over drinks and dessert when you’re back and the sun sets...
14. Grab a bouquet – flowers from your local store or market. Separate the bouquet – a few blooms in a vase to place in your fridge (yes, to enjoy when you open every day), a few in a vase to set out

near the sofa, and a few single stems in a vase to place by the tub or your sink, or wherever you need a smile.

15. Read or listen – to a new book. Ask everyone to join you or do this alone. Find a space in the house and read for an hour – then gather and share what you read! Add snacks, of course.
16. September 12 is chocolate milkshake day – so duh – make one and enjoy! Then go for a long walk and tell jokes, laugh out loud, and skip.
17. September 29 is national coffee day – so go to a coffee shop with friends and play a game and enjoy your favorite treats. Find a new coffee shop that you've never been to before. Linger and love the ones you're with.
18. Attend a football game – make it a high school one – and get some snacks. Cheer for the team you pick and enjoy watching all the energy and fun that teenagers bring!
19. Apple nachos, anyone? – Slice apples and place on a plate. Drizzle with caramel sauce and sprinkle on nuts and dark chocolate. Enjoy in your lawn chairs outside as you watch the sun set.
20. A Charcuterie party – invite friends. Ask each friend to bring 2-3 items for a board – then create the board together when they arrive. Provide cute paper plates, and questions for conversation.
21. Bake bread – like banana bread or corn bread – or both! Do this first thing on a weekend morning. Then plan your dinner to go with later that night...
22. Paint rocks – Grab several, grab paints and brushes, and sit outside and paint them pretty. Then go for a walk and leave along a trail. These make people smile. And you will, too.
23. A Thrift store day – Do a little research and pick five thrift stores and visit them all one weekend, for fun. See what you find maybe for your patio or yard or kitchen! Enjoy this so much!
24. Donut run – Pick a donut place you love and plan a hike to it. Maybe you park a mile away and you walk. Then you enjoy donuts and chocolate milk – and you walk back. Done. Exercise and treats together.
25. Fall festivals – look on Facebook, the internet, Instagram and more...for any festivals going on in your area or close by. Put them on the calendar and go! Go!
26. Alfresco dinner at home – invite people. Two or three, or six! Light candles, play music, and make the menu simple. Ask them to bring their own drink. Or just provide dessert. Smile...
27. That swap – it's time to transition your closet – so go through the summer and donate or put away. Then put out the fall and organize. This will take a while, and it CAN be fun. Then donate your bag of discards and grab your favorite fast food and sigh...you did it!
28. Outfit your car – Go to the car wash, vacuum and clean. Then go shopping for organizers and things to keep your car nice this fall.
29. Plan a weekend away – get it on the calendar and plan it. Either a day trip away or a weekend or longer. Plan it and enjoy it. Every detail of the planning and the going...
30. Make salsa - Spend an evening making and jarring some fresh salsa – then grab bags of chips and deliver both salsa and chips to a few friends. Why not start the giving season early?