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TIPS

The Dressing – Fun for Fall – by Marcy Lytle

I had so much fun shopping styles from Amazon this summer, so I decided to browse there for fall affordable fashion! I scanned articles from designers on what's hot for fall and found some fun ideas that we can wear in the real world...not on the runway. I love trying something new, and I love a good deal. Amazon has been amazing for me, in fit and satisfaction of product!

Argyle sweater – in this coffee hue! Yes, I saw argyle sweaters appear once again, but aren't they really a classic? This pretty one will look great with jeans and booties this fall...and maybe a fun hat!

https://www.amazon.com/GRACE-KARIN-Lightweight-Crewneck-Cardigan/dp/B08BC43DHB/ref=sr_1_16?dchild=1&keywords=argyle+sweater+women&qid=1596030819&s=apparel&sr=1-16

Poncho/cape – Haven't these been around a while? This actual cape showed up on Marie Claire's list of fall trends for 2020! I do love the warm colors and the price, and...it's reversible!

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0185NFI0A?linkCode=ogj>

Plaid for the Win – I love plaid and I'm glad it's still around. However, I don't care for the "country" plaid look, so I'm happy to see some different more structured and work style looks for fall! Check out this one!

https://www.amazon.com/Timeson-Leggings-Business-Collared-Christmas/dp/B08CRPW1KP/ref=sr_1_33?dchild=1&keywords=plaid+tops+women&qid=1596031842&s=apparel&sr=1-33

(You'll notice I'm not including any pants in this list because I haven't ordered pants on Amazon yet...so I'm sticking with tops and dresses for now...)

Shearling Jacket – I had a warm camel colored shearling coat last year and loved it. I found this really pretty two-toned one and I love it, too!

https://www.amazon.com/Daisy-Del-Sol-Womens-Reversible/dp/B08DRSV7TZ/ref=sr_1_6?dchild=1&keywords=shearling%2Bjacket%2Bwomen&qid=1596557917&s=apparel&sr=1-6&th=1

Rust Sweater – Yes, rust is in this fall, although I've always loved this hue – the same color as lovely fall mums! This one looks sooooo cozy and cute.

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08F7PCRS5/ref=sr_1_2?dchild=1&keywords=rust+cardigan&qid=1596556184&s=apparel&sr=1-2

Patchwork – Are you in to this? I'm not sure I'm a fan, but I do think this flowy blouse updates the patchwork vibe, and looks very fall-ish and pretty! I might be willing to try it...

https://www.amazon.com/FARYSAYS-Womens-Fashion-Sleeve-Multicolored/dp/B07SKR799Z/ref=sr_1_6?crid=X17XKVICHA5&dchild=1&keywords=fall+fashi

[on+for+women+2020&qid=1596556635&s=apparel&srefix=fall+fashion+%2Cfashion%2C210&sr=1-6](https://www.amazon.com/s?k=on+for+women+2020&qid=1596556635&s=apparel&srefix=fall+fashion+%2Cfashion%2C210&sr=1-6)

Puff Sleeves – They're still in! I loved this style of sleeve for summer and it's staying on into fall. And the marigold hue is also here for the new season! Check out all the options on this one!

https://www.amazon.com/SheIn-Womens-Sleeve-Pullover-Keyhole/dp/B08519CVXZ/ref=sr_1_5?crd=17W3PWMNVKELB&dchild=1&keywords=puff%2Bsleeve%2Btops%2Bfor%2Bwomen&qid=1596557600&s=apparel&srefix=puff%2Bslee%2Cfashion%2C204&sr=1-5&th=1

Seven for You – Porch Appeal

This month we asked our panel of women that contribute to share their ideas for making their porch (front or back or yard!) appealing. We didn't ask for something elaborate, but rather any item or idea that makes them enjoy their space and makes it more appealing to spend some time there! I love all of the ideas they submitted, and hope you do as well:

I love the "Welcome" signs I now that I see everywhere. My daughter and I took a class a little over a year ago and painted these signs. They are quite the trend. I have mine by the door in the garage that goes into our house.

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We live in the last house on the left of a dead-end street in the country, so I don't spend a lot of time decorating my porches each year. I used to, but since our kids are grown, we don't have a lot of people coming and going anymore. So, I spend my time and effort elsewhere. There is one thing that I do every year and that is plant a couple of citronella plants in our backyard flower beds. I put one between our pool and hot tub and one by our lounge chairs. I am sold on these plants and I do believe they really repel the mosquitoes. Also, they are a durable, pretty plant and well worth the money.

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Adirondack chairs are most likely on sale this time of year, and adding a couple in the same color as your front door, and then a couple of accent pillows makes a porch pop, for sure!

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I brightened up my porch by spray painting my outdoor furniture a nice spring green. It matched the green of my plants, many of which are unfortunately now brown!

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We recently added back porch appeal with an old baker's rack, and filled it with items we found at thrift stores – including a fun # lighted sign! The pitcher was a fun find as well, and the birdhouse was made for us by the kiddos! I love whimsy!

—

I was slow to reply because my patio is not decorated at this point. I removed any plants that were there to make room for children's toys. My cushions are a bit faded and I will replace them next year. It's strictly a functional space right now. I am, however, sending a picture of our new little bird area that we enjoy from the patio.

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What about a rocker, a pop of color and a huge plant? In Pink? (2 pics)

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Stair stepping a couple of large planters adds appeal to a small porch – one on the upper step – and one on the lower – and then just change out the plants with the seasons!

It's still really hot where we live, but in a few weeks this little white planter will be filled with fall colored chrysanthemums. This is a tradition started by my hubby. He has the green thumb in our family and takes great pride in his yard. Fall is coming, but it's not here yet.

Sorry for all the pics but here is a look at my outside yard art. I love looking at my backyard and hearing the sound of water. Too bad I can't be out there now it's just too hot. I should spend more time decorating the inside of my house!

Tried and True – On the Road Again – by Marcy Lytle

We took a road trip vacation for about 10 days last month and we wanted to take along some snacks for the cooler (part of an organizer we bought for the car!). We weren't quite ready to fly, so we took to the road and booked hotels along our route! However, snacks and meals might be not as easily accessible, we thought, so we loaded up some goodies...and I thought I'd share the ideas...in case you're heading out this fall!

You'll need a cooler, for sure, and hotel rooms that have fridges so you can then take in your ice packs and refrigerated things at night. Hotel rooms with fridges are not a hard find.

Some basic staples to pack are mayo/mustard packets (so they don't have to stay cold), salt and pepper, plastic cutlery, plates and napkins (and tiny trash bags), baggies, spreaders, spoons and a bowl for mixing. You could pack all of the small things in this one bowl. Oh, and paper towels!

Bagels, cream cheese, and peanut butter – These are easy to pack and take along. Include some cute spreaders and you're set for a breakfast or snack on the road or while pulled over under a shade tree.

Trail mix – of course we'd include this! There are SO MANY varieties to make. So why not just place all the separate nuts, dried fruit and chips in baggies, and that way you can make your own mix in little to-go cups for snacking!

Noodles and veggies – Cook the noodles before you leave, and pack in a to-go container. Chop veggies, and include a small bottle of Italian dressing for tossing right before you eat.

Broccoli salad – I know, it has mayonnaise in it! But cut up the broccoli, chop the nuts, include the raisins, then mix when it's time to chow down.

Board items – If you take a small cutting board in the car, at night it's fun to have an array of items you've packed like cheese, nuts, olives and salami, and maybe a spread or two. Easy to put together in a jiff!

Popcorn with mix-ins – Usually there's a microwave in hotel rooms so take along some popcorn, or pop before you go and nibble each night, with mix-ins, or plain! Include some butter salt or pink salt, too!

Sandwiches – A good loaf of multi grain bread, cheese slices, sliced cukes and dressings, are the makings of a good lunch on the go, with chips or carrot sticks on the side.

Almond butter (or strawberry cream cheese) and strawberries – on graham crackers! Have you tried this combo? It's so good!

Tuna/pickles/mayo – Get the tuna and mayo in packets and mix, then add in the chopped pickles (you chopped before leaving home). One of my faves! Can include little cubes of cheddar cheese too, if you like!

Dark chocolate squares (70% or more cacao) – These are great for your health AND your sweet tooth but keep these cold so they don't melt! (It's hot where I live).

Make Your Own Nachos – Chips, with grated cheese and other toppings prepared ahead of time, can be great if your hotel room has a microwave!

Packing and gathering ideas and planning food is fun, in my opinion, if you have the time to do it – and it's all organized and ready. It makes road tripping SO MUCH FUN!

Hope you find somewhere to go, hop in the car, and head out safe and sound...with your snacks in hand this month of September!

Three Moms – Vacay Away

Traveling with the kiddos...some did this summer...some are still afraid...and some just find it exhausting even thinking about it. Our three moms all went on family vacays this summer and are sharing their tips on all things related to the kids! So if you haven't gone yet or last time you did, it was a disaster, we hope these tips will encourage you to pack up and go! Find a weekend or week soon, this fall, where you can escape and play...

Mom 1:

We finally took a family vacation this week to Gulf Shores, Alabama. Our children are 1 and 3, and the thought of flying during COVID-19 made me a nervous wreck. We started planning several months ago and knew we wanted to go somewhere with a beach. Living in Alaska for the past several years, we didn't get much beach time! I started researching beaches that were close enough we could drive but some place we had never been before... we had several friends recommend the Florida gulf or Alabama gulf coast. I picked a place that had a very FLEXIBLE cancellation policy. I had no clue where this pandemic would lead, so having some flexibility in our vacation plans was crucial. I found a resort in Gulf Shores State Park (away from the city/crowds) that would allow us to cancel up to 24-hours before arrival. That was great! I looked for family-friendliness, which they had (pool, beach, outside dining, nature center, etc.) Other than that, that was about ALL the planning I did! Our past year has been filled with a lot of change, challenges, stress and A LOT of planning. I wanted our vacation to be relaxing, chill, and not filled with to-do items.

Our vacation definitely looked a little different due to COVID-19 but it was still enjoyable. To keep us protected, we were:

- Constantly washing/sanitizing our hands...hand sanitizing stations everywhere.
- Wearing required masks indoors - but with our kids so young, we couldn't keep any type of mask on them. We wear tried to have our girls social distance as much as possible.
- Staying away from the big city and keeping to ourselves.
- Sitting outside to eat to avoid crowded indoor areas.
- Packing breakfast items and lunch items so we could minimize our contact with others (and save money) - PB&J, yogurt, granola, milk, cereal, fruit, pop tarts.

Traveling with toddlers isn't easy but they were troopers. Our drive was around 8-hours one way. A lot of time for little kids! To keep them entertained, I some new gifts to explore on our trip - easy to maintain, and no mess!

- These were a hit and I highly recommend! https://www.amazon.com/Melissa-Doug-ColorBlast-Activity-Books/dp/B01DU1CBD4/ref=sr_1_2?crd=14S29O2E7VLX&dchild=1&keywords=melissa+and+doug+magic+color&qid=1596659997&sprefix=melissa+and+doug+magic+%2Caps%2C160&sr=8-2
- These puzzles were hard for my 1 year old but my 3 year old loved them! Make sure to provide a hard surface for your little one to work on it, in the car. https://www.amazon.com/Mudpuppy-Ocean-Life-Puzzle-Pieces/dp/073536334X/ref=sr_1_1?crd=2KSEMDX6QXZCN&dchild=1&keywords=on+the+go+puzzles&qid=1596660047&sprefix=on+the+go+puzzle%2Caps%2C157&sr=8-1

- These doodle boards were a hit as well. The girls used both sides to color w/ crayons but oh well! https://www.amazon.com/Crayola-Double-Doodle-Drawing-Toddler/dp/B077VYSXB3/ref=sr_1_20?crid=1V1IYLOFT9UAP&dchild=1&keywords=crayola+on+the+go+travel+pack&qid=1596660112&srefix=crayola+on+the+go+%2Caps%2C157&sr=8-20

We also brought books from home, baby dolls (their favorite), and let them use their tablets for a movie. This broke up a good part of our trip, and they even took a 2-3 hour nap!

Mom 2: (kids ages 8, 7 and 5)

Each kid had a backpack and I attached zipper pouches to each one. In the pouch were their masks and travel hand sanitizer, and then a small package of wipes. We were very clear about wearing masks, what they could and couldn't touch, and we went over everything before we traveled. The kids were great about it all!

We didn't pack snacks out of the gate because we flew. Once we landed and were in our space, we stopped and got snacks like crackers, drinks and each kid picked out their favorite candy.

In order to not pack 5 suitcases, we packed one big one and then a small carry-on. We all had our own backpack for personal items. We limited kids to one stuffy, their tablet, a coloring book and one toy (because on road trips they tend to want to bring every toy). We packed clothing in large baggies to remove air, pack tighter and make room to fit everything in one bag. It worked great!

We planned flights, car rentals, place to stay and a couple big activities. But we tried to leave room open for flexibility. However, we did set a budget for everything. We talked each evening about things we saw or wanted to do and budgeted them. Budget even included souvenirs. We did pretty well. We went over a little, but had some wiggle room there with some extra funds that came in.

Our experience was GREAT! I wasn't sure about flying with Covid, but honestly Frontier Airlines was amazing! They were so clean, so well organized, and they reminded about masks and not "gathering" at restrooms on the plane several times through the flight. The airport was clean, and they spaced people out. Car rental was the same. Colorado and the towns we were in did a phenomenal job on safety and protection.

Breckenridge, Colorado was where we went - beautiful weather, so much hiking and outdoor activities! It's a great place travel on a budget because so many things are free. Breckenridge has free bus system and gondola rides. This is a great way to experience another state, the outdoors and family fun without breaking the bank. We hiked, we explored, we visited a zoo, and walked everywhere! It was just an amazing trip!

TIPS:

- Make it fun, include the kids in your planning, but give options you know are within your budget.
- Create in Word or on computer custom ID tags for their backpacks (they were so excited!) It's a simple way to include them and get them pumped up.
- Limit what they can bring.

- Pre-download videos on tablets so they are set for plane rides. Use an app like Hopper to track plane ticket prices ahead of time. It alerts deals and specials. Include some surprises too and give hints to excite them.... they'll talk about it for hours.
- Don't over plan or plan out every hour with littles. Being able to sleep in and just flow at times was so great. This made the trip relaxing and not stressful.
- Balance the planning and go-go-go with...*let's just hang out, chill and leave room to find "treasures" along the way.* BUDGET! Setting a budget seems in the moment like a barrier, but really it creates freedom to do things so you aren't constantly saying no, or we have to discuss that again, or we probably can't do that.
- Find places that have kitchenettes if you can. This allowed us to buy our own groceries. It saved us tons when it can cost us \$30-\$50 to eat out each meal. We made breakfast and sandwiches and only spent \$100 total for four days. We budgeted in for coffee (because we love coffee), one special lunch and a couple of dinners.

Mom 3: (kids ages 11, 9, 7, 4)

We went to Jellystone – a camping resort – tons of fun! We packed as normal (but added masks!). It was just a regular camping experience.

Each kid had a suitcase and packed their own stuff. They also each brought a backpack. (We double checked of course).

Planning – we booked our cabin about a month in advance. Everything was on the resort to do. We have our camping gear already ready...but also brought bikes, balls, sports equipment, s'mores ingredients, and fishing poles. We traveled there in two cars and that was totally worth it, so that we had all we needed.

The days were planned for us or we could do our own thing...which is great for a family of six!

Each kiddo had \$50 for the week and that was their spending money – at the gift shop or activities that cost (laser tag) – they budgeted their own money. This was a great learning and fun experience for them.

Each child had a pouch on their bikes to keep their masks handy!

Jellystone was so much fun with all was there to do – definitely worth the money.

<https://jellystonehillcountry.com/>

Tried and True – Savvy Shopping – by Marcy Lytle

We've all been shopping at home more, or shopping safely in a store like Target, but I've heard from more and more women about the frustration of buying clothes without trying them on. Not only is it difficult to choose a size and a fit, but if it arrives in the mail or we bring it home and it's NOT a good fit – then there's the return! And who likes to make returns? Not me! A friend and I were just visiting about this very thing...so I thought I'd share my own experience and what's working...or not.

If you're shopping online...

- Look for styles that you've worn before that fit you. For example, look in your closet at pieces you love and how they're styled (neckline, sleeve length, bodice, etc.) and shop for similar styled pieces. This ensures a better fit.
- Look for stretchy fabric. I ordered a couple of knit dresses this summer with elastic around the waist – a better chance of them fitting – and they did!
- Check the return policy and the shipping (where it's coming from). If there's no contact info or return info, and if you're buying from a foreign country, expect delays, possibly being stuck with your purchase, and/or your item taking forever to arrive. I ordered a pair of sneakers that took two months to arrive, but they were great. However, I ordered some office supplies that arrived in three shipments, one item was broken. Notes taken...
- Watch out for the pop-ups on social media that demonstrate unbelievable prices on cutesy things. Again, check out the shipping, contact info, return policy, etc. Those are huge – if they're not good at customer service – don't buy!
- Order locally, if you can. Support small businesses. Several coffee shops in my town are offering food packages or pastry boxes, etc. for pickup and they're delish! I have a friend that sells a line of clothing and she lives in my small town, so I like to support her. Another friend is an artist, so I love purchasing her work on all sorts of mediums!
- Pants are the worst, but I've found some good luck at Walmart, on line. They have some really cute jeans that are of the elastic type denim, and the wide leg option is in style right now (with an elastic waist!)
- Read reviews...see what others have said about the sizing of the piece you're considering...does it run small or true to size?

If you're shopping in the store...

- Wear the right clothes so you can try on shirts/jackets in the store itself, without going to the fitting room that is most likely closed. (Some stores won't even allow you to try on in the store, but many don't notice). Wear a tight tee (under a sweater for cover up if you wish), and then try on tops in front of the store mirror to see if they fit.
- Purchase brands you've bought before that you know fit in that certain size that you wear.

- Unbutton or unzip that skirt and put it around your waist! I did that recently, even though I was wearing jeans, just to see if the skirt was going to work.
- Change your styles to fit this crazy season. Opt for comfortable but cute, instead of stiff and crazy stylish. Look for cute details, but a comfortable fit, i.e. stretchy or knit material.
- Consider just shopping for accessories this fall, to brighten up what you already have: a new scarf or a hat, a cute bag or some new sneakers, dangly earrings or a pretty necklace! You might be surprised how you can revive a plain combo into something snazzy!
- Purchase long cardis or comfy jackets to go over graphic or plain tees that you already have. These are easy to slip on, to see how they fit.
- If you don't mind returning the items, then pull whatever you want, take it home and have yourself a great time trying each piece on!
- Shoes – you can still try these on with ease! So find the deals and enjoy – I recently snagged two pairs from Nordstrom Rack for \$17 each!

There's no reason to stop enjoying the hunt for a new outfit...even at home or in a big box store...without entering a fitting room. It is a bit of a challenge, but a fun one! It will certainly get your creative juices flowing...

And if you find a good deal, share! Or if you're still looking, ask! All of us are in the same boat, in the same sea, swimming around for those great deals that fit, feel good, and look fabulous!



HOME

Carole Gilbert
An Adage A Day, September 2020

A Year in Time

It has been one year that I have been on board with this fun and uplifting magazine. It amazes me how time has gone by. I cannot believe it has been a year! As I reminisced about this I thought about some timely quotes and adages. I thought, "There's no time like the present" to write about them. This quote is meant to get us up and going. To never put off until tomorrow what you can do today. After all, it may be now or never.

The adage, "There is no time like the present," is thought to have been around from the 1400's. It began as an ancient English phrase simply to give advice for the day. It was first recorded in 1562 and has been around ever since. It has always been one of my favorites, I think because I have never really been a procrastinator, except for chores and homework. Those I would put off as long as I was allowed except on Saturdays. It was my Mama's rule that my brother and I could not go play until our chores were done. This was Saturday's in the 60's for us. Did you have chores growing up?

Our chores were not difficult, we just had rather been playing. My brother's main chores were to feed the animals and yard work. I was younger so I was given easier chores. I helped dust around the house, and I ironed. I was small in size, so I had to stand on a stool to reach the ironing board. And all I was allowed to iron were pillowcases. I always wondered if this was a made-up chore, just to give me something to do. And as if our pillowcases were not enough, I also had to go to my grandparents who lived in front of us and iron theirs.

When we got done, we were free to go play. Sometimes I would have something planned to play and therefore hurry through my chores, therefore not doing a good job, only to be directed to do them again. And if I didn't finish in a timely fashion, those chores would still be there the next day and I would not get to play until they were done. So, I learned what it meant to never put off until tomorrow what you can do today, as Benjamin Franklin said, and to do it right the first time. I know this was what Mama was trying to teach me but because of my ironing chore I grew up strongly disliking ironing and I never outgrew this. I looked forward to the day I would never have to iron again.

There is another proverb that states, "Tomorrow never comes." It means that when tomorrow arrives it then becomes today so it is never tomorrow and basically supporting the adage of never putting things off until tomorrow. It has even been made into a song and sung by greats like Garth Brooks and Elvis. But I can testify that sometimes tomorrow does come.

When I got married my husband wore only two kinds of shirts and one kind had to be ironed. The first few months of our marriage those shirts slowly disappeared. I would sometimes think about ironing them another day. Maybe. He did not even notice them missing until several months later. His mom had given him three nice, crisp, needing to be ironed, shirts for Christmas. So, after I washed them, they too disappeared. I still did not think my husband noticed but one day he asked me where they were, and I could not lie. I had to take him to the spare closet that was filled with his needing to be ironed shirts. Remember that adage of "Tomorrow never comes?" Well that tomorrow did come. They say time heals all wounds, but even now, before he buys a new shirt, he asks me if it will need to be ironed. I wonder why?

The years have gone by. We are still married, and I still do not iron his shirts. Time keeps on moving into the future. It is a never-ending cycle. The hands on the clock are like the waves in the ocean, going around and around, both of which only God has the control.

"This is what the Lord says, he who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar-the Lord Almighty is his name," Jeremiah 31:35 NIV.

So, I will praise God and cherish this present time that I get to spend writing for this magazine that I love and sharing a little of what I have learned with you. Like they say, "Time flies when you're having fun."

Practical Parenting – Don't Stuff It – by Marcy Lytle

I follow a young mom on Instagram and had watched for months as she and her husband did a complete house remodel, she ran her business of sharing family outings and date nights for couples, she took care of her two little boys, and tried to maintain a happy face all the time while she was juggling all of these plates. I thought to myself that she surely was tired...and before long she admitted that she was struggling. Not only was she tired from all the activities, but she was panicked about the state of the world...and she realized she needed help.

This time of life, with kids at home distance learning, all the fears swirling over the virus (still), moms and dads trying to keep their jobs and homes intact, and yet still make time for romance and family life...say what? It's daunting for all of us, no matter what age our kids are!

One thing is going to be the topic of this article this month, and that's the encouragement to ask for help instead of staying quiet and trying to deal...

- There's no benefit from being a strong mom for everyone else but yourself.
- There's no reason to carry heaviness when you have friends willing to help.
- There's no cause for despair, because you KNOW the caregiver of all caregivers!
- There's no way you're going to be able to do it all, so don't even try.
- There's no good that comes from comparing your family to others.

Okay, now that that's out of the way, how in the world do you unload, unleash, and *unworry* your crowded mind and weary body?

ASK for help. This is hard for mom, but it's an imperative. If unloading the dishwasher puts you over the edge, hand that job off. If the never ending piles of laundry depress you, have a laundry party where everyone folds, puts away, and dances to music. Don't continue to do all and be all...there is no winner in that kind of game!

CRY and pray...because He hears every heart cry of moms...and HE cares. Visualize rolling your heavy backpack of worries onto his shoulders, and then just holding his hand as you walk daily together and He carries the load.

TAKE time to read or listen the word, even if something else has to be left undone. If it's only a one page devo a day, read it. If it's one song you listen to alone in the shower, do it. If it's an escape with your earbuds for a 15 min walk, ask for it and take it.

GIVE away some of what's on your plate. You know how you share your food with your toddlers? Share your to-do list with your family. If everyone is overloaded, then sit down together and decide what can be done – erasing some of the to-do's or bringing in help.

STOP comparing your kids, your home, your life, your clothes, your body to every other mom you talk to. Don't talk with moms that make you feel less than...only visit with those that encourage you and lift you up!

Yes, we are strong women, we can do all things through Christ, we are mighty and all of that good stuff we want to be. But being mighty often means being humble, resting, acknowledging and receiving. Otherwise we mighty women end up bruised and broken...and sometimes for good.

Moms, I could say, "You've got this. You can do it." But I feel that some of you don't want to hear that, because you don't want it and you don't want to do it! And there's NO SHAME in not being able to do it all. In fact, there's great reward in letting things go and letting others and HIM in...to relieve your load.

Great reward...

I Don't Do Teens – Pure Gold – by Marcy Lytle

By now, our kids have begun to realize that life isn't going back to normal just yet. School has started and learning looks so different and weird. And we are still telling our teens to keep their distance, be safe, and wear a mask. However, they want to hang, live on the edge, and keep their faces uncovered! And yet all we find ourselves doing is barking orders like, "Wash your hands!" "You can't go there!" "You forgot your mask!" It's tiring by now, for all of us!

I remember when it was just trying to get our kids to wear helmets when riding their bikes, and my kids just opted out of riding altogether! They didn't want to ride if they had to wear a helmet. So some teens are going to opt out of going places if they have to don a mask. We never gave in, and they never loved helmets, so that was that! Now they have kids and helmets are required...go figure.

Covid fatigue is a real thing, especially among the teen world. Suicides are up, counselors' virtual offices are full, and our teens are feeling more isolated than ever...hopeless...and without purpose. If we are struggling with covid fatigue, imagine what our kids are going through, and they don't have the decades of life experience and wisdom that we do! And if we're experiencing fatigue, we are sometimes not so well equipped to help our kids.

However, as parents, we have to observe and guide and help, and here are a few ideas to try:

Keep conversations healthy. In other words, we can make sure that our dinner and phone conversations are not arguing with others about politics, full of worry over the latest number of cases, etc. Maybe we think our teens are never listening to a word we say, but believe me...they are...and those words affect them.

Keep doors open. We can allow our teens to talk about how they're feeling during the pandemic, where life and school is anything but normal. Talk as a family, and see if you can give thanks daily for at least one thing good during this time. Thanksgiving and open doors will keep the family home smelling fresh, in more ways than one.

Keep news at bay. If you want to check the latest stats or listen to the chaos on the streets, do so. But be the guard over how much of that is listened to by your teens. If the teens want to watch the news; then watch it with them and discuss afterwards, always offering the truth of the Word over the words they hear as the truth, on the media.

Keep schedules and chores. Kids need time to chat with their friends and play games, etc. But have that time on a schedule, along with other things that keep them focused and on task. Besides school work, help them develop a new hobby or learn a new skill. Allow them to make one meal a week, organize a drawer or closet, plant and grow an herb garden, etc.

Keep worship going. If you're not meeting in a building, but only watching online, then make sure to include family worship as part of your time at home. Let the teens be the ones that pick the songs, play the music, etc. Let them be the "worship leader" of the home, as they search playlists and hand out lyrics to each family member. How cool would that be?

Keep the Word at the center. This is a great time to train our teens how the Word can be a lamp, a light, a comfort, and a seed for all they need. Encourage them to write their friends a scripture to encourage. Ask them to present a thought for the day from a reading, to the family one night a week. Weekly, ask your teens what's bugging them and show them how to search the word for answers and guidance.

Keep creativity alive. Let them explore their talents through painting, music, dancing, sports, even while distanced. Allow them creative time to search, let them share with the family, or even with friends. Encourage them to write music, draw what's on their minds, make up a dance or even create and play a new game!

This is a hard time for all of us, and we cannot belittle our teens and their feelings. Their hormones, their worries about their futures, their self-images and desire for friends, their growing pains into adults, all make it hard under the best of circumstances...and much more so during a pandemic. We have to be diligent to love them, listen to them, and learn with them, hour by hour, day by day...

...until we all emerge as stronger families and our teens take with them the pure gold they discovered (or that discovered them) while in the middle of the covid fire.

Life in a Nutshell - Growing Pains – by Jill Montz

My daughter, Dotty, is planning on starting middle school sports this year. In preparation for this, she participated in her school's six week summer workout program. Monday through Thursday I dropped her off at the high school football field at 8:00am and then, depending on what all was planned, I picked her up a few hours later.

Many mornings my sports loving girl grumbled, moaned, and whimpered as she rolled out of bed, stumbled to her closet to dress and then pulled her hair up in a high ponytail to get it off her neck. The days were proving to be long, hot, humid, and hard. Most of the time was spent on agilities, lifting weights and Dotty's favorite (not) running. Dotty was learning a valuable lesson.

Growth hurts.

As her muscles were growing stronger, leaner, and longer, her body was aching from the process. Many mornings she begged me not to make her go, but I have always believed in the sports saying, "You earn your trophies in practice...you collect them at the game." Plus, I am a child athlete of the 90s where gyms didn't have air conditioning and my coach's favorite saying was, "Y'all will run until I get tired," so Dotty didn't get much sympathy from me. Needless to say, she had perfect attendance.

By the end of the program Dotty had visibly developed muscles in her legs and arms, and I have no doubt that she was quicker on her feet. However, what I am most proud of is the growth that happened in things a rack of weights or a stop watch can't measure.

Dotty grew in the intangibles. She learned she was stronger than she realized. She found out that when she was hot, tired, and her legs were wobbly she still had something left in the tank to sprint down the field when the whistle blew. She learned to cheer for her friends to encourage them to achieve their best. She learned that being first is great but being first is not always possible, and we celebrate those who get the victory. She learned there are good days and bad days and there are more days in between. She learned hydration is very important and to never drink chocolate milk before you go outside and run in the heat (no need to elaborate there).

Growth is a part of life and it can be beautiful. When it comes to my flowers it is lovely to watch a plant grow up from the dirt, bud, and bloom. When it happens in our family's pecan orchards we consider it financial success to watch the pecans form their green hull, grow, and eventually open up to produce the pecan inside.

I was working in my gardens the other day and I noticed my crepe myrtle tree was definitely experiencing some growth. The older bark had cracked as the tree swelled in size and it was peeling away to expose the new bark underneath. The process looked kind of painful. All around the base of the tree were dried up grey strips of dead bark that had fallen to the ground as they broke away from the tree. But the new bark looked so healthy and tan.

It kind of reminded me of a chemical peel I once got in my early 30s. My face was bright orange when I left the salon and for DAYS it peeled off in huge flaky strips, and I left a trail of dead skin wherever I went. It was really kind of disgusting. But after about a week my new skin felt so tight and smooth and it looked so fresh! The process of getting there was a bit gross and painful, though.

There have been other times in my life where growth was gross and painful, too. Those days I felt like my heart was cracking and like my soul was being peeled back to expose all the raw areas of me. Those were tough days. Back then I didn't always want to get out of bed and show up to whatever faced me that day. I moaned, whimpered, and grumbled on several occasions; and many of my growth periods lasted longer than a six week school workout program, or even the seasonal shedding period for a crepe myrtle.

Some of my growth periods took years...and some are still happening. But like Dotty, I have learned a few things. I have learned I am stronger than I realized (and probably stronger than some other people thought, as well). When the pain becomes too much to bear and I feel like I am going to crumble, I have learned to dig deep and push through. I have learned that there are good days and bad days and there are a lot of days in between. And I have learned that I have survived every bad day I ever had. I have learned that some days I am strong enough to succeed on my own and some days I need friends to encourage me along the way. I have learned that "this too shall pass" applies to both good and bad days, and so I enjoy the good ones and I know the bad ones won't last forever.

My growth hasn't always been pretty. Sometimes my attitude, thoughts, feelings and words were ugly and sometimes they were directed at people that got hurt by them. And sometimes those people were the ones I loved the most. But like the tree bark, I pray that I am dropping the old ways and emerging with newer, better, and brighter ways of loving and living with those around me.

Tiny Living – Still Here – by Leyanne Enterline

2020 feels like it's never ending!

I don't know about you, but it's been one thing after another in our lives. I mean life is hard as it is; and now with the world completely upside down; life is definitely a bit more chaotic! Besides that, with all the different opinions on how people are dealing with how to handle COVID it's making for more confusion, anger, frustration, depression...

Maybe it's just me, but I'm pretty sure I've felt every emotion possible during this "pandemic." Do we go to church, do we wear a mask, and can we hug? We can play sports and be around tons of people in a grocery store, with complete strangers, but not be with our friends and family? I'm not going to get into my personal thoughts, but rather just write what I see of what's going on around me. This is life right now and I definitely have had my ups and downs.

All that I can truly rely on is the knowledge that *God is good* and He knew all this was going to happen before it happened, and He has a plan for us. I wish I knew what that was and the patience to wait is completely wearing out.

I've cried out to God nightly and feel that He has remained quiet. But in my weakness He is strong, I know that He will work everything out for good, and that He loves us. In the meantime, I will try to work on being righteous, patient and joyful through all this. It is very hard to remain positive at times, but this is only for a season and we WILL get through it. I pray for everyone as they deal with this season in their own way.

On to the positive side of our continued tiny living...we are still living it! Since Brian lost his job in March and my business has been slow, we are thankful for the super low payments on our land and trailer. Brian has gotten some work from a friend in New Mexico, which has allowed us to still travel and have fun on the road! We get to head to Colorado for a second time this summer, and the boys have picked up a fly rod to try some new type of fishing. They were fortunate to have some lessons from our friend on fly fishing, so they can't wait to go and try what they've learned in Colorado!

I am thankful for the friends and family around us that surround us with their love and encouragement. Tiny living may only be for a season (or actually, going on four years) but God knew what we needed at this time and place, and for that we will be thankful.

Love grows best in tiny spaces...

Chipped China - Being Rehomed – by Jennifer Lytle

“Ugh,” I thought to myself, “The worst time of the day to work from home is this hour. Why can’t he just put his computer down and be present with us?” It wasn’t the first time I had similar thoughts. This was an ongoing point of contention throughout certain periods. Honestly, I thought that I had already passed this stage of disagreement in my marriage. Now, he had picked up a job that had him on his computer until 8 on Sunday evenings.

More significantly than his work hour, however, Jesus was inviting me to develop my inner spirit. Longsuffering was my test. Love was my test, along with peace, joy, kindness, and gentleness. This evening, I wanted nothing to do with this test! I only wanted my husband to be emotionally and mentally available. This test revealed I needed endurance, humility, and sacrificial love. Possibly, it indicated a need for a more balanced schedule and stronger communication, but my heart needed Jesus too.

My inner man is being rehomed.

This is my season.

Some days the silent prayer is easier to embrace than others.

“Whatever it takes, Jesus.”

Have you ever wondered why apartment rent typically increases with each lease renewal? Property owners and management firms understand that moving is both a) expensive and b) requires diligent forethought and planning. Many renters continue to pay rent at an increased rate because of the effort required to put a move into motion. Moving is hard work.

There can be benefits to moving, too. Often, moving creates an opportunity to recognize unnecessary items or clutter that would otherwise go unrelinquished.

“Whatever it takes, Jesus.”

One of the best things to happen this summer during The Great Slow Down, was rediscovering my love for bike riding. My daughter learned to ride her bike and our family enjoyed multiple treks around the neighborhood. My son even learned to ride! We made it up to a 4-mile excursion on a few occasions. Most days, there was only enough time or energy to go back and forth on one especially scenic road. Beautiful homes set far back from this road dot the route with elaborate landscaping and intricate walls or gates. Along this familiar and comfortable ride, one curious site held my attention. An orange construction cone held a caution sign. The sign read:

Caution: Bees being rehomed.

They may be more active and aggressive than usual.

Keep your distance.

This was the most fascinating procedure to witness over six or more weeks. The first step seemed to take the longest, though I should in no way be considered an authority on these facts. A tightly woven black fabric was wrapped around a portion of the tree where the hive was located. It was tightly bound and secured. The next step was the introduction of a new home directly on the location of the old hive. Remains from the black binding, which had been

removed, were lying in a pile at the base of the tree. Honey bees worked to rebuild a hive inside the new wooden structure. After a shorter period than the binding stage, the new wooden structure was secured several inches to one side of the tree, at the same height as the previous hive. Lastly, and I was so grateful to witness the final move, a professional came. Starting with a smoker, the apiarist was slow and methodical. I nearly felt concerned that the apiarist would fall asleep with the prolonged process. Afterward, the apiary gently moved the wooden structure from its temporary side perch to a special area in his truck. Then, it was gone!

With God being omniscient, I cannot believe this was a fortuitous wonder I was fortunate to witness. Much like the rehomed beehive, my soul too needs to be moved. The portion of the tree where the bees were moved from had become dead. If the hive were allowed to remain in the tree, I wonder if the tree ultimately would have stopped growing. Maybe it would have continued growing in a twisted manner until it became hazardous. The bees required needed a new, life-sustaining home. The tree too needed time for its trunk to heal.

How can we grow from glory to glory (please see [2 Corinthians 3:18](#))? Pay those moving fees, and go to the place God is inviting each of us to!

“Whatever it takes, Jesus.”

Jesus, thank you for every soul reading these words. Reveal the hives that need to go, the wounds that need to heal. Help them accept your rehoming. Amen.



YOU

Strengthening Your Core - Islands are for Visiting – by Marcy Lytle

Did you dream all summer of visiting an island somewhere, vacationing far away from the rest of the world, finding some secluded spot where the virus didn't exist, and setting up camp to forget all your troubles? I'm thinking many of us wished for such a trip and such a place! However, I don't know of one person that found such a place, and I don't know of anyone that actually lives on an island (the tiny kind). Secluded islands (for the most part) are for visiting...but they're not really for living.

During these past several months, I've observed that many of us have felt isolated and have either enjoyed it and have shut out the rest of the world...or we're depressed and missed all of the interaction we once had with others. For me, I'd say I felt a little of both.

I've come to enjoy our nightly walks, simple pleasures of being outside more, and even dealing less with people and angst that comes from rubbing shoulders with lots of people. However, I've also missed gathering of crowds for worship, sitting among a full theater for a new release, and hugs and handshakes and smiles and shared meals.

We've all definitely become more withdrawn, because we are mandated to stay away from close proximity with others, even when walking or shopping. Six feet away, we turn our heads and our feet to walk on the other side when we see a person approaching. When we roll down our windows at a drive-thru, we cannot tell whether or not the worker is smiling or frowning beneath that hot and sticky mask they have to wear ALL day long. We have to sit alone on our back porches or only with a family member or one close friend, missing and longing for more connection with those we used to see and visit with...

One reason people love to vacation on an island far away is because of the exotic experiences that can be had. From exotic drinks, to exotic excursions or safaris, we like the thrill of something a bit different and out of the norm of the crowded cities in which we live. But most of us do not take up residence on a secluded island. We only visit it for a while and return home.

Why? We were created for fellowship and connection. Even though introverts enjoy their time alone, and extroverts mingle too much, we all have this innate desire and need to connect. We need affirmation. We need the opportunities to give. In other words, we need people.

While this pandemic is still here, we have to make the choice to look beyond the mask, step outside our comfort zones, and live...not seclude...on our own little islands. And here are a few ways to do that, while we wait for normal life to resume...

- We can make eye contact with those who pass by, and say, "I'm smiling! Have a good day!" instead of turning our heads.
- We can make an effort to meet a friend in a park for a visit apart, while catching up and praying with them to bless them.
- We can spend some of our isolation time thinking about people we miss and offering their names up to Him, in prayer.

- We can analyze our own selves, by doing some deep reflection, and spend time healing at his feet in worship.
- We can create beauty through writing or drawing or building or mending, while we're alone and away.

The beauty of a faraway island is the colors, the sights, the sounds of nature that await...but many are drawn also because of the resorts that offer every amenity we can imagine. But the beauty of returning home is the memories made, the pictures taken, and the experiences had while away on the island.

We're only visiting this isolation island right now in life, I think. Or who knows, isolation could be a way of life for a good long while. But while we're visiting this island, let's observe the beauty as best we can and offer that beauty to those around us in as many creative ways as we can...during this vacation from the norm.

That way, when we return, hopefully we will be rested, ready, and renewed to rub shoulders, really changed for the better and the better of our friends that now sit at our table once again.

Life Right Now – So Faithful – by Bethany Gomez

“Just put one word on the page,” I tell myself.

The dreaded writer’s block is back or, in this case, it is more like I’m saying, “There is too much going on in my mind concerning several things that I can’t form a single sentence!”

I was staring at that blinking cursor on the blank page for a while, but before I gave up I finally just typed the one thing that I had repeated to myself a couple of times. Lo and behold, it was more than one word! And it sparked the rest of this article.

Sometimes, I would rather do anything else but sit down and write my thoughts out for other people to read because why would anyone care to read about my life or my thoughts? I feel like I have so little to offer, little to no wisdom to impart. But then I am reminded that if by some chance something I write makes at least one person feel like they are not alone or helps them know that God loves them, then that is enough to keep me writing.

I will not bog you down with all of my thoughts, as that wouldn’t be good for anyone. I will share only three that are taking up a decent amount of my thoughts as of late:

First, there’s the fact that I will be 33 this month. Another birthday usually brings up thoughts of the previous year and expectancy for the next year and that is definitely true of this birthday, despite everything going on right now. What happened during my 32nd year of life? Not much, but at the same time a whole lot. I feel like I stayed in my comfort zone too much. Granted, half of my 32nd year was during a pandemic, under quarantine, practically no one was allowed to leave their comfort zone...but I still could have prayed to God for direction for what He would have me do to help others. I hardly did.

Also, I wish I hadn’t wasted so much time worrying about things that I should give over to God. One of the main thoughts is my dream of having a family of my own one day. It is just so hard to let go of that dream because it has been so important to me for so long, but if it is that important to me, then I know that it is that much more important to God. I would rather serve God as a single woman, than enter into something that is not God’s will for my life. If I have learned anything in this past year (or for that matter, in my nearly 33 years of life) it is that God is so faithful. Even when my faith is waning or weak; He remains faithful. Even if I don’t see His faithfulness, He is still faithful.

2 Timothy 2:13 says,

“If we are faithless, He remains faithful – for He cannot deny Himself.”

Second, there’s the fact that I bought airline tickets for a trip to Boston next month with a few of my friends. If this trip does not get cancelled, postponed, or I don’t get sick, then this will be the 5th year in a row that I will be blessed to witness the glorious New England fall. Unlike years past, the main reason for going to Boston has sadly been canceled due to Covid. To sum up, we have held an annual fall market at a church up in Norwood, Mass. for the past four years. It is called Market of Hope, a non-profit organization that two of my friends started. You might be wondering, *If the market got cancelled due to the virus then how has the trip not gotten cancelled?* For one, our wonderful volunteers from the church are among the most vulnerable. If I had to guess they are almost all over the age of 65. Two, a flash of optimism took over two months ago when round trip air fare was around \$100! I’m fully aware that things can most

certainly change. As I am writing this, strict travel bans are everywhere including one of our trip destinations. I'm trying to stay optimistic about still getting to go. My friend Katy that's coming has never been able to go over the past years, and I can't wait to show her all our favorite things. I also have a strong feeling that we will all be ready for a getaway in order to rest from our busy, sometimes stressful schedules. At the same time, I am trying not to get my hopes up.

Third and final, is the fact that I will be reporting back to my elementary campus for face-to-face teaching this month. The beginning of the school year began virtually for the first three weeks. Instead of sharing some of my thoughts, fears, or opinions on the matter of schools opening for in-person teaching and what that might look like this year, I would love to pray over this school year instead:

Lord, the first thing I want to do is lay this school year down at your feet. This burden is too heavy for any of us to carry. I ask that you be near to us. Near to the brokenhearted, near to every student, every teacher, every parent, every staff member, every decision maker. I ask that you protect everyone whether at school or at home. Protect the most vulnerable, whether it be those with compromised immune systems or those students living in unsafe homes. Father God, give us peace that surpasses all understanding, give us endurance for this year, and give us patience, grace, creativity. Be our provider, our healer, our friend. I pray for those that are afraid or hurting, may they feel Your perfect love. I praise You in advance for all of the answered prayers and testimonies that will come out of this school year. In Your name, I pray!

“You faithfully answer our prayers with awesome deeds, O God our Savior,

You are the hope of everyone on Earth.”

Psalm 65:5

Healthy Habits – Awaken – by Marcy Lytle

It's September, by golly. Summer is over and a new season is here! Fall is my favorite season of the year, even though summer temps linger too long for my liking! And while fall scents are popping up now; which will awaken our sense of smell, we have other senses that need awakening as well! Waking up our senses can feel like breathing in fresh air, and give us strength to face this next season with gusto, not weariness!

The eyes:

- Plan a drive to see fall color (or watch it on Youtube)
- Purpose to wear a bold fall hue (start with a deep red – on your lips, maybe?)
- Put away your phone when you're outside, and observe the beauty around you

The nose:

- Purchase a couple of new fragrant candles from Paddy Wax, and burn them each morning (my faves are the ones in the Library collection)
- Peruse the internet for potpourri mixes you can simmer on your stove
- Pick your favorite herbs (rosemary and basil) and smell them often.

The hands:

- Pick out new linen for your bed or bath according to how it feels.
- Plan a massage night for yourself, or with your family, back and foot rubs included! (Just include lotion, candles, brushes, music, and whatever you find around the house...)
- Present something you've created with your hands, to a friend!

The ears:

- Pull out some old albums or CDs and play them, enjoying the lyrics that feed your soul, or easy listening jazz!
- Place your ears in a listening position to the truth of God's word as you read or listen to a podcast.
- Press in to really listen, with eyes closed, the cicadas as they make their distinctive sounds.

The tongue:

- Pretend you're a TV chef and make a meal that's outside your box of normal recipes.
- Prepare something decadent for dessert and enjoy every bite.
- Peek in your fridge and create a combo of flavors you've never tried before.

Awaken every one of your senses this fall, so that you are fully alive and well, enjoying the world around you in all of its goodness and blessings from HIM.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uBKGwRJHLXA> - fall colors

<https://paddywax.com/collections/library>

<https://www.cleanandscentsible.com/fall-simmering-potpourri-recipes/>

<https://www.thesprucecrafts.com/homemade-gift-ideas-1251561>

<https://www.fromachefskitchen.com/>

<https://spoonuniversity.com/lifestyle/weird-food-combinations-that-are-delicious>



MARRIAGE

In This Together – I Pray You Hope – by Bekah Holland

I think sometimes, hope is all we have. Bigger than our dreams. Bigger than our marriage. Hope in something bigger than ourselves.

So today....

I pray you find hope in the uncertain and you catch a glimpse of something that changes you.

I pray you find hope in the small things. A happy ending. A smile from a stranger.

I pray you find hope in a hand reaching out to hold yours, just when you feel most alone.

I pray you find hope in moments of joy and laughter. That they'll lighten your soul.

I pray you find hope in the darkness. That you believe there is light beyond the void you're in.

I pray you find hope in others...that you see the good and the possible in the people you meet.

I pray you find hope in your challenges. That they will teach you to grow and reach for more.

I pray you find hope in your pain. The most beautiful things in this world have been broken and pieced back into a work of art.

I pray you find hope in the unknown....and that you hold tight to your faith despite the circumstances and trust in the unwavering love of God.

I pray that in all things you would find hope in the creator and author of your faith. That you would have "confidence in things you hope for, and conviction in what you do not see."

"Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness."

Desmond Tutu

Date Night Fun – Plan a Trip – by Marcy Lytle

It's September, and there are four weeks, just like every month. So what if date night included planning a trip that you'll take in October? Planning a trip together is so fun, and one of the most rewarding times together...sometimes even better than the trip itself! And since all of our date night options out are still limited, this might be a fun solution.

Here are five date night ideas (one for each week of the month, plus an extra) to get that next road trip on your calendar:

First, the location: Spend time together browsing options for places to drive in your area. Consider ghost towns, small town charm, national parks, historic downtowns, or whatever you enjoy (and whatever is open!). Grab your laptop and a few snacks, and browse. One can browse while the other takes notes. Once you've chosen your destination, step outside and take a walk discussing the dates you'll take off, how long you will be gone, etc. Get excited.

Tip: We've found that purchasing an actual paper state map of our area enables us to search for towns in a specific radius, depending on how far we want to travel.

Second, the activities: This night, spend time searching the internet for best things to do in the cities you've chosen. Maybe you've picked a route to three small towns not far from where you live. Search for eateries, shopping, history, events, parks and more (be sure to check to see what's open). Take a drive to your local Target and purchase a folder to keep all your plans and brochures orderly and ready for your trip! Stop for an ice cream on the way home as you talk about what excites you the most!

Tip: Type in "itinerary in..." for each place you're going and sometimes individuals will post on their blogs exactly what they did in that place...great info for you!

Third, the lodging: Will you stay in a hotel or bed n breakfast? We've found that in small town travel, bed and breakfast or air bnb homes are the best. They usually offer ambience you can't get in a hotel, and perhaps feel a bit safer because they're isolated instead of housed in a big high rise. This search is the most fun, as you contact hosts and find out amenities and provisions! Book your place! This night, either on line or inside an open store, purchase little toiletry items and car organizers for your road trip!

Tip: If the place has a kitchen, consider taking your own food to make – that can be a date night all to its own!

Fourth, the preparation and packing: Spend date night taking care of some fun things like washing and cleaning out the car, packing together (maybe purchase some of those cool packing cubes or a new toiletry bag!), cook some of the food items you can prepare ahead (trail mix!), etc. Put on music and give thanks for this opportunity to go!

Tip: Since you're tripping in the car, consider an organizer for your back seat that will keep your books, wraps, shoes, etc. corralled and not rolling around!

Fifth, the extras: Think about things you can take to do while you're resting in the evening, or even pulled over in a state park under a shade tree! For example, include a journal to reflect and record your fun, a new book or puzzle book, a game to play, or even a sketch book and pencils to create! Pack them in a cube or a bag or a box, to have ready! So spend the evening gathering, shopping, and putting these items together...over a root beer float!

Tip: On your itinerary, list out these items as options when there's down time. Otherwise, you'll forget and come home sad that you forgot!

There you go! Start planning, and incorporate that planning into date night with him, as you search, shop, pack, plan, and enjoy all the steps in having a good time!

After 40 Years – Little Winks – by Marcy Lytle

I remember when we were dating, decades ago, my soon to be husband would catch my eye across a room full of people and wink at me. Oh my gosh, I felt all sorts of flutters because I loved him so much, and that wink just sent my heart soaring! And truth be told, he still catches my eye and winks at me, and it still happens – that flutter of love!

I realize that those little things are still so important now, the things that maybe no one else would notice, but we do – the things that make each other feel special and loved.

I went to run an errand the other day and he quickly went out in the yard and replaced our yard lights with the new ones we had just purchased a few days before. He also replaced a bulb in the kitchen. He wanted to surprise me when I drove up, with those little jobs completed.

When we're watching a show, he takes my feet, removes my shoes and rubs my toes. I love that! It is so relaxing and it thrills my heart when he gently remembers this kindness to me!

I work in my bedroom at a desk and he knows how I love to have the bed made – first thing – so that my room feels put together and not messy – while I work. Since he's the last to wake up, he always makes the bed first thing. I notice.

When we take an evening walk, he puts out his arm for me to place my hand (unless it's too hot – then we don't touch!), so we can walk arm in arm as the sun sets.

I enjoy filling the tray with a bunch of bananas and keeping them there, because that's his fruit of choice daily, before he starts his day.

I could go on and on listing the little things we both do (he's better at doing them than I am!), and I could also dismiss them as not being important (which I have at times!) But when I stop and take the time to notice and hug him for thinking of me, there's this connection we have that sinks in and satisfies.

I've been known to be so busy and self-absorbed that I'm totally thinking of the big things I wish he'd do, so much that I overlook all of the tiny small things he's SO GOOD at doing to bless me. When I finally stop and observe and give thanks, it makes me want to give back and notice him as well.

Last night, he noticed that my back was hurting and he told me to come lie on the sofa while he rubbed my feet. He prayed for my back before we went to sleep, and yes...he winked at me during the show that we were watching.

And guess what? That wink is still the best, the smallest but the greatest, and it still wins me over.

As I've grown older with him, I'm trying to learn to be more observant and offer him little kindnesses as well. I love grandiose gestures for sure (who doesn't?) but those aren't too easy to come by right now during a pandemic. But I don't feel at all like we're choosing to "settle" for

something less. Sometimes, the very least noticeable kindness is the one with the biggest result...a fluttering heart and a kiss on the cheek in response...because we feel so loved.

Yesterday, I organized his truck seat with a new box full of pockets and he was delighted. It was fun, and I can't wait to find another way to bless him, because I have to work at it. He's just servant-hearted and it comes naturally. That's easy to overlook by a person like me, but I'm trying my best to notice, adore him, and love and relish all of the little winks from across the (now, not crowded) room in the coziness of our own living room with no one else around to see...but him and me.



ENCOURAGEMENT

Rooted in Love - Life Is Like a Gumball – by Kaelin Scott

I'm pretty sure that everybody, at some point in their lives, has gotten a gumball from a gumball machine. It's just one of those things that you've got to try at least once, especially since it's so cheap and the colors are so tantalizing. But in case you haven't ever tried it, let me try to explain it. You put a quarter in the slot; turn the knob, then wait in anticipation as the machine spits out your gumball. It's exciting to see if you'll get your favorite color, and it's a rush of pure joy if you do. But sometimes you get a color you're really not a fan of, or maybe your gumball comes out all dented and chipped instead of perfectly round and beautiful.

If you're like me, you'll still eat the gumball no matter what shape it's in and no matter what color you get. Because, hey, I spent that twenty-five cents and I'm sure not going to waste it. Even if I don't get exactly what I was hoping for, I still make the most of that gumball and chew it until all the flavor is gone. Usually, they are too big for my mouth and make me look silly while I chomp away, but it's a fun experience and definitely worth the money, in my opinion.

Recently, as I was thinking about gumball machines, I realized that they are very symbolic of life. We each get one chance at living, and we all have high hopes for what our lives will look like. We dream about the perfect job, the perfect spouse, the perfect house, the perfect kids, the perfect friends, etc. But sometimes, kind of like the gumballs, what we get isn't exactly what we were expecting. Sometimes we're handed difficulties, hardships, and painful situations that don't match up with our hopes and dreams. Sure, some people seem to get exactly what they want all the time. But in reality, we all have disappointments and setbacks and broken hearts at some time or another.

But the beautiful thing about life is that we can choose to make the most of it no matter what. Even if we don't get our perfect "gumball," we can still enjoy the life we're given. We can still squeeze every ounce of flavor out of it. We can still be grateful and happy.

God purposely gives each of us a unique and different life because He loves diversity. You might look at your life compared to someone else's and think God gave them the better gumball. Maybe you wish you could demand a refund or an exchange. But your life is beautiful just the way it is, and it's up to you to choose joy and thankfulness. You can hope for perfection and be disappointed in anything less, or you can embrace what you're given and make your life count.

Every gumball has potential, and so do you. Don't be so busy comparing your life to others' lives so that you miss out on its beauty. And don't forget that God doesn't make mistakes. The life He gave you is the one He wants you to have. Make the most of it!

“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” John 10:10

I think we can agree that we're living in difficult times and the entire world is being shaken. Even as I write this, I'm weighing my words so as not to offend, I'm asking for help in explaining this deep thing in my heart that grieves me so much. Lately, I find it easier to express through poetry the thoughts and feelings that rise up within me. This poem is about peace and what I see as an obstacle in bringing God's "kingdom on earth as it is in heaven" that *we who believe* profess to want and pray for. Does God really take a "side"? Does he really support one agenda over another? Who is benefitting from the hate, intolerance and accusations slung back and forth—certainly no human being. How can we live in tune with God's heartbeat, ready for the Day? I pray this poem speaks to anyone who has ears to hear.

DOVE OF LOVE

Dove of Love with an olive branch...
The earth is longing for you
With hope of peace and promise of release
From prisons of pain and storm.
Pure and free, the first and the last,
With gentle and yet ferric strength,
Your olive branch is offered to all--
Every nation, and color, and bent.

But the earth cries out as she sees you fall,
Deflated and berated, all hope negated,
The olive branch loosened, but not lost;
Why do you falter, dove of Love?
What burden do you bear
That causes you to dip and waver
And struggle through the air?

She speaks softly, the dove of Love...
So quiet yet so resolute:
"It's my wings you see, they work against,
They don't move in Harmony.
The left one cries freedom, mercy, equality--

It will not be bound or constrained.
The right one cries morality, honor, authority--
It will not give, understand or explain.
They defy and deny, refusing to hear
the heartbeat that sounds as one.
Yet I fly on, olive branch held tight
Til righteousness and mercy meet.”

And when will they meet, dove of Love?
When will the heartbeat be heard?
“The heartbeat, in Power, will sound out the hour
When Harmonic angels arrive;
Then left and right will no longer strive,
Their strength will diminish and die.

Light and Truth will lift me high;
The earth will exult as the olive branch falls,
Bringing hope of peace and promise of release
From prisons of pain and storm,
To every nation, and color, and form.”

Moving Forward – Good is Coming – by Pam Charro

Am I the only one waiting for life to get more positive and exciting?

I'm guessing I'm not alone. It can feel so hard to dream right now. Sometimes all I see is how isolated and bored I am, and my accomplishments so far don't seem very impressive. So much failure and disappointment, dysfunction and issues throughout my life...and now there's nothing but time and loneliness to stew in all of it.

Is this all I will ever be?

What will forever define my life and its impact?

Will I always be too messed up to make better choices and be a part of something awesome?

How can I ever receive the good God created me for when everything is such a mess?

And now will I ever be able to live life the way I want in order to try and make something better?

I had hoped for so much more; now I just feel stuck.

It's easy for me to forget that nothing that has happened has caught God by surprise, not even unwise life choices that have had long-lasting consequences. He still has a good plan for our lives that no crisis or detour can stop, and not a tear will be wasted.

His mercies are new every morning!

But he also knows that there is a time for everything (Ecclesiastes 3:11), even things we wouldn't have willingly chosen, and he already knows the good that is brewing from even our unhealthy decisions and our unhealthy planet during this time of relative stillness. As is written in Isaiah 30:15, in quietness and trust our strength can be found. There is treasure in the nighttime, but it takes eyes of faith to see it.

Maybe part of the purpose of this time is not so much for fun, but to grow in patience and steadfastness, and to learn to be still and listen while we have fewer options to be busy. Whatever its purpose or purposes, I can make the most of it by staying close to him and trusting him to be what he is, which is good. I can also ask him to change my vision so I can experience his highest possible good for me while I'm waiting. So I'm thinking maybe being off-balance is more a matter of perspective than circumstance.

God has had a plan for this so-called chaos all along and doesn't need to wait until things (or we) are better to bring good out of life. We can't stop him from bringing it no matter what we do, but we ourselves will likely be so much happier if we choose to align our view with his. And then, maybe encouraging others with this hope will also help us feel less stuck and frustrated, because shining our light feels good.

Today, tomorrow, and every day that we have life, new treasures are available because God is a good giver. It may not look the way we had anticipated, but that just means we need to ask for different eyes to see it.

Simple Truths – Surrounded – by Marcy Lytle

This is my second month out of three, filling in for our writer, as she is on hiatus. And as I looked at the title of her column, I thought to myself, “Is any truth really simple?” After all, it seems that we hear or read on social media someone’s TRUTH as they see it, and we really don’t know who or what to believe, at all. It’s all so complicated! Politics mixed in with racism mixed in with corona virus makes for a pot of pretty nasty and smelling concoction that’s anything but clear!

Sometimes, when truth becomes complicated, I have to sit back and observe and be still and become aware of the simplicity of truth around me. And that’s why I love the column title that Erica gave to this section of the magazine. Simple truths are the best ones to hang on to, gaze at, think upon, and live by...now aren’t they?

Here are a few of my simple truths, from just looking back through the photos on my phone of things and places that caused me to pause and snap...

- Flowers in a vase – they’re real and they smell divine, and the color is breathtaking, and they remind me of the Creator.
- Ice cream on a hot day – the opposite feeling from the heat around me provides refreshment to my body and soul – reminds me of his rest.
- Herbs and citrus – Rosemary, lemon and vanilla simmering in a pot with aromas that cannot be reproduced because they’re natural and clean – reminds me of His goodness.
- Parting clouds – that hole in the darkness where the sun shines through – reminds me of his faithfulness.
- Smiles – I was able to surprise him with a gift, and his smile of joy and the love behind it – reminds me of the joy there is in giving to someone else.
- Swings – A place to sit and move in the breeze with feet off the ground and the thrill of a child – reminds me that he enjoys just hanging with me.
- Popcorn – a bowl piled high with refillable goodness that’s so satisfying and delicious – reminds me of his open hand full of good things always, never ending and always there.

Take a look back on your own phone and see what made you stop and give pause. Then start to look around for the simplicity in all of the chaos, and see if you don’t find yourself breathing and sleeping a little better, all because of the simple truths that surround you.

Psalm 32:7

You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble;

You surround me with songs of deliverance.

Unearthly Thing - “But DADDY...I want it NOW!” – by Angela Dolbear

I asked and prayed, and pleaded and cried. And stomped my feet—spiritually speaking. But in the end, God didn’t come through the way I wanted Him to.

Did He hear my prayers? Yes!
Did He come through for me? Absolutely.
My God is faithful beyond my imagining.

But He didn’t answer my cries in the way I wanted. Me. Me. Me. *Yuck.*

The whiny cries of the iconic character from the original *Willie Wonka and Chocolate Factory* reverberate in my head. “*But Daddy...I want it now!*”

God’s blessings are so abundant, I feel like I am beginning to get spoiled. He blessed me and resolved my situation, but I couldn’t see it, because I was blinded by my own will.

Hello, my name is Veruca Salt (today...), and I cringe in repentance.

God’s blessings are abundant. They are part of His character. Jesus talked about how the Father loves to give good gifts to His children (see Mathew 7:11). And in my 29 years of being His kid, I can tell you that is true. Time and time again. Father God often gives good things to those to ask.

Are they too abundant for my human head and heart? My mind tries to reconcile these concepts. I see two areas where I need to make adjustments to address my “I want it now/my way” attitude.

Adjustment #1: My Expectations

I get stuck on a certain way, a certain timing, in which I believe how God should work in answering my prayers. Even typing this out loud screams of its absurdity to me—SO wrong. Utterly ridiculous. God’s ways are not my ways, though I am working on it (see [Isaiah 55:8-9](#), one of my favorite portions of the Bible).

Application: STOP putting limitations on how I expect the Almighty God, the Creator of Universe, Who is limitless, will choose to work, both in timing and result. The fact that He answers my little human requests amazes me. He is faithful and good.

Adjustment #2: King Comfort

I have made my comfort of the utmost importance. Physically (which is a whole other topic to be covered at a later date), as well as situationally (see Adjustment #1). If I am not comfortable with how a situation turns out, I am devastated. I have needed to repent of this false devastation more than once.

Application: No matter what I may think, God is in control. I know this to be true, so I need to live it out. Right now, and forever, I need to remember and rejoice that my God is in control, and He is good, and also His is intimately involved in every moment of my life. (*Author’s Note:* I will be rereading this article at a later date, after another episode of “DADDY! I want it NOW,” when I will audibly moan at my current ridiculousness, and ask God for forgiveness. Repent, and repeat...)

Last Sunday, [Pastor Lyle](#) (July 26 message) preached on the Lord's Prayer (see [Mathew 6:5-15](#), and then [Luke 11:1-12](#)). He reminded us that God's glory has prominence over all, and that God's ultimate desire for my life is NOT my comfort, but for my whole being to be used for HIS glory. And that His kingdom be advanced ("Your kingdom come, Your will be done"). *So good.*

Yes, and amen! It's good to be reminded that my purpose is to glorify His name and expand His Kingdom, in all that I do. The meaning of life simplified.

And yes Lord, Your will be done. NOT mine. When and where did I get the idea that I am in any way shape or form in control? And that I know best? *Ugh.*

The message also talked about how the Lord's Prayer describes our daily submission to God, in all things, and for all things. How else can humans learn to reprogram their selfish thinking to solely glorifying God, and the expansion of His kingdom? I need that. Less of me. More of Him.

Adjustment Prayer: Lord, please reprogram my human brain to seek to glorify You and expand Your kingdom.

So the next time I feel my will and flesh rise up and say, "I WANT IT NOW," I look to my Heavenly Father, and say, "Daddy, not my will, but Yours will be done."

Amen.

ANGELA DOLBEAR is the author of four novels, and several short stories. She also writes and records original music with her husband, Tim Dolbear. Please visit her author page on [Amazon](#) for more information.



FRESH THYME

FRESH THYME - Bales in the Field – by Marcy Lytle

Let me begin by saying I know NOTHING about farming. I know that I don't want to live on a farm, but I do enjoy gazing at farmland on a road trip. And when there's an entire field with bales of hay spread out in nice rows, I almost gasp and beg to stop and exclaim, "I need a picture!" I have so many photos of bales (or wheels) of hay. I love them all. And recently, we walked by a huge field and my husband hoisted me on top of one!

I have no idea why a field of hay rolled up in bales is so attractive to me, but it is. It's a scene that just speaks peace to my soul. It's one of those scenes that makes me want to pull over and stay a while, to empty my busy mind, and look out over these huge objects as they sit, seemingly immovable, softly calling me to sit a while, as well.

And then, this summer I decided to look up hay and anything interesting about those bales! And what I found spoke to me:

While those scenes are beautiful, I read that those wheels cannot lay there very long. They have to be moved.

- The plants underneath get smothered.
- Smothered plant areas make great places for weeds and dandelions to grow.
- Leaving bales in place too long can reduce the next crop's yield by 25% or more!
- Bales left too long in a field soften and flatten, and cause exposure to the elements – thus loss.

After I read about the danger of leaving the bales in place too long, I thought of that scene in the bible where Jesus' friends were with him atop a mountain where all seemed pretty picture perfect. They asked if they could just stay there and hang out and live...and Jesus then escorted them down the mountain back to real life.

I told my husband just the other day that I wish life would just stand still, sometimes. (Of course, I'd like Covid to be gone, first). On days when my kids are well, money is in the bank, health is good, and prayers are being answered, I'd just like life to stop. I want to stay right here and not age any more, not see my kids go through any future troubles, and not experience any more loss of any kind.

In other words, I'd like life to be a field with beautiful hay bales for sitting and gazing and enjoying. But there's this process called refinement, transfiguration, healing, and setting up an eternity with no more sorrow that still has to take place.

I love it that Jesus took his friends up to that mountain, but it wasn't to have them build a tent that excluded those down below. It was to encourage them to reenter the villages, taking with them the great scene they had witnessed, all in the strength they received from time with their Lord.

I was encouraged that day when I sat on top of that hay bale. It was fun. I wanted to stay there a while. But those bales have to be moved, so that growth and life and strength can take place...until it's time to roll out the hay once again.

He always has scenes and oases of rest that he calls us to...green pastures to lie down in...for strength and renewal. And strength and renewal is never just for ourselves, but it's to hoist up a friend, encourage a neighbor, or send out a strong arm to the fallen.

I will continue to enjoy country drives and hay bales, but I'll also have a new respect for what they mean and why they have to be moved...so that what's underneath can survive and then thrive.

FRESH THYME - Imagine and Believe – by Marcy Lytle

One day we were driving around town and I was thinking about the “fall,” you know, when Adam and Eve ate that forbidden fruit and ushered in all sorts of pain and suffering into the world. I was looking at the kinds of businesses around town that only exist because of pain and suffering!

Lawyers are here to defend us when wrongs occur.

Spas and health clubs are here to keep us healthy.

Repair shops are only built to fix things that are broken.

Stores and restaurants exist because we no longer have access to the garden.

Doctors’ offices and hospitals are built to house and treat illnesses and woes.

Counselors and psychiatrists help to heal our broken hearts and minds.

Jails house those who do wrong and inflict pain on others.

I could go on and on, but you get the picture. If pain and suffering didn’t exist in the world, we’d have so much more land, no need for repairs, and we’d be well and healthy and strong...and then what would our world look like? What kinds of jobs would there be? Oh wait, would we even need to work?

Sin is real, and even though many song lyrics talk about doing what feels good no matter what, when we wrong ourselves or others...pain results.

Just yesterday I read about a drunk driver entering the highway going the wrong direction, and when an accident occurred, the person in the other vehicle died. Drinking and driving mixed together is an activity that’s wrong, and it causes devastating results.

For anyone to say that sin (wrong doing) doesn’t exist is to be blinded by the pain in this world that does exist because of that original sin.

I cannot explain or even comprehend why the actions of one couple affected generations to come, but it did. And God says that what we do affects the generations after us. We can leave them with blessings or curses, depending on our actions. If we are so fearful that we hover and prohibit our kids from living, they will experience fear and pass that on to their kids. But the same occurs with the opposite. If we build up the faith in our kids, share with them stories of God’s love and faithfulness, they will swim in that stream...against all resistance.

Sin is real. Sin hurts. Sin permeates our society and lives on our streets. And the only antidote for sin is Jesus. We cannot stop sinning on our own. From the time we breathe our first breath, it’s all about “give me what I need and give it to me now,” unless we at some point in our lives surrender. We can surrender our bent toward sin, and change by bending toward forgiveness.

All of the above places I mentioned that exist to help the hurting are there to help us all, in our quest to be healthy and whole. However, no amount of gym memberships, appointments with counselors, and time spent in jail can fix the original problem – sin. Sin is doing wrong when we know to do good. And that encompasses a whole lot of wrong in all of us.

John 3:16 is probably the most quoted verse in the Bible, and with good reason.

*God so loved the world that he gave his only Son
that whoever believes in Him shall not die but have eternal life.*

That one verse is the antidote for sin – to just believe in the love of a good, good Father – and that's it.

Next time you take a drive around town, count the businesses that only exist because we live in a broken world, and you'll be astounded. And if you work in one of those businesses, thank you. If you attend one of those businesses for help - good for you. And if you don't yet know Jesus, the One who restores us back to the pre-fallen state of fellowship with the Father, all you have to do is believe.

Imagine a world without sin, without broken, without sick, and without harm.

That's the world that's promised to those who believe.

FRESH THYME – One Pair – by Marcy Lytle

I would NEVER be caught without sunglasses, EVER, because the sun made my eyes squint and hurt. So I had every cute pair out there, from big frames to colorful frames, and I loved wearing them. That was, until reading glasses became a staple. For years I then carried two kinds of glasses in my purse, a reading pair AND the sunglasses, until...about a year ago.

I really found myself in a bad mood when we headed out for a stroll and I carried my phone, and two pair of glasses. The sunglasses went on my head to help my eyes, but then if I had to read my phone or anything else, I had to switch the glasses. This drove me NUTS.

I don't really remember why or how it happened, but I think I just decided I was going to only take my reading glasses (because I could not function without them!) and over time, I didn't need the sunglasses anymore...and now I don't like sunglasses!

That little story I find amazing, even though it happened to ME! I would never have thought I could live without sunglasses, but here I sit not liking them anymore, my eyes don't bother me (in fact, sunglasses bother me), and I'm back down to only having to carry one pair!

So what's the point of this crazy story? I realized that there are things I think I need or must have that I can really do without just fine! I suppose my eyes had grown accustomed to the sunglasses, but now my eyes don't like the shades any more! I'm sure this would not work for everyone, but other things might.

I remember standing by another mom while waiting to pick up my kids from school and she commented, "We just *have* to have a playroom in our new home." My husband and I had just lost our big house and I found myself rolling my eyes as she talked, because I was just thankful we had a home with a garage!

There are all sorts of things we think we cannot live without, and yet we can, and we might, and we might be happier without those things!

People that move to tiny homes and love it find out they don't need all the space they once thought was necessary!

People (me) that went to the movies two to three nights a week thought they'd lose their mind without that activity during the pandemic, but my mind is intact and more walks have been enjoyed!

People lose a job and cannot afford a gym anymore, and find that exercise can be fun at home, in the yard, and around the trail – who knew?

We all have our own lists of things that bring us comfort and joy, things we have come to place on our need list, and things we *must* buy...but sometimes...just sometimes...it's a good thing to reconsider all of those things!

My sunglasses story is just my story. I cannot even explain why my eyes have now adjusted and I'm just fine out in the sun. It seems crazy to me. But I'm no longer switching and carrying two pairs of glasses, and that little difference has made me feel good and free.

We can all think of little annoyances, burdens, must-haves, that dictate our lifestyle and our happiness, and then just take away one of them and see what happens. Sometimes what we think brings us pleasure is really just an extra load.

I found it fascinating to realize that I don't need sunglasses after all, when I thought I couldn't live without them. It still boggles my mind. But here I am, about to head out on an errand, with only one pair of glasses in hand...

FRESH THYME – Share the Love – by Marcy Lytle

A sweet friend of mine recently gave me a clipping of an autumn rose sedum plant, and I was so excited to have it. She had been gifted the same from a friend of hers, so she was passing on the love. I was glad to receive! This same friend has shared with me so often little things that have benefited her or that she's enjoyed, and it's absolutely so fun to be on the other end of receiving such surprises.

So I thought of other things we can all share, things we have or have enjoyed, by just leaving a surprise on the front porch of our friends!

Stovetop potpourri in a jar – A bunch of rosemary, two lemons, and one tablespoon of vanilla placed in a pretty mason jar and tied with twine makes a nice gift for anyone. As cooler temps approach, you can totally change up what you place in the jar for scents of the season!

A good book we've enjoyed – If we have a book we've read and are willing to share, we can just pass on the love with a little review tucked inside, with a square of dark chocolate to enjoy while they read!

A succulent in a pot – Either put together one or purchase one at your local hardware store or nursery, include your favorite scripture verse, and leave it on the doorstep of her house.

A recipe with ingredients – Maybe you put together a great trail mix, or a pasta dish that everyone loved! Place the ingredients with the recipe in a large bowl with a tea towel (from the dollar store) and deliver to her door (six feet away, of course).

A pack of hand sanitizers – My daughter sells a pack of purse-sized ones that smell so good, and she was having a giveaway for teachers. That's a great idea, or even for your friends. For about \$15 you get five, and they're seriously the best. (insert link here)

A good buy from Amazon – Maybe you purchased a cute salad mixer, or a great car organizer, and you loved it. Order one for her and have it delivered in a couple of days max! Share the love!

A journal and a new pen – Write an encouraging note to your friend on the first page, and encourage her to fill in the rest with creativity, thoughts, or prayers. She will love it!

Those are seven ideas of sharing the love, and I'm thinking there are so many more ideas swimming in your own head. During this time, especially for moms with kids, teachers and law enforcement wives, and those nursing the sick or the elderly, there are plenty of friends with whom we can share what we have to bring a smile.

So fun!