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TIPS

The Dressing – Stay Warm – by Marcy Lytle

January might be the coldest month of the year where I live. We might get a chance of snow in the forecast, we will most likely wear our warmest winter outerwear, and you might find us sipping something hot by the fire on a cold night, under a blanket. So when we do step outside, we dress in our warmest of the warmest items in our closet! Here are a few ideas...

Boots – I found these boots a few months ago at a store in Huntsville, Texas called Wild Honey. They have a website, too. These boots were so unique (and comfortable) and on sale...so I got them and love wearing them to keep my feet cozy and warm.

Cozy Flannel – I found this jumpsuit on vacation in Pennsylvania back in the summer, and it was on clearance, as it was from last year's winter stash. It's the coziest outfit because it's so soft, and it's warm. Shop at the end of the season to find warm clothes (before the bathing suits appear – which will be soon!)

Button-up under a sweater – I love this look. This is a plaid shirt I wore alone in early fall, but now it's worn under a sweater (from Walmart). Try mixing your plaids with your stripes for a cozy January look!

Layers – Some days in January are still not that cold, but I like to dress in layers because the weather can change in the matter of a few hours. A long jacket (this one is from Old Navy) layers nicely over whatever I'm wearing underneath to keep me from freezing should the temperatures drop.

The Heavy Business – This look is my heavy pea coat (Old Navy) over the top of a flannel shackled – YES it was a cold blustery day and called for all the warmth! Your jackets don't have to be the same length to layer. Uneven layers are fun!

Scarves – Do you have a lot of winter scarves? I have several rolled up in a basket by the front door for grabbing on cold days – because I like my neck to stay warm! Sometimes I just drape one if it's just a bit cool outside, other days I add on top of a coat (gold one is Old Navy!), and other days I wear waffle weave and grab my staple scarf – a gray handmade one I purchased at a market. And the scarf with the jean jacket is from HMart! Scarves are the best!

Turtleneck Sweater – This is the warmest sweater I own and it's heavy, so it's for cold days. It's long, it's cozy (purchased at Forever 21 years ago), and it makes me smile because of the colors.

Cableknit Classic – One of my favorite sweaters is the cable knit. It reminds me of the past but is so chic for the present. This navy one is from Azzlee. It can be layered or worn alone. Comfort is key in the winter, and this one fits that bill.

What are you wearing that's cozy and warm? I'm pretty sure January is the month where the winter wear gets marked down, so it might be good on a cold day to shop around...for now, and for next year's winter closet, as well.

Seven For You – Now That It's Over – by The Panel

Where do you store all the STUFF from the holidays? From dishware to décor, to the tree and more, it all takes up space! We asked our ladies to share their own personal experiences with putting away everything in its place when the New Year begins. I love that we are all so different and have different responses each month. These ladies inspire me to think outside the box (no pun intended) and to consider how each of us lives and marvel. Isn't it fun?

I hugely downsized all my many Christmas decorations, many handmade, after my husband passed away. I kept an amount that I could store and manage by myself. So I really mean hugely downsized.

The only thing in my attic is my beautiful 7-8ft tree that I kept, but it's safely stored in a strong container for another time. All of what I kept is stored in one section of a walk-in closet in a spare bedroom on shelves that I can easily access by myself. My 4ft tree is stored in its original box and I have ornament boxes for decorations and wreath boxes for wreaths. I kept a few throws and Christmas runners, some bows and garland and that's about it. It's very different than in years gone by, but it still looks and feels like Christmas and that's the important thing. - Debbie

In order to decorate, and then store seasonal items more efficiently, I have tried to incorporate some of the ideas suggested by Myquillyn Smith aka The Nester. If you are not following her on Instagram, you should take a look. I have learned so much from both her Instagram account and by reading two of her books. One of her tips was choose the right size pillows for your space, keep the inserts all year, and change the pillow covers seasonally. I am no longer storing big bulky pillows. It is so much easier to pack away just the covers. Also, I buy a living room throw that can go beyond Christmas and through the remaining winter months. And personally, when winter is over, I use the throw elsewhere as a comfy bed for our sweet pup. And since I buy inexpensive throws, I can look forward to buying a new one next year. I have the appropriate sized tubs to store each room's decorations separately. There are also separate tubs for tree decorations. As an empty nester, I am in no huge hurry to get everything up all at once anymore. So having decor divided out into separate tubs makes it easier to decorate room by room by tree. – Shelley

We have a big shelf my husband suspended in the garage up high, and it's where all of our décor tubs go, at least that's the hope. They are organized by season and stacked up there, until fall arrives again and we get them all down. We also have two large metal storage cabinets in the garage. Inside one of these is all of my table décor, placemats and chargers, serving dishes for holidays, and things like that...ones I pull from all year long. I'm always looking for better ways to organize, and this metal cabinet has been one of my faves. I also use pillow covers instead of buying more throw pillows. There are a couple of baskets in my bedroom and throws of the season look pretty hanging over the sides when in season, and folded inside for when the season's over. – Marcy

I store our holiday decorations in our storage building. This building has many shelves upon which are many different things along with the storage tubs and totes that house each holiday's decor. They are labeled and stacked on the shelves. I don't use all of the decorations every year, but I do love to pick and choose. I also have some decorations from my childhood. And because I don't want to part with these holiday heirlooms it makes me think twice before I buy new decorations. I can only store so much.

As for all the wrapping paper, bows, and bags, I keep them all together in our game room's closet. They are there along with the non-holiday wrapping items ready for me to use whenever I need to. And these are actually stored in boxes and bags.

I will say the amount of decorations we have stored now is probably a fourth of what we used to have. Over the years we have downsized our holiday decor and I always remember before I buy, "It has to be stored." I also try to remember before I buy, the Grinch when he said, "It came without ribbons, it came without tags. It came without packages, boxes, or bags. Maybe Christmas (he thought) doesn't come from a store. Maybe Christmas perhaps means a little bit more." Maybe he has the right idea for stuff that needs storage, too. - Carole

A few more ideas for storing and clearing away all of the Christmas decorations are:

Hang wreaths on a coat rack – what a cool idea!

Place tree lights, each strand, in a large ziplock and label "tree lights" – simple to do!

Tiny ornaments can be stored in an egg carton – we all have these!

Take time to use that label maker (we have one we had forgotten about!) – label your boxes!

I saw one person glue plastic cups to the bottom of a box, to hold individual ornaments!

A genius ideas for Christmas cards received – punch holes and bind them like a book!

Three Moms – Soups, Sips and Snacks – by The Cousins

It's winter, and hopefully the family is finding time to cozy up around the fire, or at night with a tray full of stacks, or out back around a pit...where all sorts of beverages and foods and warm indulgences are being enjoyed. The moms are sharing what they do with their kiddos and what they like to drink and chew!

Mom of Three

My kids are really picky when it comes to soups, mostly because they don't like mixed food together. I'm personally a fan of soup season, because it's so easy in the crockpot or Instapot! This allows Mom to do other things...

So, we do like potato soup using hash browns, or frozen tater tots, instead of peeling potatoes. In the crockpot the tots go with chicken broth and seasonings, cook for two hours on high. Then I add cream cheese and more broth if too thick, and top with bacon, cheese and green onions. Sometimes I save a few tots to crisp up and put on top! It's easy and delish – the kids love it. Chicken tortilla soup is easy as well, and I can pull out the chicken with chips and cheese for the kids, when they prefer it that way. I don't make a separate dish, but often pull out what they like! Chicken pot pie (the kids are learning to love) in the crockpot works as well. Chili is big in our house, too. I add red kidney beans to the meat and chili tomatoes and a bit of beef broth.

As far as sip, my kids like hot cocoa. I personally love apple cider! And of course, when we get coffee, the kids like a fun warm drink at a coffee shop. Snacks? Charcuterie boards are great and easy and what we love in our house!

This New Year we look forward to cleaning out rooms to make room for the new gifts. The kids enjoy us helping them place their new things, to make their rooms fresh and inviting. We also pray over the New Year with goals. Maybe a vacation, or outings like the zoo or park, to talk about our list to budget ahead, mark the calendar, etc. We try to be intentional on family time before sports begin again! Otherwise, the New Year can fly by and we've done nothing together as a family. Just a day of planning with the kids is so helpful – even asking the kids for prayer requests. Then finally, we love playing with all of their new stuff – the simple things mean a lot.

Mom of Two

Come winter, we do love soups, all of us! It's also usually to put soups together and have for leftovers. One is our cheesy chicken soup (recipe from my mom) – it's a rotisserie chicken, Velveeta cheese and chicken broth, veggies, warm bread – a comforting meal. Chili is also a favorite. My husband's dad has a great recipe with beans, veggies and meats – and we usually use chips to dip it with! It makes a LOT so we eat it later with honey cornbread. A Third soup is the Chick Fila A chicken noodle soup. My girls would eat that every meal, every day. It's super delicious and easy to pick-up. And I don't have to cook this one! I do have a homemade chicken noodle soup recipe, as well. We also love a good pot roast to make the house smell awesome.

In January, this year we are expecting baby #3. Typically though, we do have snow days or go skiing. We have an adventure park where the girls can tube and have other winter activities. It's a fun time to live in the mountains.

We don't really have any special warm drinks. The girls don't even like hot chocolate, which is a bummer, because I love it. No specific snacks, either. It's more of a warm feeling from the food we eat and the aromas that fill the house!

Mom of Four

At first, Grace, the oldest in the family, told me that they don't have any special drinks or foods for the story this month. But that's the beauty of being a family. The food and the sips and the soups don't have to be "special." Grace said they drink hot cocoa and sometimes have marshmallows on top, if Mom gets them. She also said they enjoy popcorn while cozied up watching movies, but it's plain popcorn, no fancy flavors. That's the best! And soup...well she said her mom's tortilla soup is delish.

Mom says the family loves veggies and spinach dip from HEB for snacking, hummus and pita chips for dipping, and lots of banana and pumpkin bread. They have a country store near their home where they purchase these two often! And besides her tortilla soup, they love chili – different kinds they find online. They love to use a chili starter from the Braum's Grocery Store.

In the Kitchen – Great Combos – by Marcy Lytle

It's winter, and we need some good combos for eating. Of course, there's the usual like soup and crackers, or chili and cornbread. But think about trying some other combos, like we're sharing below! It's fun to see what tastes good together, doesn't it?

Pear and Walnut Salad

This combo was super enjoyable and healthy and all things good, and it makes for a great winter dish. Pears are delicious, don't you know?

Ingredients:

- 2 lemons juiced
- 1 c water
- 4 Bosc pears, cored and sliced thin
- 8 oz garden salad mix
- ¼ cup Italian Asiago Fancy Shredded Cheese
- ½ cup walnut halves and pieces
- 2 T extra virgin olive oil
- 2 T pomegranate juice
- ½ t Dijon mustard

Instructions:

Combine lemon juice and water in large mixing bowl. Dip pear slices in the mixture and then allow to dry on paper towel. Place salad in a large bowl and layer with the pears, the cheese and the walnuts. Cover salad with plastic wrap and chill 30 minutes or until ready to serve. Combine the olive oil, pomegranate juice and mustard in a small bottle with a lid. Shake the dressing and toss with the salad before serving.

Ham and Potato Pizza

Doesn't really sound like a good combination – potatoes on pizza – does it? But this meal actually turned out easy and super yum. The recipe is from *Real Simple*.

Ingredients:

- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided, plus more for brushing
- 2 pounds refrigerated pizza dough, at room temperature
- 2 large cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- 1 medium shallot, thinly sliced
- 12 ounces fresh mozzarella cheese, roughly torn
- 6 ounces thick-cut ham, chopped
- 2 handfuls baby spinach
- 12 ounces Yukon Gold potatoes (about 4 potatoes), cut into 1/8-in. slices
- Kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

- Ranch dressing, crushed red pepper, freshly grated Parmesan, and chopped flat-leaf parsley, for topping

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 450°F. Coat a rimmed half-sheet pan with 2 tablespoons oil. Add dough and press it all the way to edges of pan. (If the dough starts to fight you as you press it, leave it to sit for 10 to 15 minutes so the gluten can relax, then go at it again.) Brush top with a thin, even layer of oil. Scatter on garlic, shallot, mozzarella, ham, and spinach. (Scatter the cheese all the way to the edges so you get some crispy bits!)
2. Toss potatoes with remaining 1 tablespoon oil in a large bowl. Arrange in an even layer on pizza, doing your best to avoid overlapping them. Sprinkle with a good pinch of salt and lots of pepper.
3. Bake until crust is golden and cheese is brown in parts, 25 to 30 minutes. (If you'd like a little more color on the potatoes, stick the pizza under the broiler for a few minutes, watching carefully so it doesn't burn.)
4. Top with a drizzle of dressing, crushed red pepper, loads of Parm, and parsley, then cut into big squares.

Farm Dust on Colored Carrots

My niece introduced me to Farm Dust, a seasoning for everything! And recently I discovered a bag of colored carrots at Trader Joe's that were absolutely so flavorful and delicious!

Just read the directions on the carrot bag, toss the carrots in olive oil, dust them with the seasoning and roast. A great side dish to any meal.

And leftover carrots are great to add to baked potato soup, if you're making that this winter.

Apple Nachos

Apples and nachos don't even belong in the same sentence, unless you're slicing them and arranging them in circles and then topping them, as you would chips on a plate!

We visited my niece recently and the kids helped me make this delicious snack/dessert and we all devoured the nachos as soon as they were piled high!

Ingredients:

- Apples, cored and sliced
- Caramel and chocolate sauce
- Nuts, chopped
- Sprinkles or any other candies (these kids chose all sorts of things!)

Directions:

On a large platter arrange the apple slices around in a circle or in rows, making them pretty. Drizzle the sauces and then just top with all the things.

You can see by the photo that they topped with LOTS of things. It was super decadent, but you can add whatever you like to give this combo a squeal of delight.

Tuna and Goat Cheese Sandwiches

We had a Christmas Tea a few weeks ago and this was the favorite bite. It's a great winter dish to make for having a friend over to sip tea, or just for the family while you cozy up and watch a movie. Make it quaint or add chips and make it quick. Either way, these are good!

Ingredients:

1 can (6oz) light water packed tuna, drained and flaked

1-2 T mayo

¼ tsp lemon pepper seasoning

4 T crumbled goat cheese

4 slices multigrain bread, crusts removed

4 large fresh basil leaves

Directions:

In small bowl, combine the tuna, mayo and lemon pepper. Spread 1 T of goat cheese on each slice of bread. Spread with tuna mix, top with basil, and other slice of bread. Cut into rectangles or triangles.

SUGAR + Spice - Turn the Other Cheek – by Angela Dolbear

Blush is one of the most underrated makeup products. On a day when you feel tired and not your best, dab a bit of blush on the apples of your cheeks, and then watch as your countenance magically appears brighter and healthier! Amazing, right?

Blush comes in so many colors and formats. I was a die-hard powder blush user for years until wrinkles started to deface my face.

So I gave an inexpensive cream blush a try: [e.l.f. Monochromatic Multi Stick](#) (Target, \$5). I loved it! It stayed vibrant on my cheeks for most of the day. “Glimmering Guava” is my favorite shade in the multi-stick. It gives my cheeks a bit glow without looking sweaty or like I might be feverish with malaria.

The e.l.f. Multi Stick can be used as a lip product too. I found it a little too dry on my lips, but my lips are extremely dry.

I still use powder blush occasionally, especially if the weather is humid. I recently received [Kat Von D's Everlasting Blush](#) in my November Boxy Charm sample box, in the shade rosebud (I think this shade is sold out, but the other shades are lovely too).

It has become my new favorite powder blush. The color is soft and flattering. The blush lasts all day, and the packaging is elegant and refillable. Good for the environment!

Also, I have always been a fan of multi-product palettes that contain a blush, bronzer and highlighter. Anything that helps me get my makeup done faster.

My current favorite multi-product cheek palette is by OPV Beauty, a new company (to me) out of the UK. Their [Glow Perfect \(in shade 3\)](#) palette is well pigmented for powder products and looks so lovely on my cheeks, and whole face.

BONUS Hack:

Applying blush effectively can be a bit tricky. It's hard to get a good color application without looking like a clown, or like you are super embarrassed, or worse, looking like a super embarrassed clown! But here is a “hack” trick to applying blush that works, even in a rush.

For powder blush, swipe a soft blush brush across the blush pan, tap it on the side of the pan to loosen excess product. Then dab the brush on the high points of your cheeks lightly, and then keep dabbing the brush on your face diagonally up to your hairline. Blend the blush into your cheeks with light sweeping circular motions.

For cream blush, it's the same idea, small dabs, and then circular blending. I like to use my fingertips for cream blush.

Here's to a soft healthier glow to take us into the new year.

The beauty of blessings to you!

Angela Dolbear, Beauty Editor, is the author of contemporary spiritual novels, such as [THE GARDEN KEY](#) Series, and [THE TORMENTOR'S TALE](#), as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). And she loves writing

and recording songs with her husband, Tim --listen on [Sound Cloud](#). She is also a self-proclaimed beauty junkie and has been since long before her mother allowed her to start wearing makeup at the age of 14. She keeps UPS and the USPS busy delivering small boxes on a regular basis from Ulta, Sephora, Amazon, and many independent cosmetics companies to her home Nashville, TN. Please connect with her at www.AngelaDolbear.com



HOME

Practical Parenting – Staying Well – by Marcy Lytle

I think parents can administer vitamins daily, shove fruit and veggies down their kids' throats, and make them grab that coat before they head out the door...and STILL the viruses land and cause sickness. It's maddening, especially this year with so many viruses literally everywhere we turn. And when one child gets sick, it seems the rest of the family starts to domino. Here it is January, wintertime is here and we're indoors more, so maybe these are a few things to be reminded of that are less thought of to keep us sane and healthy, at the same time.

Kids need to let energy out, and not in the house. Since it's cold, take family walks SOMEWHERE. Visit the mall on a scavenger hunt, and give them each \$5 to spend. It's a great way to expend energy and have fun at the same time. Use YouTube to YOUR advantage and find exercise videos that the family can do together, inside. A family that moves is less likely to stay down...

Buy new toothbrushes, wash comforters, purchase new pillows. It might be just the right time of the year for newness in the areas we forget about...to start off without germs that embed themselves among the fibers.

Health comes in many forms, and if there's conflict among siblings or parents, this is a good time of year to resolve them, ask forgiveness, offer forgiveness, kiss and makeup. Okay, maybe it's not all that easy, so ask for help. Confess your faults to one another...so you may be healed. Hey, that's a verse in the bible!

Reassess what everyone's eating. A bin of store-bought granola bars might not be the solution for breakfast and snacks. But homemade granola is so easy and so tasty, and a big option if you have the time to do so. Sitting in front of the TV endlessly snacking might not be the best either, so portion out movie snacks and encourage everyone to eat slowly. And oh, learn to love popcorn without butter. It's possible!

Keep on giving. Christmas might be over, but the season of giving lives on. In the colder months, encourage the kiddos to draw and make cards, and actually send them in the mail to grandparents and friends, or neighbors. Giving helps that heart beat stronger.

Get more sleep. Use timers for bedtime and for waking up. Take family naps or rests together, reading and chilling from the stress of homework and work. Watch carefully what it is that everyone listens to or observes before bedtime, so that sleep is sound. Sleep is superb!

Make one change for health. Talk and think together with the kiddos and give each person one change to make. Maybe she can work on not biting her nails (keeping fingers out of the mouth), or sodas can be left off the grocery list. Perhaps the family can have one night a week of healthy veggies and dips, instead of chips and queso. Or tablets can be put away for family dance night. One change from each person could make a family well!

Those are just seven suggestions and reminders for all us, parents and kids alike, to look around at our habits and our habitats, and see if we can't make a few changes for the better, for a better New Year with less tears over sickness and woes.

I Don't Do Teenagers – Tell Them Yours – by Marcy Lytle

I was visiting with some young ladies (in their 30's) and we were all discussing our favorite childhood toys. These three ladies were sisters and when they were kids their family didn't have a lot of money. The girls said their favorite memory was making their own paper dolls, placing tape over them and then using double-sided tape to stick clothes they also created. I said wow, that was a lot of work, and their reply was, "We were poor," as they smiled though...at the memories.

It might be that some of our own kids/teens view themselves as having "less than" others especially after Christmas, when they see what their friends received under the tree. I'm thinking no matter what our kids are gifted, if they have eyes that look, they will see another friend that was gifted more. And our teens then have this choice to be disappointed and ashamed of their own family situation, or to give thanks and be happy with what they do have.

It's a hard thing to train our teens to view gifts this way, because we as their parents struggle with the same thing. Maybe we were hoping for a trip and it was canceled due to lack of funds, but our friends are flying off to ski next week.

If you overhear your teens making comments about the "lame" gifts they received, or how they wish they'd gotten more, maybe consider these ideas to set the family back on track...

Don't scold, but rather listen to their disappointment and probe a little deeper. See if part of their worth is wrapped up (no pun intended) in what they have. Reaffirm who they are in Him.

Don't give the speech about starving kids in Africa that have nothing. I'm not sure that comment ever does any good except irritate the one listening. Do talk about perhaps rejoicing in the fact that a friend did receive a cool gift. Invite your teen to give thanks FOR that friend, and you do it with them as well, for your own frustrations with what you have and have not.

Do take these frustrations to Him, together. Confess the jealousy, the envy, and the want that is still there even after Christmas gifts have been opened. Remind them how God can handle our feelings and He knows just how to supply what it is that we really need.

Do talk about what it is they wished they'd received and didn't. Then pray together and ask God for provision in His timing for all of your desires and needs. Then place these at his feet, and trust.

Do encourage your teen to look at what he/she has and how they can best enjoy all of the gifts they DO HAVE. Maybe they can invite a friend over to watch a movie and make snacks, and make memories that last a lifetime.

Those are five little ideas and suggestions that may or may not have immediate results. But when we take time to listen to the kids, pray with them, encourage them to leave their hurts with Him, it enables us to do less scolding and downplaying and disregarding of our teens and their needs. It also enables us to release their hearts to Jesus, who loves them and care for them and DOES send good gifts from above.

While you're reminding them, remind yourselves as well. And think back to a fond memory you have of enjoying something simple and small as a kid, and share with your family one night over dinner. It might not be paper dolls. Mine was playing in the "forest" next to our house building forts. Tell them yours...

An Adage A Day – It's Never Too Late – by Carole Gilbert

Happy 2023! It's a New Year. Time for a new beginning. We don't need a New Year's resolution, we can just do it! There are some things I never thought I'd be doing at this stage of my life. I have to keep reminding myself that it's never too late. And it doesn't matter how old we are, God doesn't see us as aged, He sees us as getting wiser and more understanding. Of course, God uses us when He's ready, whatever age we are.

I have grown to love this idiom, "It's never too late," that started before the nineteenth century. It means that it's always time to start something new. Maybe it's a goal you have or something you have put off doing for a while but hope to pick back up. Maybe it's something you need to mend. It's never too late. You're never too old and you're never too young, as I like to stress to the kids.

I get the opportunity occasionally to talk to children about writing. I love sharing this concept of "it's never too late" with the children. I love telling them how I was 50 years old when I started my fun career of writing. They have their whole life in front of them but sometimes as they grow up, they forget about the things they love or they give up, like I did. I actually wrote my first poem when I was about four years old. It was only two short lines, but it did rhyme. I put a melody with it and sang the two short lines over and over and over and over again! My momma and grandmother must've loved me so much to listen to me over and over and over (you get the picture) or maybe they had earplugs. Whichever the case, they told me it was a beautiful song and encouraged me to continue writing. Maybe they secretly hoped I would add more lines.

I love to remind myself that many great things were done by older people. Many great examples are given to us in the Bible. Sarah was 90 years old when she gave birth to Isaac. Elizabeth was also in her older years when she gave birth to John the Baptist. Now those are life milestones I would not want.

Then there's Moses. He was 80 years old when his encounter with Pharaoh started. And Aaron, his brother and spokesman, was 83. And Paul, for another example, served God even while in prison in his older years.

Did you know that Julia Childs was in her mid-30's when she first thought about trying to cook? And we know what all she accomplished.

Also, one of my favorite stories to share with children is the story of Ray Kroc, the founder of McDonald's, who was 52 when he came up with his idea of fast-food hamburgers.

There are also many examples of young people doing great things in the Bible. The same Moses mentioned above started his God led journey as a baby in a basket on the Nile River. He was rescued and taken to the Egyptian palace to be raised as a prince. And Isaac, also mentioned above, was just a boy when he was led by his father to be sacrificed under God's

command. He was the child God promised to Abraham. He helped pave the way for our relationship with God. And we all know David was just a lad when he slayed the giant Goliath.

So, whatever you like to do, if it's tickling the ivories, or giving your best shot, be the cream of the crop, and go for it. The time is now. It's never too late!

Here's to new beginnings!

Tiny Living – On the Road Again – by Leyanne Enterline

We are currently heading back from our three-week tour with Brian (my husband), as I type this story. Actually, he is still on the road, but the kids and I are done and over with this super long trip! *If you can't beat 'em join 'em!* So that's what we decided to do! We left our tiny home for a bit and traded it for slightly larger hotel rooms! We started in snowy Utah, then onward to northern California, Vegas, and then southern California.

Lucky for us, I'm used to small spaces. Therefore, cooking on the road presented some challenges but we were able to stay well fed in our tiny hotel rooms, even on a strict diet! It was probably not the healthiest choice of meals, but beans and rice are our friends and the kids stay full, so that combo works great! Of course, I packed my handy one-pot burner that plugs right into the outlet, and a pan, and we were set for many meals! I did forget to pack a large ladle, and a pot holder would've been handy, but we were able to manage. Most of our hotels were near a grocery store, which made eating on the road much easier. I always try and prepare with a curbside order, so as not to waste any vacation time wandering around a store and giving into the temptation to buy way more than needed.

Five flights, four different hotels, large luggage, laundry in event centers, food on the go, Vegas shows, concerts, beaches, Universal Studios, random eye appointments, sushi, extravagant shopping...all these have crazy stories that I could go into detail on forever... What an amazing experience and life long memories that we are so grateful for!

Living tiny may be challenging, aggravating, squished, and frustrating... but the life experiences that we get to have and travel the United States without having to worry about a large house payment, a large home or lawn to take care of, and big bills...does make us appreciate what we do have.

And so, living tiny continues on...into 2023.

Remember love grows best in tiny spaces

A Night to Remember – A New Song – by Marcy Lytle

I read over on the Three Moms page about how one mom suggested sitting down with the kiddos to start the new year with asking them for prayer request, setting goals for family time, and scheduling on the calendar intentional fun. Any time a new year begins, it's such a good thing to start fresh, with all the new toys, the new calendars, and the new hope that arises after a season of joy. So this devo is about a new song!

In the book of the psalms there are many verses about having a new song. There are prayers to God asking for a new song, and there are reminders to us to sing a new song.

Psalm 40:3 says,

*He put a **new** song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.*

Many will see and fear the LORD and put their trust in him.

What's your favorite song? (Let the kids answer).

So let's play them and listen to the words and the music, and see what it is that we like about these songs! (Play each song and discuss what you like, or choose a couple if time is limited.)

Sometimes, over the course of a year we can have sour notes appear in our songs that we sing. Maybe we start the new year out thankful for all we've received for Christmas, and then we start to wish we'd gotten more and that sort of sounds sour – like complaining – like terrible notes in a song. (Ask someone to sing a line of a song but make one note sound sour...)

This is the perfect time to ask the Lord to give us a new song, by replacing our sour notes with His notes of joy and thanksgiving.

Think about the songs we like – it's usually because they're joyful or happy. So let's pray together for a new song of joy for 2023 to come out of our mouths. And when we do, others see and then trust the Lord, as well – what a cool promise!

Now that we've asked, let's read one more verse.

Psalm 96:1

Sing to the LORD a **new** song; sing to the LORD, all the earth.

Once we have a new song in our hearts, we are told to sing – to sing to the Lord – sing our new songs!

A song of praise talks about the goodness of God. Do we have favorite songs of praise we've learned? What are they? (Let them share.)

How can we sing these songs we love in a new way? (Ask for suggestions and then make some...we can add instruments, we can clap or tap our feet, we can dance, we can smile or raise our hands. We can sing loud or sing softly, or with our eyes closed.)

Guess what else? We can write and sing our own songs of praise! (See if the kids have any thoughts or lyrics or music and sing them!)

Let's sing a song together a new way, with our new heart of joy, and give thanks for a new year, a new song and purpose to sing together all year long.

Family prayer: *Lord, we ask for new songs all year long, and then for the reminders to sing them. Give us new ways to sing the songs you place in our hearts, and to write our own songs. Thank you for your joy, and may we spread it to those around us with new songs.*

In Each Room – Just a Few Updates – by Marcy Lytle

I just wanted a few updates, something fresh, clean and pretty...in my kitchen...before the holidays. It seems that some event, guests arriving, or hosting a party always sparks us to want to fix things up and make things look nice. But sometimes the funds aren't there, or the time is short. So here are a few things I did to make my kitchen pop like new, at least a little.

We have indoor/outdoor carpet in our kitchen and a **big area rug**. So I opted for a rug with color! My kitchen is mostly white and gray, so this colorful rug really made me smile – from At Home. Of course, everything else didn't look right, so...

New dish towels were ordered from Amazon. I took a picture of the rug and ordered accordingly, pulling out the hues of orange in the rug and mixing some prints. So fun, and not too expensive at all.

Above the stove was a green wreath that had hung there too long – it was grimy. At Home had a round simple wreath that needed a bit of sparkle, but it was only \$9.99. I found a couple of new picks and they actually clipped on to the wreath. I added **twinkle lights**, and they're staying!

Even my sink spray and dish **soap containers** didn't match, so I looked at Meyers (my favorite) as they have so many colors and found some to go with the kitchen décor – simple and subtle – but cute!

A new clock was really welcome on the wall above the cabinets. The old one was dark and lacked luster, but this new one is retro, white and bright! It's from Target.

Finally, I wanted a **new tray** to stand up behind the stove...so I kept stepping back and observing the view of the kitchen, took pictures of the space, and then went shopping. I found a tray I love at Big Lots, of all places! I love the circular tray, with the circular wreath, and the circular clock above.

That was it, for now. Little updates make for big and pretty differences. And I'll keep looking and changing and add a few more pretties as the year progresses.



YOU

Inner Strength – December Memories – by Michelle Wyatt

As I reflect on this last month, I realize that it was full of "how to" moments with my children.

Unwrap Moving Boxes

My kids and I had just moved into a new apartment. Moving in December was great because we got to unpack the Christmas boxes right away. We all love the Christmas season!

- cut a slit at the edge between the lid and the side of the box
- find the origin of the first layer of tape
- Peel and pull (if the tape gets stuck you can use scissors)

Make a Gingerbread House (In our case, more like how to make the pieces stay..)

- Soften the icing by kneading the bag first
- Test where the edges will meet before putting the icing on
- Squeeze icing along the edge of both pieces and gently press them together
- Hold the pieces together for at least 15 seconds
- To ensure the candy stays, place the icing on the candy (especially the bigger sized ones)
- Place the candy on the desired place and hold for at least 15 seconds
- If something doesn't hold, repeat the process and add reinforcing icing.

The boys took turns practicing these steps. It was not a simple task. At the end of it, they preferred to eat parts of it and appreciate its beauty. They gave me permission to finish it if I wanted to.

Put up Christmas tree lights

I asked Brendan for his help putting up the lights. He pulled the string of lights tight and let the rest of the cord fall. As soon as I saw this, I stopped him and taught him how to put them up. He did a great job paying attention and following along until he reached independence with doing it.

- Hold the neatly wrapped bunch of lights in one hand, letting out some slack (I showed him what I meant by slack) while using the other hand to guide the individual cord on the tree
- Lay the cord lightly on the branches, starting at the top of the tree
- Wrap it around and go to the next branch or two below to put the string of lights on
- Follow this pattern until you have reached the bottom of the tree

Believe in Santa Clause when some people don't

This was a conversation I knew would come but was hoping not so soon. Matthew told me one day after school that other kids were saying Santa Clause wasn't real. He asked me if I believed in Santa. I told him that I will always believe in Santa Clause, that he is a special spirit, magic of Christmas.

- Make the decision to believe

- Tell yourself that it is ok to think differently than others
- Keep Santa Clause in your heart, mind, and soul
- Tell someone you trust and cares about you how you feel if need be

After I talked to Matthew about this, I was relieved that he was at peace about it.

The lessons I've learned from all of these experiences are:

- Don't assume what kids know or don't know how to do. It might surprise you
- Once you give a direction, give your child the opportunity, space to follow it
- Sometimes less direction is more
- Have he or she do as you do is often the best learning strategy
- Most importantly, these learning experiences are memories created between you and your children. Cherish them!

If I can do it, so can you!

A Hopeful Heart - Changes, Challenges, Chances – by Christina Oberon

New Years is my favorite time of year. I don't remember when that started, but the feeling of sheer delight in possibilities, opportunities and a fresh new start has always given my spirit a rush. How exciting to know that yesterday is gone and here comes new hope for the 365 days ahead.

Each new year also brings me to a deep reflective state of mind and heading into 2023 felt different than years prior. I felt the heaviness of unhealthy relationships slowing me down and it became clear that I needed to make some changes. I knew these changes would be challenging, possibly even heartbreaking, but they would also provide chances for my soul to be liberated and to live a life on my terms. You see, through my reflections, I realized that I allowed my well-intended desire to serve others unintentionally become me living life on their terms.

While some may focus on trimming excess weight in the new year, I'm trimming the weight of others' demands and expectations. God is giving me clear vision on who and what deserves an investment of my time, attention and effort. He has been revealing to me: I can only love and support others at the level they are willing to do so for themselves; I cannot pour into someone who lacks vision and drive to do the work required to experience the reality they desire; I can serve others in a meaningful way while also protecting and preserving myself; I can love others through prayer and an encouraging word, without pressure or performance.

It's okay to let go.

Finishing the race that is set before us requires forgetting the things which are behind, discarding what might impede our progress or hinder our witness, as we reach forward with steadfastness to complete God's plans and purposes for our lives.

Facing the challenges of change and letting go of what I am not responsible for is allowing me the chance to restore my spirit and bring me back to that hopeful and excited feeling of expectancy that the new year has always allowed me to feel. So the next time I'm tempted to revert to my old ways, I'll remember the three C's and remind myself that these Changes, although Challenging, are Chances for a greater, more fulfilling year ahead. With that weight lifted, I expect to soar in 2023!

Healthy Habits – A Sip of Tea – by Marcy Lytle

I'm not a coffee lover or a tea sipper, or any lover of hot drinks, really. I know, that's odd. But I have come to enjoy and make time and move myself toward a cup of tea more often. There are benefits from drinking warm tea, not just from a physical standpoint, but for other reasons as well. And this January might be a good time to revisit that sip of tea from a healthy view.

1. Consider having a tea party. I hosted one in December with a few friends. It was a great reason for me to purchase a new tea pot and think about an intimate setting for fun. We made ornaments, tied scarves, and answered questions around the table as we sipped tea and ate little sandwiches and small pies. Healthy? Why, yes it was...it warmed my heart.
2. That scratchy throat needs it. This is the real reason I revisited sipping tea. Adding lemon and honey to a warm tea (my daughter introduced me to Throat Coat tea) really helps this time of year to soothe the throat and calm the cough. Every single morning, first thing.
3. The time it takes to steep is good. It's not a quick drink to make, this hot tea. There's boiling the water, dropping in the tea bag, and waiting for it to steep. I suppose it requires a bit of patience, and that's always a good thing...waiting for something good to come our way, isn't it?
4. The cups and teapots are adorable. It's heartwarming and cheerful to own a teapot of any kind. Mine is wood and black, but some like dainty and flowery. I don't even know all of the options for teapots! And the cups, well they're just as fun to own and use. Having a little treat that makes one happy is healthy, because it lightens the spirit.
5. If you've got a whistler, listen for it. I've never had a teapot that whistles until I just purchased this new one. Again, I haven't been a tea drinker. But honestly, when I heard the first whistle, I was so delighted. It's like a call, beckoning me to sit and slow down, sip a hot beverage, and read, meditate, pray or just observe. And that, my friend, is healthy indeed...

As we start a new year with all the goodness that it holds.

Life Right Now - Return Policy By Jennifer Stephens

The crumpled remains of wrapping paper and bows were tossed out with the trash weeks ago. And as we listen to the bells ring in another new year, some of us are down on our knees - frantically searching through every drawer and digging in every corner for the gift receipt that will allow a full refund of (*insert unwanted gift here*). Hmmm...where IS that receipt?!

There are those who will argue that returning gifts is impolite – the gift giver meant well and didn't intentionally choose to give us something we won't like. Others believe it's perfectly reasonable to trade a crummy gift for something better – citing economic reasons. I'm somewhere in between. As a pre-teen all I wanted was something "cool" to wear, but inevitably, I'd open an ugly, itchy sweater. Taught to appear gracious and give thanks to the gift giver I had to wear it at least once in front of them (while trying not to scratch a hole into my skin) before it eventually landed in a donation pile. If I received a duplicate item? Lucky me, I had a backup should the first one ever meet its demise. Even today I hold onto random items that will make a one-time appearance when the giver is set to arrive for a visit (I know, now you're wondering if that tchotchke you gave me last year is *always* sitting on the shelf, orrr...Don't worry. It is. Probably.)

My choice to avoid holiday returns is more than just about being polite to the gifter. Frankly, I don't want the hassle. No matter what each store's policy claims, there is no hassle-free return! First, there's the line. It's just so looonnngg. And it is winter, so we're either getting overheated wearing a heavy coat while waiting in line or we're stuck juggling a bulky coat with the thing we're returning while waiting...and waiting. If we do attempt to hold off until mid-January in order to miss the long lines, we're likely going to miss the return window anyway because each seller has their own specific window of time when they'll accept returns. How are we supposed to remember when to return what where? Then there's the online returns which come with very specific guidelines and sometimes require expensive return postage. Oh, and don't forget the unavoidable "restocking fees." It's just not worth it!

So I'll wear the itchy sweater (ugh), hold onto the matching blenders (just in case), and proudly display (at least once) that unsightly trinket if it means I can steer clear of retail's clunky return process.

But there is a return policy I am grateful to have...the one offered to us by Jesus.

His return policy doesn't involve a long wait. There's no return window timeframe. And there isn't a fee we need to pay in order to receive Him. The cool thing about Jesus is even if we get lost and fall away momentarily, He doesn't make us jump through hoops to return to Him. It doesn't matter if we've lost touch with Him for a week, a year, or a decade.

In Job 22:23 we read, "If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored..." No matter how long it's been since we've been in relationship with Jesus, Jeremiah 24:7 tells us, "I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the Lord; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart." Jesus paid the ultimate price for us – for our sins. "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the

Lord, and He will have compassion on him and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.”
Isaiah 55:7

Sometimes we fall away from Him and think maybe we're too far gone. So we sink to the ground – the crumpled remains of the person we used to be. We find ourselves down on our knees, frantically searching for that missing something. It's in THAT exact moment when we can call to Him. We can rest assured knowing Jesus is right there. Waiting. For us. Exactly where He's been the whole time. And best of all? He offers us the ultimate no-hassle return policy.

Under Pressure – Oh, Yes! – by Debbie Haynes

Hebrews 11. You know the chapter, and the first verse.

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

Another version might say that the fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It’s our handle on what we can’t see.

From those two statements, we can make another. Whether God chooses to show us evidence or he doesn’t, we can still keep our faith in him because we know his character, we know that he loves us and he has good plans for us, because he says so in his word!

So one question I’ve been wondering about and asking is what part, if any, of the promises made to his children in the bible can be applied to us today? I started reading in Colossians 1 where Paul says that God organizes the church (we, his followers) like he does a body. The head controls the body and neither separates itself from each other. And in Romans 7 and Galatians 4, we are assured that we are children of God, adopted by Him, redeemed and actually heirs of God through Christ. Our status as sons and daughters, part of the body of Christ, gives us a legal and binding relationship to God.

So what does this mean? This knowledge reveals to us that we have no cause to worry or fear as we enter a new year. We are part of the body of Christ, and as members (sons and daughters) we are his Church. And since he is the head – he’s full in control. That should make so much sense to us!

So yes, we as his body will be held together to accomplish his purposes, whether or not he shows us evidence – because his word says so and his word is bond!

If you’re like me, you might wonder at times about the state of the Church (we, his followers) or evidence that he’s moving among us. We can be assured that Jesus, our Head, holds us together like a body and will not separate himself from us. Instead, he will love us, lead us and protect us, as members of himself.

So are the same promises he made to his children long ago good for us, now? I say, “Oh, yes!” Now, today, and every day...



MARRIAGE

In This Together – Pass Me Your Pie – by Bekah Holland

When our fearless leader/editor and THYME creator asked me to write a monthly column for this magazine, initially I laughed. But apparently she was serious, since that was 3ish years ago and she hasn't fired me yet, despite my inability to turn in a single article on time. The first words out of my mouth were somewhere in the neighborhood of "um, me, really, that sounds like an epically bad idea." Because I'm a reader, I know the type of writing that is typically found in something as real as a magazine, and not just some random person without an off button yammering on a blog. And in case you haven't ever read my particular brand of yammering, I am most definitely not what I would consider a real writer (except that I am capable of writing and can usually put words together in a somewhat legible manner). But since they still let me put my name on stuff, I guess I might have to change my idea of what a writer is. All of this rambling is just the precursor for something that should resemble a coherent article related to marriage; therefore, I should get to it.

One small problem, however, is that first of all my only expertise in marriage is basically that I happen to be married and my husband is a saint. But this article is for the first month of a new year and I should most likely mention something about New Year's resolutions and tie that seamlessly into relationships. I should also mention that I hate New Year's resolutions and I am anything but seamless. So first of all, I'm going to respond to the shock and disgust at the whole hating resolutions thing that I'm assuming is happening right now.

I don't have any concrete reasons for not really subscribing to the "new year new me" mentality. If you've followed me here for any length of time, this is no big shocker. If not, hold on to your britches because I'm going to get a little real. My biggest complaint about sitting down before the start of a new year to put together a list of big goals and life changes isn't the ritual of making that kind of list. I'm a big list maker, so I get the idea. But honestly, it seems that it's become more of a societal expectation to create these outrageous goals and post them on some form of social media because is it even real if you don't post it on the internet? And in the grand scheme of things, it feels like just setting ourselves up for failure.

Now don't get me wrong...I love goals and, as I mentioned, lists. I've even written plenty of my own resolutions. And failed at 99.9% of them. Why? Because even on my best day, I'm not giving up carbs or running unless I'm being chased or drinking the recommended amount of water, unless we count the water in my daily cup (or 6 cups) of coffee. So what makes me think I should set my goals to crazy status and say I'm going to run a half marathon or stop counting cupcakes as breakfast since they're made with eggs? Great question. One I haven't been able to answer, so now I just don't.

I do, however, have an ever-growing mental list of things I want to do better, or more, or less, and who I want to be. As a recovering lifelong people pleaser, most of my existence has been centered around ensuring others are comfortable and happy even if I have to throw myself in front of a truck, figuratively or literally. Now while this next statement may seem to be coming out of left field, bear with me. Growing up in the church, I was regularly taught about submission and peacemaking, which, as it turns out, is not at all what I thought it was. Now peacemaking? I can rock that all day. It's what I'm best at and I'm assuming God had a plan when he built me. Submission, on the other hand, as it turns out, is nothing like I learned. My marriage is not 50/50. And honestly, I wouldn't want it to be.

Now before you turn me in to the marriage police, hear me out. My marriage at its very best is 100/100. Not because either of us are or even can give a 100 percent all the time, because we

most definitely cannot and do not. But we do find ways to balance each other. Some days I'm struggling and my partner has to give way more than usual. And others, he is facing his own challenges and I have to step up and do both of our shares. And that works for us. Perfectly? Nope. Does it ever cause problems? Sure. Have we managed to fight through it for the last 16 years? Yep. Because when he is down, I get to be up. I'm good at that part. I get to remind him who he is, how much he's overcome and how loved he is. But needing to reverse those roles is not quite so easy for me.

Recently, I lost my very good job unexpectedly. This isn't something I've shared openly, but if I'm going to actually be real here, I guess I need to jump in or rip the band aid off or (insert your favorite idiom here.) I enjoyed my job, I was pretty good at it and it gave me a sense of accomplishment and confidence, while helping to provide for our family. So what followed that unwelcome surprise was not pretty. It involved a lot of crying, queso and quality time hiding in my closet (fine, all three at once more than a few times). I felt like a failure on a much higher level than any of my short-lived past New Year's resolutions. And instead of being angry or frustrated or any number of other things I expected my husband to be, he stepped up to remind me who I am. Every day he finds a way to tell me how valued and cherished I am, regardless of my employment status, while making me laugh, laughing at my particular brand of crazy, and even holding me on the closet floor until I'm ready to face the world outside of our bedroom again.

To me, this is "submission." This is giving ourselves to another person and doing our flawed best to get it right. It's not being a doormat, or always saying yes, or taking orders. It's listening, even to the things our partner isn't saying. It's seeing the best in someone even at their worst. It's choosing to love each other without losing ourselves.

Do we still have plenty of room to grow and things to do better? *Abso-freaking-lutely*. But these are the kind of "resolutions" I've adopted. Not insurmountable and lofty goals of becoming someone more like the people I see on social media who paint a very pretty picture to share with the world. Because while I have a long way to go to become the person I hope to be some day, I have come a long way from who I was. And my marriage is on the same path. As I grow and my partner grows, our marriage flourishes. Sometimes that process looks easy on the outside, but anyone who has been married for longer than five minutes knows that maintaining a relationship is anything but easy. It's difficult and messy and can make you question everything. But to love and be loved is worth every single bit of mess and cranky remnants of stupid arguments we managed to find ourselves in.

So maybe this year, find something that doesn't just make you better on the outside. If losing 30 pounds and exercising every day and giving up pie is your thing, great! Make your list and pass me your pie. But while you're at it, perhaps resolve to find things that bring your soul joy, give your mind peace and make your heart full. And maybe just a little pie, while you're at it.

"New Year's Day is the accepted time to make your annual resolutions and good intentions. Next week you can start paving the road to hell with them." Mark Twain

Date Night – Scavenger Hunts for Two – by Marcy Lytle

We took the kids on a Christmas lights scavenger hunt last month, courtesy of FridayWereInLove on Instagram, who published a cool graphic to follow. I love scavenger hunts and enjoyed it as much as the kids, so I thought maybe we would enjoy scavenger hunting as a couple, as well.

Five ideas for January, while it's cold and dreary, making it fun and cheery instead:

1. Visit your local mall (yes, even though maybe it's not so popular of a place now, it's still fun!) Separate with pen and pad in hand and make a scavenger hunt for the other. You do the top floor and he the bottom. Meet back at Auntie Anne's for a pretzel before you both hunt. You walk with him while he hunts for what you wrote down. And then he walks with you. The one that finds the most items (make a list of at least 10!) in a given amount of time wins!
2. Stay in tonight and watching a film? Send him on a scavenger hunt in the kitchen to put together your plates of snacks. You browse your closets and put together outfits for you both to wear, set up pillows and drinks, and enjoy your scavenger supper together, while watching your movie.
3. Bundle up and take a nature walk on a day when you can. Before you head out, make a list of something in each color – red, blue, green, brown, purple, etc. – at least a dozen colors. See if you can find something in every color on your walk. You may have to walk through a neighborhood, around a playground at a park, or get in the car and go for coffee afterwards to find them all! How fun...
4. Remember that ABC game you played as kids when on a long road trip in the car? You had to find something that started with each letter of the alphabet. Since Scattergories is a game that uses the alphabet, pull it out. I bet you still have this game! It's a scavenger hunt game of sorts. For your snacks, use crackers of different kinds and all sorts of cheeses and jams to scour and create your snacks while you play.
5. Plan your date night away for one overnight stay at a hotel in your own town, downtown. Scavenger hunt through the hotel for something historical, something architectural, something beautiful, something unique, something super comfortable and something tasty. Make it a night to remember, and watch a mystery movie in your room.

Create your own scavenger hunt ideas for the two of you, and you might want to do this on a regular basis – once a quarter! Make it something to remember as 2023 begins!

For Better or Worse – Ping Pong – by Kaelin Scott

My husband loves to play ping pong, and he's really good at it, too. He always wanted me to play with him, but it wasn't fun to me because I was terrible at it. Plus, I honestly didn't care one ounce about ping pong, so I didn't have the drive to improve. But my hubby kept asking me to play, so I finally decided to try. At the very least, he would stop bugging me about it if I played a little bit.

As we played a few times, he taught me simple things that help hit the ball better, and I actually started improving. More than that, I started having fun. Soon we were hitting the ball back and forth and laughing and being silly together. Of course, he was still way better than me and beat me every time, but that didn't matter so much. What mattered was that we were enjoying quality time together.

Sometimes having an open mind can help your marriage grow. Simply playing ping pong with my husband made him happy, and it gave us a fun activity to do together. I didn't have to learn to play, but it was an opportunity to let him teach me something new. It wasn't a huge or monumental victory, but it did provide joy, laughter and memories. Three things that are so precious in this life.

Even though I'm still no champion when it comes to ping pong, I'm glad I let my husband teach me how to play. More than learning the game, I'm thankful for the sweet time it gives us together. Rather than scrolling on our phones or staring at a TV, we spend active time enjoying each other's company. My husband is a pretty funny guy, so I spend more time cracking up than anything. And that's perfect to me.

Maybe today, you can have an open mind about something in your marriage. Maybe you can do something new or go somewhere different. Maybe make a food your husband loves that you're not really a fan of. Maybe take up a new hobby or listen to his kind of music. It doesn't have to be big or grand in order to make an impact.

Sometimes, making our spouses happy is as simple as picking up a ping pong paddle...



ENCOURAGEMENT

Rooted in Love - Quality Over Quantity – by Kaelin Scott

Sometimes I wonder if I'm not certifiably insane.

As a stay-at-home mom/homeschool teacher, I'm literally with my kids all the time, yet somehow, I always feel guilty for not spending enough quality time with them. Sometimes I feel like I don't fully enjoy my children being little. Like I don't cherish these days with them under my wing.

But in reality, I'm doing the best that I can. It's not feasible for me to spend all day every day playing, as much as I would like to. There will always be dishes to wash, laundry to fold, and meals to cook. Being a mom means taking care of my family, not just entertaining them.

So why do I feel guilty for the time spent doing necessary tasks? Why do I feel like I don't spend enough quality time with my kids? It's nothing but an attack from the enemy to take away my joy. The devil wants to rob me of enjoying these precious days by making me feel bad, and it's sad how often he succeeds.

If you're in the same boat as me, let's recognize this tactic and fight against it. We don't have to feel guilty for managing our time. There's nothing wrong with letting your kids play by themselves while you cook, clean, or do other vital tasks. You are not neglecting them. You are simply performing your various duties of motherhood.

Let's not focus on the time we feel we *should* spend with our children. Let's focus on the time we *do* spend with them. It's not about quantity; it's about quality. We don't have to spend 10 hours a day playing with our kids to show them how much we love them. We just have to take the precious moments we have together and truly make them count.

Your kids aren't going to hold it against you if you don't spend every waking moment playing or entertaining them. When they grow up and look back on these days, they'll remember you being there, and that's what really matters. There are a lot of things to be done, and there's only one you to do them. But if you do all of them with love, then you're going to be just fine.

"Do everything in love." 1 Corinthians 16:14

The end of the year is probably the messiest time for a Texas garden, at least in my garden. Half-dead heat-loving vines cling to trellis and fence for life, and leaf litter is all over: paths, pots, and patio. Fall comes late, so leaves are still falling in December. No use raking them until they're finished.

Weathermen predict it will be a warmer and dryer winter than normal, and it seems they're half right, although, technically, it's still fall. It's been warmer than usual, but we've had lots of light steady moisture, perfect for plants; they're soaking it up and loving it. This is not a complaint, simply a fact: if there's anything messier than leaves, it's wet leaves!

The fall colors have been exceptionally beautiful. I have no idea why, and I suppose it doesn't matter. The layered mosaic of leaves lying on the ground is almost mesmerizing, a representative collage of all the previous year's delights and disappointments. Soon, they'll be gathered up into bags or compost bin, leaving a clean garden slate for next year, much like the practice of year-end soul searching.

Speaking of soul searching, I think I've grown up a bit. Leaf litter used to bother me. Pinterest pictures of perfect gardens with pristinely arranged rocks; overflowing succulent containers; and creative, uncluttered pathways stirred up the envy monster. Complaining inwardly, I wished all kinds of silly things:

Why can't we have California weather, why do my trees have to lose leaves, I wish there were no squirrels, etc.

I began to realize my attitude carried over to my personal life:

Why can't things be smooth, if only people would listen to me, things would be better IF. "REALLY?" says God. "SO I'M NOT IN CHARGE HERE, NOT DOING A GOOD ENOUGH JOB?"

I don't mind leaf litter so much anymore.

The garden has been God's instrument to teach me that I can't control wind blowing, leaves falling, excess heat and cold, plants that just die, and a thousand other perils that "mess things up." Just like I can't change people, convince them to think differently, prevent pain as lessons are learned, make them choose wisely, and so on. The leaf mosaic randomly strewn across my garden, sometimes beautiful, often not, is an inescapable part of this messy life. Peace comes from knowing God is in charge and I'm not, and I'm good with that.

Moving Forward – Living – by Pam Charro

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and active.

1 Peter 1:3

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope.

I find it interesting that God would refer to both his word and his provision of hope to us as "living." It kind of makes sense, though, when I think about the meaning.

I've been feeling pretty overwhelmed and discouraged these past eight months or so. Actually, the past several years have been fairly rough. I keep thinking that the rebuilding of my life is going to begin, but then I start another strange challenge that looks nothing like it. It's exhausting to keep feeling like I'm not getting anywhere, and in every unfamiliar and uncomfortable scenario, I feel inadequate. It's so easy to forget that I'm loved, and that God's plan for my life isn't being thwarted by my inability to always make wise choices or feel strong.

*I need a hope that moves with me through all of the pain and uncertainty,
a certain thing that energizes me when I just want to quit.*

God knows we needed more than words or temporary fixes that only live with us a short while. He understands what keeps us truly alive as we endure difficulties; and we get to keep practicing belief during each difficult encounter. That belief, along with Jesus himself, makes us more beautiful and radiant the longer we practice. I get tired each time, but I ultimately get stronger, because that is what new life from God does!

I'm aware that my time here will probably never be easy, but I'm so glad I have much more than a sweet-sounding theology to keep me going.

God provided life for us to keep the death around us from winning, and we can count on that Life to be with us here, in every situation, until we pass on to the next one.

Simple Truths – One Photograph – by Marcy Lytle

We watched one of those Christmas movies a few weeks ago about a photographer that felt as though she'd lost her purpose behind the camera. After all, was she making any sort of difference in the world? So she was considering taking a job at a desk, stepping away from her keen eye of photography, because this new job meant more money and status. She was quite discouraged and in a quandary, and in stepped the man. (You know, there's always a good guy nearby in these Hallmark films...)

She reconnects with an old friend in her home town she's come to visit, and it's a town that was ravaged by a flood years prior, a flood where she took photographs of the devastation...and the hope. He showed her that her photos were pinned up in restaurants all around the town, and had been there for years. That did encourage her, but that was long ago...

Back to the current part of the story, this photographer (I can't recall her name) found a stuffed reindeer in a park that looked new, and so she had posted on the local media in hopes that the little child that lost it might have a parent that would see the post, and retrieve the reindeer. As the movie was nearing the end and the photographer was headed to the airport to return to the city to take that job behind the desk, she needed to make a quick stop. Someone had responded, and she was happy to return the reindeer.

As she handed the reindeer over to the grandfather (he met her with his granddaughter), he asked her if she was from the city, and proceeded to tell her how he had grown up there and moved away. But when he saw photographs of the storm devastation, one particular photo stood out. That depiction of the pain in the faces of the people that had suffered loss prompted him to give back, to give big, and he was a big donor toward the restoration of the city.

Stunned, the photographer thanked him and felt this overwhelming sense of gratefulness and purpose flood her heart. The picture he referred to was one she took. She said nothing, but the realization that just one of her photos moved a man to donate and rebuild an entire town sent her back to her city. She turned down the other job, and decided to stay behind the camera, with a new purpose (and of course, the young guy – her first love).

That movie and its message stuck with me, and encouraged me, too.

Sometimes, we feel as though what we do, what we love to do, is not making one bit of difference in this world for good. Surely, wiping snotty noses all day does no one any good. Or perhaps the mundane showing up to clean someone else's house has to be the worst job ever. What about working retail, dealing with impatient customers? Any number of jobs that we all do seem worthless at moments, especially at the start of a new year, when we evaluate what it is that we're doing.

But it might be that we're doing just what we're supposed to be doing. And while it's unlikely that a reindeer might be left in the park down the street and we meet up with a stranger that inadvertently encourages us like nothing else...it is likely that very story we need to settle our souls. We need to realize that if what's in our hand at the moment is what we can do, then we

need to do it with gusto. If we're only seeking to change because we feel despondent and useless, maybe we need to pray for His strength to continue on with new passion and vision.

What is that you love to do? Plant a garden? Write stories? Share recipes? Tend to children? Sing and write music? Read for long periods of time? You're unique, and so am I. And we don't need to carry heavy loads of worthlessness into 2023.

Ask him for encouragement, and then look for it. If change is on your horizon, ask him for boldness and peace to move forward. If what you're doing just needs an extra boost, this story is it. You're making a difference, whether you know it or not. One photograph, one wiped nose, one smile offered, one hand extended...makes ripples we know nothing of...but He does. And that should settle the weariest of souls among us.

Unearthly Thing: When God Takes Out the Garbage: A Story of Resolute Resolutions – by Angela Dolbear

Recently, I went through a gut wrenching, soul-aching couple of weeks. God was doing some deep, dark sifting through my intellect and spirit. He was really taking out the garbage.

I ask Him to do this nearly every day. I ask Him to help me remove any thought, attitude or action that I have which might come between us.

He certainly took me up on this request. The Creator of the Universe cleaned out some of my modes of thinking, and he showed me how they were not what He had in mind for me. They were hurting me and my relationship with Him.

It felt like an open wound that needed some time to heal. Depression came over me while I grieved these old ways. But they had to go.

Hindsight is 50/50, I say. I don't always remember the lessons I am so graciously taught. My husband, Tim, recorded the melody of a new song he was working on and gave it to me to write lyrics for it. The Divine Clean-Out issues will be in the lyrics for the new song. I am sure to remember my lessons since I will be singing them over and over. The song is called "When God takes Out the Garbage."

I only have the chorus lyrics written at this point:

"When God takes out the Garbage
He rips off the pretty bandage
It hurts for a time, but there's healing inside
When God takes out the garbage"

The vocals and feel of the song will most likely have a street rock/punk attitude, but it will forever be in my repertoire of songs, so I will never forget what God did for me.

Almost all my songs come from insights that God has shown me, good and bad. God is good to use music to cement His work in my brain, heart and soul.

I took notes of all the things God spoke to me during this time through devotionals and Joyce Meyer podcasts. I have a lot to pull from when I write the verses for the new song.

I realized these areas of concern had been ingrained in me for years, so I needed to make sure these weeds and garbage God pulled out of me didn't grow back. I will perpetually ask Him for help with this. I will do my part by making a list of resolutions of areas I resolved to change...for good.

Is the timing a coincidence that right now a new year begins? No. I don't believe in coincidences. I've never really been one to have a list of New Year's resolutions, since they seemed flippant, and easy to dismiss if they don't come to fruition. My new less-garbage-filled resolutions were serious sanctification. But I like that it is a new year, for my new thinking, so I went with it.

So here are the "areas of improvement" resolution list God put on my heart:

◆ **Seek to be "famous" in Heaven, not on Earth.**

I have published four novels and many short stories. I had been harboring a low-level grief and anguish over not achieving some measure of success with these publications yet. No “Best Selling Author” title appears before my name. I had not been able to fund my cosmetics and shoes penchants with the money I made from writing like I hoped would happen.

But God used the books He gave me to help people in their spiritual walks with Him. Several people made decisions to invite Jesus as their Savior into their lives through the novels.

That is far more important than any accolade the world can offer. “Time here on earth is like a grain of sand in all eternity,” Joyce Meyer said in her “True Greatness” podcast.

God really made sure I realized this. *Ouch...*but in a good way.

◆ **Know who I am/are in Christ.**

Sounds simple right? Especially for someone who has been in a close relationship with Jesus since 1991. But I had too much self-doubt and a sense of worthlessness for someone who is covered in the blood of Christ.

God showed me I needed to know I had value, worth and security in Him. I was deceived into thinking I needed to do “important things” in the world in order to be deemed significant or worth anything to myself or to other people.

“You will never be more important, or loved by Christ, more than you are at this moment,” Joyce Meyer also said in her podcast.

This statement blew my mind and melted my heart. Jesus is the essential and most loved person to me. To learn that I am so valued and loved by Him as well is a lot to wrap my head around. Yet it is so simple. I am still reflecting on this.

◆ **Learn to serve others**

I have served in many church ministries through the years. My husband and I have been worship leaders at various churches for over 15 years. But God is calling me to serve others like Jesus did: at all times and regardless of circumstances.

God gave me a purpose right *write* where I am, and He strategically placed me there for His purpose (as He has done for everyone on Earth). His purpose for us is to glorify Him and expand His kingdom. Priority number one.

Everything is in God’s hands, including me and the gifts and abilities He has given me. I read in a YouVersion App devotional about overcoming self-doubt and unworthiness that I should be like a garden hose connected to the water spigot, like being connected to Father God. “And then the Holy Spirit is like the water that flows through us and the books we write in order to water, refresh and help many people.” So beautiful.

So, me, this connected garden hose, one who is loved by Jesus right here and right now, will let the living water of God flow from me through novels and stories, and songs, to do God’s work, to reach people for Him, and not for me.

Such a comforting and glorious resolution. And so freeing.

Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series, and THE TORMENTOR'S TALE, as well as many short stories. Her novels are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). Angela writes real, relatable, and reverent fiction. She loves reading, writing prose, as well as writing and recording music with her husband Tim in their studio in Nashville, TN--listen to their music on [Sound Cloud](#). Please drop by and sign-up for news and to read new stories and hear new original music at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>. Blessings to you!



FRESH THYME

FRESH THYME - One Big Pile – by Marcy Lytle

Have you ever felt like your life is like one big Christmas morning? Hear me out. You've been given and handed and received all of these gifts throughout your life. Maybe you've been handed a talent for singing, God granted you the love of your life in your husband, your house is more than you could ask for, and the car you drive is a dream. And kids, well they're just the miracle of all miracles. But perhaps you've also had some of those gifts turn out to be lemons or explode or grow old and fade. Your talent was abused, that husband left you, the house burned, and the car is no longer new.

So here you sit after living however many decades you've lived, among opened gifts, unwrapped paper and bows off to the side, a trash heap in one corner, a few things on a shelf for display, but overwhelmed with His goodness and life's tragedies, all at the same time. Picture with me Christmas morning after everything's been opened, but nothing's been cleaned up. Pure joy, and absolute chaos. Some kids were elated and others were disappointed. That toy was missing a part, and the other toy required batteries you didn't have. He gave you something you'd never wear, and she didn't give you anything. You now sit and sigh...

And that's how life is.

I woke up this morning filled with gratefulness at the blessings in life, thinking over how fun yesterday was...and then I remember that others aren't having any fun at all right now. A family member is ill or away from home. And then I saw that picture in my head. Me, sitting on the floor in the middle of my life with unwrapped gifts all shiny and new and lovely...and piled boxes and ribbons and bows as a mess off to the side. It was years and years of Christmas all in one room! It was like I saw the ghost of Christmas past, present and future all at once – gifts I've loved and used – and others buried under the rubble. I felt overwhelmed and heavy and anxious...

I just sat and cried. I poured out my heart to Him, and told him of all the thoughts that swirl and the pictures that play, and I imagined just sitting in that mess and offering it all to Him. Could he somehow make sense of the mess? Put things in order? Settle my soul?

I know that He can. I know that I can't.

I love it when we all have a verse we hang onto, place in the middle of our life stories, or quote on a particularly hard day. I do it all the time. But there are some days that a verse out of the whole of the Bible won't suffice. We don't even know the context, it only sustains us for a minute, and the verse somehow makes us feel guilty that we're not living the promise that it gives.

So no verse in this story, only admitting that life is full of Christmas days year after year, and the days after, year after year, when the gifts settle in their places, the boxes and paper are gathered and discarded, and the ribbons and bows are tucked away for using another time, and organization returns. It eventually happens, and then summer is already here, fall begins and we start the process over and over again.

Why?

It's because giving and receiving – it's what life is all about. Learning to give when it's hard, offering peace to another when war's at hand, receiving and giving thanks for "that" we didn't like or want, and sitting in the middle of all of it, that cycle of life of giving and receiving and organizing the chaos... It's then that we close our eyes, ask Him for his help. We sit among the chaos and the beauty all together in the same room and we cry. And we are held. And somehow, we see clearly to stand up and move away and let Him guide us forward in another day toward the Light as He clears a path and makes a way.

And then the New Year begins, and somehow there's hope because the Hope that lives within us lives.

Happy New Year, 2023.

FRESH THYME - Thankful...Still Not Content

Have you ever felt extremely grateful for things, people, and experiences...but still find yourself whining or pining or wishing for something more? I have. And it makes me so mad at myself. Giving thanks, I've often thought, is the cure-all for whatever ails me. And while it's a great beginning point, I'm realizing it's not the sustaining grace. In other words, I can write and list and give thanks for a 1000 things (which I did one year), and still find myself waking up, or going to sleep, in tears about what I still don't have.

So, just why is it that we're not content, even though we're thankful? I've thought of several reasons...

I want to have a formula or a duty that just settles my soul once and for all, so that I don't have to "practice" my faith. I have thought before that if I take time to note and be grateful as I begin each day, then the rest of the day will be set to perfection. But in reality, I'm finding that practicing thankfulness requires me to note the good all day long, not just in the first five minutes after my feet hit the floor.

I want it to be easy...this thing called contentment. I want God to wave his magic wand (I know, he doesn't use one...) and wipe away all my discontent and give me joy unspeakable in every moment, so that discontent is never present. But in reality, I'm finding that contentment is a choice – a hard one – that I must choose often, OVER the discontent that knocks at my door multiple times a day.

I want all of the basics in life covered, so that it's just little things that I'm missing, but then I have these things called eyes that see others, want what they have, and desire to get that for my own. Why do I compare and envy and want? In reality, I'm human and I'm going to have human desires that war against the contentment he gives, so I'm thrown right back into giving thanks for what I have...and what I don't have. And choosing to rejoice with those that have what I don't.

Are you tired, yet? All of the above exercises require strength that we don't have on a daily basis. And when we try each one, we can totally become exhausted in the process of disciplining ourselves to give thanks, choosing to be content when we're not feeling it, and squelching those desires that arise when we gaze over there at what she has and we do not.

We've just come out of the season of Thanksgiving, and I'm betting that we all gave thanks for the food we ate, the family that arrived, and the goodness of God in our lives. But I'm also guessing that many of us are glad that the Thanksgiving holiday is over, because it just hurt...because pain has been so huge and loss has been so great.

And Christmas just ended as well, that season where "Joy to the World" rang out, silent nights were enjoyed, gifts were given and received, and all the lights and the color and the tastes and the smells just enveloped our homes in the best of ways. We found ourselves feeling so content at times, as we attended this party and that event and opened that gift and gave another one this gift...but then...

Here we sit, yes thankful for it all, but discontent once again because it's over, perhaps it wasn't so grand, and new hurts and failed memories are now embedded in our hearts and minds, and it's January...another year that we're older, and taxes will be paid soon, and oh yes...we have to clean up all of the joyful messes that came with the blessings of the past season.

Discontentment is at the door. And it will open the door, enter without being invited in, and stay with us a while, if we don't do something to stop it. It is said that the root of discontentment is unmet expectations. So maybe we all need to start with thinking about what we expect for the New Year. And maybe at the heart of our discontent is really disappointment with God and his ways, his actions or inactions, and his silence...or his voice.

The most content people I know are the ones that have very little of what this world offers, and yet they have found the simplicity of a simple faith in a God that is good. That's where I'm going to return this New Year of 2023, when he created all that is and called it good...and that includes you and me.

The goodness of God.

Sounds simple enough and calming, doesn't it?

And being calm is the opposite of being discontent.

Sounds good to me.

FRESH THYME – The Cool Down – by Marcy Lytle

I make granola often, maybe every couple of weeks. I love making it and have tried all different sorts of recipes. Making granola requires patience, and here's why. One has to be very careful to not burn it, as the oats are tender. And one has to be let it sit and cool COMPLETELY before breaking it up into jars. Otherwise, the granola is gummy and not fun to eat.

There are SO MANY things we bake and cook and make that require patience and a time of cooling, before enjoying. Handheld apple pies are another. Bite into a hot pie without thinking, and you might burn the roof of your mouth! Same with pizza right out of the oven.

I was thinking about this cooling off process and how it just has to happen, we cannot rush it, we have to wait. And if we don't, we ruin things.

It's no different with our relationships. I've been so hot with anger over something someone said or did or the way they looked or sounded that if I don't have this cooling off period, I might regret what I do! Can you relate?

- Sometimes, the cooling off period allows me to think over the situation and possibly see it from a different view.
- Sometimes, the cooling off period invites me to sit and listen to HIM soothe my wounded heart and tell me he's got it, and I don't have to fight back.
- Sometimes, the cooling off period teaches me and trains me in that virtue I have so little of...patience.

But when I don't allow the granola to cool or the pie to sit, or the pizza to rest...ouch! All the work of making the granola is a waste, the pie is no longer appetizing, and I've got a burn to deal with.

Next month is February, the month of love...right? I've ruined even our Valentine's Day date night with an angry response to an innocent action or inaction on his part. We often "think" we know why or what or how the event or word or look was given or spoken or occurred...and we don't know the whole of anything!

Cooking teaches us so many things. There are the ingredients, the mix, the stir, the rise, the bake, and then the wait...for the cool down.

I didn't even know that meat needed to rest before being cut into, until a few years ago!

So join me this month and let's cool down when things start to simmer up, and let go of thinking we have to react and take a bite and break things up, because we just can't wait. Love is patient – I've heard and read that somewhere – oh yes! But it's not easy to be patient.

So we continue to make granola, tenderly and carefully, and then when the baking is complete, we go do something else while the pan cools...so that when we return we have something so deliciously crunchy and good to be saved for the enjoyment of all.

FRESH THYME – A Hard Prayer – by Marcy Lytle

I think it's hard to be in this world but not of it. And what I mean is that we're inundated with insurance and investments and assurances knocking down our doors wanting us to sign this, consider that and look at these options so that while we're in this world we feel secure. "Secured investments," is what we're to seek!

I looked up that verse in the bible that tells us to be in the world but not of it, and it doesn't even mean what we mostly consider it to mean, or at least what I've thought it means. But before I go into that, let me move further into my frustration of living in the world but not of it, as I have thought of it.

Fear seems to be the backing behind so many decisions we make, and one could say rightly so, because the world is a fearful place. Death comes unexpectedly, loss happens, tragedy occurs, sickness falls, and everyone wants to be ready to stave off grief, hold on to what we have and make it grow, somehow protect ourselves against harm, and boost our system so that we're never sick. And all of that is exhausting!

In fact, trying to hold up this sign and that one, take this pill and that pill, run this lap and that one, invest in this or that, is such a juggling act that the very skill it requires to keep all of those balls in the air can cause a set of maladies all its own!

So being in the world but not of it seems impossible, in light of what we think it means, that we're supposed to live in this world full of all these terrible things but not be of it, but rather rise above and live on top of all the things that plague "others."

Somehow, we think those that *believe* should be able to find a formula of living or giving or doing that staves off all of the things that the "world" has to experience, and that we are supposed to learn to live spiritually and rise above all the things concerning this world because "greater is He that is in us than He that is in the world."

Can you see how that would create a pompous set of people?

Now...I just read a commentary on the verse about being in the world but not of it, and what Jesus meant in context is not what we carry with us in our heads. It might be more like we are not of this world but are sent INTO the world to do what? Well, it's certainly not to point fingers and tell others if they follow us and do what we do, so they won't have trouble. We are to be IN the world as a light in the darkness. And that light doesn't illuminate over our heads and say, "Look at us," but rather that light shines as we experience with the world...

the losses, the tragedies, the death experiences, and the sicknesses.

We are to be in the world, among them, suffering like they do, and yet not of the world, only because we have HOPE in Jesus, not in the things I mentioned at the top of the page.

We've personally been signing documents and papers and dealing with lawyers and brokers, regarding my dad's estate after his passing. Lucky for us, we're also at the age where Medicare is available so there we have more documents and more papers and more people telling us

what we need for critical care should this or that happen. Then the brokers say we need to secure our future and our retirement. And as we age, there is this test and that test “they” want to do, to ensure that we live the longest and healthiest and happiest life ever...because all of the things we own in this world are then placed where they need to be.

It's quite maddening, and it's made me want to scream and fly off this merry-go-round globe called the earth and leave it all today. Or at least fly away to the snow and sit on a mountain and marvel. Some days, it's been overwhelming because it feels like being in the world has become this heavy blanket of darkness that's holding my feet secure HERE and it's making me forget that I'm not part OF this world, and I'm forgetting why I'm here in the first place.

Jesus was sent into the world not to be of it but to be in it, among the people, to love them and demonstrate the love of the Father. He did that by eating with them, seeing their needs and meeting them, and living among them while they fished, suffered and yes...even died. He brought life wherever he went. He lived in the world but not of it.

I don't have the answers to any of my swirling questions, because I'm sure Medicare and investments and assets and vitamins and pills and exercise and securities are all good things...in perspective. But when all of that weight prohibits me from stepping outside my door to observe the sun cast its light on the leaves across the street as it rises in its brilliance, or when the fear of what I might lose keeps me from giving what I might gain, then I've lost the meaning of the entire Word of the gospel.

God, help me to be in the world where you've placed me to be among friends and neighbors, loved ones and strangers, and to not be of the rat race that scampers for every piece of cheese in every corner to secure my place. But rather, let me learn to be of your world where peace reigns and hope is eternal and love wins.