



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

Online Women's Magazine | [thymemag.com](http://thymemag.com)

June 2023



TIPS

## **The Dressing – Summer Fun – by Marcy Lytle**

Summer is here now, and hopefully we've all been able to put away the coats and jackets and leggings and boots...in favor of more color, less fabric, and all the fun that this season brings. New bags, a hat to cover our faces, shoes that are comfy yet cute, city tees, artisan made earrings...and oh yes, that light wrap for cool downs at night. Here are a few suggestions for you!

Rainbow clutch - I found this at Ford and Fossil, but rainbow clutches are an easy find these days. I just love all the colors that make a pop for an otherwise neutral outfit. And rainbows in the summer, well they're just showstoppers in the sky!

Black and white – At a market, I found this cute black and white bag, which I think is a summer staple, especially against the pinks and greens I see everywhere! Make it a cross-body or a tote, with a removable strap, for versatility and fun!

Straw hat – I've had this hat a while and it's perfect for sitting outside at games, taking walks around the lake, strolling through small towns, or wherever you might be on a day in June when the sun is high in the sky. There are foldable versions of these on Amazon, great for travel!

Leather sandals – I always shop the discount stores first...for shoes. And when I find leather sandals, I like to grab a pair. This pair is comfortable and cute. They go with everything, from skirts to shorts to jeans!

B&W sneakers – These were also found on the shelves at a discount store, and I got them because of the white with the black stripe. Worn with a cute skirt or dress this summer, and you've got yourself an outfit. These go with SO many things!

Neutral sneakers – I was shopping for 10-year old Ayla on line at Old Navy and spotted these sneakers. Ordered them (they fit true to size) and love them so much – again with skirts and dresses – all the rage this season!

City tees – I happened upon this Los Angeles tee and Austin tee at Ross. Sometimes these just appear, or you can order them – city tees – of the cities where you have lived, traveled, or places you just love! Get several!

Summer earrings – Again, Ford and Fossil has the CUTEST earrings, but if you visit your local farmers markets, shop for the earrings that are handmade and made well. And lightweight, yet make a statement. They're the best!

That light wrap – At Nordstrom Rack there were several of these thin wraps in the accessory section for under \$15 and I grabbed a couple. Great as a bathing suit cover-up, or on your shoulders at dinner or at the movies!

If you're traveling, or just scooting around town, stop in stores or places you don't normally frequent and capture some deals that make your summer fun, too.

## Seven for You – Travel Stuff – by the Panel

We asked the cousin moms for their packing tips for littles, so we wanted to share packing tips for the adults as well...our favorite products and tips! Packing is so fun (in my opinion). It's the unpacking that's the worst. And packing means we're going somewhere to relax...hopefully! Here are our tips:

If checking baggage, **take at least one change of clothes in your carryon** in case your checked luggage gets lost. I use packing cubes for all the little stuff like undies, socks, etc. and roll much of my larger items. I wear my bulkiest shoes for travel. I pack my purse and use a backpack to carry the stuff that would usually be in my purse, plus my book, laptop, change of clothes, etc. – Anita

I love to travel!! One thing we have started doing now that it is just the two of us - is we always pack just a carry-on. We take a carry-on suitcase and then a backpack or large bag. Our clothes go in the suitcase and our backpack will have normally at least one pair of shoes and then medications and toiletry items. If we are going to be gone more than a week, I just plan to do laundry at one of our stops. When packing, I roll my clothes to save room and then **if I need to take socks I will always put them inside a pair of shoes to save that room**. We are TSA approved (and I highly recommend if you fly more than two or three times a year) so we don't have to take our shoes off when we go through security. I always wear my tennis shoes to save room in my carry on. If we are going somewhere cold, I will wear my coat on the plane. It may be 90 degrees at take-off but it's always a little cool on the plane and I save all that space in my suitcase.

When flying out early in the morning, I always pack us boiled eggs and a muffin. I just recently found out **we can take food in the airport, so boy do I try to do that**. Airport food is way too pricey and not very good. We are going on an Alaska cruise in June (I am so excited!) and our plane leaves at 6:00 AM. I will be packing some food! – Melissa

Packing is one of my favorite things to do. Not too long ago I realized a tip that I now do each trip that helps me SO MUCH. **I lay out each outfit (clothes, shoes, jewelry, hat, etc.) and snap a picture. Then I save those photos on my phone**. This helps me so much each day as I dress...no thinking or wondering or wearing something and then wishing I hadn't worn it later in the trip. My favorite tip by far.

**For road trips, my favorite toiletry bag is by My Maria Victoria** – hands down. It stays clean, it's pretty, and holds SO MUCH. For the airplane, I prefer a zipped makeup bag that I place in the suitcase and not my carry-on, so I don't have to worry about tiny bottles. While we have traveled with just a carry-on, I didn't like that, so we just pay the suitcase fee. Probably not the best budget-wise, but I like to have room. And we always include an extra bag for the things we buy, and we bring that back with us on the plane as a carryon. I do use packing cubes, just to keep nightwear and undergarments and socks separate from the clothes. And like others have said, we **wear the heaviest shoes on the plane** and our jackets.

This next trip we have waterproof shoes that are heavy, so we plan to wear those while we fly! And we recently purchased two matching carry-ons that are so pretty, from Walmart. For road trips for just a couple nights, we use a couple of rolling zip-up bags – love them, too!

Finally, I always have **earplanes** when we travel by air. They keep my ears from popping and hurting. - Marcy

I'm without doubt, the world's WORST 'packer.' It takes me AT LEAST three tries to get it right! I stew about it, and then start packing at least a week in advance of my departure date, and I WAY over-pack on purpose! I will literally lay out 10 outfits for a 3-day trip! (Yes, that's a lot of capital letters, I KNOW!) **I have a packing list divided by categories that I generally follow**, so that I don't forget anything needful, but, still, I struggle to choose the "just right" items and the "just right" amount of everything.

In the first go-around, I lay out everything on a spare bed that I WANT to take to wear. Then as I mull it over, I remove, replace, pare down, and then actually pack the "winners." But, I'm still not done! I will go back again and again, add accessories, sweaters, etc., and then reduce again, by trying to pair up one item for multiple uses (NOT my strong suit-pun intended). I'm NOT that person who can just throw in a pair of jeans, a couple of tee shirts and a jacket and go! I do try to take only one pair of dress shoes, one pair of flip flops, sneakers, etc., because my feet are BIG and my shoes take up a lot of SPACE!

So then, a couple of days before departure, I have to really, really get serious and actually pack in whatever bags I'm taking. I do like the organization of packing cubes, but sometimes it's not necessary depending on where I'm going and my mode of travel. I pack my allergy meds in the pill box. Then, finally, on the day of departure, if they aren't already packed with duplicates, I pack up my cosmetics, hair care and toiletries I used to get ready, in their separate bags and haul my bags downstairs. Whew, I'm exhausted but I'm ready to go! - Debbie

I love to travel. And I love going to events to speak and sell my books. But I don't like to eat out the whole time I'm gone. So, **I pack my own food for lunch and supper**. When I first started this, I used a small lunch box with a reusable ice block, but the block took up more room than I wanted, leaving less room for my food.

One day, while at Walmart I came across this small lunch box that had a built-in frozen section by Packit. I gave it a try and I love it! You simply put the whole lunch box in the freezer, and it'll be ready to go. It also stays cold so much longer.

One more item that I use with my lunch box is the container inside. I like to take food to make wraps along with other snack items, so I use containers with at least two or more compartments. I love using Sistema Klip It containers from Walmart. They have easy-locking clips for closing that work so well.

Later, my son acquired a container from Lifeway. He and his wife gave it to me as a gift because they knew I used them. And I love to use it when traveling. It's also perfect for multiple food items and even has a charcuterie board! It was such a thoughtful gift, and the board makes me feel like I'm eating gourmet on the go. – Carole

Travel. Usually, it is an exciting time to get away. But planning and preparing can cause frustration as you agonize over what to pack. If you're traveling by car, it's a little less overwhelming since you can, well, you know ... take the kitchen sink!

However, if you're traveling by plane, then it can become a frenzied time to become a Houdini in creating a travel bag that utilizes ever tiny space to accommodate all of your must-needed items on the trip.

In 2019, while living in Austin, TX, we needed to fly to Michigan twice during the summer. My husband, Dennis, was in charge of making the flight plans. Needless to say, he went the very, very, (may I emphasize VERY!) budget route. We got reservations on Spirit Airlines, and according to their online rules of carry-on baggage, there was a charge for putting your bags in the overhead compartment. Only carry-on bags that fit under your seat were allowed for no charge.

So I had to think fast; what was the best carrier I could take that would fit under our seats? I found **two nautical-looking bags at a local Marshalls; they're actually insulated beach bags**. And they turned out to be the perfect luggage. They fit perfectly under my legs and I was able to reach into the bag to get my laptop, and other things.

The serendipity is that once we reached our location, **we then used those same bags for day trips, as an ice chest and beach bag**.

And now, I travel with them all the time. Using the satchel as my toiletries bag, and the tall bag as my food-munchie bag. – Gloria

I don't travel often, but when I do there are a few things that I use to organize my belongings so that my trip is the most fun. I use a large suitcase, a toiletries bag and a tote.

My large bag holds clothing, shoes (which I put in a plastic grocery bag to keep my clothes clean.) and any larger item that may not fit in my toiletries bag. For example, I may want to take a few hangers to hang up clothes that get a bit wrinkled when folded. Also, **I usually take a hand mirror that is too big for my toiletries bag**. I put it in a plastic grocery bag in case it breaks during travel. Then I slide it between clothing, to cushion against breakage.

I have a large toiletries bag that is divided into four sections and stays closed with velcro straps. Most of my toiletries, make-up, jewelry, etc. go in that bag. If the trip is short, this bag sometimes fits into the large bag.

Lastly, I take a tote that holds cross stitch, books, snacks or anything I might want to have easy access to during the ride.

When packing, **easy access and remembering where I put things is the key**. – Gina

## **In the Kitchen – Color on Your Plate – by Marcy Lytle**

Veggies are plentiful this time of year, in all the colors. From zucchini to peppers, to carrots and corn, there is so much color to choose from when making meals for you and your family...as well as fruit like strawberries! These recipes are so tasty and fun, and just the best idea for the start of a new season. And even the green of pickles!

**Ally's Salad** – I follow Ally's Kitchen on Instagram and watched her make this salad, and then tweaked it a bit for us...and we LOVED it. So pretty on the plate and so healthy, too – and tasty. We took it with us on a weekend trip recently, and it traveled well.

- 1 c sliced celery
- 1 c diced cucumbers
- 1 c mini diced peppers
- 1 c diced carrots
- 1 c baby spinach or arugula
- 1 c Kalamata olives, drained
- 1 diced granny smith apple
- ½ c sliced almonds
- ½ c chopped walnuts
- ½ cup sliced radishes
- ½ c feta cheese crumbles
- ¼ c olive oil
- 1 large lemon – juice only
- 1 t turmeric
- 1 t sea salt
- 1 t coarse black pepper

Combine all the veggies, olives and apple in a large bowl, add the cheese (it's optional.) In a small bowl whisk the oil, juice, turmeric, S&P. Drizzle on the mixture. Toss and blend. Refrigerate about 30 min before serving.

**Burrito zoodle bowl** - We both absolutely loved this take on a burrito bowl, sans rice. You'll like it too!

- 2 T olive oil
- 1 chopped onion
- 2 cloves chopped garlic
- 1 lb ground beef (90% lean)
- 1 t chili powder
- ½ t ground cumin
- S&P
- 1 15oz can black beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 c cherry tomatoes halved
- 1 c corn kernels (thawed, if frozen)

- 1 c red enchilada sauce
- 1 cup grated cheddar
- 1 c Monterey jack cheese
- 1 lb zucchini spiralized into zoodles
- Chopped cilantro

Heat oil on medium, then cook onion til tender about 6 minutes . stir in garlic and cook 1 minute. Add beef and cook until no longer pink, drain fat if needed. Return to med heat and stir in spices, then the bean, tomatoes, corn and sauce and cheeses. Cook til cheese melts, about 5 minutes.

Add zootles and cook, tossing to coat, til heated through about 3 minutes. Sprinkle with the chopped cilantro. Enjoy.

**Fried wonton pickles** – Oh my gosh, these were easy and delicious. I love fried pickles anyway, and this new recipe is a great way to serve them up fun and for guests!

- 12 dill pickle spears
- 12 slices Havarti cheese
- 12 egg roll wrappers
- Oil for deep frying
- Ranch dressing for dipping

Drain pickles and pat off moisture. Wrap each pickle in a slice of cheese and then in an egg roll skin. Use a bit of water to seal edges.

Pour 2 inches of oil in large pot and heat to 360 degrees, or frying ready.

Working in small batches, fry the pickles til golden brown on all sides and crisp (2-3 min). Transfer to paper towel lined plate and let cool a bit. Slice in half on the diagonal and serve!

**Cucumber/tomato salad** – This recipe is from one of my favorite cookbooks by The Stay at Home Chef – Family Favorites Cookbook. Easy to make and delish.

- 2 english cukes, sliced and quartered
- 1 pint cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1 small red onion diced
- 2 T olive oil
- 2 T lemon juice
- 1 T apple cider vinegar
- 1 t honey
- 1 t salt
- ½ t pepper
- 2 T minced fresh dill



In a large bowl toss the cukes, tomatoes and onions. Make the dressing: whisk oil, lemony juice, apple cider vinegar, honey, S&P, and dill in a small bowl. Pour dressing over the veggies and toss. Tightly cover bowl and put in fridge for at least 1 hour before serving.

**A Simple Supper** – One night we both just wanted chips and salsa. So we have this divided bowl into three sections that allowed us to add guacamole as well!

- Tortilla Chips
- Your favorite salsa (make it or try Beba's Pfresh – best one in a jar!)
- Queso (Just melt cheese and add rotel, or serve it plain)
- Guacamole (avocado with your favorite mix-ins – lime juice, red onion, tomatoes, bacon, cilantro?)

Grab a pretty divided bowl if you have it; or three cute small bowls, and set them on a tray. Fill with the three ingredients above. To make it really simple, just cut open the chip bag down the middle and serve it all up, sit down and watch a movie, and enjoy.

**Skewers for the kids** – We recently had a charcuterie night, but the kids weren't really interested in what the adults were eating. So these skewers made for a pretty and tasty pileup on a platter that they all enjoyed (and some of the adults did, too).

- Cinnamon raisin bread
- Strawberries
- Peanut butter
- Curly que skewers

Spread peanut butter on bread and cut the sandwiches into squares. Thread with strawberries, alternating...and you're done. Make sure the strawberries are patted dry so they won't make the sandwiches soggy.

**Sheet pan supper** – This is a sure-fire easy supper that's easy to put together with what you have.

We had:

- Chicken
- Carrots
- Onions
- Broccoli
- Olive oil
- Seasoning of your choice (Italian blend is great)

You can use whatever you have! I buy chicken breast tenders, season them with the onion and olive oil, and place on one side of the sheet pan. The carrots are sliced, as is the broccoli, also seasoned and tossed in olive oil.

Bake it all at 400 degrees for about 20 minutes. Dinner is done.



## **SUGAR + Spice The Skinny on Thinning Hair – by Angela Dolbear**

I was born with thick hair, and it remained monstrously thick and wavy into my adulthood. When my mom braided my hair in two braids, each braid was two inches wide, and about an inch thick.

But now, not so much. I had steadily been losing hair for years. Recently, I tried to put my hair in braids. The sad little braids were less than a half inch in width. It's hard not to grieve my thick hair.

It seemed like my hair was starting to fall out in my mid-30's, when I found out I had a slow thyroid and an auto-immune disease. I wonder if just plain age contributed to my steady hair loss too.

I could no longer wear my shoulder length hair down without some synthetic hair help. The thin wispy length was not pretty. Thanks to Amazon, I obtained a small collection of clip-in hair extensions and "messy bun" hair pieces for when I pull my hair up (which is most of the time).

I prayed and prayed, asking God to help me, hoping I wasn't being vain in my requests.

During my research for hair growth products, I came across [Bondi Boost shampoo and conditioner](#). It contained natural ingredients and was reasonably priced. Then I saw one of my friends on Facebook post about how much she liked Bondi Boost. So, I gave it a try.

I had been using the [HairMax hair growth tool](#) 2-3 times a week. The over-50 beauty influencer I sometimes follow, swears by it. After a couple of months, I saw a little regrowth.

When I started washing and conditioning my hair with Bondi Boost 2-3 times a week, and using the HairMax laser on those days, I had noticeable regrowth. It took a few months, but the very thin spot of hair on the top of my head had more hair covering it!

I can wear my hair down now without needing to clip-in an extension. It's still thin, but now I have actual hair covering my scalp everywhere, and not just thin wisps.

I wish I had before and after pictures. I was too distraught to take any before pictures, I think. But I thank God that I have hair now. I'm so thankful.

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](http://www.AngelaDolbear.com)*

## **The Cousin Moms – Traveling with Kids – by Charissa and Kamrin**

It's summer time and that means road trips, plane rides, heading out for fun at the beach or the mountains or somewhere fun...with the kids! Traveling just by ourselves is one thing...but packing for the kids and the entire family is another! We all need tips, and the cousin moms are sharing their hacks and strategies and goodies for when it's time to go – with children in tow!

### Kamrin

My number one tip is to teach the kids early on, how to pack their own suitcases (of course, you have to check them) and giving them a list of what to pack. This is a huge help and makes it less stressful when packing.

Secondly, how to teach them involves each kid having their own piece of luggage. This allows them to learn responsibility and gives them their own room. When the kids were learning how to read, I literally drew a list of pictures and a number, how many of each. I gave them the paper and they packed, then I double-checked before we left. Now, they can read on their own. One time I wrote "outfit" instead of the pieces and one kid forgot underwear!

Make sure you have plenty of outfits, and if there is no washer where you're going, pack two more than you need because no matter the age- accidents happen!

On a plane, the kids have their own carry-on (backpack) and that way they carry their own stuff. A fail there though, is to make sure you give them a limit. The first time we did this, they way over-packed with stuffed animals. Now I add more to their list like: one or two books, their tablet, one stuffie, things like that. I also remind them that blankets and pillows can't go on a plane...no room!

I learned this from my mother – leave room in the suitcase for souvenirs. Or bring an extra bag. Be prepared if you're into souvenir shopping. Budget your spending and souvenir shopping so that you don't go broke!

For road trips, if your family loves music, plan your playlist ahead or rotate choices of songs in the car (so there's no arguing!) Also, create "quiet time" in the car where kids read. We also have road trip games and in that folder were license plates, or icons to find, etc. We even had a prize for the winner. These different things break up the long rides and make them fun.

If you can cook wherever you're staying, this saves money. So we planned our meals and bought the groceries THERE, not at home where we'd have to pack. If traveling with infants, only pack what you need for a day, and buy the rest when you arrive. This frees up suitcase room. Wait on some necessities until you arrive! Even at Disneyworld, we were able to have grocery delivery to the hotel room.

I have not always used packing cubes, but recently started. They are a huge help for me, personally! The kids haven't used them, but cubes or large ziplocks are great for placing the outfit inside, and the dirty one at night, and you're done! Or...include a dirty clothes bag!

To keep hair gels from expanding on the plane in the luggage from the air pressure, I learned you can take a square of plastic wrap over the top and then screw on the lid. This keeps bottles from leaking! I also pack with reusable travel bottles (we each have these!) instead of purchasing travel-sized items.

Lastly, make sure you pack backup chargers for your electronics!

Charissa

When it comes to travel, we always pack differently if we are flying...or driving! Also, depending on the ages of your kids, that changes what you pack! My kids are infant, ages 4 and 6. We do try to save money and hopefully have a fun travel experience.

By air, we are constricted with what we can bring. We pack each kid a water bottle and make sure its empty before going through security. After that, we can fill them in the airport. We also bring snacks that fit in our carry -on, like dried snacks. Goldfish or beef jerky are good choices, so we don't pay for airport food. A lot of planes charge for snacks now, so this saves money if we bring our own.

For car and plane, the girls use Amazon tablets. Of course, screen time is big topic of conversation. But when we travel, it's our girls' time for tablets, for educational games, movies and TV shows. They also have their own earphones. This is a great way to keep them occupied, and it's fun, because they say, "Oh, it's our tablet time!"

My girls love to color, or maybe other kids like differnet activities, theses go in the backpacks. We let the kids carry their own backpack, so our own bags aren't so full!

Another thing when on the plane, most flight attendants will allow kids to see the cockpit. Just ask! This is a great way to familiarize the kids with the plane, and sometimes the staff gives the kids wings.

Make sure the kids go to the bathroom before boarding. And pack an extra pair of clothes, in case luggage is lost or delayed. Car seats and strollers are free on airplanes, no check-in charge. If you have a bag that covers those, you can throw in packages of diapers in with the stroller or seat!

For car travel, there is more flexibility and more room! I usually am able to pack similar items but more activities. The Dollar Tree or the Dollar Spot at Target are both great for finding little things for the kids – coloring or sticker books, puzzles, etc. A long car ride is fun to include an hourly activity to open each hour. This is great for anticipation. Car games are great to play, like Spy. Every few hours we stop and stretch our legs, as this is a must!

Finally, always allow yourself grace because there will be frustrations and hiccups. Take a deep breath, and you'll arrive and have fun. Travel with kiddos can be stressful, but it's so worth it!

## June Tried and True – Last Month's Learning

It's always fun to live and learn, at any age. And, observing and asking questions and listening improves our learning, doesn't it? Here's my list for June of things I've been learnin':

There are tablecloth weights I found on Amazon that work well to hold down the corners while you picnic, so your cloth doesn't fly away!

Ikea has an inexpensive high chair that wipes up well and doesn't take up much room – used at restaurants and at home!

The Good Left Undone is a good book – better and better as I read it – highly recommend.

Got some “nubby” sweaters in your closet you're about to donate? Think again, and keep them to wear around your waist on days you need color, to cover your stomach, or just an added accessory!

Slice open a bag of chips. Set out the trio of guacamole, salsa and queso – it's the simplest supper ever. More details on In the Kitchen on the TIPS page.

I picked up the most beautiful and totally full of scent candle at a market. Lighthouse Candles – in a beautiful bowl and worth the price for a gift for you...or someone nice.

Recently attended a Hitchcock marathon party with snacks and cute décor – try it for a summer get together!

Speaking of entertaining, The Dollar Tree has large bowls great for chips, and tiny cups, great for appetizers or individual dips.

The Dollar Spot at Target always has the cutest baskets...they change often...but they're all so cute! Great for table décor, for a plant or on a shelf.

Mentioning this again because it's that time of year for picnicking or snacking outdoors...these craft boxes from Michaels make great food boxes, portioned out to enjoy and take on the go!

If you're a Texas and you haven't had a Storms burger, you need to! It's my favorite stop as we travel on road trips through small towns. Find one, and go.

Make stops at little shops in little towns and treasure hunt. Just found an amazing wheat plate with a handle. Can't wait to use it!

When's the last time you ate mango? Lately, we've diced it up in guacamole for dipping, and also in chicken salad. It's a great addition I'd forgotten about!

Paddywax has the cutest jar of incense sticks, and the lid serves as the incense holder when burning. Great gift idea...or just for yourself...while you're getting ready in the morning.

Do you know how to pick out a watermelon? I always forget or don't have the right information. A friend posted this chart...so helpful!

FDC – it's on commercial buildings – and my husband recently informed me that it means Fire Department Connection – I did not know that and now I do!

We ate at Freebirds recently (you can build your own nachos there – delish!) and did you know the name of this restaurant is from a Lynyrd Skynyrd album of the same name?

There's a devo book by Max Lucado for boys called You Can Count on God...a great stocking stuffer idea for later...or a summer gift for him.

Lazy Susan turntables are GREAT for pantry shelves, for those canned goods or bottles. Just twirl and find what you need!



HOME



## **Practical Parenting – It Worked – by Marcy Lytle**

Current issues – we do try to tackle – like music and the news and other things that are relevant to parents raising children. But this month, I'm just sharing some personal things that worked then...that just might work now...if you're in the throes of bringing up kids in this ever-changing world. From the practical to the spiritual and everything in between:

I remember growing aggravated at calling the family to dinner, and each one would trickle in, and I didn't like it. So I got a **dinner bell**, a small one with a loud ring. I told them I would ring it and that meant to come pronto! It worked...somehow...it worked. And I kept it atop the coffee pot to use every night we ate at the table together.

Our kids often wanted to sleep in our room at night, so we started a **Friday night family campout** – the one night a week when we all slept together – on the floor in the den. It was great fun, they could “count the sleeps” until it rolled around. And they began to realize that was the only night...and to stop asking.

The kids sometimes argued over who got to sit in the front with Mom when we traveled around on errands, and we'd all forget whose turn it was. For a short while, while this was an issue, we had a **seat sign with their name on it**, and they switched it each time we returned home, so they'd know where to sit next time.

**Devo time** was a struggle, as every time (almost without fail) someone was irritated, distracted, or the phone rang or SOMETHING to keep us from enjoying the Word together. Or...someone was sleepy. Never figured this one out, except I figured with that must resistance it must be worth continuing, so we did...**through the struggle**.

I recall having many family discussions about manners at the table, particularly the one about placing the **napkin in your lap**. It just didn't make sense to half of the family. We talked about it and soon the kids realized there are some things you do because Mom says. Period. I don't know if they still place their napkin on their laps, but at least I taught them!

We didn't have a lot of extra space for friends and playing in the house, so we turned half our **garage into a playroom** – with carpet, a sofa, a television, even a retro neon Coke sign, and a mini fridge. It was a great place for the kids to take their friends and make a mess and be loud...while the house stayed sane inside.

When our daughter was learning to drive, she knew to leave the phone alone...but once I was sitting in the front seat and her phone rang. She looked over to see who it was and nearly drove us all into a tree. Then the rule changed...**phone goes in the glove box when driving**. We learned the hard and the scary way...

My husband and our son spent months on restoring an old 53 Hudson car – the cutest car ever. However, it became expensive, laborious and we ended up not finishing it because of so many reasons. I always felt like that time was a failure. But I've come to realize the **time our son spent with his dad was priceless**...and now he's grown and can fix and configure so many things!

She hopped on the bed every night after a date, and that worked for us, even though we were so tired and ready to sleep. **Never turn away a teen when they want to talk**, no matter what time it is. Those memories are priceless.

**Diaper bags** were a pain to pack, and often made me grumpy when I had to do so and remember every detail. My husband wanted to help but if I had to tell him every little item, that defeated the helpfulness. So...I **made a list** and tucked it inside a pocket...one he could check without asking me. It worked!

As the kids grew and Band-aids only helped with flesh wounds, the heart wounds were out of my league. So I **prayed A LOT**. Never underestimate the power of laying your burdens at his feet, and walking in peace...even about issues with your kids.

Hope these little tips encourage you and help you, as you too encounter struggles and try and fail or actually find things that work and make your life so much better!

## **I Don't Do Teens - You Tell Them – by Marcy Lytle**

Nope, nothing was told me about what to do when I started my period, so when I did at a friend's house, I was embarrassed and not prepared. So my friends gave me the goods with no instructions, and the outcome was pain! I think parents “back then” just didn't talk about all the private things. I was told not to “French” kiss and if I did, I'd not be allowed at home. Little did my mom know that I'd been French kissing for a while...sigh. So with my kids, and with your kids, we need to be the ones that speak up and tell them...

*All about* periods and the emotions and the practical and the stuff they don't get taught at school. Tell her she might be moody, the cramping is normal, she doesn't have to let her brother know, and that it's normal to feel odd and all the things. Show her how to carry the goods discreetly in her purse, how to use those goods, which ones work best for her, etc. Mom needs to tell daughter in a manner that is not embarrassing, so that it's not something taboo or weird.

*All about* kissing and why it's best to wait until you're much older and ready for marriage. You could talk about Mom and Dad and how it would be weird to think about either kissing another person. And, when we get married we don't want all sorts of other people to have our kisses...only the one we love. And love is fluid as a teen; so kissing needs to be for MUCH later. Even tell them how kissing leads to other things that are reserved for marriage. TALK. Listen to their questions, and talk some more.

*All about* dating and what that means, and why they're not allowed, and how groups are important, no matter what “everyone else” is doing. Bring up the verbiage that they hear at school, because “dating” means something different now than it did when you were a kid. Invite your kids and their questions to the table, and keep the conversation going always...

*All about* divorce in your home or their home, and why it occurs sometimes, but it's not their fault or the kids' faults that are their friends. Teach them to be sensitive to their friends if they don't have both parents at home. If you're divorced, be open and honest and loving and kind. Teens need to feel secure and loved and received and validated...when families are crumbling around them.

*All about* body parts, and changes and scents and growth, of all kinds. Sweat glands are working, periods cause foul odors, cleanliness is important, and changes are taking place they won't understand. They will feel awkward and clumsy, and that's okay. It's all part of growing up, and you're proud of who they are and what they're becoming...changes and all. Tell them.

That's just five things. Notice your kids and what they're into, where they spend their time, how they feel and how they're influenced, and TALK. Don't keep quiet just because you don't know what to say. Mostly listen, and pray. Then share what you feel and believe, and be the parent, the one that tells them the truth...in this lying and crazy world.

## **An Adage A Day - My Fruit – by Carole Gilbert**

It's June. Fruit is at its best. It's all so yummy and colorful! I don't have a favorite fruit, I love them all! And I love to buy a different variety every week but there's one fruit I always have at least a couple of and that's apples.

I've always heard it said that "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree." This sounds logical enough but what does it really mean? This expression is an old German proverb and it's thought to have been around since about 1585. It was first mentioned in the United States by Ralph Waldo Emerson in about 1839. And it's actually not referring to fruit but to people, in particular to children having similarities to their parents.

I have two wonderful daughters-in-law and I love hearing them talk about our sons' habits as grown men. They are so similar to my husband in so many ways that I understand what "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree" means.

Years ago, my husband, Jim's mom, had to be put in a nursing home because of Alzheimer's. That is such a cruel disease to watch someone go through, and especially someone you love. Because of this, I spent a lot of extra time with Jim's father helping him do whatever he wanted or needed at his house. We cleaned out pantries, cabinets, and also my mother-in-law's clothes and possessions, getting them packed and ready for whatever he decided to do with them when the time came. We got to know each other so much more! We talked, we cried, and we laughed. I started to see my husband through my father-in-law. I saw my father-in-law's sweet gentle spirit and that helped me to notice more in my husband. It was amazing how much differently I saw him as I was getting to know his dad. It helped me to have a deeper love for Jim. I'm so glad my husband is a "fruit" from his father and that my sons are "fruits" from them. And I pray for this to continue on in our family.

Don't get me wrong, my husband and sons have their own characteristics, qualities, and quirks also but sometimes seeing someone through someone else's eyes opens ours to see them better. I encourage everyone to get to know your "fruit" and from where it comes. And be sure to rejoice and give thanks to God for those you can and pray to God for those you need to.

Matthew 7:16-18 says,

*You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.*

I did date other men, some of whom I knew nothing about the tree they came from or what kind of fruit they were, and some of whom I'm so glad I didn't stay with and especially marry. God knew the tree I needed. He guided me to that tree. And he guided an apple from that tree to me. So, as another old idiom goes, "How 'bout them apples?"

## **In Each Room – By the Bed – by Marcy Lytle**

This month's focus is what's by your bed...whether it's a nightstand, a table, a bench, a chair...what is it that sits there and why? And how can practical things needed in the bedroom be part of your décor, as well as functional? It's so fun to decorate rooms, but often by the bed is a mess! Here are some ideas in case you're reorganizing and making pretty that room where you or your guests sleep.

**A bench** – Benches are great pieces to add to the bedroom, at the foot of the bed or nearby, for holding items, sitting to put on your shoes, resting to read a few minutes, or for draping throws or blankets. And a trio of pretty pillows looks great as well. If there's a vast wall by your bed, a bench is a way to set something functional and useful, but make it art as well.

**A trio of three** – If you have a nightstand or table by your bed, consider a trio of three items next to your lamp. Maybe it's a fake succulent (or real, your choice), a candle and a book. If the book has a bright cover, even better! Or, how about a reel of twine? If the bed is centered by a window, always open the blinds to let the light shine in on your cute tables. Keep them free from clutter, by storing your night potions and lotions and glasses and remotes tucked away in a drawer. This cute array will make you want to keep your bed made, for sure!

**A chair** – Maybe you have a lone chair that was an heirloom, or one mismatched chair from an old dining set. Place it near a bed in a corner. A pretty throw or blanket can hang there, with a few photos above, maybe of your travels. Mixtiles is a great place to check out to have your photos framed for hanging. And who doesn't need an extra seat from time to time? Make it a cozy spot for reading or praying. This chair was my grandmother's and I love it!

**A turntable** – Every home should have some source of music, other than our phones! And a retro turntable is just the piece, along with a stand underneath for holding records. This is a great addition to a guest room, for sure! Provide some albums for easy listening for yourself while cleaning or on a rainy day at home. You can find old albums at vintage stores, often for a dollar! And guests can choose to listen when they visit, for fun. This turntable also has a CD player and a radio. It's so fun for kids and adults, alike!

What's by your bed? If it's a messy pile or a junky area, it's time to clean up and decorate with something useful and pretty. Maybe you have an old trunk, or a stack of old books. Incorporate them into your bedroom décor. Some place small tables on either side of their bed with chairs, so each one has a desk area! And lamps are a must. Turning off the ceiling light and turning on a cute lamp provides all the feels for bedroom ambience.

By the bed. Shop around your own home and garage and your parents' places and see what you can create, set up, or arrange to provide some color and light and fun as you lay your head down at night or rise in the morning light.

## **Tiny Living – The Impossible Challenge – by Leyanne Enterline**

Living tiny in general is squished with two adults and two almost grown boys!

Living tiny and trying to pack up for a trip is even more of a challenge, and often seems impossible.

Before we had a storage unit placed on site, we stored our suitcases on the top bunk bed. Pulling that luggage down and trying to find a space to set each piece while packing was hard. And performing this task while not getting in the way of anyone else has become impossible! Someone always runs into one of them, can't get by them, or is frustrated to not be able to find a seat because a suitcase is occupying it! Can you picture it? We try to pack last-minute so we don't have to pull the luggage out too early...but still the frustration remains the same.

After my husband Brian returns back from a trip, we try to have him unload immediately because there is just no room! Sometimes his luggage will sit in the "living area" for days just because of the busyness of life, and we just can't get around in our tiny space. We've tripped, we've kicked, and we've shoved his luggage, hoping each piece will magically disappear. Of course, it does not.

When we're all four packing, it's just mad chaos. Depending on the length of the trip there can be several suitcases, backpacks, and extra bags all over the trailer. This makes it impossible to do anything else like eat or live, so the packing must get done quickly in order to move around in such a tiny space!

All in all, we do love going on trips but it is a headache to pack up and unload! Not to mention all the laundry that goes over to my parents' house when we return, which is another beast all its own to tackle!

Living (and traveling) tiny has its challenges for sure and we try to adapt, but at times we want to scream at the very little room we have in laying out clothes, opening our luggage, stuffing backpacks and all the things.

However...we always remember that love grows best in tiny spaces.

## **A Night to Remember – Taste and See – by Marcy Lytle**

Kids know all about tastes, don't they? They either love what they taste or they hate it. There's no in between. And tasting is something they know about doing with their mouth only. But what if this month, the family could come together and taste something else, as they taste something sweet with their mouth and also something else sweet without biting or swallowing at all...

Preparation: Have a few tasty candies for the kids to sample as you go through this lesson. There are nine points, so nine flavors might be good: Chocolate, graham crackers, strawberries...just whatever you can provide from what you have in the house – but make them all tastes the kids love – just a pinch of each one. Let them take a small bite after each point below, as you go through the lesson.

What does it mean to taste something? (Let kids answer, i.e., eat it, swallow it, lick it). But taste is more than just eating, it's experiencing a flavor we either like OR dislike, isn't it? Some things taste awful (let kids tell what food is disgusting) and some things are the best (let kids share their faves.)

If we experience food we love, we want it again and again. It tastes good to us.

It's the same with God's goodness in our life, it's like tasting the sweetest dessert we can't get enough of, and we always want more. Let's read some verses and see what these people are tasting in the character of God. For example, if Mom tucks us in at night and sings or reads to us, we taste her love. If a friend gives us a gift for our birthday, we taste the sweetness of their friendship. Get it?

Psalm 35 says, *Taste and see that the Lord is good.* But how can we taste the goodness of God unless it's in a candy bar or ice cream?

*The poor man called and the Lord heard him* – what did he taste? If someone really listens to us, we taste a good friend. (Take a bite of something sweet...and after each point below).

*I sought the Lord and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears* – what did this guy taste? If someone settles our fears, we taste peace.

*Lions might grow weak and hungry, but those who seek God lack no good thing.* – What do lions like to taste? God provides for animals so they taste his goodness.

*The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous* – Who are the righteous? We are, when we love and obey Jesus. When his eyes are on us, we taste his protection. Just like when we keep our eyes on puppies, or babies.

*He delivers them from all their troubles* – How does it feel to be out of trouble, when you do something wrong? What makes you know you're okay? Hugs, kisses, forgiveness. We taste God's deliverance when he sends our troubles away.

*The Lord is close to the brokenhearted* – Has your heart ever been broken? How did it feel? When God is with us when we are sad, we taste his nearness.

*The foes of the righteous will be condemned.* Did you know the Lord fights our enemies, like fear, hatred, loneliness, etc? What other enemies do we have? When he defeats our enemies, we taste his might.

*The Lord will rescue his servants* – Think about being on a boat in need of a rescue. How would you feel when a big ship brings you on board as your little ship is sinking? When God rescues us, we taste his care.

Do you see now how we can taste and see that the Lord is good? How were all your bites you ate? Some might have been your faves and others not, or maybe you liked all of them. Everything about God is good, because he is good...that's the kind of God we serve.



## **Under Pressure – Four Things – by Debbie Haynes**

Do you ever feel like in this crazy sour world that a bit more sweetness would do us all a lot of good? What about peace and tranquility instead of all the turmoil? It would be great to have someone covering us during life's battles and standing high above all the threats and fears that come against and make us want to run.

There are four cool descriptions of Jesus the One who has the words of eternal life and is the Provider of all we need:

**Rose of Sharon** from Song of Solomon 2:1 – The original translation isn't really a rose, but rather similar to what we know to be a hibiscus flower. It's valued in different parts of the world and it's the source from where we get our spice, saffron. And one prominent fact about the Rose of Sharon is that every part of the plant is edible...leaves, blossoms and even its bark. It also contains high levels of vitamin-C and Anthocyanins, which are antioxidants, good for us all. So when the scripture says, "I am the rose of Sharon" it coincides with when he says he's the way, the truth and the life...the living water...the bread of life. The region of Sharon was a beautiful, coastal plain with the Mediterranean Sea on the left and Israel on the right. This plain was famous for its ability to grow anything, and this flower grew in profusion there – a thing of beauty to behold. We find sheer beauty and sweetness when we find Jesus...personally ours.

**Lily of the Valleys** is stated next, referencing how we the church are fashioned and modeled after Him, planted and placed in a world full of thorns. And even though we live currently in this thorn-ridden world, we can have Christ-like purity...in the valleys. Notice the plural use of the word. He is our peace and salvation, a sweet smelling sacrifice for us.

**Banner** is a term mentioned where it says, "he brought me to his banqueting house, and his banner over me was love." We know that a banner is a long piece of fabric, similar to a flag, and used for declaration, establishing a rallying point or it just signifies unity of purpose. We read that he takes us to his banqueting house – the place of meeting – and there he raises his banner over us. His banner of his presence covers us, provides for us, stakes his claim over us and gives us identity in his name. In Isaiah 10 we read that the "root of Jesse will stand as a banner for his people and nations rally to Him." One of the names of God is Jehovah Nissi – the Lord is my banner of victory.

**Standard** is the fourth thing Jesus is to us...a figure or object that is raised high on a pole bearing a sign or symbol. Standard is also a basis for comparison, like a ruler. Isaiah 59 says when the enemy comes in like a flood, the spirit of the Lord lifts up a standard against him and puts him to flight. When we are allegiant to Christ, our standards are his standards, and we fly the colors of boldness and faith. During battles, there were those that went before the armies with their standard raised high. And when they won, they planted their flag on the land that was conquered.

It's always so helpful to have visuals when thinking of our Savior, and he's given us plenty of them. Beautiful and personal, high and lifted up, and the victor *always*...no matter the current state of what's around us on any given day. He has already won.



YOU

## **Inner Strength – No Devices Needed – by Michelle Wyatt**

From the game Would You Rather to a group hug, it was no ordinary trip to McDonalds.

My boys had device time prior to coming in and wanted to continue to play games when we got to McDonalds. Yes, even some McDonalds have devices now at the tables that kids can play on for free. I told them that I wanted to focus on family conversation time and that I had something fun in mind. I'm glad I didn't say, "Let's play Would You Rather," because the last time I mentioned that, Matthew said, "No. I don't like that game." Instead, I just asked some fun questions/scenarios and gave each of my boys a turn.

Some examples include: Would you rather be a monkey or a fly, be a giant or tiny, and float on clouds or walk on water? We went around and gave our answer including why. It was the why's that led to interesting conversation.

We all chose to talk about being a fly first. We didn't even talk about being a monkey.

"Flies can go everywhere," Matthew and I said.

Brendan added, "Flies eat everything." (I'm not sure if that was a positive or negative argument).

We ended that one by saying how cool it would be to fly.

The question would you rather float on clouds or walk on water was the highlight of Would You Rather. Matthew immediately chimed in with, "I'd rather walk on water because that's what Jesus did." That comment surprised me in the best way! It left Brendan and me speechless. We all smiled.

As I felt the conversation coming to a close, Brendan stepped up as a great role model for encouraging non-device play and took off his shoes heading towards the play scape area. It turned into hide-and-seek. We had the whole place to ourselves, too!

The first round Matthew asked that I give them clues. The second round was without clues. I may not have given obvious clues, but it was still tempting to silently give gestures to help them out. Matthew wanted help covering his eyes. That turned into cuddle time. He also hid under his coat, putting it by me, another form of cuddle time. Brendan told me that he knew where Matthew was right away, but he wanted to take a while to find him. You see, Matthew gets upset if he's found too quickly and Brendan recognized that. I told Brendan I figured as much and that he was an awesome big brother for doing that and I was very proud of him! Of course, I gave him a big hug after that. Matthew joins in for a hug and before you know it, group hug time here we come!

*Group hugs usually make us laugh.*

*Laughter is the best! I love how my boys laugh!*

I hope this uplifting story will inspire some creative ways to have quality time in your family, too.

If I can do it, so can you!

## Healthy Habits – Kindness and Purpose – by Marcy Lytle

If we aren't kind and don't receive kindness on a daily basis, our hearts grow frail and weak from loneliness and despair. And without purpose in life, it's hard to get up and get moving and to have a reason to live. Without kindness and purpose, we cannot thrive physically or spiritually, and we might find ourselves shuffling along on the sidewalk instead of deciding to skip. So how can we add a little more kindness and purpose to our lives to increase our health meter in all aspects of living?

*Be kind to the unkind.* Next time a car cuts you off; smile and release that anger to Him, and say a prayer for that hurried driver. Offer kindness instead of a curse word.

*Be kind to the waiter.* Maybe she forgot that napkin or refill you asked for, or perhaps he messed up your order. Choose to smile and be kind, with a generous tip, if you please. Sometimes, they have bad days just like we do.

*Be kind to your spouse.* Sometimes, he gets the brunt of our frustration every single day. So being kind to him by little gestures we know he loves goes a long way.

*Be kind to your plants.* Yes, go outside and snip the dead blooms, fertilize the roses, and water the dry herbs. Taking time to care for plants is a time to breathe and give thanks.

*Receive kindness from Him.* His mercies are new every morning, his compassion is there, too. Take it. He carries us when we're tired, and his ears are always there, his hand is never short. Know that the Lord is good and receive kindness from his hand in a harsh, cruel world.

*Find purpose* in the mundane chores and cooking and caring that we do 24/7. Do all of these things as unto Him, because He sees and rewards.

*Find purpose* in showing up to support those kids, in replying to a friend with an encouraging text, in being there for your family when they're tired and need a boost.

*Find purpose* even in rest, as you sit down and put up your feet and read a book, or lay your head back to be renewed with a nap, or take a vacation to play and to laugh.

*Find purpose in pain*, the hardest of all. But he says all things work together, so trust that they do, while you wait for the hurt to subside. Finding purpose in pain eases the sting, sometimes.

*Find purpose* in your path, the one *you* walk, whether it's through loss at the moment, or great excitement at a new addition to the family, or even if your path is not very well lit today and you can't see where to go. There's a purpose in moving one step at a time, forward, in faith.

Kindness and purpose. Remember these two words this month of June, as the heat of summer rises, perhaps the blooms in your yard start to fade, or life just seems heavy. Be kind and receive the deluge of blessing from His hands, and know that there's purpose for you. All you really have to do is cast your care on Him, follow his ways, and taste and see that He is good. As long as we live and breathe, kindness and purpose will do our bodies, minds and hearts a world of good.

## **A Hopeful Heart - What Makes a Friend? – by Christina Oberon**

When I was a young girl, I looked up to my older sisters. Being stuck in the middle, with three older and three younger sisters, I couldn't quite find my place in sisterhood, but I craved the bond. My desire for female friendship started at that time. Since then, the women I now call friends and whom I have in my life have had a profound impact on me and I wouldn't be who I am today without their influence and shared experiences. It has been these friends who have heard all of my deepest fears, wiped tears from my eyes, held my hair after a night of drinking, seen me at my worst, and cheered me on during my best. They have remained a constant during various life stages and transitions, providing me with a sense of belonging.

As the years go on, I ponder the question, "What makes a friend?"

Friendship comes from experiencing and nurturing connections over time, as each friendship is unique and evolves organically. But meaningful friendship is a deep, significant, and fulfilling connection. It goes beyond surface-level interactions and involves a strong emotional bond, shared values, and a sense of purpose. Meaningful friendships bring joy, support, and personal growth to the lives of those involved. I am able to recognize these friendships in my own life and feel immense gratitude for them.

The meaningful friendships I am blessed to have involve emotional support and a safe space to express ourselves. They thrive on authenticity; allowing us to openly and honestly be our true selves. Trust and honesty are huge factors in my meaningful friendships. Reliability and consistency in actions and words build trust and strengthen the bond. While I love to learn and grow from differences, when it comes to deep connections in my friendships, those have been developed through shared similar values, beliefs, and life goals. This alignment has created a sense of understanding and common ground. My friends and I support each other's personal growth and development by offering encouragement, motivation, and constructive feedback; inspiring each other to be our best self and pursue aspirations. Other attributes that I've realized are so important to me in a friend is acceptance (not enabling); quality time and shared experiences; mutual respect of boundaries and autonomy; communication and active listening to needs, concerns, and expectations; longevity and commitment to withstand the test of time through investing in the relationship; and reciprocity.

Some friends are for a moment, some for a season, and others, for a lifetime. But by cultivating these qualities, we can create and maintain meaningful friendships that enrich our life.

So I pose a new question we can all ponder.  
"What makes ME a friend?"

## Life Right Now - The Next Chapter - By Jennifer Stephens

If life is like a book, with each new stage marking the end of one chapter and the beginning of the next, then I want my story to be a real page turner. Maybe not a bestseller, but definitely the type of book that would make me stay up all night reading. The kind of book I'd sleepily convince myself to power through "just one more chapter" until eventually it's three-something in the morning and that one chapter has turned into the very last page. When it's both so late and so early I don't know if I should try to sleep or just get myself up out of bed, because by this time of night (Day?) my alarm will be blaring in just two short hours!

I don't want the end of my current chapter to be the spot where the bookmark gets stuffed between pages and the book tossed aside, ultimately abandoned and replaced with the next one silently waiting to be chosen from the TBR stack. This chapter needs to end in a way that the reader is unable to resist turning the page...with a possibility or an opportunity (Will you? Can you?). An obstacle or decision (Oh, no, now what?) Perhaps the start of a new plan (What if?) Maybe a bit of reflection (I didn't realize...)

As I wrap up the teaching chapter and dive into the retirement chapter of my life, everybody keeps asking the same question. "But what will you dooooo...?"

I get it. Sort of. In the world of teaching, I'm old, but to the rest of the world I'm still youngish. And people worry I'll get bored. So, what WILL I do? How will one chapter end as the next one begins?

We all know a good chapter can't end without purpose. For me, my teaching chapter ends with a touch of reflection. Thoughts of a thirty-year career filled with good memories (like when former students unexpectedly stopped by for a hug) and the not-so-good (the C-O-V-I-D years...). The majority of my life has been spent inside a classroom. Learning. Teaching. Loving.

And now it's over.

Of course, the end of this chapter also means a change in finances, which can be scary (Oh, no, now what?) But retirement is filled with possibilities and opportunities for something new! Time to connect and re-connect with friends (If we've been talking about meeting for lunch, let's finally make it happen!). Time to visit family. And time to promote my children's books and hopefully get them into more bookstores! Not to mention more time to write and read (My to-be-read pile is nearly two feet tall and still growing!).

I think the best way to enter this next phase of life, without fear of boredom or financial strain, is to have a plan. Thankfully I don't have to document and submit this plan, both electronically and hard copy, to ANYONE! This plan doesn't even need to be written down. I'm my own boss now. But it's important to at least have a vision moving forward.

First, I plan to linger. Linger over a cup of coffee on the patio. Linger through the aisles of stuff and racks of clothes at the thrift shop. With no one dictating my agenda, I will dilly and I will dally all the livelong day. But I won't just fritter time away. I plan to venture out on long walks each morning (Anyone want to join me?). Being physically active is a luxury my work life didn't allow. This new chapter will grant me the ability to use my spiritual gifts to serve others - volunteering at church for the things I was too busy to do before (After a day of teaching, collapsing on the

couch was the only activity on my agenda.). I've got a plan to take on new hobbies too – like gardening! I've dabbled with tomatoes, but I want to dig my hands into growing our own food (What should I try first?). Of course, I'll organize and reorganize all the things. And I already have a growing list of cabinets and shelves needing to be painted. I'm pretty sure there's going to be one (or two) rescue dogs joining the family soon. Now I can prepare delicious meals (no more takeout) and bake lots of tasty treats! Basically, I can finally be the stay-at-home dog mom I was always meant to be.

My retirement plan looks slightly like a story from the old "Choose Your Own Adventure" series I remember reading in grade school. There's definitely no room for boredom. And it's certain to be filled with all the thrills and antics of the latest John Grisham novel (Minus the crime, of course!). As long as I embrace God's plan for this phase of my life, this new chapter is sure to be *un-put-downable*.

We each have our own story, written just for us. A tale unlike any other. Our book of life may resemble a pristine hardcover mystery, a beat-up paperback romance with creases and folded down corners, or something in between. Heck, our tome could even be found stored inside the front-lit screen of a Kindle. No matter how - or where - our individual stories unfold, waltzing through life's many chapters is easy to do when we remember God is the author.





MARRIAGE

## **Date Night Fun – Ask Them – by Marcy Lytle**

I ran into one of my oldest and dearest friends today at a store, and she was my daughter's kindergarten teacher. We talked and talked, and when we parted she texted to ask if we'd like to come to their home sometime soon...to which I replied, "That would be amazing!" I think there are lots of reasons we don't ask other couples to join us on date night. Either we think we have to entertain them at our homes, or we don't know if where we ask them to go will be fun, or we're just too tired to make conversation...at all.

But for the month of June, consider asking them...

*Ask them over* – but don't pressure yourself to make dinner (unless you like to do that). It could just be dessert outside on the patio, just for a couple hours. If conversation topics are hard, google couple conversation starters and use some of those ideas to get the talking going. We often don't invite because we don't have the energy. So purchase one of those cheesecakes that are at the store, different flavors, make some coffee...and ask them.

*Ask them out to dinner* – Maybe you know that they love to eat out as much as you do, so find a patio by the water and ask them if you can make reservations for four. Be up front and honest and say it will be separate checks, if that's okay. That way they know what to expect and can decline or say yes. Make it a fancy affair if you want and pick a nice place...or somewhere casual...your choice.

*Ask them to meet you at the park* – This is one of our faves. We meet in the evening atop a little hill, bring the lawn chairs, and each bring our own picnic dinner. OR...you could decide ahead of time if you want to divvy up the food. And you could invite a third couple if you wish! Place your chairs in a circle, catch up on kids and life; even offer to pray together as you leave. And be sure to stay long enough to see the stars appear in the sky.

*Ask them to enjoy a cup of coffee* – This might be great for a Saturday morning meetup. Think about going to a coffee shop that you've never been before. Bring a puzzle or a game, and go early, so you have the rest of the day to do your chores and errands and all the things. Another couple might just love this idea, and this activity might become a regular thing!

*Ask them and treat them* – If you know a couple that's been going through a hard time, or maybe it's a duo that you appreciate for all they do, or perhaps they just come to your mind...treat them to a night out. Let it be part of your giving for the month. Tell them it's your treat and ask them to meet...then dole out the blessings in words of affirmation over them while you dine. Pick your favorite spot, one you can afford...and go.

Which one will you choose this month and who will you ask?

## **In This Together – Snowballs in June – by Bekah Holland**

Listen. In case I haven't made it clear, I have no idea what I'm doing. Not as a parent, or a friend, a human and especially as a wife. Like, not. a. thing. In fact, just the other day, I was reading a study done over the last 50 years by two renowned therapists, about their ability to judge the likelihood of a marriage being a success or failure within 7 minutes of their session. Intrigued, obviously, I read on, reading that in their study they could predict with 93.2% accuracy, whether or not a marriage would succeed or fail by a single action. Want to know what that is? If not, avert your eyes now, because I'm going to tell you anyway.

The ability to recognize, and verbalize, things you notice in your spouse.

Now, just to make sure there isn't any confusion, this isn't meaning the easy and/or fun stuff. Calling them out for things like their inability to pick up their dirty socks from beside the laundry hamper, or yelling at the TV during football games loudly enough to wake the dead, or losing everything from their keys to their ability to remember what they (I) walked into any given room for, however are not exactly the kinds of things that fall into the helpful category. And these most definitely aren't the things that create a "successful" partnership. But being aware of and grateful for the things they do? The positive things? That, my friends, is a step in the right direction.

For example, if I am intentional about noticing the things my husband does, I'll see when he fluffs the throw pillows on the couch the way I like them, or when he can see that my day is the kind that might end with me hiding under my desk and declares it "fend for yourself dinner" day to all the people who are waiting expectantly to complain about whatever I was planning to fix. Or I'll see when he saves the last bit of my favorite treats so I can enjoy it, or puts on Jeopardy for me, even though he'd probably rather jam hot poker in his ears. Now, I can notice those things all day long, but unless I SAY them out loud, he doesn't have any idea that his attempts to do something for me matters.

And in the same vein, my husband can think I'm pretty or notice that my hair is in a less messy pile than normal on my head and that I've put on clothes that aren't considered pajamas, or be thankful for a meal I've worked on or any of the little things I do for our family all he wants. But if he doesn't share that with me, I'll sometimes find myself feeling unappreciated or unvalued. And let me tell you, that if you let it, that feeling can quickly spiral into hurt, or resentment, which can lead into an even darker place. However, when he does express his gratitude, it brings with it the possibility of something I'm not completely sure how to verbalize.

Feeling seen and appreciated is, in my experience, life giving.

No, I'm not sitting around wishing someone would notice that I do the dishes and the laundry, the meal planning, grocery lists, cooking, managing all of the appointments and activities and the forcing of showers upon a to-remain-nameless tween boy in our house. Okay, if I'm honest, I probably do wish someone (fine, everyone) would notice all of those and the other million things that we seem to get done without nearly enough hours in each day. Yeah, I really, really do wish that. But, I don't need a thank you for every single thing I do. I do, however, need a "that a girl" every now and then, and to feel like my labor of love is noticed. Selfish and a tad narcissistic? Probably. Still true, though.

Through all of the ups and downs and all the other things in the middle, in and out of days and hours and years, my husband and I slowly learned this. We absolutely do not always remember

to do it. We don't always notice or really appreciate each other and what we each bring to this messy life of ours. Probably not anywhere close to as often as we should. But that's why we call it intentional. I try to mention it as soon as I do notice something he's done, and then I make sure I double down on it again later, when we've collapsed on the couch watching whatever Netflix show we don't have to actually watch because we've seen it so many times. And earlier in our marriage, he used to leave himself sticky notes for himself as reminders to tell me I'm beautiful and messy and that I'm all his (you know, since that was before the days of cell phones, electronic calendars, Alexa and Siri, when the dinosaurs roamed the earth). I still love that he did that! Because it showed me that because it mattered to me, it mattered to him, even if it required bright neon reminders.

This is what we all try to do, right? Make sure that despite all of the noise around us, that our partners, kids, parents, friends know that we see them and that our days are better because they exist in them.

If you are wondering if you should speak up about the good stuff more often, then trust me, you need to. It doesn't have to be anything spectacular. Just a "thanks for (even if internally you're screaming FINALLY) taking those boxes out" or a little "you look darn sexy in your sweatpants and dress shirt you're wearing for zoom meetings," or even a "come snuggle on the couch and we'll watch Jeopardy and I won't complain once."

The little things add up. They snowball just like the bad stuff.

And I don't know about you, but I can use a snowball of appreciation every now and then. Because it helps me remember my why. Why I clean and cook and referee and make smelly teenagers shower even though they'd rather smell like a goat. My why is them. Each of them with their own personalities and direction and idiosyncrasies and ability to push me right to the brink of insanity, are my reason for working so hard and loving so big and more than likely a big part of my need for therapy. But they're mine and I would walk through fire and back again for just a smile and a hug. So say the stuff. Share your gratitude. And make it a cereal for dinner night without an ounce of guilt, because, we really are all in this together.

*"A happy marriage is the union of two good forgivers."  
Ruth Bell Graham*

## **For Better or Worse - Accidental Softball Coaches – by Kaelin Scott**

My daughter started playing softball this year, and she had so much fun learning the game and making new friends. Being part of a team has been an awesome experience for her. For me and my husband, it was more of a commitment than we had originally planned.

Her coach decided to step down halfway through the season, so we stepped up to the plate (pun intended) so the girls could still play the rest of the games. Neither of us had coached before, so it was challenging. But it was also so much fun! I loved being out there on the field, cheering for my daughter and her teammates, encouraging them and helping them grow and learn. Being there for the girls was the best part, and it was also a lot of fun doing it alongside my hubby.

*I'm so glad we were able to tackle it together.*

In my marriage, I need to be like that. Like I am with the girls when I'm coaching them. I need to step up to the plate for my husband in anything he needs. I need to be encouraging and supportive. I need to help him grow and become the best version of himself. And I need to make sure I cooperate with him, because we're on the same team.

It might sound silly, but coaching a team of eight-year-old girls showed me a lot about marriage. Being married to someone means being his biggest fan. Cheering him on, even when he has a bad day. Letting him know when he's doing a great job. Standing out on the field with him and tackling each day together. Sticking by him and making him feel loved.

I don't know if we'll coach again next year. We never really planned on it in the first place, but we really did enjoy it. Either way, I'll never forget the memories we made alongside our daughter and her team. And I'm so grateful for sharing it with my husband. Sometimes we grow closer to each other through those challenges we face together.

## **After 40 Years – The List – by Marcy Lytle**

Sometimes, one of us will remember to do something special and small for the other one, and it brings about something rewarding and big between us – gratefulness for each other. We're not wonderful at it, but when we surprise the other one with a gift or an experience or a note or "something," it becomes one of those things that warms the heart and the affection flows...

I thought it would be fun to share some of what we've done, add a few more ideas, and give to us all in a list of things to work from...so that we're sure to be aware and care and share with the one we live with, sleep with and have fun with.

After all, everyone likes a little treat, don't they?

1. Light a candle and place it by the soap on the tub or by his sink, right before he (be sure to blow it out though!)
2. Pull up the trash can or take the trash out...a chore that's normally the other one does.
3. Grab that pile of towels and fold them and put them away...while the other one is not looking.
4. Purchase his favorite soda or drink that isn't normally in the house, and place it in the fridge to chill.
5. Call the one who normally cooks early in the morning and say you're bringing home dinner, so they don't have to cook.
6. Clean out the car and surprise them!
7. Let the other one sleep in on a weekend and not be bothered...by anyone...even you.
8. If you hear your spouse clearing his throat or coughing, make tea with honey and lemon and serve.
9. If your spouse is upset about someone/something, try saying nothing and just offering to hold without assessment or instruction.
10. Empty the dishwasher and surprise her/him. And when you see it emptied, don't criticize if they didn't put the dishes in the right place (yes, I've done that...)
11. Mark "date night" on the calendar and plan it...for the other one.
12. Buy a new book you think she'd like and leave it on her desk, with a cute bookmark.
13. Surprise him with movie tickets to the movie you don't want to see, but he does...or vice-versa...and go and enjoy it.
14. Purchase a new coffee mug and leave it by the coffee pot.
15. Grab her feet and put them on your lap and rub them during the movie you're watching together.
16. If you're tired, offer the treat of taking a quick nap so you'll be nice and not mean. (we both are mean when tired!)
17. Save dollars and calories and share a plate at that restaurant, and let that person pick the plate...and you eat it...without complaint.
18. Ask him/her out for ice cream with toppings...FOR DINNER. That way, no guilt is involved.
19. Set up a couple chairs in the backyard and make Italian sodas and grab some shortbread cookies, and invite the other one to gaze...

20. Plan a trip. The ultimate treat.

This list wasn't hard to make, but sometimes we get so busy that weeks and even months can go by, and we really haven't noticed or blessed that one we often take for granted. Lists always help me stay on track. Maybe you'll like to have this list on hand, as well.



ENCOURAGEMENT



## **Moving Forward – Well Done – by Pam Charro**

A precious friend passed away suddenly a couple of weeks ago. It's hard to describe the impact this young man had on me during the short time I knew him, but I would like to try.

Michal never had the opportunity to experience so many things that most of us get to do. He never married or had children, and he never had a career that would appear impressive to most. He was not what most would consider to be drop dead gorgeous or supremely fit (at least, not on the outside). Few seemed to really know and understand him, as he struggled socially. He felt emotions deeply and often struggled with depression. He was extremely gifted intellectually and communicated well through the written word, but was never well known for his writing, which was something he really wanted to do.

So why did this person so profoundly affect me? Well, not because he was intelligent, or deep, or knew the Bible well, or was kind and joyful and goofy and was always smiling, even though he was all of these things. Not because he was creative and a genius of sorts, although I believe he was. Michal mostly impressed me because his life was a success.

Why would I say that about him? That's a very valid question, and I will try to answer it, although it's a struggle and I'm crying again even trying respond to it. My friend obviously wasn't a success in the way that most would define it. I've known many people who were gifted and deep, and who others considered to be kind, and who actually had successful careers and families, but I wouldn't necessarily say they had successful lives.

As a mother, I've so wanted my sons to be my former view of successful, which included happy. I want them to take care of themselves, to thrive in their careers, and to be happily married and give me grandchildren. But what if they had all of those things, but never accomplished the true purpose for which they were created? I'm seriously rethinking what I want most for my children now, because I am completely convinced that my friend did what God put him here to do: He loved Jesus and people with all of his heart. And they knew it.

I can't convey how powerful Michal's celebration of life was, except to say that it confirmed everything I'd already sensed about him. Everything I've already mentioned was validated by the hundreds of people who attended, and those who spoke of him all said the same. He left such a strong imprint of love because he was intimately acquainted with the Source of love. It made him who he was, and it flowed out of everything he said and did.

I cry because he left us too soon and we need more like him here. I'm sad because I wouldn't say he was happy here, even though he carried a lot of joy. So many of his dreams never came to pass, and I can't help feeling that his passing was tragic. But what matters most is that he ran the race to the finish line and brought Jesus a little closer to everyone who knew him. May I, my children, and everyone reading this, at the end of our short time here, also hear the words that I know he is hearing from Jesus right now: "Well done, my beautiful, beloved child." I can't think of anything more successful than that.

# Garden Essentials—June 2023

---

Jasper, my cat, and I have a morning routine. We're both early risers, waking up around the same time (if I'm lucky). The first thing I do is turn on the electric pot to boil water for my Taster's Choice instant coffee. People turn their nose up at instant, but this is the best coffee, in my opinion, and I have my parents to thank for turning me on to it. While the water heats, I feed Jasper a tasty breakfast of dry mixed with wet food, sometimes some chicken breast on the side. (Yes, he's a bit spoiled!) If it's still dark, and I'm able to keep from getting distracted by deviously enticing social media, I start with some spirit food—the Chronological Bible study reading for the week, a Psalm, or maybe something from a book. Now, later, or both, spirit-food is essential.

But as dawn lights the earth, I feel the pull of the garden. I head out the door, coffee in hand, with Jasper following behind me. Our routine is to walk around the garden, starting in back, then down the left side yard, around the front, and then the right side. I continue my spiritual nourishment by listening to scripture and/or the daily devotional on the excellent app Lectio 365. I usually take clippers with me because there's always something that needs clipping. Walking, listening, kneeling, praying, I engage in what I call my "garden essentials": checking for invaders eating the plants, deadheading flowers, pulling unwelcome weeds, taking note of empty spots that need to be filled or things that might need to be moved. I find renegade vines that need to be directed and secured. I check the sheds for signs of rodents. If squirrels are digging in my pots (especially the succulents), I spray a pepper solution and sometimes place rocks or decorative balls in those tempting areas. These things are essential for my plants to thrive and for my garden to look the way I want it to. At the same time, sometimes, in spite of my best efforts, plants just die or nature works against me. That's where grace, trust, and acceptance step in.

By this time I'm ready for a second (or third) cup of coffee and Jasper is ready for his second (or third) breakfast (he has Hobbit habits!) We go back outside to refill the bird feeders, another essential in caring for the multitudinous birds that come to eat and drink in God's garden. The feeders accessible to squirrels need hot birdseed that squirrels hate. In the two feeders hanging near the kitchen window I use "no-waste" food to eliminate messy shells. All feeders are carefully placed and protected with baffles—essential to minimize rodent invaders.

Taking care of these "garden essentials" stirs up thoughts of what is essential for me to thrive and become whole in Christ: spending time with Him in Presence and prayer, feeding on His Word, examining my inner thoughts and outward behavior, re-structuring my haphazard priorities, reining in my wayward habits. Hmm...a lot like the essentials for my garden. And when I fail, others disappoint, or life just throws a hard ball...grace, trust, and acceptance. And prayer, always prayer.

Now I admire the blossoms on the Rose of Sharon and exult that, so far, the clematis is alive and about to flower. The old fountain converted into a succulent tower is looking beautiful (and squirrels aren't bothering it!). The birds are descending to feed as I sit still to watch and enjoy the fruit of the essentials.

## **Rooted in Love - Doing Dishes for Jesus – by Kaelin Scott**

It was nine o'clock on a Monday night and I was standing in the kitchen, staring at a sink full of dirty dishes. I'd been on the go since six that morning and all I wanted to do was sit down and read a book. I was so tempted to leave the dishes until the morning, but I knew that I wouldn't have time. I knew that if I didn't get them done right away, the mess would just grow even bigger.

So I rolled up my sleeves, put in my earbuds, cranked up some worship songs and got to work. I tried to focus more on the music than what I was doing, and it worked like a charm. Before I knew it, I was dancing around the dishwasher having a good old time. I got so into it that I even wiped down the appliances and swept the floors, too. I forgot about being tired and did the job with a cheerful attitude.

Now before I continue, let me just confess something. I don't always do dishes with a happy heart. A lot of the time, I have a pretty sour attitude about it. But that evening, I chose to find joy in my task, and it ended up being fun. Okay...maybe not fun, but somewhat enjoyable at least.

Just like I teach my children, I learned a lesson that night. Life is full of things we don't want to do, but a good attitude goes a long way. It makes life easier on you and everyone around us. Grumbling and complaining don't do anything but make the job even more laborious.

So let's challenge ourselves this month to lighten our own loads by choosing joy as we face our most mundane tasks. Let's be grateful for the food that was on those dirty dishes, the little hands that make finger smudges on every window, the pairs of feet that track dirt all over the floors. Let's look at each responsibility as evidence of God's love for us, because he has entrusted us with such beautiful blessings.

A sink full of dirty dishes can be a chore, or it can be a chance to worship. Sometimes we just have to look at things a different way.

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord.” Colossians 3:23

## Encouragement – Rhythms – by Marcy Lytle

“a strong, regular, repeated pattern of movement or sound.”

This word came to my mind this morning.

I was giving thanks for the writers of this magazine and how we seem to be in a sort of rhythm now...a full array of a bundle of thyme from women in every walk of life. Motherhood, being a single mom, gray hair, growing gardens, teaching others, writing books, enjoying fashion and makeup, sharing things learned and seen, hard things and joyful things – which are sometimes the same. And everything is bordered by faith and love. It's a nice rhythm, one I'm thankful to be a part of.

I was listening to the rhythm of the dishwasher as it hums and rinses and washes and then does it again, and again, until the cycle ends. It has a rhythm all its own as the dirty becomes clean again, as the water removes every piece of grime and food...so the utensils can be placed in their drawers and cabinets, to be served on and eaten on, by guests and family. A nice rhythm, isn't it?

I'm watching the rain as it comes down in a rhythm all its own, steady and light, peppering the lawn and coloring the street with a glossy shine. The cars are driving by in a steady rhythm too, on their way to work here or there or everywhere, as the little beads of rain in their rhythm fall onto windshields and race to their destination, over and over again until the rain stops...and the sun shines...or a rainbow appears...until next time the rain falls.

I'm in a rhythm as I type this story, a rhythm I experience every single morning at my laptop next to the window where the blinds are open, and the new day has begun. Letters I've memorized as my fingers move in a pattern across the keyboard stringing together thoughts and words and stories and hope, to share with my friends who are so nice to stop by and read the rhythm extended from my hands.

I listened last night in the theater to musical rhythms and scores in the film we were watching called *Chevalier* and those rhythms transported me away from the rhythm of home life into a historical tale of prejudice and music. The main character was full of rhythm that played out on the violin, and that rhythm caused listeners to pause and wonder and sit in awe at the magic that exuded from the skilled one who played his instrument so well.

Rhythms, as the definition states, are strong and regular, and they usher in a sort of peace to a less than rhythmic day of surprises and interruptions and to-do lists and tiredness. We need rhythms to soothe us, remind us, settle us and send us...don't we.

I'm thankful for rhythms, patterns of movement and sound that show up daily even in the mundane of life...because rhythms are anything but mundane. They remind us of His strength, his regularity, his repeated sounds of movement and patterns in nature, in song, in His word and in his power displayed across the fields and the sky.

What rhythms are you experiencing today? Look for them, listen to them, sit near them and be settled...by the strong and the regular of the One who knows all and is all.

## Encouragement - Remembering Rocks – by Angela Dolbear

Dread and distress fill my stomach as I gaze at the mountain of wool sweaters, thermal tops, and other winter weather clothing items piled high next to my open suitcase.

I need this collection of winter wear for my five-day trip to St. Paul, Minnesota. Snow still covered the city, even in late March due to the fifth snowiest winter in their weather history.

Anxiety grew and bound itself around me, suffocating me. I can't do without all these warm clothes! Getting cold triggers a Raynaud's Syndrome episode where my hands turn purple and all my joints ache. So, how was I going to fit all this stuff into my large pink & mint suitcase, and keep it under 50 pounds? A feat that seemed impossible. I thought, *I can't do it. Lord help me.* I knew He would, but I was still overcome with anxiety. Blah.

More anxious thoughts joined the irrational thinking party in my brain, like *what if the storm forecasted to arrive delays my flight? What if the weather is too cold for me? What if I slip on the ice? What if...what if...what if...*

Travel and packing for travel, are both big anxiety triggers for me. But I still love to travel. While I pack, I pray through my apprehension and worry. It doesn't seem right. Prayer should eradicate my distress. It doesn't make sense that the intense wound-up feeling has control of me.

The irrationality of my anxiety frustrates me. I have had little nervousness when facing major medical procedures, like a heart catheter procedure or a complete hysterectomy. But I nearly lose my cool packing a suitcase. So maddening!

My trip went well. Very well, in fact. I packed everything I needed into my suitcase, was able to zip it up, and it was only forty-seven pounds.

All my flights were on time. The storm with snow that blew sideways--I kid you not--came in after I landed in the St. Paul/Minneapolis airport. I had an awesome time staying in my brother's cozy home, and I was able to love on my family as we grieved at my cousin's memorial service. In fact, the weather was nice while I was there. I didn't slip on the ice once. The ice had all melted by the last day of my trip. God is good.

On the flight home, I'm glad I remembered to thank God. I asked Him to help me remember His blessings and His faithfulness whenever the death-grip of anxiety starts to take hold.

How can I remember all He has done so I won't get anxious next time I travel? I don't like feeling so consumed by nervousness that I can only breathe in short shallow breaths. This is not where I want to be as a child of God.

In the Old Testament, the patriarchs set up stones of remembrance to mark a particular event where God did something miraculous for them. In my modern life, occasionally I get Facebook memory reminders of blessings I had posted about in years past. But I could use something more dependable, more consistent.

I used to keep a prayer journal full of prayers and praises for answered prayers, but it now exists as a Word document on my desktop computer, which I rarely open and read.

Keeping a digital list of the accounts of God's faithfulness is good. But my spirit is telling me there needs to be more. Something deeper. Something stored in my memory and ready for instant recall at the first signs of stress.

I know there are a couple of internal roadblocks that need removing to keep me from anxiety-overload:

1. Deep in my heart, I know I am not trusting God fully (bad me).
2. His Word is my reminder of His help with everything, so I need to keep His word fresh in my heart and mind, and fully trust in it (see point #1).

If I trusted God fully, I would have peace all the time, in every circumstance. The lack of trusting God is illogical. He created the Universe. I am in awe of all the amazing deep space galaxies and stars the new [Webb telescope](#) is taking pictures of. That's His doing.

He sacrificed His Son to pay the greatest debt I ever had. How can I not trust Him?

Reading my devotional this morning about the Sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, I realized that is what is missing. I need to trust God that He will send His Holy Spirit to remind me of His Word, which I have hidden in my heart and written on an old post-it note I see every day taped to my computer monitor.

I need to not *let* my heart be troubled; to trust God and "trust Me also," Jesus said in John 14:1.

I need to trust He will do this for me because He said He would.

He will remind me of the times He helped me, even times when I was out of control and encased in anxiety.

He is my Rock (see Psalm 18). He will be my reminder. I trust that God will be my reminder to remember: to remember all the blessings, healings, words of wisdom, and suitcases He has helped me with in the past.

God is good. I will always remember that.

*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 – Lost in the Story – by Marcy Lytle**

I can honestly say I've never had a friend read a few sentences in a novel of any kind and then proceed to tell me what the book was about. That would be silly.

I also have never heard anyone watch one minute of a two-hour film and be introduced to one character, and proceed to write a review of the movie...how absurd.

And wouldn't it be crazy to create an entire philosophy of life based on either of the above, or on even one full chapter, or three characters...if there was much more to read or see?

And yet...that's what many do with the bible.

Some religions are created and made and followed from a few choice verses, verses that serve to support the creators' own agendas or beliefs. And folks follow and sign up for these religions, and even fight for them.

Some "religious" people claim to know God and his ways and how he works, having never read or heard but a few stories as a child, and they completely miss the full story of the entire book of His word.

Some have read a few chapters because they had to, as a kid, or out of guilt, and they've determined that God isn't fair, he's not really good, and certainly not loving...because he just can't be...with the way things are. Yet, they've missed the entire story of the bible from beginning to end.

I have been one of those people before!

Growing up, I heard lots of bible stories that were good, taught awesome lessons and showed great qualities of God, but they didn't sustain me as an adult when life's fan blew dust and blinded my eyes.

Even as a young adult, I judged and made assumptions based on my little box of God and how I viewed him, until all of my foundation crumbled...and I began to search for more.

And then one day I read the synopsis of each book of the bible, which I think I've shared before, and I wept at the consistency of the story, the constant purpose and love of God – my creator. I saw the connection and the meanings of so many things I had skipped over and misread or dismissed. And I began to be drawn into **relationship**...not religion.

God isn't complex or obscure or non-relatable or confusing...it's our lack of diligence to read his entire story that causes these things.

I don't understand it all and never will; this side of eternity. But I do see now a bigger picture than a tiny slice or window through which I'd looked for years.

Don't settle for a verse a day, a chapter before bedtime, or even a story on a felt board that you share with your kids. Those are awesome, but they're mere Band-aids to the root cause of what we all need – a realization that HE pursues us with goodness and mercy and cares for us like



nobody's business and is trustworthy in ALL that life brings by way of a fan in the face, a crumble of the rocks beneath us or even a blast that shatters our thinking and our believing.

Study a topic, read commentaries, learn the original meaning of words, sit under great teaching (of one who humbly studies the word), get the context and the culture of the time the story was told...and by all means read with intention of knowing the truth, the One God, and experiencing a love like no other.

If reading His word doesn't stir up a hunger that stirs you to read more, then you're not reading it correctly. I know I wasn't. And I'm still learning, but boy is this entire book full of everything I need just when I need it...and I never realized it before. I was so lost...but then I got lost in the story of His love from beginning to whenever the end comes...and I want to know more and more of this truly amazing and loving God that knows me by name.

## **FRESH THYME - My Eggs are Old – by Marcy Lytle**

I chuckled when I walked into the kitchen this morning, considering making a big breakfast which I rarely ever do. You see, I don't care for eggs at all, so I just don't make them. But once in a great while, I will. This particular morning, however, my first thought was maybe I shouldn't make breakfast after all because the eggs in the fridge are old. How long can eggs last and still be good, I wondered? And then came the chuckle, because I thought how old my own body's eggs are old – well actually – they're non-existent.

We women have 300,000-400,000 eggs at puberty and none after age 50 or so! We lose our ability to produce life from our own bodies, and it's traumatizing for many. Not only is the cessation of being able to give birth heartbreaking to some, the fact that our bodies are no longer even capable of birthing something new takes a toll on our minds and our shapes and so many things! Growing older is not for sissies, I'll say!

Back to the eggs in the kitchen. I can easily toss the old eggs in the fridge and go to the store to purchase more, because they're readily available (although expensive!) I can crack a few open, scramble them or serve them up over-easy, which is how my husband likes them. Eggs are a staple, served at restaurants everywhere as one of the most common items on the breakfast menu. I know, because I scour the menus to find something without eggs, only to settle for pancakes most of the time because of the few choices available.

When one can no longer be a part of the life continuation on this earth by birthing babies, it signifies a new era in living, and reconsideration of our purpose here on earth. At least, it feels that way for some. I never even wanted to have children, so I didn't really feel sad when baby birthing days were over. But boy have I felt sad as I've aged and realized that even the ability to give birth is now gone...forever.

So what do we women do, what is our purpose, why are we here, and how can we contribute to society...when our eggs are old or gone?

I was thinking just this week how we search for purpose from the time we're small. We try to figure out what sport or hobby we're good at, and our parents spend so many dollars placing us in that class or taking us to those lessons. We then experience a great deal of angst over choosing a college and a profession, because there are SO MANY choices out there, and we want to get just the right one to fit who we are, to make lots of money, to enjoy our jobs. Next, we search for the right person, the perfect house in the best location, and the schools where our kids can thrive...always looking for purpose in our choices. PURPOSE is a big deal!

As believers, we know that we are created to worship God and it hit me this week that too much time in our lives is spent pining or pursuing purpose, when it's really so simple. It's found in that one-liner where we are directed to love Him with all our hearts and others as ourselves. In other words, to be kind because of the kindness shown to us.

Kindness gets lost in the shuffle when the eggs grow old and disappear. My kind deed of making my husband breakfast never took place because our eggs were old. And oftentimes, as we age we struggle with feeling relevant, needed, appreciated and noticed...so we grow bitter,

rejected, judgmental and critical of those around us. When our purpose and the way we offer life and contribute to society after the eggs are no longer able to be served...is to be kind. "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

There it is in bold print, our purpose, our preparation and our service when our eggs are old.

No eggs to serve up at your table or to your family or your little corner of the world? No worries, kindness abounds because He has been kind to us. And it never grows old, there's no money involved in showing it or offering it. And it's the most gorgeous dish on the table.

Ways to be kind as we age:

- Pray for the young moms
- Text young women encouraging words
- Compliment what she wears or give praise to her kids
- Smile at young families and young children
- Serve in ways that are fun to you
- Love yourself and be kind to yourself
- This enables you to be kind to others
- Give without expectation KNOWING that HE sees and he will reward and notice and all the things...

## **FRESH THYME - Other than You – by Marcy Lytle**

One of the reasons our magazine exists is to connect the generations. We can get completely wrapped up in our own decade in our fashion, interests, habits, etc. so much that we don't relate at all to those older than or younger than ourselves. I think that's a travesty. Just like I don't want the younger generation to forget me or lose interest in those my age, I have to do the same and keep up with what's going on with them. It's the same in so many other areas, as well. It helps ground us, gives us eyes to see out from our own front yard, and it keeps our minds sharp and our hearts open.

Here's what I mean:

Reading, for example, an article by a friend from another generation enlightens us on what matters to them. It helps us relate and offer kindness, or even opens us up to new ideas. A good thing!

Listening to music once in a while on the radio, or watching an awards show, gives us insight into what's popular. Why is that important? We may sit with a teen, and it's good to know what they enjoy, so we can converse with them over lyrics. Conversely, it's good to listen to the music of the older generation when we're young, to broaden our horizons. I love it when kids know the songs their grandparents love and vice-versa.

Visiting with a family, which lives in a different economic status from our own, stretches us. If we have more than they do and we don't visit with them because of that, shame on us. If they have more than we do and we stay away because it makes us dissatisfied with our own lack, then shame on us again. We must stretch our friendly muscles across the money/material divide.

It's a good thing to visit a coffee shop where the college kids hang out, or to sit with an elderly person that can't get out. Both places might be uncomfortable, like we don't belong there, or we don't like what we see or hear or experience. However, we might be a listening ear or offer a smile or observe and learn...all GOOD THINGS.

Those are just a few examples of ways to stretch ourselves to do things outside of our box in which we live. Something other than us.

If we only hang with our peers, we become oblivious to the world behind and in front of us, and we miss so much of the rich part of life...knowing someone other than us.

If we don't watch that or listen to this because kids are so crazy these days, or those old folks are stupid (thoughts we've all thought), we become judgmental and crotchety and unfriendly and all the things that make no one want to be in our presence...and that's not good.

If we constantly feel less than or even better than those people over there or here, we are allowing our thoughts to rule us. Feeling less than someone because of what we don't have is a useless way to think or live, and feeling better than someone because we have more is a dangerous lookout to pull over and stop. Pride is not pretty, and neither is self-abasement.

Let's be thankful for who we are and the decade in which we live, let's not shake our heads at those behind, or avoid those ahead, because we all have value. We're worth knowing and loving and tolerating and even considering as friends.

If you're over 50, I encourage you to not skip over the stories in THYME written by the young moms, single moms, women with no children, etc. Read their stories and listen to their lives told in the paragraphs they write. And if you're a young woman and you're here for the stories for young moms but skip over the articles written by those over 50, don't do it this month. Read with a kind and open heart as you read their stories, and smile at the wisdom they share.

I often find myself sitting among only those like me, and that's like sitting in a stagnant pond, which we all know stinks after a while. It's then that I get in my little paddle boat and start moving my legs, looking ahead and behind for those other than me. After all, ducks and turtles and frogs and logs all float in the same water, bask in the same sun, and enjoy the same views. And we have brains and a heart, so segregating ourselves for any reason at all just isn't wise or healthy or loving...at all.

Come sit by me on the log where I'm enjoying the sunshine, and I'll pop over on the lily pad where you live tomorrow...because it's always good to learn from someone...

other than you.

## **FRESH THYME - Pomp and Circumstance – by Marcy Lytle**

Impressive and formal activities. That's what they were, at Prince Charles' coronation. Either you enjoyed watching and loved all the formality and tradition, or you despised it. I think it's fascinating to watch, but I understand how silly and frivolous it all is as well, in light of this world and its needs. Pomp and circumstance, for sure.

Did you watch the series *The Crown*? Who knows if those stories got it all right, but I sat in awe of the queen and also in disgust, at the traditions and formalities placed upon a mere human being to serve as leader of a monarch. I really felt for young Charles, as depicted in the stories. I even related to the other children, being under pressure to perform and be a part of the show.

I think pomp and circumstance is fun, when you're a kid dressed up as a princess, playing as if you're part of a celebration and being crowned and offered a scepter and a kingdom. But being part of pomp and circumstance in real life and having to note your p's and q's is not. Did you know that saying about p's and q's comes from when sailors minded their pea coats (p's) and queues, or braided pony tails (q's) by looking sharp as they departed their ships?

These days, it seems people push away from pomp and circumstance, much like many of the royals have done over the years. It's too much pressure to be "perfect" so we rebel and often try to be as imperfect as we can be.

I wasn't raised in a royal family, but my dad was pastor of a church. And on a tiny, tiny scale I often felt pressure to perform, to mind my p's and q's, so as not to disgrace the pastor's family and "position." It was a lot of pressure back then, as somehow it seemed we were to present to the people a perfect family. And boy, were we not perfect. But we didn't dare let anyone know about it. We showed up at church three times a week, and sometimes on Friday, for services where we had duties to perform...with a smile...I might add. I remember one service showing up to play the organ and I was in turmoil inside, and it must have shown on my face. After church, one lady came to me and said, "What's wrong? You weren't smiling today." I wanted to punch her. Seriously.

Somehow, I grew to dislike the performance robe I was expected to wear at every ceremony of worship. Oh, the accolades and attention were nice sometimes, but then they grew stale, because we're not meant to live on pedestals or above others. That's why it's so burdensome when we create our own pomp and circumstance and place those minding of p's and q's on our children.

I eventually broke. Life had gotten hard and I didn't know how to cope, and I could no longer show up for the performances and services and give with a smile to all these people that didn't really know me. Could that be how the royals felt as they too were scrutinized, placed on high, and expected to exude perfection? In my little world, I couldn't take the pressure. I can't imagine how they did it in their big wide world!

This must be why Jesus arrived in a bed of hay and rode into town on donkey. Oh, he was king for sure, but king because of his position as son to the Father and rightful heir, not because of pomp and circumstance.

I watched part of the performance, observed the robes and crowns, the throne-like chairs, listened to the music and heard all the words of Prince Charles' coronation and wondered. Did he and Camilla have a big fight before the big day? Was their time to make up and forgive? How does son Harry really feel about his father? Are the stories true? Were Prince William and Kate's children throwing fits just before the cameras rolled? How many people there even liked Prince Charles? Was his stomach hurting or was he giddy with delight at all eyes being on him, and people holding up his robe?

We will never know, because pomp and circumstance ruled that day. But after it's all over, those humans will retire to their homes (palaces) and live just like we do...well, sort of. We too went home after church services and we lived like those in our congregation. I stomped and cried when I wasn't allowed to be like other kids and go places they went. I didn't like some of the ways my parents treated me. My life was so mundane and boring, and I yearned for freedom.

All I know is that performance of any kind, when placed and pushed and demanded upon children to be "perfect" in an imperfect world is a load akin to a backpack full of stones that will eventually topple the strongest.

While pomp and circumstance is indeed a fun watch and a good series to binge and sit in awe of on a Saturday morning, it's not reality. It's fantasy. And fantasy is fiction. And fiction isn't real. And not being real isn't healthy.

Feeling pressure to perform or be or be noticed? Don't succumb. We are loved without a physical robe and crown, we are seated next to the King always, and there's no pressure...only peace and acceptance in His presence.