



A BUNDLE OF
THYME
For Every Season

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TIPS

In the Kitchen – Easy and Fun – by Marcy Lytle

You're going to be tired, that's a given, when preparing for Thanksgiving dinner. So you'll need ideas for the leftovers, or quick meals for the few days before, for your family or yourselves. We've got you covered below! And...what if you made meal time with the family (however many of you gather this year) full of planned conversation? We've got ideas for that too! Enjoy...

Quick Meal Ideas:

Mad Dash Mixes are the way to go – have several of them on hand! Their **tortilla soup** is SO GOOD, and you could use your leftover turkey instead of chicken for your protein. <https://www.maddashmixes.com/>

Take that leftover turkey and slice it, and top it on top of a **bowl** made with all the veggies and greens from your fridge, and roast up some butternut squash as well!

Grab **links of sausage**, wrap them in a cheese lined tortilla, secure with a toothpick and bake til browned! Dip in mustard, add a leftover side from the Thanksgiving table, and you've got a fun dinner!

Consider frozen **fish sticks** – they've come a long way! Crunchy tilapia fish sticks by Gorton's are SO good! Bake some frozen fries, then make your own tartar sauce and you're good! Mix mayo with capers, pickles, lemon juice and black pepper. You've got your own sauce, and dinner is made.

Just **arrange and eat** whatever you've got, and make it pretty! Maybe a circle of Brie, topped with jam and sliced almonds for the center. Two kinds of crackers, a bunch of grapes, some squares of dark chocolate, and a small bowl of pecans leftover from your pecan pie baking!

Conversation Fun:

Consider a **Thanksgiving tree** for your table with ornaments, and let each person go one by one to hang an ornament and give thanks. What a great and fun activity!

https://www.amazon.com/amscan-Thanksgiving-Tree-Activity-Parties/dp/B00RAEI3MG/ref=sr_1_4?dchild=1&keywords=thanksgiving+tree&qid=1601586321&sr=8-4

Ask the **same question** of everyone at the table, to get their answers. For example, ask everyone to share their favorite animal and why.

Ask someone to **start a story**, and then let each person around the table add to that story with a sentence or two, until you have a completed book at the end of the conversation!

Place a shape under each person's plate (triangle, rectangle, circle, or square.) During the dinner, each person discovers their shape and finds something in the room that most resembles that shape. Sort of like I Spy...

Purchase a set of family cards and hand one or two to each person. That person can then ask anyone at the table to answer the question from their card. https://www.amazon.com/After-Dinner-Amusements-Family-Time/dp/1452164886/ref=sr_1_3?dchild=1&keywords=thanksgiving+family+conversation+cards&qid=1601586807&sr=8-3

Seven for You - Stocking Thyme – by Marcy Lytle

We asked our panel of women to share their favorite ideas for stocking gifts, because it's time to start shopping! We also thought maybe some are giving a bit less this year, and need some ideas to fill those stockings instead of pile up under the tree! Or maybe you're still able to do both. Either way, we wanted to offer you LOTS of options for giving those kids, spouses, friends something fun and special this Christmas!

The Accessory:

Earrings – These cute ceramic earrings are unique and so artistic – a great idea for her!

https://www.etsy.com/listing/725057443/pink-button-floral-stainless-steel-stud?ga_search_query=earrings&ref=shop_items_search_1&frs=1

Vintage pouches: I've fallen in love with these little vintage zippered pouches. They run anywhere from 25-125 depending on color, seller, condition etc. They are the perfect size for Covid shopping. The larger ones are big enough for my phone, my keys, cash, and CC card. They can be used for wipes, money, makeup, or maybe 500 paper clips...who knows! You can put several of them in your larger bag and then grab one out to run into the store. These little pops of color are from the late 80s to 90s...leather and have stood the test of time. You can find them on Ebay, Poshmark, Etsy, or other resale sites. Pick a fav color to give....just the right size to go in a stocking.
https://www.etsy.com/search/vintage?q=leather+zipper+pouch&term=vintage_mailbox

Scarf: A small scarf that can be worn around the neck or the head is a fun find in a stocking! Madewell has so many cute ones!

https://www.shopbop.com/washed-bandana-madewell/vp/v=1/1503241319.htm?fm=pd_sb_pd_browse_1_bstslr&os=false

Hair scrunchies – Attic Salt has a cute variety, but so do lots of stores! Buy a couple and slip them down in her stocking.

Barrettes – They're so cute in your hair! Madewell has some beautiful clips for pinning your hair back, up, or to the side!

Food Stuff:

Mad Dash Mixes – I love these and they've all been super delicious. First found them at a festival, and started then buying them on line. Lots of choices – get a bundle!
<https://www.maddashmixes.com/>

Salad dressing shaker - Durable plastic with sealed flip top. Different sizes available

https://www.amazon.com/OXO-Grips-Little-Dressing-Shaker/dp/B00CYDFTP2/ref=pd_bxgy_3/146-4881736-

[7229844?_encoding=UTF8&pd_rd_i=B00CYDFTP2&pd_rd_r=b2724fee-c98a-4bbf-8790-956c29c691e2&pd_rd_w=wO4jD&pd_rd_wg=BakOc&pf_rd_p=ce6c479b-ef53-49a6-845b-bbbf35c28dd3&pf_rd_r=WE7JW5P7RM395FW27PRR&psc=1&refRID=WE7JW5P7RM395FW27PRR](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00CYDFTP2?encoding=UTF8&pd_rd_i=B00CYDFTP2&pd_rd_r=b2724fee-c98a-4bbf-8790-956c29c691e2&pd_rd_w=wO4jD&pd_rd_wg=BakOc&pf_rd_p=ce6c479b-ef53-49a6-845b-bbbf35c28dd3&pf_rd_r=WE7JW5P7RM395FW27PRR&psc=1&refRID=WE7JW5P7RM395FW27PRR)

Salad dressing maker – I have this cool bottle with markings on the side – you just fill and shake – and you have homemade dressing for salads!

Dressing to go - great for picnics. Salad dressing, ketchup, mustard, etc. I've even put soft butter in them to go.

https://www.amazon.com/Evriholder-D2G-3PK-AMZ-Dressing-Container-Green/dp/B00LPZQUS0/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=evriholder+dressing+2+go&qid=1601566556&s=home-garden&sr=1-1

My daughter loves hot tea, so a new flavor of tea and a fun mug are on my list.

I love to shop World Market for mini food gifts, small packs of cookies, etc...and always a chocolate orange!

Lindt 70% dark chocolate bars are the best – especially kept in the fridge – for a snack – give everyone one of these!

These mini prep bowls are one of my favorite gifts ever – I use them all the time when cooking or for tiny pinches on a food board.

Have you seen these peanut butter knives – they are long and get to the bottom of the jar – a must have!

The Whimsical:

Fun hosiery – My sister and I love these! Look at the fun patterns!

<https://www.amazon.com/Summer-Transparent-Elastic-Cityelf-Anklelets/dp/B07FBZGXRS>

Circle of 5th - Wear it while you're playing and it helps you find the key of a song.

<https://shopretroworks.com/products/musicians-ring-musicians-transposition-spinner-ring>

Lavender Spray: If you're a fan of essential oils you'll love this product. Just one or two sprays on your pillow before bed and the sweet aroma of lavender will fill your senses and the feeling of calmness will put you right to sleep. https://www.bathandbodyworks.com/p/lavender-vanilla-pillow-mist-023531114.html?q=pillow%2Bspray&lang=en_US&start=1

Head massage/scratcher – These are cute, feel good, and a conversation starter for sure!
<https://www.amazon.com/Massager-Scratcher-Massage-Scratches-Tangling/dp/B077RVN297>

When I'm shopping for stocking fillers, I like to find candies and snacks from different countries. I find a lot of fun items from World Market. They have many choices, and it's fun to shop for them. I also find many items at grocery stores. I try to find flavors only sold at Christmas, or that are different from the kind I usually buy. (One year I bought jalapeño flavored M&Ms.)

There are those things that are "guilty treat" items that my family loves, and I only buy them at Christmas. One of those items is spray cheese (that's what we call it anyway.) I think it's really called Easy Cheese. <https://www.amazon.com/Easy-Cheese-Cheddar-Snack-Ounce/dp/B00H46SBY0>

Funny socks

This tabletop cornhole game is a sure hit for him, and fun for all – from Attic Salt.

The Kids:

Highlights Puzzle Books – they will love these!

Bubble Bath

Farm in a Tin

Magnetic travel games

Tiny Rubiks cube or Lincoln logs

Tiny squishies!

Pez – they're still around and the kids love them – check out World Market for the latest.

The Practical:

Nail file <https://www.amazon.com/Best-Crystal-Glass-Nail-File/dp/B0796VJN2B>

Razor blades

Stylus

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01B7X4JJ6?ref=ppx_pop_mob_ap_share&fbclid=IwAR3ale4_a8nmINzyMyc281SGu0t1PfvAEUdTF5nSk564PSpt3EXISOQC08Y

Match sticks - I love these cute matches that you can find at target! They look great next to any candle as decor and even have a place to strike the matches at the bottom!

Pencil

case/bag

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00N7AADQG?ref=ppx_pop_mob_ap_share&fbclid=IwAR34jnDUNpRc4zoPEvCJ-RiRppqahiU-Sh-sTsLd9K9Jw41vcJG7mk4nTLI

New garden gloves are a great stocking stuffer idea. Even in the winter months it helps my disposition to be able to work in the yard. https://www.amazon.com/COOLJOB-Gardening-Breathable-Outdoor-Protective/dp/B08F4Z4X2S/ref=zg_bs_3480678011_1?encoding=UTF8&psc=1&refRID=P8YB1M177SRFE7JX66Y9

Fast food gift cards – These are the easiest, probably the most used, and they fit perfectly in the stocking!

Cash! – Just fold some up, or roll it, tie a bow, and slip it in!

Batteries are a great stocking stuffer for those getting toys or electronics – for sure!

The Body:

Supergoop sunscreen – This is one of my all time favorites when it comes to facial products. Sunscreen is such an important part of a morning routine and this cute little bottle makes it so easy to protect your skin throughout the day!

<https://supergoop.com/products/unseen-sunscreen>

A rich nourishing lip balm is great for dry winter days.

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0070XAL0E?tag=byrdie01-20&linkCode=oji&th=1&psc=1&ascsubtag=4593485%7Cn9a468174a965463d9cae03ebb48ddc7b11>

Bath salts for a long evening soaks - in the tub. We are shower people the other nine months of the year, so salts are soothing!

https://www.macys.com/shop/product/french-girl-mint-sea-soak-enlivening-bath-salts-10-oz.?ID=7988909&pla_country=US&CAGPSPN=pla&nrtv_cid=ae501d27f6d640053b92cad87d7164c6447b169ee12c445a82ab81239da2b3c4&cm_mmc=narrativ- -nhealth+%26+beauty- -beautyeditor- -1719789670981294908&m_sc=sem&m_sb=narrativ&m_tp=PLA&m_cn=health+%26+beauty&m_pi=beautyeditor_NAME&m_ac=narrativ

Kensie perfume for the purse or travel – it smells great – and it's just the right size!

https://www.amazon.com/ideas/amzn1.account.AFGMY23AF4JI2JNTTWLXIE3ZJVCQ/22JY2KVHIDNA3?type=explore&ref=idea_cp_vl_ov_d

My two favorite products for skin care are from Gruene Witch Apothecary – their toner and moisturizer smell and feel amazing.

<https://gruene witch.com/>

Lynda's Pride soaps not only smell amazing, and there are so many choices, but they're priced well, too. We just got some on vacation – they slip easily into stockings!

<http://lyndaspride.com/>

The Inspirational:

Be the Gift by Ann Voskamp – a great read and motivator for the new year.

What about a magazine subscription, like Eating Well, or Magnolia Journal or Family Handyman? Roll it, slide it in the stocking, and you're done!

For Him:

Pens – My husband loves a nice pen so I'm always on the hunt for something cool for him.

Soaps – Why not stuff a scented soap bar in his stocking, he might get hooked and want them all year!

Bend Lotion – This treat has healed my husband's dry rough skin and he swears by it.

Honey scoop – If he stirs honey in his morning coffee, he'd like this stirrer. If he doesn't stir honey, then buy him the honey as well!

Look at this unique tiny tool for keeping him well and getting in doors! Have you seen it! So cool!

The Splurge:

Zymbol bracelet – One of my favorite pieces of jewelry I got last Christmas – and I think I'll love it forever. Check out the options and the story behind the jewelry!

<https://www.zymbol.net/>

Guitar capo - Allows the player to easily slide cap on guairt neck while playing. Comes with lifetime warranty

https://www.thaliacapos.com/collections/capos?wickedsource=google&wickedid=439189349716&wtm_term=&wtm_campaign=10207049455&wtm_content=101721245013&wickedplacement=&wickedkeyword=&gclid=EAlalQobChMlv8ffrZ-U7AIVDbblCh0CRg4AEAQYASABEgKSqPD_BwE

Names necklace – It's tiny and will be a sweet surprise in her stocking – a necklace with kids names on disks!

https://www.etsy.com/listing/107771864/personalized-mini-mom-necklace-petite?ga_order=most_relevant&ga_search_type=all&ga_view_type=gallery&ga_search_query=mom+personalized+baby+necklaces&ref=sr_gallery-1-3&frs=1

Initial and message – This initial necklace with “one in a million” inscribed on the back would be a nice surprise in the stocking. From Macy's.

The Dressing – Sweater Weather – by Marcy Lytle

Hopefully by now, fall temperatures have arrived where you live. We hope so, here in Central Texas, as we wait for them a long time! It's a good time to stock up on sweaters for the weather ahead during winter. Good sweaters bring coziness and comfort, and we can all use both of that as we near the end of 2020. Can I get a nod and a yes?

Here are a few of our faves:

Look at this cute hedgehog sweater from Banana Republic! He's sitting in a coffee mug – what a great gift idea or a treat for yourself!

https://bananarepublicfactory.gapfactory.com/browse/product.do?pid=571067001&vid=1&tid=bfpl000002&kwid=1&ap=7&gclid=EAlaIqobChMlo-mB1Paf7AIVNQPnCh1b-w4uEAQYASABEglae_D_BwE&qclsrc=aw.ds#pdp-page-content

There are four colors to choose from in this mock turtleneck, and I love them all! This sweater looks super comfy and cozy! From Target!

<https://www.target.com/p/women-s-mock-turtleneck-pullover-sweater-a-new-day/-/A-79605195?preselect=79394127#lnk=sametab>

I have a couple of these cardigans with the snap buttons, and they are my favorites! And I've bought this brand of clothing before, on Amazon. You might want a couple of these, as well!

https://www.amazon.com/MEROKEETY-Womens-Sleeve-Neckline-Cardigans/dp/B07FMJHT92/ref=sr_1_20?dchild=1&keywords=sweaters+for+women&pd_rd_r=8d0ca9c7-06a9-42be-8d77-b9e1908c52f6&pd_rd_w=MGadS&pd_rd_wg=ioiaX&pf_rd_p=0ec05f25-9534-48fe-9c3e-40b89957230e&pf_rd_r=SJ50F8KS8SXBEST2YB1Z&qid=1601987081&sr=8-20

I LOVE the way they paired this crewneck pullover from Target with the floral skirt. The bottom of the sleeves are tapered, providing shape and elegance. I want this one!

<https://www.target.com/p/women-s-crewneck-pullover-sweater-a-new-day/-/A-79610375?preselect=79393825#lnk=sametab>

Do you like sleeve detail? Look at this sweater from Amazon, in so many color choices! Oh my gosh, it looks so comfortable and so pretty!

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08KRPRY6S/ref=sr_1_39?dchild=1&keywords=pullover+sweater+women&qid=1601987774&s=apparel&sr=1-39

It's called a ballet neck, with raglan sleeves, and look how it's paired with pants of the same hue! Love it! This one is from the Loft outlet...so cute tucked in one corner!

<https://outlet.loft.com/kimono-sweater/534347?skuld=29941544&defaultColor=8951&catid=cat3950031&selectedColor=8951>

In case you're dressing up, a peplum sweater might be for you! I think these only look good on certain people (I'm not one of them!) but they are sooooo cute. And look at those animal print pants!

<https://www.target.com/p/women-s-crewneck-peplum-pullover-sweater-a-new-day/-/A-79623570?preselect=79394036#lnk=sametab>

Three Moms – Thankful Kids

You may read that title and wonder, “Thankful kids. Do those exist?” It’s funny, it seems that some kids are more bent toward being thankful and showing it, and others have to be trained and trained hard! We decided to ask our moms to share funny stories and/or tips about their kids and thankfulness...and maybe you can relate. Maybe you’ll feel better about your own kiddos, and have a ray of hope for the ones less grateful!

Mom of Four, ages 10 and under:

It seems all of our kids are different. Our oldest had a friend over one time, a friend that was in need, and our daughter started giving away any and all of her clothes – even ones we hadn’t decided to get rid of. We also, as a family, put money in an envelope to set aside for giving. So, I think generosity is born out of thanksgiving. *When we realize that we have more than enough of anything*, we are thankful, and that causes us to want to share.

I also think that *our kids observe and hear their mom/dad give thanks*, so they learn to follow suit. Even before our meals, we give thanks for our food. It’s simple and perhaps a ritual, but it reminds us all to stop and recognize where good gifts originate! At night, during family prayer time, we add in thanksgiving for everyday things. One particular thing we gave thanks for was a birthday party for my daughter and all of the friends that she has.

I remember one of our four had a long season of ungratefulness, so it seemed fitting to *remove some of her most treasured toys* and put them away for a bit. It didn’t take too long (but it did take a while!) for her to realize what a blessing her toys were, and how she needed to remember to be thankful.

And finally, I often *tell my kids when they’re being ungrateful*, and share how it’s hurtful to give nice things to them, only to see them turn up their nose at the food I’ve prepared, or the gifts they’re opening. I think honesty goes a long way. They need to realize the effects of ungratefulness, as they mature into grateful adults!

Mom of Three, ages 9 and under:

Prayer time in the evening is when we work on thankfulness. Mostly, prayer time for the kids is asking for things and praying for others. But we then ask, “What are you thankful for?”

Dinner time is a great time for being grateful, because we ask them how their day was, and what they are thankful for. It’s fun to hear their answers.

Party time is when we verbally remind them to give thanks to the giver. We remind them, but as they’ve gotten older they have now begun to do this on their own.

Living it out, when they see us give thanks, when we remind them to notice little things, and when it’s part of our family lifestyle is important to us.

At Thanksgiving, our extended family is around the table, and this is a time when we give thanks for those with us, stating specific things we love about each one.

Cleaning out toys, our kids want to sell stuff to make money, but...we ask them to share or give away...as a way of being grateful for what they have.

The Lord's Prayer is something we are teaching our kids and hoping to do more of in 2021, and it begins with praise.

Mostly, parenting thanksgiving is the best. My husband reminds them to thank me for dinner. I remind them to thank Dad for what he does. So we try to be thankful in our own house, for the gifts we've been given in each other...even with their siblings. This is more of a challenge, because it's easy to take each other for granted.

Mom of Two, ages 4 and 2

When kids are young like my two little girls, it has to start with their dad and I being an example. Even for the smallest of things, because these are "big" to them. For example, getting a new lollipop, or trying on a new pair of shoes, or getting to sit in the front seat while we go down the road to feed the cows. These are the experiences that our little ones have.

Thankfulness in our house looks like being thankful for these small things. We make sure that we constantly thank God for our food. We also thank God at night – and we ask our girls,

"What are you thankful for, today?"

One of our daughters answered, "I'm thankful for my backpack."

We also give thanks in the middle of arguments. It's a teaching moment when there's a fight over a baby doll. I recently told the girls how we need to be thankful that we have multiple baby dolls, so we don't need to fight over one! Just showing them the toys they have, or the extra clothes we have to give away, gives me a chance to teach gratitude.

Sometimes, I do wonder if they are getting this concept of thanks, like all parents do! Recently, I was taking a nap with Sadie, our four-year old. Earlier we had gotten groceries, and I bought the girls both new water bottles. Sadie looked at me as we were about to doze off, and said, "Mommy, thank you so much for my new water bottle."

Moments like those tell me yes! They're getting it. It also teaches me, when my little girl gives thanks for a simple water bottle. It reminds me to see those simple things, too!

Tried and True – A Fall Walk – by Marcy Lytle

We love to walk and walk often, on all sorts of trails from granite to concrete, to rocky to smooth, as it's one of our favorite forms of exercise. And when the days are now dark so early, we have to find places to still walk in the evenings – so we usually choose well-lit paths or even shopping centers – either indoors or outdoors. On the weekends, we can still choose parks, if it's not too chilly! And...we've noted lots of ways to stay safe while walking that I thought we'd pass on to you!

1. **Wear good shoes.** There are all sorts of hazards, mostly turning ankles by stepping off the side of a path, and wonky shoes are not a good idea! I carry my walking shoes (Moka shoes) with me in the car, so that if we decide to walk while out, I have them handy.
https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0307/0738/4459/products/YB2207BS_1_1024x1024.jpg?v=1585386262
2. **Walk with someone.** Even on city trails that we've walked, we've gotten turned around. We meet stray dogs and all sorts of surprises when we walk, and we are thankful we aren't alone. So grab a friend, or take your dog (on a leash), but walk with someone.
3. **Put away your phone.** If you're going to snap a picture, then stop and snap, but then put the phone away. Talking on the phone and especially texting while walking is downright dangerous. We've seen slick spots of water, surprise holes in the ground, or drop-offs on the side that we would have missed had our noses been to the screen.
4. **Consider an insulated backpack.** If you're planning a long walk, carrying a tote on one shoulder might be uncomfortable. But an insulated backpack (we love this one we just recently got) distributes the weight evenly on your back, and you can carry a little snack or drink, stop and enjoy it, then walk back!
https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00J0S019S/?ref=idea_lv_dp_ov_d&tag=aiponsite-20&linkCode=ic6&ascsubtag=amzn1.ideas.JTFIXMNGYB8K
5. **Wear your mask.** I know. You're outside. But wearing the mask around your neck so that you can pull it up if you need to, is wise. We have been on a few trails where it was crowded, or we see someone coming fully masked, and we want to be considerate of them. We don't have to wear it if no one is around, but we can be prepared if there is.
6. **Consider allergies.** Cedar season is coming, and there's always something blooming that can cause us aggravation while outdoors. So if you're allergic, make sure you've taken your meds or whatever you need to do, before you get caught on the trail sneezing and wheezing!
7. **Take some tissue.** Carry Kleenex (that small pack) in your pocket. I don't know how many times we've been caught out walking and sneezed with nothing present to wipe our noses – not cool!
8. **Stay to the right.** This is HUGE! I wish bikers would alert you that they're coming beside you, but it's rare that they do! And if you step to the left, you might just get mowed down by a fast tracker. I think this is one of the most important things to be aware of, when walking. If you stay to the right, they'll pass to the left. All the more reason to be aware while walking.

9. **Observe signs.** If there's been a big rain and there are signs along the path that say "turn around, don't drown," that's probably not a good trail for that day! Seems obvious, but don't get caught down on a trail that's covered in slippery mud or running water.
10. **Smile and say hello.** Lots of walkers have on head phones and won't even know that you've spoken. Many won't make eye contact. But it's healthy, nice, and kind to say hello and smile as people pass by. Oftentimes, they look up surprised and happy that someone has spoken. And that will make your heart and their heart beat a little stronger and healthier...



HOME

A Night to Remember – Colorful Thanks – by Marcy Lytle

It's always a great time of year to remind our kids to be thankful, but November is the time when thanksgiving is in the air – everywhere – so why not focus on it during family time? Kiddos have to be trained to be thankful, taught to notice, and encouraged to verbalize their thanksgiving. They also need to understand how a grateful heart makes a merry heart! And while they're learning, we adults can be reminded as well!

Preparation: You'll need construction paper in fall colors (orange, brown, green, red, yellow, purple), scissors, and a bowl full of Sixlets (if you can find them) or Skittles or other colored candies. Make your paper match those colors. Ask the children (or adults can do this beforehand) to cut out a leaf shape from the paper. Place these in a circle around a bowl full of the candies. Now you're ready!

Read the story of the 10 lepers that Jesus healed from the book of Luke:

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

This is a story of 10 sick people that were healed, but only one of them returned to thank Jesus. Thankfulness is SO important in healing and blessings. When we are thankful, it lifts our mood and pleases our Father, and allows us to smile.

- Why do you think it's important to give thanks? (kids answer) Every good gift we have comes from our heavenly Father, so let's give thanks for something in the color yellow...

As each person gives thanks, they choose a yellow candy and place it on the coordinating colored leaf.

- How do you feel when you do something nice for someone and they don't say thank you, but just ignore you? (kids answer) It doesn't feel very good, does it? Let's give thanks to our Father this time for something in the color green...

As each person gives thanks, they choose a green candy and place it on the coordinating leaf.

- These men in the story were all healed from a terrible disease. Why do you think nine of them didn't return to give thanks to Jesus, their healer? (kids answer) Let's give thanks this time for something purple...is this color the hardest?

As each person gives thanks, they choose a purple candy and place it on the coordinating leaf.

- Sometimes, we are disappointed when we don't get the toy we want, or get to watch a TV show, or other things we want to do. How can we give thanks when that happens? (kids answer) Let's give thanks this time for something brown!

As each person gives thanks, they choose a brown candy and place it on the coordinating leaf.

- The most precious gift of all in this life is the gift of forgiveness and salvation when we believe in Jesus and ask him to cleanse us from "leprosy" - anything that makes us unclean – like lying, stealing, hating and other bad attitudes. Have you received this gift from Jesus? (let kids answer and pray...) Let's give thanks this time for something red...just like the blood of Jesus that was shed for our sins!

As each person gives thanks, they choose a red candy and place it on the coordinating leaf.

- Often, our thanksgiving is offered up to God in song. What's your favorite song and why? (let kids answer). Let's try to sing one of these songs! Now let's give thanks for something orange!

As each person gives thanks, they choose an orange candy and place it on the coordinating leaf.

*Once all the candies are on leaves (let the kids go ahead and distribute them all by color), enjoy a few together and **give thanks** for all kinds of weather that happens in the winter months...because the Creator of the Earth give us seasons so that all things grow well in due time.*

An Adage a Day - Negative Nancy in November – by Carole Gilbert

I am not writing this column to be political. I am not writing it about politics. And I am not writing it because it is the Presidential election month of 2020. I am writing it because I heard the phrase “Negative Nancy” in a church sermon preached by my son recently and thought that might be a fun phrase to research and write about. I had no idea it came about from our 36th President, Lyndon B. Johnson. He used the phrase “Nervous Nellies” while discussing his Vietnam policy and from that “Nervous Nellies” eventually evolved to “Negative Nancy.” And “I cannot tell a lie,” these are not connotations someone wants to be known as. They refer to being worrisome or disagreeable. “Nervous Nellie” actually began by referring to an over excitable horse.

I have always had a fascination with the presidents of the United States, maybe because they were and are willing to take on that position knowing it will include putting up with Negative Nancy’s and Downer Dan’s. John F. Kennedy said, “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.” That must be what most presidents have in their minds when they run for office. It cannot be for the benefits. Rutherford B. Hayes, our nineteenth president believed, “He serves his party best who serves the country best.”

So, as we go through this historical election, we must remember this is still about the good of the country. If we could all just leave the negativism there by the door and continue forward, we would be in a brighter spot. That probably will not happen, but I challenge us to try. I like this quote by Eleanor Roosevelt to give us a positive boost, “With the new day comes new strength and new thoughts.” And this month, part of our United States will be Negative Nancy’s, Debbie Downer’s, and Pessimistic Patty’s. The other part of us will not. It will depend on if the candidate we are rooting for wins. And there is no reason to get “hot under the collar” if our candidate does not win. Remember what Abraham Lincoln said, “Most folks are as happy as they make up their minds to be.” So let’s be a Positive Polly or create our own effective epithet, like Rootin’ Rita, instead. (I hope to be an Encouraging Carole.)

In conclusion, I would like to add a few more quotes. The first one is from President Jimmy Carter. He was not one of the greater presidents, but he had great beliefs. One of his most memorable quotes came during an interview, “We have a tendency to condemn people who are different from us, to define their sins as paramount and our own sinfulness as being insignificant.” That does remind me of a Bible verse having to do with taking something like a log out of my eye before looking at what is in someone else’s eye (Matthew 7:3). And remember this quote? “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself,” from Franklin D. Roosevelt. That reminds me of more verses about not fearing, which are included in the Bible 365 times. That is enough guidance and authority for each new day. And Abraham Lincoln had a great, biblical sounding quote when he said, “I am rather inclined to silence, and whether that be wise or not, it is at least more unusual nowadays to find a man who can hold his tongue than to find one who cannot.”

Presidents, as much as we may or may not like them, come and go. But we all know who our true unchangeable leader is and who is always totally devoted to us. Dwight D. Eisenhower was not a Christian until ten days after taking over the Presidential office in 1953. Just three years later, he declared our motto to be, "In God We Trust." He is the only known president to meet God while serving. Some may think nothing great ever comes from the White House. That time the greatest did. Now that is something to be positive and grateful for.

Chipped China - I'm Jumping In: Are You Reaching Out? – by Jennifer Lytle

When our family still had a membership to one of the local trampoline parks, I observed my 16-month old jump into a ball pit to save a struggling toddler. Though he had been distressed by being placed in the ball pit previously, he must have decided to endure the discomfort in order to help a fellow out who had been left to himself for several stressful minutes. The toddler was whimpering, whining, and looking quite pitiful about his situation.

He wasn't crying out. He wasn't asking for help. He wasn't desperately flailing, but there was no mistake. He needed help! He wanted out! His quiet pleas went unanswered and an observant, empathetic 16-month old acted. That little dude jumped in and went after the one who needed someone.

My 16-month old had been observing from the side. He had watched intently what was happening and tried to reach in, lying flat on his belly, with an extended hand. Quickly, he realized this was not the solution and turned around to get in feet first. He waded over to the toddler and tried to offer his hand.

Unfortunately, the toddler looked at the 16-month old with uncertainty and refused to be comforted by this heroic deed. He still wouldn't move and remained frozen in fear.

After letting the scene unfold, this Momma jumped in after my own 16-month old to encourage his efforts and ensure that he felt safe. If he needed a hand to get out, I was right there to pull him up.

Have you been offered a hand? Take it with gratitude! Ignore that the hand is younger than yours or not the person you preferred. Give thanks for the help. Take what's valuable and add your contribution, too. You just might find a double portion blessing for each of you.

I Don't Do Teens - The Follower – by Marcy Lytle

It's pretty easy to tell your own child's personality at a young age, whether they are a leader or a follower. Of course, they can switch or perhaps go back and forth between the two, but often our kids are bent to one or the other. And by the teen years, if a follower is their bent (inclination), we parents start to worry. Followers often lack confidence to be who they were intended to be, or they value friends so much they want to be like them.

So how can we tell if our children are followers?

- If she changes her fashion style depending on who she hangs out with, she might be a follower.
- If he acts stupidly and dangerously when around his friends, but not at home, he might be a follower.

In other words, followers sometimes become chameleons so they blend in, so they can mix with the crowd, and not be spotted...because they're just like everyone else. In fact, the thought of being spotted because they're different is terrifying to a follower.

- If she loves to read books, but her new friend thinks books are lame and your daughter then quits reading...she might be a follower.
- If he loves to sing, but his buddies think singing is for girls, and your son stops doing what he loves...he might be a follower.

The scary thing about followers is they lose their sense of who they are, and their beautiful individuality gets swallowed up in a sea of those they follow. And the scarier thing is that teens that grow up to be adult followers end up with all sorts of woes...

So how do we train our teens to be who they are and to stay true to that person?

Affirmation – this is giving emotional support and encouragement to our sons and daughters for staying true to their likes/interests when others don't affirm. Teens crave affirmation from their friends, but if it's not there, we can be the foundation where they stand.

Commendation – this goes further than affirmation – it includes praise! Celebrate who your teens are, by speaking specifically to their strengths, and reminding them to then praise the one who made them – just like they are!

Example – If we are followers (they can spot us if we are!), our kids will notice and that's not helpful. However, if they see us walk away from a group that's gossiping, choose wisely in our finances instead of keeping up with our neighbors, they will note that too...and remember.

The first three letters of those words spell the word ACE, and hopefully you'll ace it as a parent if you follow those three, in producing a vibrant adult with self-confidence that isn't swayed by the masses. And even better, their bent to follow will only end up behind the ONE worthy of following at any cost.

Practical Parenting – While Mom is Busy – by Marcy Lytle

Your kids have already been curbing their social contacts, their school has been anything but normal (at least for many), the world is topsy-turvy, and here we are entering the colder months, where staying indoors will be more common than not. Winter blues may be a real thing for all of us this season, because we've already been blue before the season started! Parenting wild children with energy is no fun, if there are no outlets. Thankfully, playgrounds are opening and we can get outside...but now the cold weather is coming.

Keeping kids occupied and still and happy during the holiday season is difficult, for the most creative parent out there. So I've put on my thinking cap and come up with seven ideas for parenting energetic children in the house – while trying to make dinner and shop and clean – and all that jazz.

Make a white board calendar from now til christmas, and write down the activities on the days you need the to be busy, so that they can just read it and do it, and not forget it! Here are some ideas of what to fill in...and when they perform the activity...they get a dollar! (This way they'll have a bit of cash for Christmas spending...or saving). Obviously, this is for kids that can read, so I'd say ages 5-12 would work, and the little ones can hang with Dad! Each of these activities should give you an hour...or two.

In order for the kids to earn a dollar, there can be no arguing, everything has to be cleaned up, and all items put away!

1. Give the kids your stack of magazines you've read, some scissors, glue and construction paper. They are to cut out images, glue them and cover the paper, to make placemats for each person in the family.
2. Ask the kids to have a story time, with pillows and blankets, in a corner. Each child picks a book and the older ones read aloud. Pillows and blankets and books are to be put back when done.
3. Send the kids to a table with white paper, markers and stickers, and have them make cards for friends and family for Christmas. Give them a list of names or let them make it. Olders need to help the youngers.
4. It's called the board game hour(s). Each child picks their favorite board game, and each one is played for 20 minutes each (or longer if kids can), with approved snacks as well. Lay out a big sheet for them to play and eat.
5. Gym for all can be a time when each child picks their 3 favorite exercises and writes them down. Then they all show up for "class" and each child trains the others, to selected music. Send them to the garage or backyard for this (on a warmish day). Let them take waters and fruit for snacks.
6. Zookeeper fun can be had when each child picks five of their favorite stuffed animals or figures and sets up a zoo in the den. Give them five bowls and/or boxes, and tell them to prepare the zoo for visitors. When you finish your chore, visit the zoo...
7. Set them in front of a good movie that YOU pick – give them paper to draw images from the movie as they watch – then show and tell the family later in the evening!

Hope these help give you ideas and sanity this holiday season, with a few little kid-fun while you have a little mom-done.

Tiny Living – It's Really Okay – by Leyanne Enterline

The days seem long but the years fly by, is what I usually hear. However, I don't know about you but it feels like this year is super long!

It's going on month seven that my hubby lost, was furloughed, from his career. And my business has been up and down as clients seem to be going longer without getting their hair done, and are much more conservative about coming in.

Praise the Lord again for tiny living!

Otherwise, we would not be able to afford a home at the moment! We are so grateful to be where we are, even though it definitely was a bit unexpected. We didn't plan on living tiny for so long, but it is what it is, and we will continue to have *joy in the small blessings* God has given us each day!

Choosing joy has been so hard though, because we have been wallowing in the doom and gloom for a bit. We have been so mad, sad, angry, depressed, *why me*, but...we need to make lemonade out of the lemons. And we are all working on that as a family!

The kids don't seem to be as affected by our current life much, besides the fact that we are traveling a bit less. But that's really okay with the boys, because it just means more fishing and friend time!

Brian and I struggle continually with our attitudes towards life and each other. Usually when one of us is down about things, the other is doing pretty well and can help lift the other one up. But when we're both down, watch out! It's an angry household, which has been tough.

We are definitely in more prayer than ever, more worship, more seeking God. He has faithfully provided some type of income every week! We literally *live by faith weekly* on the finances! We have been blessed and know breakthrough is coming! This long year won't last forever!

We have some more trips coming up, which is our favorite of all, to travel as a family!

God has continued to bless this tiny home and we will rejoice in the little things as we drink our "lemonade" and give thanks...



YOU

Healthy Habits – Holiday Routines – by Marcy Lytle

I know, the holiday season is here, and we can't believe it! So why not get a jump start on healthy habits before the holidays actually begin? It's the holiday season that often sets us all off of our routines, increases our stress, and thus we become more susceptible to illness because we're so run down! I can only say that from experience, that running around and crowding our calendars and squeezing in perfection can make for a way less-than-perfect holiday season! So what are we girls to do?

Here are seven little routines that might be worth noting, so that we actually enjoy the holidays this year, as different as they may look because of the weirdness 2020 has brought us so far:

Shop now, and spread out the spending: Even if you're not sure what your family wants for Christmas yet, start putting aside a little money each week, or buying gifts you do know, now...so the crunch of spending all at once is avoided. Purchase a few gifts each week.

Start planning your foods/recipes - now - while you're sipping cider and watching movies. Peruse the internet or your cookbooks or your favorite places and make a list of sweets, breads, breakfasts, and more...and place them in a folder. You're done, and all you have to do is then bake when the family's hungry!

Sleep in peace (you know, sing *Silent Night*...) by delegating holiday responsibilities. Make a list of all the things – like hanging lights, putting up the tree, cleaning linens for guests (if you have any!), going through wrapping supplies, etc. Make the list, dole out the responsibilities among family members, or among weeks if you're going it alone, then sleep...and get to each item on the list as it comes.

Step into an exercise routine and maintain it – don't let it go just because the holidays are here. Don't let life and worry and stress keep you from going outside, to a gym, in your room, or wherever you can escape to run, dance, get some sunshine, or whatever invigorates and lifts your mood and your body to a higher level of health.

Speak life. Make sure your thoughts are thinking true things about your Good Father and those around you, and then speak them out loud. Affirm the truth about yourself, your relationship with Him, and the way he cares for all that concerns you. Speak it aloud, so that you hear it, and hear it often.

Settle into a rhythm that works for your home. Most likely, there will be less events and gatherings to attend this holiday season, and that may sadden or gladden your heart! If you're sad about that, make a list now of some new family traditions to begin that involve staying home or close by. If you're happy about the lack of gatherings, start making your list of movies and games and fun to be had with your extra family time together. In fact, a few new games might be just the thing to buy for everyone!

Sink into your favorite chair, close your eyes, and sing. Singing is good for the soul, whether you make perfect notes or not. Sing your own song to him, bare your soul, praise his Name. Or sing a familiar tune that has words that send your soul soaring. But whatever you

do, sing. You could start with a Christmas carol like “Deck the Halls with boughs of holly, fa, la, la, la, la, la , la, la la.” That’s a happy tune for sure!

Holiday routines. They don’t have to kill us. They can actually send us into 2021 with a little skip in our step!

Life in a Nutshell – Have No Doubt – by Jill Montz

November is the time of year my family has been working and waiting ten months for. In the pecan industry, the bulk of our business happens in the last two months of the year. For the Pecan Shed, 80% of our sales happen in 60 days. No pressure right?!

By the time most people are still digging through left over Halloween candy in hopes of finding that one good piece left in the bag, our orchard crew is putting in twelve plus hour days on harvesting equipment as they gather pecans around our 25,000 or so trees. Many mornings the crew arrives well before dawn. Calloused hands and cracked knuckles rub tired eyes and stubbly chins as the crew fill thermoses with coffee and tractors with diesel. They bundle up against the brisk north Texas breeze as the first rays of dawn begin to cast long shadows on the orchard floor. Steam rises from the crew's strong coffee as they decide daily duties and head to their respective tractor. Many won't see the barns again until almost dark. Several of the men and women will work late into the evening under the florescent lights of our cleaning barn as they process, sort, sanitize and prepare pecans to be sold locally, across the United States, and even internationally.

These 30 days in November are long, hard, cold, and to be honest...quite nuts at times. The harvesting process is a race against Mother Nature to get pecans picked up before rain slows down procedures or wild animals eat the profit. But have no doubts...to our crew...this is the most wonderful time of the year.

While the farm is buzzing with the sound of tractors rolling through the trees, our two retail stores are hustling and bustling with shoppers. From the moment we turn over the OPEN sign, customers from all over Texas and across the U.S. walk in or call to place an order for our farm fresh pecans. Many have been our customers for decades and we use this time to catch up on family and what's new with them. Some are new to the area or to our store and we offer them our knowledge of all things pecans (and a few free samples too if they are so inclined). Both stores are a bee hive of activity as customers prepare for the holidays. It can be chaotic but it can also be a lot of fun!

Well after the CLOSED sign has been put out and the retail floor lights dimmed you can find my team still working in the warehouse to box up orders for shipping or to prepare for the next day. We have been known to leave the store close to midnight and return some mornings around 6am. I have jokingly said we just need to invest in cots and stay the night, but so far I have not had any takers. My store staff runs on caffeine, Aleve, cold pizza, prayers, and a whole lot of humor! (We can get a little nutty when we start getting less than six hours of sleep.) These men and women are more than my staff...they are my family! I am so blessed to get to work with each of them. The days are long and busy and mentally and physically exhausting. But have no doubts...to my store staff...this is the most wonderful time of the year.

While the business is booming and I am doing my best to be a good leader for my team and a good support person to the orchard crew, I will admit for 60 days a year I'm not so great as a mom. My girl Doty has grown up feeling the pains that come with pecan season. These include, but are not limited to...

- A grumpy mom living on too few hours of sleep, too many bottles of Dr. Pepper, and too many doses of Aleve
- A house that has no groceries because all meals are purchased through a speaker and come in paper bags

- Dotty knowing to be on her best behavior because if she isn't I just might snap and take all my frustrations and exhaustion out on the child I love the most
- Very few, if any, holiday traditions...I don't have the time or energy to do much more than work and survive until December 25th
- A mom who is absent from some school parties and events that fall in these two months
- Dotty pretending not to notice the forced smiles as I try to fake joy and happiness and cover the tears of exhaustion that threaten to slip over the edge and onto my cheeks

The days of November are hard for Dotty, too. She has spent all 13 years of her life learning how to adjust to them. Some years are better than others and I have tried to get better. But have no doubts...to Dotty...this is not the most wonderful time of the year.

However, she is beginning to understand that these 60 days help me to be able to be more present the other 305 of the year. She is starting to realize that being a part of a family business means the buck stops with your last name. She is learning that being the boss doesn't mean you get to get off first...it means you get to leave last. She has discovered that success doesn't come easy and sustained success comes at a cost.

Some might say the price she has to pay is too high, but I would have to disagree. I grew up very similar to Dotty. Only during my childhood my parents were putting in blood, sweat and tears and taking on mountains of debt to make ends meet. Dotty (and I) have it much better nowadays. Plus, I live closer to the fast food places so at least Dotty's meals are warm when she opens the bag (nothing against my mom...she just had a 30-minute drive home every night. I still can't stand to eat cold fries!)

While I do remember exhausted and stressed out parents from my childhood, I also remember parents who succeeded when many thought they would fail. I remember parents who showed me by example that hard work pays off. I remember parents who never gave up no matter what happened. I remember parents who hobbled off to bed achy, exhausted, and worried only to wake up the next day, well before my own alarm went off, to do it all over again.

I remember we still had Thanksgiving meals even if some years they were enchiladas from a local restaurant. We still had Christmas even if we didn't get a tree until December 23rd. My parents still asked about school, sports, friends, and other social activities. My brother even has a birthday in December and I think he got a cake most years (might need to fact check that one...if not a cake I bet he got the cash that the cake would've cost and he probably liked that more anyway).

I grew up knowing that 60 days a year things were going to be...well let's just face it...they were going to be nuts. I still know that 60 days a year my body and several well-meaning friends are going to ask me...are you nuts?! You need more sleep, more water, more dry shampoo...when was the last time you washed your hair?! My kiddo knows that for the next 60 days she will not have a candidate for Mom of the Year living in our house. But have no doubts...for Dotty...she doesn't have one the other 305 days of the year either!

Because the truth is none of us are Mom...or Dad...or Aunt, Uncle, Grandparent, Best Friend, Boss, Employee, Teacher, Coach, Husband, Wife, Doctor, Nurse, Patient, Pastor, Social Worker, Saint, or any other title of the year for any extended period of time. We all have our good days and our bad ones. Some good days string together for a week or perhaps

two...maybe even a month (maybe two). Some bad days do the same. All of us are just doing the best we can. And have no doubts...doing the best you can do...well that's doing enough my friend.

Life Right Now – Evidence – by Bethany Gomez

There is this song that came on the radio recently that you may have heard, if you listen to your local Christian radio station. It's called "Evidence" by Josh Baldwin. The song is about recalling the evidence of God's goodness throughout your whole life and also His goodness, not only in the good times, but the difficult times in your life as well. It also talks about His faithfulness to always walk beside us in every season. It's such a powerful song and its message is just what I needed to hear.

I need to recall God's goodness more often. Sometimes I let the bad and negative things in my life drown out all the countless good things which can cause the enemy's lies to permeate my thoughts. God's goodness is all around, and if I simply stop for a little bit to think about His goodness in my life even when the storms are raging, then I truly believe peace and joy will be in the midst of them.

One of those particular storms right now is not directly *my* storm. It's the storm of someone so close to me that I feel the effects of it ever so much. It's kind of like being in the cone of uncertainty of a major hurricane. The wind and storm surge may not be as great as the place where the eye makes landfall, but it's still pretty damaging.

My mom was diagnosed with stage 3 melanoma back in April. Cancer. The most evil of evils. It has always been one of my biggest fears for me, or someone really close to me, getting cancer. My mom gave me permission to share a little bit of her journey and testimony. She has told everyone really close to her because she knows that prayer and support, not pity and sorrow, from those around her will get her through this storm. God has, of course, been in the midst from the very beginning.

My mom has always told us that if ever she were to get cancer that she would not go through chemo or radiation treatments, because she never wanted to live life too sick to function, and she didn't want our family to go bankrupt trying to pay for these treatments and hospital visits.

The only treatment her doctors recommended she do is something called immuno therapy. It sounds safe enough, but really it is two powerful drugs taken through a port. Essentially, the side effects could be similar to chemo, minus the hair loss. The treatment, we were told, was extremely expensive and my mom didn't have insurance. So when the cost of 6 treatments was covered, my mom was faced with one of the most difficult decisions of whether or not to do the treatment given the fact that God had made a way financially. However, the side effects could be less than ideal. I tried not to pressure her, but I didn't want her to "do nothing" because in my mind, doing nothing would result in my worst fears being realized.

She decided to go ahead and start the treatment. We were all hopeful and prayed against any severe side effects. The first treatment went okay. She broke out in a rash that lasted about a week. The second treatment nearly destroyed her. Seeing my mom become seriously sick due this treatment was heart wrenching. She couldn't eat or drink much of anything for 21 days. She lost so much weight and she became severely dehydrated and ended up in the hospital. She hardly slept and is still not getting a full night's rest. Her body is not functioning like it should, due to those drugs destroying her immune system trying to find the cancer. I wish she had never started it.

I couldn't help but ask God,

"Why is this happening? I already trust You to take care of me and those I love."

But do I, really?

One of the many evidences of God's goodness through all this is the fact that my sister now has a job that is very flexible and she has been able to be there for my mom physically more than I have. She has taken her to almost all her doctor's appointments, treatments and overnight ER stays. I wish I was able to help more, but I know that Mom has been in good hands.

Another evidence of God's goodness is the many good friends supporting my entire family through this. All of them have stepped in to help in some way or another. Some have been praying (which is so vital to getting through this trial), sending money for groceries, bringing over food to my parents, waking up early to go on a walk with me so that I can just talk it all out, and my sister's boss said, "Do whatever you need to do," when needing to take my mom to her appointments. Others have been making gift baskets full of comfort items for my mom, sending sweet texts checking on how my mom is doing, and so many more evidences. I know that we would not make it without true friends like these.

And who gives us those friends? God does.

As we are coming up on Thanksgiving, I am ever more thankful to God for giving my family and myself the most wonderful, life-giving friends.

I could continue on with so many more evidences of God's goodness, but I will leave it here with another reminder from the song "Evidence" to always look for God's goodness, because it's all around.

Help me remember when I'm weak

Why should I fear, the evidence is here

Strategic Women - Jochebed – by Debbie Haynes

Have you ever heard of the name Jochebed? I'm pretty sure you have no one in your circle of friends with this name, but there is a woman in the Bible with this name whose children became great! Having great children is the desire of every mom, but is there a formula that produces them?

This lady's story is found in Exodus 2 and 3. Jochebed means "glory of Jehovah," and this woman was from the priestly line of Levi (one of the 12 tribes of Israel). Jochebed was Moses' mom, and the other siblings were Aaron and Miriam.

The scene presented to us in Exodus is one where the Children of Israel are enslaved by the Egyptians, yet still favored by God. The more harshly the Children of Israel were treated, the stronger they grew! A murderous plan was devised to kill all the Hebrew male babies, but God dealt WELL with the midwives among them, and the people continued to become mighty.

We know that Jochebed had Moses placed in a basket, due to her fierce love for God and her child, so that her son would escape being murdered. But it says in the New Testament in Hebrews 11 that God thought very well of Jochebed, too, and He honored her. It's so cool how the text in the New Testament reinforces the stories from the Old Testament. He honored Jochebed by making her Moses' mother – and we know that Moses became the leader of the Hebrew nation. She had been sort of a "nobody" until God elevated her to the Hebrews faith "Hall of Fame."

Moses was a great leader and legislator. He received the 10 Commandments, watched as God parted the Red Sea, prayed for manna to sustain millions, and these are only a few of his great accomplishments! And it all began with the love of his mother.

Aaron was Moses' brother, the first High Priest of Israel, the one who stood between the people and God to offer sacrifices and be the spokesperson for Moses. Jochebed's grandchildren were also part of the priesthood. What a rich legacy she left!

Miriam was Jochebed's daughter, and she was very brave and wise, as she responded with courage in scary moments. God used her to help place baby Moses in a safe place. Miriam grew up to be a prophetess, songwriter and poet, and an active participant in tabernacle worship!

Because Jochebed was a mom that followed God and not man, she raised three amazing children who literally changed history...children called by God and set apart under his loving eye.

The story of Jochebed reminds that even when we see NO POSSIBLE WAY out of a grave situation, God's power knows no boundaries. Even laws that are made to kill innocent children can be thwarted when a mother obeys her God.

There's a [hymn](#) about God's grace that's offered when burdens are greater, labors increase, and afflictions are added. When trials multiply, his grace has no measure and his power has no

boundary, because he gives again and again. The lyrics continue to remind us that when we have exhausted our store of endurance and our strength is gone, our Father's love has no limit and his grace no measure.

A strategic woman, Jochebed, is no different than you or I. She simply loved her God and loved her children. That love didn't keep away evil plans, but it did protect her children from the evil one, because her Source never failed.

Strengthening Your Core - In Case You're Wondering – by Marcy Lytle

I don't know if you're wondering or not, you younger women that read, but I'm telling anyway. There are SO MANY things that I've come to see and realize in my sixth decade that I sort of wish someone had told me about...but they didn't. I didn't know to ask, but it would have been helpful to know that...

1. Sex is still great – although less frequent – but awesome. Who knew? So glad.
2. Shaving isn't really a thing much – except for those like 10 stray hairs on your legs – so annoying.
3. Purpose wanes, because we're not sure about the future – but we have wisdom and hope stockpiles now to draw from – because we're older.
4. Speaking of stockpiles, it's important to have an “emergency” shelter so start building it now – truths to stand on when your kids need your help and faith.
5. Losing parents is not easy, not matter how old, how they pass, or even if you've been irritated at them your entire life.
6. Friends are SO important because your kids will have their lives, which they need to have. So you need to still have yours.
7. Bitterness isn't pretty on the face, so get rid of it...don't wear it...do everything you can to toss that robe and burn it.
8. Your butt becomes flatter and your stomach becomes fatter. You can fight it, but it happens...to most everyone.
9. You'll catch a glimpse in the mirror and see your mom or dad...and it will freak you out.
10. Avoid the couch and the lazy chair, in favor of fresh air and long walks and talks. These keep you alive.
11. No, fashion doesn't have to fade. If you love it, keep creating and wearing!
12. He will have habits, but so will you, ones that annoy and distress. But fight the urge to mother...and lean in to the urge to love him more.
13. Bite your tongue, because it will be easy to let it loose to downgrade your relationship. Keep accountable to HIM and offer words of affirmation to him.
14. Date night is important at all ages. Keep it on the calendar, and often. As well as weekend getaways.
15. Friends you once had will be gone, because it happens. Look for news ones and always give...expecting nothing in return...but the joy of obeying HIM.
16. Yes, walking with HIM gets sweeter, but only if that bitter robe is discarded...
17. Your house will look old and cluttered, and you'll sigh and wish...so brighten it up regularly instead of wallowing in the dark.
18. Prayer never grows old, so guard that exercise as if your life depends on it, because it does.
19. Your hair gets thinner and a different texture – invest in scarves and hats – and smile big.
20. Life is grand because you'll see each sunrise and sunset as a gift, if you give thanks in all things.



MARRIAGE

In This Together - Yes, Thank You – by Marcy Lytle

We started with a picnic by a pretty pond, and he took the blanket and spread it out for us to sit on and eat. Right away he noticed some ants on my corner of the blanket, and suggested I toss a piece of a pretzel off into the grass and it worked! The ants diverted...

In the car, we were reading for a bit and he made sure we had a spot that was shaded, that I was comfortable, and my seat was in the right position. We often stop to read or rest under a shade tree, just because we can and it relaxes us both and makes us nice people the rest of the day.

In the afternoon, we took our lawn chairs and found another spot to sit and watch ducks and people fish and chill. This was an entire Saturday outside because the repressive heat of the summer was gone and it was SO NICE with the cooler temps. He carried both chairs, opened them up, and made sure I liked where I was sitting.

By the evening, we were back home and on the sofa. He grabbed my feet and started rubbing them, which is something I LOVE so much – it's really just the best! He doesn't like his feet to be rubbed, but I do, and he knows it.

My husband's "gift" is serving, and people that know him soon realize it. He doesn't serve to be served. He doesn't wait to be told. And he doesn't demand or expect accolades. And those types of people often are overlooked, stepped on, and their services abused. I've even done it, in our marriage. I'm not inclined to serve near as much as he is, so I have to purpose to take note, give thanks, and bless him for who he is. I have to PURPOSE to do those things.

I feel as though I've written about his sweet acts multiple times, but it takes multiple times of purposing to take note of his actions. Being married to a servant-type, we non-servant types can easily slip into expectation and not even realize it. We can even let our own responsibilities go, knowing he will take up the slack. And we can even treat him with disdain at times, because he's serving others and not shining in the spotlight.

That one particular day I did take note and I smiled. He serves me so well, way too well for what I deserve, especially when I'm tired and irritable.

If I'm being honest, I'm glad he doesn't like his feet to be rubbed, because I don't want to rub them. I can carry my own chair, but he always wants me to have a lighter load, and that's okay with me! I can be quite self-centered when I'm in a mood...and he knows it. I know it, too.

He knows my strengths and weaknesses, and I know his. Being married seems to bring out the parts of each other that we don't like...and we highlight them. And if we're not careful, we will forget the strengths because the weaknesses get under our skin so badly...until...

We see those kind acts he's giving, we notice his sweet tenderness with our children, or we observe his organization skills in the garage...or whatever it is that makes him tick. And when we see his strengths, when we give thanks for those deeds, and when we pray for (not just

dismiss) his weaknesses, somehow the lens through which we look becomes a little cleaner and we see a bit farther.

Just now, as we're pulling into a parking spot for another rest, he turns and looks at me to ask, "Are you out of the sun?" And I say, "Yes, thank you."

Date Night Fun – Five Thanks – by Marcy Lytle

It's been quite hard thinking up lots of date night ideas during this season of so many things being closed or not accessible during this crazy year! Here it is November, and now the weather is cooling down, so it seems the options are narrowing even further. One temptation might be to quit date nights altogether, and opt for sofa slouching every weekend. But...you know we won't let that happen...so below are some thankful ideas for this 11th month of year.

Jot down five things you're thankful for, and then make your date night revolve around those. Here are our five picks:

1. **Friends** – Invite another couple over for s'mores around the fire pit. If you don't have a fire pit, consider purchasing a cute s'mores kit, and setting out blankets or chairs in the backyard. It will be dark, so you'll need to be on the back porch or in your lit yard. Ask each one to bring a song to share from their play list, aloud, and to share why they love it so much. Finally, dance in the moonlight in the backyard to those songs...or others!
https://www.amazon.com/Nostalgia-SMM200-Stainless-Compartment-Marshmallows/dp/B00PY05VMS/ref=sr_1_2?dchild=1&keywords=smares+maker&qid=1602508661&sr=8-2
2. **Food** – You'll be baking and making lots of recipes these next few weeks, so for date night – don't make it – go get it! Consider supporting your local restaurants that are open by getting takeout and heading to a favorite lookout over your city, for a romantic dinner for two in your car. If it's warm enough, open the windows or back, and lay out a blanket and eat. Begin by thinking over the year and giving thanks for at least five things, aloud, to each other. Then take time, both of you, to send a text message to five friends to thank them for something specific. Share their replies, then head home holding hands.
3. **Health** – Make this date night idea all about good food, fun exercise and settling words.... Head to Whole Foods or a store where you can opt for two items – both healthy – for a snack. Pack it in a bag you bring along (or a cooler) and head out for a nature walk (this date will need to be on a weekend!) - where you stop and enjoy your snack along the way. Search and find a new trail! Finally, take out the books you've both brought along, and read for a while, observing nature and people (if any other walkers go by.) Make this date last at least three hours...so there's time to breathe.
4. **Books** – There's a book called *Be the Gift* by Ann Voskamp that's a great choice, or you can choose your own – one with the theme of thanksgiving. I really like another choice, too, called *Say Please, Say Thank you*. Make coffee or another warm beverage, get some dark chocolate, and sip and read aloud, portions of the book. As you read, stop and give thanks and pray and give more thanks. Make this a solemn, yet joyful, date night together as you celebrate the gift of words.
<https://annvoskamp.com/bethegift/>
<https://www.amazon.com/Say-Please-Thank-You-Respect/dp/0399525386>
5. **Celebrations** – There will be family gatherings (hopefully) for weeks now...but you need a couple -gathering to celebrate your marriage! What is there to celebrate? How about these three things? Celebrate an answered prayer, a practical blessing, and something

in nature! Both of you write down your pick for each of those, but don't share until date night. Create a food board together, settle in by the fireplace, and share. End the evening by watching the *Greater* movie on Netflix as you celebrate the goodness of God in your lives.

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2950418/>

In This Together - Communicating Brides – by Kaelin Scott

“She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue.”

Proverbs 31:26

Before my husband, Britton, and I were married, we dated long distance for two years. Most long distance relationships don't work out, and I can testify to the fact that it is very difficult to do. But despite the hardships, there are extremely valuable lessons to be learned. During those two years, we definitely faced days of uncertainty about the future. What we didn't realize was that we were strengthening our future marriage along the way. We were building skills that would help us later on, and I am so very grateful for that. At the time, I wanted nothing more than to be with Britton and not be separated anymore. But looking back, I'm thankful we had to go through it because it made us stronger.

There are many keys to having a successful long distance relationship, like trust and faith and patience. But I think the biggest one is *clear and concise communication*. When you only get to talk over the phone, you learn to weigh and measure your speech. You are forced to consider the way you are coming across to the other person and how your words make them feel. Communication can make or break a relationship, especially a long distance one. Britton and I had to learn very early on how to do it in a healthy and effective way. This has carried over into our marriage, which has been a lifesaver at times.

If you can't communicate effectively with your husband, your entire marriage can quickly fall off the tracks. Communication is an essential building block to having a strong relationship, and it helps you grow together, too. If this is something that you feel you are lacking, then *go back to the basics*. Think before you speak. I know that sounds silly, but it's a lot easier said than done. Really consider your words before you let them come spewing out. Are they helpful or hurtful? It is also vital to say what you mean. Speak clearly and be straightforward. Don't try to make your husband guess how you feel. Along with that, mean what you say! If your words do not match up with your heart, then it may not be a good idea to speak them. Our speech should be transparent and truthful, not convoluted or dishonest.

Being open and honest with your husband is absolutely necessary in order to enjoy a happy marriage. And it is critically essential to our spiritual lives as well. In fact, our relationship with God is compared to marriage many times in Scripture. Like any intimate relationship, being close to God requires good communication, which occurs in the form of prayer. Bring your heart to God openly and honestly. Trust Him with your worries and fears. Tell Him how you feel. And *don't forget to listen in return*.

One-sided conversations don't work with our husbands, and they certainly won't work with God. We can't talk and talk and talk, without stopping to listen to Him. His words might not be audibly discernable, but He is always speaking to us, and He has so many wonderful things to say!



ENCOURAGEMENT

I've always believed that, for the most part, I was a Mary, choosing the "better" things...the "one needful thing." Sitting at the feet of Jesus is the most important thing I can do. It's the one thing that enables me to live a life of purpose, meaning, and fulfillment. It's the one thing that keeps me grounded and pointed in the right direction. But lately I've been feeling more like a Martha.

Doing, doing, doing--life is filled with things I must do: outside projects, inside projects, the business and must-dos of life. You would think a single retired person would have lots of disposable time—some people think that—even I used to think that. After all, I don't have to cook if I don't want to, I don't have family laundry to do, I don't have to go to work every day and I don't have a lot of commitments. I purposely keep it that way so that I have plenty of time to spend on the better things...the one needful thing; yet, to-dos manage to weasel their way in, on a relentless mission to crowd out the *one needful thing*.

I try to read and have quiet time first thing in the morning, to fuel my spirit and lessen the chance of missing it altogether as things crowd in, but it's often a battle. I begin to think of the things that must be done, the phone calls I have to make—and then there are the "interruptions"—a text, an email, my cat. Stop, refocus, put the phone in the other room, start again, stop. This mind-battle extends the time and then I'm pressed with the thought that the cool morning is rushing by and the afternoon is hot—different tasks to do accordingly, I'd better start. This is an on-going exercise in discipline, focus, and an opportunity to allow the "one thing" to reign over the onslaught of must-dos. Some days are better than others.

How do I manage the things I must do while keeping the "one thing" at the forefront? *Must* I really do these things, or do I just *want* to do them? Do I have to be a Mary *or* a Martha? I feel both of them pulling at me, and they both feel right. The Mary in me needs to connect with God to keep my inner life in order. The Martha in me can't forget the must-dos that keep my outer life in order.

Putting these thoughts into words, it's becoming a bit more clear. I see a somewhat blurry picture of both Mary and Martha serving Jesus. Mary gave him her full attention, honoring him as King; Martha prepared food to nourish his body, which was a sacrifice, because someone had to do it. Mary chose the one eternal needful thing, but Martha carried on with the earthly tasks necessary at the time. And so, in this heaven-on-earth life, I must learn to balance the two in my personal life.

Something that helps me achieve balance is to align my inner and outer life as much as possible. Because of my "Mary time" with Jesus, I have a mission, a calling, a purpose (whatever you want to call it) that I hold to by *faith*. Most of the things I do are in some way tied to that—even though they're earthly tasks, they're meant to help me fulfill my inner purpose directly or indirectly—this is Martha at work. Sometimes I get off track (read my Nov. 2019 story "What Matters Most"), but if I listen, God brings me back. Some seasons are busier than others—spring and fall is a busy time for gardening, plus I have a few additional projects I'm working on—I guess that's why I'm feeling a lot like a Martha right now.

Sharing these thoughts with you has brought me peace. I'm reminded that my busy-ness is for a purpose and it's all good. God is good, always present, always listening, waiting for me to sit at his feet for a moment whenever and however I can.

Well, it's time to go...must-dos waiting.

Unearthly Thing - Gratitude Attitude – by Angela Dolbear

Lately, the hit song “Gratitude,” from the 80’s band Oingo Boingo, is on repeat in my mind. As a worship leader, one might think the songs playing in my head would consist of all sanctified tunes, songs of praise worship (which actually happens a lot), but I was teenager in the 80’s, so that music is ingrained in me. I live in the world, though I am not of it (ponder John 17:14-16). I asked God to help me never to forget what life was like before Jesus lived in my heart. Mind and soul. But that is a topic for another day. I digress...back to gratitude! Today, I am writing about gratitude, hence the song.

November brings one of my favorite holidays, Thanksgiving. Pumpkin everything (I am not complaining, but partaking! Yum!) everywhere, along with big dinners and big shopping, and oh, uh, big football, so I’ve heard. And it’s a time to give thanks. Hopefully, big thanks to God.

Gratitude in action

I live with almost constant anxiety, which seems to gain strength as it feeds on the Covid pandemic and the political unrest. Anxiety is a strange and unwelcomed sensation that is new to me, since it is a side effect from the stroke I had in March 2018.

Depression has also come to live in my brain, since then. Before fireworks exploded in my brain, I never experienced either of these mental conditions. But now I do.

I recognize them when they come around, like a hoard of angry villagers brandishing torches of fire that I can’t escape from their encroaching pursuit of my emotional equilibrium.

I was asking God to heal me on a day that was particularly dark and suffocating. He told me to be thankful.

Sounds odd, I know. But I knew what He meant.

God taught me to demolish the strongholds of anxiety and depression by specifically naming

things for which I am grateful.

Even the smallest things: the nice desk chair I am sitting on, the beautiful home I live in, in Nashville, my sweet black cat Maddy, who always knows when my anxiety levels are high, for my awesome husband and best friend Tim (I could name specific items of gratitude for hours about him), and for the hot coffee in the cute atomic print mug, which I am currently drinking while I write.

After naming as few as five items of gratitude, the fog began to lift. The dark weight of depression began to diminish.

I will keep naming people, places and things of which I am thankful, until gratitude has become my attitude. And I am free. And so loved by God. Which I am eternally grateful for.

“When you intentionally think about things that are godly, there’s no room for the enemy’s lies to get into your mind,” Joyce Meyer wrote in her daily devotional, from September 18, 2020.

“Concentrating on trying to not think wrong thoughts can actually increase them, but focusing on what’s pure, true and life-giving—filling your mind with good things—will shift the whole direction of your life to line up with God’s Word.” This was a life-changing revelation for me. I realized I couldn’t wait for something good to just fall into my mind; I had to choose my thoughts on purpose.”

Yes! I choose to think on gratitude.

Here are just a few of the many, many verses on gratitude from God’s word, to give us something good to think on (all quoted from the Amplified translation of the Bible):

- “Remember [with gratitude] His marvelous deeds which He has done, His miracles and the judgments from His mouth” -- 1 Chronicles 16:12

- “Know and fully recognize with gratitude that the Lord Himself is God; It is He who has made us, not we ourselves [and we are His]. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. -- Psalm 100:3
- “People will speak of the power of Your awesome acts, And [with gratitude and submissive wonder] I will tell of Your greatness.” -- Psalm 145:6
- “But if anyone loves God [with awe-filled reverence, obedience and gratitude], he is known by Him [as His very own and is greatly loved].” -- 1 Corinthians 8:3
- “Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, and offer to God pleasing service and acceptable worship with reverence and awe” -- Hebrews 12:28

Application: Instead of focusing on my extreme need or suffering, and praying with a sense of fear and a sliver of blame on God, as I am prone to do when I have been run-over by anxiety and/or depression, I need to ask Him with trust, faith and patience, to fill me with gratitude. And I need to replace my anxious thoughts with deep gratitude for everything I touch, everything surrounding me. Even the comfy office chair I am sitting on.

Application Prayer: Father, thank You for giving me the ability to think healthy thoughts. Please replace lies, deceptions and destructive thoughts with the truth of Your Word, and real life examples of gratitude. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Great heaps of blessings to you, and thank you for reading my ramblings!

Picture note: This is Sparky, the sweet squirrel my husband and I raised from an infant. I am so very grateful for that experience, and all the lessons we learned along that journey. God is good!

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

Moving Forward – Already Seen – by Pam Charro

I found another wall inside of myself today...more unhealed hurt that is keeping me from fully trusting, fully giving of myself.

I don't want it to be there, but there it is.

I have been in therapy since the fourth grade. I became a Christian 32 years ago this month. And while I have come such a long way over the years, I sometimes wonder if I will spend the rest of my life going around and around the same hurts and insecurities. I just want to be well!

I have to constantly remind myself of God's gentle perspective when I see my weaknesses. He is the only one who knows how to heal me, and he is faithful in that task.

As Malachi 3:3 states, he stands carefully over me and uses just the right amount of heat to bring up my impurities without overwhelming me. And Philippians 1:6 assures me that he who began his good work in me will finish that good work. None of my frustrated striving will bring any good fruit. I just have to trustingly lay all of it before him and know that he is very good at what only He can do.

Equally important is that I remember that he isn't overly focused on my weaknesses. He knew what he was getting when he paid for me, and he is delighted with the person I am right now. He loves to use me every day to make himself known; and he loves simply walking with me when we are alone together. He enjoys me right now and he loves it when I simply enjoy right now with him.

What joy to know that even as I am being refined, I am already seen as precious.

I can relax and enjoy being me.

Rooted in Love – Spiritual Cleanout – by Kaelin Scott

Is it just me, or is cleaning out the fridge one of the worst ways to spend thirty minutes? Seriously, I can find some really nasty stuff in there! It's not something I particularly enjoy, but it has to be done every once in a while. It's important to get rid of old, moldy stuff before it starts to stink. And it's good to wipe the shelves and drawers down once in a blue moon, too. Cleanliness is important, along with staying organized. Admittedly, I have never been very good at either of those things, but it's something I have been working on over the last several years.

If you know me at all, you already know that I like to compare ordinary things to spiritual life. Everyday life is chock full of metaphors if you really look for them. And of course, I couldn't help finding one of those metaphors as I was cleaning out my fridge. While I threw away rock hard cinnamon rolls and mushy grapes, I thought about the importance of cleaning out our hearts and minds. Every now and then, it's good to take inventory of our thoughts and feelings. There may be things we're holding onto that aren't healthy anymore. As we grow and mature, we have to throw some things away. We can't expect better things to come if we're stuck in the past. Sometimes we have to let go and make room for something new.

Just like the expiration date on a carton of milk, certain thoughts or behaviors start to turn sour if we let them linger too long. Spiritual growth means discarding fleshly behavior and replacing it with a Christ-like attitude. We must comb through our inner selves to determine which traits are of God, and which are of the world. Which thoughts and actions are pleasing to our Lord, and which ones cause us to be distant from Him?

In the Old Testament, God speaks about the pleasing aroma of His people's sacrifices. I don't know about you, but when I leave rotten food in my fridge, the aroma is far from pleasant! And you know, the same is true about our hearts. When we allow sinful nature to linger and fester, it can really start to stink. It can even make us nasty and unpleasant to be around, and God does not take joy in that. But when we clear out our fleshly ways, making room for His presence and influence in our hearts, we become beautiful and fragrant to Him. He delights in us when we become more like Him, glorifying Him through our thoughts, speech and actions.

If we want to be more like Jesus, we have to cleanse our hearts. It can be scary and painful and hard, but it's so worth it when we blossom into the women we were created to be. We can sit in our stink and let ourselves rot. Or we can choose to become something fresh and new!

“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” Psalm 51:10

Simple Truths – One Big Bloom – by Marcy Lytle

My husband is fascinated with gardens, especially roses. But any garden will do, really. When we vacation, he loves to roam through gardens, either natural ones or ones we pay to visit. I enjoy them as well, because plants are fascinating! All the colors, shapes, characteristics, smells, etc. are so interesting and somehow calming, as well, when we walk among a huge array of them – all arranged for visual stimulation!

Recently, he saw an agave (the century plant) blooming and decided to look it up and was amazed by what he found. The agave plant only produces one blooming stalk during its life, and that happens right before it dies! He came into the kitchen and stated, “Isn’t that so cool?” My first reaction and reply was, “No, that’s so sad!” I was thinking about our own lives and how sad that would be if we lived all our lives with no “blooms” and then right before we die, we produce something beautiful, but then it’s gone! Are you with me?

Then my husband kept reading and realized that the main stalk gets about 20-30 feet tall, and young plants spring up around its base. And that further reading gave me hope...for that plant...and for all of us!

After finishing, my husband said he thought what he had just read was great and there were so many lessons to be learned. He didn’t have time to write a story, so I told him to send me the short version...and I’d write it. At first, though, I was hesitant because I was only seeing the fact that the bloom never happened until right before death. How could that plant keep growing, and thriving, knowing there would be nothing produced for decades?

I suppose the best part of the information is the little plants that spring up around the big plant. And the fact that at the end, the plant doesn’t slowly wither up and disappear from view – it goes out with a profuse bloom that causes all to take notice! Now, that offers hope to all of us!

Here’s what my husband’s take was on the century plant:

1. Go out with a bang.
2. Pass on the mantle to the next generation.
3. Lift your head high.
4. Leave a lasting legacy.
5. Reach for the stars.

Honestly, if I had read that same story without his commentary, I would have gotten a whole different lesson from it. And that would have been how sad it is to live all of your life without blooming until the end...and I would have gotten off the page and never thought about that sorry plant again.

So, take what you want from this story. Either make sure you have a friend nearby that sees the glass half full instead of empty (my husband is that friend to me!)...or be amazed and encouraged yourself, as he was, at that awesome bloom and the shoots that arrive when the plant is gone.

I'm amazed, and I think it's a cool story. But if that plant were in a garden, I'd still probably wander on to a whole other area, while my husband stands there and marvels...



FRESH THYME

FRESH THYME – A and S – by Marcy Lytle

Assumptions and Speculations. Both of these get us in trouble all the time. We assume something was meant or said or happened, and we're totally wrong because we don't see the whole picture. Or we speculate about intentions or actions and we believe so many lies, we're in a bad place for sure! I've been guilty of both of these and have to daily make a choice to steer away from each one!

Here's what I'm talking about:

- We assume he knows what we want so we say nothing, wait for him to act, and he doesn't. So we assume he doesn't love us. (Commonly happens in marriages)
- We assume when God doesn't answer a prayer right away that he either doesn't hear or doesn't care. (This is totally untrue!)
- We assume when we invited them to dinner that they would reciprocate, but they never did, so they must not like us. (We decide then to never invite them again.)

Have you found yourself thinking similar things? Most of those assumptions we make end up making us feel unloved, unappreciated and unnoticed. If we then continue to feel that way, our assumptions then affect our actions, and we actually push people away because we're hanging our heads so low!

- We speculate that because of Covid our future is bleak and without hope. (We are never without hope!)
- We speculate that because she looked sad that she must be having marital issues. (Speculation is dangerous!)
- We speculate that if our kids don't take extra classes and excel, they will not succeed in life. (This builds pressure which we don't need)

Speculation is a waste of time, it's a dangerous pastime, and is totally irrational. It's forming opinions about the future based on nothing but what we see or feel, not facts.

Reading and listening to social media can provide a feeding ground for assumptions and speculations. So many are misunderstood and judged, both the contributor to social media, and the recipient of social media. I've often seen friends "take a break" from Facebook or Instagram because of the information overload. Politics, family slander, opinions, too much information – it all floods the mind and then one of two things happens: We recognize it all and ignore the stuff and focus on the cute family photos and encouraging words...or we assume and speculate about those posting. The latter is no good!

Assuming and speculating are both a waste of time and energy, and can totally kill relationships. So how do we stop doing both? II Timothy reminds us to stay away from anything that produces a quarrel. Assumptions (where our minds come to a conclusion and a judgment against someone) destroy trust and love. Speculation (where our minds predict an outcome without knowledge) completely eliminates faith and hope.

I have found that when I start down the road of assuming and speculating, the longer I walk that path, the harder it is to turn around before I've already fallen in a ditch and sprained my mental ankles. It's best to start the day thinking on whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy – in that order. Then there's no room for the A and the S.

FRESH THYME - The Ditched – by Marcy Lytle

We recently saw a movie called *The Last Shift* and I loved it, because it left me thinking about the story for days. I won't disclose the whole story here (because I hope you watch it!) but basically an older man has been the manager at a fast food drive through for 38 years and feels very proud of his job. He's taken ownership of the place and loves that he's been there so long...until a new arrival shows up.

This new arrival is a young man that will take the older man's job, because it's soon to be his last shift. He's retiring to move away and tend to his aging mom. This new arrival is a disgruntled youth and he starts making fun of the old man, chiding him for never doing anything with his life except make fries and burgers.

There are LOTS of other things that happened in the movie, with both of the characters, but this one particular observance is what I'm focusing on in this story. The older man felt good about himself, in fact he felt proud – until someone made him feel less than. Both characters end up showing their flaws, but this part made me sad.

There are all sorts of people in the world, and we only live in our little small circle of friends that are usually "like us" in economic status, looks, and beliefs. Yet there are those we are yet to meet that are totally unlike us, and the words and looks we offer might just make or break that person's day...or life.

This older man had found his niche, he was good at what he did, and the customers liked him. He had learned to manage the store well, and he was given responsibilities that showed him he was trusted. One thing the boy asked was, "How much do you get paid?" When the old man shared his hourly pay, the boy scoffed and alerted the old man to how little that was, and how the people he worked for were just using him. The old man was stunned and began to wonder about his job and even himself.

I'm pretty sure I've let something slip out of my mouth that made someone feel less than about themselves. And I know that I've received words and comments from others that have made me feel bad, as well.

I recall when we had some friends over not long after my son had been born and the lady commented on my weight "gain." I'm thinking she meant nothing by it, but it made me feel fat and I hated myself for months until I lost some weight. Another time, I had some friends over to see our new home and the first thing one said was how small my kids' rooms were, and I then was embarrassed and felt self-conscious about my home that I had loved.

Let me stop here and say that often we receive words and comments from others and they mean nothing by it, and we need to let their comments roll off our backs like water off a duck's back. However, for this story I'm talking about us – our mouths – our words – and to think before we speak.

The boy in the movie was irritated, disgruntled, and angry that he had to take a menial job because he was on probation, and he was stressed with his own life situation. He had an attitude, and he spouted off whatever he thought without any regard for the consequences of those words landing on tender ears. In this film, it was the ears of an older gentleman.

Sure, the older man maybe could have climbed the social ladder of success and perhaps gotten a more prestigious job, but he was happy. He loved what he did, and he was proud of it. Those two attitudes are something more we all need – the satisfaction with what we have and the smile that come with contentment.

But along comes social media, advertisements, new ideas and the constant barrage of words and directives to become more, do more, make more, and get more...and that sounds appealing. We look and we wonder and we want, and pretty soon we've driven right off the road into a ditch.

That boy's words sent the older gentleman into the ditch of despair, when he had been driving on the highway of happiness.

Note taken. I hope I remember that movie and its message (one of many) for a long time...and watch what I say to those around me that are like me...or unlike me...but still a friend worth valuing and affirming.

FRESH THYME – Great Advice – by Marcy Lytle

Someone once told me, “You can’t do everything, and you don’t have to.” Those words, coming from a person I admired, changed my life. I no longer feel guilty when I don’t say yes to every question I’m asked, about joining in at this event or that, serving here or there, or even giving to him or her. It was real freedom to be able to say no, and know that I was perfectly okay and didn’t need to feel bad about my decision.

I think we all need to hear this same advice as the holiday season approaches. This year, of course, we may not be called up on to do as much as other years...but there is still all the activity, the baking, the giving, the doing...that we feel as though we “have” to get done.

We feel we have to make certain foods, bake pies and cookies, make everything from scratch and all that jazz.

No, we don’t have to.

We feel like we have to spend a certain amount, get that person a gift, send that person a card, have family photos made, and check off our entire to-do list for Christmas.

No, we don’t have to.

We feel like we need to make sure we give to those in need at this time, be thankful and have a good attitude all day, and keep a perfect house – for the holiday season.

No, we don’t have to.

What would happen if we let go of that pressure we put on ourselves to get it ALL done in record time, and something was left undone!

Gasp!

I follow a funny lady on Instagram and her motto is to “Charm without lifting an arm,” because she shares how to delegate everything so that it’s never a one woman show, with that said woman collapsing at the end of an event! Recently, she shared a whole story on all the pre-packaged food she purchased and how good it tasted, and how it left her time to do other things!

So here are some novel ideas, for some of us:

- If buying gifts is pressurized due to funds, don’t buy them. Be honest and let your family know that they are loved, but gifts won’t be given. Then breathe...and take the funds you do have and buy one nice thing for your immediate family.
- If family photos and all the outfits and finding the right spot and gathering everyone together is too much, then skip them this year. Snap a few candid shots of the kids, and

display them on Facebook, and be done. Sigh...and smile at the load you just let off your shoulders!

- If your to-do list is daunting and you mark off two things, only to add 15 more things, cross off at least half! Give one of those must-do jobs to another. Ask, unashamed, and without regret, for help. Then say thanks and be on your way.
- If you feel guilty because of needs you've heard of, but you just can't give this year, then say a prayer for that person and be at rest. Prayer is not something less-than, it's a great gift when backed with faith! Do it!
- If your house is a wreck and cleaning it is too overwhelming, enlist help. Pay for a house cleaner. Pay your teens! Tell your husband! (Don't pay him...) Assign duties, and then don't criticize their methods. Just give thanks that they pitched in...and you let them.

I don't know what else might be stressing you out during the holiday season. It might be sadness because someone is missing this year, it may be bitterness at loss that's occurred during Covid, or it might just be that you're tired and don't want to do it all for everyone else.

I'll say it again, what was said to me.

"You can't do everything, and you don't have to."

And guess what else? You're just fine if you don't.

Enjoy the holiday season, look out at the lights, give thanks for small things like candles burning and books to read by the fire, and sit down...and let go...and close your eyes and be still.

Happy Holidays.

FRESH THYME – I Can Do This – by Marcy Lytle

Here's Texas fall weather: It's 40 degrees and chilly in the morning, and we're so excited because it finally feels seasonal...but wait! The forecast says today's high will be 88 degrees...say what? It happens repeatedly throughout the fall season where I live and it drives me nuts! We definitely know how to layer our clothing, because we have to, in order to survive! We might leave bundled in a sweater, and return home in a t-shirt. We often heat up the car at 6am only to blast the AC at 5pm. It really is enough to drive one bonkers, most days.

What I've started to realize is that when I know the heat is coming in the afternoon, I let it ruin the beauty of the cool in the morning. In other words, I have a hard time enjoying the moment, the present, the right now. And it's because I know it's going to end soon.

I do this with vacations as well. Before we ever leave, I start thinking about how sad it will be when vacation is over and we're back home. And the last day of vacation I feel sad most of the day – missing the current fun – because my mind is already back at work and busy again!

My husband is the opposite. He is very present in the moment and in the now. He doesn't think or worry about later. He lives and breathes for our morning hug, his cup of dark roast coffee, the present work list for the day, and then when the day is over – he lives for the moment with a nice walk, the sunset, and...you get the picture.

He's a man of peace 99% of the time, and I'm a woman of unrest maybe 50% of the time! However, I have learned a few ways to train myself to be more like him, more in the moment, so that I actually enjoy my days instead of fret that they're soon going to end! It's hard for me, and I have to discipline myself and make an effort, but when I do – I'm all the better for it. And so are those around me!

- I make myself pause and observe
- I relax my mind with the Word
- I give thanks for the cool AND the hot
- I make myself smile (it's amazing how often I realize I'm not!)
- I stay in contact with others who are unlike me
- I journal my thanks
- I pray and ask for His help

I have an active mind, and I'm sure that's part of why I'm always thinking ahead about the heat instead of pausing to enjoy the cool. I've been known to miss the joy of a show, because I'm texting or planning or working. Sometimes, I have to actually plan "down time" so that I can breathe and look up and look out, and see the trees blowing and the sun setting...because it all happens sometimes without my seeing it at all!

If you're like my husband, God bless you. What a gift you've been given. And if you're like me, let's link arms (well, as best we can) and purpose to end the year of 2020 by being present,

taking note, giving thanks, and stepping out in the cool breezes and smiling big...and then doing that all over again when the heat rises. We can do this!