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TIPS

The Dressing – Just Put It On – by Marcy Lytle

I don't know how we have survived the summer heat here, but we have...and summer is a long shot from being over. Many mornings I wake up and think, "How can I dress cool today?" When actually any clothes I choose are hot! I wore long pants some days, a dress or skirt another, and then my jean shorts on another. I just accepted the fact that I was going to be hot, and went with it... Sometimes, we just have to dress and go! I browsed my closet and put on whatever looked comfy and felt good for the day.

Here's what I've been wearing:

Green baseball tee with Walmart drawstring – See these pants? I have two pairs – one in this pretty summer green and another in light gray. They have been my staple pants for the season. Love them so much! And today I paired the green ones with a baseball tee from Kohls, found on clearance!

Same pants, stripe tee and crossbody in red – This striped tee from Target is so comfy and cool, and it goes with literally everything. I added this crossbody in a pop of red for outings when I wanted my hands to be free.

Old Navy neutral dress with tee over top – This dress was only \$15 at Old Navy and it's sleeveless, but I snagged it! This look is just a graphic tee tied in the middle with a hair tie, and tucked under. This is as comfortable as it looks!

Same dress with halftie under – Same dress from Old Navy, but this time I added a half tee (great for hot days – adds no bulk!) underneath. And look! I tied a scarf on the shoulder – so fun!

Knox Rose top with jeans – This gauze top from Target is one of my favorite summer purchases. I LOVE the stitching, and it was so fun to wear just tucked in my favorite pair of cropped denim. Knox Rose is a fun brand!

Knox Rose dress – Another of the same brand, this dress screamed, "Buy me!" and I did. Aren't the colors so pretty? It is worn with a cotton slip underneath that I got from Amazon - another favorite from summer purchases.

Stripe top and jean shorts – I got this shirt last year from Steinmart. It's somewhat dressy, but I've paired it here with jean shorts. I love to mix dressy with casual. Do you?

Shirt dress with tee and red bag – I found this button up sleeveless shirt dress on the H&M clearance rack for \$10 and I've had so much fun styling it! This time it's a tight tee over top and tucked, and a fun red bag my sister gifted me from SOCO in Austin.

I think cotton, loose fit clothing fits the bill for August...and lightweight pants if you wear them. There's just no escaping the fact that August is hot...but we all know that fall is coming soon (or at least, we hope it is.)

Seven for You – Heartfelt Gifts – by the Panel of Women

Condolences come in the form of cards, plants, visits, calls, and so many other ways. They're so needed in hard times, and we asked our panel to share some of their most meaningful gifts they gave, or have received, when times were sad and difficult. Maybe you have a friend that's struggling. We hope these will give you an idea on ways to send your heartfelt thoughts in more ways than one.

Here are just some of the things my friend sent me during my two surgeries and for my birthday. I was facing my surgeries alone and these little gifts helped me so much. It's so easy nowadays to use Amazon to send little gifts of cheer and support. No packing, shipping and trips to the post office. The little jar is full of "hugs". I can keep them or give them to others who might need them. We need little bits of kindness these days. – Cathy

Our church ladies set up a 2-week meal train that meant so much to me at a time of loss. Their kindness was so humbling, and the surprise of a daily delivery of something wonderful and nourishing at a time that I couldn't think was really appreciated. I learned that even simple foods like beans and sandwich makings were so welcome. Also, I received several Door Dash gift cards, which were great because they don't expire, so I could use them whenever needed. Our ladies really sustained me during this time. Body and soul. – Debbie

Recently, a young, 30-something year old female family member passed away from breast cancer, leaving her mother and daughter. I bought them each an angel holding a candle that they could keep as a reminder that they now have an angel watching over them in heaven.

When my son died, I had his ashes blown into a glass heart ornament and gave each of those who loved him one of those glass ornaments. Also had paper weights made. – Anita

My dad passed recently and a friend left two orchids on my porch (via HEB delivery – didn't even know they did this!) and these orchids are now part of my tablescape. Another friend left a green plant and a card on my porch. And ...we were in the movies with friends when we got the call about my dad passing. We missed most of the movie, so our friends later sent us a gift card for the theater. *So very thoughtful.* Cards that people took time to write and send meant the world to me... - Marcy

My last hospital stay in November 2021 was pretty stressful because it took a few days to find out what was causing the pain and high white blood cell count, as well as what was the nature of the extremely large growth the CT scan showed in my uterus. During this scary time, I received so many texts and messages of prayers, as well as beautiful flower arrangements. When you are stuck in the hospital not knowing what is going on, it's heartening to know others are praying for you (at times, I could feel these prayers!). And having the sweet flowers to look at was a reassuring reminder that I was loved. – Angela

My dad passed away from lung cancer while I was in my late 30's. I had three kids, a job, several commitments at church and a home to run. My parents stayed with us often during my dad's treatment since they were from a smaller town that did not provide what he needed. My mom moved in with us the last three weeks of his life. I say this because I believe what a person needs is very specific to their situation. During my dad's final days I needed help with the kids!! I needed encouragement that I could handle all of this. I needed comfort so I could

comfort others. We needed food. I received all these things because of the amazing church body we were a part of at the time. Meals showed up at our door, people checked in on us, a dear friend dropped off a beautiful coffee mug filled with lip balm and special soap. I think the key is to try to evaluate what the person/family needs and just show up. So many times people will ask what we need but we don't want to inconvenience others so we say we are "fine" OR we perhaps we really don't know what we need, ourselves. My motto: We pray for God's leading and we show up. - Shelley

Three Moms – As School Starts – by the Cousins

Mom of Three

We are not the best at preparing for school or routine. We just sort of jump in every year! But as far as what we try to do to prepare for the new year is we do spend time praying over the kids, as we ask them what they would like us to pray for. It's important to have them bring their fears to the Lord and pray for them together, throughout the year.

As far as fear, I don't really start the school with fear. I do pray for safety and protection, that they have good teachers and wonderful friends – basic things. I'm very grateful for the area where we live and love our principal, and I trust that HE has them covered. Now, when my oldest starts middle school next year, check back with me – because I do have some fear there! I'm very grateful for our current circumstances.

As far as our routine, we try to start the beginning of August going to bed earlier and getting up earlier, making sure we are home for dinner together and praying together. We also make sure the supplies are ready and labeled, and backpacks are cleaned out, etc. I tend to do another room cleanout before school starts, to make sure their desks are cleaned and old stuff is thrown out. Back to sleep habits and chores works for us!

And the last thing, this summer was crazy in that there were things that happened out of our control like the passing of a family member – the unexpected. Our family plans were a little off. So we are trying to fit in water parks and other smaller experiences rather than one giant getaway. Lots of swimming!

The weekend before school starts we try to have a family fun day – having a last hooray before school starts. Nothing is on our calendar, and they get to pick a dinner out, etc.

From a mom's perspective, prayer is vital – praying over them and their teachers and their schools – a prayer warrior parent! Invite the kids into the prayer time in the evenings and allow them to talk to you, and also note answered prayers! Finally, give yourself grace, moms. We often worry about all the stress and routines and that doesn't help anyone. Pick one little thing and then add another, instead of trying to do it all at once! Enjoy school starting and all the excitement with grace for all! "Too blessed to be stressed," as my late papa would say.

Mom of Two

Preparing for school...

Neither of my girls have been school age until this year, but this year our oldest starts kindergarten. I do have some fears, but I'm also very excited for her, as well. She is prepared and ready!

When I do have fears, I seek to ask God to alleviate my fears. I give them all to Him and let him hold those fears.

The more I know about what to expect, the less anxious I am. After orientation and getting prepared, this helped me as well.

Getting prepared doesn't require a lot of change for us, as the girls have already been in preschool all week all day (because we both work away from home), so they are used to getting ready and getting up early. No real "summer off" for them except for vacation.

One thing we will prepare for is dropping the girls off at two different schools, and they will miss each other so much! Who will drop off who will be a change in our routine, and something we will need to decide and be sensitive to each of our daughters, as we make this change.

One last thing we'd like to do before school starts is do some back to school shopping for new supplies and outfits. I did that with my parents as a kid, and I want to do the same now. That is going to be so fun! Maybe we'll also go to a water park and celebrate the end of summer, too. We want to enjoy company with each other before school starts up!

Mom of Four

Back to school is just around the corner. Preparation has hit me, and I start thinking through the kids' clothes, as they have grown! I start budgeting for shopping and back to school...and then I start thinking about how fast summer has flown by!

Practically speaking, we organize clothes first. The kids go away to their grandmother's house for a week, and that week I sort through all their clothes. I make a list of what they need for school.

Back to school supplies and clothes cost a lot, and we've just had camps and vacation! Grandparents often help up with these things, which is a huge blessing. We also plan a few shopping days in August shopping and more vacation. We also try to get all the kids' appointments taken care of – eye doctor, dentist, well checkups, etc.

The biggest fear for me is how busy we will be. Our oldest starts 7th grade sports and band, we have one in football, and two in volleyball. Every fall is busy, but I am concerned about "blowing and going" and not just being tired, but missing quality family time!

Finally, before school actually begins...we try to be intentional with the kids these last few weeks, nothing extravagant, but one on one watching a show, or going on a walk, or getting nails done, enjoying a bike ride, etc. are all on the calendar. We might even have a sleepover. Any time together before the rush of school – we'll take it!

In the Kitchen – Cheese, Please – by Marcy Lytle

Whether you like a lot of cheese or just a little, we're sharing some fun recipes that have cheese in them that are good for a weekend getaway, for friends that gather, or just for a night home watching a good movie! Each one has a little or a lot of cheese...you pick. Maybe you'll want to have entire night of nothing but cheese dishes. Enjoy!

Potato Rounds

We made these on a weekend away, as the ingredients were easy to pack!

Ingredients:

- 3 large russet potatoes
- Grated cheddar (finely grated)
- Chives
- Cooked bacon
- Sour cream (if you like)
- Butter, salt and pepper

Bake the potatoes in the microwave, then slice into once inch rounds. Brush both sides with butter, salt and pepper and place on a grill rack placed on a sheet pan. Bake at 350 til the skin edges are crispy.

Meanwhile, cook the bacon, chop the fresh chives and grate the cheese.

When the potatoes are ready, just top with those three and serve. Similar to potato skins!

Taki Cheese Balls

These are also great to pack for a weekend away or to make ahead for guests. And they're so cute on a tray, and tasty with the Taki chip!

Ingredients:

- 1 8oz pkg cream cheese softened
- 2 c shredded sharp Cheddar
- Paprika and toasted sesame seeds (or almonds)
- Rolled tortilla chips (Taki – fiesta or fajita flavor)

Combine cheeses in a bowl, shape into small balls, roll in seeds and sprinkle with paprika. Cover and refrigerate overnight. To serve, insert a Taki chip in each one!

Healthy Spinach Dip

There's only a little bit of cheese in this alternate version of the loaded spinach dip recipes you find most places. And this one is just as good!

Ingredients:

- ½ c fat free plain yogurt
- 1 oz fat free cream cheese
- 2 t thinly sliced green onion
- 2 t (each) finely chopped yellow and red pepper
- 2 t Italian salad dressing mix
- 1/8 t ground nutmeg
- 1 cup frozen leaf spinach, thawed and squeezed dry
- Radishes and carrot sticks

Combine first seven ingredients, then stir in the spinach. Cover and refrigerate at least an hour, and serve with veggies or chips.

Sweet Corn Pizza

This pizza was absolutely amazing and easy to put together. One of my favorite pizza recipes!

Ingredients:

- 3 ears sweet corn, husked and cut off cob
- Chili lime seasoning
- Olive oil
- 1 lb fresh or frozen pizza dough thawed
- ½ c mayo
- 1/3 c crumbled queso fresco
- 1/3 c fresh cilantro, divided
- 1 T lime juice
- ½ t chili powder
- 1/8 t pepper

Grill the corn (removed from the cob) in a bit of olive oil and butter in a skillet, seasoning with chili lime seasoning.

Press dough onto greased baking sheet into 15X10 oval and bake according to directions (8 min) before topping with the corn. Bake again as directed.

While the pizza is baking, add mayo, 3 T of the cheese, 3 T cilantro, lime juice, chili powder and pepper to a bowl. Then pour over warm pizza and corn.

Sprinkle with remaining cheese and cilantro.

Layered Hummus

Such a pretty tasty dip for picnicking or for an appetizer when guests are over, or just to enjoy with pita chips for two!

Ingredients:

- 1 10 oz carton hummus
- ¼ c finely chopped red onion
- ½ c Greek olives chopped
- 2 large Roma tomatoes chopped
- 1 large English cucumber chopped
- 1 cup crumbled Feta (I don't like Feta so used queso fresco)
- Pita chips

Spread hummus into a shallow 10 in dish. Layer with all the toppings. Refrigerate til serving with the chips.

Last Month's Learning – by Marcy Lytle

Did you know that HEB delivers gifts? They do! I recently got two orchids from a friend, left on my front porch with a sweet note.

Read the labels when you're shopping Target clearance. I recently came home with a maternity shirt and it didn't look good when I put it on...because it wasn't for me!

I didn't want jalapenos in my salsa recently and substituted green olives instead...tasted great!

After seeing the new Elvis movie, we looked up the actress that played his wife. She's also in *The Society* on Netflix – started watching it. Kind of eerie...stay tuned. (Okay, we've watched more and it's intriguing but you may want to fast forward through many unnecessary scenes!)

My sister says the canned lentil soup at Trader Joe's is amazing. Have you tried it?

Maybe you knew this, maybe it's not even true – but we read that the 21 gun salute is 21 because the 21 is the sum of the digits in 1776!

Taki chips – the fajita or fiesta kind – are great with cheese balls! It was my first time to try them.

My husband discovered a new brand of shoes to him – Huk Gear – and loves them – especially the style Overcast.

I found a cute bathroom organizer at Target that works in the kitchen! It's clear and has drawers, great for markers, tape, scissors and more...on that counter where things collect.

Sympathy cards might be an old-fashioned form of condolence, but they mean the world to those that receive them...such an act of kindness to take the time to write and mail!

I learned from the kiddos what a salp is, at the beach. Have you heard of this creature?

Never ever go to an aquarium in the early afternoon when daycares are there by the numbers! Wait until late afternoon, when they have all cleared.

The Icees at QT are really good...better than other places...I have no idea why.

Just tried Sister Shubert's cinnamon rolls – amazingly good – just like I'd heard they were!

Serving sliced apples? Squeeze lemon juice on the bottom of the dish, lay the slices face down.

Miracles still happen. My cousin's wife's body was shutting down from sepsis and overnight, she literally rose like Lazarus!

Have you tried Mad Dash Mixes? Great for now and...if you're shopping early for Christmas stockings...later.

Marshalls really has the BEST bags for cheap! Recently found a canvas bag, super roomy, with pockets inside to hold all the goodies at the market, or the movies!

You can wear “gratitude” tees any time of the year, not just at Thanksgiving. Yes, you can. And when I did, it made me feel grateful (I needed that change of attitude that day!)

SUGAR + *Spice Our Lips are Sealed* - by Angela Dolbear

The famous song by the 80's pop group The Go-Go's is currently playing in my head, as I write about my favorite summer lip products...SO fun!

This summer, I have been more into glosses, balms and lip oils, and less into a full lip liner+lipstick look. I have so many favorites, it was hard to choose just a few to feature. Okay, so here we go.

#1 Favorite most-reached-for lip product: [Vaseline Lip Therapy in rosy lips](#)

I LOVE this product! I have a feeling it's been around for years, but it's new to me. It's inexpensive, lasts a long time, moisturizes my lips, has a light pretty rosy tint and light shine, *and* I adore the little pink container that is small enough to slip into my pocket.

When I want a dressier lip color: [ColourPop Lux Lip Gloss](#), and [MAC Lip Glass](#)

ColourPop Lux gloss is new to me. Most of the shades are more neutral but still add a light pop of color. The glosses are shiny without being sticky, and they stay on for a long time. The glosses are also inexpensive. I have deeper and brighter shades on my wish list for my next shopping trip to their website, or to Ulta.

MAC Lip Glass is a long-time favorite of mine. I will buy a tube whenever I see it on sale. It is high-end stuff at \$21 a tube, but it looks and acts high quality. It hugs your lips and provides shine and color for hours. It's so beautiful and worth the price. It's my favorite "treat yourself" product.

The classic I always have around: [Carmex Classic Lip Balm](#)

I always have a tube of Carmex next to my bed, in my handbag, in my desk drawer, and in bathroom drawers. Carmex provides deep moisture and shine for hours. It also heals dry and chapped lips too. Carmex is inexpensive and available everywhere.

DESERTED ISLAND product of the month:

I love to use my hands and fingers to apply cosmetics, even though I have more make-up brushes than I will need in my lifetime. And it's loads easier to wash my hands, than it is to wash make-up brushes.

To prevent product overload on my fingers, I wipe my fingertips on a washcloth I keep folded in thirds length wise, in front of my makeup mirror. I was running through tissues so much, and they tear easily, so I purchased a stack of [black washcloths at Target](#), which wash well and clean the makeup off my fingers more thoroughly. Fantastic!

Blessings to you!

Angela Dolbear, Beauty Editor, is the author of contemporary spiritual novels, such as [THE GARDEN KEY](#) Series, and [THE TORMENTOR'S TALE](#), as well as many short stories, which are available in paperback, Kindle and audiobook formats on [Amazon](#). And she loves writing and recording songs with her husband, Tim (listen on [Sound Cloud!](#)) She is also a self-proclaimed beauty junkie, and has been since long before her mother allowed her to start wearing makeup at the age of 14. She keeps UPS and the USPS busy delivering small boxes on a regular basis from

Ulta, Sephora, Amazon, and many independent cosmetics companies to her home Nashville, TN. Please connect with her at www.AngelaDolbear.com



HOME

Practical Parenting – Is It Vacation? – by Marcy Lytle

I see a lot on Instagram and other social media platforms where moms post how it's not really a vacation if you take the kids. And I totally get that. Just packing alone makes for a tired mom when going away with kids – all of their clothes and toys and gear – it can result in exhaustion before we ever leave! And of course, the vacation has to be full of kid friendly activities because Mom and Dad can't just go off and leave the kids in the hotel! Maybe you experienced all of this, just these past couple of months!

Vacationing with kids certainly has its challenges, but we can enjoy it maybe a little more and actually call it a real vacation if we change our mindset.

Sometimes, parents only get away once a year and perhaps that's why they feel this need to have it be a real vacation with down time, reading time, alone time and fun adult time. So, of course, it's disappointing when that ONE vacation is only full of whining kids and water slides and chicken nuggets with fries.

- Get away more often! Yes, vacation costs money and maybe can only happen once a year, but nights away with him (even if it's in your own bedroom after the kids are asleep) can be seen as mini vacays throughout the year.

Sometimes, the vacation is so full of "family friendly" activities that we feel estranged from our husbands because the kids are in our beds and in our hotel room with us ALL THE TIME. How in the heck is that a vacation at all?

- Plan a date night for the weekend you return home, or an entire day – where the kids are away with friends or family. Put this in your vacation itinerary as an end to the fun time, and look forward to it.

Sometimes, we look at other couples on romantic getaways, on a cruise, away on an island and we long for that togetherness. Instead, sticky hands are ruining our one cute outfit that we packed – and he didn't notice anyway because he's corralling the kids one more time from stepping off that cliff they're not supposed to go near...

- Quit looking over there! Comparison and envy are joy killers for sure when traveling with your family. Romantic snapshots of other couples without their kids are cool, but they're not reality and they're not your life at the moment. Let them have their fun, and you choose to laugh and have yours.

Sometimes, we're just exhausted and it seems after a vacation at Disneyworld or the resort nearby just leaves us even more exhausted and we wonder why we went at all. Was it even worth it?

- Yes, vacationing with your kiddos in tow is just for a season and I promise they'll be gone before you know it – and then you'll wish they were with you! Go with the kids, let go of perfection and neatness requirements, and be in the moment in their mess...while you catch his eye and wink...and ENJOY.

Parents, be encouraged. Vacationing is expensive and yes, it seems the kids are with most of us – as we don't have nannies or grannies to keep our kids while we play. Some do, and that's great. But many don't! If only one vacation is on your calendar a year because of funds, give thanks for that one. And make personal memories with him every week – by marking it and making it happen. If the time with the kids is just TOO much to plan and handle, then just do day trips with them from time to time – you don't "have" to take two weeks away to show others that you vacationed! And finally, do what makes your family happy and works, letting go of what others think or what they're doing or what they seem to have together. Look at your own family and gaze at their sticky fingers, dirty feet and listen to their screams of delight and cuddle with them in the middle of the night.

I promise...they'll grow up and even become better travelers, and you'll have more time to yourselves, and you'll look back and laugh at what's making you cry now...

I Don't Do Teenagers – Who They Are – by Marcy Lytle

Labels...names...they're changing everywhere...and our kids are growing up in a world where our daughters may no longer be defined as women, and our sons may no longer be called men. While many changes are wonderful, labels that have derogatory meanings behind the changes are confusing and could cause our children so much angst in identifying who in the heck they are.

Now, maybe more than ever, our kids need to know who HE says they are...especially as school begins another year. And whether they want to hear it or not, we need to speak it. I was thinking the other day how important it is for parents to remember that the seeds they plant might spring up fruit quickly...but more often than not...that fruit may not be seen for a long time. So that's why the seeds are so important!

One thing He says is that He is the vine and we are the branches. This is great for our kids' identity in Christ. From him flows all the life we need and it flows right out to us...freely and beautifully as we stay next to HIM.

Our kids are **branches** connected to great strength.

John 1:12 says our kids are children of God...this means they have access to everything the Father has for them – protection, salvation, grace, and even discipline – to bring them life.

Our kids are **children** to the most loving Father...God.

John 15:15 says he calls us friends. Jesus really loves hanging out with us and revealing to us his innermost character and love – he's a true friend.

Our kids are **Jesus' friends**...always.

Secure is another name we can place our kids' foreheads – because Jeremiah states he has a plan and a future for our kids of good and not evil.

Our kids are **secure** and no one and nothing can snatch them from the Father.

The bible also says we are his workmanship, created in his image, and that makes us valuable to our Creator.

Our kids are **valuable** to the highest degree to the One who made them.

We are also told that we are exceedingly loved by God in that while we were sinners (separated from God) he died for us so that we might be set free from the penalty of sin and death.

Our kids are **loved** and free to be who God created them to be – teens who inhabit His praise.

Branches, children, secure, valuable and loved...all labels they can wear and stand up tall and represent the God who calls them friends. It's a confusing time for teens, and if we speak the truth about who they are, it won't matter what others say they are or should be or cannot be.

An Adage a Day - Happy as a Lark – by Carole Gilbert

We live in the country beside a lake and our little country town is a protected bird sanctuary. So, we have lots of birds of all kinds all around us. I love birds! I really do, but not on my back porch!

This last spring, I bought a couple of small decorative lanterns to replace my old ones. I hung them up beside my back porch table. A few mornings later I saw two small pretty birds trying to build nests inside them. They were so pretty with little yellow breasts, and I loved hearing them sing but I could not let them nest in my lanterns. I knew when their babies came, they would give us a mess and a hard time when we sat on our porch.

I watched as the male brought little twigs for the female to inspect before adding it to the beginning of the nest and I hated when I had to go pull it out! I did this as they started building not once, but twice! They were just as stubborn and determined as I was. After cleaning out my lanterns the second time, I put tape over the top to help keep the little birds out. They still came and tried to get inside but the tape stopped them. I felt so bad. I would go outside and tell them they couldn't nest on my back porch, try the neighbor's house. Funny thing is they would sit there on the top of my lanterns and listen to me. I guess they had gotten so familiar with me that I didn't scare them when I went outside to shoo them away. After that, they didn't come as often but on occasion they would, and they'd sit on my taped lanterns and look inside our window. They would sit there singing knowing it was only for a visit and that they couldn't stay. I loved seeing and hearing them. And I loved that they seemed content when they flew off to the nest that I'm sure they built somewhere else.

My grandmothers loved birds! And we lived in the country then, too. I grew up hearing idioms and old quotes from them along with my great grandmother. I can't remember all their phrases, but occasionally I will say one that's in the back of my mind in my everyday conversation. It's like remembering an old recipe. I think, "Oh Yeah! I haven't thought of that one in a long time." Idioms and old sayings used to be referred to in a lot of conversations, but now no one seems to have heard of them, especially younger people.

One day, I was talking, and I referred to a situation making me "happy as a lark." I hadn't thought of that one in many years. It made me wonder about the little birds. Were they as happy as a lark now somewhere else? Were they larks? So, what does this idiom mean?

"Happy as a lark" refers to being extremely happy and even carefree. It sounded like my little birds. This idiom started in the middle 1800's and is referring to the joyful melodious singing of the lark. Did you know larks come from a species of birds that includes over 50% of all birds and that larks can even sing while flying? Even in the Bible, larks represent hope, joyfulness, and laughter, which makes them an excellent example for a Christian woman to focus life on, and especially with how the larks love to perch and sing, happily, almost nonstop.

Is this feeling of being "happy as a lark" why the little birds were singing? The female was expecting. And her male was working on preparing them a home. Their singing was so

beautiful, and I wondered if the little birds were as happy as they sounded. It was definitely “music to my ears.” The little mama bird made me think of the mamas I know. And I know they’re like me feeling that all the time and anytime I get to be with my babies, no matter how old they may be, makes me “happy as a lark.” How about you?

Tiny Living - Alternative Lifestyle – by Leyanne Enterine

Private jets, fancy hotels, limousines, fine dining, hanging out backstage, celebrities, after parties, extravagant vacations... yes, yes, I have to tell you, I have an alternative lifestyle. It's all because my husband is an audio engineer and the production manager for a comedian.

All the trailer talk is true, it is tiny, we do barely fit, but when we travel with my husband we live a lifestyle like no other. I suppose it's the best of both worlds. Both situations are pretty extreme. I feel like I'd like a happy medium, but this is the life we have right now and I will be grateful.

I'm sitting in business class in my chair that can lay down, with my warm blanket and pillow they gave me, being fed all the things – typing this while on my way to Maui. I mean one cannot complain for sure!

I was just sitting here watching *Cinderella* and thinking I feel the same as her, though the lifestyle keeps switching back and forth, back and forth for me. One day, I'm living in a tiny trailer barely fitting our new school books in it, because there's just no more room. To the next day, when I'm in a fancy plane headed to an extravagant vacation to meet for dinner with famous people! It's nuts! Though I don't fully desire either of these lifestyles, they both come with their advantages and disadvantages. I suppose it's good to see both sides of things!

The trailer life is simple, though squished, and it's *a trailer!*

The rich and famous life is exciting, but also exhausting with late nights and lots of smiling and talking with people I don't know. I know that sounds strange, but for an introvert it's physically and mentally a lot! I love our down time during the day to sleep in and recharge with the family.

I love to travel, so to have this experience is truly amazing and we'll always remember the fun family times that we've gotten to have together in new places! And I suppose it's taught us to get out of our shell and interact with another world that we would have never been a part of and hear their stories and their lives, and to connect. It's also good to see how maybe those who don't have as much still thrive. I have more compassion when I walk in their shoes.

Rich or poor, everyone has a story, everyone struggles at some point. I'm thankful to live in it all both/and - and be able to try and connect - no matter where someone is on their journey, as well.

A Night to Remember – Obey and Pray – by Marcy Lytle

School is ramping up again and most likely teachers everywhere are feeling the stress of the preparation and even the safety of their classroom. It's good to pray with our kids for their own fears as they face a new school year, but what if we spent time as a family praying for the leaders at the schools? It might ease up everyone's stress, and the bible says so much about praying for our leaders!

Preparation: Have these items on a table ready to use as a prop – a book that one child can easily read, a pair of reading glasses (or any glasses), an apple, and about 10 sheets of scattered paper on the desk.

I Timothy 2:1-2 says, "I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority..."

What preparation do teachers have to do for the school year? They have to hang things on their walls, prepare lessons, get their papers and books and supplies ready, and it's a LOT of work! That can create a lot of stress, especially if they have their own children at home to take care of, as well.

Ask one child to gather and stack the scattered paper.

Imagine if you had 50 scattered papers every few hours you had to organize! It would drive you crazy!

Teachers are in authority at school, while kids are in their classroom. This doesn't mean we have to believe everything they tell us, but we do have to obey and respect them while they're teaching. This means we obey the rules like raising our hand before speaking and staying quiet when the teacher is talking.

Ask one child to read a page from the book, while the rest of the family chatters and doesn't listen.

How did you feel, while reading, when no one was listening? Not good, right? It felt like your listeners were being rude...and they were!

Teachers are people too, with families, children, homes to run, bills to pay, meals to cook and lots more. They need lots of prayer support for all of their personal pressures away from the school building.

Ask one older child to take the apple and cut slices for all to enjoy.

Did you know that the idea of giving a teacher an apple originated back when many people grew apple trees and had so much, they wanted to share out of their plenty with the teacher for his/her good work? It was a healthy snack offered in appreciation for a teacher's education.

Teachers have to read SO MUCH. They find books for the classroom to read, they read notices and bulletins from the principal, they read their own textbooks from which they teach, and they read the kids' papers that they turn in for a grade. That's a lot of reading!

Ask one kid to put on the reading glasses and ask everyone to close their eyes, and then have that child lead in prayer for the hands, feet, and eyes of the teachers for the coming school year. For joy as they prepare, strength as they grow tired on their feet, and rest for their eyes as each day ends.

Finally, that verse says to give thanks for those in charge. We will pray as a family for the teachers often, and remember to find things to be thankful for. Maybe she comforts us when we fall on the playground, perhaps he picks us when we raise our hand, or maybe our teachers keep order when one kid gets unruly in the classroom. All of those things are things to be thankful for.

Praying for others increases our own peace. And now that we've prayed for the teachers, let's pray for each other as we hold hands and give thanks...

(Allow each child to express their fears or stresses about the school year – and offer them to God – wrapped in thanksgiving.)

Chipped China – In Between Both And – by Jennifer Lytle

August bridges the end of summer with the outset of fall. Despite the sweetness of ending one season while basking in the setting of the next scene, the between seasons can yield discomfort. I find insecurity crops up for me with the anticipation of unknowns.

As a family, we will be in between several stages this season. For this article, I was going to attempt and focus on one. But after sitting with a new friend who mentioned the word *transparent* a minimum of a dozen times . . . I'll consider her offer as inspiration and share the "balls in the air" the Lord has my family and me juggling.

This fall . . . my family might be moving. *Eeek*. Moving has been a both/and experience for me. It is both exciting and exhausting. We will have tons of square footage. Yay!? Can I keep up with the cleaning? Can I hire a housecleaner? It is both stressful and satisfying. What if the neighbors are horrible? What if there are rodents? It is both worrisome and wonderful. What if we lose our beautiful space for a busted one? What if the commute turns out to be a blessing?

Also this fall . . . my family will officially become a wholly homeschooled family . . . well, our youngest *technically* will not be school-age just yet. Oh, my gosh. School is such a personal and encompassing scenario. It is so emotionally and relationally sensitive in many ways. It is political. It is personal. It is expansive. Does it dominate the conversation of every conversation I have with other similar-stage families or those who have already passed that season? I am not even ready to talk about this yet with others outside of my immediate, immediate community. (Like, no one, really.)

This fall . . . I will forgo a traditional work position for self-employment. This is something people do when their financial lives are secure, no? This is something people do when they're able to check all of those boxes. Do I have three months of expenses saved? Do I have steady revenue? Do I have repeat customers? Have I replaced my income? No. No. Maybe. Not yet?

Do these opportunities indicate The Father's confidence in me? Is this affirmation of both advanced maturity and expanded capability? Does He trust me more? Is He growing me?

Will we be comfortable? Am I going to do it all well? Are my children going to thrive and have what they need for a good future? Am I enough? Do I even need to be enough?

These questions loom. If I was me 20 years ago, the questions would swallow me. Doubt could squash the possibilities of both laughing and leaping into my Father's loving, trustworthy plans. What is the worst that can happen? I have to find another job? Okay. Easy. What if we have to call pest control? Check. We did that before. He's got me. He's with my husband. He certainly has got my children. If Abraham could entrust a servant to find his son a wife, I can entrust both our school year and future learning to Jesus. If an angel rolled away the stone so Jesus could walk out of the grave, I can take steps away from traditional work and find freedom in something new. If a gold coin could come from the mouth of a fish for taxes, our new space can sing on key again.

Father, thank you for changing seasons. Thank you for the opportunities to grow and build and prune back. I am looking to you and know I can be both unfamiliar with the terrain and cared for perfectly.



YOU

Inner Strength – Triggers – by Michelle Lynn

Have you ever had your thoughts and feelings become triggered by something else?

Until recently, I thought triggers were something that was robbing me of my inner strength. I've come to find out that identifying triggers leads to greater inner strength.

As I write this article, it triggers thoughts, questions and unresolved feelings about a past experience with a family member. I think to myself, "I've got to focus on writing my article. I'm frustrated that I can't focus." So I decide to journal about what's distracting me so that I can focus. Guess what? I triggered, not distracted.

One trigger that came up as I was writing has to do with my moving situation. My boys and I *have* to move. One place that is an option, and yet one that I don't want to consider, is moving to a place called Hutto. The reason I hesitate is that my boys and I lived in Hutto with my mom, about two years before she passed away. She was very helpful in supporting the boys and me, and then that turned into us helping her as she got sicker and sicker. We did eventually move out, but I continued to go by and visit her and take care of our house. I drove her to the hospital a few times. Eventually her health decreased so rapidly that she went into hospice and passed away a week later.

So, as much as I would like to move on from that experience I'm just not ready to do that, yet. I don't know if I'll ever be able to not be triggered by that memory, but I am open to exploring the question.

My boys have been amazing through all the moves. With each move, I prayed how to explain it to them. Honestly I don't remember the exact words I shared, but I know I was empathetic and positive.

That being said, the other emotions that moving triggers in me are the emotions and thoughts that arise while I'm placing my boys through all of this change.

How do I cope with all these triggers?

Aside from writing, I...

reflect,
pray,
share my thoughts with a friend or counselor,
create art that expresses my feelings,
read a book,
etc.

This next journey is a process.

If you're in a season of triggers as well, praise yourself for every step you take, as small as you may think it is. And if I can do this, with His help, so can we both!

Life in a Nutshell – Okay with Just Me – by Jill Montz

Rest. Much needed. Much enjoyed.

Genesis 2:2

“...so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.”

Exodus 23:10-11

“For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest your crops, but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused.”

Leviticus 25:4

“But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of Sabbath rest, a Sabbath to the Lord.”

If you read my July article, you might recall I decided to take the entire seventh month of the year off from all forms of social media. My mind, heart, and soul needed a rest from the constant “scroll.” During the time away, I learned some interesting things about myself, my tendencies, my strengths and my weaknesses, and what I really enjoyed and didn’t enjoy about social media. Here is what I discovered in the silence.

Before July rolled around, I started *practicing* stepping away from social media by putting time limits on the apps on my phone. This helped me start to ween myself off the distractions I so loved. However, I added “mind games” to my phone with the thought that I was helping my brain stay active. What I was really doing was using the games as a way to check out and decompress during the day. So I took those off my phone, too. I didn’t want to substitute one distraction for another.

When July first rolled around, I found myself checking my weather app quite often (surprise, surprise...still hot in Texas). I ordered a lot off Amazon (can you say “prime days?”) And I found myself googling all kinds of odd things (what’s going on in Burma these days?) I still turned to my phone for any kind of distraction.

When I had a difficult call to make at work, I swiped my phone on to escape.

When the line at Chick-fil-a was too long, I swiped my phone on to distract myself.

When I couldn’t sleep at night, I swiped my phone on to look up insomnia.

When I felt overwhelmed, I swiped my phone on to order something to fix it.

When I felt sad, I swiped my phone on to look at pictures that brought me joy.

I still used my phone as a way to escape from dealing with my thoughts and feelings. While social media used to be my “drug of choice” to escape me, I found myself using anything handy to still run from my inner self. But after about the fourth time of checking the weather in Burma (desperate times call for desperate measures,) I started to call myself out on what I was really doing and made myself start naming what I was feeling and thinking in those moments. It wasn’t as fun as ordering more shoes off my QVC app, but I think it was more gratifying for my soul.

On the bright side, without spending hours a day scrolling through my feeds I was actually able to get a wealth of things done I had put off because I was “too busy” before. I cleaned, I organized, and I donated lots of stuff. One day, while I was cleaning my living room shelves, I realized I had no physical pictures of Dotty (other than school pictures) since her preschool days. So I printed hundreds (literally hundreds!) of pictures off my phone and even framed a

few and put the rest in photo albums. I had been using Facebook as my online scrapbook, which is fine and something I will probably go back to I am sure, but it was nice to have some physical pictures to look at and flip through.

I also went to the library, checked out several books, and read to my heart's content. I spent hours with my nose in a book and lost all track of time. It was bliss! I had forgotten how much I loved to read for the joy of reading!

During July, several fun and happy things happened and I found myself wanting to post about them, but instead of sharing these events with the world I shared them with my closest circle of friends and family. While I love (and missed) seeing happy posts about my friends' kids, vacations, pets, and life events, I also realized that social media makes me feel closer to people than perhaps I really am. Sometimes I know so much about a person's life (and them about mine) that I actually feel connected to them when in reality I am not. To me this is a positive and a negative side for social media. In some ways I can connect with lots of people all at once, but in other ways it makes me be lazy about really connecting with those I am closest to.

A downside to being off social media is I did miss some great moments, posts, and events. I was so grateful to the friends who kept me in the loop when they noticed Dotty got invited to a party or when an event was coming up they knew I wouldn't want to miss (like food trucks in town...yum!) The truth is that social media is a part of our daily lives and can be a useful tool. This is one of the main reasons why I know I will go back to some form of social media use in the future. As a society, we use it as a primary tool of communication...and that's a great use for it.

I was also sad I missed loving and liking some posts by friends and family. Many had great life events to share such as kids getting baptized, celebrating another year of being cancer free, braces-free smiles and toothless grins holding a note for the tooth fairy, first jumps from the diving board with no floaties, trips to the lake, the beach, the mountains, and even the grocery store where no one had a meltdown in the candy aisle. I missed "hearting" all those fun moments, but again I was over the moon excited when I got a text message or a call to include me when my people realized I was off social media. My circle felt a little cozier in those moments.

But the craziest thing of all during my time off social media is...I swear time slowed down! I know for decades, or at least since Dotty was born, I have been begging the hands of time to turn slower. And for the entire month of July it felt like they did. I found myself looking back at the end of the day and not feeling like I had rushed through it. I didn't feel like I missed it. I felt like I was there for every second. Because I didn't have the option to "check out" of life with social media for minutes or hours at a time, I felt like I was living life looking up rather than looking down at my phone. It brought me such joy to feel like the days weren't flying by.

I know many might not feel the same way as I did during my month away from social media. Many might still feel rushed, or their lives might still be chaotic, but for me it was a much needed rest and restoration for my soul.

I still haven't decided how I will reenter the world of social media. I hope I don't jump back in cannon ball style and start swimming in the deep end of things. I hope I find just sticking my toes in every once in a while is enough to stay connected without going under. But, time will tell. Until then, if you want to know the weather in Burma or what is "today's special value" on QVC, I must say I really don't know. It took some time, but I finally found myself okay with

me...my thoughts and my feelings. I was able to sit and just be. In fact, some moments I was so content to sit and just be, I fell asleep. Just ask Dotty and the nail tech at the nail salon. They said I looked so peaceful (and only snored ever so softly). Another perk to no social media...I got in a few more naps in July!

Healthy Habits – All the Obstacles – by Marcy Lytle

Sometimes, we have the energy and motivation to stay healthy...and then we fall off the wagon...because of obstacles. Life happens, we grow weary or depressed, or all sorts of stumbling blocks make us lose our focus on what makes us feel good and stay good. It often helps to identify some of those obstacles so that they can then be removed, and we are back on the healthy habit road again...

Guilt – This is a biggie. We haven't walked in days, we aren't going to the gym like she does, and we don't enjoy swimming like they do. So we sit at home and feel guilty that we can't perform our healthy routines like someone else is doing. We all know that comparing is useless, so stop it! No guilt, when it comes to making healthy choices. Start with what you love, choose it, and do it. And lose the guilt.

Shoes – I get it. Feet hurt. And they hurt more and more as those years pile on. I've been out and wanted to take a walk, only to realize I'm wearing the wrong shoes. I've found that keeping my best walking shoes in the car works for me. My shoes are a pair I bought right when the pandemic hit and we began walking more. If these shoes are always there, I'm more apt to grab them and go.

Time – We wake up and our minds start turning, the lists get longer, and the sighs become louder...because we have so much to do. Time gets away from us throughout the day, and by evening we realize we've sat all day, made bad food choices, and it's then time for bed. It helps to have set times when we move. Maybe it's first thing when our feet hit the floor, or during lunch, or for me – it's about 4:30 when I like to head out for my walk. If healthy habits become routine, on the daily schedule, they're more likely to stay on the list.

Taste – Oh my gosh! It's hot outside and ice cream or anything cold and sweet is calling our name. That's okay! Remember we did away with guilt up above? We can still taste the sweetness of summer without indulging in the heaviness that goes with it. Portions are so important here. Share a dessert, instead of eating the whole thing. Order one scoop of ice cream, not three piled high with all the toppings. And try at least three healthy choices in your meals this month – maybe add one piece of fruit, more nuts daily, or a leafy green. Little choices and steps make big strides...

Tiredness – The heat has gotten to us and we're too tired to move. Life has been hard and we don't have the motivation to exercise or eat properly, so we do neither. One can be tired even if one sleeps, if the mind is full and the heart is heavy. Practice the art of laying your burdens down at his feet, where they belong. He really does care for you. This will lift the heaviness. Rest by still water, like He invites you to do – without guilt or shame. Drink from his goodness and eat at his table. Then rise in his strength. If you're too tired for good health, close your eyes and meditate on Psalm 23 – start there. He will give you rest, so much rest.

What obstacles keep you from good health? Identify them. Ask your friends or kids to tell you what they see. Write them down. Pray about them, and work on one at a time. Smile more. Give yourself grace. And start stepping forward...

Life Right Now - August Pie - by Jennifer Stephens

So I made this pie the other day.

August Pie.

I read somewhere it's called August Pie because it's made using whatever summer berries or fruit you like. It's super easy to make. Just grab a bag or two of frozen fruit (yes, fresh would probably be better, but this is what I happened to have) and toss it into a ready-made pie crust (again, you *could* roll your own, but Pillsbury does such a nice job...). Top it with a mixture of cream, flour, sugar, and spices, then bake. Sometimes, I make it with just peaches or with peaches and blueberries.

But this time I threw in a bag of mixed berries with the bag of peaches. Oh.My.Word.

All those different flavors blended together...mmm, the deliciousness!

Peaches on their own are pretty tasty, but when mixed with the zing of the raspberry, the sweetness of the strawberry and the hearty strength of the blueberry, the creamy lusciousness of the peach just bursts forth! They're better together.

When it's growing, the peach doesn't look down disdainfully from its perch and profess to the strawberry, "I live the lush, high life in the branches of this sturdy tree, and you come from a simple, lowly plant." The raspberry doesn't criticize the peach knowing peaches face a personal struggle of separating their flesh from their pit. And the blueberry doesn't snub the scarlet strawberry because they're on different sides of the grocery isle.

Isn't that exactly like people? At least, how we should be. When we come together with people from different backgrounds with different perspectives and different life experiences, we are better. When we choose love over hate, peace over conflict, and act with gentleness over hostility, we are better. When we seek common ground before contradictions, we are better.

Now occasionally we'll unexpectedly take a bite of fruit that makes our mouth get all squishy and we're forced to spit out the sour culprit as quickly as possible. When that happens, do we say, "AlIIIIII blueberries are horrible and I'm never eating another one again!"? Of course not. We don't blame the actions of that one BAD blueberry on all the other GOOD blueberries.

We shouldn't do that with people either. We might encounter someone sour – but don't let that single sour soul leave a bad taste in your mouth.

Because just like mixing berries and peaches makes for a better fruit pie – tossing in a cup of kindness, a teaspoon of love, and a dash of self-control with a whole lot of patience creates the perfect recipe for we the people. And through the fruit of the spirit, WE are better...together.

"But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another." Galatians 5:22-26

August Pie

1 refrigerated pie crust
1 pkg. frozen peaches
1 pkg. frozen mixed berries
1 cup heavy cream
1 egg
2/3 cup sugar
1/4 cup flour
1/2 t. cinnamon
1/4 t. salt

1. Heat oven to 400
2. Put pie crust in pie dish and add fruit
3. Stir the other ingredients and pour over fruit
4. Bake for 50 minutes
5. Cool and eat! (It's also good warmed up and served with vanilla ice cream)

Under Pressure – Don't Damage the New – by Debbie Haynes

There's this passage in Luke 5 about not placing a piece of new garment on an old one and not placing new wine into an old bottle. Maybe you've read it. I've read it many times, but the meaning behind the story was always vague to me. I sure didn't get the physical meaning of it because I've often taken new fabric pieces and mended old garments with them, and the patch held well. So obviously, I was missing the point.

I decided to research the meaning. It is saying that no one in their right mind would tear up a new garment (made with new cloth) and put that piece onto an old garment, because it would render the new garment damaged and unwearable. It's not about saving the old garment but rather about NOT damaging something new...making it unusable.

So what, then, is the spiritual application?

John's followers had come to Jesus to ask how they patch their old ways (regulations and rules under the law) with this new salvation Jesus was teaching. The old is all they had known. And Jesus' answer was no – you'd never cut a hole in a brand new garment to try to save something old. This made them realize that the law and the gospel could not be combined and made into one.

On another occasion, Jesus' followers asked why they had always fasted (according to law) but Jesus' disciples weren't fasting at all? Jesus replied with a wedding parable about the guests and the bridegroom and bride. He was great at telling stories those listening could understand.

As I read further, scholars said that since glass wasn't invented yet, the bottles used to hold liquids in that day were actually goat skins, tightly stitched together and treated with oil to form water-tight containers. Once the wine or liquid was used up, if the bags weren't refreshed, refilled and retreated like when they were new, they would become dry, brittle and cracked – and liquid would seep out. The bag would then become useless.

In other words, when we use up what fills us – if we don't maintain the container properly - then adding something new will destroy what's inside, plus the bottle! It's not a one-time fix, but a constant renewing of the heart, the container of God's spirit.

If we are a shriveled bottle, cracked and dry – holding on to past ways, hurts and rules – we can't hold "new wine." Our bottles have to be refreshed so that the wine AND the bottle are preserved.

We all tend to cling to the old. I suppose it's human nature. But when we stay at Jesus' feet and ask for grace, he prepares our bottles to be cleaned, refreshed and oiled to accept the new wine. The old may taste better and be familiar, but there is life in new things. Jesus told us we would do even greater works than he did...reach more people than he could...while on the earth.

70 times in scripture we read that God planted forests of majestic cedars and watered them from their roots up. The cedar wood was then used for cleaning and the wood for building. And

in Isaiah 43 it says God will do a new thing, to not look back to the hold or used shriveled wineskins. Instead, he says he will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert and never forsake his people!

Pray with me:

Father, we come to sit at your feet to prepare our wineskins for new wine. We want the old to melt away and to clean and refreshed. We desire to let go of ideas of how things must be, but rather be open to renewal of how things will be...as you plant something new in our hearts.- Amen.



MARRIAGE

In This Together – Sometimes, My Darlings – by Bekah Holland

Just last month, I wrote all about how my husband and I have gotten so much better at communicating and not getting our undies in a bunch about little things. Which means, of course, that we got to take that little tidbit of information out for a test drive.

We had a house full of teenagers, which is apparently just our life now, and my husband questioned me on some things having to do with said house full of teenagers. Now, his words shouldn't have bothered me. He wasn't trying to be combative or hurtful. But, for whatever reason, my brain translated his opinions as - *he thinks I'm not doing anything right and I don't think I'm doing anything wrong and obviously he thinks I'm a bad mom, maybe human, how dare he, men, ugh, maybe I am a bad mom and a bad human* - and then descended down an impressive shame spiral. Now, I realize just how dumb this sounds. And it wasn't exactly the kind of moment I'd like mentioned in my eulogy. BUT, there were some good things that came out of this less than ideal moment.

First off, as a life long people pleaser, my immediate reaction to any and everything is, "I'm sorry. Let me fix it," regardless of whether or not it was mine to apologize for or fix. But this time, I didn't apologize. Probably, it's because I was plotting ways to smother him in his sleep. But still, it's progress, people! Second, I made myself sit with the uncomfortable feeling of having someone I love upset with me. This is not how I like to spend my time. I'd much rather ignore all the less than rainbows and sunshine issues and imagine myself frolicking through a field of flowers. The fact that I do not frolic and also have allergies and should not kick up a field full of pollen (and also, that this is Texas and we have had approximately 743 days of 105 degree temps; therefore, everything beautiful is dead) is completely beside the point.

I sat with the feeling and tried to figure out my role in it. Was I wrong? Was I being overly sensitive and creating a problem where there wasn't one? Was I right, and my husband better bring tacos along with an elaborate apology? And since I couldn't come up with a good answer to any of those questions, I didn't just shove it down like Bekah 1.0 would. Bekah 2.0 asked. Not to be difficult or start an argument, seeing as I'd been playing out this non-existent fight in my head for 24 hours, but to try to see from another lens. And maybe try to be less cray-cray.

Guess what happened? Nothing. Nothing happened. I brought it up. Said husband didn't think it was a big deal and was not upset, so all of the hours I gave to this not so epic Jerry Springer-like event, were a complete waste of my day as well as my serotonin and dopamine levels as I prepared for every possible way this "fight" could go. I have definitely been known to allow completely ridiculous scenarios to live rent free in my head. Ask me who that benefits? Not my husband, who has had to endure my morning aftermath of fury after committing some kind of atrocity in my dreams. Not my children, especially not my oldest, a teenage girl who is free spirited, strong willed, witty, brilliant, painfully sarcastic and is the world's most talented eye roller.

The things I allow to take up space in my mind never ever just stay there. They spill out into my actual real life and affect my actual real people. So I have to be really intentional about squashing the crazy before it starts seeping out into reality. Am I great at this? Nope. Do I still have to talk myself down off a ledge when my husband makes some unforgivable mistake in dreamland? Sometimes. I think that being a highly sensitive person leaves me vulnerable to taking on a lot of what other people are feeling. Which can be equal parts wonderful and terrible. If I'm taking care of myself and my needs are being met, being able to walk beside someone I

love and sit with them in their pain can be and has been incredibly beautiful to experience. Because mostly, we all just want to be seen and understood and accepted. But if I haven't been taking steps to ensure that I'm healthy both mentally and emotionally, I have been known to take on hurt feelings and pain of others and heaping it onto my own pile of big feelings and it doesn't take long for me to feel buried under an avalanche of other peoples issues. I'm not helping them. I'm not helping me. I'm just stuck and trying to figure a way out of that kind of quicksand is a whole thing...and not a whole fun thing.

Next, this usually requires more work, lots of extra time with my therapist, lots of peeling back layers of both real and imagined problems as well as really hard conversations with the people I love that almost always include my having to apologize for any number of things. Let me just tell you that as a person who is a recovering over-apologizer, it's WAY easier to apologize for things that aren't really your fault than to take ownership of stuff that most assuredly is. But I guess that's all part of this whole human experience, as well as figuring out a balance of strength and humility. Because if I don't find that balance, I will find plenty of opportunities to practice the humble thing.

Life is funny like that. And I've always thought God has a sense of humor and has to get a kick out of watching us backtrack when we make our messes after acting like a taller version of a toddler demanding to do it our way. But thankfully, despite all of the starts and stops and resets, God is always patiently waiting for me to try again the right way. And so are my people. And even more thankfully, they lovingly wait for me to pull up my big girl britches and take the next right step.

All of this rambling all boils down to one thing....don't quit. Don't quit messing up. Don't quit stepping out and stepping up. Sometimes you'll fall flat on your face. But sometimes, sometimes, my darlings, you fly.

"If you can't fly, then run. If you can't run, then walk. If you can't walk, then crawl. But whatever you do, keep moving forward." Martin Luther King Jr.

Date Night Fun – Not Just for Kids – by Marcy Lytle

There are things kids do that look fun to me, so why not incorporate them into date night with him? I've often envied the kids' meals because they get a little toy or treat inside, and I also note that kiddos have fun laughing and squealing at the most simple of activities! It's August, the heat is on, and we need a bit more laughter and simplicity and childlike views of the complicated world...don't ya think?

Here are five ideas:

Paint Rocks – Find a big shade tree by a river where you can set your chairs and enjoy some cold lemonade and shortbread cookies together. Search for and find some nice flat rocks. Pull out your paintbrushes and paints and design good words, pretty pictures and awesome color to leave behind for the next couple that arrives at your same spot. What a fun date!

Legos, Sure! – Have you put together the more difficult sets of Legos, lately? They're not for the faint of heart! There's a really cute Bonsai Lego set. Have you seen it? And even a flower bouquet. It would be fun to have "building" snacks as well...like graham crackers with strawberry cream cheese and fresh strawberries. Or check out the Windmill cookies from Trader Joe's. You might even want to display your creation in the house, when you're through!

Battleship or Bingo – These two games...do your kids have them...or something similar? If you choose bingo, invite another couple and make it a night of snacks and prizes. If you choose Battleship, make snacks together that one might eat on a big boat! Maybe a buffet of some sort, with cool drinks. Laugh, get competitive and pull out another kid's game too – like Go Fish!

Movie Madness – Choose a kids' movie, one you've missed in the theaters, or one you liked as a kid – both of you choose one! Find big blankets, crank up the AC, and cuddle in with snacks you enjoyed as a kid or ones you see the kids eating now that you'd like to enjoy. Was your favorite Skittles? And...of course...a big tub of popcorn. And why not some kidlike treats like sundaes in waffle bowls?

At the Pet Store and More – When's the last time you two visited a Pet Store to see all the cute animals and their antics? Kids also love aquariums, so consider visiting one nearby. And while trampolines might not be a safe option, you can still skip through a park and land on a swing, to push each other high. End the night with s'mores by the fire...

Why let the kids have all the fun? They're starting back to school this month, but you can start back to the basics with giggles and laughter when you copy their joy in all that you do together.

After 40 Years – Morning and Evening – by Marcy Lytle

We've been living together over 40 years now and it would seem logical and normal that we have a few routines. And we do! I think these routines settle both of our souls before we start the day...and ease our minds before we go to sleep, and I love them both.

I wake up super early and head to the kitchen for breakfast and to work on this magazine – I love writing in the early morning.

When he awakes he says, “Good morning!” from the bedroom so that I know he's up, in case I need to get lunches ready if he's leaving the house that day.

He makes the bed – ever so perfectly – first thing. He does this because he knows it makes me happy. And I appreciate it so much.

I make our lunches or start a load of laundry and I head to the bedroom where we hug and hold each other for as long as we like, because that physical touch sets the tone and actually lowers the blood pressure (at least it feels like it does.)

That's the simplicity of our morning, on any given weekday...and it's something I look forward to daily.

Late in the evening, we head to our bedroom to get ready for bed.

I am the first one to take a bath (yes, we both prefer baths not showers) and he catches up on a game on his phone or emails.

We make sure the News is on at 10:00 mainly to catch the forecast and the sports news. I like to hear the headlines, too.

I am in bed first, where I prop up my pillows just so and read a bit or scroll, while he often comments aloud while he gets ready for bed on a news story, or asks a question...and I answer.

When he crawls in next to me, he opens a devo book we're reading together, and with his glasses on he reads out loud to me – while I listen. He really is handsome while he reads...

This is my favorite pre-sleep activity because we read the truth about Him and our relationship with Him and others. It settles our souls, brings us hope and enlightens our spirits. It's a great way to end the day...

But then we turn on King of Queens because that couple, although absolutely horrible to each other, makes me laugh out loud. I need that before I sleep. And I handle the remote and scroll. He's just content.

He dozes off, I snuggle next to him, and soon we're both asleep.

Simple routines, nothing spectacular, daily and unremarkable...but they're ours.

If life is too complicated for hugs, stories, a little light TV and making the bed...then life's too complicated.

Would you agree?

For Better or Worse - Best Friends Forever – by Kaelin Scott

If I asked you who your best friend was, would you say your spouse?

I think that should be part of the marriage vows. “I promise to be your best friend.”

To some this may seem like common sense, while to others it might sound foreign. I don't claim to know it all, but I think that a successful marriage consists of two best friends. Because how can you thrive alongside someone – make a life and raise a family together – if you aren't also friends?

While we're talking about it, what exactly makes someone your best friend? Well, everyone might have a slightly different answer, but there are some traits I think we can all agree on.

Like *honesty*. Being truthful with each other, even when it's hard. Sometimes telling the truth means hurting each other's feelings, but it's also necessary to avoid bigger future hurts. Along with that is good *communication*. You can't build a friendship if you never talk or discuss things. Communication is key to a thriving relationship of any kind.

Another important one is *trust*. That means trusting the other while also being trustworthy. You can't have double standards here. If you want to be able to trust your best friend (or spouse), then you have to give them reason to trust you, too. Communication fits in with this as well.

Every good friendship also needs a healthy dose of *fun*. Nagging and whining and being grouchy all the time is a sure way to kill a friendship. If we want to maintain a friendship with our spouses, then we need to have fun together. For some that might mean regular date nights or weekends away together. For others, this might not be feasible. Like me and my husband, who live on a ranch out of town and have two little ones. But we still try to find fun by doing simple things together at home and especially outside. Creativity goes a long way. Just make your own fun!

I could go on listing attributes of a good best friend, but I'll leave the rest up to you. Whatever matters in friendship to you, those are the things you need to cultivate in your marriage. Being best friends with your spouse brings so much joy to every day and truly enriches marriage.

If you're already best friends, good for you! Keep it up and enjoy each other. If you've never considered this and don't know where to start, I suggest communicating to your spouse something important to you. Whatever is on your heart right now, go find your hubby and tell him about it. And then ask him to share something he cares about with you.

Friendship is key to marriage, a building block for everything else. And isn't it nice to have a best friend by your side? Who better than the one you share a bed with?



ENCOURAGEMENT

Rooted in Love - Cluttered Corners – by Kaelin Scott

I have a sign in my house that says, “Memories last. Clean houses won’t.” I bought it because it’s so true, especially as a mom of young kids. Most of the time, I’m okay with having a messy house that’s full of love. I’m really not the neatest person anyway, and I’m pretty laid back about the house compared to most. But, every once in a while the mess causes me to have a mental breakdown.

Actually, if you want to know the truth, that just happened about two hours ago. I started noticing the clutter and messes in every corner, nook and cranny, and I just got overwhelmed. It’s hard to explain but sometimes, it feels like the walls are closing in on me.

I can’t really relax because I’m surrounded by messes.

Even if I spend an hour cleaning or organizing, there’s still always more. It can never possibly all get done, and it feels suffocating at times.

So in the middle of cooking dinner, I actually started crying. I know it probably sounds silly. In a way it is. But in that moment, I just felt defeated. Overwhelmed. Fed up with living in a pigsty. I was fine after a few minutes and after letting it out, but those feelings will likely burst out again sometime down the road when I get tired of the clutter again.

My reason for telling you this is because I’m guessing I’m not the only one. Actually, I know this for a fact because my friends at Bible study talk about similar struggles all the time. It’s something that seems to plague every young mother, whether she’s got a handful of toddlers running around or a couple of teenagers. Keeping up with all of it is hard. And despite what Instagram and Pinterest might have you believe, nobody’s home is perfect. It’s just not possible.

So mama, here’s what I want you to know today. It’s okay to have a messy house. It’s okay to be surrounded by clutter and junk and messes that are impossible to get rid of. That’s part of life with littles, and it’s okay. Don’t feel like a failure or a bad mom or a lazy wife or any other lie that might be running through your head. Success as a mother isn’t measured by how sparkly your countertops are – if that’s even a thing. I wouldn’t know because mine are usually dotted with drips of peanut butter and jelly.

And along with that, please remember that it’s okay to get overwhelmed. Getting frustrated and upset and even angry sometimes is totally normal, too. Just because we aren’t capable of having a spick and span home all the time, that doesn’t mean we don’t get fed up with it occasionally. There’s nothing wrong with getting upset or feeling overwhelmed. Everybody has those days.

Usually, when I get into one of those funks where everything in the house just makes me want to scream, I get it out and then get over it. It doesn’t do me any good to wallow on it. My strategy is to organize or tidy up one area and be satisfied with that. If I start trying to attain perfection, I will be sorely disappointed. And exhausted. And it will be a gigantic waste of my time, because another mess will pop up immediately after.

Cleaning and organizing are important and, of course, they have their place. But we can’t set unachievable standards for ourselves and our families. Knowing that little people inhabit my home, I can’t expect it to look like Joanna Gaines just came in and decorated. Kids are small,

but they make huge messes. And they don't tend to pick them up without some outside motivation. Accepting that makes it easier to face those messes when they arise.

There will come a day when my house is neat and tidy and everything is in its place, but today is not that day. And yes, sometimes that frustrates me to the point of tears. But that's when I just have to let it go and focus on what really matters. Because like my sign says, a clean house might not last, but the memories made there will.

Firmly Planted – Still Quiet and Cool – by Dina Cavazos

Day after day of one hundred degrees, or more...is this a scheme of some hidden power of Texas to cause all but the most foolhardy to run back to the coolness of the North? Will this murderous climate be the solution to overcrowding? If I wasn't a native, if I didn't have deep roots here, if I didn't feel there's more to love than the climate, I would probably run. But I know that this extremely hot summer isn't the norm.

The last two summers were unusually cool for Texas. I remember because I have a thing for water. Only a few years ago, I began to desire to be *in* water—not necessarily swimming, but definitely floating, and I wanted to do it in my own backyard. An in-ground pool was not an option, but I found the perfect solution in a stock tank pool (look it up on Pinterest!) In late August of 2020 I had one installed. Summer was almost over and it seemed almost every day it rained or wasn't hot enough to heat up the water sufficiently. I was looking forward to the next summer—but, alas, it was cooler than normal! The shade in my backyard and temperate nights kept the water too cool for me. (I like warmish water—I can't stand the shock of cold on my skin, no matter how hot it is outside!) I used the pool several times during the summer, but it wasn't enough to satisfy that seemingly insatiable desire to be *in* water.

Not so this year. A daily dose of 100° and warm nights have kept the water just right. I get to submerge, float, kick back, and half-heartedly exercise multiple times a day. It's a joy to read, pray, ponder the garden, and even watch movies at night...all while reveling in the miraculous combination of molecules called H₂O.

I used to dread summers because of the heat, but the pool has been a game changer for me. Getting wet brings my body temperature down—I'm able to raise the thermostat to 78 and still be comfortable inside, though I spend the majority of time outside. I usually start with a good soak in the morning. Being still in the water settles me, and my stillness invites the birds to descend. They flit back and forth from bird feeder to bird feeder. Some eat the spilled seed on the ground, and some sit in trees and watch. A squirrel drinks upside down from the lion fountain and I see an anole on the fence extending his beautiful red dewlap. The gently moving water creates a shimmering reflection on the plants around the pool. These things are easy to overlook if I'm focusing on gardening chores, not paying attention.

Every morning Jasper, my cat, and I walk around the garden doing the necessary watering, clipping, and pulling weeds. It's so easy to get distracted and start doing more. Before I know it the morning is gone, and quiet time with it. There's no end to work—gardening chores and projects, adding new design elements, even thinking about ideas can be “work.” When I get in the pool I'm physically removed from garden work and I'm able to be still and quiet, take notice of what's around me, and ponder the invisible behind it all.

Not everyone can have a pool to soak in—I'm overwhelmingly grateful that I do. It's added a new dimension to my life: an opportunity to enjoy God's gift of water, another avenue to stillness, and a way to cope with intolerable heat. Now, I actually enjoy and look forward to

summer—but I must confess that underneath my summer dress is a wet or damp tank top nearly every day all day, everywhere I go, with a very few exceptions.

“Work in the invisible world at least as hard as you do in the visible.” Rumi

Moving Forward – Surrendered – by Pam Charro

Have you ever met someone who knew the Bible well, attended church regularly, and claimed to love Jesus, but something just didn't seem right? She just didn't seem very kind, happy or peaceful. All that the Bible claimed to offer to give him - he just didn't seem to be receiving. How could these friends be missing out on the benefits of such an amazing relationship with Jesus?

I call these people "head-knowledge Christians." They have done all that they can do to figure out where the answers are, and they are usually proud of their accomplishments. They win at all of the Bible trivia games and I had better not tell them they are wrong about any of their facts. What is the disconnect do you suppose, the reason that these people don't seem to be very godly?

My goal, for many years, was to be like them. Personally, I like it when life makes sense. If it has to be uncomfortable, or even painful, I can handle that as long as I can understand what is going on. I bet you can see where I'm going with this. The problem is that, sooner or later, it doesn't seem to make any sense. We all get to that place, eventually, in our walk with God. And that is when we have to choose:

Will we believe him anyway, or become disillusioned?

I have come to realize that I can only be transformed to the degree that I surrender my right to understand. No matter how painful and unfair everything looks, if I want peace, I must refuse to put God on trial and withstand the temptation to be offended. I have often had to take the long way around, but I always end up at the same fork in the road. God is God, and I am not. He either cannot be trusted or I will believe him.

It truly is that simple.

I can still become a "head-knowledge Christian" if I choose to. It wasn't all that long ago that I faced my own wall of ice that I had constructed between my heart and the God who wanted it so much because I just didn't understand why life turned out the way it had. But ultimately, I decided I wanted peace and trust even more than I wanted to understand. I got tired of going around the same mountain of doubt over and over. It was exhausting!

I pray that I have practiced surrender often enough to be quicker at it than I used to be, and that God continues to honor it the same as he has all these years. He is good, he deserves my trust, and I want to really, really believe. I want the resulting peace and transformation that makes it obvious my faith goes beyond head knowledge. No matter what.

Simple Truths - Metal in the Garden – by Marcy Lytle

I was out watering my garden on a morning when it was already hot before 9am, the flowers were drooping and not even really blooming anymore, and the grass was crunchy as I walked to the back fence. Not much color was visible, except for the few hardy plants that bloom anyway...and I realized that the metal art in my yard was taking center stage.

I have an orange metal flower, a trio of tall metal leaves, and metal ladybugs in my herb box. They were looking so pretty against the failing landscape I had planted and watered...but now the heat had taken its toll.

I was just thinking how the artificial was outshining the real. And it was all because of the stress of the heat. Those metal floral and bug arrangements required no attention at all, all year long, as they didn't require soil or sun or rain to shine. They just stood there among the garden waiting to shine when it's their turn...and that would be the month of August here in Texas.

I happen to love metal art in the garden. I even love wandering through a metal art sculpture garden, which we've done a few times while traveling. Someone took the time to craft and design these beautiful "fake" garden items and it took a lot of labor and creativity and time. So, why not enjoy them?

One can spiritualize anything, I suppose. I began thinking how it's never good for the artificial to shine in our lives, because the reality of His goodness should be front and center. And that's real. But so is hardship, dry times, drought seasons, and hard beating heat...and it's during those times that other things have a chance to take center stage.

That orange metal flower in my garden, just because it's not rooted in the dirt, doesn't mean it's any less beautiful. It's the same with our lives. Yes, growth and goodness and all the cool things that come from being planted by the rivers of life are awesome when they're lush and green and life is good. But when life is hard, we just might need something crafted and created by someone else – that Master Gardener – that places his beauty around us that HE's made just for us to enjoy!

Someone makes those metal statues and wildlife and beauty, and they make them to ADD TO the beauty of the natural garden, both standing side by side.

Feeling a little parched and dry and crunchy these days? Needing a little extra watering time? It's okay, because He's got other beauties standing around you that he's crafted to shine while you drink deep. He never leaves us without color or shape...just because we're in the heat of the moment.

Got any metal art in your garden? Maybe August is the time to add something, to remind yourself that beauty is shaped and formed in every season to shine and be seen, at all times, by those who choose to notice.

Unearthly Thing - When Jesus is Your Everything – by Angela Dolbear

Interview with an Interior Designer/Business Owner/Wife/Mom

I love learning about other people and what they do, and what motivates them. Especially creative people of faith. I always come away encouraged and built up spiritually.

Recently, I was talking with interior designer Tanya Hembree, and I loved how she spoke about fusing her business and her faith. Tanya is a woman of strong faith. I know this first hand, because she also happens to be my sister-in-law, so I get to witness her walking out her faith within the growth of her business, as well as navigating motherhood of three children, all exceptional young adults (if I do say so, myself...love my precious nieces and nephew). After our discussion, I came away inspired. I hope you are, too.

Tanya owns and is the owner and principal designer of [Onyx + Alabaster](#), a design studio, amazing home goods store, and cozy artistic gourmet coffee lounge, located in the in the Hallmark-movie-like charming Public Square in Franklin, Tennessee, inside the town's historic fire house, which she recently purchased through "a series of miracles," she said.

What inspired you to start your business?

I've always loved creating beautiful spaces for my family. So when I naturally got asked by friends and colleagues to help them, it seemed to be a natural way to make money. I did it on the side while I held a steady paying job never thinking it would be my primary. But I loved it, I was good at it, it had purpose and meaning for me. I wanted to help change people's lives through my creative talent, and I could do that in the intimacy of decorating a home. I have always loved people, creating, and business so it was a natural next step when the requests kept rolling in.

How do you incorporate your faith into your business?

My faith is the primary cornerstone to my business. I purposefully start every day in God's word, pray about everything, and have created a culture that is God honoring. I often start days and meetings with prayer - asking for wisdom, creativity and peace for the day. I like to say, "We're a business of Christians not a Christian business."

How do you manage family and business?

This is always a balancing act. Depending on the season, this has looked differently. When my kids were younger, I tried having stronger boundaries making myself more readily available and trying to be present for them when home. It's always been my goal above all else to be a good wife and mom over a business leader. Sometimes however, the business cries louder so it's a natural inclination to put time and effort there, so I've set personal boundaries to keep my focus on what matters most, Faith and Family. Some practical ways I've done this are by not checking emails or working at home. In the short seasons where I'm under-staffed or we have something huge going on, I have had to bend a little here, but generally speaking I unplug when I'm home.

How do you cope with the anxiety or struggles owning a business might bring?

The weight of responsibility of leading 27 team members and a long list of clients is not light. However, that is why I start each day in God's word and prayer. Also, I've learned to rest on Him, rather than on myself. Striving only leads to negative outcomes and a worn body and spirit. Why in the world would I ever think I could do all of this in my own strength? When I've taken the passenger seat and prayerfully and calculatedly made decisions it's always worked out better than when I have strived. I stay focused on what matters whether that's the meeting I'm

in, or the client I'm seeing. I don't get overwhelmed with all that my day holds, I just take one thing at a time. When anxiety rises, which it comes at times, I have learned to take the Word seriously - taking up the Sword. Anxious times come for me in the evening while I sleep. I've learned to literally memorize scripture and quote it as though I'm thrusting a sword at the anxiousness that comes at me. Every time I do this, the anxiousness leaves me.

How do you balance being a firm boss and a good witness to employees?

When it comes to keeping the balance of leading well and being firm, I try really hard to think through the lens of keeping a healthy culture for all, treating others the way I would want to be treated, and doing what is right for the business more than the individual. We have core values we lead by in our company and those help guide decision making. I also, prayerfully lead in difficult situations, and sometimes it's not as easy as it sounds. However, when I need to talk about challenging things, I call it "family talk." Like I would at home, sometimes I have to talk about difficult things or challenges, I always affirm my love doesn't change, but we have to talk about the hard things or how we can do something better next time.

What advice would you have for a woman who wants to start a business?

Do something you love and something you're good at. Make a plan and learn all you can about starting a business (licensing, insurance, contracts, pricing, etc.). Most importantly, DON'T BE AFRAID. You don't have to be perfect or have it all together. Just prayerfully take one step at a time asking for wisdom as you take each step. Taking a step of faith is the opposite of fear. Fear and Faith are enemies and can't co-exist, so as long as you're fearful you'll never take that brave next step of faith. God shows up when we step out looking for Him along the way.

Anything else you would like to add?

I think more than anything, whether you're leading at home, leading a team, or just starting a business, do everything for God's glory and purposes. I have built a brand and a culture that is God-fearing and focused on making a difference in the Kingdom of God. If I had focused on wanting to be the best, my own brand, or if I was looking for some sort of notoriety, I don't believe the outcomes would have been the same. In God's kingdom the opposite is true. If you humble yourself and serve others, He will lift you up. So as you prayerfully consider your next steps in this season, look for how you can expand the kingdom or help change someone's life, showing them Jesus through the craft of what you love doing. That's how you live an abundant life!

Tanya's Instagram says that she "loves creating experiences and spaces that speak peace and beauty into other's lives," and she describes herself as, "Jesus is my everything, proud wife + Mama, and Curator/Entrepreneur of [@onyxandalabaster](#) + [@theonyxhall](#), and the Black + White Sofa Podcast."

If you find yourself in the Nashville area, take a short trip down the highway to Franklin, and visit the Public Square (especially at Christmas time—so beautifully festive!), and stop into Onyx + Alabaster to browse the shop, and sip one of their signature lattes.

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



FRESH THYME

FRESH THYME – A Dozen Ideas – by Marcy Lytle

I know lots of folks and parents and kids want to get in that last bit of fun before school starts, or have back to school celebrations the first few weeks school gets going. And even if your kids are grown and gone, there's this sense of urgency to enjoy all the days of summer before they're gone. Even though it's hot!

So here's a list of a dozen ideas you might not have thought of...as the dog days come to an end:

1. Ice cream sundae bar with all the toppings for dinner.
2. Rent a paddle (pedal) boat if it's not too hot, or a canoe or kayak – as a family – or with a few friends.
3. Consider an evening in a fancy hotel lobby for appetizers, or out on their patio by the water.
4. Root beer floats, anyone? Make hot dogs to go with, and cuddle in for movie time.
5. Invite a neighborhood family over for s'mores in your backyard to get to know someone new.
6. Find a new park and go on a scavenger hunt for 10 items (make a list before you go).
7. Visit a drive-through safari (early morning before the heat of the day) and feed the animals.
8. Give each person a set amount of money and head to the mall! Be sure to include pretzels!
9. Set up the sprinklers in the backyard and run through them, lemonade on the side.
10. Build an amazing family room fort and beds and flashlights, and sleep together there!
11. Decorate sugar cookies and deliver to friends nearby as back to school treats.
12. Go out for pizza and then stargaze and eat brownies.

Whatever you do, keep a running list of ideas for the entire school year, so that when life gets tough...there's an idea list waiting...to make every one laugh and play.

FRESH THYME – Barricades Gone – by Marcy Lytle

We live near a busy street that was repaved and completely redone a few years ago, and it was such a pain while the construction was happening. The cones and the one-way streets and the narrow lanes were a nightmare that seemed to last for a year – maybe it did! And when the construction was finally gone and the road was repaved and smooth once again, the entire neighborhood breathed a sigh of relief as we could then cruise at a normal speed on this street that took forever to repair.

And then...over a short period of time the road began to crack and buckle, and we found out the company didn't do the repair correctly! Once again our major exit from our neighborhood was coned off, trucks were present, and slow-downs and long lines of cars occurred. Maddening!

Just today, that road is open again and I smiled so big as I zoomed on fresh pavement that is (hopefully) made over correctly this time...made to last.

I wondered what the pavement/road might say if we could hear it talk:

"The heat and the wear and tire of life had really produced irreparable cracks in my surface. I was made as a foundation for others to ride, only my foundation was crumbling, and the breaks were visible...and causing harm to the cars above. I was completely broken, in need of repair.

Soon there were bright trucks and men in neon vests working on my surface, digging and filling and repairing every fault that was causing my neighbors so much angst. It took a long while, but I waited patiently because I had no way to repair those cracks on my own. So I let the fixers go to work.

It was a nice day when I thought my repairs were smooth, but deep inside I knew they hadn't dug deep enough or used the right tools, and I heard them talking – they were in a hurry to get the job done and leave. This kind of talk worried me, and I knew I needed a better surface and that in time I was going to crack again.

And I did...and the neighbors cursed...and they detoured another way...and I hurt their cars...because I was still so broken way down inside.

A bit of time passed, but this time different people showed up – a whole new company – with the right gear and the timeframe needed and the know-how to fix what truly was broken. They knew how to right all the wrongs from the previous "repair," so once again my patience was tried. It was months and months before the work was complete and the orange rubber things were removed, and the cars came through...

And that was today.

It feels different. The digging was deeper this time and the hands that dug were stronger and more skilled. I feel like my foundation is solid now and I'm ready for neighbors to drive, to visit, to sing as they soar along my lanes to where they're going....

No more cracks or bumps or breaks...only smooth surfaces and memories as I caught a glimpse of the master builder as he picked up his tools and reminded me that I was now made new, not the same as the old, and ready for service once again.”

I wanted to write this from the viewpoint of the road because haven't we all felt that way? We've been completely run over for years and time and circumstances have caused big breaks. We thought we were “fixed” with all the things we tried...only to realize how deep those breaks were. And then HE showed up and dug deep, called us away to rest, rebuilt us with skilled and loving arms, and set us up for service...when the time was right.

I'm not sure where I am in the process, but I don't fret about it anymore. I'm pretty sure I have some cracks that run deep that He's still repairing, and I know there are places where no traffic is coming because He's set out his cones so that I can rest.

And that's okay, because when the barricades are gone, I'll be ready for the path he wants me to run...and for those who will run it with me.

FRESH THYME – Cast, Don't Carry – by Marcy Lytle

We carry, bring in, and lay our groceries down on a counter because they're so heavy, and we begin to unpack them one by one, placing each item where it belongs until our counter are clear and free.

We hand over our luggage to the airlines to carry for us, while we fly. We trust and hope that the baggage will arrive, where we will then pick it up and carry it again, until we arrive at our hotel where we lay it down and unpack it and enjoy our vacation.

We carry children that are tired, too small to walk, or need our assistance, and our backs grow sore and weary...so we set the children down. We place them in the crib or ask them to now walk, so we can have a rest...

We tote huge tents and backpacks when we go camping or hiking, and we carry them as we climb and walk, only to gladly lay them down at camp arrival. We then set them up to rest in, sleep in, and live in...until it's time to pack up and carry them out again.

We even carry huge shopping bags and purses as we hit the stores for things we need, gifts for others, and they're heavy, they hurt our backs, and we can't wait to lay them down. We unload them all and throw away the bags, sighing with relief as we put everything away.

And yet...we carry burdens on our shoulders day and night that we're not meant to carry. We lug around guilt and shame, we lift heavy weights of worry and fear and they make us weary, and we shuffle around with concerns we acquire daily until we can barely walk from the weight of it all.

I write this, because I do this!

He says to come to Him, if we're heavy burdened, and he will give us rest. He says to cast our cares on him because he cares for us. And he says we will not be in want, because He's our shepherd.

And yet I'd say this is one of the hardest parts of walking life with Him...not carrying all of these things like bags on our backs, luggage in our hands, and weights on our shoulders. We lay them down in prayer at night, but we pick them up with the next morning's light.

Moms are especially prone to carrying burdens, and somehow it's become a part of who we are...moms that worry. But I'm constantly praying and daily laying down my own personal pride...yes that's what I call my own issue...in order to walk in peace. What about you?

For me, it's just pride that I know what's best and it's possible that He will lead me somewhere awful and leave me, and that if I just think about things long enough, I might be able to come up with a solution OTHER THAN laying it all down and resting.

Ouch. That's the reality of carrying burdens we aren't meant to carry, and I'm the first one to raise my hand up high and say, "This is me!" I do this!

Maybe your reason for carrying instead of casting is that you've been hurt by others, disappointed in God, or you've had to pull up your bootstraps and carry on, one too many times. You're done with depending on anyone else, especially Him. We all have reasons we walk around with bags, when there is a place where we can deposit them for safekeeping.

Just this morning, my mind started swirling way too early about the what-ifs, and before I could even get up for the day, my backpack was full and heavy and already on my shoulders before I took a step to the kitchen.

If we can learn anything from all of our carrying scenarios mentioned above, it's that we are in a constant life mode of packing and unpacking. There's never going to be a time when we aren't packing something, whether it's a diaper bag, a book bag, or a piece of luggage for a wonderful trip. And there will always be the unloading of each of those said bags, because life is a series of loading and unloading.

Once we accept that fact, maybe it will be a little easier (and we will be a little easier on ourselves) to recognize the daily load, lay it open and poured out at his feet, smile and take His hand...and do it all over again tomorrow. And hopefully, over the years of walking and talking and laying and giving our burdens to Him, we will eventually pick up less and less each day because we will see the futility in the process and the freedom in the relationship with a God who said he'd carry it all, so that we don't have to.

I'm still in that daily movement of loading and unloading. Where are you? My first chore of the day is to load the washer with all the clothes we used over the weekend, so they can be washed, folded away and worn again...then washed again...rinse and repeat. I'm thankful for a place to lay them as they're soiled, and even more grateful for a huge tub where they can be washed...and entirely thankfully grateful that they come out clean every time.

Lay your burdens down, unpack your luggage, empty out that backpack, and spill out your produce...it's all too heavy for anyone to carry today. And when you do pick up that next heavy bag, remember there's a time and place to hand it over, set it down, and let it go...and walk free. And there's only one set of hands that are capable, strong enough and willing. And they're His.

And guess what? He's promised to carry us, as well. Now, that's a beautiful picture.

FRESH THYME – WE DEFINITELY SHOULD – BY Marcy Lytle

I was watering one morning and saw that all of the bark was peeling off my crape myrtle tree, landing in thin strips on top of the potted plants at the base of the tree. Large pieces fell and littered the area, which happens every so often with this tree. Crape myrtles are gorgeous trees when in bloom, but this peeling of the bark is a mess! So...I looked up why this tree sheds its bark.

I found that the peeling bark is a natural process of a mature crape myrtle. Crape Myrtles bloom profusely here in Central Texas in the dead of heat, in the middle of summer – they're stunning. But then the peeling begins. That normal peeling is a sign of healthy growth!

The site where I read about this has this cool statement:

“It's something you should definitely enjoy rather than stress over.”

The process is called exfoliating bark, and other trees go through this process as well. Disease, pests and infections are gotten rid of through this process. And...the process doesn't happen until the tree is several years old.

I think trees are so interesting, and we can learn so much from observing all of them. But this particular morning I was observing my crape myrtle. I was thinking about the aging process in my own skin...or bark...so to speak. Exfoliation rids the bark of unwanted pests, so it's a necessary experience. And it only happens in maturity...which made me think further.

Maturing into older age is not fun, for the most part. I can think of lots of things I do not like about aging, especially after watching our four parents decline in all sorts of ways. Watching my parents start using a cane, or wearing a hearing aid, and then my dad losing so much weight he looked like a skeleton was depressing. Maybe you've observed these things as well with your own aging family members. It's left me with this panic that the years ahead are going to be nothing but peeling bark!

But everything in the bible says aging is blessing, wisdom comes with aging, children and families after you are a blessing, and yes...our bodies will fail and become weak...but there are things to enjoy about the “peeling” process that comes with maturity.

I have definitely stressed over the aging process, much more so after watching those before me. Looking in the mirror to see fine lines become not so fine anymore, and skin become less taut, and all the things, isn't fun. And then listening to young girls in their 30's talk about how they're getting Botox already has often made me sick to my stomach. Seriously?

Beauty fades. We are told this, but then we are also told that inward beauty is renewed daily and shines. I also saw this firsthand with my parents. It's not always the case, but I believe it is for those who love HIM.

As that bark falls to the ground on crape myrtles, it leaves the trunk in sort of a patchwork of color, and it's quite interesting to behold. The tree is not dying...it's actually thriving...when the natural process of peeling takes place.

I can certainly stress over the “what-ifs” of aging, if I let my mind wander into what might happen to me in my later years. We can all stress over what’s coming up tomorrow, if our minds go there. But what I really want to do is find the enjoyment of maturation, of more years that pile on so quickly I can’t even believe it. How could the movie *Men in Black* be 25 years old! (We just saw it as a *classic* in the theater.)

There are a few older people that I find fascinatingly beautiful inside...but also on the outside...even though they have lived way past their “prime” years of prettiness. They are the women I enjoy sitting with and talking over life with, those that continue to give and serve, and those that enjoy a good belly laugh as they sink into a comfy chair because they need to put up their feet.

Peeling bark? Aging skin? Droopy eyes? Exfoliation you didn’t see coming?

Enjoyment in life doesn’t come from how we look, although we live in that reality for a season. If we truly mature and allow the aging process to cause us to drink up the water and lean in toward the sun, we should definitely enjoy life and not stress over the years to come.

Believe me. I’m preaching these words of life to myself as I’m typing them for you to read as well.