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TIPS

## **Seven 4 You – Skin Care Works – by Marcy Lytle**

There is SO MUCH to choose from when it comes to makeup these days. And there are lotions and powders and liners and shadows of every shade and brand, enough to fill a suitcase! However, I've found that unless we have good skin care, it doesn't matter how good our makeup is. We need to care for the skin we have, before applying the glam.

So...the question to our panel was about skin care, what they use, and why they like it:

I recently purchased a Lumi-Spa skin care system and I love it. My skin looks and feels better than it has in a long time. I really like that it's waterproof so I can use it in the shower, which is when I wash my face in the morning. My skin feels very soft, looks smoother, and my pores appear smaller after using it. It's by NuskIn.

[https://ohthejoy.mynuskin.com/content/nuskin/en\\_US/mysite/mysite-home.mysite.html?storeId=US01067769&fbclid=IwAR3IvtWrnE1UI7raQRqEFbwCm0v\\_6vwBJAvGTWoc0rBIhur5l-xGk1lekE#home](https://ohthejoy.mynuskin.com/content/nuskin/en_US/mysite/mysite-home.mysite.html?storeId=US01067769&fbclid=IwAR3IvtWrnE1UI7raQRqEFbwCm0v_6vwBJAvGTWoc0rBIhur5l-xGk1lekE#home)

My facial routine is pretty basic. In the past, I used some expensive products but honestly could not see a big difference. I also have sensitive skin, so I have just been staying with my normal routine. I use Neutrogena products, mostly. I cleanse my skin with a cleanser called HydroPeptide - it doesn't break my face out. In the mornings, I then use the Neutrogena moisturizer that has sunscreen in it and then I use Almay makeup. At night I use a facial wipe to clean makeup off and then I use the same cleanser and a night time moisturizer. I try to drink at least 6 to 8 glasses of water a day! I wish I had started using sunscreen as a young person, because I have a million sun spots but - oh well - that is just how it is.

<https://hydropeptide.com/>

I wash my face with IS Clinical Cleansing Gel twice a day. It was recommended by an anesthesiologist many years ago and I order it online. I use a Clarisonic brush twice a week especially in the hot humid summer months. When I worked, I applied Lancome moisturizer daily and then foundation. Now that I don't work, I used a tinted sunscreen/moisturizer combo that I absolutely love called Elta MD UV Physical. I do not do well at keeping lotion on the rest of me. I just get in a rush...

<https://www.amazon.com/EltaMD-Physical-Tinted-Sunscreen-Broad-Spectrum/dp/B00C8FVZZY>

<https://www.amazon.com/CLINICAL-Cleansing-Complex-fl-oz/dp/B0026TOCK2>

I dry brush my skin several times a week and use essential oil soap a friend of mine makes to wash my face. I like avocado and coconut oil for my moisturizer. I put the essential oils in the avocado/coconut oil. I know it sounds weird, but it works for me. I also rub just a drop of coconut oil on the lower half of my hair after shampooing. It makes it soft and helps with grey wiry hair. You may want to put it in after using a straightener or curling iron.

I have allergies but I did not realize at first how much they affected my skin. I used lotion daily for years and then my skin started to be so dry and itchy, I tried all the unscented, healing kinds of products. But nothing worked. So, I stopped all lotions and googled natural remedies. What they recommended was in my kitchen! I use 2 T extra virgin olive oil mixed with 4 drops of fresh lemon juice. I only have to use this occasionally when my skin starts to get dry and that's not very often. I mix enough for about a week, about two tablespoons full, and I mix it in this fun bottle we got on a trip through Montana. It does not take much, and I use it on my face and body. I just put a small amount on my fingers and rub it in. I also do an occasional yogurt face mask...just plain yogurt from the container!

Super simple, due to ultra sensitive skin, that's my routine. I use only goat milk soap for face and all-over cleanser, Canus Caprina soap from Amazon, and diluted ORIGINAL Johnson and Johnson baby shampoo for eye make-up remover. Coconut oil is my facial moisturizer. Body moisturizer is Alba Botanica super emollient lotion. These have been my regulars for 20+ years. If I have to be in the sun, I use Neutrogena 100spf.

[https://www.amazon.com/Caprina-Canus-Fresh-Original-Ounces/dp/B00V0CPCT6/ref=sr\\_1\\_3?crd=39M8ZZWMLSRM&dchild=1&keywords=canus+caprina+soap&qid=1591910737&sprefix=canus+capri%2Caps%2C413&sr=8-3](https://www.amazon.com/Caprina-Canus-Fresh-Original-Ounces/dp/B00V0CPCT6/ref=sr_1_3?crd=39M8ZZWMLSRM&dchild=1&keywords=canus+caprina+soap&qid=1591910737&sprefix=canus+capri%2Caps%2C413&sr=8-3)

[https://www.amazon.com/s?k=alba+botanica&crd=1CQ2788F2C6N8&sprefix=alba+bot%2Caps%2C208&ref=nb\\_sb\\_ss\\_i\\_3\\_8](https://www.amazon.com/s?k=alba+botanica&crd=1CQ2788F2C6N8&sprefix=alba+bot%2Caps%2C208&ref=nb_sb_ss_i_3_8)

My husband has skin issues due to a medication he takes, so his skin itches and breaks out on the arms and face, and even his head. My sister read about Bend Soap Company and all their testimonials (which are amazing) so we ordered some. My husband LOVES it and uses their soap on his hair and the lotion on his skin. He has seen marked improvement!

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

I have shared this threesome before in another post, but Gruene Witch Apothecary in New Braunfels, Texas has a coffee facial bar, a witch hazel toner, and an anti-aging moisturizer that when used faithfully together makes a difference. I have seen age spots fade, and my skin feels tighter and smoother...and the scent is amazing!

<https://gruenewitch.com/>

I just use organic cooking avocado and coconut oil. Sometimes just organic coconut. I use a hand held dry brush from Eco-tools. Makes my skin feel so good!! With the oil, I add about 5 drops each of frankincense and lavender essential oils in a travel size bottle. It lasts for a long time.

<https://www.amazon.com/stores/Ecotools/Homepage/page/31B47B2F-142A-4E7E-9784-C8C3F8CC7160>



## **The Dressing – Wear It Now – by Marcy Lytle**

All during these months of staying closer to home, buying online or curbside, and avoiding public places, I've heard over and over that people are staying in "comfy" clothes like sweats or shorts, and tshirts. I get it. Those outfits are super comfy. But I've found that a lot of clothes that look pretty and make me feel dressed up can be comfy, as well! Not all "nice" outfits have to be uncomfortable and itchy! I've quite enjoyed purchasing and wearing skirts and dresses, so here are a few of my faves!

I've found that knit is good, elastic feels great, and color is the bomb...and if I wait until life is back to normal to wear these things...I might be waiting quite a while!

This navy and white striped dress from Amazon can be dressed up if I choose to go out, but it's totally comfortable to sit around in, while working from home or visiting in a park. The belt, which is attached, can be tied in the front in a long bow, or around the back and back to the front in a short knot.

[https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07NNJP4GR/ref=ppx\\_yo\\_dt\\_b\\_asin\\_title\\_o00\\_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07NNJP4GR/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_asin_title_o00_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1)

I love this sunflower dress. Fitted at the top, but flowy at the bottom, and full of sunshine! You can tell it's comfy just by the photo! And the sunflowers – well, they are my favorite flower! What's yours?

[https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07RYF7MB3/ref=ppx\\_yo\\_dt\\_b\\_asin\\_title\\_o00\\_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07RYF7MB3/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_asin_title_o00_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1)

Isn't this black dress the best? We all need one, and it doesn't have to be dressy. This one is elastic at the waist, has pockets, and can be worn with every shoe in the closet! I wore it to the park to sit by the water...it was divine.

[https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B082X25B9W/ref=ppx\\_yo\\_dt\\_b\\_asin\\_title\\_o01\\_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B082X25B9W/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_asin_title_o01_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1)

I've really enjoyed this midi length skirt from Old Navy (did you know that length is back?) The color is a neutral, so I've worn it with gold, mauve, white and more. It washes up great, and also has elastic on the back of the waist!

[https://oldnavy.gap.com/browse/product.do?pid=571589012&cid=79586&pcid=79586&vid=3&grid=pds\\_13\\_15\\_1#pdp-page-content](https://oldnavy.gap.com/browse/product.do?pid=571589012&cid=79586&pcid=79586&vid=3&grid=pds_13_15_1#pdp-page-content)

I purchased a light blue chambray and a khaki skirt in this same style. Elastic waist, great length, the perfect skirt for summer with tshirts or button-ups or whatever! They do have to be ironed, because they're linen...but they iron easily and quickly!

<https://outlet.loft.com/chambray-pull-on-skirt/528973?skuld=29353644&defaultColor=0652&catid=cat3950033&selectedColor=0652>

Love this green wrap dressy blouse. It's from Ann Taylor Factory, and it's great for summer! LOVE the tie wrap at the waist, and the fact that it can be worn with capris or a skirt!

<https://factory.anntaylor.com/tie-waist-keyhole-top/536778?skuld=29694853&defaultColor=2007&catid=cat3960032&selectedColor=2007>

### **Three Moms – Summer Snacks**

Keeping kids full seems impossible, doesn't it? They want to eat constantly, while watching shows, playing games, after activities, in the car, and just everywhere! It's hard to constantly just serve what's healthy, because every kid wants cookies! It seems to be a mom dilemma for sure – among everyone! One mom said her kids say the word “snack” every 30 minutes. Can you relate?

We decided to create a list of snack ideas, and how to portion and keep them. You'll notice these moms include a good balance of sweets and fruit and fun!

#### **For snacks:**

- Apples and peanut butter
- Popcorn (with M&M's sometimes for family movie night, and definitely for road trips)
- Pears and Laughing Cow cheese
- Veggies with Ranch or HEB dill dip (the best!)
- Applesauce and applesauce pouches – convenient, don't require refrigeration and mess free (usually.)
- Yogurt
- Cheese sticks
- Cuties – those mini oranges – delicious, refreshing and healthy
- Popsicles, sugar free made by Popsicles – delicious and better for teeth
- Watermelon (great for picnics and beach trips!)
- Favorite candies

#### **For organizing and serving:**

- Let the oldest cut up fruit and veggies, and be a part of making the snacks for younger siblings.
- Keep a bottom shelf or fridge bin for reachable snacks.
- Create a snack bin to sit on top of the fridge, where food is not in arms reach of the littles.
- Keep lots of options available, so kids have a choice to pick from.
- Limit snacks, especially before meals, but also let them have one so Mom can have quiet time!
- Find new snacks often, to give the kids variety and different nutrients.
- Require kids to ask permission for snacks (so they don't eat candy all day!)
- It's good to balance between sweets, fruit and salt intake with snacks.

- Keep healthy snacks on their level, but others out of reach because snacks affect dinner!

Moms need to support moms, not compete with each other on what they serve their kiddos. Every family is different and every parent requires and expects different things when it comes to what they allow their kids to eat. The important thing is to have variety and fun and health, all rolled into one – so that meal time and snack time is enjoyable, not deplorable!

## **In the Kitchen – Simply Good – by Marcy Lytle**

Summertime should be simple, including what we make in the kitchen. It's too hot and we're too busy having fun to spend hours and efforts to make elaborate time-taking meals for our family to enjoy! I hope you and your family are out riding bikes in the early morning, sipping cold drinks in the afternoon, and relaxing by water as the sun sets! And here are some goodies for you to enjoy as you breathe in the summertime vibes and enjoy all things simple and good:

### **Caramel Apples**

We made these on a recent weekend away with our kids, at the request of one of the kids! We bought the nice crispy small apples, so that each one could enjoy an entire wrapped apple of goodness!

- 4 Werthers bags of caramels (4.51 oz bags)
- 8 apples (granny smith or the crispy small reds)
- 3 T heavy cream
- Assorted toppings (we used sprinkles, tiny chocolate chips and chopped pecans)
- 8 popsicle sticks

(There were 9 of us, so using the small apples, we had plenty!)

Wash and dry the apples totally, and then press the stick into the top of each. Line a baking sheet with wax paper.

Unwrap the caramels (great for the kids to do!) and place them in a med pan over med-low heat. Add the heavy cream and cook, stirring, til they melt and are of a smooth consistency. Reduce heat to low.

Dip each apple into the mixture, shaking off excess and off the bottoms, then roll in your favorite toppings, and place apples on the line baking sheet. Refrigerate until caramel firms up, about 15 minutes.

Serve apples immediately or store in fridge until ready to enjoy!

### **Lemon blueberry bread**

We had this for breakfast on our weekend trip. It's a great loaf to bake and take. Just wrap it in foil and enjoy it the next day. Each slice is so yummy!

- 2 c flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 t baking powder
- ½ t salt
- 1 t lemon zest
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten
- ½ c milk

- ½ c butter, melted
- ¾ c fresh blueberries

Preheat oven to 350, coat bottom and ½ inch up sides of a 8X4 loaf pan with nonstick spray. In a large bowl, stir flour, sugar, baking powder and salt. Stir in lemon zest. Make a well in the center.

Combine eggs, milk, and butter in a medium bowl. Add this mixture to the flour mixture. Stir til just moistened (batter will be lumpy.) Fold in blueberries and spoon batter into prepared pan, spreading evenly.

Bake 60-70 minutes til toothpick inserted near center comes out clean. Cool in pan on wire rack for 10 minutes before removing. Then cool completely on the rack.

I think this would be great with a tall glass of lemonade for an afternoon snack!

### **Blackberry Cobbler**

I'm sure you have many recipes for cobbler, but this one is one of the easiest I've ever made and so tasty! We took all the ingredients with us, except the berries. If you can pick berries at a farm, do so!

- 1 stick margarine
- 1 c flour
- 1 t baking powder
- 4 cups blackberries
- 1 c sugar
- 1 t salt
- ¾ c whole milk
- ½ c sugar

Melt margarine in deep pan. Mix 1 c sugar, flour, salt, and baking powder and milk til smooth. Add the melted margarine. Pour into a baking dish (I used 9X13), ladle fruit over top, and sprinkle with ½ c sugar.

Bake at 350 for 30 minutes or until brown.

Of course, serve with ice cream!

### **Sausage and Browns**

The key to this recipe is to let the hashbrowns sit on the heat, in the pan, until they start browning, before you turn. Otherwise, they will turn mushy. But this skillet breakfast is so good! (We included a side of salsa).

- 4 cups frozen cubed hash brown potatoes
- ¼ cup chopped green pepper
- 1/3 c canola oil

- ¼ lb smoked sausage halved lengthwise and cut into ¼ in slices
- 3 slices American cheese

In large skillet, cook potatoes and pepper in oil over mid heat until potatoes are golden brown. Stir in sausage and heat through. Remove from heat and top with cheese. Cover and let stand for 5 min til cheese is melted.

(We doubled this recipe).

### **Tiny Skewers**

These bites of fun were what we ate one night after we got back home, using up the rest of the sausage we had! This is one of my favorite snacks (and cute, too!) to whip up in a jiffy.

- Sausage rounds cut from links
- Thick sliced pickles
- Cubes of cheese
- Toothpicks
- Mustard, salsa, and chips to go alongside

Just grill the sausage rounds until browned. Skewer each one with a pickle slice and a cube of cheese, and set on a cute tray. Include the condiments, sit down to enjoy a movie, and eat!

### **Tried and True – Fun to Buy** – by Marcy Lytle

It's been a while since we shared some favorite products that we've been using and enjoying for a while, and some are new ones just discovered during all of this time of being at home more, and shopping on line! I love hearing what others have bought, created, or done during these past few months. And since summer is in full swing now, I thought it would be fun to share with you some cool things...just in case you're already doing some Christmas shopping...in July!

**JR Watkins lotion** – I ordered this peppermint scented body lotion and LOVE IT. Not only does the tingly peppermint smell good, it feels good, as well. And the lotion is just the right thickness (not too greasy or too watery – you know what I mean!). It's a keeper in my stash of potions! We bought the foaming hand soap as well, and love it too.

<https://www.amazon.com/J-R-Watkins-Rejuvenating-Peppermint-Lotion/dp/B07B6FDXRV>

**Elf eye shadow and powder** – Yes, this makeup is cheap, but I like it. I know some of the products are used up quickly, because there's not much too them, but I like that. I can afford to try a new product and see if I like it, which I have liked quite a few of these! This cute eyeshadow palette, and the pressed powder, are two of my faves.

[https://www.elfcosmetics.com/prime-and-stay-finishing-powder/300110.html?dwvar\\_300110\\_color=Light%2FMedium&cgid=face-powder#start=3](https://www.elfcosmetics.com/prime-and-stay-finishing-powder/300110.html?dwvar_300110_color=Light%2FMedium&cgid=face-powder#start=3)

**Pencil pouch** – I discovered this company Notebook Therapy while browsing Instagram! I love so many of their cute products and this pencil case that squishes down and then up, is so cute! There are bento boxes on their site, and all sorts of little organizers for your office. Love all of them.

<https://notebooktherapy.com/products/tsuki-popup-pencil-case>

**Epoch hand sanitizer** by Nuskin – My daughter sells these products and they just came out with the hand sanitizer. What I love is the scent (most sanitizers smell awful!) and the size of these little bottles that are easy to carry in my purse. They come in a pack of five, so I can keep one in so many places. It only takes a little dot, to go a long way.

<https://linktr.ee/kamrinwolfe>

**Tablecloth clips** – For me, these are a must for outdoor dining. We used them on a recent trip with our kids, as we ate out on the patio every meal. Not only are they cute, but they are just weighty enough to keep all of our tablecloths from blowing up over the table (I hate it when that happens!) These are from Amazon.

[https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07WK1TR3D/ref=ppx\\_yo\\_dt\\_b\\_asin\\_title\\_o05\\_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07WK1TR3D/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_asin_title_o05_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1)

**Sprinkler Ball** – We found this on Amazon as well, and it's so big and looks so pretty as it spouts a huge sprinkle out over the lawn! It's a great addition for your backyard for kids to run and play and cool off on a hot summer day.

[https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0859BZDM9/ref=ppx\\_yo\\_dt\\_b\\_asin\\_title\\_o04\\_s01?ie=UTF8&psc=1](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0859BZDM9/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_asin_title_o04_s01?ie=UTF8&psc=1)

**Fun paper plates** – I've started stocking up piles of cute paper plates and napkins – mostly from the Dollar Store – but other stores as well – when I see them. It makes snack night at home, or even a romantic dinner for two, so fun when cute little summer colors and shapes are set on your tray or table!

**Paddywax candles** – I've sang their praises before, but I really do love these candles. They're long burning, smell great, and come in all sorts of cute jars. I chose these two scents for summer, in their apothecary jars.

<https://paddywax.com/>

**Glass storage containers** – I keep these in my fridge all the time for cut up celery, leftovers, cucumbers, any small portions that I want to keep and keep fresh. They are super air tight and keep things fresh longer. I got them as a gift, and they're great!

[https://www.google.com/shopping/product/5645165701010374837?q=storage+containers+glass+for+fridge+5+piece+amazon&biw=1600&bih=708&prds=epd:6613915044988176495,pmr:3&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiy6Lmig\\_LpAhUR26wKHbXCAK4Q8wII1wc](https://www.google.com/shopping/product/5645165701010374837?q=storage+containers+glass+for+fridge+5+piece+amazon&biw=1600&bih=708&prds=epd:6613915044988176495,pmr:3&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiy6Lmig_LpAhUR26wKHbXCAK4Q8wII1wc)

**Pretty Planter** – Smith & Hawken's brand at Target always has nice things for the home, and we recently found these stately planters with self watering troughs in the bottom. Aren't they pretty? We purchased them for our church's porch and they look so nice by the benches!

<https://www.target.com/p/23-recycled-urn-planter-smith-hawken-153/-/A-54341524?preselect=53863628#lnk=sametab>



HOME

## **Practical Parenting – Summertime Sanity** – by Marcy Lytle

It's summer, but we were already all home long before summer came. So now, what? How do we keep our kids busy while we're still trying to work and stay sane? I'm a big fan of schedules, so that's what I'll promote here. Scheduling might be hard to initiate, and sure there needs to be flexibility, but having an outline helps a family know what to do, and enables them to have time and allowance to do it. So fun!

**Daily Do's** – Hang a daily schedule on the fridge for kids to follow, with words for those that can read, and pictures for the littles. It helps keep you from having to verbally bark orders all day! It might look as simple as this:

Morning: brush teeth, get dressed, make bed, eat breakfast, feed the dog, clean room

Afternoon: quiet time of reading, play a game with sibling, exercise

Evening: Pick up any toys, shoes and clothes and take to rooms. Shower, brush teeth, say prayers, give thanks.

**Outings on Weekdays** – It might be fun to hang a list on the fridge of possible daily outings with the kids so that they don't go stir crazy. Hopefully, we are getting out more and things are opening up...just a bit! It might be fun to pick one for each day of the week, to look forward to! Here are some options for weekdays:

Sunset scavenger hunt walks (you can make your own or print out from computer)

Little libraries around town (these are in yards, and you can leave a book and take a book!)

Early morning sketches (take pads and pencils and draw trees and nature)

Fast Food lunch (a once a week treat!)

Water works (sprinklers in the yard, water parks if open, pools or streams or ponds)

**Weekends with the Fam** – This is time to carve out for family fun for sure, even if vacation isn't possible or feasible right now. There are family outings to make happen on the weekend, that are something all can look forward to starting on Monday! Check these out:

Breakfast and Bicycle rides – Load them up, head for parks and trails, and ride (early before it's too hot!)

Drive in movies – If your town has one, go. If not, set up one in your own backyard! Add popcorn!

Another town – Check out what's open in a nearby town (within an hour), pack snacks, and take the kids. Visit that town's park, stream, or fast food joint – just for something different.

Evening singalongs – Bring out the instruments, play the music, dance and sing...then sit down and snack!

Picnics – outside or inside, depending on what suits your fancy. Spread a blanket, let the kids help with the menu, include a game, and make it happen.

**Projects** – These might include ways for the kids to give back and bless others, always a good thing:

Make cards and send them to the elderly you know.

Paint rocks and leave one on the doorstep of neighbors as a gift.

Draw pictures and sign them, deliver to other kids you haven't seen in a while, with a treat attached.

Bake cookies and decorate them (why wait until Christmas?)

Collect boxes, tape them together with duct tape, and decorate them all with scrap fabric and wood and plastic bottle caps, etc.

Rearrange and organize one drawer in your bathroom, or an area in your closet, and be creative!

Writing down ideas, putting them in little squares on a calendar, hanging up schedules for kids to see, planning and dreaming and being creative – it all helps create order and fun and pleasure at home for YOU and THEM.

## **I Don't Do Teens – Eyes on the Dash – by Marcy Lytle**

Our teens need friends to hang out with, friends to chat with, friends to trust and grow into adulthood with...all the things. And right now, it's been hard for our kids to have any contact with friends and really hang out as usual. Nothing's been usual about life for us, or for our kids. And it's important that our teens have good friends! But are there really any good friends, when one is a teenager? I was chatting with a friend about her daughter going to summer camp, and I said I hoped she'd find some good friends with good influence. But we both agreed that finding teens that are a good influence is downright hard! Teens just basically are hormonal, act on impulses, are self-absorbed and only worried about influencing themselves to be all they can be...at least that's the way it seems.

So what's a parent to do, when it comes to teens and their friends? We, as parents, want our kids to have solid friendships with their peers, but is that possible? How do we guide them toward that goal, and what if those friends are bad to the bone?

### **Here five suggestions to consider:**

*Monitor the hangouts.* Whether the kids are hanging out on line, through text, by playing games, or actually in person...observe them. Observe your teens after they've been with that friend and see if their behavior has changed for the worse...or the better. What is their conversation like? Is there rivalry or jealousy? It's not wise to just leave our teens with friends and hope for the best. We can pray, observe, guide and observe behaviors and attitudes.

*Be a good friend.* It's always said that parents shouldn't be their kids' friends. But I beg to differ. Obviously, we should not be their friend in the sense that we just go along with them and never parent. But a parent can be the best example of a friend our teen will ever have. We can listen well, encourage, laugh, and keep in confidence things that are told us in secret. We can be a parent they can trust and admire, and train them to be that kind of friend to others.

*Comfort in disappointment.* Our teens are going to be hurt by mean friends that talk behind their backs, like them one day and not the next, move away to another state or country, or any number of things that come in life to separate good friends. We know how that feels, as we too have lost friends over the years. It hurts, and it hurts deeply. This is when we point our teens to Jesus, the best friend a kid can have. It starts early, this pointing to Jesus, because we want our teens to run to him for solace and to find comfort in his word. Teach that, model that, and help them through as they find new friends when old ones leave.

*Step in.* Do you see your son being belligerent and defiant every time, after hanging out with that guy? Maybe the girl he's been interested in is manipulative and dangerous. Or perhaps the friend your daughter had over is asking to borrow things, making fun of your daughter, or worse... You are still the parent and you can step in, to stop bad connections. Pray, and then have a talk with your son or daughter. We are always to be a family of acceptance to people to help them out, but when a person becomes poison to our children, we need to step in. We can talk to that teen and see if they'll listen to instruction, if we've built a connection with them. It

can be awesome when a teen listens and changes. But sometimes, that teen has to go back home and stay away if they are truly hurting our family.

*Welcome and love.* If your teens feel your home is loving and you are kind, hopefully they will ask their friends in to visit. Be a parent that encourages and speaks kindness to your teens' friends, a mom or dad that models love and acceptance, and a parent that cares. Invite that friend to a family dinner hangout and play games. Encourage them to be with the family. It will be evident right away if that kid is trying to pull your child away into hiding and deceiving. Open your doors, invite them in, but then be the keeper of the gate and the warrior in prayer.

Whatever we do, we cannot assume that once our children are teens that will make wise decisions when it comes to friendships, or that they will be attracted to good kids. There's always that appeal to the dark side, and it only takes one bad friend pull our kids away into a dark world full of all kinds of danger. Teens need friends. But those friends are going to be good influences or bad, and probably our own teen will be a bad influence at one point as well! God is acutely aware of our desires and hears our prayers when it comes to our kids.

Once I found a journal on the dash of my car, after I'd dropped off my daughter at school. She "accidentally" left it there, and inside I saw a note from a boy that wasn't appropriate. I think God was all over that "accident" because it enabled my daughter and me to have a conversation that was needed, about guys, their intentions. She too realized that God was looking out for her...

He's looking out for your teens as well, just keep your eyes on the dash...

## Chipped China - My Little Library – by Jennifer Lytle

Growing up, I was a voracious reader. My mom questioned me about reading in the car; she repeatedly warned me about reading in the dark; she even threatened to take away my books one time when I was in late elementary (no joke, but you won't hear that backstory from me...not now, anyway.) Piled, stacked, and shelved in my little bedroom library, I had scores of mysteries volumes, Golden Books and Little Critter, and books on manners and etiquette (yes, I absolutely loved reading formal, how-tos on everything a girl might want to know from setting a table to answering a phone or babysitting).

When I was in middle school, I turned toward non-fiction and read *The Diary of Anne Frank*. I became absorbed in reading the experiences of that young girl and the group of those who hid with her for over two years during the German occupation of the Netherlands. It was then that I became entirely infatuated with everything pertaining to what those of Jewish descent refer to as [The Shoah](#). You and I typically refer to this period in history as the Holocaust.

As a college student reading for pleasure was no longer attainable (so I felt,) or of interest to me. I remember a moment when I placed a heavy textbook on my bed, dreaded the looming required reading, and felt sad about my loss of reading with delight. My desire itself was gone.

Part of what happened, in combination with my reading-intensive workload, was that I no longer knew what to read. My relationship with God had changed and I did not know what was appropriate or beneficial to read. After one period of spiritual development, I tried to pick up one of my favorite authors from high school. Upon reading even the first few sentences in one horror novel, I felt just that - horror - by what I had read as a young person. Turning to Christian authors, what little I did read was usually forced. I read books about raising a family and marriage, along with books from Christian authors about living a life of faith. Frequently, I found these books did not create that insatiable desire to keep reading and I ended up with many partially read books. Perhaps my spiritual development was minimal? I tried to read one or two classical Christian pieces and it was never as engrossing as I had once experienced.

Sadly, it took several years before I was able to connect with *The Hunger Games* trilogy, by Suzanne Collins. Afterward, I turned to *Ender's Game* series, by Orson Scott Card. My love for reading again bloomed and I felt a little like a kid who gets their first brand-new bike after learning to ride without training wheels.

It's funny that I should just finish reading the article by THYME's own Writer/Contributor, Angela Dolbear, about acceptance and being uniquely crafted. For a period of time, I had placed myself in a box and wouldn't allow anything outside of the label, *Christian*, in my library. It's funny . . . or perhaps it's just a lugubrious posture.

Despite being freed from only reading a certain category of literature, I have both found myself struggling to grant freedom to others in choosing and in accepting my own liberation at times.

In this season of what I would refer to as the great slow-down routinely known as the pandemic, my family and I began to build our own little free library. For many years I have wanted one of

these after spying them in our community. Is it ironic that my husband wanted to design and build a bigger Little Free Library, complete with a pull-down table and seating, and I disagreed that we should break with tradition? I wanted to confine him the same way that I had once been confined in choosing and enjoying literature. Though I am a tad bit embarrassed to admit, I wondered what my neighbors would think about our larger-than-little library.

Build your libraries; big or small. Fill them with your favorite genre of written works. I encourage you to read for pleasure. Read what suites you. Read what speaks to you. Read the stories that make you want to go back for more even if others might not approve of your interest in . . . romance novels or historical pieces.

And, my sweet Angela, write what your soul says! I need your words to fill my library.

## **Tiny Living – The Low Down – by Leyanne Enterline**

My boys are ages 13 and 11. I feel we have had a unique upbringing for our kiddos so we may not fit in the “typical” way to raise your kids but I’ll share our journey, in case you’re new to this column.

We lived the American dream of owning our own house, two nice cars, traveling some, with two parents working outside the home. As the kids started getting older we thought,

“What are we doing? Is this how we want to live our lives?  
Working to survive and pay high prices to keep up with the Jones’? No!”

My husband had started traveling more with his job and we home school, so we thought, why not travel with him? Why not sell pretty much everything we own, buy a travel trailer and travel the world? *Sounds adventurous and fun, right?* Well that’s what we thought and we’ve been doing just that for the past four years!

We bought some land as a home base and pretty much just started traveling. The kiddos were 7 and 9 when we literally sold all we had, except for a few things we put in a storage container, and bought our 325 sq. ft. home. We have lived in it so long that even the other day I mentioned something about a dresser; and my kids didn’t even know what that was! They don’t even remember having an actual home to live in...

Many of our friends, that home school as we do, are somewhat like-minded. Several travel and live a bit more simply than most, it seems. A lot of us have a few acres so we can have animals and let the kiddos run free and explore. Many of us have our own gardens and eat a more simple diet. We love this life and wouldn’t have it any other way.

Was it hard to go away from the trek most follow? Yes.

Do we constantly question ourselves and wonder if this is the way for us? Yes!

But for now, tiny living is working and we have a tribe that think like we do and that keeps us going on this crazy, adventurous path that we never could’ve guessed we be on!

I love that my kids can have the space and time freedom to explore. They have a love and respect for wildlife and creating their own adventures outside daily. They have an entrepreneurial spirit and are constantly trying to figure out how they can use their hands to create something new. From handmade bows and arrows to fishing lure making, or just plain digging a hole, they are truly in their element and using God’s gift of creation for us to enjoy. I have learned to learn through the eyes of a child.

When we first told our kids of our adventure my youngest said,

“We won’t have a backyard while we travel? Oh! I know! The whole world is our backyard!”

That brought tears to my eyes as I thought, Yes!

Yes, it is!

## **A NIGHT TO REMEMBER - QUIET TIMES** – by Marcy Lytle

Kids learn all sorts of things from parents. We teach them how to tie their shoelaces, how to brush their teeth well, and how to sort and put away toys. And hopefully, we spend time with them in devotionals, such as these we print each month. However, we can add to this teaching by showing them how to develop a personal quiet time with Him. More than ever, our kids need a firm foundation, a relationship with Him, and ears to begin to hear their Heavenly Father speak above all the noise.

So just how do we model that, and encourage that, from the youngest to the oldest in our house?

A good quiet time includes the following five components, either all each time, or at least part of these, as we sit still and get to know God, his character, his love, and his mercy.

Preparation: Carve out a time and space for quiet time for the family, and for each kid. It might be on their bed, a corner of the sofa, near a window, on Dad's chair, near the dog, or on the back porch. Give each one a personal space, and have one for the family as well. Spaces can be rotated each month! Keep this devotion as a guide (the books mentioned below are not endorsed by us, but rather suggested for you to research and try.) You may want to pick one of the five below for each night of the week, or just fit it to your own family's schedule and need.

**Reading** – Kids need to be read to or read the scriptures, to learn of their Father's character. Start with love. Start by telling your kids how you have experienced the love of the Father. Then read them John 3:16 and explain that there is no greater love than to lay down our lives for another, which is what Jesus did for us.

Consider *The Attributes of God for Kids* as a resource.

[https://www.amazon.com/Attributes-God-Kids-devotional-parents/dp/1976208114/ref=cm\\_cr\\_ar\\_p\\_d\\_product\\_top?ie=UTF8](https://www.amazon.com/Attributes-God-Kids-devotional-parents/dp/1976208114/ref=cm_cr_ar_p_d_product_top?ie=UTF8)

**Listening** – Kids need to know what God's voice sounds like. He will only instruct them to love and to think on good things. Any other voices need to be dismissed. Share with your kids a time when you heard the voice of God and what it was like. Stop and be still, and ask the kids to listen, and let them share. He can speak to them through nature, through a friend, and through His word.

Consider *Growing Up with God* for your older kids, as a resource.

[https://www.amazon.com/Growing-Up-God-Everyday-Adventures/dp/1947165461/ref=pd\\_lpo\\_14\\_t\\_0/137-2557384-0797714?encoding=UTF8&pd\\_rd\\_i=1947165461&pd\\_rd\\_r=cdad3e28-64ba-4181-9205-100e68728941&pd\\_rd\\_w=CqetF&pd\\_rd\\_wg=4TG5Y&pf\\_rd\\_p=7b36d496-f366-4631-94d3-61b87b52511b&pf\\_rd\\_r=4HGZ0B14PGHTVGM7AMKY&psc=1&refRID=4HGZ0B14PGHTVGM7AMKY](https://www.amazon.com/Growing-Up-God-Everyday-Adventures/dp/1947165461/ref=pd_lpo_14_t_0/137-2557384-0797714?encoding=UTF8&pd_rd_i=1947165461&pd_rd_r=cdad3e28-64ba-4181-9205-100e68728941&pd_rd_w=CqetF&pd_rd_wg=4TG5Y&pf_rd_p=7b36d496-f366-4631-94d3-61b87b52511b&pf_rd_r=4HGZ0B14PGHTVGM7AMKY&psc=1&refRID=4HGZ0B14PGHTVGM7AMKY)

**Praying** – As a kid, I learned to use my five fingers as a pattern for prayer – my thumb pointing at me reminded me to repent of wrongdoings, my pointer was to pray for those around me, middle finger being the biggest reminded me to pray for leaders, ring finger for family, and pinky for those in need. That about covered it! But prayer is so much more. It's certainly asking for things, but it includes giving thanks, and exalting God. Read The Lord's Prayer with your kids line by line, aloud, and give thanks. Repentance is a valuable piece of prayer, as well.

Consider *A Book of Prayers for Kids*, as a resource.

<https://www.amazon.com/Book-Prayers-Kids-ways-every/dp/099740633X>

**Worshiping** – Does your family worship together? Explain the value in lifting up the name of Jesus, praising His name aloud, singing together, dancing together, and all the things that worship includes. Then grab your instruments (hands, homemade, pots and pans, or recorders!) and sing and pray and dance together. Let the kids talk at the end, about their experience of worship.

Consider Spotify's Top Christian Kids Music, as a resource

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6kHYVFgRmNCBQasIYMWu1M>

**Journaling** – Let your kiddos make or pick out a journal all their own. Little ones can draw pictures. Older ones can write down thoughts and verses. Get your own journal. Write as a family. Spend time recording thoughts, prayers, answered prayers, questions, and blessings. Journaling unloads the mind, and serves as a great place to record God's mercy and grace. When our kids were small, we each had a spiral and drew a picture to go with a bible verse each night. I still have these!

Consider *A Child's Prayer Journal*, as a resource.

<https://www.amazon.com/Childs-Prayer-Journal-Kids-Mindfulness/dp/1977981208>

This month's devotional was a bit different, but we hope you will keep it as a resource for you and your family. Good habits start young. And the best habit to start is spending quiet time with him. It's never too late to begin...

## **An Adage a Day - Apples and Oranges-** by Carole Gilbert

Apples and oranges. Apples to oranges. Apples and oysters. Wait! What? Apples and oysters? This is how this idiom was first written in 1670 by John Ray in his *A Collection of English Proverbs*. This man was an English naturalist publishing works on the topics of botany, zoology, and natural theology. He was one of the first to study and classify the concept of species, which are collections or groupings of items having distinct and like qualities. This is where he came up with a lot of his comparisons and I am sure he was trying to make a point if he put apples against oysters.

John Ray spent a lot of time observing nature and the world around it. One of his many popular publishing's includes, *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of Creation* (1691), in which he confirms and gives facts from his observations that everything in creation is as the Bible states. He was from England and is often thought of as the father of natural history. Such an interesting guy!

Also interesting is how this idiom evolved and takes on a different version depending on where you live. It started as 'apples and oysters' in 1670 in England, then as 'apples to oranges,' aka 'apples and oranges,' starting in 1889. The French refer to 'apples and pears' while in Latin America they say, 'potatoes and sweet potatoes.' And the British English use the phrase 'chalk and cheese' for their comparisons. All of this is getting me in the mood for a summertime picnic, except for the chalk. But chalk does go along with summer too. Who does not enjoy sidewalk chalk art!

The meaning behind this idiom is that you cannot compare objects with no similarities or items of different species. That is where John Ray came up with apples and oysters. How can you begin to compare these two? You can't. And I love them both. They are different in every way but they both mean summer to me. Apples off the trees and fried oysters at the beach! So yummy! It is said, Summertime and July is "as American as apple pie." Now that's a good comparison!

We know apples and oranges cannot really be compared. They are both tastefully unique in their own way but are not alike. When we compare, we tend to confuse. How many of us considered whether to wear a mask or not to wear a mask these last few months, only to compare opinions by others and then become baffled by all the different responses. When we compare, we confuse ourselves, our family, and our friends. We are saying something, or someone is better or not better. Another way to look at masking or anything else is to remember we are all different and unique like the fruit, so to each his own.

As I researched this idiom, I found myself trying to think of the things I compare. When I buy fruit, I do compare apples to apples and oranges to oranges. I compare different colors and prints against my skin when I am shopping. I compare which flowers to buy, which paint color to use. I would probably compare two peas in a pod if I had the mentality to observe things in

nature like John Ray. I did not realize how much I compared. I do hope I do not compare people.

I then wondered what God says about comparing. The Bible is filled with comparisons, but those comparisons are fitting and used for description.

Proverbs 25:11 says,

“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.”

And one of my favorites is Matthew 6:26-27,

“Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”

In other words, it is important to know if the things we are comparing have the same functions, are like items, are the same in nature, and that they are useful for further discussion. Then they are comparable. They are not like apples and oranges.



YOU

## **Strengthening Your Core – 1000s Elsewhere – by Marcy Lytle**

*Better is one day in your courts than thousands elsewhere...Psalm 84:10*

I've sang those words, read them multiple times, and always associated them with being in a worship setting with lots of people...like church. And I'm sure that's a good place to be. But recently, this verse popped up in my head in a whole new light.

I'm a person with a mind that races. It's always active, hardly ever rests, and therefore I accomplish a lot...and also become weary a lot. An active mind is good and healthy in some respects, but it can operate on overload and kill a day's joy in another.

Lately, my mind has been full and occupied with thoughts about the virus, the protesting, the injustice in the world, and the future of friendships, relationships, schools, churches, and you name it – I've thought about it. It's not that thinking about all of that can do anything constructive, but it's just that my mind runs like a ticker tape, on a never ending spool...

Then one afternoon, this verse emerged in my memory.

One day in his courts is better than a thousand days outside of his courts.

Just where are his courts? That's the question, and here's the answer:

In Chapter 84, we read that his dwelling place is lovely...these courts of the Lord. It's where birds can have their young without fear of an enemy swooping to steal and take away. It's near Him, it's His house, and it's where praises are being poured out. His courts are where people are strengthened, over and over again, and prayers are going up constantly.

In other words, *these courts* are His presence.

It's better to experience one day in his presence than thousands of days outside it.

Like a lightbulb, my mind stopped ticking. If I could slow down and just choose one thought of praise to my Father, rather than 1000 thoughts of the "what-ifs" and "oh-mys," I just might find myself in a better frame of mind and soul.

In verse 11 we are reminded that God is a sun and shield, and he withholds nothing from those who walk with him blameless, trusting in Him.

When my mind steps out of the courts of praise and into the land of a thousand laments, I find myself drowning. I fail to see His protection for me and my house, I begin to grow weary and weak, and prayers are suppressed and replaced with complaints.

And I forget...that one day in his presence...praising Him...is better than all the thoughts I can worry about or swim in, in a single day.

Why do I constantly wander in the forest of my mind through scary passageways, among thorny limbs, and among dark paths...when there's an oasis in the clearing calling my name to come and drink.

I want to always choose better.

Did you know there's another verse that says one can put 1000 to flight? Yeah, I'm not sure it refers to this example, but I'm thinking one good thought of praise to Him can put my 1000 bad thoughts to flight until they vanish.

Thank you, God, for your Word and your Truth.

## **Life Right Now – No Matter What – by Bethany Gomez**

My response to 2020 has become, “Jesus come!” I’m not necessarily saying come back, (although that would be fine with me) but just come and be in the midst of these storms we are in, or are facing.

*They say* to write what you know. I know this. My heart is breaking over the deep rooted racism and hate still embedded in this country. It is breaking for the injustices occurring in the Black community. It is breaking for my Black friends and family, including my sister-in-law, my niece, and nephew that have grown up and are growing up in a world where they are treated differently because of the color of their skin.

First, I want to apologize for being fairly silent on this matter. My silence is not because I don’t care. I care so deeply that I first wanted to work on remedying my ignorance about the presence of racism still in our country. I’m half white, but I look Hispanic. I was raised in a predominantly white environment, but I was also raised to love and treat everyone equally. I know now that being a person that doesn’t see color is a start, but, that is not enough.

One day, I asked my dad, “What can we do?” He reminded me that as Christians, as believers in Jesus Christ, we have to approach this differently. One of his past jobs was a corrections officer, so he understands much more than I do what is going on when it comes to racism, especially in the police system. He also has a heart for the lost and a good deal of wisdom that has come from walking with God for so many years. He told me that the only thing that can bring about change is the *transformative love of God*.

It is all about the heart.

We know as believers that there is an enemy bigger than racism, an enemy that perpetuates it, and his name is Satan. The Bible says,

“The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy.

I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

John 10:10

My dad continued with saying that we are first and foremost called to live for the Kingdom, not the world. This is not our home. God calls us to,

“Be not conformed to this world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,  
so that you may prove what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

Romans 12:2

God doesn’t want any of His children to die, but to repent and be saved through His son, Jesus, so that we can live with Him in Heaven for eternity. We are called as believers to spread this good news to the world. I believe the more and more hearts that are turned toward Jesus, the more we will see a change in how people of color are treated. Jesus teaches us to love our neighbors as ourselves.

He told the parable of the Good Samaritan to give us a picture of how to love our neighbor. I’ve heard this parable before so many times, but now it has a whole other meaning. I want to be like the Good Samaritan. When I see my Black brothers and sisters hurting or in pain, I don’t want to walk by like the priest and Levite did; I want to rush to their defense and help heal their wounds.

For the little bit that I might experience racism based off of my skin color or my Mexican sounding last name, Black lives experience it exponentially more, so I will do my best to oppose racism in all its ugly forms. Among other things, I will continue to educate myself, I will follow more Black men and women of God on my social media, I will listen and learn and unlearn, I will petition for justice. I will pray for wisdom and discernment; but above all else, I will keep on sharing the love of God and the good news of the Gospel.

There was a powerful question that I came across that I thought was very eye opening. It was posed by a young, Black believer. He had a very similar response that my dad had. He posed this question at the end of his video message.

“Will you defy God to appease the world or will you defy the world to serve God?”

I choose to serve God, no matter what the world says.

## **Life in a Nutshell - Aloha to Fear – by Jill Montz**

This past week my Facebook Memories have been filled with pictures, videos, and stories from the trip to Hawaii my daughter, Dotty, and I took last year. I know it is cliché to say but it truly was the trip of a lifetime. While I'm not necessarily a "beach person" (sea, salt, and sweat really aren't my thing...I am a mountain girl at heart), I'm definitely a "Hawaii person." We stayed on the island of O'ahu and it was breathtakingly beautiful.

The temperature was perfect, all the beaches were postcard worthy, the people were kind and gracious (and loved Texans), the food was fresh and delicious, and don't even get me started on the flowers...a gardener's paradise for sure! I think I took more pictures of floral beauties than I did of Dotty, but sometimes I took pictures of my little beauty standing next to the floral ones so it wasn't a total mom fail.

I seriously didn't want to leave and more than once perused Zillow listings for possible home and store locations. I mean if we ever expanded the Pecan Shed I think Hawaii would be a great place to put in a new store. I have a hunch the pecan could give the macadamia nut a run for its money. At least I am willing to move there and give it a try!

Hawaii was everything I ever dreamed it would be and more. I would hop on a plane tomorrow and go back if I could. Now before you start thinking I am fishing for the Honolulu Chamber of Commerce to book me a free trip (I wouldn't turn one down!) I will say Hawaii holds a special place in my heart for many reasons, but perhaps the greatest one of all is because of my grandmother.

Grandma went to 49 of the 50 United States before she passed in February of 1995. Hawaii was the only state she never visited. As a young girl, I loved to hear all her stories about the places she saw and the people she met. I vowed to her way back then I would go to Hawaii myself someday as a way to honor her. *A little back story is needed here.* My grandma was my favorite person on this planet. While I have often wished she could have met Dotty, I'm not sure my heart would've been able to hold loving them both at the same time. I still miss her to this day and think of her often.

Grandma was old school. She was hard core Church of Christ, never wore pants, cooked and baked better than any Food Network personality, and loved me like no other person ever has or probably ever will. She was the mom of three boys. She had four grandsons and (you guessed it) ONE granddaughter (see why I was so treasured!) She put me in dresses with layers upon layers of petticoats and let me "twirl" for her until I got dizzy or until we were both pleased with how the skirt fluttered out around me. She rolled my long hair in pink sponge rollers every Saturday night for church the next day and she bought me any doll I ever looked twice at in a department store. (Side note: To date she now has five great granddaughters. I can't help but think she has been hollering to Jesus "more girls...more girls" every chance she gets!)

My grandma also never learned to swim and she always claimed it was the reason she never went to Hawaii. Grandma would tell me, "If the plane crashed while over the open water I wouldn't be able to swim to safety." I would reply, "If the plane crashed you might have bigger issues than not being able to swim!" Her fear of water kept her from experiencing the awesome beauty of Hawaii (and other places that require trips across an ocean). I know she would have loved the flowers, the food, the history, and the people. Although I'm not sure how she would have liked a luau. I am willing to bet she would've grabbed a tan elbow or two and suggested

they might get bigger coconuts or a fuller grass skirt. Heaven knows she commented on every swim suit I ever owned past the age of ten.

I never really understood Grandma's fear of water. Probably because I've been swimming since before I can remember. I also don't understand some of my friends' fear of flying, but then again I boarded my first plane at the age of seven and I don't enjoy long road trips.

The fact that Grandma never made it to all 50 states probably bothered me more than it bothered her. But I often wonder if she did regret not going. For this reason (and others) I pushed Dotty to do many things very young. I wanted her to try new adventures before she learned to be scared of them. Little did I realize my child is scared of very little and thus doesn't need my pushing. This trait alone has given me more than a few grey hairs already.

Before the age of four, Dotty had flown on a plane, was taking gymnastics, was enrolled in swim lessons, and was playing team sports. Before the age of eight, she had been on any roller coaster ride she was tall enough to get on, had been snow skiing and zip lining, spent several sunny days being whipped around the lake on a tube (constantly asking to go faster), had been hunting, and had been put on many stages to sing, dance, and act. Now as she finishes up the age of twelve, she has been on roller coasters on every coast and many in between, loves to practice driving (still wants to go fast), never shies away from any animal be it a kangaroo, stray dog, dolphin, giraffe, or anything else someone will let her feed or pet or hug on, still loves any stage (and the spotlight), tries to sign us up for every church mission trip regardless of where they are headed, will try just about any food you set in front of her, and can't wait to go off to college someday.

I have zero doubts these adventures had way less to do with me pushing her to try new things and are all about the adventurous nature God Himself gave my sweet girl. But I never doubt kids are more fearless when mommas are standing close by to catch them (or to cringe and have an icepack handy and the local ER on speed dial).

All this to say (God bless your heart if you are still reading this) that I never want Dotty to fear things so much she misses out on wonderful opportunities and memories that will last a lifetime. You might be asking, does she get her fearless nature from me? That's a hard no. I have absolutely no plans of skydiving, bungee jumping, swimming with sharks, owning any animal other than a dog or cat, snowboarding, singing on Broadway, studying anything that has bodily fluids, water skiing, or moving far, far (did I mention far) away. Dotty wants to do all this and more!

But these fears pale in comparison to some others I have:

I fear things like letting myself be vulnerable.

I fear failure...as a parent, business leader, and just as a person in general.

I fear getting hurt emotionally or mentally.

I fear having regrets.

I fear letting go of control.

I fear God won't answer my prayers.

I fear God WILL answer my prayers.

I fear opening myself up to the Will of God. (What if He wants me to take a mission trip to some place without AC, clean running water, or Dr. Pepper?)

I fear stepping out of my comfort zone. (Clearly. See the point above.)

I fear being great because with greatness comes scrutiny, criticism, and all kinds of haters. (You just sang that Taylor Swift song didn't you?)

I fear walking down the street and asking my neighbors if I can pray for them. (What if they ask me a Bible question I don't know the answer to or what if they ask me to pray about some really hard issue I might not have the words for?)

I fear a lot of things Xanax and meditation would have a hard time dealing with.

I know fear is normal and serves in many cases to keep us from harm. My fear of dying in a tornado caused me to buy a house with a storm closet built in. My fear of skin cancer causes me to put on sunscreen. My fear of ridicule from my preteen causes me to bypass all the pictures of ladies with bangs on Pinterest the night before a haircut. These are all good forms of fear. However, fear can hinder us. While some great programs, classes, groups, techniques, tricks, and drugs have been created to help people overcome their fears, some fears just don't go away. I am certain even if my parents had enrolled me in Toastmasters by the age of six I would still, 34 years later, be petrified to stand in front of a group to speak (nothing against Toastmasters. I know several people who have grown greatly with the program. I am just TERRIFIED of public speaking. Like check my blood pressure I could very well stroke out kind of terrified.)

Fear is nothing new under the sun. In the Bible, the phrases such as "fear not" or "do not be afraid" are used many times. Often these were used before a person was called to do something they more than likely didn't want to do or didn't think they could do. (Anybody just picture poor little Mary standing before an angel hearing she was going to be the mom to the next king?) God knew they felt this way. Over and over again God reminds us He is with us and with Him all things are possible. On our own we can't face down hungry lions, corrupt rulers on a power trip, giants with an even bigger ego, Red (green or blue) Seas, floods, famine, fortified cities, or friends who turn out to be foes. On our own we can't face losing a job, a sick child, the death of a loved one, cancer, natural disasters, social unrest, and Satan himself. But with God...we can face anything.

I still have less than zero plans to swim with sharks or bungee jump. Hot air balloon rides and dating again are on the *maybe* list. Just typing the words "public speaking" makes my stomach flip upside down. Thinking about raising a teenager and someday letting her go off into the world makes public speaking look easy. A mission trip someday (at least one with the hopes of running water...AC and Dr. Pepper are negotiable) is a definite possibility. A trip back to Hawaii is a must.

In Hawaiian *Aloha* is used as a greeting and when parting. *Mahalo* is used to express gratitude.

In life fear will come and go and I am grateful for the lessons it will teach me and the blessed assurance and peace it will cause me to seek in God alone. Mahalo, for reading this article to the end.

## Healthy Habits – Mind over Matter – by Marcy Lytle

We all know that reading our bibles and praying, thinking on good things, and staying positive are healthy and wise when it comes to keeping our minds occupied and well. And we need to remind ourselves of this often. However, there are lots of little practical things that can help our minds rest, stay at ease, and close in peace at the end of the day as well...

1. Do something with a child. Paint her toenails, play with paper dolls, color with him, or toss a ball. This detangles a cluttered mind.
2. Bake bread. Reading a recipe, digging our hands into dough, kneading and forming and waiting and smelling...it's all good.
3. Leave the house. Staying in all day wearies the mind. Drive out in the country, or to another neighborhood, and observe beauty in creation and in your neighbor. This makes your mind smile.
4. Close your eyes. It might be to take a nap, but it could be to just hear the birds sing or wind in the trees. But often, we don't hear these things unless our eyes are closed. Hearing heals the mind.
5. Phone a friend. Don't sit and stew and wait and wonder why she isn't calling. Call her. Don't complain or gossip. Just encourage her. He says he will refresh you when you refresh others.
6. Take off your shoes. Sit down, remove your footwear, put up your feet – against something cool – and rest. Tired feet make tired minds.
7. Exercise. This is always touted as being good for your body, but it's good for your mind, too. Walking is the simplest exercise there is, so walk. Even if it's hot – walk and carry a spray bottle and water – but walk.
8. Create. Maybe you don't consider yourself creative, or maybe you do but never have time to do the "big projects." Try creating a new outfit from your closet, rearranging a shelf, sketching a scene, or painting a pot. Little creations make big satisfactions.
9. Make a flavored drink or water. Google beverage recipes and try a new one. Make it cold, over ice, add a straw and serve it in a favorite glass. And sip...ever so slowly.
10. Empty the bowl. By this, I mean get rid of the thoughts that clutter. Write them down and throw them away. Visualize placing them in a box and handing them over. Whatever emptying looks like...do that.
11. Hand-water your yard. My dad has always used the hose to water, and he looks so peaceful doing it. Watching the water as it falls on dry ground, and seeing grass literally perk up beneath it, is amazing and mind-blowing. And healing.
12. Vacate. Leave town, even if places aren't open, hotels are scary to stay in, or money is tight. Don't wait until you have funds. Pack up snacks and books and blankets, and leave town for the day...by a creek...to a town square...in a park...but away from familiar surroundings.

Print out this list and hang it where you can choose one thing a week to do, even one a day, so that your mind stays healthy and sane and free and alive. Mediate on his words, love others,

and pray always. But get up and do something physical to affect that mind of yours, so that it functions well and at peace, uncluttered and free.

## **Created for Life - Greed's Opposite Spirit** – by Ginny Hurley

Listening to the quiet sounds of the night, I began to see a picture of a prevalent noise pervading our atmosphere. A greedy little gnome came to mind, screeching and bellowing out the words, "More, more, more!" I then looked up the definition of greed and it simply said, 'inner emptiness, lack of control, need to have everything, predatory, self absorbed.'

As I asked the Lord why I was sensing this spirit, I felt His answer to be profound. It seemed that greed is hidden behind every evil thing. From corona to politics, business and education, greed seems to raise its head and want more. The desire for power creeps into aspects of life in the arena of marriage, religion, politics, relationships, and on and on. Even the desire for power is derived from greed in needing to have control over someone or something to gain more for self.

So whatever the opposite of greed is, that's what I want!

Is it generosity? Could it be humility? Maybe thankfulness?

*Ephesians 4:2*

*"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."*

*James 4:6*

*"He gives us more grace. That is why scripture says, 'God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.'"*

*Luke 14:11*

*"For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

Verses tumble on about fearing the Lord, listening to wise counsel, honoring others above self, being thankful, giving with a happy heart, and loving unconditionally. These words give me hope that a greedy world system has come to its end. Greed has been conquered by the love of our God who came to transform our world into His original creation, with freedom and joy.

*Isaiah 66:2 (Passion)*

*"But there is one My eyes are drawn to: the humble one, the tender one, the trembling one who lives in awe of all I say."*

My soul finds great rest in these words above. I picture children laughing and dogs leaping around them. I am made whole with purity's joy. I am hopeful for change as God invades these thrones of greed, turning the wisdom of this world into truths that confound that world with humility.



MARRIAGE

## **In This Together – The Spark** – by Bekah Holland

“So it’s not gonna be easy. It’s going to be really hard; we’re gonna have to work at this every day, but I want to do that with you. I want all of you, forever, every day. You and me....every day.”

Nicholas Sparks

Now I know I normally save my little blurb or quote for the end of my articles. But sometimes, especially when you’re well past your editor’s cut off and you’ve already scrapped two pathetic attempts, mixing things up just a little might just push you forward and put the words on the paper that make a little sense. *I hope*. So here are my musings for today. Buckle up.

If I am going to be completely honest, some days, being married is hard. Most days are great, and lots of days are comfortable and comforting. But some days....some days are awful. I always thought that this was something that I had to hide. I grew up never seeing my parents disagree. I never saw my friends’ parents argue. Even as an adult, I didn’t know that my friends who were in long term relationships had days when they’ve considered making a run for it. I guess it’s one of those things like the dishes in the sink and laundry piles. You want to sweep it under a rug to project a pretty picture to the outside world. I get it. I feel you. And just in case there is any question here, I’m not talking about dangerous and/or abusive situations. *(If you are in one of those, you’ve got my FB info right here, so send me a message and we’ll get you to a safe space. You are not alone. You are enough. You are valuable. Period.)*

What I am talking about are two humans, trying to figure out how to live together in wedded bliss while simultaneously trying not to lose their minds. We’re imperfect. We’re selfish. We’re annoying...all of us. My husband and I have experienced the gauntlet of issues in our 15 years together and with our extended families and friends. We’ve been through loss and grief, joy, health fears, births and deaths, broken bodies, broken hearts and broken minds. We’ve been through some of the highest of highs and what felt like the lowest of lows. And most of the time, we have been able to weather these things together, he and I against the world.

*However, there are other days.*

There are days where we’ve let little annoyances fester unspoken. Ones that started as basically nothing, but over time, built into a big something. And once the avalanche starts, it’s can leave a pretty rapid path of destruction in its wake. We all have those stories. Something related to the human condition, I guess.

Now, we all know how dumb we are in the early stages of a relationship. Everything is so new and squeaky clean. It’s full of romance and butterflies, our brains are flooded with dopamine, and we can’t imagine being anything but blissfully in love with this beautiful person we’ve chosen. Fast forward a few years....add in job stress, money stress, kids stress (whether that’s having them or not having them, wanting them or not), social injustice, mental health struggles and then wrap it all up in a nice pretty global pandemic bow, and we have yourselves a recipe for meltdown. One day, we’re daydreaming of walking down the aisle to Canon in D or the ever trendy Etta James, then we blink and suddenly find ourselves lying in bed, listening to the brain rattling snores coming from this person we’ve have pledged our life to, wondering if we can claim an insanity defense if we were to actually smother our partner with a pillow. And to top it

off, we can't even remember the last time we shaved our legs, much less felt those same goosebumps we did after our first date. It happens to the best of us.

Even the couples that look like they have this special secret ingredient that the rest of us mortals long to have....yeah, you know the ones. I promise you that if they were honest, they could recount stories of times when they were far from picture perfect. It's because while God created us for connection and communion, we are also still messy and imperfect even without adding an extra set of baggage to the mix.

But what makes us keep going? Why would we keep drudging through the bad days when we don't feel at all "in love?"

*One reason.*

My mom always told me that love is a choice. I didn't really understand this until I'd been married for more than five minutes, but there are days where we have to work REALLY hard at our marriage. I personally blame the entire rom-com movie industry, Christian "romance" novels and Disney princesses. They paint this easy, gentle, fun loving picture that just sets us up for the letdown of unrealistic expectations. If you want the truth, I was so unprepared for what marriage was going to be. I had zero idea how to deal with conflict, misunderstandings, when to speak up and when to shut up. I thought it was supposed to be easy. But it wasn't. Some days it still isn't. But the thing that has given us reason to push forward with each other instead of running far, far away is the fact that even though he still gives me the shivers, we are friends before we are lovers.

My husband and I met in our early 20's at an airport in New Jersey. After I finished being grumpy about getting stuck alone in Newark after dark, we became friends. We would banter back and forth, arguing over football, and talking about our favorite TV shows. He'll tell you that he knew I was special from the moment he met me. I'll say he thought my spice girl hair-do and flippant sarcastic attitude were intriguing, because he couldn't just woo me with his long eyelashes and big brown eyes. We'll agree to disagree, but either way, he was right (do NOT tell him I said that! He's reached his "I'm right" quotient for the month). We WERE special. And for years after that meeting, we would talk on the phone, picking up every silly conversation wherever we had left off.

Those years getting to know each other from a distance (Louisiana to Lubbock) without any other expectations really helped to build our foundation more in friendship than hormones. But our friendship has carried us through the dumpster fire portions of marriage. And there have been some. We've gone through times that neither one of us could see a way out. We were tired. We were hurting. We were broken, both as individuals and as a couple. We did not feel "in love." Sometimes we didn't even feel "in like."

Choosing to love each other - even when we didn't like each other - saved us more than once or twice. As well as choosing to fight even when we wanted to quit saved us again. Not because we necessarily wanted to all the time, but more because...

*We were invested in our friendship.*

So when things get mundane or hard or busy, remember the person who made you laugh too loud in the middle of a fancy dinner, or left your favorite candy on your nightstand after a tough day at work. Remember the person who pushed you to stand up for yourself when you forgot

how to and be proud of who you were and are and will someday be. Find him/her again. And even more importantly, be that person again.

And when we do, and the friendship that holds it all together remains, we can find the spark that's been hiding in the dark, waiting to come to life.

## **Date Night Fun – Jump In - by Marcy Lytle**

As time goes on and we're still cautious in our socializing, it's hard to think of dates where there aren't crowds or viruses lurking at every table, right? Or maybe you're already out and could care less; you're ready to be back at life. What's important is that we don't let date night slip away, just because date places are few and far between! Just like when we jump into the deep end of a pool on a hot summer day, we can totally jump into fun with our dates this month of July...no matter what is going on in the world.

Dinner theater for two – Pull out the card table and set it right in front of your television and decorate it for two – with whatever you have on hand – to make it romantic! Maybe pick a few flowers and place them in a vase, add a candle, set out placemats and fun plates (you can even use colorful paper ones!), and then serve your food while you pick a movie to enjoy. We've enjoyed the Hallmark mysteries just because they're light and not heavy, in this heavy-filled world right now. The food doesn't have to be fancy, just the setting...with the lights down low...in a dinner theater you've created all your own.

Adventure for a day – Get out a paper map (or look online) and choose one or two towns within two hours of your home, google what there is to do and eat and see there, and GO. Pack up a few water bottles, include your walking shoes (because you'll see a pretty park), take a magazine or puzzle book (because you'll want to linger in a quiet spot in a small town), and some cash for junking. Be on the lookout for cool old buildings, junk shops, eateries that have good reviews, and hidden treasures. You'll come home happy and full.

Shopping for Christmas – Yes, I'm putting it out there. Shopping for others and with a purpose is fun for both, with list in hand. Wear something red or green, make a list of someone to bless this Christmas (or for Christmas in July!), decide on your budget, and go. Find great sales, and start buying now. You could just purchase stocking presents for fun, or you could pick a friend and purchase a surprise and leave it on his/her porch at the end of the date. Enjoy something red and green, like watermelon!

Remodeling an Area – How can this be a date, you ask? It can be SO FUN. Pick an area of the house. We recently picked the front area of our kitchen by two large windows. We decided to make it an office area, so we shopped for furniture, designed the look we wanted, and ordered. It's a blast! It doesn't have to be big. Maybe he has a messy desk, and you have a messy shelf, and both are driving you crazy. Sit down and google inspiration (save copies of how you want these areas to look) and then order or go out and get a few organizers, and start – doing it together! Enjoy an ice cream float when you're done, then go back home and admire.

Conversations by Water – Take your lawn chairs; meet another couple under a shady tree near water...and converse. Bring a picnic and eat, and get to know each other. Ask questions, and listen to their answers. Don't discuss the state of the world, the pandemic or anything negative. Speak life to each other and encourage and pray. Then give thanks. We often do these things alone, but with another couple can be life-giving to both! Stay until the sun sets and breathe in deep as you are reminded with your friends of His faithfulness to all...as you gaze up and see the stars march across the sky in the dark.



## **After 40 Years – Pat Phrases** – by Marcy Lytle

When you've been married for decades, you can almost finish each other's sentences. You know what the other one likes/dislikes, you recognize his/her moods, and just know each other pretty darn well. And then...there are the other things that occur...like phrases we become accustomed to saying and hearing. All of them are not sweet...at all. And I don't think it's ever too late to take note of what we say and change it, because some habits aren't so good to fall into, in a marriage.

Sometimes, especially when I'm tired, I hear myself saying a few pat phrases, things I say quite often, that when I think about it – they aren't so nice. And then I listen, and I hear him say the same ones! One of us starts a bad habit, and the other picks it up, and pretty soon those phrases are normality, but they're not uplifting or encouraging one bit.

Here are a few I've noticed that come out of my mouth that I'm trying to change:

**“You weren't listening”** – Maybe I say something and an hour later he comes in the room and asks me about the very thing I told him earlier. That pat phrase is the first thing out of my mouth. And maybe sometimes he isn't listening, but there are often times I think I've told him and I haven't. And other times I tell him when I know he's busy and preoccupied, instead of stopping and waiting until I have his full attention. When I say this pat phrase I'm judging him as being inattentive, and that puts him on the defensive. Never a good place to be!

**“What in the world”** – I walk into the room and see him doing something I'd rather him not do, or he tells me something I think is absurd and silly, and instead of responding with a nice affirmation...this pat phrase pops up. I'm basically saying I think what he's telling me or what he's doing is stupid. Only I didn't use the word “stupid.” It's all there though, behind my words, that judgmental spirit.

**“What do you mean?”** – He says something I disagree with. And sometimes I don't really disagree, I'm just disagreeable! Maybe he states a fact or a statistic and doesn't get it quite right. Or he gives his opinion about a news story or an event, to which I rear up and make him feel “less than” because he didn't fully understand it like I did. Wow, how self-absorbed of me!

**“Uhghhgh”** – I wasn't sure how to spell this sound that comes out of both of our mouths when we say no discernable words but we utter this sound of disapproval. Maybe I hand him the remote and he has forgotten again how to exit Netflix, or he's told me something (I wasn't listening because I didn't care) and I tell him he didn't ever tell me. You know those times...when he acts or does or missteps and we just roll our eyes and grunt.

**“What's wrong with you?”** – This might be the worst of all, when I attack his character. I'm saying I'm right, he's wrong, and even more than that – he's rotten to the core. This phrase is like lighting a stick of dynamite, because there's sure to be an explosion that follows. Anytime I come out with a phrase that implies that sort of attitude, I feel bad. And yet, sometimes it happens.

We all find ourselves in ruts of rash phrases that if said too often then become a pattern. And I personally realize it when I hear both of us do the same thing. We've fallen into a pattern of pat responses, the same ones over and over again, and it almost always causes frustration between us.

There's never a time when we say we're too old to relearn, repent, and reestablish good practices in relationships, especially with him. I've found that those phrases slip out when I'm just too lazy to stop and think, pray for self-control, and walk away before I speak.

Reading self-help books and books on marriage and attending seminars are all good things for relationships, but until we're aware of the heart behind the hate that spews out, we don't really change.

I'm working on listening to myself and changing my words.

Words are powerful. They can shape a child. And they can hurt, or bless, a husband.



ENCOURAGEMENT

## **Simple Truths - Gracefully Broken** – by Erica Simmons

If you are a regular reader of this column you already know that for last few months I have been on a journey that has been difficult. If you are a first time reader or occasionally a reader, you know now. I am going to take a few months away to find a way to press into God and heal, but I wanted to share a few things that have happened and let you know where I am currently.

A couple years ago, I heard about a new journal writing of Mother Theresa that had been discovered. The big news about the discovery was the fact that on several occasions she expressed doubt about her faith. She was such an iconic and faithful follower that the revelation caused quite a stir. I am not Mother Theresa by any means, but I too have found myself in the midst of the biggest battle of my faith that I have ever encountered. What is ironic about it is that a few years ago I faced what I still consider the hardest time of my life, yet through it all my faith was strong and was the foundation upon which I firmly stood – and both got me through. So why is this situation different? I ask myself that question and sometimes I realize that it isn't. I just need to make the decision to stand on God's truth, to accept it, and quit looking at my circumstances and focus on who God is. Then there are times that the overwhelming emotions challenge what I have for all my life believed and trusted. As I have struggled, I am amazed at how God simply refuses to let me go. So, I have some healing to do. But before I take a break, I want to share three experiences, *God moments*, that have inspired me.

**First**, I shared in one of my earlier articles about a year or so ago about how a fellow church member shared how her signature line on her email account was "In Him." I was so inspired I decided to add it to my email, too. So for more than a year, anyone who gets an email from me knows I am boldly declaring my allegiance to my Heavenly Father. A few weeks ago, I got a call from my supervisor; she is an executive director for the school district. She called to tell me how she sees me living my life and this has inspired her. She shared how she was struggling aligning her faith with some of the work she was taking part in, and so much more. The important thing is not what we discussed, but the timing of the call. As I struggled, God wanted me to know that my sacrifices for Him make a difference, they have an impact. *I am just NOW understanding* the importance of that last statement, because part of the problem has been my questioning and wondering if choosing to live a life for Him even makes a difference. I was thinking from the standpoint of being a parent, but what we do for Him is so much bigger than our children.

**The second thing** I want to share is title and subject of a sermon my pastor preached last week. The title of the sermon was "The Truth," but the part of the message that stood out to me was the question, "What happens when you base truth on your own understanding?" That is so powerful, because the heart of the issue that has lead me to question my faith is indeed due to leaning on my own understanding and erroneously thinking that it was God's truth. I am aware of this, which brings me to the last thing I want to share.

**A third thought...** I have a 10,000 gallon above ground pool in my back yard. I have learned the hard way how to take care of it and keep the water clear. The flip side is that I know what happens when I don't do what I need to do and the water can go from clear and pretty to bad, so quickly. So it will come as no surprise that I let the pool get out of hand during this time and it developed a pretty bad algae problem. I went through the process and just about had it clear, when things turned bad again in a matter of days. I made the rare decision to just drain the pool and refill. It took me a couple days to drain it and then we got in and scrubbed and vacuumed out all the algae. That is where I am right now. I have had too much of my own expectations in God's truth, and I've had to be completely emptied of my own understanding. I am now empty and going through the process of being scrubbed down, so I can be refilled with God's PURE truth. I have been *gracefully broken*. It just hurts way more than I thought it would, and because I have spent so much time focused on the pain, hurt and disappointment of everything, I have allowed the enemy to attack me and challenge my faith in ways I would have NEVER thought possible.

I have known for a while know that I am standing at a major crossroad of my life of faith. I am tired and am weary and I want to quit. The funny thing is I will not actually live my life any differently. I have no desire to bring into my life anything outside those things God has over the years shown me that I should not have in it as a Christian. So I will say good-bye for a bit as I allow God to do His work, because I know there is no other life for me. I just need to take time to be with Him with no other outside obligations weighing me down. I need to allow Him to not only fill me with His truth, but lead me to who He needs me to be for Him - going forward. If all goes well, He will have lots for me to share with you when I get back in a few months. As I close, I have to once again share the scripture that has gotten me through my fair share of tough spots:

Romans 8:28

*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him,*

*who have been called according to his purpose.*

I love Him, but most importantly He loves me. What a simple truth.

## Firmly Planted - The Man – by Dina Cavazos

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Unrest is here, reminiscent of the '60's when protests about Vietnam and civil rights rocked the world. Change happened as a result, but it wasn't enough; and it will never be enough until it is Complete. We don't know when that will be. In the meantime—the present NOW—I'm looking up, the only solid direction, and listening for the voice that centers me when things are swirling around.

Just last night I came upon a poem called *The Child*, written by Ingrid Jonker, a South African poet and human rights advocate. It was read by Nelson Mandela at his inauguration speech. To me, it expresses far more than the words actually say...the beauty of poetry. It inspired me to write *The Man*.

I offer it with prayers that it speaks a word from above to you.

The Man

The man isn't dead.

He cries out in through voices heard in the land;

He cries out to God, the one who defends.

The man isn't dead, through tears and wounds and pain;

He's alive in the breath of those living in shame.

The man isn't dead.

In Staten Island and Fergusen, Dallas and St. Paul,

In Chicago and Cleveland—his blood runs in the streets.

Young men, old men, woman and child,

Bend over in insult and anger and fear.

The man isn't dead beneath the knee bent in triumph--

It will collapse; it will break, all the way to the ground.

The knee bent in sorrow is strangely profound;

The knee bent in humility takes the prize...

It will rise.

The man isn't dead.

Minneapolis and Baton Rouge, Louisville and Atlanta,

Your legacy pulses with blood and breath still alive--

A surgery of steady purpose,

To crack hearts and open eyes.

The man isn't dead.

He sings in chorus with others,

Hoarse with weariness and waiting

For my blood and breath

To come alive, come alive.

## **Rooted in Love - Purpose In Pain – by Kaelin Scott**

Miscarriage isn't something people generally like to talk about. Many couples face it alone, suffering silently while no one else has any idea of their pain. It's a tough subject, but I don't think there should be any shame in bringing it out into the open. We are meant to help carry one another's burdens, and sometimes healing comes through sharing our pain.

I never knew that one in four pregnancies ends in miscarriage, until I became one of those statistics myself. When my daughter was a year and a half old, I lost my second child at seven weeks. Add onto that a somewhat traumatic emergency room experience, and my husband and I were both pretty shaken up and exhausted. To sum it up, we were devastated, as anybody would be. But we recognized that there are two reactions to trials – to become angry and distant from God, or to draw near to Him and trust. We both agreed on the second option; we chose to praise God in the storm.

Making that choice did not magically take away our pain, nor did it suddenly erase our sadness. But it did give us hope, because we knew that God was in control and that we didn't have to face it alone. We trusted His plan, even though it hurt, and we knew we could grow through the trial. Let me tell you, it would have been so easy to get mad at God and blame Him for my suffering. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't tempted to do just that. But worship would be meaningless if I only offered it during happy times. So, painful as it was, I decided to believe and actively remind myself that God is good ALL the time, even when life isn't. His plan is perfect, no matter what. In choosing to believe this, although my heart was absolutely broken, I was able to experience joy and hope and peace.

Sometimes God allows things to happen in our lives that don't make sense and maybe never will. But I believe the words of Romans 8:28.

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him,  
who have been called according to His purpose.”

Sisters, there is purpose in our pain. We may not ever understand it here on earth, but our job is to trust, not understand. Whatever you are facing today, remember that God is bigger. Have faith that Jesus can calm the storm and, until He does, cling to Him and dwell on His goodness. You are never alone. He is with you through it all, and He knows how much it hurts. Give it to Him and believe that He can turn your mourning into joy. He can make beauty from ashes, but His timing is not always the same as ours. Wait on Him and know that He loves you and has a plan for you.

I am still in awe of His love for me, and so very grateful for the rainbow to our storm. Less than a year after our miscarriage, we were blessed with a happy, healthy baby boy (who is now an energetic toddler). I still don't know why things happened the way they did, but I can see the fingerprints of God all over our story. And I promise that they are all over yours too.

## **Unearthly Thing - “Consider the Ravens...” – by Angela Dolbear**

Occasionally, words and phrases I hear and read seem to be on repeat. They show up in different places, or teachings I hear. Coincidence? I think not. I try to pay attention when this happens. It's usually means God is trying to get my attention, to teach me what I need to learn.

Ravens are the current topic on loop. Not the professional football team from Baltimore, of course. Sports have little to no bearing on my world. Ravens as in Edgar Allen Poe's famous poem, and various ominous gothic decorations (my personal favorite!).

“Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; they have no storeroom nor barn, and yet God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds!” Jesus said, in [Luke 12:24](#).

The whole portion of this quote sticks in my head, as I grapple with my fears and doubts. I have long-standing struggle with trust in God over my finances. Which makes no sense, since God has consistently provided for my husband and me. Every month.

While I was paying some of this month's bills, my head pounded with a migraine over my stress about what to pay and what not to pay (yet), a Voice I know well, speaks in my soul and stops me in my tracks. Literally stops me from all activity.

*“DO YOU QUESTION MY FAITHFULNESS?”* God asked me.

*Oh, Lord.*

Ouch of ouches in my spirit. Even as I write this now, tears collect at the corner of my eyes. The pain of the voice sucked the air out of my lungs.

How could I question my Lord's faithfulness, when I have experienced nothing but His full and never-failing faithfulness, including all things financial.

I love having such a close relationship with God. It's such a huge blessing. But my disobedience really hurts sometimes, especially when I come face to face with it.

I needed to change my way of thinking. To really stop, and consider the ravens.

Ravens seem like unlikely creatures to use as examples. They are dark, solitary, flesh-eating creatures. Yet, God uses them in multiple incidences in His Word. Such as:

- Unlikely heroes: Noah sent a raven from the ark to test out the post-flood land to see if it was dry yet;
- God's Prophet Feeders: God used ravens to feed the Prophet Elijah in his distress ( peruse this interesting story in [1 Kings 17!](#)); and
- Portrait of God's Great Provision: Jesus uses ravens as an example of His unfailing provision in the previously mentioned quote. It's interesting to me that God uses these dark and ominous birds in His illustration, as opposed to say, a peaceful dove or a sweet sparrow. Ravens are birds of prey, and kin to the vulture! Side note: It shows me I have a lot of preconceived notions about birds and other things that are not true...but I digress.

Realizing the deepness and trueness of God's faithfulness, reveals the lies that I believed about my perceived precarious state of provision, or lack thereof, fearing I could lose everything at any moment. So wrong.

This massive error shows me that I had not made God the ONE true King over everything in my life. I still thought I ruled over my finances. I repented of this mindset. Jesus needs to be Lord over all areas of my life. Amen, and amen.

I am so very grateful that God still loves me when I mess up, when I have things all wrong.

I received a beautiful picture of God's love in my women's Wednesday Night Bible study this week. We are going through [Angie Smith's Seamless Bible Study](#) (it is such an excellent study...I highly recommend it to deepen your understanding of the Bible as one complete story).

The study brought us to Hosea 3:1, which is a beautiful illustration of God's unconditional and ever-present love for His people. His love isn't dependent on our obedience.

The whole book of Hosea is so good. One of my all-time favorite novels, *Redeeming Love* by Francine Rivers, sets the book of Hosea in the 1850's, during the California Gold Rush period. So lovely. (I won't lend my copy out, so please purchase your own copy to hoard, and also bless Ms. Rivers with book sales.)

My Lord is faithful – every day, all the time. Before I get out of bed every morning, I ask Him for strength to do the things He wants me to do, and to give me guidance. And every night, when I lie in bed and think back over the day, I am grateful for the strength that He provided. And the guidance. Prayers of thanksgiving are ever upon my lips. He fights my battle with disease every day.

I have lived with Scleroderma, an auto immune disease for over 20 years. It has tried to take me out of this world by attacking my lungs, heart, and brain, but God has healed me with every terrible episode. Even now, He strengthens my hands to type, my fingers are stiff with damaged skin and scar tissue cause by the disease. But my God is faithful.

And my God is faithful about His promises. He brought a group of people He called His own, the Israelites, through thousands of years of disobedience, conquests, and exile, to fulfill His promise of the Messiah, my Savior Jesus Christ, so me and everyone else who believes in Jesus could be saved. He saved everyone with His sacrifice of Himself (Another excellent insight from the *Seamless* study!)

So I can certainly, beyond the shadow of a doubt, trust my God to take care of every single one of my needs, no matter what it is.

*Lord, may I never, ever, ever again question Your faithfulness.*

I have a new appreciation for Ravens. Unfortunately, I have never seen one flying around my neighborhood in Nashville, Tennessee. I will consider how God used them, and fed them. And how much more He will use, feed, and care for me, one of His own kids.

**\*BONUS MATERIAL\***

***A Simple Nightly or Anytime Prayer Exercise, for Kids and Adults***

I learned this in a video from the *Seamless Study*. Every night when you pray, find:

1. One thing you are grateful for;
2. One thing you are sorry for; and
3. One thing you are asking for.

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## **Moving Forward – The Healer – by Pam Charro**

What a year 2020 has been so far! Our country is experiencing pain and difficulty right now in so many ways. These challenges have stretched all of us, even strong believers, uncomfortably, and many have experienced various types of physical, financial and emotional trauma. It is easy to understand why some feel jaded and without hope. Words fail in the aftermath of massive layoffs and lost loved ones due to the pandemic and racial injustices; and so much in such a short period of time! I am beginning to wonder when the next disaster will strike. How much more can we take? Where is the cure and comfort for all of our wounds?

I am so thankful that our Father understands all of these feelings and has comfort for us during these difficult and painful times. He has provided everything we need; our job is to believe his words, regardless of feelings and appearances, and receive his love and comfort.

Psalm 41:4

*So in my sickness I say,  
"Lord, be my kind healer.  
Heal my body and soul; heal me, God!"*

Psalm 13:3

*Take a good look at me, God, and answer me!  
Breathe your life into my spirit. Bring light to my eyes in  
this pitch-black darkness or I will sleep the sleep of death.*

Psalm 46:1-3

*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.  
Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth give way and the  
mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters  
roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.*

Isaiah 26:3-4

*You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast,  
because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever,  
for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal.*

Isaiah 30:15

*In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength.*

Philippians 4:6

*Do not be anxious about anything, but, in every situation,  
by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*

1 Peter 5:7

*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

The Healer is here! He is powerfully alive and well and waiting for us to go to him in quietness and trust, where we can receive rest for our souls.



FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME – Find a Log – by Marcy Lytle**

We recently spend a weekend with our kids, away at an airbandb, and the last morning we went on a hike to find a pond on the property. Some of us were less than enthusiastic (because it was hot and muggy), others were adventurous (because that is their nature – my husband!), still others were willing to go because it's what we were all doing (so why not?) Whatever we felt, we all put on our walking shoes and began the trek to find the pond, down a trail and through a bit of high grass and along brush, until there it was...

It wasn't huge, but it was quite something! It was completely covered with lily pads and tiny jumping frogs! The kids squealed and we all marveled, because we don't really see that in the city, where we all live.

We discovered more trails, and kept walking, but it was a relatively short hike. The littles grew a bit weary and one wanted to be carried. Our son and his wife were childlike and enjoyed giving each other piggyback rides. My husband wanted us to "come on" and see the next thing in nature that caught his attention. Me, I just watched and observed my entire family together outside, and my heart felt complete.

And then...my daughter and her daughter sat on a log. I think that was my favorite scene of all. I'm not sure why, but there they were sitting and resting, and Ayla (age 7) picked a small flower, her mom smiled, and they rested...both wearing sneakers...one wearing sunglasses....and the other a darn cute cap that had been bought at the zoo two days prior. It was a picture worth taking.

As I've scrolled through my phone over the past few weeks, these photos keep drawing my attention. The hiking adventure that lasted maybe 30 minutes provided a great backdrop of family life and the stillness and the beauty that came when mother and daughter found a log and sat for just a minute.

A lot can happen while sitting on a log:

- All of nature can be observed from a place of rest.
- Tired legs can be rejuvenated.
- Conversations and smiles can be passed.
- Tiny flowers nearby can be picked and smelled.
- Listening to nature and to each other can bring new life.

When's the last time you found a log and sat with someone and picked a flower and rested?

I hope our family continues to hike together and play together. For me, it's one of the most important things in life, to get away. And if you can snap a picture of one of your kids with one of their kids, and the love is obvious and the rest is good...then that's just pure gold right there.

Find a log. Take a friend or family member. Sit and observe. Get up and marvel at the lily pads. And make plans to do it again real soon...

## **FRESH THYME - Informed or Insane? – by Marcy Lytle**

Covid-19

Looting

Hurricanes

Curfews

Masks

CDC

I could go on and on with the list of words that pepper the news stories right now, and have been for the past few months. We turn on the news every night at 10pm to get the latest updates on what's happening in our city and around the world, and quite frankly – it's depressing! We both have news pop-ups on our iphones where we are alerted with "breaking news!" And if we stop and read every one throughout the day, everything starts to feel insane!

We want to grab our heads and say, "Stop with the madness!"

When our family went away together for a weekend, we were still connected, but being away from the city helped a bit with an escape from the madness. Of course, we wanted to be aware and informed, but sometimes our conversations became dark and full of despair. That's not fun. So we stopped and played a game, or took a walk, or watched the kids.

So just how much of listening and reading and staying informed is healthy, and how much is harmful?

I'd say the answer to that depends on each one of us and our tolerance to the news.

Obviously, journalists and media personnel are going to fill our ears and eyes with sensational stories that are full of truth and untruth. It's impossible to decipher all of it and categorize it, so we have to do something with the part that disturbs us the most. We have to cast it over on HIM.

Obviously, we need to stay informed so that we can pray effectively, vote smartly, take care of our health and our families, but it's also impossible to know exactly every move to make, when to make it, and who to help and how much to do! We have to listen and obey, and follow PEACE.

Obviously, we need to be prepared for emergencies that are weather-related, to stay away from dangerous parts of our cities, to be informed so that we can make intelligent decisions that change our world for the better, but it's not in our skill set to ward off every danger that lurks in the shadows. We have to dwell in His SHADOW and rest.

There's got to be a healthy balance to being informed but not insane.

The only way I've found to stay informed but keep away from insanity is to be sensible.

- When I start to feel anxious, I can turn off electronics and the television.
- When I begin to wonder and worry about the future, I can read the Word about His love and protection.
- When I frantically search for ways to safeguard me and mine I can pray and listen, and obey for me and my house.
- When I see storms on the horizon, I can lie down and sleep because He's there with me to speak, "Peace, be still."

It's not easy, striking a balance between informed and insane. But we have to search for it, find it, and stay there. We can think about the scales of our minds and emotions and see which way the scales are tipped. Too much information tips us toward insanity, because the information we hear is full of all sorts of scares, lies, agendas and yes information – but it's wrapped in fear. Fear tips the scale toward insanity. Fear is an emotion we all find on our scales, but we can totally move it to the other side where FAITH resides, and bring ourselves back to peace.

It's not been easy and it may not get easier for a while. But be encouraged to turn off, disconnect, and settle your heart before plugging back in to stay informed. Information is good. Insanity is bad. Keep an eye on the balance...

## **FRESH THYME – Mistrust – by Marcy Lytle**

*Trust has to be earned.*

We hear that phrase all the time in broken relationships between parents and children, husbands and wives, employer and employee, etc. When trust is broken, we don't automatically trust again. We wait until the trust-breaker proves himself to be "worthy" of our trust. And rightly so, correct? I mean who wants to be disappointed and stepped on again, if they trust someone that has disappointed them over and over again? No one can stand that kind of repeated hurt...

I was thinking about mistrust, because we've become a society that trusts no one. We don't trust the government because of lies and being misled. The police force is not trusted because of abuse, and it doesn't matter that there are good cops...the bad ones have spoiled the bunch. Teens don't trust their parents because of divorce, abandonment and neglect. Spouses don't trust each other due to extramarital affairs and pornography online. I would venture to say that mistrust leads the pack of emotions in the bulk of our society.

I haven't written anything above that you don't already know. However, that mistrust can bleed over into our relationship with HIM, if we are not careful. We often lump God into our pile of people and things and entities that are not trustworthy. That action only comes from losing sight of the truth, forgetting his character, and thinking that our ways are better than His...therefore when he doesn't "come through," He cannot be trusted.

*Is it okay to mistrust God?*

I think we all have mistrusted him at one time or another in our lives, mainly when unanswered prayer brings confusion, hurt and grief. Maybe we prayed for healing, and death came instead. Perhaps we gave thanks a new job, only to lose it two months in. And maybe that family member that's causing so much grief has caused us to give up trusting God at all, because we are so weary we cannot trust at all...anymore. There is no strength left to trust.

I do have a handful of people that I trust completely, but even they are flawed. Every single person in my life, including myself, has failed my expectations and I've felt a twinge of mistrust over an act of neglect or forgetfulness or failure.

So what are we to do with the trust that must be earned? Who has earned our trust, and what happens if we trust again?

- Obviously, Jesus earned our trust when he died on the cross. After all, no greater love has any man than to lay down his life for a friend.
- Obviously, God earned our trust when he created the heavens and earth, caused the sun and moon to rise every single day, because he has proved himself faithful.
- Obviously, Jesus is worthy of our trust because there is NO OTHER name by which man can be saved except for Jesus – the name above all names – the name that heals, protects and covers a multitude of sin.

- Obviously, the Holy Spirit can be trusted to guide us into all truth and comfort us in hard times, because he's the gift of HIS presence that goes with us throughout all of life, once we place our trust in Him.
- Obviously, the Word of God is trustworthy because it has stood the test of time and proven to be true – every word and every foretelling and every hope and every story – offers hope of wonderful things to come.
- Obviously, all of creation teaches us to trust the Creator when it blossoms and blooms through cracks in sidewalks, stands tall through gales of wind, and flows freely over rocks and through canyons, singing praises and clapping hands to the Maker of all things.
- Obviously, He knew we'd lose our footing and falter in our faith, so he tells us to trust once again and not lean to our own understanding but to acknowledge Him – and he WILL direct our paths.

I don't know where you stand right now and where your trust meter points, but it can only point to one entity and authority that never fails. And when we point that meter at each other and start mistrusting and fighting and quarreling among ourselves, our meter soon breaks and is rendered useless in measuring trust.

God never fails in being faithful. It's because FAITHFUL is his name. He is trustworthy of all of our faith, all of our trust, all of our dependence, all of our hope, and all of our future.

Riots, pandemics, economic losses, diseases, and even death will emerge over our land until that final day...He told us it would be so. But...

Isaiah 26: 3,4 says this,

*You will keep in perfect peace*

*those whose minds are steadfast,*

*because they trust in you.*

*Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD,*

*the LORD himself, is the Rock eternal.*

I want that perfect peace and a steadfast mind, don't you? He never said that peace reigns when we get what we demand every time we pray. He did say that peace reigns when we give thanks in all things, regardless of our understanding...because our trust is in Him.

## **FRESH THYME – Those Friends – by Marcy Lytle**

How have your friends made you a better friend? Have you ever asked yourself that question? During the course of our lives, we have friends that come and go, and each one has an impact on our lives...for the good or the bad. But even friendships that end badly can create good in all of us, if we let it. I was thinking about friends from childhood to the present, and came up with so many good ways that I have learned and grown. I'd love to hear yours in the comments below!

- Childhood friends that I still have are pure gold. They have stuck with me, they know me and allow me to feel comfortable around them, and they have common memories with me. I'm fortunate to have several that I've known since I was super young, and they're some of the best friends...ever.
- Moms of my kids' friends were the best friends during middle and high school years. Showing up at games and getting to know their children on the field, at team parties, and just watching our children grow together provided some great times for all of us! It gave us all this permanent smile when we think back to those years, and we now see our kids grown and married...and having kids. A forever connection!
- Church friends that pray and stay and live and give bring encouragement to me, and I hope I do to them, as well. Counting on another to be there when a parent dies, or to rejoice when a daughter gets married, and to worship through all the phases of life is life-giving. I'm so thankful for a body of believers across the nation that I've known and worshiped with at some point in my life.
- Neighbors that become friends are a special class all their own. They watch our house when we go away, they put away our trash can or we do theirs, and they wave at the beginning of our day as we leave or at the end of our day when we arrive back home. Neighbors are great.
- Vacation friends are so fun, when we meet someone from another state or country and find ourselves drawn to them while we're away having fun. We've met several people on our trips, including seven women on one trip to NY with startling needs that we've been able to pray for, and remember. I sat by one person on an airplane and got to know that person so well over the course of a 3-hour flight, all for a purpose, I'm sure!
- Online friends that we've never met but ones that follow what we post are just the best, really! Many women that read this magazine I have never met face-to-face but we chat, we LIKE each other's social media posts, and we message each other often. I would love to meet each and every one of them someday, but I'm sure I won't! That doesn't make them any less my friend...
- Marketplace friends are those hairdressers, clerks at the store, the guy at the bank drive-up, or the young waiter at the restaurant we frequent, all people that serve us and serve us well. It's comforting to build relationships with people we see often and trust to take care of our needs, big or small. These friends are huge. My dad, 94 years young, has many of these kinds of friends that recognize him when he shows up to deposit money or order a burger in a drive-thru.

When I stop and think about all the different kinds of friends I've met and am still meeting, I'm amazed and sit in wonder at how each one has shaped my life. Yes, there have been many friends that have exited with hurts, but I have to learn to live and learn and love again. I've hurt others, as well, and forgiveness is prime when it comes to friendships. Other friends have shown me what it's like to give selflessly when they call or text just to see how I'm doing. Those that let me be me, in all my quirkiness and sarcasm, still love me in spite of what makes me odd. And friends I've only met in passing have strengthened my resolve to be kind and engage with everyone I meet, regardless of their skin color, economic status or belief system.

Friendship. It's grand, isn't it? And to have friends, we must be friendly. And when we are friendly, we will get hurt. But when we are friendly, we all will grow into mature, loving, kind people that have learned from the Master – to love at all times.