



A BUNDLE OF
THYME
For Every Season

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TIPS

In the Kitchen – Simple Suppers – by Marcy Lytle

Supper, by definition, is lighter than dinner. It's sometimes a southern term, but it's always delicious! And lately, we've had some pretty simple eats, due to time constraints, lack of ingredients at home, or just because we wanted something light and not heavy. Hope you enjoy some of these, and an evening at home or on the road with something simply yummy.

Smoked almond hummus

We took this in a cooler to a game recently, and enjoyed it so much. I love a good hummus, especially one with great flavor. The recipe says to keep the liquid with the beans, but I'd drain and add as needed next time. I also added in a few pecans!

- 15 oz canned garbanzo beans, with liquid
- 2 garlic cloves
- 2 T tahini
- 3 oz smoked almonds
- ¼ c fresh lemon juice
- 1 T kosher salt

Combine all ingredients in a food processor, and pulse til smooth. Serve with a drizzle of olive oil, chopped smoked almonds on top, and parsley.

Burritos

The simplest to make, yet so tasty. I think my sister gave me this recipe back when we first married. And I often forget about it, and then find it again. And it's so good, over and over, no matter how many times we eat it!

- Ground meat
- Salsa
- Refried beans
- Grated cheddar, or American cheese slices
- Large tortillas

Brown and drain the ground meat (or ground sirloin, if you prefer). Add salsa and refried beans, and stir til combined and heated through. Warm the tortillas to make them easy to roll. Place cheese down the middle, then the meat mixture. Tuck and roll. The amounts of ingredients vary, depending on how many burritos you are making. If a full pound of beef, it will make 8 burritos, and you'll need a full jar of salsa and beans. But if just for two, a quarter pound of meat will do, and reduce the other ingredients accordingly.

Perfect Trio

Recently, we just wanted a snack for dinner, that's all. We pulled out only three items, arranged them in bowls, on a board, and with a candle, and the simplicity and flavor was perfect – while we watched a Hallmark show.

- Lime tortilla chips
- One avocado
- Salsa

We keep our chips in a glass canister, we sliced the avocado and added lime juice and salt over top, and we poured our favorite salsa into a dipping bowl. We added fun napkins and plates (from Dollar Tree), and we were set!

Frito Pie

When's the last time you made this simple supper at home? For me, it had been a while. But it's so simple, and even great for your family, for an evening that's no fuss- and all delish.

- Chili (your favorite recipe) – can just be ground meat, beans, chili powder and cumin, onions, a bit of salsa.
- Fritos
- Cheese
- Onion

Other toppings: cilantro, sour cream, more salsa or other cheeses

This is a great dish for family, as you can let them make their bowls on a buffet table. Just a huge bowl of Fritos, the big pot of chili, and any toppings you wish!

Flavorful Rice

I like rice as a base for bowls, as a side dish, and with a protein, but sometimes it can be just plain – especially brown rice.

Brown rice (I use the quick cook kind – Success)

Chopped onions

Chopped pecans

Chopped parsley

Butter, S&P

Just cook the brown rice according to directions. Meanwhile, chop the mix-ins. Drain the cooked rice and add butter, S&P to taste. Add in your mix-ins, and enjoy. This was super flavorful and we loved it so much.

Carrot Loaf Cake

This was a hit at Easter, and would be a great addition to any May table. It was really an easy cake to make, and the edible flowers on top sent the presentation over the top! There are lots of ingredients, but honestly it was an easy bake.

- 1 c all purpose flour
- ½ cup whole wheat flour
- 1 t ground cinnamon
- 1 t baking powder
- ¾ t baking soda
- ½ t kosher salt
- ¼ t ground ginger
- 1/8 t ground nutmeg
- 2 large eggs
- ¾ c packed dark brown sugar
- ½ c vegetable oil
- 1/3 c unsweetened applesauce
- 1 ½ c shredded carrots

For the glaze:

- 3 oz cream cheese room temp
- 3 T confectioners sugar
- ½ c heavy whipping cream
- ½ t pure vanilla extract

Chopped pistachios and edible flowers for garnish (I found the flowers at Whole Foods, on the mushroom wall.)

Heat oven to 350, lightly coat a loaf pan with cooking spray. Line the bottom with parchment with 1 in overhang for easy lifting. Set aside.

Whisk flours, cinnamon, baking powder, baking soda, salt, ginger, nutmeg in med bowl.

Whisk eggs, brown sugar, oil, and applesauce in a large bowl. Fold in carrots and flour mixture til just combined. Pour into greased loaf pan.

Bake til a wooden toothpick comes out clean, 55-65 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack and let cool about an hour.

Prepare the glaze: Stir cream cheese with confectioners sugar in medium bowl, then gradually whisk in cream til combined. Whisk in vanilla.

Using the overhang, lift the cake from the pan, transfer to platter. Drizzle with glaze. Garnish.

Salad Board

For the simplest supper of all, stare in your fridge and start pulling out all the goodies for a board. This particular night, we had all the makings for a salad:

- Carrots
- Pretzels

- Crackers
- Ranch dressing
- Cukes
- Avocado
- Radishes
- Red onion
- Turkey
- Olives
- Greens
- Cheese slices

I don't know why, but eating salad by choosing the individual ingredients to build your own, is so fun and part of the enjoyment of the meal. If you don't have a large wooden cutting board, visit your local Marshalls. They always seem to have several!

Seven for You – Manners for May – by Marcy Lytle

Manners. Our moms taught them to us, or didn't teach us. And every family had different "important" manners that just had to be observed! I have a friend that insists that her children write thank-you notes for gifts received, but upon discussion with my kids, my son says a verbal "thank-you" is enough. Other parents demand a "yes ma'am" when their kids respond and nothing less will do. Yet, others feel this is a southern thing and don't require it at all. Manners are interesting, they're so important, and yet they vary from house to house.

We thought we'd ask our panel of women which manners are important to them, and why. And we also have observed that manners aren't so obvious any more at the dinner table, among social gatherings, or even in homes between parents and children. Does it matter...this thing about manners?

Read our responses and see what you think, and let us know!

When someone says thank you the correct response is, "You're welcome." Not, "No problem."

When a group sits down to eat at a table, they should wait until all of the people are present before eating - unless there is a compelling reason to go ahead and start eating.

When an elderly person needs a seat, other people should accommodate them by standing or moving to another spot.

When a person has limitations, it's not only good etiquette but also human kindness that dictates how we help them. We speak slowly and clearly if someone has impaired hearing. If someone has trouble visually, we take their arm and help them navigate unfamiliar areas like curbs and door thresholds. We hold the door open for the person using a wheelchair, walker, or baby stroller. – Shelley

Respect, kindness, and consideration. These three form the basis of good manners, which is not found to be common today. Good manners put others before you. When my twins were small and visited their friends' houses, often the mother would say, "Can your children just stay a few days? They are so well-mannered and kind; I want that to rub off on my children." Of course, I laughed and thought to myself, *This is not something that rubs off. It is taught from home from the very beginning.* – Edith

Number 1, answer a question when asked. Or at least, acknowledge that you've heard it. Technology seems to give people license to not listen.

Number 2, be aware of who is around before making negative comments that can hurt. In this angry climate, I feel it's so important to think before we speak, and to practice kindness.

Number 3, clean up after yourself and respect others' things as being *precious* to the owner. Disrespect leads to rejection, which leads to anger. – Tanya

I was raised in a very strict home, so the loss of manners is disturbing to me. Teaching kids the importance of “please,” “thank you,” and “you’re welcome,” can take them in a good direction in life. We enforced these with our kids and now encourage them with our grands.

Another manner that is important to me is respecting elders, and not just the elderly. I believe children should respect all adults and adults should respect anyone older. Actually, respect should be given to all by all. One way I see children not giving respect is by interrupting adults. Don’t get me wrong. We should listen to our kids, but they need to learn when and why to interrupt and not do it at any time because they want attention. I may be old-school, but my mom never let us kids interrupt her when she was talking. We knew to wait patiently!

The last manner on my mind also goes with my previous one. It is the simple act of giving time, even a little time, to our elderly. They are our backbone and should be treated as such. Giving them a little of our time tells them we care; and in turn, we will be uplifted. And that is good for our care. It is a win-win manner being good for all. – Carole

I looked up some of the top manners we should teach our children and ones we all should know. My parents made sure we practiced these daily.

- Say please.
- Say thank you.
- Look people in the eye when you speak to them.
- Apologize.
- Smile & have a **good** attitude.
- Respect each other.
- Treat others as you wish to be treated
- Say excuse me.

I can say, I taught these to my children and try to remember them myself.

One area of etiquette/manners that stands out in my mind as not being successful concerns table manners. I think of my Dad and how we tortured him at every meal.

We had our evening meal as a family. What was prepared for us, we ate. There were no exceptions. Napkins were placed on our laps. We had to sit up straight. No talking at the table unless spoken to. The knife and fork use....as in which hand they should be held in, caused some contention. My mom is from England and she always used utensils the "Brit" way. We were not allowed to. So many rules, I may have forgotten them all.

Most meals were painful, Dad barking orders to sit up straight, to use our napkin. Liver and onions days were the worst. My brother and I cried. I tried to eat it, but I'd choke on the liver. No dessert for us because we didn't eat our meal. This all sounds so horrible...even to me as I'm typing. So let me get to the best part.

My Dad retired from the military and we sat down to eat our first evening meal since he hung up his uniform. I didn't see any food in the kitchen and didn't get to help Mom cook. Dad walked in with KFC....something we never had. Mom took out paper plates! The end of the world was near. No real plates! We had buckets of chicken...no utensils other than a fork for the sides.

Greasy fingers and faces! Dad was slouching and stuffing his face. Napkins were on the floor and the table. We talked with our mouth full. It was amazing!

There were so many regulations that my Dad had to follow in the Air Force, so many expectations. That night, he felt free and we all felt it, too.

The lesson I learned that night is that manners are good and important, but sometimes we must be able to let them slip in the right settings and just enjoy! – Cathy

I was taught to call and let people know that you're dropping by, not just show up. Showing up, unannounced, puts everyone in an awkward position.

Unanswered texts and emails make me grit my teeth! Even if we're busy, surely we can quickly reply with "I'm busy, will respond later." I suppose all the messaging gets lost in the masses, but better efforts can be made.

Call the grandparents. It seems that some kids do this better than others, but if they only knew how much a five-minute conversation meant...

Reciprocate. If someone speaks and is interested in you, be interested in them. If a neighbor has you over for dinner, be kind and return the favor. It's not a "rule" but it's so nice... - Marcy

If you're a parent, reading these things, here's one bit of encouragement and advice. Just do your best, don't sweat the small stuff, and demonstrate good manners. When your kids are grown they will either follow suit or make their own way. But continuing to parent grown kids in the area of manners is never a good idea. By then, it's time to enjoy your own life and let them enjoy theirs. Good manners are important. But relationship – that's the best.

I do have some things I hope don't go out away - especially with my grandkids.

1. I think a handwritten thank you for a gift is always a nice thing or these days an email or text would be acceptable.
2. I still think "Yes ma'am" and "No ma'am" (or sir) is just a way to be respectful to others. And saying thank you!
3. My grandmother taught me to burp with my mouth closed. I am trying to teach my grandkids to do that. My daughter-in-law had never heard of that! - Melissa

I taught my children to write thank-you cards when a relative or a friend sent something by mail, even if they thanked them on the phone. I don't see this anymore, unless it is a wedding gift or shower gift. I also don't think it's appropriate for the mom to send a thank-you for a shower gift instead of the bride-to-be.

My pet peeve is anyone talking with their mouths full! I see kids and adults doing this. And no elbows on the table. That's all! - Debbie

The Dressing – Clothes that Travel – by Marcy Lytle

Hopefully, you'll be traveling again this summer, at least on a road trip or away for a few days. And packing for travel, I hear from so many, is always a chore. I love packing, but I do take time to make sure the clothes are what I need and want to wear. I do not like having to iron, or wondering what to wear, or finding myself caught without an item I need! Clothes that travel well are a must for me, so here are a few tips!

It's almost summer, so **dresses are awesome**. I've shared this brand before, but Merokeety dresses from Amazon are not only super inexpensive, many are made from fabric that doesn't wrinkle, they have pockets, they fit loose and comfy, so they're a great choice for summer vacations.

https://www.amazon.com/s?k=merokeety+dress&crd=2EJP3PUBUKO9M&sprefix=merokee%2Caps%2C241&ref=nb_sb_ss_ts-doa-p_1_7

Always, a **wrap or a jacket** is a must. Whether he cranks up the AC in the car, or the airplane is chilly, or we find ourselves out on a night and the wind is cool, I don't want to be caught without something to keep me cozy. I also like to have it early morning in the hotel room. A long cardi works best for me, because it too folds up, doesn't wrinkle, and a neutral color like gray, black or beige can work well for any outfit.

https://www.amazon.com/MEROKEETY-Womens-Sleeve-Neckline-Cardigans/dp/B07FMRVMYL/ref=sr_1_15?dchild=1&keywords=long+cardigan&qid=1618226816&sr=8-15

The purse or bag to carry ends up being a **backpack or waist pack**, for me. Hands-free is what I want to be when we're sightseeing, hiking, or wandering around new places. If we're doing a lot of hiking or walking, a backpack is great for carrying waters and snacks. (You can have him carry it, too!) If we're mostly shopping and staying in one place, the waist pack (there are so many new options) is great.

https://www.amazon.com/Backpack-Leather-Shoulder-Fashion-Satchel/dp/B083LDYSV4/ref=sr_1_1_sspa?crd=1UN7AMEOZUD4N&dchild=1&keywords=miztique+backpack+purse&qid=1618226897&sprefix=myztique+back%2Caps%2C216&sr=8-1-spons&psc=1&spLa=ZW5jcnlwdGVkUXVhbGlmaWVyPUE0VkiRQU9BNTNDTjcmZW5jcnlwdGVkSWQ9QTA1ODg4ODAxRjlyTVBPS0VVMzdLJmVuY3J5cHRIZEFkSWQ9QTAxMTA2NzEzOUUyVTNITEwxM0dTJndpZGdlE5hbWU9c3BfYXRmJmFjdGlvbj1jbGlja1JIZGlyZWV0JmRvTm90TG9nQ2xpY2s9dHJ1ZQ==

Shoes, oh my. The feet are the problem, right? Walking a lot means comfort, but comfort isn't always cute. **Two pairs of shoes**, at least, go with me (and often, more). I'm not a fan of normal tennis shoes, so I like a cute walking shoe that's stylish yet functional. Sperry's, Keds, or even Converse are all good choices. And then for days when not as much walking is involved, I love a good pair of slides or sandals that don't hurt anywhere! Sore feet make for a sore vacation.

https://www.amazon.com/Keds-Womens-Double-Chambray-Sneaker/dp/B07VB15BK3/ref=sr_1_6?crd=1RQI7ML8KTTVB&dchild=1&keywords=keds+slip+on+sneakers+for+women&qid=1618226967&srefix=keds+slip%2Caps%2C385&sr=8-6

Jewelry. I usually take my pearl studs (I feel they dress up even a t-shirt day), one cute necklace (pendant on a chain), a cuff bracelet, and a watch – and then a few bolder earrings to match outfits. Once all of my outfits are chosen, I **choose the jewelry** and pack it away in a little fabric zip bag.

https://www.amazon.com/ideas/amzn1.account.AFGMY23AF4JI2JNTTWLXIE3ZJVCQ/2TVKQTSKJZ8G6?type=explore&ref=idea_cp_vl_ov_d

Tshirts and jeans/pants. That cardigan I mentioned above is great to wear around the waist with a **graphic tee and jeans/pants**. Opt for one of the wider leg styles for this season. You can wear a pair of pants more than one day, if you're not too messy! Just lay out the pants, top with the tee, and roll up the combo to pack.

https://oldnavy.gap.com/browse/category.do?cid=1035712&mLink=5151,1,HP_Prim_4_a

Tie-Dye tshirt style dresses are so comfortable and cute, especially this one from Old Navy. Pair it with a pair of sneakers, and you're off for a day of sightseeing and fun. You can even tie a cardi around the waist with this dress, too.

https://oldnavy.gap.com/browse/product.do?pid=647174DBhDpARIsADJ3kjnYKhFqxGHpuN82TRtmOeNZWCzyDiinhDtzvGA8nXzQsoA3txqEjv0aAr7wEALw_wcB&gclid=aw.ds

A hat or a head scarf. This is a must-have! There will be days when your hair is not your best look – because of the water in the hotel, the fact that you're too tired to wash it and style it, etc. So find a hat that fits your face, and take it! Or pack a couple of scarves and make a headband. Just fold in a triangle, then roll. Make a knot in the center. Place knot on top of head, and tie scarf at the back of your neck. Pull out hair around the sides, and you're done!

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0792WD78P/?ref=idea_lv_dp_ov_d&tag=onamzmarcel05-20&linkCode=ic6&ascsubtag=amzn1.ideas.2AP72CHJ5C5P9

Lay out your outfits, with jewelry and shoes and bags, before you pack. Always pack an extra couple of tops in case you need them. And of course, leave room for those must-haves you see in the cute shops where you stop, wherever your vacation leads you.

Enjoy!

Three Moms - Loving Laundry (Not)

I'll start by saying that I'm very bad at laundry, and my husband does it all! I would say he probably does 95% of it, no joke. He is way better at balancing working at home and laundry. I'd rather do any other chore! I am good at putting in the washer and into the dryer, but putting it away and folding it – I'm bad at it! He folds while we're watching a show with the family. I'm grateful for him!

Now that the kids are a bit older, the kids are involved. Each has a basket, and we tell them to put away their clothes. We still have to hang for them, though, because they're too short for that! They put things in their drawers.

Now, we have all the masks to wash! So I created a basket in the laundry room for the masks after school, then we wash them at the end of the week. We have stayed on top of that really well!

We do laundry daily, as with five people that works for us.

My laundry room is now organized, which helps us all. I hate it when the room is a mess. I have added wall decals, a cubby for vacuum parts and attachments and laundry soap, and I'm excited about it (maybe I'll even do laundry more often). I have collapsible laundry baskets – a space saver! I also switched to dryer balls instead of dryer sheets. I have saved money by using these, and I can spray them with essential oils diluted with water, so they smell nice!

We use Method laundry detergent – free and clear, and mango scent for softener. I even have a lavender laundry boost for bedding and towels. I switched to Method years ago, because of allergies, and I also shop at Target. For some reason, certain smells linger in clothes (from kids) but this brand works. We use liquid detergent. I also clean my washing machine with bleach solution in the tub of the washer every few weeks. We also have a hamper in the laundry room for wet things, or super soiled items, so these aren't in their rooms.

Mom of Four

We are in a new season of laundry! The old way was having the kids responsible for folding and putting away, before the season of sports and activities. But now, there is no time for chores – really at all. Back in the early part of the year, we realized how busy we would be, and it seemed insane...as I'm also working a lot of hours with my job!

I have recently hired a lady to come every Friday, and for \$60 she cleans and does laundry. She does 4-5 loads while cleaning, and gets us caught up. I've also been in a good habit of throwing a load in, in the morning, then transitioning to dryer after school, as I can...

One of our biggest challenges is towels. The kids are supposed to hang their towels but it's not a habit. These are still an issue! Six towels for a family each night is too much, so we're working on that! My mother-in-law (she had five kids!) recommends that each kid have a different color of towel, and is then responsible for washing and putting away that towel, and then reusing it!

We use all Tide Free & Clear because our oldest is sensitive to laundry detergent. For drying, Arm & Hammer dryer sheets, and dryer balls!

Mom of Two

Before kids, I used to do laundry when all of our clothes piled up, maybe once a week. But since kids, with constant spills and stains, one day a week would end up being an entire day of laundry! So now, if I see a laundry basket full, I throw in a load first thing in the morning, then in the evening I dry and put away. I do about three smaller loads throughout the week, so weekends are not overwhelming!

My kids do not help, but they do run and jump in the warm and dry pile. I sort out the clothes into piles and then put away. I have had the girls try to take their clothes to their rooms, but they're just starting that.

I've been trying to teach my kids that sometimes their kids are not always dirty, so they don't always have to be thrown in the hamper! This helps loads not be so big!

I just tried a new detergent Buff City Company – and I love it! They have all sorts of products for laundry, cleaning supplies, soaps, etc. It smells great and has just a few ingredients. Both of my girls have sensitive skin, so we do not want harsh chemicals. This detergent is great for all of us! Side note: my husband is a dentist, so at work we wear lab jackets and scrubs. My husband's scrubs are a mess – so they are kept separately.

In summary, best thing for me, being a working mom, is to divide up the laundry into smaller loads, so that the weekends are left for fun! (I do not like putting clothes away, so I do ask for help...)

Tried and True – Emergency Ready – by Marcy Lytle

Back a few months ago, we here in Texas experienced something that perhaps we will never experience again, and had never experienced before. I'm sure you heard it on the news...as the ice/snow storm of the century wreaked havoc on our city, our power grid, our water system, and more. We were not prepared for that emergency. But I have a brother-in-law that is prepared (he lives in California), and he was so nice to send us our first item for our emergency kit, should we need it again.

I thought I'd share with you what he sent, along with the links to buy the items. Maybe you will want to prepare for your next storm when the lights go out, the water is shut off, or food is not plentiful in the stores. Who would have thought we'd need all those things? Not I. But it's good to be prepared, and why not start now, and slowly but surely get our supplies in order?

Portable Heater. These run on 1 lb. bottle of propane. There are many on the market but a good choice is Mr. Heater little buddy. They run in price from \$80 to \$150.00. The propane bottles are \$50.00 for six. You can often find them on sale. 12 bottles is a good amount to keep on hand.

https://www.amazon.com/Mr-Heater-F232000-Indoor-Safe-Portable/dp/B002G51BZU/ref=sr_1_2?dchild=1&keywords=mr+heater+buddy&qid=1617738234&sr=8-2

Water. You can buy water at the store to keep on hand or you can buy emergency water that has a longer shelf life. It comes in cans, quart cartons and in bags. For drinking you should keep 1 gallon of water per person, per day. If you buy store-bought water, write a date on the bottles and rotate every six months. My brother-in-law has a 55 gallon drum of water he keeps filled and rotates the water every year.

Food. You can buy food at the store and set it aside for emergencies. Most store-bought food has a "use by" date printed on it. This does not mean the food is bad on that date - it just means that it might lose its nutritional value. One idea is to keep emergency food in an emergency shed. Canned fruit and vegetables, meats, tuna, beans and rice, and a large bucket of freeze dried breakfast foods are great. Rotate the food as it expires. Some emergency food that is freeze dried has an expiration date anywhere from 5 years to 20 years. This is not the best tasting food but will keep you fed. Keep about a month's worth of food. You can also buy emergency food bars that have 1200 calories that will keep you alive (some taste good - some don't.)

Communication. We were given a crank powered radio, weather channel, phone charger, flash lite combo. It also has a solar panel for charging. It's good to have two heavy duty auxiliary batteries for cell phones that have four complete charges and can be recharged with your computer (if there is electricity) or solar. One option is the Patriots 4 (they run about \$50.00.)

https://www.amazon.com/Version-Emergency-Hand-Crank-Radio-4000mAh-Portable-Flashlight/dp/B085ZX6TCR/ref=sr_1_6?crd=3ILG8ORPX38DU&dchild=1&keywords=crank+po

[wered+flashlight%2Fradio%2Fcell+phone+charger&qid=1617738843&sprefix=crank+powered+%2Caps%2C211&sr=8-6](http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/16.1738843&sprefix=crank+powered+%2Caps%2C211&sr=8-6)

Here is list of additional items that would be helpful to keep in your emergency kit:

Lanterns

Batteries with a shelf life of 10 years

Solar blankets

Propane stove and propane bottles

Solar sleeping bags

Glow sticks

Water filter/water filter straws

Extra medications

Cash (if there is no electricity there will be no banks)

Treats you enjoy to keep up your morale

Hopefully, these kits won't be used. But weather is certainly going to extreme these days, all over the country, and it's great to be prepared when storms hit...or to have supplies when they hit a neighbor nearby, so that we can share.

I'm thankful my brother-in-law got us started. It might be a fun idea to get your family started, as well.



HOME

A Night to Remember – Wild Flowers – by Marcy Lytle

May flowers. Hopefully, they're blooming somewhere near you, and you can gather a few for this study with your kiddos. They're beautiful, they only appear certain times of the year, and they're called "wild." Why is that? It's interesting to know, and might just help us all grow...

Preparation: Take the kiddos on a weekend to view wildflowers and try picking several to use for the study that evening. If you cannot pick wildflowers, then print some pictures of several to use in the study.

Wildflower characteristics:

They grow without human help – We have to water our houseplants or they die, but wildflowers just depend on the water they need from their Maker. We too, can depend on what we need from our Maker, God, to bloom where we are planted.

The daisy is one of the most identifiable of all wildflowers – Do you know the names of the wildflowers we have picked? If not, give them a name by what you see!

In most cultures around the globe, *wildflowers symbolize happiness* – Why do you think that is so? Is it their color? Do they make you happy looking at them?

Wildflowers regrow each year by reseeding – The wind blows and there they go – replanting wherever they land! Wildflower seeds hitchhike on animal fur, get blown by the wind, or even float down the river.

Watch video.

Native plants, like wildflowers, are necessary to *support insects and other wildlife* – All of God's creation works together to create beauty, provision, and growth. Isn't that cool!?

Wildflowers *help stabilize the soil from erosion* – they have a job other than just to stand there and be pretty.

During winter, wildflower seeds *are an important food source* for birds!

Embed this video https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=11&v=3CCOWHa-qfc&feature=emb_logo

Luke 12:27-28 is a great verse about observing the flowers of the field. And we are told that God cares for the flowers, so why wouldn't he care for us – the ones made in His image – the ones he died for – and where he now resides – in our hearts?

Let's read it together:

Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith!

Do you know who Solomon was? He was a great and wealthy man, but God says even his great riches didn't make him as valuable as one lone wildflower that God cares for.

We are like these wildflowers in many ways. God is the one who takes care of us, keeps us growing and living, and he also spreads our "seeds" across the world so that his beauty keeps replanting and showing up, to bring happiness to those around us!

An Adage A Day - Here's Hogan! – by Carole Gilbert

Have you ever thought of someone as being as “stubborn as a mule?” Maybe you even said that to them. A lot of us in our family are stubborn. My kids will tell you that I am and it's true. I get it honestly from my parents and my kids get it honestly, themselves, from me and their dad. There is nothing wrong with being stubborn as a mule, depending on what you are stubborn about.

For many “donkey's years,” I thought a mule and a donkey were the same but as I researched this column, I learned that is not true, I guess I need to get off my high horse and learn a little more about the animals around me. I always heard, “A horse is a horse, of course, of course, and that's according to the source, the famous Mr. Ed.” I loved Mr. Ed, the horse.

We have horses down the street from us and a family of donkeys across the street from them. And then we have one donkey just two houses away from us named Hogan. I do not know if any of these are mules, but I bet most of them are stubborn. Hogan is a small little guy but when he brays, or honks, as the neighbor boy calls it, he can be heard for a long distance and he sounds like he is in such distress although I know he is not. Hogan is very well cared for by his hosts.

Every time I hear Hogan, I am reminded of the phrase “stubborn as a mule.” I imagine Hogan brays the way he does because he is wanting something, even though he has everything he needs. He is stubborn because he wants something more, and he is going to be heard until he gets it.

This phrase, “stubborn as a mule” seems to have no definite origin on file. It does have one reference from the early 1800's and it has been quoted ever since. While writing this column I learned that mules came from horses and donkeys being bred together. I thought, “What? Hold your horses! I never knew that.” This was the straw that broke the donkey's back! I had to know more. I learned that mules are actually not stubborn but smart and cautious. So much so that they will in any way possible avoid danger which is where the misconception of stubbornness began.

And it was no “donkey work” to me to also learn that donkeys held symbolic meaning in Biblical times. They were a symbol of peace and wisdom where horses were symbolic for coming in power as in carrying kings coming to fight. This is thought to be why Jesus chose a donkey to ride into Jerusalem, to come in peace. This is also thought to be why donkeys have the impression of a cross in their fur on their backs. Did you know that? I didn't!

All of this reminded me of one of my favorite stories that is as strong as a horse, even though it is about a donkey. It is found in Numbers 22 starting with verse 22. This story tells of Balaam and his donkey that had been with him for a long time. Basically, Balaam is not doing what God wants, the donkey is not doing what Balaam wants, so Balaam punishes the donkey for being stubborn. Then the donkey looks at Balaam and starts to speak! I think if my pet started to

speaking, I would listen. The Angel of God was using the donkey and spoke through him to Balaam because in the end God would prevail. I believe donkeys must be special if God used one like this and Jesus chose one for His triumphant entry.

So, every time I hear Hogan braying,
I will look to God and I will be praying.
I hope to not be stubborn as the mules,
But wise like the donkey,
In remembering God rules.
As strong as a horse I will try to be.
I will share about God,
And I hope you will join me.

Picture of Hogan is courtesy of his Hostess, Deborah Klein. Thank you, Deborah!

Chipped China – Thyme for Cheers – by Jennifer Lytle

It has been a year since my first article with THYME Magazine. I am so grateful to be able to write, to share, to laugh, and to reflect on God's love with each of you. I would love to reflect on some of my favorite takeaways from the articles throughout the year.

- Close your RV's awning every evening to avoid needless repairs.
- Sometimes we might seem like a big loser, but Jesus makes us a winner!
- Pecan trees can bring a family together.
- You have permission to celebrate!
- The middle of one's life story often requires faith.
- Bedroom decor goes on sale in January.
- Plating food probably makes it taste better.

With all that I have gleaned from browsing the pages of *A Bundle of THYME*; I am curious about your favorite thoughts, lessons, ideas, or encouragements.

I have enjoyed the travel plans and date nights. They have inspired me to try to make my own, but also freed me up to simply try the same activities. We tried:

- the dinosaur park
- a stay-cation over Spring Break

I have appreciated "meeting" the authors through their biographies and shared photographs. Maybe I can make a road trip out of visiting:

- The Pecan Shed
- Angela's church
- Marcy's porch (don't you love the different set-ups?)

Even though fashion magazines have never been my favorite type of perusing material, it has been interesting to consider current fashion trends. Now I might try:

- purses with chains for straps
- scarves as belts
- scarves as headbands

Some of my favorite articles are those found in *A Night to Remember*. Memorable moments with my own kiddos are thanks to:

- the big Loser
- a drive-in movie night

Aside from these fun tidbits, I have continued to hear God whisper the same message I first shared when I began to write with THYME. My work is to embrace what is before me and know the joy that Papa has given as my inheritance. Thank you THYME (and readers!)! Cheers to another year together.

I Don't Do Teenagers – The Next Season – by Marcy Lytle

Summer's near and there's this fear that our teens are going to nag us, sit around and play games, eat us out of house and home, or want to be with their friends nonstop, and all the other things that teens do to drive us bonkers. It's good to have a family talk and decisions made and items covered, before the last school day ends. Expectations and realizations need to be stated and even written down, so that the family can breathe and look forward to the summer vacation rather than dread it...

Will they work? If a summer job is what we want for our kids, have them start looking now. But decide on number of hours, if you will need to transport them, where it needs to be located, or will they babysit or do lawns, or what? Or maybe you could pay them to do work you need at the house. Talk about it now, have a plan, and use the month of May to make it happen.

What about home life? Lay out a plan with your teens on expected items to work on during the summer, like closet cleaning, bathroom drawer organizing, tending the animals and/or yard, perhaps making a meal once a week, watching younger siblings, or applying for colleges. Talk about each expectation and/or chore and line it out on the calendar. Perhaps you'll pick three big items, so place one in each month of the summer for them to do.

Phone/game time? Set limits. It's summer, so maybe they can have more hours alone with their phones/games, but still set limits. And if the phone/games ever become an issue of contention, then they're taken away. Talk about what games are allowed and safe. Remind them again about proper interaction with others, and have them check in. Be aware of what they're doing, and commend them when they do well.

Activities? Will there be a family vacation or weekend fun? Get it on the calendar, and include your teens. Let them also have input with maybe a sleepover, or a shopping day, or time with their friends. Sit down and talk about family vs. friend time. Hear their concerns, listen to them, as you want them to listen to you.

Food and meals? If teens are home, invite them into the kitchen/planning of meals. Maybe they can cook or prepare something healthy on a regular basis. Or maybe she'd rather do dishwasher duty, or he'd rather set the table. Make sure family dinners happen, and happen often.

Sleep? This can be a real point of contention in the summer. Will you allow sleeping in til noon daily? And staying up til 2am nightly? If not, teens need to be told expectations and talk it through. Maybe one night a week is late night. Or one morning is late sleep. Schedules are so helpful, talking is a must, and having family discussions are good!

Who's the parent? YOU ARE. It's so good to listen to our kids, get their input, and give as we can. But there will be things they ask that we have to say no (if we feel uncomfortable or that it's unsafe or they've lost our trust). There will also be things we can say yes to (as they've matured, become more responsible, or just because we want to offer fun.) We can try our best to balance both.

What if we disagree? YOU WILL. There will be non-negotiables that they won't understand, but that's okay. There will also be things you'll realize you've been too hard about, or too lenient with, and you'll need to explain or apologize. But communication helps. Praying together helps. Listening helps.

And respect wins.

Practical Parenting – Clothes Issues - by Marcy Lytle

He emerges from his room in his favorite shirt, but it has a ketchup stain you were never able to get out. She shows up in a polka dot skirt, with a striped tee, and her high heels and looks like (well, you have no words), and she's waiting for your approval of delight. He insists on wearing ONLY boots everywhere on every occasion, even to the playground. And she will not wear a dress, no matter how much you plead and beg, no way.

I think dressing kids is one area where we parents daily have troubles and constant turmoil between their idea of what looks good and our idea of what IS good. After all, we are the parents, right? I recall such issues with my own kids, often.

So how, as a parent, do we navigate the clothes issue? It doesn't go away in the teen years. In fact, by then it's brands and how much skin to reveal, and image, and body parts, and oh my!

I think one of the most fun things about being a mom was shopping for my kids' clothes when they were little. But I remember being so sad to realize that they started forming opinions about their own outfits at a very young age, and they no longer wanted me to pick out their clothes! Mom alert! Some kids don't care about such things, but so many do...

Here are some general ideas on clothes picking and wearing, to help young moms let go and still have control and sanity when kids show up for school, for that wedding, or wherever we are going...that might help.

Discuss clothes options. It never hurts to have a discussion with our kiddos about their likes/dislikes and about your demands/leniency. From the time they can talk, tell them your expectations (they have to wear underwear!) and listen to theirs. Then meet somewhere in the middle.

Discuss skin baring. Believe me. These issues will occur before you're ready. Tell her why she needs to cover her stomach. Just don't make her feel ashamed with your stern scolding. Use clothing wars to talk about wise (and safe) life choices.

Discuss and even write down closet choices. Maybe your three no-budge items are: No stains, no bellies, and nothing tight. This allows them to choose their clothes within boundaries, without you saying a word.

Let go of perfection. You may see an outfit put together that's SO CUTE and want her to see it through your eyes, but she most likely won't. Let her mix/match. It's okay. He may only prefer solid t-shirts even though that plaid button-down would look handsome. Let him wear what he loves.

Let go of battles. Ultimately, what you say goes, when they are little. But think about your battles and if it's your "image" you're protecting or if it's really a battle worth fighting and winning.

Let go of projection. In other words, maybe you detest ruffles and bows, but she loves them. Let her love them. Or maybe you absolutely love khakis on little boys, but he only loves jeans. It's okay.

Clothing wars start when they're really young and then they turn into bitter brawls when they're teens, if we're not careful. Parenting, even from the closet, is hard sometimes. But it requires examining our own motives as much as it does teaching them to observe their own. And it requires us to stand firm, but also to let go. That dance that is never easy between mom/dad and the littles.

And after you've thought hard and discussed and let go, then pray. He cares even about the closet wars. So ask Him and let Him give you ideas and thoughts to consider as those kiddos of yours choose their outfits wisely...or show up at the breakfast table in garb that makes you gasp.

Tiny Living – Water Wars - by Leyanne Enterline

One thing I've learned most about tiny living is that we have to be creative and work with what we have! We literally must be prepared for the most random, strange things that could possibly happen.

Something that we did not think about is the amount of humidity that comes inside our tiny home. We constantly have a line of water dripping from the edges of the inside on the ceiling. The mess this causes is really annoying. It mostly drips onto Eli's bed, the cabinets that contain all our clean towels, and my side of the closet. (We have no idea why it's on only one side!) The only guess is that we have vent fans that are on the other side, so those must in some way help prevent the humidity - just on that side. To help with mildew smell, we have added a vent box *thing*, not exactly sure what it's called, but it absorbs the drips. And then we add a towel over the clean items that are inside the cabinets. As for Eli's bed, his bedding just gets washed a lot!

Water wars tend to be an ongoing issue with our tiny living. I have somehow managed to make something pour out a ridiculous amount of water, which of course has caused some warping. We have a filtered water container (I never know how much water is in it), so I am constantly filling it up. And more than once, I have overfilled and awakened the next day to a massively wet floor and counter top. I managed to do the same to our espresso machine and had another lovely mess on the counter. I guess the plus is that the counter gets a really good cleanup about once a month!

Another good idea for our tiny living is that we make sure the outdoor fridge is completely closed. Apparently if it's not, water will for some reason leak into the kids' drawers in their room and make another unwelcome pool inside. We found out the hard way, as well, that we must check all around the outside for any cracks that may happen over time. During a good rainstorm here, if there are any leaks, water can possibly seep inside the closet and soak all the clothes. *Isn't that awesome...*

Speaking of water, we have super hard water out here. This really affects everything. Anything that has a filter must be changed regularly. Our shower vent head must soak in vinegar weekly because it gets so clogged with calcium build-up, and this causes water to shoot out randomly and everywhere! It's the same with the sinks. The filters must soak regularly to help rid the calcium build-up. The hot water heater is something that must be cleaned very often, as well. It gets a collection of rocks in it, and this too can cause major problems.

Do you want to live tiny, yet?

All in all, we have learned that we will forever deal with water wars. We are thankful that they've all been resolved for now! We think in living tiny that we're ready for whatever may come, but somehow the water wars keep us on our toes...towels and tools in hand.



YOU

Healthy Habits – Routines – by Marcy Lytle

Routines, we hear, are meant to be broken. And while that's true, when routines become ruts, there are sometimes that routines can be healthy for us! If we routinely wear the same outfit and never branch out for something new and fun, well that routine might be one that needs to be changed up a bit. But if we have no routines at all, this can affect our health negatively. Let me explain:

The routine of brushing our teeth and cleaning our face is healthy. Leaving makeup on and going to bed is not a good mix. What causes this, sometimes, is that we stay up too late and are too tired when it's finally bedtime. A better routine might be to set the alarm and start the prep for bed at a better time, when we are wider awake.

The routine of daily quiet time is healthy. No, we don't need to fret or feel guilty if we miss it due to schedules or "down" days...not at all. But the practice of sitting still to read, pray and listen is rejuvenating. And if we can't find a good devotional, it's okay. We can just read a few scriptures, or release our troubles at his feet, or pray for that friend. Just the routine of stillness is so refreshing.

The routine of watering plants is healthy. Keeping something alive, tending to it, taking the time to stand there and water it is something I find to be soothing and just what I need to calm my soul. I learn so much from watching wilting leaves perk up in a matter of minutes. If you're a young mom, you probably don't have time to tend plants, so just tend your children and observe them while you "water," and smile.

The routine of list-making is releasing and healthy. I find that writing down my to-do's daily, weekly, and monthly takes them out of my head (where they are scrambled) and onto paper or my phone or calendar (where they are ordered.) Do I get them all done? No way. But I sure feel organized and it's easier to keep track, with this daily routine.

The routine of exercise is healthy. We all know this, but often days and weeks slip by (because we're busy) and exercise is avoided and not experienced altogether. I get it. But I've found that sometimes we put pressure on ourselves to perform these massive workouts that require so much time and energy. Even a 15 minute walk on a routine is good. Even a 15 minute dance workout on YouTube gets our hearts pumping. And if these are routinely done, daily, we are actually moving and getting it done!

The routine of giving thanks is healthy. Stopping to actually write down our thanks or note them, daily, is maybe one of the healthiest activities we can do! I've found that when I don't, days go by and I forget the niceties, the blessings, and the beauty of the world around me. But when I stop and record, I smile bigger, breathe in deeper, and sigh out a huge "thank-you" to the ONE that keeps me sane.

The routine of cooking is healthy. It's hard to keep meals healthy, make them from scratch, and take the time to clean up, especially when life is busy. But we can find ways to cook so that it's fun and healthy. We can ask for help. We can buy premade veggies cut up or frozen or other

products to help with the speed of cooking. We can keep it simple. But cooking, because we control the ingredients, is always better than grabbing in a line somewhere...

The above are probably not something new, and we could go on and on with other routines that are healthy. The gist of this article is that some established routines help give us order, make our lives more organized, and enable us to have time to actually relax when the routines are done. Routines aren't meant to break our backs and cause us angst. Those types of lists can be let go. But the good ones make us strong and healthy and more agreeable to be around...

Life in a Nutshell – Those Red Marks – by Jill Montz

Very few people know I was the valedictorian of my high school graduating class back in May of 1998. Other than putting this achievement on a lot of scholarship forms and a few summer job applications in college, it rarely is useful information 23 years later. While I don't lead off with this accolade when I introduce myself to strangers, it does hold more meaning to me than I actually wish it did.

I always loved school. I loved to read, I loved to learn new things, I loved to write (and still do) and I was good at taking tests. Math was never my strongest subject, but, when things did click for me, I loved that feeling of breakthrough. School helped me to validate myself. Getting those red penned 100s on tests and straight A's on a report card reaffirmed that I was "good enough."

After high school, college proved to be a bit tougher. There were no more daily grades to tell me "good job" and some classes only had mid-terms and finals. These courses made me wait a long time until I got the reassurance from a number that I was measuring up to what the expectations of the professor were. Then there came my first B. Talk about wailing and gnashing of teeth. And of course it was in Algebra. I only let that happen one other time and that was in grad school. Another math-based course. Geez! Jill and numbers just don't compute.

I spent five years in college getting my bachelor's and master's in business administration and I would have gone longer if I hadn't decided getting married was more important. I still loved school. I still loved to read, learn new things, write, and I was still good at taking tests. And I still loved getting those red written 100s and A's to remind me I was "good enough."

After college, I joined the working world in the human resources department of a local hospital. Here there were no daily grades and only one yearly evaluation. Then I left the hospital to help manage my family's retail store and working for my parents meant no evaluations. Of course I was told daily I was doing well, but there was not a grade to justify such a thing. I had no numerical way to quantify how I was doing. Without the red pen marking up my progress or a printed letter beside my name to tell me I was "good enough" I had no way to reassure myself I was...or wasn't.

And so I leaned more towards the "wasn't" on my own self-evaluation. (When you are a perfectionist at heart and good in academics it is easy to have validation that you are or are close to "perfect" at least in one area of your life.) Without grades, I tended to focus on all my mistakes, failings, areas that needed improvement, and never saw myself as "good enough."

I marked up my soul with red strikes against it.

Now let me tell you about a different type of measurement we use in our business. Most people don't know we keep track of how many pounds of each variety in each particular orchard we harvest each year. We keep these records for a variety of reasons, but one is to see how the trees in that area are doing. Are they continuing to increase in production each year, maintaining, or declining? Then we use that information to see if we need to investigate problems or manage the trees differently. We need to know if we are doing a good job with the trees and if the trees are "good enough" to keep investing time and resources into them.

The trees, however, do no such testing. They keep no records from year to year. They don't even consult the birds or the bees for their input. They are simply trees. They grow when it is

time to grow. They bear fruit when it is time to harvest. And they go dormant in the winter when it is time to rest. They know they have done “good enough” because they did what God created them to do. Outside forces like nature and our orchard crew might break them or shake them, freeze them or fertilize them, soak them in rain from the heavens or water from a sprinkler, but the trees don’t worry about such things. They go back to doing what God made them to do and that was not to check their total production numbers from the last five years.

Now back to me. It took a divorce (where, ironically, I felt like someone had scribbled a big fat zero on my heart) to help me find a way to better evaluate myself. During those dark days when I felt no one could understand my pain and hurt, I turned to the only one I trusted that could. I was 30-years-old when I read the Bible cover to cover for the first time. And in those pages I found a different way to wield a red pen. Proverbs 3:5-6 says “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him and he will make your paths straight.”

So if I was to stop leaning on the old ways I knew how to judge my own worth, I had find new ones. And thankfully the Bible had plenty.

Psalms 139:13-14 “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

Jeremiah 29:11 “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Luke 12:6-7 “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs on your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”

In these and many other scriptures, God tells me and you we are worth more than what a red pen writes on a test or a report card says. We are worth more than what this world says about us. And we are worth more than what we think of ourselves. In fact, He tells us we are worth the ultimate gift He could give us. Romans 5:8 “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

God took a red pen that day that flowed, not with ink, but with the blood of His Son Jesus Christ, and He wrote on each of us the words...*forgiven, redeemed, loved, wanted, and worthy*. The greatest teacher of all said we could never be “good enough” but we don’t have to be because Jesus paid it all.

I still struggle with my perfectionist ways from time to time. I often want to go back to college just to get that rush of seeing a number or a letter next to my name. I pray daily for God to take these needs from my heart and fill that hole with His love. It’s a process. And if I was grading myself on how I was doing so far, I wouldn’t give myself a numerical or letter grade. I would just take my red pen and write on the top of the page...Showing Improvement! Keep up the good work!

Life Right Now – Running Buddies - by Hannah Bouck

Growing up, my dad was a marathon runner and I SO badly wanted to be like him.

I was in 7th grade and decided I wanted to learn how to run with stamina and gusto like him. After weeks of begging to take me along with him on a run, Dad finally gave in, but prefaced the excursion by letting me know I was required to keep up. I felt confident, so I put on my best Skechers and hit the gravel, eager to join my dad....

What I did not expect was for him to take off and literally leave me in the sand, frustrated with me that I couldn't keep pace and that I had intruded on his running ritual. From that day forward, I have hated running.

Sob story aside, I learned a lot from that happening. And also, let me preface by saying I absolutely adore my dad! He has his moments like we all do, but he is a great dad! He just takes running a little too seriously (wink wink.)

What I learned is the importance of walking.

We have to walk before we can run, and we have to tie our shoelaces before we can go outside. All of those steps lead to something else, and they all are also learned. All of this to say, each step leads to a destination and as we strengthen certain muscles, we soon have learned to run from point A to point B with little effort. What we forget; however, is to bring people along for the journey and slow down enough to walk with them along the way.

In a twist of fate, I recently began walking distances with a goal to be able to run a 5K. I'm taking baby steps, as I conquer previous mindsets towards the activity, but I am grateful for those who are taking time to teach me along the way. It's hard to break old ways of thinking.

My dad had his "running solo" mindset and I had my "no running at all" one. Neither really had positive outcomes, because they were both centered towards the "I."

The hope right now is that as "I" strengthen this learning muscle, ultimately I hope that I continue to walk with those in need of a running buddy, as well.

Holding you close,

Strengthening Your Core – Never Heavy – by Marcy Lytle

I've heard all of my life that we are to "bear one another's burdens" and "carry our cross" and "intercede" for others, etc. While all of those are great things to do for others and for HIM, we often miss exactly what the scriptures mean when they tell us to carry things! I was just reminded of this lately, when I heard his sweet voice remind me,

"Carry your burdens TO me, not instead of me."

God never asked us to pick up the burdens of others and carry them as if they were our own. Maybe we hear of a best friend going through a horrific illness with her child and we are sick for days with worry. We carry her need in prayer, until we almost become sick ourselves. We wonder what would happen if we had to endure that same hardship. We are angry at God for not helping her out NOW. And we keep pleading and begging, all with the idea that this is casting our cares on Him.

Casting is letting go. And the reason we can let them go is because HE CARES FOR US.

I have the most trouble with this, and have had all my life.

I carry others' burdens on my own shoulders, and then that makes both of our burdens too heavy to bear. I empathize to the point of being unable to sleep because I'm overcome with sorrow as they too are sorrowful. And then...I don't know what to say to this friend so I retreat and pray...and cry and wail...only to feel exhausted when I'm through.

Here's one of the most familiar passages in the Bible:

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find **rest** for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is **light**." (Matthew 11:28)

However, I don't know many of us that walk in the rest when we are weary and burdened. *Rest* is the key word here, right in the middle of weariness and overloaded shoulders! How can that be?

Somehow, we have to let these things go and lay them on His shoulders, and then walk beside Him, in His strength. Maybe we can visualize the burden hoisted up to his shoulders and the relief our shoulders feel when the transfer is made.

The next part of that passage says to take his yoke upon us – because he's gentle and humble in heart AND his yoke is easy and his burden is *light!* If the burdens we're carrying are heavy, they're not meant for us to shoulder! With oxen, a yoke enables both animals to share the load. But a yoke with Jesus – well he's pulling and we're just staying next to him!

Somehow, we have to connect ourselves to the truth that Jesus is the strong one, and because of his strength, we are able to walk, without heaviness, because His arms never tire. We have to see that the yoke just connects us to Him, it's secure and steady, but it's never heavy.

That rest for our souls is so elusive, right? How can we rest, when our friends are suffering? I don't think anyone wants their friend to suffer when they are suffering. What good does that do? If we find rest for our souls, then our friend can glean from that rest, instead of having two that fret.

He promises rest when we come to him weary and tired, yoke up with him and walk in his strength and learn from his gentle humble heart.

Somehow, we most certainly will find rest for our souls – that will then translate to rest for the souls of our friends in need – because the transfer has been made. Visualize it, thank Him that when we are weak He is strong, and then walk along admiring the One who not only carries our burdens but relieves them in due time...

He offers rest. So let's take it. And not feel guilty or refuse it, and keep stumbling along.

Under Pressure - A King's Dream – by Debbie Haynes

Last month, the story was about the four guys that took a hard stand against the culture of the day and against the king's order by refusing to eat the king's meat – because it had been contaminated with idol worship and not prepared according to right standards. In the end of that story, God poured out favor and these four young men influenced the entire kingdom, and the king even declared that the one true God would be worshipped by his people. So we saw that it certainly paid off to take a stand!

This month, King Neb (we'll shorten Nebuchadnezzar) starts having troubling dreams, but then forgets what his dreams are about. He calls together magicians, astrologers and sorcerers who tell the king to relay his dreams so that they can interpret. Since King Neb doesn't remember the dreams, but only the trouble they cause, he requires these guys to make the dreams known to him – and if they don't he will cut them into pieces and make their houses dunghills. Sounds like a good movie plot, right? However, if they do show him the dreams and interpret them, these guys will receive gifts and great rewards, with honor!

Of course, the guys start defending themselves and state that there's no one who can do such a thing, stating, "Only the gods can do that!" They continued to argue, and King Neb stops them in their tracks. He is so angry that he decrees that all the "wise" men be killed. What a tantrum the king throws!

Daniel and his brothers were sought out to carry out this decree (the same four guys from last month's story.) But Daniel went straight to the king and said he could relay the dreams and interpret, if he was given a little time to pray to God. King Neb agreed, and Daniel and his brothers prayed, and God gave them the knowledge they needed.

Daniel praises God for his wisdom, for the seasons, for kings that he places and displaces, and for all of God's understanding. He thanks God for making known the king's matter to him, and was ready when the king asked Daniel to share.

Daniel starts by stating that the guys the king sought out to help him could not help him at all, but only God in Heaven *reveals secrets* and makes known such things, and then he tells King Neb the details of his dreams.

In verse 44 of Daniel 2, Daniel interprets, by stating that God is setting up a kingdom that cannot be destroyed. The king hears the full explanation and falls down and worships God, the "revealer of secrets," and makes Daniel a ruler over the entire province and over all the wise men in the area.

The declaration in this story is that there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets!

In the New Testament in Luke 12, it says there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nothing hidden that will not be known. It further says that whatever is spoken in darkness will be heard in the light, and that which is said in closets will be proclaimed from the rooftops.

God still has ways of revealing hidden things through His Spirit that lives in us, when we believe. He is always about bringing darkness into light, so that lives will be saved. He demonstrates his faithfulness to those that follow His ways, and he still guides human affairs when we humble ourselves to honor and obey His ways, and to hear his voice. And when we do, even kings and kingdoms will fall and declarations will be made that honor God and no other!



MARRIAGE

After 40 Years – What a Picture – by Marcy Lytle

He carries the umbrella to the door to open it for me, because it rains.

He holds the popcorn box during the movie for me, all I have to do is enjoy.

He asks me if I'm cold so that he can offer me his jacket.

He rubs my tired feet while we watch a show.

He forgives me when I'm snappy because I'm tired.

He thinks I'm beautiful when I know I look disheveled and a mess.

Very often, I sit in wonder at this husband God has given me that depicts a picture of the love of God to me, the love that I missed somehow growing up among the “do’s” and the “don’ts” of Christian living. God knew I needed that, so here he sits beside me, my husband of over four decades, now.

Oh sure, we often get in arguments and there are days when I don't see those niceties above, but only the words or the inactions that bug me and make me angry. All married couples have days where we see nothing but the bad about the other, because of a misspoken word or deed or out-of-character move on their part, or ours!

But today, in this early morning time alone, I'm so thankful for the picture of Christ my husband has been to me on so many days.

He wipes the kitchen clean, a lot better than I do.

He goes along with my adventures and enjoys EVERYTHING we do, because he's content.

He hugs me tight and holds my hand, so that I know he's there.

Today, I choose to focus on the good in him, and not the bad. I note that I can always find bad, because we're flawed, and we mess up daily. But I'm focusing on the good from His hand and from his hand, because enjoying the good brings peace to our marriage and my heart. Enjoying the good about him turns my gaze upward to give thanks for this jewel of a man that stays with me, is loyal, and is my best friend.

I don't know where your marriage stands, or if you're even married, at all. But there's this verse that says HE will even be our husband – our protector and provider – when we feel alone and without. Isaiah 54 says our Maker is our husband.

I know that my happiness and feeling loved is not dependent upon Jon, because he fails, and so do I – so often. But on these mornings where I give pause and notice the areas where he shines, it feels good and right and maybe one of the most holy things I can do all week – find the good in him and give thanks. And that, in turn, focuses my gaze to the goodness of God, as well.

Date Night Fun – Small Town Simple – by Marcy Lytle

It's warmer outside, it's the perfect time for picnics and strolls and shopping, so it's time to hit the small towns in your area for simple getaways that refresh and restore. There's nothing like stepping out of your normal into another town to visit their simple. Seriously, it's so fun to getaway for the day to another world...even if it's just an hour or so away. These dates for the month of May are dates for the entire day:

Small Town bookstores – Search the web and find bookstores in small towns near you, and make it a day of browsing and buying perhaps a new cookbook, a destination book, pages of beautiful sceneries, a good mystery, or any five topics on your list. Maybe one will have a coffee shop inside or nearby. What a fun day this will be!

Small Town shopping – Go to a town near you that has a great town square or a historical shopping district. Very often, the square will also include an old pharmacy where you can stop in for an old-time shake, a vintage store for treasure hunting, and an eatery on a corner with local food fare. Just search for things to do and check out the shopping options.

Small Town picnicking – Many small towns have a city park with trails or picnic tables or gazebos, or a pond with ducks, etc. Plan to spend the day under a tree playing games, up on the lawn throwing Frisbees, and spread out on a blanket for a picnic fare like no other. If you want to make the food, search and find and make it all together, before you leave. Or stop in at your local store and purchase all the snacks, and go. Consider Italian sodas, cute plates and napkins, and a good playlist for listening to while you eat and relax.

Small Town attractions – There's a town near us that has a castle for touring, another has a tiny amusement park right downtown, and still another has a cute theater that's now open and serves food! So search the towns near you and find an attraction, or one that's out away from town, and make a reservation for a tour or to visit, and enjoy one or more.

Small Town markets – Now is the time of year when small towns will be having their farmers markets or vendors set up, so maybe find two or three, take a cute shopping bag, and go hunting for your next yard décor, home décor, plant, even gifts for Christmas – early! Pick up some fresh cheese and crackers, and olives and chips, and enjoy these, as well.

- If you're in the Central Texas area, Belton has a cute theater to try, Taylor has a great downtown and vintage stores and a coffee shop, Salado has a great area for picnicking by the water, Bellville has the castle tour...for a few options.

For Better or Worse - Boots and Glue – by Kaelin Scott

Everybody has that favorite pair of shoes. The ones we wear until they fall apart, and then we still wear them some more because we can't bear to part with them. For me, it's my cowboy boots. I bought them at a flea market, so they were already a little worn when I got them. But I love them, and they really come in handy living on a ranch. They're comfy and cute, and they're my go-to shoes to throw on.

Awhile back, the sole came completely off one of the boots. I was just walking along when all of a sudden, it was hanging down and flapping around. I was obviously a little upset. They're my favorite boots, after all. I wasn't about to throw them away, so I commissioned my husband to glue the sole back in place. He did, and it lasted a few weeks before falling off again. But I still didn't give up. I asked him to glue it again, so he did. And this time, it worked. It's been over a year since then, and those boots are still going strong. You can see a little bit of hardened glue on the side, but I don't care. I love those boots and I'm going to keep on wearing them.

It sounds kind of funny, but my boots remind me of marriage. People in the world today are so quick to throw things away in favor of something new, and it seems like that extends into marriage. When things start falling apart, it's easier just to replace them than do the work to repair them. It's not convenient to stay and fix it, or to try again if it doesn't work. Other times, things get too comfortable and worn, and we get tired and restless. We just want something new because we want excitement.

But marriage is something that is meant to last. Throwing it away just isn't an option. When it falls apart, we've got to bust out the glue. There's no right answer on how to fix things, and I'm not trying to minimize marital issues. I know life can get messy, and pain isn't simply wiped away with the snap of a finger. But marriage, like my favorite pair of boots, is worth salvaging. It may be easier to throw it away and move on, but what's easy isn't always what's best. And sometimes, things are even better after a little bit of brokenness.

When things get hard, we can't give up. We must stand and fight for our marriages. And above all, remember that God knows exactly how to put all the broken pieces back together. But we have to trust Him in all His goodness. He created us to become one flesh, and He is able to heal any division.

In This Together – I Don't Know Much – by Bekah Holland

I think we're going to try something a little different. Not because I feel like I'm in a writing rut (even though I probably am) and not because I have some deep, spiritual feeling about something life altering to share (because, trust me, I do not). Nope, we're trying different because I'm stretched fitting-in-my-swimsuit-after-a-global-pandemic thin. So here's the thing....I don't really know much about anything, much less marriage, but I have learned a few things along the way in my 40-ish years, most of them the hard way.

I've learned....

How to meet people where they are, but also when to leave them there.

Sometimes, there is nothing you can do to make someone feel better. So either let them figure it out on their own, or join them on the floor.

There is no such thing as a perfect marriage. Sometimes it's exciting, sexy and amazing. Sometimes it feels like your old favorite, comfy worn out t-shirt. Sometimes you just want to change your name and move to one of the rural Dakotas to teach goat yoga.

Every friendship is different. Some are important for certain seasons in your life. Some remind you that it is okay to walk away. Some become family and lobsters for life (sorry, not sorry, for the shameless *Friends* reference!)

There is not a mess too big or shame too ugly to make you unlovable to God. Ever.

I can trust God with everything, lose my faith, and then crawl my way back again. And again. And again.

Sometimes in marriage, you give more. Sometimes you need more from your partner. It's not 50/50. We're rarely able to give equally all the time. So give when you can. Speak up when you need a little extra. And don't keep a scoreboard, because that's a surefire way for everyone to lose.

Learn your loved one's love languages. It sounds sappy and woo. Do it anyway. It will be worth it.

There is no required standard of beauty that you need to live up to. You are valuable. You are worth it all. Period. Find someone who loves you enough to remind you when you forget.

When you mess up, when you hurt someone, when you recognize that you are wrong, apologize. Don't wait. Own your words and actions. And don't apologize with expectation. Say I'm sorry. I was wrong. I hurt you. I will work hard to do much better. Don't make excuses for why you did what you did. It doesn't matter.

Don't ever stop growing. I look back at things I've said, phrases I've used, ignorant to how they might affect someone else, and I'm embarrassed. But never let embarrassment make you defensive. Know better. Do better.

Do not under any circumstances ask your spouse if something makes you look *insert adjective here* unless you're willing to hear an honest answer. If you want to hear a compliment, give one to yourself, call a girlfriend and ask for one, or do what I do...."Babe, I took a shower and put on pants with a button. Tell me I'm pretty. Now mean it."

Kindness is beautiful. Work harder at being more kind than working toward society's distorted view of beauty.

Practice empathy. Is it hard? Sometimes. Do they deserve it? Maybe not. Will it really make a difference? Who knows. Do it anyway.

Find your happy place. No, not the tropical destination with an umbrella drink kind of happy place. One you can access easily. Daily. Maybe multiple times a day. Mine is a patch of green grass in my backyard with the sun shining on my face. Pre-Covid, the bookstore was a close second. Whatever it is, find it, guard it, treasure it and find your way there often. We all need a little space that brings us peace.

Love. Love big. Love loud. Love quietly. Love often. Don't let those three little words lose their meaning because there isn't action to back them up. Love your partner, your friends, your kids, your local barista, your neighbor who forgets to rake their leaves, your dogs (okay, cats too, but they're kind of jerky so...). Love because God loved you first.

I don't know much, but I know these things without a shadow of a doubt. Do I always follow my own advice? I wish. But I do try to remember when I forget and go back and try again, but better the next time. There will always be an army of critics ready to call you out on each and every misstep, big or small. So work your tail off to be the voice of peace, forgiveness and kindness....even to yourself.

"Just keep loving me. I'll keep loving you. And the rest will fall into place." *Unknown*



ENCOURAGEMENT

Have you ever wished you could push a button and reset your life, or certain aspects of it? I made decisions in my youth that changed the trajectory of my life. If you've read some of my past stories, you know that it took me awhile to "grow up" (not that I'm "grown up" yet!) In my ignorance, I lived out my willfulness and desire to have my way. I said and did things that reflected my inner emptiness. Before I *really* knew Jesus as my Lord and Savior, I acted as if I was Lord and Savior, of myself and others.

This awareness of my past mistakes, my shortcomings, and my selfishness can, at its worse, bring sorrow, regret, and self-criticism; but, at its best, it brings so much more. At times I'm overcome with thankfulness for God's grace. His complete acceptance and forgiveness is overwhelming, and it has helped me to extend the same (as best I can) to others. The way he has worked in my life and has changed me—despite my blind resistance and waywardness—is unspeakably kind and miraculous.

What if my life had been "perfect"...what if my path had been smooth and easy? What if I'd been born into affluence and comfort? What if I'd been "successful" as the world sees it? Would I have been led to question the emptiness of it all? Would I have been able to let go of it? Only he knows, and what I know is that I can trust him. He goes after those whose hearts are turned towards him in truth and he knows how to draw us to himself.

It's futile to wish for a different past, to regret and lament over what was. It is what it was because I was who I was. Now, I am who I am because of it. Even though I'm not always pleased with who I see myself to be, I know (by faith) that my creator is and that's what I hold to. I move forward with God by my side, doing my "utmost for His Highest" each day.

Right now my garden is in re-set mode. The historic deep-freeze event devastated gardens all around, mine no exception. The bright spot, for me, is that I'd made some plant choices that I regretted. Some of those plants, like the viburnum still standing as a brown skeleton, aren't coming back and I have a chance to make a better choice. One tree I regret losing is my Arizona Cypress, but I plan to plant another one, in a better spot vacated by another freeze victim. My garden, like my life, is always changing. It reflects the choices I've made in design and content—not always the best, but the best according to the vision and knowledge I have today—and that, my friends, is all we can do. Be at peace, for the Lord your God is good.

Moving Forward – Let Go – by Pam Charro

I had a very good friend once say, "You know, life is just a series of learning to let go." We were talking about parenting at the time, but I'm realizing that statement applies to so many areas of life.

Ecclesiastes 3 tells us that there is a season for everything, including a time to keep and a time to throw away. Unfortunately, I was not taught as a child to let go of much. We did not have a lot of income, and even if an item wasn't really serving us well anymore, we would hold onto it "just in case." I've struggled throughout my life with clutter issues because I'm never sure when to let something go.

While I've made some progress in this area as it pertains to material items, I seem to have a much more difficult time letting go of people or life seasons. I've evaluated so much of who I am based on where I spend the most amount of time. So when a job or relationship ends, it's such a struggle for me to know what to invest in next. And God has allowed me to experience a lot of that type of loss in just the past two years.

*After all, I can clearly see what I am losing. And that hurts.
But I have very little idea of what is coming my way.*

My children have mostly grown and left. My marriages have both failed. I have been unemployed for over a year. People I have invested in have suddenly discarded me. It's painful and it's uncomfortable.

And yet I know that God is developing me during this time because he is teaching me to trust in his goodness during all of the uncertainty. His promises to always bring about a better life than I could ask or imagine are what I have to count on more than ever, now. He has shown me countless times that when I couldn't see any good ahead, more good was to be found. And it showed up in the most unexpected ways! This same God is still alive and well and is working to bless me.

I've also come to realize that it's not the trial; it's who is in the trial with me. I have been made so much stronger by finding his presence in my life, especially when circumstances have seemed the most difficult. He is faithful, loving, and steadfast. The best friend anyone could ever have! Really, everything else is just stuff that will quickly pass.

So let the seasons come and go. As Proverbs 3 says, I will trust in the Lord and not rely on my own understanding.

*I will learn to gracefully move forward
so that I can continue experiencing
God's beautiful next for my life.*

Rooted in Love - The Small Stuff – by Kaelin Scott

A few months ago, a freak thing happened to me. Okay, actually, these kinds of things happen to me quite often, so it wasn't that unusual. I had a sore or something on my head that bothered me for several days. It finally went away and I forgot about it, until I was getting ready for church one morning and noticed it had left a bald spot! It was right on top of my head and about the size of a dime. I'd like to say I reacted calmly, but I didn't. I freaked out. Actually, I was grumpy and upset all day. I mean, I'm too young to be bald!

But after a while, the shock and dismay wore off, and I realized that it wasn't really that big of a deal. It was frustrating, yes, and definitely not desirable. But there are much, much worse things in life than a little bald spot on my head! Lots of people face bigger problems and worse situations every single day, and getting my panties in a bunch over something so trivial is kind of silly. Realizing this also led me to realize that...

I tend to sweat the small stuff a little too much.

I worry and fret about things that might not even happen. I freak out and get worked up over things that are out of my control and which, frankly, don't really matter that much. Life is so beautiful, but I often focus on little details that aren't perfect. I nitpick my life instead of enjoying it as a whole. What if I could roll with the punches a little more instead of letting myself get beat up by everyday imperfections? Because honestly, looking back in ten years, am I going to remember those minor details that I thought were so important? Probably not. But I will remember the days where I made the most out of life.

Does a teensy weensy bald spot stop my family from loving me? Not a chance. Does it stop God from loving me and providing for me? Absolutely not. So why should it stop me from enjoying my day? I can choose to sit and wallow, or I can choose to embrace joy.

We always have a choice. We can sit on the sidelines waiting for everything to be perfect, or we can jump in and seize the day.

By the way, my hair did eventually start to grow back. Now it's about an inch long and sticks straight up, making me look like a rooster. But I'm a happy rooster, and life is good.

Life is always good, if we choose to look at it that way.

Simple Truths – About Moms – by Marcy Lytle

I think it may be the shortest prayer I've ever heard before a meal, and it was often prayed by my mom. "Father, we're grateful," she would say and then smile her little smile, as we all lifted our heads to start eating. We teased her and often wondered why she said such a short prayer, but we also liked it, because it meant we could eat right away. It was much better than the prayers of some others that thanked God for the wind and the rain, and the friends present and those gone, and oh yes – the food that was prepared and the "hands that prepared it." No one wanted that prayer. We all wanted the prayer that Mom prayed.

I'm thinking that short succinct declarations or songs or statements made by moms are the ones that stick with us our entire lives, so they better be good ones. The best part, I think, about Mom's prayer is that it says just what it needs to say. It acknowledges God as our Father – our provider. And it thanks him with a grateful heart, one that is humbled to receive his blessings.

So, for all you moms, moms to be, grandmothers, and any women that love children, here's a list of encouragement for you, to keep on saying your short phrases from your heart. They're not too silly, too short, or too simple. They're just right, when said with sincerity out of a heart of a woman that's walked with God and loved fiercely all the little children in her care.

- When you sing "Jesus Loves Me" to your babies, it seeps into their souls and will never be forgotten.
- When you state "God loves you, son," he will remember that when he strays as a teen and feels unworthy.
- When you call out "Wash your hands" for the tenth time before noon, he will give thanks when a pandemic hits that he learned this healthy routine.
- When you remind her that "money doesn't grow on trees" she'll say it again to her daughter, when she's demanding that new dress.
- When you insist "Say Thank You" when they open that present or receive that gift, they won't like it, but they'll do it, and soon their heart will follow.
- When you command them "Don't talk with your mouth full" they will be glad for that advice when seated at tables with colleagues.
- When you query "Is your homework done?" before they head out to play, those same children will run a company someday.
- When you reply "NO" because it's unsafe or unwise, they'll still be alive at 35.
- When you say "I love you" while they're sticking out their tongues, they'll feel the sting of disobedience and come running home.

I don't know what phrases your mom said to you. Moms often say wonderful things, but they can say hurtful ones, as well. Short phrases stick with us, and we can take those untruths and make them truths, if we are now grown moms with wounds from words said. And we can speak kind truths, stern truths, and loving truths to our kids so they too will smile as they remember what we've spoken. And if we make a mistake, the best thing we can then say is "I'm sorry," and the children will remember that too, and grow up repenting for all the wrong that they do.

Think back, this month of Mother's Day, to the words and the phrases and the songs spoken over you, and remember. Ask Him to erase the bad ones, and to establish the good ones, as you now pass on motherly love to the generations to come...

Unearthly Thing - Style that Brings Praise – by Angela Dolbear

Mounds of clothing surround me, as I sit on the floor of my dressing room. I am stunned by the abundance. The piles take up most of the floor space in my 10x11-foot underground dressing room.

It's spring cleaning time, and I have started the process with my clothes. Each pile consists of a different genre, such as pajamas, workout clothes, jeans, etc. And then there are sub-genres defined by season. Having lived two years in Tennessee so far has taught me that we have real seasons here, which I need to be prepared for with the appropriate wardrobe.

I try not to mentally flog myself with guilt over the copiousness of my garments. I collect clothing and accessories like some people collect Hummel dolls or Elvis plates. Style is important to me.

Instead, I convert my brewing guilt into gratitude. I gaze up at the "[Shoe Tower](#)" which holds my many pairs of Creepers (my favorite casual shoes) and heels, and remember all the incredible deals and sales that allowed this independent author to purchase them. I thank God for all the beautiful and useful things He has given me.

God consistently guides my attention toward items He knows will fit me and bring me joy, and that will be useful. He once directed me to a [pair of baby pink Creepers](#) with big black hearts on them. So cute! They were \$75 shoes on sale for \$13. And there was only one pair left, and they were in my size. I clicked my cart to check out, and cheered the day our awesome UPS delivery man, who also adores my dog, delivered the shoes.

Every time I wear my pink Creepers, which is often, I look down at the hearts on my soles, and my heart swells with love for my Lord, for the gift He gave me, perfectly in my size, and exactly in my style.

Being in my style helps me feel more prepared for the day, and any situation that arises. If I am stylishly dressed, my hair is done (even a ponytail in a [scrunchie scarf](#) qualifies), and my makeup is on, I feel physically charged to get to work.

I work at home, and I doubt that my dog and my cat have opinions on my appearance. They seem to be mostly concerned with treats, food, and playtime. But my husband works at home, too. So I put forth effort for him, as well as for myself with my appearance. I guess I'm "old school" like that.

My style has changed over the years. Right now, I am all into black and white, [particularly black and white stripes](#). I am undoubtedly influenced by Moira Rose, the super-stylish matriarch of the Rose family on Schitt's Creek. We just finished watching all six seasons of the funny and touching comedy series, where Moira's over-the-top dramatic black and white ensembles grow more flamboyant with each episode.

Along with cleaning out and organizing of clothing, and making room for new clothes, the arrival of a new jewelry armoire for my birthday, has me put my focus on my jewelry. I still have all the turquoise necklaces, earrings and rings I wore 20 years ago, when I sported a bohemian style. Quite the opposite of my current mid-century pin-up style. But I still love all the turquoise jewelry. Perhaps I can work a piece or two into an outfit some time. Especially, during the summer. Hmmm...

I have never followed current trends. It seems exhausting to me. And what if something that is currently on trend doesn't work on me?

Style is a form of expression, whether you have your own style, or you are totally on board with all the new spring lines. It's part of who God made us, as creatures of choice, and change.

Style has been around me all my life. My mom has a great sense of style, which undoubtedly has had the greatest influence on me. I used to love to play in her shoes when I was a little girl. In all the pictures I have seen of my mom's mother, she too, was a beautiful woman always dressed with flair.

God has used my style to minister to others. The younger women in church tend to gravitate toward me, maybe because I appear non-threatening, and/or a little bit nuts. I try to pray unceasingly to be an excellent spiritual auntie, or even mother figure for these precious lambs.

My personal style evolves as I change on the inside, too. My faith grows stronger and deeper through every season I live through. Whether I am reveling in a time on the mountain top, or trudging through the valley of the shadow of death, I know God has His Creator's hand on me always.

Through changing times and trends, God is always with me, with His rod of discipline to keep me from faltering and hurting myself, as well as His staff to keep me from wandering off, and getting eaten by proverbial wolves.

As I navigate around the lawn-size plastic bags marked "Goodwill," and the box of items to sell on [Poshmark](#) in my dressing room, I stop and look at all the beautiful things God has given me. At the rows of cardigans, jackets, my tower of shoes, and at the fabulous pink chandelier my husband installed for me, and I can't help but be overwhelmed with thankfulness, and appreciation.

"Let all that I am praise the Lord; may I never forget the good things he does for me."

(Psalm 103:2, New Living Translation).

Yes Lord. Thank You and praise to You.



FRESH THYME

FRESH THYME – Don't Walk Away – by Marcy Lytle

There are so many Hallmark stories with the same story line, the same mistake that the main character makes, and the same ending. You know what I mean. The couple that liked each other way back in high school or college now meets again 10-15 years later. They slowly warm up to each other again and just as one is starting to tell the other how they really feel, they “overhear” the other one talking and misunderstand...because they only hear in part.

It just happened in the last Hallmark show that we watched. He decided to tell her he loves her and he's going to stay in the city, only he walks in as she's talking to a girlfriend. That girlfriend is asking about a different guy, and asks if her friend is interested in him...because she thought perhaps she was. The main character says, “No, I have no feelings for him at all,” and the guy listening thinks she's referring to him! He walks away and almost leaves...until he goes back and the story ends well...with a kiss.

How many times does that happen in these stories? I've often wondered why Hallmark can't come up with more endings for their romantic love stories. I suppose they feel the scenery, the music, and the pretty people involved are all we need to be satisfied. But, seriously?

Today, when I watched this story I thought of the most romantic love story of all time – that of Jesus and us. It's so simple and pure. He loves us so much and wants a relationship with us, so that he can share all of the Father's love with us so that we are changed into the best version of who he made us to be – people that care for and love others.

However, we walk into that story of Jesus in different parts of the movie of our lives, just like the characters in the Hallmark story:

- We grow up in church and overhear talk of religion and nothing of relationship, so we walk away.
- We encounter a person that calls himself a Christian only to be hurt by that same person, so we dismiss Jesus – if that's what he's all about.
- We enter a group of friends that are meeting for bible study, and we hear a verse about how God heals, but our own brother died...so we walk away from “that truth.”
- We read the Bible out of duty and obligation, so we can ease our minds before bedtime, but we never hear the full story of God's love...only snippets and pieces...so away we go.
- We confess our love to the One who died for us, only to have bitter roots from our childhood come up and choke that love because of memories or losses. We're off...

In other words, we're like the people in the Hallmark story. We only hear in part, see and assume because of that part we've heard or experienced, and we walk away to never return until...

The only thing that made the man in the story turn around was the overpowering desire he had for change, and he knew the girl he was leaving was the one he wanted to spend his life with.

In a split second he didn't get on the plane, but drove back to the lodge (there's always a lodge) and tells her she's the one. They kiss, and all is right with the world.

I don't want to miss out on anything God has for me because of something I've witnessed or heard others say that made me doubt who He was. I don't want to walk away from his Word because one scripture (out of context) stirs up ill feelings because that promise "didn't work" for me. I don't want to turn my face away from His gaze because I'm afraid or skeptical or I've been hurt before by those who misrepresent Him.

Jesus loves us, fiercely. He doesn't play games, he doesn't recall our past experiences with him and hold them against us, and he never walks away – threatening to leave us for good. And the quicker we realize this, the quicker we can move that piece of the puzzle out of its misplacement and into its rightful spot – in the whole beautiful picture of the wonderful plan that awaits us.

Next time you walk in on a conversation and only hear in part, observe someone's actions and dismiss them because of what they've done, or walk away because you're fearful...reconsider what you're doing. And then think back and see if you've done that with HIM because of what others have done in His name, by mistake, to wound your heart against Him.

That girl in the story really did love the guy, and he almost missed the happy ending because of what he "thought" she said regarding her feelings for him. We can also miss our happy ending if we only see in part and dismiss the whole, in favor of never walking back to declare and receive the Love of Our Life.

FRESH THYME - Exchange the Why

Recently, I heard a speaker say we need to exchange the “why” for the “who” when it comes to understanding and walking with God. And I also recently studied the book of John and read of the many, many times Jesus was asked SO MANY questions, and he answered them all the same, “Believe in me and the one who sent me.” It seemed their questions constantly got in the way of seeing who Jesus was, right before their eyes.

Another common question I’ve heard from friends, and now even kids, is “Why won’t God speak to me? I just want to hear him.” And that’s something we all long for, I’m sure. It would be so cool if God would thunder his voice out of the heavens and tell us what to do, where to go, and that we are loved so much. Or if he would just write in the sky with a permanent marker the direction we should take our lives, we’d feel so loved.

I spend a lot of my time asking why. And so do toddlers. They start pulling on us, asking why, almost from the time they start to talk. They’re learning, so it makes sense that they wonder and want answers. But honestly, there comes a time when we as parents get so tired of “why” and as our kids mature, we just want them to know who we are, trust us, and love us for that alone.

Asking why enables us to learn, in seasons of learning and growing and maturing. But continually asking why because we’re skeptical shows that we don’t really trust the one we’re with. The followers of Jesus wanted to know why he healed people on the Sabbath, why he talked to an outcast in society, and why he went into homes of sinners for dinner. If they’d only seen who Jesus was and believed, they would have understood his love and compassion and how that superseded the rules and the traditions they followed.

I have a million and one questions about life, and there are some days that the why questions get the best of me. Why did that person die that horrific death? Why were those little girls so mean? Why did my friend do that? Why did my husband not do that? And when I have days like that, I’m exhausted by nightfall, and guess what?

Those constant “whys” keep me from observing all of the answers written in the sky and on my heart and all around me. I miss the sunset because I’m worrying while I walk. I miss the phone call from that friend because I am frustrated with the other friend. I miss the sink that he cleared because I’m angry that he forgot to call. Numerous whys make for broken relationships.

I know the goodness of my God, and it’s present all around me every day, below me, beside me, and above me. His faithfulness screams and is in my face, while I shake a fist and demand answers to my questions. I know the love of the Father, in the fact that he sent his only Son to die for me – for me! And yet I wonder if he truly loves me when a prayer goes unanswered for too long of a time... And finally, I know the Word because I’ve read it all my life, of his wonders, his amazing love, his patience and his mercies. And yet I miss this ONE who has said it all, answered it all, and given His all...in favor of grilling Him for more.

No one likes to be grilled, drilled, or killed with questioning. It’s tiring for the one questioning, and it’s heartbreaking for the one being questioned, if they’ve proven their faithfulness and love

with their life. And we then have this choice, daily, because it's daily that we're going to be tempted to question why.

Are we going to keep asking why, demanding answers, before we will relax and enjoy our Maker?

OR will we exchange all of those questions for Who is it that loves us fiercely, keeps us at all times, and cares for us like no other?

I have to choose daily and sometimes I fail miserably. But thank God, there's another sunrise tomorrow and I get a chance to choose again. And when I choose the Who, I think I'll be at peace because I'll see him for the Provider and good Father that he truly is.

FRESH THYME – It Takes a Year – by Marcy Lytle

I've shared multiple times about my journey in 2020 of giving thanks for three things per day, and recording them. At the beginning of that year, it was easy, because I just spouted off the normal: food, health, family, etc. Those are the obvious. Then a month into the practice, I realized that some days I woke up and had to think hard to come up with three new things. And this bothered me, because there is SO much to be thankful for! As the year progressed, and 2021 was suddenly here, I realized the progress I made took an entire year to occur.

Finally, after a year of taking note, purposefully looking around me – at the small and the big – I had begun a rhythm of giving thanks and actually seeing things to give thanks for! But yes, it took an entire year. Lots of things take a year (or more.)

It takes a year for the cycle of the seasons to run their course. We cannot hurry up any of the seasons, because they are set in motion, and we have to wait for each change patiently...until the cool winds blow...or the heat of the summer appears. And after a full year, they begin again, giving order and hope to our cycle called the world.

An entire calendar of 12 months takes a full year to fulfill. We tear off a page, or mark off our to-do lists, over the course of January through December. Each month brings its own set of holidays, weather events, styles of clothes we wear, and rain or no rain. We make plans for vacations months in advance, and then that month arrives, and we go. And after a year, we start another calendar and another...

They say when a loved one is lost that it takes a full year of mourning, because every holiday or celebration we approach brings memories and pain, until that full year has passed. I suppose it's mostly true, because I remember experiencing that when my mom passed, almost four years ago now. The grief is still there now, but it's not as deep.

Some movies are even made about "a year in the life of..." including *Minari* and *Nomadland*, which we saw this year. The producers chronicle a year in the life of someone interesting, and we sit and watch that family or person evolve over the course of a year's time, and we find it compelling.

I read a quote "Our hope is not in the new year...but in the One who makes all things new." And it's something to take note of, this timeframe of a year.

I remember when I quit drinking sodas. For a long time, I still craved them, especially when I ordered a hamburger! But over time, the craving lessened and I eventually came to prefer water instead. And that process took about a year.

There are all sorts of time schedules that we build our worlds around, and sometimes a year can seem like an eternity, especially if we're waiting for vacation to come. Other times, a year seems like a flash, when our kids are grown and gone. But a year is something to notice, something to be patient about, something to reflect upon, and something to record and grow and learn during the process.

We can all give ourselves a little grace when we aren't improving as fast as we'd like, getting over wounds or hurts, or seeing change in areas of our lives and remember *the year*. Cycles. Months. Moons. Rotations. Seeds and seasons. And when the year comes to an end, we can look back and then measure and see where we've come from and where we are now.

Summer's near, and it's been a year since summer was here. How will this summer be different from last, or will it be? What are we thankful for now that we didn't even notice last year? And how have we loved better, forgiven more, observed all things beautiful?

Just something to think about...

TRIED AND TRUE - The Family Vacay – by Marcy Lytle

Whether you stay at home, tour the city, take a road trip, or fly away...planning a vacation can be daunting, especially with little kids, big kids, or no kids at all! Here are a few tips to help you as you navigate the idea of vacationing this summer. Even if funds are low, there is fun to be had! Even if you think there's nowhere to go, there most certainly is! And even if they might complain, take the kids anyway. Memories are priceless!

Staying at home

- Make one room like a hotel room or BnB (trays, snacks, robes, TV, drinks, games)
- Pack your suitcases for the night.
- Show up in that particular room for an "overnight stay"
- Close off the rest of the house
- Party away

In the city

- Find a new park with picnic areas and trails, maybe a new library or museum, too.
- Search for a new fast food place you've not tried
- Pack up kites, Frisbees, blankets and mosquito spray
- Make an invitation to give to each member of the family
- Put it on the calendar for a Saturday very soon and go.

Road trip

- Get a paper map of where you want to go and pick a route (do you have a whole day, multiple days, or what?) Figure out driving time and city stops.
- Search for "things to do" in those cities (be open to parks, eateries, shopping, history, zoos, etc.) and figure the cost and search the hours open. List it out and print it!
- Pack snacks like trail mix, fun drinks, Pringles, cookies and more...
- Reserve hotels if staying overnight.
- Clean out the car, then pack it up with all the goodies, and head out of town and don't look back.

Flying away

- Pick a city or destination you love and search for "best things" in that area or prices and events of the resort or park, or wherever you're going.
- Search "four day itinerary" or however many days you're going, and read blogs of other families/people that went. These are so helpful!
- Get your tickets/rental car/hotel reservations. Search for coupons first, for the places you'll visit!
- Put the date on the calendar and plan activities related to the trip from now til then (packing, meal planning (eating out or in while there?), shopping for necessities (travel size toiletries, extra bathing suit, etc.)

- Place all your printouts, maps, etc. in a folder or even booklets, if kids are going – they can follow along! Then fly away and enjoy...