



A BUNDLE OF
THYME
For Every Season

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TIPS

The Dressing – Centerpiece Creations – by Marcy Lytle

Rather than talk about clothes or shoes or accessories this month, we're going to talk about dressing up our tables with easy tablescapes that won't break our budgets. Halloween is the end of the month, and perhaps you're having kids over for fun. Thanksgiving is next month and maybe you're hosting the buffet. And Christmas is coming, where you're sure to spread a table of goodies! There are cute ways to make a focal point for each occasion!

Halloween:

Often, the Halloween table is full of snack trays. Try filling clay pots of different sizes with candy corn, and decorating the top rim with ribbon. Just place them around the table. You can set them on tiny mirrors if you have them, and add tea lights.

You can fill a vase with fall flowers (fake or real), add some spider web netting and tiny spiders. You're done!

Use three painted or decorated mason jars and paint the letters B-O-O on them. Fill with battery operated lights and insert cutlery and straws for your guests!

Thanksgiving:

One simple idea is to take a large clear vase and fill it with small pumpkin gourds. Gather branches from outside and place them in the vase. You can paint them, or leave them natural. Place a bowl of nuts nearby, and you've got a simple but elegant look around which to place your savory dishes!

Take that same large vase and insert a large candle, fill the bottom two-thirds with tiny pinecones.

Do you have an outdoor lantern that you can bring inside? Place fall candles inside, and affix fall foliage to the outside, and set in the center of your table.

Christmas:

Do you have some old vintage books? Stack them up and place a small plate with a candle on top for an old world look!

Line your table full length with a burlap runner. Purchase small succulents and place them down the center. Add tall red candles in between! And sprinkle pine cones all around.

Do you have a wood cutting board and a few mason jars of different sizes? Place them on the board, insert votive candles, and decorate with ribbon or Christmas foliage.

Of course, you can scan the internet to find any number of ideas for tablescapes. But then look through your garage, your yard, and your cabinets and see what you have. Then just arrange what you have in a group of three, add light and color and fragrance if you wish! Invite your friends over and enjoy...

Seven for You – Purse Essentials – by Marcy Lytle

Our panel question this month was “What do you carry in your purse?” I wanted to include some ideas for all of us, as we approach the holidays and start thinking of stocking gifts. I always start buying these early, so that as Christmas nears, I’m not stressed over the bucks that add up in trying to find all of the small stuff that ends up costing a lot! I love what these women shared, and I hope you will too!

Lip Therapy

I love my EOS brand lip balm that comes in a large sphere. There are times when I don’t want lipstick and I just need moisture. And because of the unusual shape, I can always find this quickly in my purse.

<https://www.walmart.com/ip/eos-Organic-Lip-Balm-Sweet-Mint/15136069>

I have to have my chapstick! I really like either Softlips because it's easy to carry (long and thin). Or I like EOS...it's also easy to find in my purse due to the round shape (like a ball). (This must be a great thing, since two ladies cited the same reasons for EOS!)

I love having lipstick and some kind of lip moistener. I’m so fair skinned that I need a bit of color.

The single most used item in my purse is Blistex Silk and Shine. I am allergic to lipstick...even the plant based ones. I gave up long ago trying anything else. This product is my tried and true go-to.

Chapstick with SPF for me!

Mango sunrise by Chapstick!

I can’t go anywhere without my Lipsense Lip Balm and Rose Gloss.

I am loving NYX Butter Gloss in the shade Praline. It’s a great nude color and not sticky at all. Sticky glosses are the worst!

In my purse is my PowerLips Polish from Nu Skin, and my personal favorite color choice for now is Tenacious. It gives just a subtle hint of color and shine and lasts for hours.

A Fresh Mouth

I carry the GUM interdental brushes. They are small, plastic, disposable, brushes about the size of a toothpick. They come in a small plastic case so they always stay clean in my purse. As I get older, it seems that more and more stuff gets stuck in between my teeth. These are perfect for just a quick on-the-go clean-up to get all those food particles out from between my teeth. I don’t have to worry as much that something is visible and my mouth feels so much better.

https://www.amazon.com/GUM-Proxabrush-Go-Betweens-Interdental-Brushes/dp/B07F3CT3FN/ref=zg_bs_8297644011_1?_encoding=UTF8&pvc=1&refRID=POS55R62H01JM52224AH

I must have mint or gum...I always need it and so do my husband and adult kids when they are with us – my purse is always the go-to for all of us, so I stay stocked up. Trident spearmint gum and Tic Tacs or Icebreakers, and Wintergreen or cinnamon Altoids are our faves!

Smooth Hands...and nails

I have to carry lotion in my purse. I am not particular to any brand as long as the scent is not too overwhelming. If we stay in a hotel. I will usually swipe the lotion because it's the perfect travel size.

I like hand lotion, Bath and Body Works warm vanilla sugar...because the scent doesn't make my nose itch! And I love antibacterial hand gel, since I'm kind of a germophobe.

I always have to lotion my hands. I have one container that looks like a paint tube – love it as it makes me think of using my artistic side whenever I can! It's called Seeds For the Gardens of the Imagination - www.libraryofflowers.com a handcreme bottled by Margot Elena

I love love love this lotion!!

https://www.amazon.com/Library-Flowers-Handcreme-Linden-2-3-FL/dp/B00BTLEK6Y/ref=sr_1_6?crd=21KZ3ZM739O15&keywords=library%2Bof%2Bflowers%2Blinden&qid=1567537174&s=gateway&sprefix=library%2Bof%2Bflowers%2Blinden%2Caps%2C165&sr=8-6&th=1

In my purse is always an emery board, since my nails are thin and break easily.

An item I love in my purse is my glass finger nail file that my sister gave me as a holiday gift. Game changer! I've since ordered them as gifts for others and more for me...for my husband, for the bathroom, etc. There are different brands on Amazon, and I ordered the medium size that comes in a full metal case. Love these!!

<https://www.amazon.com/Glass-Nail-File-Manicure-Fingernail/dp/B00TDDI6IS>

I like to carry a nail file, cuz a broken jagged nail that snags your new blouse needs to be put back in its place..

I also LOVE bath and body works hand sanitizer that is Gingham – smells so good! And so clean after use – no stickiness

Gold Bond Radiance Renewal hand lotion is super hydrating and inexpensive. I have really dry hands and go through a lot of hand lotion so I was glad to find a great cheap option.

Avon Intensive Healing & Repair Hand Cream with hydra boost technology for my extremely dry hands is a new item I'm adding to my purse!

Writing Space

I carry a small cute notepad with a matching pen. I never know when I might need it!

In my purse is a notepad and pen to keep the littles busy at events where they have to be still!

I carry a journal/notepad where I make lists of things to do, events to remember, and my grocery lists, with meals on one page and grocery list on another. I love having all my info in one place! A friend makes the cutest journals ever.

https://www.facebook.com/OhDearOhMyCreations/?_tn_=%2Cd%2CP-R&eid=ARDnyKNeXtSnTf5_je_eo-mWUvqk3SjUuFYRLwMN_c0LtejgkbdUz-n3iNCgxH8Aqx9iIYDYOakkYU2

Key Spotter!

My car has a keyless open and start....as long as the key is nearby. Because I've spent 4+ months at the hospital this year with my husband, I've used their free valet parking service a lot, which means I have to leave my key with them. It is hard to remove the key from the main ring, so on AMAZON I ordered a bright green leather wristlet type of key holder, which easily clips on/off the main keychain! Because it's brightly colored and fits over my wrist, it's always easy to spot in my purse or in the valet's pile!

https://www.amazon.com/litymitzromq-Wristlet-Keychain-Fashion-Bracelet/dp/B07XJPJ8H9/ref=sr_1_2?keywords=green+wristlet+leather+keychain&qid=1568313794&s=beauty&sr=1-2

The Eyes

I always carry two identical pairs of prescription reading glasses in my purse, but in two very different cases. I use the glasses in the bright green with tiny pink pigs on it ALL the time if I'm out and most of the time at home, because I can find that case so easily no matter where I am and I KNOW it goes back in my purse. The other pair is mostly a spare, but are in a dark, sedated animal print case.

My purse has a first aid bag, but it is what I put together in baggies. This has been invaluable for about any situation I might encounter. Advil, Clartin(adults) Claritin(Children) eye drops, ear ache drops, benadryl pills, benadryl cream, neosporin, bandaids, splinter out, Emergen C, alka seltzer night time for colds & coughs the only thing I am out of that I always carry is Lotriman (my 22 year old grandgirl needed it at our vaca (but I had it) lol!!!

I have carried this ever since my grands started walking!!

For the Kids and Shopping

I carry snacks for littles. These have been awesome for kids in church & events.

I carry a small hairbrush for my own use, and for when I have the grandkids with me!

I carry store coupons, so hopefully I'll remember to use them! Here's a cute carrier...

I love this tiny bag that folds into a pouch, to have on hand for farmer's market stops. Or any kind of random shopping. It's so small, it barely takes up any room at all...from IKEA.

My purse is a mix between mommy necessities and toddler snacks, which if we're being honest turn into mommy snacks quite often.

Extras...

Two of us said we keep safety pins in our purse, you know, for those mishaps that occur! They are cute in these little boxes!

My Apple earbuds find a home in the zipper pocket of my purse in case I'm waiting somewhere and need a song break.

Doterra touch roller in Motivate is another must have. It smells awesome, and is a great mood booster and pick-me-up when I'm dragging. I've even used it as perfume when I forgot to put some on!

Flawless by Finishing Touch hair remover is quick, gentle, and great for those stray facial hairs that are only visible in the car visor mirror ha!

Within whatever bag that I carry I always have many little bags to organize my necessities. I found that too often I was rummaging through my purse looking for a lip gloss or my keys so I thought, "Why not organize it?" I have two bags, both from Old Navy, that I love. However, you can find small tote bags at any store like Target and Walmart. Inside each bag I truly have all the things you could ever need all the way from lip balm, bobby pins, hair ties, gum, tissues, and floss to lotion.

I carry my White Barn Concentrated Room Spray (my favorite is Georgia Peach), but that varies from time to time. I'm very sensitive to odd smells and carry it with me to use as needed.

<https://www.amazon.com/Bath-Body-Works-Georgia-Concentrated/dp/B07MYW37H6>

Selah's Style – Cute Cypress – by Marcy Lytle

This month we're featuring the style according to Cypress. Cypress is in 1st grade with Ayla (Selah's cousin) and she loves fashion as much as Ayla! In fact, they are best friends!

Cypress says she loves her kitty cat shirt from Justice so much! She has two cats, but she says two are enough! This picture is in front of her mom's best friend's herb garden with tall sage and rosemary behind her.

Halloween is this month! Cypress is so ready, but wishes it was a little cooler outside! She wants to wear her favorite jacket that her Grammy gave her.

Texas Allstart Cheer is Cypress' favorite place to go! And she's wearing her favorite unicorn shirt. She says, "Gymnastics makes me feel like a unicorn!"

Buddy is with Cypress, as she tries to show off her cute, black, sparkly shoes she just got! However, Buddy has other plans, and Cypress comments, "Oh, Mommy, people love dogs more than shoes!"

In the Kitchen – Mostly Veggies – by Marcy Lytle

Over the years, we've watched a few movies about eating more vegetables, with the most recent one being Game Changers. We decided to step up our veggie eating, although we've always incorporated them into our meals. This month I'm sharing a few of those recipes I've designed and ones I've used from cookbooks, along with an apple pie. It's the easiest apple pie, ever. After all, it's fall and color and taste and smell is what this season is all about!

Broccoli with Cashews:

This is a simple recipe and oh, so tasty. I packed it in a thermos for myself and had it while I was out, stopped under a shade tree, reading my latest Book of the Month. This was completely filling and satisfying for lunch!

- 9 oz Broccoli florets, cut into smaller pieces
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- 1 T olive oil
- ½ c cashews (I added a little more)

Heat oil in pan, add the garlic and nuts. Stir over heat about 2 minutes, then add in the broccoli and stir fry for another 4-5 minutes til just tender. Serve hot. (To pack and eat later, I'd recommend removing the cashews, as they will soften in a thermos.)

Triple Layer Veggie Sandwich:

I made this for my husband and it looked so pretty, but it was piled so high! I wrapped it in press-n-seal and placed in his lunch. His comment later was, "It was really good!"

- 1 bagel, cut into thirds
- Red pepper sauce (I used Newport Creamery)
- Broccolini
- Carrots
- Red onion
- Cucumbers
- Kalamata olives

Chop and/or slice the veggies (I grated the carrots). Lightly toast the three sections of the bagel. Layer the veggies and a bit of sauce, then add the middle bagel, layer again, and add the top.

Cast Iron Skillet Apple Pie

This recipe caught my eye because it looked so simple, and I love using my cast iron skillet. The pie looks pretty in it, so you don't need a pie dish. The skillet is the dish! This simple pie tastes soooo good. And yes, apple pies need to be refrigerated so that they last more than a day or two...

- 2 pie crusts
- 5-6 chopped apples
- 1 cup sugar
- 1/2 t cinnamon
- ½ stick melted butter
- Cast iron skillet

Preheat oven to 350.

Place one pie crust in the bottom and up the sides of your skillet. Peel, core and chop the apples into small cubes. Mix the sugar and cinnamon. Place half the apples in the skillet, sprinkle half the sugar combo, then apples and sugar combo again. Pour the melted butter over the top. Finally, place the other crust on top, pinching the two crusts together. Make slits or cut out shapes in the crust to let the steam escape.

Place a piece of foil in the bottom of the oven to catch any drippings. Place pie in the oven to bake about 20 minutes. If needed, cover the edges with foil to prevent them from burning and bake another 20 minutes til crust is golden brown. (I didn't need to cover the edges.)

Fall Veggie Bowl

I found some fun Halloween pasta on the shelves at Marshalls, so I bought it. I love whimsical touches to meals! Pasta makes a great base for any veggie bowl, and then you just top it with whatever you have on hand. And I found this Salty Steer Seasoning at a festival, but you could use any seasoning you like.

- Small pasta
- Veggies (I had broccoli, carrots, red onion)
- Slivered almonds
- Kalamata olives
- Cherry tomatoes
- Seasoning
- Lemon juice

Boil the pasta til just tender and drain. Stir fry the veggies in a little olive oil and butter. (1 T each). Add the cherry tomatoes. Cook until the tomatoes start to pop and the veggies are tender. Squeeze some lemon juice over top, and season lightly (the olives will add a salty flavor.) Add the almonds in near the end, just to toast.

Arrange the pasta on the bottom of the bowl, then arrange the veggies separately around the bowl to make it pretty...or you can just stir them altogether...either works! I added the olives in last.

This tastes good warm...or cool...if you place it in a lunchbox.

Tried and True – A Drawer Full – by Marcy Lytle

Bandannas. I have a drawer full of them, in all colors. I watched an episode several years ago of Pioneer Woman and she said bandannas are “sweeping the nation.” I’m not sure about that, but I did stock up (they’re so cheap!) and I’ve used them over and over again. They wash up nicely, don’t have to be ironed, and they’re the best! They’re especially nice to have for the holidays...or all year long.

Here’s why you need a drawer full:

Napkins – It’s nice to have cloth napkins for guests, or for special occasions, or to pack in a lunch box, instead of a paper napkin. We use these often when setting up our dinner to watch a show at home, or by the fire in the backyard. They are just warm and cozy, and this time of year the orange/blue/green colors are great!

Tray liner – Having a buffet or party or setting out snacks? Line your plain or used tray with one bandanna, and you’ve got yourself a color palette for decorating and charm! I use one all the time to line my tin tray with handles.

Purse handle – If you carry a plain black or brown purse, why not tie a bandanna on the handle to add color? Or if you carry a bright colored purse, opt for a gray/white bandanna. I think this one might be my favorite.

Hobo adventure – We recently took the kiddos on a walk to a creek where we tossed in sticks and stones. We purchased the stones at the Dollar Store and gathered sticks from the yard, tied them up in bandannas and affixed to a long branch! It was so fun.

Kids at night – Do you still rub your kids’ chests with Vicks? I always have and I had mine rubbed too, when I was a kid. Fold a bandanna in half and tie around their necks to keep the Vicks in place, and to make the kiddos smile, too!

Scarf – Bandannas make great scarves! Fold in a triangle, roll, and tie around your neck with the knot in the front, on the side, or in the back. Wear a simple necklace hanging out from underneath, if you wish!

Wrap – Did you know a bandanna is cheaper than a gift bag? So if the gift is small, use a bandanna to wrap it and tie it, and the recipient gets two gifts in one!

I love having a drawer full of these in all colors. I feel like they go with every style, for every occasion, and last a very long time! Is your drawer full?



HOME

Practical Parenting – Packing Lunches – by Marcy Lytle

I've read and seen so many articles on healthy snacks for kids (most of which I don't know any kid that would ever eat them), cute little ways to pack food (who has time for that?) and so much more that I'm thinking might be quite overwhelming for moms! I'm a very practical person, and I'm thinking most young moms (and even us older ones that still pack lunches for fun!) could use some hints that actually make packing lunches easier, not harder...

Here are a few tips you might enjoy trying...

Buy the thin ice packs. They don't take much room and they fit nicely under a sandwich. Add a napkin on top if you're afraid of moisture.

Vary up your sandwiches by presentation. Place that turkey and cheese on plain bread, in a wrap, on a roll, or on a skewer. Same food, different look.

One way to keep apples from turning is to slice it into fourths (and keeping core), then placing the pieces back together and wrapping with plastic wrap – supposedly this works!

Clementines are a great fruit that requires no prep – the kids like to peel them!

I heard that wrapping a sandwich in parchment paper (just fold it over) is great, because you can then unwrap and use the paper as a placemat!

If kids like dip, consider disposable portion cups – found at the stores (tiny cups with lids).

Collect unused packets from fast food (cutlery, napkin, salt and pepper) and keep a stash to throw in the lunch box!

Hard boiled eggs made at the beginning of the week are great and easy to toss in, as well.

And from a mom of three, here are some simple ways to keep sane and healthy while packing:

- 1. Schedule & Plan Lunches:** Each week I plan out the kid's lunches and they go on a meal plan calendar on the fridge. **I can better track what we need and don't need for my grocery shopping. This is a huge help not only for time and list, but for my budget. If things are not planned out I tend to stress at store, forget items or overspend.*
- 2. Portion Food:** After planning the lunches & buying the items, I portion into baggies (chips, snack items, cookies, etc.) **This has cut my time in half in the mornings.*
- 3. Organization Bins:** I recently reorganized my fridge and pantry, and sorted out breakfast, lunch and dinner items. The kids now know what they can grab for breakfast, snacks and options for the lunchbox as they learn to start packing their own. ** I can keep an eye on how much my kids are eating (because we all know that kids will just eat and eat and eat...) It's important for me to pay attention to how much and what they are eating. It also keeps them, well us, from wasting food and running out of food in between budgeted grocery trips.*

Happy lunch packing this fall, chaos and all!

I Don't Do Teens – Fun with Friends – by Marcy Lytle

Your teens are really too old to go trick or treating, but I'm betting they will want to do something fun with their friends for Halloween. There's all sorts of mischief to be had if they roam the streets with nothing to do, so why not offer up a few ideas for the kids and help them make the night a fun one for all? Maybe they can invite a few friends over, or perhaps it can just be a family affair. Either way, Halloween fun doesn't have to end just because our kids aren't welcome to carry bags for treats anymore!

Five ideas for the teens in your house to still be spooked:

Help them to create a maze in the yard. We have a neighbor that does this. Collect boxes or large pieces of plywood, and allow them to create a simple pathway that zigzags to the front door. They can decorate the maze with spider netting and set out lanterns (battery operated for safety!), to make the night fun for the trick or treaters that come to your front door.

Help them throw a small party. Let them come up with a menu, allow them to pick up the items at the store, and let them create! If the weather is good, let them bob for apples out back, and make smores with tealights set among small stones, or if you have a fire pit, use that! They could even play hide and seek (if they're still young teens that don't think that's goofy!). Give the kids bags, hide wrapped candy outside in the dark, and hand them flashlights! Great fun!

Help them set up a pumpkin carving table. If you don't want a mess, just set out all sorts of craft glue guns, pipe cleaners, googly eyes, stickers, etc. for decorating the gourds. If you don't mind the mess, provide newspapers and pumpkins, and let them carve the night away! Just provide lots of snacks and end the evening with Halloween charades.

<https://buggyandbuddy.com/halloween-games-kids-charades/>

Help the kids find a spooky movie, let them decorate the room and set up the food. What about the 1933 version of King Kong? I bet none of you have seen it! They could totally set up pillows on the floor, light candles around the room, and make popcorn with all sorts of Halloween toppings like candy corn, caramels and dark chocolate chips! Serve them in cute Halloween bags you can find at the store.

<https://www.amazon.com/King-Kong-Fay-Wray/dp/B001R6AW18>

Help the older teens by providing a way for them to "trunk or treat" with their (your) cars. Wouldn't that be fun? Maybe they could park in a circle in a parking lot nearby, and serve a buffet of food/games from one car to the next. Each teen could bring a part of the food array, and one game. And each one that participates decorates their own trunk. Provide flashlights for all, and encourage them to visit and have some good clean fun in the dark...teen style...supervised, of course.

Halloween fun doesn't have to end for the older kids, or for us parents, either! I love to think up spooky fun, fall colored foods, and have a scary good time – without all the gore. And our kids

can, too! They don't have to hibernate when darkness is near, they can be the light and bring good cheer!

An Adage a Day - Counting Chickens – by Carole Gilbert

As a child I would often spend the night with my great grandparents. They lived in a small coastal town and I loved the slow pace that went along with visiting them. I also loved the rocking chairs on the front porch and Grandpa's old car with the hole in the back floorboard that I would drop pebbles through while riding in it, but what I was most fascinated with at their house was the chicken coop in the backyard filled with chickens. Grandma had me go pick eggs for breakfast, and of course, Grandpa would go to supervise. That's where I first heard "Don't count your chickens before they hatch." Grandpa told this as I picked the eggs and laughed. I always wondered if the eggs might actually hatch as I picked them up. As I got older, I learned what this saying really meant and remembering Grandpa's laughter as he told it gave me such sweet memories.

This saying is a proverb, an expression that gives advice, and is used to caution someone to not make heavy future plans on something happening before it actually does. It is believed to have originated from the Greek fable writer Aesop, who lived from 620-560 BC. As the story goes, a milkmaid had milked the cows and was carrying the pail of milk on her head all the while daydreaming of where the money was going that she would earn from the milk. Items like buying chickens for eggs, and the new dress she would buy from her riches selling the eggs. Unfortunately, through her daydreaming and not paying attention, she fell and spilled all the milk, therefore having no way to fulfill her dream. Hence the phrase from Aesop's fable becomes the proverb, "Don't count your chickens before they hatch."

Since I grew up hearing this proverb, my kids did too. As I said it to them I would think of Grandpa and the chicken coop. When my eighth grade son asked if he could raise chickens for eggs I was excited! We already had goats that my daughter raised and I thought it would be fun for my son to learn about chickens, and we loved to eat eggs. So off we went to buy chicks. We didn't really know how to pick chicks or even if there was a way, so my son picked six cute ones and we bought a small storage building and made a chicken coop. It was fun, enlightening, and turned out to be expensive! And my son was getting big ideas on what to do with all the eggs he was going to have. All the while, we never thought about that old proverb and how it might possibly apply to what we were doing.

The little chicks started growing, but it didn't take long for three of them to die. The other three continued to get bigger and we couldn't wait until they were big enough for eggs! As they grew, we began to see the prettiest colors in their feathers! Colors I didn't think chickens had or at least none of the ones I had ever seen. Then one day we noticed (or maybe they just got big enough to tell) that they weren't chickens! They were roosters! And they didn't want to sit in the nests in our chicken coop and they definitely weren't going to lay eggs! All they wanted to do was wake us up, and our neighbors, every morning with a wonderful "cock-a-doodle-doo!" I had long before learned the meaning behind "Don't count your chickens before they hatch," or so I thought, and now it was my son's turn. Actually, maybe, we were learning it together. If we had only remembered and applied that insightful proverb earlier!

Tiny Living – Squished! – by Leyanne Enterline

We just added to our tiny space!

Two adorable Australian Shepard Collie mixes were gifted to us!

Now, these are some big pups to have in a trailer! Yup, we're nuts. The boys have been BEGGING for a dog and of course we didn't just get one, because each needs a friend, right? Oh my, our lives have been changed for a bit! We thought with living on two acres with outside dogs would be perfect...plenty of space to roam.

It turns out, puppies don't like that idea. Day one of outside in a super nice dog run that we set up, they decided to have a 10-hour disappearing adventure. However, by a miracle from God they were found by a sweet lady on her back porch. Thankfully, these three month old pups decided to go the wooded route on their journey rather than take to the streets. It was truly a blessing from God that these pups were returned unharmed from all the critters out here, cactus, and thorns...so inside they came!

We now have a giant crate and all! I see why full-timers that are usually a bit older than us have small dogs inside their trailer. Large animals and four humans don't fit all that great. And the giant dog food is inside of course, because the ants wanted to have a treat outside. To say we are squished is an understatement!

We literally have to squeeze by the crate to get to the front door (we don't have a back door but for reason I can't not say "front door") and the dog food is on top of our kitchen counter because the pups found it on the ground and had at it!

Any advice on tiny living with large animals would be very helpful! I do not have this down. I feel in my heart that the giant pups coming into our lives are a symbol of change that's about to take place, maybe a sense of settlement or consistency or maybe a larger space coming.

Tiny living has its ups and downs for sure. We are definitely in a constant state of learning.

Remember, loves grows best in tiny spaces!

A Night to Remember – Tempted...to Evil – by Marcy Lytle

Halloween is this month, and it's a great time let our kids dress up, eat candy, and enjoy all things a little bit spooky and fun. I just recently found some cute decorations at the dollar store for the 6-year old in our extended family, like a black spider web with a huge pink spider glue to the middle! She wants to "freak out" her brother (he's the ripe old age of 7.) I always remember loving this time of year, especially because of the fun involved.

What a great time to use this time of year to talk about evil...and good...and the way to shun evil and run to the good! It's a good time of year to sit down with the kiddos and talk about the dark, scary images and people, and what to do when we're afraid. It's also a good thing to talk about the difference between fun and scary (hiding and seeking and "Boo!") to scary and evil (hiding and seeking to harm.) Discernment can be taught, if we take the time to do so!

Preparation: Print out a few clip art images of the items in bold below. Cut them out and lay on a table face down, allowing the kids to turn over one at a time as you discuss. Provide candy corn and popcorn for treats while you gather and learn. Set out a box of Kleenexes, a flashlight that works, and you could include fries with ketchup if you want! Provide tiny pumpkins and markers for decorating at the end.

Halloween images:

Witches: While witch hats and costumes abound, our older kiddos need to be aware that there are really people that "cast spells" on people and seek to do evil. We do not have to fear that, because we belong to the Good Shepherd. And we are to have no part in seeking to place evil upon anyone else.

Read Psalm 23: 4 *Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me;*

Ghosts: Little friendly ghosts like kids dressed up in sheets with holes for their eyes are funny and fun! But ghostly stories of evil spirits lurking in the dark to harm us are not something we need to listen to, or entertain. Ghosts cannot harm us! (Toss the Kleenexes at each other!)

Psalm 34:14 *Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.*

Dark Corners: Sometimes at night when the lights are off, we become afraid of shadows and noises, because we cannot see. However, darkness is as light to Jesus, because he is the Light of the World – and he lives in us! (Turn off all the lights before reading the verse with your flashlight.)

I John 4:4 *Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world!*

Skeletons: Did you know that under our skin we have bones that look just like these skinny, bony guys? He's nothing to be afraid of, although these skeletons are used to spook people. Think of your funny bone (that one in your elbow that hurts when you bump it!) and just giggle out loud and see if that silly skeleton doesn't make you laugh a little, too.

Proverbs 17:22 *A cheerful heart is good medicine.*

Blood: At Halloween, people will wear masks and gloves and costumes with fake blood dripping down them, to scare us. However, the blood isn't real, and bleeding isn't funny. We can turn away and think about how blood brings life! Jesus' shed his blood for us on the cross, so that we could live...forever! How's that for turning away from evil and seeing something good?! (Squeeze ketchup on those fries...)

I John 1:7 *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*

Black Spiders: Little and big, there are spiders everywhere, tangled in webs, and placed around to scare and spook each person passing by. These can be fun to use to scare our brothers and sisters, because they're not real. They're just plastic bugs! However, if they scare us at Halloween, we can remember that bugs and spiders are just a part of creation, and they can spin their webs, but we are bigger and mightier than they!

Romans 12:21 *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

Jack o lanterns – Carving pumpkins is fun, but there will be some pumpkins that look so scary to us, either with scary faces or weird stuff stuck in them and coming out of them! Pumpkins are great, and carving them is a super fun activity, but we don't have to be afraid of the ones we see with scary expressions. (Let everyone put faces on their tiny pumpkins!)

II Tim 1:7 *For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*

There are all sorts of things in this world that are fun, funny, and enjoyable, and because of evil in the world, they will be presented to us in evil ways. However, as children that belong to God, we can know that what God has created he will show us how to enjoy in good and healthy ways, in ways that bring us joy and not fear.

Evil is in the hearts of some people, because they don't know the love of God. We can pray for them, be kind to them, but when we're tempted to do evil with them...we can turn away and follow peace and joy in Jesus!

In God's hands, intended evil becomes eventual good. – Max Lucado



YOU

Strengthening Your Core – How Honest? – by Marcy Lytle

He doesn't want to be told if he has bad breath, and I do. I'd rather be told and be embarrassed for a second, but be pleasant to others around me. I guess he'd rather not know...ever. Everyone is different, right? So how honest should we be with our friends? Being too honest can ruin a great friendship, but never being honest at all is not friendship...is it?

Let's look at common areas where honesty, and how honest to be, arises...

She's texting while she's driving, and you're riding in the passenger seat: Shouldn't this be a place to be honest? After all, your safety is involved! If she is offended and refuses to put away her phone, then perhaps we'd be better off driving or riding with someone else. If she gets offended by our request, isn't that her problem?

Her kids are not behaving in your home: This is a sticky situation. Maybe her kids are carrying around their juice boxes and dripping grape liquid onto your rug. It's your home, and you can most certainly be honest and say that you do not allow carrying drinks or food away from the table. Be honest. It's better than being resentful when she leaves, and never inviting her over again.

She's always frustrated and in a dither, but you see ways she can organize her life: Some things are better left unsaid, unless we are asked. If she asks for help, then a door is open. But just offering up honest suggestions (although good ones) unsolicited, makes for a possible hurt that may be hard to mend. You can always pray for an open door, or pray for God to help her. He's great at things like that!

Her dogs are in your face and on your lap when you visit: My daughter has two dogs and she knows the larger one of the two scares me and annoys me. I told her this, and she politely puts her in her kennel when I arrive. I appreciate that I was able to tell her, and she nicely attends to my needs, even though her dog doesn't bother her! That's a real friend! We should totally be kind with our request, so as not to offend, but speak up when we're bothered by unwanted "pests," (I mean, pets.)

She constantly gossips about others in your circle of friends: One way to be honest without being offensive is to change the subject, speak only nice things about those same people, and to avoid nodding or agreeing with every accusation. Gossips won't stay near non-listening ears. She will either stop, or ask you why you're not agreeing, or find something else to talk about. Sometimes being honest is just being nice. And the other person gets the picture.

You've heard a rumor about her, and she's unaware: Rumors are best to be left un-spread and dead at the door. There's never any good in spreading rumors to others. However, if we know a friend well enough and know that she'd rather be told, we can offer the info, without revealing the source. Or better yet, we can tell the person that started the rumor to stop, go to that person, or seek counsel.

You are the one annoying the heck out of someone: What? How can that be? Yes, we can sometimes be the one that talks too much, whines too often, or has stinky breath. We have to

decide whether or not we can handle others' comments on our behavior. The best way to be (which I am NOT, most of the time) is to carefully consider comments made, and discard them if given in a hateful manner, or change our ways if we see that we're wrong. A good idea is to ask a family member if that comment about us is indeed true.

There's a huge difference between being honest with good intentions and being honest because we're annoyed and want to "fix" our friends. From my experience, most of the time, I opt for praying first before I speak. And I hope others do the same with me. Many times, God speaks to that person or to my own heart, and my words become unnecessary to voice. However, when others have had to be honest with me, or me with them, it often goes well when the attitude is filled with humility and grace. We offer grace, and we receive grace. At least, we can hope that's the case.

Honesty is always a must when safety is at risk, when space is violated, or when we feel uncomfortable. But it's usually a waste when it's just our opinion that she needs to change, or she's just different, or she's not open to any feedback at all.

What's your opinion?

Upper Quadrant – Something Died – by Marcy Lytle

I remember when my kids both left home. My son was the last to go, and he had spread out to use both his and his sister's rooms when she got married, a few years prior. So when he left, two bedrooms were cleaned out and empty – it looked like death had occurred! Fast forward another decade, and my mom passed away. These are just two events, big events, where I felt like something also died in me, when these family members moved away to another physical...and heavenly location.

Can you relate?

It happens so fast, just like “they say,” the maturation of our children from baby to toddler to teen and beyond...until they're gone, forever, out of our homes. We have approximately 18 years with them, and then we're back with our spouses, or left alone, and they are no longer under our thumb, our rule, or our management. And they have lives to live, apart from us. It stings! It's a grief like none other, when their beds and clothes and toiletries are taken, and when their chatter on the phone late at night and their messes that use to annoy us now become fond memories and wishes to experience again. Something's dead.

It's such a sad time to lose a parent, no matter their age. All of their annoyances or even the frustration of caring for them is gone, because now they're physically not here. We can't call them for advice, lean on them in times of trouble, or count on them to come through when we're in a mess. They've died. They're gone. And there's this gaping hole in all of us, because we're no longer a child to anyone, any more. It's a feeling and realization that only deepens as the time goes on and we realize we'll never see them or hear their voices ever again, on this earth.

Wow, all of that is depressing, isn't it!? I felt quite depressed when my kids left. Some moms I talked to were glad to see their kids go, but most felt as I did...lost. I immediately refurnished the empty rooms, to bring life back into our house, and I redecorated their bathroom. This helped. I went to bed at night and longed for their presence to come through the front door, to enter our room and plop on the bed to tell us about their date or the movie they saw. But they didn't. It was just him, my husband. And me.

One day, I caught the expression on my husband's face that said something profound, although he never uttered a word. It spoke, “I'm still here.” I realized that even though something had died inside of me as a mom, when my kids left, I still had a husband. I still had friends. And I still had my kids to talk to (thank God for cell phones!). Life was not over. I was still very much alive, and although it would take time, I would learn to enjoy life without the kids down the hall, and look forward to their visits when they called.

One day, I remembered my mom without falling apart and weeping deeply, although those times still occur. They are less frequent and I find myself saying aloud, “Miss you Mom,” with a smile on my face and thanksgiving in my heart at the gift I was given, and the gift she's now received, of a complete and whole body, restored hearing, and joy unspeakable.

Something's going to die again. We live in a world where death occurs. My garden suffered greatly this past summer because of the heat. But this fall I'll plant new flowers and water them,

and they'll grow and provide beauty to our yard. Winter's freeze will kill the annuals, but the perennials will dig deep and stay present. It's so cool how looking at and observing creation brings us hope that though death occurs, seasons change, and pain too hurtful for words happens, life is still there. It's there beside us in the form of a husband, a puppy dog, a succulent, a friend, a cloud blowing by, or the breezes of another seasonal change.

In response we can either, open our windows and allow the stench of death to be replaced by the fragrance of autumn, or we can keep those same windows shut and miss out on the beauty around us.

It's hard when something dies. No denying that. And it's hard being of the age when you're closer to death than you are to your birth. But He said that nothing is too hard for Him, and that includes bringing us back to a life well lived, with joy and fun and friends and peace.

Healthy Habits – Worship Wonders – by Marcy Lytle

You've already read the title and are probably wondering, how is worship part of developing healthy habits? Sounds a bit odd, I know. But worship, I'm realizing, can mean all the world in whether or not we stay healthy in our attitudes, our heart, and our spirit, all of which affect our mental and physical health. I've been studying and learning about how worship is a common and eternal thread throughout every book of the Bible, and it's so much more than we usually realize that it is!

- When we are questioning whether or not God cares, worshiping him for what he's created and establishing that truth about who he is – the God who set the sun rising and the moon setting – this settles a heart that's unsettled, one that causes angst and worry.
- When we lose our way and wonder what real truth is, worshiping God through speaking his words of truth over us (He loves us, He cares for us, He lives for us and has good plans for us), this calms the storm that rages and sends us reeling into the darkness, and guides us back to the light. Our weary feet can walk and run again.
- When we feel weak and weepy and all things teary, we can leap and dance for joy. He says the joy of the Lord is our strength. And just how do we get that joy? By sitting in his presence soaking and listening, just like we soak our feet or hands in a bath full of soothing oils and fragrance, we are rejuvenated and healed. In his presence is joy. And joy makes us strong.
- When we remember the hope beyond this life and begin to sing about heaven and all of its glory and how we will be healed and all things will be new, we just might erupt into praise that causes us to lift our hands and offer a shout or a clap out loud! Shouting out praise is powerful in lifting a droopy head that's been hanging down way too long!
- When we make a decision to trust Him even though we can't see, it's like making a decision to walk a marathon even though we don't want to. We've trained for it, we're wearing shoes and clothes for it, and we can do it. We can trust Him to enable us to leap over hurdles, run that extra mile, and make it to the finish line. He's a perfect trainer!
- When we give thanks for His mercy and grace by singing songs of thanksgiving or writing our gratitude out on paper, we unleash the heavy weight of sin and shame caused by failure and wrongdoings. His grace is just like being let loose out of a pen that has held us captive, and we then are allowed to run free in praise and adoration for that freedom!
- When we declare that our faith is in none other than God, that he alone is our rock and our shield and our deliverer, we can move mountains! Those are some strong biceps, right there! Faith comes through hearing the word of God, and when faith arises, obstacles move. We can look back in wonder at what faith has done!

Worship is one of those wonders in the bible that not only is wonderful, full of wonder, and part of praising a wonderful God. It produces wonderful results in the air around us that we breathe, and in the air inside us in our lungs.

“It’s His breath in our lungs, and we pour out our praise to You only” is a line in a worship song. And when we pour out our praise, it does our bodies and souls just as much good as running and working out, and more...

Try it. Worship, respond, dance, and believe, with all your heart, soul and mind.

Life Right Now – That Waiting... - by Bethany Gomez

I uncovered, I guess you could call it, a pattern when I was writing my article last month. I'm surprised that I didn't notice this pattern sooner because it has occurred quite a few times since I have been writing every month for *A Bundle of Thyme*. Of course it doesn't always happen the exact same way every time, but very similar. I get writers block so often that I never really paid attention to why this so often happened; that is, until last month when it happened again.

I would say 9 times out of 10 I don't really know what to write about each month. I may have an idea, but the majority of the time I don't have a single clue. When that happens, I often say a simple prayer that goes something like this,

"Lord what do you want me to write about this month?"

And usually what follows goes something like this:

I begin writing, but nothing too revealing or vulnerable. I write a few lines. Backspace. Try again. Nope, nothing sounds right. I get a little frustrated. God gives me a "be more vulnerable nudge" and a "write about this" idea. I hesitate. I basically tell Him, "No, I can't write about that," not even realizing that He just answered my prayer that I had prayed a little while ago. Then I go back to writing what I want. Nothing comes forth, sometimes not even one word. A deeper frustration sets in as God keeps lovingly nudging away.

Finally, I say, "Oh, alright God!"

And just like that my writers block almost instantly vanishes (save the "exhausted writers block" moments and the "perfectionist tendency moments") and the words start flowing and a feeling of peace sets in.

I came to realize that often times I get writers block because I let fear dictate my writing. I have this bad habit of worrying too much about what others might think, so I stay pretty guarded a lot of the time, mainly in my daily life, but I've come to learn it happens in my writing. And yet I have been so encouraged by others' vulnerability countless times that I don't want to keep letting fear stop me from sharing what God wants me to share. I want to share my stories and what God has done for me, so that hopefully others will be encouraged and at the same time realize they need more of Jesus in their lives because He is life. With that being said, I'm going to try to always be more vulnerable no matter how scary it is. I'm learning that if I balk at writing something it's probably because God wants me to, so here goes.

I rarely write much about being single mainly because that is not who I am, it is just the season I'm in right now and also because it calls on me to be vulnerable. Sometimes I feel like this season has gone on long enough and I find myself again asking, "God, what is the hold up?" I thought I would be married by now with 2.5 kids. Although, recently I have had fleeting thoughts of maybe it's just not meant to be. Then the desire to get married and have children takes over and those thoughts vanish. Even though I turned another year older last month, I think what I desire more than ever right now is to continue to wait on the man that God has for me. I have this strong feeling that it will be worth it.

Growing up, my dad told us girls to make a list of some of the attributes that we wanted in a husband even though God knows who it will be in the end. I believe that having a list is just a step of faith, so here is mine:

He has to love Jesus, first and foremost, love others, love kids, love to laugh and make me laugh. He must love adventure, and (let's be honest) having kids is an adventure, right? And finally, he has to love me and desire to serve God together side by side till death do us part.

My prayer mantra as of late has been simply, "Let go and Let God," and always "Trust God," no matter how difficult it gets in the waiting. He will always be worthy of my trust.

Romans 15:13

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him,
so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Created for Life - Trending Now in Waco and Pawhuska – by Ginny Hurley

Two completely delightful families have changed the atmosphere in their hometowns. Where once crumbling buildings fell into disrepair, transformation has occurred within city streets. Ricketty sidewalks along with their dusty storefronts have been given life while keeping the integrity of their history and culture. Undesirable eyesores are now glorious family gathering places. I want to compare these two transformations and highly recommend a trip to celebrate both destinations.

The first one I want to describe is in Pawhuska, Oklahoma, created and developed by Ree Drummond, commonly known as Pioneer Woman. Starting with a simple blog, she began to gather a following that turned into a cooking television show. Her popularity gained momentum because of her genuine demonstrations in the kitchen and humorous tales about her life on the ranch. She is the quintessential accidental country girl. With descriptive and lively humor, she describes life with her gentle cowboy she refers to as, Marlboro Man. The enormous cattle ranch is filled with daily hard consuming work and everyone is always hungry! You can't help but smile as she creates incredibly delectable treats and main dishes for her cowboys and cowgirls. Ree Drummond's joy in celebrating family and caring for neighbors is contagious.

Before Marlboro Man, Ree was a vegetarian who spent most of her time shopping for the latest styles and enjoying her late night friends. What a turnaround! Ree has recently bought the old Mercantile on Main Street in Pawhuska, which houses a beautifully huge shop, café, bakery, and coffee shop. Every nook and cranny is filled with joyful colors, delightful gifts, cowboy items, and lovely ranch décor. My favorite things are the children's books written by Ree! The food is indescribable and to me, unrivaled. Then, if you want, you can drive out to the Drummond Ranch Lodge, where she cooks and films her shows. Upon arrival you are amazed at the vastness of everything! Even the ranch dogs greet you with licks and wagging tails. The television show, *Pioneer Woman*, doesn't even come close to portraying the beauty and reality that is the Drummond Ranch. The most impressive thing about the visit is the generosity and hospitality of Ree and Marlboro Man. You can actually open the cabinets, refrigerators, climb into the pantry, stir her dishes, and enjoy every minute of this magnificent lodge. The deck, flowers, lawn chairs, and the view take your breath away! Upon returning to town, you can enjoy Ree's ice cream shop created in honor of her beloved basset hound, Charlie. There is a pizza place directly above Charlie's Ice Cream Shop, too. The entire area is now beautifully renovated with friendly shopkeepers and happy people. It was a delightful visit, and I hope to return.

The second place, transformed by an incredibly creative couple, is one you are probably familiar with, where most of you have already visited. It is Waco's Chip and Joanna Gaines' world of Magnolia. They began with real estate renovations on a national television show called *Fixer Upper*. Making dreams come true is their specialty. Chip's antics and Joanna's creativity have captured America's heart. They bought the old silos in Waco and developed an entire destination for whole families. Food trailers and outdoor games for children and dad's are brilliant, creating a place for everyone while shoppers wander inside the enormous buildings. The latest purchase, at least as far as I know, is the old Elite Café, which they have transformed into a destination itself. Lively outdoor conversations, superb coffee, and friendly staff scuttle through the swarms of customers, making sure everyone is welcome.

Being a Baylor girl with a Baylor husband, we have been astonished at the brilliance produced by the Gaines to the Waco area.

To compare these two renovators brings me great joy, as I love both of these towns and greatly admire such innovation. The similarity is in the wholesome family atmosphere, service, and enjoyment for everyone. The differences are in the personal tastes and styles of the families. The Drummonds are generations of ranchers with hearty appetites. Ree uses lots of bold colors and animal themes. The Gaines are builders, decorators, and renovators of homes with a farm touch while keeping clean minimal touches. Both have their own line of items they have created. Both are lovely and enticing. One of my favorite things about Ree is that she has kept her prices down and affordable. One of my favorite things about Joanna is her value of family and destinations. Both of these families have created jobs and livelihoods for many people in their hometowns. To me, the crowds only make it all the more festive! It's amazing how popular and busy they are, even out in a little Oklahoma town in the country. So I hope you choose to visit both and applaud such creativity.



MARRIAGE

In This Together – Light and Darkness – by Bekah Holland

I hate to jump head first into a touchy topic....but this is me jumping head first into a touchy topic: Mental health.

Your initial reaction may be to immediately stop reading this and run to the nearest feel good article you can find. I get that. I am the queen of hiding as far away from the uncomfortable as humanly possible and drenching myself in all things warm and frosting covered. However, there are people in my life. People that I deeply love, that suffer with mental illnesses. And that was a catalyst for me to jump into the river with them while they navigate the waters.

While this is slowly becoming a topic that's peeking out from the rugs we've swept it under for the last few thousand years, it still holds a stigma. *Especially in the church.* I was very privileged (I know, as Christians we like to say "blessed." And while I am that too, I also recognize that I had an advantage to grow up in a home that didn't make me feel like my emotions or feelings were something I needed to be ashamed of. But on top of having wonderful parents who loved me enough to do things differently than their parents did, I was a girl. And there are, more often than not, double standards (that touchy topic is one I'll tackle another day.) But no one expected me to hide my tears. And my genetics and makeup didn't include a brain chemistry that made me susceptible to depression or severe anxiety. Truthfully, I didn't know much about it.

In the last few years, thankfully, more and more brave people have started speaking out about their reality. A reality that includes self-harm, depression, crippling anxiety, body dysmorphia, eating disorders, and many more that I don't have time or space to even touch on. These people have been hiding in the dark, out of fear of judgement and shame. And let's be real for a second...we (*as in the church*) really excel in the art of judgement, so in all honesty, they've been hiding in the dark from us. But little by little, as people begin to find the strength to come out into the light, we have an opportunity to bathe them in love and acceptance. We have an opportunity to open our minds and our hearts and learn about things that we may not understand.

I haven't always gotten it right. In fact, many times, I've gotten it completely wrong, inside out and backwards. But I'm still trying and I hope learning in the process. If you're still reading, I hope and pray that you have never experienced the overwhelming, destructive, pain filled reality that mental illness can bring. But chances are that, even if you haven't lived it yourself, you know and love people who do.

What, you may be wondering, does this have to do with marriage?

Well, here you go...did you know that in marriages where one partner has a mental illness, the divorce rate increases almost 80%? EIGHTY PERCENT! If you have been in or are in a partnership where one of you lives with chronic depression or eating disorder or a bipolar diagnosis, I promise that this statistic makes sense...on both sides of the line. The struggling partner may feel pain and hurt from not being understood by the person they love the most. And the other partner may feel afraid, helpless lonely or resentful. So this is where the marriage piece comes in....you can't do this alone.

Let me say this loud enough so you can hear me in the back of the room.

YOU CAN'T DO THIS ALONE!

Because this is so personal and so raw, we tend to just keep it close and hide it from the world. But God didn't create us to do life alone. He created us for community. We know (whether we act on it or not) that a person with mental illness needs to meet with a therapist/psychiatrist to work through coping mechanisms, medication, etc. If that's you, get yourself an appointment. STAT. Your life can be drastically different, better even, with a bit of guidance and lots of hard work. If your spouse is struggling, get yourself an appointment. Yep. I said it. Go. Talk. It. Out.

It's hard to be in love with someone who's hurting in ways we can't fix. It can feel very personal. You may try to take responsibility for things that are in no way in your control. You may rate your "success" as a husband or wife based on your partner's mental health status at that moment. You can even begin to experience some depression and anxiety yourself. This is not your job! Your job is to love, support and be a safe space to land (and you need to be healthy to do that). Your job is to pray. And when you've prayed all you can, pray some more.

I know this is a lot. I've basically verbally vomited all of these words and barely tiptoed into the water. That's okay, I think...because this is an ongoing struggle. We don't just get to talk a little about a hard topic and then go about our business like that's the end. Although some days, that sounds like the kind of plan I'd like to adopt. But we're barely scratching the surface of the hard stuff. The ugly stuff we like to pretend doesn't exist. Especially not in our neatly laid out Christian lives.

So we have some choices. Do we start being honest and vulnerable? Do we start being the hands and feet of Jesus and love those who are hurting? The best way to answer that and all of the other questions that may surface is also the easiest (albeit slightly cliché thanks to 90's pop culture)...What would Jesus do? Do that. And then do it some more. Wash, rinse, repeat. But please please please, if you don't remember anything else, remember this...you are not alone.

You are more than the chaos you feel.

You are loved.

You have purpose.

So take another step. Walk a little farther into the light. We can walk together. That's what Jesus would do.

"The most precious light is the one that visits you in your darkest hour."

Date Night Fun – Fall is in the Air – by Marcy Lytle

October, at least where I live, is full of weekend fun in my town and all around! There are so many festivals and events to attend, it's hard to fit them all in! In fact, we can't, but we can find some to attend and call it a date. Just where does one look to find festivals and events? I thought this month, instead of citing specific events (which won't necessarily be where you live), I'd share how we plan and find events to attend, and things to do!

Check your local newspaper. Even if you don't subscribe, pick up one on the weekend and browse what's happening in your area. Our paper lists art events, musicals, movies, eating fun, and more. Pick one, be brave, and plan your date night.

Check the internet. I often google "Central Texas festivals" and a few websites pop up. So google your area and see what you find. There are usually pumpkin festivals, scarecrow festivals, and all sorts of hayride opportunities during the month of Halloween! If you have kids, you can take them with you. But there's nothing wrong with going on a date to one of these events, without kids! We do!

Check your neighborhood news. We have a paper called Community Impact, and it has pages of coupons, a calendar of events in the park or movies, and all sorts of things within a few miles of our home! Sometimes we just call our date night a *community impact night*, and head out to do all things new that we've discovered in our area.

Check Pinterest. Google "food bars" and create one, and invite another couple or two over, to enjoy! Search for "date night ideas" and see what pops up, then be inspired to readjust to your liking. Search for "fall date ideas" for specific activities related to the season.

Check Facebook or other social media. Follow date night bloggers. See what others are doing and what events are posted, and look them up. Often, these bloggers will offer money saving tips. Others will comment on the places they went, whether the experience was good or bad. This is good information!

Once you've done the above, here are some good pointers:

- Be sure to check the cost, the parking, and all the details for events you might choose to attend.
- Be sure to make the idea your own, tweaking and changing, and creating as you would like to enjoy it!
- Be brave and venture out to try something new, a place you've never been, and have fun!
- Be diligent to write down and keep a running list of date night ideas that work, ones you love, so you can do them again!

October is a busy month for most, so get a few date nights scheduled and written in, so that you have that needed time to get away and enjoy and breathe...before Thanksgiving and Christmas roll in!

After 40 Years – He Was There – by Marcy Lytle

We all have events in our lives that changed us, for the better or for the worse. For some of us, it's a catastrophic death, or a divorce, or loss of a job, etc. And we also have markers in our married lives that we live through, coming out closer together or drifting further apart. For me, not too long into our marriage we were burglarized. Not once, but three times. We lived out in the country on a couple of acres, and there weren't a lot of houses nearby, so we were an open target...for thieves. A lot of other things happened in that house as well, and they have haunted me for decades.

Several years ago, I finally decided to seek counsel because I felt like I was unprotected, even though I had prayed for God to ease my fears. After being violated three times, I felt abandoned and often questioned, "Where were you, God? You say in your Word to cast my cares on you, but seriously? Three times?" I had it in my heart and mind that He doesn't protect, and he isn't always present, and that peace after intrusion was impossible.

During that counsel, I was asked to close my eyes and picture God with me in the house, after each burglary. I tried, but I just couldn't do it. Every single time, I only saw blank space – where God should have been standing at the window or the door – but he wasn't. I left the counseling, distraught again, and without hope of ever moving past my hurt. I had moved past some of the fear over the years, but still had hurt at my Father.

Fast forward another decade or so, and I was thinking about that exercise I was asked to do. My husband and I were out on a date, we had gone in to a restaurant, and it was so cold! He offered to go to the car and get my wrap, which he did and brought it back to me. I was covered, I was warm, and I was so thankful for his attentive heart to my needs.

As we left the restaurant that evening, I remembered something about those intrusions. Each time, I cried at night and my husband held me close and told me not to worry. I remember feeling totally afraid but leaning into his peace, and riding on that. Have you ever seen a father ask his tiny daughter to step up on his feet as he dances across the floor with her? It was sort of like that. I wasn't able to rest or have peace, but I leaned on the peace that my husband carried, and I slept.

A light came on, and I realized something. God was with me...in the form of my husband. No, He didn't reach down and stop the intruders from coming in and stealing, but he did provide me comfort when they left. My husband was the peace that He sent, when I thought He left me vulnerable and naked, open to being stolen from again.

When I thought about this, I didn't say anything to my husband, as we were walking across the parking lot to our car. However, I did grab his hand and give thanks for the hundreds of times over the years that he has been my covering, my help, my comfort, and my ear...when I felt robbed and taken advantage of. God gave him to me, this precious gift, and I had overlooked His presence in him.

I'll never quite understand why God "allows" thieves to steal from us...or does he? However, he did say that in this world troubles would be present. He also promised to never leave us or

forsake us, and to work all things together for good. And sometimes that presence and that good is standing there in bodily form wearing the ring that signifies we belong together, as he steps in and demonstrates the Father's love to a scared little girl.

Thank you, God, for reminding me that you were there, and you are there, all the time. And thank you, God, for a husband that sees and believes...even when I don't.



ENCOURAGEMENT

Best of the Mess – All in My Mind – by Ashley Zanella

As the holidays roll in and the summer slowly creeps to an end, my mind is already in preparation mode. From the time I conceived, to the time I gave birth to my first son, I had gained 70 pounds. I was able to work off about 30 pounds of that within the first three months and by four months postpartum, we had successfully conceived our second son.

Yes we planned to have them so close. Yes, we are crazy. Back to the weight loss journey--

It has now been about 13 months since I began working off all of that baby weight. I had gained 29 pounds back during my second pregnancy and had set a goal for myself that was a few pounds more than where I was pre-babies. After so much hard work and so many ups and downs with how I approached food, I am thrilled to say that I have reached my personal fitness goal a year after having back to back babies!

There is a catch with fitness goals though, isn't there? Reaching your goals is like getting massage on your mind. You feel accomplished and complete. That is because with most goals, once you're done, you're done. But with fitness that just isn't the case. You're never done until you're dead. You are always going to have to take care of your body and your health.

So, YAY, I hit my goal. But that just means I now have to set a new goal. This is imperative with the holidays coming up.

It's so easy to say, "Oh, it's Halloween. I can eat this bag - and that bag - and another bag of candy. It's okay, I'll get back into the gym on Monday."

It is so much harder to say, "As much as that candy looks amazing, I look and feel even better. I don't need to eat that."

So in order to help keep myself motivated and stay on track with my fitness goals, I wanted to share with you how I've approached this past year and share some tips and recipes over the next few months. Breaking it down into three components, here the first step towards how I lost 60 pounds since last July:

#1 - It's all in the mindset. In order to get really excited and focused, I had to have an end in mind and I had to have something really exciting to look forward to. For me, that was setting a goal weight and a reward for hitting that goal. I knew that persistence was EVERYTHING when it comes to health goals, so having a tangible goal I could see was important for me. The goal may be inches lost, fitting into an old pair of jeans or getting that cholesterol down to a certain level. Whatever it is, it helps if that goal is crystal clear in our minds.

The reward is very motivating to me. My reward was that I would pay to have a professional cut and color for my hair. Usually, I cut and color my own hair because I don't like spending money on something I can do myself. Also, I have very long hair and it's always been a habit of mine to change my hair when I don't feel good in my own skin. And I was tempted - boy was I tempted - to make some drastic changes over the past year. But I stuck to my goal and restrained myself. I knew that at some point I was going to need some extra motivation to persist through this

journey and it definitely came in many many times over the past year. To top it off, now that I've hit my goal I could care less about my hair. I think it looks fine how it is right now and that's because I feel comfortable in my own skin again. Go figure!

If there is a goal you are striving towards whether it be fitness related or not, I am a firm believer that you have to get your mind right first. Get clear on that goal and get clear on what success looks and feels like. You can do anything you set your mind to - as cheesy as that is to say - so clear your mind and focus it on that goal!

*Next month I'm going to share how I was able to make it to the gym 3-5x every week with a 1 and a 2 year old. In the meantime, to help stave off those sugar cravings, here is one of my favorite green smoothie recipes. Give it a try and let me know how you like it!

Green Smoothie

- 2 cups kale
- 1.5 cups water
- 2 T ground flax seed
- 1 cup your favorite greek yogurt (the less sugar, the better)
- 1 cup frozen strawberries
- 1 cup frozen pineapples
- 1 medium banana

First blend the kale and water until fully liquified. Then add all other ingredients and blend until smooth! I usually share half of this recipe with my kiddos and they love helping to make it and enjoy it!

Firmly Planted – Worth it – by Dina Cavazos

A garden is never “finished.”

It’s always evolving.

Plants die from stress or need to be moved to a better spot, leaving space for something new. Trees grow, creating more shade, or trees die, letting in sun. Over the last nine years I’ve planted a gazillion things, some with success and some not. I have a box full of plastic sticks and tags that identify the plant and tell how to keep them happy. In a somewhat haphazard way I try to keep track of where I bought them and when I planted them. I have *many* plant labels with no living plant to testify that I ever planted it. These, obviously, weren’t happy. Fortunately, I have enough happy plants that form the main body of the garden, and each year I add or take away; each change, brings me closer to what I’m working towards.

My goal is a mostly evergreen garden that can take Texas’ heat, short-lived sporadic freezes, and unpredictable rainfall—a garden that doesn’t need constant pruning, with plants I don’t have to protect and cover, which is too much work. That eliminates a lot of plants, including most succulents, which I love! But, because I love succulents and they give me so much joy, I make an exception. I have several planters with a variety of succulents that I keep trying to coddle along. Ghost Plant has been the most hardy, and I have a couple of sedums that grow at will in various places in the ground. But I want the gorgeous combos spilling over the edge in glorious array of color and form...without moving to California.

I’ve tried so many varieties, always with an eye for those that have a chance of making it outdoors. If the container is light enough I’ll bring it in when it freezes, but that’s a lucky few. The perfect loose potting mix (hand-mixed by me), the right location, just enough water but not too much, guarded against pecking birds and slimy snails—my little exotic specimens of botany are well-loved and cared for. I often have to move them around to find their happy place. Often they just shrivel up and die and I don’t know what I did wrong. They are higher maintenance than my other plants.

But when plants grow and bloom and cohabitate in that pot so beautifully, it’s so worth it.

I wonder if we’re the succulents in God’s creation. We humans can be so finicky, so temperamental, so difficult. We always want things “just right.” Yes, we’re high maintenance. But just like I’m not giving up on my succulents, God won’t give up on me, or you. The moments when we grow and bloom and cohabitate in that pot so beautifully.....He must think we’re worth it.

For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. Ephesians 2:10

Simple Truth – Avoiding Total Eclipse – by Erica Simmons

Yes my title is a word play of the song “Total Eclipse of the Heart.” I don’t want you pondering that question the entire time you are reading my story and being distracted. Now on to more important things. If you follow my column with any regularity, you know that the last two months I have shared some very personal struggles that I’ve had as a parent. I can spend the remainder of this column telling you about new and amazing things God is doing in both my sons’ lives, but instead I will share the most important lesson God reminded me as I was going through this storm. The enemy HATES it when we operate in truth!

As I spent time reflecting and sharing my story of the roller coaster that I went through in a matter of days, I wanted to know what the heck just happened. This is when the Holy Spirit nudged my spirit and revealed the attack was a result of me being open and honest about an issue I have for the most part dealt with in secret. I started to use the word “private,” but that would convey that we should not ever have things going on in our lives that are private and that is NOT what I want to communicate. You see, keeping secrets is what we do when we don’t want anyone to ever know those things that we have attached shame and fear to, and so we work hard to keep them a secret. Secrets are things we try to keep in the dark, and you know who thrives in the darkness... So whenever we make the bold decision to take our secrets out of the dark, the enemy knows he is losing authority over those things and attacks. The enemy will do any and every thing to keep us from operating on truth and faith.

I have learned over the course of this Christian walk to recognize when this is happening. As soon as we do what is right, all hell breaks loose around and in us. This brings me to the point I want to make, in my column this month...

We as Christians have to make sure we never ever let the enemy get us in a total eclipse of the truth. According to dictionary.com one of the definitions of eclipse is any obscuration of light. We have learned over the course of our lives as Christ followers that His truth is light and the enemy wants to use lies, deception and other tactics to block that light in our lives. He knows the importance of that truth. We see this demonstrated to us when Jesus was taken into the wilderness. It is the ONLY thing that defeated ALL of the enemy’s tactics.

In my case, God needed to rally around me as I was allowing the darkness to set in. Yes, I said I was ALLOWING. I was discouraged and tired from trying to deal with my secret. It had worn me down, so when I finally dragged it out into the light I was not as strong as I should have been. This was because I let the lies of the enemy about my prayers start to take root. I have written about being a prayer warrior in a previous column and my desire to be fierce in my prayer life. I did have cycles of time when I was focused and dedicated to it and then drifted away because I felt like my prayers were ineffective. I mentioned this to a friend over lunch a couple weeks ago and she recommended a book on prayer that she was reading. So I pulled up Amazon right then and purchased the kindle version. As I started reading, the author made a simple statement that vibrated through my soul.

This is a paraphrase:

We will never be able to separate our good from our bad, our flesh will always be a part of who we are and our flesh is imperfect.

After reading it I had this revelation:

He whispered in my soul "You are never gonna get it right." That is not the goal, it is not why Jesus died on the cross. In fact, it is the opposite, because we were never going to get it right. He had to die in order to pay the price for us never being unable to get it right. So what is the point? The point is to do our best. Live our life in what we know about His truth. That truth as we seek Him more will be even clearer a year from now more than it is today; and more clear two years from now than that! What we know of God is as a grain of sand on a beach of knowledge about Him. The goal is not to know all there is to know about Him; it is to continue to learn more about Him. The first one is impossible, the second one will provide us all we need to withstand the fiery darts of the enemy and not allow his tactics to obscure our light, God's truth.

We need to keep up the good fight of faith, seek God's truth and not allow the enemy to eclipse our truth. Make no mistake about it. He is on the hunt seeking who he can devour. Case in point, just this week it was revealed that Drew Brees did a piece for Focus on the Family on their "Bring your Bible to school" campaign. Turns out, Focus on the Family sponsors a gay conversion camp. To say the vultures came out would be an understatement. Drew Brees released a video on his Instagram account stating he did not know about the group's beliefs in this area, which only made things worse. You see, he was attacked from the one side for being a coward and not standing up for his beliefs and from the other for being irresponsible and NOT knowing. We are in a time in our society where no matter what he said he was going to be attacked. Gone is the ability for high profile people to be able to stand up and simply say I am a Christ follower, I freely made that choice for my life, I look at the Bible as the word of God. I don't get to pick and choose which parts I think are right or wrong, because I know that my desires would dictate those choices. Therefore, I accept all of it as truth and that is what I use to live my life. It is not a measuring stick that I use on those around me, that is not why Jesus died on the cross. I respect every person's right to live their life as they choose, and I ask for the same respect.

As for Focus on the Family, it is an organization that does great things, it does not kidnap people who declare themselves gay and force them into their camp. They provide a service that parents are choosing to make. If we think that every organization we support and every business we give your money to does 100% in line with our beliefs and values, I have a bridge I want to sell you. I believe Christians should be allowed to bring their Bible to school if they want to. This is what I believe and I am not ashamed of it and I will not allow your beliefs to supersede mine. We all can coexist if we give to each other what you are demanding from me, respect and acceptance of the choices I make for my life.

I know that was a lengthy speech I will never give on a platform anywhere near as big as Drew Brees, but it is one that I am passionate about. I was reminded of Peter when he denied knowing Jesus, he panicked and had a knee jerk reaction to a situation he did not see coming. I wonder if Drew will be better prepared to stand on God's truth the next time around.

The enemy is trying to push the narrative that both can't be true. I can be a Christian and respect and accept others choices that run contrary to the word of God. It is what he is using to divide us and keep us with our truth away from those who need to hear it.

At our church, we have a mission to relationally love others to Christ-centered wholeness. It is hard to be in relationship with those who think we are the enemy, distrustful of our motives. Let's make the enemy out to be exactly what he is: a LIAR. Don't let him eclipse us from our truth one situation at a time.

You see, I was not prepared a few weeks ago when he attacked, but shame on me if I am not the next time. I had allowed the gradual eclipse of the truth, but God in all His goodness did not allow a total eclipse of His truth.

But boy it was so close...

Moving Forward – Disappointed – by Pam Charro

I was completely wiped out. It was taking all of my energy to survive work each day, and the days I had off just weren't enough recovery. I felt my body was full of glass shards, and each less than perfect interaction with another person shook me daily, over and over again, and left me bleeding on the inside. I didn't understand what was wrong and I wasn't sure how long I could keep going.

I was so puzzled. It had taken me years, but I had finally obeyed God and gotten out of a miserable situation, absolutely certain he had such great plans for my life. Now this new beginning, which I was sure was finally my chance to shine, seemed just as painful as the life I'd left behind.

Why was everything still so hard?

Where were all of his promises of good for me?

It wasn't until recently that I began a bible study that explained what was plaguing me: Disappointment. And somehow (once I had a name for it) repentance - and tears - seemed to flow fairly quickly. I hadn't realized how unfair my expectations were and how much weight I'd placed on these past few months to make up for not only the pain of many years, but also the difficulty of transitioning into something new. Yes, God's promises for me are certain and they are good, but rebuilding a life takes time.

One of the exercises in this bible study was asking ourselves what we thought adult life would be like when we were kids. If you are like me, you assumed you would outgrow all of life's difficulties once you were all grown and powerful. Someone would love you and you would have children who love you and your job would be perfect and nobody would ever die or leave and everything would be perfect. Except life didn't turn out like that, for any of us, and no one has taught me how to process all of it. So if I'm really going to rebuild, I need to build on what is true.

I was made for heaven, but I'm not living in it yet. I must accept hurts as a part of life here or those deep disappointments will continue to be a daily thing. But there is incredible beauty in the struggle. *Why?* Because I can still choose to believe that life is worth it because of who God is and what he has in store for me.

Is it really true that all of these troubles are light and temporary?

Is he really good all the time, no matter how bad things seem?

Does he or anyone really care about how unfair life has been and how much pain I'm in?

Is what lies ahead a million trillion gazillion times better than anything I can ask or imagine?

Each time I say yes to these questions, I get a little braver and a little stronger. Faith and love show up and put my life into perspective. My hope returns.

And suddenly all of that crushing disappointment just doesn't seem so powerful anymore.

Real Stories - Crafting the Nights Away – by Abby Garcia

The first time my family and I went to Disney World was in 2015 with my high school band. We instantly loved it. There was fun and magic at every corner, and we felt like little kids again! We have been going there every year since then. We even joined the Disney Vacation Club! Mickey Mouse ears quickly became my favorite Disney accessory, but after a while, I wanted some that were different than the ones everyone else had. I figured why not make my own? After making my first pair, I made another, and another, and another. I must have made over 30 different pairs of ears!

And so...Pinblossom was born.

Pinblossom opened in April of this year, but it has changed so much from when it started. For example, like the name suggests, I initially wanted to focus on designing enamel pins. I did make one floral Snitch enamel pin, but since then, I have ended up making more Mickey ears. Additionally, I originally opened Pinblossom just to make my medical school application more diverse. However, Pinblossom has become an instrument to connect with people. My customers are the heart of my business. I don't even really like to call them customers because the purpose of my business is not making a profit, but instead its purpose is to share joy with others. And I feel joyful in return, when I see pictures of my fellow Disney fans wearing and enjoying my ears because I feel like a part of me gets to have that fun with them! I also have the opportunity to practice an important lesson.

In Matthew 22:35-40, Jesus explains that the greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, and second to that is to love your neighbor as yourself. So the purpose of my business is to do just that: Love God, Love Others. I am still learning how to share the love of God through Mickey ears, but I think the most important way to do so is to stay open and willing to do what God wants with Pinblossom. I like to share encouraging words and verses on my Instagram stories. Also, I hosted my first fundraiser for the El Paso Children's Hospital Foundation. I didn't raise as much money as I had initially wanted, but I'm learning to surrender and accept that it isn't about what I want. It's about God's plan. I'm learning that God loves even the small victories, and I'm learning to trust that God is going to use that money exactly how He needs to. I hope to continue doing fundraisers like these, and I am staying open to using my business the way God intends me to use it.

In addition to sharing truth about Jesus, I also love designing new and different ears! I work on my living room floor in front of the television. Most of the magic happens at night after I have finished studying for the day. I keep all my supplies in little organized bins, and my tool of choice is my mini hot glue gun. With my supplies, I always strive to make ears that are new and different from everyone else's. One thing I've noticed about other ear shops is that their products are exclusively made out of only flowers, only fabric, or only foam. Knowing this, I wanted my ears to be easily recognized and different from what is out there. With Pinblossom, I have tried to incorporate those elements together to create an entirely new look to my ears that other shops are not doing! For example, with the Halloween season coming, I have designed some spooky ears with all of the previously listed elements—fabric, florals, AND foam—incorporated together so that you can get the best of everything. Another example of my efforts to create ears that are different is my Mashup Collection which features colors and designs from one Disney movie and a quote from a different movie. The purpose of this collection is to celebrate diversity and how we can come together to create something beautiful.

My business has allowed me to strengthen current friendships, but also curate new ones. For example, my existing friends have graciously modeled for me which has also let me discover a love for photography. Through Instagram, I have connected with new people from all over—Kentucky, Missouri, California, Florida, even two lovely ladies from the United Kingdom! We've been able to bond over our silly love for Disney and Harry Potter. Additionally, I've made friends with other online shop owners through trades. This is a fun activity because we then promote each other's shops, and we can form a little community of shop owners that support and encourage each other. I also get to connect with people through doing custom orders. I get to work one on one with my fellow Disney fans to create the pair of ears or crown that they envision. Usually, they have a celebration that they want special ears for. For example, one person contacted me that she wanted customs for her and her fiancé's honeymoon to Disney World! She told me their favorite characters, and we worked together to make the perfect ears and ear hat for her and her future husband. Making these allowed me to share and encourage their creativity and add my own artistic touch to the final products. And I am excited that a piece of me gets to celebrate with them on their trip to Disney World!

I will continue making Pinblossom a positive example of a Jesus-loving business. I truly love what I do, and I am grateful that God gave me creative talents that I can share with everyone. My business has allowed me to celebrate my creativity by designing unique ears, and I am humbled at the opportunity to use my influence in the Disney community to share God's love with others. It seems silly that making Mickey Mouse ears would lead to sharing the love of God with others, but it has.

God can work through anything and anyone, including a kid with a hot glue gun making mouse ears on her living room floor. I can't wait to see what he does with Pinblossom in the future!

Pictures:

1. Floral Snitch Enamel Pin

2. Ashley, my beautiful friend and model, wearing the Mod Mickey Ears
3. Catherine, my beautiful friend and model, wearing the Aurora Flower Crown
4. Alaska, my beautiful new friend through Instagram, wearing the Galaxy's Edge Dark Side Ears
5. Ashley, my beautiful new friend through Instagram, wearing the Galaxy's Edge Light Side Ears



6. Alex and her mom, Helen, lovely fellow Disney fans, wearing their custom ears.

7. The custom ear hat featuring Agrabah and Genie

8. The Boo To You Pumpkin Ears for Halloween



9. The Stranger Trick or Treat Ears for Halloween



10. The Little Dory Mermaid and Tangled Up Ears from the Mashup Collection



11. The Coco Skellington Ears from the Mashup Collection and for Halloween

BIO:

Abby Garcia is the owner and artist of Pinblossom which was inspired by her love for Disney, crafts, and design. She is a native Texan and a senior undergraduate student majoring in Biology. She has too many favorite characters to count, but she does especially love Winnie the Pooh. She is also a proud Hufflepuff, and her favorite class at Hogwarts would be Care of Magical Creatures. She hopes to one day become a public health physician in preventative care to promote wellness at a population level. She also wants to live close to Disney World, become an annual passholder, and maybe even work for Disney one day. When she isn't studying or working on her business, she loves taking care of her plants, sewing backpacks, and spending time with her friends and family.

FRESH THYME – The Farmer’s Market – by Marcy Lytle

Do you go to the farmer’s market? I love to, but often don’t, just because of time...or perhaps I’ve already gone to the store. Some say the market sells their produce at higher prices, as well. I don’t know about that, as I’ve never compared. However, I do know that they often have produce and items I don’t see in the store, at all, and I absolutely love going and coming home with fresh ideas...as well as fresh produce!

Here are a few tips for shopping at farmers’ markets. They are so fun to shop in the fall months, especially, when the temps aren’t quite so hot while you shop!

Take a bag. Over on the TIPS page, I mention a small pouch I carry with me when we go to the farmer’s market. In that pouch is a huge bag that tumbles out and it holds so much! These bags are from IKEA. But you can totally carry a canvas bag, or a plastic grocery bag. It’s just fun to show up with your own bag, designated just for marketing!

Take a cooler. You might not be going home right after shopping, so in case you pick up fresh tamales or eggs, you might want to keep them cool until you do arrive home.

Try something new. We recently tried micro greens, little pads of tiny greens that are so tasty atop so many foods and sandwiches!

Take cash. You can use a card, for sure, but if you decide before you go that you’re only going to spend say \$50, then take the cash and stop when that cash is gone. This will keep you in budget.

Take a card. If the vendor has a card, pick it up and keep a folder or pouch with all of them inside. You’re going to discover a jelly or honey or lotion that you LOVE, and you’re going to kick yourself if you can’t remember who sold it.

Taste samples. If they’re offering, take them up on it! Fresh salsa is fun to try, along with those fresh breads and cookies that are offered. Sometimes, if you go early, you can taste and buy a treat for breakfast while you shop!

Treat yourself. Pick up a fancy bar of homemade soap, or freshly poured candle, one that will fill your home with fall scents and smiles.

Those are just seven little tips for shopping at the farmer’s market. If you add in a walk before or after, a stop at a coffee shop, and a country drive, you’ve got yourself an entire date or experience that you’ll want to do over and over again.

FRESH THYME – New Reality – by Marcy Lytle

I've been studying *worship* this year, looking at the word and the concept through all the books of the Bible. Verses I've read multiple times came alive in new ways. That's the cool thing about His word, it's always alive for each season of our lives, with new blooms and beauty to enjoy and take in. The verse that caught my attention this time was a familiar one:

Cast all your anxiety on Him, because he cares for you.

I had been reading about how obedience is part of worship. It's hard to have real fellowship with a holy God if we're being disobedient to what we know to be right and true. For example, if we hate our spouse or a friend at the moment, it might be a bit stifling and quite impossible to lift up a song of praise, thanking God for his greatness. Not because we're a bad person, but because hatred isn't something we're supposed to carry around!

Back to that verse. I hadn't really read the verse before it. It says this:

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

I began to ask myself, "Is holding on to my cares and not casting them over on Him being disobedient?" In other words, I felt that perhaps a bit of pride (and frustration) was keeping me from casting my cares on Him. I felt the need to humble myself under his mighty hand and surrender those things to which I held such a tight grip.

What? I'd always assumed that God had grace for my weakness in that area, and He does. However, I'd become accustomed to keeping my anxious heart and mind to myself, because in reality – I didn't trust him and I was disappointed in His ways. His ways don't always include removing the things that cause us worry, but rather showing up in the middle of it all to bring us peace. My insistent stomping of my feet at why in the world would this be His way had made me hold tightly to my anxious heart.

I don't know how to relay this realization, except to say that I – for the first time – feel as if maybe I can now move forward with some of the anxieties I carry with me daily. I'm barely beginning to understand these two verses coupled together, but I'm getting there.

I need to approach my Father in humility and realize that his hand is indeed mighty, that the truth is that he DOES care, and I can release my cares over to him, and let them go off of my weary shoulders.

It's never his intent for us to walk around with heavy feet, because of fears on our backs. In fact, carrying them just might be an act of disobedience. Ouch. That really hurts...his heart...and mine.

So just how do we actually cast those cares over on Him? I think we read His word and see these truths, ask Him for his help, and trust that He will gently unroll our fists and loosen the ties so the heaviness slides into his hands, and we are free...

He's great like that, our God. So longsuffering with us, our entire lives, as he reveals more and more of who he is so that we can truly worship Him in freedom.

FRESH THYME – Not in the Bahamas – by Marcy Lytle

We had a wreck last month, two days after our daughter had a wreck, and the other days of the week weren't so wonderful, either. However, we weren't hurt, and for that we were so grateful! It seems that in the middle of the chaotic and traumatic week, we were still so incredibly thankful to be alive and uninjured! Sometimes, wrecks end in all sorts of bad outcomes, sick people don't get well, and we feel there's nothing to give thanks for...not one thing!

I posted on my social media about the crappy week, because that's the way it felt, and how we were thankful for no injuries. Someone posted a comment that said something like well, at least you're not in the Bahamas. The commenter meant nothing bad, and nothing bad was taken from it, but I did think about that comment for days to come.

When a friend is suffering, no matter how small or little we deem the suffering to be, it's not very helpful to start a comment with "at least you're..." I remember when my mom passed away, after a very hard three weeks in the hospital with her, someone told me, "At least she didn't suffer long." And although that statement was true, it didn't ease my suffering and pain. And although I wasn't in the Bahamas losing everything in a hurricane last month, I was scared and traumatized by the rear-end collision and the collision my daughter was in, with her three kids.

On the flip side (isn't it a darn annoyance that there's always a flip side?) when we suffer a loss, it is good to realize the blessings in the middle of the loss. It is true that we were not in the Bahamas, and with that comparison our little collision was like a bump in the road. We still have our health and our home and our family and so much to give thanks for, even with a torn up rear-end on our car. But so often, we don't want to think about the blessings, because the pain is too present.

At first, I was a bit irritated by that comment, and by the comment that person said after my mom died. I'm sure I've made inappropriate comments to others as well, in their time of loss. And there have also been times I haven't known what to say at all, so I say nothing. That too can hurt.

The main thing I've been thinking about since our wreck is that everyone experiences life differently.

Those of us that have experienced hard lives as children can often be non-sympathetic toward others as adults and judge their "minor" troubles as insignificant.

Those of us that have had it "good" most of our lives, often react to fender-benders as if they're hurricanes.

But all of us can be tender towards the hurting, be kind to ourselves when we are the one hurting, and of course remember the good in the middle of loss.

No, I wasn't in the Bahamas and I'm so glad I wasn't.

Yes, I was in a wreck and it wasn't pleasant.

I hope I remember to keep my eyes from rolling when others complain about what I call a trivial disturbance in life, and that I only say kind things to them when I speak.

I hope I remember to give thanks when my disturbance is really trivial in life and that when others are less than sympathetic, I can laugh and move on.

Are you in the “Bahamas” hurricane of life? I’m so sorry for your loss, and I’m praying for total restoration and peace.

Were your fun plans ruined recently, but everything is now okay? I’m so sorry about that, too.

At least we weren't...

FRESH THYME – The Rehearsal – by Marcy Lytle

I'm one that rehearses.

Let me explain.

After we see a movie, I come home and while I'm getting ready for bed I rehearse every scene of the movie, even sometimes talking out loud about it in the bathroom. (My husband hears me sometimes...but he still loves me.) When we've enjoyed a particularly wonderful vacation, I rehearse our activities in a journal and in my mind, when we return home. I love to have good memories and stories etched into my brain so that I can recall them and relive them over and over again...because they're so great!

But recently, I realized that because I'm a "rehearser" I also have learned over the course of my life to rehearse the bad. Old wounds sometimes resurface in my mind and I think back over the situation and recall every detail. Thoughts and fears sometimes bombard my mind and I rehearse all of the what-ifs and "what happened last time" and I think back on the things that have occurred and start wondering and questioning and fretting, until I'm spiraling into the pit...of despair.

I just recently thought about this and how "rehearser" is really a great adjective to describe me. And while it's good that I rehearse the great memories and experiences, it's detrimental to take up that same practice with the bad stuff.

I'm sure that's why that verse about thinking on good things is in the Bible. In fact, those verses go on to say not only are we to think on what's good, but it should be noble, and lofty, and praiseworthy. This type of mind does not occur naturally.

Especially for we women that are moms, wives, sisters, daughters, ladies that carry burdens, nurture, give and love without limits. We will mostly likely always rehearse the sweet times with our kids, the wonderful visits when they stop by, the beautiful stories that we experience in the movies, and the lives of those we read about in books. However, when times are hard, worries are many, and our lists of concerns about kids and life and family and friends grow long, we tend to rehearse the bad. That rehearsing nature takes over, and sits on our shoulders like a load of bricks. When we've been hurt or disappointed or failed by those in our circle of friends, we make mental notes of those looks, the words that were said, and the actions taken, and we rehearse them, too!

The problem with rehearsing the bad is that the more we rehearse, it's like spreading mortar between those bricks on our shoulders until they become a permanent fixture of who we are, and a wall over which we cannot see.

The good about rehearsing the good is that those memories become rays of light that shine through every cloud on a dark and dreary day, even when storm clouds threat and downpours occur.

I hope that I can stop and ask myself daily, "What are you rehearsing?" And I hope that I can train myself to remove the bricks and look towards the light.

After all, rehearsals are scheduled so that the opening act of the play is engaging and amazing. And I'm pretty sure rehearsing the good will make for an excellent production with beautiful music and dancing that will be enjoyed by us all...



FRESH THYME