

A BUNDLE OF

TH  ME

APRIL 2018

TIPS

Seven 4 You - She Had Gum – by Marcy Lytle

“Can I have gum, Granny?” was the question every grandchild asked her (my sweet mom, that is.)

“Of course you can,” she’d answer as she opened her purse and handed an entire pack, for the child to choose a piece for herself.

Mom passed away about nine months ago, and I’ve realized now that my brother is now the one who carts around packages of gum, and my own grandkids now have learned to ask him for that stick of chewy goodness. And, of course, he too produces a pack for them to choose their own piece.

Another thing my mom carried around with her was loose change. Very often, the kids would gather around the table and she’d empty her purse of so many coins, we wondered how in the world she carried those heavy pieces in her bag! Each child got a handful of coins for their piggy bank and squealed like we adults do when we get a huge bonus at work...

Those small treats were one of the things that identified mom. Not only did she have gum and loose change, but she freely shared with the kids when they asked. She actually delighted in seeing their faces light up at these small treats that really didn’t amount to much value at all.

This memory made me think about what it is that I have in my purse that kids clamor to my side to receive, and it’s an iPhone! “Can I have your *pone*?” the youngest one asks, and I gladly hand it over, so he can play the free games I’ve downloaded for the kids’ pleasure.

I suppose all kids like to rummage through purses, don’t they? It’s fun to see what’s inside those bags that the ladies carry. Of course, there are personals not for others to view, but shouldn’t we always have something in our “bags” to share and give away?

1. What about a kind word? These are free and easy to share, with anyone who sits down next to us.
2. What about those coins? Those add up to dollars, and sometimes we can share those, too, with a friend in need.
3. What about a treat? Gum is something moms don’t usually provide, but grandmoms do. So what extra special something can we offer that those we meet don’t get elsewhere? Maybe a smile?
4. What about time? Just five minutes to listen to a story, or lend a hand, goes a long way.
5. What about an invitation? Asking her to lunch or to an event may be like giving her an Oscar.
6. What about a prayer? If she shares a need, offer to lighten her load by taking that need to Him.
7. What about hope? Hopelessness is rampant, and we have cups full of eternal hope. Pour it out.

I love those sweet memories of my mom handing out gum and coins to the children. It makes me think of that story where little kids were gathered around crowding Jesus, and his followers

tried to send them away, thinking they were a bother to their Master. However, Jesus became indignant at the disciples and invited the children to come closer and blessed them and brought them into his arms. He had love and compassion to give, and the children knew how to receive it.

I don't want to be afraid to ask my Father for a treat, because I know it's his good pleasure to bless me.

I also don't want to miss an opportunity to open my bag and find something to give to those asking of me...

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The Dressing – Spring Bags – by Marcy Lytle

Since there are two other stories on the TIPS page about purses, we thought why not complete the theme with spring bags this season! According to one source, it's all about moderation in our bags for Spring 2018. However, what I saw in the photos didn't look like moderate handbags. Either way you shop, in moderation or in lavish abundance of all things pretty, here are some of our favorite picks for your spring wardrobe.

Fringe crossbody – This cute bag is from Kohls, and it's got fringe, but it's not outrageously long, and there's not other "bling" to compete with it. It's a great color for spring/summer because it goes with every single outfit in your closet. Find a pair of sandals to match! This bag is from Kohls.

https://www.kohls.com/product/prd-2622422/sonoma-goods-for-life-lexy-fringed-crossbody-bag.jsp?ci_mcc=ci&utm_campaign=CLASSIC%20%26%20MC%20HB&utm_medium=CSE&utm_source=google&utm_product=77413397&CID=shopping15&utm_campaignid=204517412&gclid=EAlaIqobChMlssC6_5vg2QIVSrXACH05mQSyEAQYAiABEgIrkPD_BwE&gclid=CIODm4Wc4NkCFZAXAQod5E4L0A

The straw bag – These are everywhere, in all shapes and sizes. Check out this straw bag from Urban Outfitters with the colorful lining. You can carry this as a purse out shopping, or to the beach, as well, when the weather warms up! (I found the cute bag pictured above at an antique store for nine bucks!)

<https://www.urbanoutfitters.com/shop/circle-handle-straw-bucket-bag?category=bags-wallets-for-women&color=014>

The Bird – Isn't this the cutest? Love, love this handbag from Modcloth. How can this be anything but the best to add to your wardrobe this spring? A bird, a cute chain, and it's small enough to fit in your larger tote if you need to carry both!

<https://www.modcloth.com/shop/accessories/perfectly-perched-suede-bag/157030.html>

Bucket bag – Isn't this floral bucket bag in a black background gorgeous? It's from Zara, and I can imagine carrying it with white tshirts, jeans and strappy black sandals. Or any solid color shirt, for that matter! A great price, too...

<https://www.zara.com/us/en/bucket-bag-with-floral-embroidery-p12040304.html?v1=5697517&v2=358019>

Hobo bag in red – This triangular hobo bag is found at Steinmart, and we're loving the red color for spring and summer. Red is a great accent in both your bag and your shoes, as it's a staple color to have for this season!

<https://www.steinmart.com/product/alexis+triangle+slouchy+hobo+bag+64460462.do>

Wicker – Similar to the straw, yet so different, this bag is found at Zara. It looks like a mini picnic basket, doesn't it? Find yourself a pair of neutral slides and you're good to go for a day out shopping or lunch with a friend at a restaurant – or on a blanket!

<https://www.zara.com/us/en/wicker-handbag-p12342304.html?v1=5321721&v2=819022>

Satchel bag – Look at this pretty teal satchel bag with the tan woven front pocket from Modcloth! It's so pretty, and looks so great for this spring and summer. Wear it against florals or solids, whatever you feel like!

<https://www.modcloth.com/shop/accessories/authentically-academic-bag/154476.html>

When is the last time you bought a new purse, one that wasn't black or brown, just because? This spring look around and find one to carry with you for that special occasion, that afternoon at the mall, or for any reason at all!

Selah's Style – She's Turning 5

Since Selah's cousin Ayla is turning 5 this month, we are featuring her style up close and personal! Ayla lives in Hutto, Texas with her older brother Gideon (he's 6 ½) and her little brother Augie (he just turned 3). Being the only girl in her family (beside her mom) is tough sometimes, especially when most of her parents' friends also have boys! However, Ayla has one special friend Madeline, and you'll see her below.

Here's Ayla's style:

The Romper – Ayla loves comfort, so this cute romper from Old Navy is just the thing for playing on playgrounds in the spring with her brothers. Check out the new shoes from Ayla's Nanny, Lee. They sparkle when she moves her feet!

Bare Shoulder – Who says only adults can wear this style? Ayla asked for a dress with bare shoulders, and finally she got one! It's one of her favorite styles for the spring season, a must for all girls! The friend in the photo is Madeline.

Jellies and a Jacket – On cool days, Ayla wears her jacket for outdoors, but enjoys the jellies on her feet. She has jellies in more than one color, as they are easy to wear, comfy, and fit so snugly and nice!

Messy Hair and Leggings – If she can, Ayla prefers the air-dried look, where she wakes up, stands in front of her box fan, and lets her hair just "fly" into place. And when she wears her spring dresses, she sometimes add leggings to keep her legs from freezing.

Ayla enjoys fashion, but most of all she loves being fancy free. Her fashion rules are:

1. Nothing scratchy.
2. Blue is the new pink.
3. New shoes rule.
4. Dresses are best.
5. Be yourself.

Enjoy your spring as you venture out in the breezes, the sunshine, in a swing, or just playing with your friends...and remember...smile! That's the best accessory to wear!

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In the Kitchen – Spring Night Fun – by Marcy Lytle

We recently had a couple over for fun – a party to watch the Oscars. It's one of my favorite things to do, from planning the menu, to decorating the table, to setting out the food...to eating it with friends! I'm always on the hunt (on the internet, in magazines, or just perusing my fridge) for new ideas and tasty combos for a reason to have guests over to enjoy.

It's officially spring now, and we can start hosting guests at our table outdoors...or indoors...with all sorts of fun foods that don't include hot soups or heavy casseroles.

Check out five of our faves from that night we had fun:

Baked brie on a board –

- 3 sheets frozen phyllo (8X14 inches) thawed
- 1 T melted butter
- 1 wheel Brie (6oz)
- 1 sprig thyme
- 1 T honey
- Candied walnuts, grapes, crackers

Lightly brush each phyllo sheet with butter, stack the phyllo on a baking sheet, and place the cheese wheel in the center. Top with the sprig of thyme. Fold up phyllo to mostly cover cheese, pinching phyllo together where it overlaps. Brush top of phyllo with rest of butter. Bake at 400 degrees until golden, about 15 minutes.

Transfer to a platter (or a large cutting board!), drizzle with honey. Serve with the nuts (I found candied pecans at my store), grapes and crackers (your choice).

Delish...and pretty!

Black Pepper Caramel & Cashew Popcorn

- 4 cups lightly salted popcorn
- 1 ½ cups roasted salted cashews
- ½ cup sugar
- 2 T butter

In large bowl, toss the popcorn and cashews. In nonstick skillet stir in sugar and 2 T water over low (leave it alone – don't stir). Cook until sugar bubbles and turns amber, about 5 minutes (I found it took longer than this – and make sure the skillet is heating evenly). Swirl butter into caramel, fold caramel into popcorn mixture, and season with black pepper.

Serve in cute little popcorn bags or set out in a bowl for grabbing...

Grilled Cheese Sandwiches with Shallot Jam

- 7 T butter at room temp

- 1 T olive oil
- 1 ½ cups thinly sliced shallots
- 2 tsp brown sugar (packed light)
- ½ cup red wine
- 2 T balsamic vinegar
- 10 slices sourdough
- 10 oz sharp cheddar sliced

In large skillet, heat 2 T butter and the oil over med heat. Add the shallots and sugar, season, and cook until shallots are browned, about 8-10 minutes, stirring some. Add the wine and the vinegar, cook and stir til the liquid evaporates, another 8 min or so. Let the shallot jam cool.

Place a rimmed baking sheet in a 450 degree oven. Spread remaining butter on both sides of bread, spread 1 T shallot jam on half of the bread slices, top with the cheese and other bread slices. Place on another rimmed baking sheet. Place the heated sheet on top of the sandwiches and weight down with a cast iron skillet, bake 5 minutes. Carefully lift (should come loose easily if bread is buttered well) skillet and top sheet and flip the sandwiches. Replace sheet and skillet and bake til cheese melts and bread is toasted, another 5 min or so. Remove the skillet and sheet, let cool 5 minutes. Cut and enjoy...

These come out so crispy and perfect!

Cornmeal crusted onion rings and BBQ mayo

- 3 cups vegetable oil
- 1 cup cornmeal
- ¾ cup milk
- ¼ cup cornstarch
- 1 tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp cayenne
- 1 large onion sliced ½ inch thick, separated into rings
- ½ cup mayo
- ¼ cup BBQ sauce

In a pot, heat oil over medium heat. Do this first, so the oil gets hot.

In a bowl, whisk next 5 ingredients, season. Coat onion rings in batter, fry in batches (don't overcrowd pot) and drain on paper towels (about 3 minutes in the oil). Mix mayo with BBQ sauce, and serve for dipping!

I loved these – they came out so crunchy and light.

Berry Lemon Sparklers

- 1 ½ pints raspberries and/or blackberries, save some for garnish
- 1 1/3 cups sugar

- 2 cups lemon juice (from 8 lemons)
- Ice
- Seltzer
- Mint sprigs

In a medium bowl, mash the berries with the sugar and let stand 10 minutes (reserving a few berries for garnish). Stir in $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water, then strain into a large pitcher, pressing with spoon to extract the juice. Stir in the lemon juice and more water to fill pitcher.

Fill glasses halfway with ice, pour about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way up with the mixture, then top with a splash of seltzer, and stir.

Garnish with berries and a mint sprig.

So springlike and refreshing!

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Tried and True – Essentials – by Marcy Lytle

Our purses are our life...aren't they? They house secrets, necessities, personal info, receipts, our phones and our glasses, etc. We just cannot function without our purses, or something that carries everything we might need on any given moment. What I used to carry in my purse is not the same as what I carry now. No longer is there a need for those "time of the month" items, checkbooks are really a thing of the past, and a wallet with pictures – when was the last time we saw that?

I thought it would be fun to share some essentials I carry in my purse today, an older and wiser woman, one that has progressed and changed in my needs and my stashes. I'm not listing the obvious, like the phone and the glasses – those are the two biggies. But I am sharing other things that have ended up in my purse, and I've been so thankful that they live there. And by the way, I used to carry tiny purses, but I just don't any more...phones are too big...and the first item below is, too.

Water – As we age, so I hear, we forget to stay hydrated. We don't get as thirsty, so we forget to drink enough water throughout the day. I love having a water bottle standing up on the side of my big bag. It reminds me to take a sip often, throughout my day, until the bottle is gone. Yeah, it's a little heavy, but that motivates me to drink it dry. (I'm trying to switch to a glass bottle instead, but I just haven't yet!)

Lip softener – I found this Sephora almond lip balm that feels like the bomb on my lips! There's nothing worse than being out about town and having cracked lips as the months get warmer. This balm is really the best I've ever had.

<https://www.sephora.com/product/lip-balm-scrub-P415438?skuld=1835354>

Lip gloss – I used to not carry any lip color or stain, but I'm thinking that I need it now. My makeup wears thin by the end of the day, my skin isn't tan anymore (not from the sun, anyway!) and so a little color on top of the balm never hurt anyone. In fact, it makes me feel like smiling.

A large pen – These are in the bins near the front at Michaels. They are awesomely large and easy to find when you're digging through your purse – even in the dark – in the theater- when it's time to sign that bill for the food you've purchased. And they're so darn cute, in all sorts of patterns and colors!

A Bandaid – I know, moms of little kids probably carry Band-aids all the time but I hadn't for years. However, I love knowing I have one, should a cuticle start bleeding, or if he cuts his finger on the car seat moving mechanism (happened recently!). A Bandaid takes up no room, and it WILL come in handy for you...or someone near you.

Safety pin – I have shirts that gap open sometimes in the front, I've had bra straps snap loose, and I've come apart at the seams, and had no repair anywhere near before. A safety pin is a life saver in the purse, while you're traveling, and in the car. Again, for you or a friend. If a friend needs one and you have it, she'll love you forever.

Kleenex – Didn't use to carry these, but now I do. If I sneeze in a movie, forget to grab a napkin, or experience allergies that make my nose run (3/4 of the year where I live!) I have a stash of these to grab. And...if grandkids are with me, their noses are always running, aren't they? So I have a wipe in hand!

The card organizer – maybe you already have one and have carried this for years. But this kind with the slots that leave each card visible is my favorite. I also like that it can fit down in a larger pouch. When I need to pay, I don't have to scramble through a pile of cards, dig in the bottom of a pouch, or fumble through my purse – this little sleek number is easy to find. It's also a quick carry when I switch to a smaller bag for a nice evening out.

Mirror – Isn't this circular orange mirror cute (see above)? It's from Avon. It has a clip and hangs on my purse or pouch inside, for easy finding. It's for applying that lip gloss mentioned above. I'm not as adept as it as I used to be, and sometimes my eye makeup gets smeared, as well! So a little mirror is good for those fixups when things get messed up.

What do you carry as must-haves in your bag? Has that list changed over the years? There are so many things we stash inside that become clutter, from receipts, to magazine pages, to loose change, to half-eaten granola bars, and our purses become a dumping ground, don't they? Try setting one day a week as a time to clean out and replenish...your essentials, that is.

HOME

Practical Parenting – We’re Talented – by Marcy Lytle

We were putting together a puzzle at her tiny white vanity, because her little brother had taken the puzzle apart, and it had to be restored, you know... I knelt down to be at her level, while I watched her eyes and hands work together quickly to put across the edges, the corners, and the pieces, and I tried to fit in a few myself.

“You’re really great at putting together puzzles,” I commented, as I looked at her and smiled, because she was wearing one of her dress-up gowns.

“Princesses are talented. I’m a princess. I’m talented.” She shrugged her shoulders when she answered, as if to look at me and say – don’t you realize that – duh!

Parenting isn’t all about teaching our kids to be clones of ourselves, extensions of our dreams, or polite little adults at age three. Sometimes, parenting can be about learning from them. One of the best things I’ve ever observed and tried to learn from children is their unawareness of those around them. It’s why they dance freely, wear what they want, and (unfortunately sometimes) say whatever comes to mind. We can learn from that.

However, on this particular day I smiled at this little girl’s confidence in her ability to do things well. Somewhere along her short span of life so far, she had learned that princesses are “all that” and more. They have talents, and that’s the truth. Therefore, since she was wearing a princess dress it stood to reason that she, too, had talents. There was no wondering about it, no questions to answer, just plain and simple living and being – in all of the glory and talent that comes with being a princess.

Moms feel like so much less than princesses most of the time, don’t we? We’ve spent the night up and down with kids, we’ve served three meals to a bunch of *ungratefuls*, we’ve cleaned and scraped and fallen into bed at night exhausted. If our kids are grown, we’ve given to our kids and their kids, prayed for them endlessly and given advice when asked, and we sometimes feel old and neglected and overused, don’t we? Being a mom rarely makes us feel like donning a princess gown, much less reveling in our talents.

However, on that one morning, kneeling by my daughter’s little girl, I smiled and I admired her strong sense of who she was – a girl with talents to put a puzzle together by herself – each piece in its perfect place. And pretty soon she had the complete picture emerge and the puzzle was complete.

We’re no different, and we need to believe it. If it requires dressing up for a date once in a while (whether he notices or not), shopping for something new like a daring hat or a pair of heels, then we need to do it. And we need to sit down and observe our children, no matter their ages, and watch them at work. We need to realize that we’ve been putting together pieces for a few years or a few decades, and we’ve become quite adept at watching them fit into their places. And it’s all because we are princesses.

Yes, there’s a verse that says...

The King's daughter is all glorious within... (Psalm 45:13)

This means we are talented because we belong to Him, talented enough to take the pieces he's given us in our little families and with his guidance and oversight put them into place, so that a beautiful picture emerges. Oh, it might take placing one and then moving it around, or setting one aside until more of the picture emerges, but the puzzle will come together.

And when someone peers over our shoulder and comments about the beauty of what they see, we can also shrug our shoulders and say, along with Ayla, "I'm a princess. Princesses are talented." Don't you get it?

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I Don't Do Teens – It's a Big Deal – by Marcy Lytle

What's important to our teens is usually not understood by us as parents. Somehow, we forget what it's like to be a teenager and therefore we downplay and belittle those things that are huge and monstrous in their eyes. And sometimes, when we downplay that which is huge, we hurt our kids' feelings, when all they needed was a little validation.

Of course, there are times when our kids are totally manipulating us and we know it. This article isn't about those times. We're going to address those other things, like...

Zits – Is that what they still call them? My mother used to call them blemishes. But they're a big deal. A small red bump might as well be a huge red ball that someone has affixed to the forehead of our sons and daughters! They especially grieve and lose their peace if this zit appears right before prom night, or hours before a date. These small red spots can send a perfectly well-rounded teen to the bedroom for the evening, and they are definitely a big deal.

Clothes – Many of our kids are super concerned about their outward appearance. They like to have something new and something cool to wear from time to time. I had one child that was content to wear whatever...and the other one wanted specialty name brands. What is a parent to do about this big deal? Is what they wear really all that important?

Weight – Kids get bullied and teased if they are overweight, and even underweight. Other kids are just mean. There are often hidden reasons behind why our kids are not at a healthy weight. Sometimes, it's due to negligence in taking care of their bodies, and other times it's due to issues that cannot be controlled. But weight is definitely a weighty matter!

Grades – Kids are going to compare. After all, adults still compare, don't they? Comparison breeds discontent and envy, and if our kids aren't doing as well as their peers, they going to be frustrated and feel bad about themselves. And sometimes our especially smart kids even get teased for the good grades they receive. Big deal, these grades our kids receive!

Depression – It's sad to note, and even more horrifying to realize, just how many teens are committing suicide these days due to depression. For whatever reason (and there are many), our teens feel down and depressed and become withdrawn and afraid, all of which can spiral down to a pit of severe discouragement for the whole family, with no idea of how to pull them up. But we can't ignore depression. It's real, and it's a big deal.

Those are just five things that our teens consider to be huge in their lives. And it's a good thing for parents to note the top five things their kids consider to be big deals, from time to time. We can for sure open our eyes and observe our kids and their actions, and probably make a list of five items easily.

What can we do to help make these big deals manageable and small, so that our kids can stand tall?

1. **Listen to them and validate their fears.** If zits are bothersome, take them to find just the best meds or creams to treat. Talk to them about laughing about zits too, because

every teen has those red bumps pop up at one time or another. Allow them to stay in, if they're too self-conscious. Lean in towards grace and understanding.

2. **Give them a budget, and then let them buy what they want.** If he wants to spend his entire \$100 on two shirts that cost a bit more but he enjoys, let him go for it. And if she wants to take her \$100 and sift through the secondhand store for treasures, praise her good taste. Help them allot a portion of their own pay at work for clothes. Use the big deal of clothes shopping as a good lesson in managing money well.
3. **Set an example of good nutrition for the family.** Provide healthy snacks, ridding the house of sodas and candy. Let those be once in a while treats. Be active, as a family. If the entire family lives on Cheetos and hours on the sofa, our kids don't stand a chance. Get help, if this big deal is too big to handle. And if health issues are the cause, encourage your kids and help them through. Pray with them, and encourage them daily.
4. **Make a plan** for kids that struggle with grades, and loosen up if grades are too big of a deal because of pressure from above (you.) All kids are not going to make all A's all the time. And we shouldn't expect them too. Grades are big deals for colleges, we all know, but they're not big enough to cause undue stress. Meet each of your teens where they are, and encourage their strengths, teach them to ask for help, and congratulate them on doing their best – even if that's a C.
5. **Pray daily**, even with your teens. Families should never discount the power of prayer and His Word over the mind and emotions. There is power in prayer and power in the Word of Truth about who we are and who He is in our lives. And if depression is still a big deal, seek help, without a hint of embarrassment or shame in that seeking.

The best thing we can do as parents is observe and connect, and care and be generous with our time, our love, and His grace – for these big deals in our kids' lives. We have big deals, too, like paying bills on time, our own weight issues, and marital struggles. But if we notice their big deals and lend a hand, perhaps ours won't seem so big when we see our kids thrive and survive in this other big deal called life.

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Life as We Know It - 18 and Counting – by Erica Simmons

Every month that I sit down to write this article, I struggle against the overwhelming desire to just throw up all over this blank page. To just unload all the good, the bad and the ugly. Then I gather myself and put together a pretty little story that's all neat and tidy. *The problem?* Life is not neat and tidy. It is messy. And parenting is even messier. Daily, I am trying to teach individuals with their own wills how to make choices and decisions today that will not negatively impact their lives years later. I struggle with the unseen or unheard judgment others might have when reading my stories. Today, for this story, I am not going to let any of that stop me.

The number 18 has been filled with laughter, an excited sense of independence, frustration, anger and doubt, but so were years 1 thru 17. Let's start with the laughter. The build up to 18 was filled with the boys anticipating being adults and indulging in some "freedoms" of adulthood. I, being the loving and kind mother that I wanted to be, was the first to let them indulge. Now turning 18 is a time to celebrate, and what better way than with some champagne. I buy them each a bottle and have it nicely wrapped in their fancy bags. After we get home from their birthday celebration, I have them close their eyes, place a wine glass and a bag in front of each one of them. The looks on their faces will be one I will cherish, especially when they reach in and pull out a champagne bottle filled with candy. Priceless. They were good sports about it, though.

One message that both the boys communicated clearly to me in words and deeds has been their desire to spread their wings and have more independence. I have already been uninvited to a doctor's appointment by Jordan, who wanted to go by himself because he could. I am not free to attend the others. Another way is they wanted to be independent was by establishing their credit. This one was hard for me, as I have battled back from poor financial decisions. The hardest part of it all has been trying to balance what I want and making sure they understand how to go about doing things the right way. That is a decision that's already had a bump in the road.

Jerimiah came into my room and talked to me about how one of his friends was not getting along with her mother and she wanted Jerimiah to help her get a cell phone, independent of her mother. My immediate response was, "No way." Then I realized that I have to teach them to make choices themselves, not make choices for them. So I told him he would have to make that decision and think about the pros and cons. That was on a weekend, and a couple days later I was told he had made his decision to go ahead and help her. What I was not told was that he had already gotten the phone and used his brand new credit card to charge the fees. When I found out, I made *livid* look like smiles and laughter. The plan was she was going to pay the card down on that Saturday, but it did not work out that way. The good news is he took responsibility and paid the card off, as well as learned a valuable lesson. I learned a lesson too. New rule: once a decision is made by my boys, they have to come tell me the plan.

Jordan is so fierce. He locked his keys in his car. It happened on the day that two friends and I were out enjoying our annual birthday lunch. For whatever reason, my phone did not ring and by the time I realized he was trying to call, I could not reach him. Fearful something had happened, I rushed home just in time to see Jordan exiting the house with a white hanger. He told me that he locked his keys in the car, it was \$75 for a locksmith, and he was going to get them out himself. He was so frustrated with me for not answering that he was not in the mood to listen to me about calling for roadside assistance. About three hours and an anxiety attack later, we had

his car unlocked. He was determined to call the insurance company himself and fight the battle alone. He said he wanted to do it alone, but I felt it was more because he thought he had to. He still battles the lies of the enemy that were established early in his childhood, because I was away with Jerimiah dealing with his early medical issues.

As I look at my children and some of the choices they have made, I begin to question the point of living my life as an example if they are not going to follow it. The Holy Spirit told me two things:

1. My life choices should be for my Heavenly Father, and...
2. It is an example for them, no matter what path they travel. I have to trust the Lord that all things work together for good for those who love Him.

They do love Him, and hearing them talk about when they move out and Jordan saying the location has to be close enough so they can still go to church, warms my heart to no end.

The 18th year has brought with it some new areas of growth, but I have been in this long enough to know if I have faith, everything will be just fine.

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Tiny Living – What It’s Really Like – by Leyanne Enterline

A year and a half in, and we’re still living tiny. Time flies! And I am beginning to feel like the walls are closing in a bit...

This season the boys played football, basketball and baseball, sometimes all in the same week! That is a lot of stinky dirty clothes filling up their room and the laundry bin. I usually try to wait and go to my parents once a week to do laundry, but with that many sports I need to go a little more. (I’m sure my parents are getting annoyed as well.) I thought by now I’d have some sort of solution to the laundry issue, but I don’t quite yet.

One regret I have with this trailer is that I wish we would have gotten one with a washer and dryer! *What were we thinking?* I can deal with having no dishwasher, but laundry without a washer is a tough one. I should just get a wash bin and scrub clothes the *olden way!* I have plenty of trees to hang a line on and dry our clothes. Now that’s a thought!

With the walls closing in and the weather being so rainy lately, we’ve really been trying to have some sort of activity going. The boys get outside as long as it’s not pouring. Rain boots are worn and the boys have been making the best of our strange weather by digging up earth worms for hours! Luckily, baseball has indoor facilities, so the boys have been able to still get their energy out with sports, and this enables us all to get out of the same small space!

We play lots of games, and the boys are getting quite good at a card game I learned with my family growing up. We just got internet, finally! It took them 60 days to get it out to the boonies apparently! We’re just in Spicewood, Texas - not in the middle of the jungle! So strange! After internet hookup, we were lucky to see some of the Olympics as a family.

Living so tiny, I do feel that maybe a few more arguments break out than normal but they also must be solved quickly, because there’s no place to hide out! We know where everyone is! Stomping away and storming off doesn’t go over well, because we take five steps and we’re in a different room but we can still see each other.

I thought moving out to the country would encourage me to want to entertain more, because the trailer has an outdoor kitchen which would be fun for grilling, having a fire and hanging out. However, if guests don’t want to hang out outside, with such a tiny space and our guests inside, we are too crammed. Our living area is also the eating area, so we maybe fit six people on the couch comfortably, but only four can actually eat without bumping elbows. I do miss having a bit more space to entertain.

Tiny living with a family has been such an interesting journey. I think the boys look forward even more to our house/pet sitting gigs to get out and have some more room to play!

However, we are so blessed to have a space of our own and will embrace this tiny living until I crack!

A Night to Remember – Eggs and Jesus –by Marcy Lytle

Plastic eggs. Have you seen just about enough of them? There's always the dilemma of what to do with them once Easter is over and they've been broken open, and all of the candy and coins have been spilled out and enjoyed! How about using those plastic eggs for a family devo! No, not another lesson on the crucifixion or the resurrection – that was last month's story. Read on, gather your leftover eggs, and call the family together.

Preparation: *Let the kids gather the materials: a large bowl of water, placed on an outside table or blanket where the family can gather, a few plastic Easter eggs that are open, and a small toy figure. Also, you'll need a few battery operated tea lights (from the Dollar Store).*

Miracles in the water – Peter was in the boat and saw Jesus out on the water. Jesus called to Peter to come to him, but that would require Peter walking on water! He stepped out of the boat and saw the waves and started to sink, but then...he looked up and saw Jesus. He walked right to him. His faith and Jesus' faithfulness enabled Peter to do the impossible. (Matthew 14:22-33)

Place one half of an Easter egg in the water so that it floats like a boat, and place a little figure inside. Have someone call to that figure, as Jesus called to Jesus, and demonstrate the miracle on the water. Talk about how if Jesus calls us, he will empower us.

My cup overflows – Psalm 23:5 says God prepares a table before us, even with enemies all around. He then anoints our head with oil and our cup overflows. Why do you think God says our cup overflows instead of our swimming pool overflows? He wants us to daily come to him and ask him for what we need, and then hold up our cup (our hearts of faith) and let him fill us.

Ask each kid to scoop water and pour it out, demonstrating how God constantly fills us up with his love, we pour it out on others, and he fills us up once again. His supply never runs dry.

Give and it shall be given – Did you know that we are told in the Bible that it's better and we are more blessed if we give, rather than receive? It's true! As we give what we have been given, God makes sure that we are given right back – more than we gave away! (Luke 6:38) God's bowl of goodness is never empty!

Have one child pour water into another child's empty cup, and that one into another, and so on, continuing to dip in the full bowl for the first one's pour.

Broken hearts – Did you know God says he is near to the brokenhearted? It's in Psalm 34:18. When we are sad and our hearts feel broken and sad, He is right there beside us whispering and singing of his love in our ears and into our hearts. He's also the Master at mending broken hearts, too!

Put two halves of Easter eggs together and talk about how sometimes our hearts get broken – from loss of a pet, a family member, a game, doing poorly on a test, losing a friend (let kids name more). Ask each kid to break open the egg to show how our hearts break in two. Pray together for the broken hearted, and then put the eggs back together.

Light of the world – John 8:12 says that Jesus is the light of the world. We know that he came to bring us all life, as well! When we believe in Him, repent of our sin, and ask him to become our Savior, we carry his life and light with us.

Let each child place a battery operated tea light (turned on) inside their egg, and snap it shut. Turn off the lights and sing a song together about Jesus' love – or light – or life!

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The Family Practice - Growing Up – by Brandi Oman

When we are children we can't wait to grow up! We see our parents and believe they walk on water, we want their "freedoms," and the idea of being a grown up is just too cool. As a teenager we want the independence of driving a car, making our own money, and hanging out with friends without our parents having to keep a tight leash on us. Then the day comes when we turn 18 and we may become a bit bold-headed believing we are adults now because a law says so and we are all grown up! (Everyone can laugh now...)

Then the day comes when you find out you are pregnant! These next 9 months will quickly show you how not grown up you are and how much you have left to grow up. The biggest kicker is when that baby shows up. You don't magically know everything that is going to take place for the rest of your life.

I was 19 when I had Caiden and I thought I had it all together. I had a decent job for an adolescent without a college education, I worked full-time at a credit union making \$12 bucks an hour, I had a car, my own apartment, and I paid bills. This was what my 19-year-old brain considered to be a grown up, responsible adult. When Caiden came, I had a switch turn on in my life. 12 dollars an hour doesn't even cover one box of diapers, not to mention that those diapers would be depleted in one week! Kids need health insurance... and that too costs a pretty penny. Formula at that time was 23 dollars a carton. The formula was also depleted in a week, and I still had to feed myself throughout all of this.

News flash! I needed to grow up...fast!

I began with learning the ins and outs of having an infant. My infant grew up to a toddler, to a little boy, and now he is a big boy! Do you think I am grown up? No, I am not!

Each stage of my child's life is a new stage in my life as well. Caiden is in elementary school and he wants me at a minimal distance. That part alone is hard as I must learn a healthy balance of letting him go, but not too far. Caiden has a friend who lives next door. We started with allowing Caiden and his friend to play outside in the front yard with the parents of both parties keeping a close watch. Now they love to run from one house to the other to play with one another. Yes, my nerves are cautious, but I know Caiden is safe. This was huge for me as I had to let go a little, but he is enjoying the freedoms he is given. His friend rides the bus, and for months Caiden has been begging to ride the bus, too. I finally met the bus driver and allowed my boy to get on. I did cry because it means he is growing up and my life is changing ... yet again.

I'm guessing this is what God feels with us sometimes. He wants to hold on to us so tight so he can keep us safe, but he must let go sometimes to allow us to have our free will. We always come back to him, even though sometimes we may stray for a little while. Our relationship with our Father is always shifting, changing, and growing up.

Allow yourself to grow up with your child and don't beat yourself up for not doing everything by the book as you do...

YOU

Under the Influence – No Guilt – by Marcy Lytle

I've often been asked why I don't attend certain events that others expect me to attend i.e. women's events at my church. Some say, "You're going to miss a blessing if you don't come!" However, I know I won't miss a blessing, because I'm already blessed, just by knowing Him. It wasn't always that way, though. Sometimes, I used to cower and avoid and feel bad and carry guilt, because I didn't go and do whatever everyone else was doing.

One day, my pastor was with me when others were talking about events and happenings, and the subject came up again about how I don't go to weekend retreats. My pastor came to my defense, as he said these life-giving words to me, "She doesn't have to go to everything." I knew that, but hearing him affirm that truth set me free. I had grown up thinking I had to please people, show up to everything, or sit in a corner and feel bad about myself if I didn't.

Recently, another woman pulled me aside to ask me once again, "I was wondering...why don't you go to the ladies retreats?" But this friend wanted to know my answer, because she too didn't go, but felt bad for not doing so. When I shared my story and my freedom and how it's okay to not do what everyone else is doing because "you're going to miss a blessing" she sighed the biggest sigh of relief, and said, "Thank you."

I knew how she felt, because it was the way I felt when I had been told the same thing years before, and I was able to lay that burden down.

We women carry all sorts of undue weights on our shoulders that no one really placed there, but we think we have to carry because of what others are doing and saying, and how they're looking at us.

We are not going to miss out on any of God's blessings if we don't do like all the other women do.

There is no guilt or shame in staying home to be with our families, if leaving on a weekend is not our wish.

We should never point a finger at her because she isn't like us, in any shape or form.

When we host an event, we want people to show up. I get it, oh I do. I've hosted many. And I've measured my value by how many people come. And that stinks. I love it that my friends (including my own daughter) absolutely have the time of their lives at ladies events and outings away from their husbands and homes, on any given weekend.

We're all different. We all have different likes and dislikes. And God made us that way, uniquely designed, but all in his image, reflecting the many colors of his great love for us all.

I don't want to be the friend who pulls and prods my friend to do what she doesn't want to do.

And no one wants to be the friend who's being pulled and prodded by that other friend.

We come under the influence of what others are doing every day, and we have this choice.

- We can follow suit because it's what we want to do.
- We can follow suit because we're pressured and feel guilty if we don't.
- We can say no, and cry and feel guilty for days for doing that.
- We can say no, and feel completely okay and enjoy ourselves while the others do what they do.

I don't go to weekend retreats (I know you're wondering...) because I enjoy the weekends to play and go out with my husband, and I need that respite. And I don't enjoy large groups of women. I enjoy one-on-one lunches with friends.

See, there's no big revelation about why I don't go. It's no secret. And there's nothing wrong with my reason.

And I feel so good to be telling you so...

I hope you do, too.

Under the Influence – Hurt Skews by Marcy Lytle

I've been hurt.

You've been hurt.

We've all been hurt.

Sometimes, our hurts are self-inflicted like when we allow our own issues to flare up and we act out, and then later we realize no one really hurt us – we hurt ourselves.

Sometimes, our hurts are totally inflicted upon us by others who are downright mean, like when we are mistreated, abused, or neglected, and those hurts are just awful.

Sometimes, our hurts are perceived because of our own expectations, and the person(s) that hurt us has no idea and had no intention of inflicting a wound into our soul.

Hurts happen. And we can't deny them or overlook them, but we certainly can't lug them around with us when they occur. That suitcase is heavy and full of dirty clothes, so to speak, that need to be shaken out, washed, and hung out to dry – in the sun – where all impurities can be burned away.

One of the ways hurts end up hurting us more than the original action is that they skew our vision.

If we are hurt at a spouse and harbor unforgiveness, we see every little thing he/she does as purposeful and ugly. That one unforgiven act becomes a cloud over us that turns all that was once sunny into the total obscurity of gray and fog.

If we are hurt at a friend for an action or non-action, and we decide to write off that person instead of letting the hurt go, we are choosing to wear glasses that are covered in scratches. Have you ever worn such a pair? Nothing looks right, and it becomes so painful to look through them, so we toss them aside until we find a new pair.

If we are hurt at someone and that person has no idea that they've hurt us, we are carrying around double baggage. It's like our eyes are tearing up like the way they do when we're cutting onions, and we're then wiping our eyes with the same fingers that touched the onion! Ouch!

Any way we want to view it, hurts skew our vision. We can be told a truth and completely miss it, because we've decided that what we believe supersedes anything else that can be said. We can be in the presence of the person who hurt us and see their stare across the room right past us as a dismissal of our presence, when in actuality she might not have her contacts on, and just might be unable to see past three feet in front of her. I once had a friend become so upset at another friend for that very thing. She had waved down the hall, and the friend didn't wave back. It wasn't until much later that it was realized the friend who didn't wave didn't have on her glasses!

Hurt is baggage, it's a scratch, a cloud, and it's a pain that has to experience healing before we can move on without limping or squinting.

Physical hurts require ointment to rid us of infection. Jesus' love is the ointment of the soul.

Physical hurts require time for the healing process to take place. Be patient with yourselves and others and allow as much time as you need for your soul to soar again.

Physical hurts require protection for a season. Peeling back a scab before its ready is sometimes the worst – and can leave a scar! Hide in the protection of his covering – the Rock that's solid and sure – and then emerge unscathed and whole.

Whatever your hurt is, and whatever mine is, I hope we both will realize the danger and the harm in staying hurt forever. No one wants to see badly, as it causes us to stumble and fall, sometimes hurting ourselves again and again.

Psalm 147:3

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

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Created for Life - The Magnificence of People – by Ginny Hurley

To realize that every person ever born was created in the image of God is mind boggling. Genesis tells us that we carry the DNA of Adam. Each new baby born carries a place for God in his heart. We know that we must be born anew in Christ Jesus in order to live in His Kingdom on earth and in heaven. Every human has his or her destiny hidden in Christ before they are ever conceived. He is not willing that any perish. He loves completely and is the Person of LOVE.

Yet, in His infinite longing for a relationship with us, His love dictates that we get to choose to know Him or not. We can't choose our families, but His intention for families is to make us feel safe, vital, and adored within these relationships. In many instances mistakes and failures cause us to deny His goodness and remove us from the very place of love He intended. We then join the world in our misunderstanding of a good Father and His unconditional love. The fact that God is with us in every circumstance, yet never makes us choose what is right, is sadly forgotten in our quest to be free from these entanglements. We often take justice into our own hands and refuse to forgive others because we think God should make people act kind and loving. Our hearts grow hard and we are blinded to how much He loves us. We say we love God and worship very happily... without these other people spoiling our devotion...

However, believers are in a season right now where the presence of God is our focus. The call of Moses' heart was to know Him and not to go anywhere unless God moved with him. The church, or I should say Body of Christ, is yearning for this Presence, having seen a glimpse of His goodness. Seeking God with our whole heart, mind, and body moves heaven and causes great activity in the spirit realm. Atmospheres change and worship abounds! It is truly glorious!

As I was pondering this, I asked the Lord how I could show Him my devotion. I felt like I heard Him say,

“I love people! All people!
Whenever you are with someone,
My heart's cry is that you love them!
When you love people,
you are loving Me!”

I recall a popular teaching on having boundaries with people, and I believe this teaching has caused some to use this excuse to keep people at bay. In other words, it's okay to keep people out of *my* space. They are pressing my boundaries and I don't like it. Either they are scary, or they're not my type...

Another teaching is that we can only really have three to five friends. Others we can keep at bay. Don't let them get too close, or we will be overcome with their issues and problems! We use the idea that Jesus only had 12 close friends to make us feel better when we exclude people and ignore the very ones God loves! A friend is still a friend whether closely intimate or farther away from our heart.

God wants us to be a friend to the friendless.

Friendship and community with people is God's idea! He absolutely adores it! Friends loving friends! Friends loving strangers! People actually seeing others as uniquely wonderful and created for something good, changes cultures and nations! To love someone with heavenly love is to see them from His perspective. If we really take time to value someone that we don't know or don't think we want to know, can change both our destinies forever!

I treasure the thought that the older I get, my garden of friends grows more profusely. A lifetime of loving people gives us hearts filled with great joy and gratitude! That is one core reason He chose to go to the cross; to bring us back into relationship. Now, I can say in full gratitude that I have friends that I have walked with in different seasons of my life and in different places on the map. Each one has enriched my life in a unique way, and I care deeply for each relationship.

Some are lifetime friendships that I would not trade for anything.
Some are new friends that I have met along the way.
Some were discovered easily.
Some took time and effort.
Some were in school.
Some were gained at work.
Many came flying into my life through God's great wisdom!

But each one has a special place in my heart. I don't always agree with each one, and I know for a fact that I am often way off their radar! We love each other anyway because a friend loves at all times.

Friendships are like stars in the sky. Some are stunningly bright, while others are glowing faintly; yet as a whole they unfold as a canopy of beauty over our lives every single night! Jesus is the Person of Love and in Him is no darkness at all! People are His most valuable gift, His lights in a world full of darkness. Jesus came as Savior, and one of His most precious names is Friend, forever.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. It is shining brighter as we come closer to the end.

Greater love has no man, than to lay down his life for his friend!

Healthy Habits – Those Veggies – by Marcy Lytle

We all know we're supposed to eat them, and we do, if we have to. I happen to love veggies, but it's so easy to grab chips or a soda instead of a carrot or a celery stick. I want someone else to cut them up, prepare them for me, and present veggies to me in a tasty way...don't you? Isn't it interesting that lots of kiddos shun veggies and opt for colored candies and salty snacks, as well?

There are so many varieties of veggies and ways to cook them now, so there really is no excuse for not adding more to our diets. But still, we struggle.

This month we thought we'd suggest just simple switches for heading on the right path of those foods that are really good for our bodies.

Spinach – This leafy green has a super impressive nutrient profile! Try buying a bag each week at the grocery store and using it for salad, wilting it in a pan and topping with pine nuts, or placing on your sandwich instead of cheese!

Carrots – These too are packed with good stuff like vitamin A and C, beta-carotene, and potassium. Buy these in bulk and cut them into sticks and rounds, before you put them away. (You do not have to peel them!) This way you'll be less tempted to pass them by when you're craving a crunchy snack. Place them in your lunch instead of chips. Honestly, the crunch is really what you're craving – not the salty chips.

Broccoli – Eating this cute little tree-like veggie can help prevent chronic diseases! Have you tried roasting the florets alongside other veggies on a sheet tray? Just drizzle with olive oil and Italian seasonings and let the broccoli almost get crispy. So good!

Red Cabbage – This veggie is full of antioxidants and is super heart-healthy. If you don't like cutting up cabbage, buy it already shredded in a bag. Mix red cabbage, hazelnuts and apples to make a delicious salad with a vinegar and oil dressing. Yum!

Green peas – My husband refuses to eat these, but I once fooled him with guacamole made with green peas! Seriously! While you're googling that recipe, click on this link for green pea hummus!

<https://www.marthastewart.com/1050267/fresh-pea-hummus>

Brussels Sprouts (yep, it's Brussels, not Brussel) – This veggie can enhance detoxification! Some people will not eat these little tiny cabbages because of the bitter taste. But did you know that if you saute' them with a bit of brown sugar, instead of boiling them, it offsets the bitterness? Use a bit of olive oil to keep them from sticking but yeah – add brown sugar!

If you are short on time, buy veggies pre-cut.

If you don't how to cook them, spend one hour on the internet and search!

If you're addicted to anything non-veggie, rid your house of those things!

If you think your family will disown you, think again.

Whatever you do this month, try adding more veggies to your list of food choices. And don't just make them the same old way you've always done – try something new – add in flavor – and enjoy the color!

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Get Fruity – The Two E’s - by Gabbi Crowhurst

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” Galatians 5:22-23

Hi everyone! This month, I went a little bit out of order and focused on self-control, rather than gentleness. To be quite honest, it was because I totally forgot about the word gentleness, and thought my fruit for this month was self-control. BUT, I think God was working in that because it was exactly what I needed during this period of my life.

If you’re like me, you hear the word self-control and part of you wants nothing to do with it. And, for me, it’s not because I’m unwilling to work hard, or push myself, or do difficult things. I consider myself to be a pretty motivated person. But self-control is not about doing hard things; it’s about doing the right things when you absolutely do not want to do them. Ways I have had to use self-control this month are in my *eating habits and in my emotions*.

I have been trying to get healthier since the beginning of 2018 by drinking more water and eating more natural foods and less fast food. I’ve made some drastic improvements by drinking so much more water on a daily basis, and I have incorporated many more fruits and veggies into my meals and snacks. What I struggled with, however, was consistency. I would have a solid three or four days of clean eating, and feel incredible and healthy and energized. But then, I would have days where I ate poorly for three meals in a row. I noticed myself feeling guilty and coming down on myself for eating badly, and not just because I want to be healthy, but because I was disappointed that I didn’t have the self-discipline. I found a verse that has really helped me in this particular struggle. 2 Timothy 1:7 says, “For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.” It was a reminder to me that the Holy Spirit gives me power to overcome all kinds of temptations, and the self-discipline to do so as well. Eating the right foods may seem like such a small problem to some people, even one which God doesn’t care about. But I believe God gives me power and self-control in all situations, so when I feel unmotivated, or want to reach for a Pop Tart instead of an apple, He gives me the ability to overcome what I want, and act in what I know is best for me.

Another area I was stretched in my self-control was in my emotions. As an individual, I’m not one to hold anything back—particularly what I’m thinking or feeling. Generally, when I have something to say, I will say it. However, in two different situations with friends I have had to learn that it’s not always beneficial or life-giving to share every thought and emotion. I have had to realize that there are certain things that require me to keep my judgements, personal hurts, or disagreements to myself. It is so hard. It feels unnatural! I have always wanted one person to know everything I was feeling and thinking—to just have one person that *truly* knew me. That was my desire. But this month, God put situations in my life where sharing my honest emotions hurt a relationship. I know now He was teaching me that I don’t have to be “fully known” by one individual, because *He* is the one who knows every part of me.

*My relationship with my Heavenly Father is special
because He is my one person
-my one confidant-
that knows every detail of my life, emotion I feel,
and thought that goes through my head.*

It was so freeing to be reminded that when I stop myself from causing conflict over a small hurt I had, I still have someone to talk to who feels my pain and knows how to give me the best advice. And that's Jesus.

I am so overwhelmed with thankfulness because I don't have to have the strength to do difficult things on my own. I don't even have to muster the force all on my own to show self-control. But in all things, the Lord promises to be my strength. The Spirit of the Living God is inside of me, giving me "power, love, and self-discipline." I can rely on Him for motivation, courage to do what's hard, and friendship to have someone support every step.

MARRIAGE

In This Together - Expectations – by Charissa Corbin

Well, we STILL have snow on the ground. I am starting to forget what grass looks like! Sooner or later, the snow will melt. In the meantime, we are doing our best to take advantage of the mounds of snow we have been “blessed” with this winter. This past weekend we decided to take our daughter sledding to the same hill we took her a year ago when she was only 5 months old.

I had great expectations!

I knew I would capture her smiling and giggling as she glided down the hill with Daddy... begging to go down the hill again. I thought maybe we would even have time to build a snowman, start a snowball fight, or make snow angels.

She hated it.

She cried the minute we put her in the sled and screamed the whole way down the hill. We gave her a minute to calm down, and then I tried going with her. Same thing happened. I attempted to set her down so we could play in the snow, and she cried. All she wanted was to be held and have absolutely nothing to do with the snow.

Have you ever been disappointed that your expectations were not met?

I tend to set expectations in all areas of my life – motherhood, my marriage, my family, friends, etc. When we got married, I expected we’d own a home at this point, but with my husband’s job we have traveled all over the nation every few years. We don’t own a home, but we have traveled more than most do in a lifetime and have seen some amazing places! When I was pregnant with my daughter, I expected I would make her wholesome, organic food every day. As much as I try to live up to that, I enjoy picking up some chicken nuggets from McDonald’s every now and then, and so does my daughter.

Setting expectations for yourself, others, and your future is good as long as you have the flexibility that they may change, or that the outcome may look different than what you initially imagined. As cliché as it sounds,

“Expect the unexpected.”

Disappointment comes from setting such strict expectations on something or someone, and that something or someone not meeting them. It is bound to happen. Once the disappointment passes, try and enjoy the unexpected or at least learn from it. Although my daughter had a terrible time in the snow, I felt like a kid again and sledded down the hill as many times as I wanted. It was glorious!

I pray our expectations will be met to the fullest; but when they are not, that we will learn, grow, and enjoy the unexpected.

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Date Night Fun – Monday Funday – by Marcy Lytle

Date nights do not always have to be at night...or on the weekend. We usually opt for the weekend because we can stay out late, the kids can stay up later with the sitter, and there is a lot to do in a town on the weekend! However, sometimes the best date night can be enjoyed on a Monday, after the weekend is over.

Vacation Day – If you are able, ask off for a Monday and plan an entire date day. Not only is it something to look forward to after the weekend is over, but you can get all of your cleaning and grocery shopping done on the weekend, and feel guiltless for a day off to play with your favorite person. It's a great day to get the kids off to school, and make it a day of breakfast out, a walk in the park, a bit of shopping for whatever, and a matinee movie. Try it!

Relax the Back – Mondays at work are usually the busiest, because we're trying to catch up and organize our week, and we end up at home tired and worn out. Same with our kids, Mondays really get us down! Make a plan for every person to settle down and get into bed early. Have the kids read or relax with music, while you two enjoy a spa for two before bedtime. Use lotion for feet rubs and back rubs, put on soothing music, and read to each other out loud. It might be a regular routine you'll want to do every week!

https://www.target.com/p/burt-s-bees-174-peppermint-foot-lotion-3-38oz/-/A-10798755?ref=tgt_adv_XS000000&AFID=google_pla_df&CPNG=PLA_Health+Beauty+Shopping&adgroup=SC_Health+Beauty&LID=700000001170770pgs&network=g&device=c&location=9028263&qclid=EAlaIqobChMI7uq38obs2QIVyLXACH0AAwoeEAQYBSABEqLwZPD_BwE&qclsrc=aw.ds

Lunch for Two – Since Mondays give us the blues, why not make that the day of week for lunch with him/her? If a picnic outside is an option, pack up these wraps and meet up under a tree on a blanket. Otherwise, have your own favorite restaurant that you can count on for fast service, an intimate booth, and good food! This date time is sure to be a favorite, as well!

<https://www.bettycrocker.com/menus-holidays-parties/mhplibrary/recipes/14-easy-wraps>

Coffee and a walk – I get it. My husband loves a good cup of coffee to wind down in the evening after a long day. And sometimes he just wants to sit. I love to walk and get away from the computer and hold his hand. Mondays are great nights for a visit to the Super Target for a cup of your fave, and a walk around the shopping center. If your kids need to come along, let them. But tell them it's a family date night for fun drinks and slow walks, hand in hand, looking at the lights of the stores and moon emerging in the sky. You might even want to skip back to the car, when your walk is over. Or have them bring flashlights and books to read in the back of the car, while you and he/she sip in the front, with quiet music in your ears.

In the Backyard – It's staying light a little longer, the breezes are still cool because summer isn't here yet, and we have backyards that sometimes we never enjoy because life is busy! However you can get out back (or front), do it on a Monday evening. Don't cook, don't clean, don't check emails, don't make phone calls, at least for two hours. Don't talk about projects and gripe about the state of the nation, just enjoy the atmosphere of the outdoors on a spring

evening. Order in, bring out the food, and eat together. Dance after dinner, toss a ball to each other, or even squirt each other with water guns. You'll get wet, you might get dirty, but bath time awaits you when you're back indoors.

There are all sorts of ways to incorporate date night on a Monday. If your weekend is too full of kids' and their sports, visiting relatives, cleaning and shopping, or working in the yard, Monday might be just the night for time alone or at least semi-alone together. Mark it on the calendar with a big smiley face and make it happen!

After 30 Years – His Clothes – by Marcy Lytle

When I first met my husband, over four decades ago now, he had just returned from another country with his family, where he had lived (his parents were missionaries) for several years – away from the fashion updates of America. His pants were a bit too short for my liking, but he didn't really have a place to shop or time to care about the latest and the cutest. His hair was parted way down on one side, and the straight blond strands fell across one eye. Besides that, he was in a wheelchair, because he'd suffered a terrible car accident.

I'd had my fill of those guys in high school that were dressed to please, walked with a strut, and thought they were God's gift to all women. So when I saw this other young man who wasn't interested in what he wore, but he was interested in me, I stopped in my tracks. Was I going to let his lack of style affect my beating heart...that was definitely beating faster when he was near?

It wasn't too long before he noticed his clothes were out of date, and you can imagine my amazement when he showed up one night in corduroys (yes, that was cute then!) – my heart beat even faster! And in addition to that, his hair was styled. I'm very much into visual stimulation, as shallow as that may seem, but he won me over. Of course, thankfully, I'd seen the inner guy before he changed to this cuter and finer outer guy!

Fast forward now over three decades, and he emerged from the closet the other day in a pair of pants that were too short. Not sure how they got that way or why they were in the closet, but I scoffed, made a remark that he needed to change, and he stood his ground. He was running late, it was what he had on, and he was leaving in those floodwater black trousers...much to my dismay.

All of a sudden, I had a flashback to when he wore those short pants when we first met, and how he didn't care then and he doesn't care now – about the picky preferences that I care about. And I absolutely fell in love all over again. I didn't like how he looked, but I loved how he sounded and his resolve to be confident even if he needed a couple more inches on the bottom.

I hope I can learn to be that confident one day, when my wrinkles show up a little too much around my lips, when those veins on my legs are a bit too visible, or when I look in the mirror and wonder why no one said anything about the hole under the arm of my sweater. I don't want to be aghast, fearful of what others think, or change how I look because of embarrassment over small things like a couple of inches on the ruler.

Over time, we can either become increasingly judgmental and demanding of our spouses, because they never quite make the grade...or we can become increasingly amazed and dumbfounded at how beautiful he/she is because they are comfortable in their own skin.

I'm pretty sure he threw those pants out when he returned home that night, but he had a good day all day, two inches too short, and so did I. I don't know if anyone saw the pants and whispered behind his back, and neither does he. But he didn't care.

His clothes. They're his to pick, to wear, and to enjoy. Mine are mine. And that is that.

ENCOURAGEMENT

Words of Wisdom - No Fear in Love – by Sofia Herrera

Many people say that you don't know a good thing until it's gone.

But what if you could know a good thing exactly when you have it?

To this day, I still remember my 8th grade year in middle school and my senior year in high school as being two of the best school years of my life. They weren't my best years because of the choices that I made, or what was going on around me in my life at the time, but rather about the people that I spent my time with and the moments I chose to cherish. In the short 18 ½ years that I've lived I have encountered many people, many of whom have been extremely important and valuable to me at specific times in my life whether or not they knew exactly what was going on behind the scenes. Countless times people have asked me,

"Sofia, how is it that you get along with so many people? How is it that you have so many friends? What's the secret?"

The truth is, there is no secret.

When I was in the 8th grade I met a friend that began to quickly mean a lot to me. Little did I know that this friend would become my best friend all throughout high school and (looking at things now) probably for the rest of my life. I had been bullied for the majority of my early middle school years, and when I met him it was like a breath of fresh air. I'd never met a boy of 14 who spoke so openly about God and who was so kind to others. Yes, we got picked on for secretly liking each other, and to this day we sometimes still get nabbed at. But from an early age I saw something in this person that I knew I couldn't let go of. Like any relationship, romantic or not, we have our ups and downs. And just because we're humans and we have our faults doesn't mean that the relationship needs to end. With everything that has happened throughout our friendship, both of us have been able to move forward and look past our adversity because we see the true character in one another; and we know that is bigger than whatever obstacle that could possibly stand in our way.

The goal as a Christian is to be more like Christ, so then we should be loving one another as he loved and is loving us. The Bible says,

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.
It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered,
it keeps no record of wrongs.
Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.
It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.
Love never fails."

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

The older I get the more I've come to realize that in relationships there will be disappointment, there will be anger, there will be hatred, obstacles, setbacks, mistakes, failure, downfall, the list goes on and on! But if we continue to focus on those obstacles, those relationships WILL FAIL! If I spend my time concentrating on all the disappointment, chaos, confusion, and even the faults of the other person in a relationship I will be a madhouse! And I will be the first to admit that I myself have fallen into times such as these where all I've focused on is the turmoil. But it's

done me no good. I decided from a very early age to love; love others for who they are to me, not based on what they've done, or for who they are to others.

Once I started to change my perspective it became easier to move past all the negative things within my relationships; and I was able to cherish those relationships so much more! I am able to see a good thing exactly when I have it. Because most of the time; once I push aside the front that people put up for "show" I am able to see them for all that they are, and that there are so many things to love about them.

It is so important to tell people the things that we do love about them, and to seek out and spend time on those relationships we deem valuable.

For me, I sometimes think of how great it would feel if someone were to tell me how much I mean to them. If that's the case, then why shouldn't I be telling the same things to others?

If you love someone, tell them.

If someone is on your mind and you hope they're doing well, tell them.

If a friendship falls out of touch and you want to rekindle it, reach out!

The bible says,

"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.

For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love."

1 John 4:18

THERE IS NO FEAR IN LOVE, so there's no reason to wait and keep that love to yourself. You never know when you're going to get the opportunity to tell that person exactly how you feel.

So go out and love relentlessly.....and who knows, it may even make their day.

Saddle Up - The Road Less Traveled – by Marcy Lytle

Nope, not there. I go to the next closet. Yep. That's where I put it. Gathering items for my last child's graduation table is rather bittersweet. At the moment I am not emotional as I am sad. I am frustrated as I cannot find where I put all the treasures that I have been saving for this time. I sit down. Wistfulness and nostalgia set in. My last child. She graduates in May. She will be an adult this summer. My last one.

Where has the time gone?

I spy a book of poetry, and a memory floods back to me from my senior year. Back in 1984 when I graduated high school, I received the distinction of being 2nd in my class of 750 graduates. I was a very serious student, and athletics and grades were important. I worked hard and thus achieved the above result. This came with a requirement of writing a speech and presenting it to my class at graduation. Speaking in front of others was not too fearful for me as I knew I would be prepared, based on what the counselor told the valedictorian and myself. As I was preparing my speech, I remembered a poem that was so special to me. It's by Robert Frost and called...

The Road Not Taken:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

I reflected on this poem once again at this point in my life. So many years have passed since I used that poem in my Salutatory address. Upon rereading it and thinking back, I realized that I had taken a road less traveled in a number of ways – not choosing a career path over staying home with my children, choosing home schooling, focusing on relationship and not things. (Side note: no judgment here for anyone that made choices

different than myself – it's just what I chose personally. God has each of us in the place we need to be in His kingdom for His greater purpose – AMEN!). I think the greatest of the ones that came to mind was the choice of home schooling. It was definitely a new road. No one in my family had chosen this road prior. I was questioned by so many along the way as to its value and worth.

As I look back now, 19 years later, that road is certainly well-trodden with huge potholes as well as smooth patches. As with anything, it was a true life challenge. Would I have chosen a different path now that I can look back on that particular path? Absolutely not. I have many reasons that I could list, but my main goal here is to challenge you with your path.

- Are you facing a choice as to which road to take?
- Are you on that road and in a pothole or cherishing a smooth patch for a bit?
- Are you at the end of the path and then looking on to another choice in direction?

Wherever you may be, know that your choices don't have to be made alone. You have a Father that helps you, guides you, directs you and leads you. I know that along my way on a path that was not well trodden, I sought my Lord on so many, many occasions.

- There were times of tears – both in distress and in joy.
- There were times of fear of failure.
- There were times of elation when one child made a great achievement.
- There were times of solitude when others around me did not share my joy of home schooling.
- There were times of peace when I know my Father was encouraging me through the laughter of my children as they played together.

Wherever you are with this right now, I encourage you to know that you are not alone. God is there WITH you. He is walking with you. As the poem about walking with Jesus goes, when there are just two footprints in the sand, God hasn't left you. That's when He is CARRYING you. Personally, I am at a time in my life when I have a number of paths that I have to choose from. I am resting in Him – waiting and listening.

Let your Father speak to you – He is there with you. He loves you.

Let Him love you and show you that perfect path.

Firmly Planted – The One Thing – by Dina Cavazos

Hello reader friends.....this may be rather short—short and simple, clean and concise—this is where I've been heading for several months now (maybe years?). If you've been with me the last few months, we've been walking through getting rid of baggage—needless things such as too many dishes, old grudges, and a thrift store addiction. I, and I hope you as well, have been nurturing a growing desire to focus on the main thing, the *one thing* that satisfies.

Maybe it has to do with growing older....time is passing quickly—what will I do with the time I have left? I came to a crossroad several years ago and I prayed that my remaining life would be purposeful. I felt the futility of pursuing comfort and nice things (not that there's anything wrong with those things, hear me!). But if those things are *first things*, then it's a life of emptiness. I believe God has been answering that prayer in his slow, patient way. He's showing me my purpose as I follow his leading to simplify and become freer to do acts of service.

The thing I've been doing the last month has kept me away from home a lot and I've had no time to finish the kitchen and no time to work in the garden—there are possessions and projects both inside and outside to reevaluate, a garage full of clutter, and many past-due garden chores. I'll soon be able to direct my attention back home with a renewed passion to reduce the stuff that burdens and weighs me down.

Along with the weight of possessions and projects I'm no longer called to bear, I'm aware of an internal battle that isn't so easily won. Jesus set me free and makes it possible to overcome the forces at work within and without but my part is to be vigilant and constantly depend on his power and grace. I love *stuff*—there's so much of it everywhere, and it's beautiful and tempting to possess! I love *entertainment*—movies, Words with Friends, drinks! I'm so thankful for God's goodness and the wonderful things he gives us, but they are not *first things*. I love my *friends and family*—but they hurt my feelings and disappoint sometimes. I want to handle it all graciously, lovingly. *Help me Lord.*

My life today is different than yesterday because God is real and alive and at work in me. I'm hearing his call and there's nothing more satisfying than following that. I encourage you to listen, and follow his call to you—it's the *first thing*, the *one thing* which satisfies. I leave you with a beautiful song that says it so well.

[Deliver Me-Audrey Assad](#)

Moving Forward - Lord, Don't You Care? – by Pam Charro

Mark 4:38 Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

I can't remember how many sleepless nights I've cried out to God in my storm. How could he just watch and do nothing? How could he expect me to believe he cared when this hurt so badly and there was no evidence he was doing anything about it? The pain has been very real, and sometimes it seemed it would last forever.

I wanted him to rescue me, but if he wasn't going to, for him to make me smarter than my dilemma. At least, if I could understand everything I could know I wasn't crazy. Unfortunately, both the pain and confusion remained.

I have often wondered what was wrong with me in that this God walk thing was so difficult. If I really trusted him, shouldn't life be relatively easy most of the time? I'm doing the best that I can so why does this hurt so much?

Only recently have I come to understand that I, along with everyone else in the world, am much more broken than I wanted to believe. I thought we could at least treat each other decently while God was working on the deep stuff. I didn't realize that God does so much of his best healing working on several people at a time, within relationships. It can seem pretty unfair sometimes. But God knows I might have to endure something for a long time before I discover my own need for transformation in it, and he won't deprive me of that opportunity to go deeper with him even when I object.

I am thankful for God's faithfulness in this trial. I still don't understand everything, and not all of my wounds are healed yet, but because I was forced at several turns to either believe him or lose faith, he has matured me and grown my faith and trust in Him. My goal is to be more surrendered to him in future difficulties, to not expect myself to have everything figured out in advance, and to grow in enjoying the journey.

He just loves that we're doing life together!

I am the daughter of a perfectly loving, all-knowing, positive, joyful God who is going to do something wonderful beyond comprehension with my pain. In this truth, I can rest.

Because he does care.

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Real Stories - The Big Move – by Sarah Shuck

One thing I have learned about myself over the years is that I usually take a while to fully commit to a major life change, sometimes even a small life change... So deciding to move with my family of four across the country to our home state of Michigan was no different.

My husband and I had moved to Texas shortly after college for different reasons about 14 years ago. We met at the church plant home group that I helped start and after five years of being friends and a bit of persuasion on his part, we married and started a family. For the past few years, we had considered buying a new home. We looked for a new house in Texas. We put together a wish list of what we wanted in a new home, but found that anything in our price range that began to meet our expectations was to be too far away from our church home and children's school. As our children grew, we wanted more space for them to run and explore. My husband had always dreamed of a spacious woodshop. In addition, I was missing the four seasons and being around my parents, siblings and extended family.

We sensed that we needed to make a change.

We had prayed for God to make clear what our direction should be and that we would find closed doors if the timing wasn't right.

Over the past three years, my husband had put a few applications out for various jobs that sounded interesting. As a public school teacher, he was considering making a vocation change if an opportunity came up. Nothing ever came of those applications and so we continued on. I had stayed home from my job as a public school teacher to be with kids. This last year I found myself ready to get back into a teaching and found a position at my daughter's school.

Then, a sequence of events shifted our momentum.

In Michigan, we had alerted people of our interest to find jobs and that if something ever arose and the timing was right, we would consider it. It was March of last year that my husband was called for a surprise interview from a Michigan school district very close to where we would be looking. Since he didn't have the correct certification though, that prospect fell through. But it got the ball rolling for both of us to see what it would take to get certified. I still remember when we actually had to put money into the process in April, and the small seriousness that it started. Could we have a different house with a yard? Could we maybe get the puppy we talked about? And the woodshop? What if, what if...? But also the reality of leaving so many dear people and places started to set in. The worst was the thought of leaving our one set of parents who had decided a while back to retire to Texas, but had become a wonderful oasis for us at their property and had given us amazing support. Nothing can replace them.

Still, up until May of last year, I was still uncertain. I remember that I told people that it was only a possibility and that we have nothing for certain at all. There was no resigning of our current teaching positions. There was even minimal talk about it because it just wasn't for sure.

We just kept stepping through the doors that God seemed to be opening.

And through this, there was a sense of peace even though the uncertainty was agonizing!

Around the middle of May 2017, there became an issue about a certain table saw that my husband was given the opportunity to purchase at a really good price. This was an amazing table saw that he would LOVE to have in his future woodshop, if he were to ever have space for it. There would be no chance to use it in the space where we were living at that time. And I remember looking at him, and saying, "If we are really going to make this move; and we are doing it in faith that everything will work out, then you need to get this saw."

That was the big huge shift in my soul. At that moment, we had to agree together to take the step out over the ledge of the unknown and completely trust God. We couldn't be certain of jobs or a house or anything. But we said yes. And so for me, it really happened at the moment that we chose to buy John Pound's table saw. Still in my mind's eye, I can see where we were standing when we had that conversation – in our back yard - near our blackberry bushes.

After that, things very much feel like a blur. We finished school, prepared our house, resigned our jobs and within a week, I had a call for a job interview. I did a video interview and that same day, they called me back and wanted me to teach a lesson for them as a 2nd interview – in Michigan. So we scooped up some stuff, took our pop-up camper and drove two vehicles up, with the intention of leaving the camper and one vehicle. Our house was listed on the same day that we left Texas, and within two days we had a full price offer on the house. I taught for my interview and was offered the job the next day. We drove back, having made the deal to sell the house, I had a job, and we had two weeks to pack and move!

Once we arrived in Michigan, my husband had three interviews set up, and the first one offered him a job that would pay almost comparable to what he made in Texas. He took it. During this time, we were also looking for houses that would split the difference between our two jobs. We found one on our second day out with our realtor that checked off every item on, not only our needs list, but on our wish list. It offered the amazing space and trees that we wanted, has a pool, backs up to a river, and has the woodshop of my husband's dreams.

All of this truly has felt like the guidance and leading of God, in the way that all of the parts fell into place when they needed to. Jobs and houses and location, all had to come together.

Only our Heavenly Father who sees everything;

and cares about the details, could order these things.

I feel His favor when I look outside over the river and watch an eagle fly. I sense His peace as my children run outside and get muddy. And I see His graciousness on my husband's face when he gets a chance to create something out of wood, out of something that God has already created.

FRESH THYME

FRESH THYME – All In – by Marcy Lytle

I remember watching my son at age 2 hunt for Easter eggs. He walked out in the grass beside by dad's house which was left just high enough for hunting, my son saw an egg – and into his basket it went. The funniest thing was when his basket got a bit full, one egg went in, and one fell out. But he was completely unaware that he was losing eggs faster he was filling his basket. It was so funny!

I thought of this scene as Easter was approaching and I recalled that saying, "Don't put all your eggs in one basket," so I looked up the origin. The origin isn't known for sure, but the meaning is clear. We think we should cover ourselves in all areas, and not rely on one source for everything we need. In other words, it might be good financial advice to not sink an entire savings into a house, but rather to divvy it out in several safe markets, to draw a good dividend.

However, it seems this way of thinking permeates other areas of our lives, besides just finances. For example, people put their faith in God, but spread it out in other things as well, like good karma, feng shui, wishing stones, the universe, and all sorts of other good-feeling places and actions, just so we're "covered" in case one doesn't do the full job. It's just like putting all of our eggs in one basket – we don't want to do that – just in case our eggs (our lives) can hatch into something amazing elsewhere.

This can be so dangerous.

It's not dangerous to move your bed to a more comfortable position in a room, or to write a wish upon a rock. Our entire family wrote prayers on rocks when my mom was ill, and placed them in a prayer garden. And it's not awful to think what goes out comes back – like karma. The Bible even speaks of giving and it will be given back to us.

However, when we place our eggs in too many spots and our faith becomes diversified so that we diminish God's power in our lives, it's not a good thing.

If we move our beds and furniture around and think we are somehow causing spirits of peace to enter our house, or if we write wishes on rocks and hope the earth receives them, or we call upon the universe to be kind to us, we are scattering too many eggs and pretty soon our basket will be completely empty and void of any life at all...except the temporary kind.

There's this verse that says God is jealous over us (James 4:5). This is not the jealousy we experience when we want what someone else has, that's envy. Because we belong to Him, he is jealous (protective) over us so that we thrive, live, survive, and experience everything he has for us on earth...and after we're gone. He requires our full faith, not a piece of it.

In other words, he wants us to place ALL of our eggs into his basket, and his basket, alone. When his children wandered in the wilderness and placed their trust in idols that they built with their hands, His anger and jealousy was aroused – not because he was puffing up his power – but because he was grieved at their disobedience and what that would do to their walk. He was leading them to the promise land. And diversifying their trust was only leading them to destruction.

There are lots of good ideas out there and good sayings and even some good found in other lines of thinking, but we have to be careful that we aren't taking what's in our basket of faith (perhaps disappointment and frustration with unanswered prayers) and placing it elsewhere, or allowing it to fall to the ground, to be swallowed up by that high grass in which we're walking.

Is your basket full? Have you allowed eggs to fall out? Are you even looking for life anymore, or are you just watching others?

Consider placing ALL OF YOUR EGGS of faith and trust back in the basket where they belong, in the full goodness and mercy of a heavenly Father that meets ALL OF YOUR NEEDS – not just some of them – when you trust and obey.

#

FRESH THYME - Little Prayers – by Marcy Lytle

He prays to find his keys because he's about to be late for a very important meeting at work, and all he has time for is a whisper – and he suddenly remembers that he left them in his coat pocket. Awesome, he nods upward.

She prays for a parking space because it's raining and the kids are screaming, and oh she needs one up close so badly – and there it is! *Thank you* is her heartfelt response.

Haven't you done this? We might call them little prayers, because they're not life/death matters. They're just mundane things in our lives that make or break our day. And so we pray. We whisper. We give thanks when the lost item is found or the space becomes free, and we have a little spring in our step because of it.

Are there such things as little and big prayers? I mean, does God hear those giant prayers for health and hope more than he does for keys and spaces? Or does he even hear those little prayers, and is it just a coincidence when we suddenly remember and they decide to move?

Prayer is one of those tricky things we're told to do (without ceasing!) and yet we often don't really get it, at all. We hope he hears and so we ask, but does he really concern himself with those small things that get in our way when we're in a hurry or frustrated and frazzled?

I think he does. I believe he hears every prayer. I know he's concerned over every little thing that concerns us. After all, we are his children and he is our father.

This I know, that God hears our hearts. And he answers us according to His best and what we need.

He loves it when we talk to Him, even when we've lost our keys.

There are some who never bother God with the small things and only beg Him to move when there are big obstacles that appear, like tornadoes, loss of jobs, or loss of life. God hears their cries.

There are some who bother God constantly with every small thing, like what paint to choose for the remodel, which dress to wear to the party, and what food to buy at the store. God hears those bothers.

But I think the happiest praying folks of all are the ones who just talk to him and listen, and obey what he says, and trust that he knows.

If he says yes and they find the keys, they are elated and happy. And if the keys remain lost forever, they are content and make new ones.

If he moves that car and they pull in, they give thanks for that wish that is granted. But if that car sits there all day and they have to walk in the rain, they put up the umbrella and go, knowing He is with them.

It's hard to explain prayer and how we can *get* the hand of God to move in our favor. The truth is that the hand of God is always in our favor – it sent His son to die for us – and that favor has been with us since we first believed.

Little prayers, big prayers, long prayers and short prayers, he hears them all. And his hand is moving, always. Maybe not in a swipe to change the screen upon which we are gazing, but with a gentle touch to cause us to pause and wait as we rest in the knowing that He's there and He's for us, never against us...

FRESH THYME – Once in a While - by Marcy Lytle

People leave.

We leave churches. We leave relationships. We leave cities. We leave jobs. We're a people on the move from one place to another for various reasons, some of which are good, and some of which are not so good at all.

When parents leave families, kids may ask the rest of their lives, "Why did my dad abandon me?"

When friends leave churches, there's so much chatter asking, "Why did they leave?"

When coworkers exit jobs they've had for years, the other workers query, "What happened?"

My husband and I were discussing this very thing just the other day, about how when people leave, the question is always the same, "Why did they go?" "What's wrong with where they were?" "I wonder if I should go, as well?"

We recently experienced a mass exodus of folks with whom we've gone to church with for years, due to lots of changes happening around us. But no one has asked us, "Why are you staying?"

We, and other couples like us, have been married for decades, and very rarely are we quizzed with questions like, "What makes you guys stay together for so many years?"

Everyone wants to know why things break up, fall apart, and move away...just in case there's something horrible they're missing as well...and they need to go too! When we find out he left because he'd "outgrown" her, we begin to wonder if we too are outgrowing our spouse. When friends move on because and don't say good-bye we begin to speculate about the "problems" they must have seen that we don't see, and we start to drift away as well. It's something that is interesting and peculiar (isn't it?), the fact that we notice, we ask, and we wonder about the leaving...

But we don't notice, don't think to ask, and rarely wonder about the staying.

I'd rather know why people are sticking with a good thing rather than exiting, I'd love to hear their heart, their vision of why they stay and don't leave...rather than all the woes of why they're leaving...wouldn't you?

Sometimes, it's funny to observe all of us and why we do what we do. I wish someone would ask me why I'm staying with my husband instead of leaving him, now that the kids are grown. I'd tell them that my love for him has grown stronger because of my relationship with Jesus. HE enables me to stay. I wish a friend would ask me why I stayed instead of exiting my church when changes occurred, and I'd tell them because I like change, change is good, and I'm excited for the newness that is coming. I wish another would ask why I've stayed put in one city for my entire life instead of moving around, and I'd answer that traveling is great fun (to me) but I prefer a home base near my kids and my parents.

There's absolutely nothing wrong with change. We too left a church many decades ago, and people wondered why we did. There's nothing wrong with asking why people are leaving, going, and not staying.

But once in a while, it might be fun and interesting and enlightening to know why people stay. It might be that we need to stay a while longer as well, and consider our reason for exiting, at least once in a while...

Under the Influence - It's Not the Pot... by Marcy Lytle

Or is it?

I have seen some of the prettiest blooming flowers in the ugliest of pots and thought the garden was beautiful. I've also seen pretty pots along store fronts with scraggly plants, and have not been impressed at all. The pot is not what's seen – it's the blooms profusely vibrant in color and size that attract the eye and make us want to linger for a snapshot to take away with us.

So why is it that we spend the majority of our grooming time trying to improve and prolong the beauty of the skin in which we live? I'm all for taking care of ourselves to our best abilities, but I've been curious lately to compare my grooming time in front of the mirror to my time spent on the blooms I'm producing in my relationship with Him and others.

Here's what I mean:

Procedures to erase our real age are available over our lunch breaks. We recently watched the Oscars, and I noticed how round and full some of the cheeks were on the ladies, when just a few inches below sat their wrinkled neck. It seems like an awfully tiresome job (and expensive) to keep up an anti-aging schedule, when aging will not relent.

So what if we undergo procedures of the heart so that our anger and bitterness that are growing old with us are cut out, and blooms of forgiveness and joy are seen instead?

Lotions and potions abound, in order to make our skin supple, tanned, without blemish, and hydrated. This is great, and necessary. I enjoy a bit of tanning lotion myself now that spring is here and legs are bare, and lotion is vital to helping out with dry skin! I get it!

But what if we soak in his presence a bit more, linger at his feet a while longer, and emerge with this softened heart to hear the cry of the hungry and hurting around us? Wouldn't that be awesome?

Clothes that hide belly bulge, sleeves that cover flabby arms, hair products that thicken and glisten – they're on shelves all around town! I shop for anything that makes me look better than I look when standing naked in front of the mirror, don't you? It's what we do, so that we look our best.

Consider asking Him to clothe us in kindness, increase our faith in his goodness, and allow ourselves to be vulnerable so the least of those can approach us and see...Him...not us.

Some of the coolest vessels out there are cracked, old, and misshapen, and yet they house the most amazing vines and flowers and color. In fact, these are the ones that make those who pass by stop and say, "How awesome, look at that!" And those large painted pots along sidewalks with heat-stricken leaves and dry dirt cause those who look on to say, "That's so sad-looking."

We're not going to stop trying to make ourselves look good on the outside, most likely until we're dead and gone. But we can try our best to remember to work on the inside and allow the profuse blooms to be what people see, instead of the few wrinkles on our faces.

Go on, get your hands in the dirt and start planting seeds in the clay pot in which you live.