

A BUNDLE OF

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**MARCH 2019**

# TIPS

## **Seven for You – Check These Out – by Marcy Lytle**

I feel sorry for so many brick and mortar businesses, I really do! There are so many that are closing, and I'm reading that it's partly due to online sales. These storefronts just can't compete with the ease and availability of shopping online. I totally get that. I too shop online at Christmas and during the year more than I ever used to. And I enjoy browsing the internet to see what's new and interesting. However, I LOVE going to the physical stores, as well!

For this month of March, I thought it would be fun to share my newest and favorite websites or apps that I frequent often, and why I do! Maybe next month, I'll share my favorite shops where I show up in person to buy.

**Thrillist.** This is actually something I signed up for, to receive in my email. I know...another email. However, this site sends lists of all kinds. "Best tacos" or "the most quaint towns in each state" or "things to do this weekend" and it's all centered around where YOU live. You can just visit the site or sign up to have it visit you. I use this often for inspiration! <https://www.thrillist.com/>

**Lakeside Collections.** This is one of those mail order catalog sites, but the thing I like about their options are that they are affordable, I've liked every item I've ordered, and they're dependable and fast! There are really cute kids' toys and yard décor and even kitchen items. Just click through and shop, and I think you'll like it too. <https://www.lakeside.com/homels>

**Texas Escapes.** If you don't live in Texas, I hope you have a similar site for your state. It's a site where you can search for towns and up will pop the history and interesting information. We use this site often when going on road trips. We pick several small towns, search, and print out the story of its origin and try to find the old buildings pictured on the site. It's great fun! <http://www.texasescapes.com/>

**Cinemark App** – If you attend a lot of movies, you'll want this app on your phone. It's only \$8.99 a month and there are all sorts of perks involved. You can order tickets on line and have no convenience fee added, and you get free tickets and points, and discounts on concessions. It's really user friendly once you figure out how to purchase, to show the code to the ticket taker, and how to use your other code for snacks! <https://www.cinemark.com/movieclub>

**Duluth Trading Company** – Love this site for the guys. I bought my husband several items from this site for Christmas and he loves each one. Mainly, I like the workshop tools and gear links. Check out all the categories. One favorite from Christmas was the grapefruit hand lotion! <https://www.duluthtrading.com/workshop-and-gear/>

**Kelsey Nixon** – This is a young lady that used to have a cooking show on the Food Network and that gave her a name. I follow her on Instagram, but she has a website too. She cooks and organizes and shares all of her tips and tricks. She has two little kids and has just a very pleasant way of spreading cheer and good stuff with women everywhere! She's a fun follow. <http://www.kelseynixon.com/>

**The Book of the Month Club** – One of my gifts from Christmas was that my husband signed me up for this book club where for \$14.99 a month I get to choose from five options, and receive a hardbound book of my choice (I'm not a fan of Kindle – I like paper in my hand!) in a cute box, with a bookmark around the first week of every month! I have received three books so far and am loving my collection. Not sure what I'll do with them all once they're read though...maybe have a book swap! <https://www.bookofthemonth.com/>

What are your favorite websites or apps or places you like to browse? I try to pare down to just the ones I really love every once in a while, so that I'm actually using them for good and not having them use me for wasting time! I hope you click and check them out, too!

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## **The Dressing – So, It's Spring! – by Marcy Lytle**

It's so fun, in my opinion, to see what new trends are popping up each season. Some of them are outlandish and most of us wouldn't wear them to the places we usually go. Others are so pretty and a great idea to try, if we love fashion and all things clothes. I love all of it! I love seeing what new ideas are being presented on the runway and then adjusting them to fit my own wardrobe and closet. There are lots of new trends for 2019, but here are a few of my personal faves:

**Pale Blue** – This color is in for spring and we found this pretty blouse from H&M that looks crisp, stylish and comfy. If you look closely, it's a small stripe. It ties at the waist and would look cute with so many colors on the bottom – from jeans to khaki to black – and more!

[https://www2.hm.com/en\\_us/productpage.0745816001.html](https://www2.hm.com/en_us/productpage.0745816001.html)

**Scarf print** – I love scarves, so this idea of a scarf print in a dress is so cool! Check out this beauty. It's long-sleeved but lightweight. Great for those spring lunches or weddings or evenings out with him. Do you love it, too? It too is from H&M.

[https://www2.hm.com/en\\_us/productpage.0766324001.html](https://www2.hm.com/en_us/productpage.0766324001.html)

**Ruffled blouse** – I'm not a fan of lots of ruffles, but just a few are okay and look great. Check out this pretty floral print with a small ruffle on the shoulders. Super pretty and feminine for your spring wardrobe! This one is from Old Navy.

<https://oldnavy.gap.com/browse/product.do?pid=393950012&cid=1105426&pcid=10018>

**Color block** - Yes, it's back. And we LOVE this color block sweater in black and white from Target. It's paired with a green skirt, and we love that as well! This sweater will go with everything in your closet! (need pic)

<https://www.target.com/p/women-s-elbow-sleeve-color-block-pullover-sweater-who-what-wear-153-black/-/A-54201218?preselect=54138228#lnk=sametab>

**Crochet** - I'm not a huge fan of crochet, maybe because I wore it in the 70's? But it's back, and this really pretty top from Maurice's is just crocheted in the front. It comes in this beautiful marigold hue, and what a great top for spring!

[https://www.maurices.com/product/solid-crocheted-front-tee/107181?ref\\_page=search#color/C3855](https://www.maurices.com/product/solid-crocheted-front-tee/107181?ref_page=search#color/C3855)

**Polka Dot** – Yes, those little cute dots are showing up this spring. Check out this blouse with a subtle ruffled sleeve in a beautiful color – gold rush - for the season. It can be found at Dillards!

[https://www.dillards.com/p/jolt-polka-dot-ruffle-sleeve-tie-front-top/508817897?di=05660210\\_zi\\_gold\\_rush](https://www.dillards.com/p/jolt-polka-dot-ruffle-sleeve-tie-front-top/508817897?di=05660210_zi_gold_rush)

**Natural Bag** – One trend is neutral hues top to bottom. We love this natural box bag from Zara. It just screams, “Spring!” It’s not large, so you’ll want to pare down and just carry the essentials to lunch or out for a day of shopping. It comes in two options!

<https://www.zara.com/us/en/natural-handbag-p12624004.html?v1=7887699&v2=1180507>

You can always keep a bright cardigan and tights on standby for those chilly mornings, as pictured above...to wear with a new dress that’s for the new season. (That one is from Francesca’s!)

What pieces are you adding to your wardrobe this spring? What pieces will you keep? Will you try one of the trends or stick to your core traditions? Why not consider doing both? Spring is all about the new shoots and blooms and leaves appearing, so let the new you spring forth as well.

## **Selah's Style – On the Playground – by Marcy Lytle**

Spring break is this month, and kids will be out playing (hopefully) if the weather cooperates. It's that time of year to venture back to the parks and the playgrounds for loads of fun. And who knows, maybe you can take in a movie or two, as well. Have you seen the new LEGO movie? Kids need to be able to move about (and you do, too!) as they climb and swing and run. But then again, they like to dress themselves...so that's always fun, too.

It might be still a bit chilly during Spring Break, so always have coats in the car just in case. On the day we ventured out, it was just right...no coats needed.

Ayla loves to wear her "costumes" anywhere she goes, and she always includes leggings or pants underneath for modest playing while climbing and sliding. And nope, shoes do NOT have to match when one is playing outside. They just have to be comfy! If it's okay with her mom, sometimes Ayla adds a bright hue of lip color for any outing at all...

Gideon goes for comfort all the way, and he's wearing a matching set of shorts with a tee today! Decked out in blue sneakers from Target, Gideon is also sporting a cool watch that is in sync with his parents' watches! He has a schedule he follows from his watch! On this particular day, Gideon brought a sketch and writing book, because he's working on a short story about a stink bug...

Augie is dressed so stylish and cute in his long sleeve denim shirt and khaki shorts from Target. He wants you to be sure and notice the "fween" color on the bottom of his sneakers that he can put on by himself, because they Velcro! Blue and khaki is a combo that is never wrong.

Here's a better view of the front of Ayla's dress as she slides down with her Mister (grandfather) – which is great fun. Having a sliding partner is quite special, isn't it? And those leggings under the dress are great, to keep legs covered and warm.

Finally, what about the style for the adults who are on the playground with the kiddos? Here, Mister is sporting a plaid shirt from Eddie Bauer, one of his favorite places for clothes. He says they don't wrinkle and they retain their shape! And his shoes? They're Sperry's brand, of course!

Kids enjoy playing outside, as it allows them to get their energy out. Imagine with them, sing as you swing them "higher, " and put your own book or phone away as you climb and slide, as well. They might want to sit and draw, they may say they can do it by themselves, or they may grab your hand and plead, "One more time!"

Enjoy spring style from your favorite clothing store for kids...which for these kids – it's Target!

## **In the Kitchen – March Muffins – by Marcy Lytle**

I don't usually gravitate toward muffins, or any pastries, for that matter. However, homemade muffins or big blueberry ones freshly baked in a coffee shop do alert my senses! March is a great time for breakfast on the patio, if the temperatures aren't still too cold. Or we can start packing up food to go in the car, for a nice spring drive outside of town. What could be better than filling a small basket with muffins, tucking in a thermos filled with our favorite drink, and heading out for these scrumptious treats with friends or family?

Here are a few of our faves...

### **Blueberry Muffins**

One of my friends has a famous mom, Marjorie Johnson, and she is 99 years young! She travels around appearing on television shows, and she wins blue ribbons at the Minnesota State Fair all the time! She has a cookbook I love, and her blueberry muffins are the best! Did you know (her hint) that you only need to spray the bottoms of the tins for a perfect rise and lift from the pan!? It really works!

<https://www.amazon.com/Road-Blue-Ribbon-Baking-Marjorie/dp/159298195X>

Here's her recipe:

- 2 c all purpose flour
- 3 t baking powder
- ½ t salt
- ½ c sugar
- 1 large egg
- ¾ c milk
- ½ cup melted butter
- 1 c fresh blueberries

Sift flour, baking powder, salt and sugar in large bowl and set aside. In separate bowl beat egg slightly then add milk and butter, and whisk. Pour the wet into the dry and stir till just moistened. (Batter will be lumpy). Fold in the berries.

Grease 12 muffin cups (only the bottom – to allow for a perfect round top!). Fill ¾ full. Bake at 400 degrees for 20-25 minutes til golden brown. Test with toothpick. Remove and cool on wire rack.

### **Honey Muffins**

This recipe is from a tiny cookbook I purchased at a festival where the folks were selling their honey. I made these recently one Sunday morning for the kids when they were visiting, and they were a hit! They're easy and tasty, great paired with a hot drink or juice!

[https://www.amazon.com/Bubbas-Beez-Honey-Hive-Cookbook/dp/0989084620/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?keywords=beez+honey+from+the+hive&qid=1550062965&s=books&sr=1-1-spell](https://www.amazon.com/Bubbas-Beez-Honey-Hive-Cookbook/dp/0989084620/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=beez+honey+from+the+hive&qid=1550062965&s=books&sr=1-1-spell)

- 2 T honey
- 1 c milk
- 1 beaten egg
- 2 T melted butter
- 2 c graham flour
- ½ t salt
- 1 ½ t baking powder

Preheat oven to 350. Mix honey, milk, egg and butter in a bowl. Mix flour, salt and baking powder in a separate bowl. Add to the liquid mixture.

Bake in greased muffin pans until golden brown.

### **Crunchy Pear Muffins**

- 1 ¾ c flour
- 2 t baking powder
- 2/3 c soft brown sugar
- ½ t salt
- 3 t cinnamon
- 1 large egg
- ¼ c vegetable oil
- ¼ cup 2% milk
- 2 pears
- 1 T walnuts chopped finely
- 2 T turbinado sugar

Preheat oven to 400. Grease a muffin pan (bottoms only) or line with paper cups.

Sift the flour and baking powder in a large bowl, then stir in brown sugar, salt and 2T of the cinnamon. Beat the oil, egg and milk in a small bowl, then pour into the flour and mix til just combined (it will appear dry). Peel and chop the pears and fold in. Spoon into the muffin tin.

Mix the finely chopped nuts with the turbinado and 1T cinnamon. Sprinkle over top and bake for 20 minutes until well risen and cooked through!

## **Tried and True – Today's Dishes – by Marcy Lytle**

I have dishes and cute serving pieces for every season of the year...almost. At least, I'm trying to collect them. In a culture where so many are headed toward minimalism, perhaps you aren't interested in collecting any more dishes at all. However, there's a reason that I think we all need some seasonal dishes to set on our tables...

We are a group of people that anticipate and long for that which is not the present. When summer is over, people pine for the lazy vacation days they had or the warmth of the sun's rays. When September barely begins, stores hit us with Christmas décor to make us look forward to the holiday season way ahead of time. And when the coldness of winter lasts too long, we start wishing for spring and might plant a seed or too way before it's time...

I found myself these past few weeks being inundated with spring décor every time I hit the store, but I wasn't quite ready for it back in February! There have still been fires to enjoy and cider to sip...before I trade all of that for spring flowers and outdoor picnics.

All of that anticipation and pining, back and forth, seeps its way into our souls as well. We are constantly in a state of dissatisfaction with our lives, hoping and wishing that God would swoop down and make a change and lead us into our "destiny," while we miss today's blessings. We also pine for and reminisce about the past, or if it's been a bad one, we feel shame and regret. So much of this mind turmoil disturbs the beauty of the season we are in, right now.

That's why I love seasonal dishes! I just finished setting out cute little muffin stands and heart shaped plates for my husband and I to enjoy, and to set out for the kids. This month, I'll start preparing my front porch for spring décor and pulling out pastels for serving and filling with fun food. I can't wait to use our picnic gear that's been stashed away since early last fall.

I have this large cabinet in the garage where I finally organized my seasonal dishes. I don't have a huge amount of each, but I love a pretty tray that speaks to my kitchen and says what season it is. I also enjoy a couple of small plates for serving our lunches upon, as we see the flowers or rabbits, or whatever might happen to be there. Any time I'm out and can find cute paper napkins to tuck into his lunchbox or aside my breakfast plate, I grab them, to use for the current season.

All of these little seasonal things remind me to be present, enjoy the moment, look at the beauty, and savor the flavor of the here and the now. It calms me down. Having these small things in my home, on the table, and in the kitchen, keep me from feeling anxious about what season just passed or what season lies ahead.

Go on. Shop for a little seasonal plate or napkin or candle, and set it out. You don't have to spend a lot; you can even visit the Dollar Store for a treat.

March is here and spring is near. Enjoy every moment and don't worry about the summer heat on the horizon or what the winter did to your flowering garden. Observe the tiny green shoots coming out of that cute wicker basket etched into the bottom of that triangular plate you just spotted on the shelf...and purchase it.

Set it on your table and eat from it...while you enjoy today.

(Pictured above is a tiny spring plate I found on the shelf at Marshall, with a blue rabbit in the corner. And the dip is in a small ceramic pot!)

**HOME**

## **Practical Parenting – Listen and Laugh – by Marcy Lytle**

She stepped on the stool to wash her hands in my bathroom but barely ran her hands under the water, using no soap all. Aghast, I tried to convince her to lather and scrub and rinse! Kiddos just don't want to take the time to do jobs correctly, and that's why we as parents have to train them to do so. It's a super hard job, especially when we don't always perform at our best, either. And we just get tired and weary as we constantly instruct and command and yell for the tenth time to do the job right!

Here are some funny things we all do and say and observe, as we try to train these kids in the way they're supposed to go...only to fall into bed at night thankful they are just still alive.

"Dab it" – This is what Augie, age 3, tells me when he pees in the toilet and I help him finish the job. He can't balance on the stool AND grab the paper, so he instructs me as to what to do with a few squares of paper before pulling up his pants.

"There's dirt under your nails!" – This is what I said to her after she washed those hands mentioned above, when she only ran them through the water for one second. That dirt doesn't bother her one bit, and she will happily eat her lunch and lick her fingers, dirt and all.

"Wipe your mouth." – Isn't that the number one instruction of all parents everywhere? Kids eat chocolate and get it on their cheeks and all over their face, and we try to wipe it when they're babies (screams and fits occur) and then we try to get them to wipe it themselves when they're toddlers (only they always leave it or smear it onto other parts of their bodies!)

"No jumping, please." – Any soft surface, like the sofa or the bed, requires at least one high jump, right? But we know, as the wise parents that we are, that one jump might result in one nasty fall with a broken arm. Our "please" soon turns to "or else" when multiple jumps ensue...

"Just a little bit!" – You know, you're doing crafts with the kids and you let them handle the glue bottle (because sometimes glue sticks don't get the job done!). He turns it over and starts squeezing but then forgets to quickly turn the bottle right side up. And...well you know...a puddle of glue forms on your table...

"Let me help you." – That offer is almost always refused by any child once they can talk and walk away. She grabs the scissors to cut off the tag from her new stuffy (stuffed animal) and you don't want her cutting into the animal itself. So you offer, she refuses, and before you know it, the tag is off and everything is intact...or not.

"Go to the potty." – We say this directive before bedtime, before we head out the door, and anytime it's been over an hour since the last time the one who's new to underwear went to the bathroom. And we say it to the toddlers who dance around in circles stating, "I don't need to go!" Potties are downright scary to some kids, and we'll never know why...but they have to learn to go.

"Only one more story." – As our eyes are barely open and our words become slurred because we're so dang sleepy ourselves, she begs for another book and another tale. Those big eyes

and that sweet voice jolt us to rouse ourselves for this one request, because it's the most snuggly time of the day and we really want it to stay...so we acquiesce and we read.

"I don't ever wash my face." – And...that's where you pray for your kiddos to know the truth and the truth to set them free. You're pretty sure that's NOT the case when kiddos visit your house and you're trying to get them to bathe. So when they're not looking, you wet the cloth and you swoop in for one big swipe across their face, and you do it so quickly and move on...hoping they don't realize what you just did.

All of those statements above were heard in our house in one night's stay by three littles, just recently. I bet most moms hear them every hour all day long, and want to pull their hair out by dinner time.

Parenting is laborious, requires tenacity, and sometimes is barely rewarding AT ALL. And then one day she's reading her own books and doesn't want you nearby, and she's polishing her perfectly cleaned fingernails. And he's fully potty-trained and a clean freak, and won't let you near the bathroom door, and in a few years he's putting together wood creations with drill guns and not glue.

Training does pay off. It works. And it's good to sometimes just sit and listen to yourself and to them as well, and laugh hard at the pain of it all.

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## **I Don't Do Teens – Seasonal Fun – by Marcy Lytle**

Spring is in the air. And our teenagers might not even notice the change in seasons, because they're too busy noticing their faces in the mirror, the text she just sent that had a "tone," or the way his teammate just missed the ball because he wasn't paying attention. Our teens are consumed with all things personal in their looks, their relationships, and their social media. Noticing a change of season, the blooms on the trees, and the brisk March winds is not anywhere on their radar.

So why not, as parents, place this season in front of them?

Here's how:

- Over spring break, let them build and plant and start tending an herb box. They can Google how, you can purchase a small one, or you and or Dad can help them put one together. Take or send them shopping for the herbs you use the most that grow well in the spring, and ask them to plant them and start tending them. You could even have them research dishes to make with these herbs! Great idea! <https://www.diynetwork.com/how-to/make-and-decorate/decorating/how-to-make-a-kitchen-planter-box-for-herbs>
- Take the family on a picnic in a beautiful park where blooms are plenty, on a sunny day. Assign your teens the task of putting together the basket full of goodies, snacks, sides, drinks and dessert for the meal! Give them a dollar amount to spend, and ask them to get creative with the cloth, the napkins, the plates and the décor. What a fun outing that will be.
- Spring cleaning is a real thing, but it doesn't have to only be YOUR thing. Figure out the area most in need of organizing (closet, drawers, bathroom) where your teens house their junk, and give them the task and a time limit to be done. Offer suggestions of boxes to use, how to label items, how to sort and give away, etc. Let them go to the dollar store for bins and markers. You might be surprised at their skills!
- All things new – that's what spring is about. New blooms emerge from plants that looked dead. Temps rise and warm our skin. Everything screams, "New!" If you can, gather a few dollars and let her or him shop for something new – either a new room décor piece or a new pair of shoes. Give them the job of hunting for a coupon or a sale, and budgeting out the amount they're given. Maybe there's a chore they can do to earn the funds to spend. Everyone likes new, so let them have new.
- Have you or your teens tried flavor infused waters, with herbs and fruit? There are so many ideas out there, and wouldn't it be fun for your teens, each night of spring break, to present to the family a new flavor? Show them a clear pitcher or glasses to use, have them make a list of the groceries they'll need, and let them shop with you to get. Then each evening, let them prepare the refreshing drinks. This could result in a good habit for all of drinking more water! <http://healthylivingmadesimple.com/infused-water-perfect-spring-refresher/>

We often welcome a new season just as adults, and forget to include our kids. Help them look up from their phones and step away from themselves to notice the scents, the sights, the beauty and the fun in this season we call spring. And invite the family to work together and enjoy what these soon-to-be-adults present with their creativity and fun!

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## **The Family Practice - Wood Floors – by Brandi Oman**

Every so often we have to change things up in our homes. We repair fences, change faucets, and change the flooring. This is partly because as humans we like fresh things and also because floors get old.

The changes in our home become disruptive with the dust and noise. Tools and trash everywhere can bring frustrations and tension into the home. Arguments between the household may break out and at the end of the day everyone is ready for the new floor. All an 8 year old picks up on is that everyone is in a bad mood and the house is messy.

So what does a mom do when it feels like everything is falling apart?

Make a memory!

We are repairing the faux wood flooring on our stairs with real wood. When we rip up faux wood it snaps and rips up - real bad. A few weekends ago my family decided to grill and the grill broke on us. So we took the old faux wood and burned it. Caiden's daddy showed him how to properly snap the wood and place it in the fire. Caiden learned how to nurse the fire. Caiden had a ton of fun. He forgot that the household was losing their mind, and that the tables were dusty...he just knew it was him and his daddy.

The stairs are now placed; they are a real wood, beautifully stained and very sturdy.

Many times in our lives, we like to hold on to the old "faux wood" because when we start making changes it gets dirty, messy, and disrupts what we are used to. When God gives us our new "stairs" it's usually always better, beautiful, and cleaner.

Finding the good in letting go of the old, and even making it a fun, learning experience can be everlasting.

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

## **A Night to Remember – All Things Green – by Marcy Lytle**

St. Patrick's Day is this month, and while some don't really do much to celebrate this particular holiday, it might be fun to bring the family together to see what it's all about, and the importance of the color green. It also might be fun to start by reading the history and origin of St. Patrick's Day just for fun! Discuss the three leaf clover and show the kids a picture! Then sit down and take a look at this time of year when that which was brown now starts to turn green...

Preparation: Pack a picnic for indoors on the floor or outdoors if weather permits. Include a wooden cutting board where you can set up an array of green olives and cubes of cheese, with toothpicks utensils. Also include a dip made like this: 3 T maple syrup,  $\frac{3}{4}$  c sour cream and cinnamon – just mix syrup and sour cream and sprinkle cinnamon on top! Serve fruit alongside for dipping. Include fresh water for drinking.

*The first sign that spring is near is when green grass starts to appear!*

Psalm 23:2 says he makes his sheep lie down in green pastures. Would you like to lie down on the brown dry ground or the thick green grass? Jesus, our good Shepherd, knows when we need to rest and he offers us a beautiful place to be!

*March winds blow the leaves on trees, green not brown – blow in the breeze!*

Psalm 52:8 says “But as for me, I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the lovingkindness of God forever and ever.”

Did you know that an olive tree is known for its longevity, and able to withstand all kinds of harsh weather? God makes us like that, when we trust in Him. No matter what kinds of breezes blow, we won't bend and bow!

*Plants that live are nice and green, none of that brown or in between.*

Psalm 92:12-14 says, “The righteous man will flourish like the palm tree, He will grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still yield fruit in old age; they shall be full of sap and very green...”

Here's another promise about green! Trees that are full of sap and green provide life to those around them. In early spring, when a tree is cut, sap runs out to be then made into maple syrup!

*Green means life and there is no fear, when planted deep by the water near.*

Jeremiah 17: 7,8 says “But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”

Another promise to those who trust in Him – is that even when there's a drought (lack of water) the leaves are always green (life is there!)

Family prayer: *Father, thank you for spring. Thank you for new life after winter has passed. Thank you for the promises you give that if we trust in you, we never have to worry about a thing. Amen.*

## **Tiny Living – A Few Stories – by Leyanne Enterline**

Besides the one time when we were told that ISIS was after our neighbor, everything else was pretty calm living in town in suburbia. However, I feel like living tiny on property outside of town warrants some very odd things happening. Perhaps it's the area where we live. It's mostly farm land with lake rats from the 70's (both I love,) and it makes life super interesting.

So interesting that I have to tell a few stories...

Today, for instance, a lady pulled onto our property while we were outside and she got out of her car. We walked over and asked what she was doing and if she needed any help. She said, "Nope," as she stared up at our oak tree and told us she was looking for mesquite! She said, "Sorry," and slowly walked back to her car. We didn't say anything else. I think we were in shock that she was literally considering just cutting our tree down. What? I have no idea what was going on there. Who just exits their car to cut down a person's tree? I'm super confused on this one! And we have tons of mesquite that we would have gladly surrendered, if she just would have asked.

Our property is on the corner of a main road and across from the famous Willie Nelson's storage units. So you can only imagine the interesting people that rent those units...including my parents! We're pretty sure there were people living in one unit at some point in time. These units have also been a stakeout for the FBI. I mean, *where in the world are we?* Occasionally, we hear some crazy yelling from over there and Brian has to call the cops. But really, for the most part it is very quiet. I just wanted to share the randomness. We hear Willie will be selling soon!

We have a farmer that lives across the street and we get to see the cows come out all the time. All of the mooing and poop smells have been pretty fun! We found out that Farmer John's family owned the land that we're on and he remembers growing up playing on our property with his cousins.

Our son Asher has found one arrowhead so far, and we can't wait to continue the search! It's such a cool feeling to know that Indians once roamed our land. I wonder what all they did on it? We find random pumpkins and onions growing. Perhaps they planted these seeds? With such a tiny footprint, it makes our land seem so large with ample room to explore.

We'll see how long these oddities continue; and in the meantime, we will enjoy our blessings of living tiny!

Remember, love grows best in tiny spaces!

**YOU**

## **Strengthening Your Core – Soft Eyes – by Marcy Lytle**

We watch this show on television called *New Amsterdam*. It's a series about a new medical director that comes to run a huge hospital in New York, where the patient is put first, no matter the cost...even in the most unconventional ways. It's a great show, and we love it. One particular episode recently stayed with me...

There was a patient that had gone blind and she was unable to see her daughter or husband, for years. However, a new treatment had become available, one the doctor assured her would work, so the family waited with bated breath until she returned to her room after surgery. As the bandages were removed, we could tell just from her countenance that it didn't work. Her little girl was on her lap, but her mom still could not see her face. It was quite disappointing, to say the least!

The doctors were dumbfounded but soon discovered that her eyeballs were just hard (an after effect from the surgery) and needed some drops to moisten and soften them up. The drops were applied, a simple thing, and she could see again! Imagine the change on the lady's face when she saw her daughter, and when her daughter was seen!

This episode brought a tear to my eye, because I was struck by the fact that a lot of us have hard eyes...and hard hearts. We've been broken, cut into, messed up, and left for blind...because of a hard life. Perhaps parents have disappointed us, disease has stolen from us, or money has slipped down the drain too many times and we're destitute. It's sort of like the lady, after surgery. She had been cut on, promised a new view, only to be left in the same blind condition.

We go to church, we pray, we read the bible, and we feel like screaming at God, "Do I really have to go through this again?" as we feel as if he's taking us down the hall once again into that cold operating room where he works on that which we cannot see. We try to obey and do what we're told, only to emerge back into our same room with our same blindness, while those around us wait to be seen.

It was all because of her eyes being hard that the lady could not see. It was a simple fix of applying some drops; drops that the doctor knew existed that could heal, after the surgery she had. The moistening of the eyeball enabled that surgery to be complete.

I thought about my eyeballs and how they get hard and unable to see those around me. I get weary in well-doing and disappointed over and over again with life, as we all do. Here are a few specific ways my own eyeballs have hardened after life's cuts and scrapes:

- Friends disappointed – so I shut my eyes to new relationships - for fear of hurt.
- Struggled too hard and long with a particular behavior or thought – so I hardened my eyes not wanting to look at that struggle anymore and to just accept it and live with it.
- Saw and made too many judgments on the shortcomings of those closest to me – so too many eye rolls that state "whatever" had caused my eyes to harden and not want to see people anymore.

- Didn't understand scripture and it didn't work for me – so I shut my eyes to reading anything else for lack of understanding and desire to learn.
- Circumstances at times overwhelmed me – eyes hardened and shut just for protection – like trying to avoid dust that was circling around me.

Maybe you have been through too many “surgeries” in life where you've tried time and time again to forgive, move on, be healed, get over it, etc. and you're just not willing to undergo any more cutting in order to see or be seen. It's so understandable to feel that way!

However, just like this lady had a doctor in the room that knew about this simple application of ointment to soften her hardened eyeballs, we have Jesus. He never tires of waiting on us to sit still and just be. Just be in his presence with his tender hands holding us until we soften and breathe and see the beauty again, sitting in our laps right near us.

I hope this story speaks to you. It's so easy to allow ourselves to stay hard and shut out those around us with beautiful faces, because of hurt. But that's no way to live, even if seeing again brings about hurt again.

It's one thing to be born blind never able to see or have memories of color or beauty. But it's quite another to be born seeing all of the beauty in the world and then become blind to it, because of pain.

I don't want to live in a hardened eye ball state of mind...do you?

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## **Under the Influence – Can I Borrow That? – by Marcy Lytle**

I remember when I was a kid that my mom and other moms would go next door and ask, “Can I borrow a cup of sugar?” They did this when they were baking and realized they were one cup short or one egg short, and had this need to finish their task! Neighbors didn’t mind at all hearing the knock and answering the door, happy to share with a friend.

I also remember at summer camp having friends that wanted to borrow my clothes, and I could in turn borrow theirs. She wore my cute dress and I borrowed and wore her cute shoes. I never really liked doing that, but I felt pressured to do so. One time a friend tore my dress, and that made me mad.

I know lots of folks that have a library of books they are willing to loan out to other readers. Inside the books they have these little stickers that say who the books belong to, so that the one borrowing will know who to return to the book to, once it’s read.

I don’t really like to borrow anything, for fear that I may forget to give it back, or even worse damage it!

However...I have no trouble borrowing trouble from tomorrow.

We all know that it’s unwise to borrow trouble, because each day has worries of its own, right? And yet, we all do it.

We that have aging parents borrow trouble by worrying about the how and the way and the worry of what will happen when our parents can no longer take care of themselves. That’s a legitimate borrowing of worry, isn’t it?

We have kids, tiny and big, that have these problems in life. Maybe they’re struggling in school or with peers, or they need finances or wisdom in making big decisions, and we borrow trouble by worrying. We worry if they will ever be well, successful, and able to “make it” without our help.

I can certainly borrow trouble about all sorts of things if I let my mind go there. And to be honest, it’s SO EASY to borrow trouble. It’s so easy to let the boat of worry where I’m sitting to just drift out to sea far from the shore, because I loosened the knot where I was tethered and tied.

Think back to those analogies above:

We borrowed sugar because we just needed one cup to complete a cake recipe. So why can’t we borrow faith from a friend in the same way, just to help us complete our beautiful day we’re struggling through because we’re a bit short? I know we have friends who are glad to offer, because their cups are full.

We borrowed clothes because we liked what she had and she liked what we had, so we thought, “Why not have a little fun?” Why can’t we train ourselves to borrow, or trade, our sorrow and angst for someone else’s beauty and fun? We can surround ourselves with friends

that won't worry and drift with us, but rather open their closet and share a belt of truth to hold up our sagging pants of worry!

We borrow books because there are adventures to be read, and she's got that great one sitting on her shelf! Or we loan out a book to a friend to borrow, because what we've read was so good that we want to share! Why can't we borrow goodness and mercy instead of worry and trouble, just for the asking? That story of how he pursues us is all throughout the bible!

You may be reading and saying (along with me), "That sounds well and good, but I can't help but worry." I feel that way too, sometimes. I feel unable to control the thoughts that enter my mind. It's like this ticker tape that runs constantly and I don't know where to turn off the button that makes it scroll.

Imagine with me, upon rising in the morning, you are sitting in front of a huge bookcase stockpiled with true stories of hope and faith. In fact, you are...in His word. Imagine that living on either side of you are neighbors with pantries full of sugar, just waiting to be shared. You have that...if you have friends. And imagine that there's a closet awaiting you to wear a different outfit each day, one that fits you perfectly in fabrics that make you sing, all for the choosing. You do...it's all of the beauty he's clothed you with since you were beautifully and wonderfully made.

I have to consciously make the effort to pick out the truth and read it, ask for the sugar I need, and choose to wear beauty and not ashes. It's hard, I'm not gonna lie. But borrowing trouble is heavy and sorrowful, and that's harder to bear and worse for the wear.

Go on, borrow. Ask for what you need. Trade it in.

But don't borrow trouble.

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## Healthy Habits – Quiet, Please – by Marcy Lytle

I have a lot of quiet time. My kids are grown and gone, I work out of my house, and I have all this time by myself. And yet...sometimes I still need quiet time. By definition in this story, quiet time is where we sit still away from the “noise” of the world and its duties and we focus on hearing and being and resting in Him. That’s what I’m referring to as quiet time. Oh, it’s quiet every day in my house while I’m working, but that’s not quiet time where I rest. My mind is full of what I need to get done, my lists are near me so I can add to them, and my phone is within view so I can catch calls and texts and messages...so there is plenty of noise!

Everyone’s quiet time with Him probably looks different. And the time of day is different, too, depending on our schedules. However, I’m thinking that across the board most of us don’t have enough quiet time with Him at all...and when we do...we’re in a hurry to get back to those things mentioned above for fear of getting behind.

Here are some ways to maybe find and cherish and protect and fence off that quiet time we all need so much. Why? Because it’s in the stillness and the quiet with Him that we hear him say things to us that strengthen us, give us hope and assure us that he “Is God.” We need that. And we don’t hear that when every thought and action requires a balancing act because our plates are too full.

*Some of this list won’t be doable for all, but it will for some:*

1. Take a lunch break. Don’t work through lunch eating on the run. Make yourself sit down, actually chew and savor each bite, and just be still and alone – like tea for two – with Him. You might find that you realize you are His delight.
2. Walk away. Even if it’s just a 15 minute walk down the street and back, do it. Observe the sky and the trees and feel the breeze. You might find that your faith is renewed in the One who created all that you see.
3. Close your eyes. If you’re able to sit down or turn off your motor and park under a shade tree, do so and close your eyes for a few minutes. Think of at least seven things you’re thankful for. You might open your eyes and see more clearly to face whatever lies ahead in your day.
4. Indulge. I know. Every woman everywhere wants to shed pounds and not gain an ounce. However, that little mini blizzard at DQ is small and delicious and won’t hurt you – once in a while. In fact, it might satisfy every sweet tooth you’re feeling, and make you smile. That’s a good thing! Eat it alone in your car, with no one else near to ask for a bite and you might taste His goodness too!
5. Just one verse. Don’t tackle a whole sermon series or topic or chapter. Hone in on one encouraging verse. You can google “scripture for sadness” and a list of happy truths will pop up to choose from. Pick One! Read it to yourself silently, sing it softly, and chew on it for a while until you believe it. You just might feel like you’ve been infused with a strong antibiotic to ward off the diseases of the day!
6. Listen. Ask a question, a simple one, like, “God what do you want to tell me today?” and then be still to hear. If one thought of condemnation or shame pops up, that’s not His voice. So tune that one out. His words will be that he loves you, He loves you, He loves

you... If you can hear that and believe it in the quietness of your ears, you'll emerge back to the noise above it all.

7. Let the sun. One of my favorite things to do on a cool day is to park, lay back my seat and feel just a hint of sun on my skin through the window. This only works right now, before the heat of summer arrives. There's something about being still and quiet in the sunshine, feeling that vitamin D soak into your skin, that lifts the spirit. Do it. You might be surprised as how your attitude shifts upward

What do you do for quiet time? Is there not a chance of having it, because kids are around constantly? Ask, speak up, and request for 15 minutes alone. Mark it on the calendar. Are you too afraid to sit still and be, for fear of what you might think? Find a list of encouraging scriptures and keep it on your fridge, and go with one of those for your thinking...every time you're alone. Is being alone with Him frightening, because of fear that He might point to some huge shortcoming in your life? There is no fear in His presence. None. And he never points and shames.

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## **Life Right Now – Impacted and Inspired – by Bethany Gomez**

A little over a month ago, my family and I went to visit my grandma, my dad's mom, for her 85th birthday party. It was a big, fun celebration with well over 20 people in attendance. Close and distant relatives and dear family friends all came out to help celebrate my grandma. My dad revealed to me that a couple of years ago he and his sister decided to throw my grandma a birthday party every year from then on. Not only does my grandma love any chance she can get to spend time with her family, but my dad said he wants to honor and celebrate her life and legacy while she is still here.

*It was during this visit that I realized a few things.*

First, I don't like to think about it but my grandma, along with my other grandparents, are not getting any younger. My thoughts of late have really been ones of longing to spend time with my grandma as much as I can and to show her just how thankful I am for her. She is one amazing lady. Although I wouldn't know just how amazing she is without my dad telling me stories about her, for she very rarely voluntarily shares stories about her life.

One story in particular that my dad told me is a story that I will never get tired of hearing. It brings him to tears every time he tells it and my tears are not far behind. He told me that when my grandma was 3 years old her mom passed away, and when she was 5 her dad abandoned her. She was sent to live with her aunt in Chicago and while there her aunt physically abused her for several years. My grandma ended up trying to run away, twice. The first time she ran away, she ended up at a nun's convent. They took her back, not quite understanding my grandma's situation until the second time she ran away. Thankfully, the convent helped her find relatives that lived in Houston, Texas. So at the age of 9 she moved across the country to Texas, where she grew up, and by the age of 16 she got married to my grandpa.

Fast forward many years, my dad remembers my grandpa would make phone calls to my grandma's aunt and talk to her for a little while, sometimes passing the phone to him, to say hi. On occasion, even my grandma would talk to her, but finally one time she told my grandpa she just couldn't do it anymore. My grandpa (being the wise person he always was) told her,

“Then why do you go to church if you're not  
going to do what the priest says to do,  
which is to forgive?”

That question brought conviction to my grandma and it was soon after she was able to forgive her aunt, not knowing what she would be asked to do down the road. I was too young to remember this, but my dad told me that my grandparents got a call one day from a lady that found my grandma's aunt sick and bedridden in her home up in Chicago. My grandma flew up there and for a month visited her aunt in the hospital until she was well enough to go home, but clearly she was not able to live on her own anymore. So it was decided that she would live with my grandparents in Houston. My grandma welcomed her into her home and cared for her until she passed away from cancer about a year later.

After hearing this story for the first time, I was blown away by this powerful testimony of forgiveness. My grandma had every right to hate her aunt for what she did to her, but my grandma chose forgiveness. And in the end, Grandma received her aunt's entire inheritance. If I had to bet, I think my grandma was more blessed when her aunt finally asked my grandma to forgive her for what she had done and when my grandma told her that she already had.

Second, during this past visit with my grandma, it hit me how much she has changed, or in other words, how she has adapted since my grandpa passed away seven years ago from cancer. They were married almost 60 years, and during that time I noticed that she was more quiet and reserved, while my grandpa was this big personality, loud and outgoing. I think my grandma loved letting him take the lead at social events, while she did what she loved, which was cooking and serving her family. When my grandpa passed away I thought *how is she going to make it* as I watched her tiny little frame sob over losing her husband at his funeral. Most of the family was concerned for her. I thought my grandpa was the stronger one out of the two, but during this past visit my dad told me that he was finally able to tell her that had she been the one to pass away first he thinks my grandpa would not have had the strength to keep on living without her. He told her she was stronger than my grandpa. She, of course, denied it and didn't want to accept it, but the more she thought about it I think she realized the same thing my dad did. I've realized that my grandma is sweet but feisty, petite but strong, quiet in words but loud in her actions. She is loving, (including the tough kind of love) and she has a cute, funny sense of humor.

Thirdly, without fail, for as long as I can remember, my grandma has asked the same question to me (or anyone) almost the moment I walk through her door.

"Are you hungry, Miya?"

It doesn't matter how late it is or if I tell her that I'm not that hungry, she almost instantly begins pulling out yummy things to eat, usually her homemade tortillas with a side of refried beans. She tells me to sit down and eat, and she says it in such a way that makes it nearly impossible to say no.

Finally, I realized she is going to, and already has, left a tremendous legacy. I've been thinking and praying about how I can honor her more, along with my other grandparents. They have impacted my life tremendously. They continue to inspire me to be more giving, forgiving, serving, and loving. I am so thankful to God for each one of them.

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## **Created for You - Magnificent March Musings – by Ginny Hurley**

While visiting with a friend, she began to share about branding. As she continued to speak, I found myself laughing and expressed to her that my idea of branding seemed to be at odds with what she was saying. This little West Texas girl knows that branding is a hot iron that you place in the fire to brand your livestock. You do it to keep track of your cattle, horses, or whatever animal you happen to be raising, so it will be distinguished.

Her idea of branding had something to do with communication, new technology, and labels. Aw Ha! There we have an understanding! Branding! Well, I can get that! Keeping track of your personal visual representation. It's mine! So the term branding actually fits both scenarios, two cultures, colliding into one. I can work with that!

This silly thought came to me about words. Some of the terms or words I've heard throughout different seasons in my life are obsolete or have morphed into something new. Several of these words are slang and no longer used at all in this millennial age. Let's take a look at some of these!

### **Who remembers:**

Mergatroyd  
Hunky Dory  
Living the life of Riley  
In like Flynn  
Holy Moley  
Jumpin' Jehoshaphat  
Gee whillikers  
Heavens to Betsy  
Knee high to a grasshopper

She's got moxie  
Okidoki  
Gadzooks  
Knucklehead  
Nincompoop  
Pshaw  
Fiddlesticks  
Made in the shade  
Life is swell

### **Then:**

You're cruisin' for a bruise  
See ya later alligator  
Open a can of worms  
Hang loose  
Far out  
Good buddy

Burn rubber  
After while crocodile  
Knuckle sandwich  
Let's split  
Groovy  
Space cadet

### **What are these:**

Spats  
Fedoras  
Saddle shoes  
Floppy disk  
Xerox  
Rotary phone

Knickers  
Poodle skirts  
Pedal pushers  
Record player  
Carbon copy  
Party line

### **Remember:**

Kilroy was here  
This is a fine kettle of fish  
Wake up and smell the roses  
More than Carter has pills  
Shooting the breeze

I'll be a monkey's uncle  
The milkman did it  
You're pullin' my chain  
Hung out to dry  
Draggin' Broadway

Hanging out  
Getting licks

I'm about to bust  
Sittin' pretty

Okay, so are you smiling yet? I know some of you are laughing while others are reminiscing. Some of you are clueless and puzzled. For those with raised eyebrows, wait a few years. Your little terms and endearments will be gone with the wind, out with the lights, skidaddled, water under the bridge, gone girl!

Look these over and enjoy the memories! Laugh at yourself or your parents! Time marches on yet has a way of remaining in our hearts. Delight yourself in celebrating the past while looking forward to the new!

**MARRIAGE**

## **In This Together - March Madness – by Charissa Corbin**

It is that time of year – March Madness. For me, March Madness tops all other sporting events... the Super Bowl, NCAAAF championship, Wimbledon, and The Masters (heck, every sporting event beats golf!) My husband and I fill out our brackets, and as competitive as we are, it is an intense few weeks of banter on whose team will win.

As a previous collegiate athlete, I know the feeling of playing in a game that you know could be the very last one you will ever play. You have spent a lifetime building up the strength, skills, and stamina for this moment. You have a team that you have spent countless hours with on (and off) the court, pouring blood, sweat, and tears into every practice and every sprint. The teams that make up March Madness all have different stories, different skillsets, and come from all over the nation. One thing they ALL have in common is they had to work hard to make it to this tournament. They didn't get lucky. They worked day in and day out to make it to this moment.

I read a Facebook post from a friend the other day that said,

“A great marriage isn't something you find.  
It's something you make and have to keep working on.”

This is so true. Picture your marriage as one of the teams in March Madness. You're not competing against other marriages but you're competing against the daily, weekly, yearly struggles that marriages face. The loss of a loved one, financial instability, a new move, health issues, raising children, maintaining passion, job insecurity, and the list goes on... Overcoming these obstacles TOGETHER builds tenacity, a closeness only marriage provides, and a deeper love and understanding for one another. March Madness in a marriage doesn't just last a month but a lifetime. You will have moments of victory and defeat, some games will be easier than others, but both will make your marriage great.

Continue on learning together, practicing, committing yourselves to one another daily, communicating through struggles, and most importantly trusting in your Heavenly coach and your marriage will be unstoppable.

Continue your game... I'm cheering you on!

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## **Date Night Fun – The List – by Marcy Lytle**

Every month we usually share five ideas of date nights for you. However, this month we thought we'd share "the list." It's so helpful to have a list of ideas to pull from, when planning a night out. Usually, one person is a great thinker of "things to do" and has no trouble being creative thinking outside the box for a day or night out for fun. But that creative one likes a break now and then, as they wish their spouse/date would plan a night out for them.

This list is for you...the one who has trouble and needs a reference sheet:

1. Make a list of 10 couple questions (even Google for ideas), print them out and quiz each other over dinner or coffee and dessert.
2. Bake and/or pack a meal or dessert together and enjoy it by the fireplace, or out by a fire pit in the yard or park.
3. Check out a new coffee shop and all it has to offer, while putting together a 100-piece puzzle.
4. Take a drive outside the city in a loop – one that will take a few hours – stopping at will to read historical markers, try small town diners, take photos of abandoned buildings, etc.
5. Find a new restaurant to try, eat there, and then walk around in that neighborhood.
6. Flip through photo albums, or visit a bookstore and flip through picture books of foreign countries or exotic animals.
7. Go for a walk on a trail, with a backpack full of snacks and drinks. Even pack a cloth for your stop to sit and refresh. You can pick up snacks from Trader Joe's!
8. Hold hands together and stroll through an outlet mall, going in new stores you've not tried before, and trying out a new snack from the food court.
9. Make it all about ice cream. Visit three creameries and try one scoop at each place!
10. Just listen to music on his playlist and her playlist. Share the why's of the music you love and the lyrics that speak.
11. Think of a kind act for another couple – perhaps a surprise gift on their porch, shop for gifts for their kids, actually hand-write cards to send, etc.
12. Listen to a podcast together, take notes, then discuss.
13. Learn to dance by searching YouTube for the type of dancing you want to learn!
14. Visit a craft store and pick out a kit or brainstorm a yard decoration idea, get the stuff, and make!
15. Make it all about "newness" – visit three places in your city you've never been before – museum, coffee shop, park, etc.
16. Peruse magazines and/or newspapers together, try the crossword puzzle, read out loud to each other, find a coupon and use it.
17. Write or read poetry to each other, then sketch each other or a beautiful scene.
18. Use one of those unused appliances like the ice cream maker, the panini grill or the fondue set.
19. Visit a garden for inspiration, then a garden center for new herbs or plants or veggies, and then plant!
20. Cross something of your to-do list TOGETHER.

21. Say yes to the dress or the shoes, or something each of you wants to buy, and go for it.
22. Zip into a convenience store for peanuts and coke, then sit in the car and people watch.
23. When's the last time you make milkshakes for dinner? Throw in dark chocolate almonds, your favorite ice cream, and anything else that sounds good – and blend! Watch a Netflix movie while you enjoy.
24. Go see a movie you wouldn't normally pick to see – like a foreign film with subtitles.
25. Find live music in your town at a coffee shop or venue, and go listen.
26. Pick a high rise hotel and take a game like Outburst, buy a snack, and play the game and relax in the lobby. (We love the newest version of this game!)
27. Make it a spa night. Rub each other's feet with lotion, give massages, brush each other's hair, light scented candles.
28. Set out a picnic on the floor or in your own backyard. Order pizza to be delivered. Buy fancy paper plates and napkins, and try a cool drink using a recipe you find on Pinterest.
29. Rent a pedal boat or kayak or just sit by a body of water in yard chairs, with dips and chip.
30. Organize phone photos and send a few faves to be printed, pick out frames, and set them for display in your home.
31. Find a sports event nearby, soccer or baseball or tennis, and go watch. Eat popcorn. Drink coke.

I'm the one who is constantly brainstorming date fun ideas, but my husband is willing and happy to give me a break and plan a date, too. He just has a hard time and takes a long time to plan an outing. Once in a while, I update this list, print it out and hand it him for easy reference. I don't mind if he chooses an idea I wrote down, as long as he plans it and I can just show up and enjoy. And he doesn't mind giving my brain a break, and making me feel special and loved.

## **After 30 Years – Up and Away – by Marcy Lytle**

We will celebrate 40 years of marriage this month! It's hard to believe, and I suppose I'll have to change the title of this column to up the decade, right? Neither one of us wants a party with friends; as we'd both much rather go on a trip to celebrate. After all of these decades of marriage, we've figured out our common likes and we run with them. We still enjoy each other so much. And traveling is at the top of our list!

Budgeting, planning and actually going on trips can be daunting for some, too expensive to even consider, and some have too many details to take care of behind...so vacations are few and far between. However, there are ways we've found to still go, get away, and enjoy, and here's how it went down for our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary trip out of town:

We started months ago, planning. We subscribe to a few lists (Thrillist is one of our faves) that we receive in our inbox. We recently got a list of quaint towns in each state to visit, and we saw that St. Augustine, Florida was one of them. That's how we picked our destination!

Next, we go to the website for the city and see what there is to do. Trip Advisor usually pops up with the "best" places to visit, eateries, museums, landmarks, etc. We both enjoy history and sightseeing, as well as perhaps a good play or show. We look to see if there is enough for us to do while visiting. It's also important to us that we read reviews and other folks' itineraries. (Google "Two days in St. Augustine") or however many days you'll be staying and blogs and stories pop up!

Once we've picked our destination, we start a list of all the places we'd like to see and what we want to do, and what time of year is best to visit. This is a fun activity we do at night together, while sitting with laptop on my knees, as he writes down questions and ideas while I visit sites.

After we've decided, we check fares. We do this for a few weeks, until we find prices that fit our budget. We usually switch destinations if the cost is outrageous, AND we have now started going on off-seasons – which makes a huge difference in cost. We make sure the cheap fare isn't then increased by huge luggage costs – we try to read the fine print!

Lodging is next, and we decide if we want a B&B or a hotel. If we're going to be gone most of the days and evenings, then we opt for a hotel. If we are leisurely seeing a city and relaxing in our room a bit, we might choose a B&B for ambience and atmosphere. We check to see if parking is included, if breakfast is part of the price, etc. And again, we read reviews. Then we book!

The last big thing we reserve is a rental car. We often have travel points from our credit card which pay for the rental and sometimes the airfare too! That's always a winner!

We do all of the above months in advance so that we can pay as we go, and when the actual trip arrives the big ticket items are paid for.

Finally, we make a list of the things we want to do and the cost, and whether or not we need reservations. We write down what we will be spending. We also choose lots of restaurant ideas to pull from, while in the city or destination of choice.

All of these ideas are printed out, along with our reservation confirmations, city maps, etc. and placed in a plastic ziptop folder (I find these at the Dollar Store sometimes!) This way, everything is together and will fit in our bag. I even paperclip each day's activities and papers together, with an itinerary on the top sheet. This way, we don't have to spend our vacation planning and talking and deciding. We have an outline to follow!

40 years. It's a huge milestone, isn't it? I love him more than I ever have. Over the years, we have argued until we don't remember the original source of disagreement, we have blown our budget and experienced losses, we have said good-bye to parents and seen our own bodies start to age, and we've prayed and seen miracles in our family and kids. We've seen, and done and experienced a lot. But there's lots of life to yet live.

And one of the greatest and most fun things we've done and still hope to do is travel. It releases stress, it helps us connect, and it gets us outside of our familiar environment into other worlds around us. We meet cool people, pray and ask God for amazing encounters, and we enjoy the planning almost as much as the going.

Sometimes, we have funds to go for a week and other times for a weekend. Every chance we get to go is fun, no matter the time we spend away.

I hope you both read lists and plan and organize...and go. It's a great boost for any relationship from year one to year 70 and beyond...to get up and away from it all as often as you can.

**ENCOURAGEMENT**

## Do the Exercises

A few weeks ago through a series of events I my back locked up. It became very tight and it was Very painful to stand and move around. It was one of a few things going on that eventually drove me to the doctor. To help my back I was given a sheet of stretches to do to help loosen it up. That was on Tuesday January 29<sup>th</sup>. Every day my back would bother me, every night I said I was going to the do the exercises the next morning, every morning I would not take the to do them. Wednesday February 6<sup>th</sup> a walk of about a quarter mile caused some pretty good pain and I again said I was going to do the exercises. I didn't. The next day I ran to HEB to grab me some lunch and the walking around caused me to hurt. By now you know what my thoughts were, yep, do the exercises. As surely as my name is Erica the next thoughts that entered my head was God laying out to me how my mantra over the last few days of do the exercises was not only the solution to my physical ailments, it was the answer to spiritual ailments as well. As I took that elevator right to the SECOND floor, my spirit was flooded with this message and the seeds of this story planted. It is funny how God can use the most ordinary of circumstances to deliver and extraordinary yet simple message. Do the exercises. You see ... By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a Godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know Him, the One who called us to Himself by means of His marvelous glory and excellence (2 Peter 1:3, NLT). What is a Godly life? Glad you asked.

A Godly life is that life full of the spiritual fruit outlined in Galatians 5:22-23. To access it all we just need to do the exercises. OH MY GOSH, literally as I am writing this I realized that what if the fruits of the spirit laid out in Galatians ARE the exercises!!! What is the common thing between my stretching exercises and the fruit of the spirit outlined on Galatians? We have to CHOOSE to do them. I have always looked at this verse as measuring stick to how well I am aligning my life to God's word. The more aligned the more fruit I will have in my life. What just stirred in my spirit is that no matter what my life looks like if I am a Christian I should be walking in love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. My key to overcoming is choosing to do the exercises.

John 15:2 talks about Christians being branches that have fruit (the exercises we have learned to use) and How God then purges those branches to give us opportunities to learn to use more exercises (to bear more fruit).

When the enemy is waging war, I have to put my shield up and stand my ground. I have to trust the Lord to fight those battles out in front of me and walk the path that He clears. If I retreat the enemy advances and that which was mine I have given away. Jesus said in the word John 10: 29C ... no one can snatch

them out of my Father's hand. That is the same thing for us, the battles that my Father has won for me, the victories He has given me, NO ONE can take from me, but I can sure give them away, to the enemy. Getting them back is not as easy as oops I made a mistake can I get that back please. Quit. Giving. Your. Victories. Back! Don't stop doing your exercises, keep doing them, exercising makes us stronger, adding more makes us even stronger.

I was an athlete through my college years and I remember how much I would dread coming off my offseason. I dreaded it because I hate how sore it made me. The truth is if I had continued to work out during my offseason I would not have been nearly as sore. I would have been more prepared for what I was about to go through. Being a Christian has not offseason, life has no offseason there is no time off. I should always be doing my exercises. Unlike pre-season workout the enemy's attacks have no start date I can mark on my calendar. We have to stay ready stay spiritually in shape so we are prepared for the enemy's attack. Not so I am physically ready to do battle, but spiritually ready to stand as my Heavenly Father delivers me the victory.

The hard part about writing encouraging stories about faith is making sure I not giving the impression that I am trying to change God's narrative. In the case of this story, by not mentioning prayer and reading the word, I am NOT saying they are not VERY important exercises in our Christian routine. I am sharing a new perspective for ME on how the fruit of the spirit, up until now, was viewed for ME as a measuring stick of how spiritual I am. They are things I should be doing, not acquiring. As life happens I can choose to live it in the fruits of the spirit building up my spiritual character standing strong in the knowledge that for my Father there is no failure.

A few weeks ago I set before the Lord during our women's discipleship group two things I wanted to start doing in my life, to learn to speak boldly in truth and to have more self-control (which is one of the fruits in Galatians). Speaking boldly has its roots in love or should be guided by love to be able to speak the truth to two very important people in my life. Already I see God's faithfulness in these two areas. You see He pruned me so and gave me the opportunity to bear more of His fruit. I can honestly say neither of these have ever been easy for me, but now how looking back on the two weeks there just seems to be a different level of something about being able to do it. Too much to try to share, but suffice it to say God has been setting me up and I had to choose to step up.

## **Firmly Planted – New Grace – by Dina Cavazos**

Last month I wrote about simplifying the clothes closet—keeping only what gives me that “spark of joy.” As an experiment, my daughter and I each counted one row of tops—she had 75 and I had 73. That’s not counting folded items and summer clothes put away. Crazy! I haven’t done the brutal work of piling and eliminating—I’m taking a more gentle approach, but at least I’m making progress. I’ve pared down home décor and essentials and I’m happy with the simple, clean look. A box of once-treasured vintage items and some things in the attic that I haven’t touched in 12 years will soon be a memory of times past, and even that will fade.

But there’s more. Eight years ago, I started working on creating a prayer garden in my backyard. I had so many ideas and a vision of what it should be. The materials I needed seemed to appear at every thrift store and garage sale I went to; I found some relics in the barn of my childhood country home; I knew all the best places for landscape supplies and plants. Pretty soon, I had a collection of unique items—rusty metal pieces, beautiful aged wood, garden art, several types of rocks, benches and chairs, pots, bird feeders, etc. They were there at the ready when I had an inspiration for another element of the garden.

Etched into the concrete patio (the piece that launched the start of my backyard retreat) are the words, “*All for Him 2011.*” I really did give all for Him—the One who spoke quietly in my heart and challenged me to listen. I wasn’t sure of the purpose for the garden; I just knew I had to create it. Primarily, it’s been a place for me to meet with God as I work or contemplate the wonder of life seen everywhere in nature. It’s revealed new layers in spiritual life lessons I don’t think I’ll ever master: walking in faith, paying attention to the invisible as well as the visible, being ok with making mistakes, finding peace in chaos. For several years I’ve been fueled by this mission. It’s been fulfilling to use my energies and resources to create a peaceful sanctuary right out my back door.

*But I sense I’m moving into a new season.*

The hardscaping is in place, trees are finally providing shade, and the beds are planted. The sense of mission, the momentum, and the energy that propelled the accomplishment of the prayer garden vision have faded. When I think of the physical labor alone, moving rocks and dumping wagons of decomposed granite...how did I do that?! He gave me grace. The clutter of unrealized projects in the garage and the side yard is getting on my nerves. Everywhere I look I see parts and pieces--the collection of wood standing in the corner, items on stand-by hiding in cabinets, nooks, and crannies collecting dust and taking up space—it feels smothering and heavy. These feelings evoked by what I see as “clutter,” but used to see as potential, tell me that season of grace has been lifted.

A new season is bringing simplification and rest and I know it’s time to extend this journey into the garden. My plan is to clear the clutter and look for ways to reduce maintenance in order to make room for something else. For me, simplicity brings peace and clarity. A life uncluttered with “seen things” helps me focus on “unseen things.” The garden is still an important part of my life, but it belongs to the Lord. It’s only a means to know him better—the Alpha and Omega, Faithful and True, the Light of the World, Bread of Life. There’s no purpose at all otherwise. As

long as I'm "firmly planted" in his being and nothing else, I can move with him. I don't know what the next "assignment" will be, but I'm confident it will come, and, with it, new grace.

## **Moving Forward – In My Dreams – by Pam Charro**

All of my life, I've had mostly negative, scary and stressful dreams. I've either been running away from something or someone, fighting with family members, or stressed out from trying to accomplish tasks or pass tests.

I'm happy to share that all of that is finally starting to change.

Recently I've noticed that when I do battle in my dreams...I actually win! I very seldom, if ever, dream of running away from something. And I often even dream of healing people and/or preaching the gospel to them! I stand up to what is threatening or stealing with God's word and it actually works, even while I'm asleep! It's so exciting, empowering and liberating, and all I can attribute it to is renewing my mind.

The Bible says in Roman's 12:2 that we are actually transformed when we renew our thoughts to agree with what the Word says. So I have the opportunity to be renewed and restored from the very deepest parts of my subconscious, the parts I'm not even aware of.

Those parts that come out while I'm asleep.

It also reminds me of Mark 4:27, when Jesus is sharing the story of the farmer's crop. "Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how." Again, he is referring to the Word of God and its powerful ability to constantly grow, even when no one seems to be paying attention.

How exciting it is for me to see God's faithful transforming in my life! And all the more encouraging to see it happening...even in my dreams!

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## **Best of the Mess – Today – by Ashley Zanella**

Today I lost it.

It's been a hard month, which is comical, because I actually got away for a whole week with my husband on a cruise. Everything has a cost though, and going on that trip meant that I was going to see my husband a lot less when we returned so he could work to make up those missed days. It also meant my toddler and baby were completely off their sleep schedules (and of course as parenting would have it, they also started sleep regressions right before we left.)

Don't get me wrong!

I was incredibly grateful and blessed to have that alone time with my husband. And for my out-of-state mom to have gotten the opportunity to spend time bonding alone with her grandsons, I'm so thankful. I'm so blessed. I'm also so overwhelmed sometimes. And you know what? That's okay.

- Today had been over a week since I'd had more than a few hours with my husband...and zero alone time.
- Today marked nearly two weeks of what used to be 2-3 hour naps, but now totaling a lovely 20-30 minutes.
- Today, every single time I sat down, my toddler found something new he wanted, needed and had to have now.
- Today he broke his record by throwing a fit for 25 solid minutes because I wouldn't open the closet where we stash the toys that get taken away.
- And...today was day two of body aches, slight fever, hot flashes and fatigue.

So yes, today I got to a point where I was just overwhelmed!

After my toddler woke up the baby for the second time, only 20 minutes into his nap, I lost it. I had no idea where I would find the energy to keep up with the demands of the rest of the day. I went to get the baby and, with tears in my eyes, I told my husband "I'm done." And I felt done. I felt so utterly exhausted. I felt like I was drowning. In that moment, I knew my frustrations were petty. I knew it could be so much worse. I realized there are people that never get to meet their baby or have lost theirs. Two of my friends have experienced both of those losses recently. Yet there I was just SO frustrated, so overwhelmed that I was about to cry over an interrupted nap.

So what did I do?

I did what most women do. I vented to my best friend and got the words of encouragement I needed. Not only did she help encourage me through words, but she snuck by the house and dropped off a goodie bag with a card, wine, and pick-me-up snacks. Her act of selflessness and love helped refill the cup that had been gradually depleting over the past week and was nearly empty. It helped me realize that a little selflessness goes a long way. This made me think of my

boys who were probably acting out because they knew their mom wasn't fully present or willing to really play with them. We just needed to get out of the house, even if I didn't quite have the energy for it. So when that third nap was interrupted, I packed up the boys and went straight to the park. We had a blast! It turned out that the fresh air and time outdoors was the exact medicine we all needed. That feeling of drowning, fatigue and exhaustion was lifted. There were no more tantrums the rest of the night, just hugs and kisses. It's amazing how all it took was an amazing friend, a different perspective, and some fresh air.

Now here I am at the end of one of the most exhausting days I've had in months, with my cup full. I may have lost it today, but without getting *that* exhausted and *that* just "done" earlier, I wouldn't be going to bed reflecting on how blessed I am to have a hard working husband, two incredibly fun and independent kids, and a compassionate friend.

Thank you for reading my very first article for *A Bundle of THYME* Magazine! As a mom of two small children, life can get hectic, but I aim every day to make the best of the mess! I hope you'll come along the ride with me whether you're a mom, mom to be, or simply find these experiences fascinating.

## **Real Stories – Every Single Day – by Bekah Holland**

Sometimes, it takes me a long time to learn the most simplest of lessons.

I mean, take cooking, for example. My mom is like June Cleaver meets Betty Crocker....no pressure, right? Growing up, she made the most wonderful home for us. She spent her days chasing two kids, cleaning, managing schedules and even making our clothes. Even with all of that, she put these amazing, homemade meals on the table by the time my dad got home from work. All through my childhood and teen years, she tried to pique my interest and teach me to cook. I wasn't interested in learning to make anything requiring more thought or time than a Hot Pocket.

Fast forward to about 10 years, and this comes back to bite me. My soon to be husband's birthday fell on a week he happened to be out of town for business. I had big plans to make him this grand dinner. I pictured candlelight, music, ambiance and of course, a delicious homemade meal. Keep in mind that these were the days before smart phone and high-speed internet access. I finally found a pork tenderloin recipe that didn't seem too complicated (thanks to AOL's search engine). So I made a list, did the shopping, cleaned and set a beautiful table before starting my preparations.

A bit late into the process, I realized that I didn't have a string to tie the pork loin. "Meh," I thought. "No big deal. I mean, twine should be fine", I thought. In case you were wondering, the results from cooking with blue fishing twine closely resembles roasted Smurf. It was horrible! My fiancé sat down at my table with beautiful drippy candles, soft music playing in the background, and a plate of inedible food in front of him. He laughed. I cried. We ordered pizza. I also may or may not have accidentally given him food poisoning on our first Thanksgiving as a married couple where he ended up in the ER, but we won't talk about that one. It's funny now, but I'm still a little surprised he didn't run out the door and never come back. I got better at cooking (and not poisoning people) over the years, but there's not a day that goes by that I cook a meal that I don't wish I had listened to my mom years ago and saved myself some pride-reducing moments and many disastrous meal attempts.

Fast forward many years...

Here are some things to know about me. I was raised in church. I grew up with parents and grandparents, family near and far who prayed for me and over me every single day of my life. I know how powerful prayer is. I know our God is capable of more than I can imagine. But sometimes I just get distracted or busy. And this time, I got so wrapped up in our life and the craziness that comes with having kids that I sometimes forgot to pray like I should. Our family went through some rough years. Things I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy. And I knew that not only did I need to pray more, but I needed to start praying more intentionally.

I began praying and I saw God move again and again. I saw changes in people and dynamics and situations. It was amazing to see God work in people that I love so deeply, and work in me at the same time. But I'll be honest. After a while, some days I'd choose sleep over getting up to spend time in prayer. Or I would completely forget and then just quickly say, "Lord bless us," and move on with my day. When I did that, I'd see things change for the worse. The same people, dynamics and situations that I'd seen improve would look just like they had before God had shown up. Like the enemy saw some weakness and beat his way back in. When that happened, I'd get back on my knees and get back to work. But I didn't always want to. I was

exhausted and empty trying to do it all on my own. I was constantly pouring my time and energy into praying protection over my family and interceding for those I love.

I should have felt filled up and confident, I thought, but instead I just felt depleted. One morning, rather frustrated, I vented my heart to God.

“Why can’t I just take a break, God?

Why do I have to fight this battle every single day?

It’s not like YOU need ME!”

In typical God fashion, he poked at my heart and opened my eyes. He brought to my mind the story of Moses and the Amalekites. In case you need a quick Cliffs Notes version reminder of the story, here’s a recap. When the Amalekites attacked the Israelites, as long as Moses held up his arms with the staff in his hands, the children of God would advance toward victory. When he got tired and dropped his arms, they would start losing ground to the Amalekites. And, of course, Moses’ arms were going to get tired! I mean, have you ever carried a baby in a baby carrier...you know, the kind that clicks into the car seat and feels like it weighs 75 pounds when you’re walking across a parking lot? Or raked leaves? Or raised your hand waiting to be called on for so long your arm feels like it’s a weight? You get tired. Moses did too. But God didn’t leave him to hold his arms up in the air all on his own. He gave him support. He gave him people like Aaron and Hur to hold him up when he was too tired to continue on his own. And God gave me support too. He gave me family who will stand in the gap for me and pray over me when I’m weak and over ones who encourage me along the way. He gave me people who will hold up my arms so that we can continue working toward the victory God has for us.

I wish I didn’t take so long to learn these simple truths God put in His word for me. But sometimes I do. Sometimes I missed the full impact of His truth because I wasn’t ready. Just like my mom trying to give me the tools I might need to feed my family someday, I wasn’t paying attention. Now, I have a funny story about a blue dinner and possibly trying to poison my husband, but I want to do better when it comes to praying God’s Word over my family and interceding on their behalf. I don’t want to miss the ways that God wants to use me, and also how He wants to fill me up and strengthen me, because there is more victory in store when we’re ready to raise our arms and hold them there, even when they get tired. That’s what our village is here for. That’s why we surround ourselves with people who love God. All so we can stand together...”for where two or more are gathered, there I am.”

**FRESH THYME**

## **FRESH THYME - Unleashed and Free**

I think one of the biggest things for girls (especially girls) to overcome is worrying about what others think about us. I don't know at what age it kicks in, but once that thought process grabs hold, it keeps us on a leash the rest of our life. If that worry is never overcome, we end up as older women in a chair multiple times a week trying to erase signs of aging and lift that which is fallen. On, there's nothing wrong with that either, unless it's the worry that motivates the sit.

Little girls are often so confident in their style, when they play dress-up, aren't they? She emerges from her room with a boa around her neck, clunky plastic high heels, and lipstick that is quite outside the lines of her lips. We applaud, she loves it, and she prances around as if she's Queen for the Day.

Fast forward to age 13 or so and that same little girl is now emerging from her room where she spent too much time trying to cover that zit and too long staring into her closet wishing she had clothes like her friend. She's also extremely self-conscious about her belly pooch, that baby fat, that hasn't disappeared like some of the girls that now have their boobs in bloom. And it's all most likely because she has spent countless hours watching girls of her age on television, or perhaps one girl at school made a rude comment.

That's when the worry starts...those thoughts that we aren't pretty or skinny enough, we're too short or too dumb, or any number of other thoughts about how we don't measure up to some sort of standard placed on us by society. Sometimes, those standards are even placed on us by our parents.

It's time to get married and we're planning a wedding, and then our friends are throwing us a baby shower. We want our wedding to be unique and for our guests to think we've done a spectacular job in presentation and beauty. We compete with others for a more grand announcement of the gender of our baby, as we worry what others will think about what we share and how we share it. Social media has infused worry that we won't stand out or be loved, like she is over there on her page or her site...

Now the leash is attached our neck and the cord has shortened. If we don't snip it loose, here's what then occurs:

Aging start happening, kids leave home, life deals us some hard blows. We look around at her and she still looks good, her kids hang out with her constantly, and her life seems all bliss. And ours? We look into the mirror still feeling like that little girl that one time realized she wasn't all that cute, she didn't really fit in, and most likely the other girls don't like us anyway...because we can't erase the lines of time and loss.

This is where we have another chance to change, ladies, to snip the leash and run free!

I've been there, and am in the throes now of the aging process and losing my parents and losing my own footing in this crazy world. I can at times find myself wondering what others must think of the way I dress or my lack of this, or why I don't show up here, or how in the world can I

allow that. Some days I wake up and find myself on that short leash and it chokes me. It chokes me dry.

But here's the difference between us and those animals that are fastened to collars with leashes. Our leash is self-snapped and we can just as easily unsnap it and run free. It's not easy, but we can do it! We can tell ourselves that no weapon formed against us will prosper, we are the apple of His eye, and we are beautiful in all our phases of life – inside and out. We can shake loose the worry and whining and wondering what they think or how they look at us, and we can step away from the house with a smile.

In fact, a smile is one of the most beautiful things we can wear as we age. It softens lines and fills our lips, it brightens our mood and lifts our spirit, and it causes others to look at us and wonder – not why we don't look like this or do that – but rather why we are so happy!

What others think about us cannot define us, and the quicker we tell our girls (and boys) this truth, over and over again, the better their lives will be. The only thing that defines our life is what HE thinks, and his Word is full of how his thoughts toward us are innumerable and wonderful.

Psalm 139:17,18

*How precious to me are your thoughts, God!  
How vast is the sum of them!  
Were I to count them,  
they would outnumber the grains of sand—  
when I awake, I am still with you.*

Think on this verse until you hear the “click” from the collar that's been choking you and you see it fall to the ground. Shake yourself and realize that you are no longer tethered to worry and fear...and then run. Run free and run hard, and emerge from your room wearing those shoes no one else likes...but you think make you feel grand, comfy and smart. Yep, even a shoe can do that!

## **FRESH THYME - Not Doing It**

I think all women everywhere have anxiety in some area, even though they pray, fight against it, gather their thoughts, meditate, attend yoga sessions, or whatever they do to stave off fear and worry. I know I do. I have to daily choose to think on good things, cast my cares on Him, believe the truth, and surround myself with others who do the same. It's an ongoing battle, and one we just have to win if we are to be of any good to our families and friends...and to ourselves.

However, at least in my own life, there are so many other areas where I've lived in peace and not worried and experienced faith and walked in truth and slept well at night...and I'm so thankful.

The culture that surrounds us these days is screaming and pulling at us to say, "Have you thought about this, though?" "Here. Take up this new worry. Fear this. And do this in order to avoid disaster." It's everywhere, from the moment I wake until I rest my head at night, new possibilities to worry myself to death with.

But...I'm not doing it.

Here are a few things I'm talking about, new worries that are offered to us on a daily basis:

*Aging.* If we scroll through the cable television channels, there will be several infomercials on wrinkly skin and how to avoid the signs of aging. Besides that, for those of us who deal with elderly parents and see what they experience with memory loss, aches and pains, and even loneliness...we can totally lie awake at night wondering if that too will be our plight as we observe more wrinkles and drooping eyes. So we're enticed to buy this cream and have that procedure and sign up for this beauty enhancer to stave off the loss of beauty we see in the mirror.

I'm not doing it.

*Cancer.* I have a friend right now that's in the hospital, and I bet you have friends with the diagnosis, or maybe you yourself have cancer. When I wake in the morning, there is certainly going to be one news clip on my laptop news that tells me about a food I'm eating that causes cancer, or some product I'm using that's sure to be the death of me. I can click and read each one and change up my pantry and clean out my fridge, for fear that I might die tomorrow. But I cannot pick up one more worry.

I'm not doing it.

*E coli or other foodborne woes.* There's a cruise somewhere that's full of passengers with stomach bugs. There's a lettuce in our crispers that's carrying bacteria. Another restaurant is shut down for uncleanness in the food prep area. We're eating and wondering if there's some creepy thing on the food we're trying to enjoy, so we wash our food, we buy organic, and we fret and stew (no pun intended) over every dish we eat and offer at our table. Fear wants to set up in a canister on the shelf in our kitchen.

I'm not doing it.

*Bread, sugar, preservatives.* She's not feeding her kids sugar of any kind. In fact, she's taking her kids food to every party and every event, so they don't taste anything bad for them. They're not eating carbs so you can't invite them over for the newest sandwich recipe you found that includes strawberries with chicken! They'll insist on eating it sans that new potato bread you found that tastes delicious. You read the labels and there are so many ingredients that you know aren't good, so you put the jar back on the shelf and walk away...from everything. It's overwhelming to keep up with what's good and what's bad to ingest and digest. Maybe you should quit your job and devote it to clean and healthy living.

I'm not doing it.

*Suicide.* Anti-depressants can cause it, her daughter talks about it, there are signs you must notice in your children, and it's on the rise in our world among kids. Yikes! Could your own children be contemplating it, your grandchildren influenced by their peers about it, and is the world actually so desolate and hopeless now that you've even considered this selfish act of death that would critically harm those you love and those that love you? They want us to take these pills to stave off our sorrowful sighs, but yet the side effects can cause the very thing we fear.

I'm not doing it.

*Perfection.* Ah, there it is. Another video pops up on Facebook where she shows us how to get that perfect makeup with long eyelashes and flawless skin. Oh, and she has this great product she's selling to straighten, curl, give lift to and much more – to our hair! Even if our hair is thin and brittle and lifeless, we can expect miracles. Or there's another picture of a white sofa with a counter in the back with perfectly lined stools at a counter where there's a candle burning and fresh fruit in a bowl, with not a crumb to be seen. That's how we want our houses to look and it's how we want our hair and face to shine. But it's all so expensive and time consuming and we just click off and sigh...as we go back to our thin lips and dull colors in our home that we used to think were so cute. Should we work on our perfect look?

I'm not doing it.

I could go on and on, but you get the picture, don't you? Am I saying to ditch healthy living and eating and wisdom and medicine? No way. I am saying we don't have to buy into the worry behind all of the above. My dad has this saying, "Do what you can with what you have. And don't worry about the rest." The truth of the matter is that I cannot control all of the above, stave off the aging process, build a wall around my family so that they never hurt or get sick, keep my skin and hair from experiencing the beauty of time (yes, I said *beauty*), or only eat that which I prepare, refusing to enjoy life with my friends.

I will not pick up worry in more areas than those I already have, as I don't believe that's healthy...at all. I love to eat good food, dress in cute clothes and wear makeup that enhances. I want to live a long life free of disease, and I absolutely love decorating and fixing up my closet and my home. But I want to enjoy and do all of that because it's fun and enjoyable, not because

I'm scared to death I'm going to fall prey to the evils that lurk in the shadows. And that's the difference.

I'm not doing it. I'm not picking up another worry or woe, when today is all I have promised, anyway. I will pursue peace and ask for wisdom, and walk in that direction daily, as I live and enjoy life to its fullest. And I will be careful to skip over articles and commercials and even conversations that cause anxiety to rise because I didn't "know that." After all, the information I just read might change tomorrow!

I'm not doing it. Are you?

*(If you do any of the above because of health concerns in your kids or your family, I'm not referring to you. Of course, you need to proceed with caution. This article is meant to encourage all of us that struggle with fear of the unknown and that which we read and that which we see...when there is no worry at hand.)*

## FRESH THYME - Observations

It's everywhere. Friends and young people and celebrities – everyone is minimalizing. In fact, you'll read about one of our writer's journey on clearing out clutter over on the ENCOURAGEMENT page. It's a great thing to do, to clear away clutter, to make our spaces simpler and more pleasant and cleaner and more enjoyable. I'm totally into that, as well. I cannot stand junky areas of the house, and when I notice them they stress me out. So onto my to-do list that goes – clean that shelf, organize that drawer, arrange that pantry.

Minimalizing is such a good way to assess and discard, to bring peace. It's a good way to observe and see how much stuff we have amassed and to also teach our kids to share and give or swap with our friends or kids in need. It's necessary in this consumer-crazed world in which we live as we see and then we buy and we store. It's all SO GOOD.

However, as we humans all like to do at times, it seems sometimes extremes are taken that cause stress the other way. Let me explain:

*Shopping for furniture, I notice lots of white.* White dining room chairs (seriously?), white sofas and white rugs. While it's quite beautiful and stunning, who can really live in a room adorned in white on places where we are supposed to walk, sit, and dine?

*Looking at decorating ideas on line,* I see lots of open space with nothing on the walls or floors, and then a massive – dining room table – in the center. Space is limited in my house, and while some can afford a ton of square feet, I cannot! So isn't that quite defeating the purpose of minimization if we buy a bigger space to display our lack of clutter?

*I read about ridding our homes of paper and plastic,* while these folks promote sites that only sell fair trade and recycled items that are quite pricey. That's wonderful to save the planet, but I would have to rethink before I chunk down \$300 for a sweater. I suppose if your closet is minimal, this might work well for you. But I like lots of options.

*There seems to be a "Look at me and what I'm doing and how much better the way I live is than yours" type of attitude that goes with some extremes.* Not all, but some. In other words, if we could all "see the light" and do what they do, our world would be a much better place. Maybe it would, but for some reason that attitude is not attracting me towards that reasoning right now...

Maybe it's all because I'm of the older generation that I see the extreme (at least, what I call extreme) as not really doable for me, and because I like a comfy sofa more than a pristine one, and well...I have grandkids with sticky hands from eating...yes from eating candy that I gave them that's not organic or 100% pure. For some reason, extremes seem exhausting to me.

If you're into minimalizing, go for it. I am too, along with so many as we observe our clutter and pare down. And share your story with a peaceful intent as it relates to YOU, like Dina does in her story "New Grace." But if you're into minimalizing so that you can show the world your perfection without a dot of dirt or one piece of plastic in your pantry, go for it as well. Just don't tell me that your way is a better way...because that doesn't make me want to follow suit.

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## **FRESH THYME – She Told Me Twice**

It was really cold, and the weather forecasters had mentioned a slight chance of snow/sleet in my area, which is a big thing where I live. While all of you northerners sleep right through that kind of forecast, I toss and turn hoping if we do indeed get that white stuff, that it doesn't melt before sunrise!

Imagine my dismay when I awoke that morning to see absolutely nothing on the ground, and then...my daughter called. She was taking the kids to school and they squealed as they noticed white stuff in the crevices of roofs in their neighborhood! She knew I might not know, so she called to see if I'd stepped outside to look. I hadn't even thought of looking up! And there it was – a happy line of white on the tops of the houses on my street – that stuff we rarely see. And it made my day.

The very next week I received another phone call from my daughter. Once again, she was calling to inform me about an icy view I might have missed. She knew it would burn off when the sun rose in the sky, but there it was, on the way to school again, but this time on the ground. The heavy dew and light mist had frozen and the fields were glistening and white. She knew I wouldn't see it in my front yard because the heat of the house would prohibit the frost. But down the street we have an open field.

I pulled on a coat and hopped in the car and drove a few hundred feet just to observe the beauty, once again. I was so happy she called to tell me, and so thrilled that I got to see the beauty!

By now, some of you know exactly what I mean, if you're a neighbor and a Texan. Others of you are giving me the eye roll and thinking, "Seriously? A bit of icy frost made your day?"

My daughter knows me well. She knows I absolutely love weather and all that it brings, and I especially love those rare winter moments when we get any hint of that wintry mix. If she hadn't called me, however, I would have missed out on those small pleasures. She took the time to let me know, to call me outside to look up, and encouraged me to drive down the street to look around...to see!

I know it's a little thing, but it was huge to me!

It reminded me to think of my friends, and to let them in, focus their attention, or call them to see that which I know makes them happy!

For instance...

- When I see a good movie, I can write my movie buff friends a text and recommend.
- When I eat at an awesome restaurant, I can invite a friend to join.
- When there's this incredible sale on shoes, I can phone the one who will be delighted at the news!
- When I read an awesome verse that brightens my mood, I can share with a friend who's feeling the same.

- When I read a good book, I can loan it or offer the title to a book lover friend.
- When there's a rainbow in the sky or a full moon at night, I can share that news with one who cares.
- When I have a creative idea I can take a photo and inspire a friend.
- And when any of my friends do the above for me, I can be sure to thank them and pass it on.

I'm so thankful that my daughter knows me, she took the time to listen to her kiddos, and she cared enough to text her mom to take a look at that which she knew would make her smile.

And it did! In fact, she did it twice!