

A BUNDLE OF

TH  ME

**JULY 2018**

# TIPS

## **Seven for You – Balanced – by Marcy Lytle**

When the scales of our minds, bodies or even our schedules are tipped too far down on one side, we feel the imbalance, and it's difficult to live well. For example, if we are overloaded with worry and fear, we find it hard to sleep soundly. If our bodies are tipped too heavily with caffeine or sugar, we suffer for it. And if our schedules are too full or too sparse, we frantically try to erase commitments or fill in some fun! We need a little more balance!

**Here are some choices to think about, to bring our lives back into a little bit of balance...when we need it:**

Getting dressed – There's this one "rule" I like to stand by when it comes to fashion, to keep the look balanced: Big necklace/little earrings or big earrings/little necklace (or no necklace) but not both big! Sometimes, too much bling and jewels that are huge and hanging so heavily on ears and around the neck make us look like we might topple over! If you like that look, go for it. But for balance...don't.

While we're thinking – When my mind is full and running over and tipped way too far in the list of worries department, there are a few things that help to bring my thoughts captive, back into balance: reading the truth (the Bible's promises about his goodness), imagining emptying my thoughts at His feet, and asking a friend to pray. Sometimes we can be that friend too, but having someone pray with us relieves our burden and brings us back to normalcy. It really does.

Makeup – Those smoky eyes and false eyelashes and big pouty lips look good on the camera and the red carpet, because lights are shining and cameras are clicking. But for we who walk the sidewalks to and from our front doors, perhaps a bit more balanced look is easier to maintain and prettier on the face. If we're going to enhance our looks with too many "falsies" we need to make sure our glue and painted lines don't come loose and bleed! Especially in the summer months, it's nice to have a more balanced approach to make up – minimal foundation, a simple lip gloss and maybe a brush of color on our cheeks. Let the sun enhance our glow!

At the table – Balanced eating is difficult, when we're constantly trying this diet and that meal plan. I recently read that the most *fit* people live a lifestyle of good eating, not a yo-yo back and forth of cutting this and adding that. Moderation is usually a huge key most of us never turn. Eat slowly, just until we're satisfied and not stuffed, and drink more water than any other choice of beverage. Share meals when eating out, and shop the perimeter of the store instead of opting for boxes and cans. Enjoy a small bite of the real dessert instead of gulping down five of the cardboard variety. Don't fast all day so we can eat all night. Little changes tip the scales back to the middle – and the middle is okay! We don't have to aim for bone skinny.

Those calendar slots – It's okay to have empty days with nothing on the calendar. I myself need to realize this. Sometimes "nothing days" can turn out to be just what we need – a day of reading, resting, driving out in the country, or observing the clouds in the sky. It's also A-okay to say NO to the tenth birthday party your kids are invited to, or that lunch date you're afraid to

miss, or even to that next church event you're expected to attend. Sure, there are times when we can't help the busyness upon us, but there are also times when we can.

The clutter – Do piled high tabletops, messy closets and car seats full of junk have you feeling like you're going to scream? Don't try to tackle all of those jobs in one sitting – that idea is daunting and makes you feel imbalanced for sure! Use those empty calendar boxes and fill in one cleanout job per week. This way, each place that acquires a pileup gets attention regularly, instead of being left to become a junk heap the entire year. Buy a few cute organizers, delegate one of these cleanup jobs to a family member, but toss out the clutter. You'll sigh with relief when the clutter is gone!

The work – This may be the one area we feel completely helpless in taming and balancing. Bosses require us to meet deadlines, extra hours are demanded if we want to advance, and if we hear there is one more project and team we're supposed to be a part of, we might just roll over and die! Work deadlines do appear throughout the year, and we have to suck it up and acquiesce. However, there's this thing called prayer where we can go to our big Boss upstairs and tell him what's going on. Ask him for insight, favor, creativity and miracles in the job department, when the stress of making another dollar to pay another bill is too much. Then listen and trust and obey.

These are only a few areas of imbalance that appear in our lives, but when they are all out of kilter, we are in trouble. Wearing a big necklace and big earrings aren't any big deal, but working four jobs and never seeing our children is. We live in a human body that requires balance of rest/work/play. We have minds that need to shut off when we sleep in order to work properly the next day. And we have to stop and notice a sweet new puppy in the arms of a small child, instead of whizzing past, nearly knocking her down.

What can you bring back into balance? Ask for help. Pray about it. Breathe. And unload the heavy side, to bring that pleasing balance back into sight. Aren't balanced scales so pretty to view?

## **The Dressing – Flip Flop Fun – by Marcy Lytle**

I recently got my favorite pair of flip flops ever, on clearance at Eddie Bauer Outlet, and I've been wearing them like crazy. I had sworn off flip flops a few years ago, because that thing between my toes had started hurting my feet! However, these flip flops I found (in this pretty hue of red!) did not hurt my toes...or my feet! And they're cute. That makes them a winner for my summer wardrobe!

So we thought why not share some other cute flip flops out there, that aren't completely flat or flimsy, or way too trendy!

Here's what we found:

**Simply Brown** – These are super cute and affordable. I love the leather look, and this hue of brown for summer goes with everything from jean skirts, to shorts, to capris and more.

<https://www.target.com/p/women-s-elberta-flip-flop-sandal-universal-thread-153-brown/-/A-52862758?preselect=52803608#ink=sametab>

**Pretty in Blue** – These are the flip flops I purchased at Eddie Bauer, but in a pretty shade of blue. In fact, they come in many colors, and they're on sale. Seriously, these are comfortable, so much that I went for a long walk in them and they felt great! Cute too, paired with yellows or navy, or even summer reds!

<http://www.eddiebauer.com/product/womens-eddie-bauer-break-point-flip-flop/92006134?showProducts=111&color=500&sizetype=&size=>

**Pearls and Beads** – Like a bit dressier version of the flip flop? Check out these from Maurice's! These would be great with summer patio dresses or denim capris, as pictured. And even to a casual outdoor wedding, one can wear these with the right outfit!

[https://www.maurices.com/product/skylar-beaded-thong-sandal/61830?ref\\_page=search#color/C605](https://www.maurices.com/product/skylar-beaded-thong-sandal/61830?ref_page=search#color/C605)

**Fringe, Anyone?** - If you enjoy the fringe look and something a little different, this thong might be for you, from Bealls. There are two choices of color combos, and these are so cute for shopping or hanging out by the pool...or wherever you go this season!

<https://www.stage.com/p/dolce-by-mojo-moxy-cappy-thong-sandals/378610/?selectedColor=2096034>

**Amazon Best** – These flops made the top flops for 2018 for women on Amazon. There are so many options in colors you'll be an hour choosing! Check them out!

[https://www.amazon.com/Teva-Olowahu-W-Womens-Olowahu-Flip-Flop/dp/B008KLRTHS/ref=as\\_at?creativeASIN=B008KLRTHS&linkCode=w61&imprToken=R-c2XcYrGZYxmuGPdO16BQ&slotNum=13&ascsubtag=\[st\[p\]c\]eu37u2i00kmm5y6myvfe1vm\[i\]qDVLTP&tag=thestrategistsite-20](https://www.amazon.com/Teva-Olowahu-W-Womens-Olowahu-Flip-Flop/dp/B008KLRTHS/ref=as_at?creativeASIN=B008KLRTHS&linkCode=w61&imprToken=R-c2XcYrGZYxmuGPdO16BQ&slotNum=13&ascsubtag=[st[p]c]eu37u2i00kmm5y6myvfe1vm[i]qDVLTP&tag=thestrategistsite-20)

**Perforated (?)** – Yeah, that's what these are called, because that's what they are...from New York & Company! Great price. We like this green hue, but there are options here for you, too.

<https://www.nyandcompany.com/perforated-thong-sandal/A-prod13320001/?An=102576&prodNo=19>

**Summer Silver** – This season needs a little sparkle, because it's so hot outside. Silver shoes are always fun, no matter the outfit...so why not silver flip flops? From JCP.

[https://www.jcpenney.com/p/gold-toe-ranielle-womens-flip-flops/ppr5007260370?pTplType=regular&country=US&currency=USD&selectedSKUId=14914060034&selectedLotId=1491406&fromBag=true&quantity=1&utm\\_medium=cse&utm\\_source=google&utm\\_campaign=flip-flops&utm\\_content=14914060034&cid=cse%7Cgoogle%7C007%20-%20footwear%20and%20handbags%7Cflip-flops\\_14914060034&gclid=EAlaIQobChMI8KvL-db42gIVhi-BCh1oOAmlEAQYAYABEgKQcvD\\_BwE&kwid=productads-adid^225616513383-device^c-plaid^368424981335-sku^14914060034-adType^PLA](https://www.jcpenney.com/p/gold-toe-ranielle-womens-flip-flops/ppr5007260370?pTplType=regular&country=US&currency=USD&selectedSKUId=14914060034&selectedLotId=1491406&fromBag=true&quantity=1&utm_medium=cse&utm_source=google&utm_campaign=flip-flops&utm_content=14914060034&cid=cse%7Cgoogle%7C007%20-%20footwear%20and%20handbags%7Cflip-flops_14914060034&gclid=EAlaIQobChMI8KvL-db42gIVhi-BCh1oOAmlEAQYAYABEgKQcvD_BwE&kwid=productads-adid^225616513383-device^c-plaid^368424981335-sku^14914060034-adType^PLA)

Flip flops sometimes hurt between my toes, so I'm pretty picky when it comes to finding and wearing a pair. But when I do find a pair that fits and doesn't really flop too much, you'll find me in them all season long! What about you?

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## **Selah's Style – Best Job on the Planet – by Kevin Karnes**

When I raise my voice, my kids call it “yelling,” but I call it motivational speaking for the selective hearing...

I have the incredible honor of being a stay-at-home dad to three amazing young girls. There is not a better “job” on the planet! I may not earn a paycheck, but my days are filled with rewards that that cannot be measured:

random hugs,

imaginative play,

hilarious quotes,

the opportunity to help guide and direct my girls,

and most of all “time” with my kids.

However, just as with all jobs, mine has its challenges too:

random fits and tantrums,

hearing “dad, dad, dad, dad...” more times than I can count each day,

and my job is 24 hours a day seven days a week.

One of the most consistent challenges I face is getting my three girls dressed and out the door for school each day! While this time can be chaotic and stressful, I do my best to remind myself that I only get this time with them once, and it will fly by faster than I care to think about.

With that in mind, we try to have fun and enjoy the process. Here are a few pics of my girls and some of the quick (but fun) things we pick out to wear when getting ready.

(pic of Zoe) Zoe(7) almost always wants to wear skorts. We have fun picking out crazy socks and a headband to match!

(pic of Hayden) Hayden(5) loves to wear skirts over her pants whether they match or not...

(pic of Logan) Logan AKA “the Honey Badger” (3) picks a dress every day and does not enjoy getting her hair done, so a hat will do just fine!

(pic of Zoes hair) My skills do not include fancy hair-do's but pigtails are easy and pretty fun, if you ask me.

(pic of Haydens hair) Again, quick and easy, Hayden calls this a half-up side pony

(pic of the three on porch) And finally before heading out, the girls line up and we play “Daddy's

Shoe Shop!" I pretend to own a shoe store and they come in to buy shoes for the day. It may not sound like much, but they love it and it sure beats "motivationally speaking" to them over and over to get their shoes on!#



## **In the Kitchen – BBQ Sides – by Marcy Lytle**

June is synonymous with bar-b-que isn't it? It's the beginning of the summer season, there's Father Day in the mix, and it's time to fire up the grill for burgers, dogs or steaks! In addition to those grilled favorites, there are always sides that we enjoy with the main dish. Usually that includes chips and dip! This month we are suggesting a few other alternatives that will make your next outdoor bar-b-que a hit because of the flavor on the table, including a flavorful salsa with pineapple!

### **Avocado Tomato Salad**

We had this salad recently, alongside steak nachos. It tastes delicious and can also be used as a dip. However, it stands alone as a side to any bar-b-que meal you decide to cook up! (As you can see in the picture, I didn't have corn, so I added in carrots – it worked!)

#### Ingredients:

- ¼ c olive oil
- Juice of 1 lime
- ¼ tsp cumin
- Kosher salt
- Freshly ground pepper
- 3 avocados, cubed
- 1 pint cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1 small cucumber, sliced into half moons
- 1/3 cup corn
- 1 minced jalapeno (optional)
- 2 T chopped cilantro

In a small bowl, whisk oil, lime juice and cumin together, season with S&P.

In a larger bowl, combine the rest of the ingredients, then gently toss with the dressing. Serve immediately.

### **Corn Apple Salad**

We had dinner at my daughter's house, and they grilled burgers. She asked me to bring a healthy side, and I chose this recipe. It was extremely tasty, as the apples with the corn were a pairing I had not tried before. Super delicious!

#### For the dressing:

- 2 large egg yolks
- ¾ tsp salt
- 1 tsp sugar

- Pinch cayenne pepper
- Zest of ½ lemon
- 1 cup olive oil
- Juice of ½ lemon
- Pinch of salt

For the salad:

- 5 large ears corn removed from cob (then grilled in a pan or grilled cobs first and then removed)
- 2 large granny smith apples chopped
- ¼ cup finely diced red pepper
- 3 T chopped green onion
- The salad dressing above
- S&P to taste

Prepare the mayo in a blender or food processor: combine yolks, salt, sugar, cayenne and lemon zest til thick and pale in color. Add oil alternately with juice in three parts, adding oil in slow thin stream. This will produce a thick mayo. Fold in the chives.

Toss together the corn, apples, red pepper and green onion. Add ¾ cup of the mayo and toss. . Use more or less to taste. Chill the salad an hour or two before serving.

(You can use prepared mayo instead, just add chives and lemon zest and a squeeze of lemon juice for flavor)

### **Pineapple Salsa**

I always enjoy trying new salsas, especially ones with fruit added in. We recently tried a peach salsa in a jar from New Canaan that was a little too sweet for my taste. However, we packed this pineapple salsa recipe up for a picnic and we both loved it, for dipping!

Ingredients:

- 1 pineapple
- 1 ½ cups chopped red pepper
- 1/3 cup chopped red onion
- ¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro
- 1 small jalapeno, minced
- Juice of 1 lime
- Kosher salt
- Chips for serving

Pineapple needs to be chopped into small pieces – you can buy a whole pineapple, core and chop, or buy it already cored. Mix all ingredients together in a bowl and enjoy.

## **Tried and True – June Faves** – by Marcy Lytle

It's June. This is the time of year to make those summer plans, slow down a bit, and enjoy life without so much stress and chaos from school schedules, work, and calendars – right? Maybe all year is stressful for you, but I hope you have a weekend getaway planned or a full-on vacation on your to-do list this summer, along with relaxing and down time by the beach or the lake, or just sitting under a nice shade tree in the backyard!

I thought it would be fun to share some of my favorite things this time of year, from products to activities to purchases...in case you want to try one of them, as well!

1. **Tanning cream.** My daughter Kamrin Wolfe is selling Nuskin products and I bought the tanning cream month or so ago, just as it was getting warm enough to show my legs for the warming season. I have tried tanning lotions each summer, and some of them have had a foul odor, others took several applications to show any difference. This Nuskin cream can be applied in one or more coats at one time, and then it's not needed for days. It doesn't have an odor, and it's so smooth! I'm hooked.
2. **Fresh flowers in jars.** I get tired of regular vases, and enjoy placing fresh flowers in mason jars or other fun containers – even old tea cups – if you cut the stems short! When summer heat burns, my roses and other big flowers suffer, but these perennials like lantana and little daisies grow profusely. Their stems are super thin, so I pile them together in a jar, and add another art dimension next to them – in a trio of three. So fun!
3. **A good read.** Winter is not the only time of year to cozy up with a blanket inside with AC cranked up, to read. Or cozy up outside under a shade tree when the breezes are blowing, and read there! This book *The Charm Bracelet* is a great book for summer reading, in one of your cozy spots, or on the plane to a faraway destination. It's all about a lady's charm bracelet and how each one, and the story behind it, affects her relationship with her daughter and granddaughter.
4. **Candle scents.** Who says Mexican pumpkin candles have to be enjoyed only in the fall? I recently lit mine in my bedroom while I was working, and the aroma filled the room. It was a warm day, and that scent transported me to a cooler time of year. I love having a candle burning when I have a long day on the computer!
5. **Tiffins.** Have you heard of them? They are on the shelves at World Market, and they are ceramic...or aluminum. I bought both! The ceramic version can keep hot foods warm, and the aluminum ones are more for small snacks. They're great for picnics, and super affordable! They're so cute, and fun to pack and carry with you to that outdoor concert, or Sunday evening in the park.
6. **Shine the Light books by Usborne.** My niece and daughter held an online shopping event for this brand of children's books, and I ordered these pictured here. As the child reads, he holds a flashlight behind the page to reveal hidden images! How fun is that? There are so many choices of these books, and these are also great travel options for kids, or to buy now for the Christmas season to come in six months!
7. **Welcome.** Isn't this doormat so cute? My friend Hannah Hirsch made it for me, as she was raising money for a trip to El Salvador this summer. I absolutely love what she

wrote on her sample, so I ordered that very one – Nice Shoes! I love visitors seeing this mat when they walk up to my front door...and of course I love shoes!

What are your faves this season? Think about it. And if you don't have any, it's time to go shopping, get out, and make memories and buy fun items to jazz up your home or yard, or picnic time with friends. Visit your local bookstore or library, light up a candle, and place fresh flowers in your house for YOU – even if no visitors are coming!

Enjoy the season of warmth before it gets too hot to handle!

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**HOME**

## **Practical Parenting – Those Games – by Marcy Lytle**

Parents are in the stands, seated if their kids' team is winning, or up pacing if they're losing. Son steps up to bat and strikes out. Stomping occurs, words fly out at the coach that's pitching, and we don't think Son hears or notices...but he does. Daughter's out in left field, perhaps, digging in the dirt, and Dad yells at her to get up and pay attention, when the coach just told her the same thing. However, she only heard Dad because he was louder.

I've been there...with soccer, basketball, volleyball...and more. I happened to be the quiet parent who didn't give a rip who was winning, because it was "just a game." But when my kids left the game upset, because they didn't get enough playing time, my heart hurt. My husband, on the other hand, really got into the game with all of his body and voice, like lots of parents do! He had to restrain himself, and it was hard, because he wanted the team to win and his children to do well!

What parent doesn't want that?

I don't think there's a parent reading this article that hasn't realized or experienced the craziness of parents that goes on at the games. And most likely, whichever parent is the loud one has been told more than once to pipe down, when yelling at the umpire, coach or player! However, the next game rolls around on the calendar, and we're situated on the bleachers calm and cool, until "Come on!" slips out and we're right back to yelling and pointing the finger.

I don't like that part of the sports world, but I get it. Everyone is made differently, and some people get into the game as if they were on the field with the rest of the team, instead of sitting far away on hard aluminum seats! There are other places where I get boisterous and indignant, and my husband could care less. If there seems to be injustice due to race, I can get quite stirred up! Just ask my kids!

Injustice on any playing field is hard to deal with, for kids, and especially for we parents. Oftentimes, we're correct in noting the poor job the umpire is doing, the favoritism that coach is showing, or the lack of attention our child is paying. We want to win, we desire our kids to do well, and we just can't help it!

What parent doesn't want that?

Here are a dozen pointers that might be worth printing and hanging on the door of our refrigerators, or taping to our mirrors, before we head out to the next game with the kiddos:

1. They hear us when we curse and stomp and yell, and they feel disapproval.
2. They will never learn to stand up for themselves, if we're doing it for them.
3. There are ways to train our kids to talk to their coaches, defend their positions, without losing their temper.
4. There are ways we can train ourselves to stay calm as well, and we might need a little help from a friend!
5. This is a season in our kids' lives that is supposed to be fun, a time to learn teamwork, and a place to succeed...which means play well...not winning every game.

6. This is a season when we need to look at ourselves and understand why it is that we're upset, that we're screaming, that we're scheming to "tell that coach a thing or two."
7. The world is not going to end if our kid doesn't prefer baseball as his sport of choice.
8. Life isn't over if our daughter decides she'd rather bake cookies than kick soccer balls.
9. Those kids over there who are better than our kids are better. So what?
10. Those kids over there who are bringing down the team with their lack of skill are people.  
Yes they are.
11. Trying to make our kids be what we were not is never good.
12. Taking the time to let our kids be kids and love them in the process is priceless.

Very few children grow up to be professional athletes, and even if we see that potential in our kids, it should be developed and grown as they desire, not as we demand.

Our children are only small for a very short time, only live in our homes for a few years, and then they're gone. Memories of games should be of running in the wind, being with friends on a team, eating snacks after the game is over that Mom or Dad made, and images of Mom and Dad both clapping when they head to the dugout with a, "Strike 3! You're out!" or a, "You scored a run, Son!" And all of our children should be better people as they approach adulthood as they've learned to work on a team, experienced wins AND losses, and disciplined their minds and bodies to do their best.

What parent doesn't want that?

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## **I Don't Do Teens – So Embarrassed – by Marcy Lytle**

Have you ever been embarrassed by your teen? That's like asking if you've ever eaten food, right? Of course you have, daily! Our teens act and do things that we did not teach them (or at least we don't think we did) and we end up being ashamed to call them by our same last name. And it works in reverse, as well. They are embarrassed by things we say and do, and walk away so that they won't be seen connected to who we are!

Say, for instance, our daughter likes to row in kayaks and canoes, and we prefer riding in gondolas and carriages. Our response might be to judge her because she's different than anything we've ever been or will ever be, and to be embarrassed when she shows up at an event for the family in shorts and a tee, instead of a dress and a hat.

What if our son enjoys painting and creating, when we think he ought to be on the field scoring and fighting for the next win? Perhaps we played on a sports team and think that every good teen needs to learn sportsmanship and teamwork, so we make disappointed faces as he shows us his latest rendition of the setting sun in hues of orange and yellow.

Many times, we parents force our kids to fulfill our unexpected dreams, but if we take it one step further, we can become completely ashamed of what they are. This is not a good place to be, for them, or for us.

### **Here's what being embarrassed of our teens brings:**

A child who needs approval getting a shaking head

A parent needing affirmation only doling out criticism

A relationship that could have been great but instead ends up broken

Disappointment in family dynamics and love

We saw a movie called *Lean on Pete* where a sleazy dad is all a young teen boy has, because he lost his mom early in life. The dad then gets arrested, and the boy is left with no one...except a horse he's been caring for. That horse becomes his companion, his confidant, and his life. What an embarrassing situation for the young boy, to have to deal with a disappointment of a negligent parent!

However, we as parents are supposed to be older and wiser, right? When our teens exhibit behavior that embarrasses us – like choosing a career path not on our list of choices – we have to be the bigger person and choose love. Even if our teens talk rudely to our friends, wreck our cars due to misbehavior behind the wheel, our reaction to their actions can be the final straw that breaks everyone's backs...or the hand up that glues a relationship together for life.

Kids are going to make mistakes, and those are hard to forgive, especially when he/she disobeyed. They're also going to make choices that are perfectly okay, but ones that don't look like "the best" in our eyes. And we can discipline for mistakes from disobedience, which we



should, but it can be done with love. However, when it's just a matter of opinion that only hurts our pride, it's a different story altogether.

Take a good look at your sons and daughters and see if there's any embarrassment you feel when you are around them, and evaluate, and ask yourself these questions:

- Why am I embarrassed?
- What can I do to change that embarrassment to love and acceptance?
- Am I afraid that loving them will ensure certain death?
- Why can't I trust them into His hands for safekeeping?

Ask a friend to pray with you to determine the difference between embarrassment because of your own judgment and disappointment because of bad choices. Both reactions wound our kids. And even though these pre-adults may wound us deeply and daily, we are supposed to be parents and not peers. We have to instruct, train, trust, and then love...praying that He will guide their footsteps into paths that lead to life.

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## **Life as We Know It - It's So Hard to Say Goodbye... to Yesterday** by Erica Simmons

This song was all the rage at graduations and on the radio during graduation time after it was released. I remember shedding many a tear even though I did not have a niece or nephew graduating. It has been a song I have dreaded hearing when it came to my boys graduating. So if you are reading this, May 26, 2018 has come and gone and my boys have officially graduated high school.

As I was thinking about my article for June, I thought how cool it could be to do our pre-graduation years in a mini-life montage. To prep, I looked up the lyrics to the song and took a listen. The opening chords hit me as I expected and the words of the first stanza stood out to me, especially the part about the good times outweighing the bad. This became more and more evident as I browsed through our pictures and relived the memories. There are some life changing moments connected to some of them, though the impact may not have been noticed or appreciated at the time. As I share each photo, I will share thoughts about why each picture stood out to me over the many I have taken across the years.

And off we go!

*How do I say goodbye to what we had?  
The good times that made us laugh  
Outweigh the bad*

This is the day my twins were born and the day my life changed forever. The strength they gave me on that day has helped me make some of the toughest decisions of my life, as well as fueled a desire in me to live the best life I could in order to be the best provider I could be for them. Oh, and the protectiveness! There is no greater force than the love of a parent for a child and the lengths they will go to in order to protect them.

This is the day they were christened at my childhood church in Eupora, MS. It is the only picture of us as a family, as their dad was there. Even then, I was clinging to the hope that we could indeed be a family. I had walked away during the pregnancy, but the overwhelming responsibility of being a single parent had hit me and I did not want to do it alone. Even though he never got his life together enough to be what we needed, he was there with me to commit our children to the Lord as one.

The decision to move my boys away from the core family to Texas was a hard one. One made even harder by the relationship my uncle was developing with the boys. He came by to see them more than my own brothers. Every week he made it a point to come by at least once and bring them some sugar laden snacks that were no good for them, those Hi-C drinks and the flavored sugar wafers. In the end, the life I could provide for them in Texas won out. Trips home would always consist of time out at his house in the country and time riding around with him on his four wheeler. We lost him a few years later to a car accident, but those times he had with Jordan and Jerimiah were precious and I am so glad my boys had him in their lives, if only for a short time.

The hardest part of the early years was dealing with Jerimiah's health scares. During these times I had to be away from Jordan. This picture was taken after his first big medical scare. We ended up spending about six weeks in the hospital, which was about two hours away from our home town in MS.

On the balcony of our first real apartment after moving to Texas...we started in a small two bedroom in Austin, but it was with three sisters. The management company found us a place bigger out in Round Rock and moved here a week or so after we got to Texas. This photo reminds how simpler times were. When all they drove was a tricycle on the balcony. Oh, so much safer and slower!

Things are not always what they seem. Jordan got in so much trouble for this, but as you see we could not resist taking a picture to document the event. Powder was everywhere. We later found out Jordan was a victim in it all, as it was Jeremiah who was the actual culprit of the great powder caper.

We worked hard to make sure the boys saw my family as much as possible back home. There was one year we went home four times! It was important to us to maintain those family connections. Desiree was born in December of the same year as the boys. They were thick as thieves as is evident in this picture, where they ALL have their shirts on backwards.

Our fishing phase: I met Bernard at one of the jobs I worked and he loved to go fishing, and invited me and the boys. It became something we enjoyed doing together. As you can see, Jeremiah's love of pictures started at an early age.

Life before Jeremiah became afraid of living, moving creatures. Oh the good ole days. It was easier for all to go out as a family.

This is my favorite picture of Jordan. I don't know why, but just looking through all the old photos - this one of him captures my heart. I love the way he holds his head.

Then life seems to have gone into hyper drive - the start of school years. Their first graduation. It is not hard to see why this picture captured my heart in my walk down memory lane. Seems like it was such a short time ago we were celebrating their graduation from kindergarten and now their senior graduation is upon us.

There are so many more pictures I could share in this story and I had more that I planned to share...like the first day of middle school, first day of each of their high school years, 8<sup>th</sup> grade formal, 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, senior prom, etc., but this feels like the right stopping point.

As I looked back over all the wonderful amazing pictures of our family and how precious they are to me and how hard this time is for me, I heard a gentle word in my spirit. It was simple and yet powerful.

*If I am holding onto to the old I won't be able to grab a hold of the new.*

So I tuck these amazing memories away in their boxes again and turn to walk in the newness of life that He promises us. Adding new memories to the old, knowing what lies ahead is greater. That still does not prevent a tear of two from sliding down my cheek every now and then as May 26<sup>th</sup> approaches. And I think He is okay with that.

## **The Family Practice – Casting for Catfish** by Brandi Oman

In the world we live in, we are so blessed with the ability to take a desire we have, and a few bucks later, it's ours - pretty much instantly. Now, our children are growing up with the same type of expectations. This can be a blessing when we say, "Man, I am EXHAUSTED today. I could use a cup of coffee," so we drive thru Starbucks and – boom! - We have a coffee of our choice in less than five minutes. This can be not so great when we have a hurried type of lifestyle, so our kids are addicted to McDonalds and don't want a fresh home-cooked meal.

The point of all of that was to show how easy we truly have it.

This weekend I was blessed enough to take my son and nephew to my grandparents' house. They live out in Comfort, Texas where they grow some of their food, they live a much more slowed down life, and the atmosphere brings us all down to earth. The boys had the opportunity to ride in the tractor, drive 6-wheelers, and go fishing! They had a ball, and my grandparents were right there with them!

When we got to their house, the boys begged to go fishing. So we packed up the fishing rods and bait and the boys, and took them to the fishing hole. When we got to the pond, they both baited their hooks, cast out their lines, and almost instantly those bobbers went down! The boys were reeling in their lines one after the other with perch. They were ecstatic! My grandfather cast his out with different bait to attract a different type of fish...he wanted a catfish! After a good while of being there, my grandpa yelled for us to bring the net over. His line had been hit with the big mama Jamba! He reeled in a big catfish that weighed about three pounds. If you have ever caught a catfish, you know it can be a real treat to reel in, because it fights you all the way to the top of the water.

So now that my son Caiden, who loves to fish (and I mean is addicted to it) saw that his papa caught a catfish he insisted he must catch one! Seven-year old boys are not patient, and fish don't bite hooks immediately just because we want them to. We got Caiden all baited up and prepped for a catfish to bite his line. He whined and complained because one didn't come instantly. He insisted on reeling in and casting out his line in hopes this would make all the difference, but on Saturday night it didn't. It was getting dark and it was time to head back to the house. Caiden was disappointed he didn't catch the fish he wanted at that moment, but I promised we would come back Sunday morning.

Caiden woke up bright and early staring me in the face at 7:00 keeping me to my word. We prepped ourselves, and it was day two of our mission to catch those catfish! I told Caiden,

"Today is the day! I can feel it!"

I explained to him that we would take turns using one pole so he could learn the tricks of how to entice the fish to bite. Our bait was old deer liver, and we were in a perfect spot in between two points of the peninsula where it begins to shallow out. There is an area there for the fish to hide out in the marsh, and the key to all fishing is *patience*. I cast out my line and watched my bobber. About five minutes later a fish was playing with it and then the bobber shot down. I told Caiden,

"You have to let the fish take the bait a little bit, then give it a nice tug and reel that sucker in!"

We did that for about an hour and brought in three catfish! My grandpa brought in another one as well.

You see, the boys were able to catch the perch easily because there are more of them, they are an easier catch, and easier to lure in. That gave the boys instant gratification. The catfish were more difficult to catch, as there were less of them in the pond, they take more knowledge and skill, but that catch will be a story they will tell for a lifetime.

We don't think about the things given to us on the drop of the dime,

but we remember the memories of us working for the things we have.

In my opinion, I feel like some of our prayers to God are not instantly answered. Does he love us? Yes. Does he want to give his children gifts? Yes. However, his gifts are so precious he doesn't want them wasted like a drive-thru coffee but treasured like a home-cooked meal.

**The end of something is better than its beginning.**

**Patience is better than pride.**

***(Ecclesiastes 7:8)***

## **A Night to Remember – June Bugs – by Marcy Lytle**

Have your kids seen June bugs where you live? Where we live, they show up right at the beginning of summer...and they're nasty. They buzz around front doors and try to get in the house, and if you step on one to kill it, it makes this horrible crunchy sound. And...they're so sticky! I do not like June bugs one bit. So why not talk about these nasty bugs and other "bugs" that show up in summer...with our kids?

**Preparation:** *This lesson is mostly for older kids that can talk and discuss and do a little research for you...before you begin the study! Of course, the little ones can ooh and ahh over the ugly bugs, but you'll need talkers for this lesson. Let the older kids research and print out pictures of June bugs, and maybe a few facts about them, and present them to the family. Then using a chalkboard or whiteboard, provide markers and/or chalk to write down answers to the questions as you follow along in the lesson.*

**June bugs damage gardens** – they eat leaves! There are other bugs that are pests in the garden as well, so we have to protect what is growing. Are there any bugs in your yard that eat the leaves of your plants? What's growing in you this summer? Anticipation of fun, vacation, and no school? Don't let bugs of laziness and discontent eat away while you're waiting for fun. Think of a list of things you can do at home this summer to keep boredom at bay. *(Let kids write down "Boredom Busters" on the board: crafts, cleaning closets and drawers, making Christmas gifts early, baking snacks, etc.)*

**June bugs eat at night** – Sounds scary, right? They don't want to be caught, so they venture out after the sun goes down and that's when they do their damage! Sometimes, we have bad dreams that arrive after dark and they try to make us afraid. Summer is a good time to turn on the light, swat those nasty bugs (bad dreams) and get some good sleep. Think of a list of ideas for bedtime reading and relaxation to keep buggy dreams away. *(Have a child write down ideas for "No More Buggy Dreams" on the board: reading the Bible, listening to uplifting music, praying together as a family, thinking good thoughts from the day, counting blessings, etc.)*

**June bugs like porch lights**...and they want in! – Like mentioned above, June bugs like to hang around the lights on your porch! When there are a large number of them, they buzz and bump and make going inside rather unpleasant! Did you know there are other "bugs" that try to get in our house? They're called arguments, laziness, selfishness, and contention. They're the kinds of bugs that cause families to fight and quarrel and end up hurt at each other. Think of ideas of how to stop arguments BEFORE they begin. *(Write on the board ways to "Bug Away From Us!" and list good things to try: giving of our time and resources, saying thank-you and being grateful, setting alarm clocks when chores need to be done, apologizing quickly when mean words fly...)*

Now we have three columns of ideas and things to try this summer, to keep pests out of our garden – our home.

Hang the board in full view and make sure the family reads it each Monday, to start fresh with June bugs staying away!

*Read I Corinthians 13:4-7 (MSG) together and then pray:*

*Love never gives up.  
Love cares more for others than for self.  
Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.  
Love doesn't strut,  
Doesn't have a swelled head,  
Doesn't force itself on others,  
Isn't always "me first,"  
Doesn't fly off the handle,  
Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,  
Doesn't revel when others grovel,  
Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,  
Puts up with anything,  
Trusts God always,  
Always looks for the best,  
Never looks back,  
But keeps going to the end.*

*Provide pretzels, Twizzlers, celery, peanut butter, sliced apples, raisins, chocolate chips, etc...and let the kids make a "bug" snack. They can use the peanut butter for "glue" to affix eyes or wings or legs!*

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## **Tiny Living – Strange Creatures – by Leyanne Enterline**

Living tiny means living outdoors a lot!

We are rarely home; and when we, are we are all outside! And living outdoors with boys and only one bathroom means the restroom sometimes is outside as well... However, that backfires when one of the boys urinates into a holly bush and that wakes up the rat snake that is hiding out! There are so many critters out where we live that we just never know what's going to appear! My oldest has been begging for a pet snake, but after his encounter with a surprise one, I think we're over that issue!

One night we had all the windows open and kept hearing this strange high-pitched screeching sound. We decided to imitate the unknown creature's sound and we began communicating for quite some time together. Well, we found out *what the fox says!* A beautiful silver furry fox was in our yard, hanging out. It was so much fun interacting with this mystery animal.

Not much longer after we acquired our two acres, my sister and her family purchased some land up the road as well. So the same fun creatures live out there, and the kiddos are having the time of their lives! One day, we were at her house and the kids came running inside yelling at us,

“Get out here, quick!”

Of course, we had to see what was going on, so we jet-packed out the door. The kids took us for quite a walk in the woods to an old fallen tree, and they then told us that a family of armadillos lived in it. They said the armadillos were really nice for a bit, while they petted them. Then they got angry and reared up on two legs and started clawing the air at them! I have never in my life thought I would need to say,

“Remember don't pet the armadillos. They can carry leprosy!”

Actually, I didn't even know about the leprosy info until my sister told me later to make sure the kids washed their hands well! The life of a Texas boy requires much outdoor animal research for Mom! So many strange creatures! Even today, we were on a search for roly-polys but instead we came across scorpions, weird flying beetles, and yes...a ridiculous amount of ants.

We live on the corner of a street that many family and friends have to pass by, so as a new tradition - everyone honks as they drive in front of our place. Today, my dad stopped by and told us of all the creatures he saw last night and how he's on a hunt for the skunk that's digging holes in his yard. In addition to that news, on his way home last night from the boys' baseball game he ran over a giant rattlesnake!

Living tiny has been quite the adventure! Being outdoors has been so much fun, but also a bit scary at times. Even so, we absolutely love this strange, mysterious, and sometimes cautious journey that we are on together as a family!

Have a blessed day!

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**YOU**

## **Strengthening Your Core – Again and Again by Marcy Lytle**

Last year we vacationed in Cape May, New Jersey and then drove up the Jersey Shore to other small beach towns, and ended a couple of our last days in a small historic town called Smithville. It's a quaint village that is totally picturesque and we wanted to just settle there and stay. It's one of those places we wanted to visit again. In fact, I purchased some amazing perfume at a shop there, and I'm almost out now. But every single time I spray it and smell it, I'm escorted back to that village and that shop where we purchased it.

The truth is, however, that we rarely visit places again and again, because it seems that the second visit isn't nearly as memorable and exciting as the first. When we first visit, everything is new, we're amazed by the colors, the way the little town is nestled among the trees, all of the eateries and fun things to buy, etc. Maybe we will wait several years and take our kids back to enjoy, but going there again and again makes the place lose some of its charm and wonder...if it becomes too familiar.

We are mostly that way with many things in our lives. Some of us do like to visit the same restaurant over and over again, but others of us like adventure and the unknown of a new menu, new environment and new tastes. We don't attend the circus or Sea World or watch a movie over and over again in one given week, as we would suddenly know every trick that's coming, all of the moves of the dolphins, and what's next in that scene and this story.

We like adventure, something new, a cool place to try, or an interesting event to attend...one we've not seen before.

In other words, we need stimulation, satisfaction, smiles, and beautiful sights to keep us interested, alive and moving forward.

I've realized lately that one of the places I can visit over and over again, multiple times a day, without end, and feel rejuvenated, alive and completely blessed is His presence. It never grows old, it's new every time, and there's something amazingly refreshing that I can walk away with each time I've sat at His feet.

Here's what I mean:

- His mercies are new every morning. It's true. He never tires of offering me grace.
- His love never fails. Any time I need a warm hug of acceptance, His arms surround me.
- He sings new songs. My heart can be still and hear his voice as he whispers melodies that heal.
- He amazes me. He can show me things in nature, in people, and in my kids that make me grateful.
- He smells great. Scents of forgiveness, faithfulness and a perfectly groomed Father settle me.

I can visit his presence any time I want to, over and over again, and experience it all as if it were the first time we'd met. A relationship with him is never stale, I never know what to expect, and

there's always something new for me to feel with every one of my senses that he gave me – with each time I come.

And the best part is that I don't have to travel far, spend tons of money, or take off time from work to experience the beauty and wonder of a visit with Him. He's as near as a walk to the back patio away from the noise, to hear that first bird's song of the morning...again and again...as a new day begins.

## **Healthy Habits – The Aftertaste** – by Marcy Lytle

I was talking with a friend recently and she mentioned how she never wants to exercise, but when she makes herself do it – she feels so much better after it's over. She has more energy, she mentally knows she has done the right thing, her heart is pumping, and she just feels good all over. However, that initial strength to get up out of the chair, put on the walking shoes, and head out the door, takes some discipline and will power. It's that initial movement that then becomes the follow-through, and that then becomes part of the healthy routine that does a body, mind and soul some good!

Here are several activities that are good for our health, hard to initialize, but once the motor starts running and completes its course, we are better in every way, for it:

**Walking** – We may as well start with the one activity we just mentioned. There are so many nights when we get settled into our chairs eating our dinner and watching the News, and we have to pick up that remote and switch off the TV before the next show starts. Even if we're tired, or it's getting dark, we try to put on our shoes, get a big drink of water, and start out to walk – somewhere. We sometimes walk in the neighborhood or on a path in a park, especially this time of year. Or we even walk on the sidewalk down big neighborhood malls, if we have a couple errands to run – a two-for!

**Forgiveness** – Letting go of that initial hurt is harder than putting on walking shoes, for sure! We want to hold onto the hurt and think of ways to shame that person back, for the way they inflicted a wound on us. However, if we let it go quickly, it's much like removing a thorn from a finger. There's no time for it to fester and become infected, causing all kinds of sickness throughout the body. The only way to quickly forgive is to see that person at the foot of the cross, on the same level playing field as where you stand. You both need forgiveness, and when you decide to let go, He swoops in and comforts. And the best part is that He is trustworthy to deal with that person's actions!

**Makeup off** – One of my mom's rules to live by was telling me to clean my face nightly – to never ever go to bed with makeup on. There are so many oils that secrete through our pores at night, not to mention the nastiness on our pillow from a dirty face! There are nights when we are too tired to do anything at all, but washing is next to godliness, isn't it? You'll definitely feel better if you take time to wash before climbing into bed alone...or with him. Even if you're dog tired.

**Box it up** – You've heard it before, from lots of sources. Box up half of your meal when you're eating out before you open your mouth. My friend recently had the waiter cut her burger in half and bring the to-go box before she ever took that first bite. She knew that if she ate one bite and saw the other half, it too would be downed in a flash! Wisdom caused that good woman to ask for a box, insert the burger, and close it up – out of sight! It's a hard decision to make, but one you'll be glad you did later, when your stomach feels just satisfied and not stuffed.

**Rest...outside** – It's so easy in the summer months to stay indoors where the cool breezes from the AC flow, where you're comfortable. Here where I live it is still 90 degrees when we start to

go to bed! I get it. It's hot outside, and inside keeps us from sweating. However, find that sweet time of the day when you can get outdoors and feel the sun on your skin, the moon in your view, or the leaves or spinners blowing as the wind sweeps across before you. There are days when I've been working long hours at my laptop (like today), and it's so easy to just keep going and going...until it's 5 pm and time for dinner. However, when I make myself stop, even for a few minutes, and wander outside to water plants, observe the trees, or sit in the shade, I feel empowered, refreshed, and better, even if it's hot. A little sweat never hurt anyone; in fact, it's good to sweat sometimes!

**Serve** - Okay, you've done your duty and frankly, people you served didn't recognize what you did, so you've sworn off giving and doing for anyone else but yourself. If people aren't grateful, you're not giving them a dime of your money or a minute of your time. I totally understand! Been there. Done that. However, when we stop and remember who it is we're serving, who it is that rewards us, and who it is that we're making look good (and it's not us!) we then are free to give without expecting anything in return. Sound impossible? It isn't. It's downright good to do, and the aftertaste of this activity is amazing...when done in the right "spirit."

**Hydrate** – We've talked about this before in other issues, but here it is again, as summer approaches. It's easy to stop in the drive-thru daily and get a diet drink or a regular coke, or go to the theater and order an Icee. They all taste so good, and there's nothing wrong with them once in a while. But water should be our intake in multiple cups a day, especially when it's warm and we become dehydrated quickly. I've read and heard that as we age, we forget to drink, because we just don't get as thirsty. So keep that water bottle full, carry it with you, and drink up – often – and see your skin and body respond in elasticity and glow!

God has so many promises that come to those who obey, love others, and walk humbly. They are good promises that bless our lives. Our bodies also promise us good things as well, when we treat them kindly, obey the warning signs they give us, and walk often instead of sitting.

It's hard to do anything where there's an obstacle in the way, even if it's tiny. It requires picking up that rock, moving that chair over there, or just making a decision to get the log out of our own eyes before picking at the speck in another's.

And the aftertaste? Healthy relationships, healthy living, and healthy hearts!

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## **Created for Life – Relevance – by Ginny Hurley**

Our culture here in the United States and most nations is constantly changing, shifting, and reorganizing, depending on the latest trends, newest styles, and freshest ideas. Even the colors, chosen for new homes and redecorating, are coming and going faster than the paint is drying on the walls. The culture calls us to be relevant, so it goes on and on into a frenzy of activity that exhausts us and causes us to feel deprived or out of date. One popular term for the older generation is the word *dinosaurs*, or those not adapting quickly enough to fit into the culture. Jokes are made about grandchildren having to help their grandparents use their devices and new equipment. We all laugh and roll our eyes, just as the latest technology pops up on the screens of our newest devices telling us to update.

What is our view of this from heaven?

How does our Father feel about these cultural changes?

I know He gives us innovation. He loves our creativity! He enjoys partnering with us when we dream. These are good things. Technology can connect those who are lonely or far removed from help and knowledge. Many wonders have come from the hand of technology and communication, yet our legacy seems without foundation. Core values have become debatable and challenged. That is where the rubber meets the road. That is not okay.

What is true in our basic understanding and center of all things is clearly stated in Hebrews 13:8,

“Jesus, the Anointed One, is always the same – yesterday, today, and forever.”

Jesus is the most contemporary, relevant, and timeless Person. He is always constant in every area of life. He always loves, always provides, always protects, always cares, always satisfies, and is significant in every circumstance. He remains faithful when we are not. He remains with us when we don't feel Him. He holds us when we're not worthy. He relates to every fear, every failure, and every hurt. There is nothing He won't do for us and nothing too difficult for Him to accomplish in our lives. With Him, all things are possible and the sky is the limit. All of His promises to us are yes, and the love He carries overflows with good things. What He offers holds substance and will never be destroyed.

We can actually be strengthened by His constant, unchanging, and relevant life. His world never goes out of date. There is no expiration date on His kingdom. Jesus is relevance itself. More so than any other thing that we can hold on to, His surety and kindness are rocks. He is timeless. He never ages. His steadfastness is like the wind and the air. He is not a whim or a dream. He is reality itself, more real than the most solid object in our world. Jesus is the blueprint and makes us fully alive and relevant in every way.

If you are feeling useless or irrelevant, fearful of your future, or concerned for your children, remember the One who is faithful. He will never disappoint, never devalue, or never hold a grudge. And He will surely never call you a dinosaur!

Call on the model of relevance at its best, Jesus!

**MARRIAGE**

## **In This Together – Sunny Season – by Charissa Corbin**

Living in Alaska, we experience two extremes - one being almost 24 hours of no sunlight - and the other nearly 24 hours of complete sunlight.

I prefer the latter!

Thankfully, I happen to be in my favorite Alaskan season. June 21<sup>st</sup> marks the summer solstice and the experience of around 21 hours of complete sunlight. As I'm writing this story, it is 10:00pm, still light outside, and I have no desire to go to bed anytime soon. The birds are still chirping, neighbors are taking their evening stroll, and the moon is nowhere to be seen.

Summers are filled with midnight festivals, 10k runs that start well into the evening, and nearly 24 hours of packed activities every day. Come June 21<sup>st</sup>, the clock starts ticking and everyone knows the winter will quickly approach and we will be longing for the long summer days! Not a day is wasted.

The summer season is too short to not soak up every moment.

Marriage has an array of seasons, too.

There are times we feel like the sun never sets and we are blissfully walking hand in hand. However, for those of us that have been married for any amount of time, we know that it isn't always blissful. We experience seasons of loss, grief, anger, stress and confusion.

Guess what? That is OKAY.

Marriage isn't perfect. It is a beautiful union, but not perfect.

During your sunny season, I pray that you hold on to those memories and the feelings those memories created. Praise God for those seasons, and thank Him for the renewing warmth of the sun. Those will carry over to the harder seasons that you have yet to endure. The lingering warmth will help you cope, work together, and get through whatever comes your way. The sun is bound to rise again.

It always does!

I pray that your marriage is filled with more sunny summers than you can count!

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## **Date Night Fun – One Place** – by Marcy Lytle

We've done this a few times, and it ended up being one of our best times for a date night out. It can be day or night, depending on which place you choose, but neighborhood outings are the best! It just requires a little research, but truly so fun. Just access your town's website or newspaper or community news, and you're good to go! Or talk to friends who live in different areas of town and see what there is to do!

Below are ways to pick a neighborhood for time with him that's sure to be awesome! And one little hint of something to take with you, while you do:

**One street** – There's this one road in our city that is riddled with eateries and junk shops, and it stretches from north to south – it's called Burnet. We have driven it for decades, usually to arrive at a specific destination for dinner. However, we recently drove the entire length, stopping at places we'd not stopped at before. We searched for treasures, enjoyed a bite or two at new places, and observed anything interesting that caught our fancy. It was fun! Find a street in your town, or one nearby, and just drive...and stop...and eat...and enjoy.

- Check out these journals from World Market. Consider stopping by to get one and keeping a notebook record of the shops you discover and eateries, along the way. Fill it in each time you visit a different street!

<https://www.worldmarket.com/search.do?query=journals>

**One subdivision** – Maybe there's a subdivision that's brand new, or an old one with flipped houses, or one with all "green" homes, or one with tons of huge old trees that provide shade. Pick one of these neighborhoods, park your car, and walk a few miles. Notice the ways people landscape their yards, stop in at a local coffee house if there's one on your path, wave at people who are outside, pick up an idea or two for your house or yard, and enjoy the great outdoors. Yes, it's summer. But choose early morning or just before dark, and do it!

- I'm loving this cute tin with small coloring pages and pencils! Take it with you and pull it out, when you stop in for coffee, and enjoy!

<https://www.worldmarket.com/product/tranquility-keepsake-coloring.do?sortby=ourPicks&from=Search>

**One shopping district** – Is there a huge shopping mall near you? Or several cute shops lining a couple of streets? Usually, shopping districts have stores and restaurants all together in one area, so you can get errands taken care of, and stop for bites along the way. We have several malls that have events throughout the summer, like fireworks on display, festivals of art, or sidewalk sales. Look for these and show up, hand in hand, to browse and bite.

- Look at this adorable set of three tote bags!!! Stash them in your purse, and pull out for your purchases. You won't need to worry if the shops offer you bags, because you'll have your own!

<https://www.worldmarket.com/product/elephant%2C+owl+and+penguin+foldable+tote+bags%2C+set+of+3.do?sortby=ourPicks&from=Search>

**One pool** – Why not hang out with him beside a body of water this summer? If you have a pool in your backyard, make date time around it with another couple...or not. Venture out to the lake, or to a public pool in a small town and set up camp. Include lawn chairs, snacks, and reading material. Pick a time to go when it's not so crowded, like first thing in the morning or after dark. Pools aren't just for splashing, screaming kids. They can be for romantic, real adults.

- Check out these flaming drink holders for two – aren't they cute? Use them at the pool or lake, or back home in the tub! (The link is for World Market, but I've seen them at Target and Dollar General, too!)

<https://www.worldmarket.com/product/flamingo-inflatable-drink-holders-set-of-2.do?sortby=ourPicks&from=Search>

**One museum** – Summer is a great time to visit a museum. It's air-conditioned inside, you can browse and read at your leisure, and hopefully the open hours are at a time that you can fit into a Saturday or Sunday afternoon. To make it a fun date, research the museum's story first. If it's an art museum, find out more about a famous artist and check out a book at the library to read together. If it's a history museum, take note of the artifacts there and the stories of old, and share your own stories you remember of your grandparents and their lives. You could probably take in more than one museum...so go for it. Without the kids. So that you can read and linger and wonder...together.

- Sometimes the grounds of a museum are a great place to enjoy a picnic. Look at this amazing "festival blanket" and purchase one for the two of you!

<https://www.worldmarket.com/product/6-multicolor-medallion-cotton-festival-blanket.do?sortby=ourPicks&from=Search>

## **After Thirty Years – Hold His Hand – by Marcy Lytle**

Sometimes I notice whether or not couples hold hands, and oftentimes it's the younger couples who do...and the older ones who don't. And I wonder out loud in my mind, "Does she find his older hands unattractive?" Or sometimes, "Maybe he doesn't think to hold her hand." Then there are those days when I catch a glimpse of a really old couple walking across a parking lot, holding hands, partly to steady each other – but mostly because they love each other – I hope!

Holding hands obviously isn't all there is to loving him, but it's certainly a part of it. It's so very easy to allow that one little action, that of grabbing his hand, to slip away into oblivion....until we don't recall what it felt like to "have and to hold..." Do you ever wonder if that part of the marriage vows meant to hold hands? It could!

It's easy to shove his hand away if we're irritated, to walk beside him in our own thoughts and never reach out, or to think things like – well he never holds my hand – so why should I hold his. And we can do that and miss out on so much, like:

*Holding his hand* in the darkness of the theater, just like we did when we were dating...why not? It's still as romantic now, as it was then.

*Holding his hand* while both arms are swinging, when walking down a trail or along a sidewalk...why not? I know, it's hot this time of year, but go on and grab his hand. At least for a few minutes.

*Holding his hand* in the car while he's driving and we're not...why not? Maybe not in rush hour traffic, or in beating rain, but around town, we can hold it and squeeze it!

*Holding his hand* when watching a show on television together...why not? This will require us sitting on a sofa, though, instead of in our separate chairs.

*Holding his hand* when on a date night out, wherever we are...why not? Observe his fingers, his life lines, his strength, and adore this man we're with!

There are certainly times when I'm trying to eat popcorn and candy and I don't want to be bothered with holding hands. There are also times when I can be irritable (imagine that!) and I don't want to be touched. Can you relate?

But we are missing out on one of the smallest, yet loveliest, actions a couple can take to show that the other makes his/her heart patter...still...no matter how long we've been together.

It's strange how this little action falls away over time, so don't let it. Reach out, clasp his fingers around yours, and give his hand a squeeze.

Then wink at him...and you're both sure to smile after that.

**ENCOURAGEMENT**

## **Words of Wisdom - Finding Your Happiness – by Sofia Herrera**

As a college freshman, I can wholeheartedly say that college sucks. It's a lot of work.

Over this past school year I've quickly discovered that everything everyone ever told me about college was true in that if you want something, you must work for it. The real world doesn't go around handing out fast passes to success. It has to be earned. If I don't put in the work and study or go to class, there's no one calling my parents to tell them I didn't show up or that I'm slacking. The responsibility all falls on me.

It's taken me about a year, after graduating high school, to really realize the amount of independence that I have. Growing up, my parents always allowed me to be independent, to a certain extent, and pretty much do whatever I wanted as long as it was under their rules. But now, being that I'm not forced to be in a building for seven hours a day, I pretty much have the world at my fingertips. Sometimes (even more so lately), I find myself thinking that I really can do anything I want with my life. I'm a firm believer that we aren't meant to just go to school seven hours a day for 13 years to graduate, go to college for another four, and then sit at a nine-to-five job that we hate for the rest of our lives until we retire. I figure, we spend the majority of our life after school working, so why not do something we love? Something that makes us happy!

Lately I've been trying to do more of that....more of what makes me happy.

In my junior year of high school, we discovered that I have a hormonal imbalance stemming from my brain in my pituitary gland. Upon getting an MRI on my brain, the doctors also found that I have a brain tumor called a cavernoma. After meeting with a neurosurgeon, during my senior year in high school, we came to the result that I would need to have brain surgery so that they could remove the tumor. Upon finding out this new information, my family and I decided to clear a date in the future for the surgery so that I'd have enough time to recover without having to miss any school. Being that I was about to graduate from high school, the summer of 2017 was definitely out of the picture. So we decided on the summer of 2018. This past year has been a time of preparation; with preparing my friends and family for what I was about to undergo and for more importantly, preparing myself. The amount of fear I had to suppress, faith I had to have, and hope I had to acquire was a lot...especially having to take it all on during my first year in college when the majority of my friends were hundreds of miles away from me. As part of prepping for the surgery, I figured I would also start prepping for my recovery. I started writing down tasks at home that I needed to finish, movies I wanted to watch, and even books I hoped to read. Just a few things that would maybe help ease my mind that I could be excited for after enduring my surgery.

As my spring semester of college was in full swing, I got a call from my doctor's office saying that I needed to make an appointment to come in. So I did. When the day came and my mother and I went in for the appointment, I was told that I'd been diagnosed with PCOS or Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome. This means that I have cysts on my ovaries. I was told that this sort of syndrome is incurable and that I was put at a high risk for type-one diabetes. In addition, I needed to be put on the paleo diet right away to reduce the amount of sugar in my body. The way I looked at it, was that this was yet one more thing that was wrong with me.

Being that this past May was when we'd decided on going forth with the surgery, we also set up an appointment in April to meet with a neurosurgeon to discuss the next steps we needed to take. During the appointment, the neurosurgeon explained that he thought that at this time he

didn't deem it smart for me to undergo brain surgery given the fact that I haven't showed any serious symptoms. He pointed out that by going through an inch and a half of brain I would have the potential of being at higher risk for symptoms such as seizures after the surgery versus if I was actually showing more serious symptoms now. So, we decided that I'd get an MRI on my brain every year to check up on the tumor and then go forth with the necessary actions to take from there. In a way, I was kind of disappointed, because this was one thing that I could be done with. I felt that this situation was something I was going to have to live with for the rest of my life, and...I'd felt like the enemy had won. But, it wasn't until I met with my lovely friend Kamrin that I started to look at my circumstances in a different way.

That day we talked a lot about my life and about what things I was doing to actually make myself happy. For me, I view my life as a to-do list and that if I can't check something off my list I begin to have a little bit of anxiety. But God doesn't view my life as a to-do list. If I've learned anything since my diagnosis, it's that life is unpredictable; and that no matter how hard you plan, sometimes things just aren't going to work out in the way that you'd like them to. But that doesn't mean that you can't be happy. Just because I'm no longer getting my surgery doesn't mean I can't finish those at home tasks, watch those movies, or read those books. It just means that those are things I get to look forward to doing every day.

These past two months have definitely been a time of growing for me and a time of learning to do more of what makes me happy and allowing my faith in God to be bigger than my fear. There definitely were and still are days when I feel 100% alone being that my circumstances are out of my control and no one can take them from me. However, **I've found that I can't always change my circumstances, but I can always change my attitude and the way I look at things.** I can decide to sit around and wallow in self-pity, or I can go out and decide to live the wonderful life that God so graciously granted me. I've come to a point where my faith has to be bigger than my fear. I need to let go, and let God.

Just like any other person, I have dreams and desires and I'm going to have to work for them too. No one's going to hand them to me. But it's what I decide to do in my storms that is going to shape the person I'm going to turn out to be. As long as I'm happy, the rest doesn't really matter, because my life is in God's hands.

So think about your life. Are you happy? If not, then what's stopping you from chasing your dreams and desires? We're only granted one life, so why not live it today? After all, tomorrow is never promised.

"The rest of your life is a long time. And whether you know it or not, it's being shaped right now. You can choose to blame your circumstances on fate or bad luck or bad choices. But, things aren't always gonna be fair in the real world. That's just the way it is. But for the most part, you get what you give...What's worse - Not getting everything you wished for or getting it, but finding out it's not enough?

The rest of your life is being shaped right now.

With the dreams you chase, the choices you make, and the person you decide to be. The rest of your life is a long time.

And the rest of your life starts right now." ~ Haley James Scott

#

## **Firmly Planted – Love of My Life – by Dina Cavazos**

I recently went to a class reunion and saw the love of my life—at least I thought he was when I was in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Eons ago—but first love memories etch deeply in the soft tissues of the young, often forming a backdrop against which all else plays out. It's not easy to forget. Maybe you had a similar experience, or maybe your first love is still your love. Whichever way it went, we each have a unique path to walk, and I've learned that comparing the scenery only makes for a rocky trail. Even so, we can encourage one another by sharing, not comparing, our stories.

*I remember the heat of it like yesterday...*

*Intense fire of love, burning in my heart;  
Eternal devotion, ever hard to part.  
You're my one and only, there will never be another;  
I don't care a whit that it doesn't please my mother!*

It was a year of bliss, but when school ended I made the fateful decision to spend the summer with my cousin. I was too young to know what I really wanted. The intensity of the fire and devotion subsided enough for me to have second thoughts about the relationship and I wrote a "Dear John" letter. When I went back home to start the school year, I realized my mistake and begged forgiveness. Tears and regrets had no effect. Either the wound was beyond healing, or his devotion wasn't as real as I'd thought it was. I never found out because the curtain came down hard in unrelenting, unforgiving silence. The rest of my high school years took an emotional downturn that set the stage for a life of "looking for love in all the wrong places."

Fast forward forty years or so—how do I feel now? The truth is, I'm so very thankful that God didn't give me what I thought I wanted. Looking back on a life of ups and downs, bad decisions, and resulting consequences, I see that they were tools God used to mold me, like clay on a potter's wheel. ***What I wanted wasn't at all what I needed.*** Stubbornness, rebelliousness, foolishness, ignorance: these things ruled my life, not because I was young, but because I was lost. It took some major re-shaping to get me to see I needed someone to save me, mainly from myself. I remember the moment of realization—maybe that's another story—that led to another process of maturity that continues to this day, because there's always more to learn.

A soul-mate with a "heart of gold" that would love and understand me to the depths was my heart's desire, but my concept of love was shallow and self-serving. It was the romantic ideal of youth, twisted by media and a culture that glorifies the wrong things. It took a long time, but I finally *do* have a relationship with someone who has a genuine, unfailing "heart of gold." It's the First Thing—the primary, foundational relationship that humans need to align with all that's true and right and it's better than I could have imagined.

The more we hang out the more I know he knows me to the core and I become my *true* self, the more unshakeable peace I have, and the more my heart becomes gold, like his. All prior relationships were incomplete because the primary one was missing.

This is *my* story—the hindrances to finding our hearts' true desire may be different, but what we have in common is that there's someone who loves us like no other, who's relentless in his

pursuit, who never gives up, who knows what we really need, and is just waiting for us to come to that moment of realization that will change everything forever.

I end with a song of my youth that expresses the search, similar to mine, for the love of my life with a heart of gold.

[Heart of Gold-Neil Young](#)



## **Moving Forward - Let Him In – by Pam Charro**

As some of you that follow my column know, I'm in the middle of a long trial. It's one of those challenging times that the Lord often allows with those who have walked with him for a while. I have spent most of the years of my situation hating how difficult it has been. But I'm also getting better at recognizing the diamonds that are being formed in the process; and one of the most precious has been deeper intimacy with him.

I have always struggled to understand what he is doing in a tough situation, and have concentrated hard to pass life's tests (I often have dreams about being perplexed or lost in a school setting).

But, lately, I'm beginning to focus less on getting to the end of my difficulty. I'm not so much looking for what he is doing as I am looking for who he is in my struggle and what it means for me. I don't think he is nearly as concerned as I have been about me getting "it." He wants me to get HIM!

He is so much more than the one who orchestrates my dilemma, so much more than a teacher at a chalkboard waiting while I sit in my little desk, sweating over my test. He created my innermost being and he knows and cares for everything about me! How could he possibly be aloof when I'm in pain?

Yet, he has patiently waited for me to understand this about him so that I would invite him into the pain with me...so that he could be there for me in a way that just wasn't possible until my view of him changed.

### **To be the close friend I've so desperately needed in my life.**

I'm finally learning that life is so much more than surviving one difficulty after another. It's about having a deeply close friend to walk with through every single moment of life, one who knows and loves me so much that everything else is just "stuff."

He wants so much to be close to me, even when life is ugly, if I will just let him in.

#

## **Real Stories - Love Salute – by Erin Bayer**

I have always had the pleasure of celebrating Father's Day with my dad. Maybe not on the exact calendar day, but I'm privileged to have a dad to celebrate. Up until this year, I have also been blessed to celebrate Father's Day with my husband Brian and our little girl, Camden. This year will be the beginning of a new chapter in our lives, one that reflects the similar pattern in which I grew up.

I have the honor of being a rookie army wife. I know many other army wives, past and present, but *being* is way different than *knowing*. I seriously underestimated how hard "deployment separation" would be, minus the missed holiday aspect. My dad has been a first responder my whole life so I'm used to maneuvering around the holidays so that the entire family can celebrate together. Since meeting Brian, I didn't think I'd have to make that same allowance for our family so soon. But God surely has gone before me in preparation to support my own family in unconventional ways.

I'm young and still experiencing those seasons of life that offer the opportunity to gain wisdom through mistakes and failures. Since my husband has been away for military training this summer, I've been faced with many of these growth opportunities. Some of these opportunities have allowed me to rise to the occasion. Others, well, it's a struggle without my number one fan. It is apparent what is missing in his temporary absence. But what he has left at home and how our little girl remembers him, is encouraging to see.

Being the millennials that we are, we decided Brian would record a couple videos for Camden to watch every day and I post pictures and videos to a shared album that Brian can view if/when he gets the chance. We also put measures in place to ensure that Brian does not miss much of the day-to-day happenings back home. I write a daily journal entry and send three or four to him at a time. Usually I include pictures or sermon notes from the Sunday before. I haven't had a "pen pal" since I was seven years old. It's kind of nice going back to the basics; from millennials to baby boomers.

We were blessed to celebrate Brian's birthday before his deployment and he will be back before mine. I was relieved that he wouldn't be gone over the winter holiday season but amongst the hustle and stress of preparing for this first separation, I didn't take into account summer holidays. Camden is two years old so we haven't created too much of a tradition when celebrating Mother's Day and Father's Day. We do well to affirm each other in our parental roles out of appreciation anyway, but sharing those sentiments on their respective days somehow becomes even more purposeful.

We'll be in the letter-writing phase for a few more weeks. It has been a challenge to rely on my words solely to convey an abundance of feelings. However, Brian's number one love language is "words of affirmation." Who says God doesn't have a sense of humor? My primary love language is "actions" so it's no wonder that everything I love about him is about what he does and how he does it. The Father's Day edition letter to my soldier details, in words, how his actions as a daddy and a soldier make me swoon!

### **Ten Swoon-Worthy Affirmations**

1. The way you make her smile, even from a long distance FaceTime call.
2. The way you beam when she says 'DADDY!' with a high-pitched squeak.

3. The way you prompt her to say cute things just because no one says them like her.
4. The way you melt like chocolate fondue at her every request.
5. The way you play with her to get the last giggle out before bedtime, even when I'm trying to set a serene mood for the occasion.
6. The way you live selflessly for us and put us first.
7. The way you altered your identity from civilian to soldier to provide for our family and fight for those who can't fight for themselves.
8. The way you desire to lead us and your peers, taking cues from the leadership of Jesus.
9. The way you set high standards for yourself and our family by always working on your personal development.
10. The way you see me, love us, and are compassionate to others.

**FRESH THYME**

## **FRESH THYME – Healing**

Where do you stand on how prayer for healing works?

I mean, the Bible says a lot about praying for the sick. In Matthew, Jesus tells his followers to go out and heal the sick (and raise the dead!) Have you experienced anyone being raised from the dead...physically? Jesus himself went out in crowds of people and saw sick people, touched them, and they were healed. Peter spoke to a lame man and told him to get up and walk – and he did! And still later, we are told that if there are any sick among us, we can take them to the leaders of the church for prayer. And we read that the prayer of faith will raise that sick person up!

I'm praying for several needs right now, as I'm sure we all are, and I'm not seeing the answer. I'm praying in particular for a family member who is ill. I've prayed before for sick people and seen them get better and give glory to God for their healing. I've also prayed for friends with cancer and seen them die without being healed...here on earth.

So back to my original question...how does this prayer thing for healing work?

We are told to pray, told to expect miracles, told to give thanks when they come, and told to have faith...

But what if that prayer is never answered this side of heaven? Does it wreak havoc on our faith, like hail on a roof in a thunderstorm? Are we out shaking our fists at the sky, wishing that storm had missed our house altogether, because now we've got to repair the roof? If we don't repair the roof, we're going to have our entire house flooded and ruined, the next time it rains.

Unanswered prayer for a parking space is one thing, but being on our faces and knees daily for a miracle of healing that never reveals itself is another. Faith wanes, we wonder if God is listening, we don't understand what he's trying to say to us (or if he's just being silent?), and we re-think our theology on this thing called prayer.

I taught a class on prayer a couple of years ago, and realized several things as I was studying for it. We try to formulize prayer (figure out a plan of action that always works), we feel entitled to answered prayer because we've lived a good life, and we give God a grade or a score on how well he did, if the answer comes as expected. If it's a full healing with no residual effects, he gets a gold star by his name. However, if patience, too much trust, and sometimes a "no" is handed to us, our lack of understanding on how a good father can require that much relationship causes those holes in our roofs to appear.

I didn't know that God was all about relationship when I was a kid. I thought he was a taskmaster, and yes – I thought if I performed well and up to his standards – then he owed me a cushy life without heartache or lack. But as I've gotten older, and disappointments have come and gone, as well as exciting victories, I know that he's cultivating this lifelong eternal relationship to where I can dwell in his presence forever...unashamed, unafraid, and untouched by storms that produce hail.

I recently read that God won't allow a soul searching for him to be comforted anywhere else other than with him. Even when relationships fail, bodies are sick for way too long, and minds are peppered with questions, the end goal is for us to experience the grace and the glory the table he has set for us – with dishes he has prepared – not dishes we have demanded.

I believe that we belong to God, that we are his children, and nothing in this life that comes our way – including hammering hail in the middle of the night – goes by him unnoticed. I believe that he has good planned for us and not evil, and a future and a hope for us, one that's glorious. I also believe that he has asked us to pray in faith and believe for the sick around us to be made well, and then to leave the answer in his hands. And finally, we must eat that which has been set before us, if we want to leave his table full and not empty...even if it's something so distasteful we want to spit it out of our mouths.

Prayer works. It moves the hand and heart of God. But it doesn't get him to wave a magic wand to grant all of our fairytale wishes.

Feeling hammered by hail stones of doubt?

- Surround yourself with friends who will hold up your hands
- Give up trying to understand his ways and just breathe
- Give thanks for any good that you can see in your life and your vision around you
- Listen to music with lyrics that speak truth about his character
- Cry and pour out your heart, as much as you need
- Find strength in knowing that he loves that sick one more than you do
- Hang up all theology in favor of a relationship with the father...

And if that sick one is not healed, that answer doesn't come, and your entire roof ends up blown off and down the street, sit down and weep...as long as you need. God is faithful to finish that which he starts in all of us, including giving us legs to stand and finish the race...and see those answers someday when we stop seeing through a glass darkly but see all things clearly against the backdrop of eternity.

I'm still praying for healing, in hope, and in faith, because He told me to pray for the sick. And I plan to rejoice when the healing comes...because it will.

##

## **FRESH THYME - One Month** – by Marcy Lytle

It will be one year this month since my sweet mom passed away. I can hardly believe it's been that long, and I still miss her terribly. I had so many friends contact me during the year, as I shared on social media that I still missed her and was struggling. Friends who had lost their moms understood. They reached out with words of kindness and affirmation; letting me know that what I was feeling was normal, and that it was understandable to still be grieving.

I can't say how much that meant to me.

But there were also times when I felt and thought other things, as well, like...

*How could the world around me just go on, with people laughing and going on trips, etc. when my mom just died?*

*Why did most people quit asking about me how I was, after about a month? Was it because they thought I'd be okay by then?*

*Why did waves of grief sweep over me, out of nowhere – in a store or in the car or while watching a movie – and uncontrollable sobbing would ensue?*

*How do I make sense out of this life down here, when after you're gone, your clothes and shoes are discarded as trash?*

I know other people have voiced different questions and regrets, wishing they'd known their parent better or asked more questions, or been more attentive to the one who is now gone.

One month seems to be the marker. We're given a week to grieve deeply, another week off of work, the third week to step back out slowly, and then by that fourth week we're supposed to be back in full swing of life, gliding back and forth as we reach the sky.

That just doesn't happen, though.

People have lives to live, and they have to get back to that. I know, because mostly I've been on the other side of the grief. I've been the one who looked on at a friend as she lost her parent, or sat by another friend that lost a child, and wept with yet another friend that lost a neighbor. I too checked on them, called them, and asked "How are you doing?" for about a month, and then their grief was gone from my mind...at least filed away for a while.

Occasionally, when I saw that person, or something reminded me of her, I'd whisper a prayer of comfort.

But mostly, she was on her own.

Grief knocks us down and there's a part of our heart that dies with that person we've lost. I'll never stop missing my mom or remembering her smile, and her warm heart and kindness toward me. I'll never forget that she was often proud of me and what I was doing in life, especially being a mom raising two "wonderful kids" as she called them. I don't want to erase from my mind those last three weeks of her life in the hospital, where I sat by her bed, changed

out her ear plugs and straightened her pillow – although those memories bring pain. Those were my last moments with her, and they are forever etched into my heart and soul.

But one other thing I hope I remember, too.

*Thank you* to all of my friends who reached out that first day, the first week, the first month, and beyond...it was noticed and appreciated.

I hope I can do the same for my next friend, when grief shows up at her door. More than one month.

We all loved for a lifetime, so a lifetime of memories will be with us...and bring a tear once in a while.

So I ask you, my friend, "How are you doing?"

I'm still missing my mom, terribly. Thank you, for asking.



## **FRESH THYME - The Royal Wedding – by Marcy Lytle**

Can you imagine having the life that Prince William and Kate have? I'm thinking many women have been dreaming of having just that kind of life since they were little girls. Isn't it why we dress up in princess dresses and wear tiaras? (I don't recall doing that, but I see so many who do!) Is it why we love to watch Hallmark movies where everything ends up perfectly lovely and she marries the prince of a guy in the end? Is it the reason we take selfies and post on Instagram, hoping we too will meet Prince Charming or get "noticed" and become Queen for a day?

Just last month, the other prince, Prince Harry and his fiancé Meghan got married. It took place at the Windsor Castle. So let's just talk about castles for a second. Have you ever visited one or stayed in one? We've visited very low-key castles indeed, a few times, but nothing like this one across the seas, where this fantastic wedding of the year took place! Castles have lots of rooms and steeples and peoples! If we were offered a night's stay at one, we'd grab it for sure, right?

What about the wedding dress? Meghan's was just a mere \$180,000 in value, about the value of a home in median suburban America. And then I read this...

*After the vows, the couple will ride through the narrow cobbled streets in the Ascot Landau carriage, escorted by the Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment.*

<http://www.news.com.au/entertainment/celebrity-life/royals/royal-weddings/royal-wedding-2018-everything-you-need-to-know-about-prince-harry-and-meghan-markles-big-day/news-story/2328bd63e959fd81c1069b9e50de096f>

A carriage ride like Cinderella had!

I've ridden in a carriage pulled by horses in downtown Austin, Texas in the dead of winter with blankets wrapped around my legs, but it wasn't on narrow cobbled streets...and it was only 20 minutes long...and I had to pay!

It's predicted that the wedding may have cost in the neighborhood of \$58 million.

Now that your jaw has come back from the floor, I'm curious if you watched the wedding, or if you could have cared less. Is it wrong for us *lowlies* to have dreams about the higher-ups and wish our lives resembled theirs?

I don't think it's wrong. I think it's human nature to want to rise above pain, and necessity, and the mundane drudgery of working 9 to 5, and all of the things that make us age much more quickly than we should...so we dream. We dream about...

- That perfect husband
- The body she has that we wish we had
- A trip across the world – all expenses paid
- Every prayer answered straight away when we ask

- A new house, a new car, and a beautifully landscaped yard
- Children that sit quietly and thank us profusely for all that we are and do
- Futures that are secure and settled and...
- An occasional ride in a carriage across cobblestone streets while we wave at our subject

Every one of us has a dream of some sort that either was squelched as a child, so we dream no more. Or perhaps we dream so much that we cannot function in our daily lives. Or maybe we only dream when we're tired and we wish for another life different than the one we have, at least for a day or two...

The Royal Wedding will go down in history as another one of those events that will be talked about for days and weeks, the Royal Couples will still be in the news, and there will be comments about the dresses and the waves and the hats and the shoes...

There's this longing in all of us to be exalted and honored and loved and adored...isn't there? It's what we hope for when we marry, to have someone by our side that does just that...daily.

But doesn't true peace and happiness and satisfaction in life coming from giving all of that away? I think it does. It's because in the giving of that away, we receive more blessings that we can even imagine.

So who do we give it to? To Him, the Creator of the Universe, the Prince of Peace (our Prince Charming!), the King of Kings. And then he reaches out his hand and offers us a place right by his side in his royal court of all courts, to be taken care of cherished as the treasure that we are.

Royal weddings and the lives of the rich and famous are interesting to observe, that's for sure, because their lives so transcend the ones we live in our neighborhoods with two cars in the driveway, and maybe a dog on the porch. But the life our King offers us transcends anything we can imagine, at all.

I can imagine a lot, can't you? And while I'm aging, wishing for more, wondering why that, or wailing in sorrow, He's preparing this place for me where all of that is erased...forever. It's just that I have to wait while he finishes inviting everyone to the table.

Don't know this Prince? His name is Jesus. Just believe in Him, surrender and say yes to all that He is, and get ready for the wedding of a lifetime and beyond...

## **Fresh THYME – Try the Light – by Marcy Lytle**

I love having options for lighting in every room in the house...other than ceiling lights. Do you? There's just something about turning off the big overhead light and adding subtle lights around the room with lamps, night lights, candles, and more. Recently, I was home alone and decided to turn on some of these lights, and then I began to think...

Nightlights in the bathroom give visitors a welcome feel, make kids want to turn them on and off, and there are so many cute ones out there, they are part of the décor of the room! I have a pretty bird one that I plug in for the month of June, and then I switch out every six weeks or so for something new. What "new" light have you added to your home to welcome others and make them ooh and ahh?

Try the light of hospitality by inviting some friends over this summer...

A pretty lamp in a den can be a statement piece all its own. I love this teal lamp shade on our light in the den. Most of the den is decorated in hues of orange and deep gray, with touches of mustard. But this teal lamp stands out and adds a pop of something different! I like it! What "pop" have you added to your normal look in the place where the family gathers?

Try a lamp shade that covers your family in prayer as you gather together to relax...

Candles are absolutely my favorite, and winter is not the only season to enjoy them! There are SO MANY great scents out there, so I pick my faves and light them often...especially near my work space. I love to see the flicker and smell the scent (tobacco patchouli is my fave!) while I work hard. It eases the load of a long day's work. What scent or flicker have you set up next to the busiest places in your home?

Try a flicker of hope with perhaps great music playing while chores are being done...

Lanterns on the porch make night time come alive, don't they? We have one on our front porch that has a timer, and the light comes on after dark, then shuts off six hours later. What fun that is! It not only makes the porch a welcome place to visit, but it illuminates our way to finding the front door and that shadowy key hole when we arrive home at night! What light have you added that looks pretty and inviting?

Try a lantern of beauty by adorning your porch to make others smile...

As I write, I smile at the thought of arriving at home and seeing our lantern light on the porch, stepping inside to the dark house and switching on one lone lamp to give a little ambience, lighting a scented candle and waiting for its aroma to fill the room, and sneaking off to the back to switch on a nightlight just to see it's glow.

Turning on overhead lighting definitely brightens up rooms, but little subtle lights around the house and in the yard brightens up the heart and the warmth of a family place where we're safe and warm and loved...

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