



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

Online Women's Magazine | [thymemag.com](http://thymemag.com)

June 2020



TIPS

## **The Dressing – Go Bold!** – by Marcy Lytle

A few weeks ago, I ordered myself lots of new earrings. Partly, I ordered them because I was tired of my decades-old stash, which consisted of mostly studs...not many big earrings. After all, I wore LOTS of big earrings back in the 80's and really grew tired of them. However, I had seen lots of photos of cute tshirts and simple shirts really taken to the next level with a cute pair of hoops! Yes, hoops! And when hoops are worn, there's no need for a statement necklace or a scarf, or any other accessories.

When my order arrived, I was delighted and even made room for these large earrings on my jewelry wall. You can see the picture over on the article called Seven 4 You – where we all shared what we've been doing during this slower pace of being at home more. I thought I'd share some of these finds with you, in case you too want to start a new trend this summer. These hoops are great for any outing, at home in the backyard or down the street at a park with friends...or on vacation...should we all get to go!

The first four pairs are from American Eagle (Yeah, I didn't know their jewelry was so cute!)

**Flowers** – Isn't this pair stunning? These would be great with a maxi sundress, or shorts and a tshirt! They are so unique and pretty.

[https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-flower-statement-earring/0484\\_9457\\_900](https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-flower-statement-earring/0484_9457_900)

[https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-flower-statement-earring/0484\\_9457\\_900?menu=cat4840004](https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-flower-statement-earring/0484_9457_900?menu=cat4840004)

**Braided** – This hoop that's braided in gold is one of my favorite pair! Gold goes with denim, navy, red, and all sorts of summer hues!

[https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-braided-hoop-earring/0484\\_9430\\_284](https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-braided-hoop-earring/0484_9430_284)

[https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-braided-hoop-earring/0484\\_9430\\_284?menu=cat4840004](https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-braided-hoop-earring/0484_9430_284?menu=cat4840004)

**Multi-color** – I just wore these with a white shirt, and I think this pair just completed the outfit! These hoops are not heavy in weight, just heavy in beauty and fun.

[https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-multi-color-hoop-earring/0484\\_9466\\_900](https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-multi-color-hoop-earring/0484_9466_900)

[https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-multi-color-hoop-earring/0484\\_9466\\_900?menu=cat4840004](https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-multi-color-hoop-earring/0484_9466_900?menu=cat4840004)

**Tortoise and Raffia** – I think these are so pretty, and if you've got an animal print pair of loafers, then you're good to go! I just recently found a pair and love them! Or even an animal print belt.

[https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-tortoise-raffia-statement-earring/0484\\_9446\\_900](https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-tortoise-raffia-statement-earring/0484_9446_900)

[https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-tortoise-raffia-statement-earring/0484\\_9446\\_900?menu=cat4840004](https://www.ae.com/us/en/p/women/jewelry/earrings/aeo-tortoise-raffia-statement-earring/0484_9446_900?menu=cat4840004)

**Gold Disk** – World Market has great jewelry, and I love these disk hoops. If your outfit is already colorful and busy, then opt for a solid hoop like this!

<https://www.worldmarket.com/product/gold+disc+hoop+earrings.do>

<https://www.worldmarket.com/category/jewelry-clothing/earrings/hoop-earrings.do?template=PLA&plfsku=535216>

**Beaded** – This pair looks like a pinwheel! What speaks summer more than this colorful pair! Beaded, lots of hues, and so cute!

<https://www.target.com/p/sugarfix-by-baublebar-fringe-hoop-earrings/-/A-78365078>

[https://www.target.com/p/sugarfix-by-baublebar-fringe-hoop-earrings/-/A-78365078?ref=tgt\\_adv\\_XS000000&AFID=google\\_pla\\_df&fndsrc=tgtao&CPNG=PLA\\_Jewelry%2BShopping\\_Local&adgroup=SC\\_Jewelry&LID=700000001170770pgs&network=g&device=m&location=9028316&ds\\_rl=1241788&ds\\_rl=1246978&ds\\_rl=1248099&qclid=EAlaIqobChMI34OXya-d6QIV8PvjBx2CdAPqEAQYECABEgL7efD\\_BwE&qclsrc=aw.ds](https://www.target.com/p/sugarfix-by-baublebar-fringe-hoop-earrings/-/A-78365078?ref=tgt_adv_XS000000&AFID=google_pla_df&fndsrc=tgtao&CPNG=PLA_Jewelry%2BShopping_Local&adgroup=SC_Jewelry&LID=700000001170770pgs&network=g&device=m&location=9028316&ds_rl=1241788&ds_rl=1246978&ds_rl=1248099&qclid=EAlaIqobChMI34OXya-d6QIV8PvjBx2CdAPqEAQYECABEgL7efD_BwE&qclsrc=aw.ds)

**Paint Palette** – This pair looks just like a paint palette. Who knows, they might even inspire you to take out a brush and create something beautiful! I think this pair would be so pretty with a red tshirt, or a denim shirt!

<https://www.target.com/p/semi-precious-hoop-earrings-universal-thread/-/A-79545383>

<https://www.target.com/p/semi-precious-hoop-earrings-universal-thread/-/A-79545383?preselect=78470880#lnk=sametab>

Maybe you're like I was and need a change in your wardrobe but you don't know where to start, you don't want to spend much, but you want to look cute for the summer months ahead. Start with earrings. Break out of your rut of wearing the same pair, just gold or silver, or just tiny and cute...and go bold!

## Seven 4 You – While at Home – by Marcy Lytle

We asked our panel of women what they did while staying at home these past weeks, waiting on “normal” to return. Many people baked, read books, went on long walks, played with kids, and all sorts of things that they never had time to do before! So we thought it would be fun to see what these women did, in case we might want to try one of their ideas ourselves!

One of my fondest memories growing up was swinging in my grandparents’ porch swing in their backyard. It was so calming and relaxing to me. We had a porch swing a couple of times more than twenty years ago and I had always wanted another. When my son graduated, he left a large metal stand he welded as a high school project. I thought many times I needed to hang a swing on it but never had. I found myself sitting on the couch during COVID 19 and looking at swings online. I did not need to spend the money, though, so I stopped looking. One afternoon while coming home from one of my two trips to the grocery store during the entire shelter in place I came across a glider on the side of the highway! I thought, “Thank you, Lord! It is mine!” The next four days I spent doing hard work, what I call ‘exercise,’ and it got me off the couch. I repaired, glued, drilled, screwed, and hung the glider on the metal stand. And I was swinging!

---

I sewed 56 masks, made 4 girl horse pillows and 4 boy dinosaurs from a free sewing pattern.

I also made my first batch of instant pot yogurt. To die for!

For the yogurt, I used the cold start process which YT blogger 'Freida loves bread' perfected. Her videos are the best to understand yogurt making. It requires 3 main ingredients:

- ultra pasteurized milk (like Fairlife)
- starter plain yogurt
- sweetener of choice

I used 1/2 cans of sweetened condensed milk and half a bottle of Natural Bliss creamer (also ultra-pasteurized). I added 1 Tclear vanilla.

Whisk really well and turn on the yogurt function. It incubates for 8 hours, and then put 4 paper towels on the yogurt, put any lid on it, and refrigerate overnight. It's amazing and addictive. It's BEST with lemon curd:

1.25 cups Sugar  
1 stick softened butter  
4 eggs  
1/2 cup fresh lemon juice  
zest of 2 lemons.

Beat until combined. Heat until almost boiling (but don't boil) and thickened. Awesome. It's Ina Garten's recipe.

---

My outdoor furniture, plants, and fixtures needed refreshing. So with some extra time on my hands, I got some spray paint and new plants and went to work. It took me less than half a day. Now, I can relax and enjoy my lovely vista.

---

We put stone pavers down to create a path in our backyard. The area never could grow grass because of the heavy foot traffic, and now with the stones to walk on, the grass is filling in and looks great. We had been meaning to do this for years!

---

I've been on the search for the best banana bread out there! I've yet to find it but here's a picture from the first one I made. It's Joanna Gaines's recipe from her book, *Magnolia Table*.

---

One thing I did was make my closet more like a dressing room. I wanted my scarves and jewelry and shoes all near my clothes so that when I get dressed, I can see each piece and put together an outfit without digging through drawers or bins to find accessories! I already had a shoe wall and a jewelry wall, and a scarf bin – but I redid them all. My husband ran across a couple of bins for the shoe wall – they hold so much! I hung my scarf rack on my over-the-door ironing board so that I could see all the colors and patterns. And I took my new earrings (I changed my style – purchased a bunch of big earrings online!) and made a twine hanger for them on my jewelry wall. I discarded several necklaces I never wear, in order to make room. I am pleased!

---

Does moving count? God opened the door for us to move into a cute little home after four years of sharing space with others in our church where we pastor. He has now provided us an adorable place in the country. It's perfect for my husband and me! We moved on May 2nd as Texas was beginning the early stages of reopening since the Covid-19 began.

---

Sheltering in place has caused many of us to do life differently. My hubby and I have been doing a lot of driving around and seeing new places with limited interaction out of the car. He has experienced elevated irritation with the news on TV and not being able to get a haircut. I am also irritated with the news, but I rather enjoy seeing some length to his hair. (He won't let me take a picture.)

---

I have been cleaning out my closets and finding unfinished craft projects. Here is a picture of a hooded towel that I added cross-stitch to, a while back. I finally finished it. It's for my 2-year old grandson.

---

It's been fun to MAKE graduation cards and sending letters to the grand babies with stickers and craft supplies that I already have or have ordered on line. I am so happy that I found some fun things to celebrate during this uncertain time.

---

I cleaned out my entry area to my home. I do this twice a year, and I was a bit late this year...but finally made it happen. I put away coats, sweaters, scarves, etc. and all the junk that had collected over the winter months. I opted for hanging bags that I use when I go out – a market bag, book bag, movie bag and beach bag – ones I can grab and go. I also placed my watering can on the floor nearby, a pretty plant on the bench, and tried to just clean up the space. It feels good, and I felt good after doing it!

### **Three Moms – Summer Fun – by Marcy Lytle**

Summer is here now, and it might feel like you've been in summer mode for months already as far as the kids being home. But now, hopefully, the school work is done and you can play a bit! However, there is still safety and money concerns for families and our three moms are sharing some ideas that are simple and super fun, for the month of June. If you have some as well, leave your ideas in the comments below!

We go for car rides often, and one ride is to check on our new house that is being built. It could be anything though, a ride in the country with ice cream in hand, or a ride to drive by and see pretty scenery.

Our family has been playing Charades and Pictionary. We downloaded an app (Worddraw) and it's a bunch of ideas for both of these games. We use individual white boards and sit on balcony, and play both. The kids have loved it!

Recently, we went through a drive-thru safari, and the plan is to do that again. It's cool in the car since it's so hot, and we can take picnic, and stop for a treat. Lots of families were in line, so maybe check out all the details before going!

We go down to the creek and go fishing. The kids have loved this, because we can do it at the end of a long day. There's a creek behind where we live, and it's an easy access.

Sometimes at night, we enjoy a treat while we watch a family movie together, but this summer we are hoping to make homemade sno cones!

<https://www.norinesnest.com/homemade-snow-cones/>

---

We live on 30+ acres of family land in the Blue Ridge Mountains, so we've spent most of our quarantine days outside and exploring. Some of our favorite outdoor activities include:

1) Finding the colors of the rainbow. My girls and I love rainbows. We love the colors, the representation of God's promises, and the majestic beauty. During our walks we try and find something red, orange, yellow, blue, green, and purple. When we get home, we glue them on paper and talk about our findings.

2) Riding the four-wheeler. My girls are obsessed with riding the four-wheeler. We have two - the adult version and the kid's Frozen version. The pure joy on my girls' faces when they ride the "big" four wheeler is priceless. We create memories that will last a lifetime.

3) Feeding the fish and geese. We have a pond in front of our house filled with fish and owned by two hungry geese. We save up some of our older bread, walk down to the pond, and feed them. They are the closest friends my girls have had during this quarantine .

---

We are saving up for an above ground pool, since pools are closed in our area. In fact, our daughters created and made jewelry to sell, to save up money for the purchase! And sometimes, we go fishing at night when it cools down. We play cornhole, basketball, and go on bike rides. Those will be our same routines this summer, along with picnics. All outside!

Indoors, we may cook more – one of our daughters made dinner tonight! One of our four wants to make Lego movies. This gives them something to do this summer that keeps their creative juices flowing, and they keep learning, as well!

One activity we've done is paint a glass door in a mosaic of hope and love...it was so fun for all!

## **In the Kitchen – Loaded with Flavor – by Marcy Lytle**

Recently, we've enjoyed some new dishes that are just so good they make my mouth water as I type! I'm not a fan of super time consuming recipes, unless they're fantastic and worth it. However, the following weren't hard, they were surprisingly tasty, and we will enjoy them again and again! Great recipes to add to your summer table...

### **Mediterranean Pasta**

Oh my gosh, this was good. And it came together so quickly! I will keep this recipe around and make it over and over again. The flavors are delicious!

- Kosher salt and black pepper
- Pasta (Spagetti or whatever long pasta you have)
- 4 cloves garlic
- 2 C grape or cherry tomatoes
- 1 can quartered artichoke hearts (14oz)
- 1 can whole pitted black olives (6oz)
- 3 T olive oil
- Red pepper flakes (optional)
- ¼ cup freshly squeezed lemon
- ¼ cup freshly grated Parmesan
- ¼ c fresh Italian parsley chopped

Bring a large pot of boiling salted water to a boil and cook pasta al dente. Reserve ½ cup of the pasta water, then drain.

Prep your veggies: mince the garlic, halve the tomatoes, drain and chop the artichokes, drain and slice olives in half.

Heat the oil in a large skillet over med-hi heat, add the tomatoes, garlic and 1 t salt, pepper and red pepper flakes (1/4 tsp), cook and stir til garlic is fragrant and tomatoes break down, about 1-2 minutes.

Add pasta to skillet and toss, add artichokes and olives. Drizzle lemon juice over the pasta and continue tossing and cooking for 1-2 minutes till warmed thru. Add pasta water if needed.

Taste and adjust the S&P as desired. Remove from heat and sprinkle with Parmesan cheese, toss once more and enjoy!

### **Cauliflower Kale Rice with Fajita Veggies**

We had this for lunch, and the rice was amazing (be sure it's dry and pulsed in batches per instruction). I ate every bite in my bowl, and also enjoyed a few tortilla chips with it, as well!

- 1 can black or pinto beans
- 1 red, 1 yellow pepper, ½ red onion, ½ yellow onion

- 4 cups cauliflower florets
- 1 bunch kale, thinly sliced
- ½ lemon
- 1 T olive oil
- One avocado mashed with S\*P and lime juice.

Make sure cauliflower is dry, and place in food processor in small batches (removing after each one) and pulse til it's like rice (2-3 pulses – don't overpulse. In a large skillet, heat the olive oil and add kale, saute til wilted. Add the cauliflower and saute about 5 minutes, season with salt, pepper and lemon juice.

In a skillet saute the veggies and season with S&P and lime juice, remove and then heat the beans in the same skillet.

To make your bowl, just place piles of each group, add a lime wedge, and you're done!

### **Loaded Hummus**

I love hummus, but this recipe is like a hummus salad – perfect for a picnic – and filling! It's gorgeous in color and HUGE in taste!

For the hummus:

- 1 15 oz garbanzo beans, drained and peeled
- ½ cup tahini
- 3 T fresh lemon juice
- 3 small cloves garlic
- ¾ T kosher salt
- Water as needed

For the topping:

- 1 ½ c cherry tomatoes, quartered
- 4 persian cucumbers diced
- ¼ med red onion diced
- ½ lemon juiced
- S&P
- Paprika
- 2 T finely chopped herbs like parsley, mint, chives for garnish

In a food processor, pulse the chickpeas by themselves about 1 minute, scrape down sides and pulse again for consistency. Add tahini, lemon juice, garlic and salt and blend til smooth. Drizzle in 1 T water at a time til you get a smooth creamy texture. Taste and adjust seasonings.

To serve, tops with all the toppings, drizzle with olive oil and serve with pita chips. (We enjoyed it with carrots and wheat crackers.)

## Lemon Cakes

These are delicious and easy to make and share with friends! The recipe makes a lot of these, especially if you use the mini muffin tins! And you'll want to drizzle icing over and over the tops, until it's all gone! We plated these and left on neighbors' doorsteps.

- 1 box yellow cake mix (and ingredients listed on cake box)
- 2 oranges
- 2 lemons
- 1 ½ boxes confectioners sugar

Make the icing first: lightly grate rinds from oranges and lemons (don't go too deep – the white part will be bitter). Squeeze the juice from the lemons and oranges in the bowl as well. Whisk in the sugar until smooth.

Make the cakes: preheat the oven to 350. Make cake according to box instruction. Spray mini muffin tins with non-stick cooking spray, fill halfway up with batter. Bake for 12 minutes til done. While the cakes are hot, dunk each one into the icing and set on wire rack to drain off excess juice.

Once glaze hardens, they're ready to eat!

Tips: place foil under the racks while you dip and drain, and scoop with a spoon the excess and drizzle back on top of cakes. I drizzled about 3-4 coats, as there is lots of the icing!

## **Tried and True - Having Fun Yet?**

Last month, one of our writers wrote an article called “Laundry Worship” where she talked about the most mundane of chores becoming an act of worship! I loved it! I thought it would be fun to mention a few more chores and how we can actually make them into fun, instead of so boring and laborious. After all, household chores are here to stay for now and always, and they face us every single morning whether we like it or not! Some chores I don’t mind, but others I detest. Emptying the dishwasher is my least fave! I think it’s because I realize it needs to be emptied right about the time I’m starting dinner!

**Ironing** – I’m starting with this chore that I’m thinking a lot of you don’t do anymore. You have wrinkle spray or a steamer, am I right? But whatever way you choose to get out the wrinkles, it’s still annoying to have to stop and do it. Especially if you’re in a hurry to get dressed and time is of the essence!

How to have fun: Set aside an hour a week to get out the wrinkles, instead of just when you’re ready to get dressed. Put on music and breathe, and enjoy the disappearance of the wrinkles and the appearance of something you can now wear next time, even when you’re in a hurry!

**Mowing** – Do you still mow your yard, or pay a lawn service? We still mow, because we both enjoy the opportunity for that exercise. However, the time it takes to do it and actually finding the time to mow is the problem! Once we actually mow, we are super satisfied and happy (and dirty!).

How to have fun: Do the yard work together. Make lemonade to enjoy on breaks. Sit together on the patio between the front and backyard trims. Brainstorm about new plants or flowers or outdoor art. Make it an actual “date” as you work together – not apart. If you have little children, consider this as a date option – seriously – get a babysitter or do it when the kids are resting! Or set them up on the patio with crafts and snacks while you work!

**Cleaning the bathroom** – Toilets, bathtubs and floors – nasty and not fun. And getting our kiddos to start learning and start aiming and start wiping is like pulling teeth – next to impossible!

How to have fun: Create a cleaning bucket with pockets for each cleaning item, gloves, wipes, etc. Assign pieces of the chore to each family member and make it a relay race. (Well, not a race, but you get the idea.) You and the kids sit in a room drawing, coloring, reading, whatever. And the bucket gets passed to each individual. Mom does the toilet, then passes the bucket to big brother. He wipes the counters, and passes the bucket to little sis who sprays the tub, and Dad comes in for the rub. It can work!

**Unloading the dishwasher** - As I mentioned above, the dishwasher seems to be full all the time and needs to be emptied just before dinner! And if someone unloads it and doesn’t know where the items belong, then it could wreak havoc next time Mom needs that garlic mincer that was placed in the wrong drawer!

How to have fun: Let this be a chore that is attended to daily. Although the dishwasher may not be full and clean daily, if it's checked each morning or evening, at least it will always be attended to! Pick a time that's not near mealtime. That person can ask one more person to help, as they unload and put away. If there's an odd piece without a known home, it's put on the counter for Mom...later. While unloading, the two have to sing! Yes, *have to!* It will be hilariously great!

**Dusting:** We have one room in our house that is especially dusty all the time – our bedroom! Pretty sure it's because of the printer going all the time, while I work. Dusting every windowsill, baseboard, surface and table is a pain.

How to have fun: Each person has their own Swiffer duster, with a specific surface named and taped on the handle. (windowsills, tables, shelves). These stay in a cabinet or bucket, and when it's time to dust everyone draws a Swiffer and goes to town! The job will be over in a jiffy!

Obviously, there will need to be inspections, training on how to clean, and expectations communicated, in order for this “fun” to be effective and not a pain. But once everyone is in a rhythm, the beat will produce a marching army that produces a clean house!

Make chores fun, every one of them. Or at least try to...



HOME

## **Practical Parenting – 15 Reminders – by Marcy Lytle**

I've watched on line and read and listened to all the moms out there that felt two conflicting emotions when school was closed and lessons ensued at home...while normal life had to keep going! There were often posts of how fun it was to have family time for walks in the evening to the creek. There were just as many posts about heads down on the table and frustrations running high! So I figured you moms could use a little affirmation right about now, since summer is just beginning and you're not quite sure you can endure!

- You're allowed to scream and cry. It relieves that pressure so that you don't burst!
- You may not get applause right now, but one day your kids will appreciate your care. Seriously. It might be when they're 30 years old, but they will.
- You are smart and brave when you ask for help.
- You will get to watch your grandkids throw tantrums as pay back to your grown kids.
- You are a hero, just without a cape. But go head. Wear one if you need to.
- You are beautiful, and you deserved that cookie you ate today. Savor every bite!
- Your family is not weird because you're different. You're uniquely you.
- You will not thrive if you become your own critic. You will thrive if you let it go...
- You are allowed to fail. Completely. And so are your kids...
- Your desires are dear to His heart, so go on. Tell Him and wait to receive...
- Your dirty oven means aromas fill your house and the family is smiling.
- You need friends that encourage you, so be one that encourages her.
- You will never receive greater comfort and peace than you will in His presence...even if it's 5 minutes.
- You can do all you need to do in His strength and wisdom, and in his rest and peace.
- You can control the playlist for music in the house, and require that all who hear...dance.

I know Mother's Day was last month. I know you're hoping and wishing for a new house, a vacation away, date night once again, a husband to treat you like royalty, and all sorts of pampering and treats, because you're tired. You're spent. You're over it. It doesn't help to be told that children grow up quickly, because right now it seems they will forever be pulling on your sleeves and whining. So I won't say that.

What I will say is to find a way to release the pressure before the top blows off and there's a mess to clean up. Keep your chin up, because you are greatly valued and seen and heard, by the One who can supply all your needs according to His riches. And the One that can give you wings to soar like an eagle...while you wait.

Here's to Summer 2020, a home of plenty...where balloons fly high and moms laugh out loud.

## **I Don't Do Teenagers – Bummer** – by Marcy Lytle

Disappointments happen to our teens. Just this spring season, our graduates weren't able to attend their ceremonies because of a world pandemic. Our teens weren't able to finish out their sports seasons, go swimming with friends, or even have a birthday party or sleepover. Lots of firsts have happened this year, and there was no way that we – their parents – could have seen it coming.

However, hasn't it been amazing to see how creative parents and people have become? Drive by parties with signs in windows, creative walks in neighborhoods, and zoom gatherings on line! All of those have been wonderful, but I know there are still teens (and moms) who are so disappointed in missed celebrations.

How do we handle disappointments with our teenagers? It doesn't help to just tell them to stuff it, to remind them of the starving children in Africa, or to cry and try to make it all up to them by going broke with electronics or other gadgets to ease their pain.

First of all, it's good to talk about it. Teens and talking are sometimes only paired up with their peers, but teens and talking with parents is so important! Talking out feelings with parents that are non-judgmental but wise is a good thing. Listen to their disappointments without criticism. Sometimes the listening does the healing.

Secondly, remind them that many of the psalms were written by David, who poured his heart out to God continually, and then he eventually turned his sorrow into worship. Invite them to read Psalm 142-144 and see how David turns his lament into praise.

Thirdly, take your teen on a date or out for ice cream and lay back and look at the stars, giving thanks to God the Creator for at least 10 good things. Gratitude always helps lift our moods and spirits!

Fourth, pray together with your teen. Ask God to heal the hurt that came from loss of celebration or connection with their friends. Model a prayer with them, or just invite them to pray out loud. (This is great training for when they become parents!)

Finally, be patient. Offer an ear and a hand, should your teen need to talk further. When you're alone, pray for your children and ask God to speak to them...so that they learn to hear his voice for themselves.

And smile really big when they come to you, to share what they've heard or how they've let it go, and picked up contentment instead...

(It's not an easy formula to handle teens and their disappointments. It takes practice and modeling in front of them, and lots of love. The best thing we can do is open the door for God to speak and for them to listen...)

## **An Adage a Day - The Haste of Our Lives – by Carole Gilbert**

My husband said this title sounds like a soap opera. I assure you this is not about a soap opera. It is not about a saga of any kind, but it is about the continuity to the next episode of our lives. We are coming out of the Coronavirus Pandemic and I hope all of us have learned something. Something unique to each of us and something we can take with us into the future. Something to tell our kids and grandkids, and something to keep in mind and remember. God gave us this world and He gave each of us everything we have. Maybe it is time we realize it, think about it, and show gratitude for it. To me, living with gratitude is the best and only way to live and I am not always good at it, but I try to be.

Several years ago, in about 2011, we had a severe drought. We all did unusual things to help with not wasting water. One thing I did then, I still do now, because it helps to lend a hand with preserving the natural resource of water that God gives us and, as we saw firsthand, can so quickly be in shortage. With all that said, what I do (which was recommended by a friend) is I collect my runoff shower water in buckets. I then use this water in different ways especially when flushing the toilet. It was simple then and it is simple now. My family does tease me about keeping up the practices from the drought, but it is a win-win situation all around, especially since it helps with our water bill.

I thought a lot about wastefulness during the drought and during COVID 19 since my life was slowed down. I thought a lot about how quickly life can change. I realized more ways I was unknowingly wasteful. Did you? Was it your time you found yourself to have been wasteful in, your money, natural resources? I know we all worked to not be wasteful with toilet paper.

There is an old proverb or idiom, “Haste makes waste,” that is so appropriate for this time in our lives. It means that when we do something in haste, we can end up wasting more than if we had just taken more time in the first place. This is not one I said to my kids very often while raising them, but I will keep it in my thoughts and heart now. We were forced to take the haste out of our lives for a short time during the Pandemic. Did we prefer life in that slower pace, or do we want to go back to our hurried schedules? Or maybe we look to compromise somewhere in between.

This idiom has been worded in some ironic similarities to what we have gone through with the Coronavirus. When it was first written in the *Book of Wisdom* in 190 B.C, it said, “There is one that toiled and laboureth, and makes haste, and is so much more behind.” Seem familiar? Later in the *Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales*, c. 1387, it’s translated, “In wikked haste is not profit.” Then in 1670, John Ray’s *A Collection of English Proverbs* says, “Haste makes waste, and waste makes want, and want makes strife between the goodman and his wife.”

Lastly, Ben Franklin’s famous dictum, c.1700’s states, “Take time for all things, great haste makes great waste.” This proverb speaks for itself. It helps us all learn a little bit more about the importance of our time and how we use it. The COVID 19 gave us time and lots of it. Time to

think, time to be still, time to realize who we love and how much we can miss them. Time to cry, laugh, wonder, praise, and worship.

In Proverbs 28:20 of God's Word it says, "A faithful man will abound with blessings, but he who makes haste to be rich will not go unpunished." God wants us to use and take care of everything He has given us but in the haste of our lives we so often give it over to waste. I will be more conscious of where I am wasteful and hasteful now. I hope we all will. And I hope we have all learned the power and peace of being still and taking time.

## **Tiny Living – Isolation – by Leyanne Enterline**

I hear the word “isolation” a lot lately. Obviously, we’re in the middle of a pandemic and we have to be isolated from one another, so that is the main reason we hear it. But for us, in this tiny living scenario, we have been feeling that for a while!

About a year ago we had someone pray over us that the isolation we had been in would be gone. Not necessarily loneliness, because we have each other, but we had sort of distanced ourselves from the outside world and become more secluded from others. I mean, after all, we live in a trailer in the woods far from town! That’s pretty isolated, I think!

We were involved in the kids’ school activities and sports, but nothing really outside of that. Not many hang outs with others. Brian and I had our separate friends but not many couple friends. Brian worked at a church, but because we went to separate churches we didn’t get involved with anyone in those churches. (We went separately because the church Brian worked at was super far away from our home).

Now travel back the seven years before when we lived in California. Brian worked at church and with the youth group, we were super involved and hung out with people ALL THE TIME. We even lived for about a year with some friends from the church. So maybe our isolation when we moved back to Texas came from needing some space from our past craziness. It was fun, don’t get me wrong, but that was a lot of friend time! We were always constantly doing something.

So we move back and the progression of isolation set in. I don’t think we really realized it until we were prayed over. We thought, “Yes! That is our word! That’s what we have been living in!”

Brian quit the church where he was working so we could start attending as a family. We started our search but we started going on tour with Brian so much it was hard to find something at that time. Finally, we found a place we loved and then... the PANDEMIC! Back to being isolated in 325 square feet! Talk about the walls closing in!

We try to be outside as much as possible or we lose our mind! Funny though, we’ve been more connected to our friend groups than ever! Brian has started zoom calls with his old high school buddies. I’ve started connecting with old friends more, as well. It’s been fun to have this weird slow time in our lives to really dive deep in the word and see what God has in store for our future.

Reconnecting with others has been so much fun and we can’t wait to get back into our church to meet some more new friends and say goodbye to isolation!

## **A Night to Remember – Field Hockey – by Marcy Lytle**

I saw recently where a family played field hockey with pool noodles, a bouncy ball, and two laundry baskets. We wanted to do that with our own family, because how simple is that to set up in the yard? And then I figured why not make this game part of the family devo for the month of June? Setting up a game outside with the family is one of the best ways to demonstrate God's love for us. How? So glad you asked...

Preparation: A pool noodle for each family member, two laundry baskets, and a bouncy ball (all from the Dollar Store) – and a nice evening in the backyard. (And always, snacks).

The object of field hockey is to score a goal in the basket! There will be interference, the other team might take the ball away, but object is to get it back and score one for the team! But seriously, the object of family field hockey is to have a good time.

**Round One:** Place the ball in the center, divide the family into two teams, and shout "Go!" See which team can score a goal first.

Ask those who scored how they feel, and those that didn't how they feel? It doesn't feel good to have the ball taken away from you as the other team scores. But good sportsmanship is to congratulate the other team and play again...

**Round Two:** Set up the ball and go for the goal again, this time allowing the youngest to make a goal by helping, encouraging, and handing off the ball to he/she.

Sometimes there are those on our team that are small or young and need encouragement for a win! It feels good to let the ball go into their hands so that they can smile and experience a win. How did it feel to help the youngest score a goal?

**Round Three:** Set up the ball for action and only allow one person on each team to have a noodle. The others just have to shout words of encouragement as that person goes for the ball.

Encouraging our team members is so important! It's never helpful to yell mean things, but it's always helpful to shout nice things. What words did you shout?

**Round Four:** Set up the ball for another round, and this time move the baskets farther apart, so everyone has to run more.

If the goal is really far, we sometimes get tired. This is when teamwork is important – passing the ball – running alongside – and staying focused on the goal. Can you imagine if the baskets were as far apart as the goals on a football field? We'd all be tired!

**Round Five:** This is the last round. Everyone's in the game for the win. But now we have to use our non-dominant hand to play. What a challenge!

There are times when we are weak, broken, or just tired and we don't play the game well because our strength is gone. Again, teamwork is the key, as we move on down the field and do our best to score!

Gather the family for drinks and a snack on a big blanket and talk about the game you just played. In I Corinthians 12 it says this:

*But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*

God loves teamwork. He's given us members on our team (friends and family) on the field of life, and we need to help each other score goals of success, health, happiness, and more. We aren't made to achieve goals alone, but with the help of a team! Every time we play a game, we have to remember that and not become focused on our own abilities and push others aside, just so we can score. It's important to build confidence in each other so that all finish the game well, satisfied, and victorious.

## Chipped China - The Art of Goodbye – by Jennifer Lytle

This week, the lid to my crockpot shattered. It quietly slid off the side of the crockpot and down the edge of my cabinet. I was pulling the chicken out of my enchilada soup to prevent it from over-cooking during the crash. Some athletes might have caught the thing mid-air. Not me. After deeply inhaling for the huge undertaking [necessary, required] I would need to venture in order to clean up every single sliver of glass, I thought, “Oh well, I needed to replace it anyway.”

I haven't always been this sophisticated.

It was during my first few years as a “playdate” Mom that I grew to understand there is an art to Goodbye. You may wonder if I had to learn the hard way. Quite a few tears (mommy's and son's alike), a number of ultimatums, and general grumps and gripes helped me recognize something must change. Many thanks to one particular friend who grew with me through this developmental stage as a new mom.

Fortunately for me, I too had a friend years later who was still growing through this stage of her own life as Mom. I may have felt relief or even pride to realize many must learn this lesson (the hard way.)

Did you ever watch the sitcom, *Seinfeld*? The show ended when things were “up.” Audiences were excited. Reviews were high. There really was no tangible reason to end the good thing. It was likely a hard decision, but much like Jerry, I learned it's best to say goodbye on a high note.

My two older children have recently discovered the best thing ever is playing together before bedtime. They enjoy their final moments of freedom before lights out and it makes my heart soar. Listening to them giggle, chat, and plan is beauty! I desire so much to let it go on for hours and hours.

Pre-COVID-19, our family had little to no “space” for playtime during evening hours. Some days, the atmosphere was too tense for playtime. Now that we as a family have experienced a lot of breathing room to just be present, the last thing I want to do is interrupt together time. On the occasion where there has been time, space, and desire on each of their parts to “hang out,” the last thing I want to do is set limits!

You might wonder if I had to relearn my lesson the hard way. A few bumps (maybe more than a few) and I remembered. When I fail to limit my children's free time, together time ends poorly. Yelling. Sometimes a slammed door. A whack, perhaps. Promises of retribution the following day. *Sigh.*

They are still new to the art of saying goodbye.

And...apparently, I'm still growing in my ability to let a good thing go.



YOU

## **Strengthening Your Core - Basically Free** – by Marcy Lytle

I'm sure you've been inundated, as I have, with emails from all the stores where you've ever purchased anything – sharing the latest sales. BOGO, 70% off, and one store even had a code VERYRARE because they hardly ever have sales of the magnitude they were offering! I did take advantage of the sales and had to wait a little bit longer for delivery, but I was delighted when I got some cute tops from Ann Taylor Factory and The Loft and Old Navy, and more!

It's funny, because often I read things like "it's basically free" and it did feel that way, when I was able to purchase a cute floral puffy-sleeved blouse for summer for a tiny fraction of the normal price. I ordered lots of new earrings from American Eagle because they were "a steal!" And it's been so fun opening the packages. I smile so big, as I hang up my new purchases and decide where to wear them – to the car or to the park or the backyard (insert a funny emoji here.)

Even gasoline has been so low that if we could travel, we could go far without spending lots of bucks!

This all started me thinking about freedom. I mean, we are told that salvation (erasure of sin and the guilt of it) is free if we just believe. And it is. And yet, because of the misrepresentation of Jesus to the masses, many people aren't interested in erasure of guilt. In fact, they want to keep on doing whatever they please, if it feels good. We want to seek revenge, to put others in their place, and do wrong in order to make our own lives right.

The reason these incredible sales have been occurring is because brick and mortar stores have closed, and in order to make money – these stores have to offer incredible deals to the folks who are at home in need of that shopping fix and new things! And the sales and the pitches and the offers worked! Sure, I wanted those two tops if I got two free! Why not?

I know that salvation is free from Jesus, because he paid the price for my sin. That's HUGE. I understand the need for a perfect sacrifice to undo all the havoc that's been caused by evil in the world. And I cannot thank Jesus enough, in an eternity of lifetime here and there, for giving me eternal life – free of guilt – full of joy – if I only believe. That's the purchase of the ages for sure – he died and gave – so that I might receive and live!

But I have learned from shopping and from my experience with Him over the years, it does take expense on my part for a relationship. It took a little expense from my pocketbook to get those deals, and it takes a bit of expense from my heart to get that peace he offers!

I lived for 30 years with the free gift of salvation (well, I don't really know exactly when I believed, but I was young.) I was scared into believing, and I know that Jesus, in his mercy, took that little bit of faith and forgave me and gave me the gift of salvation – from sin and evil. Best free gift ever!

But I also know that the extras, of peace and joy in the middle of hard times, aren't free. Not by any means. I do not have peace if I don't learn to cast my cares on Him. If I choose to carry them around, I'm heavy and fearful and a mess! Joy isn't free, either. It's not even a BOGO sale. Joy is something I have to choose daily, minute by minute, reminding myself to whom I

belong and how powerful and mighty he is. I have to read about his character, demonstrate and receive his love, and walk without anger with my husband, and others. Joy isn't free, and it's not there when I'm bitter and judgmental.

So...if you will, think about those sales and the deals and the fun it is getting those reminders in your inbox of the next thing you need to buy at that low, low price! And think about the gift of salvation, if you've never received it. It's totally free for the asking and for the believing – that Jesus died and lives again – and he conquered the power of sin and death! Then start this amazing life of a relationship with him where he gives you purchasing power for the other things like peace, joy, hope, forgiveness of others, kindness, and so much more – if you expend a little effort in getting to know him and obey Him.

Basically free? That's cool, if the quality is there. And salvation is pure gold.

Still costs a bit? No worries, when your heart and bank is full of trust and love for Him – the one who holds all good things in his hands, just waiting to be poured out into your heart – your daily inbox – day after day.

Check it now, and see what you can believe, purchase and receive!

## **Life in a Nutshell – Weeding** (in the garden of life) – by Jill Montz

Green thumbs run in my family. So do dirty hands, muddy knees, and smudges of dirt across sunburned faces.

I am the happiest when I am outside working in my flower gardens. While I prefer 72 degrees with a light breeze I have been known to spend hours out in the hundred degree Texas heat or even several hours with temps well below freezing and winds that even Winnie the Pooh would claim to be stronger than usual on a blustery day.

My flowers bring me so much joy. But that joy comes with lots of work. Planting, pruning, fertilizing, watering, and weeding seem to be a never ending cycle.

As much as I love to admire and adore my beautiful flowers, I am always amazed at weeds. Weeds can grow and even flourish with barely any soil or nourishment. They spring up in cracks of cement where just a sliver of dirt exists. They fight their way through rock piles to find the sunshine. They grow strong and “bloom” in the hottest heat and they often last even after a fairly hard freeze.

Weeds don't give up. They are hard to kill and hard to like (even those with flowers or the kind that offer you a wish as part of their growing cycle).

I often equate weeds to the negatives in my life. No matter how much I work at keeping my world blooming beautiful it never fails a weed will spring up right in the middle of all the prettiness of my Life's Garden and right when I least expect it.

Sometimes these proverbial weeds take root in my mind. For example, I can be trying on jeans at a department store and, while several pair in my usual size fit just fine, I might slip on a pair that is quite a bit snug. Instead of assuming it might be the brand that sizes things differently or perhaps I grabbed a more form fitting style, the Weed of Self Criticism finds that pea size spot of self-doubt and takes root. Before I can wiggle out of the ill-fitting jeans and back into the original pair I wore into the store (forgetting all about the cute ones that DID fit just fine) that Weed of Self Criticism has said things like...

- Wow fatty! You sure have packed on the pounds.
- No wonder you don't date. You look disgusting.
- You are so obese I bet people are only nice to you because they feel sorry for you.
- No matter what you do in life all people are ever going to notice or remember is how fat you are.
- Might as well go eat some more. That's all you are good at.

That Weed of Self Criticism is brutal. All weeds are. They don't care about who or what they hurt in their process of growing. They do whatever it takes to survive. And for that Weed of Self Criticism to stay rooted in my brain it is going to have to bring out the big guns and hit me where it hurts.

And the sad news is I let the Self Criticism Weeds take root more times than I care to admit. I am getting better at recognizing it earlier and taking the necessary steps to get rid of it, but usually not before I have left the store and let a few tears roll down my cheek.

The way I combat this Self Criticism Weed is I reach out to friends and family who love me regardless of what the tag in my jeans say. I remind myself that I am more than a number on a scale. And I search the Word of God to find scripture that supports the truth that God sees beyond appearances. He sees the heart of us all.

Another weed that loves to grow in my Life's Garden is the Weed of Self Doubt. This little booger shoots up almost every time I am given the opportunity to do something outside my comfort zone. It likes to find a crack in my self-confidence and it pushes its way to the surface with things like...

- You are a terrible public speaker. Your voice quivers every time you get in front of people.
- You aren't funny. People laugh at you not with you.
- You are so awkward. You will totally bomb and then you will be too embarrassed to show your face in front of those people ever again.
- No one cares what you think or have to say.
- You aren't smart enough to discuss this topic. There are lots of other people who would do a way better job than you will do.
- You're too fat. (The Weed of Self Doubt is in the same family as the Weed of Self Criticism.)

The Self Doubt Weed has caused me to say no to more things than I care to admit. Thanks to it, I have also had the Weed of Regret. Both these weeds' roots run deep and they are a little harder for me to exterminate. Again, I turn to those who love me unconditionally and are my biggest supporters to help me keep this weed from taking over my thoughts when opportunities arise. I read about those great heroes of the Bible who also had doubts, but who God still used in great and mighty ways. (Moses is one of my favorites!) And then I remind myself that all the greats in this world have failed. Failure is what made them great. Without failure there is no growth. So instead of fearing the failure, I try to expect it and embrace it (and sometimes I don't fail that bad and sometimes not at all).

The worst weed of all is the Weed of Shame. This weed has deep roots and thorny leaves. Once the Shame Weed finds its way into my soul its roots spread out and search for any place to burrow deeper in to. The Weed of Shame thrives when it can get me to believe statements like...

- God doesn't want a sinner like you.
- God is sick and tired of you doing the same things over and over again and not learning a dang thing.
- You are a hypocrite.
- You aren't worthy.
- God hates people like you.
- God won't forgive you.

The Weed of Shame breaks my heart every time. It doesn't come up as often as the others, but in the darkest spots of my Life's Garden it finds just enough room to take root. This part of my Life's Garden is the part I ignore most of the time. It isn't pretty anyway. I don't like people to see it and I never post pictures of it on Facebook. This is the part of my personal garden where beauty struggles to grow. Anything I try to plant and nurture seems to shrivel up and die. So I

stop tending to it and that is when the Weed of Shame starts to take over. It grows quickly and before I know it its root system is starting to search out other areas of my Life's Garden.

Getting rid of the Weed of Shame has taken a lot of work, some professional counseling, and at times some professional medication. These days I am very vigilant to watch that part of my garden and make sure no weeds of any kind start to take root. But it is still a struggle.

All weeds are a struggle. There a dozen or so more I could go into but we all have different "weeds" in our lives. These are just the most common (and hurtful) to me and maybe to you too. No matter how much I work to keep the weeds out, they still pop up from time to time. But that's part of gardening...and life...dealing with the weeds when you find them. Because not dealing with them causes a whole slew of other issues.

My garden at my house is lovely this time of year, but I bet if you looked closely you would find a weed or two. My life right now is lovely as well, but I can assure you I have a few weeds trying to put down roots daily. A beautiful flower garden takes work. So does a beautiful life.

## **Healthy Habits – Obey the Rules** – by Marcy Lytle

There are lots of rules that I suppose are meant to be broken, if they oppose our inner conscience or are harmful to ourselves or others. We recently watched a movie about a religious family that wouldn't allow their children to read books for fear of outside influence. Even adult children! One guy broke the rules and was shunned. How sad!

However, there are many rules that are meant to be followed...for our safety and benefit...and life! I recently purchased a new mandolin for slicing veggies and when I went to use it the first time, I was in a hurry and didn't refresh myself on the manual's instructions. I was slicing a carrot and knew it wouldn't fit in the claw so I used my hand (without the guard) and almost sliced off my finger. One would think I would know better, but I skipped the rules...and suffered.

I thought it would be fun to publish a list of little reminders about good rules to follow that bring us life and health, when we adhere and don't stray:

**No texting while driving** – even at red lights. We still see SO MANY people texting or looking at their phones while driving, and they veer into other lanes. Also, if we text and drive, so will our teens... There's just no good reason to pick up the phone while behind the wheel. Pull over if it's an emergency, and if it's not, observe the sunshine and the beauty as you drive instead of the dings and pings.

**Read the manual** – Point noted above. This new mandolin has a guard for odd veggies that don't fit the claw. I didn't bother to refresh my knowledge of that – and it would have only taken me a minute. It pays to read the instructions and save a finger.

**Wear the mask** – to protect others – even if you don't care about yourself! We've been out and about and noticed some stores where the shoppers and workers all wear masks. Although it's still eerie to me, I appreciate their protective measures. We also stopped at a famous gas station/store where hardly anyone was wearing a mask. Whether or not we agree with all the rules, wearing masks is a protective measure and rule we can all follow to show others and ourselves respect for life and health.

**Read the Word** – No, it's not a RULE that if you don't read it, you will be punished. But if you don't read it, you will be swayed to stray, drawn to doubt, and fall into fear. Who wants to do that? There's a reason we are encouraged to know the word and hide it in our hearts. It staves off all evil. A great rule to follow!

**Drink water** – however you can make that happen! If it's placing a bottle out in your line of vision, do it. If it's eliminating other non-healthy beverages, do it. If it's asking a friend to keep you accountable do it. Drinking water should be a rule for all of us, to keep us hydrated, especially as summer nears.

**Maintain** – There are rules of maintenance that come with appliances, cars, outdoor furniture and almost every large purchase we make – including our AC units in our houses and even the entire span of our yards! Maintenance is my husband's job and boy is it a job! If maintenance doesn't take place, there's great expense to all involved! Maintain your weight, your health,

your tongue, your thoughts, your friendships, your homes, your giving, and all the good things in life.

**Rules of engagement** – I know it's tempting during this time to become accustomed to being distant from friends, allowing our thoughts to overtake us that we don't matter and people don't care, and all the things that come from "distancing." However, there are multiple reminders in the Good Book to continue to assemble, to continue to give, to continue to choose love...even when it seems hard to do so. Text a friend, drop off a surprise, email a note, send a card snail mail, but do something to engage with others and encourage. In doing so, you yourself will be refreshed. It's just the way engagement works. He sees...and He rewards.

What rules have you found that need to be followed? Did you learn that lesson the hard way? For some of us, the ones that are by nature rule followers, this is a no-brainer. For others, more independent and stubborn, it takes reminders that the rules are there for a reason...for safety and covering...and health.

## **Life Right Now – Uncovered Hope – by Bethany Gomez**

I wish I had a fun, anecdotal story to share, but not much has changed since my last article, other than heading into the beginning of my summer break, the rise in the temperature outside, and maybe my outlook on things. I have become exponentially more grateful for a few things that I realized I had taken for granted.

Do you ever find that when some things are taken away, sometimes you realize you took those things for granted and oftentimes that produces more gratitude for whatever it was you had, when you had it? Has anyone else uncovered things that they have taken for granted over these past few months? I most certainly have.

*I have taken for granted hugging.* I wouldn't say I am a big hugger, but I enjoy a good hug, especially getting a hug from someone I haven't seen in a while. There have been many studies done on the benefits of hugging and that tells me right there that I should've been more grateful for hugs before covid-19 temporarily discouraged the hugging of people not living in my house. If you haven't researched it, hugging is known to reduce stress, and less stress can strengthen the immune system, which we could all benefit from right about now. I think doctors should be recommending hugs during this pandemic. I'm only kidding, but it makes me think I should stop taking hugs for granted.

*I have taken for granted well-stocked grocery store shelves* and even more - simply having enough money to buy food. I know millions are struggling with knowing where their next meal will come from. I hardly gave a thought to the blessing of walking into a grocery store and having access to whatever I wanted or needed, when I needed it and without limits on certain items like meat, eggs, bread, and (how can I not mention) toilet paper. I'm also super grateful for all the grocery store employees working to keep the shelves stocked and getting everyone in and out of the store in as safe a manner as they possibly can.

*I have taken for granted celebrating birthdays together.* Although I love some of the creative ways people have been celebrating their loved ones' birthdays during this quarantine like, birthday parades, Zoom birthday blessing parties, and gift deliveries, I miss the good ole days of cramming people into one space, enjoying good food together and helping celebrate my friends' or family's birthdays.

*I have taken for granted traveling.* Currently, traveling is discouraged and I think even banned to certain areas, still. If you can travel to certain areas, you are required to quarantine for 14 days, so what is the point? Being unable to travel freely has made me grateful for all the trips I have taken pre-pandemic, but it hit me recently that a summer trip that was being planned back in February with some of my closest girlfriends is not happening. Even though the planning was in its beginning stages, I was so looking forward to this trip. It was going to be a place I had never been to before; and quite frankly, a place I had been dreaming of visiting for a long time. On top of that, I was going to be experiencing it with some of my favorite people. I'm giving myself permission to be a little sad about it and then I will look back at all the amazing trips God has allowed me to go on and remain hopeful that I will go on more trips.

*I have taken for granted being able to worship with others at church,* most importantly. Occasionally, I would remember to thank God for this freedom because I know that not everyone has this freedom. My gratefulness for this blessing has increased greatly during this time. Yes, I know that God does not live in a building and His presence is poured out to whoever seeks it, but I also know that God created us for community. We thrive and grow when we do life together. It encourages my faith and encourages me to grow in my relationship with God. I

can't wait to be back together again, but while I wait I will keep praising God in the midst of this ever changing world.

It is comforting to know that He never changes. I don't want to put my hope in anything else.

Romans 8:24-25

*For in this hope we were saved.*

*But hope that is seen is no hope at all.*

*Who hopes for what they already have?*

*But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.*

## **Created for Life - Tales from the Covid Yard – by Ginny Hurley**

I wasn't planning on writing ANYTHING that even came close to the word COVID! I kept thinking of other topics and interesting ideas that women like to talk about. Each time, I thought about it, I would be outside on my lawn chair, which is my happy quiet angel place. God kept illuminating this topic; so I am sharing about my beautiful green and gorgeous lawn, filled with shade and glorious flowers that died over night.

As some of you may know, I love working in the yard and even trimming and edging! It is a joy for me to plant and dig in the dirt. Our spring lawn had some weeds and every year we fertilize with a good weed and feed. We suspect the culprit to be the fact that it needs aerating and more water, but our big tree in the back was also showing signs of illness. An expert came by to share advice, and we discovered it is dead from the trunk, and the canopy that is there will eventually be gone. Nine hundred and fifty dollars will remove it for us! What? It's our shade and holds our beloved doves and songbirds!

Thoughts of people suffering from this unknown virus came to mind as I prayed and asked the Father what He's up to. He is not the author of death or illness and I know that He alone is our HEALER! He began to show me that the signs in my garden of old turf, are actually His call to the NEW! Many teachers have been sharing about the new wine and how God is about to do something new. He's been saying the harvest is plentiful and we are the ambassadors, but we don't yet know what that looks like. We are hearing and joining in the sounds of unity among believers all over the world. So many are experiencing Jesus and sharing communion together online. Our hearts have soared as we have viewed beautiful children worshipping and recognizing their True Healer, Friend, and Savior!

Viewing my lawn caused something to arise in my spirit and I began to pray and intercede in a new way. It was as if I found my voice in the midst of chaos and said, "Jesus, You are the Way! Come and heal our land and forgive us for living our lives at church meetings, and allowing Your beautiful world to die! Make me Your vessel of honor and love! Bring me to the place of surrender with my True Love being my most important first purpose and reason to live!"

Victory and challenge come over me as I partner with God to save our land! Jesus has finished the work and done all that needs to be done in order to bring us back to the original plan. Now I ask Him for my own intimate strategies, plans, and directions. He will show me where to go and how to get there. He will give wisdom in renewing our own land with the provision to do anything it needs! He is that good! He has NOT changed, but I have! He is retraining the way I think! He is giving me new designs and awakening my spirit to SOAR again from a New Place!

This COVID lawn will live again and be better than EVER!



MARRIAGE

## **In This Together – No Tap Dancing Required – by Bekah Holland**

Sometimes I make a mess of things. Shocking, I know. And other times I feel like I'm right where I'm supposed to be and I've got my life together. Not as often, in case you were curious. And while I know this is supposed to be marriage related, today, I'm going to talk about some other relationships. But mostly the one I have with myself.

In case you don't know me, I've been married for 14 years, and by the time you read this, I will have a newly minted 13 year old daughter and 9 year old son. *Jesus, take the wheel.* I work full time, and hopefully will not quit my newest second job of helping my children through online learning. If I'm quite honest, I'm sure I'll be fired before I turn in my notice, but that's because my kids are used to being taught by patient humans who are organized and follow a plan and love to help young minds grow. Now they have me. And I am basically the antithesis of all of those things.

I'm not always patient. Sometimes, I want to shake the sass out of my teen daughter. Okay, a lot of times. Also, I love to be organized, but I usually come closer to an organized chaos. And of course, I love to see my kids learn and grow, but I was much better at the first steps and learning to read stage than the attitude that comes with puberty. Seriously. I'm not always any good at this. I'm tired and frustrated and probably get it wrong at least as much as I get right. But I could self-deprecate all day long, so I'm going to stop there. (But seriously, if you want to not feel all alone in this journey, hit me up....I've got stories for days).

Since we've been spending ALL OF OUR TIME inside, I've been trying to go for a walk most days, just to save what's left of my mind. I walk so I can breathe fresh air (and then sneeze for three hours because Texas), take some deep breaths and gain some perspective. While I've been walking, I've been listening to some podcasts (which is not my MO but I'm trying to be an *adultier* adult and listen to less 90's rap and more inspirational and intelligent babble.) On top of that, my love for reading lends itself to fiction, but I've been reading some biographies and other non-fiction to, once again, try for a better grasp on this whole grown-up thing. Full disclosure, I usually bribe myself with a pint of ice cream to start and finish this type of book. What can I say? I'm a work in progress.

Anyhow, something amazing happened when I started taking a small amount of time out of my day to be by myself and not just try to hide from all the endless piles of laundry in a warm fuzzy story about someone else's made up life. What happened is that I started both reading and hearing things that made me stop and see clearly into my own mind and heart. I am exceptional at listening to other people's problems, helping them finding their voice and fighting for them to fight for themselves. Want to know why? Because...

*It's much easier to see a path to healing and growth in someone who is not you.*

It's also way less invasive and takes much less work. But what happens when you stop and turn all that helpfulness inward? Yowza. If you're me, you stop mid step and sit on the sidewalk while you try to figure out how you missed this. These words came through my headphones and changed everything.

"Love is not something you have to tap dance to get."

I consider myself a relatively self-aware kind of person. I know that I've got tons of things that I'm working on. I say I'm sorry for things that don't require my apology, and I eat my feelings as long as they aren't too big...if they are, I quit eating all together. I share my unsolicited advice with people who have not asked for it and I have to try really hard not to attempt to fix anything and everything that might be hard or uncomfortable for the people around me. These are just a few of my annoying traits. I'm sure my friends and family could think of a few more, but you get the picture.

However, until I heard those words at that moment, I was completely oblivious to why. Somehow, somewhere along my journey, I began to believe that I was only worthy of love if I was able to prove my value. What could I do to make you happy and comfortable and feel safe and unbothered by the world around you? I couldn't understand why my husband would get so frustrated when I saw something I thought might disturb him so I'd jump in both feet first and try to fix it.

Let me give you a recent example:

We share an office which, when working from home only a day or two a week together, is no biggie. Working 9-10 hours every single day in the same room? A tad more inconvenient. One day during a frustrating hour when we're both on calls and I'm too loud (and so is he) and I can sense his irritation (did I mention in my list of personality traits that I'm incredibly sensitive to how others are feeling?) So I start doing what no sane person would do....I begin setting up an office in our guest room. I grab some boxes and a piece of plywood for a make shift desk and get down to making things "better."

As I'm sure you've guessed, this was not well received. He likes to be near me and enjoys sharing our space, but there I went trying to fix something that didn't really need fixing....which created a whole new problem of my fixing stuff, and on and on and on which is probably the 7<sup>th</sup> ring of hell Dante was talking about. Now don't get me wrong, it's been coming from a good place, I think. I genuinely do want others to be happy and am a doer and fixer by nature. And I believe with all my heart that our world needs people like me just like we need leaders, artists, strategists and visionaries, etc, etc.

BUT....I came to the realization that I wasn't always doing this for the benefit of others.

*I was doing it to prove that I was worthy of their love.*

I was begging to be seen and appreciated and most of all loved, and of course I couldn't be loved if I didn't float around like a fairy godmother turning everyone's pumpkins into chariots. How exhausting to live constantly trying to earn what was already mine! I am already loved. I don't need to prove myself or convince anyone of my value in this life. My husband doesn't need a fixer, he needs a partner, and I need the same. No jumping through hoops or tap dancing required.

Self-realization can be hard! It's not comfortable. It's confusing and takes courage and grit to face ourselves sometimes. But guess what? That's okay...because as one of my favorite authors loves to remind her readers....**we can do hard things**. God created us to be brave, strong, kind, merciful and loved.

I'm doing the hard work now. I'm looking in the mirror and offering advice to me first. I'm learning to sit quietly, even when it's uncomfortable. I'm learning that even if someone is angry or hurting, my job isn't to fix it, but to love them in that place. And to love me, too.

"Worthy now. Not if. Not when.

We are worthy of love and belonging now.

Right this minute. As is."

\*\*\*Brene Brown

## **Date Night Fun – Connecting Outdoors** – by Marcy Lytle

Whether or not we're now venturing out to meet up with other couples, we are all still being safe and wondering how close and where we should meet, and what we can do to still have fun. It's been quite a challenge to think up date night connections with friends, but we've done it and seen others do it as well. This month is devoted to double dating while distancing. How in the world can we meet with friends and have a good time and yet keep safely away? It's hard, for sure!

Find a patio – We recently met another couple at a restaurant with a huge outdoor venue of picnic tables, and the manager let us bring our lawn chairs so that we could set them up and not be right next to our friends. How nice was that? We were able to order our food and visit, outside under big shade trees, and have a great time! Think of conversation starter questions (or look them up on line) and have a great time learning about each other all over again!

<https://www.skiptomylou.org/dinner-conversation-starters/>

Hit the trail – Stay your distance, but go for a walk with your friends. Pack your own food, and enjoy your dinner by a body of water – a pond – or a lake. One fun game to play is to bring fly swatters (get them at the Dollar Store) and balloons and play balloon tennis in a wide open area in a park. You'll get a bit of exercise, and a lot of laughs!

<https://littlebinsforlittlehands.com/balloon-tennis-gross-motor-play-activity/>

Have movie night outside – We've heard of folks doing this, setting up their movies outside in the yard and enjoying the theater without going to the theater. You can see how to do this by clicking here. Ask them to bring their own popcorn and snacks, and you have yours as well. Either lay out blankets or provide chairs, and let the movie begin!

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qe\\_PJR1FiFg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qe_PJR1FiFg)

Set up on the lawn – We have some friends that live in an apartment complex, and outside their back door is a grassy lawn area. They invited us over one Saturday morning for breakfast and conversation. They offered to provide the food, but we felt better bringing our own – banana bread from Marjorie Johnson's cooking *The Road to Blue Ribbon Baking*. This was a couple we didn't know a lot about, so we asked questions and learned! It was an awesome visit...six feet apart.

<https://www.amazon.com/Road-Blue-Ribbon-Baking-Marjorie/dp/098010470X>

Pick a pavilion – There are pavilions or gazebos in parks, so just seek and find one. Each couple can bring their favorite tunes on a playlist, and share. The pavilion can provide protection if it's hot outside or if there's a chance of rain. In fact, a light summer rain date under a pavilion might be just the perfect date! Pick up your favorite takeout on the way, and have your conversation revolve around food, your faves, how you cook, childhood comfort food, etc.

That's just five ideas. Connect with friends and meet up, staying safely away and taking precautions – but meet! June is a great month for being outdoors, and that's a great place to be health-wise, too. Go ahead and call them, and invite them, and get it on the calendar.

Start filling in those little squares again with double dates with friends...

## **After 40 Years - I'm Not Patient** – by Marcy Lytle

If there's one thing I've learned during this virus scare is that I'm NOT patient. I suppose I'm patient in some areas (or maybe not), but I'm not a patient person in most cases. If you are, then my hat's off to you. But I'm just admitting it today – I'm not patient.

So I decided to look up patience in the bible and refresh myself on this virtue. I know it's one of the fruits that supposed to emerge in our lives, but my fruit's a bit shriveled up. Can you relate?

I haven't been patient waiting for things to open.

I haven't been patient waiting to see my family.

I haven't been patient staying at home.

And my impatience causes frustration in my relationship with him. He's a pretty patient guy, and I'm not, so we clash like thunder and lightning sometimes.

When I become impatient I start snapping, I hurry us up, I start being sarcastic and all sorts of nasties to him...because who else is there to release my frustration upon? There's no one around!

So here's what I found in my searching:

- Wisdom yields patience (and part of that wisdom is to overlook offenses) Proverbs 19:11
- Patience is better than pride (Okay, I have that too.) Ecclesiastes 7:8
- It's his might and strength that gives us endurance (This might be why I'm tired) Colossians 3:12
- Patience equips me for good work (okay, I'm thinking...) 2 Timothy 3:17)
- Laziness prohibits patience from doing its work (ouch) Hebrews 6:12
- Patience in suffering is a virtue (and no grumbling!) James 5:8-9
- Can't experience God's mercy and compassion without trials, that bring patience (I knew that) James 5:11

Okay, I've read plenty now, and it's sobering isn't it?

I'm thinking that in my marriage is one of the key places that patience needs to be demonstrated, and yet it's often the place where we are the most impatient! I need wisdom to know that being patient and speaking softly will produce intimacy with him. Pride produces nothing good in my marriage. I need Jesus. Good works can be performed by us as a couple, if I'm patient and let patience work in me. It takes work to be patient, and my marriage is worth that work! There's no better place than in my marriage to receive God's mercy and compassion, and to demonstrate it to the world, as well. And that requires patience.



ENCOURAGEMENT

## **Simple Truths - Great Expectations** – by Erica Simmons

I pride myself on my self-reflection. I think it is a valuable tool that allows me to grow in my areas of weakness. This is more easily done when dealing with how I handle situations in my personal and professional relationships, and it proved to be invaluable when dealing with myself overall.

For the last few months, I have been sharing my struggles about life as a parent of non-minors, and my final confession was that I was devastated when I finally realized my children were not going to be who I wanted them to be. I spent my life and living in a way that I truly wanted my boys to see and mimic; and when they did not, I viewed myself as a failure. I experienced a hurt and a disappointment that stripped away so much of who I was that I was left raw in ways I did not know was possible. I pushed away and avoided friendships that were near and dear to me in an effort to hide what I had become. I was angry with God and did not even want to talk with him about it. But our God, in all His compassion, met me where I was and patiently waited for me to bring my pain into the holy place and willingly share it with Him. It was not easy and it took me months to finally crawl into my Father's lap and share my pain with Him. Once there, I was able to look at things more objectively and understand why my boys' choices for their lives were such a blow to me. Some of the truths I had to deal with were harder than others.

First, like so many of the obstacles I have faced as an adult, the root went back to my childhood. I was such an obedient kid where my parents were concerned, I simply did NOT do things they did not want me to do. Because of my obedience, I honestly expected my boys to do the same thing. I never even prepared for the alternative - that my boys would choose to engage in behaviors that I did not engage in or approve of. I KNOW, how arrogant of me, but I put forth that it was not my arrogance but my naivety. The funny thing about all this is because I was so obedient, I was so unprepared for so many social situations as I got older. I was socially awkward and painfully shy.

Another truth that I knew, but did not truly understand, was that the choices I have made for my life, like serving God and trying to live a life from that perspective, are choices I should have made ONLY because I love Him. This has taught me so much about what loving someone unconditionally is truly about. Learning to accept my boys individually for WHO they are and learning to leave the judgment and disappoint out of it has been both hard and rewarding. It makes me reflect more of who my Father is.

The final truth is that my boys can become who I want them to be or they can become who God wants them to be. One of the things I often find myself doing is forgetting how imperfect I was, with the bad decisions I made and the roads I walked. Why is it that as a parent I expect my children to have a mistake-free life? A life where they make all the right choices and never have to suffer consequences of the choices they make. It is unrealistic of me to not only think that, but to put that unrealistic expectation on them.

Most importantly, I realized I could damage my future relationship with my sons if I did not step back and allow them to live their lives as they chose. Even in learning how to do that, I almost destroyed my relationship with Jordan. I learned that even saying the right thing the wrong way can be detrimental. I hurt him in ways that I can never take back. As a parent, I worked hard to protect my children and in the end to learn the extent of the hurt I inflicted was painful and hard to accept.

We all have a story and it unfolds and has twists and turns that we cannot predict or plan for, but the only thing that matters is who we are in Christ. I have provided my children a solid foundation, which is all as a parent I can do. I have now created a safe place for them to come and talk to me about what is going on with them. They take advantage of that sometimes, and sometimes they don't. What I have to make sure I do at all times is give them God's truth. Not that they will always accept it, but truth is the only thing that will not change, and God's truth will be their anchor.

Many years ago when I was young and impressionable, thinking the world was supposed to make sense, stories of the Illuminati introduced me to the idea that the world is not as it seems. I developed a healthy skepticism for such stories, but also for “legit” information. Over time, the process of weeding through the tangled maze of fact and fiction the world offers led me to seek, pray, and learn to trust the Source of All Things True.

It’s natural to question and look for answers to understand what’s going on. Right now, ideas are circulating about a conspiracy to collapse the economy, a conspiracy to establish a one-world government, a conspiracy to vaccinate with intent to do harm, a conspiracy to remove the current leader...possibly intertwined, and led by an unidentified group called “They.”

I know people, Christian and non-Christian, who sincerely believe this, people I respect. The arguments and postulations can be rather convincing and frightful. After all, it *is* written that deceptions and takeovers would come. It’s obvious that things aren’t right with the world, and the mechanisms and forces that control such things as the economy, world peace, and the nations, are far beyond me. So what if it’s true? What if there is a conspiracy to take over the world, our money, our freedom...? The immense amount of available information is daunting, if not impossible, to sort through, and it’s often unreliable. Facts are made to sound like fiction, and fiction is presented as fact. Unless confirmed by my own trusted senses, there’s no source of information I can count on...with one exception.

Is there really an organization of wealthy power that secretly rules? Do “They” underhandedly conspire to accomplish “Their” selfish plans? Should I be wary of life-saving vaccinations on the chance that they’re intended to harm? In government, does the letter of the law override the condition of the heart? Hand me the sword that divides bone and marrow!

I’m not a conspiracy theorist; I’m a conspiracy realist. If there are conspiracies, I can’t do anything about it. The theories can’t be proven, and “They” are beyond my reach. Realistically, the logistics don’t make sense. There are too many players in the game—intelligent people who care about others, who are in the know, who would have to be involved to make the conspiracy succeed. Humans don’t cooperate well enough to pull it off—sooner or later someone gets greedy, offended, reveals the secret or otherwise succumbs to innate weaknesses.

But there is one who could pull it off. He’s in this world to do just that—conspire to deceive us.

The Trusted Book says, *“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”* What a brilliant statement—written so long ago with the timeless perspective that belongs only to God. The *real* conspiracy, the Book says, is perpetrated by one who’s called The Deceiver. His mission is to keep us, in a myriad of ways, from knowing God, trusting God, abiding in him and following him. Instilling fear, suspicion, and uncertainty is one of them. Getting us to turn on one another makes his day.

God knows every plan of Man. He will either thwart it or use it to accomplish his own good purposes—his Divine plan—whether it appears so to my limited knowledge and understanding, or not. I have an unfailing guide in the triune God. His instructions hold true and keep my feet in the narrow way: do not worry, love one another, be merciful, forgive, keep your eyes on Me, pray always ...and so much more that brings Life, not death.

There's only one conspiracy to be concerned about—only as it keeps me on guard and on point in a divine mission. May you take courage as you undertake your part. Together we'll defeat on earth what has been defeated in heaven, as we love and pray for one another.

## **Moving Forward – Always** – by Pam Charro

1 John 1:5

*God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all.*

Have you ever considered the implications of this part of scripture? Many of us have heard it most of our lives, along with similar verses which speak of God's goodness. But what does it really mean for us?

The understanding of who he is contrasts with so many other things I learned about him when I was younger. Part of my misunderstanding was because my parents didn't represent him accurately, and part was erroneous teachings in church, where scripture wasn't accurately explained. But all along, he has patiently waited for me to discover the truth about what his goodness means.

I can tell you that, for me, it means that nothing negative that has ever happened to me was a reflection of how he feels about me. That's been huge for me because so much taught me that I was unloved and that the world was a scary place. That I should often be ashamed of myself. That when I act well, I might get good, but as soon as I mess up, I need to be afraid. Because so much is dark and painful and there's no guarantee that life is worth it.

And yet because there is no darkness in him, he is unable to be anything but good, so he could not have been in agreement with those who harmed me. God isn't joyful and positive one moment, then angry and punishing the next, unlike many humans who are unpredictable and unsafe. I do not have to be afraid that I'm suddenly in trouble with God, even when I make mistakes. There may be consequences to bad choices, but negative consequences are never the end of the story. God is always my friend, and always a safe harbor, even when I'm hurting or my heart is hard and needs to be softened. No brokenness in or around me can stop him from being good to me.

This means that, even in painful circumstances, there is always a promise for good in life because he is in it. Good is what he is, and good is what he does. Always.

## Rooted in Love – The Hard Way – by Kaelin Scott

My most recent struggle with my four-year-old daughter has been cleaning her room. She has gotten much better about it, but it was a real point of tension in our house for a while. I would send her to clean her room, and she would immediately start crying like I had asked her to stand on the roof in the middle of a hailstorm. Seriously, she acted like it was the end of the world. She would complain about it being “too hard,” and I would point out that it wouldn’t be so hard if she would clean up her toys after she played with them instead of leaving them all out. I suppose that’s a hard concept to grasp when you’re four, though.

Eventually, she finally started cleaning her room – sometimes not until getting privileges taken away. She got to work and start putting a few toys away, but when I checked on her again, she had gotten distracted and started playing instead. I had to remind her (perhaps none too gently) over and over again exactly what she was supposed to be doing. She dragged out a simple chore, which should have taken ten minutes at the most, and make it an hour-long task. I explained that the sooner she got her work done, the more time she would have to play. It didn’t make a difference. She didn’t want to clean her room, no matter what I told her. Once, I even found her cleaning her brother’s room instead of hers, because apparently it was easier. Many times, I was tempted to just go and clean up for her and get it over with, but I knew that wouldn’t teach her anything. Sometimes as a parent, as frustrating as it can be, I have to let them learn the hard way.

And it was frustrating. It still is at times. But through it all, God has showed me a lesson about myself. He has opened my eyes to the fact that I am not so much different than my sweet (and yes, stubborn) little girl. My own life has plenty of messes that I’d rather just leave alone than attempt to clean up. Or maybe I go into it with determination, but I get distracted along the way and forget my purpose. Sometimes it’s tempting to try and clean up someone else’s mess instead, because it seems easier or helps delay what I really need to do. I know that putting it off only wastes my own time, but I make excuses, I whine and complain, and I avoid facing my mess at all costs. But sooner or later, it has to be faced. All of our problems do. Whether it’s unaddressed sin, dreams laid by the wayside, broken relationships, or any of the number of things life throws at us, eventually those messes have to be dealt with. The longer we wait, the higher the mountain becomes, making it harder and harder to clean up.

I know God could easily solve all my problems with a snap of His fingers, but I also know that He is a loving Father who wants me to learn and grow. If He took away all my pain, all my suffering, all my junk – what would I gain from that? He wants me to lean on Him and trust Him, of course, but He also wants me to do my part. He wants me to take responsibility. He wants me to be a humble and joyful servant, but I can’t do that if I just expect Him to do everything for me. He gives good gifts, He loves beyond measure, and He takes away our pain. But He also disciplines, and He also gives us hard work that seems too overwhelming for us to do. And I think that’s sort of the point. Without His help, it *IS* too difficult to do. But according to 2 Corinthians 12:9, His power is made perfect in our weakness. It is not with our own strength that He expects us to accomplish astounding feats, or even ordinary tasks. It is by His strength and through His grace we do these things, so that we are able to glorify Him.

Many people claim that God doesn’t give us more than we can handle, but that really isn’t true. Today, you may very well be facing a mountain or a mess that you just cannot handle. **But God can.** And if you lean into His strength, you will overcome it. Jesus told us that “everything is possible for one who believes.” We can do anything, it’s true. But it’s not by any power or might of our own, it is through His grace alone.

Like I tell my daughter, we just have to take it one step at a time until the job gets done. Start with something small, and soon you will be moving mountains. God isn't afraid of our mess, because He knows that it stretches us and makes us grow. And maybe as soon as we clean one mess, another one will show up. But He'll be right there to encourage us and remind us of our purpose. There is always hope, so don't give up.

## **Unearthly Thing - Judging Doesn't Go with My Outfit – by Angela Dolbear**

I wish I could see people, places and things as God does. But His ways are not my ways (please see [Isaiah 55:8-9](#))...though I hope that my thoughts and views become more like God's every day.

It was during a time when I was feeling unsettled about myself, my style of dress, and about the books I had written, and were currently writing, that God clearly spoke to me about how skewed my views were. I was internally struggling something fierce.

It was Christmas time, I forget which year. My husband was traveling a lot that year for a German software company he was consulting for. I was feeling a bit lonely, having decorated our Christmas tree by myself.

I have a fondness for all things from "[The Nightmare Before Christmas](#)," particularly for Jack Skellington, the bone-thin, well-dressed, main character of the film. I love the movie, especially the music.

God used my fondness for this film to speak to me. It was one of the handful of times I heard God speak to me directly. Clearly, and with authority.

When I finished cleaning up the empty boxes that stored our Christmas decorations, I sat down to watch *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, all the while asking God about the things I was questioning. (Note: Almost always I have a running dialogue with God in my head...is this praying without ceasing? I ask Him questions, ask for help, wisdom, and clarity, and I try to still my thoughts enough to listen to answers.)

If you are not familiar with the plot of the film, our hero Jack is feeling unsettled about who he is, what his purpose is...is he really the Pumpkin King, in charge of Halloween? (Sound familiar!?)

During Jack's song, "Jack's Lament," (sung by Danny Elfman, one of my favorite artists/composers) where he laments his doubts about his purpose and identity, I heard God say to me, very clearly--no--He *told* me, "BE WHO I MADE YOU TO BE."

In those few words He clearly spoke to me in my spirit/mind/heart/soul, there were paragraphs of meaning, telling me to turn away from my thoughts of trying to fit in, or change my style, or write a different genre of books that would be more "successful."

I had been judging myself. Harshly. I based my self-imposed criticism on the shaky ground of perception. Not on Truth.

I was to be God's "Unearthly Thing." This world will pass away (please see [Matthew 34:35](#)), so I should not try to conform to its ways. God wanted me to authentically be the person He made me to be, and to remain that way. Because then I would be able to fulfill His purpose.

Throughout the duration of the movie, God continued to show me where I was in error about my thinking; about what I thought successful looked like, and what other people think of me isn't valid, and can sometimes be in direct opposition to God's purpose.

All these views and criticisms were inhibiting me from using the gifts He gave me for His glory.

When the movie ended, I remained on my couch in awe for quite a while, basking in the glow of having spent the evening with my God Almighty.

I love that He trusted me to “get it,” and hear Him even when He used an animated film, which some church people would never consider viewing (so I have been told), to speak such life-changing words to me. Maybe it was more of God meeting me where I was, of speaking my language, so to speak. Still, I love that the Creator of the Universe would do that with me. A mixed up retro-gothic girl, living in a place she never felt like was home. An Unearthly Thing, for sure.

We are not meant to be one certain way that some might think equates to right living. We are meant to be all things to all people, especially for the sake of sharing Christ and talking about what He has done for me (please see [1 Corinthians 9:22-23](#)). Which I try to do, as often as the situation allows.

So this got me thinking about judging others: how can I encounter another person and make assessments about them, especially about superficial stuff? How could I let the (perceived) judgements of others hold any influence over me?

And I have no place to judge others. Why would I want to? It's not a good place for my mindset to hangout. To be constantly criticizing others would cramp my ability to express kindness and compassion, would it not? If my mind enters “judging” mode, then it's not in the right frame to pray for others, or help when/where help is needed, or even speak a kind word of encouragement. Would it not also stop up my flow of the Holy Spirit to hear from God?

I know we should be wise and discerning about all things, but does it necessarily include looking down on others? Or would it prompt the desire to look for situations where we could kind, praying ambassadors for Christ?

So many ideas I ponder in my wanderings...while I unashamedly wear my Jack Skellington sweater, or my Jack jacket (which I purchased at Disneyland in Anaheim, CA, one of my favorite places on the planet!), or my purple and black Jack dress (which I have not had the courage to wear to church yet, I will soon...hopefully).

And I will smile, and listen for any divine prompting to help others. If a judicious look is thrown my way, I will continue to smile, and ask God to help me kind, compassionate, and loving, just like He is.

I am still struggling with the bad habit of criticizing myself. While I am writing this article, this whiny, shrill voice in head is telling me this article will not be good, and will have no spiritual or interest value to anyone. But my logical and sanctified mind knows I have prayed throughout its composition. And I know the fulfillment of God's work does not depend on my ability. He chooses to use me, and He equips me. Such an honor, and an act of love.

The Creator created each of us uniquely, for His unique purposes. We are all parts of the same body, each part with its own gift and purpose (please see [Romans 12:4-6](#)). No part is greater than the other, and all parts are used and guided by God Himself. How lovely is that?



FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME - He Draws Near**

We recently said goodbye to some awesome friends as they moved far away from us, and it was hard! They needed to move on, and we were so sad to lose our connection, our fun together, and our conversation as we had grown so close since the time they lived near us. We knew when they moved here that they wouldn't be staying long, but after over a year with this dear couple...the time came...and they were gone.

Of course, we can stay in touch through Facebook (so thankful for that!) and phone calls and all sorts of technology. But it just won't be the same. It's a grieving process for sure, when loved ones move on to a new life, a new job, another city and another place. I cannot imagine the times in the pioneer days when children said goodbye to their parents as they married and moved west...perhaps to never see each other again!

I really struggle when friends exit out of my life. I suppose many of us do, but I get familiar with friends and open up and share, and trust and give, only to have that routine upset and be forced to make new friends and become familiar with new faces. I don't like it and never have.

I remember when I was 13 and my sister married, and moved away to California the very next day. I was so mad at her that I threw away every memento from her wedding. I wanted no reminders of the day she left me, and I cried and cried. I saw my parents cry, too. And that broke my heart. Families break up, and a dad or mom leaves, with kids that cry themselves to sleep for years. We lose loved ones to death and we grieve until we hurt, deep inside, with a pain that cannot be cured.

*Or can it?*

There's this verse that says He draws near to the brokenhearted and saves those crushed in spirit (Psalm 34:18).

Isn't that refreshing? As others move on, He draws near! And the truth is that we usually want the ones that have left to come back into our lives, instead of drawing near to Him. We'd much rather have the comfort of that friend, the closeness of that parent, and or the nearness of that family member back! Losing someone is hard!

He knew there would be loss in this world and that people and family and friends would move on. He knew there would be much sorrow associated with saying goodbyes and much angst with saying new hellos. So he made us that promise above that he would draw near and save us.

*Draw near us to do what and to save us from what?*

He draws near to remind us that he is EVERYTHING. He saves us so that he can HEAL us.

He knew what it was like to lose friends, close friends. He suffered betrayal, he was misunderstood, and close followers denied him – said they didn't even know him! He had friends die, he went through so much more than we will ever experience here on earth.

So when he says he will draw near, he does so with power to breathe new life when our old life seems stale and empty. When he says he will save us when our spirits are crushed, he can really do that. Sometimes it's the last thing we want to do – reach out to take hold of Hand that is offered – but he never withdraws it.

I'm reaching for his hand every time I lose a friend, say a goodbye, or feel disappointed and crushed. Sometimes I hold it loosely, just brush it, or just look at it. But when I sit still long enough for him to take my hand and squeeze it and hold it and start walking with me, I'm comforted and safe and warm once again.

Oh, it's a daily walk, and a minute by minute deal. Sometimes, I run off just like a toddler does when he shakes his dad's hand loose to make an independent run. But there's that strong hand again, when I get up from with a skinned knee and bruised heart and reach out to grab it.

*He draws near, when others move on...*

## **FRESH THYME – On Track – by Marcy Lytle**

It's one of the worst things to hear on the news, when we're told that a train carrying passengers veers off its track and wrecks, with multiple injuries and fatalities. Thankfully, it doesn't happen very often, but when it does... There are all sorts of investigations into the personnel that run the train, the mechanics of the train itself, and the tracks beneath it. Those investigations continue until the problem is discovered, so that a disaster like that won't happen again!

I've veered off the tracks many times, haven't you? I'm going along in life at a fast pace, only to come to a turn in the tracks and completely derail in my faith, and come to a crashing halt! It's then that I analyze what made me veer off the track in the first place. And it's often the same three things that cause real trains to roll over and stop:

### *The personnel that run the train*

When I allow the Conductor to run things, I stay on track. In other words, when I consult his word, rest in his promises, cast my cares onto him, and offer praises of love and adoration for his mercy and goodness, my life train stays on track. It's when I move up through the cars into the conductor's cab and take charge, thinking I know a better way to go, when the veering starts to occur. That attitude and action never fares well for me, or for those on board with me. It happens when I panic about decisions and worries and wants, and I decide to "make" things happen my way. It's never good to ask the conductor to step aside...so that I (the passenger) can drive. That's not how trains run...

### *The mechanics of the train*

I find that when I'm tired, everyone needs to stay away. And often, I'm tired because of my own choosing. Other times, I just haven't slept well and I end up grumpy. Tired people don't make wise decisions, they don't speak nicely, and they just cannot function at a good capacity. This is when things start to break down, like communication with our spouses. Tiredness is never a good predecessor to conversation with our spouse or anyone close to us. It causes us to tune out, sputter annoyances, and lash out accusations. This then makes our train veer and start rolling off track. Yikes!

### *The tracks beneath*

Imagine the train, dependent on well laid tracks, coming to a breakage in the iron below it. This will definitely send the train off track and into who knows where – causing all kinds of damage to the train, the travelers, and those nearby. Train tracks have to be maintained and cared for, and noticed, and replaced. The tracks beneath me are my foundation. I've found that foundations crumble when they're based on speculation, emotion, or hype. So I have to continually take up those shoddy pieces and replace them with faith, hope, and love. Each joint of the track has to be secured with those bolts that hold the track beneath me together. Otherwise, I'm going down.

I don't like to drive behind a person that veers on the highway. Often, it's because they're distracted with their phone, they've drank a little too much, or they've driven too long and need to pull over to rest. And I certainly don't want to be the one that veers. Our new car has a beep system built in that reminds us if we barely start to cross the line into danger.

I have a beep system too, in my own life, and that's the Holy Spirit. He always gently nudges me back on track, if I'm awake enough to feel it and respond. And when I do, it's a clear ride to a safe destination. And there's nothing more fun than a train ride through the mountains, across bridges, next to deep lush valleys and through tall stately trees, and then arriving safe and sound having had the ride of a lifetime.

Makes me want to book a train ride...how about you?

## **FRESH THYME – The Real Stuff – by Marcy Lytle**

I have shared this story often because I was so amazed by it. And I know it to be true because my dad told me the story over and over again, about how to determine and choose what's real – and how to determine and refuse anything that's counterfeit. He worked at a bank for all of my childhood years and I remember this story so well...an experience he never forgot and made sure to tell his children...so they never forget.

Dad said that while working at the bank they were trained in spotting counterfeit bills. Of course, this would be a necessary knowledge to have while handling money, for sure! I recall thinking to myself that Dad was going to tell us about counterfeit bill markings and how they different from the real thing, so that they are easily spotted. I imagined that he would take some of these fake bills from his pocket and reveal their obvious differences, and we would *oooh* and *ahhh* as he showed us.

That wasn't the case.

He told us how the bank workers were required to stay in the vault a long time (I can't recall the length of time, but I think they had to work in there for days!). They were to handle the real money, feel it, observe it – and nothing but the real money – until they were accustomed to the feel. This would then become so real to their sense of touch and sight that they would then become so familiar with the real money that...

When anything fake showed it, it would feel so different, they would immediately spot it!

In other words, they spent time with the real thing, a lot of time, so that when the unreal dared to show up at their desk – they knew it. They would have become so familiar with the real that the fake didn't have a chance of survival!

This story amazed me. I began imagining these bank workers in vault surrounded by piles of real money, money they were given to feel, to experience, to look at, and to know. And they had to immerse themselves in this money, not just walk in and out, having seen in for a few minutes. It took time for them to take in and receive the knowledge that came with learning what the real stuff was.

Dad said that after they emerged from the vault they could then go back to work, and easily spot a fake bill. They had felt the real money so long that the fake stuff immediately felt different and was discarded and exposed.

Isn't that story so cool?

You know where I'm going with this.

In a world where fake news is rampant, stories arise daily about the why's and how's of our current situation, politicians and leaders spill out information that varies from day to day, and more – we can learn from the bank story something huge. It doesn't take hours of sitting and sifting through all of the stories and trying to figure out what's real, in order to live in peace in

this crazy world. That type of experience brings exhaustion and confusion, and then tomorrow we have a dozen more stories to sift through...

The best way for us to be sure that we're on the right track, we are ready to discard anything fake that could harm us, and that we don't allow outside "counterfeit money" to pile up in our savings account (so to speak) is to immerse ourselves in – the WORD.

God's word is completely full of hope, truth, faith, and the unfaltering character of God, our heavenly father. Our best bet to spending our time wisely to cover our family and what we claim as ours is to read it, study it, believe it and pray it. He offers peace that passes understanding in troubled times, he calms super stormy seas, and he turns water into wine. He parts seas that are not crossable, he heals the sick and even raises the dead, and he softens stone cold hearts and melts them into his pure love.

And that truth, that vault of piled up real stuff, is where we need to spend our days. It's so that when we emerge into the real world again, we're able to immediately spot the fake and choose the real. And when that line gets fuzzy again, we can always return to the vault and stay as long as we want, because that real wealth is not going anywhere...and neither is the One in whom we trust.

## **FRESH THYME - The Simple Things** – by Marcy Lytle

I've found that during these uncertain and scary times, it helps me to get away from the city and notice the simplicity of nature and small pleasures, and to give thanks. Haven't you? If I stay home too much, working and cleaning and doing and staying away and watching and listening...I become anxious and weary. But one day away can rejuvenate me to face another week.

Yesterday, we took a road trip to three small towns, just for fun. The experience is shared over on the Local Flair blog, and you can find it on the COVER page if you scroll down. However, in this story I want to take note of the small and beautiful things that caused my heart to beat a little sweeter, my eyes to open a little wider, and my thoughts to settle down from boiling to a nice aromatic simmer...

- The fields were green and wildflowers were everywhere still...breathtakingly beautiful.
- Water that we packed tasted so good and refreshing after we strolled in a park.
- That park had a stately tree that was huge and historical and provided shade for travelers, long ago.
- There was this river by which we sat, and observed the reflection of the trees in the water.
- There were these rocks and trails and greenery and benches all for walkers and observers – me!
- One antique store was open on a little town square, and there were treasures on every aisle.
- The town square was still mostly closed, but the sidewalks were there...for strolling...always open.
- The breeze and the temperature were perfect, and we noticed and we drank in its refreshing...
- The book I brought to read was just the escape as I leaned my chair back and entered another story, while we parked under a tree.
- A text from a 7 year old to see what I was doing made my heart sing and my lips turn up to smile.
- The fact that I needed a light coat as we left in the morning was an unexpected surprise of "Ahhh."
- My walking shoes were so comfortable as I held his hand and we explored new places, both breathing deeply in rhythmic paces.

Just think. If we could pause enough to think of a dozen simple pleasures each day, we might all live 10 years longer just from the peace that comes from seeing and giving thanks and observing and living life well.

I hope to maintain this exercise of simplicity, even after the memory of spring 2020 fades into the fall of 2020 and whatever that may bring. Will you join me?