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For Every Season

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TIPS

The Dressing – A New Season – by Marcy Lytle

Fall trends are fun to watch and observe. I'd love to attend one of those runway shows up in New York sometime, but in all reality, most of us aren't going to wear those clothes in our everyday life. However, I think it's mad fun to look at the trends and pick out a few ideas to spice our wardrobes, just like we change our spices in our kitchen for cooking! We pull out the nutmeg, the pumpkin and all the aromas of fall, so why not pull out a few key trends and pieces to give our closet a fresh aroma as well? It's so fun, and we have done the looking for you...and picked out these spicy ideas for you to consider:

Dark florals are in. Not spring colors, but the dark hues of the new season. This blouse from Zara is under \$50 and is really pretty in the detail – look at the gathers and the high collar. It looks great here with black pants, but it would pair with jeans, as well.

<https://www.zara.com/us/en/floral-printed-top-p03440250.html?v1=25806957&v2=1281662>

Knit on knit – Knit sweaters are in, and you can even wear them with a knit scarf when the breezes turn cold. I really love this feminine slouchy sweater, and the half tuck brings a bit of shape to it. Wear it with your jeans and nice brown leather belt; and you've got yourself a cozy look for fall.

<https://www.zara.com/us/en/textured-knit-sweater-p05802005.html?v1=13482564&v2=1281662>

Plaid is back. I've chosen these ankle length pants from H&M for the price...and the fact that they have elastic in the waistband. There are several options, and these would look so cute with an oversized sweater and a pair of loafers!

https://www2.hm.com/en_us/productpage.0783346006.html

Square-toed heels are a new look. I haven't tried these on yet, but I can imagine that they're comfy since they're not pointed! I love this heel, and the sleek look of this pair of shoes. They would be so pretty with pants or a dress or a skirt, or any outfit at all.

<https://www.aliexpress.com/item/32959368061.html>

Pocket Bag. I love this purse. Scroll down to see the inside and how flexible it is. I'd love to find a pair of boots and a long coat in the same hue, for fall outfits. This is called a shopper bag, and I like that name! I'd slip my phone in the outer pocket and go!

<https://www.zara.com/us/en/flat-shopper-bag-with-outer-pocket-p16056004.html?v1=14197563&v2=1281705>

The Trench. This is always a classic. And after I wrote what I did above about finding a coat to match that purse, here it is, on the same site! You might not like the ensemble, but check out the back of the coat. The bag and the coat – a great combo!

<https://www.zara.com/us/en/flowy-trench-coat-with-belt-p05071225.html?v1=25011475&v2=1281595>

Dress it up. A new dress is great for fall weddings, lunches with friends, a night out with coworkers, and more. And I love the different options of prints in this one, and the way it looks with boots! It looks so comfy and yet can be dressed up in so many ways.

https://www2.hm.com/en_us/productpage.0764514002.html

Once you start smelling the scent of fall, start shopping for something new as well. Try it on, take a photo, and share it with us! Or even shoot us an email and be featured with your own fashion page if you'd like to share one month!

Seven For You – What's a Hostess Gift? – by Marcy Lytle

I once watched a show on TV and the presenter stated a few things you're never supposed to take to a friend's house, when they're serving dinner to guests. He said never to bring an extra dish that isn't asked for. This messes up what they have planned, and your dish may not fit in with the décor. I hadn't really thought of that, but it makes sense. If someone is hosting a party, they usually have a plan. However, I'm not so sure that's always the case these days!

I asked our panel about hostess gifts, if they take one to friends' houses when asked over to a party, or if they receive gifts. If so, I wanted to know what makes a good hostess gift. Do our children even know what a hostess gift is? I know that it's completely not necessary, especially for just an informal gathering. But once in a while, if we know our hostess has worked really hard, it's nice to show up with a treat in hand.

I'm the world's worst about not hosting at all because I don't have the time or don't want to clean house, or any number of reasons. However, I say let's invite friends over! Let's just sit on the porch and drink tea, or enjoy a dessert, or a cup of ice cream. Nothing has to be formal or fancy, and neither do our gifts when we're invited to their house! They can just be thoughtful and fun.

Flowers...(or bullets)

My husband and I invited my cousin and his family over to our new house for dinner. We had a good laugh, because they brought me a beautiful bouquet of flowers...and some ammo (bullets) for my husband. They knew what a gun fan he was. We loved it!! I thought it was super thoughtful of them.

I have been given a bouquet of flowers as a hostess gift.

If it is a special occasion or I just feel like it, I'll usually take flowers or a seasonal plant.

My favorite one I received was a pottery pitcher that was filled with flowers. It was the thoughtfulness of this gift, not the money spent...

(The same presenter above said if you do take flowers, be sure to take them in a vase. Otherwise, the hostess has to stop what she's doing, find a vase, and arrange... I'm not sure we have to be that picky, but it's something to think about!)

Homemade or What You Have

I love homemade gifts the best, whether a sweet or something artsy. My daughter-in-law made me a wall hanging with a beautiful saying about her prince (my son) being raised by a queen (me). Very special to me. My other daughter-in-law makes THE WORLD'S BEST chocolate chip cookies and shares them when they come over. I'm making my sisters a set of pot holders, because they saw mine and really liked them. Just because...

Someone brought me a homemade dessert as a gift and I loved it!

Since I like doing crafts, perhaps I should make some things to have on hand. Then, I don't have to run out to purchase something.

Yesterday, I went to a Korean household. I knew I didn't need to bring anything, but I was feeling playful so I just grabbed what I had on hand, and it turned out to be a "bouquet" of green onions! The people I was visiting were left-brained engineers and they cocked their heads trying to follow my logic which made me laugh, because I'm anything but logical! Luckily, my Korean hostess was also gracious, and said, "We make pancakes outta these." Then I cocked *my* head! Life is fun, if you let it be. But seriously, I like to bring something because people just aren't thankful enough anymore!! And that's a major trait of being godly.

Dish Towels

I like the gift of new dish towels tied with a ribbon. This is a practical gift that can be reused for a long time!

I think a fun dish towel from World Market would be great. I love receiving these, especially if the person remembers the colors of my kitchen and it matches!

<https://www.worldmarket.com/product/green+and+pink+fern+print+kitchen+towel.do?sortby=ourPicks&from=Search>

Candles or Lotion

Candles are fun to take to friends. Especially one that fits the season. I love finding great fragrances at World Market and with their coupons that show up so often, I usually can get one on at a great price! Paddywax brand is my favorite!

<https://www.worldmarket.com/product/paddywax-tobacco-and-vanilla-old-fashioned-filled-candle.do?sortby=ourPicks&from=Search>

Bath and Body Works – I love anything from there (including candles) so I give and love to receive these gifts, as well!

Chocolate

Chocolate. Period. Barnes & Noble has tiny boxes by the checkout counter!

The only thing I can think of that I have received as a hostess gift is chocolate. I guess I just don't think about it because my get-togethers are usually casual. Or, they are a party like a shower or birthday where people bring gifts for the guest of honor. In that case, the guest of honor gives hostess gifts to the hostesses.

Wine

I have given a bottle of my favorite wine - from Duchman winery in Driftwood, Texas - their Sangiovese.

<https://www.duchmanwinery.com/>

Book or Gift Cards

I give gift cards to Starbucks or Chick Fia or Ulta or Target...and have received as well. I love giving...and I love to receive!

It doesn't have to be a special occasion. I have given devotionals to friends.

A good book you've read that you want to pass on, if she's an avid reader, is a great idea.

*If you are asked to bring a dish, here's what one lady suggested:

I really haven't done a hostess gift other than taking food in a long time, but I do try to take the food item I'm bringing in a new reusable plastic container that I don't want. That way, I can leave the food and it's container with the hostess for them to have the next day.

One lady shared the following, which I think is probably the way many feel these days...

I don't really take a hostess gift to parties very often. I will bring food or drinks to contribute to the meal, but not a specific hostess gift. I don't really ever recall receiving one, either. Usually, they are just casual get-togethers, so it's not really something I've seen our friends do. Of course for a special event, like a house warming or holiday party I would bring a gift...

<https://www.gourmettexaspasta.com/>

Sometimes during the fall there are cute spatula sets, tea sets, or even a tiny grater that would be fun to stock up on, to have on hand. Or what about some gourmet pasta?

Hostess gifts may be long gone, but I hope they aren't. They should never be expected and we should never feel the pressure to take one. However, on those occasions where we remember and we think of something, maybe there's a reason to take one...and bless their day.

Selah's Style – Back to School – by Marcy Lytle

By now, the kids are back in school and we're back into routine, supposedly. What are your kids wearing, and what backpacks are they carrying? These days, the supplies are no longer personal pencil bags and notebooks and crayons, but rather the entire classroom shares what is brought. And many schools require uniforms, so personalization even in the way our kids dress is gone! I have my own opinions about such things, but this isn't the place to share. What is fun to share are the styles and attitudes and love that kids bring to our world through what they do wear and what they do buy...when given that option.

Gideon, Ayla and Augie are siblings. Gideon is entering 2nd grade, Ayla is entering 1st, and Augie has one more year to go of staying home with Mom. However, all three got to enjoy the back to school treats of new pj's, new clothes, and new packs and lunch boxes. Each one has their own expression that suits them perfectly!

Their pajamas are from Target, as well as the Descendants and Paw Patrol backpacks. The Bumblebee pack was ordered from Amazon. Ayla's dress is from a dressmaker in Georgetown, Texas.

<https://www.facebook.com/dotdotsmile.janetthill/>

We'll start with Augie first, because he was the most interested in posing for the pictures. He loves his new pajamas that are comfy and soft. They were a three-piece set that included shorts AND long pants – the best! And check out his choice for backpack and lunchbox. The lunchbox even lights up! He will be accompanying Mom on outings and errands, so he'll need a place to stash his toys and snacks for safekeeping. He's ready!

Next, Ayla shares her new pajamas. The shorts were a tad big in the waist, but Ella (her grandmother) stitched them up so they fit nicely, now. Ayla is all about comfort! And one of her most comforting breakfast choices is a waffle, cut into squares, spread with peanut butter, with syrup on top! Ayla also loves dresses, especially ones that are soft and twirl. We love this print...and those shoes! She's not a "bow" person so her hair – plain and simple – is as pretty as pretty can be. And, can you tell she's a Descendants fan?

Gideon is the big brother of them all, and was the most hesitant to get dressed and pose. He'd rather lay around in his comfy pajamas than to don stuffy shorts and a shirt, and put on tennis shoes! But, he's rather handsome in his complete outfit, while holding his lunch box. He chose the Bumblebee set. Gideon loves toys that transforms, and as pictured above, he loves his siblings...at least most of the time.

In the Kitchen – 7 or Less – by Marcy Lytle

It's fall, schedules are busy, the weather is changing, and we've got too much to do to stand and cook in the kitchen all night! Easy dishes are what we need to feed our families so that we can spend more quality time together reading, walking, or enjoying each other's company! This month, we're sharing quick and easy meals with few ingredients so that we can be in...and out...of the kitchen in no time, with our bellies full and more evening time to enjoy.

We've tried to include 7 or less ingredients, not including seasonings, of course!

Easy Pizza

Naan bread is an easy choice for individual pizzas. Just line them up on your baking sheets and start topping! You can find packages of Naan in the fresh bread section.

- Naan bread
- Tomato sauce and/or fresh tomatoes
- Fresh mozzarella
- Fresh basil
- Your favorite topping
- Garlic powder and Italian seasoning

Set your oven to broil. Place the Naan bread on the sheets and spread with the sauce and/or fresh tomatoes. Sprinkle with garlic powder and Italian seasoning. Add freshly sliced mozzarella and fill in the gaps with torn basil. Season with salt and pepper.

Broil for about 5 min till bubbly with browned edges. Add a bit more fresh basil and a drizzle of olive oil and serve immediately.

(You can totally add pepperoni or meat if you wish)

Mexican Brown Rice

This is a super easy dish and so tasty. The picture here was made for eating later, which is a good idea if you have time to cook earlier in the day, and just want to pull out the meals when you get back home.

- 1 ½ c frozen or fresh corn
- 1 15oz can black beans, rinsed and drained
- 3 c cooked brown ready to serve rice
- 1 cup salsa
- 1 T chili powder
- Garnishes like cilantro and avocado

Heat corn and black beans til corn is tender, about 3 minutes. Add the rice and chili powder, stir to combine. Cook and stir about 3 minutes. Stir in salsa and cook another 2 minutes.

Remove from heat and let cool, then garnish with toppings.

(Again, you can add seasoned ground meat or chicken if you like)

Chicken and Pineapple Tostadas

We love these tostadas – so full of flavor – and so easy to put together!

- 1 lb chicken cutlets
- 1 grated garlic clove, 1 T chili powder, $\frac{3}{4}$ t kosher salt, juice of 1 lime
- Pineapple rings
- Salsa verde
- Red onion
- Shredded lettuce
- Tostada shells

Toss the chicken cutlets with 1 T olive oil, the lime juice and garlic, and chili powder and salt.

Grill the chicken over med-hi heat about 3 minutes per side and toss with 1/3 cup salsa verde. Grill 3 pineapple rings until charred, about 2 minutes per side, and chop.

Divide among six tostadas. Top with sour cream (optional), lettuce and red onion.

Sheet Pan Fajitas

If a meal can be made all in one pan, I'm in! Easy clean-up! No real measurements given here; just make enough to fill your family's tummies.

- Chicken cut into strips
- Red onion
- Yellow, red, and green peppers
- 1 pkg taco seasoning
- Avocado
- Lime juice
- Tortillas

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Mix Taco Seasoning with lime juice and olive oil, and toss with chicken and sliced peppers and onions.

Cook in the oven about 20 minutes, turning halfway through.

Serve in tortillas, top with avocado.

Sesame Popcorn

Who doesn't need a snack on a busy night while the kids are doing homework, or we're settled in and watching a new fall TV series?

- 6 T butter
- 2/3 c sesame seeds
- 1 T sugar
- 1 t kosher salt
- 16 cups hot popcorn

Melt the butter with the sesame seeds in a small skillet over medium heat until the seeds are toasted, about 5 minutes. Stir in the sugar and salt. Toss with popcorn and serve.

(The original recipe called for 1 T salt but we found that to make this snack way too salty.)

Tried and True – Bring it Back – by Marcy Lytle

Etiquette rules, are there any? Or is it just “whatever you feel” at the moment? I’m thinking that most of our etiquette rules are not rules anymore, and that a lot of us have forgotten those niceties our grandmothers taught us, or demonstrated in front of us!

I know that when my kids were small, we had party favors for every kid in attendance. That seemed like the “nice” thing to do, but it can be so expensive! It’s nice to thank kids for coming, but at \$5 or more a kid, plus the party expense, we might go to bed with a headache! I also know that many of us were raised to send thank-you cards – the handwritten version – to anyone that gave us a gift. I have one family member that thinks if he’s said “Thank you” in person, there is no need to offer a second thank-you by mail.

I get it. Times change, and we evolve. However, when I’m out and about, noticing and grimacing, I see some things I’d like to see return, or maybe appear, because we’ve quite grown into a selfish society, in my opinion. I’m including myself in these observations. My daughter told me that when she recently went on a business trip, every person sitting in the airport terminal had earbuds in, so apparently they wanted no interaction or conversation at all!

So here are my observations and my own wishes that we’d see these simple niceties return, because kindness makes the world a better place, doesn’t it? If I sound old, then maybe I am. But I’m thinking maybe we all might enjoy these reminders and smile or take note...just maybe.

IPhone:

Don’t chat on your phone when in the aisle at the store. Shoppers are trying to get by you, and you aren’t even aware...

Don’t text on your phone when you’re at a stop sign or red light. The other drivers are hesitant to go...or to stay.

Don’t play games and scan social media when out to dinner with friends, family, or anyone! It’s just quite rude.

Clothing:

Take a look at the back of you in a mirror, when you slide into those shorts, and make sure your derriere is well covered. Please...

No one wants to read your bad attitude on your shirt, where you state that you hate the president or love to get drunk. Graphic tees can be fun and not foolish, can’t they?

When shopping, even at the discount stores, please hang up that which you knock down, those shoes that you didn’t like, or put away that toy that your child played with. Make the world a better place, even down the aisles of Ross and Target.

Gatherings:

Please RSVP and let the host know if you're attending or not. Don't make them guess and provide food when you have no intentions of showing up. You can respond, yes you can.

Compliment the host and her home and her goodies and her hospitality. You'll make her day.

If it's a wedding, don't bring extra guests, don't let your kids run amuck, and don't show up late without a good excuse. Just don't.

In the City:

If you're going to ride a scooter, please say something before you approach a pedestrian on foot, because you're scaring us all.

Smile, why don't you? If you're walking a trail, or strolling downtown, make eye contact with humans and smile. Smiling is a mood and face lifter!

Don't honk, scream, or throw up your hands because someone is slow. Your blood pressure will thank you.

In a Public Restroom:

Flush the toilet, for goodness sake.

Don't sit in the stall and scroll on your phone while a line of ladies is out the door. Sigh...

Take your child with you into the stall, and make sure they clean up and then wash their hands.

Around the Elderly:

Speak up. They can't hear you mumble, and they feel bad that they can't. But they want to.

Don't call them "sweetie" or say "you're cute." They have importance and value. Look for it.

Call or visit. It doesn't take five minutes to call and say hello and listen to how they're doing, and a short visit might make their day.

At Church:

Don't gossip about the leaders, their kids, or that lady over there. In fact, don't gossip ever.

Don't show up once a month and complain about what you see or don't see. Maybe you just missed the greatness while you were out...

Don't ask for more programs and activities, unless you're willing to help out.

Do I sound bitter? I'm not. I can be very selfish and self-focused at times and I need the reminder, as well, to look up and out at others and give a smile and attention. I'm talking to myself, and to all of us, to pick up some niceties once more and show up at the door...ready to give, to notice and to be...a blessing and not a burden.



HOME

Practical Parenting – Without Worry – by Marcy Lytle

We set our alarm every night to wake us up, even though my husband tells me over and over again, “You always wake up, I don’t know why we need to set the alarm.” And it’s true. I usually, over 90% of the time, wake up on my own, BEFORE the alarm sounds. But my reply to him is always, “Well, I won’t sleep well if I know I have to wake up, and the alarm is not set.” He quietly nods, knowing me so well, and clicks the button and off we go to sleep.

What does this have to do with parenting? Everything!

That alarm clock is there as my safety net, it gives me security, and allows me to sleep soundly without any worry that I might accidentally one day sleep past my normal routine and miss getting up on time! And this made me realize how important it is for our kids to have safety nets, boundaries, alarms, limits and “fences” in order to make them feel safe and secure.

It’s not true that giving our children “free range” to express and do and go and come as they please makes for healthier kids. It’s our job to train them, and that includes setting alarms for them so that they can “sleep soundly” knowing all is well and tomorrow will start on time.

Here’s what I mean:

We need to **set a time limit on electronics**. Maybe a timer of one hour per day, or whatever we feel will work best with their schedules. All kids need down time and relaxation, just like we do. But they don’t have the skillset to stop when healthy, unless we train them with the timer. Hey, maybe we need a timer for ourselves as well!

We must **provide a safety net without holes** through which they can fall. Our homes have to be safe places where they can talk about anything, be themselves, and seek refuge and help from those who love them the most. If we’re messed up and have nothing to offer them, we can get help and mend that hole in the net. If our home is chaotic constantly because our schedules are too busy for order, we can clear our calendars to make peace. And so on...

We can **set limits on staying up late and eating** too much or too little. Kids don’t have a lot of wisdom in these areas until they’re grown and gone, but we can train them with the wisdom we’ve been given. We can set bedtime so that they get enough sleep, and we can stock our pantries and refrigerators with good snacks like fruit, nuts, and veggies. Free range eating and sleeping will create headaches and tummy aches for the entire family!

We can **build a fence of protection** around the minds, eyes, and ears of our kids. They’re curious, so we need to close the blinds to what’s lurking outside. Kids will say mean things to them that are not true, so we need to fill our kids with truth. Their eyes will be tempted to wander to sites on their phones, and their ears to listen to lyrics that harm. A fence guards them, and enables them to love life and jump, play and run like kids should do, with joy.

We can **teach them about setting an actual alarm** by which to wake up, sharing with them the importance of good etiquette of arriving on time and not making others wait, the benefit of a good routine, and the way alarms are helpful in making life good for us...and others.

I'll always set my alarm, because I enjoy sleeping without fear that I won't wake up. It settles my heart and my soul, to know it will go off, even if I'm in deep sleep. I don't want to miss that early flight for vacation, the wakeup to get dressed and pick up work, or an alarm to get out of bed and smell the roses...

Do you? And you certainly don't want your kids to live in fear of any kind, either...

I Don't Do Teens – Hearing His Voice – by Marcy Lytle

I remember when my son was a teenager, he often told me that he tried to listen to God but heard nothing, and it quite disappointed him. I realized then that I hadn't really taught him what it's like to hear His voice, how to respond, and how to know when it's NOT his voice. The Bible says the sheep know the shepherd's voice, so that tells me that if our kids know Jesus then they can know his voice, IF they have practiced learning it, knowing his character, and responding.

Here are some good things to talk about with your almost adults, but not quite yet:

Hearing his voice comes from knowing his character.

Your kids need to know that when they have self-degrading thoughts, that is NOT their Father speaking to them. They can turn from that immediately. He will always speak gently to them, with a good outcome in mind... Tell them that the Father's voice encourages and speaks of love and understanding.

Hearing his voice comes from knowing His word.

If your kids hear a thought that says to cheat, to lie, to even take their own life; that is NOT his plan for them. He says to be honest, to put others before ourselves, to give, to live, and to thrive. Help them develop a plan for reading the Word on a daily basis.

Hearing his voice comes from listening to those that love Him and love us.

Sometimes others speak what He's saying, and we need to listen. A grandmother, an aunt, a dad, or a friend that we know loves and knows God can sometimes offer insight that is life-giving if we just listen!

Hearing his voice requires realization.

Sheep know the Shepherd's voice because they realize He's their provider and their guide. Remind your teens that God is what they need and He has every good gift available, and they do not need to graze in some other pasture.

Hearing his voice is stifled when we sin, because sin separates.

We can talk about sin, how it's when we know to do good and don't do it. It's an attitude of the heart or a deed that manifests because of that attitude. Hating a sibling or harboring a lie is like stuffing cotton in our ears and saying, "Blah blah blah." Repentance is a good thing. He loves it, and He loves us. Forgiveness is amazing!

There are other ways to help our teens hear his voice, but these are good starters. Above all, pray for them. Pray in faith, knowing that your heavenly Father pursues his children and desires a relationship with them, where dialogue and intimacy exist in full measure.

Column title: *An Adage a Day*
By Carole “Lisa Lynn” Gilbert

Forever Saying

Do you have a phrase you say often, a cliché, a saying, a quote, or an adage? Whether it's an old axiom or a present day proverb, I bet you have one you've said yourself. I grew up within ten miles of three sets of grandparents all taking care of me and spoiling me. They also taught me a lot about everyday life situations and how the grass wasn't always greener on the other side and how pigs don't fly. I learned how to not put the cart before the horse and that counting your chickens before they hatch doesn't help you aim for the stars. I'm sure by now you're wondering, but I heard every age old adage, as these sayings are called, many times as a child and later I repeated these to my children. Unfortunately, I believe these are forgotten expressions and need to be redeemed.

Join me through this column in refreshing or restarting these age old adages, present day Proverbs, and superficial new sayings to memory so their truths and lessons are not forgotten in time. We'll look at one saying per month and to get this column started let's look into their meaning. Proverbs, not the proverbs in the Bible, give advice whereas adages give a common truth. Both are well known sayings and each individual one will have its' own origin.

Interestingly, Ben Franklin, a self-made business man, renowned civic leader, and inventor of several daily used items such as bifocals and the lightening rod, which began the invention of electricity, is attributed to writing many of these well-known adages. He wrote under the pen name “Poor Richard” and published *Poor Richard's Almanac* from 1732 to 1758 which included his sayings and more that we still repeat today like “a penny saved is a penny earned.” This particular adage actually started long before Ben Franklin. In 1640, George Herbert wrote in *Outlandish Proverbs* the quote “A penny spar'd is twice got” and the advice seemed to go on from there being published and requoted until Ben Franklin and still is today. No matter who said it first the meaning remains the same. For each penny saved, your worth grows. I can't tell you how many times I've said this one to my children while they were growing up.

And for one more saying to get this column started, the title “An Adage a Day” is derived from “An apple a day keeps the doctor away.” This is actually a proverb and started in 1860 in Wales as “Eat an apple on going to bed, and you'll keep the doctor from earning his bread.” It was meant to promote healthy eating therefore healthy living. I think having daily advice in our thoughts also promotes healthy living.

These old sayings hold dear to my heart. I raised my kids hearing them and they need to be passed on. Join me as we look on the brighter side and send Grandma's and other sayings along with their meaning, origin, and stories of how they've been used "to infinity and beyond!" I hope to be like my grandmothers and be forever saying.

Tiny Living – Thoughts and Questions – by Brian Enterline

When I asked my family about how they feel about tiny living here is what I got...

From the kiddos...

Likes:

- BB gun shooting
- persimmon eating
- washers
- swinging
- the star on the trailer
- love the bunk beds...

Dislikes:

- too small
- not enough space for their own personal things
- cleaning the poop tank...it stinks!
- Endless amount of projects on the land

From Brian...

Likes:

- affordable
- simpler
- able to leisurely travel more

Dislikes:

- not enough space
- cleaning the poop tank stinks!

From me...

Likes:

- less to clean
- can talk to anyone from whatever room I'm in
- no need to buy any furniture or décor, ever

Dislikes:

- it's tiny!
- miss having a washer, dryer and dishwasher

Tiny living definitely has its pros and cons. While we still enjoy the coziness and closeness together, we are also getting tired of being too cozy and too close! Going on three years with the

tiny living, this is really all the boys know. I think they are still fine, although when we go to friends' houses and see those kids' awards and artwork and space for all their toys, that space becomes a longing for my boys. The boys have started to ask, "When will we have a home for our stuff and room to spread out and play?"

We are constantly on the go because I feel the need to escape the tininess and plus we have to go somewhere to wash our clothes! As the boys get bigger and the toys get bigger so does the pile of stinky laundry. As I mentioned before, the walls are closing in!

As I write this article, we are on our way to New Mexico. I definitely enjoy the flexibility to just get up and go. I start to think, though. While having this time for freedom, what is our purpose? Just merely to travel around and just survive?

I'm trying to start looking at each place we go and see how we can help others. I'm trying to stop being so selfish and see what we can get out of our visits to different places for us, and really see what we can do to be a servant. Just having a self-realization moment!

We will continue to live tiny and see the goodness on this crazy journey, and then share it with you...and see if our "like" list grows!

Remember Loves Grows Best in Tiny Spaces

A Night to Remember – What is a Steward? – by Marcy Lytle

We recently played a fun game with the littles, all about being a good steward. Since they didn't know what a steward was, we used the word "keeper." The definitely knew what a zookeeper was, the one who takes care of the zoo and the animals in it! We began by reminding us all that God has entrusted certain talents and gifts to our care, and we must be good stewards, or keepers, of these things!

Preparation: Just create a word document and copy in clip art photos of about a dozen things like: money, toys, ears, eyes, food, dogs, clothes, etc. Let the kids cut them apart and spread them out on the table.

Below will be an example of how we played the "game," all the while learning how to be good stewards of our gifts.

Each kid selects a picture and answers these questions,

Example 1:

"What would it look like to be a bad steward of your pet?"

Answers might be: not feed him, never play with him, punch him...

"What would it look like to be a good steward of your pet?"

Answers might be: feed him, be gentle when you play with him, take him for walks.

Example 2:

"What would it look like to be a bad steward of your eyes?"

Answers might be: watch bad things on television, cheat on a test, etc.

"What would it look like to be a good steward of your eyes?"

Answers might be: read the Bible, watch good videos and good games on iphone, etc.

Example 3:

"What would it look like to be a bad steward of our clothes?"

Answers might be: leave them on the floor, never wash them...

"What would it look like to be a good steward of our clothes?"

Answers might be: put them away, try not to get them dirty, share them when we outgrow them.

The kids really enjoyed answering and listening to each other's answers. It might be fun to provide a light snack, and then play charades afterwards, using those same photos.

Consider reading Matthew 25, at least one of the stories in that chapter. You could even play this game and do this lesson in the dark, by lantern light.

God wants us to be great stewards of all that he's entrusted us with, so that he can entrust us with more!



YOU

Strengthening Your Core – Prayer Visuals – by Marcy Lytle

The other morning I woke up feeling heavy. I have list a mile long of friends that need healing miracles. I'm betting that some of you do, as well. I reached up and took out each "stone" or burden from my "backpack" and threw them. I've talked about casting our cares before, but I'm finding that I have to do this daily. Every darn night I end up with heavy stones that weigh me down, because of worry and fear. So every time that happens, I have this choice to empty them and cast them over to Him (which involves some throwing muscle, by the way) or to carry them around until I too become sick.

That visual of the heavy backpack and casting our cares on Him helps me. There are other visuals I've had before, that have helped as well. If you're like me, you sometimes need a visual. After all, our kids are taught all the way through school with visuals like chalkboards, diagrams, pictures, maps, etc. It's a good avenue to get things from our heads into our hearts.

Here are some great prayer visuals to use when you need help processing, praying, and putting down all of your worries and your fears:

- If you've suffered a traumatic experience, close your eyes and imagine God with you in that room or space. He has promised never to leave us or forsake us, so ask Him to help you see him there with you. Allow his comfort to sweep over you like warm water from the ocean, as you lay back in the sand.
- If your kids are top on your list of worries, think of placing them like you would images into a grid on a website. Copy them and paste them, caption them "God help her/him" then click off and leave them be. He is aware, and He cares. When that grid goes haywire, then copy and paste again.
- If you're just plain weary from the heat that's been turned up too hot in your life, find a shade tree and take a chair and sit there. Observe the shadows and the breezes that offer a respite from the hot sun, and begin to give thanks for his goodness. Physically find this place, or just think on it until you feel the breezes blow. Drink a cool glass of whatever your favorite drink is, even if it's not available. Imagine the coolness as you swallow down into you thirsty soul.
- If you've lost sight of who God is in his glory and majesty, close your eyes and see this – or better yet – step outside after dark and view it in person. Look up on a clear night as the sun sets and watch the stars appear, one by one, and remember that God calls them to march across the sky – everything in His order and His time and under His control. Sigh, and breathe at how huge He is and rest in his power to do the impossible.
- If you've got a headache that won't end because of worry, stress or anxiety, imagine a bouquet of balloons. Inside each balloon is a small piece of paper with your worries written down, one by one. Imagine holding the bouquet and letting one balloon go at a time, releasing it into the atmosphere until you no longer can see it – but HE can. Seriously, he asks us to let these burdens go, lay them down, and he will carry them for us.
- If you're weighed down with some sin you cannot overcome, whether it's something damaging to your body, a foul attitude, or hatred or whatever – imagine a great deluge of

water falling from the sky. There's no lightning or thunder, just a deluge of gentle rain and you're called outside to play. You stand there with your mouth open wide and drink, feel the cleanse, and the soak. That's what he does when we sin, he washes us and erases all the dirt and makes us clean.

- If you've given and given in caring for someone, meeting financial needs, spending time helping until you're so tired and can barely move, imagine a big can where you toss all that you've done and given into the can, only to see another can where He's tossing in 10 times as many blessings back to you. He says when we give, we shall receive pressed down, running over, blessings from above... So get a good glimpse of Jesus heaping his blessings into that can, then standing inside to make room for more.

What visuals do you use? Ask God to help you see a picture of His goodness and grace when you pray, when you're tired, and when life is too much.

His word is true, and reminding ourselves with pictures that calm our minds and souls is a good exercise to bring us rest.

You – Upper Quadrant – Here We Are – by Marcy Lytle

The upper quadrant is usually a good thing, right? Finding out that we are in the upper quadrant of our academic class feels good. The upper quadrant of a race is filled those who might have a chance of actually winning. And the upper quadrants just sounds like a place we all want to be...except when it comes to age. I decided to use that description recently because of where I am on the spectrum of life. If I'm given 80 years on this earth, then I'm in the upper quadrant now. I hope to have more years, if quality of life is mine, but who knows...*right?*

Some of you that are reading are right here with me. Some might be ahead and some of you may be way behind me. But all of us are either in it, know someone in it, or we're close.

What I do know is that being in the upper quadrant of life is actually quite daunting in so many ways:

- You're the oldest ones in your family line. No more leaning on the wisdom of the aged...because you're becoming that group and you're now supposed to have gleaned some wisdom out of the years you've breathed.
- You're thanking God every day for your health and praying that you can walk, climb and have fun with your grandkids for years to come. So you're out walking daily to keep your heart strong.
- You're watching your grown children build their own lives without you at the center of things, not because they're mean, but because they're busy growing. Boy, are they busy.
- You and your siblings are all aging and wondering what happened to the decades of the 20's and the 30's. How could we be twice that age now? I mean, seriously, how?
- Your body is changing, your nose is growing (at least it seems to!), your hair is thinning, and your feet are hurting. But you don't feel old at all on the inside! You still giggle at bubbles.
- You're realizing the value of friendship, the necessity of laying down the rest of your burdens and fears you've carried too long, and the beauty of every sunrise and sunset. Life is too short to keep grumbling and whining.
- You're panicking on some days, because it really does seem like the earth is spinning faster and the months are rolling way more quickly than they used to...how can it be September already? And didn't Y2K just happen?
- You're planning and going and doing and living, because there's SO MUCH more life you want to live before you end up...well where your parents did...alone and sick and in need. Those memories are still too fresh and sad.

I could continue writing for another hour about all of the changes that come with entering the upper quadrant of this race called life. And I could be a cheerleader for all of us and do nothing but shout winning phrases, vocalize ways we can all score one for the team, and shake pom-poms in our faces to make us smile. There's a place for all of that, because we for sure need encouragement. So I will always try to offer that.

But this column is going to be real and raw, so that you can relate and cry with me, maybe realize that someone else is feeling your pain, and even roll your eyes at the crazy thoughts I think on any given day in this ring of the track on which I'm running.

My purpose in changing this column name and in writing these stories is to empty my heart, my mind and my soul onto the screen, in hopes that we can indeed hold our heads high because we've made it to this point. We may have shin splints and our sides may ache from dehydration, but we're here beside each other, still walking...

I'm extremely grateful to be alive and well, because my list of friends in need of miracles is growing longer and longer. That scares me and haunts me. I've learned so many things in my walk with God that I must now really practice and decide if I believe, or if I don't. I can no longer wonder if he's really faithful, question if his promises are true, and worry that he is going to leave me or forsake me. It's time for me to quit wondering and start stating my faith in my Father, to start proving to those behind me that I will finish well and not weak, and that my confidence will not wane but instead grow stronger...

Are you with me? Here we are and here we go. Each month until I run out of things to say, I'll be sharing all about the walk in the upper quadrant of life. I welcome your comments, your questions, and your suggestions if you have a topic you'd like me to tackle. Or if you have a story to write, please email and let me know.

Healthy Habits – Skin Care – by Marcy Lytle

I'm not a skin care specialist, by any stretch of the imagination, but I learned early on from my sweet mom to never go to bed with makeup on. She insisted that I clean my face nightly, no matter what time I got in. She also instructed me to work gently under my eyes, never pulling the skin, only patting it. I remember lots of cool things my mom told me to do, and I still do them today! And as I've used products and thrown some away, I have a few that I really love and am sharing with all of us this month. Hope you'll consider trying a few, or commenting with your own skin care routine and what works for you!

For the face – I recently purchased a trio of products from Gruene Witch Apothecary. It's a small soap bar, a toner, and a moisturizer. I've been using the trio for almost a year now, and am sold on it! I got the set at a festival, but they sell the individual items on line. The smell is amazing, and my face feels 100% better and fresher, after I use all three. If you live in the Texas area, they even have a calendar of where they'll be so you can purchase in person!

<https://gruenewitch.com/>

For the feet – I have the world's worst heels – or at least I did. They were really a bother to me, as they are to lots of people – with cracked dry skin that peeled and itched. My daughter sells a Nuskyn foot lotion that has changed my world. I use it every morning (and every night is recommended) and it works! My heels are no longer rough, but instead they're smooth. I could not believe it. Normal lotion just didn't work, but this one is made specifically for heels. It's a winner! You can order from Kamryn Wolfe on her Facebook page.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/OhtheJoy/>

For his hands – Last year for Christmas I ordered my husband a lotion from Duluth Trading Company and he loves it! It's grapefruit scented, which is one of our favorite scents. It's a big bottle, looks great by his sink, and works for his rough hands. Smells great...did I say that? I like Duluth – check out all their products for him!

<https://www.duluthtrading.com/spit-and-polish-honey-grapefruit-lotion-16-oz.-78803.html>

For the lips – You may laugh at this one. I was at Dollar Tree recently, on the phone with my sister, and she told me to be sure and get Palmers Cocoa Butter lip balm. If your dollar store doesn't carry it, you can find it on line. It's the smoothest, silkiest butter for your lips, and I love using it over the top of lipstick. It's a great stocking gift and a must-have for your purse for the coming cooler months!

<https://www.dollartree.com/bulk/Palmers-Cocoa-Butter-Lip-Balm>

For the body – There are many good lotions I've tried, but I keep going back to Sunshine Farms out of Montgomery, Texas. Their products are so good, and you might want to order Christmas gifts from this site. We actually visited the site and toured the farm, and were so impressed. Check out their body lotion and the fragrance and the ingredients. All of their products I've tried are amazing...

<https://www.goodcleanlivin.com/product-page/skin-lovin-lotion-single-8-oz>

For your makeup – I never used to use primer or setting spray. Maybe you have been using both for years. However, since I started using them I love them and feel they really help my skin after it's made up, to stay! Both products I purchased from the Elf line of cosmetics. The primer goes on silky smooth right before I apply my foundation or BB cream. It smooths out the face to make an even palette for the makeup. After my makeup is applied, including bronzer and blush, I spray it to set it with Elf setting spray. Both really do seem to work for keeping the makeup in place and fresh all day long...

https://www.elfcosmetics.com/poreless-face-primer--large/83409.html#q=primer&lang=en_US&start=10&sz=24

https://www.elfcosmetics.com/matte-magic-mist-and-set/300090.html?dwvar_300090_color=Small&cgid=#q=setting%2Bspray&lang=en_US&start=5

For sleeping – I love Nuskin's night cream. I even have my husband using it on his face. It goes on smooth, not oily, and feels great. I've used lots of night creams and used to be a fan of Oil of Olay for years. However, I've switched over to Nuskin, not only because my daughter sells it but because it seems to rejuvenate while I sleep. I never go to bed without it, and now that he's using it too, we will have to stock up!

Need link

For bathing – We splurge here. We both love scented natural soaps that fit the season. Maybe it sounds crazy, but when I open peppermint soap near Christmas time, or pumpkin scented soap soon for the fall, I breathe in deeply and sigh. These natural soaps from World Market, or we often buy them homemade from markets around town, lather so nicely and feel so fresh. I have sensitive skin to many soaps, so it's why we switched a long time ago. But we are hooked, now! Here's a link to one of our faves...

<https://www.worldmarket.com/product/aaa+grapefruit+and+tangerine+bar+soap.do?sortBy=ourPicks&from=Search>

Have you tried microfiber wash cloths for bathing and cleaning your face? It took some getting used to, because they're so soft...but boy do they lather! We both prefer them now. They are great for removing makeup and they clean so well, and dry out in a flash! Just an added tip...because we love them and have switched to them...all in white! I cannot recall where I bought them, but look for them and get a pack. You'll love them! They're so soft, they're hard to hold!

Life Right Now – Never Alone – by Bethany Gomez

A recent trial provided a growth moment for me. I believe you can choose to either go through trials or grow through trials. At the time, I wanted to be upset and just get through it, but I was presented with the choice to change my attitude and grow through it, even though it was a struggle. My choice: grow.

It was a Sunday, and my sister was at work. I've gone to church by myself before but for some reason, I was not too happy with having to go to church alone this time. Satan picked up on my discontentment and decided to take full advantage. As I was driving to church, having begrudgingly convinced myself to go, I started crying out to God about how tired I was of going to church alone. And yes, a few "why" questions managed to escape. I knew how ridiculous my thoughts were, but I didn't care at that point to take my thoughts captive and allow some truth to come in and replace the lies swirling around in my mind. I was intent on feeling how I was feeling.

When I arrived at church, I absolutely put on a "mask" to hide what was going on. I had a feeling the only people I would converse with at church anyway would be the greeters, and I was right. Well, I was almost right. I did share a few words with a friend that sat with me; however, she had to leave early. But that was about it. I walked out feeling so alone and unseen.

I got into my sweltering hot car, blasted the AC and started the long trek back home. Normally, I would've taken a few major, busy highways to get home, but instead I went a route home that I'd never taken before. In the moment, of course, I had no idea that taking that route was a total God thing. About halfway home, I started getting hit with warm air blowing from my vents. Concern immediately set in, because I thought my AC had just broken in the middle of summer and the temperature was almost 100 degrees outside. Then my eye caught the needle on the cold and hot gauge, which was slowly rising. Common sense kicked in and I immediately turned off the AC and watched the indicator go down a little, but then it continued to creep back up. For the most part, I remained calm. This was partly because I didn't see any smoke or steam coming from my hood. I knew I just wanted to get as close to home as I could before the needle reached the H. I knew I had a better chance of doing that if I didn't get caught at any lights. The light I was coming up on thankfully turned green, and I slowly made my way into downtown Round Rock where I turned down a side street and shut off my car.

Looking back, I'm surprised I kept it together because I could no longer call on the one person that would know what to do, my dad. He had come to my rescue so many times when car problems arose. He now lives almost two hours away. I couldn't call my sister, either, to come pick me up. I knew my brother wasn't nearby and usually worked on Sundays, but I called him just to get some level-headed advice on what I should do. He was at work and would be for a few more hours, so he gave me some options on how to get home and said when he got off maybe he could help me get my car home. I made a few phone calls to some of my closest friends, and thankfully one of their husbands was on the way home from church and gladly picked me up. I have some amazing friends!

I wonder if you can guess what I did when I got home to an empty house. Yup, I cried...a lot. To quote one of my favorite movies, I was in the "depths of despair." I could barely muster a single prayer.

When my brother arrived, he noticed the state I was in. He took me aside and told me everything would be okay. He told me stop worrying because I did not even know what was really wrong with my car and it does no good to worry about anything when we serve a mighty God. I didn't want to hear it, but every word that was coming out of his mouth was true.

"Has God not ever taken care of you and provided everything you need?" He asked.

He then shared a testimony of how God came through financially for him and his family on a recent trip they went on. I couldn't deny anymore that I needed to change my mindset and trust God. And the answer to that question he asked me was no. God has always provided everything that I need and I knew He wouldn't stop now. The peace that came when I finally chose to put my trust in God was a wonderful feeling. My thoughts were still on upcoming car repair costs and wondering how I was going to be able to afford everything, but they were no longer in this hopeless state full of worry.

Matthew 6:27 says, "Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?"

In the end, it was my radiator that busted. My dad was able to come that next Saturday to install another. He has saved me so much money in car repair costs, it's utterly unbelievable. I don't know how I will ever repay him. I know he doesn't expect me to, but I hope one day I can give him something for all the man hours he's spent on fixing my cars.

God had it all taken care of the moment it happened. He guided me down that less busy route home, gave me friends that picked me up and took me home, and gave me an older brother that was willing to help me figure out what was wrong with my car. Above all, He gave me an amazing earthly father that loves me and is always willing to help with anything that he can, one of them being the ability to do major car repairs. I was never unseen, and never alone.

John 16:33

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace.
In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Created for Life – Ancient Keys – by Ginny Hurley

Last month, I wrote about mysteries. However, I feel that there is so much more! This month, I decided to study about ancient doors that have been locked long ago, and the ancient keys, lost.

The term *ancient* means old, long ago in the past, before the fall of the Roman Empire, beyond time. I've seen pictures of ancient castles and traveled to places like Ephesus where crumbling ruins stand in all their ancient glory. Now the people that lived there and the things surrounding their lifestyles have flown away, leaving rubble and stones. Memories of past victories are in history books where few travel. Such cultures and ideas are long lost.

Yet, there are ancient treasures submerged in darkness that are coming to light, hidden for kings to uncover.

*Isaiah 22:22 says,
"I will place upon His shoulders the
key to the treasures of David's palace. He will open doors
that no one can shut, and He will shut doors that no one
can open."*

The Passion translation says that the doors He opens are doors of revelation, treasures, favor, and opportunity. When He closes those doors, no amount of human striving can open them.

Human authority is always temporary; therefore, when Jesus took back the keys to the Kingdom that were lost from sin, there were ancient doors still waiting for His people to discover and open. Clearly, in Matthew 16:18-19, Jesus said He was giving the keys of heaven's realm to Peter and His church.

Treasures hidden since ancient days are still there for light to uncover. In Matthew 5:14, Jesus also told the church that we are lights, just as He is THE Light. Darkness will never overpower light. The least flicker illuminates a large cavern.

As I was searching through pictures of ancient doors, my heart began to awaken to finding the specific keys that open these doors. Revelation is to reveal our identities, but ultimately for the sake of others. A word of wisdom, a still small voice, a word of knowledge can change the direction of a lost and hurting friend. Favor, shown by God to us, brings joy and generosity to hopeless and fearful neighbors as we recognize the source of our favor. Problems are solved by heaven's strategies. A nation without water has a problem. God has given His people a key. Cancer, Alzheimer's, and other sicknesses are a problem. God has given His people a key. Jesus said He would give us the keys of heaven's realm to forbid on earth that which is forbidden in heaven, and to release on earth that which is released in heaven.

Our job is to find the right key, search the darkness, listen to His voice, become intimately acquainted with Him and open these ancient doors, benefitting people and nations. He came to earth for people. He shed His blood for people, all people. Because Jesus loves all people, He yearns for us to look for keys, dig for clues, call on Holy Spirit

to reveal the treasures set in place just for His children to discover. They will change the world, one person at a time and whole nations together.

I believe the earth is groaning for answers and freedom. Every problem has an answer. Jesus has that answer for everyone. He grieves when others are hurting and loves to share His secrets. A spirit of wisdom has been given to us, and just as Solomon asked for wisdom, so can we.

Recently, we had Drew Neal speak at our church, and he called us *Solutionaries*. I love that! We are God's answers to a world in need. Poverty is a problem that God cares about. Greed is a problem. We can complain continuously about problems. Jesus is the answer and He has given us the keys. We are God's *Solutionaries*.

Let's ask heaven. Let's shine our light in dark places. No more hiding in fear from sin. It's our honor as sons and daughters. It's our heritage as kings and queens. Treasures are for royalty and we are a royal priesthood. Salvation includes everything about us, not just fire insurance. God cares about our lives in every detail. He is personal. Jesus said that when He walked by, the Kingdom was here. Fullness in every way walked by that day.

They missed it, and so have we. Let's gather together for God's full victory. He is reforming our culture, and transforming minds. Nothing is left out of His finished work. He broke out of the grave clothes and then told us to...

GO!

Tell the world!

Be ME on the earth through My great Comforter.

Spread it out to the ends of the world.

Colossians 1:27

*To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles
the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*



MARRIAGE

After 40 Years – The Sandwich – by Marcy Lytle

“Lord, help me be nice.”

It's a simple prayer that I have to pray multiple times a day...sometimes. I can get busy, in a dither, or just feel blah and just start being short, mean, and sarcastic to the one I love so much – my husband. Can you relate at all?

Just yesterday we ate lunch at a place where he was satisfied with his meal and I was completely disgusted with mine. The food was inedible and left a bad taste in my mouth. So you can imagine that I was complaining as we got in the car to leave, and I really wanted an ice cream cone or “something” to remove the bad taste and make me happy.

We turned down a street where a Sonic sat on the left hand side. I wasn't too thrilled with that choice, but we pulled in and looked at the menu, where all of the desserts were listed – but NO ice cream cone. They just had these blast things that I don't care for. (Yes, I'm super picky with my eating!) I was still irritated, and upset that he pulled into Sonic because I had told him they didn't have cones. I know, I sound like an ogre, and I was being one. I admit it.

As we were about to back out, he saw the screen change images and said, “Wait!” I think I saw an ice cream sandwich. (I do love those...)

I snapped back and said, “No! There's nothing on that menu that I want. Let's just go.”

He was insistent and pulled back up, and there it popped up, stared us both in the face – an Oreo ice cream sandwich.

Right then, I was disappointed in myself for not listening and being “nice” to my husband who was only trying to help me become satisfied in my dissatisfied state.

I was very happy, we ordered the treat, and I began to eat.

Right then, I felt that little twinge of guilt for hounding him, griping so much, and being such a toddler by throwing an adult tantrum.

That prayer surfaced onto my whispering lips again,

“Lord, help me be nice.”

It's like a tumbleweed; that attitude and disposition of mine. It can be content and still, sitting in the shade, until the wind blows. Something happens that is irritating. I'm tired and should have rested. I feel blah and want the world to offer me joy. It can be any number of swirls in the atmosphere that come behind me and push that tumbleweed attitude right out of the restful shade into the hot sun, tumbling and tossing around, all the while screaming, “Bet you can't catch me!” as my poor husband is running beside me with a fan and a net, trying to corral me once again back to solitude and peace.

Now, that's quite a confession, isn't it? I can be rotten to the core, some days. I can be just like my kids when they were in their car seats in the back whining for another piece of candy, or wipes for their sticky hands, or that toy that fell into the floorboard that they cannot reach.

Thankfully, my husband forgives me over and over again for those words of ugliness that escape from my lips that need a good smack – and I'm not talking about the romantic kind!

What prayer do you whisper that calms your soul and readjusts your attitude?

He hears us all, and He's so patient and longsuffering, because He knows we get tired and irritated and frustrated over little things that pile up into big things that send us reeling...

That ice cream sandwich saved the day. And my persistent husband caught the screen and insisted on pulling back up, and he too saved the day. My taste buds were happy, I said I was sorry, and we ended up downtown hand in hand, strolling in the heat of the day as happy as can be.

"Lord, help me be nice."

In This Together – Either Way – by Bekah Holland

Why don't we celebrate more?

Of course we celebrate the big things...birthdays, anniversaries, births. But what about the other days?

As I write this, I'm waiting (and waiting and waiting...) to hear back about a job I interviewed for. It's one I've wanted for quite some time, and I've put off other opportunities in order to wait for just the right fit. And in my mind, this is it. This is what I've been working toward for months. But in the meantime, until the powers that be decide to share their decision, I'm in this weird (okay, awful) holding pattern. I want this, but I also want what God has planned for me, even if this isn't it. However, waiting is THE WORST! I can live with a no. I can live with a yes. But *wait* is not high on my list of personal strengths. But I also know from experience, sometimes God says, "Wait," too.

Thankfully, I have a great husband who supports my goals and dreams and wants God's best for me too. So while I (not so) patiently wait for news, I got this text from him. "Hey babe, please let me know as soon as you hear something. ***We'll celebrate either way.***" Those simple words were like a cool breeze on a hot Texas day. He didn't care if I got it, other than that it was important to me. He wanted to celebrate not only my successes, but also my attempts, whether I succeed or not. Where has this been all my life?? Why haven't we been doing this all along? His simple text made me feel so understood. Because I stepped out of where I'm comfortable...and that's hard.

In case you don't know this about me, I really, really like to be comfortable. I wear t-shirts and flip flops. My life goals include making my bed the most comfortable space in existence and finding stretchy pants that don't look like stretchy pants. And when I get good at something, especially in my career, I like to stay there. Forever. But I was willing to get uncomfortable. And my husband noticed and wants to celebrate with or without the promotion. That makes me want to celebrate each other more. Not just big moves and big days. I want to celebrate life and love and all of the everyday normal stuff in between. I want to celebrate good tries as well as good grades. I want to celebrate when I get off my butt and exercise three days this week.

Because, I'll be honest, I need more celebrating in my life.

Apparently my husband has seen and heard this without me saying the words. Or really even realizing it myself. Because his words set something off in my heart! A reverberating YES in my soul. That's it! That's what I've forgotten. I've forgotten to be proud and excited for all of it. My husband reminded me how important it is, not only to celebrate life, but also how it feels to be understood by someone. How vital it is to my heart to be seen...good, bad and all the junk in the middle.

So take some time this month. Listen. Don't listen just to respond. But truly listen. Watch. Pray. Find something that someone you love is saying, even if it's just a whisper. Because often, in our quietest whispers comes our deepest needs. To be seen. To be understood. And ultimately to be loved...without condition.

After 40 Years – The Sandwich – by Marcy Lytle

“Lord, help me be nice.”

It's a simple prayer that I have to pray multiple times a day...sometimes. I can get busy, in a dither, or just feel blah and just start being short, mean, and sarcastic to the one I love so much – my husband. Can you relate at all?

Just yesterday we ate lunch at a place where he was satisfied with his meal and I was completely disgusted with mine. The food was inedible and left a bad taste in my mouth. So you can imagine that I was complaining as we got in the car to leave, and I really wanted an ice cream cone or “something” to remove the bad taste and make me happy.

We turned down a street where a Sonic sat on the left hand side. I wasn't too thrilled with that choice, but we pulled in and looked at the menu, where all of the desserts were listed – but NO ice cream cone. They just had these blast things that I don't care for. (Yes, I'm super picky with my eating!) I was still irritated, and upset that he pulled into Sonic because I had told him they didn't have cones. I know, I sound like an ogre, and I was being one. I admit it.

As we were about to back out, he saw the screen change images and said, “Wait!” I think I saw an ice cream sandwich. (I do love those...)

I snapped back and said, “No! There's nothing on that menu that I want. Let's just go.”

He was insistent and pulled back up, and there it popped up, stared us both in the face – an Oreo ice cream sandwich.

Right then, I was disappointed in myself for not listening and being “nice” to my husband who was only trying to help me become satisfied in my dissatisfied state.

I was very happy, we ordered the treat, and I began to eat.

Right then, I felt that little twinge of guilt for hounding him, griping so much, and being such a toddler by throwing an adult tantrum.

That prayer surfaced onto my whispering lips again,

“Lord, help me be nice.”

It's like a tumbleweed; that attitude and disposition of mine. It can be content and still, sitting in the shade, until the wind blows. Something happens that is irritating. I'm tired and should have rested. I feel blah and want the world to offer me joy. It can be any number of swirls in the atmosphere that come behind me and push that tumbleweed attitude right out of the restful shade into the hot sun, tumbling and tossing around, all the while screaming, “Bet you can't catch me!” as my poor husband is running beside me with a fan and a net, trying to corral me once again back to solitude and peace.

Now, that's quite a confession, isn't it? I can be rotten to the core, some days. I can be just like my kids when they were in their car seats in the back whining for another piece of candy, or wipes for their sticky hands, or that toy that fell into the floorboard that they cannot reach.

Thankfully, my husband forgives me over and over again for those words of ugliness that escape from my lips that need a good smack – and I'm not talking about the romantic kind!

What prayer do you whisper that calms your soul and readjusts your attitude?

He hears us all, and He's so patient and longsuffering, because He knows we get tired and irritated and frustrated over little things that pile up into big things that send us reeling...

That ice cream sandwich saved the day. And my persistent husband caught the screen and insisted on pulling back up, and he too saved the day. My taste buds were happy, I said I was sorry, and we ended up downtown hand in hand, strolling in the heat of the day as happy as can be.

"Lord, help me be nice."

Date Night Fun – Music to My Ears – by Marcy Lytle

We recently spent a while doing something before we went back in our house, after returning from a walk, and it was quite refreshing and fun. I thought it would be fun to incorporate that activity into date night ideas this month. What was it? Just look below and see, and then try one of these ideas in this month of September. September marks the start of a new season where temperatures finally start to fall a little and we look forward to all the new scents and sights of autumn. It may as well be a new season for time together while you enjoy a bit of listening, too!

Playlist – I frequent YouTube more than my husband does and recently, I had saved quite a few songs that I love. In fact, my son had sent me a song by Tom Walker called “Leave the Light On” and it is one of my faves, so we started with it. For this idea, go out for the evening to a neighborhood near your own and take a long walk, observing the houses and their yards and their décor. Stop for an ice cream cone or slurpee, then pull up in your driveway and sit in the car and go through your playlist, as you listen to tunes together. This activity calmed us both, brought a few tears to our eyes, and it resulted in us praying together. A perfect date!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kCntEnZD3NE>

Vintage – For this date idea, search your area for thrift stores and decide ahead of time what you can spend. Look for old band tshirts from groups that you love, and also purchase an album or two. If you have an old record player, play these when you get home and enjoy a snack together – like biscuits sprinkled with sugar and strawberries on top. If you don’t have a turntable and love this idea, consider buying one – they’re not that much (under 40 bucks on Amazon.) And make this regular date night idea that you do over and over again.

https://www.amazon.com/Victrola-Bluetooth-Suitcase-Turntable-Turquoise/dp/B00UMVVUOC?ref=Oct_BSellerC_3003611_0&pf_rd_p=4c77e881-d48a-556c-ba85-cd68cb17bcb9&pf_rd_s=merchandised-search-6&pf_rd_t=101&pf_rd_i=3003611&pf_rd_m=ATVPDKIKX0DER&pf_rd_r=SH4BRVESPO1TA1PFWKJ&pf_rd_r=SH4BRVESPO1TA1PFWKJ&pf_rd_p=4c77e881-d48a-556c-ba85-cd68cb17bcb9

<https://www.pillsbury.com/recipes/grands-strawberry-shortcakes/cd2f11bd-5038-447c-85f5-f944a2e4b14a>

Competition – If there’s a musical show on television that you both like and enjoy watching, like The Voice or American Idol, or other musical themed shows, make it a date night in and dress up for the occasion as if you’re going to the actual show itself! Make appetizers and fun drinks, set a large tablecloth out on the floor and make it a fun feast. When you’re done, pull out your old trivia cards and only ask the music or entertainment questions of each other, until one of you has answered at least five correctly.

<https://www.tasteofhome.com/recipes/tune-a-piano-sandwiches/>

Double the Beat – Invite another couple to join you cruise your town, listening to unknown musicians. Find one playing in a couple of coffee shops, stop on the street if there's a musician or singer performing, and settle in a jazz club, if you can find one near you. Put together your dollar bills and purpose to give a tip to each one, and maybe purchase a CD. Pull up where you can overlook your city and observe the stars and the moon, and sing a few tunes together before heading home.

Splurge – Look at the performances near you for a musical, a symphony or a concert and save up to go. Outdoor theaters have probably closed for the summer season, so save up to go to an actual indoor musical performance. You pick out his outfit, and let him pick out yours (if you dare.) Before you go, stop for a quick bite to eat at your favorite fast food (yes, in your dressy clothes). It will be fun! Oh, and wear one of these new hairclips – they're everywhere this season!

<https://www.rue21.com/store/jump/product/2-Pack-Gold-Pearl-Studded-Hair-Clips/0117-001811-0008174-0077>

Music is that universal language, isn't it? Find your common interests, or let him choose and then you. But incorporate tunes, lyrics, and movement into date night often. It will lift your spirits and make you smile...together.



ENCOURAGEMENT

Best of the Mess – Peaceful Waiting – by Ashley Zanella

I look out and I'm standing on a dock - the water is still around me.

It's early morning, fall, some fog is gathering around the edges of the water.

It's peaceful here and in this season where everything stands still, I feel a tender giddiness knowing that soon, the sun will rise, the air will warm and the fog will slowly dissipate into the trees and bushes that surround the water.

Ever since I was a child, I have absolutely loved foggy mornings. My bus stop was approximately one mile away from our house. Childhood was such a traumatic time in my life, so walking alone in the fog, wearing my fall boots for the first time and listening to Avril Lavigne was something I craved and looked forward to. It was a promise that tomorrow would be better. I didn't know where I would go in life, but I knew that if I took the right steps and was patient, things would brighten up a bit.

Fast forward to now. This week, I finally heard back about a job I have been interviewing for, during the past month. The position has been put on hold until at least September while they go through something internally within the business. No feedback was offered when I asked. They said everyone enjoyed their time and conversations with me in each interview.

It would be a lie to say that I didn't feel disappointment to not get this position, but at the same time there is also peace. I had been praying for peace on their decision and whatever happens from here, and one of my friends happened to pray over me. While he was praying with my husband and me, he said that I would get an unexpected offer and that it would fulfill all of our needs.

I still don't know what that means. I have no clue if that position will be re-opened in September and if I am the primary candidate for it. I have no clue if I am going to find an even better opportunity in the meantime. I have no idea what will happen today or tomorrow.

However, I do know that I am at peace.

I'm sitting on that dock, and now my feet are fully submerged in the crisp water, patiently waiting for that sun to rise and warm the waters. And in the meantime, I think I'll enjoy the view for a little while longer.

Firmly Planted – Hold on, Hang on, Let Go – by Dina Cavazos

The scorching heat of late summer has me holding on to the fact that it will end and fall will come. After all, every year of my life so far, fall has followed summer. Whether the cooler weather arrives in September, October, or November, eventually, it comes. Right now I'm holding on, but if 100 degrees lingers too long, I may have to *hang on*. I'll remind myself that I don't really want to relocate and I really *can* make it without a pool, and the winters are really pretty nice, as winters go.

My plants are holding on too. June and July were unusually cool and wet for our area; otherwise, they would be hanging on to life about now. As it is, the less heat tolerant plants wilt under the death star, but perk up by morning. A cool drink of water helps them revive so they can hold on for another day, to repeat the cycle once more. This exercise of holding on and hanging on is one I'm well acquainted with, and I'm guessing you are too, because we all come from the same Garden. In my life journey I've held on to a lot of things, both positive and negative. I've held on to expectations and "the way things should be," struggling to enter an evasive peace, struggling with forces that opposed every attempt to make good things happen.

My children were raised in the midst of a dysfunctional relationship. I used to think he was the dysfunctional one, and he was, but I've come to see my own dysfunction and accept responsibility for my part in it. During those very difficult years, I not only held on, I *hung on* to survive—not physically, but in every other way. Back then, I was holding on to emptiness. I didn't have a solid foundation of truth, so my desire was for a life the "world" had held out to me. It was a good life I wanted: a lasting marriage with happy healthy children, and basic needs met—nothing wrong with that. However, the problem was that I wanted the life without the Life-Giver, and I was totally unaware of it. The life I was trying to hold on to didn't fit together—it was like making a picture from a mixed bag of puzzle pieces. My inability to create a cohesive stable life for myself and my children finally led to *hanging on* in desperation. By this time, I was reaching for the Life-Giver. Part of me was hanging on to the dream that had become a nightmare, and part of me was hanging on to promises I could barely understand. The moment came when I had to choose: hang on, or let go.

In the years since that letting-go breakthrough, my focus has been more on the Life-Giver and he's taught me more about holding on, hanging on, and letting go. It's taken more than a few lessons, and, of course, it never ends. Thankfully, my life isn't a never-ending cycle of desperation and revival, and hasn't been for a long time. Other than the arrival of fall, the object of my holding on isn't a thing I want to happen or a life I want to live. I hold on to Life itself, which is Christ, the living Word that has Life **in Himself**. I hold on to his words that bring truth to my soul. Until God's Kingdom is manifested on earth, as it is in heaven, I will always be holding on to a higher truth than my eyes are able to see. Because in this world we have tribulation, I will sometimes have to desperately hang on until that higher truth takes hold of me. It's then that will I find the peace of *letting go*, and fall into the Living Water.

Moving Forward – Even in Loss – by Pam Charro

I was thinking a little too hard a couple of weeks ago about love and life.

I thought about loving a pet for 15 years and losing it to death. I thought about raising children and having them grow up and leave. And I thought about loving a spouse for many years who was unable to return that love. In all of those scenarios, an investment of love was made that ended in pain. And I wondered,

Where does all that love go?
What do we get for all of that giving?

At work the next day, I was talking to a friend who had just adopted a puppy. She was frustrated because she wasn't getting any sleep, and was considering giving the puppy back. I said, "You know, people with pets live longer."

And that was when it hit me. Asking where the love went was the wrong question. What I should have been asking instead was,

"What did that love accomplish?"

Because love is never wasted, even when it doesn't end well.

Yes, it hurts to lose a loved one, when a relationship changes, and when love isn't returned. Ultimately, it would be great if those we love never left and always loved us back. Losing at love can feel absolutely devastating.

The truth is, though, that even in loss, love has created something beautiful: US! We are the ones who benefit by loving because the love that was in us changed us. We became softer of heart, more selfless, more patient and forbearing, more like our Father who created us.

Simply more beautiful.

What could be more valuable than that? No wonder people with pets live longer. The love inside of them just may have created more years of life!

God, make me a vessel that reflects your love. Give me wisdom to remember that love is always worth it because of the work that it does.

Even if it's just in me.

Real Stories – Puzzling – by Shellie Cleveland

For many years, I was NOT a puzzle person. My sweet mother-in-law often has a puzzle out on a card table in their living room and she invites her family to work on it with her while they visit. I would sit down with her and pretend I was trying to put in pieces, but I was mostly enjoying the social time with all the folks at the table. I just didn't get the allure of puzzles. It did not seem like fun to me – it was work.

Then last year at Christmas time, I sat down to play with my 6 year old great nephew, Rhett, and he wanted to do a puzzle. My sister had some 48 piece Christmas puzzles among the toys for her grandkids, so we picked one and got started. Rhett was very good at putting together the puzzle and in a short time we had it done. He spotted another puzzle he wanted us to do next, but it was considerably more difficult – 500 pieces and they were small. I was skeptical about our ability to complete it, but he was very persuasive, so we dumped out the puzzle and started searching for edge pieces. It was a lot harder than he realized, and he lost interest after a little while and left me alone at the table.

I am not sure why, but for some reason, I decided I would finish the puzzle instead of putting it back in the box. I felt a little challenge in the back of my mind. *Could I do it?* We were staying at my sister's house for a few days for Christmas and I worked on the puzzle whenever I got a chance. My 87 year old mom helped me a little bit, and I realized that her eyesight had deteriorated more than I thought. She had a very hard time putting pieces together. My sister, my niece, and my husband Andy all helped too. I enjoyed connecting with each of them while we sat at the card table and worked on the puzzle. Rhett would bounce in every now and then and put in a piece, too.

I noticed that the puzzle pulled in all the different generations. We got about three-fourths of it completed but then it was time to pack up and head to my in-laws for Christmas with that side of the family. Oh well, maybe we would get it done next year.

Not surprisingly, when we arrived at my in-laws, there was a puzzle out, and I sat down and really worked on it this time. We had it put together pretty quickly, and I was a little disappointed it was done so fast. Something had changed, and *I was actually having fun doing puzzles.*

The following week when my sister came to see me she said, "I brought you a surprise." Her husband went out to their car and brought back a large square piece of plywood wrapped in foil and laid it on the table. I pulled back the foil and there was my almost finished Christmas puzzle laying on a poster board. She laughed and said, "You and Andy were having so much fun working on the puzzle, I thought I would bring it to you. So I slid it off the table onto the poster board and wrapped it up on the plywood. Now you can finish it." It sounds crazy, but I was really excited she brought it to us to finish. We worked on it during the rest of our holiday time and put the last piece in on New Year's Eve.

I don't exactly understand it, but I really had a great feeling of accomplishment completing that 500 piece Christmas puzzle. Maybe that is why we have intentionally started puzzling.

We went to Andy's aunt's house on New Year's Day and she just happened to mention she had some puzzles she wanted to get rid of, so I went upstairs to the game room with my mother-in-law and sister-in-law and I picked out two puzzles to take home. I found out there is a whole puzzle network among our family and friends that I didn't know about! They share and trade puzzles. And now, I was in the loop. I wasn't sure if this trend of liking puzzles would last, so I thought to myself, I will do these two and see where it goes.

The first one – a snowman theme was done by Jan 5th and I posted it on Facebook. The second one – a wildflower theme was done by Jan 13th and I posted a picture on Facebook again. I am glad I have been taking pictures and posting them when we finish a puzzle, because it is very easy to lose

track of which ones we have done and how long it took to complete them. We have already passed several on to other people in the puzzle network, and Facebook friends who puzzle are now dropping bags of puzzles on our door step!

To date, we have completed nine, and we always have a couple waiting in the wings. We average about two a month, although we did one per week in January. We don't have any official time line for the puzzles and no pressure, but I think the cold weather contributed to our faster pace in the winter. We just work on them when we feel like it, in the evenings and on weekends, sometimes individually, but often together.

Andy will come up to me in the kitchen or while we are watching TV and say, "You wanna puzzle?"

So we go to the dining room and sit down at the table and work on it together. We have different approaches to puzzling, which I think is funny. I feel that you **MUST** start with the edges first. I mean, how can you figure out where the other pieces go, if you don't have the edges in place? Andy, on the other hand, will pick up a piece and scrutinize it closely, very thoughtfully comparing it to the picture on the box.

He will then place it on the table in the middle of my carefully constructed edge ring, with no connecting pieces and say triumphantly, "It goes here."

I always say, "You don't know that!"

But often he is right and I am dumbfounded. I look to match the shapes of the pieces and he matches the colors in the pieces. We do it differently but we each have our strengths, and they complement each other, much like most things in our 37-year marriage. We have found that puzzling is very relaxing, even if the puzzles are hard. Sometimes we talk as we puzzle, but often we sit in silence, quietly working side by side. When we get down to the last few pieces, Andy always lets me put in the final piece because I enjoy it so much. I have gotten up in the morning and found the lone, final piece waiting for me to put it in and complete the puzzle. That is love!

We have gradually worked up to more difficult puzzles, the hardest one being the hot air balloon puzzle pictured here. 1500 tiny pieces!! It was beautiful and hard but very fun and satisfying to finish. It is one we will keep and do again. Nowadays, we have a puzzle out on our dining room table all the time.

We are officially puzzle people. And it is puzzling, but also very fun and rewarding.

Simple Truths - It's A Wonderful Life – by Erica Simmons

The film with the above name is without a doubt one of my all-time favorite Christmas movies. In it is one of my favorite actors, James Stewart. It's full of romance, humor and is a powerful story. But on to what I have to say...

In last month's article, I decided to boldly step out and share a tremendously personal story about my son. Writing the article was easy because it was a story of struggle and of hope. The day I finished was the Sunday after Jordan made a not so smart decision while spending time with former and current member of our church youth group. That day I made the rounds to a few parents and the youth leaders sharing how I handled the issue with Jordan. As in my story, I was open and honest about Jordan's marijuana use. I know where we have been on this journey and felt that where we were was a better place. After talking with one couple, I started to doubt that after one comment and the look on their faces. Let's just say that spiritually things went downhill from there.

One of my favorite authors, Joyce Myers, described in one of her books how we have these faith gardens. This is just a paraphrase of the main idea. We patiently sow our seeds of faith and just about time we are going to get our breakthrough, the enemy attacks and we start pulling up all our seeds in an emotional fit. Janice Seney said it this way: We are driving down the highway of life in the right lane headed towards our breakthrough and something happens, and we move out of the lane we need to be in and miss our blessing.

To say I was discouraged after that conversation mentioned above would be a huge understatement. I had been so hopeful, because Jordan's marijuana use had decreased and he had not moved on to more dangerous drugs. However, the question posed to me was about how long he had been using, which I believe is now four years. I asked myself, "Am I just looking for excuses to make myself feel better about this and to give myself false hope?" By the time I had driven home from church, I was done with Christianity, I was hurt because I knew how I raised my children and felt that God did not protect them. I was done and had made up my mind to leave the church. I spent the rest of the day solidifying my decision.

I was tired. And this brings me back to *It's a Wonderful Life*.

I love a lot of things about that movie and on Monday I got to add another thing to that list. In the movie when George is at his very lowest, the Creator of the universe went into action to show George how important he was and how much he was loved not just by those around him, but by the Creator of the universe as well. He sent a guardian and JUST for George. This was not someone on his way to help someone else and had a little extra time to help George. This angel was sent for the sole purpose of saving George, of encouraging him at his lowest point when he felt like no one else even cared. That was how I went to bed that night.

Monday morning, I woke up to an email from the editor of THYME. I was having doubts about the article and was not sure I wanted to let it go to print. We went back and forth via email that morning, not just about the story. She shared some wise, kind and encouraging words with me. It was just the beginning of the encouragement God had in store for me.

When I bought my house a few years back, the realtor was a dear friend and fellow church member, and a few months ago he started sending out what he calls Monday Morning Coffee. He starts with an update on the state of the housing market and then goes into an inspirational story. This one started with this quote.

“Life is not about waiting for the storm to pass... it’s about learning to dance in the rain”. – Vivian Green.

That alone blew my mind. The story went on to share the story of a minister who was getting ready to preach at school conference. The minister was not feeling well and had been invited down early to hear the performer they had scheduled as well, and shared the impact it had on his life. The performer had an amazing story of his own; his name is Patrick Henry Hughes. I don’t have time to share the story here, but if you take the time each month to read the stories in this magazine, please take the time to look up his story. It is an amazing one. The minister went back to his home and shared his experience with his church called...

Simple Truths

Did you just get goose bumps? (Read the name of my column). I hit reply back to my friend and said, “I needed this!” You see? This is what God always does, simple things, small things, to encourage us and to keep our faith going. It was these things that I started to doubt, the simple truths. These are the things I wondered if by grasping onto them that I was desperately trying to make ugly situations look better than they were. If told to someone who was not walking the Christian life, they could easily be brushed off as coincidences. Isolated in one-on-one situations, they can, but I have a lifetime of these small encounters with God.

When I was at my lowest point, discouraged and hurting, God showed up.

I think about the opening scene in the movie and of all the people praying for George, many of them because of the things George did for them, things some would say were simple and small, but for those involved they made a big difference. Clarence asked if George was sick and the voice of God said, “No, worse. He is discouraged.” Being discouraged is worse than being sick. In sickness you have hope that medicine and treatment will help, but when discouraged we have crossed the line and let go of or lost our hope. That was me on that Sunday in July. I had let go of my hope, the one thing that I had that was allowing me to dance in the storm. The enemy wanted to tear up my garden of faith that I had been patiently sowing. He was trying to force me out of my lane where my blessing awaited me, but my God was having none of it. All (and I mean all) the areas I was having doubts about - God addressed.

By the end of Monday, I was starting to see how some of the psalms can start out so deep, dark sad and end with such praise for our God. I discovered that life truly is wonderful, not because it is perfect, but because I don’t have to walk it alone. I can choose to dance in the storm. And if that is putting lipstick on a pig, then bring on the pig. I’ve got plenty of lipstick.



FRESH THYME

FRESH THYME – Above the Shots – by Marcy Lytle

What the world needs now is love sweet love...it's the only thing...

You probably can sing the song that goes with those lyrics. And it's a good song, and so true. The world needs love, not hate. Hate causes mass killings, like we've been witnessing in the past days. And mass killings incite fear and anxiety among all of us. What is this world coming to?

Lately, I've been thinking about all the things we promote that are good. Things like positive thoughts, good vibes, random acts of kindness, and yes even love, sweet love. We promote love for all people, regardless of age, ethnicity, gender, economic status, and more. All of those things are wonderful...and yet hate persists and people are dying.

People are dying in their sin. Yes, I said the word sin. There is such a thing as sin. And what the world needs now to eradicate sin among us (all of us) is the love of Jesus. Human love is flawed, fickle, and fabulous all at the same time. We're in love with one spouse today and another in a few years. We are smitten with our newborn baby and she loves us, and then that same child can't stand us when she's a teenager. Human love can only go so far, because it's human. It's limited. It's dependent on mood, feelings, hurts, and wounds, and whether or not we can overcome hurt and trauma and all of the things this world inflicts upon all of us, including mental illness.

I don't think it's trite or a cliché to say what we need is Jesus. His name has been pushed aside and only heard as a curse word in a movie, it's only used in anger when we're mad at our children, and we only see a picture of him on Catholic candles in the Dollar Store. Jesus is not represented and lifted up as he should be, so our world either doesn't know who he is, or doesn't have a clue of his character and power and authority and love on this earth...to change us all.

- At the name of Jesus, darkness flees.
- In the name of Jesus, people are healed.
- With the name of Jesus, inherited tendencies toward destruction let go.
- At the sound of Jesus' name by those who love him, demons run the other way.
- As we share the love of Jesus that took him to the cross, the chained are set free.
- With the proclamation of the name of Jesus in worship, He is exalted.
- When the name of Jesus is exalted, all men are drawn to Him.

It's then and only then that we will see change on this earth, when his name is taken from the pages of the bible and demonstrated in love, joy and peace to those around us as we share with them the character of the God who so loved the world that he gave...he gave his son...that son's name is Jesus. That son, the perfect holy sacrifice, died on a cross to make a way for us to have relationship with a holy God that is over all, knows all, and can heal all of our wounds and all of our diseases.

But if we, the ones that know his love and forgiveness and power, never say his name, because we're ashamed or afraid, they will never know.

We don't have to apologize or explain Jesus. We just have to know him and represent who He is, not who he's not. He's not an accuser. That's the enemy that's whispering lies into the ears of the killers. He's not a legalist, imposing laws and restraints upon people, but rather offering freedom to live. He's not a mean Father, sending people to hell because of wrongdoings, but rather One that offers grace to live eternally and never die.

Jesus. Jesus.

You makes the darkness tremble.

Jesus. Jesus.

You silence fear.

Do you know that song? If not, look it up. Sing it with your children, sing it to your own soul, sing it loud and sing it clear for all the world to hear...so that what they need, what the world needs now, can be heard above the all the deafening and deadly shots...

Jesus

FRESH THYME – Eco-Anxiety – by Marcy Lytle

Have you heard of this? I hadn't until recently. It appears that many people, probably of the younger generation, have this anxiety about the future of our planet. From plastics to waste to global warming and extinction of species, it's a real concern for those who plan to live here for many more decades. In fact, there are those that are telling us to "panic" so that we will get on board and do something about all of this!

We are told that glaciers are melting; we have about a dozen years until our lives are vastly affected by climate change, and other scary things are occurring that can certainly cause panic.

I was talking about this with my husband recently and we recalled how when microwaves came out, we were told by some media sources that they caused cancer, not to stand near them when we cook, and all sorts of things that kept us from buying one for a long time. Fast forward decades and we're still alive and kicking.

We began purchasing bottled water, because we were told that tap water was full of toxins and that bottled water was the best way to go, to stay healthy. However, we now are told to abandon plastic water bottles altogether and carry metal or glass bottles, to save from dumping the plastic into landfills.

I'm not necessarily comparing apples to apples, but I am talking about the media and news sources that we listen to. I think it's wise to be aware of our surroundings, and certainly smart to take care of the planet on which we live. That's just common sense.

However, I'm not sure that listening to the panic stricken environmentalists is the healthiest manner of living, especially if it brings on anxiety.

Spiritually speaking, I recall as a child being told often that "Jesus is coming back!" "You better be ready!" Those warnings also made me panic, that somehow if I wasn't doing good things, thinking great thoughts, and living a holy life, I might be left here to die when the rest of the "goodies" go up there – to heaven.

My point in writing this piece is to just comment on the state of things in our society. News and media brings with it all sorts of stories of doom and gloom. Just this week, there were shootings in public places where innocents died, all for no good reason at all.

I guess what we need to do in all of these cases is take affirmative action, but then rest in peace, while we live. Hopefully, there's a balance to be had with all of the anxious thoughts that are sent to our brains via our ears, on a daily basis.

We can:

Live realistically. We can do what we can, by recycling, not being wasteful, etc. But we don't have to go to sleep at night wondering if we've done something horrid to contribute to our demise.

Pray fervently. God says we can live in peace, and that he has not given us a spirit of fear. So we can ask for peace, listen for his words of wisdom, sigh and relax.

Listen sparingly. It's great to be informed, if our sources are true. But how many of them are? How can we know for sure? What are we supposed to believe? Listening is good, but living is better.

Give always. Giving is always a great way to save our planet and our future. We can't take anything with us but His spirit that resides inside, so we can definitely share all that we have with all that we know.

Focus fairly. We can't focus on a dozen issues and create change effectively. But we can focus on something that is dear to our own hearts. Maybe the dying critters in the ocean are something we want to give to, learn about, and educate on. That's one thing we can do, when we cannot do a million things.

Rest reverently. God hasn't told us when the world is ending, but it is. We don't even know if we have tomorrow, but we have today. And those attitudes inside us need changing, as much or more than the outside world actions do. So, we can reverently obey his word and then rest in his promises of peace, a future, and a hope.

I don't have eco-anxiety, and I'm not planning on picking up that worry. I feel like if I focus on what I can, do my best with what I've been given, and pray and trust Him to guide me if I need to do more, I can settle in at night and sleep...in heavenly peace. Even if I just drank a coke with a plastic straw...

FRESH THYME – Gotta Interact – by Marcy Lytle

Did you know (you do, if you're on Instagram) that you have to interact with other people on social media in order for them to see your stuff? It's true. You cannot set up your account and post every day, hoping the world will see what you've written, the beautiful photos you've taken, and think you're all that...unless you look at their stuff and comment and notice, as well. That's just the way social media works, and the creators were geniuses in making it that way.

Did you know that (you do, if you attend church or have friends that meet up) that you have to interact with people in order for them to interact with you? You cannot show up at church or your friends' houses for gatherings and hope everyone there will notice your new shoes, ask you about your job and care about your stuff unless you care about them. That's just the way humans and communication and friendships work.

We would rather just post our stuff and have all the world love us and praise us, show up and have friends gather around to be near us because we're great, and go home and bask in that attention and light.

We gotta interact!

Here's why we don't:

It takes time and work to comment on social media on others' posts, and we may not find them that interesting. It's the same with our friends and their lives, if they're different than we are.

It takes dying to our selfish needs of adoration and looking out to adore others and what they have to say and share. Interest is a two-way street, not a one-way corridor to blissful living.

It takes vulnerability to put ourselves out there in the first place, and it's pretty easy on a screen because no one's in our room. But when we meet with people, they're in our space and we get uncomfortable and withdrawn.

Here's what we must do:

We have to be friendly, if we want friends. It's that way on Instagram, and it's that way in life. Sure, there are people that we may be friendly with that won't ever reciprocate, but there are many more who will.

We have to learn to love the different in her, to see the real in her to appreciate the value in her, and that won't happen if we're always waiting for her to see the value in us.

We have to be vulnerable because how can we love her, how can we win him, how can we be a friend that shows His love if we aren't known and choose to know?

Everyone has different personalities from introvert to extrovert and somewhere in between. He knows that. But we also have a great big God that can move us forward to connecting with others, when our main reason for not connecting is selfishness, pride and fear. He can help us do what we can with those near us, so that...

Our posts, or life pictures, of the good life he offers us are seen and appreciated and people want more, because we've seen their life pictures and commented and appreciated and want more, as well.

We gotta interact!

FEATURE STORY - The Enforcer

We attended a huge outdoor concert, with thousands of other people in our city, called Blues on the Green. It was the last one of these for the summer, so you can imagine the crowd. We had no idea it would be so huge! On line, in the description of the event, it clearly stated no alcohol and no smoking, as this was a family friendly event. However, how could one enforce such rules in such a large area with such a crowd of people, with no entry and exit points?

They couldn't. They didn't.

We set our chairs mid field, quite a ways back from the stage, and watched people fill in around us, within inches. There was a girl and her friends (and her tiny dog that was hyper), sitting just in front of us, pouring drinks into cups, just as it was getting dark. There was another set of friends on a blanket to the right of us passing around a smoke, with the vapors wafting across our faces. We looked around and saw lots of people doing just what was said NOT to be done.

But there was no enforcer. So rules and courtesies were broken.

As we left that night, I thought about this world and comments I hear from time to time about God and one of the main questions I hear is, "Why doesn't he step in and stop the madness?" referring to shooters and disasters and abusers. We all want a God that enforces the rules, so to speak, especially the rules that are being broken that hurt us, and those we love. We want his mighty hand to save, the one that he talks about in his word. "God, come and save us!" is our cry when terrorism threatens our safety.

However, we don't want God the enforcer to step in and monitor our lives and how WE live. We don't want to follow any sort of rules, and we certainly don't want to be told how to live our lives. We want to disobey all the guidelines he laid out for us in his "rule book" – the one laced with love and safety and blessings – and then we want him to obey our command to show up and fix what we've broken.

Imagine how silly it would be at the concert if someone there, one who was drinking and smoking and ignoring the rules, complained to the event planner that people were drunk and unruly, or they became ill from inhaling the smoke, or other such maladies associated with breaking the rules. Wouldn't that be unreal to complain about evils and atrocities that were brought on yourselves by your own actions against your own fellow concert-goers?

By now, you maybe raising your eyebrows and thinking, wait a minute. We didn't do anything to bring on haters and killers and crazy people and storms. Oh, but I beg to differ. We, as a whole of humanity, continue to disobey the rules to love God with all our hearts, minds and souls and our neighbors as ourselves. We, as a group, don't want to repent of any wrongdoing of ill will, gossip, slander, or hatred in our hearts. We have rights, after all. We, as a whole, don't want to be told in any way or form how to live our lives. We want to live and let be, love when it feels good, and promote self above all else.

God doesn't bring evil into this world, and he for sure is the Enforcer who will end it all one day...because he said he would. But until that day, he said there were be trials and tribulations.

All because of sin. Because we read the signs and we decided to sneak in the concert with that which we were told to leave behind. And when we light up and blow that proverbial smoke into his nostrils, his hands are tied. He cannot be both the Enforcer and the passive one that allows demise.

Which kind of God do we want? He's been all about restoring that relationship that was broken from that fateful bite long ago in the garden. He wasn't the Enforcer then, but rather the Father of lights that warned and waited...for obedience. Obedience did not come, but rather defiance, and the whole of earth has groaned ever since.

But, wait! Because of his great love and mercy and longsuffering and promises, he's giving us all a chance to come and say yes, I want to follow. I want to obey. I want to live.

We can't have it both ways, a God that steps in and enforces when we think he should to protect us all, and then a God that sits by and says do whatever you want and go to hell while you do.

The signs are clearly marked. If we're going to show up at His concert and hear His music, then we've got to leave selfishness at the door, along with all of the evil in our hearts. And the only way to do that is to humble ourselves and give it up as we walk across the field to take our place when the music starts...willingly and lovingly...to the God that only has our best in mind...and always did.