



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

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TIPS

## **The Dressing – Fall Bags and Hues – by Marcy Lytle**

This fall, some of the styles from the 70s are emerging again, including suede and Boho. I personally love both, but just in touches, in what I wear...not a complete head-to-toe look. And these two can just be incorporated into the wardrobe we already have. Another item for fall is chocolate brown, or shades of brown, which is a favorite of mine. I think brown goes with so many other things and looks great with gold accents!

Boho - I love a boho look, sometimes, when it all comes together. I found a cute set of boho earrings on Amazon (came with a bracelet too!) I had a cute floral headband, and I layered a sweater vest on top of a tee. And then the bag I found at an artisan market on vacation. Grab a boho bag this season, or a Sherpa bag – I hear Walmart has a cute one!

Brown – This blouse from Amazon is one of my favorite pieces this summer. And the new belt is from Old Navy – I snagged it at 50% off for ten dollars! The blouse and the belt, worn with high waisted jeans, looks like a great outfit for Thanksgiving dinner!

This brown sweater type shirt is also from Amazon and it's the comfiest. I added a boho necklace and earrings, and that Boho bag. I'm even wearing brown boots. Everything is in a different shade of brown, like the fall leaves! And I'm here for it.

What about adding a brown bag? Another friend shared this one from Amazon, with the gold chain handle, and I've loved it for the season. It's easy to switch from bag to bag, if you keep all your purse items in two places – a large wallet – and a zipper pouch!

Texture – I've had this backpack for a while. It's from World Market, a fun place to find bags with texture. And texture is a great thing to add to your fall/winter wardrobe. And a bag is the place to do it. Grab a textured bag and carry it all season!

The Rack – If you have a hall rack or some hooks, make them look pretty and functional at the same time. Organize your favorite fall bags, a couple of caps, a scarf and a sweater – all in fall hues. It will make you smile as you grab a bag before you step out the door.

Suede – It's all the rage this season, especially in a bag. I found this black suede bag (it also has a smaller one inside!) on Amazon and I'm in love with the style, the pockets, the feel, and the look!

Bulky Necklaces – Fall and winter is the time to wear the heavier jewelry. I recently found this necklace from Erin McDermott – follow her on Instagram! I love the layered look, and she has so many choices in so many colors!

The Tote – This purse is also a tote, and it might be my favorite purchase this year. I bought it from Madeline Parks, at a sale, and it's so pretty. Again, it's textured. She also has these amazing crochet belts for sale. Check out her website!

## **Seven for You – A Hard Thanks – by the Panel**

It's easy to give thanks for all the good things...and we should! But it's not so easy to give thanks for the hard times...until maybe lots of time has passed. We asked the panel to share some "hard thanks" this month, to encourage us all that all things really do work together for good, even if it doesn't seem like any good is to be found in the middle of the pain.

*It's hard to stand tall when your knees want to give way  
When lying on the floor curled and weeping is calling you  
When standing tall has not lifted you any higher  
Or caused the tears to cease  
Why do we think that standing tall makes it all go away  
That it makes the regrets and sins of our past simply melt?  
Let me find my way in self-pity  
Let me count my failures if I choose  
My edges feel raw and so they are, from disappointment  
Scratching and chipping and yelling at me..."You Lose"  
Losing is in me...it seems to be my other middle name  
We are taught to smile and stand tall, keep the outside  
perfect to show off  
I'm not alone  
So many others curled on the floor behind doors  
Without the masks we wear on Sundays in our fancy dress  
So I want to reach The Others.  
To shout  
"Let us be  
The imperfect, the good as we can be, the way we were  
Created, just a bit broken, like the world  
Like His son who wanted Love not just on Sundays  
Like His son wept for us  
We can weep"  
I'll stand tall when the world sees us not in images of airbrush and plastic pages  
I'll stand tall when scars are badges of honor*

*I'll stand tall when hiding our pain is not mandatory for being human*

*I'll stand tall when I'm ready or maybe never*

*Maybe never is just human too.*

My daughter says I'm resilient. She penned it on a card she sent me. I look at it every day.

I don't always feel I live up to the term especially three years ago when I wrote the above poem.

I was struggling with my health and facing two surgeries. In the ER/Hospital more times than I cared to be. It was just a matter of when the surgeon could schedule them.

One early morning phone call challenged me more than I had been challenged before.

My daughter 1400 miles away suffered a stroke. She was 27 years old. The fear, the adrenaline rush, the tears...all of it crushing me.

Somehow, you do what needs to be done...pack your bag and get on the plane. Lots of thoughts flashed through my mind, the "what ifs" and "should have dones." The plane couldn't get me there any faster and so the time dragged on.

My child made it through brain surgery. And when she was able to speak, she told me about the dream she had. She saw three angels hovering over her. One was her grandmother; one was her great great Aunt (both passed on) and the last angel she was not able to identify. They gave her comfort and told her she would be okay.

There were so many angels looking after my child, her best friend who saved her life, the surgeon who worked miracles, the retired military general who gave her comfort (he was recovering from a stroke too) and a random encounter at a restaurant. My daughter was recovering and wanted soup. I ordered soup for her and the young man filled my order and then looked at me, left, and came back with a box of cookies. I didn't order cookies. He held my hand, and said, "These are for your daughter, I hope they help." How did he know?

God challenges us and shakes us up a bit; we need to be shaken. We need to know that we are imperfect, but from that imperfection comes strength.

I am thankful for all of this...for miracles, for kindness, for my child, and the love of strangers –  
Cathy

I thought I had it hard growing up in a pastor's home. There was such a long list of "don't do this" that I had a hard time having any fun in life at all. It seemed as though everything I wanted to do was a sin, i.e. go to the movies! I equated God with the no-fun Father with a hard hand. And I carried that bitterness toward my parents for a long time. But as I now have had children and they are raising theirs, I realize that my parents protected me from lots of "junk" in the world. They did the best they knew how with their skill set, and their knowledge of what it meant to follow God. And God was faithful to bring me along into a relationship with Him that is fun, loving, and freeing...in spite of that hard and restrictive childhood I thought was so bad...I'm truly thankful. – Marcy

During our 46 years of marriage, the management of our cars was my husband's "thing." I HATED CAR PROBLEMS!! As he was in the hospital undergoing those awful cancer treatments, he researched and purchased a follow-on extended warranty for my then fairly new

car, so that I wouldn't have to worry about the upkeep, should it have a problem. He even managed having better tires than those which came from the factory put on the car from his hospital bed.

It's been five years this month since he passed, and to date, I've not paid one single dime for the maintenance of this car. The policy just expired this month and I'm now researching the feasibility of purchasing another, because it's what he would do if he could. I'm so thankful for this blessing from the Lord, in providing such peace of mind in such a difficult time. – Debbie

Recently, I was a vendor at the Texas Oklahoma Fair selling my books. I had never done this event before and probably won't do it again but for some reason this time I did. And I'm glad! I didn't sell many books, but I did talk to lots of people that I wouldn't have gotten the chance to talk to at my other events. One young couple really touched my heart. They were probably no more than 20 years old, and they walked up to my table and started asking questions. They were surprised to hear that my writing started with sharing about my momma's death when I was a little girl. And how it was so hard for me when I lost her and was thrown into many horrible situations. They asked more questions, and I answered. I was able to tell them about our wonderful Heavenly Father and how He's always with us, helping and protecting us, and that my books are really all about Him. For some reason, that I do not know, the young woman started to have tears almost immediately.

The young man looked at me and bluntly asked, "How do you know for sure? How do you really know when God comes into your heart?" The girl was nodding behind him with her tears wanting to know, also. I thought, wow God, I know why I'm here. This opened the conversation up for me to tell them all about losing Momma, about the different homes I had lived in, and about the horrible day that led to the moment of me asking Jesus into my heart. I told them about realizing my sinfulness and how I felt the Holy Spirit that very moment. I also told them my momma always told me one day I would know when I needed to do this. They both had tears by this time. And then, I told them about being thankful to God for everything I'd gone through, including losing my momma, because I wouldn't be there talking, and sharing with them, if Momma hadn't died.

God had His plan in motion for my life and it included everything I went through. It still does. I know something was on their hearts. And I hope God used me that day to help them. They went on to sign my prayer book, took a business card, and assured me they would buy a book online. As they walked away, I smiled to myself, and thanked God for everything and for the opportunities He gives me like that one. – Carole

My dad went through radiation and chemo for 18 months before passing away with lung cancer. He and my mom lived 90 miles from us and the cancer treatment clinic. During the various stages of treatment they would stay overnight with us or stay for a meal before driving home. During his final months, the treatments and hospitalizations got much more frequent. There's nothing that makes time stand still like sitting in a hospital room holding someone's hand. My mom and I were beside his bed when he took his last breath. It was a precious moment. During those months I had three kids under 12, a job, an active church

presence, and a busy life. There were moments and days I thought I would crumble. But the prayers of many devoted friends sustained me. I am very thankful to have been able to walk the path with him and my mom to the very end. It was a true blessing. – Shelley

In 2010 my sister graduated to her heavenly home, dying from terminal cancer. She had been taking care of our 92 year old mom who could no longer live alone. So, I moved my mom to my home, quit my job and cared for Mom as best I could until she passed, a year and a half later. It was a difficult time that was physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausting. But, the time I got to spend with my mom was truly a gift. Our relationship grew and I feel like I was able to give back after all she had done for me over the years. It was a true blessing to my life and I am thankful. - Gina

## **Cousin Moms – Kids Faves – by Kamrin and Charissa**

Every mom wants to buy things for her kids for Christmas that they will actually enjoy and use, not something that will end up being in the back of a closet somewhere,

Holidays are coming and that means presents and gifts and lists, and of course, I have three kids. However, the kids aren't tiny anymore and are so different, and have their own activities and interests. They're also really not into toys and things, as such. My oldest son's list is mostly memorabilia, t-shirts, caps and shoes – he loves shoes – and sporting equipment. The youngest is the same with sports things, and he is really into Funko Pop. Our daughter's list has definitely turned a 180 this year. It's gone from dolls and toys and sparkles, to arts/crafts supplies to create and sell (she loves to make her own money). She also has skincare and clothing on her list – as she's a pre-teen.

We see ads and the top 10 toys and things for kids in every age group, and some are for the older kids. But from a parent standpoint, for the older, if you don't want to buy all the video game "stuff," etc., my recommendation is:

1. Give them categories to make a list, if you want it. My mom still does this for us, as adults! This helps us think of what we need and triggers things we might need in each part of the house. As I age, I love getting the necessities...practical gifts.
2. Maybe do less on the gifts (even though that's so fun) under the tree, and do a memory or an event or memory. Opening gifts with kids may be everything, but for us, we have Christmas a both sides of the family and they get lots of gifts there. A couple years ago we did a huge family gift of Nintendo Switch and games. Another year we did a big gift which was Disneyworld! It can just be a weekend away. Ask the kids for info regarding events, and maybe you might want to give cash or gift cards for those events.
3. Don't be afraid of gift cards or even snacks – the boys always love that.
4. Listen to your kids and look at their lists. I think sometimes, will they really like that? YES, if they put it on their list, they thought of it.
5. Christmas is about thinking of others to give and be a blessing, and my hope is that the kids love whatever they get – candy in the stocking or a huge gift.

Lastly, figure out traditions for the holidays. I don't really care about a gift from my husband or the kids at the moment. Some do love that. But I love the events, the traditions and the fun outings. The kids get a gift card and favorite candy sometimes. Traditions are the best! So if it's finding the hottest toy, get it. If you want to do a trip instead, do that. Our traditions we do as the five of us are different than my parents' traditions. I love the tradition with my parents, with a whole day event - I cherish it. My husband's family has dessert and opens gifts. Enjoy what YOU do with the people you love. Don't compare, find the joy instead. Don't break the budget. Have fun.



## **In the Kitchen – Easy Makes – by Marcy Lytle**

It's November. And I'm not even sharing one Thanksgiving meal recipe here, at all. I realized last year that so many have their traditional dishes, and they're not budging from them. . Or...some folks completely eat a different table of food altogether – opting for Mexican or Italian – just to enjoy something other than traditional. So this month, I'm just sharing some treats that we ate and enjoyed, they were comfortable and easy to put together, and we enjoyed every bite. Maybe you'll want to try one over the next few weeks of the holiday season, just for fun.

### Avocado Cheddar Grilled Cheese

If you can visit a local market during these fall months, buy a loaf of sourdough bread. Or make your own. Let that be the base, then add these few ingredients for the most delicious and crunchy sandwich for lunch:

- Sourdough bread
- Avocado slices
- Cheddar cheese slices
- Cooked bacon
- Butter

In a skillet, melt the butter. Lay one slice of bread down with the cheese on top, and let it start melting. Then add the avocado and bacon and a little more cheese, and that second slice of bread. Place a couple pats of butter on top, and then after the bottom is toasted, carefully flip the sandwich. Make sure both sides are toasted well.

Serve with whatever you like We added fresh cherry tomatoes, and it was such a good lunch!

### Rio Ramen

This is an old recipe from my vault, and it's really a favorite that we both love SO MUCH. It's sort of like a taco salad, only the base is Ramen noodles – and the flavors are amazing:

- Two packages of beef flavored Ramen soup
- 1 lb ground beef
- Shredded lettuce
- Tomatoes
- Onion, diced
- Green pepper, diced
- Grated cheddar
- Salsa

Brown the meat in a skillet, and add in the seasoning packets from the noodle pouches. Cook and stir until done, and drain. In another pan, cook the noodles.

Drain the noodles well and place in the base of your shallow bowls for serving. Top with the beef, then layer all the rest until it piles up and looks ready to eat. Top with the salsa. Avocado is good as well, as another topping.

Serve with tortilla chips if you like!

### Cast Iron Skillet Pizza

This was so easy, and I was really impressed with how well it turned out. If you have a cast iron skillet, this pizza recipe is a must to try! I like that it doesn't have too much sauce.

- 12" cast iron pan
- 1 T olive oil
- 12 oz pizza dough at room temp
- 2 c shredded mozzarella cheese (use low moisture block, not fresh – for a crispy crust)
- ½ c pizza sauce
- Toppings of your choice

Move oven rack to bottom and preheat oven to 450.

Evenly spread oil on bottom and side of cast iron pan. Gently stretch the dough to fill the bottom of the pan and dimple it with your fingers. Sprinkle the cheese over the entire top of the dough, all the way to the edges. Then dot the sauce over the cheese, also to the edges.

Add your toppings and bake on bottom rack 18-20 minutes, or til the bottom of the crust is golden brown and cheese is melted. (Just check the crust by using a spatula to lift up the side).

Place the hot pan on a wire rack momentarily, then use a sharp knife to run around the edges to keep crust from sticking to pan. Use spatula to then carefully transfer pizza to a cutting board to keep the crust crisp. Serve hot and enjoy!

### **Healthy Artichoke Dip**

It's good sometimes to have a dip in the fridge for the family to enjoy with carrot sticks or chips, when they're hungry and you're busy. This one is it!

- Blender
- 14 oz artichoke hearts (rinsed and patted dry)
- 1 c packed baby spinach
- ½ c canned white beans (rinsed and drained)
- 1 scallion
- 2 t grated lemon zest
- 2 T lemon juice
- ¼ c grated Parmesan

- ½ t pepper

Place all of the above in a blender and puree til finely chopped. (I had to stop and stir several time to get it all to blend). Place in a bowl and top with more black pepper and grated parm, and enjoy.

## SUGAR + Spice - New and Old Faves – by Angela Dolbear

I love trying new products, so this month, I have compiled a few of my new favorite hair and makeup products that I have loved after I gave them a spin. I also highlighted an old favorite tried and true product because it's worthy of the props!

[Versed Day Dissolve Cleansing Balm](#), Target \$18-- I have facial cleansers galore after years of having a Boxy Charm/Ipsy subscription. Some are very high-end and pricey, but this cleanser I bought from Target is hands down my absolute favorite. My combination rosacea skin loves it! It's made with Eucalyptus oil, which cleanses and hydrates my skin.

[Embryolisse Lait-Crème Concentré, Face Cream & Makeup Primer](#), Amazon, \$17 – I read about this French moisturizer in an online magazine. It is both an excellent moisturizer and primer make-up artists swear by. I applied a less-than-pea-size dollop to my face in the morning after my SPF moisturizer. A little goes a long way. After about fifteen minutes, I apply my make-up. It keeps my skin hydrated all day, and my makeup stays fresh but not oily or cakey—like magic! This cream has become a staple in my skincare routine.

[Suavecita Pomade](#), Amazon \$15 – I have been using this pomade daily for years to tame frizzy hair and give my style a more finished look. It keeps my Bettie Bangs smooth and in place. A tiny bit goes a long way. I swipe on a fingertip from the jar, rub it in my palms, and smooth it onto my hair. It's not greasy or stiff and has a light pleasant scent.

The beauty of blessings to you!

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## **Tried and True - Last Month's Learning - by Marcy Lytle**

It's the next to the last month of the year, and every month is a month full of mornings and evenings where we observe and learn. It's fascinating to realize how much information is around us – some useless – but oh so much is useful and fun. So I'm sharing my list with you!

I just ordered myself a book from Voice of the Martyrs that has 366 days of speaking to fear and sending it away...from credible sources like those that are being persecuted. Loving the book so far...*Whom Shall I Fear*.

Did you know there are extenders you can buy for light switches so that little toddlers can turn off and on their own lights in their rooms? How cool!

Pop Shelf is a fun store...and I recently found some sponges for the kitchen that I'm buying on repeat. One reason is because they're not yellow, blue or pink – I don't like colored sponges! They're neutral, they're puffy, and they have a scraper on one side. One dollar each!

We went to a museum tour and in the back there was a craft room. The tables were strewn with magazine pages and stock paper, and each person got a little paper journal they could decorate. I just cut and glued and made myself a travel journal! What a fun activity for the family members this holiday season, when it's too cold to go outside!

Another book I recently bought is *O. Henry at the Holidays* – short stories that represent the holidays throughout the year – how fun! Put this on your Christmas list!

You're going to take photos this holiday season, and maybe you keep them all on your phone, or you print and place in albums, and I've done both! But check out this photo box – holds so many photos in little clear boxes and looks great on a shelf!

I saw a ladder with Christmas ornaments hung in the center like a tree – here it is – I like it! In case you want to be non-traditional...and you have a huge house.

The kids told me about these – Bambas - puffed peanut and corn snacks – the peanut and dark chocolate ones – and we love them. They're good with popcorn at the movies. From Trader Joe's.

If you have a Hat Creek Burgers near you, did you know they serve breakfast? And their queso is amazing. And they put lots of pickles on the burgers. I like Hat Creek!

Some say greasy with a z sound and others with the s – which do you say! Apparently, both are acceptable!

We started a new series on Amazon Prime called Unforgotten – really riveting – and great stories – each season is a new murder to solve!

Michael's has the best crafts for each season – some cute ones for Thanksgiving – for the kids at your table. And they're often on sale!

Crocheted toys are all the rage and SO darn cute. I'll put a link here for an Instagram account to follow for very best.

Laughter really is the best medicine for a weary heart. Find those that bring you joy, sit with a bunch of children, or just watch something hilarious on TV and laugh out loud. Hard and long. Start the season with joy.



HOME

## **Practical Parenting – The Art of Conversation – by Marcy Lytle**

It's Thanksgiving month, where families will gather around a large table. Maybe the kids will be at their own table, or maybe they'll be mixed in with the adults. But either way, it's always a good time to go over and encourage the art of conversing with family members. It might even be good to practice before they all arrive on a few nights during dinner, before Turkey Day. Here are some ideas on how to develop that art from the young to the old...

### All together at one table:

Note the grandparents first. Encourage the littles to ask grandparents questions and talk about school or their friends, or see what their grandparents have been doing! The older generation has lots of good stories to share!

Remember to chew and swallow first, before talking. No one wants to see that half eaten turkey in your mouth!

Adults and parents need to steer clear of controversial topics that might cause arguments at the table. Thanksgiving memories need to be pleasant ones, not full of fighting words.

Parents and grandparents can be aware of the littles at the table and engage them in conversation, so that the adults aren't just talking over the heads of the kiddos.

And a fun idea is to place a question under the plate of each person, to be read and answered during dessert!

### Kids at another table:

Remind the kids that dinner is not the place for loud laughing and noises. It's the time to ask cousins and siblings how they're doing, and to really listen.

The kids could bring a Thanksgiving joke to the table and have it ready for asking, once dinner is served.

Kids need to be refreshed on being courteous, not critical, of other kids at the table. Complimenting each other and smiling, instead of poking fun and teasing is the way to go.

If kids have a need to ask an adult a question at the other table, they don't shout, but rather quietly get up and whisper in Mom's or Dad's ears.

### Guests who aren't family invited in:

If your family has new folks at the table, ones that are perhaps new to the community, or a neighbor, or from another country:

Make guests feel welcome by serving them first and telling them how happy you are they're with you.



Using good manners in voice and eating habits tells your guests that you respect them as new friends.

Maybe share stories of funny things at holidays, like when the turkey burned or an entire dish was forgotten and left in the oven. Keep conversation light and smile-inducing.

What else would you add, this Thanksgiving? It's always a good idea to remind the kids, let them know what's expected, and then demonstrate it all at the table before the day arrives. In fact, it's a good idea to demonstrate the art of good conversation during dinner...all year long.

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

Kids of the teenage kind think a lot about the word “beautiful” rather we realize it or not. It seems that most girls by this age hope to be beautiful, so they start this quest and angst of trying to look beautiful on the outside by their shape, their hair, their clothes, their makeup – so that the boys will like them. And it seems the boys are starting to notice the girls, and they might be attracted only to the ones that look beautiful on the outside. So now, this teenage time of life, is a good time to talk about real beauty.

Beautiful on social media is connected with looking sexy...and that's attractive to our kids...if their self-worth is in how they look. So, how do we as parents shift their worth to all things beautiful on the inside?

### Terminology

We can make the effort to use the word *beautiful* to describe what we see on the inside instead of the outside. Practice this in front of the kids. Ask them to look for the beauty and compliment it, perhaps once a week on a specific night. Maybe you saw her helping her little brother with his school work, call it beautiful. Or Dad recalls that Mom stayed up late one night making mums for homecoming – call it beautiful - the way she served.

### Affirmation

Use God's word to affirm each other often, to encourage and uplift, so that our kids aren't seeking for affirmation from others all the time. Leave words of affirmation on sticky notes, tucked into their backpacks, scriptures of how God sees them and loves them written on their bathroom mirrors, everywhere they go!

### Confession

Spend time with the kids where they're allowed and encouraged to confess the way they view themselves and others. Maybe your daughter is self-conscious about her height or weight, or the color of her hair. Maybe your son is tempted to look at girls and talk with friends about the way she looks or walks or how she moves. Invite your kids to share, and pray with them.

### Eyes

We all have eyes that wander and then our hearts and bodies follow. If our kids are on social media and observing what beauty is from that stream, they will mimic what they see. If the movies and shows they watch are full of lust and outward terms of beautiful, their minds will be full of that. And if we let our own eyes and minds and actions present to our kids that beauty is skin deep and skin is what really matters, our kids will follow suit.

It might be worth spending a little time together as a family on what is true beauty, and to visit this topic often. Of course, there's nothing wrong with seeing the beauty on the outside, but it should only be a small part of seeing the total picture. And constantly chasing after beauty is a

tiresome task, one that never ends at the pot of a rainbow, but only a rainbow that's here today for a second...and gone tomorrow.

## **Brought to Mind - Childhood Décor – by Lindsay Christianson**

I'm not sure how old I was when I started collecting and putting out my "own" decorations, but I clearly remember how much I enjoyed it. I think the little pumpkin in this photo is one of the first things I got to decorate my own space with. It's also one of the few things from my childhood décor I still use.

Little Lindsay had very unique taste. I would tape up pages from magazines or Sunday school craft projects even though most of the painted macaroni and glitter came unglued over the years. I could spend a whole day curating a perfectly chaotic collection of everything I had that fit with the season. Then, usually the day after Thanksgiving, I'd do it all over again for Christmas.

I loved decorating for fall and Christmas because they were my favorite parts of the year. Christmas for obvious reasons shared by most kids, fall because... well, because it meant Christmas was coming soon. Having my own personal decorations for these seasons made me feel very grown up.

If you have kids who enjoy helping you put out seasonal decorations, why not let them buy or make décor for their own spaces? It's a great way for them to feel special and express their creativity. And, if their creativity is as wild as mine used to be, it might not be a bad idea to let them express it in their bedrooms or playrooms instead of the living and dining room.

Each year, when I unwrap decorations I've had since I was little, it brings back a little of that childlike anticipation for what the seasons and holidays hold.

## **In Each Room – Pillows and Rugs – by Marcy Lytle**

In the fall and winter months, it's all about ambience, isn't it? And while neutrals are a great way to go when decorating a home, there is now a trend toward rich color. I felt my old circular light gray rug needed to go, when I spotted this rich in color rug at Target. A large area rug that extends under your seating area brings warmth and softness, and invites the kids to sit and play and linger...

Rugs can be hazards for sure, so include some tape or nonslip material underneath, but consider warm color when shopping for a room. Take a photo of your room to have on hand when you shop. And lay out the rug in the store before you pay for it. It helps!

Pillows definitely play a part in coziness in the cooler months. I keep these fuzzy gray pillows tucked away from March-September, but I love them on the sofa in the fall. They're soft for afternoon naps. A solid color pillow is great for your palette, and then you can build from there.

And why not have one pillow that speaks to the season, like an orange leaf one! I have one for Christmas that says "This is as Merry as We Get" and it makes me smile. Maybe you'd like one that says "Grateful" or "Thankful" – not too many – just one as a statement on a bed, in the center of the sofa, or even on a porch chair.

I found this "Hello Fall" pillow at the store At Home in a pretty green color. I hung a table runner over the sofa, to compliment the pillow, and a throw on the other side. Adding layers on your sofa just invites cozy afternoons of leisure while reading or watching a show. Again, take photos with you when you shop and then imagine different pillows and rugs in your space.

I love to switch my pillows out for the season. I use pillow covers for the square throw pillows, because I can store the covers and switch them out with ease. I have a bench on the side wall where other pillows stay, and I switch them out as well. For the fall, I chose one of those gray fuzzy pillows mentioned above, some pumpkin pillow covers for October and November, and some texture and other shapes of pillows as well, besides just the square ones.

Too many pillows might be annoying and hard to manage, but a few special ones you can change out, rearrange and enjoy are just right for the cooler months. And rugs are those statement pieces that make or break a room. Try trading in all of your tiny rugs for one large one, and see if it doesn't perk up your space!

## **A Night to Remember – AARGH! – by Marcy Lytle**

We have an

**Awesome**

**Amazing**

**Remarkable**

**God,**

**Hey!**

Teach the kids this acronym before you begin, make it part of your family traditions, with the new word AARGH meaning something fantastic instead of a remark of arrgh meaning being upset at the way things are.

This month of November, we're going to give thanks but in this unique way, using this new acronym AARGH.

Preparation: This devo could be done the day after Thanksgiving, around a table of leftovers you're now enjoying, or before the big day...any night this month! Ask the older kids to arrive with a definition of these three words: Awesome, Amazing, and Remarkable. Or have the definition written out on a white board or little cards for all to read and have in hand.

*Awsome* means extremely impressive or excellent and it's a word we use to describe God.

*Amazing* means something that causes surprise or great wonder!

*Remarkable* means it's worthy of attention...quite striking!

All three words describe our God and his work in our lives.

When we give thanks it says in Psalm 95 that The Lord is great - a great King – the mountains belong to him, the sea is his, and he formed the dry ground.

Everyone say together, THAT'S AWESOME!

It also says he is our maker, our God, and we are always under his care.

Everyone say together, THAT'S AWESOME!

When we read in the Bible of something that's of great wonder, we stand amazed at God's power.

What's something amazing God did for Daniel in the lion's den?

What about Noah and the ark?

What did he do for the blind and the lame when they came to him?

When God heals us, delivers us from scary things, and saves us from disaster, we can all say together,

**THAT'S AMAZING!**

Share with the kids something amazing God did for you personally.

When something is remarkable, it causes us to sit up and take notice because it's so cool!

What did Jesus say to the criminal hanging by him on the tree? He forgave him and gave him life! 2 Peter 3:9 says God is patient and doesn't want anyone to die!

God sent his only son to earth and we celebrate his birth next month, and he's the savior of the world.

**THAT'S REMARKABLE!**

These three attributes we can ascribe to God on a daily basis and it will make our days full of joy and hope as we say AARGH – you're an awesome, amazing, remarkable God – hey!

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

Tiny living is so ready to be in a larger space!

It's amazing and difficult to watch the new build go up. Every day we anticipate the move!

The building process is coming along pretty quickly, but not quickly enough. Each time a contractor doesn't show up, we become frustrated, wondering, *Where are they?* Then other times, they all come at the same time for days in a row and we think, *Wow! They're moving so fast!* We have pretty much finalized the finishing touches and this did not happen without a headache! We've had eight years living tiny, to be prepared for what we wanted, and yet somehow we weren't prepared at all. It's the craziest thing!

Brian and I have very different tastes. And at this point, just getting a house with a washer, dryer and dishwasher are my main requirements. However, I did have to nix some "artsy" looks that Brian was going for. We had to come to some agreement, with both of us having to *give* a little and maybe not get exactly what we wanted. But we compromised and the house will turn out great.

I thought living tiny was not for the weak, but I must say the same about building a home! There are some pretty major decisions with a very hefty price to pay. We're closer to the finish line and just praying that everything comes together wonderfully. There have been some pretty major issues that have taken place, and we've have to remember to give these to God and not stress about it all. This is in His hands and He's gotten us this far, and He'll continue to get us through the rest. The process of building has been an emotional roller coaster but also fun and exciting!

My oldest son is writing his senior thesis on tiny living. His thesis statement is that everyone should experience tiny living for a season at some point in their lives. I love that this living situation has impacted him for the best, so much so that he would choose to write an entire paper on it! I had no idea the effect our style of living would have on the kiddos and I'm so happy that they think it was a good one and can appreciate why we lived the way we did, and want others to do the same at some point. This definitely makes the momma heart happy!

So to conclude, please consider tiny living at some point in your lives. You never know the impact it could have on you or the others around you.

Remember. Love grows best in tiny spaces...





YOU

## Inner Strength – Hard Shells – by Marcy Lytle

Turtles. They have a hard shell made mostly of bone. Its outer surface is covered in scales, and these animals are cold blooded creatures. And our grandson has one as a pet. It's in a large aquarium, and Gideon takes care of Tank regularly. That's why, when we visited a bakery that made sourdough turtles, we brought back one to enjoy!

Another fact we all know about turtles is that they can pull their heads, legs and tails into their shells completely...to defend themselves from predators. Don't you wish we could do that? I have tried before...to hide from those I don't want to see, or pull away from those I don't want to see me!

As they grow older, the hard shell of the turtle provides a shield from predator attacks.

I was thinking about turtles when I gave Gideon his sourdough, as I watched him smile and enjoy the bread!

I wasn't born with a hard shell, but I certainly developed one as I hit the teenage and young adult years, when I was disappointed in friends and even family. I didn't want to let anyone else in, to hurt me anymore. So I held new friendships at an arm's length.

I think I had a definition of "loyalty" as *staying friends and close for life no matter what*, and it was becoming apparent to me that friends come and go, enter and exit, and I then have this choice. I can toughen up externally and push away new friends, to "protect" my vulnerable heart. Or I can forgive, bless, and pray for those that exit and work on being a better friend that loves without expectation.

Now, that's hard. And I haven't done a great job at any of those things. But there's this part of me, beneath my hard shell, where He lives and resides and whispers to my hurting heart daily. And he enables me to keep my head and hands and legs "out" so that I can move forward and not hide, when new relationships are offered in my path.

Turtles are interesting and fun pets to have, they're slow and they're really striking to observe. And while that hard shell serves them well, I'm not sure it serves us well as humans, with hearts that long to be loved and to love...without hurt. And our best defense mechanism is to not defend at all...but rather rest in the knowledge that He loves us best, and he gives us inner strength to love again and again.

## **Under Pressure – Me or Him? - by Debbie Haynes**

There is a driving force within each of us that is stronger than most anything else that we fight against. And that force is pride. It's an enemy of our soul; and yet, it's one of the hardest things to eliminate. And in fact, we are told in the Word that the "pride of life" is not of the Father...and in another translation it says the love of the world squeezes out our love for the Father. And this warning is not directed to those outside the church, but those inside...as perhaps they become adept at ignoring and sweeping their own lusts and pride under the proverbial rug.

Sometimes, even when we find ourselves doing something good for others, giving or showing some form of service or benevolence, we might even do those things with the motivation of pride in our hearts.

C.S. Lewis penned:

"For pride is spiritual cancer: it eats up the very possibility of love, contentment, and even common sense."

"A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you're looking down, you can't see anything that's above you."

Jonathan Edwards wrote:

"Pride is the worst viper in the human heart! It is the greatest disturber of the soul's peace, and of sweet communion with Christ. It is with only the greatest of difficulty that it can be rooted out. For pride is the most hidden, secret, and deceitful of all lusts!"

Remember the giant Goliath in the Bible? He was proud and arrogant, and the humble boy named David was aware of his own limitations as he said, "The Lord will deliver you into my hands." Proudful Goliath was brought down by the profound faith of a young boy.

I woke up one morning, impressed that pride and thanksgiving simply cannot co-exist in our hearts. The very thoughts of our hearts, the actions we carry out, and our chosen allegiances, will be ruled by one or the other.

Recently, I asked God to help me focus on the things for which I'm thankful, and they were mostly tangible: my home and family, my lack of want of the basics of life...food, shelter and clothing. But there's more. For thanksgiving cannot dwell alongside pride.

*Pride* is related to me, what I want, what I need, what I deserve.

*Thanksgiving* is directed above and is completely focused on Him. What He's done, who He is, what He's promised.

Even when our circumstances bring us low, we must force our pride down. We decrease so that He can increase.

Here are some practical ways to help us do just this:

- Give thanks to the Lord because he's good and his love endures forever. (Ps 107:1)
- Give thanks to the Lord for his righteousness. Sing praise to the Lord. (Ps 7:17)
- Give thanks in everything for this is the will of God for you! (I Thessalonians 5:18)
- Give thanks and don't be anxious about anything – ask God. (Phil 4:6)
- Give thanks as the peace of Christ rules your heart – (Col 3:15)

I know that for me personally, when I put my pride down and direct my attention upward to God, He puts a song in my heart. He gives me hope and courage to be brave in Him.

Look up.

Look at him.

Look at His word.

Look at his character.

Look at his promises.

And sing a song of thanksgiving.

## **A Hopeful Heart - Giving Thanks – by Christina Oberon**

As Thanksgiving approaches, many of us take time to reflect on what we are thankful for, like family, health, friendships, and the simple joys of life. The holiday is a perfect moment to pause and appreciate the goodness around us. However, gratitude shouldn't be something we practice only in November. Practicing giving thanks year-round can have great benefits on our mental, emotional, and even physical well-being.

We all hear how gratitude is powerful. But gratitude is more than just saying "thank you." It's a mindset, a way of viewing the world through a lens of appreciation. When we focus on what we have, rather than what we lack, it shifts our perspective, making us more resilient in the face of challenges. Numerous studies have shown that practicing gratitude regularly can lead to lower stress levels, improved relationships, and even better sleep. I have personally experienced these benefits many times.

In today's world, it's easy to get caught up in the turmoil and overlook the positives. We rush from task to task, often feeling like we're not doing or achieving enough. We obsess over the news and world events. But taking a few moments each day to acknowledge what we're thankful for can help break that cycle. It serves as a reminder that despite life's difficulties, there are still countless reasons to be appreciative.

Thanksgiving is a wonderful opportunity to express our thanks, but gratitude doesn't have to be tied to a specific date on the calendar. It is my belief that incorporating it into our daily lives is essential for long-term happiness and fulfillment. Simple acts of thankfulness, such as keeping a gratitude journal or expressing appreciation to loved ones, can become habits that make a real difference.

Gratitude also helps us stay present. When we pause to reflect on what we're grateful for, we're anchoring ourselves in the moment, savoring the here and now. This is especially important in a world that often pushes us to constantly look toward the future. By practicing gratitude daily, we can counteract that pressure, finding joy in what we already have rather than constantly seeking more.

I try to integrate gratitude into my routine in different ways. I write down things I'm grateful for in my gratitude journal.

Whether it's a quick text, a note, or in a conversation, I try to say, "Thank you" often. Expressing thanks to the people around me is a great feeling and creates stronger connections.

I also usually take a few minutes each night to reflect on something good that happened, no matter how minor. This has helped train my brain to focus on the positive aspects of life. Even during difficult times, there are things to be thankful for, like lessons learned, support received, or personal strength discovered.

An often overlooked thing about gratitude that I love is its ripple effect. When we practice gratitude, we not only improve our own well-being but also positively impact those around us. Gratitude is contagious. It spreads from person to person, forming a culture of kindness, appreciation, and respect. By making gratitude a daily practice, I believe we can create a ripple effect, improving our relationships, our communities, and ultimately, our world.

So, while Thanksgiving is a beautiful reminder to give thanks, let's carry that spirit with us every day. Gratitude is a gift we can give ourselves and others year round.

## Healthy Habits – The Unload – by Marcy Lytle

We, I, often talk about laying our burdens down, unloading our proverbial backpacks, letting go of what burdens us, handing it all over to Him...we say it in a dozen different ways. The Word tells us to come unto him if we're weary and He will give us rest. But, you might be wondering and thinking – that sounds good – but how in the heck does one do that? How do we let go of our burdensome and heavy load, and give it to Him?

Here are some practical helps:

**Tell** – Sometimes, just telling someone about what we're carrying takes the load off our backs, because now have a friend sharing the load. Of course, we have to be careful who we choose and how much we tell, depending on the load. But a trustworthy friend? Well, she's pure gold if you have one. So tell.

**Write** – My husband and I, and my children and I, have written notes by hand to each other. It helped us all process, I suppose, when we were upset. And somehow, putting a pen(cil) to the paper to unload a hurt or a wish, etc. sometimes made us realize our hurt was unfounded. Or we looked at things differently once we tried to express it on paper. And unloading on paper is also a way to just get it all out, and even toss the paper in the trash, thus...letting go.

**Read** – The Word is the best place to go, to see how unload the heavy. “Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my sighing...” it's the beginning of a prayer in the psalms. It goes on to cry out for help and acknowledges that God hears our voices, and we can lay our requests before him, knowing full well He's present. Lot of verses remind us and instruct us on how to lay them down.

**Pray** – After we've told, written, read the Word and realized that honestly...God is the most trustworthy of all friends, we are finally ready to open our hands, unzip the pockets, shake loose, or take out all that we've placed in the backpack...and hand it all to him. Practically, that might look like visualizing while we pray – handing the heaviness over to Him – and watching Him clasp the worries in His hands. Prayer doesn't have to be a formula or a recitation all the time. It can simply be closed eyes, looking into His face, and letting go.

**Worship** – I can't tell you how many times I've started listening to worship, the songs that sing about the goodness of God, his faithfulness, his love and his mercy...and the load just falls off. Then if I start dancing and (again) visualizing my feet standing on his feet as we move in sync...again I begin to feel lighter and unafraid.

We gather stones of heaviness daily, as we step outside our homes and enter the dusty world, walk the gravel paths, and encounter a rolling boulder or two from the hills around us. So a daily exercise of emptying the pack, laying down the load, is a necessary one in order to have legs that can skip, instead of shuffle under the load.

Try one of the above, or all five, and see if your back, and your heart, doesn't feel less burdened, as you do the healthiest exercise of all – hand the heaviness all over to Him.

## **Life Right Now – The List - By Jennifer Stephens**

The guests are arriving. The table is set. Right now, the plates sit empty - unaware of the deliciousness that awaits. Isn't that like us? It's so easy to get caught up in the noise of life and momentarily forget all of God's goodness that surrounds us. We feel discouraged. Empty. And if we're not careful we can find ourselves stuck in a pit of despair. But it doesn't have to be that way. Even though there's lots of yuck in our world, there is so much to be thankful for. So much thanks for us to be giving.

I'm a list maker by nature. And yes, I'm one of those people that will add a previously accomplished task just to experience the thrill of crossing it off the list! There's the ever-growing to-do list. The grocery list. The holiday shopping list. Some people even craft a bucket list. When I was still teaching, I always had to create a list of goals for the school year. Sometimes we have a thousand ongoing lists running around inside our heads for this or that. So many lists!

With all the negative news creeping its way into my brain lately, I found myself teetering on the edge of the pit of utter sadness. It seemed necessary to curate a list of things to be thankful for as a way to combat the yuck of the world. A gratitude list. Since my mind can get muddled and murky, keeping a mental list is out of the question. Instead, I grabbed my notebook (and sometimes the notes app on my phone) to capture those moments that make my heart smile. A visual record of all God has done to make each day a little brighter.

Doggy kisses  
The first red leaf  
A just right cup of coffee  
Sunsets  
Hazelnut scented candles  
A new book to read  
Birds visiting the feeder  
That first bite of a melty chocolate chip cookie fresh out of the oven  
Slow mornings  
A pantry so full it needs organizing...

Join me in creating a list of thanksgiving. Let's fill our plates with reminders of Him. The table is set and the guests are arriving. Let's greet them with gratefulness. And maybe the next time we stumble towards the pit, we'll be lifted up with gratitude.

What's on your list?





MARRIAGE

## **In This Together – An Open Invitation – by Bekah Holland**

November...the month of “no shave November,” big family dinners that hopefully don’t include deep-fried turkey incidents that end up on TikTok, and social media posts filled with things we are thankful for. I love these things. I even usually try to follow the daily thankful post trend for the month, but I typically start forgetting days, then try to play catch up which usually leads to me swearing at my phone and social media and forgetting the things I was supposed to be remembering to be thankful for. And I have SO much that I am unbelievably grateful for, and am very aware of so many privileges I have. So don’t panic, this isn’t going to be an anti-Thanksgiving kind of article. I usually save that for Valentine’s Day so you can breathe easy for a minute.

But, I also know that for some of us, this month is hard. I know people who are alone on the holidays, whether their family is far away or they don’t feel like they have anyone to belong to. I know people who have lost someone they love, and this time of year is a stark reminder of the empty place at the dinner table. I know people who spend days and weeks trying to make a perfect day and it doesn’t ever meet everyone’s expectations. Or more likely, falls short only of their own. And, in case you didn’t catch it, when I say I know people who fall short of their own expectations, I mean me. I wish I could tell you this was a special occasion kind of neurosis. It’s not. I have these impossible ideas of the way that things are supposed to be. The way that our house looks and how I should be able to keep it. How I should be able to manage my job, while still trying to learn to do my new job without crying under my desk, along with keeping up with kids and schedules and appointments, making sure everyone takes their medicine and vitamins and somehow tricking my teenagers into eating something with ingredients I can pronounce, while still trying to be at least a decent wife, knowing when my husband needs extra time and when he needs space. Making weekly meal plans that at least a fourth of the people who live here will suffer through without too many complaints while still managing groceries along with a budget and somehow trying not to look like I’m not completely falling apart, even though I am on the inside.

My husband notices, trying to build up what I’ve torn down in myself and always reminds me that I’m enough. But he has his own things to manage and I want to be his partner and encourager, not another added stressor. Are these my own issues and not the responsibility of anyone else? *Abso-freaking-lutely*. I don’t expect anyone else to understand much less know how to make it better. Maybe my trying to do it all and be everything to everybody is rooted in some kind of need to control things that are not even in the same universe of things I can or should be trying to control to keep the peace in everyone else life but my own. I’m a peacemaker by nature.

There was a picture my mom had hanging in my room for as long as I can remember that had my name, Rebekah Eve, and the meaning of it...”devoted one” it said. And I took it to heart. I think God did make me to bring peace to chaos (though I’ve created plenty of that as well) and I definitely am not one to give up on anything or anyone without a fight. With one exception. *Myself*. I know I should (and probably will be) embarrassed to admit that. However, I also know that if I had someone else who was vulnerable enough to verbalize some of the things that I had been feeling too ashamed to say out loud, maybe I would have been able to figure out some of the whys to my particular brand of crazy, or at least not have felt quite so alone. That’s why I promised myself that I’d be open about the mess in my life and my head that I’d really REALLY rather not admit to myself, much less broadcast to the whole freaking world. But, here we are, And if, by chance, you find yourself struggling to manage an unmanageable load, or if this time of year feels like it flies by in warp speed while you try to keep up while running on a soapy slip

'n slide leaves you feeling exhausted and not turning out like the Martha Stewart magazine spread you were aiming for, these next words are for you.

\*You are enough. Even if you don't take the turkey out in time and have to pray against food poisoning like you'd cast out demons.

\*If you need to fall apart and lose it, saying things you don't even want to admit to thinking, you can fall apart to me. Scream, cry, make no sense while you verbally process emotions dramatically. You can go full on drama queen on me, with zero judgement. Because I've been there. Basically every day of my life.

\*You need advice? I'm much better at other people's lives than I am at my own, so I can give it.

\*You don't want a fix and just someone to verbally vomit to? I'll be your sounding board. I'm a lot stronger than I look and I live with 2 teenagers so I promise I can take whatever you throw at me.

\*Trying to hold it all together all the time is exhausting. I mean like your soul being sucked out through your toes kind of exhaustion...and we aren't meant to do it alone.

Now, our partners are our people. They are there with us on the mountaintops and also down in the valleys we fall into sometimes. I've seen my husband at his worst, and also borne witness to the beauty of him finding his way to the light...and vice-versa. He still loves me when I'm panicking about something (usually inconsequential) and when I haven't brushed my hair in two days. He is my home. But I think that outside friendships are equally important to our marriages as well. So you can just consider this an open invitation. I have an open couch, a listening ear, a bottle of wine and a cup of tea available at all times. I'll answer the phone (even though I hate answering the phone, but I make exceptions for people who aren't telling me my car warranty is expired) and we can sit on our respective couches and vent or talk our way through a movie or TikTok session.

Lean on your partners. Let them love you. But remember you have a laundry list of women who have been where you are, and even those who are still where you are. And if you don't, you can put my name at the top of that list and any one of my personalities will be available. We do have so much to be thankful for. And often times, we allow the outside noise to distract us from all we've been given. But the beauty of that is that we can press the mute button on that noise and fill the silence with the voices of the people who love us best. So this year, while you're running yourself ragged, take a few minutes to remind yourself of the gift of true love and true friendship that stands the test of both time and moments of insanity. I'm going to do the same, and just maybe, this year, we'll manage to give ourselves the grace we give others and use that space to be grateful for all of the people in our corner from spouses to friends, both the ones down the street and even some we've lived through life with online.

"And these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of all is love"

*"When you feel overwhelmed by the weight of the world and its expectations, run to those who offer comfort. Let them whisper words of truth over you. Let them offer you rest and share their strength and remind you to set your eyes forward to a place of both healing and grace."*

## **Date Night Fun – T-H-A-N-K-S – by Marcy Lytle**

I love holidays, I love the fall holidays, and I love November. I need reminders to be thankful. I think we all do. I need reminders to give thanks for my spouse. I think we all do. And I need reminders to live out those things in all that I do. I think we all do. This month we're taking the word THANKS and making a list of date night ideas that start with those six letters. How fun is that?

T – is for TRUNK. Pack your trunk with at least four things and head out on a date. Pack a couple of chairs for sitting in a park to watch the fall color and leaves. Pack a cooler with snacks you've picked out from Trader Joe's (if you have one) – they have the best fall snacks! Pack your walking shoes for a stroll on a trail. And pack a puzzle book to do together for fun.

H – is for HANDS. Make sure on this date you purposefully hold hands in all that you do – under the table if you're eating, in the theater if you're at a movie, on the sidewalk if you're strolling. Voice what it is you love about each other's hands. Then take those hands and make a meal together. How fun!

A – is for APPLES. I know, apples are for October, but they can be for November as well. If you like caramel apples, make them and enjoy them. Maybe it's apple pie you love, or apple crisp! Heat up some apple cider and bring home churros, and watch a movie. Apples are great you know, for keeping the doctor away.

N – is for NEW. Make your date night out something totally new. It can be a restaurant you've never eaten at before, or a walk on a new trail, or perhaps a new couple can be invited to join you. Just make the night fresh and new.

K – is for KIND. Think of a couple of friends who could use some kindness this month, and make a plan to bless them. You might want to leave a care package at their door, invite them over for dinner, or slip a gift card in their hand when you see them. Maybe you might serve them in some way by keeping their kids while your friends go out. Just purpose to be kind to someone, and make it a night of kind deeds.

S – is for SPOON. Make it a night at home where you enjoy soup, and then ice cream, and play the game of spoons! Tortilla soup is always a favorite, and why not try your hands at Mexican fried ice cream? Go through your spoon drawer and look at all the different kinds of spoons, and use them all. Even the tiny ones for sugar in your coffee or tea. A night of spoons!

Now, wasn't that fun?

## **After 40 Years – Two Things – by Marcy Lytle**

I remember not long after I had my children, I felt overwhelmed with all the to-dos and decided that my list of things I had to accomplish was way longer than my husband's list. In fact, did he even have a list? So I proceeded to write out all the chores and duties we both performed at home, and my list was about five times longer than his (Okay, well maybe ten times). I proceeded to make a color coded list and affixed it on the fridge, trying to even out our individual tasks, to make it more "even." And this entire process was from a point of bitterness, with the thought that I was doing it all.

Fast forward decades now, and it seems we have a pretty good balance on things. And it wasn't the list on the fridge that changed things. It was voicing our needs, noticing each other's preferences, and giving more... Go figure. That idea of giving. Where did that come from?

We don't have it all figured out by any means. And there are still some days I feel overwhelmed, but I speak up before I fester up, if that makes sense. And we've gotten into a rhythm that feels pretty good.

He waters the outdoor plants while I make the bed, each morning.

He washes the towels, while I wash the clothes.

He cleans up the kitchen, after I make the dinner.

He shows up for whatever fun is planned, on the list that I made.

Now that last one used to be a source of contention for sure. I always planned the fun and wished that he would plan, too. But you know what? He's not so great at planning the fun, mostly because he's so thorough and it takes so much time for him. And I can do it in a flash. Also, I've come to realize that having a husband that shows up for fun, and will do anything and everything on my list, is truly a gift worth noting!

Of course there are other obvious things we do for each other, as well.

He hangs lights in the yard (he's great at these type of things – I am not!), I create the pretties.

He takes out the trash (I do help gather it), I clean the bathrooms.

He prays for me every morning when wakes up, before he gets up. I pray for him at night, before I sleep.

I no longer have a color-coded list on the fridge, because the kids are grown, and because we talk often if one or the other is stressed. Well, I talk. Because he's hardly ever stressed. Hardly ever. And that's one of the gifts he brings to our marriage, as well.

So is our life balanced, now? Am I less bitter? I'd say yet to both questions, but it wasn't because of my colored markers. We've just lived for decades together and somehow our hearts have grown to appreciate and communicate just a bit more, rather than bicker and demand. Oh yes, we still do that sometimes, but it's more the rarity than the norm.

Contention and bitterness over who does what is probably something that occurs in every marriage, but it just can't stay there and fester. Talking things out (without accusation), working our own hearts to position them to give and to trust God in the other...those two things win over contention and bitterness.

Yay for God.

## **For Better or Worse - Living the Someday – by Kaelin Scott**

It's so easy to only look ahead. To plan for the future and dream about what things might look like, down the road. To make preparations and investments and wise choices that will impact later generations. But sometimes we also need to look back.

I remember when my husband and I were first dating. We lived in different states and always talked about how *someday* we'd get to be together all the time. Then I moved to Texas, and we dreamed about *someday* getting married. And when we were finally married, we hoped to *someday* have a family and a home, etc.

It seems that in every phase of marriage, there is something more to look forward to. Something more to achieve. More room to grow. But I can't help but reflecting on our old dreams and goals and desires. Because right now, in this very moment, we are living those old *somedays*. We are living the life we once only dreamed about, and that is so very special.

I love looking ahead and wondering what life might be like five or ten years from now, but I also don't want to forget where we've already been. I don't want to take for granted the progress we've already made. We've grown so much over the years and accomplished so many things, both big and small. We've done that all together, my hubby and me.

There's still room to grow, yes. There are still things we want to do and achieve. But we are also living the dream. Our dream. The dream we built together. That's worth stopping long enough to smell the roses and enjoy the moment we're in. Because soon it will be another memory, and we'll be off to the next phase of life. But right now, it's a dream come true.



ENCOURAGEMENT



## **Rooted in Love - Generations of Friends – by Kaelin Scott**

A few weeks ago I got to attend a women's conference with ladies from my church. It was just an overnight trip right outside of town, but we all worshiped together and enjoyed a day of fellowship. There were women of all ages there – from single women to young moms to grandmothers, and even great-grandmothers. It was a fun little getaway that refreshed my spirit and helped me form new connections.

The theme of the conference was relationships, and we used the book of Ephesians as our anchor. I got so much out of the speaker's message, scribbling furiously in my notebook every time she spoke. We had actually just finished a sermon series on Ephesians at church, but this was a whole new take on it, which I found so interesting. Isn't it neat how the same passage can fuel different topics and messages? The Bible is so awesome that way.

My favorite part of the day was when the speaker talked about relationships with other women. She emphasized the importance of having friends from all stages of life. We talked about how special it can be to have friends who are older than you, who have walked the road you're traveling and can give you precious insight. And it's also important to befriend those who are younger than you, so that you can be the one to pour into someone else. Along with that, we need friends our age, in the same stage of life we're in. The ones who get what we're going through because they're right there too.

Womanhood is such a beautiful thing, something that we should walk through and celebrate together. Rather than compare ourselves to each other or judge one another, we can embrace our differences and walk hand in hand. We all need someone to pour into us, and we also need to pour into others. We have to be bold and make the effort to befriend the other women in our lives.

Maybe we won't get along perfectly or be best friends with everyone, and that's okay. But having friends of all different ages is such a blessing, one we'll miss out on if we're stuck inside a particular box. There's something so beautiful about befriending multiple generations. So let's embrace each other as we walk through womanhood together, forming friendships in unlikely places.

## **Unearthly Thing - The Closet Under the Stairs – by Angela Dolbear**

The closet under the stairs in our home is perfect. Everything is in a container, and the plastic bins are neatly placed on the shelves with the contents organized by holiday or linen category. It's an organized wonder. Sometimes, I will open the door and flip on the light just to admire the systematic splendor.

It's the only closet in our house that is like that. We cleaned it because the closet is in our basement, so we wanted no chance of moisture collecting behind crammed-in sheets or table linens. This stays clean and organized all the time, most likely because its contents only get used once a year at Thanksgiving and Christmas, or if we have guests come to stay with us.

The other closets and hard-to-open-and-close drawers in our home are overflowing with stuff—just stuff I need to sort out and organize. But I can't do it without significant anxiety overload. I feel overwhelmed and exhausted as soon as I open the door or drawer. So, then I close it, turn my back on the mess, and head to my office to work on my fifth novel, *The Mid-Century Breakfast Club*, which is exciting and enjoyable for me.

But the mess is still there. Lurking in the back of my mind...behind a closed door. Just waiting...I know it's there. I can feel it.

Why do I have such a giant hesitation about cleaning out closets and drawers? Why do I procrastinate when I know how satisfying it is to have orderly, organized closets and drawers? Sometimes, I tell myself I don't have time. Instead, I should be writing, marketing my books and music, or practicing vocals, but deep down, I know that's not true.

I love to give things away and throw out useless stuff. There is a thrift store nearby where all the proceeds go toward helping people in the community with utility and housing assistance. That makes my heart glad, so I should be happy to give away items I am not using to help those in need.

So then, what's my issue? Why all the drama, mama?

Recently, I was reading an article or a post, and the term "perfectionist" came up. What I read rang a bell of truth in my soul. So, I researched perfectionists' tendencies. They sounded very familiar and not good.

I am not perfect, and neither are my surroundings (i.e., see above mention of closets and drawers). My kitchen is very clean, but my office is a mess. And dust is everywhere (I'm not a fan of dusting). So why did the term perfectionist seem fitting? To gain wisdom on any topic, I search for biblical information about perfectionism (the internet is helpful for this).

According to [soulshepherding.org](http://soulshepherding.org), "Being perfected in the character of Christ is different than what is ordinarily meant by perfectionism. Perfectionism is a manifestation of anxiety, straining to be ideal or to have an ideal experience of some kind."

Yikes! Is my anxiety about a messy closet caused by an unattainable archetype that I have? Hmm...

The site also said, “God alone is perfect, and his perfection is manifested in Jesus Christ. To receive Christ into our life is to receive his perfection so that God accepts us as righteous because of Christ. Then, this righteousness needs to be worked out in our lives so that we actually take on the character of Christ. This is a process of being perfected by God’s power as we trust in the Lord Jesus and train ourselves to grow in godliness.”

This idea makes me examine my “ideals” and how skewed they are regarding real perfection, which is being done in me through Jesus. Suddenly, my anxiety about cleaning stuff out and the apprehension to get it done has melted away.

I asked God to help me have an orderly home and to help me not keep things I could give away to people who need them.

More wisdom I learned on the topic of perfectionism:

- **Learn to Live in God’s Kingdom Today** – “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33).
- **Trust in God to be Made Perfect** -- “It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect” (Psalm 18:32).
- **Rely on God’s Perfection as Your Refuge** -- “As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the Lord is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in Him” (Psalm 18:30).
- **Admit Your Weaknesses to Experience God’s Grace and Power** -- “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me” (2 Corinthians 12:9).
- **Focus on the Process of Growing (Being Perfected) in Holiness by Grace** – “Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6; see also Philippians 3:12, 2 Corinthians 7:1).

This wisdom has helped me see that messes are just messes and should not be a source of anxiety, especially when I have a God who is with me. I have prayed and asked God to help me develop a plan and the desire (and time) to clean out the closets and drawers and dust, and write and work on music. He is good, so I expect to have my stuff in a sensible order, in His timing. And without anxiety. Beautiful and organized, just like the closet under the stairs.

Blessings to you!

*Angela Dolbear is the author of contemporary Christian novels, such as THE GARDEN KEY Series and THE TORMENTOR’S TALE, as well as many short stories. Her novels are available on Amazon in paperback, Kindle, and audiobook formats. Angela writes real, relatable, and reverent fiction. She loves reading, writing prose, and writing and recording music with her husband Tim in their studio in Nashville, TN—listen to her new album STORMS on your favorite music streaming service. Please drop by and sign up for news, read new stories, and hear new original music at <http://www.angeladolbear.com/subscribe.htm>. Blessings to you!*

## **An Adage a Day - Something Old, Something New – by Carole Gilbert**

I'm not going to talk about the wedding tradition of something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue. I'm going to talk about my vehicles and how I was "like a mule looking at a new gate."

Our Sunday school teacher said that old phrase, recently. I had never heard it before that I can remember. It means to be stubborn, especially over something you're unfamiliar, or uncertain, with. It refers to someone who will not budge because they don't want to deal with something, or they just don't understand why there's a change. And sometimes, we'd rather not have a "new gate." We still like the old. We get stuck in the mud and then don't want to budge. We don't want change or have something new. Just like a mule, a wedding can cause hesitancy and uncertainty.

I can be like a mule, stubborn and not willing to move. Just ask my family. And I can also be like the Energizer bunny. I can keep on going. But when it came to my vehicles, or choice of lately, I was a mule looking at a new gate and not wanting to enter. You see, it was time for me to get a new one, or *new* to me. I still loved my old SUV but since I'm hauling grandchildren a lot, we decided time might be running thin on my car. I thought, easy enough, I'll just get a newer year but the same model. So, I went shopping. I found that the newer models were considerably smaller than my old one. I have three toddler car seats in my middle row, and they were not going to fit. Not to mention the back was not big enough to haul all my stuff when I go to events to sell my books. I was so disappointed. I felt like my "old and faithful," tried and true," brand of vehicles had betrayed me. I didn't want another model from the one I'd had for so many years. But I found myself without a choice. I would have to go through a new gate and take a new path.

Whether we like it or not, God gives us a new path, a new way of life, in many different forms, at different times. The wedding tradition of something old, something new, symbolizes a new path. It's a union of the already in place family with the new spouse. The union, the connection, joins them together. And it doesn't have to be about a wedding. With my vehicles, I joined, or married, memories of the old with the new ones to come.

As long as we're looking toward God, and following His path, we don't have to feel uncertainty. Our path to follow, our gate to God, comes through Jesus, our bridegroom. And we know God is in the changing business. Not only for His glory, but also for our benefit. He takes the old and makes it new, for which I am so thankful.

Interestingly, Jesus rode a donkey, which is like a mule when He entered Jerusalem. And just as interestingly, He did go through a gate, the eastern gate. And He didn't stop to look at the gate in hesitancy or uncertainty, He went right on through, bravely and boldly. And I want to be just like Him! So, I wasn't like a mule looking at a new gate, I went on through. And after all my dilemma, I love my *new to me* vehicle.

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.  
The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*

## **Simple Truths – It’s Just a Whirr – by Marcy Lytle**

I was pushing (now 2-yr old) Camp in his tree swing and we caught sight of a helicopter that flew over the backyard at least 10 times while we were swinging. Every time the helicopter came into view, Camp queried,

“Where you going, helicopter?”

Of course I played along, as I chose different destinations it might be headed, like to help sick people, rescue someone from the water, and other options that made him smile.

I could not believe how many times that helicopter appeared in the course of an hour, or how many times Camp asked the same question, to which I was running out of answers to give!

When I got home, I thought about how many times thoughts and questions circle my mind daily, often the same thoughts and questions – nothing ever new – like why someone died, the fear of aging – you know. Simple things like that! And as much as I’d like to say that helicopter of questions disappears and never returns, there it is again...overhead...whirring its blades. So annoying.

Oh, I’ve learned over the years to quiet those annoying questions and fears with all sorts of exercises, like praying, remembering the truth about who He is, quoting the Word, telling myself that thoughts are just thoughts and nothing else. But still...the helicopter circles.

And I too find myself asking,

“Where you going, helicopter?” as I so wish and long for it to disappear for good.

I’ve often defined myself by those thoughts, felt guilty, down on myself, and like a complete failure when it comes to faith. But lately, I’m realizing that’s just not true.

What defines me is my faith in Him, and I’m secure in that. Thoughts that circle and fears that whisper are just blades whirring in the wind above me, causing a bit of a disturbance for the moment, but they’re not part of who I am.

So if you too find yourself out in the sunshine of a perfectly clear day, enjoying yourself with a toddler, or reading a book in a chair, or walking on a path lined with falling leaves...and then you hear that noise above your head, know this:

You are not defined by what whispers in the air above you or in the rocks in front of you that might cause you to cover your ears or stumble and fall. You and I are both covered in grace, empowered with love, and held in His hands...always and forever.

Somehow, just realizing that I can now just say, along with Camp, “Where you going, helicopter?” and keep on swinging and enjoying the day has eased up my mental strain a bit.

Hope this visual helps you, as well. After all, what’s important is where those thoughts land when we send them away.

My heart is pining for garden time. Life doesn't always allow us to indulge in our favorite things, and such has it been for me lately. For several weeks my time has been dominated by a home project I've dreamed of for many years and finally decided to do: I took the plunge and got new flooring in my home. Little did I know what a mixed bag of joy, excitement, frustration, and revelation it would bring.

A team of four guys moved the furniture, removed the old tile and baseboards, leveled what needed leveling, laid down the new vinyl plank floor, installed new upgraded baseboards, and then moved the furniture back in. Their part took a day, my part took a week and is still in process. I packed up anything I didn't want broken or dusty, and everything inside the furniture to be moved, such as cabinets and bookcases. I'm so very thankful I have a small house, and not too terribly much stuff; even so, my garage is filled with boxes, baskets, lamps, and various small objects.

The new floor changed the look of the house. I love the clean seamless look with no thresholds anywhere, and it's nice to have a floor with no cracks and dirty grout. This is the joy and excitement. But you know what happens when you get something new—everything else somehow looks old and needs updating. And so the tyranny of things rises up its ugly head.

There are several layers to this tyranny. Layer one is dealing with the “things,” eliminating belts, purses, doo-dad trays, and various and sundry that haven't been utilized, sometimes *ever*. This layer activates the tyrannical impulse to hold on, i.e. *I might need that someday*. Layer two is creating a new look without going overboard. This activates one of the most dangerous tactics of the *tyrant*: the temptation to buy things that dazzle and call my name without having a place for them. Layer three is the tyranny of managing it all--cleaning, moving, repairing, buying, selling, etc.

I like the minimalist look; the lack of clutter on the shelves and in my closet brings me peace and focus. So how did I get here, again? I've downsized and eliminated before; I've tried to live simply. It's what I call the “tyranny of things”. In our consumer culture, it's especially easy to fall victim to the acquisition of material goods. But it couldn't happen if I didn't have a condition called “the lust of the eyes”. It's one of the worldly things John warned us about in 1 John 2:16 *For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.*

I suspect that I could take everything piled in my garage to Goodwill and I wouldn't miss it. But I'm not that bold, plus there are some gems worth keeping in there. I am, however, ruthlessly going through the boxes and what not, determined to whittle down what I bring back in. The challenge is to tame the tyrant going forward. It's fun to shop, fun to get new things, fun to change things up, and there is nothing wrong with that, but I have to find my place of peace and make sure I have a healthy, balanced plate. God has shown me some things about myself, and is reining me in so that I can be more careful, more mindful, more discriminating, and less controlled by “the tyranny of things.”

As always, I'm thankful to be more firmly planted because of his faithfulness.



## **Moving Forward - You Don't Understand Yet – by Pam Charro**

How incredibly lonely it must have often been for Jesus while he was here on earth. So much of what he did was misunderstood until later.

An example is in John 13:7, when he washed the disciples' feet.

He said,

"You don't understand yet what I am doing, but later on you will understand."

This gives me such a depth of appreciation for his ability to keep doing what was right when he was often the only human who "got it" at the time.

I also wonder how often it's still true today that he does, or allows, the things he does and has to watch me turn to him in hurt and confusion because I just don't understand...yet.

Life is painful and exhausting here, and so much of what I go through doesn't seem to make any sense. It seems that understanding would often help me to endure, but the majority of the time, understanding doesn't come - at least, not when I feel I most need it. Yet, I cling to scriptures like this to remind myself that God always knows exactly what he is doing, and it's likely that, in time, I will, too. What is best in the long run is still what is best, regardless of how I feel about it right now. I can trust his wisdom and love to bring about the best possible outcome.

He cannot be anything but good.

I'll still complain when I don't like what I'm going through, but I have made a conscious decision to stop putting God on trial just because I'm in an uncomfortable situation. I'm confident that it will all eventually make sense, and it will be worth whatever I had to endure.



FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME - Better Than Sleep – by Marcy Lytle**

How could there be anything better than sleep, you might ask? Well, at least for me, sometimes there is. Let me explain.

This week has been busy, my mind has been full, and my to-do list is longer than I want it to be. Therefore, I woke up super early this morning, like 4:30 a.m. and I was wide awake because of this fullness, this overflow of too much going on. I could have stayed in bed forcing myself to go back to sleep, to wrestle with my full mind, or...I could just get on up and get some of those lists made and started. And that's what I chose to do.

Of course, I can't do this every night, and getting up that early every day isn't wise or healthy for me to do so, when I don't go to sleep until almost midnight. BUT, for this one morning it was *better than sleep*. It felt so good to make my lists, to work on some things on the computer that I needed to do, and to do all of this without any noise in the house. (And a nice potpourri on the stove was great, as well!)

There are also times when we are traveling and we have an early flight, because we want to arrive at our destination and still have day time to enjoy there. So we set the alarm and we're up again about 4:30 to catch that early flight. And yes, it's better than sleep! Excitement sometimes overrides our ability to rest. My goodness, on the night before our Christmas with the kids I'm awake early, because excitement is better than sleep. *On occasion*.

I've had nights where no matter how much I tried before retiring to empty my mind of worry and concern over family and needs, I just can't rest well, and my eyes pop open way too early. And again, I try to lay there and count sheep and tell myself it's too early. But once in a while, I'm up and in the front room, all by myself with a throw across my lap, and light music in my ears, or just the quiet prayer time I need with just Him and me. *Early in the morning*. And he hears my voice, just like he did the psalmist.

All of these things are better than sleep when they occur, because they better me. Getting things done and lists make a better me, from being anxious and grouchy and stressed at being behind. Excitement makes me giddy like a kid and that's better than sleep sometimes, because I just can't quit smiling because of what's coming and smiling and joy is good, even better than sleep. And well, spending time with Him in the wee hours of the morning, I seem to hear more clearly and become settled more quickly, and yes – that's better than sleep.

Of course, on those nights when sleep is scarce, those better than sleep moments turn into a tired in-need-of-a-nap later in the day. But that's okay. A nap in the car, under a shade tree, or with the warmth of the sun if it's a cold day, is also sweet. Curling up with a book on the sofa to rest my head about 2pm, if I can for a bit, is sweet.

I don't like to wake up early and lose sleep. But rather than seeing it as losing those zzzz's, I'd rather see that wake-up call as something that awaits me that's better...better than sleep.

## **FRESH THYME – In My Tent – by Marcy Lytle**

Some days I just don't want to be thankful. Do you ever have those days, too?

Today, and yesterday, were two of those days. Little insignificant things were getting the best of me and I knew they were insignificant, yet I was really bummed. What little things were there? So glad you asked.

We bought some string lights for the yard but couldn't figure out where to hang them, how to plug them in. Next, I stared at the walls in my house, the cracks that emerge every summer and close up when fall rains start...but they're not closing up now. We tried to figure out the light situation again, only with no agreeable solutions. We headed out to get a pretzel – an Auntie Anne's pretzel – only to see on the door that they took cash only. Seriously? But...Jon looked in his wallet where no cash ever resides and there he had just enough - if we shared a drink.

It was just a day of repeated little things that bugged me. But then there was the grief on top of all that, of losing a family member, and watching those left here on earth suffer. And the questions of why. We also watched a holocaust movie and I came home and cried at the images we've all seen, but we can never forget.

Okay, half of those things weren't insignificant. They were seriously sad. But surely you know what I mean. The day starts off and then snowballs into wishing things were different, hoping for things we don't have, and wailing in grief over what's been taken.

And yet we're told to give thanks in all things. And I didn't want to. Oh, I've done it many times before; and the giving of thanks, finding many blessings to praise Him for in the moment, has lifted my mood and heart on multiple occasions.

But this one evening, I didn't feel like giving thanks. I just felt like being "grouchy" as someone told me I was being – and I was. I just felt overwhelmed by all of the little things and the big, and together I just wanted to sit and wallow in the sadness and the disappointment for a bit.

Did I eventually choose to give thanks? Well, of course I was happily surprised at the cash that enabled us get the pretzel – but it was stale. You see, I was still finding things to grouch about. And I let go of the notion that the lights will work and thought I could just give them away if we don't figure it out. And I do have a home and a roof and SO MUCH, when there are neighbors across the miles that just went through a horrific hurricane.

But I still couldn't shake the weariness of life, the rapidity of the passing of days, and the frustration with all the little things I wish would just take care of themselves. In other words, I wasn't a happy camper and I just wanted to sit in my tent in my unhappiness, zip the door shut, and sit in the dark.

The whole reason for sharing this story is to encourage all of us that it's okay, we're human, and there will be days we don't want to be encouraged or told to give thanks, even though deep inside we do have a thankful heart. It's there because we know Him, and he knows us, and there are days when we just want to sit and stare. And still, He's there.

That's the beauty of loving Christ. He loved us first, in our mess. And he loves us now in our tents.

(By the way, we figured out where to hang the lights...)

## **FRESH THYME - Offended**

Have you ever stopped and thought about what offends you the most often? I decided to do that this week, because I don't like being offended, I don't like offending someone else, and I don't like staying offended! Who does? It's not comfortable, it doesn't feel good, and it makes for poor relationships.

### Undervalued

This might be something that offends us all. It's when others don't see our value or appreciate it, and perhaps they even belittle us. It hurts when we give or serve, and no one says anything. Or when we feel like we could bring something good to the table, but we are overlooked. This leads to thinking poorly of ourselves and being offended at those that aren't noticing.

### Not included

Maybe those people had a dinner one night and invited other friends, but we were left out. Or maybe our kids went somewhere that was fun and we would have liked to go as well, but we weren't included. Sometimes, there's exciting news that others share, but we're the last one to hear about it. Or a speech was given thanking folks for their contributions, but our name wasn't even mentioned. This leads to great offense and sometimes even anger at those who are leaving us out.

### No Response

I can't tell you how many times I've been offended when I text a group or a friend and either there's no response, or that person answers but then just disappears in the middle of a conversation. I get offended easily because I deem it rude to not respond! This leads to judgment on the other party that they're just being so selfish.

### Uncaring

Maybe we're going through a difficult time and our friends pray at first, ask for a few days, and then we're out of sight, out of mind. Yet our hearts are hurting for months and years at our loss. We might wish for friends to care, but their lack of attention then leads us to thinking they've quit caring. And while that's so far from the truth, we still think it.

I have barely begun my list and I see a common thread above, and it's all about me. My needs. My wants. And my judgment on others for not meeting those needs. This leads to being offended.

One thing I'm working on for myself is finding my worth, realizing my value, and releasing those around me to be human...and that's freeing. God is my ultimate caregiver and He's always there, his word is always full of affirmation and love, and it's actually the best resource for all of my needs! ALL OF THEM. On the few days when I really get this, when I'm on solid ground with Him, none of the above things are offensive. It's because I, too, fail at being the best friend, remembering to text, and responding and caring in a timely manner.

It might be good to make a list from time to time at what's really offending us, and to examine the why and the way we can come out of it. Because we all know that offenses lead down roads that are dark and lonely. And no one wants to travel there...

## **FRESH THYME – Thoughtful Gifts – by Marcy Lytle**

I'm of the opinion that giving gifts is a joy. And I'm also of the opinion that giving gifts to our family doesn't have to be laborious or stressful, but rather...thoughtful. Since Christmas is next month, and gift giving can be super stressful, here's a list that might help you give with joy. They're all just three or four things in a basket (get the baskets at the dollar store), and you're done:

From World Market: a bag of pasta, a beautiful tea towel, and a jar of sauce

From Marshalls: a large bar of soap, a really cute hairclip, and a candle

From Trader Joe's: a box of cookies, a container of dark chocolate peanut butter cups, and a bouquet of flowers

From Old Navy: a pair of socks, a cute graphic tee, and a bag of candy (at the checkout)

From your local nursery: a cute succulent, a cute pot, and a gift card to come back

From Target: a sketch pad, some colored pencils, and an invitation to come draw with you

From Walmart: A bag of chips, Velveeta block, and a can of Rotel, and a cute dip bowl

From a coffee shop: a dark chocolate bar, a gift card, and an invitation to meet

From Ross: cozy socks, a pair of slippers, and a throw

From a bookstore – a magazine, a journal, and a puzzle book

From your local drugstore – your favorite lotion, lip balm, nail polish, and one more pick of your choice

From your kitchen – homemade granola, a pretty scoop, all in a cute jar

That's a dozen ideas for all of your friends. See if you can come up with more, and keep the list taped to the inside of a door somewhere in your house for using as gift inspiration all year long!