



A BUNDLE OF  
THYME  
*For Every Season*

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TIPS

## **In the Kitchen – The Next Three Months – by Marcy Lytle**

Our panel shared some great recipes for quick breads (See “Seven for You” on the TIPS page), so instead of recipes in this column this month, I thought I’d share some tricks and tips and hacks and ideas for you this fall, for October, November, and December – those months when I bet we’re in the kitchen more than any other time of the year!

Paper plates and napkins are a must this time of year. Head to Marshalls or the dollar type stores for lots of options, and have them in a cabinet or on display to use at home...so you aren’t dirtying up so many of your good dishes. And don’t feel bad for doing it.

It wouldn’t be a bad idea to have a little flatware caddy nearby with plastic forks and spoons, too! Make this time of year easy for you and yours, and save the niceties for the dishes and people you’re serving. You’ll be glad for all the less work!

Did you know that if you cook your veggies in a skillet with olive oil AND some butter, you’ll get that nice charred look and flavor?

When you’re boiling potatoes for mashed potatoes or other potato recipes, drain the water, then place the potatoes back in the hot pot. The hot pot will absorb the rest of the moisture and your potatoes won’t be soggy.

This is a good time of year to look through your kitchen cabinets, drawers and pantry to see what you might want and place it on a Christmas list to give to the kids (or your husband), or to buy for yourself! Maybe you need bowl covers, bins for your shelves, a new set of measuring cups, etc.

Keep a new book in the kitchen on a shelf to stop for 15 minutes when you’re tired - just to read a couple chapters. You need to sit down when the standing gets too long...and escape into someone else’s story.

Have you gotten a magnetic pad for the season, for your fridge? Marshalls has lots! Place it there and tell the entire family if they need something, they HAVE to write it on the that pad and not tell you, or pull your arm to get your attention or remind you...just write it and say nothing. Train them to do this!

Save one little spot (maybe on the handle of the oven) to hang the prettiest tea towel you can find. World Market has the cutest ones for the season. They’re not for using, only for enjoying.

Is your drawer flatware caddy all dirty and nasty and old? Hit one of the discount stores for a new one. And while you’re there, pick up a big wooden board for charcuterie for the holidays. Use it often. Just lay out meat, cheese, olives, nuts, bread, hummus, cucumbers, and anything else you want...and call it dinner...often.

Finally, have a list of snacks for the family posted on a wall or cabinet, where they can read and prepare for themselves all season long like: apples with peanut butter and dark chocolate chips, cuties peeled and enjoyed any time at all, hummus with pita chips, a cup of trail mix, pickles and cheese, etc.

Look around your kitchen and see how you can make it work better for you, make lists, think of ways to make your life easier while you're cooking and planning, and then don't let anyone or anything enter that sacred place you now enjoy so much...unless they're invited.

## **Seven for You – Quick Breads – by the Panel**

It's that time of year for baking bread...and all things fragrant in the kitchen. But...if you're like me, you don't have all day to bake or the patience to wait...so we asked our panel for some quicker and easier versions of that goodness we all love in the fall. Enjoy!

I love making and baking platefuls of treats for my neighbors and friends. It's an old tradition that's fading fast but I'm an old traditional person. Okay, maybe not that old!? I've tried many recipes over the years from easy to complex, time consuming to quick, and favorites to not so much, but I admit I love to eat them all. And I love anything pumpkin! There has been one recipe that has remained my signature treat for many years; and of course, it's pumpkin! Cranberry pumpkin bread to be exact. I have made this recipe in normal sized loaves, mini loaves, and muffins. I have given it solo and with other treats. And I have eaten it myself every time I've made it. The tartness of the fresh cranberries with the sweet pumpkin makes this recipe the yummiest! It might take a little longer to make but it's worth it! I hope you'll try it and join me in having a very Cranberry Pumpkin kind of Holiday Season! - Carole (insert her pic)

### **Lassie Cake**

*Although this is typically made in a cake pan, it works well in bread pans, too. It's so moist it doesn't need frosting.*

- 1 Cup Sugar
- ½ Cup Butter
- 1 Cup Brown Sugar
- 2 Cups Sifted Flour
- 1 tsp. Cinnamon
- 1 tsp Nutmeg
- 1 tsp Salt
- 1 Cup Buttermilk
- 1 Egg
- 1 tsp Baking Soda

Mix together melted butter, white sugar and brown sugar.

Sift flour with cinnamon, nutmeg and salt. Add to sugar mixture and mix until crumbly.

Take out ½ cup - and set aside.

Mix egg, buttermilk and baking soda together. Add this to flour mixture and mix well.

Pour into a greased 9x13 pan, or two loaf pans.

Sprinkle reserved crumbs over top.

Bake 25 minutes.

Cool in pan before cutting.

*This recipe is used at Barberville Pioneer Settlement, a living history museum in Baberville, Florida. Students, grades 1-4, make the cake during a field trip program. - Gloria*

This is my go-to, easy, flexible bread recipe. It came from a YouTube channel that I enjoy watching called, The Farming Pastor's Wife. Leslie is a pastor's wife who lives on a farm in

North Carolina. She published this recipe as being so easy that anybody, that's anybody like me who is not a good baker, can make it. And she's right. It's very easy and literally requires 5-10 minutes of total hands on time. Just follow the simple directions and it works every time.

You can add sesame seeds, herbs or spices just before the second rise to create lots of variety. I bake it in a preheated cast iron skillet. You will impress your family and friends every time you serve it! – Debbie (insert her pic)

This recipe is old because it's on a notecard in a box. This was my OG way of saving recipes, so it's from at least before the internet came about. They are *not* healthy, but they *are* yummy...and even better with some melted butter in the middle. Eat too many of these and you'll grow your own muffin-top; I know from experience! Droooool.... Laura

### **Blueberry Muffins**

Sift into a small bowl:

2 c. flour  
1 c. white sugar  
3 tsp. baking powder  
1 tsp. salt

Whisk together in a separate bowl:

1 egg  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  c. milk  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  c. vegetable oil

Fold in dry ingredients until just combined. Mix in:

1 c. blueberries

Spoon into muffin liners. For regular-sized muffins, bake for 20 min at 400 degrees. Immediately move muffins to a cooling rack.

### **Irish Soda Bread**

Have you ever made Irish Soda Bread? I like it because it's different, and there is no kneading that takes place. It takes very little time to put it together, which is a plus as well. And then...it's the best bread when toasted, with a little butter, to enjoy with fruit or juice for breakfast!

- 4 c flour, plus  $\frac{1}{4}$  c for dusting
- $\frac{1}{4}$  c granulated sugar
- 1 t sea salt
- 1 t baking soda
- 6 T cold unsalted butter, plus  $\frac{1}{2}$  T to grease pan
- 1  $\frac{3}{4}$  c cold lowfat buttermilk
- 1 large egg, cold
- 1 cup dried cranberries or raisins

Preheat oven to 325 and generously grease a 10" cast iron skillet with  $\frac{1}{2}$  T butter.

In a large bowl, whisk the flour, sugar, salt and baking soda. Cut butter into small pieces and use your fingers to work the butter into the flour until crumbs form. Stir in the raisins and break up any clumps. Make a well in the center.

In a large measuring cup, whisk the buttermilk and egg and then add to the flour mixture. Use a wooden spoon and mix til lightly moistened and dough barely starts to come together.

Transfer to a floured surface and flour hands, shaping dough into a round loaf. It should be shaggy. If too sticky, just lightly dust with flour. Don't overmix or bread will get tough.

Transfer to buttered skillet and use a knife to score the top with a deep "X." Bake in center of oven at 375 for 50-55 minutes. When you tap the bread it should sound hollow inside. Transfer to a wire rack and cool. Enjoy within two days or refrigerate for up to a week. - Marcy

## **Cousin Moms – Any Consequences? - by Charissa and Kamrin**

Disobedience and consequences - timeout for the littles - is that a thing anymore? And as they get older, there are all sorts of areas of disobedience. What do parents overlook? Are there different consequences for different acts? What works and what hasn't worked? We asked our cousin moms to share some specific examples....and even their frustrations and/or resources for how they help the kids learn the importance of being obedient to Mom and Dad, to God's word, and to rules at home and school.

### Kamrin

So when it comes to discipline and consequences for disobedience, I'm not sure we have an A+B=C formula. Does anyone? Different situations result in different conversations and consequences. And with three kids close in age, we are constantly navigating.

However, we do handle things in three general ways:

**Conversations** – We really try hard to make sure we are a safe place (always) for our kids. This means for us as parents to respond, instead of react. I can sometimes react quickly out of frustration, especially if it's a repeated offense. Boundaries are tested, as the kids get older, I'm learning! We have a lot more conversation about the "why" when they disobey. This helps us understand their thoughts process and learn together.

**Character** – When we have conversations, we want them to understand character, not just rules. We want them to grow and operate in wisdom, and listen to Him as they are away from us. Not everything is black and white that's not in our rules, situations come up that we haven't encountered before. But because of the wisdom and character conversation, they can apply to the situations in which they find themselves. Like, what happens if at the park a friend that's older asks you to leave the park...without telling Mom and Dad.

**Consequences** – Mostly we remove something i.e. not TV for the week, or no park time, no social time. Sometimes, it might be an extra chores is priorities weren't met. We also try to offer grace. But when attitude is there and arguments ensue, we add a consequence.

An example is the park. The boys go to the park with rules: If Mom or Dad calls, you answer. You don't leave the park without calling. They stay at the park with other friends for hours. We trust them as they follow the rules. If they're late or not home on time, they get a consequence like not going to the park for a week! So, we try to build trust...in us as parents...and not do what others want them to do instead.

**Grace and Love** – We try really hard to offer grace the first time. But if something continues and they ignore the grace, then we turn toward consequences. Kids need to also have freedom to apply what they've learned.

Parenting is scary. My husband is better at extending boundaries, and it's hard for me not to worry. My oldest is now 13 and I have to learn to trust him as I can, and trust the Lord as well.



And **prayer** is definitely our biggest tool! We want the kids to follow rules because of wisdom and relationship, versus a formula.

We are not perfect, we sometimes react out of anger and we've yelled. So grace is extended to ourselves and to our kids. And as my husband I grow and walk with Christ, this helps our kids to follow. It's a work in progress!

### Charissa

One of my least favorite things to do as a parent is discipline, and how we as parents discipline changes during the different stages of our kids' life. Also, each of our children is so different in the way she responds.

In regards to discipline, whenever our girls do something they're not supposed to – that requires a consequence – we try to point it back to the heart. We explain how we live in a fallen world and He forgives us when we disobey, and we want to be more like Him. However, we will make mistakes. But how we move forward is what's important. So we start with the why.

As parents, it's always a constant battle of being patient and full of grace, but also stern and strict if they're repeatedly disobeying.

Some things we have done are: spanking hands when little but as they've gotten older, we do use Time Out and a corner sit, where they're quiet and think. We also remove things like television, or they have to go straight to bed. A lot of times discipline happens when the girls are super tired.

One thing I've had the girls do when they're arguing or not sharing, is find a verse that I feel like we could use – often ones of the fruits of the spirit. And sometimes, I ask them to write it over and over, so they can memorize it. We even tape the verse up on their wall. We have young girls, so disciplining I'm sure will change as they age.

We have also had our girls do chores – like help plant grass seed or rake leaves or blow leaves off the driveway, per Dad's instruction.

All in all, it's not fun to discipline or offer consequences as a parent, but it's also necessary. We all sin, we all make mistakes and we all learn together.

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

Here we are in October already – what? My mind is so full of everything I'm learning and experiencing, I'm on sensory overload. Do you feel that way this time of year? Well, slow down with me, breathe, and let's laugh and marvel over little things that are worth noting whether they're trivial or important...as we enter the 10<sup>th</sup> month of the year:

Fried okra makes great croutons on a salad. We just tried it and loved it!

Did you know there are lots of affordable seasonal shower curtains at Big Lots? In case you're interested, sometimes this is a fun décor for guests if you're having them, for the holidays.

Snails crawl up trees when rain is coming. Is this true? I don't know, but I've heard it is. Look at this clusters of snail on a trail near us – oh my!

You know all those outdoor summer lanterns? If you can find them on sale, they look pretty amid pumpkins on your porch. Opt for the solar kind or ones with timers!

If you're packing for travel, I recently purchased the best jewelry box that holds little zipper pouches inside. I love it...from Amazon.

Have you tried pepper drops on your salad? I had never heard of them, but they were served to us recently on a salad – and apparently they are sold at Walmart!

If you're crafty with wood, check out these trees we saw for sale that look easy enough to make from logs!

You can smear peanut butter on a platter and sprinkle with granola and chocolate chips, line up pretzels beside it, and strawberries too, for a great snack board!

Did you know that Ulysses S. Grant's wife Julia was a colorful character? She used to serve 25-course meals to guests!

Carpets in old houses from the 1800's had seams, because the carpet was laid in strips so it could be pulled up to clean or even to move! There were no vacuums back then...

Hay bales can be made into swings! Who knew?

Old homes in historic homes sometimes have plates in their yards with the date of the house, the owner, and their profession – wow! I wish all of them did!

Cut up one of those pool tubes into slices, place several on a string tied between two chairs, and ask toddlers to lie down and move them across the string with their feet. See if they will!

We recently had biscuits with pimienta cheese and strawberry jam – no butter. It was good!

## S U G A R + *Spice* - Makeup for Halloween – by Angela Dolbear

Whatever your costume choice for Halloween, find something fun that inspires you.

Last year, I had fun dressing up as Frida Kahlo, one of my favorite artists. It was a simple makeup job consisting of doing a light rendition of my regular makeup, but I replicated her signature unibrow instead of my everyday brow makeup. It was a bit tricky because I wanted the brow to look natural. First, I used a liquid eyeliner pen to make light “hair” strokes between my brows. Next, I filled in the base of the brow with some brow powder.

Lastly, I put on a flower garland headband, some dangly earrings, and my Frida t-shirt, and then my costume was complete. Fabulosa!

Here are some makeup options for your Halloween makeup needs:

- [Wet n Wild Fantasy Makers Smokey Paint Palette](#)
- [Wet n Wild Fantasy Makers Hyper Pigment Liquid Paint](#)
- [NYX SFX Face & Body Paint Palette](#) -- Two color combinations palettes are available.
- [NYX SFX FACE & BODY PAINT STICKS](#) -- Comes in six colors
- [Bowitzki Halloween Makeup Special Effects Oil Face Body Paint](#) has many special effects options.

The beauty of blessings to you!

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HOME

## **Practical Parenting – In Our Shoes – by Marcy Lytle**

I think every single kid does it. They see their parents' shoes lying around and they walk over and step into them. It's so fun to watch. And then they try to walk. And if the child is a toddler, he can't walk at all. He tries but he steps out of the shoes or falls over. But when he can master walking in the larger shoes, this big grin emerges on his face!

There's such a good lesson for parents when they're sitting on the sofa smiling at their little offspring trying to talk in the mom or dad's large pair of sneakers, when these kids have such tiny little feet.

We have to be careful where we're walking, because little eyes see and observe our paths, and they try them out when they're young.

Let's look at our shoes and see what they show and tell our kids when we're getting ready to go places.

If they see us wear sneakers, head out the door for a walk, to the park to play, and we place little sneakers on their feet...they will associate sneakers with play time.

If they see us slip on slides and grab a beach towel, the little kids will squeal with delight, because those types of shoes mean swimming at the pool! They run with delight to grab their own pool shoes.

If they see us add socks before we put on our shoes, and grab a pair of warm boots, they associate those shoes with cold weather. They might squirm and not want to wear their heavy boots, but when they step outside and realize there's snow on the ground, they be thankful for warm toes.

If they see us search our closet for our prettiest and nicest pair of shoes, and we are dressed up as well, they will observe perhaps that Mom and Dad are going on a date. Dressy shoes are for fancy places and they want to play in the closet later and "dress up" too.

In this photo I've included for this picture, Camp (age 22 months at the time) saw my sneakers and he tried his best to step into them, only he lost his balance and he couldn't get his toes all in at the same time. He looked at me sweetly and said, "Help," which I gladly did. We sat on the floor and placed his chubby little toes in the shoes and helped him stand up.

He tried to walk but it was really impossible, but I could see that he enjoyed the process of trying out Ella's shoes. They were fascinating to him, and he was curious if he could walk in them.

A few days ago, I took 11 year old Ayla shopping for boots. She said a girl needs at least five pair of boots for the season! But we only shopped for one. A year or so ago she was so excited that her feet were finally large enough to move from the girls shoes to the adult shoes...a size 5. And this time she was wearing a 6, which opened up a whole world of possibilities for boots that she'd not had before. She had arrived!

As parents, think about the shoes you wear. Talk about shoes with your toddlers, your tweens, and beyond. Go shopping for shoes as their feet grow and talk about where these shoes take your kids. Share with them how shoes are for safety, to look nice, and that they take us places...but then we take them off at night to rest our feet. Start this early, when he first steps into those sneakers you left by the sofa. Hold his hands and smile with him as he “feel so big” that he can walk in your shoes.

And pray daily that your feet take you to places where you are a light to others; that they fit you nicely as you serve others, and that you wear them often to nice places with the ones you love. And your kids will not only step into your shoes, but they’ll walk and serve and be good walkers and runners and givers...as their feet mature and they find their new shoes all their own.

## **I Don't Do Teens – Trick or Treat? – by Marcy Lytle**

No, this article isn't about teens dressing up in costumes and going trick or treating down the street. That can be fun for the kids, or not...that's up to each family. However, there's another kind of "trick or treat" that teens participate in, and that's lying. If they try to trick us as parents, it's not so fun when we realize we've been had.

I remember hearing all sorts of warnings about the teen years and how they were hard, how teens are for sure going to try us and wander off into dangerous territory, and yes...even lie and do all sorts of things that hurt us and worry us. And I remember just being crushed when I heard one of my kids tell their friends on their phone that they were going to do this (something we wanted them to do) and then that (what the friend wanted) and it was all just to deceive us...

So, as parents of teens, how do we tell when our teens are tricking us through lies and deceit, or treating us to being obedient and trustworthy? It's hard, but I found that more and more as they grew to be adults, my Father was trustworthy to reveal to us things we needed to know regarding our kids.

*I suppose* we all have to first look at ourselves and see if there are places in our lives that our kids observe us cheating or lying or tricking. Like in our driving (our kids called us out on everything we were teaching them while getting their licenses!), how we obey traffic laws or pay our bills, how we talk to our friends on the phone and if we too deceive others. If they see us do it, then they will follow suit.

*I suppose* every parent has different "leashes" they offer their teens. But one rule that's good to follow is to only let out the leash (permission to go here and there) as much as your teens are trustworthy. Give them a little responsibility or let them go out an hour later, etc. and if they call and do what you ask, then great. If not, reign them back in. Kids need boundaries, as long as they live under our roofs!

*I suppose* we get to know our kids' body language and tone of voice. If there's nervousness we've not seen before, or eyes not looking directly at us when we're talking to them, there might be something going on behind our backs. It's good to talk about things with our kids and if they lie, or disobey, and thus "trick" us, it's good to find out the why and how they were feeling about themselves and the rules and their friends.

*I suppose* we've all watched crime thrillers and listened to the news of teens doing the most outlandish things and when the parents are quizzed they say, "We had no idea our kids were into this." I remember a movie once about parents that just left their teens in their rooms night and day and didn't even know when they were home! Sounds crazy. However, including teens in the family and insisting they come with the other siblings and mom/dad for dinners and events, and show up at the table, helps us keep a relationship going that we can recognize when something goes awry.

*I suppose* some of us have hard and fast rules, and our kids might feel exasperated and perceive that we're too hard on them. This happens. And it's hard to know, as parents, how many rules to make and what the consequences are if they're broken. So our kids start to be

fearful of us, and that fear drives them to sneak around. Or maybe they're embarrassed in front of their friends that have no rules at all. This is where relationship and trust must be present. Loving our kids, communicating with them, and praying WITH them, helps ensure a parent/child relationship that holds when the other kids start to pull our kids loose.

Sometimes, nothing works. And our kids stray and test the waters. Heck, I bet we all did the same thing. But God cares, and we can come to him and ask him for wisdom. We can pray over our kids, and open our eyes and ask God to provide guidance. And He will...for them...and for us. And set us all back on track when or if we start to veer off and crash... That's the treat part of being a parent with our Father nearby...



## **Brought to Mind - Memories on My Shelves – by Lindsay Christianson**

I don't have a distinct memory of how I decided to become a writer. I always had a vivid imagination and loved making up stories and adventures even if I never wrote them down.

What I do clearly remember is being surrounded by books. They may not have all directly inspired my writing career, but they definitely fostered my love for the written word.

For most of my early life, the books I loved were picture books and read-alouds. My family would pick them out for me at the library or for a few dollars second hand. Others came as part of our homeschool curricula.

As I entered my teens, I started to spend more time reading silently as a hobby instead of listening to my mom during school or at bedtime. I wanted to find and collect books for myself. Unfortunately, most new books aimed at my age group didn't appeal to me.

Then I discovered books from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. There is a wealth of wholesome fiction for teen girls from the 40s – 60s. My favorites were Nancy Drew, Donna Parker, Vicki Barr, and the Dana Girls. In addition to devouring the plots, I learned how to identify the original vintage editions of these books and started building my collection.

My collection of vintage teen books brings back many happy times. The day trips I took with my family to antique stores. The excitement when I found a vintage first edition tucked on the shelf amongst all the newer books at a secondhand bookstore. Getting drawn into the adventures while laughing at the odd old words in some of the books (“She looked ruefully at her pumps.”)

The yellow-spined Nancy Drews on my shelf also bring to mind falling in love with mystery stories. It remains my favorite genre to read and write.

Autumn is upon us, and it's the coziest time for curling up with a book. Especially a mysterious one. It's also a great time for nostalgia. We're on the cusp of the holiday season with all its traditions and memories. Why not recall some more private traditions and memories by getting your favorite warm drink, a fuzzy blanket, and a beloved childhood book? As enjoyable as reading can be for us grown-ups, there was something extra special about it when we were children. In our world of busy lives and crazy media, recapturing that magical experience may be just what we need.

## **In Each Room – Pumpkins at Home – by Marcy Lytle**

I have lots of pumpkins. And buying pumpkins is relatively inexpensive, especially certain ones and sizes. But where do we put the pumpkins? They're a great décor accessory for October and November...up through Thanksgiving...and placing them in lots of places gives a cozy feel to any home:

**Fabric** – Have you seen them? Little pumpkins made from fabric...and they are so cute! Maybe you could even make some, if you're crafty. They look so cute on a shelf, next to a couple others things...like a trio!

**Wicker** – These are cute and can be found with battery operated candles or twinkle lights inside. They might be pretty on an entry table, or on a bottom shelf of a sofa table...just to add ambience and light to a room.

**Glass** – These are elegant, and just beautiful, if you like this style of décor. If you love glass décor, there are some beautiful ones for the fall season. Just add a few to your shelves, or your mantel...so pretty.

**Candles** – Pumpkin shaped candles or just ones that smell like pumpkin spice seem to be a favorite of lots of people...I know my family loves them. Be careful where you place these...in a trio of fall décor...but enjoy them safely.

**Tiny ones** – These are found at the craft stores, or even the dollar stores. Use them for place cards – writing your guests' names on them with a pretty marker. Place several in a bowl and set on a table. Or use them as part of games with your family. Toss them in a corn hole board instead of the usual little bags! Or carry them on a large spoon for a relay!

**Woven** – I found these last year at Big Lots and they're a fave. They're not really woven straw, but rather sturdy material that can even sit outside. They're just stunning when you get a variation of sizes.

**Real Ones** – Grab a load of pumpkins and arrange them on the steps of your porch in groups...just stunning! If you've got a wheelbarrow, fill it full as the family arrives to pick one to paint!

## **A Night to Remember – The Square Pumpkin – by Marcy Lytle**

Have your kids seen the animated movie called *Spookley the Square Pumpkin*? It's a cute watch, with a powerful message...and it's sort of the backdrop for this month's devo with the family. Find it on Netflix, watch it together, then print out this lesson and enjoy what you've learned.

Preparation: Watch *Spookley the Square Pumpkin* or just read this synopsis, before you begin. Spookley is a square pumpkin in a pumpkin patch, so he's the only one different from the rest of the round pumpkins. He gets teased and begins to feel bad about himself...until near the end of the story he saves the day *because* he's square! Grab a bowl and fill it with some fall snacks like candy corn and popcorn, or whatever your family enjoys. Share it together as you learn.

Every one of us is made in the image of God, as we read in Genesis 1:27. And we are not all made to look alike. In fact, each of us is different from the other and we aren't to make fun of or tease others because they're different.

*Think about* your own family. How are we all different? (different ages, heights, hair color, interests, etc.) Even in our own little family, we are different, yet we all love each other and work together.

Spend a couple minutes complimenting each other's differences.

*Think about* your friends and the people you know. Who stands out as being "different" and why? (maybe a neighbor has a different skin color, or a friend 's dad has a tattoo, or that girl at school is in a wheelchair.) Have you seen others make fun of people that are different? John 3:16 says God loves the world, and that means everyone...so we should too.

Spend a few minutes sharing times you've seen others make fun of different kids, or when you have, and ask God for forgiveness.

*Think about* yourself. Do you ever feel "different" and are you ever made fun of by others? Spookley was square and the others were round, and he got teased. Have you ever been teased? How did it make you feel? (Let the family share, including the parents, a time when they were teased.) Teasing someone because they're different hurts their hearts and wounds their souls.

Spend a minute or too sharing your own feelings about how you're made or how you look, or how you live.

At the end of the story, Spookley ends up saving the day *because* of his being different. We are all different and all beautiful in God's eyes, so we should see ourselves and others as beautiful.

Spend the last few minutes talking about how it's okay and even cool to be different from the rest of the patch. We are going to be seen as "different" when we choose to not gossip or disobey. Others might tease us for the clothes we wear or the freckles on our skin, or the way we walk or play. And while it hurts when we are teased, we must also realize how it hurts others to be teased as well.

How can we look at people and not see their differences and make fun, but rather see the beauty in who they are and love them? How can we see ourselves as wonderfully made?

Jesus is a good example. He spoke to those that were lonely, went about healing the sick, invited little children to sit near him, and told stories about how to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

Spookley was different just because he wasn't made like the others. And we are all different in some way, but God has a purpose – a big one and a good one – for our lives when we follow Him!

## **Tiny Living – A Happy Heart – by Leyanne Enterline**

Fall is here! So the calendar says. But in Texas I'm not exactly sure the weather follows the "calendar." It's just that whenever it's not over 100 degrees, we Texans say fall is here! It does seem like we don't have to run the air-conditioner 24/7 in the trailer, so that's a plus. Hopefully, that will help some with our pretty large electric bills we had this summer. Though our bill was never over \$200, I hear people with "normal homes" have electric bills that have been over \$500! So I'll count my blessings...

The new house building is moving along, so one day I'll get to have one of those payments that I'll try not to complain about because... I'll be in our home!

Now for an update on the "larger house." It's moving along pretty quickly! The rain has caused some delays, but we are so thankful for the rain, as the lake has come up quite a bit from all the downfall! The roof is on and dry wall will be completed this week. The cabinets are being built and all the finishing touches have mostly been picked out.

This has all occurred just in time, as Brian has started back to traveling for work. My biggest worry has been that I would have to make some major decision while he was away traveling and I didn't want to make a bad choice! But all the major decisions have been taken care of, and I'm praying it's smooth sailing from here!

We still have to work on the yard, which feels like a never ending task, but it is looking better. And we'll get there, with nothing but time. And we've been loving this slightly *cooler* weather to work in!

We had a total of five boys over here to spend the night not too long ago. They could have all stayed outside or in the new house in hammocks, or just in some sleeping bags on the ground, However, they all chose to stay in the trailer. It was complete chaos! But it made my heart happy that almost 18-year olds were having a great time in such a tiny space. I find it funny that our tiny home has been the hangout spot for such large children but I'll take it!

When we move in our new home, I'm sure we'll look back on these times and remember how fun everyone had in this tiny home.



YOU

## **Inner Strength – Those Sticky Notes – by Michelle Wyatt**

How does one turn a bad mood into a time of having fun? I'm a mom, but I'm also a teacher, so I thought this month I'd share a learning experience I had in the classroom.

If I'm in a bad mood, it can cause the kids to be in a bad mood as well. At least, it can make it hard for them to have fun and learn. How can we, as moms, balance out all the moods, without letting the kids' behavior "get out of control," as we say?

I think what works best is to give them an agenda and a to-do list with fun included, to help provide structure. This makes it easier for them to transition to non-preferred activities.

One example of this is when I use sticky notes. I love sticky notes! These little squares aren't so intimidating when it comes to writing, which is often a struggle for special education kiddos. So recently, we brainstormed and came up with an activity for the first step of the writing process.

Through the use of Play-Doh, I asked the kids to give me a word that described the dough. Then I wrote each word to Keynote, and I had them write some of the words, as well. I think it's so important for the kids to take ownership of their work, and by having the kids describe the Play-Doh, we were also having fun.

Once the words were written on sticky notes, the kids then came up to the front of the room to the dry erase board and put the sticky notes there, in order to make a sentence. Some kids did not put them in order, according to what we say. That's where I guided and helped enable them to move the words around. This took a normally super-challenging activity and turned it into something for success!

I'm excited to share that the students made silly sentences, and this activity brought out the personality of one of my autistic students who rarely speaks. Seeing him laugh and make the other kids laugh...it was a contagious moment! Now, getting back to work after all that laughter was difficult, but I'll take it!

Not every day is perfect, nor is it at home with my own boys. But little moments, like those with the sticky notes, sometime gives me the strength to handle those bad mood days at home, in the classroom, and with myself.

We were a team with the sticky notes. The kids got to get up and move around, and still process the learning. They interacted with each other, and this was refreshing for me!

Being a team at work and being a team at home gives me inner strength to carry with me from place to place.

If I can do it, so can you!

## **Under Pressure – The Gentle Whisper – by Debbie Haynes**

It's October, the month where it's fun to face all things scary. But there are real fears, those that lurk in the dark and haunt us all...that can render us frozen if we let them.

There's a man in the bible that experienced some real personal struggles of loneliness, isolation and fear. Prior to this onslaught of emotions, this man of God had experienced some mind-blowing miracles. He had prayed and God had stopped the rain. He had been fed by ravens from the hand of God. He lived on a barrel of meal and a cruse of oil from a widow woman. And he had even seen a dead boy come back to life right in front of his mom's eyes.

Then three times Elijah states how lonely he is, and how he's the only one left working for God, that he's carrying the whole load by himself. He had been used so greatly by God in such miraculous and undeniable ways, and yet his humanness was still such a personal struggle.

We are no different. I'm no different. I'm susceptible to human failings, too. And God's Word tells us to not worry. But STILL we can fall prey to lies. Even for seasoned believers, it can be hard.

*I recently had two physical issues I had become very fearful and anxious about. They were downright scary. I prayed, I resisted the lies I heard in my head, and I did my best to trust in God. And then I had the issues checked out medically. It turns out that my fear was unrealistic because the results were normal...almost comical...a quick, painless and easy fix! Far easier than my fear had convinced me.*

I then told God that I want the state of intimacy so that I know if God takes me today I'll be okay, because I'll be with Him. But if he leaves me here and I have to walk through even valleys of death, I don't have to fear because He will walk with me. But I need HIS help to learn this. Even if it takes time and time again to learn that faith can exceed fear.

And guess what? Once again, later, Elijah struggled with trust. God instructed Elijah to stand on a mountain. And there God passed by him in a still gentle whisper, not in a strong wind or fire. It was something that could only be heard in nearness. That's what moved this man of God back into service.

Church, worship, leaders...they are good and have their place. But when we recognize and know and hear that gentle voice for ourselves...there's nothing like it.

Faith or fear? Sometimes, since we are human, it's both. But God knows our potential and is very personal and patient with us, as we choose to hear his voice and feel him close...as near as a whisper.



## Healthy Habits – When Traveling – by Marcy Lytle

We recently toured Ulysses S. Grant's home and heard that he was a very thin, short in stature, man. And then we learned that after traveling the world, he gained 50 pounds in one year! Oh my! However, I can see how travel could cause one to lose all sense of health and sensibility, because of the food, the atmosphere, the sights and all the things.

As we recently came back from one week of vacation, I thought I'd share some things that keep us healthy-ish (because we mess up often, as well!) and things that keep us on track towards a healthy lifestyle:

1. We share (if we agree on the menu ordering). We are always happy when we share and state how good we feel for not being stuffed. And just the opposite is true when we both order a big meal separately.
2. The second is akin to the first. If we do indulge and order a meal that's way bigger than we can tolerate, we just don't eat it all. Yes, we feel bad for ordering it, but we'd feel even worse if we ate the whole thing. So we try to stop when the stomach says it's full.
3. Walking after dinner, on tours, around town and the countryside is good for the body while traveling. So plan your activities so that you're out and about, on your feet, and walking miles.
4. Sleeping is key to good health and pleasant conversation while traveling. If there's no sleep, there are arguments and irritations, and neither makes for good healthy relationships.
5. Take a picnic blanket and basket full of baked goods and head to a park, or even on the floor of the Airbnb or the hotel. There's something about eating food from a basket on a blanket that speaks peace.
6. Watch the sun set. Maybe life's busyness at home squeezes out evening sunset experiences, so take them and savor them while you're away. We feel held when we see the sun set under His supervision.
7. Do something you've never done before. How is this healthy? It expands your confidence and your horizon, to face life when you get back home. I recently drove a tractor!
8. Immerse yourself in the fall outdoors, where the leaves are falling, fall color is happening, and corn is being harvested. The seasonal change encourages us all that life moves and flows, and there's beauty and plenty in each season's harvest.
9. Visit a market in another town or state or country. Meet the artisans, buy something they've made or grown. Encourage the small business person. It's good to give...in so many ways...and healthy for your heart and theirs.
10. History is healthy. It expands the mind, it's interesting, and it's absolutely fascinating how far we've come. And it's something to talk about after the tour or museum browse is over.

It seems the main thing to staying healthy-ish is to keep busy in mind and body, rest that mind and body plenty, and observe and learn and stand in awe of this wonderful world you get to explore and enjoy...all under His great guiding hands.

## **A Hopeful Heart - Standing Tall - by Christina Oberon**

Being a tall woman can feel like growing up in a funhouse mirror, where everyone around you is normal-sized, but you're stretched out like a lanky giraffe in ballet flats. Ha! I've heard the phrase "It must be so great to be tall!" more times than I can count, and sure, in adulthood, it does have its perks - reaching the top shelf without asking for help, commanding attention in a room. But as a gangly teenage girl towering over her classmates? That's a different story.

In the summer of 8th grade; I grew three inches, then added another inch at 21. Growing up tall often meant I didn't fit in. I didn't fit in with my shorter, petite friends who looked so cute and compact. I was taller than my parents and six sisters, often feeling like a lumbering Amazon, forever hunched over in a misguided attempt to blend in or shrink myself. Spoiler: it didn't work. When you're taller than everyone in the room, there's no hiding it.

Class photos were torture. In alphabetical order, my maiden last name ("A") often put me front and center. But in social settings, the tall ones were always directed to the back; something that hasn't changed in adulthood.

Finding clothes was another struggle. Jeans were always too short; sleeves stopped awkwardly at my wrists, and let's not even talk about the quest for appealing flat shoes.

Then there were the nicknames, "Olive Oil," and my personal favorite, "Jolly Green Giant." It felt like my height was a neon sign announcing that I was different, as if my body had decided to grow first and let the rest of me catch up later. I often felt out of place, like I hadn't earned my height yet, and I was constantly apologizing for it.

Dating only added to the insecurity. I was convinced my height made me less feminine and less desirable. I longed to be shorter for years. As teenagers, and even as women, we overthink so much. But I've since realized we often measure beauty against a narrow standard based on our environment. Growing up in Hawaii, this was certainly true for me.

The thing about being tall is, you can't shrink, no matter how much you wish for it. So, eventually, you start to own it. As I got older, I stopped slouching and started standing tall, literally. I stopped seeing my height as something that set me apart in a bad way and instead began seeing my height as a source of confidence. Yes, I could still walk into a room and immediately be noticed, but instead of feeling like a giraffe in a flock of flamingos, I started to feel like I had an edge. Being tall became less about being awkward and more about owning the space I took up.

And hey, trees are tall too, and no one ever tells them they need to shrink. They stand proudly, stretching toward the sky, grounded and steady, serving a purpose. I realized maybe being tall isn't about towering over others but about growing in a way that helps you reach your potential.

Of course, there are still challenges. Airplane seats can be less comfy, and I'm not entirely sure I've ever met a pair of pants long enough. But now, when someone says, "Wow, you're so tall!" I smile and say, "Thanks! I like to think I'm just closer to the stars." It's a journey, growing into your height, both literally and emotionally. But there's something empowering about standing tall above the insecurities you once had and fully embracing every inch of how God made you.

## **Life Right Now - At First, I Was Afraid...By: Jennifer Stephens**

If you've ever thought the English language was confusing, imagine teaching a roomful of inquisitive first graders about homographs. Talk about bewildered faces! Reading sentences like, "The black bat flew by the boy's bat at the ballgame." Or, "We need to park the car so we can play at the park." Huh? Learning about words that are spelled the same and sound the same, but don't mean the same thing is actually quite fun! We would draw silly pictures to show things like a fan (an admirer) of fans (appliance that makes wind) to help visualize the different meanings.

Speaking of homographs, we (my husband and I) recently visited the Petrified Forest National Park in Arizona (which, if you haven't been yet, it's a must-see hidden gem), where I stumbled upon a real-life homograph. Wandering around looking at the petrified pieces of quartz, agate, and opal I thought back to that lesson with my first graders (Okay, full disclosure, the first thing I did was belt out the opening lyrics to the 70's hit "I Will Survive" ...look up the lyrics if you don't know it). But then I thought, here are these beautifully petrified geological formations that have nothing to do with Gloria Gaynor's definition of petrified.

As we ventured through the Petrified Forest and read the informational signs explaining how each piece came to be, I realized just how much we humans are like these solidified fossils. There are four mandatory conditions necessary for wood to transform into stone. It's a complicated process, but basically it goes like this: with the absence of oxygen, the presence of certain fluids, a high-pressure environment, and an extensive amount of time, the tree is no longer a tree. All the organic materials that filled the tree are no longer present in the wood and have been replaced with silica materials, leaving a beautiful stone that will last forever. How did I turn this into a stone/human homograph, you ask?

In the dictionary, petrified has two meanings. Frightened or changed. See, that's just like us humans. When we face the scary stuff (and we will), we can either live the first meaning, remaining frozen in fear, or we can choose to be like the petrified stone. Changed. Transformed. Different than we were before.

We can choose Jesus. With Him we can face our fears.

Public speaking is one of those things (along with heights, snakes, crossing bridges, buzzing insects, the nightly news, and a number of other things...) that gives me the heebie-jeebies. There was a time when I first began teaching, that I could be found crying in the teacher's lounge, moments before speaking about curriculum to a roomful of parents, because I was paralyzed with fear. Talking to a room filled with kids was one thing, but talking to adults? Yikes! Eventually I was able to power through this yearly torture, but was so relieved when I retired knowing my public speaking days were finally over! Except, they weren't over.

My recent endeavor into publishing children's books meant I was asked to give a presentation to a women's group. And there was that fear again. Why did I agree to do this? How was I going to muster the courage to speak in front of a roomful of accomplished ladies? What in the world could I possibly say that would hold their interest? I wanted to crawl inside a hole and cry like I did as a beginning teacher facing a roomful of parents. But I prayed. I asked God to give me the

words and the confidence. And guess what? I survived! In fact, a few weeks after giving the presentation, I was invited to join this women's group – how cool is that? In the words of Gloria Gaynor, "At first I was afraid, I was petrified..."

Like the tree that is transformed into petrified stone when conditions are just right, accepting Jesus into our hearts will leave us transformed from the inside out. If we're not careful, our fears, worries, and anxieties can devour our calm. But, growing in God's Word, means we'll no longer have room for that debilitating all-consuming fear. Oh, it'll still creep up every now and then, but when we choose Jesus, we'll be filled with His peace.



MARRIAGE

## **In This Together – The Most Broken Places – by Bekah Holland**

If you're reading this, it's October, which is my husband's birthday month, so I figured I'd start off my article with a happy birthday to the man who's been my partner in this crazy, fabulous, chaotic, painful, and beautiful journey we've been on together for almost half of our lives. He even lets me talk about our marriage on the internet and usually still likes me after I put my own and (sometimes our collective) crazy on display! So, babe, I love you to forever and always and I'm so glad you didn't run when I licked you and claimed you as mine.

So, now that we have the mushy stuff out of the way, I'll get down to business. And, since I started this with an ode to my husband, I feel a little less bad about the fact that the rest of this may be more about women and finding our place in this world. Funny enough, as I'm writing this, I'm listening to a documentary called *Dear...* on Apple TV. And the episode that's playing in the background (because I am not one who can write in the quiet...which makes no sense, but I've never really claimed to make much of that anyway) is *Dear Lin Manuel Miranda*, which, just in case you've been living under a rock for the last decade, this man is the brilliant writer behind Broadway explosions (some turned movies) like *West Side Story*, *In The Heights*, and *Hamilton*. I have watched *Hamilton* a minimum of 300 times, not counting the hours I've spent listening to the *Hamilton* soundtrack. Anyway, as this documentary is playing as background noise, he said something that made me stop, rewind it, and play it again. "So much of writing is just about meeting the moment you're in as honestly as possible." I don't know why that single statement affected me so strongly, but it brought me to tears. And I deleted the last three attempts at my article this month, which is already, unsurprisingly, very late.

The other night, when I was trying not to stress, unsuccessfully of course, about what I was going to write about this month, my very well-meaning husband was like, just tell AI to write it, and then it's one less thing you've got on your already overloaded plate. He was trying to be helpful because he knows that I carry a heavy load. But I feel like there might have been a very *exorcist-esque* moment in which my head slowly spun, wild-eyed with shock and horror, and words were said...not ones I'm likely ever going to admit to but, said none-the-less. Now, in his defense, he's not a writer. I don't even know that I consider myself a writer, but I do know that when I write, whether it's an article, a social media post, or a letter, it's whatever ten levels past extremely personal is. My writing is part of who I am, and when I share it, the only way I can explain it to people who don't understand is that it's something like walking around Times Square completely naked, with every thought and feeling I've ever felt in my soul printed in BOLD for everyone to see. Dramatic, you might say. Especially, given that I rarely write without using humor as a coping mechanism, and I'm sure my English teachers are appalled by my lack of proper writing etiquette and all of the things they worked so hard to impart to me. But, messy as it may be, it's mine. And even more importantly, it's me. Just in print. So, short story long, I did not follow that particular piece of advice from the man I love, and proceeded to start about six additional versions, none of which felt right. However, that quote, about meeting the moment as honestly as possible sparked something in me that I needed to start my words. From scratch. *Again*. And while this may be less marriage-related, it is very human-related, and we're just going to have to accept that this is me, meeting this particular moment, as honestly as possible.

*Bravery and Compassion*

While I don't normally find myself contemplating these things, and definitely don't think of them as a bundle deal, lately, it's something I keep coming back to. The way I've always heard bravery described or seen it portrayed on screen is likely how most people think of it. Strength under pressure, fearless, standing up to literal and metaphorical giants, head held high, knight in shining armor kind of brave. As girls, especially those of us who were girls a little longer ago than others, many of us grew up reading and watching fairy tales filled with damsels in distress, waiting. I remember wondering, more often than not, *What they could possibly be waiting for?* And, why, for the love of all things good and holy, did Cinderella go back to her evil stepmother? Actually, I have a lot of unanswered questions for Cinderella. But the waiting thing? That's my real question.

I've mentioned several times in the past that I was raised in a very traditional and conservative home. My dad went to work. My mom stayed home and raised us, kept us clean and fed and loved, while homeschooling (which I now know classifies her as a saint all on its own) and somehow seemed to retain some sanity. She took odd jobs during our youngest years, cleaning the church, scrubbing toilets and floors and the things people don't think twice about leaving behind, yes, even in church. Years later, as an exceptional and embarrassingly underpaid teacher, worked summers at a local pharmacy/corner store to give us many things we didn't deserve but still wanted. Yes, I do know she's better than me. We've established this, I've accepted it. I don't doubt she'll be giving me an earful on this later, but I can live with that too, so let's move on.

I watched my mom manage schedules and meals and budgets and kids, without being able to google "How do you know when you've lost your mind?" or "How much therapy will my kid need if I lock myself in the bathroom for 5 minutes?" While she juggled all of these things, I also saw that she didn't wait. For anything or anyone. If something needed to be done...she did it. If clothes needed washing or the milk was left on the counter, she took care of it. When someone was struggling, she didn't ask what they needed. She just showed up, emptied trash, washed dishes, started laundry, left a meal (or 4), and was gone before anyone realized that a real-life fairy godmother showed up exactly when they didn't even know they needed her. My mom didn't wait. She acted.

I realize this feels like it's gone off the rails a little, but don't quit on me yet. The stories I read and movies I watched told me that if women waited long enough, at some point, the hero of the story would show up and they'd ride off into the sunset, without any of the less-than-gentle problems that real life delivers. I thought bravery looked like Prince Charming on a white horse. However, little did I know that I had already been given a beautiful portrait of bravery, the kind of brave I wanted to be. My mother.

I can promise you, she would not give this kind of description of herself, and also probably remembers being driven to the brink of insanity and questioning her life choices like the rest of us. The things I watched her endure as a mother, a wife, a woman with grace and gentleness when not a single person or situation she lived through deserved either of those things....well, let's just say that while she won't ever see herself this way, you can trust me that my version is the most accurate. My dad, her husband of 45 years, still tells me almost every day that he had no idea that he could love anyone as much as he loves my mom. He will also tell you a million other ways that she was, and still is, a beautiful representation of true, unconditional, relentless and brave love. And her kind of bravery isn't what I thought of as courage. She wasn't fearless. She wasn't visibly tough. She cried at romantic movies. She was soft and kind and probably didn't set enough boundaries and most definitely had never heard of the term self-care. Even if

she had, she wouldn't have given herself the same kind of grace she offered others. She would rather lick a toilet seat than be in the middle of any kind of confrontation (so obviously this trait is genetic). However, for those she loved, she would stand tall, no matter how much her voice shook, and speak up bravely for us, no matter the consequences it would bring for her.

*Bravery isn't fearlessness.  
Bravery is experiencing trembling fear and yet,  
doing what needs to be done anyway.*

My mom's brand of courage is witnessing other's (my) failures, how we (I) failed ourselves, and even how we failed her, standing on her faith and choosing to see the mountains we climbed instead.

She isn't perfect. Or at least I'm assuming, since she is human even though I rarely see her as anything short of superhuman, and also hoping that one previous sentence gets me a little latitude after I've put her front and center in an article posted on the internet, therefore living forever. If I were Catholic, I would definitely be throwing her name into whatever hat holds those eligible for sainthood. Now that I've been married for over 18 years, I don't doubt that there were plenty of opportunities for her to have thrown in the towel on her marriage and raising kids who did not make anything easy...except for the fact that it would have just been one more thing to wash. She had a million reasons to doubt her life choices and make a run for it. But I'm sure that thought never (okay, probably at least rarely) crossed her mind. Because she is exactly the woman that God made her to be...filled with quiet strength, unwavering faith, compassion and courage that makes her a force to be reckoned with.

And you know what? The longer that I live, the more I see every single woman that I know, or have known, has been fighting a battle that no one ever bears witness to. At some point, every woman I know has found herself ugly crying in a parked car. Then she wipes her face, throws sunglasses on and smiles and makes small talk with the cashier/neighbor/stranger/friend/spouse, never letting on that she's barely holding it together. She dreams dreams that don't often come true, makes plans that never happen, cooks meals no one will eat, and often wonders if she's actually invisible.

Maybe she lives her love out loud, but still doesn't feel safe enough to let her guard down. Or maybe she wears her heart on her sleeve and cries during musicals, or loves a good horror movie and practical jokes. No matter our backgrounds, personalities, nature vs. nurture or whether or not we know all of the lyrics to every Snoop Dogg song prior to 2004....despite every difference, we are part of an exclusive sisterhood. One that spans generations long before and long after us. While the world around us does its best to convince us that life is a competition, I think one beautiful thing that being so easily connected through technology has created is a realization that when we compete with each other, more of us lose than win. But when we pull someone up who is drowning under a sea of grief or struggling to see a sliver of light at the end of a seemingly endless tunnel, we're telling them that their struggles aren't theirs alone. The weight doesn't have to be carried alone. And when she can see out of the abyss, she'll emerge even stronger. Then she will have the ability to see others around her who need a life raft too, and because of the kindness of friends, family and even sometimes strangers, she has the strength to help pull up someone else who may be sinking like her. And this, my friends is one of those times that the word *begets* pops into my mind. Because compassion begets kindness. And kindness begets action which begets healing. And healing begets even more courage and bravery to face those giants, both real and imagined and teach others to fight the good fight and



to find “good trouble” as John Lewis famously spoke about. Because we all need support and someone who will hold us up when we’re too tired to stand on our own. Heck, Moses had people who helped hold his arms until every single person made it through the sea on dry ground, and even Jesus had a close circle who supported and helped spread His message of hope and healing and performed miracles showing the world the real-life power of faith and hope.

So even when we might feel alone, don’t forget that there are millions of other women who may not have walked in your shoes but have walked in their own and know how to take the next right step, even if that step is one that you take barefoot, through broken glass and feeling lost. But a step is a step is a step is a step. And each one is one that leads you closer to the place you can stop, rest, reset and encourage others to take their own next tiptoe in the right direction. The direction taking them to realize their dreams, where their faith, which while at times may be wavering, never gives up, never loses hope, never backs down.

Just know that right now, whether you find yourself on a mountaintop, down in a valley, or even somewhere in between, you don’t have to walk this path alone. You have women who have forged their own path so that you could see a way to create yours. There are women who believe in you fiercely, bravely and without doubt in who you are and your ability to become exactly who you were made to be. Women who will stand in the gap, lift you up, show up with wine and a good movie, never once noticing the mess that you think is holding you back. All you have to do is reach out your hand and let us hold yours, knowing together, we are so much more than enough. So don’t give up. Don’t doubt your bravery just because fear tries to hold you back. You are and always will be the hero of your own story and the rest of us are so lucky to play a supporting role in shining a light on the beauty and strength even in the most broken places.

*“Women who believe in each other can survive anything.  
Women who believe in each other create armies that will win kingdoms and wars.”  
Nikita Gill*

## **Date Night Fun – The Color Orange – by Marcy Lytle**

Isn't orange a wonderful color? I mean, my gosh, the sunset is a breathtakingly beautiful display of all shades of orange and we stop to marvel and take pictures from sitting on a beach, to watching it set behind a mountain or just down the street from our own front yard. And it's the color of the month, isn't it? Orange pumpkins, orange décor, orange leaves, orange everything. We may as well embrace it and enjoy it...even on date nights together!

Make and Bake – It might be fun to stay in one night and bake pumpkin bread together, maybe a couple of different varieties and include chocolate chips...or not. Purchase some little bread tins, wrap up the warm loaves, and deliver them to three friends. Head back home and enjoy a slice for yourselves!

On the Court – When is the last time you played a game of HORSE together on the basketball court? Find a nice afternoon or morning on a weekend, grab that orange ball, and pack a thermos. Head to the court and shoot, and keep score, and laugh and play some more. Then take a walk in the fallen leaves in the park where you played.

Pumpkin Patch – These aren't just for kids! Find a pumpkin patch to visit and take the kids, or not...but go! Pick out pumpkins for décor, or to dig out the pulp and find the seeds. Have you roasted pumpkin seeds in a while? You know, they're good! Look up a patch in your area and visit it. Drink apple cider if it's offered. Watch all the families as they play, and enjoy the activities yourselves.

Fire Pits – Sitting around the orange flickers of a fire pit is best this time of year, when it's a bit cool but not too cold, and the warmth is inviting and awesome. Invite another couple or two and sit around a pit, in your own backyard, or find one to enjoy. Make s'mores, or purchase one of those tins of readymade queso from your store and heat it, serving with chips. Tell stories, encourage each other. Sing songs!

Sweet Potato Bar – Invite another couple, or enjoy yourselves, but create a sweet potato bar. Bake these orange potatoes until they're tender, and then set out toppings like: black beans, cooked chicken, shredded pork, cheese, bacon, onions, or butter and honey and cinnamon and toasted nuts! Come up with your own toppings or google some more! And finally, scoop out oranges and fill them with ice cream for a treat!

Enjoy the color orange this month, as the possibilities are many! Dress up in orange, drive around and look for orange, and definitely stop and watch the sunset on multiple evenings. Enjoy the color of the sunset in October.

## **After 40 Years – Collections – by Marcy Lytle**

He likes to collect two things. I like to collect clothes and bags, and shoes, and home décor...and so much more! And when we travel, we spend a good bit of time looking for these things we both collect. We are both so different and yet the same. I'd never want to collect what he does, and he could care less about the things I love to buy.

My husband loves coffee mugs, and I used to just groan when he bought yet another one. He has bins of them in the garage, and a whole stash in the kitchen cabinet, which he changes out to enjoy throughout the year. But why did I have to groan? It's a collection he enjoys building, and I've now started helping him find these cute mugs on our trips. This last trip he bought two new mugs, each unique in its own right, and I've actually grown to love these mugs as well. I like seeing him enjoy them. That's the first thing he collects...

My husband loves tools, but they have to be either repurposed or handmade. We enter antique shops while we travel and we look for bins of old tools. If they're just old, but not repurposed or handmade, then we don't come home with them. One year I had a sign made for him called Jon's Tool Trove and hung it above the big peg board where he has his tools displayed. He enjoys the hunt and the find of tools others have made their own. That's the second thing he collects...

I, on the other hand, adore clothes and bags and shoes, and he tags along while we search for those, too. He will point out something and I'll most always say no way, that's ugly. It's because his taste is not my taste (thank goodness) and my taste is not his taste! But he says he enjoys shopping with me, and he's found a way to observe the stores, the walls, and to be content while I look. Thankfully, I'm a quick shopper and am in and out in a flash.

My brother in law collected albums, Disney movies, emergency preparedness items...and he shared those with us. I thought it was cool all the things he collected. He even started collections for his grandkids, buying the granddaughters teacups and saucers, and charms for their bracelets.

Collections can be a cause for arguments among couples. I know I sighed a few times (well maybe more than a few) when Jon brought home another cup. I've asked him to get rid of some. But now, I realize that's a source of joy and why not let him enjoy them... apart from my disdain..

I think we collect things because it's fun, and life's too hard to squelch the fun someone else is having while they hunt and find that next thing they love. Yes, when we're gone our kids might toss out the collections, they might want to keep a few things, or they might shake their heads at the "stuff." But while we're alive and well and loving and growing together, we'll keep collecting.

Pure pleasure in a marriage, whether it's collecting mugs or another pair of shoes, it just that – pleasure. And it makes for an emotional connection like no other...if we let them be as they browse and buy.

## **For Better for Worse - Bigger Than Raindrops – by Kaelin Scott**

Every year, we take a trip to the beach with my in-laws after Labor Day. This year leading up to the trip, the weather forecast didn't look great. It was calling for wind and rain pretty much the whole time. My husband loves beach fishing, so he was pretty discouraged the week before our trip. Rain isn't great for fishing, but wind is really bad. So he wasn't as excited as he normally is.

Still, when we got to the beach, despite the yucky weather, he went right out there with his fishing pole (well, actually three or four). He waded out to his waist and cast out his first line. Then he turned to walk back and set the rod in its holder, and I saw the best sight of the day. A huge smile stretched across his face. And the weather didn't matter anymore. Because he was out there doing what he loves.

Sometimes in life – and in marriage too – we get caught up in the details. We focus on the little things that bother us and we forget about the big picture. The storms can be discouraging sometimes, and that's understandable. Everyday annoyances can make life difficult, for sure. But in the grand scheme of things, we still get to spend every day with our husbands, and that's what really matters. Going to sleep next to each other every night has a way of wiping away the troubles that plagued us during the day.

Maybe things don't always go exactly the way we planned them, but they can still be just as beautiful. We get to be with the person we love, so the little things don't matter quite so much. Even in the rain, we can smile and enjoy the day. Because...

*love is bigger than raindrops and stronger than waves.*

And sharing life with the one you love makes even the stormy days special.



ENCOURAGEMENT

## **SIMPLE TRUTHS – Acquainted – by Marcy Lytle**

Why did Jesus have to die such a cruel, brutal death? I mean, I know he had to be the perfect sacrifice and sinless in order to be our savior, but if death was required...why couldn't he just have had a quick fall asleep-type death, where his heart stopped, no pain, done and won?

Do you ever wonder about odd things like this? I have a mind that wonders about a lot of things. And after losing my family member to pancreatic cancer, and the horrific time he had physically battling this disease that is from hell, we've all wondered why. Why such horrible diseases have to take our loved ones. Why such tragedy strikes or why death has to be so painful in the end. I think we'd admit that we'd all like to have a fall asleep-type death, and we'd like our loved ones to live to be at least 90, and then have the same.

After a lot of thinking, here's one thing I've noted. No matter what kind of death is inflicted upon us by this world, He had it the worst. He was beaten, betrayed, tortured, ridiculed, suffered pain, and ultimately had his Father turn his back on him, as he carried the weight of sin on his shoulders...the weight of the entire world. So when we need someone that understands our grief, He does.

So once again, like the story goes, God's love is beyond understandable. He came to die for us, but also to suffer so that he would be "acquainted" with our grief. This means he has knowledge firsthand of our pain, our sorrow and our deep, deep hurt.

I'm thinking that Jesus could have chosen a different death. At least the Word says he even could have called angels to rescue him (or is that in a song somewhere? I don't recall.) But he chose to obey his father and succumb to the worst kind of suffering any of us can dream up for ourselves. Those that said they loved him started the pain with betraying him and denying that they ever knew him. And then the slaps, the assaults, the mockery and the nails...on my goodness...the nails. I can't even...

I'm not sure we will ever understand why this one over here had cancer, has treatment, and lives a full life afterwards winning the battle...and why that one over there is literally beaten up and destroyed by the disease. It's a hard thing to try and wrap our minds around.

However, when I think of His great love that he poured out on me in offering himself to suffer and have the knowledge of the suffering I would have in this world, it offers me hope that I can also experience and become acquainted with what happened three days later...the resurrection.

I remember a friend of mine losing her husband years ago and wondering if the joy in life would ever return. I believe it will. But it won't be the kind of joy we knew before the pain, like joy over a new home or even a new baby in the house. It will be this deep rooted joy that's unspeakable, full of glory. And guess what glory means? The weight of his presence. And I'm thinking his presence will be more real than it ever has been before, more fulfilling than anything in this world, and able to carry us all back to life...after death.

## **An Adage a Day - Bye-bye, Summer! – by Carole Gilbert**

All good things must come to an end. I've heard this said throughout my life, but is it true? And talking about good things, how many of us are thinking about the summer we just had? I bet one or two of us are somewhere. I loved our summer. We went to the beach, had a Fourth of July party for our church high school kids, and enjoyed playing outside with the grands. And I am not a cold weather girl, but I will admit, as fun as it was, it was a hot summer.

I grew up on the coast of Texas below Houston. I only saw it cold enough to have snowflakes once. I never even owned a coat, just a couple of sweaters. So, when I moved to North Texas during high school, I quickly learned how the good thing of even temperate weather had come to an end. I quickly learned the purpose of gloves and scarves and became very fond of pockets for those times I forgot my gloves. And I bought my first ever coat! I saw snow that remained on the ground for a week, and this happened every winter.

This proverb "All good things must come to an end," originated in 1374 by Geoffrey Chaucer, an English poet best known for writing *The Canterbury Tales*, which is about thirty pilgrims traveling to and from a mutual destination all telling about their different journeys. One thing that makes Chaucer's story so interesting is the quote he added in it.

He wrote,

"Now I beg all those that listen to this little treatise, or read it, that if there be anything in it that pleases them, they thank our Lord Jesus Christ for it, from whom proceeds all understanding and goodness."

Chaucer first said the phrase, all good things must come to an end, as "everything comes to an end" or "everything has an end." I think he really understood the meaning of being thankful for good things in his life, especially those things that come to pass. We all know the importance of being thankful and for realizing what we have. And we all know only God doesn't end. Chaucer knew this too and he knew where goodness came from. But sometimes we wish something we're enjoying could last forever.

To me, this is a melancholy phrase. And I've used it when I having a "woe is me" moment. But I always try to look ahead and see what might be coming. There's always something positive and happy to come. We just have to look for it. I must remember that the hot weather, which I love, will come again. Summer will return. It's only a matter of time and time does not stand still. And then I must remember what comes in the cold season, like Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's, which I also love.

Ecclesiastes 7:8 says,

*Better is the end of a thing than its beginning, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.*

This verse gives us a lot of wisdom, meaning it's better to wait patiently for what we hope for than to woefully wish we had it quicker. So even though all good things must come to an end we know from where they came and that they will come again. And it's in reference to things on this earth now. I'm not always very good at being patient, but I do know how to look for the positive and I've learned that the best is yet to come. It will come at the end, when I'm in heaven.



# Undone—Oct. 2024

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A false fall fell upon us for a short time, teasing with cool temperatures and dry air, then it was blazing hot and humid again. Besides the heat, an unexpected and out-of-the-ordinary assignment required my attention for over a week, keeping me from my usual routine of tending the garden. I fed the birds and watered the potted plants enough to keep them going, but little else. I nearly lost the Carolina Jessamine I planted in the Spring (it still needs to be babied), but I think it will recover from my neglect. My assignment was a love offering, and as important as my garden is to me, I will sacrifice it for love.

Contrary to what the song says, love is not just a four-letter word. Love is at the very heart of everything that matters, though I toss it around lightly and use it to describe my feelings for ice cream, home décor, movies, and a myriad of things that really don't (matter). True love is what gets me up in the morning and keeps me going all day, it's what burns inside when I see a beautiful sunset or leaves shimmering in the wind. Love wells up and bubbles over when I see my grandson's shining eyes laughing—anything to do with him, really. And my children, all adults now...there is no love more deep and powerful.

*Or is there?*

I've made no secret of my past wayward and foolish life. If there is any redeeming element of that life it's a testimony to God's faithful persistent love and his abounding grace. When I think of where I've been and where I am, the wonderful children I have in spite of the circumstances, the forgiveness and blessings I've received despite my undeserving unworthiness...I'm undone. The assignment Jesus had was to sacrifice everything for love, and he did. He opened the way to Life, for me to live differently—free from the things that beset me and held me hostage.

God's sacrificial love, unconditional forgiveness, abundant grace, encased in transforming discipline...it undoes me.

## **Rooted in Love - We Are The Moon – by Kaelin Scott**

One night after dinner the weather was nice, so we decided to go for a walk. It was just me, my husband, our kiddos, our pup, and the beautiful evening God gave us. Just as we were heading back home, the full moon began rising over the horizon, contrasted against the pinkish hues of sunset. Man, was it beautiful!

As we finished up our walk, we talked about the moon, how it reflects the light from the sun. It doesn't shine on its own, but it's still magnificent. And maybe its light isn't nearly as bright as the sun, but it's still important in its own way. We talked about how cool it is that God created such a cool solar system for our earth.

Then we started talking about how God is like the sun and we are like the moon. We take His light and reflect it to the world around us. We don't shine that light on our own, but we radiate the light He first gives to us. We're not as bright as He is, but we're still important and beautiful. The world needs that light, so we need to let it shine.

I love these kinds of illustrations and conversations with my kids. It's such a simple yet beautiful way of growing our faith together, and it's something we can remember every time we look at the moon. God's love is all around us all the time. We just have to slow down enough to see it. Sharing the joy of His creation with your loved ones is so special. There are so many opportunities to turn the conversation to Him!

After this walk, later when the kids went to bed, I was thinking more about what we talked about. I was contemplating what it truly means to reflect Jesus' light to the world. And one thing that struck me was that we have to know Him in order to really reflect Him. If we want to shine a light, we have to walk in the light. Spending time with Him isn't something we should neglect. It should be a top priority. That way we're ready to shine as bright as possible. Because I don't know about you, but I feel like the world could use a little extra light.

So next time you look up at the moon, think about Jesus and the light He shines on you. And think about shining that light to others. You are His daughter whom He loves. The world needs your light.

## Unearthly Thing - Known By Our Fruit – by Angela Dolbear

October means time for Halloween. I love Halloween. It signifies fun to me—decorating, dressing up, and, well, candy!

But as I get ready to celebrate, I brace myself. I know there will be negative talk about one of my favorite holidays, primarily by those I am called to love.

It always hurts me a little bit and makes me feel misunderstood when I see posted tirades about perceived evil that seems to only surface on October 31. I start to question who I am and if my fondness for “dark” things is unacceptable.

But really, why all the fear? Is Halloween too much for God to handle? No. Absolutely not.

I’ve always loved the dark and spooky. There is a bit of humor involved in it all. One of my all-time favorite movies is *A Nightmare Before Christmas*, which I consider to be both a Halloween and Christmas film. It has excellent music, animation, and humor. I relate to the Jack Skellington character so much.

I am typing this article with a sweet black cat lounging between me and my keyboard. She is purring softly and enjoying intermittent tummy rubs whenever I pause to think. I love that my Maddy is a black cat God gave me. Nothing evil there.

So, I try to remind myself of all the times God has told me to be who He made me (i.e. see *A Nightmare Before Christmas*). God also reminds me to allow others to be who He created them to be. Even if they feel it is necessary to condemn things and other people.

Yep. Got to love. Unconditionally--just like Jesus.

Loving others is especially important with this being an election year. People have very strong opinions and convictions about their political affiliation. I have witnessed some verbal ugliness on social media that leaves me feeling so sad. I choose not to respond or chime in with my opinions because I don’t want to add to the divisiveness, especially in this heated political climate.

But I consider my silence and what it says. I’ve heard people in the church say we shouldn’t be silent. But if our words come from the fullness of our hearts, shouldn’t they be filled with compassion instead of criticism?

Recently, I was reading about this topic in one of my daily devotionals. Jesus talks about identifying a tree by its fruit in [Matthew 12:33-34 \(Amplified Classic translation\)](#). “Either make the tree sound (healthy and good), and its fruit sound (healthy and good), or make the tree rotten (diseased and bad), and its fruit rotten (diseased and bad); for the tree is known and recognized and judged by its fruit.” Verse 34 goes on to say, “You offspring of vipers! How can you speak good things when you are evil (wicked)? For out of the fullness (the overflow, the superabundance) of the heart, the mouth speaks.”

Sounds a bit harsh, but if we take the time to read His words slowly and thoughtfully, there’s a good lesson there about being mindful of our words.

I want to be known for good fruit—words and actions that help others and exhibit God’s love. Consequently, I need to have a good heart. A clean heart, created by God (please see [Psalm 51:10-12](#)).

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!*

## **Moving Forward – Something New – by Pam Charro**

Well, I have again had to let some things go recently, and I'm feeling a little sad and disappointed. Apparently I'm not one of those people who easily release the familiar, and I feel empty. Maybe even a little depressed.

I remember a time in my life when I literally had to be driven out by cockroaches before I would leave my old apartment. The people on the other side of the duplex brought in those wonderful little black ones that are practically impossible to get rid of, and nothing we did worked, even months after the other family had moved out. We were eventually told that we had to move so that the landlady could deal with them aggressively, without tenants in the way. I was terrified. "But, Lord, it's so inexpensive here, where will we get the money to live elsewhere? This has been perfect for us." And, of course, God provided the extra money and a much nicer apartment.

I've found that I often tend to resist when God wants to give me something new. I didn't grow up with much, and letting go of what already seems to be good enough is scary to me. I can feel so attached to the familiar, even when I know it is inferior to God's best. I never really know when to let go until I have absolutely no other choice. And, in more than one area of my life right now, that seems to be the case.

But I'm also realizing, despite the sadness, that I'm excited and expectant as well. God has been teaching me the boldness and clarity to ask for exactly what I want, and the faith to trust him for the outcome. It's still a little scary to not know what is coming because I've never had this before, but that's also what makes it exciting. New is never familiar - that's why it's new!

So now I'm thanking God in advance for his good plans to fill my current emptiness and for his grace and patience with me as I grow. It's time for his best, the fulfillment of prayers and waiting. Time for something new.



FRESH THYME

## **FRESH THYME - Crying From a Yacht – by Marcy Lytle**

Before you read this story, I'll preface it by saying that we all have crying times...no matter our status, our position in life, or our economic situation. Life is hard and it hits us all hard on different days. And crying is warranted.

But what this story is about is when life is good...and we're still crying. And I'm writing it to myself, because I've been in this situation many times, "crying from a yacht." I don't even know if that's a phrase that people sling around, or even where I heard it, but I wrote it down. And I think I wrote it down because many of us live in a yacht, so to speak, where we're on the "high seas" of life, the sea is smooth, we have more than we need in the way of entertainment and belongings, and yet we find ourselves on any given day feeling pitiful and maybe even crying..."for no good reason..." we might say.

Aside from hormones, or circumstances, or being tired...what it is that makes us feel pitiful and like crying when life is good?

*Is it* the fear that life might not be good tomorrow? That might be it, sometimes. Everything is going well but we hear the news or watch a friend receive a devastating diagnosis, and our first thought is, "Oh my, I hope that doesn't happen to me."

*Is it* because all these things we have going for us don't really satisfy that deep hole in our hearts? That might be, because even when we have all the tangible things surrounding us...we need peace and contentment. And that only comes through knowing Christ and his character and allowing him to fill our hearts and needs.

*Is it* because we've acquired all these things and achieved our successes and married this or that person in order to fill that hole in our hearts...only to be disappointed and bored in all of the above? Well, surely that is the case for many. We see it in crime thrillers and all sorts of movies, where the person who has it all does something crazy because they didn't have the one thing – the joy of living.

When our kids "cry from a yacht" (whine when they have all the toys in the world but they want that one), we discipline them, shake our heads, and try our best to teach them to be content with what they have, give away and share with those in need, and to find joy in the little things like flowers in the yard to pick, or the shapes in the clouds. We point them to creation. We steer them away from things. We back off from overindulging.

When I heard this phrase, I liked it, and I could envision it. A lady of luxury, laying back against a soft cushion on the boat, sipping on her favorite drink, hair blowing in the wind...headed off to some exotic place and tears are flowing...because she broke a nail. Sounds silly, right? And we'd never do that! Would we?

Thanksgiving is coming next month. It's the time of year when we make our lists, we invite the kids to write something on a paper leaf and hang it on a cardboard tree. Then we sit around the table and read all that we've written. We sit at a full table, with friends or family, and we make ourselves be thankful, whether we feel like it or not.

I remember when my kids threw a fit and stomped their feet over the silliest things, I told them it was okay to be disappointed but it was not okay to throw a fit, hit their sibling, or be rude with their words. Not allowed. No crying on the yacht allowed. And it stopped. They got no audience for their crying, so therefore their tears dried up.

I don't want to be the lady on the yacht with tears falling because my painted nail has a crack. But I have been. I've cried because a store was closed when I showed up to shop (well I didn't cry, but it might have ruined my day.) I've cried when a dinner was ruined because I burned it, or when he didn't plan a date when he said he would, or when (today) the heat lingered instead of the cool breezes I so long for.

Why do we cry from yachts? I suppose we've overindulged and it might be good to be a little bored, have the lights go out, and find ourselves sitting in the dark with only His presence near...so that our thankful hearts turn to Him, instead of things.

I'm still thinking on this one...



## **FRESH THYME – The Sediment – by Marcy Lytle**

I recently shared with friends and maybe here in the magazine about how I realized I was carrying a heavy backpack full of stones I'd gathered during the day. And even though at night I thought I laid down that heaviness and gave it to Him, I didn't feel rest...at all.

Then I shared how I saw myself laying back against Him and I could see that I had just turned my backpack around and laid it on my chest. I was indeed lying in His arms, but the heaviness was on top of me...still. The backpack was packed full of these stones of worry, disappointment, fear and anger, and all sorts of things. Stones too heavy and too weighty; and I hadn't let them go.

It was a real breakthrough for me when I finally imagined myself removing those stones, one by one, and placing them in His hands. It felt good to let go and let Him carry my load. And even better than that, I saw a picture of Him rolling those stones in His hands, polishing them, taking care of every single heavy load I'd been carrying. I could rest!

Now it is a month or so later, and I was praying last night...again heavy for my family who was suffering in grief...and heavy with the weight of each day. I practiced this mental exercise once again of unpacking the pack, handing Him the stones, lying back in rest...but then I saw something in my mind's eye!

There was sediment in the bottom of my proverbial backpack! Sediment is matter that settles to the bottom. It's something that moves from one place to another by the process of erosion. And there was a little pile of it that I hadn't seen or removed, because it would require an upside down shaking of that pack and a good cleanout!

It was stuff like leftover particles from little parts of unforgiveness, or other reservations about really trusting God, or even little particles of doubt about his goodness. No, these weren't heavy because they'd "mostly" been dealt with, but the pile of sediment was unsightly, it sat there like a pile of dust, and I had missed it.

Over the past few days, I've been thinking about that sediment. I'm not sure I can get it all out even if I shake really hard. But He can. I watched a dying man in our family offer forgiveness to someone in his last breaths, and that took my own breath away. Do I still have little particles of unforgiveness in my heart? In fact, I'm realizing how a lot of that sediment got there.

And it's from refusing to let it all go if I don't understand. Maybe I prayed and God didn't answer, so little pieces of rock fell to the bottom, wondering and demanding in my heart to understand. If God is so good, couldn't he at least explain the why of things in this life that torments our minds?

Just this morning I realized that as parents, we REQUIRE our kids to obey whether they understand or not. They have to hold our hands as we walk across a street when they're young because they're impulsive and they just run without thinking. But they don't understand at all.

And that's just the beginning of my cleanout of the bottom, where the sediment lies...

Empty your backpack, then look in the bottom. You might want to start the shaking, too. I'm pretty sure there's more to this story to come...

## **FRESH THYME – What Makes You Laugh? – by Marcy Lytle**

We recently sat behind a young woman on an airplane for a two hour flight and she talked...and laughed...loudly. Honestly, it was annoying. We were not able to sleep at all, and we were tired! However, at least she was laughing! So many times, adults don't laugh much, especially compared to children. I recently published one of the family devos on laughter, where families had the opportunity to chuckle together. But in this season of busyness and sometimes great sadness, we all need a bit of laughter to heal our souls.

What makes you laugh? Apparently, I'm not easily amused, or maybe I should say that I don't find funny many things that others laugh about. But I thought it would be fun to share what does make me laugh, and encourage you to do the same. Make a list. And then incorporate scenes and experiences of laughter into your holiday season.

*Children* – Maybe this is an obvious answer. But my kids and their kids make me laugh, not just smile. I recently shopped with 11 year old Ayla and she told me it's just not right to not have at least five pairs of boots for the fall. And 2 year old Camp blames Mister (my husband – his grandfather) for all sorts of things, and it's funny! We watch Camp videos over and over again.

So, find the children in your circle of friends and hang with them. Laugh at their funny antics and sayings.

*King of Queens* – I'm admitting it here, we sometimes watch reruns of this show at night before we fall asleep. And honestly, I watch them (some are not good, but others are hilarious) because I want to laugh as the last activity before I nod off. The one episode where the couple on the show wants their friends to know they attended the wedding, and the main guy jumps through the camera shot of the family – that makes us laugh every time.

So, find a show you enjoy that makes you laugh, and make sure to include it at least weekly, for some fun.

*Mishaps* – Now, I don't mean bad ones, just the funny ones. Unfortunately, my granddaughter has the same funny bone. If someone stumbles or just hits their elbow, she bursts into laughter. And the other day my husband hit his toe on the closet door and it wasn't bad, it was funny...to me. I'm not sure this is a good thing to laugh at, but it's just local at home – little mishaps make for funny times. I know, maybe that's weird.

So, laugh at each other and your funny little drops and bumps – as long as no one is hurt.

*Videos* – I'm not a fan of scrolling for hours on the phone, but sometimes we both do – together – at night. (Why do things seem so much funnier at night?) We watch videos of little kids saying funny things, or there's this Pretend Cooking Show by Jennifer Garner that she posts, which is hilarious! There's another cook Bri McCoy and she's silly funny. And then there's just the absurd. It might not make us laugh tomorrow, but it did today.

So, find something today that makes you laugh and laugh over and over again, until your belly aches.

*Dancing* – My husband and I (often in the winter months, when it's cold outside) will sometimes try to learn a dance by watching YouTube in our living room, in front of the sofa, on the rug. We try, we really do. We've tried the Fox Trot but we get lost in the instructions and bumble our feet. And sometimes, we just end up falling on the sofa in hilarious laughter, especially if we video ourselves and watch it back. We should have learned to dance at much younger age!

So, find an activity or learn something new that you're really not that adept at, and laugh away!

What makes you laugh?

## **FRESH THYME - Wonder Spaces – by Marcy Lytle**

We took the kids this summer to a place in our city by the name of the same title I'm using above...Wonder Spaces. It's an immersive art display in a big building that visitors walk through, touch, observe, listen, feel, etc. When the walk is over, every sense has been touched by the wonder of the art displayed. We walked through hundreds of hanging lights that turned different colors to music. We stood by a huge wall and moved. As we did, paint in vivid colors spread across the wall in the same way our bodies moved! And there was another wall with little tiny tubes full of notes people had written, with blank ones left to write. As visitors placed them in the holes, the wall became a work of art.

Room after room we entered and were amazed at the creativity, and we all enjoyed this building full of wonder.

I couldn't stop thinking about the name of this experience and I thought about how over time, over the years and decades, we tend to lose our sense of wonder. At an early age, kids marvel and wonder at every little thing in life. A piece of crumpled paper might make them burst out into laughter. But when we find such a piece of paper we toss it in the trash, annoyed it was on the floor. Toddlers love to watch heavy equipment, and will sit and wonder at the workers as they dig holes or move dirt or pick up trash. It's fascinating. And we adults can't wait for the equipment to move, be gone, away...so we can get down the road.

I want to wonder at life again, at every little beauty and oddity and color and sound. I thought of ways and experiences that I could stoke this sense as I walk through the "wonder spaces" of life. I hope you'll make your own list, or consider mine:

- I want to observe the sun when I'm leaving the house or returning home, no matter the time of day, and wonder at the faithfulness of the One who sets it and gives it time and space each day.
- I want to sit down to eat my dinner and wonder at the flavors that meld together in that dish the restaurant prepared and how amazing it is that I live where food is readily there, for the eating and the enjoying.
- I want to observe those leaves in the trees waving and falling to the ground as this season prepares and ushers in the next season, when the trees are bare. And I want to wonder at the cycle of life and how it ebbs and flows, even when I think the fallen leaves mean life is over.
- I want to read the Word, the very breath of God spoken to me and for me, and marvel at the personal truth and growth and healing that comes from knowing the character of the One who made me. I want my breath to be taken away by the love of his heart for mine.
- I want to see people, as I sit on a park bench, shop in a mall, dine at a restaurant, and wonder at the way we're all so wonderfully made different...and yet same...and be amazed and tell these folks of the love of Christ.
- I want to wonder and fall to my knees at the grace extended to me and mine to know God, the Maker of the universe, the One that sent his son...and I want that wonder and thanksgiving from my heart for salvation to be at the top of my thankful list this season.

- I want to enter His “wonder spaces” and experience the light, the sounds, the colors and the textures of 24 hours a day that move from early morning darkness to full blown light and back to darkness once again, because today is a wonder...

Isn't it?

What wonder spaces do you want to experience once again, that perhaps have gotten lost in the madness of the world, and slipped away because of busyness and pain and disappointment? You're welcome to join me as we wonder...together...at the love of God that spills over into every movement of our days we have on earth.