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THIS MONTH'S FEATURED ARTICLE



Spring Clean Your Soul

By Matthew E. Morgan

After staring at the white and grey winter palette for months, hues of greens and blues are finally blooming! Spring is here! And with it comes the long-standing tradition of "Spring Cleaning." But your house isn't the only thing that is in dire need of a makeover – your soul has been cooped up all winter as well. It's time to dust your disposition, transform your thinking, and arrange your attitude. It's time to

spring clean your life!

After spending quite a few winters in North Dakota, my wife and I understood winter cabin fever well. For months, we hardly saw any speck of natural color. I remember coming home and staring out the frosty window with a steaming mug of hot chocolate in hand, snuggling under four quilts to keep warm.

But when spring came, it brought beautiful green grass, the cool airy breeze, and refreshing spring rains. Our laundry hung drying in the air as dandelion fuzz drifted playfully across the yard. Mother Rabbit began poking her head around my garden, wondering what I would plant for her this year. Spring has always been a time of rebirth and renewal. Here are some tips to giving spring its full fling – without breaking the bank!

Create a "New" House

The traditional response to spring is to dust the fans and ledges, scrub the floors, and change wardrobes from winter to spring clothes. This spring, take it a step further. Rearrange the furniture to give your home a fresh look. Change the direction of your bed. Add some pictures from last year. Most printing companies can enlarge that favorite vacation photo. Frame it and add it to your décor.

Take an Extended Weekend

Use one of those vacation days and slip out of the office a little early. Ninety percent of you probably have an inexpensive vacation destination close by. It could be anything from a short stay in a nearby motel to a trip to a state park resort. Do a web search for your state and the word "vacation" and see what appears. Or meander down to your local bookstore and check out the "Travel" section. Most states have a book or books designed for a budget weekend getaway.

Pick up a New Hobby

Spring is the time of rebirth. Renew yourself with that hobby that has kept you saying, "I really wish I could do that." Scrapbooking is a great way to combine starting a hobby, organizing the house, and decorating the interior. Now might be a great time to pick up a new sport like tennis or golf. You can also dust off the instrument that has sat in the corner all winter. Or travel to the store to pick up a pair of binoculars or a digital camera and enjoy the sights, sounds, and smells of nature in its own rebirth.

Make New Friends

Do you know who lives across the street from you? Start a new friendship by having them over for a cookout or helping them with their own spring cleaning. You can also take a family from church out after service. Don't neglect someone just because he or she is older or younger than you. There's a great value to trans-generational relationships. Learn what younger people like or what older people remember. There is a great deal to be learned from different viewpoints.

Try New Fashion Styles



One of the scariest steps some people can take is to try out some new-to-them fashions. If you have a budgetary concern, frequent some of the newer second-hand clothing stores. If you are not confident in being style-conscious, find a friend or co-worker who is known for being "trendy". You can also look at the catalogs and ads in the papers that announce spring sales. Also, talk to your hair stylist and see what he or she thinks about a "new do." Try some highlights to bring out color in your hair or try a new style to add some pizzazz.

Take Care of a New Pet

Fish are known for their relaxing qualities. There is just something about watching these cute bug-eyed creatures glide effortlessly through their environment. Most pet stores have a small aquarium kit for sale that contains all you need to start your own fish tank. Just add some colorful fish and enjoy. Make sure to give them names. If you spend any time just watching the tank, you can see each fish's different personality. If you are particularly brave, go down to your local animal shelter and rescue an abandoned animal. A great way to celebrate nature's rebirth is to take your new best friend for a puppy-walk in the park or to open a window and watch your new kitten stretch in the sunbeam.

Try New Food Recipes

So has it been soup and sandwiches all winter long? Spice up your culinary life with an adventure through a new cookbook (or surf the endless number of recipe websites to find some new cuisines). Chisel the char out of your grill or take a trip to the store and buy a small table-top model. There's nothing like flame-cooking hamburgers, hot dogs, bratwurst, fish, and even pizza! Be brave and adventuresome! If the absolute worst happens and your meal flops, pick up the phone and send the local pizza delivery driver your way.

Start Your Procrastinated Exercise Routine

All winter long, you have been looking at your spouse and thinking, "If it was just a little warmer, we should go for a walk." Well, it's a little warmer now; tighten those laces, grab your spouse's hand and pull him or her off the couch, and just do it! Explore your neighborhood, walk down to the local coffee shop, or just wander and enjoy the conversation – or the silence – that ensues.

* * *

Many people suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder – in other words, winter makes them depressed. Use this spring to chase away the winter blahs and find a new passion in life. Try it ... you just might like it.

Matthew E. Morgan is a budding stand-up comedian and volunteer youth pastor in central Ohio. He is married to his beautiful wife Martha; they have two cats who serve as their children (read: spoiled rotten). You can contact Matthew via the Letters' page of this magazine.

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