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## *Always Learning*

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Easter Blessings My Friend!

Yes I know Easter was last Sunday, but Easter is worth celebrating every day.

I've probably written this update a dozen times in my head over the past couple of months but it is usually while I am in my car driving some place and I never get around putting my words down. Historically, I've been good at writing updates before and after my international travel and missions trips, but with travel restrictions I've been stateside for the past two years.

My last update spoke about opening the Palm Branch Home Outlet in Ocala Florida. After seven trips to Florida and concentrated involvement in the fall, I'm happy to say that the store is still in operation and "making it". It is a journey, a work in progress - like all of us. Each month is a walk of faith, "will we sell enough to cover our fixed expenses and then be able to afford to buy more product to sell?" Please continue to pray blessing and favor over the store and that it will soar and thrive.

Working with the store has opened up the world of online selling to me (which has transitioned to selling online for Heartland Outlet in Shakopee) - what a learning curve! Talk about having to "trust in the Lord with all your heart and leaning not on your own understanding". To say that the process is a rollercoaster of high highs and puzzling lows is an understatement. I've laughed after being told, "You're not very good at your job" when I gave someone an answer they didn't like. I've been asked more questions than I could have guessed is even possible. I've had people want me to cut the price in half, provide delivery, and haul away their old appliances. I've had people tell me they definitely want something but then not show up. I've had people swear at me. I've had overwhelming response (hundreds of messages) to posts and absolutely no response to others. I've posted, and shared, and relisted, over, and over, and over again. I respond to Facebook messenger inquiries and questions several times a day for up to 30 minutes at a time. I definitely know NOTHING about lawn mowers, whether a dryer is gas or

electric, or anything about a tool that takes a battery or gets plugged in. I know very little about flooring but I can use my mathematical skills to calculate price per square foot, price per pallet, or how many boxes of something are needed to cover a specific size room (note - always add 10% to what you think you are going to need). I can look up items online like a pro.

So "how is this ministry?" you ask. There are two facets of that. First the proceeds from the sales at these stores are used to fund missions, ministry and to bless the community. In addition they provide a sustainable source of funding, so the ministries don't have to be constantly raising money and asking for donations. Second, it gives a natural opportunity to interact with people that may never step foot in a church. The prices are 30-50% less than typical retail so it saves customers money, which they love, and the store volunteers love to interact with, pray for, and bless the people. It is win-win. Simply, it is loving god and loving people. (But it can still be a lot of work;)

I've learned so much, and not just about online selling. I've learned...

- \* I can't please everyone. I can't meet many people's expectations - I never will.
- \* I get to set boundaries. I don't have to check my messages hourly. Usually three times of day or as prompted is sufficient.
- \* I am learning not to take what people say personally - I have to remind myself that people don't know me, they have their own challenges, they don't know my heart, they don't know my priorities, they don't know "why" I do what I do. Actually my goal in posting and interacting with people on Facebook Marketplace is NOT to sell stuff (that is just the by product), my goal is to get people to physically go to Heartland Outlet in Shakopee. Once a person comes in the store "sells" itself. I look at each message I reply to and send as being a personal invite to people to come in to the store and "take a look".
- \* I've learned to have standard replies (when appropriate), that it is okay to say, "sorry I don't have more photos", "sorry, I don't know what color varieties are currently available", "sorry, that item is no longer available".
- \* I often don't understand why an original post will generate dozens of inquiries and a relisting will generate nothing.
- \* I've learned that some people are very particular about their toilet paper brand and type.
- \* I've learned that prices increase (and people don't like that). That trucking and shipping is expensive. That when people return used items to big box retail stores, that increases the prices of what all of us pay for everything.
- \* I've learned people are always looking for or wanting a better deal - but that it is okay to say "no."
- \* I've learned to quickly apologize. While not intentional, sometimes people go to the store and the item they are looking for has already sold - without my knowledge.
- \* There is much I don't control, and can't control - and that is okay, and probably even good.

I am so grateful for you, your friendship, your prayers, and your financial support. I have two prayer requests to close with. First, my dad is undergoing radiation treatments for a diagnosis of prostate cancer. Please pray for a complete eradication of the cancer, and that there will be no side effects from the treatment. Second, my work and ministry is ever changing and in flux. While part of me loves that aspect of being missionary, it can be challenging to juggle and prioritize everything. Please pray for God's wisdom and discernment in how I spend my time and what I say "yes" to and what I say "no" to.

Love and blessings, *Jill*