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...buy the  
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GIVING YOURSELF  
PERMISSION  
TO LIGHTEN UP



JOYCE MEYER

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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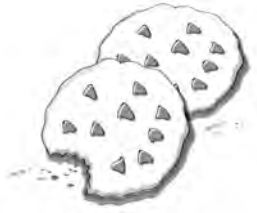
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# CHAPTER 1

## *The Cookie*



It was Saturday afternoon in St. Louis, Missouri, during our 2007 annual autumn women's convention, and we were on a brief lunch break preceding the final session of the conference. This is one of the most significant events that our ministry sponsors. It is attended by thousands of women from all over the world, and it requires a tremendous amount of hard work, creativity, and preparation. The three-day conference begins on Thursday evening, and by the Saturday lunch break, I'm usually mentally, physically, and emotionally tired. This particular event seems to take a lot out of me for several reasons. By the last session, I feel a great deal of responsibility to be sure that the conference ends in a way that leaves our attendees energized and very glad they came.

We had enjoyed a small lunch, and I was gathering all of my strength getting ready to go to the platform and bring the conference to a fantastic finish. Dave and I were leaving the lunchroom when I saw a plate of chocolate chip cookies I had passed by when I was selecting my lunch from the buffet. As I saw

them this time I thought, “I really want (need) a little piece of one of those cookies.” I stopped at the table and broke off about one-third of one of the cookies and ate it. As we proceeded to the platform Dave said, “Did you just eat part of that cookie?” His tone of voice was accusing and right away I got defensive. I felt like saying, “Chill out . . . it is just a piece of cookie!”

You might wonder why Dave cared about one-third of a cookie. We had recently signed up at a workout facility nine months prior to the convention. We worked out three days a week and had committed to a special eating plan that was rather strict. Four days a week we ate mostly protein and vegetables. The fifth day was called a “free day” because we got to eat one meal consisting of anything we wanted to eat. Usually on that day we ate pasta and/or dessert. We were free to eat whatever we wanted during that one meal as long as we got right back on our eating plan the next day. Our free day for that week was the following day, and Dave had challenged me because I had eaten the piece of cookie on the wrong day.

In his own words, he was only trying to help me. But I didn’t want help or advice. I wanted the cookie! I was tired, I had come a long way in the conference, and I needed something to get me to the finish line. I didn’t care what it was, but it needed to be fun, pretty, or sweet. And the cookie happened to be the first thing I saw that fit that description. Being a man, Dave does not understand things like that. He is very logical and in his mind, it simply wasn’t the right day to eat the cookie. He wanted me to know that I would be sorry after I ate it. However, I was not the least bit sorry. I felt that I deserved it, and in the same set of circumstances I would do it again!

My friend saw what was happening between me and Dave, and having compassion and understanding, she put her arm around my shoulder and said, “You deserve that cookie, and if I were you, when this last session is over I would go buy a pair of shoes to go with it!” (She knows I like shoes.) She totally understood that the cookie was meeting an emotional need of mine. Being a left-brained male, Dave didn’t get it at all.

I went onstage and made a joke out of it, like I usually do about most of the things that happen between Dave and me, and everyone enjoyed it immensely. Actually, the ladies cheered so long and loud and were so happy for me that I had eaten the cookie that I began to realize that there was a larger issue involved in the eating of the cookie that needed to be explored. That’s how the idea for this book was birthed. Interestingly enough, when the teaching about the cookie aired on “Enjoying Everyday Life,” it was so well received that it was voted the favorite program of the year by the people who watch the broadcast. Obviously, I’d struck a nerve.

There are times when we all need to eat the cookie and buy the shoes in order to help us finish what we have started or as a way of celebrating something we have accomplished. Your cookie and shoes can be anything that you enjoy. It can be a favorite food, a nap, a manicure or pedicure. If you are a brave man reading this book, you can play golf, go fishing, go to a ball game, or whatever helps you rest and refreshes you. You may even be a man who likes manicures, pedicures, and bubble baths, or a woman who likes to get out tools and build something amazing. We don’t have to fit into some society mold. We are free to enjoy anything as long as it is not immoral or illegal.

I sincerely wish that the male species was more understanding about the cookies in life, but most of them just don't seem to get it. Dave fully intended to go hit his golf balls Saturday evening, which is his way of relaxing and celebrating a job well done. But he still had the nerve to comment about my cookie! It isn't fair that cookies have calories and golf balls don't. If every golf ball Dave hit had ten calories, he would weigh a thousand pounds!

Dave truly was trying to help me when he commented on the cookie. He loves me immensely and is extremely good to me. But he simply didn't understand my need at that moment. My friend rescued me from the guilt that could have hounded me that day, and I am thankful to God for using her. I didn't need guilt as I approached the final session of the convention. I needed the cookie and the thought of shoes later that day!

Sadly, if we are not confident about our choices, we can easily let other peoples' comments make us feel guilty and ruin the joy we need to experience in life through doing the little things that mean a lot to us.

### *We're Not Built For Guilt*

Making people feel guilty about anything is not God's mode of operation. The source of guilt is the devil. He is the accuser of the brethren, according to the Bible (see Rev. 12:10). God will convict us of wrong choices and actions, but He never tries to make us feel guilty. Guilt presses us down and weakens us, but

godly conviction brings awareness of wrong, and an opportunity to change and progress

God never intended His children to be loaded down with guilt, so our systems don't handle it well at all. Had God wanted us to feel guilty, He would not have sent Jesus to redeem us from guilt. He bore, or paid for, our iniquities and the guilt they cause (see Isa. 53:6, 1 Peter 2:24–25). As believers in Jesus Christ and as sons and daughters of God, we have been set free from the power of sin (see Rom. 6:6–10). That doesn't mean that we'll never sin, but it does mean that when we do, we can admit it, receive forgiveness, and be free from guilt. Our journey with God toward right behavior and holiness is progressive, and if we have to drag the guilt from past mistakes along with us, we'll never make progress toward true freedom and joy. Perhaps this is the main reason why so few people actually enter into and enjoy the inheritance promised through relationship with Jesus Christ.

We are not built for guilt.

It is important that you think about this, because spending time dwelling on past mistakes is something God has told us not to do. He even sent us the Holy Spirit to help us gain freedom in this area. Don't be so intense about every mistake that you make. So what if you're not perfect? Nobody else is either. Besides, Jesus came for those who were sick (imperfect), not those who were well (perfect).

Your future has no room for your past. How much time do you waste feeling guilty?

The Apostle Paul was very emphatic about the need to let go of past mistakes in order to have the strength to press on toward the mark of perfection that God is calling us to.

Not that I have now attained [this ideal], or have already been made perfect, but I press on to lay hold of (grasp) and make my own, that for which Christ Jesus (the Messiah) has made me His own.

I do not consider, brethren, that I have captured and made it my own [yet]; but one thing I do [it is my one aspiration]: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,

I press on toward the goal to win the [supreme and heavenly] prize to which God in Christ Jesus is calling us upward.

*Philippians 3:12–14*

Satan will definitely try to make us feel guilty about our sins, faults, and weaknesses. Even worse, he will try to make us feel guilty when we haven't done anything wrong. Until my friend encouraged me, I was about to feel guilty about eating one-third of a chocolate chip cookie on the wrong day! There was no sin in eating the cookie. We could eat a dozen cookies and it still wouldn't be sin. It would not be a good or a wise choice, but it would not be sin in the true sense of the word. I just needed a little celebration before approaching the finish of my conference, and what I almost got was a dose of guilt, frustration, and resentment—all from a teaspoonful of cookie batter!

I've surveyed many people on this subject and have found that most people feel guilty when they take the opportunity to

celebrate. They push themselves to go on with no joy fuel in their tank. Joy is the fuel we need to reach the finish line of an endeavor with a good attitude. We may drive ourselves to finish, but somewhere along the way we will probably become bitter and get a chip on our shoulder if we don't lighten up and take time to celebrate the journey.

I believe that we must confront the reasons why we tend to feel guilty about enjoying and celebrating life when God has clearly ordained and commanded both. Our thinking has been warped in these areas. Satan has managed to deceive us, and by doing so he succeeds in keeping people weary and worn-out, feeling resentful, and taken advantage of because of excessive work and responsibility. We need times of refreshment and recreation as well as work and accomplishment.

I was part of that 80 percent until I decided that I was not built for guilt, and I was not going to continue allowing a renegade feeling to rule my life.

When I ask large audiences how many people feel guilty when they try to rest or entertain themselves or even do things they enjoy, my guess would be that at least 80 percent of the people raise their hands.

I studied God's Word about guilt and studied His character and nature until I was totally convinced that *God is not the source of guilt*. I see guilt as an illegal alien that attacks our mind and conscience, attempting to prevent us from enjoying anything God has provided for us. Guilt has no legal right in our lives because Jesus has paid for our sins and misdeeds. If it is in

us illegally, then we need to send it back where it came from—which is hell! Don't give guilt a green card or, even worse, citizenship and allow it to take up residence in you.

I was once addicted to guilt. The only time in life that I felt right was when I felt wrong. I especially had difficulty enjoying myself because I didn't feel that I deserved it. I was most definitely a person who needed to give myself permission to lighten up and not be so intense about basically everything in life. I was intense about how my children behaved and looked. I was intense about how my house looked, how I looked, and what people thought of us. I was intense about trying to change my husband into what I thought he should be. I really can't think of anything I wasn't intense about! I remember going to a doctor once because I was exhausted all the time and generally felt horrible. He talked to me five minutes and said, "You are a very intense woman and your problem is stress!" I got offended, left his office and continued on with my intense, stressful lifestyle.

I didn't know how to trust God with daily life. I was out of balance in almost everything and I did not yet realize that celebration and enjoyment are necessary in our lives and we cannot be healthy spiritually, mentally, emotionally, or physically without them. We must remember that we are not built for guilt, and we should deal with it aggressively anytime we experience it.

The best gift you can give your family and the world is a healthy you and you cannot be healthy without celebration being a regular part of your life. You can change the entire atmosphere in your home simply by giving yourself permission to lighten up.