

THE SECRET
TO
TRUE
HAPPINESS

Enjoy Today, Embrace Tomorrow



JOYCE MEYER



New York Boston Nashville

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INTRODUCTION

I am convinced one of the most important lessons we can ever learn is to choose to be happy every day of our lives as we look forward to the future. One of my greatest desires is to see people thoroughly enjoy the quality of life Jesus died to give us—to actually *be* happy. Not just to read about it or talk about it, but to walk in it and experience true happiness as a daily reality.

Many people, including me, are extremely goal oriented. We are so focused on tomorrow we often fail to appreciate and enjoy today because we are always thinking ahead, looking to the next event, working toward the completion of the next assignment, and seeing what we can check off our to-do lists. Our fast-paced, high-pressure society urges us to accomplish as much as we can as quickly as we can—so we can then accomplish even more. Over the years, I have learned that the intense pursuit of one goal after another can cause us to miss out on some of the happiness life offers us. God does have purposes and plans He wants us to fulfill during the course of our earthly lives, but He also wants us to enjoy and make the most of every day we live.

After years of ministry and interacting with people, I have come to believe that people desperately want to enjoy their lives—to live every day with peace, contentment, and joy, which I like to define as “anything from extreme hilarity to calm delight.” In fact, I read recently that some people are so desperate for joy they are joining laughter clubs. In these clubs, people meet together every morning for the sole purpose of finding some way to laugh before they start their day. We may chuckle at the idea of laughter clubs, but their existence clearly reveals a deep hunger for joy in people’s hearts.

The Pew Research Center confirmed this when they asked a number of Americans if they were enjoying their lives. What do you think the results were? Only about 34 percent report they are “very happy” in life.¹ This is not hard to believe, because we live in a society that highly values *what people have over who they are*. But nothing is worth having if we cannot enjoy it. No amount of money, no measure of fame, no job, no relationship, no talent or skill—nothing does any good at all if we do not enjoy our lives.

What about you? Are you enjoying today as you look toward tomorrow? Are you generally happy, content, and satisfied with who you are and what you do each day? Do you take time to notice and appreciate the everyday experiences that make life rich and rewarding? Or do you race through each day so you can get to the next one? Do you take breaks and find things to laugh about on a regular basis, or do you allow the pressure of your responsibilities to carve a frown on your face as you keep your nose to the grindstone?

Perhaps you desperately want to enjoy everyday life, but fear that actually enjoying something might not be “holy” or pleasing to God. For some reason, many of us have come to believe enjoying our lives is not okay. Often, we are not even aware we think or feel that way, but somehow we have decided we should not enjoy our lives. Instead, we believe we are supposed to be working, accomplishing, following the rules, meeting the deadlines, doing things “right,” and keeping people happy at any cost.

I have great news for you: *God wants you to be happy today and every day*. He really does. Jesus’ statement about life in John 10:10 is absolutely amazing to me: “The thief comes only in order to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they might have *and* enjoy life, and have it in abundance (to the full, till it overflows).”

What a scripture! Jesus wants us not simply to be alive, but to *enjoy* being alive. You see, Jesus did not come to us so our hearts would beat and our brains would function. He did not come simply to give us physical life, or to give us “just enough to get through”

life's challenges and difficulties. You and I were not created to simply exist, pass the time, mope our way through life, dread each new day, or trudge through our jobs with our eyes on the time clock, just waiting to leave work and take our misery home. No, we were made to enjoy every aspect of our lives, every day of our lives. This is what God wants for us and why Jesus came. He came to impart to us true life—the rich, deep, joy-filled, radical life God intended for us, the kind that is “in abundance, to the full, until it overflows.”

I'll never forget the woman who thanked me for giving her permission to enjoy life after she heard me teach on this subject. I know she represented countless others who have never felt free to enjoy life, so I want to make clear that we must believe God's will is for us to thoroughly enjoy life. You have permission to enjoy today while you are reaching for and embracing tomorrow—not just my permission, but permission from God Himself.

I challenge you today to go to a new level of enjoyment in your daily life. Determine now that you are going to enjoy where you are today on your way to where you want to be tomorrow. Say it with your mouth; stick it on your bathroom mirror; put it on your screen-saver: “I am determined to enjoy today!” And influence everyone around you to do the same.

Whoever you are and whatever your level of happiness, I invite you to step into greater joy. Live with more passion; laugh more; relax more; smile more; do more to make other people happy, and enjoy more. You'll be glad you did, and you will accomplish more because we are the most creative when we are the happiest.

Several years ago, there came a time in our ministry when we changed the name of our television broadcast and our magazine from *Life in the Word* to *Enjoying Everyday Life*. One of the reasons for the change was that I feel so strongly about the importance of enjoying the present as we move toward the future. In John 10:10, Jesus was basically saying: “I came that you might *have life* and that you would enjoy it.” Remember, He died so we could experience

authentic happiness. Not temporarily, not once in a while, but all the time. He does not want us simply to *have* life; He wants us to *enjoy* and appreciate the gift of life He has given us. That begins by realizing and believing God really does want us to make the most of every day of our lives.

My own journey toward true happiness *every day* has not been easy, and I'll share more about that as we go through this book. Enjoying daily life was something I had to *learn* to do. But now that I know how to do it, I wouldn't want to live any other way. My desire in this book is to share with you some of the truths I've learned about the secret of true happiness. As you read them and apply them to your life, don't be surprised if you find yourself enjoying your life in ways you never dreamed possible. That's my prayer for you today.

—Joyce Meyer

CHAPTER

1

Enjoy Your Everyday Life

*“Most folks are about as happy as they
make up their minds to be.”*

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN

The only life you can enjoy is your own. That statement may seem so obvious it's unnecessary, but think about it. One of the primary reasons many people do not enjoy their lives is that they are not happy with the lives they have. When I speak to them about enjoying their lives, the first thought they have is, *I would enjoy my life if I had your life, Joyce!* Instead of embracing the realities of their lives, these people spend their time thinking, *I wish I looked like So-and-So. I wish I had So-and-So's job. I wish I were married. I wish my marriage weren't so difficult. I wish I had children. I wish my children would grow up. I wish I had a new house. I wish I didn't have such a big house to clean. I wish I had a big ministry . . .*

The truth of the matter is, the first step to enjoying our everyday lives is to accept the lives we've been given. We must not allow jealousy or comparison to cause us to be absent from our own lives because we want someone else's life.

The wise king Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 5:18, 19:

“Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is for one to eat and drink, and to find enjoyment in all the labor in which

he labors under the sun all the days which God gives him—for this is his [allotted] part. Also, every man to whom God has given riches and possessions, and the power to enjoy them and to accept his appointed lot and to rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God [to him].”

I want you to notice the words “allotted part” and “appointed lot” in these verses. What Solomon is basically communicating here is: enjoy your life. Take your “appointed lot” in life and enjoy it. In other words, embrace the life—the personality, the strengths and weaknesses, the family, the resources, the opportunities, the physical qualities, the abilities, the gifts, and the uniqueness—God has given *you*.

Maybe you struggle with things that do not appear to be challenges for other people. For example, you may have a physical handicap or a learning disability. Perhaps you wanted to go to college, but could not. Maybe you do not believe you have as many outstanding qualities or remarkable gifts as someone else. You may wish something were different about your spouse, your children, your job, or your financial situation. Whatever the case, you have to take what you have and decide that you are going to do the best you can with it. After all, your life will not change until you start doing so.

God is asking you to be faithful with your life, not with someone else’s. We see in Matthew 25 that the master gave three men talents (a type of money in the New Testament). To one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another he gave one. The Bible states he gave to each one according to his own ability. The master then went on a long journey and later returned for an accounting of what each man did with the talents entrusted to him. The man who received five talents invested his and gained five more. He was able to not only return to the master what was entrusted to him but also give back twice as much as he started with. The same thing happened with the man who was entrusted with two talents. But the man who only had one talent buried it because he was afraid and returned to the

master his one original talent. The master was well pleased with the first man and the second man, but he rebuked the third man severely. All the man had to do was embrace his talent, invest it, and be able to give his master back more than he started with, and the master would have said to him, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” He did not hear those words, though, because he did nothing with what he had.

The fact that the third man did not have as much as the first two men had nothing to do with the reward he would have received had he been

What are you doing with what you have been given?

faithful with what he had. God only holds us accountable for our gifts, not anybody else’s. What are you doing with what you have been given? I believe this is a question we all need to ask ourselves quite frequently.

MAKE THE BEST OF WHAT YOU HAVE

So often, I have heard women say, “I just wish I looked like my friend.” I want to respond, “Do you know what? You don’t. Take what you do have and make the best of it.” I have had firsthand experience with learning to deal with this kind of comparison over the years.

This lesson hit home for me one time in the most ordinary way when Dave and I went on an airplane trip with two of our friends. Now, Dave and I could never be accused of “traveling light.” That day, we had nine suitcases. We travel often, and I decided long ago that with our heavy travel schedule, I was going to be comfortable and have everything I could possibly need with me. And I always take too much.

Our friends only had two suitcases—a medium-sized one they rolled and a small one they carried. When I saw them, I thought, *Now wait a minute, Dave and I are two people; our friends are two people. We have nine bags; they have two. Where am I missing it?*

I finally looked at my friend and teasingly said, “Do you know

what? Part of the reason I have more luggage than you do is that it just takes me a lot longer than you to look good. I have to have more face paint, more curling irons, more frizzes and sprays and freezes and mousses and everything else.”

Some of us simply have to work harder than others to look our best. My friend has nice, thick, naturally curly hair. She hardly has to do anything to make it look good. My hair, on the other hand, has to be washed and spritzed and dried and sprayed and all sorts of things. I need several jars and bottles of hair products to simply do my hair, but my friend has to do little more than wash hers and she’s ready to go.

I wish I did not have to spend so much time and energy on my hair. I *really* wish that, but wishing will not change my hair! I have to be happy with what God has given me, and if what He’s given me requires more time than what He’s given someone else, I have to accept that.

Likewise, you have to be happy with *your* life. God has given you everything He has for a reason—and on purpose. Everything about you is by His design. I am not encouraging you to settle for situations that need to be improved, but I am urging you to accept the way God made you and the life He has given you. Don’t complain; don’t compare; don’t covet someone else’s life, and don’t spend your valuable time wishing things were different. Realize that every life

Determine today to take the first step toward learning to enjoy your everyday life by making the most of *your* life.

includes good and bad, happy and sad, easy and difficult, strength and weakness. Your life is really no different than anyone else’s when you look at it from a broad perspective. There may be certain specific differences, but *nobody has the perfect life*.

Determine today to take the first step toward learning to enjoy your everyday life by making the most of *your* life. Embrace *your* life because God is never going to give you someone else’s!

EMBRACE THE ORDINARY

Another key to true happiness lies in understanding that most of life is “everyday.” Most of our lives consist of a routine—an unremarkable series of events that take place day after day, year after year. So if we are really going to enjoy every day, we must learn to embrace the ordinary—to delight in little things, to appreciate small blessings, and to find pleasure in the circumstances and situations other people might overlook.

Another key to true happiness lies in understanding that most of life is “everyday.”

Sometimes people think enjoying life means celebrating special occasions, observing important milestones, getting raises and promotions, going on a vacation, buying something new, winning a big game, or closing a significant business deal. The truth is: life is not one big party; we should not expect to giggle our way through every day; and we cannot sit around waiting for the next exciting event. Thankfully, those noteworthy things do happen, but they are few and far between. They certainly do not occur every day, or even once a week or once a month. We need to celebrate life’s exciting occasions and its big events, but in between them, we must be able to find joy in fighting traffic, going to work, cleaning house, raising children, taking out the trash, paying the bills, and dealing with grouchy neighbors. We all have responsibilities and things we must do, so when I speak of enjoying each day, I am not talking about entertaining ourselves from daylight until dark or about getting “our way” all the time. I am talking about the “everyday” situations I have mentioned in this chapter and the whole host of others I have not listed, the situations in which we really learn to enjoy everyday life. Enjoying life begins with making a decision to do so, because the truth is, no matter what kind of lives we have, we will not enjoy them unless we decide to do so.

Most of life involves getting up in the morning, going to bed at

night, and doing what we need to do in the meantime. This reminds me of Mark 4:26, 27, where Jesus said: “The kingdom of God is like a man who scatters seed upon the ground, and then continues sleeping and rising night and day while the seed sprouts and grows *and* increases—he knows not how.” This scripture teaches us that something happens to a seed—a process of growth and nourishment—that no one can see. Much development takes place in the seed while it is underground.

The same principle applies to our lives. Much of life takes place when no one is looking; and God works in our lives during the ordinary times. When nothing remarkable seems to be taking place and everything is “business as usual,” that’s where we develop character

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and the ability to enjoy everyday life. And as we enjoy life moment by moment, day by day, week after week, and year after year, we find all of life has become rich, deep, and satisfying. True life is really not found in arriving at a destination; it is found in the journey.

THE FREEDOM TO BE HAPPY

Not long ago, I ran across a story about a woman who learned to enjoy everyday life after many years of trying. As we close this chapter, I’d like to share it with you.

I’ve never been an athlete. I’ve never been much interested in sports, ever since I stopped playing touch football with the boys when I hit puberty. I’ve tried tennis. I hit the ball too high, too long, and way over into left field. I’ve tried softball. Thank goodness that ball is “soft” and big, because it felt just awful when it hit me in the eye. I tried running, but I couldn’t get anyone to chase me.

Finally, I settled on walking, and for a number of years, I walked three to five miles a day. I realize that there is an Olympic sport referred to as “walking,” but when I tried that, all I succeeded in doing was throwing my hip out.

I’m definitely not an athlete, but I make do, especially in my mid-life years. Which brings a question to my mind. When did I hit mid-life? I remember when I hit thirty. I had to visit a grief counselor, because I knew my life was over. I remember forty. I had to see a grief counselor the day after my first child graduated from high school and moved out of the house, because I knew my life was over.

Then I hit fifty, and I was all excited, because I was able to join an organization called AARP. My husband was especially excited because he is younger than I, and he got to join too!

Fifty became the magic age. I knew that as long as I was in good health, in this day and age, I probably had a good fifty years ahead of me. Then came the asthma. OK, I had that much earlier, but it only became life-threatening after fifty. Then came the fibromyalgia. OK, I had that earlier, but it’s not life-threatening. Then came the arthritis, and more recently at fifty-five, the diabetes. Somewhere in there, I became very interested in pharmaceuticals. But finally one day I became free.

I began by noticing the sunsets, and now I had the time to stop and really wonder at the beauty and the magnitude of it all. Then I moved onto the sunrises, and I quickly found out that if I wasted the early morning, I missed the loveliest part of the day. Then I began to notice how grateful I was to be able to witness the changing of the seasons. The first whisper of spring, the rustling of the leaves beneath my feet in the fall.

When illness would hit me, I found that I actually enjoyed the solitude—a time to reflect, gather my thoughts, and pray, at leisure. I found that I was experiencing this mid-life season, and I was no longer missing every moment, shackled to the chains of worry and what might be. I found that worrying about tomorrow only served to make me overlook the blessings of today.

It's not always easy. A few loads of laundry and a pile of dishes can take an entire day. But then, I don't push myself a lot. So I forget to make the bed as I watch the rosy glow of dawn meet the rising sun. I have time to walk our wooded acre with my little dachshund straining at the leash.

I get to meet the day every day. I get to say good-night to the sunsets. I've studied a lot of sunsets in the last five years, and I've never seen two that were alike. I get to know my Creator as I never have before, and I've gotten to make my mind up about the mysteries of life. I've grown certain that all this was no accident.

I feed the birds and I take great delight in their multi-colored hues, especially in the spring. I drag a chair to stand on so that I can fill the feeders to the brim. I say a little prayer as I wobble, a little cockeyed, on the chair, and I laugh at myself and all the pretensions of my younger life. I take great delight in my life. I thank God for all the precious little things of every day. Friends. Family. Neighbors. And health—a health of the soul. For I have come to understand what real health is, and when you have real health, then you truly have everything.¹

The author of this story did not truly enjoy life until she experienced illness. Many times, people rush through their days without stopping to delight in the everyday, and then, when they face a crisis, they finally slow down enough to enjoy life, family, friends, work, and simply being alive.

I don't want a crisis or an illness to have to be the catalyst that causes you to enjoy each day of your life. I want you to choose happiness right now—because it is a choice. Your life is God's gift to you, even in its common, run-of-the-mill, mundane ordinariness. Decide today you are going to stop waiting for the big breaks and the exciting events before you're happy. In fact, do something today that will raise your joy level in the midst of your everyday life.