

Love Life
Again

FINDING JOY WHEN
LIFE IS HARD

Tracie Miles

LOVE YOUR LIFE CHALLENGE #1

Recognize discontentment and reclaim authority over your happiness.

Reflect

Do you feel stuck in a negative season or mind-set that is stealing your joy?

How might your life change if you were to recognize and then address your discontentment by putting God first and choosing to fight for your happiness?

Act

Identify what change you believed needed to happen in order for you to be happy. Commit today to start choosing to be happy with the life you have, even if the desired change does not happen right away. Fully allow yourself to believe God hears your prayers and longs to meet the desires of your heart, but commit to living with joy and contentment as you wait to see God move in your circumstances, heart, and life.

Pray

Lord, I am committing to having a new take on life, starting today. I boldly reclaim my life and my joy from the enemy, who wants to steal,

kill, and destroy it. I refuse to let him rob me of enjoying the life You have given me by poisoning my mind with discontentment. Today I choose to embrace contentment. In Jesus' name, amen.

Smile

Spend some time outside enjoying nature. Let the sunshine warm your skin. Listen for the sounds of birds or crickets. Take a deep breath and fill your lungs with fresh air. Take a leisurely walk, and rather than letting your mind park on problems, think about all the things that bring a smile to your face.

LOVE YOUR LIFE CHALLENGE #2

Believe you are a treasure to God.

Reflect

Do you let the critical words or opinions of others steal your confidence and determine your value and sense of worth?

How does the constant struggle of trying to measure up to the expectations of others steal your love for living?

Act

Get out two pieces of paper. On one, jot down the critical words others have said to you and the critical words you say to yourself (all the lies you believe about yourself that contradict God's Word). On the other piece, write down all the good things about yourself you love and other people love about you—your gifts, talents, skills, smile, personality, sense of style, work ethic, etc. Which of these pieces of paper would make God smile? Which would bring a tear to His eye? The list of negative, critical words is not from Him. Tear it into tiny pieces and throw it away. Then tape the other one to your bathroom mirror. Read this list every day and add to it as you think of other things that make you special.

Pray

Father, I am so grateful for the truth of Your Word about who I am in You. Please help me see myself as You do. Help me see myself as the treasure You say I am and to live each day with a confidence that comes from You, not from my efforts, appearance, or accomplishments, much less the words, actions, or opinions of others. In Jesus' name, amen.

Smile

Break out of the norm and go on an adventure in your own city. Check out a new restaurant, tourist attraction, bubbling brook, or beautiful garden. Take pictures of things that make you smile, and think about how God is smiling down at you.

LOVE YOUR LIFE CHALLENGE #3

Commit to loving whom God created you to be.

Reflect

Do you love and accept yourself the way God wants you to? What change can you make today to start loving whom God created you to be?

Have you been so consumed with taking care of the needs of others that you have forgotten to take care of yourself? How do you think this impacts your peace and joy on a daily basis?

Act

Jot down a few ideas for how you can begin taking care of your spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional needs today. Be specific and allow yourself to dream big about what you'd like to focus on and the changes you'd like to implement that will benefit you as a person. Set some specific goals for implementing these new habits in your daily life and keep track over time of how you're doing. If life starts getting in the way, ask God to help you refocus and stay committed to your goals.

Pray

Dear Jesus, I want to love myself and believe I am a treasure and an amazing woman, just as You created me to be. Help me to stop looking at my flaws, imperfections, and struggles and start seeing myself through the lens of Your Word. Help me forget the words or actions of others that feed critical lies into my mind and to keep Your words about me at the forefront of my thoughts. In Your name, amen.

Smile

Do something to treat yourself today. Buy a new outfit, get a fresh hairstyle, visit your favorite coffee shop, exercise, or cook your favorite meal. Think about what will restore and refresh your heart, soul, body, and mind. Then do it!

LOVE YOUR LIFE CHALLENGE #4

Accept God's forgiveness.

Reflect

Have you been struggling with believing God could forgive you of your sins because you didn't believe you deserved it or you thought they were too big to forgive? What sin do you need to accept His forgiveness for today?

If you began to fully believe God forgives unconditionally, remembers your sins no more, and loves you, how would that change how you see yourself and how you live?

Act

If you have never received God's forgiveness or asked Him into your life, pray to accept His gift of forgiveness and salvation today. If you need to forgive yourself, set aside one morning with a blanket, your Bible, and your favorite beverage and do the following:

1. Have a deep, honest conversation with God. Close your eyes and picture Jesus sitting there with you, eyes filled with compassion and a gentle smile on His face. Let His presence sink into your heart. If you've never asked for His

forgiveness for what weighs heaviest on your heart, do so right now. Be honest. He already knows. If you have but still struggle with accepting His forgiveness, let yourself believe with your whole heart that He has forgiven—and forgotten—and vow to never bring it to mind again. Search His Word for Scriptures about forgiveness and new life to support what your heart is telling you but your mind is finding difficult for you to believe.

2. Think about what you would do differently if you were in the same position today as you were when you made your past mistake. Realize that if we learn and change from our mistakes, they have already served a purpose.
3. Give yourself time to embrace your new mindset and stop focusing on old memories. Let yourself be proud of who you are today. You are not the same person you once were, and God will continue to transform your heart and mind as you stay grounded in the truths of His love, forgiveness, and acceptance.

Pray

Dear Jesus, You know the shame and regret I feel for the sins in my life—some from my past and some in the present. I humbly ask for Your forgiveness for all my sins. I believe You died on the cross so I could be cleansed, and I accept that gift of cleansing right now. Please help me let go of my self-condemning thoughts and the habit of reminding myself of my sins every day. Just as You have forgotten them, help me not focus on and obsess over them. Help me let them go, and free up my heart to experience more peace and joy. In Jesus' name, amen.

Smile

Choose an uplifting and wholesome movie with a strong lesson. Plan a movie night with your family or friends. Buy popcorn, candy, and drinks, or tell everyone to bring their favorite snack. Enjoy the time together and let laughter and joy fill you up more than the popcorn.

LOVE YOUR LIFE CHALLENGE #5

Forgive someone who hurt you and set yourself free.

Reflect

Who in your life currently, or in your past, are you purposely or inadvertently refusing to forgive? How is your refusal to forgive affecting how you interact with others, how you feel about yourself, and your overall joy?

How might your life be different if you set yourself free from the prison cell of unforgiveness?

Act

Consider the people from whom you have been withholding forgiveness, then carry out these three steps:

1. Write down the name of a person who has hurt you who you have not been willing or able to forgive.
2. Close your eyes and pray, *Lord, I forgive* [insert the person's name]. Forgiveness won't be easy, but it will be worth it. You may not feel any different at first, but over time as you continue to forgive and invite God into the process, He

will begin moving in your heart and replacing pain with peace.

3. When you're ready—and it might not happen right away—pray something positive for that person. You may not feel like it, but your willingness to pray for those who hurt you helps set your heart free.

Pray

Dear Jesus, if I have harbored unforgiveness toward someone, open my eyes to see how bitterness and resentment are affecting my joy. Give me the strength to forgive those who have wounded me. In Your name, amen.

Smile

Buy yourself a bouquet of your favorite fresh flowers and put them in a vase in your kitchen. Each time you catch a whiff of their sweet fragrance, remind yourself how loved you are by God and how forgiveness has set you free.

LOVE YOUR LIFE CHALLENGE #6

Invite Jesus to be your best friend.

Reflect

Have you ever considered Jesus as your best friend, or have you assumed He really can't be because He is not here in the flesh? How can knowing He is always with you help you conquer feelings of loneliness?

How can pondering the traits of good and loyal friends help you embrace the friendship available in Jesus?

Act

Bow your head and invite Jesus to be your best friend. Tell Him all the reasons you need a friend today, and ask Him for open eyes to see when He is meeting your needs. How might you apply each of the five traits of being a good friend to your relationship with Jesus? Put your answers into actions today.

Pray

Lord, lately I've been feeling unseen, unwanted, unneeded, unaccepted, and all alone. But I do believe You can be the best friend I've ever had. Forgive me for not realizing the kind of friend I can have in You. Please

*help me feel Your presence, especially during those times I feel most alone.
In Jesus' name, amen.*

Smile

Take yourself on a dinner date. Pick your favorite restaurant and take your Bible with you. Read it over dinner, inviting Jesus to make His presence known and felt like never before.

LOVE YOUR LIFE CHALLENGE #7

Pray for friends.

Reflect

Are you suffering from a case of friendlessness but have been too embarrassed to even pray about it? What step can you take today to begin building a foundation for new relationships?

What kinds of things can you do to start being a friend to someone?

Act

Choose one thing you can do today to be the kind of friend you want to have.

Pray

Dear Jesus, I know You are my best friend, first and foremost. I praise You for being a friend I can always count on. But You know the desires of my heart: that I long for some close female friends. I ask You to begin to divinely orchestrate connections with the people You think belong in my life. Push me out of my comfort zone and give me the courage to make a move toward making friends, even if it feels awkward or intimidating at first. In Your holy name, amen.

Smile

Make time to call a friend or family member today who you haven't talked to in a while. Spend some time talking and catching up on each other's lives. Enjoy the gift of conversation.

LOVE YOUR LIFE CHALLENGE #8

Start a habit of smiling and laughing every day.

Reflect

When is the last time you had a really good belly laugh? How did you feel afterward?

Have you accidentally let laughter and humor become a thing of the past? How did this happen? What can you do to feel joyful again or draw more laughter into your life?

Act

Do something to foster laughter in your life today. Watch a clean stand-up comic routine, get together with a friend to tell her about an embarrassing moment, spend time with a friend who exudes happiness or has the ability to make you laugh, tell a joke to a coworker, or start writing down things that kids, nieces, or nephews say or do that are too humorous to forget. And remember to smile as often as possible.

Pray

Jesus, thank You for the gift of laughter. It not only makes me feel better, but it keeps me healthy too. I have been missing the joy of laughter in my life as a result of letting my circumstances stand in the way of my

happiness. Open my eyes to see all the reasons I have to smile and laugh every day. In Your name, amen.

Smile

Watch a movie that makes you laugh and feel happy, even if it's one you've seen a dozen times. Sometimes being reminded of how good it feels to laugh refreshes our entire mind and spirit and opens the door for positive habits to permanently take root.

LOVE YOUR LIFE CHALLENGE #9

Commit to developing a lifestyle of praise.

Reflect

When you pray, do you typically whine to God about your problems, or do you thank Him for your blessings? Do you need a better balance between sharing your complaints with Him and praising Him for all He's done?

What habit can you implement to start turning around thought patterns of complaining?

Act

Place a rubber band on your wrist. Each time you catch yourself complaining or whining about something, whether to yourself, someone else, or God, snap the rubber band and then move it to your other arm. This will help you become more aware of when you complain which can help you change your habit of complaining into a habit of praising instead. Each time you move the rubber band to the other arm, praise God for something good in your life, no matter how small.

Pray

Dear Jesus, I have a habit of complaining to others and even to You. Help me be more aware of when I am complaining. Rather than complain, help me talk with You about my problems and challenges in a way that gives You praise and honors the fact that I can trust You with my life. Thank You for who You are and for all You've done for me and blessed me with. In Your name, amen.

Smile

Buy someone you know a small gift “just because.” Hand deliver it and share in the recipient’s joy as he or she opens the gift. You’ll bring a smile to his or her face, and to your own.

LOVE YOUR LIFE CHALLENGE #10

Trust that God has your tomorrows taken care of.

Reflect

How often do you stress about the unknowns of the future and allow worry to steal your peace and joy? If it's often, how would trusting in God's protection and provision allow you to embrace the opportunity to enjoy life and live it to the fullest, despite your circumstances?

Is it possible stress and worry could be to blame for some of the health challenges you've recently dealt with? How might reducing your stress through faith help you feel better overall?

Act

Think of the top three things that tend to weigh on your heart regarding the unknowns of the future. Each day, do the following three things for each worrisome unknown:

1. Surrender that worry to God. Tell Him you're letting go of it and giving it to Him, and then try not to think about it again. If it creeps back into your consciousness, immediately surrender it again to God.

2. Do something to get your mind off the worry. Listen to your favorite song, think of a blessing you can praise God for, or do something you enjoy.
3. Ask God to give you patience with yourself and with Him as He transforms your mind and helps you learn to replace worry with full trust and dependence on Him.

Pray

Jesus, forgive me for doubting that You have a good plan in store for me. I seek Your strength and peace to help me let go of my fears and worries about the future, stop obsessing over how things may turn out, and trust that You are holding my future in Your hands. In Your heavenly name, amen.

Smile

Create a bucket list. Think about how you can begin taking steps to reach the goals or realize the dreams in your heart. Let your mind envision living out those goals and dreams, and let those happy thoughts motivate you to work toward achieving them.

LOVE YOUR LIFE CHALLENGE #11

Practice a life of gratitude.

Reflect

Is your gratitude typically focused on the gifts or the Giver of the gifts? What changes might you need to make in order to start living with a more thankful heart?

Have you spent more time lately counting your problems or counting your blessings?

Act

Go outside and look for a small, smooth rock you can carry in your pocket or purse everywhere you go. Each time your hand touches the rock, let it serve as a reminder to thank God for at least one thing in your life. And each time, express thanks for the Giver of your blessings as well.

Pray

Lord, forgive me for being ungrateful for all You have given me and done for me or, at a minimum, neglecting to live with a heart full of thanks. I commit to being thankful for You and who You are, not only for what I think You are blessing me with. In Jesus' name, amen.

Smile

Buy a beautiful journal and make it your gratitude journal. Record everything you are thankful for: the smell of clean laundry, a child's laugh, a hug from a loved one, tangible blessings, the blessing of friendships, a special way God provided for you, etc. The next time you're feeling down, pull out your gratitude journal and let it remind you to smile. And while it's open, record something new you are grateful for.

LOVE YOUR LIFE CHALLENGE #12

Do something nice for someone else every day.

Reflect

Have you been so consumed with your own life, challenges, and responsibilities you've neglected to see the people God wants you to see?

How can you be the hands and feet of Jesus this week, even if just for five minutes?

Act

Think of at least one kind thing you can do for someone today. Then actually do it.

Pray

God, I long for a heart that strives to serve the "least of these," and I want to be Your hands and feet in this broken and hurting world. Open doors of opportunity where You want me to serve, and allow me the blessing of being a blessing to another one of Your children. In Jesus' name, amen.

Smile

Put aside all your excuses and do some type of exercise today. Exercise has a profound effect on our happiness and overall well-being. It may feel hard, but afterward you will smile.

LOVE YOUR LIFE CHALLENGE #13

Reignite the fire for Christ in your heart and keep it aflame.

Reflect

Have you pulled away from church or Christian fellowship for one reason or another? How could getting involved with a community of believers again help you enjoy life more? In what ways could doing so help you become stronger in your faith?

Has the fire in your heart faded because of not consistently and faithfully walking and talking with Jesus? How might reigniting your fire for Christ change your entire life from this point forward, and what step can you take today to light it again?

Act

Don't have a home church? Start looking online for one in your community today and commit to going this Sunday. Haven't been in a Bible study for quite some time—or ever? Look for Bible studies in your community or local church and join one, even if it's already started. Has it been months since you opened your Bible and asked God to speak to you? Take your Bible off the shelf, blow off the dust, and let God breathe fresh life and hope into your heart. Sign up for a daily email devotional, download a morning devotional mobile app, or subscribe to an inspiring Christian podcast. Take at least one step

toward rekindling the fire in your heart while asking God to help you stay close to the fire as you embark on a new adventure of faith.

Pray

Dear Jesus, please draw me back to You. I have felt empty but couldn't put my finger on what was wrong. I knew I didn't feel joy or happiness, but I wasn't sure exactly why and blamed it on all the problems in my life or on Your perceived lack of attention to those problems. Forgive me for not trusting You. I am ready to be on fire for You again and live life to the fullest. Ignite my heart today! I am choosing to love my life again, and I praise You for helping me begin to feel joyful, happy, content, and at peace again! In Your most precious name I pray, amen.

Smile

Think about something you are passionate about. Consider how God could use this passion in a way that would glorify Him. Pray for Him to give you clarity and direction regarding the purpose He has for your life. When passion and purpose intersect, life takes on a whole new meaning and joy becomes unshakable. Do something in faith that will make you—and God—smile.

1. *Embracing contentment.* Recognize where discontentment resides in your heart and tackle it so it doesn't lay claim to your happiness another day.
2. *Recognizing your value.* Believe without a shadow of a doubt that you are a priceless treasure in God's eyes.
3. *Loving yourself.* Love yourself the way God loves you, and commit to trying to see yourself through His eyes instead of focusing only on what you see in the mirror or in the rearview mirror of your past.
4. *Accepting forgiveness.* Accept that God has forgiven you and remembers your sins no more. Believe you are clean and as white as snow from His point of view. Fully embrace His gift of unconditional forgiveness.
5. *Forgiving and forgetting.* Set yourself free from the prison of bitterness, hurt, and anger by letting go of the past and forgiving those who have hurt you. Remember the prisoner you are setting free is you.
6. *Conquering loneliness.* Don't let loneliness steal your joy, because you always have a Friend by

your side. Commit to building that friendship with your Savior.

7. *Being a friend.* Pray for friends and expectantly and excitedly wait to see how God will fill your life with people. Always try to be the kind of friend you want to have.
8. *Laughing more.* Laugh a lot, smile frequently, and let joy permeate you from head to toe. Be the reason someone else smiles today.
9. *Turning complaining into praising.* Stop whining and complaining and start a habit of praising instead. Make every effort to look for reasons to praise God, especially when a wave of complaints begins to roll off your tongue.
10. *Stressing over the future no longer.* Don't worry about tomorrow or a hundred tomorrows down the road, because God already has things all planned out. Trust He has control of your future and it is a good, good plan because He is a good, good Father.
11. *Developing a thankful heart.* Fill your heart with so much thankfulness that ungratefulness has no room to grow.

12. *Being the answer to someone's prayer.* Be the hands and feet of Jesus. Try to do something nice for someone else every day. Being kind to others not only makes us feel good but also shifts our focus from problems to people.

13. *Reigniting your faith.* Ask God to ignite a flame in your heart, and spend time every day getting to know His story through Scripture. And start talking to Jesus as if He were standing right beside you all throughout the day. Because He is.

My friend, your happiness is up to you. Despite what has happened in the past and regardless of your circumstances and challenges right now, you are in control of how you choose to view the gift of life and how you live out that gift. Don't let another day go by without embracing joy. Implement the tips outlined in this book and bask in the fact that you are indeed alive. Be more determined than ever to truly live the life you were meant to live, because this is the only chance you have to live it. Give it your all. Make the most of every day.

Seize today! Let it be the first day of the rest of your very own joy-filled, dearly loved, amazing life.

Notes

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