



CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

# ACTIVATED

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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

### TWO KINDS OF HAPPINESS

Have you ever wondered whether God wants you to be happy? A popular concept found in many Christian books says that “God has good things in store for you. God wants you to enjoy life and prosper and be happy.” This reduces the God of the universe to a cosmic Santa Claus. We say a little prayer to inform Him what’s on our list, then if what we asked for doesn’t appear under the tree, we can blame Him, because He’s failed to make us happy.

In fact, there are two things that the Bible says God wants from us: First, God wants us to accept His Son as our Savior: “At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord.”<sup>1</sup>

Next, God wants us to “become like His Son.”<sup>2</sup> He often accomplishes this by bringing situations into our lives that refine us and chip away at our flaws. That’s not always fun and doesn’t always make us feel “happy.”

On the other hand, Jesus’ first recorded sermon is all about happiness! In the Sermon on the Mount,<sup>3</sup> Jesus lists nine things that will make His followers *makarios*, which appears over 50 times in the New Testament and is often translated as “happy” or “blissful.”

However, Jesus’ definition of happiness is different from ours. It’s not an elusive emotion or grounded in physical and material things. In his book, *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis observed that it’s futile to seek happiness apart from God: “God designed the human machine to run on Himself. ... That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there.”

So does God want you to be happy? Yes, He does. But He doesn’t want you to seek fleeting happiness on your own. Rather, He wants you to experience the true happiness and lasting joy that only He can give. “Happy are the people whose God is the Lord!”<sup>4</sup>

1. Philippians 2:9–11 NLT

2. Romans 8:29 NLT

3. See Matthew 5:1–12.

4. Psalm 144:15

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Though we are incomplete, God loves us completely. Though we are imperfect, He loves us perfectly. Though we may feel lost and without compass, God's love encompasses us completely. ... He loves every one of us, even those who are flawed, rejected, awkward, sorrowful, or broken.—Dieter F. Uchtdorf (b. 1940)

# YOU'RE BEAUTIFUL

BY AMY JOY MIZRANY



**SOMETHING PRECIOUS HAPPENED AT SUNDAY SCHOOL TODAY.** After teaching my class of younger children, I went to host the Q&A session with the older children.

Today, there were only five teenaged girls in attendance; they were all quite shy and subdued. To get the ball rolling, we went around the circle and shared what we liked about the day's lesson, which was on the topic of how God loves each of us.

One of the girls blurted out, "They say that I'm dark like the devil!" Another girl added some derogatory comments she'd heard about her hair. The conversation threatened to take a negative turn when I believe God gifted me with a peek into how *He* sees these girls. Suddenly, they looked so beautiful and precious to me!

"I want each of you to repeat after me: I am a child of God. God thinks I am beautiful. I won't listen to the nasty things other people say, because God made me exactly how He wanted me."

All the girls repeated this with shining eyes and growing confidence. One girl laughed and said, "Oh, I feel so good now! I'm going to go home, take my Bible, and read about Jesus' love—and when I've finished, I'm going to close the book and say, 'Jesus loves me!'"

Our Sunday school is based in a very tough neighbourhood, and I don't think that any of those girls had ever been genuinely told that they are beautiful and that they matter. But that day, God gave us an opportunity to shine a light on the lies they'd been told, to build up their self-respect and confidence, and to center it in something that never changes: Him.

They are beautiful to God. Even more than that, they are *loved* by Him. *I'm* loved by Him. *You're* loved by Him. You're beautiful.

AMY JOY MIZRANY WAS BORN AND LIVES IN SOUTH AFRICA, WHERE SHE IS A FULL-TIME MISSIONARY WITH HELPING HAND AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL. IN HER SPARE TIME, SHE PLAYS THE VIOLIN. ■



# REDISCOVERING JOY

BY PETER AMSTERDAM



MOST OF US EXPERIENCED THE CUMULATIVE IMPACT OF THE COVID PANDEMIC ON OUR EVERYDAY LIVES THROUGHOUT THE PAST FEW YEARS. For some of us, this resulted in a lessening of our daily activities, whereas for others, it resulted in a larger workload or additional responsibilities. Since many of the avenues for activities or interactions with others that provide a reprieve and inject novelty into our daily routines were affected, for many this may have resulted in a sense of boredom or tediousness. Someone I communicated with during a prolonged period of lockdown described it like this:

Sometimes it feels as if the joy has been sucked out of your life and you're now on autopilot, just going through the humdrum motions, day after day. You know what you *need* to do, but you don't *want* to do it. You're not in the mood. You're in a funk. You don't have the motivation to move forward. You feel grumpy and negative about yourself, and you wonder if you'll *ever* get your motivation and joy back.

I realized recently that being bored can become a habit. You get used to it and kind of resign yourself to a boring existence. Then you stop trying. Your flame of enthusiasm becomes a little ember that's just flickering. You kind of die inside.

When you're feeling this way, it's easy to default to available, comfortable, feel-good pastimes and shallow pleasures and timewasters such as binge-watching TV,

gaming, etc. Eventually you can find yourself spending more time in these activities, but still not feeling much better.

Maybe you can relate somewhat to that description, or maybe not. Such feelings are understandable, but the good news is that no matter what our circumstances and what losses we have sustained, we can *rediscover our joy!*

It's important to remind ourselves that Jesus is the source of our joy. Knowing Him, staying close to Him and His Word, being filled with the Holy Spirit, and walking in obedience to our calling can infuse our lives with joy that is not dependent on physical circumstances.

We read this in Psalm 43:3, "*Send out your light and your truth; let them guide me. Let them lead me to your holy mountain, to the place where you live.*" (NLT) [The psalmist] sought after God, then committed to praise and trust Him no matter what, which is what we read in the next verse, "*There I will go to the altar of God, to God—the source of all my joy. I will praise you with my harp, O God, my God!*" (Psalm 43:4 NLT)

Despite his heartache and overwhelming emotions, the psalmist remembered God truly was his only help and that GOD was always there, never forsaking him even when it felt like it.

If you're feeling forgotten, by others or by God, let your hope swell and your joy return by intentionally believing that God will never leave you and is always by your side. Make a commitment to focus on God's



presence and the blessings He has given you, and let God be the source of your joy.<sup>1</sup>

The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.—*Acts 13:52*

The joy of the Lord is your strength.—*Nehemiah 8:10*

The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.—*Psalms 126:3 NIV*

Besides centering our lives on God and His Word, and seeking to be filled with His Spirit, there are also practical “joy boosters”—that is, practical approaches that we can implement to enhance or recapture our joy. Let’s look at some ways in which we might do that. This is by no means a complete list, and if you take some time to think and pray about this, God can give you ideas that will work well for you personally.

### NOTICE THE LITTLE THINGS.

Try to pay attention to even brief moments that bring joy; these could be the result of little things. Take a

1. Tracie Miles, “I Feel Forgotten,” Proverbs 31 Ministries, November 23, 2018.
2. Ingrid Fetell Lee as quoted in “How to Rediscover Joy —and Eliminate Killjoys,” Goop

moment to intentionally thank God for the little wonders that inspire you. Once you are aware of the things that produce joy, think about how you can *intentionally* build more of those moments into your life.

It could be things like hearing a baby laugh, seeing a beautiful butterfly or playful puppy, laughing at a joke, eating a delicious dessert, hearing a beautiful song, feeling invigorated after a walk or exercise session, creating or appreciating a work of art, and so on. Let small things bring you joy!

Many people are so disconnected from joy that they aren’t even really familiar with what joy feels like in their body or what types of things bring them joy. A joy journal is a good place to start: Pay attention for a week or two to all the moments when you find yourself smiling or laughing or feeling a sense of joy wash over you. Notice where you are, whom you’re with, and what you’re doing—those can all be clues to the kinds of things that might bring you more joy. ... The goal is to notice them, and once you notice what is causing them, you can re-create those conditions in your life.<sup>2</sup>

### ALLOW TIME TO DO WHAT BRINGS YOU JOY.

Maybe some of the things you enjoy doing don’t seem important enough to take the time. Perhaps it feels like a self-indulgent waste of time or a distraction to your more important goals. But it is important to consciously make time and space to enjoy life as you are able.



Take a minute to remember what you used to love to do and find a way to pick it up again. If things are different now, or you find that it doesn't "bring you joy" anymore, try something else. When you're in a blah state of mind, you often can't think of anything that would make you feel better, but don't resign yourself to that mindset. Stir yourself up, give yourself some time, find something you like to do and enjoy it!

### MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

No matter how limited your circumstances, there is always *something* you can do to make things better. And making things better can give you a sense of fulfillment and enjoyment. Doing something for someone else, even something small, can bring you both joy. I think the following story illustrates this point well. The author wrote:

I had just read "Willie and the Five-Minute Favor" by Iris Richard (in Kenya) in the July 2021 *Activated* mag. The article was inspired by something she'd read online.<sup>3</sup>

I was so touched by that story that I decided that I would also incorporate the idea of the "five-minute favor" in my life. I don't live in Africa or have a ministry with the very poor, but I figured I'd give it a shot. I needed a new challenge, I was bored.

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3. See [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/five-minute-favor-adam-rifkin\\_n\\_3805090](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/five-minute-favor-adam-rifkin_n_3805090).

Soon after this commitment, I went to the grocery store. To give a bit of the back story: In a *previous* visit to this store a week or two earlier I had been trying to return an item at the customer service desk. I was having trouble with the transaction as I didn't have my glasses and I kept entering the PIN number incorrectly. I noticed I was being attended by the store manager. The store was busy. While helping me, the manager was constantly approached by all kinds of people—customers, employees, suppliers, etc., and he was kind and polite with each one. He kept smiling as he'd turn to me and with a kind voice say, "Shall we try it *again*?" He never once lost his composure or seemed bothered at all.

So the next time I went to the store and passed by the same man, I thought, *Ah, here's an opportunity for a five-minute favor*. But I quickly started to talk myself out of it. *I'm in a hurry. And besides, he's busy.*

But no! I turned around and walked up to him, then asked, "Are you the manager?" His serene expression quickly changed, and he got a concerned look on his face that seemed to say, *Oh no, what's wrong now?!*

I reminded him of our previous encounter, then I said, "I just want to compliment you on your kindness. You make a difference in people's lives every day with the patience and consideration you show and with that constant smile of yours."

He was literally speechless! After a few seconds, all he could say was, "Oh wow! Thank you for telling me."



If you haven't yet met God's Son who has power to forgive the past, transform the present, brighten the future, and grant happiness forever, you can by praying the following prayer:

*Dear Jesus, thank You for dying for me so I can have eternal life. Please forgive me for every wrong thing I have done. Please come into my heart, give me Your gift of eternal life, fill me with Your Spirit, and help me to know Your love and peace. Amen.*

That was it. This just took a couple of minutes, but it made a difference not only for him but for me, too. I felt a sense of joy and enthusiastically told my friends about this. The “five-minute favor”—I highly recommend it!

### TAKE INVENTORY OF WHAT SAPS YOUR JOY.

Happiness can be circumstantial and fleeting, but joy is a gift from God, and we can have joy even in difficult circumstances. “The joy of the Lord is your strength.”<sup>4</sup> But it's important to recognize the things in our lives that steal our joy, the “killjoys.” Here's an excerpt of a helpful article:

Life, even for the best of us, has its ups and downs. That is not going to change, but there is a way to make the “ups” far more common than the “downs.” The key is to strive for joy rather than happiness.

The difference between the two is significant. Happiness is based on circumstances. If things are going well, we are happy, if they're not, we are unhappy. Unfortunately, circumstances in today's world are usually poor, so happiness is becoming more and more elusive.

Joy, on the other hand, is not tied to circumstances. Rather, it is the positive confidence one feels from knowing and trusting God regardless of circumstances. Joy is a key component of what Galatians 5 calls the “fruit

of the Spirit.” It is a gift from God, but we must prepare our hearts to receive it by first identifying and eliminating those things that are robbing us of joy. There are three primary killjoys: selfishness, resentment and fear.<sup>5</sup>

It's important to avoid letting negative emotions, thoughts, or moods take hold in our lives. The killjoys mentioned—selfishness, resentment, and fear—can grow with time and become habits or automatic reactions. If you have allowed any of these killjoys to take root in your life, take time to pray and connect with God through His Word in the Bible. You can have a fresh start beginning today!

When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy.—*Psalm 94:19 NIV*

### REMEMBER THAT THE SOURCE OF OUR JOY IS JESUS.

In the world, happiness is often associated with appearance, wealth, relationships, possessions, etc. The message the world is sending is that happiness comes from *outside* ourselves. We're bombarded with messages that circumstances control our sense of joy. But in reality, our joy comes from Jesus.

PETER AMSTERDAM AND HIS WIFE, MARIA FONTAINE, ARE DIRECTORS OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL, A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF FAITH. ADAPTED FROM THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE. ■

4. Nehemiah 8:10

5. See “Are There Any Joy-killers in Your Life?” Gilroy Dispatch, November 4, 2006.

# Happiness and joy

FEEDING READING



**THE BIBLE TELLS US THAT** “Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom.”<sup>1</sup> The word “gospel” is the translation of the Greek word *euángelos*, meaning “good message.” So the message Jesus went about teaching and preaching was one that brought joy and happiness.

God wants us to be joyful and positive. “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!”<sup>2</sup> Read on to discover more.

## **HAPPINESS IS A GIFT FROM GOD.**

God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy to those who please him.—*Ecclesiastes 2:26 NLT*

I pray that God, who gives hope, will bless you with complete happiness and peace because of your faith.

—*Romans 15:13 CEV*

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.—*Galatians 5:22–23*

## **HAPPINESS COMES FROM LIVING CLOSE TO GOD AND HIS WORD.**

You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy.—*Psalms 16:11*

1. Matthew 9:35
2. Philippians 4:4

I never turn my back on your teachings. They will always be my most prized possession and my source of joy.

—*Psalms 119:110–111 CEV*

I’m overjoyed at your word, like someone who finds great treasure.—*Psalms 119:162 CEV*

Since you know these things, you will be happy if you do them.—*John 13:17 CEV*

I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!—*John 15:11 NLT*

## **WITH JESUS, EVEN TIMES OF DIFFICULTY AND SUFFERING CAN’T TAKE AWAY OUR JOY PERMANENTLY.**

In all my trouble I am still very happy.—*2 Corinthians 7:4 CEV*

If Christ keeps giving me his power, I will gladly brag about how weak I am. Yes, I am glad to be weak or insulted or mistreated or to have troubles and sufferings, if it is for Christ.—*2 Corinthians 12:9–10 CEV*

Dear friends, don’t be surprised about the fiery trials that have come among you to test you. ... Instead, rejoice as you share Christ’s suffering. You share his suffering now so that you may also have overwhelming joy when his glory is revealed.—*1 Peter 4:12–13 CEV* ■



# Loving-Kindness Is Twice Blessed

BY LILIA POTTERS

THE WEATHER HAD BEEN DARK AND RAINY, and I felt just as gloomy. It happens to us all, I guess.

As I sat at my desk, I remembered it was the birthday of a longtime friend—a single, middle-aged woman who had dedicated the past 30 years to nursing and loved her work. Knowing that she didn't have family in town, I decided to give her a call. Sure enough, she was on B shift, scheduled to work late into the evening, and wouldn't have much of a birthday this year. As always, though, she sounded cheerful and was happy I had called.

After I hung up, I couldn't shake the feeling that she would really appreciate a little special attention on her birthday. Still feeling a little gloomy myself, I tried to put the thought out of my mind, but as the day passed, I couldn't shake it. I finally gave in, and that evening set off to the hospital with a card, a slice of cheesecake, and a "flower" sculpted from balloons.

My friend's grateful smile and joyful exclamations assured me I had done the right thing and were a generous reward for the little effort it had taken.

Carry out a random act of kindness, with no expectation of reward, safe in the knowledge that one day someone might do the same for you.

—Princess Diana (1961–1997)



Spread love everywhere you go. Let no one ever come to you without leaving happier.

—Mother Teresa (1910–1997)

When I got home, I realized that I had not only cheered up a lonely friend on her birthday, but I had caused my own gloom to dissipate in the process. Making her day had made my own.

Isn't that the way it is when we take the time and make the effort to do something for someone else? It's like the saying, "Loving-kindness is twice blessed; it blesses him who gives, and him who receives."

Life constantly presents us with opportunities to take an extra step or do a kind deed that will make a difference to someone. And the wonderful thing is that as we do, it changes things for the better for us too. Like a boomerang, the blessing comes back to us.

LILIA POTTERS IS A WRITER AND EDITOR WHO LIVES IN THE U.S. ■

# MY FRIEND'S SECRET

BY KEITH PHILLIPS



Try to make at least one person happy every day. If you cannot do a kind deed, speak a kind word. If you cannot speak a kind word, think a kind thought. Count up, if you can, the treasure of happiness that you would dispense in a week, in a year, in a lifetime!

—Lawrence G. Lovasik (1913–1986)



**SOME SAY THAT HAPPINESS IS WHAT WE MAKE IT.** The more time I spend with a certain friend, the more I'm convinced that's true.

Several years ago, he was a successful businessman. Then one of his employees had a breakdown and showed up with a shotgun, intent on killing as many people as he could. In an attempt to disarm the man, my friend lost a hand and an eye. When he was released from the hospital weeks later, his savings were gone. My wife and I met him when we began volunteering at the homeless shelter where he was living. By then he also had Parkinson's disease and a serious form of skin cancer. He could barely walk or get out of a chair by himself, but he was one of the most cheerful, positive people I had ever met.

He has since moved from the shelter to an apartment, where he lives on a small pension. Two surgeries stopped the cancer before it could spread, and medication and therapy are helping him deal with Parkinson's.

Still, on a bad day there are very few things that he can do for himself. Taking him to doctor appointments and shopping has been a learning experience for me. Regardless of what we're doing or how arduous it is for him, he has a secret agenda: never leave anyone without a smile. And he always succeeds. He learns everyone's name, includes it in his cheery goodbye, and remembers it next time. He finds opportunities to build people up and is generous with compliments. He tells corny jokes. He pokes fun at himself. Whatever it takes.

A lot of people, if they were in his position, would blame God or become bitter, but not my friend. "That's no way to live—and I've still got a lot of living to do," he has told me.

Happiness is what we make it.

KEITH PHILLIPS WAS *ACTIVATED'S* EDITOR-IN-CHIEF FOR 14 YEARS FROM 1999 TO 2013. HE AND HIS WIFE CARYN NOW WORK WITH THE HOMELESS IN THE USA. ■



## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Because [God] delights in me, he saved me.—*Psalm 18:19 NCV*

If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. If he had a wallet, your photo would be in it. He sends you flowers every spring and a sunrise every morning. Whenever you want to talk, he'll listen. He can live anywhere in the universe, and he chose your heart. Face it, friend. He's crazy about you.

—*Max Lucado (b. 1955)*

# FINDING PERFECTION

BY JOYCE SUTTIN

I REMEMBER, AS A VERY LITTLE GIRL, looking out across the field behind our home at what appeared to be the perfect tree. I could hardly contain my excitement as I ran to inspect it up close. But as I reached out to gather some perfect leaves from the perfect tree, I had one of my first big disappointments. On closer inspection, each leaf was marred somehow—a scrape, a brown splotch, an insect bite. There wasn't one that I could take home and hang in my room as a symbol of perfection.

Images may appear perfect from a distance, but as we look closer, we see the imperfections. We watch strangers drive by in their shiny new cars and assume that they have perfect lives, not realizing that they may have problems worse than our own. We watch television and movies and see images of perfection, illusions that fade as the final credits roll. A scenic view may look perfect from a distance, but up close we see the mud and the litter. The world looks better without binoculars or microscopes.

We look for perfection—perfect people, perfect situations, perfect relationships, perfect happiness—but because none of us are perfect, we wind up discouraged or disillusioned. But God isn't looking for perfection—at least not *our* idea of perfection. Sure, we can all do better, but often what we perceive as flaws and foibles are actually His doing, part of our unique makeup, which can be blessings in disguise. And are all problems all bad? Aren't they sometimes God's way of steering us to better things?

God doesn't expect us to be perfect. All He asks is that we try our best to love Him and others.<sup>1</sup> When we do that, we can feel secure in His love, and that changes our whole outlook. We feel better about ourselves, and that helps us to see the best in others and to make the most of our circumstances.

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1. Matthew 22:37–39



# Happiness, relaxation, and enjoying life

## POINTS TO PONDER

**COME TO ME**, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.—*Jesus, Matthew 11:28–30*

Be happy with what you have and are, be generous with both, and you won't have to hunt for happiness.  
—*William E. Gladstone (1809–1898), British statesman*

A person is fully human when joy is the fundamental thing in him, and grief the superficial. Melancholy should be an innocent interlude, a tender and fugitive frame of mind; praise should be the permanent pulsation of the soul. Pessimism is at best an emotional half-holiday; joy is the uproarious labor by which all things live.—*G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936), English philosopher, author, and apologist*

No mockery in this world ever sounds to me so hollow as that of being told to cultivate happiness. Happiness is not a potato, to be planted in a mould and tilled with manure. Happiness is a glory shining far down upon us from heaven. She is a divine dew, which the soul feels

dropping upon it from the amaranth bloom and golden fruitage of paradise.—*Charlotte Brontë (1816–1855), English novelist and poet*

I find my joy of living in the fierce and ruthless battles of life, and my pleasure comes from learning something, from being taught something.—*August Strindberg (1849–1912), Swedish playwright, novelist, poet, essayist, and painter*

It is true also that joy is in its nature more divine than sorrow; for, although man must sorrow, and God share in his sorrow, yet in himself God is not sorrowful, and the “glad creator” never made man for sorrow: it is but a stormy strait through which he must pass to his ocean of peace.—*George MacDonald (1824–1905), Scottish author, poet, and Christian minister*

It is not the level of prosperity that makes for happiness but the kinship of heart to heart and the way we look at the world. Both attitudes are within our power. ... A man is happy so long as he chooses to be happy, and no one can stop him.—*Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1918–2008), Russian and Soviet novelist, dramatist, and historian* ■

# CONTENTMENT

BY ANDREW MATEYAK



“**HAVING FOOD AND CLOTHING**, with these we shall be content.”<sup>1</sup> Those words went through my mind as I washed the breakfast dishes. *Was that even possible? Could I actually be satisfied having nothing but food and clothes?* The apostle Paul wrote, “I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content.”<sup>2</sup> Not me. There have definitely been times when I wished I had some of the extras I saw others enjoying. I haven’t always been satisfied. *How could I be satisfied with only food and clothes?* I asked myself as I finished the dishes.

As if in answer to my question, my attention was drawn to my niece, Kylie, who was seven months old at the time, as she played quietly and happily gummed a slice of apple. Now she definitely looked content—the perfect picture of peace and tranquility. But what in the world did she have? A diaper and a slice of apple, yet she was perfectly happy.

I had my answer. Kylie wasn’t worried about whether she would have food tomorrow, or if she would run out of diapers. She had her food, she had her clothes, and she was perfectly content, trusting her mother to take care of her and give her exactly what she needed, when she needed it.

1. 1 Timothy 6:8
2. Philippians 4:11

I should be the same way, I realized—happy and satisfied with what God gives me, and trusting God that He will take care of me and give me the things that I truly need. And now I am. I have not only food and clothing and other material comforts, but I have things that many millions of people in the world don’t have. I have Jesus and His gift of salvation. I have my wife and family, my health, and friends. I really do have all that I need. I am truly content!

ANDREW MATEYAK IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN THE PHILIPPINES. ■

## HOW TO BE CONTENT

Do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not.—*Epicurus (341–270 BC)*

To be content, just think how happy you would be if you lost everything you have right now and then got it back again.—*Author unknown*

Contentment is a pearl of great price, and whoever procures it at the expense of ten thousand desires makes a wise and a happy purchase.—*John Balguy (1686–1748)*



# 5 WAYS TO RELAX

BY IRIS RICHARD

**EVERY MORNING**, I wake up and board an express train leaving from fast-track station. As I speed along life's rails, I stare out the window and think. *Where has the time gone? How did my children manage to grow up so quickly?* Now it's happening with my grandchildren. I catch my reflection in the window and wonder where all that gray hair came from. *It seems like only yesterday...*

In today's ever-changing and expanding world, it's hard to take the focus off what is happening to us externally, the pressures of life on the fast track. But it's through meeting our inner needs that we are renewed. It can start simply, as the following ideas suggest:

## INVEST IN RELATIONSHIPS

Don't take friends and family for granted; these relationships need nurturing. Let people know that you appreciate them and are glad they're part of your life. Try to surround yourself with happy people. Being around people who are upbeat buoys your own mood. And when you are cheerful and optimistic, you give something to those around you.

## TAKE A BRISK WALK

Physical activity releases endorphins, the feel-good hormones in your body, which increases your sense of well-being and makes it easier to approach challenges positively. Exercise also improves your overall health. While you're exercising, concentrate on deep, abdominal breathing. This will increase the amount of oxygen

delivered to every cell of your body and flush toxins from your circulatory system.

## MEDITATE

Focus on an object—a flower, a tree, a cloud—and take in its wonder. Or concentrate on a positive thought or a Bible verse. Let feelings of gratitude fill your mind and flood your spirit. Picture your troubles, confusion, and fears taking flight as you breathe slowly and deeply.

## PRAY

Prayer is like an extension of meditation. It has the same immediate benefits for body, mind, and spirit, but goes far beyond that; it is your link with your Creator and releases His power to work on your behalf.

## TAKE TIME OFF

Much stress is work related. Make times to totally disengage from work and do something that will have a positive impact. And instead of picking up the nearest electronic device as your default diversion, try sketching or painting, creative writing, or reading a good book—something that will stimulate you in a new way and get your creative juices flowing.

IRIS RICHARD IS A COUNSELOR IN KENYA, WHERE SHE HAS BEEN ACTIVE IN COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTEER WORK SINCE 1995. ■



# JOY IN THIS MESS

BY MARIE ALVERO

YESTERDAY I SURROUNDED MY TABLE WITH FRIENDS, and we served a dinner my husband took hours to create. It was a wonderful evening. Also yesterday, headlines read of two separate, horrible acts of violence that killed people. My social media scroll also told of people close to me who were sick, dying, divorcing, burying loved ones, broke, suffering, and lonely.

Another mom and I were talking about this question of how do we exist in this broken world that holds so much evil and pain? How can we be happy? How can we teach our kids to be happy? I'm guessing that this tension—between life and death, gifts and loss, peace and fear, beauty and pain—has existed since the dawn of creation.

The other day, I enjoyed the most magnificent sunset while stuck in terrible traffic caused by a fatal accident. What do you do with that? At exactly the same time and place, there's an awe-inspiring sunset that reminds me of the beauty God can create, as well as the obvious loss and heartbreak a few hundred yards away.

I think the answer is that we have to hold both realities in our hearts. We can let the awful stuff make the beauty even more precious. We bring as much love and beauty into the world as we can, and we celebrate that! And when we come up to the ugly, hard stuff, we remember that Jesus said in this world we will have tribulation, but that He has overcome the world, therefore we can be of good cheer.<sup>1</sup>

We can find joy in knowing that God is in control, that He is the overcomer. I don't know that I could deal with all the bad stuff if I didn't have faith in Jesus; if I couldn't open my Bible and read about the faith of Jesus' early followers whose lives were so far from easy, but who carried on. They were overcomers as well, able to be light and love and hope in a dark and broken world.

My answer to whether we can know joy in this messy world is a resounding "Yes"! I'm more convinced of it than ever!

MARIE ALVERO IS A FORMER MISSIONARY TO AFRICA AND MEXICO. SHE CURRENTLY LIVES A HAPPY, BUSY LIFE WITH HER HUSBAND AND CHILDREN IN CENTRAL TEXAS, USA. ■

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1. See John 16:33.

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

# LIVING IN MY JOY

It's human nature to equate happiness with a problem-free existence. But if you allow circumstances to dictate your level of happiness, you will be constantly bracing yourself for the next letdown or problem, and you will find you aren't able to enjoy life to the full.

The happiness I offer isn't dependent on circumstances, which change like the weather. Rather, it's determined by My presence and My promises, which never change. Circumstances don't change eternal realities. Many people are enslaved by worries about tomorrow and the future. As God's child, your future destiny is already assured. You have received the promise of eternal life and love and everlasting joy and peace.

Remember the words I spoke to My first followers: "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."<sup>1</sup> You can't avoid the problems of life, but you can rise above them and live in My joy. You can't have everything I have promised and planned for you just yet, but you can have a foretaste of it. As you spend time communing with Me in prayer and studying My Word, you will take on My perspective on life. You will not only be better prepared for its inevitable ups and downs, but you will be overflowing with My joy.<sup>2</sup>

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1. John 16:33

2. See John 15:11.

