

Living a

LIFE

YOU

LOVE

Living a
LIFE
You **LOVE**

EMBRACING THE ADVENTURE OF BEING LED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

JOYCE MEYER



NEW YORK NASHVILLE

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*Be so busy loving your life that you have no time for hate,
fear, or regret.*

Author unknown

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INTRODUCTION

What do you love? I mean . . . *really* love?

If you're like most people, you may say, "I love my family," "I love my spouse, my friends, my church," or even "I love the Lord." And then there are the more temporal things we all enjoy, like, "I love my house," "I love a good dinner at a nice restaurant," "I love a great cup of coffee," "I love to go shopping," and "I certainly love a well-timed vacation."

These are all great things and make perfectly reasonable answers. We love and appreciate the people and things in our lives that bring a measure of contentment and happiness.

But I've discovered that very few people would answer, "Joyce, I absolutely *love* my life." Most of us are more frustrated with our lives than we are at peace with them. Very few people live lives full of joy, excited to wake up each day, and filled with wonder at what God might do next. I believe a good question for all of us to ask ourselves is, "Am I merely enduring my life, trying to make it through each day, or do I truly love it?"

If you don't love your life, then you should do something to change it. It may require a change of attitude or perspective. It may require getting a new career or even moving to a new city, and it may require getting some new friends and learning to see yourself the way God does. There are things we can do to ensure that we will love our life. After all, we only get one life, and we should love it and live it with enthusiasm and zeal.

I want to mention a very important thing right here in the beginning, and that is that we should never compare our life with anyone else's, because doing so often causes us to not love our own life fully and joyfully. It is "your" life that I want to teach you to love. It is the only one you have, and God will not give you anyone else's, so how about taking what you've been given and doing the most you can with it?

The daily grind often wears us down. The bills pile up, the calendar gets too full, the diet doesn't seem to be working, the traffic is infuriating, the doctor's report is troubling, the children are not behaving, the job is exhausting—and to top it all off, that darn kitchen faucet is dripping again!

These irritations (and so many others just like them) too often cause us to survive life rather than actually enjoy it. I can picture many of you nodding along in agreement as you read these words . . . life can be challenging, to say the least. But everyone's life is challenging in some way at times, and that is why wanting someone else's life is pointless. You may find that it is easier to deal with your problems than it would be to deal with theirs.

But you can become a person who says: "*I love my life.*" We can face challenges, deal with frustrations, have less than pleasurable circumstances, and still love our lives.

I think about the examples we see in the Bible:

- David dealt with giants, opposing armies and a father who favored his brothers over him, and yet he wrote: "You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11).
- Solomon had the pressures of building the Temple and running a kingdom, and yet he said: "Every man should eat and

drink and see and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God” (Ecclesiastes 3:13).

- The apostle Paul faced shipwrecks, a physical ailment, constant criticism, and persecution, but he told us: “I have learned to be content [and self-sufficient through Christ, satisfied to the point where I am not disturbed or uneasy] regardless of my circumstances” (Philippians 4:11).
- Mary would give birth in a barn after traveling in extreme conditions, and yet she said: “From now on all generations will count me blessed and happy and favored by God!” (Luke 1:48).

These men and women faced difficulty, challenges, opposition, and frustrations at various times, but they were able to look past that and live lives full of joy and contentment—they learned the secret of loving their lives!

What I want to share with you in the pages of this book has come from years of personal Bible study and *lots* of personal experience. You see, there was a time in my life when I lived stuck in frustration, anger, and insecurity. Because of the abuse I endured at the hands of my father as a child, I had many issues to work through as an adult. I had anger problems, I was easily discouraged, I compared myself to people around me, and I drove myself to the point of exhaustion trying to accomplish my goals. I loved God, I loved teaching His Word and I loved my friends and family, but I couldn't really say I loved my life. I continually wanted and searched for an elusive “something else” that I thought would satisfy the longing in my soul, but somehow it always evaded me.

But God has taught me so much over the years. It wasn't always easy—I certainly made my fair share of mistakes along the

way—but I can confidently say today that I love the life God has given me. I don't love it because it is perfect, but because it is a gift from God.

The truth is that God has given you a wonderful, joy-filled, overcoming life, too... you just need to discover it. And I think this book will go a long way in helping you do that. The life that we have currently is the only one that we have, and disliking it won't change it. If God leads you to change something that will help you enjoy it more, then by all means do so, but if not, then it is time to embrace your life and learn to love it!

In the chapters to come, I hope to challenge and equip you with the tools you need to have a life you can love. Some things will be a reminder of what God has already shown you, but many of the things we'll discuss will be new, thought-provoking steps to take in your spiritual journey. For example, in the pages to come, you'll discover that...

- You can't live a life that you love unless love is the central theme of your life.
- Your attitude affects your life more than any outside circumstance ever will.
- Each new day is more than just another day of the week; it's a new opportunity, a new beginning, and you can live with an attitude of expectation.
- You should start doing things that you have always wanted to do but kept putting off until another time.
- Celebrating your victories and progress, no matter how small, is God's will for you.

And so much more!

If you are ready to begin living with a whole new attitude,

overcome your obstacles, and wake up looking forward to the day rather than dreading it, keep reading. This is going to be a book that you'll want to read time and time again. And when it's all said and done, I believe you're going to be able to declare once and for all, *I love the life GOD has given me!*

SECTION I

“Loving Life Begins with Loving God”

And Jesus replied to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”

Matthew 22:37

CHAPTER 1

God Has an Amazing Plan for You

Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.

Corrie ten Boom

We're all planners by nature. It's just a part of who we are as humans—we want to know what the plan is. *What direction should I take in life? How are things going to turn out?* Or perhaps smaller things like, *What should I make for dinner tonight?* or *What should I wear to the company Christmas party?* Big plans or little plans, down the road or later on today—on some level, we are all planners.

Now, some people are more serious about it than others. For example, there are those people who have mapped out the next ten years of their lives in great detail. They know exactly what career path they are aiming for, what type of house they want to build, and how many kids they are going to have. Their investment plans are working for them and their relationship goals are right on schedule. Nothing is left to chance. After all, they've got plans!

And then there are others who are a little more flexible. Sure, they plan, but a week or two, or at the most a year is about as far as they've looked. These people have hopes and dreams just like everyone else, but they haven't exactly put them on a timetable.

They're more casual and laid-back. The budget is simply a guideline, the career will work itself out, and their plans could easily be titled: "Let's Wait and See What Happens."

Whether you're a long-term planner or a short-term planner, I want to share a word of caution with you today: Your plan is flawed. No matter how long you've worked on it, no matter how foolproof it seems, there is only so much happiness *your* plan can bring you.

You see, the problem with making our own plans is there are human limitations that we all face. We don't know what's going to come our way next week, much less next year. We don't know what challenges or opportunities we are going to come across. We don't know what decisions the people around us are going to make, and we don't know how the world will change in the years to come.

Many variables can alter our plans. In all honesty, we don't even know if we'll want the same thing two years from now. You've changed your mind before; who's to say you won't change it again? Your career goals could change, you may need to take on a responsibility that you were not planning on, your financial obligations could shift . . . transition is a part of life.

Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not saying it's wrong to have a plan. In fact, it is very wise to have a budget, an appointment calendar, and an idea of where you are going in the future. I've often heard it said: "Plan ahead. It was not raining when Noah started building the ark." So, planning, in and of itself, is not a bad thing. But here is what I want you to see . . .

It is only when you submit your plan to God that you can begin to love your life.

The best your plan will ever be able to do is make life tolerable, but living in the plan God has for you is the key to loving

every single day of your life. Your plan may be good, but God's plan is great. Your plan may bring *some* happiness, but God's plan brings overflowing joy. Your plan may pay the bills, but God's plan brings true and lasting success.

It is only when you submit your plan to God that you can begin to love your life.

If you're ready to move from surviving life and really begin to love the life you have, the first thing you need to recognize is this...

God's Plan Is Better Than Yours!

I think one of the most encouraging things about being a Christian is knowing that God sees the end of everything from the beginning, and nothing we go through is a surprise to Him. He's not wringing His hands, wondering how to get us through each day. He's omniscient (all-knowing) and omnipotent (all-powerful), and He has a plan in place for our future.

Anytime you are tempted to get worried or anxious, thinking, *Are things going to work out? How am I going to get through this situation? Where is God when I need Him?* (all questions that steal our joy and our love for life)—just remember what the Word of God has to say:

And we know [with great confidence] that God [who is deeply concerned about us] causes all things to work together [as a plan] for good for those who love God.

Romans 8:28

We receive from Him whatever we ask because we [carefully and consistently] keep His commandments and

do the things that are pleasing in His sight [habitually seeking to follow His plan for us].

1 John 3:22

GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies has planned it. Who could ever cancel such plans? His is the hand that's reached out. Who could brush it aside?

Isaiah 14:27 (MSG)

What an encouragement! Not only does God have a plan, but there is no one who can “brush it aside.” If we will simply trust Him and submit to His plan, there is no enemy or obstacle that can keep God's purposes from coming to pass.

Never forget: Regardless of the situation or outward appearance, God has a plan for your life, and He is faithfully putting His plan into place. When you realize God is in control, it takes all the pressure off. You don't have to worry or fret, thinking, *How*

am I going to fix this situation? You can simply rest in the fact that God has it all planned out. We should all do what God asks us to do and then trust Him to do what we cannot do!

When you realize God is in control, it takes all the pressure off.

We can embrace the great adventure of being led by the Holy Spirit and trust that He will lead us day by day into the perfect plan our Father has for us.

A friend of mine told me recently about a day he spent surprising his two children. Knowing they were going to hang out for the afternoon, the kids asked if they could go to the park and maybe stop for an ice cream after—this was their plan. But little did they know that my friend had been making plans, too.

He did take them to the park and for an ice cream...but this

was just the beginning. He told me, “Joyce, we don’t do it often, but my wife and I just wanted to spoil them for the day.” So from there they went to the movies, out for dinner at the kids’ favorite restaurant, and then a trip to the local arcade to top off the night. (Wow, I wish I could have gone!)

The point is simple: The kids had a plan, but their parents had a plan also, and theirs was much better than anything the kids could have imagined. My friend and his wife had been planning the day all along. They had everything under control. They knew how much it would cost, how to get to their destinations, what movie the kids would love, and how to make it all happen. And they knew the kids would love it!

That’s how God is with you. He’s been planning your life all along. Nothing is left to chance, and you are not on your own. God is carefully working His plan. He knows where to take you, and the exact right time to do it. He knows what you need to succeed. And you know what? He knows you’re going to love it!

The key is for us to learn to cooperate with God’s plan. Rather than stubbornly hold on to our plans, we would be wise to discover His plan and then obey God as He guides us. That’s precisely what Ephesians 2:10 tells us to do. The apostle Paul writes that we should “walk” in God’s plan, “living the good life which He prearranged and made ready for us” to live. And the “good life” leads me to something so encouraging to remember . . .

More Than You Can Imagine

Many times, when people hear that God has a plan for their lives, they become hesitant. They assume God is going to ask them to do something that will be difficult and sacrificial, and they won’t like it. The reason why many people don’t choose to believe in

God is because they view Him as a hard taskmaster; they think they won't have any fun, and life will be dull and boring. That could not be further from the truth. "Doing life" with God is a grand adventure!

The plan God has for you isn't some sort of spiritual hard labor. God is not in the arm-twisting business. He isn't going to force you to go somewhere or do something unless He has first put that desire in your heart. God wants to set you in a place—whether it's a family, a home, a career, a calling—that you can love and enjoy. Sure, there will be challenges from time to time, but you'll know you're living the life of your dreams.

First and foremost, God has laid out a path for your spiritual fulfillment. His plan is for you to be redeemed from sin and guilt, made right with Him, and have peace in your soul. This is the very foundation of your life. But God's plan goes beyond the inner life. The truth is that God wants you to enjoy your life every day. That's why Jesus said in John 10:10: "I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance [to the full, till it overflows]."

Those words from Jesus are so encouraging and important—learning to love your life is a biblical principle! There is nothing more scriptural than knowing that God's plan for your life is far greater than your plan.

Ephesians 3:20 says it this way:

Now to Him who is able to [carry out His purpose and] do superabundantly more than all that we dare ask or think [infinitely beyond our greatest prayers, hopes, or dreams], according to His power that is at work within us . . .

And 1 Corinthians 2:9 says:

But just as it is written [in Scripture], Things which the eye has not seen and the ear has not heard, and which have not entered into the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him [who hold Him in affectionate reverence, who obey Him, and who gratefully recognize the benefits that He has bestowed].

These are promises you can build your entire life around. When you submit your plans to God, He can do things that are “infinitely beyond our greatest prayers, hopes, or dreams.” Just as we love to surprise our children, God loves to surprise us with things beyond our most daring expectations, and believing that is one of the main ingredients in living a life that you can love. I encourage you to expect to be amazed by the goodness of God!

Learning to love your life is a biblical principle!

I think about the life of David. When we first read about David in 1 Samuel 16, he is merely a shepherd boy. He's out in the fields, tending his father's sheep. I wonder what the plans were for his life. Maybe he was hoping to one day take over the family sheep business, or maybe he was considering joining the army like his older brothers at some point in time. Because of his family limitations (David was the youngest of seven brothers) and his predicament (a lowly shepherd), David may have had some very modest plans for his life.

But God had plans that were greater than anything David could imagine.

You probably know the story well. At God's urging, the prophet Samuel showed up and anointed David the next king of Israel. David

I encourage you to expect to be amazed by the goodness of God!

would go on to defeat Goliath, lead the army, play music before King Saul, become best friends with the prince, Jonathan, and eventually become king himself. What a life! I'm sure David would be the first one to proclaim, *God's plans were far better than anything I could have even imagined!*

And David isn't the only example. Joseph went from a prison to the palace (Genesis 37–41). Gideon was hiding in a cave, but God used him to lead a nation (Judges 6–8). Esther was a captive who became a queen (Esther 2). And Peter was a fisherman whom God transformed into a pillar of the early church. Each one of these men and women saw their lives veer from the plans they had made . . . but God had much better plans in store.

As you read these words, I want you to know that the very same principle is true for you. The plans you have made for your life may be very good, but God's plans are better. He may take your plans and add more to them, or He may have a totally different plan for you all together, but you can always be sure that He has your best interest in mind. His plan will never be burdensome. It will always be something that fulfills the very desires He has placed in your heart. And it is guaranteed to be something far greater than what you could have imagined on your own.

But What If I Don't See Anything Happening?

A life filled with peace is a life you can truly love. If you can be at peace when the economy drops, if you can be at peace when the job pressures rise, if you can be at peace when the kids or grandkids are driving you crazy . . . then your life is a joy rather than a chore.

I believe the key to living with peace is trusting God's plan even before you see the results.

You see, God's plan in your life doesn't happen overnight—it's a process. He is building your faith, healing your soul, refreshing your spirit all in due time. You won't always see (or understand) exactly what God is doing, but you can always be sure He is at work. That's why Philippians 1:6 promises that God "who has begun a good work in you will [continue to] perfect and complete it until the day of Christ Jesus [the time of His return]." Just because you can't yet see what God is doing doesn't mean He isn't doing something great.

I believe the key to living with peace is trusting God's plan even before you see the results.

John Flavel once said, "The providence of God is like Hebrew words—it can be read only backwards."¹ I really like this quote. There are some things in our lives we can understand only when we look back on them. In the middle of a trial, it's often too hectic to fully understand what God's plan might be, but when you get on the other side of it, you can look back and comprehend what God was accomplishing in you and for you through it all.

So let me ask you a question: What are you going through today that is causing you to worry, be anxious, or be afraid? Is there an obstacle or a difficulty that is stealing your joy and causing you to dread your day instead of loving your life?

Well, whatever it is that has come to your mind, I want to encourage you to cast that care at the feet of Jesus. Instead of focusing on the problem, rest in peace, knowing that He has the solution. You may not see it yet, but God is working on your behalf, and if you'll trust Him, there will come a time when you'll look back on this situation and realize all God did to bring you through.

You can love your life when you realize it is not your own

(1 Corinthians 6:19–20). God is in control; He has a great plan. That is something you can get excited about!

Don't Forget...

- It is only when you submit your plan to God that you can begin to love your life.
- Not only does God have a plan for your life, but there is no one who can “brush it aside.”
- When you submit your plans to God, He can do things that are “infinitely beyond our greatest prayers, hopes, or dreams” (Ephesians 3:20).
- When you decide to trust God's plan rather than rely on your own, peace is the natural result.

To live is the rarest thing
in the world. Most people
exist, that is all.

Oscar Wilde