

Seven Days to Joyful Living

by Jaylene Garau

Have you ever wondered if I had another job, a different past, if a certain person wasn't in my life, if I didn't have debt or an illness, then I would be happy. We often want something added or removed from our life to make us happy and feel complete. We think that our circumstances define our happiness. I have discovered that you can find joy regardless of your circumstances and your past. This doesn't mean that your life will be perfect, but there is an overall feeling of peace and joy that is provided by only one source and it is God. It results in a feeling of being alive that I had never felt before. It is living with all of your senses in the present moment. Your eyes opened to your blessings with gratefulness in your heart. Learning to be content. It's a surrendering of your life to God and trusting Him with every aspect of it. There is freedom in faith.

I always believed in God but I never understood that I could have a personal relationship with Him. When I finally got that, my life took a completely different turn. This doesn't mean that I am perfect. I am flawed and I have many imperfect moments. However, I was able to tap into the most powerful force in the Universe. This is not unique to me. This is a gift that is available to you. "Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind." Philippians 2:2

Whether this is new to you or whether you feel that you need to reconnect or grow closer to God, my hope is that you decide to take this seven-day journey. The inspiration for this book came from God. Watching things unfold in my own life and in the lives of the people He brought into my life. I noticed that no matter what these people were going through, once they truly connected to God, they found peace. I am not a pastor or a psychologist, so I can't explain this from those perspectives. However, I am a former reporter who believes in truthful storytelling. I wrote this book in the way I observed the journey unfold in these people's lives and in my own life. I wrote it in the hopes that others would take the same journey to find peace and joy.

You should know that when I wrote this short book, my most fervent prayer was this...I asked God to place this book in the hands of whoever He chooses to. I surrendered this whole book to Him. It is why I give it freely at no charge. It is not my message to share but His. I almost didn't write this book feeling that I wasn't worthy of writing it. Who am I, after all? Then a friend sent me this quote by Pastor Rick Warren, the author of *The Purpose Driven Life*, "If God only used perfect people nothing would get done...God will use anybody if you're available."

So I guess I was available and now I hope you make yourself available to read this book. I humbly ask that wherever you are in your faith, you embark on this journey with an open heart. You may be wondering, why don't I feel God's presence in my life? I could assure you that God hasn't left your side. You can't feel Him because a relationship with God in some ways is similar to other relationships in your life. A good relationship is one where you communicate often and spend time together. Prayer and a desire to connect to God can't be an afterthought or something you do when you have time. It must become a priority. When you do that, you begin to live the life that you are meant to enjoy.

Please print out the pages of this book so you can write answers to the questions in the space provided.

Day 1

Begin today with this prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner and I ask for your forgiveness. I believe you died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn away from my sins and invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as my Lord and Savior. In your name. Amen.

This is one of the most powerful prayers you will ever say. Please know that you are accepted and God loves you. You have invited God into your life and into your heart in the form of the Holy Spirit. God wants to be there for you in the ups and downs of your life but you have to invite Him in. If you think you have already said this prayer before today, it's ok that you have said it again as a reminder of the Holy Spirit living in you. It is nothing to be afraid of. It's a gift and soon you will notice what an amazing gift it is.

God sent the Holy Spirit after Jesus' death as a gift to all of us. The Holy Spirit is meant to comfort, guide us, strengthen and help us understand God's word. Our flesh is often in competition with the Spirit and so we must allow the Holy Spirit to work in us to follow God. We are to walk by the Spirit and avoid sins of the flesh. Walking by the Spirit helps us to avoid sins and live a more holy and peaceful life. The fruits of the Holy Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. When you are filled with the Holy Spirit, you are not all of a sudden Christ-like. It takes time for the fruits of the Spirit to ripen. How do they ripen? They ripen with God's guidance through prayer and your life experiences. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Philippians 4:13 Instead of saying that you are weak, say and believe that you are strong. Instead of saying that you are afraid, say and believe that you are courageous. No person is better than another. We all have His same Spirit living in us. We are one.

"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." Galatians 5:16-23

Just as God forgives us, we must also forgive all those who have trespassed against us. We accept God's forgiveness and we must give forgiveness to others so that we may be free.

In what ways can I walk with the Spirit in my life? Who must I forgive?

Day 2

Prayer: Dear God, I ask that you help me surrender myself and my life to you. Let me trust that You will lead me in the right way. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

One of the greatest lessons that I ever learned is that we are to put our priorities in life in the following order:

1. God
2. Spouse
3. Children
4. Occupation

God doesn't ask to be first in your life because He has an ego. He wants to be put first in your life because He wants to help guide you in all areas of your life...in your marriage, in raising your children and in your work. He asks that we cast all of our cares on Him. Once you put God first in your life, trust that everything else in your life will fall into place. God is love. You have the choice; you could speak life or death onto your problems, your pain and the people in your life. Choose to speak life. "Those who guard their lips preserve their lives, but those who speak rashly will come to ruin." Proverbs 13:3.

You will be tempted by jealousy, anger, guilt, revenge and feeling unworthy. Never take a bite from any of those feelings. The smallest bite can send you spiraling down. How do you know what has been put in your heart by God or what is put there by a negative force? God is love, hope, kindness and forgiveness. He would never put anything in your heart that would make you feel worthless or feel the need to hurt another person. He does not want you to live in fear, guilt or sadness. The Holy Spirit in you is like a flowing river. It's a positive and powerful force that flows through you. Anything negative that is in you, does not allow the Holy Spirit to flow as freely. If you build a dam in a river, the flow of the river stops. If you are filled with anger, guilt or any other negative feeling, the Holy Spirit can't flow freely through you. Let go of all negative feelings. Let them go quickly. The longer you allow them to linger in you, the greater effect it will have on your soul.

God never promises us a life free of suffering. Jesus' life and His brutal death are an example of that. However, God does promise us everlasting love in Him. He promises to give us the strength and courage to deal with whatever comes our way. Yes, Jesus died but we must not forget that He resurrected. It is in His resurrection that we find hope. Our relationship with God is one of everlasting love. Remember, you can't serve two masters. Jesus spoke of this. In other words, you can't be guided by money and prestige. If you put God first in your life, you must put the things that are important to Him first as well.

We know what God expects from us. To love Him is to keep His commandments. Obedience unlocks His power. When you allow Him to guide you, then you will find joy and peace within. As Author/Speaker Joyce Meyer says, pray and obey. Be still and listen with your heart. God may not always tell you what you want to hear, but you must trust and obey. You can know God, feel His presence and sense His guidance as clearly and closely as you want to.

What are things that are important to God? How can I begin to make those things important to me?

Day 3

Dear God, help me to follow in your ways. Help me to be obedient to Your ways, grateful for my blessings and rejoice in You. Help me to understand that all of the experiences in my life...good and bad...are meant for me to learn from and grow in faith. Help me to learn what I am supposed to learn from those experiences and guide me to help others. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen

You know those painful experiences that you have kept hidden? Bring them to the light by sharing them. Others can benefit from hearing what you learned through your experience whether it was a divorce, a death, an illness, an addiction, the guilt over having an abortion or a sin you have committed. Whatever it is, you must know that you are not the first or the last person with that experience. You are to take what you have learned from those experiences to help others. Be truthful with your story and trust that your experiences can bring healing to others.

If you are going through a hard time now, don't ask God why you are going through it. Ask God, what do you want me to learn from this experience? Bring your troubles to the light and trust that God will put someone in your life to help you. God does not waste an experience. We waste them when we don't learn from them.

On your first day of this journey you asked God to forgive you for your sins. You must not carry the guilt of any sins you have committed. So often, the guilt we carry weighs us down and we don't feel God's mercy. Understand that you are forgiven, you are accepted and God loves you. A friend once told me, if you continue to live in guilt, you make Jesus' death pointless. He died for your sins. He died so that you may be free. There is no sin that God does not forgive as long as we have asked for forgiveness. You are made new through God's mercy and grace. Enjoy your life. Get rid of the chains that have held you down. God wants you to stand up and receive Him fully. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16

Even in the midst of challenging times, there are always things to be grateful for. Count your blessings often. Thank God for all that He has given you. Gratefulness is good for the soul and it's actually good for the brain according to recent studies. Thinking of what you are grateful for takes your mind off of your worries. Gratefulness should be expressed to others as well. Tell your family members and friends why you are grateful for them. Do this often.

What negative experience in my life taught me something valuable that I could use to help others? What am I grateful for?

Day 4

Dear God, help me to understand that when I am worrying, I am not worshipping You. Help me to surrender to You and let You guide me in my life and in every role that I have. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

When I first had my daughter, I thought I had to figure out this parenting thing all on my own. I was overwhelmed. Then I realized, God sent me this precious child and she is as much mine as she is His. God doesn't expect you to do anything on your own. He wants to be at the center of your marriage, help you raise your children, pull you out of your struggles and even help you in your occupation. In fact, God asks that we surrender all of our worries to Him. "Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you." Psalm 55:22

Feeling like we must control our life, our children, our spouse, our co-workers and every situation in life, is where we run into trouble. We don't control anything. In fact, the only way to fully experience life is when you completely surrender it and trust in God. There are two verses in the song "Touch the Sky" by Hillsong that I love. They are, "I found my life when I laid it down...the gift of freedom that gold can't buy."

There is freedom in surrendering. Surrender your marriage to Him. Surrender your child rearing to Him. Even in your prayers surrender. He will guide you. There are times when you should not ask for a specific outcome but instead ask God that whatever His will is, may He give you the strength, courage and understanding to accept it and learn from it. You can be as close to God as you choose. If you need help, all you have to do is ask. Once you lift a concern up in prayer, surrender the problem and trust God. Let Him do the work and you just get out of His way.

Understand that God hears and answers all prayers. It may not be the answer you want or when you want it, but you must trust that your Creator knows what experiences you must go through in order to fulfill your purpose in life. In the midst of your struggle, trust God. "The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still." Exodus 14:14

When in prayer, do not test God. In other words, don't ask for something in your prayer simply to prove God's existence or His love for you. He exists and He loves you. Faith is knowing that truth and not testing Him. Allow God to show you signs...let it be His decision. Remember that God has given you free will and so often the turmoil in your life is self-inflicted and not caused by God. God wants the best for you in every situation. Choose God and His ways all of the time.

Pray for guidance and strength. Be in dialogue with God in prayer. For years, my prayers were monologues. I never took the time to stop and listen to the direction of my heart. God may give you an answer in your thoughts, it may be revealed to you in scripture/praise song or a person may bring you the answer you were searching for. His answers always bring love and peace to you and others. Stay connected to God, to His word and to people who speak His truth. Prayer should occur often throughout your day. No detail is too small for God to care about. You are never a burden to Him. In fact, most of us don't talk to Him enough! In the car, while washing dishes, when you garden...talk to God.

What or whom am I struggling with that I should surrender to God?

Day 5

Dear God, help me to understand that change begins with me. Help me to accept that I can't change the character of those around me. I choose to follow You and allow You to mold me to become more Christ-like. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

We all have that one person or several people who push us to our limit. They test us. Be thankful for them because it is in the way that you react to them from now on, that you will see your greatest growth. You don't get rid of these people; you get rid of your negative reaction to them. There is no magic spell for this. It is simply a choice you make to let go of the drama that they bring into your life. We must be mindful that we don't create problems either. You will have disagreements, but never quarrel with anyone. We must be respectful in all of our interactions.

Don't argue about religious beliefs with fellow believers or non-believers. God is love. Let His love and mercy flow through you to others. You don't have the power to change their mind or even solve all of their problems. You simply lead them to God and let Him do the heavy lifting.

Having difficulty with your spouse, a parent, with your child or with a friend? Pray for them. Let God have the starring role in the situation. Cast your cares on Him. You take on the role of supporting actor/actress in the situation. God will do all of the heavy lifting for you in every scene of your life. You simply offer support to the person who is challenging you or is being challenged. You lift them up in prayer...always. Even when a person has angered you, forgive that person and pray for him/her. Since not one of us is perfect, we must work toward stopping ourselves from judging others. Peace comes to those who extend it.

People who lash out and hurt others are usually hurting. Don't take their actions personal. When you do, you burden yourself. Let it go and ask God to work on their hearts so that they may be healed from the things that cause them to hurt others.

You will be tempted by worry, frustration and people who will do things that could make you angry. The enemy is not the people who rattle us or the situations that irritate us. The enemies are those negative feelings that we feel as a result of those people or situations. Those negative feelings eat away at us. They are destructive. Rather than try to change those people or those situations, we must surrender our reaction to them by entrusting God with them.

How do you find peace? First, you must seek God. Only He can give you the peace you are searching for. When you enter in a relationship with God, every other relationship in your life will fall into place. It starts with you committing yourself to God. The rest will follow. Treat others with respect, love and kindness. You will receive that in return.

“Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything you can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7

It is important that you understand that none of us are worthy of God's love. We all fall short. God loves us anyway. God's love is why I wrote this book. God's love is why you are reading this.

Who can I act more Christ-like toward? In what ways can I change?

Day 6

Dear God, please open my eyes and heart to those in need. Help me to direct people to You and learn from the people you have put in my life. Help me to love one another as You love me. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

A friend once told me that our self-esteem is found at the foot of the cross. Hearing that statement made such an impact on me. I always felt that my value was based on how much I made, what titles I held or what material things I owned. None of that is important to God. Life is about growing your soul, not your bank account.

I highly recommend Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose Driven Life*. It had a major impact on my life. I made a shift from worrying about what others thought of me or trying to impress others to realizing that I have an audience of One...God.

God loves and accepts you right where you are. If you show love, respect and kindness to others, you are already doing right by God. Don't get caught up with feeling that you have failed as a parent, as a spouse or in any other role in your life. You are alive right now, right? That means that God has given you another chance to make it right. Start today. "Love one another as I have loved you." John 13:34

Share that love that God gives freely to you by sharing it with others. If you see someone in need, help that person. If someone needs someone to talk to, be the ears that listen. Even a smile can go a long way. Let others see God's light shining in you. You are God's disciple in the world. It is in you and from you that people will learn about God and feel closer to Him. SHINE... (Share His Incredible News Everywhere). Don't force it on others. Trust that God will lead you to the people He wants you to share His news with. Trust that you will know who to speak to and what to say at the right time...God's time. Put your ego aside. Dr. Wayne Dyer said that ego stands for "edging God out." When we are so concerned about what others may think of us or when we put our personal interests first, we fail to do God's work. When you do God's work, remain humble and don't boast. Give all the glory to God.

We were designed by God to serve others not to be self-centered. In fact, it's because we think about ourselves so often that we obsess over our problems to the point that we drown in our own misery. The concept of "self-help" books goes against what we have been designed to do by God. You will never help yourself by helping yourself. It is in giving that you receive.

I encourage you to wake up each day and ask God, how can I serve you? When I started to do that my eyes, ears and heart were opened in an amazing way. I discovered so many people hurting right around me who I couldn't see before. How do you help those who are hurting? Point them in the direction of God. You don't have to carry the weight of their problems on your shoulders. Be a friend to them and let them know that they also have a friend in God. Pray with them. Individually, we don't have all of the answers. Collectively in the name of God, we can make better sense of things. "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."
Matthew 18:20

Recall a time when you helped someone. How did it make you feel? What did you learn?

Day 7

Please say the following prayer either outdoors or near a window looking outside.

Dear God, on this last day of this journey I want to thank you for your guidance. I ask that You continue to open my eyes and heart to all that You want to teach me. Today, help me rest in knowing that I can surrender and trust in You. Help me to have a grateful and pure heart. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

On this seventh day of this journey, I want you to spend the day resting and reflecting on what you are grateful for. I want you to look outside now and notice the first God-created thing that you see. Whether it's a tree, the sky, or a flower. Look away from this page and look out now.

What did you see? Can you make it? Although I don't know what you saw, I know that the answer to the last question is no. Can God be explained logically? Absolutely not and neither can the things He has created. No one can fully explain how a small acorn can grow into a majestic oak tree, how a caterpillar knows when it's time to turn into a butterfly or how a bird knows how to build an intricate nest at just the right time. Although we can't explain those things, we can't deny that they do exist.

If you open your eyes and most importantly your soul, you will see and hear God. He speaks to those who are willing to listen. His voice is not a thunderous voice from Heaven but more of a gentle prompting to do good. Prayer is key in your connection to God. I never understood that prayer is a dialogue. Talk to God as you would a friend. You speak but you must pause to listen. Notice your thoughts...in what direction are they going? God will prompt you through your thoughts. Know that His word always brings peace and goodness never malice or anxiety. Sometimes when you get what God has been trying to tell you, you will feel goosebumps. That is the Holy Spirit in you.

This short journey is only the beginning. Whether this is the start of a relationship with God or perhaps it's a rekindling of a relationship with Him that you once had, it doesn't end here. Like every good and healthy relationship in your life, you must spend time together, communicate, listen, learn about Him and His character through scripture and come together at church. You must remain in connection with God regularly. Why? Life is not stagnant. It is constantly changing and therefore our relationship with God must be constantly growing. In the following page, you will find some resources that will help you remain connected to God and grow in your faith. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." Matthew 22:37

I really like the quote by Author/Speaker Dani Johnson, she wrote, "What you feed will flourish and what you neglect will die." Those words were a wake-up call for me. At the time, I was feeding myself with junk TV and aimlessly scrolling the Internet on my down time. I couldn't remember the last time that I had filled myself spiritually. From that day forward, I turned the TV off and I began to read and listen to things and people that would feed my soul. I encourage you to do the same. Feed what you want to see flourish in your life. God's love is all you will ever need. He makes you whole. Make God a priority in your life. A joyful life is found in Him.

God, I want to thank you for these blessings...

Resources

Please choose one or several of these resources to continue growing in your relationship with God. I have personally used each of the resources. I humbly recommend them to you.

Books

- *Trusting God Day by Day* by Joyce Meyer (Daily devotions)
- *The Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren
- Bible

Praise Music Artists

In Central Florida, there is a wonderful Christian radio station called Z 88.3. Look for a radio station in your area. You can also look up videos by the following artists on YouTube for some inspiration. Listening to praise music in the car is a wonderful way to start or end your day. The music helps you stay in the moment and focused on God.

- Chris Tomlin
- Francesa Battiseli
- Mandisa
- For King and Country

Movies

- Do You Believe?
- The Shift by Dr. Wayne Dyer
- War Room

Other Recommendations:

- Attend church services regularly (if you haven't found a church you feel connected to...keep searching but don't give up).
- Join a Bible study or small group.
- "Like" Proverbs 31 Ministries, The Better Mom, Our Daily Bread or other faith-based pages on Facebook.
- Volunteer! Find an organization that allows you to use your gifts to help others.
- If you are a parent, talk to your children about God. Most importantly let them see God's light in you in the way that you act toward them and others. Have a problem? Pray together.
- If you are a parent, please read this verse Ephesians 6:1-4.
- If you are married, please read this verse Ephesians 5:22-33.
- Download a Bible app to easily navigate through scriptures and read daily devotion.

If this book has helped you or you think it could help someone, please share it. Either share the link or print it out and give it to someone. This book doesn't belong to me. It shares a message that belongs to everyone. I hope that you will help me share this book. Think about the people in your social circle, your Facebook friends, neighbors, co-workers, family members and friends. Help others live the life they are meant to enjoy.