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the joy of an  
uncluttered life

# the joy of an uncluttered life

JOYCE MEYER



New York • Nashville

## DAY 1

# FOCUS ON ONE THING AT A TIME

*Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.*

ECCLESIASTES 9:10 NIV

When we do things without focusing on them, we decrease our strength to do the work before us and do it well. When we put our hands to one thing and our minds to another, we make our tasks more difficult than they would otherwise be. But when we direct all our faculties to the one thing we are doing at a particular time, we find it much easier to do. The ability to concentrate and stay focused comes from being disciplined, and we can train ourselves to be this way.

Philippians 4:6 teaches us not to be anxious about anything. Anxious people often spend today trying to figure out tomorrow. Not only do they lose the blessings available in the present moment when they do this; they also give themselves too much to think about. This makes life unnecessarily complicated.

***Practice living one day at a time.*** Devote yourself—your thoughts, your conversation, your energies, every part of you—to the day and the tasks at hand. Develop the ability to give yourself completely to what you are doing. This will enable you to enjoy the current activity, instead of dealing with anxiety or confusing thoughts that leave you exhausted.

Do you fear you will not accomplish as much if you try to live this way? It's true you may not do as much, but you will also enjoy what you do a whole lot more.

DISCOVER THE JOY OF  
CONTENTMENT

*Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”*

HEBREWS 13:5 NIV

In our affluent Western culture, people seem to crave more and more, yet they don't enjoy what they already possess. People who have discovered the blessings of simplicity are satisfied people; they don't yearn for more of anything, but they do thoroughly enjoy what God has given them. They trust God to meet all their needs (Philippians 4:19), and they believe that more will come to them in due time, according to God's plan for their lives.

The world wants us to believe that having more will make us happy, but this is not true. In fact, the more we have, the more we must do to take care of it. We may think more makes life easier, but in reality, it often complicates our everyday lives. First Timothy 6:6 says that “godliness with contentment is great gain” (NIV), and Philippians 4:11 teaches us that the apostle Paul learned to be content regardless of his circumstances. We should all aspire to this kind of satisfaction.

Let's develop the habit of asking God for what we want and believing He will give it to us if, and when, it is right. This simple approach to living sets us free to *enjoy* life.

***Make the decision to begin thoroughly enjoying what you have.*** Thank God for it and be content.

## MAKE GOD YOUR TOP PRIORITY

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”*

JEREMIAH 29:11 NIV

According to Psalm 35:27, God takes pleasure in the prosperity of His people, and He actually has plans to prosper us. True prosperity encompasses much more than money and possessions; it means that all our needs are met and that things are going well for us in every area of our lives. I believe God wants our needs to be met and that He desires for us to have the resources we need, many of the things we want, and an abundance to use to bless other people.

We should learn to handle abundance properly by keeping God as our top priority and being diligent in using the blessings we receive to bless others.

God has created us and “gives us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Timothy 6:17 NKJV). We can enjoy abundance without allowing it to pull us away from God. We can be prosperous and still keep Him first in our lives. In fact, I believe God is delighted when He finds someone He can bless generously who will make Him their top priority while also being diligent in blessing other people.

Intentionally being a blessing to others is one of the simple things I enjoy doing. It is a way I can give joy to others, and increase my own joy at the same time. ***Don't hesitate to ask God to bless you and make you prosperous. Just keep Him in first place when He does.***

LIVE A LIFE THAT  
GLORIFIES GOD

*So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*

1 CORINTHIANS 10:31 NIV

We often give God glory through our words or spiritual acts, but it's equally important to glorify Him through the way we live our lives. All of life can be holy if we live for God. Colossians 3:23 says, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters" (NIV).

God assigns to us the ordinary tasks of life as well as spiritual activities such as prayer, Bible study, good works, and fellowship with other believers. As we study His Word, we can see that we are to work and be good employees, pay our bills, deal honestly, take care of our bodies, keep our homes in order, enjoy the people God puts in our lives, enjoy our food, rest, and laugh. When we begin to see each activity as something we do unto God and for His glory, we simplify our lives. We aren't caught up in trying to *do*; we are simply involved in being who God made us to *be*.

***Begin to simplify your life by cultivating an intimate relationship with God.*** Follow His teachings and Christ's example, and love Him for who He is, not just for what He can do for you. This will help keep life uncomplicated and uncluttered.

DON'T FRET ABOUT  
THE FUTURE

*Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

MATTHEW 6:34 NIV

When we think about the future with its many uncertainties and the seemingly threatening possibilities it holds, we can feel anxious and overwhelmed. This is why God gives us grace for only one day at a time.

Every day we live contains all we can handle. It has its unique challenges, responsibilities, and blessings. God gives us grace to deal with what's in front of us on any given day, not what may come weeks, months, or years later. We may be tempted to fret about the future, but God simply asks us to trust Him day by day.

Trying to live tomorrow today makes life complicated. In Luke 11:3, Jesus teaches us to pray for our “daily bread.” Even though He spoke specifically of bread, I believe this refers to whatever it takes to meet our daily needs.

God is always faithful to give us what we need when we need it. He is always on time but rarely early. He will give you what you need for the future. It's impossible to effectively deal with tomorrow's problems today, but when tomorrow comes, you will have the wisdom and resources you need to handle what it brings. *Don't complicate your life by fretting about the future; simplify it by focusing on the present.*

## LEAVE THE PAST BEHIND

*Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you.*

PROVERBS 4:25 NIV

If we want to enjoy a bright and fulfilling future, we must leave the past behind us. We cannot see God's good plan for today or tomorrow if our focus is fixed on yesterday. We can learn from yesterday's mistakes, but we cannot go back and do things over.

When Abram and Lot needed to go their separate ways, Lot chose the best land for himself, leaving Abram with the less desirable land and with much less property than he previously had (Genesis 13:1–12).

Abram could have felt sorry for himself or resented Lot, but instead, he trusted God, who said, "Lift up now your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see I will give to you and to your posterity forever" (Genesis 13:14–15).

Basically, God was telling Abram to look *up* and look *around*. This is good advice for us. We need to look up and around instead of down and behind. ***Stop dwelling on what's behind you, and start looking forward to what's ahead.*** God has a wonderful plan for your life, and you can trust Him to have good things in store for you. Don't spend your life mourning what you have lost. Instead, take an inventory of what you have left, be thankful for it, and move forward, one step of faith at a time.

## IT'S OKAY TO SAY NO

*Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple “Yes” or “No.” Otherwise you will be condemned.*

JAMES 5:12 NIV

People tend to be happy with us when we say yes to them and unhappy when we say no. We don't enjoy feeling that we have disappointed anyone or being afraid they will reject us if we don't do what they want us to do. For this reason, we are often tempted to agree to do things we really don't want to do or feel God is leading us to do. Trying to please people creates conflict inside of us and clutters our lives. We can greatly simplify our lives by learning to say no when we believe we should.

Commit to please God above all else. Put His will before your own and before what other people want you to do. If you truly feel in your heart that God would have you say yes to something, then say yes and stick to it. ***But if you feel He is leading you to say no, then say no kindly and stick to that as well.***

God always supplies everything we need to do what He calls us to do. But He won't give us the strength to do what He doesn't want us to do. If our mouths say yes to something while our hearts are saying no, we cannot expect God to give us peace or joy. But when we follow God's leading, He gives us the grace and strength we need, as well as peace and joy.

## YOU BE YOU

*But let every person carefully scrutinize and examine and test his own conduct and his own work. He can then have the personal satisfaction and joy of doing something commendable [in itself alone] without [resorting to] boastful comparison with his neighbor.*

GALATIANS 6:4

I spent many years trying to be like other people. I tried to look like they looked, act like they acted, pray like they prayed, and do things they did. After much struggle, I finally realized God would never help me be anyone but myself. This is true for all of us. There is a reason He made us who we are and not like other people. Comparing ourselves to others and trying to be like they are complicates our lives. Nothing God has put within us is designed to copy someone else. It is much easier to simply be ourselves. God helps us do that because He wants us to express and enjoy the uniqueness of who He has created us to be.

You have no need or reason to compete or compare yourself with anyone else (2 Corinthians 10:12). Freedom from comparison and the liberty to be yourself is true freedom indeed. God does not compare us to anyone else. All He expects of us is that we try to be the best we can be. I often say, "God wants me to be the best me I can be." And He wants the same for you. Since I have realized this, I have grown considerably. Life has become more simple and more enjoyable. I believe the same will happen for you as you *simply express who you are*. God is honored when we thankfully embrace who He created us to be.

## REALIZE THAT MORE ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER

*Wealth [not earned but] won in haste or unjustly or from the production of things for vain or detrimental use [such riches] will dwindle away, but he who gathers little by little will increase [his riches].*

PROVERBS 13:11

Society often tells us that having more or doing more is better than having or doing less. I've found that this isn't necessarily true. The more possessions we have, the more cluttered our environment is, and the more commitments we make, the more complicated life becomes. Sometimes, more is not better at all; it's actually worse. I have learned to choose quality over quantity, and this has helped me greatly. Everything we own is something we must take care of; always remember that when you think of adding another possession to what you already have.

Think about this example. People often buy cheap clothes because they want to have more clothes. Then they feel frustrated or disappointed when the inexpensive items stretch easily, shrink, fade, pill, or don't look good after they've been laundered once or twice. Having better-quality clothes typically benefits us in the long run. We don't have to replace them as often, and we don't have so many choices when deciding what to wear. Perhaps you are like I am and would rather spend a certain amount on one piece of quality clothing that will hold up well and look good over time than to spend the same amount on two or three pieces that have to

be replaced quickly. The same is true for appliances, cars, accessories, and other items we use every day.

*I encourage you to develop the habit of buying the best quality you can afford, given your budget.* Resist the temptation to think that more is better because usually it isn't.

COMMIT TO CROSS  
THE FINISH LINE

*I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

PHILIPPIANS 3:14 NIV

Have you ever known anyone who approaches new projects and opportunities with seemingly unlimited energy but then loses interest and fails to follow through on their commitment? Many people are this way. They start things with great enthusiasm, but they don't finish. They either leave the project for someone else to complete, or it just remains undone.

New things can be exciting, but when the newness wears off, there's still work to be done or a commitment to be fulfilled. People who see their commitments through to the end are typically the ones who realistically assess the task at the beginning, thinking through what it requires in terms of time, energy, and other resources. They know the excitement won't last and are willing to do what it takes to get the project across the finish line.

Our society applauds multitasking and productivity, and because of this, people often take on more than they can reasonably handle. Then life becomes complicated, and other areas of their life suffer because they don't have time to give them the attention or effort they need.

***When you commit to something, be diligent in doing it well and finishing it.*** Once you complete it, you will be satisfied in your soul because you'll know you have done the right thing. Your mind will be uncluttered, and you'll be free to move on to new dreams, new projects, new ideas, and new goals.

## KEEP THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE

*A person's wisdom yields patience; it is to one's glory to overlook an offense.*

PROVERBS 19:11 NIV

Many people insist on worrying about the little problems in life, especially things like being offended by what other people say or do. We need to realize that no one says or does everything perfectly all the time, and there's no need to make a big deal out of things we could easily ignore. We can choose to stay at peace.

Life offers us many opportunities to be offended, but we can choose to let go of anything that makes no difference in the overall scope of life. The enemy will try to upset us, but we can remain at peace. Song of Solomon 2:15 says the “little foxes” spoil the vine, meaning that little things can cause big trouble. How many couples divorce over the small things they refuse to forget, which then grow into big problems? If we don't keep a record of wrongs (1 Corinthians 13:5), we will enjoy better, simpler relationships. I used to be a good “accountant” of offenses against me. Because I kept track of them and dwelled on them, my life was a complicated mess, and I was not happy.

Learn not to be easily offended, or you will forfeit your peace and your joy. ***Remember that most people don't offend you on purpose.*** Purify your thoughts and emotions by letting go of past offenses. Refuse to lose your peace and joy by meditating on what people have done *to* you. Instead, think about what people have done *for* you. Your life will become much simpler when you become willing to quickly and frequently forgive.

## GET YOUR MIND OFF YOURSELF

*Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.*

ISAIAH 46:4 NIV

A self-centered life is complicated. God never intended us to focus too intensely on ourselves. He wants us to help others and to trust Him to take care of us.

If we want to simplify our lives, we need to stop thinking so much about ourselves and our own interests (Mark 8:34). Sometimes we think if we turn everything over to God, we won't enjoy life or have anything we want, but the opposite is true. When we give our lives away to others and trust God to do what needs to be done for us, He gives us a life beyond anything we could provide for ourselves.

Of course, we should take care of ourselves physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. But we need to stop worrying about how we can get everything we want out of life. The more we think about ourselves, the more unhappy we will be.

Human nature fights for self-preservation, but when we accept Christ as Savior and Lord, we receive a new nature (2 Corinthians 5:17). This gives us the ability to be *selfless*. We can learn a new way of living that says "It's no longer about me." Always trying to make sure we are taken care of is complicated, but trusting that God will care for us as we care for others is simple. *Let me encourage you to get your mind off yourself and choose to trust God, starting today.*

## DON'T PUT THINGS OFF

*Again He sets a definite day, [a new] Today, [and gives another opportunity of securing that rest] saying through David after so long a time in the words already quoted, Today, if you would hear His voice and when you hear it, do not harden your hearts.*

HEBREWS 4:7

Life feels complicated when I have a dozen projects to finish and don't feel I have time for them all. I cannot enter God's rest until I listen to His direction and take action. Good intentions don't equal obedience.

Procrastination is one of the devil's great deceptions. How many unfinished tasks aggravate or even torment you? Think of the closet you intend to clean or those household repairs or phone calls you keep putting off. Just thinking about them can make you feel frustrated and disorganized and prevent you from enjoying life. The simple way to deal with such things is to set a day and time, and just get them done. One act of discipline will protect you from many days of feeling overwhelmed.

***If you have several unfinished tasks, don't get stressed and feel defeated before you begin them. Keep working at them one at a time.*** Look at the finish line—and be determined to do what it takes to get there. You will have to discipline yourself and make sacrifices, but the reward will be freedom and enjoyment. The Bible says that no discipline seems pleasant at the time, but later it “yields a peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11).

Discover the joy of an uncluttered life by deciding to be a “now” person who doesn’t procrastinate, and you will experience the peace that comes from doing what you need to do when it needs to be done instead of putting it off.

UNCLUTTER YOUR  
SURROUNDINGS

*For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.*

1 CORINTHIANS 14:33 NIV

Clutter overwhelms me. My husband, Dave, tends to hang on to things, but I like to clear out items I don't use or need. God gives us bread to eat and seed to sow (2 Corinthians 9:10), meaning that some things are intended to be passed on to others. I regularly give things away. I don't want to own so much that I can't enjoy what I have because everything appears untidy and disorderly.

One reason many people can't let go of clutter is that they feel guilty getting rid of gifts they've been given. They don't want to hurt the giver's feelings. But gifts given in the right spirit have no strings attached and are ours to do with as we please.

People sometimes give us gifts *they* like that don't suit our taste. We should not feel obligated to use these things. I once gave a friend an expensive bracelet, which I later noticed on another friend's arm. I was tempted to be hurt, but I remembered I had given it freely with no right to dictate what she did with it. Maybe giving it away was a sacrifice for my friend, and she did so in obedience to God but didn't really want to.

*If you struggle to get rid of clutter, consider starting a box with items someone else will like but you will never miss.* Free yourself from the complication of clutter, and enjoy peace and order in your life.

## KNOW WHEN ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

*Be well balanced (temperate, sober of mind), be vigilant and cautious at all times; for that enemy of yours, the devil, roams around like a lion roaring [in fierce hunger], seeking someone to seize upon and devour.*

1 PETER 5:8

When we become excessive in anything and don't recognize when enough is enough, we are no longer living a balanced life. This opens the door for the devil, who wants to steal our joy and push us toward excess. Having anything beyond our capacity to use it complicates our life and causes problems. So do excessive talking, excessive eating, excessive debt, and other excesses. Excess is the devil's playground.

The Bible talks about the necessity of pruning (Isaiah 18:5), the cutting off of excessive or diseased branches. Once Dave had one of our trees pruned. It was cut back so far, it looked horrible, and I was sure he had killed it. He said if I was patient, it would be prettier than ever the next spring. Sure enough, it turned out to be the most attractive tree in our yard.

Don't be afraid to cut back what you don't need. I believe such pruning opens the door for God to give you even more. *If you have more possessions than you can use, share them with someone who doesn't have enough.* This way, you will plant seeds for a future harvest in your own life. If some of the things you say cause trouble in your relationships, talk less and listen more. Say no to excess and yes to removing the complexity from your life today.

## LIVE DEBT-FREE

*The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.*

PROVERBS 22:7

Financial debt creates a complicated chokehold on our lives and puts a tremendous burden on marriages and families. Our society makes it easy to get into debt by using credit to buy now and pay later. We have become impatient, living for the moment, and caring little about the future. We purchase things in the height of emotion and then experience the pain of paying off the debt for months or years. This complicates our lives and steals the simplicity God wants us to enjoy.

I encourage you to buy what you need and learn to save for what you want, but don't go into debt to do it. The Bible says, "He who gathers little by little will increase [his riches]" (Proverbs 13:11). My husband has a simple plan: *Out of everything you get, give some, save some, and spend some within your borders or according to your ability.* Do this, and your borders (ability) will increase. You will not struggle with the stress and complication of debt.

If you are in debt, commit to get out of it. Don't keep doing the same things that got you into it. You may have to sacrifice to pay off the bills, but it will be worth it. Debt is like an iron weight you carry everywhere you go. Cut the ties, and feel the freedom and simplicity that comes with not owing anyone anything.

## MAJOR IN THE MAJORS

*Little children, keep yourselves from idols (false gods)—[from anything and everything that would occupy the place in your heart due to God, from any sort of substitute for Him that would take first place in your life]. Amen (so let it be).*

1 JOHN 5:21

If we want things to go well in our lives, we need to strive to keep God in first place. I use the word *strive* because if we put no effort into it, it never happens. Busyness can get our priorities out of line and cause us to put our energies into things that aren't truly important.

When Jesus visited Mary and Martha, they each responded to Him in different ways. Mary sat down at the Lord's feet to listen to Him, but Martha stayed busy cleaning and cooking. Jesus told Martha that Mary had made the better choice (Luke 10:38–42). Martha's life then became frustrating and complicated, while Mary's remained peaceful and serene because she understood what was most important. Martha needed to take advantage of the opportunity to hear Jesus teach while she could. There would be time to do the other things later.

Another time, Jesus met a rich young ruler who wanted to know how to experience eternal salvation. When Jesus told him to sell all he had, give it to the poor, and follow Him, the man went away sad because he had so many possessions (Luke 18:18–23). God was testing him. Had he been willing to give them up for God, he could have been given more

than he had given away. Many people make this same mistake, fearfully clinging to what they have and losing what they could have. They accept things that can never satisfy as Jesus can. ***Decide to keep first things first and major in the major things in life.*** Jesus is the most important.

## DISCOVER THE BENEFITS OF BOUNDARIES

*From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.*

ACTS 17:26 NIV

God sets boundaries, and we should too. Without them, we have no protection. Like fences, they keep undesirable people and things out of our lives. Many people are afraid to set boundaries because they think they will offend someone. But God calls us to follow Him and walk in wisdom, not to let other people dictate what we must do to keep them happy.

Each person is different, so we need to respect their boundaries. For example, my younger daughter is strict about her privacy, so she asks people not to visit her without calling first. Our older daughter is just the opposite. We may not always understand why people are the way they are, but we need to honor their right to be themselves.

Without boundaries, life becomes frustrating and complicated. With no restraints or guidelines, we will feel taken advantage of. We may also end up in places we don't want to be, doing things we don't want to do.

We even need boundaries for ourselves, such as setting high standards to live by and deciding what we will and will not do. Saying no is setting a boundary.

To have no boundaries and not to respect the boundaries

of other people is not only foolish; it causes people to miss the simplicity they could enjoy. *Ask yourself what you need to be happy, and then set your boundaries accordingly.* This isn't wrong; it's wise, and it will help tremendously as you unclutter your life.

## KNOW WHO YOU ARE

*Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God.*

JOHN 13:3 NIV

I believe Jesus was able to do the humble act of washing His disciples' feet (John 13:1–17) because He knew Himself—who He was, where He came from, where He was going, and why He was sent.

Many people do not know who they are. They try to do things they have not been called or equipped to do. We should know not only what we *can* do, but what we *can't* do. One of the greatest tragedies I have witnessed as an employer is watching people remain in positions that either do not challenge them or are over their heads—yet they won't admit it.

Why do we have such a difficult time saying “That's not my strength, and I don't think I would do a good job at it”? We get too much of our value from what we do, instead of from who we are in Christ, which is all the position and title we will ever need.

The apostle Peter did not know himself. He had weaknesses he was not willing to admit. He thought he would never deny Christ, yet he did (Luke 22:54–62). After he repented, he was restored and became a great leader in the early church. Having weaknesses and inabilities doesn't disqualify us, because God's strength is made perfect in our weaknesses (2 Corinthians 12:9).

***Do all God calls and equips you to do, but don't try to go beyond what He has enabled you and given you grace to do.***

## HAVE FAITH

*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.*

HEBREWS 11:1-2 NIV

Having faith in God is one of the best ways to simplify life. Fear, doubt, unbelief, and overthinking complicate life, but the ability to believe removes all of these. As Mark 5:36 says, “only believe” (NKJV).

Sometimes our faith is challenged by the enemy or by our circumstances. There’s no such thing as a “belief button” to push to ensure we will never doubt again. When we feel frustrated, instead of giving up, we need to realize that we receive God’s promises by faith and patience (Hebrews 6:12).

Negative emotions complicate our lives. We don’t have to get upset while we are waiting for God to move on our behalf. We can choose to remain expectant and joyful. We can simply believe.

*The next time you feel life is too cluttered and complicated, say aloud, “I believe, God!”* Then remember the many promises in His Word that assure us He will never leave us or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6; Joshua 1:5; Hebrews 13:5–6). He is the source of every comfort and encouragement (2 Corinthians 1:3–4). The more we focus on God’s promises, the less our problems bother us.

Faith in God has an amazing effect on the soul and brings joy and peace (Romans 15:13). Any time I feel upset or sad,

I check my belief levels, and I can usually find the source of my negative emotion. If I am willing to adjust my attitude and increase my faith, things get better.

Only believe.

## ASSESS THE WAYS YOU SPEND YOUR TIME

*Look carefully then how you walk! Live purposefully and worthily and accurately, not as the unwise and witless, but as wise (sensible, intelligent people), making the very most of the time [buying up each opportunity], because the days are evil.*

EPHESIANS 5:15-16

Life rarely stays the same. Things always seem to shift and change. In order to grow, we must change also. As we seek to simplify our lives, we are wise to regularly assess our commitments and the ways we spend our time. Often, we get stuck in our routines without thinking much about what we are doing, and this can complicate our lives and clutter our calendars, because we may be doing something that no longer bears good fruit.

I believe we sometimes forfeit blessings God wants to give us because we fail to evaluate how we spend our time and to discontinue the things we no longer need to be doing. The fact that we have done certain things for many years doesn't mean we should keep doing them for years to come. God calls us to do some things for a season, and when the season is over, we need to stop doing them and find out what He wants us to do next.

Cutting activities we don't enjoy out of our schedules is easy. But sometimes in the process of maturity, God asks us to give up something we do enjoy. When this happens, we should remember that His plan is always best. He doesn't ask us to do things that won't make our lives better.

*I encourage you to regularly evaluate your commitments.* Do everything you feel God is asking and empowering you to do, and let go of things that are no longer effective. Ask Him to show you where you can make adjustments that will help you experience the joy of an uncluttered life.

## SET YOUR PRIORITIES

*Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.*

PSALM 90:12 NIV

I believe people who are wise choose to do now what they will be happy with later. One way we can live wisely is to define our personal priorities and stick to them. For example, if a person makes a priority of being able to retire at age fifty-five, he or she will likely need to prioritize saving, investing, and wise stewardship of finances. When we clearly identify our priorities and live according to them, we simplify our lives because we remove many distractions and options. We know what we need to do to keep first things first.

If you need to begin to define your priorities, it's important to remember that what someone else does may not be right for you. ***Let the Holy Spirit lead you to live your own life,*** and be willing to be different if that's what it takes to live a simple, peaceful, wise, fulfilling life.

Many things compete for our attention, and when our priorities are clear, we know which ones to address first, second, and so on. Our first priority should be our personal relationship with God. If we allow anything to take priority over our walk with Him, life quickly becomes complicated and difficult. But when we start with Him and ask Him to lead us in setting subsequent priorities, He helps us live the good life He desires for us and has planned for us.

## CHOOSE YOUR BATTLES

*You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you.*

2 CHRONICLES 20:17 NIV

Sometimes living a simple, uncluttered life seems impossible because of the challenges we face in life. We do encounter trials and difficulties, but we don't have to let them complicate our lives unnecessarily by trying to deal with all of them. We can choose our battles, giving our time and energy to the ones we feel are worth the effort.

The longer we live, the more we realize that everything doesn't need to be addressed. Some things work themselves out without our intervention, and some situations are better off left alone. We can choose to deal with some circumstances by simply praying about them, never saying a word to anyone involved. In addition, the passing of time has a way of resolving situations. If we simply wait, we may be able to avoid certain types of battles altogether.

I have learned that unless something is truly urgent or some kind of emergency, it's rarely necessary for me to respond immediately. I often give myself a day or two to think about things and take time to weigh my options so I can make wise, solid decisions. I would encourage you to consider this approach, too. Realize that just because a problem comes your way, it doesn't mean you must deal with it immediately. You may not need to deal with it at all. *Choose to fight the battles that really matter.*

## PRACTICE FAST FORGIVENESS

*For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.*

MATTHEW 6:14 NIV

One of the ways people complicate their lives is by being easily offended and holding grudges. On the contrary, learning to forgive as soon as we've been hurt or wronged brings simplicity to our lives. In James 1:19, God's Word teaches us to be quick to forgive for a reason. He wants us to live in peace and joy, and this is impossible if we are bitter, resentful, and angry. As an old saying goes, refusing to forgive is like drinking poison and hoping it hurts the person who wronged you.

I have decided—and I hope you have, too—that I want to enjoy my life. But life is difficult to enjoy when we are angry or offended. When we linger in feelings of hurt or desire to seek revenge on someone, it affects our lives in negative ways. ***I encourage you to set a goal right now that you will forgive people as fast as they hurt you.*** The sooner you forgive people, the quicker the peace and joy return to your life.

Forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling. You may truly forgive someone and realize that your feelings toward that person have not changed. They may not change immediately, but as you continue to pray for them and treat them well, your feelings will eventually catch up to the godly choice you have made.

KEEP YOUR OPINIONS TO  
YOURSELF

*Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles.*

PROVERBS 21:23 NKJV

God's Word is filled with practical advice for everyday life. One thing it instructs us to do is to mind our own business (1 Thessalonians 4:11). One of the primary ways we mind our own business is to avoid interfering in other people's lives by keeping our opinions to ourselves. Often, expressing an opinion or making comments about people or situations leads to relational problems and tends to keep life tense instead of peaceful.

Each of us has enough to think about without getting involved in other people's situations. If you have a tendency to meddle, give unsolicited advice, or inject your opinion when no one has asked for it, decide to stop doing that and ***simply pray that God will lead the people around you and help them make good decisions.*** Then refrain from commenting on what they decided to do or say.

I have had to tell myself many times, "Joyce, that is none of your business." This is often true for almost all of us. We like to know what's going on, and we may want people to know what we think about it, but we can keep life simple and peaceful if we learn to keep our opinions to ourselves. We often think, *I'm just trying to help*, but unless people want our help, they won't receive it, and offering our opinions could harm our relationship with them.

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