

Suzanne Eller

Joykeeper



6 truths
that change everything
you thought you
knew about
* joy *



JoyKeeper

**6 truths
that change everything
you thought you
knew about
joy**

Suzanne Eller



BETHANYHOUSE

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Minneapolis, Minnesota

JoyKeeper • Suzanne Eller

Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group © 2020 used by permission

© 2020 by Suzanne Eller

Published by Bethany House Publishers
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Eller, T. Suzanne, author.

Title: JoyKeeper : 6 truths that change everything you thought you knew about joy / Suzanne Eller.

Other titles: Joy keeper : 6 truths that change everything you thought you knew about joy

Description: Minneapolis : Bethany House Publishers, [2020]

Identifiers: LCCN 2019056902 | ISBN 9780764235818 (trade paperback) | ISBN 9781493425037 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Joy—Religious aspects—Christianity—Meditations. | Christian women—Religious life—Meditations.

Classification: LCC BV4647.J68 E435 2020 | DDC 248.4—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019056902>

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations identified AMPC are from the Amplified® Bible (AMPC), copyright © 1954, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1987 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. www.Lockman.org

Scriptures identified BSB are from The Holy Bible, Berean Study Bible, BSB. Copyright ©2016, 2018 by Bible Hub. Used by Permission. All Rights Reserved Worldwide. <https://berean.bible/>

Scripture quotations identified CEV are from the Contemporary English Version © 1991, 1992, 1995 by American Bible Society. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations identified CSB have been taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

Scripture quotations identified ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. ESV Text Edition: 2016

Scripture quotations identified GNT are from the Good News Translation in Today's English Version-Second Edition. Copyright © 1992 by American Bible Society. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations identified ISV taken from the Holy Bible: International Standard Version®. Copyright © 1996-forever by The ISV Foundation. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED INTERNATIONALLY. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations identified MESSAGE are taken from THE MESSAGE, copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Scripture quotations identified NKJV are from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations identified NLT are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Cover design by Emily Weigel

Author represented by The Fedd Agency, Inc.

In honor of
Vivienne Suzanne McDaniel
You brought incredible joy, sweet girl.
We miss you.

contents

Introduction 13

Part One: Knowing Joy 17

1. Give a Sister Permission to Feel 19
What I feel: God is disappointed when I am sad.
What I know: God cares about how I feel.
2. Becoming 35
What I feel: I will never be enough.
What I know: God is aware of who I am becoming.
3. Chalk-Line Faith 55
What I feel: It's my job to fix everything.
What I know: God is God, and I am not.

Part Two: Keeping Joy 71

4. A Safe Place 73
What I feel: Insecure (unsafe).
What I know: God is my safe place.
5. You Are Not Shame 89
What I feel: I am bad.
What I know: God's goodness is greater.

6. Take Your Seat 107
What I Feel: I should be like her.
What I Know: God has a seat for me.

Part Three: Living Joy 123

7. Joy-Wrapped Faith 125
Devotional: Thirty Days to Living a JoyKeeper Life 131

Study Guide for Groups 193
Group Discussion Questions 197
Acknowledgments 201

introduction

When the topic of joy comes up, I understand that it can make us all feel a little apprehensive. It's confusing to be told that joy and happiness are the same thing, because the truth is that no one feels happy all the time. It's perplexing when someone implies that you are less than faith-filled because you're sad or frustrated or even angry. If you are reading this book, there's a strong chance that joy is something you not only want to understand but want to live.

Me too.

I am writing this book for the woman who has struggled to understand joy.

I'm writing it for the woman who longs for joy but doesn't always know what that looks like.

I'm writing it for the woman who is reaching for joy in a hard season. Joy is not only for you; it's yours to keep in all of those situations because of this powerful truth: *Joy is more than a feeling. It's a knowing.*

You see, if joy is reduced to merely a feeling, you'll be up or down according to your circumstances, and that's exhausting. You'll wonder where God is when people hurt your heart. You'll

think that joy is beyond you when you make a mistake. If joy is merely a feeling, you don't enjoy being in the midst of a sweet season, but wring your hands and wait for the other shoe to drop.

I don't believe this is what God meant for any of us.

The early church was marked by joy. It identified them! Non-believers looked on in confusion as the church dealt with difficult people, everchanging conditions, grief and loss—but with a solid undercurrent of joy. These believers knew where to turn. They knew whose they were. They believed that God would show them the next step even when it wasn't clear. Even when it felt like it was all falling apart, they believed his will would triumph.

At the same time, they were oh-so-human.

They had to work through conflict. They dealt with devious and power-hungry people who tried to mess up every good thing they were building. They had to pray their way through cultural differences, differing personalities, and persecution. They experienced sadness, loss, exhilaration, excitement, apprehension, and all the emotions you and I wrestle with every day.

A JoyKeeper is someone who experiences real life. She feels all the feelings. She isn't afraid to be honest when things are hard. She's tethered to something bigger than her feelings. I know this because I wrote this book in an extended season of sorrow. As I lived out each day, I'd whisper this to myself as a reminder.

Joy is not a feeling, Suzie. It's a knowing.

That principle of joy held me close to the Source. It also reinforced six biblical truths that once changed the way I viewed joy.

I pray these same six truths will help you redefine joy as well.

I pray these truths will anchor you even as your heart hammers and your knees clang. We'll unpack them chapter by chapter. Let's begin by letting them tiptoe into your heart.

- God cares about how you feel.
- God is aware of who you are becoming.
- God is God, and you are not.

- God is your safe place.
- God's goodness is greater.
- God has a seat for you.

For some of you, these don't feel like truth right now, and that's okay.

We'll take them deeper together.

We'll make lots of room to work through each one until they settle into your soul like manna. Transformation will come as you and I honestly plunge into those areas where God wants to do a miracle.

You are invited to live a life marked by joy.
Are you ready?

JoyKeeper
Joy is more than a feeling.
It's a knowing.

Suzie



part one

Knowing Joy

If joy is merely a feeling . . .

I will experience it only when things go my way.

I'll wonder if it's wrong to feel sad.

I'll be tempted to hide my emotions from others and even God.

Storms will shake not just my confidence, but also my faith.

I'll wonder why God gives it to some and not to others.

Because joy is a knowing . . .

I experience joy both in the ups and in the downs.

I am unafraid to ask God to meet me in my sadness.

I choose to live in transparency with others and with God.

I am grounded in my faith and my roots run deep.

I believe with my whole heart that joy is for me too.

one

give a sister permission to feel

It was the year I call *scarred*.

The first scratch on my heart happened the day my daughter was diagnosed with cancer. Though I am a survivor myself, this was different. She is my daughter, and I couldn't fix it. For the next several months we walked with her and her young family through surgeries, doctor visits, and recovery. Some days I sat with her, just watching her face as she rested.

When we were told she was going to be okay, I took a deep breath.

Things will be better now.

A few weeks later I went in for a routine dermatology checkup. The doctor pointed to a small freckle on my shoulder. It looked a little suspicious, he said. Just to be safe, he removed it and sent it for a biopsy. I was teaching at a conference in another state when I received the call.

It was melanoma.

A surgeon removed a four-inch chunk from my shoulder that next week. All I could think of while he was performing the procedure was all the places on my body where a four-inch reduction would have been more welcome. The surgery left a wide, uneven

scar that took weeks to heal, but when the report came back the news was good. The margins were clear.

Once again, I am ready to move on.

I went back to the surgeon a couple of weeks later to have the forty-nine stitches in my shoulder removed. As he worked, he peered at my face. He grabbed a bright light and held it close. “There’s something on your lip,” he said.

Great.

More needles. Another biopsy. Another cancer diagnosis, which meant more surgery.

When I woke up from the anesthesia, I was handed a mirror. I gazed at the thick black stitches running from inside my mouth to my nose. I wondered if I’d ever look the same. Weeks later, however, all of my scars were healing. For a fleeting few days, I contemplated getting a tattoo to wind around the giant scar on my shoulder, just for fun. That didn’t last long because I was so over needles.

“You’ve been through a lot,” people would say.

They were right, but I couldn’t help but be grateful. My daughter was healing and the outlook for her was positive. My scars were fading. Life no longer revolved around hospital waiting rooms or medical reports.

The year of scarred is surely coming to a close, and I am ready.

A couple of months later, friends sat around our kitchen table. Richard’s cell rang, and he slipped away to answer it. He’s a therapist and it’s not unusual for him to receive a call at night. I was surprised, however, when he didn’t return.

When our guests left, Richard trudged downstairs, his face haggard. He sat on the couch and patted a spot close to him.

“We have to talk, Suz.”

The phone call was not from a client, but from our son. He called to share news that turned this mama’s world upside down. He confessed he was battling a secret addiction. He was in a desperate place and had been for a long time.

We had no idea.

From the outside looking in, this seemed like an impossibility. He had created a start-up business that was a success. He traveled around the world, speaking and motivating others. He had a beautiful family and was surrounded by close-knit friends.

Looking back, it's easier to see the cracks, but it wasn't at the time.

We climbed into our car that night, both of us stunned. We prayed and wept as we drove. An hour later we pulled into a parking lot of a rural gas station halfway between our son's home and ours. As the glow of the sun crept toward the horizon, he told us a little more about his battle.

Afterward, Richard joined our son in his car and they traveled back to our home. I got into my car and drove to wrap my arms around my beautiful daughter-in-law and grandchildren. As I drove, I remember feeling that I had never felt so in the dark or clueless as a mom.

One day my son will share his story. I believe that with every fiber of my being, for God began a miracle that night. Our son continues to fight hard for himself, for his healing, and for his family. But I couldn't see that then, and the miracle didn't come overnight. We went through messy, difficult places as a family in those first few months. There were hard conversations. There were plenty of days when we weren't sure what the future held for our son. He unfolded his secrets over weeks, like a dam that had been cracked for a long time but now the rush of waters whooshed through freely. My emotions bungee-jumped. I was confused. I was sad. I was frustrated. At times I was furious.

Mostly I was numb.

One morning I fell to the carpet of my bedroom. I didn't have the words to pray. Until that moment, I hadn't given myself permission to fall apart. I was too busy doing what we, as women, normally do. I was listening. Trying to love the best I knew how. As long as I kept moving, I didn't have to deal with the thoughts that were always there, tumbling and clawing.

*Lord, I don't know what to do.
Help my son and his family, please.
God, what just happened?*

As I lay crumpled on the carpet, those feelings pounded like fists. I don't know if you've been in this place. Most of us arrive there at some point. Maybe you are there now. Psalm 23:4 refers to it as the darkest valley or even "the valley of the shadow of death."

It is in moments like these where joy feels impossible.
It is in moments like these we are most vulnerable.

Truth #1: **God cares about how you feel.**

WHAT I FEEL: God is disappointed when I am sad.

WHAT I KNOW: God cares about how I feel.

Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.—John 16:22

When we are in a season when joy seems elusive, a well-meaning person might say something like, "Have faith." While this often

JOY STEALER

Trying to control things, only to feel even more out of control.

comes from a good place, what is implied is that we are lacking faith. So we switch to control mode. We create a plan. We put on a mask. We tell people we are doing fine

and fall apart in private. The more we try to control everything, the more out of control we feel.

This creates a cycle that none of God's daughters should ever experience.

We try to hide our feelings, but they are still there



Which makes us worry that we aren't doing this "right"



Which can cause us to distance ourselves from God,
when we need him the most



Which makes us feel more out of control

What a crazy, unhealthy, nonredemptive cycle! Just reading this makes me want to weep.

As I lay on the carpet with my face mashed into the fibers, this is what I *knew* to be true: God saw his daughter, a woman with no answers and a hurting heart. I wasn't judged by him. He didn't see me as weak because I was sad and conflicted. He didn't ask me to pretend everything was okay.

Instead, I was incredibly loved and seen.

If you have ever found yourself lying on the carpet, your face mashed into the fibers, crying out to God, may I remind you of something? You are a courageous, much-loved child of God. You are in a challenging season, but that doesn't mean you aren't faith-filled. Your faith launched you out of bed this morning. You've looked to him for answers. Your heart is wide open for his direction. None of that is missed by God.

When we understand that God cares about our feelings, we are not required to control, hide, or mask those emotions. One description of joy that lights me up is this: We consciously walk into his love and care. This is what we do instead of hiding our feelings.

You may feel that God is disappointed with your emotions, but that conflicts with the character of God as demonstrated through his Son, Jesus.

What Does Jesus Do?

In John 16, Jesus warns that grief and sorrow are ahead. He had just told his disciples he was leaving. They are deeply troubled by this discussion. They huddle to discuss Jesus's words among themselves. He breaks into the huddle to assure them: "Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy" (John 16:22).

Jesus doesn't get angry because of their uncertainty. He doesn't remind them of how strong they should be.

If we really want to get to know someone's character, we watch and listen. Consider these further interactions between Jesus and those who are struggling.

In John 8, Jesus meets a woman caught in adultery. *What does Jesus do?* He sees past her sin to her heart. He stands between her and the men ready to stone her. He shows her what real love looks like, then sends her on her way.

In Matthew 14, Peter takes a few miraculous steps on the water and then starts to sink like a cement block. *What does Jesus do?* He reminds Peter of who he is and reaches for him. He's not going to allow him to sink, not for a moment.

In Luke 23, a thief hangs beside Jesus and asks for mercy. *What does Jesus say?* He offers redemption. A thief leaves the confines of an earthly hell to walk cleansed and whole into heaven!

Stories like these, and multiple others, reveal the goodness of our Savior.

They also show us what to do.

When you are tempted to push down the feeling that you are sad, overwhelmed, frustrated, angry, or hurt, tell him everything.

Invite him to fight for you and with you.

Instead of trying to be something you are not, allow him to be who he is.

Feelings Are Powerful Indicators

Rather than being “wrong,” your emotions are valuable indicators as you consciously walk into his love and care. When I was lying on the carpet in the year I call scarred, my emotions were telling me that I couldn’t go a step further without his help.

I am done.

I was at the end of my own ability and wisdom. When I cried out to him, it was because I needed him. Not tomorrow. Not the next day. I needed him in the midst of that snot-nosed I-don’t-know-what-to-do moment and all the days to follow.

JoyKeeper
Instead of trying to be
something you are not, you
allow him to be who he is.

Inviting God in to how we feel might not change the circumstances (or sometimes even how we feel at the time), but our God, who is mighty, all-knowing, and all-seeing joins in the battle. We may still be in a war, but God is on the front lines with us. This is where his goodness and character show up. We may feel overwhelmed at times. It may take longer than we want. Yet we are not alone in the battle.

As I look back at that year, I realize I sometimes felt like Peter. There were times I took a huge step of faith, only to sink like a rock. The water felt choppy. The winds were blowing. Yet Jesus was there to lift me up.

There were moments I identified with those in the crowd ready to stone the adulterous woman. I would hold a rock of condemnation, standing poised, ready to throw it at my own heart. In his goodness, God stood between me and that rock of condemnation, showing me what real love looks like.

Give yourself permission to feel, sweet sister.

That in itself will alter the course of the battle raging inside of you. When you are honest with God, it’s a strong move. You name how you are feeling. You examine unresolved hurt or emotions in the presence of the Holy Spirit. You pay attention to how you

feel instead of burying it (which only means it will erupt bigger somewhere else down the line). When we surrender control and are honest with how we feel, we partner with the Holy Spirit to teach us, redirect how we respond, and begin the process of healing.

Maybe you've been told that pushing down your feelings is strong.

It's not.

Perhaps you've believed that God is disappointed with you when you feel a certain way.

He's not. He's not. He's not.

Knowing that, how do we process those emotions with God?

A few weeks after my son told us about his addiction, I sat in a chair, my Bible and journal propped on my lap. The year of scarred was ongoing, but the Lord and I were talking about it daily. One day I wrote these words: *Is this my fault?*

I asked that because I often wrestled with thoughts like these:

If only I had been more aware.

If only I had prayed more for my son.

If only I had been a better mom . . .

When we ignore our biggest questions or thoughts—because they don't seem reasonable, because they express dismay with people or God, because they reveal our deepest insecurities—they don't go away.

They fester.

So I began to place those thoughts and questions and emotions before God in a journal. I named how I felt. I wrote down that burning

question. I might not receive an answer right away, but asking it opened the door for clarity. The Lord could show me what I couldn't see on my own and plant a sprig

of peace right where I needed it most. I didn't hold anything back, because he already knew it and loved me in the midst of it.

JOY STEALER

Hiding your feelings from God when he already knows and loves you like crazy.

I want to invite you to do the same. As you pause to do this simple exercise, ask God to join you from the very beginning. Share the emotion you are experiencing right now. Write down that burning question. Then pray about it with a God who loves you right where you are. I've shared the beginning of a prayer to get you started.

JoyKeeper

When you are honest with God, you give yourself permission to feel (and heal).

PAUSE POINT

I feel . . .

Jesus, the burning question that won't go away is . . .

#prayerstarter

Lord, thank you that you are near. I don't have to hide from you or pretend that I feel a certain way when I don't. You know me better than anyone. You know my heart. . . . [Finish this prayer in your own words. Remember he loves you so much.]

Once you finish this exercise, you may experience new and different emotions, and that's okay.

In fact, it's normal.

The Holy Spirit leads into *all* truth (John 16:13). Not partial truth. Not your next-door neighbor's truth. Not even your pastor's truth. *All* truth. When we are honest about how we feel in his presence, our eyes are opened to see the beauty of God at work right where we are. We may also see an area he wants to work in or shift in a new direction. If there's anything that makes you feel inadequacy or shame or embarrassment, then do the exercise again.

Do this as many times as you need.

If you feel a sense of relief or peace, thank him. He's rejoicing with you.

Perhaps you are reading this and life is good. You wonder if an exercise like this is for you. It is! This type of conversation between you and Jesus is not just for the harder days. When you talk to him about how you feel on a regular basis, conversation transitions to intimacy. That becomes a norm in your relationship with him. Intimacy removes hurdles that keep you stuck and offers a sacred place to share your happiness, excitement, and thoughts. When you hit the next hard situation, you run to him because it's natural. It's part of your relationship.

The more we make room to share our feelings with Jesus, the less they need their own room on the inside of us.

A Twist: Joy *and* Sorrow

Let's go back to John 16. If you remember, Jesus is warning his friends that grief is ahead. But he also says something surprising: "Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy" (John 16:20).

Over the next few days, Jesus's words come to life. Someone in their inner circle betrays Jesus, leading a group of soldiers under the cover of darkness to arrest Jesus. They experience sorrow that comes through unfaithfulness and betrayal.

When they resist the soldiers, pulling out their swords, they are instructed by Jesus to step back. Oh, the pain that comes as they feel the sorrow of helplessness.

Later, they stand in the crowd as an unjust court accuses Jesus and a guilty man is released in his place. Injustice might feel like the greatest sorrow.

Sorrow upon sorrow, it keeps coming.

Jesus lays down on a rugged cross. He dies. They are shattered.

Oh, the sorrow of losing someone you love.

They mourned, just as Jesus said they would . . . but didn't he say something about joy?

Is it possible to know joy in a time such as this?

You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world.—John 16:20–21

When I think about words associated with pregnancy and birth, these rise to the top: *expectation, waiting, fear of the unknown, labor, pain, apprehension, excitement, joy.*

When my oldest, Leslie, was only ten months old, I stood in the bathroom with my hands on my stomach. I was pregnant and my oldest wasn't walking yet. I was still nursing. She had another year in diapers. I wanted a big family, but this wasn't my plan. A few weeks later I found out I was carrying twins. To the woman who longs to hold her child and it hasn't happened, this sounds selfish, but this was what was going on in my heart. When Leslie was born, I wasn't sure how to be a mom. There was a learning curve, and it felt overwhelming. I loved her with all my heart and was step-by-step figuring out this thing called parenting. But this unexpected news seemed really big. Having

JoyKeeper
The more you make room
to share your feelings with
Jesus, the less they need
their own room inside you.

three children under the age of nineteen months seemed like an impossible gift.

It was like training for a 5K and crossing the finish line with a passable time, only to find out you are now scheduled to run a full marathon the next week. I wrestled with all of the feelings—exhilaration, excitement, apprehension, happiness, fear, fear, and more fear.

A few months later the doctor placed Melissa in my arms. Three minutes later he placed Ryan beside her. Melissa blinked up at me with blue-green eyes. She was petite and beautiful. Her brother was all arms and legs. When they placed him next to his sister, he studied my face. He had deep brown eyes like my mother's. Richard brought Leslie in. She was nineteen months old, barely a toddler. She perched on the edge of the hospital bed, fascinated by the two human beings in my arms.

Something transitioned in that moment.

I had no doubt it was going to be hard. There was a mountain of diapers, spit-up, sleepless nights, and tears ahead.

But these were my people.

We'd figure it out. I'd grow as a mom. I'd learn. I'd read a ton of books and pray and ask for help where I could find it. My plans were going out the window and I didn't think for one minute that it would be easy, but that was okay because Richard and I were now a family of five, and it was beautiful. In the midst of my uncertainty and labor and apprehension and fear, God was birthing a story. Not just my story, but also the story of those tiny human beings.

Perhaps that is why Jesus likened joy to childbirth.

God's plan isn't to replace sorrow with joy, but to write a new story of joy through sorrow. That's what he did with the early church. Jesus suffered. He died on the cross. They were afraid. They suffered persecution.

All of these things brought sorrow, but joy was birthed through that sorrow. We see this same pattern all through Scripture.

A story of sorrow

Jesus suffered on the cross.

Jesus left his disciples to return to heaven.

Persecution felt like . . . well, persecution.

A story of joy

Through sorrow the stronghold of sin was conquered.

Through sorrow they were launched into purpose and became the church.

Sorrow scattered them farther than they'd ever been before. As a result, their message spread wide, reaching more people than imagined possible.

Sorrow *and* joy. Waltzing together in heavenly cadence.

Sorrow and joy changed Jesus's followers. It changed the way they viewed their faith. Sorrow and joy even changed the way they viewed Jesus. When Jesus and his followers lived in close proximity, they witnessed him as he performed miracles. Jesus's name had always meant something to them—rabbi, teacher, friend.

After the cross and resurrection, his name took on greater significance. It wasn't just that of a great teacher or a good friend, it was the name of the risen Messiah! Joy burst through sorrow as new stories were written in the name of Jesus. They laid hands on the sick, shared the gospel with the lost, and saw the demonized released from their torment—in his name.

Just as joy was a mark of the early church, it's also a mark of our faith.

As time passed, I started to see the beauty of what God was doing in the year I called scarred. At first it, was like peering through a crystal window, but now I see it more clearly. When I look back at my journals, I see sorrow splashed on the pages. With hindsight, I also see glimpses of the joy being written.

One day, years from now, I will look back and see the deeper reality of God's goodness in those hard places.

Real Life

When I was younger, I shared a problem with an older woman. The details were private. She didn't have any answers, but she listened and I left feeling better.

"Please don't tell anyone" were my last words in our conversation.

The next day I received a phone call. A woman I didn't know well described my problem in vivid detail and then offered advice. I was so stunned I nearly dropped the phone.

When I pulled myself together, I asked how she knew. She said the woman I had talked with the day before had called her. I later discovered the older woman had made several calls moments after I left her home.

When I confronted her gently, the surprise on her face was genuine.

"I just wanted to help," she said.

Most people are not cruel. They aren't trying to make you feel bad or pile hurt on top of already-bruised feelings. They don't want to give you bad advice or betray your trust. But can we be honest? Sometimes the worst advice we receive comes from a place of caring. The other person doesn't know what to say, or thinks she understands what is going on.

We receive it. We listen. Then we walk away feeling ten times more burdened. We may try to explain, but it gets more muddled. I learned a lesson that day. This was someone I would care for as a friend, but I wouldn't go to her as a confidante.

Sharing your feelings is strong, but knowing where to share them is essential.

Talking through your feelings with God is the safest place to begin. A conversation with God may lead you to a godly friend or counselor to help you continue to sort through your feelings.

The whole world doesn't get access. This is not for social media. It's not for that person who advises you to go the opposite of your faith. If anyone makes you feel ashamed of how you feel, then it's

probably an area where God is still working in that person and you keep going. You aren't required to receive any unhelpful or damaging gift of advice. If someone offers a five-step plan that helped her, but it doesn't help you, that doesn't make you a failure. It just means that you are two different people in two different circumstances.

When you share how you feel first with Jesus, you bring it to the One who sees the whole picture. He understands your motivations, where you need help or rest or assurance, as well as those areas where you might need to grow, change direction, wait, or trust.

Knowing whom to trust isn't always easy, but you can trust that he cares about how you feel.



JoyKeeper:

Give Yourself Permission to Feel

Truth

It's obvious, of course, that he didn't go to all this trouble for angels. It was for people like us, children of Abraham. That's why he had to enter into every detail of human life. Then, when he came before God as high priest to get rid of the people's sins, he would have already experienced it all himself—all the pain, all the testing—and would be able to help where help was needed.—Hebrews 2:16–19 MESSAGE

Live It

- Acknowledge how you feel.
- Share it with Jesus first.

Start a habit of talking to Jesus daily. I set a timer for eleven minutes each morning. For the prayer warrior who prays for hours, that might not seem like much. For the distracted in-love-with-Jesus woman like me, it makes perfect sense. It's become the best part of my day. That eleven minutes can seem like a really long time on days when I am hurting or my words don't come easy, but there is still a beautiful work that takes place because I choose to be present. At other times, the minutes fly and I turn off the timer, and we just keep talking.

Jesus, I choose to honestly share how I feel with you, rather than pretend. You see what I do not. You are with me in the good and also harder seasons. I hold up my feelings, that circumstance, or that person on my heart and invite you in. Amen.