

CHOOSE JOY

Devotional

FINDING JOY NO MATTER WHAT
YOU'RE GOING THROUGH

KAY WARREN



a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Kay Warren, Choose Joy Devotional

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Preface

When I wrote *Choose Joy: Because Happiness Isn't Enough*, I revealed that I had a close family member who was living with a mental illness. I spoke about the challenge of choosing joy in the face of a struggle that was very dark and scary at times—both for my loved one and for me. As you may know, our “struggle” became catastrophic loss when our twenty-seven-year-old son, Matthew, took his life in April of 2013 after two decades of intense, painful—even torturous—mental and emotional suffering. The news of his suicide seemed to fill the airwaves for a short period

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PREFACE

of time, and we were thrust into the public spotlight in ways we had always hoped to avoid.

The detailed circumstances of his death are private, but what I am comfortable telling you is that on the morning of April 5, 2013, I had very good reasons to believe he had taken his life, although it wouldn't be confirmed until later that day. The night before I did not sleep, full of anxiety and grief because I was pretty sure Matthew had died. So when I got dressed that morning, I deliberately reached into my jewelry drawer and selected a necklace that said *Choose Joy*. I was sick to my stomach, shaking from head to toe and terrified that what I had dreaded had actually happened. But I put it on because somewhere in the dim recesses of my frozen mind I was certain the only thing that would allow me to survive the loss of my son was what I knew and believed about God . . . and joy. That morning I possessed these three things: the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that *ultimately* everything is going to be okay, and the determined

choice to give my praise to God—even on April 5, 2013.

These ensuing months of shattering grief and loss have severely tested those three convictions, and the opportunities to choose joy—or not—have been endless. I really believe that God allowed me to write *Choose Joy* before Matthew died to prepare me for what was ahead, so that when he died, I had the tools I desperately needed to survive and even thrive during one of life's most tragic losses.

Most of you will not face anything as devastating as the loss of a child due to suicide, but every single day you will face *something* that threatens your attempts to live with joy. Health problems, financial worries, marriage issues, loneliness, unresolved relational conflicts, anxiety about our nation or our world, stress over how your kids are turning out—the devil is at work nonstop to interfere with or interrupt your plans and dreams. Your primary task in life is to get to know God intimately and to send your spiritual roots deep into the soil of his love; to develop convictions and certainties

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about him that will become the source of your strength when happiness isn't enough.

I pray that these brief daily conversations about how to Choose Joy—No Matter What You're Going Through—will inspire you to know God better, to trust him more, and to become convinced that you, too, can choose joy!

The Definition of Joy

He will yet fill your mouth with laughter and
your lips with shouts of joy.

—Job 8:21

Have you ever found yourself thinking, Is joy really possible for messed-up and mixed-up people like me? Isn't joy just a biblical word that has nothing to do with real life? Those are great questions—and just the kind I ask myself. You see, finding joy is a challenge for me. I'm not naturally an "up" person; I'm more of a melancholy. In fact, I've struggled with low-level depression as far back as I can remember. Even as a little girl, I felt the weight of the world on my shoulders. So when I

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ask myself about joy, it's not from the perspective of one of those happy, peppy people who never has a down day. Some days I'm thrilled to just survive! It's really because of my own inability to live with joy that I began to study and explore why my experiences often didn't match up with Scripture.

One of the first things I realized as I studied Scripture is that the Bible gives some commands that are extremely hard to understand—and even harder to live out. And one of the hardest commands is the one found in James 1:2: “When troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy” (NLT).

Are you kidding me? When trouble comes my way, my first thoughts aren't usually about experiencing great joy. My typical reaction is more along the lines of fear, panic, worry, and even hopelessness.

And yet in Scripture I read about the life of Jesus Christ, the lives of people such as King David; Mary, the mother of Jesus; the apostle Paul; and James, the half brother of Jesus. I read how they reacted to trouble and sorrow

and hard times. And when I read about their lives, it is clear that joy—even in pain—is something we as Christians can expect to experience on a regular basis.

In my struggle to match my reality with the truth of Scripture, I've realized part of the problem was my definition of joy. I thought that joy was "feeling good all the time." And truly, that's impossible. Even for those of you who are more naturally upbeat and optimistic, feeling good doesn't always happen. So if my *definition* wasn't accurate, there was no way I could experience joy.

You and I have to start someplace more realistic, more true to Scripture, and more attainable for all of us. A few years ago I read a quote that said joy is knowing that God is in control of our lives. I liked it, but I wanted more—I needed to put more words around it to give the complete picture. So here's what I've come up with from studying Scripture:

Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet

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confidence that ultimately everything is going to be all right, and the determined choice to praise God in all things.

There's nothing in that definition about happy feelings, because as we all know, happiness is fleeting.

I also realized I had the wrong picture of a life of joy, and maybe you do too. We tend to think that life comes in hills and valleys, a series of good things and bad things happening to us. But really it's much more like train tracks. Every day of your life, delightful things happen. Things that bring pleasure and contentment and beauty. *At the exact same time*, however, there are painful things that happen to you or those you love; things that are disappointing, hurtful, and even full of sorrow. These two tracks—joy and sorrow—run parallel to each other every single moment of your life. So while you are experiencing something amazing, there is the nagging realization that it's not perfect . . . and while you're experiencing something painful, there's the glorious realization that there is still beauty

and loveliness to be found. They are inseparable, always running right next to each other.

Our goal, then, is not to figure out how to live only on the joy side of the tracks and avoid the sorrow side, but it's how to live on the parallel tracks where joy and sorrow run side by side. I don't know if you've realized it or not, but when you look into the brightness of the horizon, the tracks become one, no longer distinguishable as two separate tracks.

And that's the way it will be for us too. One day, these parallel tracks of joy and sorrow will merge into one. The day we meet Jesus Christ in person and see the brightness of who he is, it will all come together for us . . . the sorrow will disappear forever and only the joy will remain. And it will *all* make complete sense. Until then, we live with both joy and sorrow.

Will you pray with me?

*Father, I want to choose joy in my life.
Rekindle hope in my heart. Help me to
keep seeking the joy that belongs to me
in Jesus Christ. In his name, amen.*