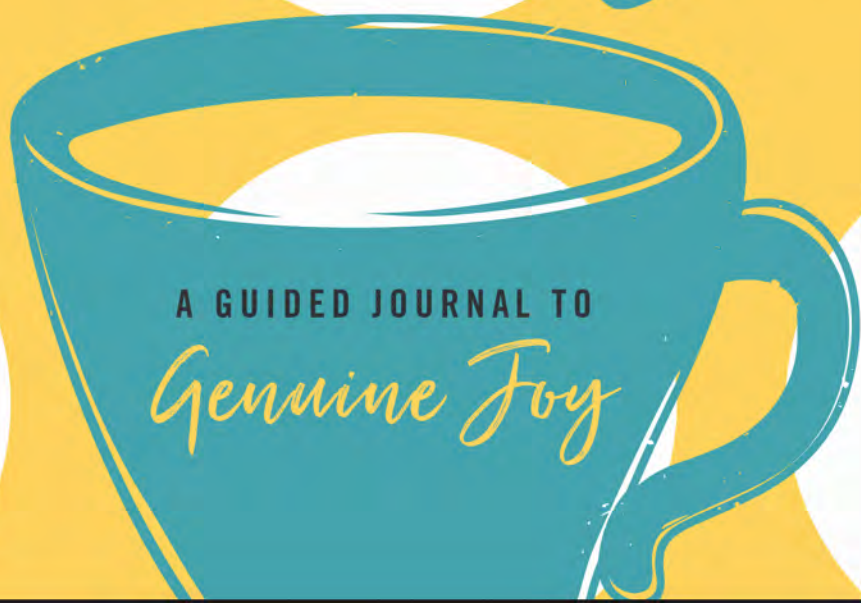


New York Times Bestselling Author

MAX LUCADO

Happy
Today



A GUIDED JOURNAL TO

Genuine Joy

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ISBN 978-1-4002-1724-3

Printed in China

19 20 21 22 23 DSC 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Happy Again

Joy seems to be in short supply. Everyone looks for it, but few seem to find it. According to one study, only 33 percent of Americans described themselves as “happy”.¹ How could this be? We enjoy unprecedented medical advancements and technological luxuries, yet two-thirds of us live under a gray cloud.

Let’s see what we can do about it. This book is a guided journal to help you find genuine joy. Happiness is available. Finding it may take some work and redirection of habits, but it is yours for the seeking. Make happiness your quest. Take time to pause, reflect, journal, breathe, and, in doing so, create a pathway to genuine joy.

It all begins by managing the way you see people.

Jesus was once asked to state the greatest command. If only He had done just that. If only Jesus had stopped with one command. One was sufficient. One would have been enough. No one would have complained or asked for a second command. In fact, only one was requested. A religious leader asked him:

“Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:28–31 NIV)

How many answers did the man seek? One.

How many did he receive? Two!

HAPPY AGAIN

If Jesus had stopped with one command, we would be satisfied. But he didn't. He offered a second, and it's a doozy. "The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself'" (Mark 12:31 NIV).

With one sentence, Jesus brought home the pathway to genuine joy. He brought it right into the middle of traffic jams and conference meetings and greeting strangers and meeting neighbors and loving kids.

"It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Indeed, loving people is good for us.

People? Aren't people the problem standing in the way of your happiness? Try to find a parking place, and you can't. Why? People. Try to get in to see the doctor, and the next opening is two years from Thursday. Why? People.

All of life's ups and downs can be traced back to people. Car pileups. Moral letdowns. System foul-ups. Emotional break-downs. System snarl-ups. Verbal dress downs. All because there are so many people.

No wonder the Bible has so much to say about finding joy in the act of sharing it. Happiness happens when you give it away.

God's solution for the ills of society is a quorum of unselfish, life-giving, God-loving folks who flow through neighborhoods and businesses like cleansing agents, bringing in the good and flushing out the bad.

Everyone else shows up at work with a scowl and a list of things to get done. But you? You still have your work to accomplish, but you also have this pursuit: *Whom can I help today? Which person can I encourage? Who needs a little sunshine?*

Maybe the new employee who occupies the cubicle down the hall. Or the neighbor whose Chihuahua wanders into your yard.

HAPPY AGAIN

Or your teacher. Yes, your teacher. The one who sucks lemons for breakfast and devours students for lunch. Others avoid her. Not you. You look for ways to lift her spirits, brighten her day, compliment her, understand her, and thank her.

The world, and your world, will be different because you tried.

“Love your neighbor as yourself.” Let’s put the command of Christ to the test. Let’s make others happy and see if we aren’t the ones who are the happiest.

ONE

Scripture has more than twenty-seven hundred passages that contain words like *joy, happiness, gladness, merriment, pleasure, celebration, cheer, laughter, delight, jubilation, feasting, blessing,* and *exultation*.¹ Our joy level matters to God.

This is no call to naiveté or superficial happy talk. Jesus spoke candidly about sin, death, and the needs of the human heart. Yet he did so with hope. His purpose statement read, “I came to give life with joy and abundance” (John 10:10 THE VOICE). Jesus was happy and wants us to be the same.



And the angel said to them, “Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

—Luke 2:10–11 RSV



TWO


How long has it been since you felt a level of contagious, infectious, unflappable, unstoppable happiness? Maybe your answer is “I feel that way all the time.” If so, God bless you. For many, perhaps most of us, the answer is “Well, it’s been a while. I used to be happy, but then life took its toll.”

“The disease took my health.”

“The economy took my job.”

“The jerk took my heart.”

And as a result something pilfered our happiness. It can seem such a fragile thing, this joy. Still we keep searching for it, longing for it. That’s what this book is meant to help you find: the unexpected door to joy.



Sing praise to the LORD, you saints of His,
And give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name.
For His anger is but for a moment,
His favor is for life;
Weeping may endure for a night,
But joy comes in the morning.

—Psalm 30:4–5

THREE

The oft-used front door to happiness is the one described by the advertising companies: acquire, retire, and aspire to drive faster, dress trendier, and drink more.

Yet for all its promise, it fails to deliver. There is another option. But you might need to change doors.

The motto on the front door says “Happiness happens when you get.” The sign on the lesser-used back door counters “Happiness happens when you give.”



“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

—Acts 20:35



FOUR

Jesus was accused of much, but he was never, ever described as a grump, sourpuss, or self-centered jerk. People didn't groan when he appeared.

He called them by name.

He listened to their stories.

He answered their questions.

He visited their sick relatives and helped their sick friends.

Thousands came to hear him. Hundreds chose to follow him. They shut down their businesses and walked away from careers to be with him. He brought joy to the people of first-century Palestine. And he wants to bring joy to the people of this generation, and he has enlisted some special agents of happiness to do the job—you and me.



“The thief approaches with malicious intent, looking to steal, slaughter, and destroy; I came to give life with joy and abundance. I am the good shepherd.”

—John 10:10–11 THE VOICE

Does the idea of Jesus being happy, attending parties, smiling, and laughing make you uncomfortable? Why or why not?

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*Happiness
happens when
you give it
away.*

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FIVE

*y*ou can't control your genetics. You aren't in charge of the weather, the traffic, or the occupant of the White House. But you can always increase the number of smiles on our planet. You can lower the anger level in your city. You—yes, you—can help people to sleep better, laugh more, hum instead of grumble, walk instead of stumble. You can lighten the load and brighten the day of other human beings. And don't be surprised when you begin to sense a newfound joy yourself.



“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples.”

—John 13:34–35

