

A REALISTIC GUIDE TO UNLOCKING JOY IN LIFE'S  
MESSY, MUNDANE & MAGNIFICENT MOMENTS

LOVE

*(even when you don't*

YOUR

*like it all the time)*

LIFE

RACHEL AWTREY

Life can be hard. Rachel has written a beautiful guide for living a full, rich, and abundant life even when it doesn't go how we'd like. As a woman who's walked through her fair share of unmet expectations, disappointments, and challenging circumstances, I recommend this to anyone struggling to make the most of the life they have—even if it doesn't look quite how you hoped it would.

JORDAN LEE DOOLEY, national bestselling author of *Own Your Everyday* and *Embrace Your Almost*

Rachel Awtrey is the girl who speaks to celebration—she helps us see that, even in hardship, we are able to find joy. This new book is an anthem for those of us struggling to see past our circumstances, reminding us that simple day-to-day changes can add up to a new, healthier perspective.

BOB GOFF, *New York Times* bestselling author, speaker, and coach

*Love Your Life (Even When You Don't Like It All the Time)* is the refreshing message we all need in a culture that lures us in with having it all, being it all, and killing it—all the time. You will come away feeling like you just sat with a best friend over coffee, having a hopeful change of perspective on your life, your mouth hurting from smiling so much, and filled with the strength to face your reality with true joy and gratitude. You will fall in love with Rachel, but even more so, you will see your life as a true gift even in the hard and mundane that you face daily.

ALYSSA JOY BETHKE, author of *When Doing It All Is Undoing You* and *Satisfied*

If you're craving an effortless and uplifting read, *Love Your Life* is for you. With honesty, witty humor, and spunk, Rachel not only urges us to claim the joy available in Jesus but gives us the practical tools to do so. Whether you're a wife, mom, entrepreneur, student, or empty nester, these pages hold truth for you.

TARA SUN, author of *Surrender Your Story* and host of the podcast *Truth Talks with Tara*

Rachel Awtrey's *Love Your Life (Even When You Don't Like It All the Time)* is a breath of fresh air. With warmth, honesty, and refreshing humor, Rachel invites readers to embrace the messy, mundane, and magnificent moments with a new perspective. This book isn't about pretending everything is perfect—it's about learning to find joy right where you are with God's transforming grace. Rachel's relatable storytelling makes *Love Your Life* feel like a heart-to-heart with a trusted friend, reminding us that even in the unexpected, there's beauty to be found. This isn't just a book; it's a companion for anyone seeking practical ways to cultivate joy and resilience. Rachel's wisdom expertly guided me to love my life more. Prepare to be inspired and changed by this must-read!

LARA CASEY ISAACSON, author of *Cultivate* and *Make It Happen*

Somewhere along the way we were convinced that a perfect life on this side of heaven was possible, and our fragile hearts were broken when we realized we'd have to fight for real joy. Thankfully, we've been gifted this beautiful book that Rachel has written to show us how to fight well. You can expect honest stories, practical rhythms, and finding magic in your very own life. What a gift.

TONI COLLIER, preacher, author of *Don't Try This Alone*, and podcast host

Rachel is a gifted writer, and through her relatability, storytelling, and truth, she makes you feel seen. Through her words, you feel like a friend is helping you not only to find joy in your life but also to blossom in whatever season you find yourself. I recommend this for everyone and anyone, but especially for young women in their twenties and thirties. Rachel will teach you how to embrace the life God has given you.

GRACE VALENTINE, bestselling author, podcast host, and speaker

The pages of this book felt like a gentle invitation. Rachel blends her heartfelt stories with practical advice, inviting you to settle into the joy that's already yours. I'm inspired to look inside the walls of my own home and to refresh my own rhythms rather than looking to "what's next" or "what's better" to find the life I love. The better is already mine for the taking, and Rachel showed me that.

NANCY RAY, host of the *Work and Play* podcast and mom of five

If you're tired of chasing joy and ready to simply embody it, this book is for you. Rachel's writing perfectly blends vulnerable storytelling with practical guidance, offering a hands-on approach to cultivating abundance in life's messy and hard moments. Rich with wisdom that's immediately actionable, this book had me furiously taking notes—and within hours, I was already revamping areas of my daily routine that were in desperate need of a joy upgrade. It's an empowering read for anyone ready to enter the “abundantly more” God invites us to experience daily with Him.

HANNAH BRENCHER, author of *The Unplugged Hours* and *Come Matter Here*

Relatable. Highly practical. Gracious. Deeply comforting. Life-giving. This book will meet you exactly where you are, especially if it's in a hard season or unexpected circumstance, and help you discover how to sing a different song over your life, with the help of the Holy Spirit. Rachel's words feel like a best friend sitting in your favorite comfy spot, offering you a warm cup and intently listening, while also having a bag full of maracas, soul-care items, and FUN to help you find your feet again. What a gift this book will be to those who need a true friend to help them fight for joy, recognize the fingerprints of God right where they are, and know that they are seen.

CLEERE CHERRY REAVES, bestselling author, podcaster, and owner of @cleerelystated

Reading this book felt like a breath of fresh air—a much-needed, cool drink of water for the soul. Rachel has a way of weaving together truth, courage, and storytelling that brings both tears and laughter, reminding us of the beauty found in both the brutal and beautiful parts of life. Her words don't just inspire; they invite, leading the reader to a deeper awareness of God's presence in everyday moments. This book is a treasure, one that lingers long after the last page is turned.

EMILIE McCORMACK, Breakaway Ministries

Rachel Awtrey serves up the REAL TALK we all so desperately need right now, with all the honesty, vulnerability, and practical advice of a trusted friend. The pages of *Love Your Life* are filled with Rachel's signature infectious joy and lighthearted humor, which she expertly uses to guide us—like a beacon in the dark—as we navigate into the more hard, holy, and heartbreaking parts of a life we might not LIKE very much right now. Reminding us that we could “wish our entire life away waiting for the next best thing” if we're not careful, Rachel instead points us to this powerful truth: life can be extremely difficult AND incredibly good—both can be true—but we can't fix what we won't get honest about. Rachel was BORN to write this book . . . and she can BOSS me around any time she wants! Read this *beautiful* book!

MARY MARANTZ, bestselling author of *Underestimated* and host of the *Mary Marantz Show*



*love your life*

*(even when you don't like it all the time)*



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*To my dad, Bill, who left a trail of "legacy" joy.*



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# INTRODUCTION

My friends joke that I have a “black thumb,” which is their kind way of saying plants come to my home to die. I’m guilty and will admit I’m that girl. Even though I know they won’t last very long, I can’t stop myself wanting to take my best shot at bringing home a spunky or colorful houseplant.

This time, it was an orchid.

Here’s the thing I love about orchids: they are tall, stunning focal points for any room, which counts as decor in my book. As most plants do, this orchid came with a stake in the soil that listed care instructions so you “don’t mess it up.” In true Rachel fashion, I took that eyesore out as soon as I got home and tossed it in the garbage.

*It's a plant. How hard can this be? All you have to do is water it!*

Weeks went by, and I was the proudest I'd ever been when it came to my plant portfolio. I constantly sent update pictures to my friend group's message thread so they had evidence that I was, in fact, proving them wrong. I was redeeming my plant personality! I even gave my plant a name—Ophelia—to officially welcome her as a member of the family.

A few days later, Ophelia's petals started dropping. *Maybe she just needs more water?*

I carried the orchid to the sink, turned the faucet on, and let a stream soak the soil. As I took the orchid back to its home base, more petals kept falling off. Thirty-six hours later, every last bloom was gone. I was staring at a naked green twig with floppy leaves.

If I had kept the stake and read the information, I would have known that orchids actually don't need to be watered every day. A dip in the water so the bottom roots can drink once a week is enough for a thriving orchid. Because of my overwatering, the roots had rotted. Although there was a chance that Ophelia could be revived, the odds were slim. I'd have to take her out of her pot, cut the rotten roots off, and repot her in a container with a little bit more space to grow. And, obviously, I'd have to stop watering her so much.

I was doing my best to treat the symptoms of what I thought was a thirsty plant. But if I had known what to do, Ophelia would still be blooming.

Much like me.

Following the world's directions to loving our lives can be a lot like continuing to water an overhydrated plant.

When I “don't like life,” I'm tempted to buy the newest trendy accessory, attempt a new recipe, make a new friend, binge a new series, book a vacation or staycation, or—heaven forbid—buy a new houseplant. I've been taught to treat my symptoms and try my best to get things right, to make myself happy and pull myself up by the laces of my favorite pair of sneakers (I'm not so much for bootstraps).

But more often than not, that's not what's needed. More often than not, I'm only adding to the problem.

How do we stop the madness? Hindsight, they say, is twenty-twenty: if I had called some of my gardening friends before things got so dire for Ophelia, the diagnosis might not have been terminal. After all, there were signs that something was up and Ophelia was starting to die. The leaves were wilted instead of firm, the stem became a bit more droopy, and the blooms weren't so perky anymore. All of this happened before the petals fell off.

Can we train ourselves to notice the wilting leaves, the droopy stem, and the blooms that are no longer thriving? Can we slow down long enough to get curious instead of charging forward as we always have?

I'm not just talking about houseplants, of course.

Part of liking your life is admitting that, sometimes, you don't. We can't fix what we won't get honest about. If today was challenging, frustrating, or chaotic, let's call it what it is. Because if the reason for the bad day stays hidden, tomorrow

may look very similar. And sometimes it feels really embarrassing to admit that the typical things are piling up, and even though you're trying so hard to keep things alive, your petals . . . well, they're starting to droop. It doesn't mean you're not capable or resilient or that you can't have a green thumb when it comes to life.

Really, it's the first step toward blooming.

PART ONE



*unlocking joy*



*the keys you didn't know you had*



CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS JOY?  
(BECAUSE THE DICTIONARIES GOT IT  
WRONG AND WE MAY HAVE TOO)

*Anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows,  
but only empties today of its strength.*

CHARLES SPURGEON

My husband, Thomas, is a pilot—and he’s out of town again. His flight was delayed by weather or some maintenance issue—I’m not sure, and I wasn’t able to stay on the phone long enough or hear him over the whines and cries of my two toddlers fighting in the background. One of them got sick earlier this week, and yesterday someone shared the other’s milk, and now—oh, look! They’re both sick.

*You can do this, Rachel. You just have to keep on keeping on.  
You’ve got to be kidding me right now.  
I cannot catch a break.*

*Bless it. Of course this would happen to me.*

*Ugh.*

My day has been so busy keeping them occupied and off one another, administering medicine, and offering snuggles that my hands haven't stayed empty enough to throw that load of laundry into the washer. And if I did want to put a new basket of clothes in the wash, that would mean rerunning the cycle of laundry I forgot about, which is now spoiled and needs another rinse. A quick SOS call to my sister-in-law Lauren will help. Then I can get dinner on the table, and maybe I can call my neighbor Katy to see if we could pop over for a change of scenery—oh, wait, I can't bring sick kids to someone else's house. Never mind.

*Don't dwell—put on a happy face. Your life is better than so many others'.*

*This is just a season—no need to feel sad. It's not going to change anything.*

But before I know it, the molehills turn into mountains. I trip over one too many Hot Wheels scattered across the floor. One too many flight delays force me to be flexible, one too many external factors outside of my control demand I “go with the flow,” something I imagine all the cool moms on Instagram can do effortlessly—but for me it feels like being dropped into another country without speaking the language.

In my head, I knew it was just a bad day.

So why, in my heart, did it feel like a bad life?

## So Hard, but So Good

I'll be honest that this—admitting that sometimes I don't like my very likable life—isn't a place I want to go. I want to be the happy girl who doesn't constantly complain, who can be spontaneous and quirky and laugh at jokes and let her kids play in the dirt and not freak out, and who embraces the present for what it is instead of what it could be.

Sometimes I am that girl. I can throw a party like no one else; I can revel in my kids running wild in the backyard. But I told myself that if I ever put pen to paper, I would try to be honest even when it hurts.

And honestly, sometimes I'm the other girl too.

It's the reason I cried yesterday and the conversation that will probably come up again next week when my girlfriends ask how I'm doing: even though everything looks good on paper, even though I've worked really hard to build a beautiful, shiny life . . . there are days that still feel a little lackluster.

Can we all give each other permission to stop hiding and admit that both girls can coexist? We can absolutely be grateful for the life that God has given us—and sometimes we can have days or months or years where, even in that gratitude, we wish things were a little different.

Maybe you've seen the overflowing sink of dishes, the muddy paw prints on the freshly cleaned couch, the toddler who knocked over the pile of laundry you just folded, the Wi-Fi that goes out right when you're trying to finish that

work project. You've thought, *Things should be better than they are*, only to realize you're wishing your life away by waiting for the next best thing.

Or maybe it's not the little things getting you down—it's the whole season you find yourself in. *Rachel, I WISH I were only dealing with a plethora of Hot Wheels to trip over*. Maybe you're bearing weighty circumstances that you can't see the end of. Caring for a medically fragile child. Struggling to catch your breath in the throes of postpartum. Wandering through the wilderness of a dry spell in your relationship with God. These seasons aren't solvable today, but they're supposed to be solvable someday, right? Right?!

Even worse, maybe your world has been rocked by larger, earth-shattering moments you never would've chosen—yet still have to live through.

I've been there. I *am* there. But here is what I've learned, here is what I know for sure: life is so hard, but it's so good. I know—even though we've never met—that your life is worth liking, even on your worst days. I know it because that's how God designed it—how He designed you.

He designed all of us to see the need for something far bigger and better than what is currently sitting in front of us and in our way of experiencing joy. Both can be true: life can be extremely difficult and incredibly good.

It can be broken and beautiful.

It can be strained and strategic.

It can be hard and holy.

## So What Is Joy, Anyway?

If you're in a spot where your days are lackluster, if you're in a spot where you want to like what you have but don't, let's get real about it.

I think about all of the times that I'm asked quickly in passing, "How are you?" and I respond, "Great!" There is a time and a place, and the frozen pizza aisle at the grocery store is not always the time to go into why life feels off. But when we carry this habit into rooms and conversations where the honesty does belong, I wonder how often we'll miss out on being fully known because who we pretend to be is not who we really are in that moment.

You don't need to "cheer up, buttercup."

You don't need to "have an attitude of gratitude."

You don't need to "just look on the bright side."

This is not a book to "bibbidi-bobbidi-boo" fix your problems. We have enough of those voices in our own heads. It's also not a book to tell you the opposite, that liking your life is one fancy gadget or affiliate link away—that in three easy steps, you can build a self-reliant life where you don't need Jesus.

This is a book to teach you how to fight for joy. It can be really hard to like your life sometimes. It's not just going to happen. You have to work for it. I don't want things to get in the way of seeing and then living lives that are abundant and beautiful. But the people who like their lives are the people who are willing to fight.

And your life is worth fighting for.

But before we can fight for a joy-filled life, we've got to understand what joy is . . . and what it's not.

Maybe we've had the concept of joy all backward?

I'll go first: I thought joy was in a destination. But it's in the journey.

I thought joy was a gift to earn once I "got through something." But it's available right now.

I thought joy was what I had to look forward to. But it's in the mundane right in front of us.

I thought joy was feeling happy all the time. But there is a very distinct difference between joy and happiness, even though many people assume they mean the same thing.

Happiness is the feeling you have based on what's happening *around* you.

Joy is the feeling you have based on what's happening *inside* you.

It's not dependent on your circumstances, relationships, or other emotions, and it can exist when everything else feels like it's falling apart. Joy is not toxic positivity. It's nodding to the issues around you without bowing to them.

Want to know one of the best things about joy? Joy can be found wherever you look for it. Happiness can't.

When you start to look for it, you can't help but notice it . . .  
. . . everywhere.

The way the morning light comes through your window and makes floating dust motes look like glitter.

The way the smile lines crease the sides of your eyes from so many grinning moments.

The way the sky turns pink before it turns blue if you catch it at the right time of sunrise or sunset.

The way a “Hey, I’m thinking about you” text can make all the difference in our day.

I could go on.

How kind of God to give us these detailed gifts to bring us joy. He is at work in our lives, going to great lengths to bring us back to Him. Let’s make room to see it.

When I have conversations like this with dear friends in my life who trust me to help them hold their realities, this is about the point where they start tapping out. They think pursuing joy in their everyday lives is too idealistic, assume that I truly have no idea what they’re walking through. But let’s pretend you and I are at that table, face-to-face. I’d grip your hands like I grip theirs and tell you a truth that changed my life: we can’t have good news if we don’t have bad news. It’s quite difficult to enjoy a peak without hiking the hill. If we’ve never experienced heartbreak or hopelessness, then healing and hope are easily casualized instead of marveled over for what they actually are. There’s nothing to celebrate if there’s nothing to groan over: childbirth and birthdays to come, the process and the product, the fight to run the race and the triumphant finish. It’s a both/and.

So many of us find ourselves overwhelmed and buried in what we are facing right here, right now. We become so

tunnel-visioned that we miss what God is doing to our left and our right.

Let me ask you this: Can you see where God is showing up for you today? No shame if you can't. It may even be painful to lean in and mentally be where you are because it's just not where you want to be. Please don't believe the fairy tale that putting blinders on to get the job done will help you through life. Being present is where we see His presence.

### There's Enough Room

Maybe we've avoided talking about joy and having that as our baseline because it seems tone-deaf in a world that often seems like it's falling apart. "Life is life-ing" is the typical 911 text I send to my friends when I feel constantly hit by waves and finally get my head above water high enough to call out for help.

I joke with our neighbors that when life just gets too stinking hard and we need a break, we'll set off our car alarms as a cry for help.

For the longest time, I misunderstood joy—I would have viewed these "car-alarm" moments as episodes that joy could never be part of. But now that I have an accurate idea of what joy is, I've realized it's present in these moments too. Maybe that's where the world has gotten it wrong all along: joy and chaos, pain, grief, and hardship can, and do, coexist.

Life is actually really hard.

We must stop believing that life has to be easy before we experience a life of abundance.

We must stop believing that it's one or the other: fullness of joy or fullness of grief.

We must stop believing that we must choose between healing and facing reality.

The enemy of joy is not grief or hardship or suffering. Grief, hardship, suffering, sadness, and anger all have a place. There's enough room at the table for all these feelings. Experiencing joy does not mean that your hardships or "car-alarm" moments are any less real; it just makes them lighter, briefer, more purposeful.

The enemy of joy is the enemy of our souls and the enemy of us living "our best life"—the life God intends us to have with Him.

The tension is where we see our need for resources beyond our own. God is kind to weave Himself in and through every detail that we could delight in and depend on Him for.

Because let's be real for a second: if life were comfortable, would we see the epic need for a Comforter?

If we could solve all our problems on our own, would we be quick to pray? Would we raise our eyes and marvel at all the ways God sees us through and sits with us in the midst of hard things? Or would we hurry to take the credit and pat ourselves on the back?

I have a feeling if my life were beautiful without being broken, strategic without moments of strain, and holy without

anything hard, it would be a challenge to lean in and see my great need for a relationship with the Lord.

God has designed us and everything else in creation to ache for Him and eventually be renewed by Him. And because He's an incredible Father, He gives us beautiful, joyful lives in the midst of the brokenness on earth. He gives us strategic relationships even when other relationships are strained, and He gives us holy hope when life gets hard. As the psalmist says of God, "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11). We have access to the fullness of joy, and God has pleasures in store for our lives.

But here is what I also know: the enemy wants us to live a subpar, mediocre, almost-but-not-quite kind of life. He wants us to feel stuck in the could've's and should've's. He wants the past to haunt us and the grief to overwhelm us and act like a bungee cord attaching our hearts to the hurt. Just as much as God wants us to experience the joy of life around us, the enemy wants to keep us distracted—too confused and fatigued to pursue joy. Because when we agree that rough moments and seasons get the final say, the enemy wins. The opposer to our abundant, beautiful, God-wink-filled lives smirks, knowing that we won't experience the fullness of who God is.

I have good news for you: it doesn't matter where you've been, what you've done, who you are, or who you're not—you aren't disqualified from loving your life. This isn't me

dismissing you or what you're going through. The opposite, my friend. I see you. There's a reason you're in the place you find yourself, and I hold space for that. You get every permission to feel the way you feel, and I agree that yes, this life can be really hard.

But I also want to give you hope. If we can follow the trail of annoyances, irritations, transitions, heaviness, and barriers to contentment—well, my friends, then we'll know what it takes for long-lasting joy to be ours.

## Good Means Abundant

*This is different than I expected.*

*This is really tough.*

These are thoughts I have on a regular basis. My imagination is pretty lively, and I think up a lot of best-case scenarios. When reality doesn't quite live up to what I pictured, I find myself a little twitchy. I've talked with enough friends to know it's not just a "me" thing. Frustration is just a missed expectation. When life lets me down, I find myself frustrated.

When my date night with Thomas doesn't go the way I planned, I'm bothered and discontented. No matter if our meal was amazing, our conversation was fruitful, and we got ice cream at the end.

When the park day turns into a chaotic adventure and doesn't meet my "I'm a cool mom" aspirations, I feel defeated. No matter if my kids left sweaty and happy, we ran into friends at the playground, or we stopped for a fun treat.

But what about the frustrating moments that feel a bit heavier?

When we found ourselves struggling to pay rent in the early days of marriage, and it left us without the budget to do anything fun, I felt unsettled.

When it took us longer to get pregnant than we thought it would, I felt discouraged.

When the military has us move *again*—sooner than we anticipated—and I find myself hovering over cardboard boxes, wrapping up our items once more, I feel disappointed.

In those fragile and frustrating times, it's easy for me to believe that it "shouldn't be this difficult," and therefore something's wrong with me or wrong with where I am.

It's also easy for me to assume that because life is tough or different than it ought to be, it's bad. This mindset steers me away from all the beauty that can be found within the pivots.

In moments like those, I'm tempted to "just get through it" to the other side. But when I'm so focused on getting through, how much do I miss in my peripheral vision by hoping joy will be easy to find once I'm out of this season I didn't sign up for?

Perhaps the grass isn't greener on the other side. Perhaps it's actually greener when I choose to water it where I'm standing.

A "good" life doesn't mean a life that's comfortable, easy, or free of obstacles. A "good" life is an abundant life (see John 10:10). And an abundant life is one that's full: full of the joy God provides.

Here's the secret to finding a joyful, abundant life worth celebrating even when you didn't sign up for the one you're living. Remember that both can be true: life can be really hard, but it can also be really good.

### Grab the Grocery Cart, Please

"We just need detergent and creamer!" Thomas said as I rounded the corner, grabbed the car keys, and headed out the front door. It was one of those grocery trips that maybe we could get by without, but it would be nice to do the laundry that night and have creamer in our coffee the next morning.

"Detergent and creamer. Detergent and creamer," I reminded myself. Not that I was worried I'd forget—I was trying to keep myself from adding to the list. You probably know this well: you go into a store for one thing but leave with several additional items. In our defense, sometimes we don't know we need something until we see it, right? That vibrant bouquet of flowers would look perfect on your table. That treat would be a fun surprise for your child. And a friend just had a baby, so a pick-me-up from the bakery would be a sweet gesture. Then there's the yogurt on sale, the peanut butter you remembered you're out of, and the gum near the checkout. Before you realize it, your arms are full, and now you regret not grabbing a grocery cart when you first walked through the doors.

"You've got your hands full!" exclaims the grocery store clerk.

“Sure do!”

“Should’ve grabbed a grocery cart.”

“Sure should have!”

*How did detergent and creamer turn into this? Do I really need it all?*

I really wish I could say grabbing more than I originally needed and trying to make it without dropping anything doesn’t happen that often, but I confess it does. I’ll go a little further and say that this experience goes beyond the grocery store.

It happens in the way I manage my time: *I can pull that off this afternoon.*

It happens with the way I take on responsibilities: *I’m sure I can fit that in. It’s just once a week.*

It happens with the way I view life. *If I can just make it through this season, I’ll be okay.*

Before I know it, my arms are full (and not in a good way).

We’re all carrying things, whether it’s a job, a family, a dream, grief, difficulties, celebrations, expectations, fill in the blank. Some of these are light, some heavy, some clunky. And that’s life: picking up, dropping off, switching arms. Isn’t it?

Maybe freedom from these things doesn’t come from carrying them differently or solving the world’s biggest problems or learning how to cope and numb ourselves. Maybe freedom comes from putting them down.

I’m not suggesting you become irresponsible and neglect what’s yours to hold. But if you’re used to juggling it all, I

have an idea for you. What if the freedom we keep talking about doesn't look like solved problems but like supporting everything with something other than your own two arms?

Somewhere along the way, we started believing that muscling through our hardest days by carrying the weight ourselves was a badge of honor. We believed it would make us stronger, more intelligent, more inspiring to the people around us. The idea of "vulnerability" turned into this ideal of sharing all the clunkiness in our life while the idea of actually enjoying something became "fake." But we're not any more mature or wise because we skipped out on the fun.

Grocery stores have carts for a reason, after all: to carry everything for us, to take it from aisle to aisle, to disperse the weight and make it all a bit lighter.

That's joy.

It's a gift from God that allows us to see life as fun and enjoy what's around us even though we're pushing heavy things.

It creates more margin to focus on the tasks at hand.

It gives us levity to survive our hardest days.

For the things you don't have a choice whether to carry (like your child's chronic illness, a messy divorce, grief over the loved one you lost, the heartache that lingers after harsh words were said), may I suggest you place them in the cart? Jesus invites us to set these things down and trust His mechanics over our ability to muscle through: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

So not only is joy *available* to us, but it's also an invitation.

My prayer for you is that joy becomes so natural, so easy, so habitual that it is just something you do. I pray that you won't know any other way to grocery shop than to push a cart and set all your items inside.

## No, Really—You Can Do This

If you lean in and take a chance on this idea of finding joy in the middle of a life you don't always like, you will walk away from this book a different person—for the sake of yourself, your home, your community, and the Kingdom.

There are a lot of glorious guides, like self-help books and personal development strategies, to help us identify how we feel and what we feel and what to do with those feelings, but I thrive on the practicals—the road maps and to-do lists, the scripts for conversation and “just tell me how” answers to my questions. That's what I want to give you.

We'll start by looking at how we approach life—because that's going to have everything to do with how we feel about our day-to-day. You may be constantly tripped by hurts and hang-ups that are just plain annoying. You may be working through a tough season that you can't see the end of. You may be walking through a tragedy, and life feels fragile. As much as I wish it were true (because, heck, things would be a whole lot easier), there is no one-size-fits-all approach to how we walk through life, deal with difficulties, or find ways to pursue joy through it all. So we've got to do a pulse check, find

the heartbeat and rhythm of our current life, and determine the appropriate next steps to take with grace.

I get it—the idea of looking at life squarely and being honest with where we are can be daunting. I promise to make it fun, and I'll always share first. That's what friends are for.

After that, we'll get down to the practical: how we can actively pursue joy in the day-to-day through our rhythms, our friendships, our homes, and more. Once we've established these patterns of joyful living, we won't be quite so whiplashed when things fall apart.

Just as much as I want you to like your life (love it, even) and live in abundance that other people can't help but notice, God wants that for you way more. Take your time. Take what you need. Ask God to show up majorly in your life through the reading of this book, and start an account of where you notice Him moving. Because He is.

Imagine the best version of you that still has laundry piling up, still trips on a Hot Wheels toy, still has the person who's hard to love in your life, still has the responsibilities you have to carry, but . . .

You feel more vibrant.

You notice the beauty around you.

You see the margin to include others.

You have the space to brush off silly things that once tripped you up.

You have the mental bandwidth to have conversations without being depleted.

You see the opportunities for play.

LOVE YOUR LIFE (EVEN WHEN YOU DON'T LIKE IT ALL THE TIME)

You turn to prayer before anything else.  
You find joy when you surrender.  
This is for you. This is so possible.