



Love Life Again

FINDING JOY WHEN
LIFE IS HARD

Individual Study Guide
Group Leader's Guide

Tracie Miles

LOVE LIFE AGAIN
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Contents

A Note from Tracie	4	
Individual Study Guide	5	
Chapter 1: Embrace Contentment		6
Chapter 2: Recognize Your Value		9
Chapter 3: Love Yourself		12
Chapter 4: Accept Forgiveness		17
Chapter 5: Forgive and Forget		19
Chapter 6: Conquer Loneliness		21
Chapter 7: Be a Friend		24
Chapter 8: Laugh More		26
Chapter 9: Turn Complaining into Praising		28
Chapter 10: Stop Stressing Over the Future		30
Chapter 11: Develop a Thankful Heart		32
Chapter 12: Be the Answer to Someone's Prayer		34
Chapter 13: Reignite Your Faith		36
Chapter 14: Conclusion		38
A Group Leader's Guide	40	
Note from Tracie	41	
Introduction		42
Chapter 1: Embrace Contentment		43
Chapter 2: Recognize Your Value		44
Chapter 3: Love Yourself		45
Chapter 4: Accept Forgiveness		46
Chapter 5: Forgive and Forget		47
Chapter 6: Conquer Loneliness		48
Chapter 7: Be a Friend		49
Chapter 8: Laugh More		50
Chapter 9: Turn Complaining into Praising		51
Chapter 10: Stop Stressing Over the Future		52
Chapter 11: Develop a Thankful Heart		53
Chapter 12: Be the Answer to Someone's Prayer		54
Chapter 13: Reignite Your Faith		55
Chapter 14: Conclusion		56

A Note from Tracie

When was the last time you felt truly happy and joyful about your life? God desires for you to delight, starting today, in the life He is allowing you to live. In fact, He has already equipped you to enjoy life even during those seasons when you feel broken, confused, frustrated, overwhelmed, underappreciated, disillusioned, disappointed, or just plain bored with the humdrum of your life.

I pray that when you're done reading this book and have intentionally put all the Calls to Action as well as the Smile Challenge prompts into action each week, you will experience a transformed heart and mind and feel like a changed person from the inside out. We can't always control the things that happen in our lives, but we can always control how we think about them and whether or not we allow them to steal our joy. I pray you will soon feel more excited about living and loving your life and will feel equipped and empowered to live it to the fullest.

This study guide will help you walk through the book *Love Life Again* at a pace that allows you time to seriously ponder and implement the strategies and activities suggested in each chapter. Keep in mind that nothing ever changes just from reading inspirational words—change requires action. Over time, positive actions become habits that shift our lives in a new direction.

Following this Individual Study Guide, you'll find a Group Leader Guide that is intended to help small-group leaders direct a small group through a study of *Love Life Again*. Please flip to page 40 for more information and to review the study guide outline. This guide walks readers through one chapter per week for fourteen weeks. Alternatively, weeks can be combined to shorten the study's length, if preferred.

In addition to bonus reflection questions, engaging group activities, and lots of discussion prompts, all designed to foster meaningful group discussions, each weekly session features specific suggestions for how group members can implement the Smile Challenges each week. These calls to action are intended to help individuals progress weekly in their quest to love their life more and live with a heart full of joy every single day.

Now, before you start, take a moment to rate your level of joy today from 1–10, with 1 being terrible (you have no joy whatsoever) and 10 being euphoria (you are bursting at the seams with joy every day). Consider it a happiness scale, of sorts. How happy are you overall right now?

Keep in mind everyone's ratings will be different because everyone's lives are different and God made us all unique. Various seasons and events in life, such as a new marriage or the loss of a loved one, also can impact where we may fall on the scale. So, there is no need to compare your level of joy with someone else's. When you finish reading the book and completing the study guide, and/or when you complete your small-group Bible study, you'll be given an opportunity to rate your level of joy again on the same scale. My biggest desire is that you see and feel a dramatic change in your feelings of happiness and ability to love life as you go through this book and study guide and form new friendship bonds with fellow group members.

On this scale of 1–10, circle the number which best represents your joy and happiness level today.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Sweet blessings,



Individual Study Guide

Embrace Contentment

Recognize discontentment and reclaim authority over your happiness.

Reflection Questions

Do you feel stuck in a negative season or mind-set that is stealing your joy? In what ways may specific thoughts about this area of your life feed your sense of unhappiness?

Call to Action

Write down the circumstance or circumstances stealing your joy and the change or changes you have believed needed to happen in order for you to be happy.

Take a moment to consider all the negative thoughts you habitually think about the circumstance(s) you wrote on the prior page. Don't beat yourself up over them, just consciously notice them and write them down in the left-hand column below. Then ponder the opposite of each of those negative thoughts and find one way to transform each negative thought into a positive one. Or simply replace each negative thought with something positive instead. For example, "My boss never gives me any feedback" might become "My boss trusts me with my work," or "I'm not good enough," could become, "My new friend said she shared her struggles with me because I am so honest about mine." Use the chart below to refer back to and check your progress:

<i>Habitual Negative Thoughts</i>	<i>Transformed Positive Thoughts</i>

How might your life change if you were to recognize these negative thoughts clearly, determine to intentionally think differently, and decide to fight for your happiness and joy no matter what?

Commit today to choose to be happy with the life you have, even if the desired change does not happen right away or your circumstances remain the same. Fully allow yourself to believe God hears your prayers and longs to meet your heart's desires, but commit to living with joy and contentment as you wait to see God move in your circumstances, heart, and life. Remember, you do not have to be on the other side of your problem(s) to live with joy!

My Personal Prayer

[illegible]

Smile Challenge

Spend some time outside enjoying nature. Let the sunshine warm your skin. Listen for the sounds of birds or crickets. Take a deep breath and fill your lungs with fresh air. Take a leisurely walk, but rather than letting your mind park on problems, intentionally ponder on all the things that bring a smile to your face.

After your walk, come back to this page and write down at least one thing that brought a smile to your face.

[illegible]

Recognize Your Value

Believe you are a treasure to God.

Reflection Questions

Do you let the critical words or opinions of others steal your confidence and determine your value and sense of worth? When does this happen and with whom?

How does the constant struggle of trying to measure up to others' expectations steal your love for life?

Read this quote and share what it means to you and how it changes your perspective about the beautiful person God created you to be: "Your value doesn't decrease based on someone's inability to see your worth."

Call to Action

Get out two pieces of paper or record your answers here. On one piece of paper or in the space below, jot down the critical words others have said to you and the critical words you say to yourself (all those lies you believe about yourself that contradict God's Word). This might feel difficult and discouraging, but when we expose the enemy's lies for what they are, God can work in our hearts to dispute them.

On the other piece of paper or in the space below, write down all the good things that you love or respect about yourself, or things you are proud of, as well as the good traits that other people love about you—your gifts, talents, skills, smile, personality, sense of style, work ethic, etc.

Which of these two lists would make God smile? Which would bring a tear to His eye? The list of negative, critical words is not from Him. Shred it into tiny pieces and throw it away, or scribble over the words here. If you used paper, tape the one with the positive words on it to your bathroom mirror or anywhere you will see it each day. Read this list daily and continually add to it as you think of other things that make you special. As you begin to see yourself through God's eyes instead of your own, you are progressing toward the goal of loving yourself.

My Personal Prayer

Love Yourself

Commit to loving whom God created you to be.

Reflection Questions

Do you love and accept yourself the way God wants you to? What makes doing that easy or difficult?

Have you been so consumed with taking care of others' needs that you have forgotten to take care of yourself? How do you think this impacts your peace and joy on a daily basis?

Call to Action

In the space below, identify the areas in your life that need some attention. Be specific. Pray for God to open your eyes to what He wants you to see, and allow yourself to dream big about what you'd like to focus on and the changes you'd like to implement. Set some specific goals for establishing these new habits in your daily life and keep track of how you're doing over time. Consider googling how to set S.M.A.R.T. goals and be successful in achieving them. (S.M.A.R.T., a technique for setting business and personal objectives, refers to goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant/Realistic, and Time Aware.) If life starts getting in the way, ask God to help you refocus and stay committed to your goals.

My spiritual needs are:

How has neglecting these needs affected me or made me feel?

What changes would I like to see happen in this area?

What steps can I take, or new habits can I implement, to begin working toward making these desired changes?

How will I track my progress toward this goal?

If I stumble in my efforts to meet my goals, what will I do to get myself back on track? (It's important to have a plan in place because road blocks to success are a part of life. Being prepared for when this happens, not if it happens, will help you feel confident to get back up and keep trying.)

My mental needs are:

How has neglecting these needs affected me or made me feel?

What changes would I like to see happen in this area?

What steps can I take, or new habits can I implement, to begin working toward making these desired changes?

How will I track my progress toward this goal?

If I stumble in my efforts to meet my goals, what will I do to get myself back on track?

My physical needs are:

How has neglecting these needs affected me or made me feel?

What changes would I like to see happen in this area?

What steps can I take, or new habits can I implement, to begin working toward making these desired changes?

How will I track my progress toward this goal?

If I stumble in my efforts to meet my goals, what will I do to get myself back on track?

My emotional needs are:

How has neglecting these needs affected me or made me feel?

What changes would I like to see happen in this area?

What steps can I take, or new habits can I implement, to begin working toward making these desired changes?

How will I track my progress toward this goal?

If I stumble in my efforts to meet my goals, what will I do to get myself back on track?

Do something to treat yourself today. Buy a new outfit, get a fresh hairstyle, visit your favorite coffee shop, exercise, or cook your favorite meal. Think about what will restore and refresh your heart, soul, body, and mind, and then do it!

This image shows a full page of blank, lined paper. It features approximately 20 evenly spaced horizontal blue or grey lines across its entire width. The lines are uniform in thickness and spacing, providing a template for writing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

Accept Forgiveness

Accept God's forgiveness.

Reflection Questions

Have you been struggling with believing God could forgive you of your sins because you didn't believe you deserved it or you thought they were too big for God to forgive? What sin do you need to accept His forgiveness for today?

If you began to fully believe God forgives unconditionally, remembers your sins no more, and that He loves you without fail, how would that change how you think and feel about yourself and how you live?

Call to Action

If you have never received God's forgiveness or asked Him into your life, pray to accept His gift of forgiveness and salvation today. Write your prayer below and include the date beside it so you will never forget the moment you accepted Jesus into your heart and your eternal life, and your earthly life, was changed. If you desire to recommit your life to Jesus, write that prayer here instead.

If you need to forgive yourself for something from your past that you've struggled to move beyond, consider stopping right now where you are and have a deep, honest conversation with God. Close your eyes and picture Jesus sitting beside you with eyes filled with compassion and a gentle smile on His face. Relax, breathe slowly, and let His presence and peace sink into your heart. If you've never asked for His forgiveness for what weighs heaviest on your

heart, do so right now. He already knows, so be honest. If you have asked for His forgiveness but still struggle with accepting it, let yourself believe with your whole heart that He has forgiven and forgotten—and vow to never bring it (whatever ‘it’ is) to mind again. Search His Word for Scriptures about forgiveness and new life to support what your heart is telling you but your mind challenges you to believe.

Think about what you would do differently if you were in the same position today as you were when you made that past mistake. Realize that if we learn and change from our mistakes, they have already served a purpose. If something painful happened to you that scarred your heart, ask God to give you peace about it and the ability to accept that it was not your fault, and to remind you that you are precious and white as snow in His eyes.

Whatever it is you do today regarding forgiveness, give yourself time to embrace your new mind-set. Commit to stop focusing on old memories and focus on the future God has for you instead. Let yourself be proud of who you are today. You are not the same person you once were, and God will continue to transform your heart and mind as you stay grounded in the truths of His love, forgiveness, and acceptance.

My personal prayer:

Smile Challenge

Choose an uplifting and wholesome movie with a strong lesson. Plan a movie night with your family or friends. Buy popcorn, candy, and drinks, or tell everyone to bring their favorite snack. Enjoy the time together and let laughter and joy fill you up more than the popcorn.

Come back here after you watch your movie and describe the title and content of the movie you watched, who you were with, and how you felt afterward.

Forgive and Forget

Forgive someone who hurt you and set yourself free.

Reflection Questions

Who in your life currently, or in your past, are you purposely or subconsciously refusing to forgive? How is your refusal to forgive affecting how you interact with others, how you feel about yourself, and your overall joy?

How might your life be different if you set yourself free from the prison cell of unforgiveness?

Call to Action

Consider the people from whom you have been withholding forgiveness. Maybe it was intentional because of how badly they hurt you, or maybe you just haven't realized until now that unforgiveness still resides in your heart and has been affecting how you feel and how you live out your everyday life. In the spaces below, in your journal, or on a separate piece of paper if you prefer, carry out these three steps:

1. Write the name of anyone who has hurt you whom you have not been willing or able to forgive.

2. Then write out this sentence for each person whose name you listed or thought of:
Lord, today I choose to forgive [insert the person's name]. Amen.

3. When you're ready and God's love has softened your heart for that person, try to pray something positive for them. You may have to come back to this page in a few days or weeks so you can genuinely pray for them. Even then you may not feel like it, and they may still not deserve it, but our willingness to pray for those who hurt us helps set and keep our hearts free. We should never let someone else hold the key to our joy.

Remember, forgiveness won't be easy, but it will be worth it. You may not feel any different at first, but over time, as you continue to forgive and invite God into the process, He will begin moving in your heart and replacing pain with peace. He will free you from the bondage of unforgiveness. It will happen slowly and gradually until one day you'll suddenly realize you feel happier and haven't thought of that person or situation at all. You'll notice that when you do think of it, the same negative feelings and hurts don't instantly pour in. That's when you'll know freedom is truly yours. Thanks be to God.

My personal prayer:

Smile Challenge

Buy yourself a bouquet of your favorite fresh flowers and put them in a vase in your kitchen. Or if you have fragrant flowers in your yard or in fields nearby, go pick a handful for your home. Each time you catch a whiff of their sweet fragrance, remind yourself how loved you are by God and how forgiveness has set you free.

Come back and record what type of flowers you chose for your table. How did the fragrant reminders of God's grace and forgiveness help you feel lighter and happier throughout the day?

This image shows a full page of blank, lined paper. It features approximately 20 evenly spaced horizontal grey lines across its entire width, providing a guide for handwriting or typing. The paper itself is a clean, off-white color.

Conquer Loneliness

Invite Jesus to be your best friend.

Reflection Questions

Have you ever considered Jesus your best friend, or have you assumed He really can't be because He is not here in the flesh? How can knowing He is always with you help you conquer feelings of loneliness?

How does pondering the traits of a good and loyal friend help you embrace the friendship available in Jesus?

Call to Action

Bow your head and invite Jesus to be your best friend. If you'd like, write your prayer below so you can remember it. Tell Him all the reasons you need a friend today, and ask Him for open eyes to see when He is meeting your needs. He already knows your heart's deepest longings, and it's okay to be honest with Him. Even our most seemingly trivial desires are important to our heavenly Father.

My friendship prayer

Think about realistic ways to apply each of the five traits of a good friend to your relationship with Jesus. Record your answers in the spaces below and then start putting them into action in your life.

1. Friends care about us and are concerned about our lives.

How has Jesus shown care and concern for me recently? In other words, how have I seen or felt Him working in the situations in my life?

2. Friends feel compassion when we are hurting.

How has Jesus shown compassion for me when I was hurting? Or whom did He send to comfort me or be with me when I was hurting? Did I give Him credit for that?

3. Friends stay connected.

How can I begin staying more closely connected with Jesus? What new habit can I begin today to intentionally connect with Him and begin feeling that close connection?

4. Friends talk and listen.

When I pray, do I ever stop to listen for God's voice or do I just do all the talking and then say amen? How might spending moments in sheer silence during and after prayer change my prayer life and my relationship with the Lord?

5. Friends are trustworthy and faithful.

How has God proven I can trust Him in the past? How has He been faithful? Do I tend to forget His trustworthiness and faithfulness when I feel alone and forgotten?

My personal prayer:

Smile Challenge

Take yourself on a dinner date. Pick your favorite restaurant and take your Bible with you. Read it over dinner, inviting Jesus to make His presence known and felt like never before. It might feel awkward at first, but don't let yourself worry about what other people think. Remember, Jesus is the best dinner date you could ask for.

Come back and record where you treated yourself to dinner. How did it feel to read your Bible in a public place, with just you and God seated at the table? How might making this a habit in your life, whether it's done in a public place or in the privacy of your home, help you grow spiritually and feel closer to the Lord?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Be a Friend

Pray for friends.

Reflection Questions

Are you suffering from a case of friendlessness but have been too embarrassed to even pray about it, much less talk about it with someone else? What step can you take today to move out of your comfort zone and begin building a foundation for new relationships?

What kinds of things could you do this week to start being a friend to someone?

Call to Action

Spend a few minutes brainstorming things you could do to open the door for a new friendship to begin. Consider what you might like for someone to do for you to open that door, and then do it for someone else. Write your ideas below. Out of your list, choose one thing you can do today to be the kind of friend you want to have and then ask God to give you the courage to do it!

My personal prayer:

Smile Challenge

Make time to call a friend or family member today whom you haven't talked to in a while. Spend some time talking and getting caught up on each other's lives. Enjoy the gift of conversation.

Come back and record whom you called and how your conversation went with that person. How did you feel after chatting with him or her and catching up? What keeps you from doing this more often? Is there someone else you could call and keep the momentum going?

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Laugh More

Start a habit of smiling and laughing every day.

Reflection Questions

When was the last time you had a really good belly laugh? Do you remember what you were laughing at? How did you feel afterward?

Have you accidentally let laughter and humor become a thing of the past? How did this happen? What can you do or what changes can you make in your daily routines to start feeling joyful again or to bring more laughter into your life?

Call to Action

Do something to foster laughter in your life today. Watch a clean stand-up comic routine, get together with a friend to tell her about an embarrassing moment, spend time with a friend who exudes happiness or always seems to make you laugh, tell a joke to a coworker, or start writing down things that kids, nieces, or nephews say or do that are too humorous to forget. And remember to smile as often as possible.

Come back here and jot down whatever it was you did today/this week to bring joy and laughter into your world. Think about keeping a notepad at home to record your laughter moments each day, or to simply record the big or little things that brought you joy. Before long, laughter and joy will become a normal thing and feel like second nature rather than something you have to consciously try to do!

Laughter moments:

Watch a movie that makes you laugh and feel happy, even if it's one you've seen a dozen times. Sometimes being reminded of how good it feels to laugh refreshes our entire mind and spirit and opens the door for positive habits to permanently take root.

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Turn Complaining Into Praising

Commit to developing a lifestyle of praise.

Reflection Questions

When you pray, do you typically whine to God about your problems, or do you thank Him for your blessings? Do you need a better balance between sharing your complaints with Him and praising Him for all He's done? What does a healthy balance look like to you, and how can you begin to make some changes in your prayer life?

What habit can you implement to start turning around thought patterns of complaining?

Call to Action

Place a rubber band on your wrist. Each time you catch yourself complaining or whining about something, whether to yourself, someone else, or God, snap the rubber band and then move it to your other arm. This will help you become more aware of when you complain, and that awareness can help you change your habit of complaining into a habit of praising instead. Each time you move that rubber band to the other arm, praise God for something good in your life, no matter how small.

What other new habits could you implement into your daily routine to help you spend less time complaining and more time praising and thinking positively?

My personal prayer:

Smile Challenge

Buy someone you know a small gift “just because.” Hand deliver it and share in the recipient’s joy as he or she opens the gift. You’ll bring a smile to his or her face, and also to yours.

Come back and record whom you gave your “just because” gift to. How did they react? How did it make you feel? Who can you possibly give a “just because” gift too next?

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Stop Stressing Over The Future

Trust that God has your tomorrows taken care of.

Reflection Questions

How often do you stress about the unknowns of the future and allow worry to steal your peace and joy?

If your answer was all too often, how might trusting in God's protection and provision allow you to embrace the opportunity to enjoy life and live it to the fullest, despite your circumstances?

Take a moment to think about some of the health issues you've been experiencing, whether small or big. Include ones you've been overlooking or ones that left you perplexed about why they were occurring. If there are any, jot them down here.

Is it possible stress is playing a role in these issues, either causing or worsening them? How might reducing your stress through faith help you feel better overall?

(For more information about how stress affects your health and how to manage your stress through faith, consider purchasing Tracie's book *Stressed-Less Living: Finding God's Peace In Your Chaotic World.*)

Call to Action

Think of the top three things that tend to weigh on your heart regarding the unknowns of the future. Those things that steal your peace and bring an ache to your stomach when you think about them. Then each day, do the following three things for each worrisome unknown:

1. Surrender that worry to God. Tell Him you're letting go of it and giving it to Him, and then try not to think about it again. If it creeps back into your consciousness, immediately re-surrender it to God.
2. Do something that gets your mind off of the worry. Listen to your favorite song, think of a blessing you can praise God for, do something you enjoy or that will bring a smile to your face.
3. Ask God to help you have patience with yourself as you try to retrain the way your mind typically thinks. Commit to trusting Him to transform your mind and help you learn to replace worry with full faith in and dependence on Him and Him alone.

My personal prayer:

Smile Challenge

Create a bucket list. Think about how you can begin taking steps to reach the goals or realize the dreams in your heart. Let your mind envision living out those goals and dreams, and let those happy thoughts motivate you to work toward achieving them.

Achieving items on our bucket lists might take time, but some goals are easier and quicker to accomplish than others. Return to this page anytime you meet one of the goals and dreams listed above and document the date and the details of your experience.

[illegible]

Develop A Thankful Heart

Practice a life of gratitude.

Reflection Questions

Is your gratitude typically focused on the gifts or the Giver of the gifts? How does this impact the way you view your life and your Savior?

What changes might you need to make in order to start living with a more thankful heart?

Have you spent more time lately counting your problems or counting your blessings? Write down a few of your blessings here.

Call to Action

Go outside and look for a small, smooth rock you can carry in your pocket or purse everywhere you go. Each time your hand touches the rock, let it serve as a reminder to thank God for at least one thing in your life. And each time, express thanks for the Giver of your blessings as well.

My personal prayer:

Smile Challenge

Buy a beautiful journal and make it your gratitude journal. Record everything you are thankful for, from the smell of clean laundry, to a child's laugh, to a hug from a loved one, to tangible blessings, to the blessing of friendships, to a special way God provided for you. The next time you're feeling down, pull out your gratitude journal and let it remind you to smile. And while it's open, record something new you are grateful for.

After keeping a gratitude journal for a few weeks, come back to this page and share how your perspective and attitude toward life—the good things and the burdens—have changed for the better.

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Be The Answer To Someone's Prayer

Do something nice for someone else every day.

Reflection Questions

Have you been so consumed with your own life, challenges, and responsibilities that you've neglected to see the people God wants you to see?

How can you be the hands and feet of Jesus this week, even if just for five minutes?

Call to Action

Think of at least one kind thing you can do for someone today. Then actually do it.

Come back here to your journal and write down what you did. And don't stop with just one! Ask God to help you live with open spiritual eyes to see people in need around you.

Consider keeping a list of all the things you do for others each and every day, either on a separate piece of paper or in a special journal.

Your personal prayer:

Reignite Your Faith

Reignite the fire in your heart for Christ and keep it aflame.

Reflection Questions

Have you pulled away from church or Christian fellowship for one reason or another? Write down the feelings in your heart and the thoughts you've been struggling with that keep you from stepping back into fellowship with other believers. Then pause and pray for God to remove those thoughts and begin healing those places in your heart which have been hurt.

Once God gives you the courage to take a leap of faith, how might getting involved with a community of believers again help you enjoy life more?

In what ways might your faith become stronger as a result of spending time with other believers more often?

Has the fire in your heart faded because of not consistently and faithfully walking and talking with Jesus? Write down your heart's longings when it comes to your relationship with Jesus.

How might reigniting your fire for Christ change your entire life from this point forward, and what step can you take today to light it again?

Call to Action

Don't have a home church? Start searching online today for one in your community and commit to going this Sunday. Remember it takes effort to visit different churches, and it takes time to find a new home church and overcome that feeling of being an awkward newbie. Ask God to guide you to the perfect church and trust that He will do exactly that. Don't give up!

Haven't been in a Bible study for quite some time—or ever? Look for Bible studies in your community or at a local church then step out in faith and join one, even if it's already started. You can also check out the free online Bible studies through Proverbs 31 Ministries. Visit <https://proverbs31.org/study/online-bible-studies> to get involved in the current online study or choose an archived Bible study to go through. You can also consider downloading the Proverbs 31 First5 app on your mobile phone and enjoy a free five-minute Bible study devotional every single day.

Has it been months since you opened your Bible and asked God to speak to you? Take your Bible off the shelf, blow off the dust, and let God breathe fresh life and hope into your heart. Sign up for a daily email devotional, purchase a devotional from your local Christian bookstore or online Christian bookseller, or subscribe to an inspiring Christian podcast to listen to. Take at least one step toward getting back into the Bible and rekindling the fire in your heart while asking God to help you stay close to the fire as you embark on a new adventure of faith.

Your personal prayer:

Smile Challenge

Think about something you are passionate about. Consider how God could use this passion in a way that would glorify Him. Pray for Him to give you clarity and direction regarding the purpose He has for your life. When passion and purpose intersect, life takes on a whole new meaning and joy becomes unshakable. Do something in faith that will make you—and God—smile.

Use this space to record your thoughts and feelings as you pursue God's will for how He can intersect your passions and God-given talents with a divine purpose that glorifies Him.

Conclusion

I encourage you to memorize John 10:10, because I want its promise to settle deep in your heart: “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (NIV).

Reflection Questions

Are you going through something that has made you feel ready to give up? What is it?

What does choosing to God-up in that situation look like for you?

How will refusing to surrender to defeat and instead choosing to fight for joy and victory change the way you feel and live every day?

What do you think of when you read the paragraph below, and how does it make you feel?

There are always going to be circumstances in life that make us unhappy. Sadness and grief are unavoidable. People will break our hearts. Disappointments will discourage us. Dreams will die, and relationships will end. Life can indeed be hard, making it seem as if it is impossible to ever feel joy again. But it's not.

Through the strength and power you have in Christ, you can choose to be happy and live with joy, no matter what life throws at you. You can choose to take a leap of faith and trust that God's promise of abundant life is within your reach and meant for you.

On this scale of 1–10, circle the number which best represents your joy and happiness level today.

My personal prayer and commitment to love the life God has given me:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Love Life Again Group Leader's Guide

A Note From Tracie

This leader's guide provides direction on how to walk participants through the study of and to help them learn from *Love Life Again: Finding Joy When Life Is Hard*. You'll discuss one chapter per week for fourteen weeks, since each week, group members will be encouraged to implement the chapter Smile Challenges into their lives. However, if preferred, weeks can be combined to shorten the length of the study.

For each chapter, you'll find bonus reflection questions, new points to ponder, and plenty of discussion prompts intended to foster meaningful group discussions. Each week leaders should encourage group members to accomplish the Smile Challenges from the chapter in some way and be prepared to discuss it in the next group meeting, when they will review what they did and how it made them feel. These calls to action are intended to help individuals progress weekly in their quest to love their life more and live with a heart full of joy every single day.

During the first meeting ask group members to rate their personal level of joy from 1–10, with 1 being terrible (no joy whatsoever) and 10 being euphoria (bursting at the seams with joy every day). They should note this on page xxx at the beginning of their the study guide. Consider it a happiness scale, of sorts. Encourage members to privately select a number by honestly assessing how happy they feel on a daily basis.

Encourage members to keep in mind that everyone's ratings will be different because everyone's lives are different and God made us all unique. Also, various life circumstances and events, such as a new marriage, divorce, family issues or the recent death of a loved one, can impact where we fall on the scale at any given moment. So, there is no need to compare our level of joy with someone else's. When participants finish reading the book and complete the small group study, they'll have an opportunity to rate their level of joy again on the same scale. My biggest desire is for every single person to see and feel a dramatic change in their feelings of happiness and to feel empowered and equipped to love their life each day as a result of going through this book and study, as well as to form new friendship bonds with fellow group members.

Sweet blessings,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tracie Miles". The signature is written in a fluid, connected style with a large loop at the end.

Group Discussion Questions

James 4:14 says, “How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it’s here a little while, then it’s gone” (NLT). If you thought tomorrow might not come, what questions would you be asking yourself?

What things might you regret when it comes to how you’re living your life?

When was the last time you felt full of joy?

How can you respond differently to challenging situations, difficult circumstances or people, or disappointments that constantly steal your joy?

How might changing your reactions and perspective regarding the things you just listed help you feel happier and better able to live life abundantly?

Embrace Contentment

Has anything ever happened to you that resulted in you living a life you never imagined or didn't want? Maybe something that caused you to question whether you'd ever be able to love life again? Invite group members to share. What was it? (If group members are reluctant to answer, invite them to write the answer privately.)

Group Discussion Questions

Do you ever struggle with feeling discontent, bored with life as it is, or as though life has let you down? Do you ever secretly think, *Surely there has to be more to life than this*? What have you done with those feelings in the past?

Share your personal experiences with the group. More often than not, when we are willing to be real with others, we receive a lot more "me too" responses than we expected. Being real and honest with fellow believers opens the door for deep friendships and relationships.

The word *abundant* in the Greek dictionary means "exceedingly, very highly, beyond measure, more, superfluous, a quantity so abundant as to be considerably more than what one would expect or anticipate." The abundant life Jesus refers to in Scripture means a life abounding in the fullness of joy; strength for our minds, bodies, and souls; and the security of eternal life with Him. That type of life is the opposite of living each day feeling empty, disappointed, discontent, frustrated, unhappy, or joyless.

What would living an abundant life look like in your life? How does your description contrast with the life you are living right now, if at all?

Spend some time praying for one another and for the struggles or disappointments you are each facing. As a group, commit to choose to begin loving the life God has given you and holding each other accountable for staying joyful.

Recognize Your Value

Ask each person in the group to share what they did last week to carry out Smile Challenge #1 and how it made them feel.

Smile Challenge #1:

Spend some time outside enjoying nature. Let the sunshine warm your skin. Listen for the sounds of birds or crickets. Take a deep breath and fill your lungs with fresh air. Take a leisurely walk, and rather than letting your mind park on problems, think about all the things that bring a smile to your face.

Group Discussion Questions

Have you ever questioned or doubted your value because of something that happened to you, something you did, or hurtful words someone once said, and now you struggle to like the woman you see in the mirror? Ask whoever is willing to share their experience.

For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.

EPHESIANS 6:12 (NLT)

Regarding the Scripture above, Tracie wrote in this chapter, “In the dark and behind the scenes, Satan works against us, hoping we will succumb to insecurities and doubt or even deny our value in Christ. He wants us to feel ‘less than’ so we will live a ‘less than’ life and not experience—or even seek—the abundant life promised to the treasured possessions of Jesus Christ. He wants us to believe that we have to be perfect to be priceless. But God says otherwise.”

Without naming names, how was someone you know impacted by believing something about themselves that wasn’t God’s truth?

What is one lie you have believed about yourself? How has believing that lie likely played a role in how you view yourself and your value.

What is one thing you consider a treasure in your life? Why do you treasure it?

Discuss the fact that those things are treasures because we gave them value, not necessarily because they have any monetary value. In the same way, we are God’s treasure because our worth and value come from Him.

Love Yourself

Ask each person in the group to share what they did last week to carry out Smile Challenge #1 and how it made them feel.

Smile Challenge #2:

Break out of the norm and go on an adventure in your own city. Check out a new restaurant, a tourist attraction, a bubbling brook, or a beautiful garden. Take pictures of things that make you smile and think about how God is smiling down at you.

Group Discussion Questions

In the first part of this chapter, Tracie wrote, “To love yourself is to appreciate who God made you to be and who you really are. Not what your past says you are, not what other people say you are, and not what you say to yourself. To love yourself is to accept yourself.” Go around the room and have each person say three nice things about themselves, just like the story Tracie shared about her daughter.

How does recognizing the good things about yourself make you feel?

What might be some reasons God gave you those good qualities?

Why do we sometimes find it hard to acknowledge, or even recognize, those things in ourselves?

Discuss the importance of taking care of ourselves. What is one way you can take better care of or even pamper yourself within the next week?

(Group leader: write down each group member’s responses so you can ask them next week if they held firm to their commitment to make themselves a priority for a change.)

Accept God's Forgiveness

Ask each person in the group to share what they did last week to carry out Smile Challenge #2 and how it made them feel.

Smile Challenge #3:

Do something to treat yourself today. Buy a new outfit, get a fresh hairstyle, visit your favorite coffee shop, exercise, or cook your favorite meal. Think about what will restore and refresh your heart, soul, body, and mind, and then do it!

Group Discussion Questions

Reassure all group members this is a safe place to be real; discuss the importance of confidentiality—what is said in Bible study stays in Bible study! Then ask if anyone would like to share about a past experience which caused them to struggle with guilt and shame. (Sharing and discussing feelings of guilt and shame can be tough. It's okay if there are group members who are not willing to share.)

Why do we often believe God can forgive other people but not us? How does that impact not only how we see ourselves but whether or not we can live each day with true joy and freedom?

Difficulty “forgiving ourselves” is usually grounded in the way we talk to ourselves and what we continually think about—especially those lies we believe to be true. Ask the group to consider these questions but not to answer them aloud:

- Do I continue to relive what I did, over and over again?
- Does that habit make me feel unworthy of God's forgiveness?
- Does constantly remembering my past mistakes affect my current decisions?
- Do I rehearse critical words and verbally abuse myself in my mind?
- Do I feel paralyzed by what happened in my past?
- Do feelings about myself affect my relationships with others?
- Do I feel like I don't deserve happiness?

In a general group discussion, talk about how not truly accepting the gift of God's forgiveness by continually beating ourselves up affects our lives in ways we don't even realize. Ask how it impacts us when we continually berate ourselves and refuse to accept God's forgiveness. Try to go beyond the easy answers and think of affects we might normally overlook.

Ask if anyone wants to share anything or if someone has an example of an area they once struggled with but in which they now accept God's grace. Encourage them to share how much their life and overall happiness have changed since they let the past go and accepted God's grace and acceptance.

Forgive and Forget

Ask each person in the group to share what they did last week to carry out Smile Challenge #3 and how it made them feel.

Smile Challenge #4:

Choose an uplifting and wholesome movie with a strong lesson. Plan a movie night with your family or friends. Buy popcorn, candy, and drinks, or tell everyone to bring their favorite snack. Enjoy the time together and let laughter and joy fill you up more than the popcorn.

Group Discussion Questions

Is there someone you've struggled to forgive? What emotions do you feel when you think about that person and what they did to hurt you?

How might your unwillingness to forgive that individual be affecting your happiness every day?

What do you fear might happen if you forgave? How can you begin to trust God with that thing you fear?

What benefits does God promise when we forgive?

Why is it important to not let other people control our happiness and to free ourselves from the bondage of unforgiveness?

Encourage each person to go home and write a prayer in a journal or on a piece of paper forgiving the hurtful person. Ask everyone to repeat their prayer each day for the next week, even it's hard or if their heart isn't in it.

Conquer Loneliness

Ask each person in the group to share what they did last week to carry out Smile Challenge #4 and how it made them feel.

Smile Challenge #5:

Buy yourself a bouquet of your favorite fresh flowers and put them in a vase in your kitchen. Each time you catch a whiff of their sweet fragrance, remind yourself how loved you are by God and how forgiveness has set you free.

Group Discussion Questions

Spend some time talking about the benefits and disadvantages of using social media, and what women like and don't like about it. Discuss how too much use of social media can often lead to a sense of loneliness, and the need to avoid getting caught in the comparison trap.

What times in your life have you felt the loneliest and why?

Have one person read Psalm 142:1–7. What does it mean to you to know that you are never truly alone because God is with you?

What did you learn from reading Amanda's story about her friendship with Jesus?

If time permits, discuss the five traits of a true friend and how Jesus shows these traits to us in our relationship with Him. Ask volunteers to share examples of how Jesus has proven to be their friend through one or more of the friend characteristics below.

- Friends care about us and are concerned about our lives
- Friends feel compassion when we are hurting
- Friends stay connected
- Friends talk and listen
- Friends are trustworthy and faithful

What will you do differently this week to begin building a stronger friendship with Jesus?

Be A Friend

Ask each person in the group to share what they did last week to carry out Smile Challenge #5 and how it made them feel.

Smile Challenge #6:

Take yourself on a dinner date. Pick your favorite restaurant and take your Bible with you. Read it over dinner, inviting Jesus to make His presence known and felt like never before.

Group Discussion Questions

How do you feel about friendship? Do you have close girlfriends in your life or is this an area of your life you want to grow?

What keeps you from taking a chance and making a move to get to know new people and make friends? How does reading this chapter encourage you to step out of your comfort zone?

When you hear the phrase “pray for friends,” how do you feel about that?

What move will you commit to make this week to take the first step toward making a new friend?

Laugh More

Ask each person in the group to share what they did last week to carry out Smile Challenge #6 and how it made them feel.

Smile Challenge #7:

Make time to call a friend or family member today whom you haven't talked to in a while. Spend some time talking and getting caught up on each other's lives. Enjoy the gift of conversation.

Group Discussion Questions

Have you ever met someone who exuded joy and optimism no matter her circumstances? Someone who always lifted your spirits just by virtue of being around you? Share about this person with the group.

Proverbs 17:22 says, "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit saps a person's strength" (NIV). In what ways is your attitude impacting your happiness?

When was the last time you laughed so hard that you cried and your belly hurt? How did you feel after enjoying the gift of laughter?

What is something you can do this week to bring laughter back into your life?

Have you ever had an experience like Tracie's where you did something embarrassing? What happened? What was your reaction?

Feel free to share your most embarrassing experience ever. Remember the goal is to learn not to take yourself so seriously! This is a great way to bond with your group members and enjoy a time of laughter to make you feel good inside and out. Laughter is good for the soul.

Turn Complaining Into Praising

Ask each person in the group to share what they did last week to carry out Smile Challenge #7 and how it made them feel.

Smile Challenge #8:

Watch a movie that makes you laugh and feel happy, even if it's one you've seen a dozen times. Sometimes being reminded of how good it feels to laugh refreshes our entire mind and spirit and opens the door for positive habits to permanently take root.

Group Discussion Questions

How do you feel when children, family members, or friends whine and complain all the time? How might God feel when you whine and complain to Him?

In this chapter, Tracie wrote, "Complaining is essentially accusing God of not being fair, of not doing things as He should." Do you agree? How might complaining to others actually be complaining against God?

Think of something you've complained about recently. How could you reword your "complaint" about that into a sentence that glorifies, praises, and expresses trust in God?

What is one thing you will commit to not complain about this week that you have a habit of complaining about?

Each time you start to complain, ask God to transform the way you are thinking about that person or situation and say a prayer of praise and trust in Him instead.

Stop Stressing Over The Future

Ask each person in the group to share what they did last week to carry out Smile Challenge #8 and how it made them feel. Ask group members what movie they watched.

Smile Challenge #9:

Buy someone you know a small gift "just because." Hand deliver it and share in the recipient's joy as he or she opens the gift. You'll bring a smile to his or her face, and also to yours.

Group Discussion Questions

The story of Ruth and Naomi describes multiple ways God miraculously protected and provided for them. Think of some examples of how God has miraculously protected and provided for you, whether in the past or present, big or small. Share them with the group.

Have you ever considered the difference between concern and worry? How does recognizing this contrast help you determine what you need to trust God with more?

What coincidences in your life might actually have been God-incidences instead, but perhaps you failed to give Him the credit?

What is your biggest fear or stressor about the future? Allow time for each person to share with the group, then spend some time in prayer inviting God's peace and protection and committing as a group to trust Him fully with the things you worry about the most.

Develop A Thankful Heart

Ask each person in the group to share what they did last week to carry out Smile Challenge #9 and how it made them feel. Ask group members if they'd like to share their bucket lists.

Smile Challenge #10:

Create a bucket list. Think about how you can begin taking steps to reach the goals or realize the dreams in your heart. Let your mind envision living out those goals and dreams and let those happy thoughts motivate you to work toward achieving them.

Group Discussion Questions

When you spend time in prayer with God, what do you spend the most time on—concerns, worries, needs, requests, etc.?

How might you feel differently if you began praising God for your blessings instead of only telling Him your needs and concerns?

Allow three minutes of silence and ask everyone to write down their blessings one by one—not just the normal things they usually feel thankful for, but even small blessings they don't typically notice.

Ask if anyone wants to share and inquire if they thought of things they haven't even considered before.

Why is it important to live with gratitude for all God has done and to making thankfulness a part of our prayer life and faith walk?

How does taking time to be thankful for the gift of life itself, not just the material gifts we receive from God, change your perspective about gratitude?

Be The Answer to Someone's Prayer

Ask who bought or started a journal last week to carry out Smile Challenge #10, and if so, how their outlook on life has changed and if they feel more joyful.

Smile Challenge #11:

Buy a beautiful journal and make it your gratitude journal. Record everything you are thankful for, from the smell of clean laundry, to a child's laugh, to a hug from a loved one, to tangible blessings, to the blessing of friendships, to a special way God provided for you. The next time you're feeling down, pull out your gratitude journal and let it serve as a reminder to smile. And while it's open, record something you are grateful for.

Group Discussion Questions

Do you live with love-colored glasses on, intentionally looking for people who might be in some type of need? How would doing so change how you live every day?

What is an example of a time you paused in your everyday routines to help someone else in need? How did you feel after helping that person?

Whether you serve in a ministry in some way or volunteer for a charity, school, or other organization, what were your motivating factors for donating your time and energy there?

What emotional or spiritual benefits do you derive from being the hands and feet of Jesus?

Reignite Your Faith

Ask each person in the group to share what they did last week to carry out Smile Challenge #11 and how it made them feel.

Smile Challenge #12:

Put aside all your excuses and do some type of exercise today. Exercise has a profound effect on our happiness and overall well-being. It may feel hard, but afterward you will smile.

Group Discussion Questions

Have you ever, or do you now, feel like you are far away from God? What might have led you to feel this way?

Has there ever been a time when you felt God spoke directly to you through His Word? Share with the group.

Do you have a routine for some “quiet time” with God? What is it and how does it affect your faith? (Be sure to remind participants it is okay if they don’t have a routine and not to feel ashamed or embarrassed! Remind them the purpose of the discussion is to help participants see the spiritual benefit in doing so and encourage them to implement quiet time into their daily lives.)

Are you actively involved in a church, or do you at least have a church home? If so, how does being active and engaged keep your faith aflame?

If you are not actively going to church, what are your reasons? Help participants feel heard and understood about whatever reason has kept them from church, since many times there are hurts involved. Ask participants how not attending church might affect the faith walk and overall happiness of a believer?

Conclusion

Ask each person if they thought about something they are passionate about from the prompt in Smile Challenge #12 and if they've considered how their passion and purpose could intersect. Allow time for sharing.

Smile Challenge #13:

Think about something you are passionate about. Consider how God could use this passion in a way that would glorify Him. Pray for Him to give you clarity and direction about the purpose He has for your life. When passion and purpose intersect, life takes on a whole new meaning and joy becomes unshakable. Do something in faith that will make you—and God—smile.

Group Discussion Questions

After reading and discussing the entire book, has John 10:10 taken on a new meaning in your heart and life? Share how.

*John 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.
I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. (ESV)*

Has there been a circumstance in your life where you've been tempted to just give up? How can choosing to God-up instead impact your faith and improve your happiness?

As you read the five statements below that Bronnie Ware said were the most common regrets of the dying, is there one you closely relate to, or one you feel you possibly might have one day? If so, share which one.

1. I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.
2. I wish I hadn't worked so hard.
3. I wish I'd had the courage to express my emotions.
4. I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends.
5. I wish I had let myself be happier.

If you related to one of the above regrets, what can you do beginning today to avoid letting that become a regret in the future?

Are you ready to live the abundant life God intended for you and has waiting for you to embrace? Are you ready to make the absolute most of the time He has given you?

Ask group members to update their happiness scale in their individual study guides.

On this scale of 1–10, circle the number that best represents your joy and happiness level today.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Foster this final discussion among the group and allow time for sharing success stories:

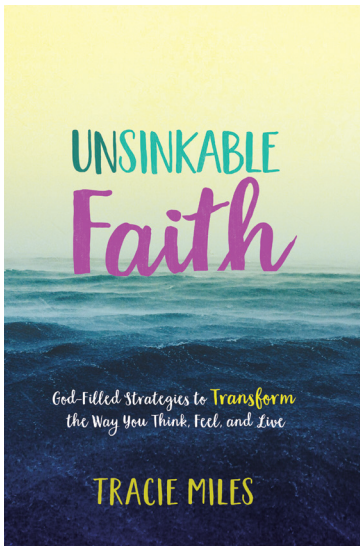
How much has your happiness and joy level increased since starting this book and study? What do you attribute the increase to primarily?

What permanent change are you implementing in your life to continue living with this level of joy and to avoid letting anything pull you down?

If your joy hasn't increased, consider going back and reading the end-of-chapter suggestions again, one per week: Reflect, Act, Prayer, Smile. Invite God to be a continuing part of your journey and ask Him to help you transform your heart and mind and equip you to live with the joy of your salvation as He intended.

Other Resources From Tracie Miles

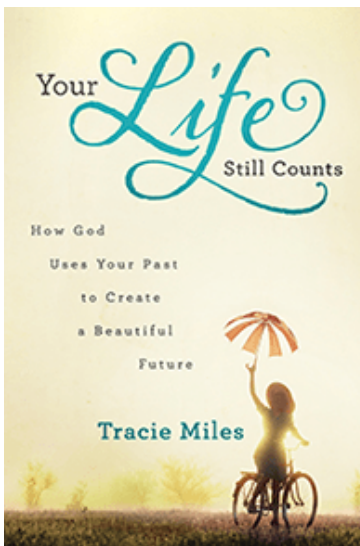
Did you enjoy *Love Life Again*? You might want to check out Tracie's other books too! Individual and group leader study guides are available for each of these books as well and might be the perfect choice for your next small group study! Books can be purchased anywhere books are sold, and the accompanying downloadable study guides can be purchased on Tracie's website at www.traciemiles.com/store.



Unsinkable Faith: God-Filled Strategies for Transforming the Way You Think, Feel & Live

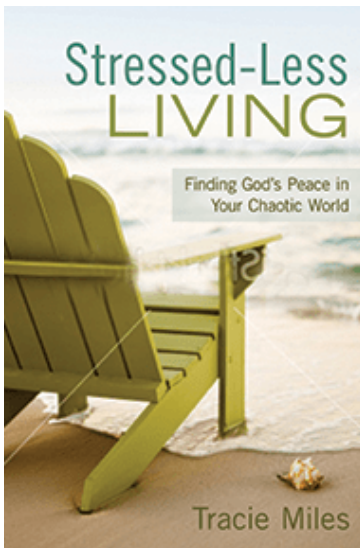
For many people, remaining optimistic and feeling positive about themselves and their lives is a constant battle — especially when circumstances are difficult and life is hard. For others, negativity is something that only sneaks up from time to time, yet still wreaks havoc in their hearts. Despite what storms roll in, hearts anchored in God don't sink. Intentionally embracing the opportunity to experience a transformed heart and a renewed mind opens the door for a changed life, because a positive mind will always lead to a more positive life. This book helps women learn how true joy and happiness are based on choice, not circumstances; equips them to overcome unhealthy habits of negative thinking by intentionally implementing three easy mind-renewing steps; helps them stop feeling hopeless and pitiful, and start feeling hope-filled and powerful instead; and empowers them discover that when

you change the way you think, you change the way feel, and in turn you can change your life completely.



Your Life Still Counts: How God Uses Your Past to Create a Beautiful Future

Many women carry around a deep, hidden, and unspoken sense of insignificance, regardless of how confident they appear on the outside. Regret and shame over failure, sin, and shortcomings weigh them down and make them feel unworthy to be loved, much less used, by a holy God. Tracie helps women not only recognize that God has a purpose for them, but that He has equipped and prepared them for their divine purpose based specifically on the experiences of their past. Through her own story and stories from other women who have discovered great purpose because of adverse experiences, she helps women embrace a new perspective about their past and discover the courage to step out of their comfort zones and see how God has plans to use all things for good. Readers will find forgiveness and healing for the mistakes of their past, and inspiration to step into the purpose God has for them.



Stressed-Less Living: Finding God's Peace in Your Chaotic World

Stress is an epidemic in our society. Seventy-five percent of the general population experiences at least “some stress” every two weeks (National Health Interview Survey). Stress contributes to heart disease, high blood pressure, strokes, and other illnesses in many individuals. Despite the clear toll that stress is taking on our health and well-being, many seem unable to find a cure. In this book, Tracie offers life-changing, heart-renewing, and long-lasting remedies that will bring peace, even when things feel out of control. In this breakthrough book, Tracie helps women unload the pressure cooker of life and learn to rely on the peace that Christ promises all those who come to Him. *Stressed-Less Living* unpacks the truth found in Scripture about how to overcome fear, anxiety, and uncertainty, and shows the stressed-out woman how she can not only survive stress, but thrive in spite of it through faith.



Tracie Miles is a popular speaker with Proverbs 31 Ministries and the author of four best-selling books, *Love Life Again*, *Unsinkable Faith*, *Your Life Still Counts*, and *Stressed Less Living*. Tracie is a contributing writer to the popular Zondervan NIV Women's Devotional Bible, and the Proverbs 31 Encouragement for Today Daily Devotional Book, and a monthly contributor to the Proverbs 31 Ministries Encouragement for Today daily devotions. In addition to her speaking and writing, Tracie is the Director of COMPEL Training at Proverbs 31. She has 3 children and lives in Charlotte, North Carolina. You can connect with Tracie on her blog at www.traciemiles.com and all social media outlets.

You can connect with Tracie on her blog at www.traciemiles.com and all social media outlets at the links below:

Facebook: www.facebook.com/p31traciemiles/

Instagram: www.instagram.com/traciemiles/

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