

How to Love Your Life, Even When It Hurts

There came a time when I had to accept that my life had not turned out the way I thought it would, and no amount of wishing it were different was going to change it.

I thought I had done all the right things and that I was on track for living out the life I envisioned. I graduated from college, got married, had three children and pursued a career for 15 years until deciding to be a stay-at-home mom. I had stayed committed to my promises and persevered through thick and thin. I had made my faith and following God a priority and even served in ministry. Although not perfect by any means, I had honored my marriage vows and tried my best to be a loving, devoted wife and the best mom I could be. I had kept my family and friends close. But sometimes on the road of life, we come across an unexpected bump that causes our plans to get derailed and our hopes to be crushed. Then one day, something tragic or life-altering happens that drains the joy out of living, or we simply wake up and realize the life we are living is not the one we expected, much less the one we wanted.

Perhaps you can relate. Maybe you had a dream crushed after years of pursuing it. Perhaps you stayed at a job for 30 years, building your retirement fund, only to have that company go bankrupt and take your life savings down with it. Perhaps you've experienced the heartbreak of infertility when you planned on having a houseful of children. Maybe you had a loved one die far too soon. Maybe you were struck with a disease that limits your abilities and independence. Maybe you thought you'd be married by now but are still single, or maybe you invested years in a marriage that ended in divorce.

I don't know what you've faced, but whatever happened that

changed your life or rocked your world just may have snatched your love for life too. And as a result, just maybe you don't think you can ever love life again.

Trust me, friend. I understand.

I had been married for 26 years, 10 months, and five days when my divorce became final. After many painful months of separation, it had become obvious that reconciliation was not possible because of my husband's refusal to stop the behaviors and infidelity that caused the marriage to fail, leaving divorce as the only option. My heart was broken. My visions and dreams of growing old with my husband—dancing arm in arm at our children's weddings, buying a beach house to enjoy together in retirement, celebrating future holidays and special occasions with our kids and their families, bouncing our grandbabies on our knees—were shattered the day he chose to leave the life we had built together.

As a woman, I felt rejected, betrayed, devastated, afraid and terribly alone.

As a mom, I felt overwhelmed with grief and worry about how this situation would scar my children's hearts permanently and helpless as to how ease their pain.

As the sole provider, I worried about having enough money to take care of my children's needs and keep us afloat. As weeks turned into months, bills were going unpaid, debt was piling up and the home we'd lived in for over 20 years was in danger of foreclosure. It seemed spiritual warfare was fierce, and bizarre things kept happening to me and my children. I perpetually felt overwhelmed and hopeless. Crippling fear, worry and stress became my constant companions. The weight of all I was facing seemed almost too much to bear. I wondered if my heart would ever mend, if the hurt would ever lessen, if the loneliness would ever feel less lonely, and if I would ever feel strong, stable and secure again.

I constantly grappled with the hardest question of all: *Would I ever be able to love life again?*

I spent every day consumed with despair and worry. I began to spend more time at home, depression sinking in, avoiding the emotional energy it would take to interact with people in public. I stopped doing many of the things I loved like playing tennis, shopping and hanging out with friends. I took a sabbatical from doing ministry as my heart tried to heal. And I even stopped going to church to avoid the obligation of awkward small talk and a fake smile. Happiness and laughter seemed to be things of the past.

For the first time ever, I began keeping an extensive journal. I quickly realized that it was a safe, private place for me to vent and pour my feelings out to God. Little did I know that this journal would become one of the things He would use to heal my heart and provide me with evidence of His work in my life.

On March 19, six months after my husband left, I wrote this entry:

Spent an hour in prayer this morning after waking up crying, again. Feeling so overwhelmed with sadness and grief that I couldn't get a grip on my emotions. I just wish my life were different. It's not what I wanted it to be, for me or my children. I wish my family weren't broken. I wish I could make everything better, but I just can't change or fix anything. I can't make my husband love me or want to be a part of our family. I can't heal my children's hearts. I can't ignore all the problems that cause me angst and worry. I'm tired. Tired of the stress and the emotional drain of this unfamiliar life. Tired of the heartache and pain. Tired of the fear. Tired of dealing with life. Physically, emotionally and mentally tired. I try to put on a good face for the kids when they're home, although there are days when it's impossible to hold back the tears. And I try to be

strong around others, but I feel like I'm losing who I am. I don't understand why all this has happened.

Lord, I don't want to be broken anymore. I want to be whole again. I want to feel whole and complete, even if my marriage is over. Even though my heart is broken, I don't want to be a broken woman. I don't want to be a broken soul. I don't want to feel broken anymore. I want to enjoy life again. Fill me with joy, peace and rest in You. I'm tired; give me strength. Restore to me the joy of my salvation. The ache in my soul is so deep, please lessen the ache. I don't understand why this has all happened and how it is all going to turn out. But I want to love my life again, right now, no matter what it looks like. Help me love life again, even while life is hard. Amen.

One day after writing that prayer, I read a devotional that reminded me not to let my desire to understand why I was going through this painful journey distract me from experiencing God's presence. God could equip me to get through each day victoriously; I simply had to choose to let Him be the source of my joy, even in the midst of less-than-joyful circumstances of life.

Upon reading that devotional, I finally stopped letting my circumstances dictate my love for life. Over the many months that followed, I walked closely with God and implemented the steps I've outlined in this book. I have stumbled in my efforts more than once, but each time, I picked myself back up and started the next day afresh. I came to realize that it was not only within my reach to love my life again but also 100 percent within my control.

Friend, loving life is a choice, and we all have the power to choose to love our lives. Our own happiness is up to us. No person or circumstance has the power to take away our happiness or love for life without our permission. No matter

what situation you find yourself in today, happiness is within your reach too.

If you're in a fragile, lonely, disheartened or fearful place today—whatever that place looks like—please stick with me. I have learned that it is possible to love our lives, despite what's going on or how much life has changed. My deepest prayer is that you will discover it is possible for you to love your life again too.

But just maybe you're reading this and thinking that nothing big, dramatic or life-shattering has happened to derail your life. In fact, life is the same as it has always been. Same ol' circumstances, different day. And therein lies the problem. You're bored and frustrated with life in general and often find yourself thinking, Surely there has to be more to life than this. It might seem as if everyone else's life is more exciting, more rewarding, easier, or simply better than yours. You feel let down by what life has given you or how it's turned out, and you're discontent. Maybe you even feel let down by God.

The truth is, regardless of which situation we find ourselves in, we all want to be excited about our lives. We know we should appreciate life even when life is hard and that good is always present even during bad times, but it's a challenge to think that way when our hearts are heavy. We know we're supposed to be content, but we still get caught up striving for more or resenting what is not to our liking. And when life seems boring and routine, we often overlook the blessings God has given us because we're more focused on what we don't have than on what we do.

It's challenging to be content in today's world. In fact, contentment seems to have become a lost art. We are constantly bombarded with images of newer, bigger, and improved items that will supposedly make our lives happier, fuller, and more satisfying. We scroll through social media and feel discontent

with our home, spouse, car, kids, vacations, clothes, shoes and everything else because we think others have it better. We watch love stories on television and begin to feel unhappy with our own relationships as we compare them with those of fictional characters, or maybe even with real-life relationships that seem better than our own. It's tempting to compare our lives with others' or think "if only ..." but these thoughts open the door for discontentment, allowing it to sink into our hearts and minds and choke our joy. Discontentment sabotages our happiness.

Hebrews 13:5 says, "Don't be obsessed with getting more material things. Be relaxed with what you have" (MSG). This verse instructs us not to look for happiness in money or material things. We are to be satisfied with the present and with what we have been given. To be content with where God has us in the present moment. Period. {eoa}

*To learn more about how you can begin experiencing this transformation in your life too, purchase a copy of Unsinkable Faith: God-filled Strategies for Transforming the Way You Think, Feel and Live by **Tracie Miles**.*