

*Happy
Anyway!*
FINDING JOY IN THE MESS OF LIFE

JO ANN MILLS



Books with Class

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*To my loving husband Bobby who has tried
to keep me happy for fifty years.*

Other books by Jo Ann Mills

Making It
Leaves Only
Command the Morning
How Excellent My Frame
Patterns and Promises
The Silver Key
Precious Memories
As the Lark Sings

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Introduction

Anyone can be unhappy; it is being happy that takes initiative. There is little correlation between the circumstances of one's life and one's happiness. *Happy Anyway* is designed to help you balance your life—to guide you into dealing with the unhappy moments and exchanging them for happy memories.

Everyone must make personal adjustments to gain happiness, but doing so is not always easy, especially when there is no one to help. Through many years' experience of dealing with many different personalities—most of it with a reasonably positive outlook—I have learned the secret to happiness and joy. Sharing my secret with you in *Happy Anyway* increases my joy.

The sources of my childhood happiness were many. When I was a child “I spoke as a child.” I looked for happiness in immediate surroundings. Becoming thoughtfully creative with a box of Crayolas or playing cowboys and Indians on real horses with a dozen horse-riding friends brought much happiness.

In my teen years, I tended to look for happiness in things. When mood swings toppled downward, there was nothing like a pair of pretty earrings, purchased out of my meager wages as a store clerk, to reset mood. But as I grew older and wiser, Crayolas, role-play, and earrings failed to work. Happiness was available in simplicity: moments of clear peace, probably tucked away in my youth. But worldliness kept me from recognizing that fact.

Christians do not have to accept the actions of bad-natured, irritating people. So if you find yourself friendless because others shy away from you, it is time for self-examination. Changes are in order! Telling others, “You'll just have to accept me because this is the way I am!” is a cop out. If you are constantly correcting flaws in others, be assured that others will avoid you like a plague.

Trading remarks about our spiritual development is common these days. When we become more conscious of how our actions affect others, we will stop living in a relative world and start seeking a better one. It is a good thing when a stranger observes us and says, “Hey, she has something I want. She is always pleasant and optimistic!”

While working to make goodness a part of our nature, we will experience many failures. But let me state emphatically: I was never successful in helping others until I took on a quality of peace, finding joy by following the sound advice given in the Bible. Then as my spirituality developed, I sought to help others develop theirs, thereby enjoying more growth and finding more happiness in the opportunities and blessings in the world of discovery that God had provided.

Happy Anyway contains many references to Bible characters and their experiences. No matter how remote those characters might seem, many of their experiences are similar to ours. Studying their lives and times helps us to understand why God recorded their stories. An in-depth study of how they handled themselves in difficult times leads us to a better understanding of how to respond joyfully to very adverse conditions. As a result, we develop insight into our own joy. Often, while pondering a given Scripture, I observe: “Hey, I think God has this put in just for me!”

Through my continuing daily Bible studies and secular readings on the subject of joy, I have made an important discovery. Many fail to find the peace for which they search because they look in the wrong places. But anyone can find joy in the same place I found mine. Make a choice to look for it in life’s many blessings—most assuredly provided to us by none other than God. Choose to look for it in little things as well as in big things.

God desires to demonstrate His love in the lives of those who are happy. He never intended that we spend hours in meaningless projects and misgivings. Let's do away with the world's myth—that we deserve to be happy all the time. It is important that one not believe that happiness must be a continual thing—all day, every day. Happy moments do not necessarily turn into happy hours, for not all things are positive that happen to one in the course of several hours.

I loved the movie *I Am Sam* because a retarded man had to demonstrate to a very successful woman how important all the brief, simple encounters are to our happiness. Unfortunately, we live in a world that showers us with unhappy occurrences—sometimes torrential downpours!

Maybe you have visited someone who has been battling a devastating, terminal disease months on end. Yet that sick person put you on cloud nine before you left. Thank God for that spirit! I remember a news story of a woman who had spent fifty-one years in an iron lung. She wasn't singing a regretful song; rather, she was filled with optimism because of the many blessings she enjoyed. Thank God for that gracious, gratitude-filled person. She found something for which most of us search our entire lives and never find. We fail to find it because we are continually getting off at the wrong exit and refuse to slow down to find the right one.

The song "Dancing in the Rain" comes to mind. I know why. Rain ain't bad, even when it falls non-stop for weeks. It gives life, replenishing water tables that have been reduced through the years. It is what we make of the happenings in our lives that label us either positive or negative. Even the most misery-ridden people are sprinkled with moments of blessings. But too many of them are wearing shut-out slickers pulled tightly, thinking that their potential blessings are forewarnings of torrential downpours. Soon they forget to be tender.

Examine each chapter of this book carefully for answers that will enable you to deal with unhappiness. Find those

answers now—before it is too late! Those of us who have decided to be positive in a negative world want others to join our ranks. Together we can make this a better place, and for our sakes we must.

“Doing what you like is freedom, but liking what you do is happiness.”

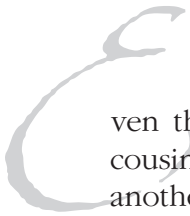
(Author Unknown)

Rage: It's Not Mine



Happiness Forecast

A tornado warning usually brings instincts for survival to the surface. When others rage at me, I will not take it personally. I realize that they are the owners of their own anger and rage. I cannot control them any more than I can control a tornado! My survival depends on my resolve to be accountable for my behavior—not theirs. Another person cannot take my joy without my permission.



Rationalizing Rage

Even though you consider yourself the optimist's first cousin, you do not want to be on the receiving end of another's unhappiness. Trying your "dead-level best" to assist just isn't good enough; you will feel trapped as you sink deeper and deeper into another's mire.

Individuals who have never learned to control anger are unhappy, and happiness finds release in strange ways. Unchecked anger can turn into rage. Rage, whether road rage or sports' sideline rage, is on the increase. Rage can kill.

Many in today's culture lack training in the acceptable release of anger, so they feel right in saying, "It's all right to get mad, so get really mad!" Angry individuals are less accountable for poor behavior than they were a few years ago. Present culture promotes the belief that others or difficult circumstances are to blame for one's poor conduct, so the one who misbehaves is never responsible.



Soaking Up Scripture

Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls (Proverbs 25:28).



Frederick Buechner, author of *Wishful Thinking*, wrote,

To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back—in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you.

Rationalization might at first be a sanity-saving technique but eventually becomes a form of denial. To some extent the tension created in our lives can be blamed on circumstances or on others. But how we handle the tension is our own doing. When traffic is congested, when stores are sold out of much-needed items, or when smog is affecting your allergies, there is no way you can control these occurrences on the spot, so you react. Wow! Do you react! The rage sends your blood pressure over the top, adding to health problems, and the end result is much more unhappiness. So we can surmise that rage is the wrong way to vent feelings.



***How we
handle the
tension is our
own doing.***





Soaking Up Scripture

*Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests
in the bosom of fools (Ecclesiastes 7:9)*



Tension and Persecution

Those who lived before us had tension as great as we have today—perhaps a great deal more. At least today we are so civilized that we don't throw people to the lions for our entertainment. Or do we? Some of today's third-world citizens are much the same as were their ancestors two thousand years ago. They often do not know where their next meal is coming from or where they will sleep. That tension may be "colored" a little differently, nevertheless it is enough to drive the one dealing with it to acts of anger or rage.

The Bible contains some classic examples of rage. Even beginning Bible students know of Saul's manic attitude toward David. And what about Jael's blow to Sisera? (Judges 4:17-22). Secular sources tell of soldiers severing heads of their enemies and impaling them on stakes.


Since the second generation of the human family, men have perpetrated acts of rage against one another. Rage has never been a positive factor in human progress; it always complicates the problem that it is trying to solve.

Puddles to Ponder


How does rage qualify as unacceptable behavior?

Loaded Shotguns

I grew up in a community of ranchers and hunters. We kept loaded shotguns and rifles within reach. However, when a quarrel broke out among neighbors, faces reddened, teeth ground, and fists clinched, but anger was held in check. No one ever thought of grabbing a gun. Our shotguns were used for getting food and dealing with natural predators of our livestock. As for quarrels, we settled them with fair fights, ones that left no scars—usually not even emotional ones.



***No one
thought of
bringing a
gun to
school.***




In my teaching experience, when two boys began to rage at one another, the principal took them behind the gym and supervised a “fair fight.” They soon grew tired, shook hands, and oddly enough, they usually became good friends. And while it was customary for every young man to carry a pocketknife, it stayed in his pocket, serving only useful purposes. No one thought of bringing a gun to school. Our automobile speedometers topped out at “120 mph,” but no one ever used that speed to pass a slower driver and make profane gestures or to yell curse words at him while passing.



Soaking Up Scripture

Counselors of peace have joy (Proverbs 12:20).



All the Rage

While moving along the interstate at the required speed limit, I commented to my husband, “We must be becoming worse drivers.”

“Why?” he asked.

“Because we have experienced more rage from other drivers in the last ten years than we have in our lifetimes.”

He replied, “No, we aren’t becoming worse drivers; some drivers are becoming worse people.”

Sports players do not always exhibit restraint during a game; neither do the spectators. Some are guilty of venting emotions that they would not dream of displaying in their own homes. Recently, people have been injured and even killed in sports’ rage incidents. Whatever happened to good sportsmanship?

Oh, sure! There has been a time or two that I wanted to loan my glasses to referees, but my husband—a basketball coach—told me never even to cheer if he jumped up from the bench. Why? Because of one bad call in particular. A fan yelled a profanity and my husband and I jumped up—both of us at the same time. The referee blew his whistle again, looked at my husband, and pointed to the door. He thought my husband had emitted that derogatory yell. Sometimes it is better to remain calm and keep your seat.



Soaking Up Scripture

Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men (Romans 12:17-18).



Fortify Quiet Time

Sometimes we allow modern conveniences to create added tension and frustration in our lives. My husband thinks we need a cell phone. True, they are very useful, but until now I have refused to get one. I know that life will be more complicated if we are on 24-hour call 365 days a year. Instead, we can choose to keep some things out of our lives, even when they are the ultimate convenience, in order to fortify our quiet time.

From the experience of being on the road as much as being at home, I have noticed that those who are exhibiting bad driving habits are often talking on a cell phone, making profane gestures at another driver, honking, and darting in and out of the traffic, thus creating hazards for others. Not only have they created problems for themselves, but they have also forced others onto life's unhappy roads—sometimes tragically.

Puddles to Ponder

How does added convenience bring added responsibility?

“All about Me” Fits

This book will deal with the “I am” or “me first” philosophy. A proper understanding of this dangerous philosophy will reduce further damage resulting in more hitting, searing, shooting, and fighting because of pent-up anger that has developed into rage, a prevalent mental-emotional condition.

Small children sometimes go into breath-holding, foot-stomping, screaming fits without correction. Many of them develop into grownups who continue to exhibit uncontrollable rage. Authorities in personality development have written many

anger and rage workbooks to help the undisciplined learn to deal with these harmful traits.

A few years ago we spanked our children for such unacceptable behavior. We spanked their bottoms because our mothers spanked ours the first and second time we tried misbehaving—and it worked! The next time, our mothers only stared, and that worked! We didn't want the next action we knew would be forthcoming. It wasn't anger but extreme disapproval and displeasure on the part of our mothers that brought on the spanking. We used to call it "training up a child."

Puddles to Ponder

What can we do to assure that children will be able to befriend and help others in a me-first culture?

Children in Charge

Young children do not reason things out, so they often act unsociably. They observe what works for others—often the bad behavior of a parent—and use the same tactics. Repeat performances come to them in adulthood and they aggressively try to take advantage of situations in which their emotions need to be held in check.

I have seen young mothers severely bruised while holding kicking, raging children, saying quietly to them, "What you are doing is unacceptable behavior." Do these children understand the meaning of *unacceptable* and *behavior*? Of course they do, but they also know they are in charge.

We do children a great disservice when we fail to teach them what doesn't work. We rob them of both present and future happiness.



Soaking Up Scripture

*Correct your son, and he will give you rest;
yes, he will give delight to your soul (Proverbs 29:17).*



The Pickle Missile

When my youngest child started to school, I began to pursue a master's degree in educational counseling. I could not believe the psychology professor's lecture statement: "Throw a good fit; lift your voice and scream; release your anger by throwing something the next time you get mad." My mother thought that throwing things in a fit of rage was very unacceptable behavior. But the next time I got angry I tried it—in the kitchen. My pickle missile barely missed my husband's head; my behavior put me immediately into a state of shock. My temper tantrum didn't work; I felt no relief. Cleaning up a broken jar of sweet pickles was proper punishment—I never tried that again.

My husband used to be a door-banger until he had to repair a broken glass in the front door. Rage is like a bad car wreck: the damage it creates is not always repairable. Hopefully, we learn to develop self control.

Puddles to Ponder

What steps can we follow to cool off rather than pitching a fit and feeling foolish afterwards?

Retreat or Explode

Stay calm; observe, but retreat from angry people. They are like demons of degradation. Speak calmly to the angry individual on what has happened. If your calmness does not bring good results, retreat!

James, the brother of our Lord, talks to us about our tongues. He warns that if we lash out with them we create more havoc. With that admonition in mind, silently count to ten the next time you are tempted to explode—or even to a hundred, if it takes that!



Soaking Up Scripture

A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds them back

(Proverbs 29:11).



Choose Your Mood

Celebrating their anger on every occasion possible and bent on their own inadequacies, unhappy people do not care what they leave in their wake—not until they make a choice. Remember this rule of thumb: Never let an unhappy, angry person control your mood. That is your choice—whether or not to respond with an angry, unrelenting, teeth-grinding attitude to outside circumstances. Choose to pay attention to the important things and move on.

When dealing with a chronically angry, unhappy person, your hands are tied because you cannot break through whatever is going on in the mind of another. You cannot decide for another. Seeing some choices that are faintly positive, you wait patiently in the wings because you care deeply about this unhappy person—your daughter, wife, mother, father, son, husband, or a friend. You truly want to help. Since you have learned


to live in an on-hold world, you can go on hold for this mixed up person, offering solace and direction without supporting the bad behavior demonstrated.

Puddles to Ponder


Purchase a Bible. Then with special marking pencils, neatly mark Scriptures and give it to an unhappy person, along with a comforting note or letter.

Out on the Edge

Job 38 is one of the most beautifully written passages in the Old Testament. It seems to me that the “friends” of Job were like some of our well-intended friends. They had come to him more out of curiosity and intent to tell him the whys and wherefores of his situation, rather than to offer him kind and caring support in a time when he needed it the most. They weren’t there “when the morning stars sang together.” Job was told, “[You] know no quietness in [your] heart” (Job 38:7).



***You know
no quietness
in your
heart.***



True! I don’t believe Job had much quietness in his heart; he had lost everything, apparently in one sitting. Our family members can die, we can go broke, all of our livestock can die, and our life-long companion can turn against us; but not all at once! Psychologists tell us three life-changing events happening to us at one time—such as the loss of a job, an illness in the family, a physical move from one city to another—can put us mentally out on the edge.

Puddles to Ponder

What can you eliminate from your life to reduce tension and frustration?

“I Told You So”

Considering the manner in which Zophar’s treatise was so nobly delivered to Job, I think Zophar was the “I told you so” type rather than the “talk to me and let me listen” type. Zophar could have just listened to Job, comforted him, and said, “Okay, that was yesterday! Today is a new day. Let’s figure out where we can go from here.”

Job had the opportunity to complain to God. At last he received an answer from Him, and what an answer God gave! If Job ever felt that God had lost control over any situation, he was convinced of his error. Job knew he had lived righteously and that unrighteousness was not the cause of his losses or the tragedies that befell him. God allowed Satan to tempt a righteous man and God had won. We don’t need “friends” like Zophar and Elihu in the wings during times like these. Most of us complain to God, as Job did, instead of thanking Him when we talk to Him in prayer. Sometimes our answers come in the form of blessings we wouldn’t recognize if He announced them to us. We need to listen to His still, quiet voice. We need people who really care about us. Listen and be watchful for those who need you to wait in the wings for them.

Puddles to Ponder

Have you met any “I told you so” people lately? What makes you feel indifferent toward these folks?

All Men Suffer

Each time I study the book of Job, my eyes open wider to his plight and the position God occupied in his life. The more one understands Job, the more one can help others deal with unhappiness and suffering. On a trip to England, a friend, knowing how much I depended upon the book to help others, purchased for me a very old book titled *The Poem of Job*. There is a hint in this book that righteousness will be rewarded by prosperity. Many today believe so. The writer is dissatisfied with the prosperity-by-righteousness philosophy because he sees how good men suffer daily. He knows that good men suffer most, not because they are sinful but because they are servants of God. Persecution happens.



Soaking Up Scripture

But rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy (1 Peter 4:13).



Some people whom we call friends may tell us: “If you lived righteously, God would not allow you to suffer so much.” If you learn only one lesson from this book, learn this one: That is not the way God works. All men suffer—the just and the unjust. Be-

cause the unjust enjoy another man's demise, they keep gouging to make Christians feel worse. They cut down our gourd vine—the same act the worm committed against Jonah—to expose us to the midday sun. The unjust appear to get away with doing this, but if we have allowed ourselves any time at all in our study of the Bible, we see comfort in the words that say, “For in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Galatians 6:9 KJV).

Taking Abuse

This chapter has been written mainly to help those on the receiving end of rage, because the givers are totally occupied with the planning of their own pity parties. Live with the comfort that mean, unhappy people do many of the same things you do. They go to work, shop, take vacations, and believe it or not, they even go to church. However, they just do not have any moral hang-ups about the tragic results of their spitefulness against those with whom they work, shop, and worship. Their miserable lives are of their own making; they can even get worse. We who care about them should try to understand them; then we should offer suggestions and help to supply the means for them to help themselves. But always remember: There comes a time when we should leave them in their mire and wait in the wings until they decide to get out. Be prepared for a long and possibly heartbreaking wait.

Puddles to Ponder

What obstacles bordering on abuse confront you or those close to you?

Except for paid professional counselors, the takers who hang around the unhappy givers of rage are those who love

them the most, those who care enough to lead, drag, or rescue the rager from themselves. And those takers are the ones who hurt the most. They take the abuse, accusations, spitefulness, rudeness, lies, bitterness, hatred, and all the other things a mean person dishes out. They keep trying to put a little sunshine into a dark stormy day for someone else. God love them!



Soaking Up Scripture

Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord" (Romans 12:19).



Change and Forgiveness

The prodigal son had a father who let him go but kept him in his heart and prayers until his return. Not many of our unhappy people are as fortunate as was the young man in this parable.



The unhappy person kills relationships.

One by one the unhappy person kills off all could-be-good relationships. Although God bundles all of us up in His security blanket of love and invites us to stay there until things get better, we can throw off the cover. Even those who love grow weary of having unhappy people around them—although those unhappy persons are family members—and eventually cease to care. Loved ones no longer

desire to be contaminated. Finally, they just aren't around anymore. And the only one standing in the wings is God, waiting for us to use our free will to allow Him to change our hearts.

Mr. and Ms. Unhappy cannot wedge their way back into others' lives easily. They must start all over again, proving not



only to themselves but also to others that they can change. While proving their repentance to others, they prove it to God. He forgives when they repent, but trust usually has to be developed before others will forgive.

Unfortunately, hurt lingers on. Many will not put themselves out to take risks a second time around. The unhappy person does not enjoy the past level of acceptance, and he must also deal with the fact that a once-open door now has its latch on the inside of another's heart.



Soaking Up Scripture

Do not let your heart envy sinners, but be zealous for the fear of the Lord all the day, for surely there is a hereafter, and your hope will not be cut off (Proverbs 23:17-18).



Get a New Life

There is a light at the end of the tunnel! Always remember: There is enough positive goodness for all to have, so there is some for the lost soul and all his unhappy acquaintances. (I dare not say friends!) New relationships can be built; old relationships can be rebuilt, some even stronger than before. But this is a soul matter—a heart matter.

Until we get it right with God and depend more on prayer, failure is inevitable. History records failures of those who have lived godless lives. It records successes of those who held the Word fast in their hearts. Where there is the will, there is the way. Get it right!

Puddles to Ponder

You cannot change an element unless you change its nucleus. We cannot change ourselves by adjusting externals. Real change comes when we have an inner drive to transform. —Selected



Happiness Precipitation

Teacher, please delegate the following activity: Ask a class volunteer to bring a Styrofoam wig stand to class. Write “Raging, Angry Person” on the Styrofoam.

Have each class member do the following: On a sheet of paper make two columns. At the top of one column, write “My feelings.” List the emotions you feel when others vent their rage and anger upon you.

At the top of the other column write “Their Behavior.” List the kinds of emotions displayed by an angry person.

Cut out each word that is in the column “Their Behavior” and bring these words to class in a small bag with a push pin for each word.

Collect all of the words from the class and pin them on the wig stand. These emotions now belong to the “Raging, Angry Person.”

Moral: If we adopt raging behavior and make it our own, we will soon become just like them, so place the rage where it belongs.

Rationalizing Unhappiness



Happiness Forecast

The rumble of thunder serves as a warning of storms ahead. I will treat my negative thoughts as rumbles of warning and replace them with positive affirmations of my many blessings.

May, Then June

Wondering where you might find happiness? You are in good company. Thousands roam the earth searching for just the right place where surely they will find happiness. These may be called fortune hunters, travelers, career seekers, or jet-setters.

After worship one Sunday, May made an attempt to speak with June because she sensed that June had been depressed lately. When May asked what was bothering her, June held back for a moment and then admitted, "I am just not happy here; I need to be back home."

"Where is home?" May asked.

"Home is Chicago." June's answer seemed to be the last place on earth where May thought happiness would be found. But it was in Chicago that impressionable happy memories had been made upon June.

"What can I do to help make you happy with us? We would hate to lose someone who is so valuable to the work here." May pleaded for an insight into making another person happy. But May already knew that none of her actions would bring June the happiness she sought.