

I used to think stress was just a normal part of life — a badge of responsibility we all carry. But as I've gotten older, I've come to realize that stress is often a cover for fear. When I say, "I'm stressed," what I'm really admitting is, "I'm afraid." Afraid things won't work out, afraid I won't measure up, afraid of what tomorrow might bring.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

—Philippians 4:6

And let's be honest — stress is easy to justify. It can make us feel like we're being responsible, like we're doing what needs to be done. But if we peel back the layers, we'll find fear underneath. Fear of losing control. Fear of disappointment. Fear of embarrassment. Fear of the unknown.

I can't tell you how many times I've prayed, "Lord, I trust You," only to catch myself moments later running anxious scenarios in my mind. It's as if

I'm saying, "I trust You... but let me hold on to this one thing, just in case." Sound familiar? If it does, you're not alone.

Like a thief in the night, fear quietly slips through the cracks of our minds, stealing the joy God has placed in our hearts. We tell ourselves we're just being cautious, bracing ourselves for the worst, but what we're really doing is giving worry the keys to our joy.

God never intended for us to carry that burden. To experience joy — true, unshakable joy — we must release our worries and place our trust in His care, knowing with confidence that we're safe in His hands. In Matthew 10:29, Jesus reminds us how much we're valued by God, saying, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care."

When we truly grasp that truth, joy begins to take root.

Some days that's easier said than done. Our minds love to race through every "what if," thinking we'll be prepared and protected. But here's the thing: those "what ifs" do nothing to change the future. They just rob us of joy in the present. The turning point comes when we decide to hand those fears over to God, trust that He's faithful, and pray.

Philippians 4:6-7 tells us, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." But don't miss the connection: thanksgiving shifts our perspective from fear to joy. It reminds us of God's goodness and His faithfulness through every season of life.



It's in leaning on God that we experience joy—not because life is perfect, but because He is faithful.

READ AND REFLECT

Read 2 Chronicles 20:1-30. What did Jehoshaphat's men do as they marched toward the enemy, and what does their response teach us about trusting God during uncertain times?

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LET'S MAP IT OUT

To be overly concerned, worried, or distracted by cares of life. It implies being pulled in different directions by worry.

Do not be anxious about anything, *A broad term for communicating with God, emphasizing worship and devotion.*

but in every situation, by prayer *A specific request or plea for help, typically addressing a pressing need.*

and petition,

Grateful acknowledgment of God's grace and provision. with thanksgiving,

present your requests to God. *To make known, to declare openly, to communicate clearly.*

This verse reminds us that God is both willing and able to handle our concerns, offering us peace in return.

Philippians 4:6, NIV

WHAT WE CAN LEARN ABOUT WORRY FROM 2 CHRONICLES 20

2 Chronicles 20 offers us valuable lessons on handling worry. When faced with overwhelming fear, King Jehoshaphat chose to turn to God rather than give in to anxiety. Here are some key takeaways from this powerful chapter.

THE BATTLE BELONGS TO THE LORD

When several armies threatened Judah, Jehoshaphat could have panicked or taken matters into his own hands. Instead, he sought God's guidance. In return the message was clear: "Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's" (2 Chr. 20:15). This verse reminds us that we don't have to carry our burdens alone. We can release our worries to God trusting He will handle what we can't.

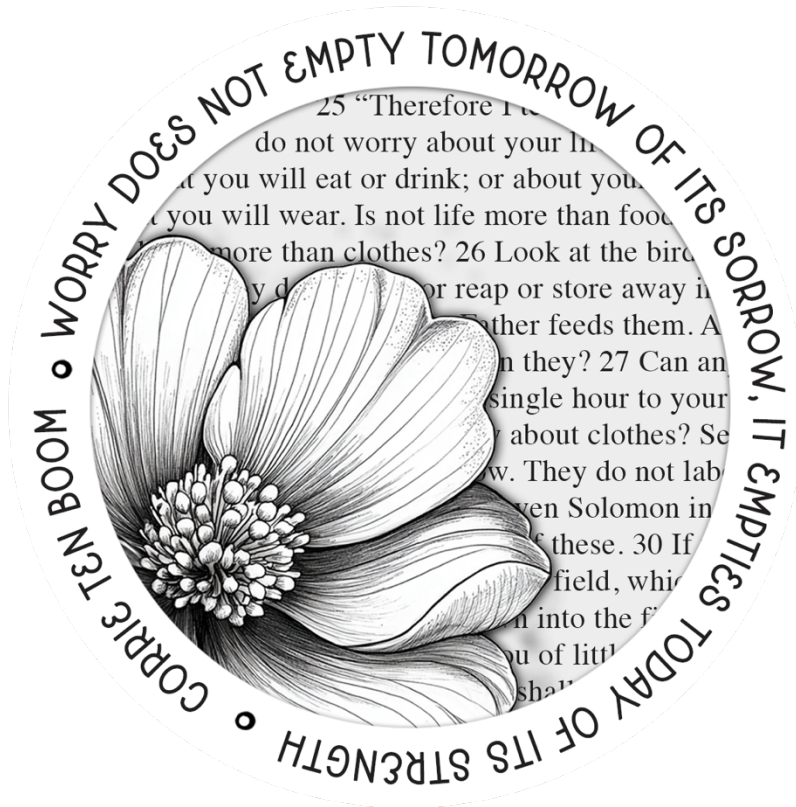
TAKE IT TO PRAYER

Rather than trying to solve the crisis himself, Jehoshaphat called the people of Judah to fast and pray. He openly admitted his fear and said, "We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you" (2 Chr. 20:12). This shows us that we don't need all the answers. We simply need to bring our worries to God, trusting that He will guide us through.

RESPOND WITH WORSHIP

Jehoshaphat's response to God's promise was worship. Notice that they praised Him *before* seeing results. As they marched toward the enemy, they

sang, and God led them to victory. Like Jehoshaphat, let's respond with worship *before* our trial is over, trusting that God is already at work.



TODAY I'M THANKFUL FOR


Use the space below to list four things that you're thankful for.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____



More Food for Thought...

The redeemed of the Lord will return and enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

– Isaiah 51:11



Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!

– Psalm 32:11



You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound.

– Psalm 4:7



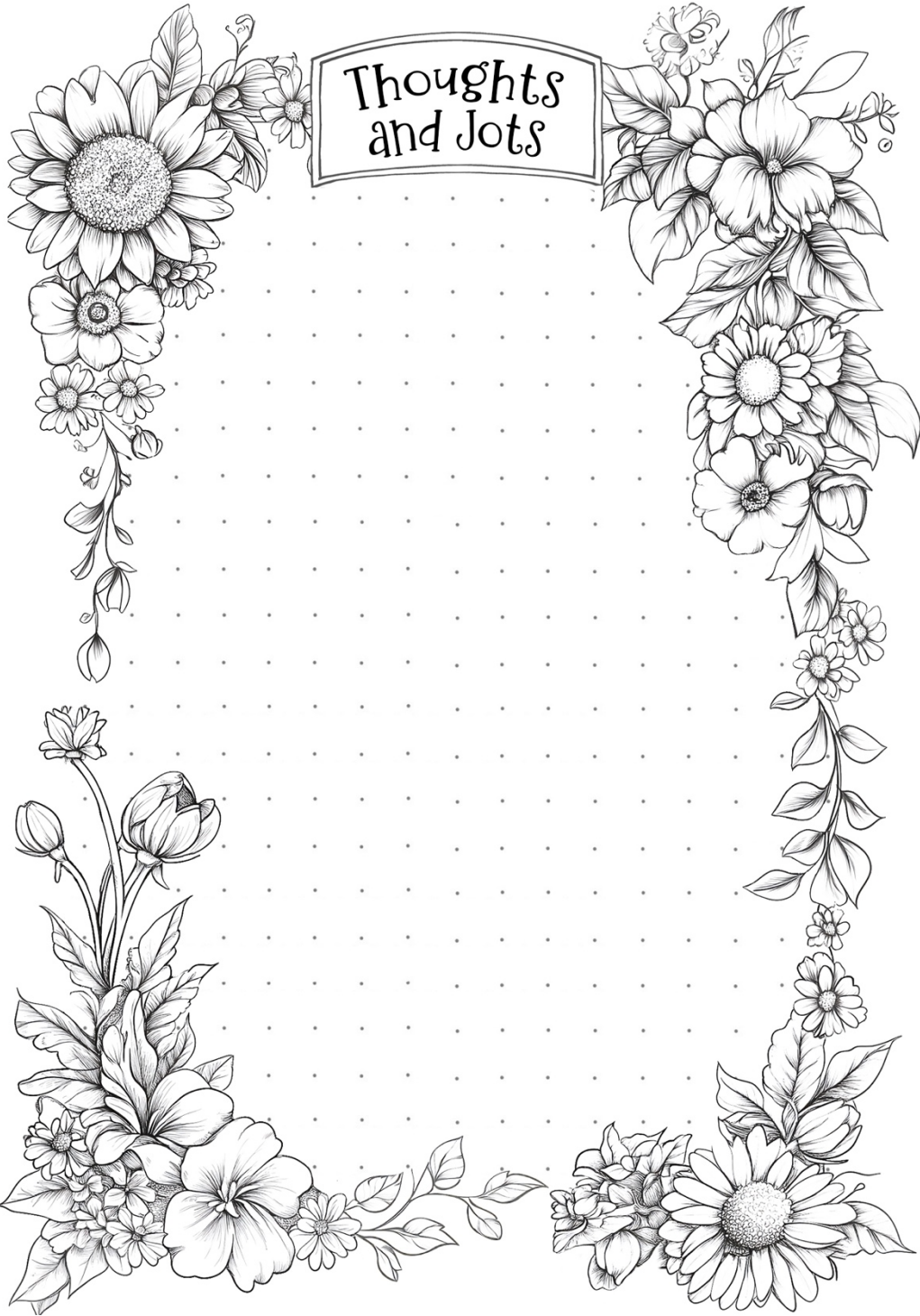
Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

– Romans 12:12



Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.

–1 Peter 1:8







My brother in law Jerry is one of a kind. And when I say he's incredible, I'm not even close to describing how wonderful he is. He's the type of guy who would swim through shark-infested waters to get my sister a lemonade if she were thirsty. I don't know how he'd bring it back without spilling the glass, but you get the idea.

After he retired, Jerry packed a lunch each and every day, along with a pretty little tablecloth, and went downtown to meet Bonnie at work. He's the kind of guy who walks on the street side of the sidewalk—a little extra protection from oncoming traffic, not to mention the splashing water. He opens car doors, carries groceries, and buys his wife a gift on the 9th of every month to celebrate their kissing anniversary. After 41 years, that's a whole lot of gifts!

Perhaps the most adorable thing Jerry's ever done for Bonnie is stock up on chocolate. He understands how women work and knows that we can be

*I have told you this so
that my joy may be in
you and that your joy
may be complete.*

—John 15:11



a little cranky once a month, and if we don't have chocolate in the house, nothing else will do. And so, that chocolate was always there, tucked away in a cupboard, waiting to satisfy a craving that nothing else could fill.

We all know what those cravings are like, right, ladies? We dig through the cupboards looking for chocolate—maybe for you it's something crispy and salty—and when you're looking for chocolate, nothing else will do.

As I got to thinking about that today, I was reminded of life. How we crave that certain something to make us happy—the perfect job, a bigger house, the person who will finally make us feel loved. Like a roller coaster, we chase high after high, but the high never lasts. Sure, those things might satisfy us for a season, but they'll never truly fill the space that can only be filled by God.

The truth is joy isn't something we can get from what we have or what we do. It's a gift from God. Jesus said in John 15:11, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." That's the kind of joy we want—the kind that sticks around no matter what's going on in life, because it comes from knowing Jesus.

When we let Jesus fill our hearts with joy, we stop chasing things that leave us feeling empty. Instead, we feel at peace, knowing that we are loved by Him. His joy keeps us going when life is hard, and it gives us hope when things feel out of control.

So, the next time you're digging through the cupboards looking for something to satisfy, let it remind you to turn your heart to the only One who can truly fill it. True joy is found in Jesus, and the best part is that it's always there, waiting for you—just like Jerry's stash of chocolate—a gift that never runs out.



LET'S MAP IT OUT

The joy that originates from Christ, rooted in His love and unity with the Father.

Indicates the personal, inward transformation that Christ brings to the believer.

Christ's teachings and commands are intended to lead us into a life of profound satisfaction and joy in Him.

I have told you this
so that my joy may be

in you and that
your joy may be complete.

John 15:11, NIV

Refers to Jesus' teaching about abiding in Him, the true vine (John 15:1-10).

A state of fullness and satisfaction, found in a relationship with Christ.

JOY IN THE SIMPLE THINGS

Use the space below to list four things that have brought you joy this past week:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____



CRAVING TRUE HAPPINESS

Charles Spurgeon once said, "We cannot be truly happy and live in sin. Holiness is the natural element of blessedness; and it can no more live out of that element than a fish could live in the fire. The happiness of man must come through his righteousness: his being right with God, with man, with himself — indeed, his being right all round."

Further on in the same sermon, he said: "His longing is not only to be treated as righteous by God, which comes through the atoning blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ; but that he may be actually righteous before the heart-searching God."

Think about that for a moment. We crave happiness, but true joy — the kind that sticks around no matter what life throws at us — is only found when we are right with God.

It's no surprise that Jesus told us: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." (Matthew 5:6)

The word "blessed" in Scripture speaks of a joy that goes beyond fleeting happiness. It describes a deep, lasting contentment that comes from knowing God and walking in His ways — the kind of joy that doesn't depend on circumstances, but on a relationship with Him.

The happiness we crave can't be found in temporary pleasures or worldly success. It's found in seeking God and His righteousness — not just being declared righteous through Christ's atoning blood, but actively longing to walk in righteousness before Him.

When we seek Him, He fills us with joy that lasts.



More Food for Thought...

I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of My joy within them.

– John 17:13



The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and He helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise Him.

– Psalm 28:7



With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

– Isaiah 12:3



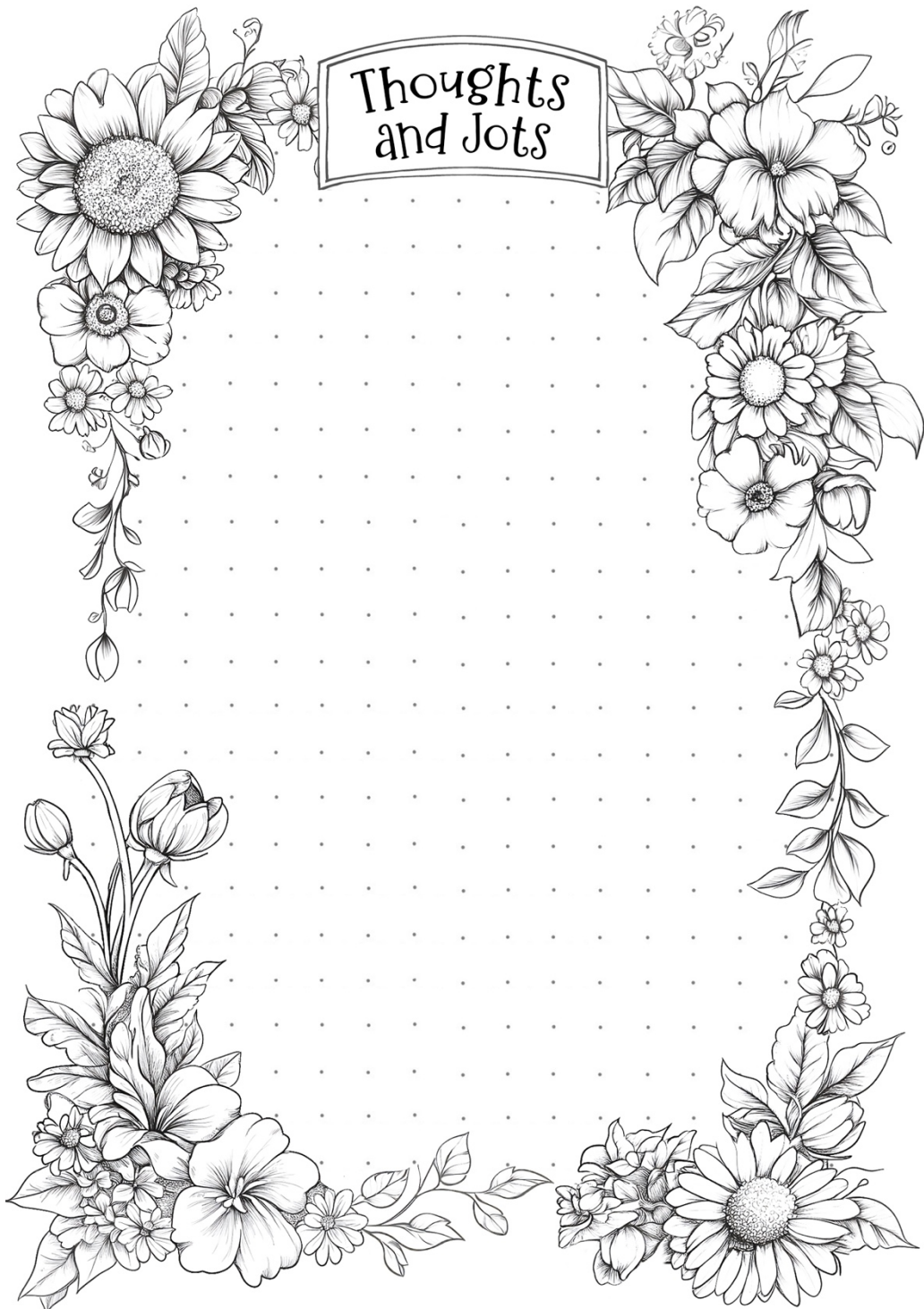
Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm.

–2 Corinthians 1:24

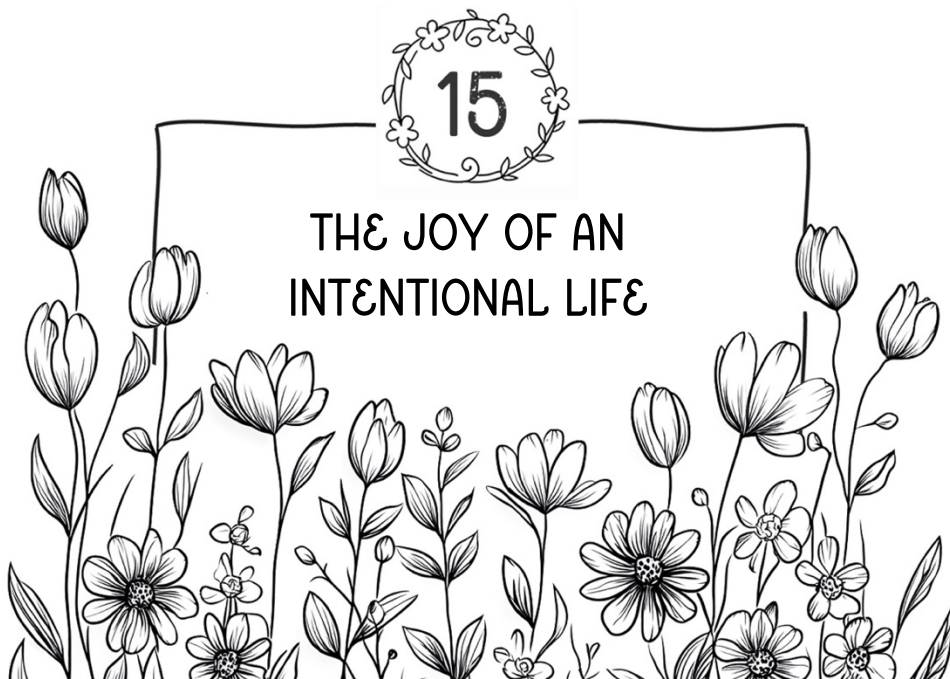


The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.

– Psalm 126:3







I'll be honest with you—back in the day, I was not one to keep things tidy. Growing up, my bedroom looked more like a battlefield than a peaceful retreat. Clothes? On the floor. Bed? Never made. Dresser? Covered in clutter. And you know what? I got used to it. I stepped over the mess every day, convincing myself it wasn't a big deal, until my parents finally forced me to clean up. And would stay clean for a few days, and then the cycle would start all over again.

Fast forward to now. Life looks a lot different with the kids grown and out of the house. And you know what I've discovered? Keeping things in order isn't all that hard when you do a little bit each day. It's actually refreshing to walk into a clean space—a home that feels peaceful and inviting. But let me tell you, that realization didn't just apply to my home; it reached into other areas of my life, too.

Because, here's the thing: procrastination doesn't just affect our cleaning habits. It has a sneaky way of creeping into our responsibilities, our

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

—John 10:10

relationships, and yes, even our faith. It whispers, "You've got time. Do it later." Later, I'll pay that bill. Later, I'll make that phone call. Later, I'll spend time in prayer. Later, I'll forgive. Later, I'll surrender to God.

But here's the truth: "Later" is a lie. It's a trap we fall into to ease our own guilt about putting things off. And the longer we delay, the heavier that burden becomes. It's like leaving your dishes pile up in the kitchen, day after day. Each time you walk in there, the pile grows a little bigger, and the weight of it—both physically and emotionally—starts to affect you. A chaotic life drains us. It robs us of peace, and that's exactly what the enemy wants. Jesus warned us in John 10:10, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full." Jesus is talking about false teachers here, but even so, worry can be one of those thieves. It may not rob us physically, but it steals our peace, drains our energy, and keeps us from living a life abounding in joy.

Look at that verse again. Notice that Jesus didn't say, "I've come so that *someday* you'll have an abundant life." No. He wants to give that life to us now. A life that goes far beyond merely surviving. A life that thrives spiritually and emotionally because of our connection to Christ.

It's found in the here and now—in the ordinary moments where we choose to live intentionally. It's in the joy of a tidy kitchen. The calm of a cleared-off table. The peace of a heart that's right with God.

Procrastination robs us of that joy. It convinces us that it's okay to keep putting off the things that matter. But here's the truth, my friend: God is calling us to move. To take action. Whether it's cleaning up a mess, mending a relationship, or spending time in His Word, there's freedom on the other side of obedience.

So, let's stop turning away from what needs to be done. Let's stop believing the lie that "later" is good enough. Today is the day to experience the fullness of life that Jesus promised. Not someday. Today.

Don't Put off till tomorrow what you can do today. — Benjamin Franklin

LIFE IN ABUNDANCE



WHAT IT IS	WHAT IT ISN'T
Spiritual fulfillment	Material wealth or success
Freedom from sin & fear	A trouble-free life
Joy and peace in Christ	Waiting for heaven to experience joy
Purpose and hope	Perfect circumstances
Eternal life with God	Temporary happiness

LET'S MAP IT OUT

Worry is like a thief. It sneaks in to steal peace and joy when we're not expecting it.

It slowly drains our hope and leaves us spiritually weary. Over time, worry can harm our faith and rob us of abundant life in Christ.

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy."

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

John 10:10, NIV

Worry takes away trust in God and replaces it with fear.

Jesus offers a life rooted in joy, peace, and trust — not in fear or worry.

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10 Practical Ways to Live Intentionally & Make Room for Joy

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1. **TIDY UP IN 10 MINUTES**

SET A TIMER FOR 10 MINUTES EACH DAY TO TACKLE CLUTTER. SMALL EFFORTS ADD UP OVER TIME, KEEPING YOUR HOME PEACEFUL AND ORDERLY. A TIDY SPACE OFTEN LEADS TO A CLEARER MIND AND HEART.

2. **HANDLE IT ONCE**

IF A TASK TAKES LESS THAN FIVE MINUTES (LIKE PUTTING DISHES AWAY OR SENDING A QUICK MESSAGE), DO IT RIGHT AWAY. DON'T LET LITTLE THINGS PILE UP AND STEAL YOUR PEACE.

3. **MAKE THE BED**

A SIMPLE TASK LIKE MAKING YOUR BED SETS A POSITIVE TONE FOR THE DAY. IT'S A SMALL WIN THAT CREATES A SENSE OF ORDER RIGHT FROM THE START — A REMINDER THAT EVEN LITTLE THINGS CAN BRING JOY.

4. **FORGIVE FIRST**

JOY CAN'T FLOURISH WHEN WE'RE HOLDING ON TO GRUDGES. PRACTICE FORGIVING OTHERS — EVEN WHEN THEY DON'T ASK FOR IT. FORGIVENESS FREES YOUR HEART AND MAKES ROOM FOR PEACE AND JOY.

5. **LET GO OF RESENTMENT**
HOLDING ON TO RESENTMENT WEIGHS US DOWN AND BLOCKS THE JOY GOD WANTS TO GIVE US. RELEASE IT THROUGH PRAYER, AND TRUST GOD TO HEAL WHAT'S BROKEN. "LET ALL BITTERNESS AND WRATH AND ANGER BE PUT AWAY FROM YOU" (EPHESIANS 4:31).
6. **SCHEDULE QUIET TIME WITH GOD**
DON'T WAIT FOR THE PERFECT MOMENT TO SPEND TIME WITH GOD. EVEN 5-10 MINUTES EACH MORNING CAN BRING PEACE AND CLARITY TO YOUR DAY. IT'S IN HIS PRESENCE THAT WE FIND FULLNESS OF JOY.
7. **CHOOSE PROGRESS OVER PERFECTION**
PERFECTIONISM CAN LEAD TO PROCRASTINATION AND OVERWHELM. INSTEAD, CELEBRATE SMALL WINS AND EMBRACE PROGRESS. JOY ISN'T FOUND IN DOING THINGS PERFECTLY — IT'S FOUND IN WALKING FAITHFULLY.
8. **PRACTICE COMPASSION**
LOOK FOR WAYS TO SERVE OTHERS — EVEN IN SMALL WAYS. JOY GROWS WHEN WE TAKE THE FOCUS OFF OURSELVES AND SHOW KINDNESS TO THOSE AROUND US. COMPASSION SHIFTS YOUR HEART OUTWARD AND BRINGS LIGHT TO OTHERS.
9. **PRAY BEFORE YOU REACT**
WHEN EMOTIONS RISE, PAUSE AND PRAY BEFORE REACTING. ASKING GOD FOR WISDOM AND GRACE IN THE MOMENT HELPS YOU RESPOND WITH KINDNESS AND MAKE ROOM FOR PEACE AND JOY.
10. **END THE DAY WITH GRATITUDE**
BEFORE YOU GO TO BED, REFLECT ON THREE THINGS YOU'RE THANKFUL FOR. GRATITUDE SHIFTS YOUR MINDSET FROM OVERWHELM TO JOY AND REMINDS YOU OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS — EVEN IN DIFFICULT SEASONS.

More Food for Thought...

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

– Ephesians 5:15-16



Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

– Colossians 3:23-24



Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

– Psalm 90:12



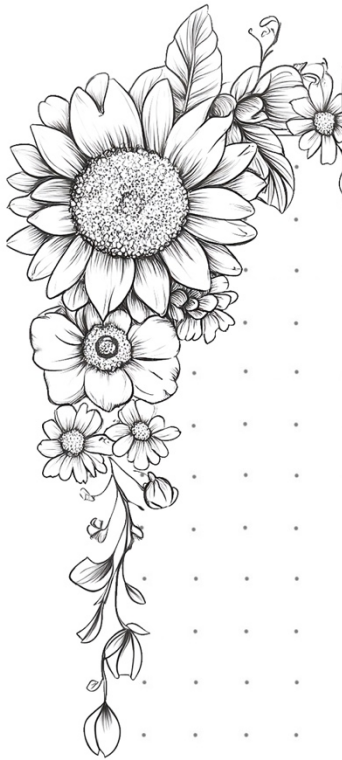
The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways, but the folly of fools is deception.

– Proverbs 14:8



She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.

– Proverbs 31:27



Thoughts
and Jots

