

HAPPY
WOMEN
Live
Better

VALORIE
BURTON



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*May the crossing of our paths lead you to
more smiles, more laughs, and more life!*

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Happy Women Read Introductions!

I know, I know. You like to go straight to the first chapter and skip the introduction. But this one time, don't. Before we dive in and discover how you can be happier starting today, I want to shed some light on why this subject matters at this point in history. And why your picking this book up is about more than just your happiness. It is about a movement.

We are in a crisis. But no one seems to have noticed. As women, we have more, but we enjoy less. We are more educated. We have more choices. We make more money. We raise fewer children. And thanks to technology, the chores are much easier. Women today have more opportunities than any women in the history of the world. And yet, research shows that collectively we are *less* happy than we were 40 years ago—while men are actually getting happier.¹ Why is that? And just as importantly, what can *you* do about it so you don't fall into these alarming statistics? Here are just a few of them:

- While we were told we could “have it all,” and it is assumed we all want to climb the highest heights of professional success, three quarters of working women today say they aspire to a financial lifestyle that would allow them to stop working and stay home.²
- Women today are twice as likely to be depressed as men.³
- Today, the average age of the first onset of depression is ten years younger than it was just a generation ago.⁴

- Women who pursue “it all” (education, career, marriage, children) have increasingly discovered that the more they achieve in the first half of that equation (education, career), the smaller their chances of success in the second half (marriage, children). Statistics are clear that the more educated you are and the more money you make, the less likely you are to ever get married and have children. The opposite is true for men.⁵

I have written this book with a dual mission in mind: to get women talking about their happiness and to give you the tools to be happier.

My conversations with women from all walks of life echo the same refrain, whether they have a stellar career and no kids or are married, stay-at-home moms of five: “I should be doing more.” “This isn’t what I thought life would be.” “I feel like I’m missing out on something.” In this book you’ll hear from women like you, talking about the angst they feel in life. The pressure they feel to catch up. The disappointment they feel at having done the right things and checked the right boxes, and somehow still not getting the life they’d expected. And you’ll hear from some who somehow seem to “have it all.” What’s their secret? I think you’ll be surprised by the answers.

Mission #1: What’s Going On?

First, I want to spark conversation between you and your girlfriends, daughters, aunts, cousins, coworkers, and any woman in your circle. As women, we need to raise our consciousness about the impact of cultural shifts on our collective happiness. Why does high income decrease a woman’s prospects for marriage and family? Why do men get happier as they get older while many women tend to get sadder—and how can you keep that from being your story? And can you really “have it all”—and how do you define “having it all”?

Through multiple conversations and taking a look at the growing research, it has become obvious to me that the threat to women’s happiness has been gradual. Because of that, most of us have not noticed the changes in expectations and dynamics over the last 40 years or so

that have dramatically increased our stress levels and made it harder to achieve happiness. Women who were young adults in the late 1960s and early 1970s point out the differences in cultural expectations easily. Having lived it and watched the changes over time, the contrast is stark.

“In 1972, there were fewer expectations on anybody about anything!” pointed out Christine Duvivier, positive psychologist and parenting expert. “I don’t think there were as many expectations on anybody about what you were supposed to achieve or supposed to have.”

Whatever the reasons for the shifts in our culture—changes that are likely impacting you in ways you may not have previously considered—you can be a part of the solution. You can raise awareness merely by bringing up the subject. I promise. *Every woman has an opinion about it.*

As I stumbled across this topic, I simply brought it up casually to every woman I came in contact with. “Did you know research shows that since the early 1970s women have become less happy while men are getting happier? Especially by their early 40s, many women are feeling like life just hasn’t turned out to be all they’d hoped. They’ve tried to have it all, but too many come up short. Why do you think that is?” Not one woman responded, “I don’t know.” Instead, they launched into long diatribes about their own lives, their daughters, their mothers, their friends. The comments were wide-ranging, but shared a similar theme:

I’m exhausted trying to do it all.

I feel like I’ve never done enough.

I feel guilty that I don’t do more.

One spring morning while sitting at Starbucks in Rockefeller Center after appearing as a guest on the *Today Show*, I met with producers from the *Dr. Oz* show. I’d previously appeared on their show and one of the producers asked what I was working on now. I started talking about this book and began to share the themes women were sharing with me. The two producers chimed in, sharing opinions from their own lives and families. Out of the blue, a perfect stranger approached our table. She looked a little scattered and quite interested in telling

us something. In her British accent she said, “Excuse me. I don’t normally eavesdrop on conversations, but what you’re talking about is so fascinating and so true.” Then for the next ten minutes she eagerly explained the stress of working, commuting, and being a wife and a mom. “I think it’s just a myth that you can have it all,” she said, sounding frustrated and like she just needed someone to hear that. “I don’t even want it all. I wish I could just stay home, but I can’t. We need the money.”

She isn’t alone in her angst. Consider some of these comments from women I interviewed:

- A 43-year-old mom of six, married 18 years and now embarking on a career in ministry, said, “I just feel so behind. I feel like I should have gotten started ten years ago.”
- A 26-year-old newlywed shared, “I feel so much pressure to get it right—at work, at home. Everyone is asking when we will have kids. I don’t know! Right now, I’m just trying to figure out how to be married and have a career at the same time.”
- A 38-year-old single professional shared, “I feel judged so often, like people think I exchanged having a family for having a great career. Truth is, I want it all. I thought I’d be married by now. It hasn’t happened. I’m starting to wonder if it ever will. I am usually strong in my faith so I feel guilty about my doubts.”
- A 60-year-old mom of two chimed in: “I think young women are stressed today because they have so many expectations on them. When I finished high school, the expectation was that I’d get married and have a family, maybe become a secretary. I felt no pressure whatsoever to conquer the world.”

The last comment by the Baby Boomer mom may just have hit the nail on the head. With more choices than ever before comes more

opportunity for second-guessing and regret. With higher expectations come more opportunities to disappoint and fail. With more women than ever climbing the ladder of professional and financial success comes more opportunities for comparison—and the chance to feel guilty that somehow you are not doing enough. Multiple challenges can contribute to feelings that deplete happiness and contentment. And through these pages, I want us to start a much-needed conversation about it.

Start the Conversation

If you were drawn to something about this book, I believe you are one of the women with the ability to spark the conversation across this nation. Women want to be happy, but more and more women are finding authentic happiness to be elusive—all the while putting on a smile to mask the disappointment, discouragement, and frustration of doing things they thought would bring happiness only to discover they don't. We'll dive into some important questions—questions that have an impact on just how happy of a life you live.

- Why is it more difficult to be content today than just a few decades ago—and getting even harder with time?
- When have you done enough?
- Didn't our moms tell us we could have it all? Were they making that up or were we just the first generation to embark on the great experiment to find out?

The first step to conquering a challenge is recognizing it exists. So we'll peel back the layers of the many changes in society that have created unexpected dynamics in the lives of women. Most importantly, we'll talk about what those changes mean to *you* and what you can do to ensure your own happiness.

Mission #2: What's Your Happiness Trigger?

The other mission of this book is helping you get happier. Using pioneering research from the field of positive psychology—the study of

what makes us happier, healthier, and more resilient—I’ve identified 13 happiness triggers. Every happiness trigger can boost your happiness, but you have “signature triggers,” happiness instigators that are more likely than others to produce positive emotion for you. We will explore each of the 13 happiness triggers and how you can activate them in your everyday life to live more joyfully and authentically, less stressed, and more satisfied. I’ve designed an assessment that will tell you what your strongest happiness triggers are. You can take it for free online at www.happywomantest.com.

Not only will you learn what your strongest happiness triggers are, but throughout these pages, I will share specific activities that will help you put your triggers to work. While many books exist on happiness, to my knowledge, none has ever discussed the concept of happiness triggers and the fact that what makes you happiest may be entirely different from what makes another happiest. The key to unlocking your authentic happiness may indeed lie in getting clarity about what innately energizes you and brings you the deepest level of meaning and satisfaction. Learning this now can create revolutionary change in your life—and it can help your friends, mate, and loved ones better understand what makes you unique. Likewise, I encourage you to have those closest to you take the assessment. Imagine what it can do for your relationships to better understand the happiness triggers of your children, spouse, friends, coworkers, and family members. Having this deeper understanding of what triggers happiness in yourself and others is bound to produce exciting results in your relationships.

How the Book Is Laid Out

Happiness Triggers

There are 13 happiness triggers you will learn in this book. They are skills, really. Happiness is a skill. If you practice the habits of happiness and make more choices that lead to happiness and fewer that don’t, you’ll see the amount of joy and contentment in your life measurably increase. In fact, studies show that while half of your happiness is genetic, only ten percent is based on your circumstances.⁶ The apostle Paul was right when he declared, “I have learned the secret of

being content in any and every situation...whether living in plenty or in want” (Philippians 4:12). About 40 percent of happiness is what you do intentionally.⁷ It is about your everyday habits, your relationships, and how you spend your time. Happiness triggers serve as a guide for how to influence that 40 percent. I’ll share these skills with you, give you a road map to use them, and vivid examples of how other women have used them to create more happiness and joy in their lives.

Conversation Starters

Between each happiness trigger, you’ll find a conversation starter. These chapters are meant to point out the cultural shifts and dynamics that really impact you and your ability to be happy—even if you haven’t noticed. You’ll be challenged to talk about these conversation starters with others and develop your own plan of action for how to keep these dynamics from draining your joy.

You’ll see questions at the start of each conversation starter that you can use for discussion with friends and getting clearer about your own growth and fulfillment. They are meant to facilitate chats and banter with the women in your life to get you all talking about that particular happiness trigger and how you can activate it—and what could hinder it from taking shape in your life. And even when you don’t discuss the questions with others, I encourage you to explore your answers to the questions. In doing so, you will begin to intentionally shape your thoughts and opinions in a way that empowers you to own your happiness.

My goal is that you finish this book equipped with the tools to be happier and that you will gain an increased awareness of the cultural factors that you must encounter along your journey. The cultural factors are sometimes going to seem a bit negative. I wish that weren’t so, but it is the reality we face. The good news is that there is plenty you can do about it.

12 Happiness Myths Every Woman Should Know

Just one more thing before we dive in. There are a few assumptions—let’s call them myths—that many of us buy into when it comes to happiness. Let’s just go ahead and debunk them now. Some are

surprising. Some you may resist. Raising your awareness about them expands your toolbox of happiness knowledge so that you can make decisions and set expectations that serve you and help you to be happy on your way to your life's vision rather than simply holding your breath until you arrive.

1. You know what will make you happy.

"If only" is a phrase that causes many women to stumble on the road to happiness. But research actually confirms that we are pretty poor predictors of what will make us happy. It's the sad truth. We think the relationship will make us happy. The new job will make us happy. Being in charge will make us happy. But the truth is, happiness is a state of mind. What makes you happy is your attitude toward your life. In fact, happiness has been defined as "how you *feel* about the life you are living." It is subjective. And if you can't be happy while you don't have everything you want, you likely won't be happy when you get everything you want. Because if happiness is about checking off your list of things and people you need to arrive at happiness, the list will magically keep growing.

2. Success produces happiness.

Pretty much everything we pursue in life we pursue because we believe it will make us happier—whether it's love or a career or weight loss or money. Success is no different. But the myth that success produces happiness is simply untrue. It is actually the other way around. The attitude, positive emotion, and optimism that accompany happiness create success. Studies show that happier people are more likely to get promoted, make more money, and persevere in the face of challenges.

3. Happiness is about what happens.

It's a catchy phrase and it seems to make sense: "Happiness is about what happens to you." But it isn't true. Circumstances actually account for just ten percent of your happiness. Study after study shows that after difficult or even tragic circumstances, people bounce back to levels of happiness close to where they were prior to the change in

circumstances. So a miserable person remains miserable and a fairly happy person adjusts to the new circumstances and regains happiness.

4. Focusing on happiness is selfish.

“There is nothing better for people than to be happy and do good while they live...this is the gift of God,” King Solomon proclaims in the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes. So why do so many people of faith think that focusing on happiness is “selfish”? Truth is, happiness is good for your health and it’s contagious. What better way to live your life than to journey through it with a positive attitude and level of happiness that lifts others?

5. With so many more opportunities and advances in the workplace and society, women are happier today than they were 40 years ago.

I’d love to be able to tell you this is true, but it isn’t. Women today report lower levels of happiness than women in 1972, and men actually report higher levels of happiness. Worse yet, on average, women get sadder and less fulfilled as they get older while men report feeling more fulfilled.

6. Women who work are happier and more fulfilled.

I almost hate to say it, but this also is not true. Women who stay at home report greater happiness than those who work. I don’t find this particularly shocking. As much as I love what I do and know I’m living in my purpose, there are days I daydream about not working at all. Can you relate? Fulfillment can be found in many ways, and millions of women have found it without 9 to 5.

7. Having children will make you happier.

This is by no means to suggest you shouldn’t have children, but multiple studies over multiple decades show that married women with children are less happy than married women without children. For that matter, you can imagine that single moms report higher stress levels and less happiness than single women without children. Children are

a gift from God, but in today's world, they also bring a level of stress and anxiety that impacts happiness.

8. If I could just make more money, I'd be happier.

There are actually only a few ways money will make you happier. And beyond a household income of \$75,000 annually in the United States, increases in happiness are very small.⁸ If you are living in poverty—let's say \$15,000 per year—and get a boost to \$45,000 per year, your happiness will skyrocket. That's because getting your needs met is essential for happiness. But once needs are met, money is not the biggest determinant of happiness. Giving some away will make you happier. So will living below your means.

9. If I live in the best neighborhood, I'll be happier.

Actually, you'll be happier in a neighborhood that is a bit less than you can afford. It turns out we are happier when living in an environment where we are doing at least slightly better than those around us. It decreases the pressure of "keeping up with the Jones." As a result, you are less likely to feel like you are missing out, underachieving, or falling behind, all of which are good for your happiness.

10. Marriage makes women happier and men feel confined.

You've seen the stereotype on every sitcom. The married man complains about how he has to get his wife's permission to go out with the fellas or is frustrated by his wife's nagging or incessant honey-do list. You kinda get the idea that men are dragged into marriage kicking and screaming. And the women, of course, are all just dying to get married. It is an intriguing cultural stereotype because study after study shows that men are actually happier in marriage than women. And when men divorce, they are more likely than women to remarry—and they remarry faster than women.

11. Happiness is easy.

Uhh...not in the world we live in today. We are constantly bombarded with messages that tell us we can't be happy until we get the

promotion, the relationship, the house, the perfect body. And we have fewer of the support systems in place that facilitate happiness—family nearby, neighbors we know, low expenses—and expectations to match.

12. *“Having it all” will make you happy.*

This is up for debate. By the looks of things, more and more women are opting out of trying—or have tried and just can’t seem to “have it all” even if they want to. Forty-three percent of Generation X women who are college graduates don’t have children. Of the ones who do, record numbers are opting to leave the workforce and stay home with their kids. And the ones who are working and raising children face stressors and challenges that erode happiness. This is not to say there are no women who “have it all,” but achieving “it all”—the husband, kids, stellar career, knockout body, and happiness—requires an alignment of circumstances few women have.

So how about you? Which of these myths have you bought into? And how does it impact your feelings about where you are in your life? In this book, I invite you to drop the myths and start over with a new concept of what it takes to be happy. It is about renewing your mind and washing away all the beliefs that actually sabotage your happiness and learning the skills of happiness that actually work. Using a combination of powerful research, biblical wisdom, stories from real women, and conversation starters for you and your friends, we are about to begin a journey that can transform your life.

You ready? Let’s get started.

HAPPINESS TRIGGER #1

Anticipation

How to use the power of positive expectation to boost your mood

Decision

“Every day, I make sure I have something to look forward to.”

Single and down in the dumps over the seeming lack of eligible, desirable potential mates in her city, Shawn complained about her eventless weekends and lonely weeknights.

“I just want someone to do things with,” she said during a coaching session. “Is that too much to ask?”

Well, maybe not. She’s attractive and smart, and one would assume she doesn’t have trouble getting a date. Her question is one most women in her position might ask. But I had a more important question for Shawn. “Rather than waiting for someone to show up and give you a ‘reason’ to do interesting and fun things,” I said, “why not do interesting and fun things regardless of whether you have someone to do them with?”

“Well, I don’t feel comfortable going places alone,” she explained.

“Okay, so don’t go alone. Ask a friend to go with you,” I said.

Shawn paused. As simple a request as I was making, somehow it fell on Shawn like new information. She normally waited for friends to invite her to do things, but never made plans and invited others along. No wonder she was bored! Her life experience was not her own—it was by happenstance. Whatever experiences others created and invited her

to be a part of, she did—from her work projects to one-year-old birthday parties. But whatever she attended, it was never her idea.

I challenged Shawn to proactively plan something interesting to do the following week. She accepted the challenge with enthusiasm, and noted that her attitude was indeed a little rigid when it came to planning something to look forward to. That week, a group she'd been meaning to get involved with had a gathering at a local restaurant and Shawn invited a colleague along. In a quick turn of events, Shawn met a gentleman that evening. Within a few weeks, a relationship began.

Now, I'm not suggesting that if you take one step, you'll find the love of your life. But I will say this: Once you take control of your life by creating anticipation—something to look forward to—you'll be surprised how many other welcome shifts can occur.

Shawn soon began putting the power of anticipation in her everyday life. She asked friends to dinner. She planned long bubble baths. She savored book night, when she curled up in bed early with a good book. She took a winetasting class and invited her sister to come along and joined a Saturday morning bike riding club she'd heard about through a colleague at work. Nearly every day, there was something to look forward to on her calendar.

If I took a look at the next seven days on your schedule, how much of it would you say is stuff you can't wait to do? Happiness, to a great extent, is having something to look forward to. It is savoring what's coming up. Be willing to get excited—even about that piece of cake you've held off all week to eat or that friend you finally carved out time to see tomorrow. The happiness trigger of anticipation is easy to pull off, but you must be intentional about it. In other words, you must do one of two things:

- Notice what's already in front of you to look forward to.
- Create something to look forward to.

When I was growing up, my parents always told me if I was bored, it was my fault. It meant I was waiting on someone else to entertain me rather than using my own creativity to find something constructive and

interesting to do with my time. As adults, we often aren't bored (there's too much to do to be bored!), but we can fall into the rut of routine, feeling that every day is nothing but a series of to-do's to be checked off. How often do you wake up genuinely excited about the day ahead? What would it take to make that your reality?

Notice What's in Front of You

Maybe you can relate to this. Sometimes, when my calendar gets really full, I can get into a rut of dreading what's coming up. Mind you, I have spent years building a life that I actually love, so it is rare that I have something on the calendar that I didn't at some point actually *want* to do. But when there is too much of it, I forget about the fact that it's exciting stuff and begin to focus simply on the fact that there is so much of it. So I've learned to pause when I look at my calendar and then breathe, mindfully soaking in the upcoming events of the day. It's not just "stuff to do." It's my life. And I'm grateful for it. And most of it is something to look forward to.

When life becomes a crowded routine of work, obligations, and whatever else is on your overloaded plate, it dampens your joy. What are you looking forward to today? How about next week? Or three months from now? Research shows that anticipation—enthusiasm for a future event—increases positive emotion and boosts your happiness. But when your schedule is full and life has become a monotony of daily tasks and expectations, anticipation and enthusiasm are likely not the emotions you feel. The good news is this: You can intentionally create something to look forward to every single day. In fact, if you are going to be a happy woman, you must. Most happy women do this naturally. They may not even recognize it on a conscious level, but if you ask them about their schedule, you'll notice joy-inducing events sprinkled throughout their days and weeks.

So that meeting you have at 11 a.m.? Rather than another meeting, look at it as an opportunity to move forward and be productive. That lunch date you scheduled that you feel like you don't have time for today? Savor the time to slow down for a meal and connect with that person one-on-one in the midst of a full day. The gymnastics practice

you must rush your daughter to later this afternoon? Remember the day when you dreamed of having a child of your own and savor the fact that you have a healthy, energetic little girl who is blossoming right before your eyes. Oh, and the finale of your favorite show you're going to curl up on the sofa and watch at 9 o'clock tonight? Express to somebody how much you're looking forward to it. Expression is a key to anticipation.

Multiply the Positive Emotions

Anticipation is about stirring up positive emotions about the future. In fact, when anticipation is done right, you can get as much positive emotion out of your anticipation of an event as you do from the event itself. It fits the old adage, "It's about the journey, not the destination." Planning your vacation is a perfect example of this, from perusing travel websites with vivid pictures of paradise destinations and imagining yourself there to booking your flight and talking through what you are looking forward to once you arrive. If it's a family or group vacation, plan a get-together weeks before the vacation to talk through plans and start your countdown. Every opportunity to generate excitement and joy in anticipation of an event multiplies your positive emotion.

If There's Nothing to Look Forward to, Create Something!

You might be like Shawn. If you look at your schedule, and don't see much to look forward to, it's time to be intentional and get creative. What have you been talking about doing for the longest? Maybe it's time to make it happen. Is there a milestone you've recently reached or one that's coming up? Come up with a way to celebrate it. Whether it's a small acknowledgment (you'll treat yourself to that new pair of shoes you've been eyeing!) or big bash (so what if you've never thrown a bash—this'll be your first!), celebration fosters anticipation.

The Power of Novelty: Try Something New

One exciting way to have something to look forward to is to try something new. Novelty boosts happiness by keeping your life from becoming dull. Always fresh with some new activity or learning, you

look forward to the next adventure. Recently, I decided I want to try growing some food. This has always intrigued me. Although I spent my summers with my grandparents and my grandmother had a half-acre garden with corn, cabbage, beets, green beans, potatoes, tomatoes, and squash and a large backyard with an apple tree, plum trees, peach trees, blackberry bushes, and more, I never had a clue how all that stuff managed to sprout from the ground. As an adult, and especially now that “organic” is so popular, I’ve wondered just how Grandmama did it. So I started very simply—with patio tomatoes.

Just today, I picked my first ripe husky red cherry tomato. I know I sound like a commercial saying this, but it was fresh and bursting with flavor! Every morning, I look forward to going out to water my tomatoes. I wonder how many more are beginning to turn from green to orange and from orange to red. I get excited to see new baby tomatoes sprouting from the vine. And there is a sense of gratification I feel from knowing that I helped nurture them into existence. I thought growing food was more complicated than this! I learned something new. It makes me happy.

Everyday Anticipation: Thank God It’s Monday!

Another powerful way to boost your happiness through the power of anticipation is to choose a career and workplace environment you absolutely love. With work taking up such a large percentage of most women’s time today, having something to look forward to when you head to work is powerful. Consider this scenario from my own life:

I spent last New Year’s Day on the beach in Miami. I got every ounce of joy out of my 12-day sabbatical—Christmastime with family, rest, play, and napping to the sound of the Atlantic’s waves crashing on the South Florida shore. In fact, I didn’t get back until New Year’s night. I fussed at myself (well, in my head, I fussed) as the wheels touched down at Atlanta’s Hartsfield-Jackson Airport. “Why didn’t I close the office on January 2 too?” I thought.

While a buffer day to get back into the rhythm of things would have been nice, my spirit felt rejuvenated and excited about the New Year. I was ready to get back to work. So on January 2, I headed to the

office. Just as I pulled up, I received this text from my assistant: *Soooo... per the calendar you are supposed to be off today. Just letting you know.*

Had I known, I'd still have been in bed. But I was dressed (in an outfit I'd thoughtfully picked out, no less!) and ready to rock. So I got out of the car and headed into the office. When my dad called mid-day, puttering around the house because he was off all week, I told him the story.

"I was supposed to be off today too, but I didn't realize it until I was already here!"

His response was echoed by several others as I jokingly recounted my dilemma that day: "Wow, now that's passion. It's obvious you really love what you do when you go to work even though you scheduled one more day off!"

Funny, I hadn't thought of it that way, but it's true. *I love what I do.* And I'm grateful. That wasn't always the case. At one point, I felt miserable in my previous career. I was good at it, but not at all passionate about it. I made a deliberate decision in 1999 to find my purpose and pursue it. Despite my worst fears that I somehow might not make a living at it (getting paid to "inspire" people isn't exactly on *Forbes'* "Top 10 Jobs" list), I went for it. My worst fears did not come true. But my dreams did. By 2001, I was doing it full-time.

Are you doing what you love for a living? If not, will you make a plan to start? Making a dream come true begins with this simple thought: *It's possible.*

In the beginning, you don't have to know exactly how to make it happen. You just need to believe it's possible and start moving in the right direction, asking the sort of questions that will lead you onto a new path. Make a decision to do what you love. Start small. Start now. I started part-time while I was running my own public relations agency. The road hasn't always been smooth, but it has been absolutely worth it. There's nothing like getting up in the morning excited about the day ahead, knowing you are going to make a positive impact on somebody. It's fun to be able to say, "Thank God it's Monday!"

Savor the Moment When It Arrives

Anticipation is savoring the future, but there are two other ways to savor that will make creating something to look forward to all the more worthwhile: savoring the moment and then reminiscing about it. Once you've spent time anticipating the experience, make sure you actually *enjoy* the experience. In our text-happy, social-media saturated culture, there is a temptation that didn't used to exist—the temptation to tell everybody what you're up to while you're up to it! Resist the urge. Fully engage in your moment once it arrives. Cherish it. Feel it. Taste it. Savor it. This moment will never come again.

Savor the Past Once the Moment Is Gone

When I was a little girl in Panama City, Florida, I looked forward with great anticipation to getting to play in the backyard. It wasn't just any backyard. Somehow, we lucked out. We lived on an Air Force base and our house just happened to be on the side of the street that backed up to the Gulf of Mexico. The view was spectacular. So at five or six years old, one of my favorite pastimes was sitting on my swing set in the middle of the backyard and watching the dolphins jump and play around three large poles about 100 yards from the water's edge. I'd count the number of dolphins and number of jumps. I'd get excited when they jumped completely over a pole rather than just bobbing out of the water. It was a real treat for me when the dolphins decided to play.

Just a few months before I turned seven years old, my parents brought me into the kitchen to explain that we were moving. I didn't really comprehend the concept at first—it had never occurred to me that we'd live anywhere other than where we were. And we weren't just moving down the street or even to another city. We were moving to another country: West Germany. As the time neared for us to move, my six-year-old mind decidedly wanted to forever remember what it felt like to sit in the blissfulness of that backyard ritual. Somehow, even at that young age, I knew how special it was. I recall sitting on my swing, telling myself the year and the place and taking a mental snapshot of

the beautiful view in front of me. Even now, decades later, I can close my eyes and feel transported to that joyful moment in time.

Think back to a vivid, specific moment in your life when you were filled with joy. What happened? How did you feel? Who were you with? Savoring is a powerful way to induce positive emotion. There are three ways we savor: the past, present, and future. Although anticipation is about savoring the future, it is worthy to note that you can also generate positive emotion by savoring the moments you once anticipated. Whether it is a mental snapshot, a photographic snapshot, or a conversation spent reminiscing about a special moment, savoring the past is one way to extend the joy beyond the moment.

Positive Anticipation Versus Negative Anticipation

In the context of happiness, anticipation is positive. However, let's acknowledge that sometimes anticipation can be absolutely a negative. It can produce anxiety (negative). These days, I rarely get nervous before I speak. But when I do, I can always trace it to one thing: the thought that somehow the speaking engagement will go terribly, I won't connect with the audience, and the people who brought me in will be sorely disappointed. This has never actually happened, but somehow the thought would creep in and suddenly, I became anxious. One of my favorite pieces of advice comes from the apostle Paul, who said, "Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6). Coach yourself with this question: What outcome do I *want* to happen?

Five Simple Ways to Build Anticipation

1. Set a goal.

It is impossible to be happy without goals. Now, your goal doesn't have to be to conquer the world. But your life needs an aim. "This week, I'm going to jog a total of 10 miles." "Next year, we are going to take our dream vacation to Paris." "In five years, I'm going to be completely out of debt." Set meaningful goals with a reasonable timeline. Close your eyes and imagine yourself achieving the goal.

2. Make a list of simple pleasures.

It's easiest to activate the happiness trigger of anticipation if you don't have to always come up with ideas on the spot. Instead, set aside a few minutes to make a list of simple pleasures. You might even write them on individual small pieces of paper and put them in an anticipation jar. Then pull one out whenever it's time to add something new to your calendar.

3. Talk about it.

Don't keep your excitement to yourself. What are you most looking forward to? Share with a friend. Talk about why it's meaningful to you. Verbalize what it's going to feel like when the moment comes.

4. Add to the joy.

When you're intentional and you begin talking about something you're looking forward to, something fun happens. You start to think of ways you can make the moment even more meaningful. Maybe you invite someone to join you. Perhaps you incorporate other happiness triggers to multiply the effect. For example, you create something to look forward to that you've never done before (happiness trigger: novelty) or you surprise someone in need with something that will really bless them and savor their reaction (service). Get creative. Add to the joy.

5. Count down.

Remember when you were a kid and you knew exactly how many days were left until school was out for the summer? Much of the fun was in the countdown. The same is true with intentionally creating anticipation. Be a kid about it. Count down. Write it on the whiteboard in your office or change out a sticky note on the refrigerator or bathroom mirror every day. The moment is getting closer every day.

Who pushes your anticipation trigger?

As long as we're talking about having something to look forward to, why not apply it to your relationships? Ideally, you should surround yourself with people you look forward to spending time with—that

should be a no-brainer! For those relationships you choose—friends or a mate, for example—a good measure of whether that relationship gives you energy or drains it is whether you actually look forward to being in the presence of that person. If you want to be happier, make it your goal to be around people who push your “anticipation” trigger. If they don’t, ask yourself, “How could we enhance this relationship so that we look forward to seeing each other?” As you probably know, some people in your life are simply not going to change. And that may mean you need to set some boundaries. There are few things more powerful to effect our happiness than our relationships.

Lower the Expectation, Lower Your Anxiety

This is a little counterintuitive, but I have to touch on it. It is possible to go overboard with a happiness trigger. Any strength, when overused, can become a weakness. If you have a tendency toward overachievement, it can be easy to set expectations for yourself that create more stress than good. In fact, anticipation can also be about giving yourself permission to lower the bar a little. I’m going to let that soak in for a second. Think for a moment about the thing that you pressure yourself most about right now. There’s so much expectation in it that it’s like a balloon that’s been filled to capacity with the air of expectation. Put any more air in there and it’ll pop! Everything would have to come together absolutely perfectly in order for the expectation to be met. Oh, and you have a deadline on it too—and it’s not a leisurely deadline, either. You got that thing in mind?

Now, close your eyes. Take a deep breath. And imagine that you gave yourself a little more breathing room with that goal. You’d still love for it to all come together the way you want, but loosen your grip on how it has to look. You reflect on the words of Jesus: “For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:30).

When our expectations of what must happen begin to line up in the perfect will of God for our lives, it isn’t a burden. The yoke is easy.

High expectations create pressure and increase the likelihood of disappointment. Now, this is not to say you shouldn’t have high expectations. However, be intentional about what you choose to have high

expectations about. If your expectations are high about everything, the likelihood of disappointment and stress is much higher. If some of those expectations are about things that are not really all that meaningful, then you've unnecessarily caused yourself stress and disappointment. The goal is to activate happiness, not stress.

Activate This Happiness Trigger!

- Take a look at your calendar for the next week. What do you have to look forward to? How could you further enhance your enjoyment of those activities? If there's nothing to look forward to, what can you create and add to your schedule?
- Pause. Close your eyes. Breathe deeply. Now imagine your enjoyment of the activity you are most looking forward to. This is called anticipatory savoring.
- Talk about what you're looking forward to. Anticipation is not to be kept to yourself. Expressing your excitement for what you're anticipating—no matter how small or large—is a key activating this happiness trigger.
- Savor the moment. When the activity arrives, be fully present. Don't let distractions muffle your enjoyment.
- Remember it with fondness. Reminiscing about past pleasures is savoring the past. What did you enjoy most? How did it feel? What did it mean to you? Talk about it. And keep a journal. Writing in a journal is a great way to reflect on meaningful pleasures. And whenever you want a boost of positive emotion, you can always go back to your journal and savor a bit more! Or make a scrapbook or photo album (online works too!) to remember your experience by.
- Set a new, meaningful goal and describe what it will feel like to reach that goal.
- Make a list of simple pleasures. Then choose one to put on your calendar today.