

God reveals Himself mightily through prayer as well as through trying times. Each page of this book abounds with surprise and delight as well as inspiring strategies for overcoming the everyday battles of life. *Fight Back With Joy* is a gift—one you can't afford to miss.

—Mark Batterson, lead pastor of
National Community Church in Washington, D.C.
and author of *New York Times* best-selling *The Circle Maker*

Margaret Feinberg is a strong voice of hope for us all. She is the real deal!

—Karen Kingsbury, #1 *New York Times*
best-selling author of *Angels Walking*

When you feel stuck in the rut of discouragement, there's no greater gift than rediscovering joy. With profound insight and poignant grace, Margaret Feinberg takes you on a journey toward joy that will reawaken your heart to the glee that comes with knowing God. You can't read this book and stay the same.

—Pete Wilson, senior pastor of
Cross Point Church in Nashville, TN
and author of *Plan B* and *Let Hope In*

Feinberg's story resonates deep within my heart. You'll be captivated by her skill in weaving together words, thoughts, and phrases—but even more beautiful is the way you'll be drawn closer to Jesus, our source of joy.

—Kay Warren, best-selling author and
cofounder of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, CA

Through her signature beautiful storytelling, Margaret Feinberg gives us an inspiring story of the true power of joy. In these pages, you'll learn to defeat lifelong patterns of discouragement, discover strategies for overcoming everyday challenges, and have your heart awakened to the delight of being a child of God. In *Fight Back With Joy*, the world of the Bible and our world come together in a way that will transform your life forever. A must-read.

—Tim Clinton, EdD, president, American Association of Christian Counselors, executive director and professor of counseling and pastoral care at the Center for Counseling and Family Studies at Liberty University

Margaret Feinberg's courage, candor, and tender vulnerability are transforming. Her raw struggles touched deep places in my life and will in yours too. *Fight Back With Joy* will deepen your compassion, bring healing, and fortify your holy resolve to follow God through anything. This is a message the church needs to hear today.

—Jennie Allen, founder of If:Gathering and author of *Festless*

So good. Just so unbelievably good. I cried more tears than I have in a very long time while reading for so many reasons. Ridiculously moving, laced with the beauty, art, and the eternal tension of Scripture. Don't think of this book as a happy-clappy, naive approach to having life ripped away, but rather a difficult and conscious decision to encounter the darkness with light, to fight back deep sorrow with deep, lasting joy. No matter your personal fight, your life will be changed by reading this hope-filled book.

—Cherie Lowe, author of *Slaying The Debt Dragon*

FIGHT BACK WITH JOY

CELEBRATE MORE. REGRET LESS.
STARE DOWN YOUR GREATEST FEARS.

Margaret Feinberg



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HELPING PEOPLE EXPERIENCE THE HEART OF GOD

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.000 | WHY WE LIVE JOYLESS LIVES



NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS are so last year, according to my friends. Many of them instead choose to live by a single word, one that embodies what they most hope God would do in their lives during the coming year.

My friend Sarah selected *love* last year, which led her to mend ties with her estranged father. Then there was John, who chose *balance*. He hung a chart on his kitchen wall to track his days and make sure he spends enough time with his family. And after Patty picked *hope*, she enlisted friends to help her see the sunny side of every situation. When her pessimistic tendencies emerge, her friends give her a “hope nudge.”

Seeing how this practice enriched my friends' lives, I dreamed about which word embodied the work I most wanted God to do in my life.

I had spent years listening for the sacred echoes, the repetitive voice of God in my life. I'd set out to scout for the divine,

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searching to better understand God through lesser-known biblical texts. And I had worked to shake myself from spiritual slumber and encounter the wonder of God all around.

During these God-journeys, a word kept bubbling inside me and fluttering about everywhere I turned. Only three letters and one tiny syllable: *joy*.

Could this be my word?

For most of my life, I had thought of joy as a natural byproduct of a life well lived. A complementary add-on, a tacked-on freebie. Like one of those late-night infomercials that promise, “But wait, there’s more!” Maybe such a bonus was included: I never seemed to find it amid the packing materials.

With the holidays in my rearview mirror and a New Year just ahead, I determined it was time to pursue a joy-filled life. No need to wait for joy to arrive mysteriously in the mail one day. I needed to try spiritual practices that might nurture joy.

Only a few months in, I was less effective at living out my word than my friends had been. Some joy experiments were disasters—like creating a homemade worry-o-graph that raised my anxiety rather than lowering it, and trying to mandate kindness, which backfired and made me a crabbypants.

The silliest fiasco was the two weeks I committed to saying yes to everything. When I asked select friends and members of my online community to join me, I received a unanimous

response: “That is wackytown!” Okay, only one person used that exact phrase, but everyone else hid behind excuses like “spread too thin,” “too busy,” and “no way I could do that.”

Their responses surprised me, because I am *that* friend—the one always plotting the next caper. I’ll call you at midnight to see if you want to try indoor skydiving, go on a ten-day juice fast, or score cheap airline tickets to Iceland. Sometimes I won’t ask or tell you what we are going to do; I’ll just send details on a treasure map of when and where to meet.

The chorus of “No!” should have alerted me that the Yes Experiment wasn’t sustainable. Discouraged but not defeated, I decided to embark on the venture by myself.

I explained the details of the Yes Experiment to my husband, Leif.

“You’re doing this? You’re crazy, you know that?”

“Of course, but I’m *your* crazy.”

“You’re going to say yes to *everything*?”

“Within reason. Don’t worry, I won’t sell our house for a dollar.”

“Do *I* have to say yes to everything?” he asked.

“You can say no to anyone and anything you want,” I explained. “But I’m agreeing to every request, including e-mails, texts, phone calls, tweets, and mail that’s addressed to me.”

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“Does that mean when I ask you for something the answer is yes too?”

I nodded.

Leif stared at the floor, his mind sprinting through the implications. I wondered how long it would take him to figure out the possibilities for *bow chica wow wow*.

Within 2.8 seconds, a boyish grin slipped across his face.

Like a Florida kid caught in a Michigan snowball fight, I was ill-prepared for the assault of requests that came from all directions. Coworkers. Friends. Readers. Strangers. Solicitors. Salespeople. In the first few days, I made so many donations I had to start selling furniture and clothes on eBay to fund the Yes Experiment. I helped save animals and refugees and fund microloans. At least I think I did.

“Do you want to donate a dollar to Easter Seals?”

Yes.

“Would you read my fifty-thousand-word book on North American flora and see if you think it’s any good?”

Yes.

“Would you like to leave a tip on the dollar granola bar you just purchased?”

Yes.

“Would you like to supersize your order?”

Yes.

Those types of asks were the most manageable. The great onslaught came from the office. My inbox exploded with requests for Skype calls, book endorsements, reprints, donations, mentoring, coaching, and more. While online, I said yes to every request to click, vote, or post. Within a half hour I knew I needed to stay far, far away from social media.

The Yes Experiment was causing me to do a lot without getting anything done. The unsustainable pace left me exhausted and empty, but my stubbornness prevailed.

I drove downtown to run errands on day four of the experiment. In a congested area of Denver, I noticed a man standing at the intersection, holding a clever cardboard sign that requested money for spaceship parts. As long as the light remained green, I could drive past and not have to buy a muffler for his intergalactic aircraft.

The light blinked yellow, and in a flash, an invisible force overtook my right foot. I stomped on the accelerator and sped through that red light with the gusto of Danica Patrick.

Why did I just do that?

Saying yes to everything was causing me to spend time and energy on the inconsequential, ignoring the people who mattered most. Rather than increase my joy, the Yes Experiment made me hypervigilant to avoid anyone who might ask for anything. This discipline was elbowing me away from the virtue of joy I sought.

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My friends were right: this caper was flawed.



Joy is one of those words that has been overused, distorted into a cliché. Plastered on coffee mugs, necklaces, T-shirts, decorative pillows—even dish soap, this critical quality has been transformed into a trinket we rarely notice and almost never take seriously.

Many people live joyless lives because they don't understand what joy is, what joy does, how to discover joy, and what to do with it once they find it.

C. S. Lewis once described joy as “serious business,” yet I assumed I could take joy lightly, capturing it in my free time like fireflies in a mason jar. I learned that you need much more than an experiment to unleash the power of joy. You need chutzpah, you need backbone, you need intentionality—and sometimes you need a crisis.

My crisis came in a flash flood of irony. I set out to conduct a joy experiment, but I became the test subject, the bubbling beaker of blue liquid, the living lab rat. Through a life-shattering diagnosis, I tumbled into uncertainty, anxiety, and pain. Along the way, I discovered what true joy looks like.

My crisis exposed the myths I believed about joy—such as the belief that fullness of joy is only available once we are in

heaven and the illusion that joy is an emotion that exists apart from circumstances.

During the last year and a half, I felt my way through the darkness of despair and stared death in the face. Somewhere along the way God unveiled a spectrum of joy I had never experienced—from the joy expressed as lighthearted laughter in an impossible situation to the joy gained from hearing the deep voice of God during times of great pain. Through it all, I learned something startling:

**More than whimsy,
joy is a weapon we use to fight life's battles.**

Sure, the virtue of joy is an upbeat companion for life, but that is not the whole story. The true power of joy supersedes a chirpy disposition, candy-coated emotion, or saccharine fantasy. It's far more tangible than any magical notion of clicking your heels and discovering your bliss.

Joy serves a useful and mighty purpose. Sometimes it comes through others as a gift of grace, but just as often it requires intentionality.

God is an unconventional teacher. He uses paradox to imbue us with common sense, propels healing through pain, and hauls clarity into our lives through the most confusing circumstances. In my case, God interrupted my misguided

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joy experiment in order to take me on a joy expedition. This journey was fraught with depression and loneliness, tears and turmoil—using unlikely circumstances to deliver joy instead of destroy it.

But in order to realize that, I had to face the moment everyone fears.