



# ***Living Joyfully in a Skilled Nursing Facility***

**LifeCare Memos® - Messages of Compassion**

As a chaplain in a Skilled Nursing Facility, I often hear a newly admitted Resident say, “My life is over now!” Many fear that they have come to their last stop in life. This may be true, but it does not mean that it is time to give up. Life at all stages, including the elderly years, is something worth celebrating. Joni Eareckson-Tada, paralyzed from the neck down from a diving accident at the age of 17, discovered the secret to living joyfully was a series of daily choices, made with **GOD**’s help. *“Even though I am confined to this chair,”* Joni says, *“my heart can always sing—always leap for joy.”* Here are some suggestions for living joyfully wherever you may be:

## **1. Accept life as it is.**

*“All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be”* (Psalm 139:16).

**GOD** knows each of your days and you can have joy in knowing that He is in control of **all** of them. By the time a person enters a Skilled Nursing Facility, health needs may dictate regular nursing care, physical limitations may keep a person from some activities, and weakness might limit a person to a wheelchair or bed. The reality is that many aspects of your independent living are diminished. The sooner one accepts this fact, the sooner a person can make the decision to get on with living each day with grace and joy.

## **2. Settle accounts while there is time.**

*“If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift”* (Matthew 5:23-24).

Many times, joy in life has been eliminated by our own actions. We live with broken relationships—as if there will always be another day for reconciliation. When time is limited, it is important to take care of unfinished business, to say the things that need to be said, to forgive and to ask for forgiveness. It’s never too late to restore your relationship with **GOD** or with another person. The joy this healing brings is not easily conveyed in words. Don’t put off something that promises so much.

### 3. Keep laughing.

*“A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones”*  
(Proverbs 17:22).

There is much joy to be found in the simple pleasures of life. Seeing the humor in a situation is a choice—an attitude of not taking yourself or your immediate situation too seriously. A sense of humor is something of great value for relieving tension, bringing people together and enjoying life.

### 4. Keep good memories alive.

*“The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love”* (Galatians 5:6b).

Whenever love is given or received, it is the stuff of good memories. Spend time reflecting on your life and the way in which **GOD** has guided and directed your path and given you *“every good and perfect gift,”* such as family and friends and faith in Him. It is also helpful to regularly do a “life review” of how **GOD** has taken things that were meant for harm and turned them around for your good. Good memories get better when you share them with others.

### 5. Do not isolate yourself.

*“Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O **GOD**, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come”* (Psalm 71:18).

This is the time to relish your relationships with loved ones. Even though roles may be reversed (you used to care for them, and now they are the caregivers), enjoy this new aspect of your relationship with friends and family. **GOD** has given you the important assignment of loving and teaching the people He brings into your life. For those who don't have family nearby, friendships with other Residents and their families, as well as with Nursing Home staff, is a two-way blessing. We never outgrow our need for people or their need for us.

### 6. Live one day at a time with all you have.

*“This is the day that the **LORD** has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it”*  
(Psalm 118:24).

Choose to experience life fully, whatever the circumstances. Don't fret about what will happen tomorrow—enjoy living today! Jesus told us not to worry about tomorrow because

*“Each day has enough trouble of its own”* (Matthew 6:34).

It does no good to dwell on the possibilities that may come tomorrow. The Bible assures us that whatever **GOD** permits, He will also provide us with what we need.

## 7. Joy comes from knowing and obeying Jesus.

*“I will be joyful in **GOD** my Savior”* (Habakkuk 3:18).

Those with faith in the **LORD** Jesus Christ have a peace and joy that this world cannot give. It is something that transcends the troubles of this world.

*“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you...Do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid”* (John 14:27).

When we put our trust in the One who made us and knows us intimately, He rejoices over us *“with singing”* (Zephaniah 3:17). Jesus reminds us to

*“Remain in My love. If you obey My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have obeyed My Father’s commands and remain in His love. I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete”* (John 15:10-11).

What it all boils down to is this—life in a Skilled Nursing Home is not that different than the Christian life. It is a life of dependence, not independence. It is a life of character, not of possessions. It is a life of spiritual calling and faith, not of tasks based on ability. It is a life comprised of both suffering and pleasure. It is **life**, **GOD**-given and **GOD**-purposed, for us to live fully and joyfully to the very last breath.

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### **LifeCare Memos**<sup>®</sup>

When experiencing the stresses of life, people need support. The Psalmist needed that support and found it when he turned to God. He said, *“Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one **cares for my life**. I cry to you, O LORD; I say, ‘You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living’”* (Psalm 142:4-5).

**LifeCare Memos** are designed as messages of compassion that integrate biblical guidelines for emotional and spiritual well-being. Topics focus on various life-care issues and address them from the perspective of Scripture.