

# Life on Autopilot

A Guide for Women Ready to Move  
from Disconnected to Intentional Living

## Is This It?

If you've been asking yourself this question, this book is for you.

**ALANNAH LYNNE**

*New York Times* Bestselling Author

# CHAPTER 1: Life on Autopilot

There you are, standing in the middle of a life that, by all accounts, looks fine.

In fact, it might even appear to be a *really good* life.

Neither you nor anyone in your family is battling a major health or financial crisis. There aren't any catastrophes dragging you under. There's nothing obvious you can point to and say, "That... That is a problem."

And yet, even though everything from the outside looking in appears to be okay, something inside you feels unsettled. It's not like your internal furniture has been ransacked, like someone tossed the place in a desperate search... but something feels "off."

Most of the time you manage to go about your day without putting too much thought into it, but every now and then, this little nagging question pops up.

It usually makes an appearance on the rare occasion life slows down... or when the house is quiet... or while driving your car... or while lying awake at night, left alone with your own thoughts.

And that question is:

***Is this it?***

***Have I done everything I wanted to do? Have I made all the impact on this world that I'm ever going to make? Why do I feel like I've left something undone?***

It doesn't show up in a dramatic or theatrical way. It doesn't rush in on a wave of despair or urgency that causes panic.

It's just a gentle, persistent kind of... wondering.

***Is this it?***

And then, if you're like a lot of women, discomfort slides in to blanket the thought, silencing it.

Your next thought might even be something like, *Why would I wonder such a thing? My life is fine. I'm fine. There are people out in the world with **real** problems, big problems. I'm fortunate, I have everything I **need**, so what right do I have to want more for my life?*

But even though you stifled it for the moment, the question doesn't go away.

It just slips back into the shadows and waits for the next time your mind settles enough for it to pop back in and, once again, try and grab your attention

If any of that seems familiar, I hope you find it reassuring that you're not alone. Many, many women feel the same.

There's nothing wrong with you... and you're not a bad person for asking these kinds of questions.

You're not having a breakdown or suffering a midlife crisis... this isn't proof you've somehow failed.

It's proof you've been living on autopilot, which happens to women who've poured themselves into everyone else's lives for years without being actively engaged in their own lives.

Autopilot is an extremely powerful and useful device when you're juggling a hectic life filled with work responsibilities, kids' soccer games, cheerleading practice, traveling volleyball, PTA meetings, and household chores.

Autopilot allows us to function efficiently... without getting completely overwhelmed, exhausted, and burned out... but it often ends up taking us someplace we didn't actually mean to go.

## **The Train You Didn't Mean to Stay On**

Imagine this.

Somewhere along the way... probably shortly after high school or college, you got on a train called "Life."

Everyone else was also getting on trains because that's what you're supposed to do... it's the natural next step in your growth into adulthood. So you pulled out a map, looked at the various routes, and evaluated your options.

You studied possible locations and job opportunities, considered what seemed to be the best, or most exciting, or maybe the most logical destination *at the time*... and then you punched your ticket and climbed aboard.

When you first got on, you were excited about the adventures waiting for you. And, because Life hadn't gained a lot of speed yet, you were able to stare out the window at the passing landscape with a mixture of nervous anticipation and excitement swirling in your belly.

The slower pace and novelty of the adventure allowed you to stay connected with your feelings and remain clear about where you wanted to go... you were able to discern between experiences that felt good and when something felt "off."

If you love the water but started seeing miles of desert with Prickly Pear and Saguaro cactus dotting the landscape, you probably didn't hesitate long before you decided to jump off at the next stop and, after a quick check-in with yourself, you decided a change was needed so you hopped on a different train headed toward a more tropical location.

But as Life gained momentum, you found the train stopping less and less often.

It wouldn't have mattered if it did, though, because after a while, you were so busy juggling work, kids, extended family, and trying to hold on to friendships you'd made along the way... you stopped looking out the window.

You stopped asking if you were still on the right train... and just kept moving.

And at the time, it made sense because getting off a moving train seems risky, if not downright terrifying. And everyone else was staying on their trains too, so you thought that's what you were supposed to do.

Besides, you got comfortable on your train... you knew the layout, the schedules and routines. You became proficient... probably even an expert... at managing all the details of the ride.

And before you knew it, years had passed. Then one day, you glanced out the window again and thought:

*Wait. Is this where I meant to go?*

The scenery wasn't bad. Your front yard wasn't made of sand, and palm fronds didn't litter your yard, but there also weren't any cacti or scorpions, so you considered it a win. You squinted and looked off into the distance at what appeared to be a gigantic puddle, maybe a lake. It wasn't the ocean, but at least you could kind of see water.

It wasn't exactly where you wanted to go, but it seemed like an okay place, so you convinced yourself to be happy.

This is a good time to acknowledge that staying on a moving train isn't a sign of failure.

You adapted brilliantly. In some cases, you might not have had a lot of choices, and staying the course was a matter of survival. It's what capable, responsible people do when Life asks a lot of them and doesn't offer many opportunities to stop, catch your breath, take a look around, and re-evaluate your situation.

You didn't lose track of yourself because you were careless. You lost track because you were busy being the reliable, dependable one who showed up for everyone else.

And that matters too. A lot!

## **What Autopilot Actually Looks Like**

Autopilot activation isn't fancy or flashy or dramatic. There's absolutely nothing "extra" about it.

A robotic voice doesn't issue a warning and declare: **AUTOPILOT ACTIVATED**. Sometimes you're able to point to a crisis or situation that flipped the switch. But more often than not, the triggers are usually quieter and more subtle.

One autopilot trigger might be the career you fell into 15 or 20 years ago.

It wasn't a dream job that you loved. It was never anything you were passionate about or something that lit you up. But you received a lucrative offer, and you took it because you had bills to pay.

Or maybe it was a practical choice. Your office was located close to your kids' school, so you could drop them off and pick them up without having to go too far out of your way and you were nearby in case of an emergency. Or it simply paid well enough and provided healthcare.

You also had the added benefit of being really good at it, and little by little, it offered advancement... so you stayed.

Over time, the job morphed from what you did to who you were. At some point, "staying" became your identity.

Or maybe the autopilot switch was activated by a relationship that was stable but emotionally flat.

There weren't arguments or painful betrayals or energy-draining, drama-filled weekends.

Everything was just... neutral.

You became co-existers who worked well together and coordinated the logistics of a shared life without much hassle.

But when was the last time you felt seen? *Really* seen.

When was the last time you were lit up by passion instead of just... connected?

The women most susceptible to autopilot activation are the stable and reliable ones. The one people turn to when things fall apart and they need someone they can depend on to pick up the pieces or keep things running smoothly.

The one who adapts, adjusts, and makes it work... even when it comes with a personal cost.

It's possible... even probable... you've gotten so used to being needed, you've stopped asking what *you* need.

Your life turned into a series of decisions based on responsibility and necessity... not wants. And after a while, allowing yourself to want anything felt indulgent, or risky, or maybe even selfish.

After so many years of riding the train and becoming completely disconnected from yourself, you may not even be clear on what you want anymore.

So you default to what makes sense, what's practical, or what's the least disruptive to everyone else's life.

And that disconnect with yourself doesn't just show up in big moments... it also shows up in small, everyday moments... like when someone asks you where you want to go for dinner.

If you shrug and say, "I don't know," you probably aren't just being polite and allowing the other person to choose.

It's very possible you haven't checked in with yourself for so long, you genuinely don't know where you'd like to go. The internal signal that says, *I like this... That sounds good... I want that...* has been lost.

When was the last time you did something purely because it brought you joy?

Not because it was productive or because someone invited you and you didn't want to be rude and decline, but you chose to do something indulgent simply because you wanted to.

Autopilot causes days... weeks... months... and years to all blend together. You show up as a functional, capable, and successful adult effectively managing life, but not necessarily *living*.

And that's why, in those quiet moments, that small still voice pops in to ask:

*Is this it?*

## **Why This Happens to Capable Women**

If you're reading this and thinking, Wow... this hits a little too close to home, please remember: **Autopilot isn't bad**, and it doesn't happen because you're weak.

**Autopilot kicks in to help capable, responsible women manage the heavy load they're carrying.** It creates a strategic system to protect women who need to manage everything that's being asked of them.

Think about it, when life asked you to show up, you showed up with bells on. When people needed you, you were there for them.

When circumstances required adaptation, you adapted. You didn't fall apart or run away from the challenge. You pulled up your big girl panties and handled it like a boss.

And while it's admirable and you've undoubtedly had a huge, positive impact on the people in your life... all that showing up and handling comes with a cost that rarely gets talked about.

When you spend years answering Life's call, you stop asking what *you* want from Life. Not because you don't care, but because you got caught up in the momentum.

And momentum doesn't leave much room for looking out the window and reflecting.

## **The Subtle Cost**

When you've been on autopilot for a long time, certain things start to fade.

You lose touch with what you want. Not because you don't have desires, but because you've shoved them aside and parked them on the sideline for so long, you can't hear them anymore.

If someone asks what you want to do this weekend, you draw a blank. You genuinely don't know what sounds like fun anymore.

You stop knowing what brings you joy, and you can't remember the last time you were excited about something... anything. Not just, *Ehhh...* but truly energized.

Unexplained fatigue... being drained and tired all the time, even with adequate sleep, is another hidden cost women report. There's no crisis or emergency draining your energy. But you live with a low-level fatigue that never goes away.

It's kind of like you've been running on fumes for so long, you've forgotten how exhilarating it is to operate with a full tank.

And the tricky part is, it's difficult to name the missing link because nothing is obviously wrong... your life isn't falling apart... and you're not in danger. You're just not... fully engaged with life.

If any of this resonates with you, I want you to take a moment and examine your life... not with the intention of judging it or fixing anything in this moment. Just to take an inventory of where you currently are.

## **A Moment to Reflect**

**Where do you feel like your life is running on momentum**, with no passion and no intentional thought about your day-to-day movements or activities? Where are you just going through the motions?

What are some **things you do because it's the way you've always done them?**

**What roles do you still fill out of obligation** or because it's what you've always done?

**What choices do you keep making out of habit** or because they're familiar, not because they excite you, or challenge you, or make you feel alive?

**At what point did you stop checking in with yourself?**

**When was the last time you asked, "What do I want?"** Not "What should I do?" or "What makes sense?" But... "What do I want?"

You don't need to change anything yet.

You don't need to have clarity or a plan or a next step.

But it's important to start noticing, because noticing is the first crack of light known as awareness. And awareness is the beginning of waking up.

## You Didn't Waste Your Life

If reading this caused a tinge of regret, or self-judgment, or self-recrimination, please stop and take a deep, centering breath.

Autopilot is not a character flaw. It doesn't mean you wasted your life or that you're ungrateful for the things you do have or that you're foolish or weak.

Autopilot is a beautiful protective mechanism that kicked in to help you adapt to all of the responsibilities you've had to carry.

But adaptation, while necessary, isn't the same as choosing.

And most people don't lose themselves all at once. They slowly lose themselves over time while doing what made sense. By being responsible and handling whatever landed in front of them.

That quiet question: *Is this it?* isn't indicating something is wrong with you.

It's something inside reminding you that there is more for you to do... that it's time to switch the focus from all those responsibilities you've carried throughout the years to yourself.

That you... what you want... your dreams... they all matter too.

## What Comes Next

Before we talk about what comes next, we need to talk about how you got here.

Nothing about this process is designed to cast blame or judgment on yourself. And we're not here to rehash the past or bring up things you'd rather not relive.

The goal is to release the pressure you've been carrying with compassion and grace so you have a better understanding of how your autopilot got activated.

Because once you understand how autopilot happens, you stop thinking there's something wrong with you. You stop feeling guilty for not having everything all figured out.

You stop wondering why you can't just "snap out of it" or move past a funk you've settled into... and why you can't permanently squash that quiet question:

***Is this it?***

# CHAPTER 2: Why This Makes Sense

If you recognized yourself in the last chapter, if autopilot feels like a familiar frenemy that's been hanging around for as long as you can remember, you might be wondering... *How did I end up here?*

*How did this happen?*

*When did I stop paying attention?*

*Why didn't I notice sooner?*

Here's what I want you to understand before we go any farther: **Your brain didn't fail you—it protected you.**

Autopilot doesn't happen by accident, and it's not proof you did something wrong.

It's an adaptive mechanism—a survival strategy your nervous system activated to conserve energy during high-stress situations when you were overstimulated or overwhelmed. Your brain went into autopilot to protect itself.

## How Adaptation Works

Humans, and (I believe) women, especially, have an incredible ability to adapt.

I think it's one of our greatest strengths.

When Life knocks on the door—or in some cases, kicks it off the hinges—and asks (or demands) something of us, we adapt to the changing circumstances. As the pressure builds, we adjust our regulator valve on the internal pressure cooker to withstand more. If someone needs our help, we adjust our schedules, and in some cases our entire life, and we figure it out.

Somehow, somehow, we just make it work.

And most of the time, all of that changing, shifting, coordinating gets done without a tremendous amount of conscious thought. One of our brain's primary functions is to conserve energy, so autopilot gets activated to take over routine tasks, and adaptation happens automatically.

Here's something important to know (even though it probably wouldn't have changed what you did)... The choices and decisions that help us survive one season often shape the next season.

A role you stepped into temporarily can become your identity. A way of operating that kept things stable and running somewhat smoothly and efficiently can become the only way you know to be.

And before you realize it, the adaptation (or autopilot) has outlasted the situation that required it and has become your permanent state.

Maybe you became the strong one when someone in your family got sick. Someone had to step up and hold it all together for everyone, so you did.

And then after the crisis passed, you stayed strong and never let yourself rest or relax or be vulnerable, even with those closest to you, because being a strong warrior is who you became.

Maybe you became the provider when your partner's income shifted or disappeared. The bills needed to be paid and someone had to step up and make sure the family was taken care of, so you did.

Maybe you worked multiple jobs or took on extra shifts to make sure everyone was okay. And then, after things stabilized again, you stayed in that "provider" energy, taking on the full weight of responsibility, rather than allowing your partner to once again share the load.

### **That "temporary" role became your default mode.**

Maybe you became the peacemaker in a family or relationship where tensions ran high. Someone had to keep everyone calm and smooth things over and keep the peace so the family didn't implode.

And because you love your family, you became that person.

And even when the conflict eased, you kept managing everyone else's emotions, because that's the role you learned to fill and you were afraid if you stepped down from your position, everything would fall apart.

Maybe you grew up in a household where resources or attention were scarce, so you learned not to need or ask for much.

Someone had to be low-maintenance and ease the pressure your parents were under... Someone had to make do and be satisfied with "just enough"... so you became that person.

And as life and resources expanded to "enough," you didn't know how to accept it... Because needing felt uncomfortable, and wanting felt greedy.

### **These adaptations weren't mistakes, they were intelligent, responsible responses to stressful situations.**

You recognized what needed to be done, and as the amazing person you are, you responded.

That's not a weakness, that's incredible strength.

But relentless strength without periods of rest and reflection, eventually becomes disconnection.

The role you needed to step into stopped being a role and crowded out everything else to become your primary identity.

And slowly, without meaning to, you lost touch with the parts of yourself that don't serve that role.

## Why This Happens Especially to Capable Women

If you're reading this and thinking, *Yes, that's exactly what happened*, let's dive in a little deeper.

This pattern shows up again and again in capable, reliable women because their competence gets rewarded with accolades and compliments for how strong and reliable they are... while their connection with self erodes until it becomes all but invisible.

When you're good at holding things together, people rely on you to keep doing it. When you're good at adapting and don't show outward signs of stress, people assume you're fine.

When you're good at saying yes, people stop noticing whether you actually *want* to be involved, or if you're showing up out of obligation or because "it's just what you do."

And while you're busy "doing" for everyone else, your own wants, needs, and dreams quietly fade into the shadows.

You still have personal goals, dreams, and ambitions, but reaching for them feels indulgent when so many other seemingly important tasks need to be prioritized.

So you keep shoving your personal needs aside, keep operating the way you have been, and the gap between *who you really are* and the identity that's *evolved* gets wider and wider.

Over time, you stopped asking:

- ***What do I need?***
- ***What do I want?***
- ***Who am I when I'm not holding everything together for everyone else?***

## When Roles Crowd Out Inner Listening

Losing ourselves is gradual... and so is the realization that somewhere along the way we've gotten lost. You don't wake up one day and think, *I've lost myself*.

You may just gradually start to notice that you can't quite remember who you are outside of your roles.

Take being a mother, for example.

Motherhood is beautiful and meaningful and for many of us feels like our biggest accomplishment. But at some point, "mom" became your only lens for yourself.

Your needs, your interests, your desires—they all got filtered through that role.

- *Is this the best thing for my kids?*
- *How does this fit into my Mom role?*
- *Is this something a good mom would do?*

And slowly, the *woman* who assumed the role of "Mom" became harder and harder to find.

I often say I lost my personal identity when my son started daycare, because no one knew my name anymore—I was just “Dusty’s mom.”

Maybe you're a partner... You love and value your partnership, it's one of the most important parts of your life.

But at some point, keeping the relationship stable and being closely connected to your partner became more important than your connection with yourself.

You learned to prioritize harmony over honesty. You *managed* your emotions rather than expressing them. And somewhere in all that managing, you lost track of how *you*, as an individual, actually felt and what you wanted.

Maybe you're a career driven professional who's spent years working hard to become known as one of the best and most respected in your field.

It's possible that, at some point, your job became your identity. You stopped asking whether you still loved the job... if it still fed the fire in your belly and made you proud of the impact you were having... or if you just kept doing it because it's what you were known for.

Maybe it's a practical decision to stay, because it pays the bills. Or because leaving, especially after an extended length of time, would feel like failure.

In all of these scenarios, the part of you that once had big dreams *in addition* to those roles got buried under years of momentum.

Most of us don't consciously choose to abandon ourselves. The roles that were supposed to be temporary became our fixed identity and our real self got crowded out.

And the saddest part is that for many of us, by the time we realize what's happened, we're so far down the road that turning back seems impossible.

Not because it is... but because we've forgotten there's another way.

### **What "Fine" Can Mask**

One of the trickiest things about autopilot is how functional it looks.

You're not falling apart. You're not acting wildly chaotic or out of control. You're successfully managing everything life throws at you, and from the outside everything appears to be fine... sometimes even great.

And that makes it easy to overlook the dysfunction that's been normalized.

Take exhaustion, for example. Being tired all the time isn't a red flag anymore, it's just how not only you, but most women, feel.

You've normalized flatness. Being numb and not really feeling much of anything isn't concerning. It's just a part of "getting older," and because we've witnessed generations of women falling into this trap, we think it's just a part of aging.

You've normalized not having wants. When someone asks what you want, drawing a blank isn't a problem. With such a full plate... of course you don't have time to stop and really think about what you want, so you settle for "whatever."

And because you've gotten so good at managing, no one notices that "normal" doesn't necessarily mean healthy.

Your partner, your kids, your friends... and even you... think it's just the way things are supposed to be at this stage of the game.

Until something happens that shakes everything up and you find yourself in a moment where the system breaks down... When "fine" finally cracks.

I'll share my own version of that moment in a later chapter—but for now, just know: if you've been here, you're not alone.

And realizing you weren't actually fine, you just got really good at pretending? That's not failure. That's awareness.

## **A Moment to Reflect**

Before we go any further, I want to invite you to pause.

Not to fix anything or work on figuring anything out... just to take a pause and notice a few things.

### **Where did you adapt to keep things working?**

- Maybe after a loss.
- Or during a hard season with your kids.
- Maybe when money got tight.
- Or when a relationship shifted.

It might've been a combination of things, but where did you step into a role because someone needed you to?

### **What roles did you take on because no one else would?**

- You had to become the strong one.
- Or the responsible one.
- The provider.
- The peacemaker.
- You became the one who holds it all together.

Which roles became your identity?

### **What parts of you became less visible over time?**

- Your sense of humor.
- Your creativity.
- Your spontaneity.
- Your needs.
- Your wants.
- Your voice.

What faded into the background while you were busy being capable?

You don't need to pull out a journal and answer these questions right now. You don't need to come to any conclusions or create a plan.

This is all about slowing down enough to notice, because awareness is the beginning of understanding.

And understanding is what makes change possible later.

### **Releasing Self-Blame**

If reading this has created a tinge of frustration or regret, please let me stop you and remind you: Finding yourself here isn't *bad* and it's not your fault.

Adaptation and survival strategies aren't failures, they're proof that you're highly resourceful and capable and you've done nothing wrong.

You showed up for everyone else and kept things going when they were at risk of falling apart, and that's not something to beat yourself up for... that's something to honor.

But here's the important thing to remember: Just because something made sense in the past, doesn't mean it has to stay that way forever.

Roles are like shoes... just because they used to fit comfortably doesn't mean they still do.

Understanding how this happened allows you to stop beating yourself up for ending up someplace you might not've chosen. It explains why, when you look in the mirror, you don't recognize the person staring back at you.

It allows you to stop wondering what's wrong with you and give yourself grace for doing the best you could in every situation you were presented with.

And most importantly, you can stop feeling guilty for wanting something different.

## **What Understanding Makes Possible**

Understanding how you got here changes everything... It allows you to look at your life with compassion rather than judgement.

It also creates space for possibilities and an opportunity to move forward in a different way.

When you learn why autopilot happens, you stop treating it like a character flaw. You stop chastising yourself for not knowing (or doing) better, and you stop making demands on yourself to just snap out of the funk.

You're able to recognize the pattern that made sense at the time... and you can choose to shift to something that better serves who and where you are now.

# CHAPTER 3: Responsibility Isn't What You Think It Is

Let's talk about "responsibility."

If I had to pick one word in the English language that can trigger an automatic negative response from women, "responsibility" would be at the top of this list.

Just mentioning the word can trigger visceral responses like the knot in your stomach tightening, extra weight pressing down on your shoulders... Maybe a lump forms in your throat or pressure increases in your temples.

For most women, the word itself brings on a general heaviness that reminds us of the load we're carrying—often by ourselves and usually for far too long—and might even cause us to think, *I should be doing more?*

Most of us have never had the opportunity to associate "responsibility" with "empowerment," but I hope to change that for you by the end of this chapter.

Before we go any further, I want to be clear about what this chapter is—and what it's not.

Like everything else in this book, it's not about taking on blame or assuming fault. It's not about proving to yourself you did something wrong somewhere along the way. And it's definitely not about thinking, *I should've known better* or *done better*.

This chapter is about understanding how your life unfolded. Not to judge it, but to create awareness. Awareness is the necessary first step to creating any kind of change.

And, believe it or not, responsibility—when understood correctly—isn't about carrying more weight. It's about realizing this is actually where your power lives.

And that changes everything.

## Honoring Real Constraints

Before we talk about responsibility, we need to talk about pressure and constraints. Because not every decision you made felt like a decision at all. Sometimes the circumstances were so tight, it seemed there was only one possible path forward.

Some decisions were made under diamond-forming pressure. Some were made in the heat of the moment or out of necessity. Some were made because there didn't appear to be any other alternative at the time.

Maybe you stayed in a job that drained you because you had bills to pay and kids to feed and leaving, no matter how badly you wanted to, wasn't a real option.

You didn't have savings or any kind of a safety net. You had responsibilities that depended on that paycheck.

So you stayed. Not because you wanted to, but because you didn't see an alternative.

Maybe you stayed in a relationship that had gone flat because leaving was too complicated.

The logistics of dividing finances and assets was overwhelming. Maybe the kids were little and still living at home and the disruption to everyone's lives seemed more painful than staying the course.

Maybe your financial options would be limited if you left, especially if you'd been a stay-at-home mom and out of the workforce for an extended period of time. Maybe you just didn't have the energy to start over.

Staying felt like the responsible thing to do, so you stayed.

Not because it was what you really wanted... not because it was the best option for you, personally, but because it was the least disruptive option for everyone else.

Maybe you became the primary caregiver for a sick parent, spouse, or a struggling child.

Someone needed to do it, and you were the one who could... or the one everyone expected to step up. And you couldn't live with yourself if you didn't and your loved one suffered, so you stepped in... because the alternative was unthinkable.

Maybe you put your own dreams on hold because someone else needed you more.

Your partner was building a business and needed you to help out, either in the business or to pick up some of their load at home so they could stay focused on the business.

Maybe your kids struggled in school and needed extra support.

Maybe a crisis hit your family, either your nuclear family or your extended family. Because you've always been the responsible, stable one—the one most able to sacrifice without falling apart—you stepped in and put your wants and needs on hold.

You didn't do it because you didn't matter, but because in that moment, you felt like someone else needed you more than your dreams.

Here's what I want you to understand: There were real constraints. The options available to you were limited, and sometimes none of them felt good. That's not the same as having no influence—but it IS different from having free choice.

And in all of those times, you weren't choosing what you wanted — you chose what you could live with.

That's not a weakness. That is part of being human and navigating life with the emotional, mental, physical, and financial resources available at the time.

**But when we make decisions under pressure or within tight constraints for an extended period of time, those decisions start to form patterns.**

And like we talked about in the last chapter, the patterns end up outlasting the original situation or their use. They become our default way of being — and those patterns eventually end up shaping our life.

## **Introducing a Different Perspective of Responsibility**

Back in 2018, when I started my training to become a Certified Canfield Trainer, the first Success Principle I was introduced to was: **Take 100% responsibility for your life.**

I'll be honest, when I first heard that I was a little resistant. Okay, full disclosure, that's a mild description of my response. Initially, a lot of anger and bitterness rose to the surface.

*I thought, "What do you mean, take 100% responsibility for my life? I've spent the past 10 years being 100% responsible for not only my life but also for my husband's life. Hell, I've spent 28 years being responsible for my oldest son's life and 20 for my youngest son's life. I've got a lock on this 100% responsibility thing!"*

I just didn't realize at the time that taking on all of that responsibility—which was something I prided myself on and was the foundation for my identity—wasn't exactly what he meant.

As I dug into my training manual and learned more, I realized that flipping the script on "taking responsibility" actually became a very freeing concept.

Jack wasn't saying I needed to take on more responsibility. He was introducing the concept that **accepting responsibility for my life meant I had the ability to change the parts I didn't like.**

Between my husband's illness and the struggles my sons experienced, I often joked that I was the Universe's favorite chew toy, and I was tired of it chewing on my ass.

By reframing the way I looked at responsibility, I was able to stop feeling like my life was completely out of my control, that I was always being whipped around at the Universe's whim, and I was able to start creating life the way I wanted.

A concept that helped me grasp this principle was: **Event + Response = Outcome** (E + R = O)

**Events** are the things that happen in your life, and are often things you didn't choose or can't control. Things like:

- A parent getting sick
- A partner losing their job
- A relationship ending

Events happen. We don't control them and honestly, they don't even have a meaning until we assign meaning to them.

The one thing we do have control over is our **Response**... how we react to those events.

This doesn't just include your immediate reaction to one specific event. It includes the pattern of behavior that follows the event.

It includes the role you step into, the belief you adopt around the event, and the way you adapt in the immediate aftermath and long-term.

The **Outcome** isn't a result of the event itself, but rather your responses.

Here's an example:

**Event:** When you were young, one of your parents got sick.

**Response:** You recognized the challenges your family faced, so you became the strong one. You took up the slack, held it together for everyone else, and rarely asked for help for yourself.

**Outcome:** Years later, you're still the first to step in and take care of everyone else... and you still can't ask for help.

Your parent's illness (event) was beyond your control. You didn't choose it and you certainly weren't responsible for it. But your response to that event not only shaped the outcome at the time, but your current outcomes are still being influenced because "stepping in" has become your pattern.

Here's another example:

**Event:** You grew up in a family where resources were tight.

**Response:** You learned not to want or even need too much. You learned to be low-maintenance and make do with what was available and never asked for more.

**Outcome:** As an adult, you and your spouse have great jobs, resources are plentiful, but you still can't let yourself want things. You still default to "making do" and even feel guilty for just taking up space, let alone asking for more.

If your responses shaped your outcomes in the past, then your responses can shape your outcomes now and in the future.

**Taking responsibility for your life is the willingness to see how your responses shaped your life — so you can influence what comes next.**

### **The Key Distinction: Constraints vs. Responses**

Now here's the crucial distinction that changes everything: Constraints limited your options. But responses shaped your outcomes.

If you're like me, there have been times—possibly many times—when there didn't appear to be any options.

If you were a single parent with young children at home and a limited support system, you probably didn't feel like you had the option of walking away from a soul-sucking job.

I was a single mom and I remember saying to my mom, "I don't have any choices about anything in my life. I get up when he wakes up. I leave work and go straight to daycare because I have to pick him up before they close. I can't hang out with friends in the evening because I need to get him home, fed, bathed, and in bed. Everything in my life revolves around his needs."

But here's something I didn't realize at the time. I did have options—just not options I could live with. I could have prioritized differently, but that wouldn't have been aligned with who I am. So while technically I had "options," my values narrowed them down to one path.

That small distinction can often create space for big internal shifts.

### **Constraints limit options. Responses shape outcomes.**

Even when your options were limited, you still had influence over how you viewed the situation and how you responded to it.

Maybe you couldn't leave the job, but you can reframe your thoughts about it. Rather than saying, "*I was trapped without options,*" you can say, "*I was doing what was needed to take care of my family. It was a temporary situation that doesn't define who I am.*"

Both responses make sense and neither is wrong, but they lead to completely different outcomes, beliefs, and life-long patterns, as well as the grace we give ourselves.

We may not have control over the events in our lives, but we have control over responses that ultimately shape the direction of our lives. And that's what it means to take responsibility.

Not to take on blame or accept fault for anything that's happened, and definitely not to take on more responsibility. But to recognize we have power in ways we might not have realized in the past.

### **Seeing the Pattern**

I'd like to invite you to look at your own life. Not to judge it, and please don't go down the path of beating yourself up for any of the decisions you've made in the past. I also don't want you to try to fix anything right now.

This exercise is about allowing yourself to see your life a little more clearly, through this new lens.

Think of one recurring situation in your life. This is something that's happened more than once, a pattern you've noticed... or maybe a pattern you're noticing as a result of reading this book.

Maybe it's:

- Saying yes when you want to say no
- Staying quiet when you have something to say
- Taking care of everyone else before yourself
- Defaulting to what's practical instead of what you want
- Feeling responsible for other people's emotions

Whatever it is, just pick one.

Now answer these questions:

**What was the event that created this pattern?**

- What happened that you couldn't control?
- What situation or circumstance created the need for a response?

**What was your response?**

- What did you do?
- What role did you step into?
- What pattern did you adopt?

**What was the outcome?**

- What resulted over time?
- Not immediately—but eventually.
- What did this response create in your life?

**What was this response trying to protect?**

This may sound silly but it isn't a trick question.

Your response was intelligent and made sense at the time because it was protecting something.

Maybe it was protecting:

- Your safety
- Your relationships
- Your sense of being a good person
- Your family's stability
- Your own capacity to keep going

Whatever it was, it mattered.

Whatever comes up, just observe it but please don't judge it. Or yourself.

Once you can see what your response was trying to protect, you can understand why it made sense. And once you understand why it made sense, you can stop being so hard on yourself for what happened in the past, and you can choose to change the pattern moving forward, if it makes sense to do so.

## Responsibility as Relief

Here's what I've discovered after years of working with this principle: **Responsibility, when it's understood correctly, isn't a burden.** Taking responsibility for my life has brought tremendous relief and allowed me to be optimistic about creating a better future for myself.

If your responses shaped your outcomes, that means you weren't passive. You weren't a powerless victim of circumstances. You made a decision based on your values and the options available at the time.

And if you had influence then, you have influence now.

Of course, that doesn't mean everything is within your control. Events will still happen. Life will still ask things of you and constraints will still exist.

But during those events, remember that you still have control over your responses.

You still have influence over how you respond. And that influence—that small space between what happens and how you respond—is where your power lives.

## What This Makes Possible

Understanding this principle doesn't fix your life overnight. It doesn't erase the past or automatically erase the patterns. But it does allow you to look at your life honestly, without judgment.

Once you understand why you responded the way you did, then you can stop being so hard on yourself. You can stop wondering what's wrong with you. You can stop feeling guilty for where you are.

When you see the patterns clearly and understand how they formed, something begins to shift. You realize you had more influence than you realized... and that means you have influence now, too.

Now that the pattern is visible, let's look at what those patterns cost.

Not to dwell on loss, but to honor what you've been carrying so you can finally begin to put some of it down.

# CHAPTER 4: The Cost of Always Being the One Who Holds It Together

Something happens when you spend years being the strong one, the capable one who holds it all together when everything is falling apart.

People start to believe you're superhuman, or at least Wonder Woman. They don't ever think about you needing support. They just assume you're fine and you have everything handled.

And maybe, for a while, you believed it too. Maybe you actually did, because what choice did you have? Someone had to keep things going and stay strong and steady and be the anchor when life was drifting apart.

But what no one talks about is this: That kind of functioning often comes at a personal cost.

It's not usually a dramatic ka-ching! It's just a quiet, accumulating weight that comes from holding space for everyone else's emotions while ignoring your own.

Here's an example of what I mean. Several years into my husband's journey of battling a brain tumor, several years into my oldest son's struggling with addiction, and a year or so after my youngest son's accident that caused him to also spiral into the world of addiction, we were at a family therapy session.

Sharon (the therapist) had known us for years, so she was intimately familiar with our family and the challenges we faced. One afternoon, while talking about my husband's latest MRI and my sons' latest attempts at rehab, the therapist looked at me, then looked at my husband and sons, and said, "She takes really good care of you guys, doesn't she?"

My husband looked at me and smiled with a ton of gratitude, because he always recognized how much effort I exerted taking care of our family. My sons nodded and agreed, although a little less impressed than my husband.

And then the therapist asked a question that threw everyone for a loop: "Who takes care of her?" The three of them couldn't have looked more bewildered.

They looked at me, then cut their gazes back to her... they glanced at each other, waiting for someone else to step up and answer this pop quiz question they were completely unprepared for.

And I sat there, hardly able to breathe because it was the first time someone had ever hinted that I might, occasionally, need help too.

In the end, no one responded. I assume they collectively decided the question was rhetorical and didn't require an answer, or maybe they thought it was a trick question because the answer was, "No one."

No one ever considered I might occasionally need someone to take care of me because I wasn't battling a serious illness. I didn't, personally, have anything major happening in my life. So, because I was fine, I was just expected to keep showing up for everyone else.

That conversation happened in 2014, 2 years before my husband passed away.

And nothing changed.

Not because I didn't hear her, and not because I wouldn't have welcomed help. But because I didn't know how to change.

The grooves worn by that pattern were too deep, and the roles were too fixed.

So I kept going for five more years until my body made the decision for me.

### **Honoring What Made Sense**

Before we go any deeper, I want to once again be clear what this chapter is and isn't about. It's not about dredging up regret or martyrdom or proving how much you suffered.

As with everything else in this book, this chapter is about uncovering the pieces of your past that shaped your life. And specifically, seeing that being strong and reliable came with a cost.

The truth that adaptation required something of you. The truth that being strong and capable and reliable asked you to set parts of yourself aside.

Not because you did it wrong, but because that's how adaptation works.

The patterns you developed—the roles you stepped into—were intelligent. They were protective and they made perfect sense at the time. And most importantly, they worked.

Until they didn't.

And just like the old pair of shoes that used to fit so well but have started to cause your feet to ache, sometimes those old roles and patterns need to be re-evaluated.

### **A Moment to Reflect**

Now I want to invite you into a different kind of reflection. Again, not to analyze or fix but just so you can clearly see and feel what you've been carrying, without judgment, so you can honor yourself.

This might bring up some emotion and, if it does, that's okay. Emotion isn't a problem to solve, it's information. It's where pieces of the past are trying to surface. You don't have to do anything with it right now, just let it show up, honor it, and give yourself permission to feel whatever you're feeling, so you can release it.

## **Choose one role you've carried.**

Maybe you've been:

- The caretaker
- The stabilizer
- The provider
- The peacemaker
- The strong one
- The one who doesn't need help

Pick the one that feels most familiar.

The one you can sense showing up in your body when you think about it.

## **Now reflect on these questions:**

### **What did this role require of you?**

- Not just actions, but what way of being.
- Who did you have to become to fill this role?
- What did you have to suppress or set aside?

### **What did this role protect?**

- Your family's stability?
- Your relationships?
- Your sense of being a good person?
- Your own capacity to keep going?

What would have happened if you hadn't stepped into this role?

### **What did this role ask you to set aside?**

- Your own needs?
- Your voice?
- Your desires?
- Your rest?
- Your joy?

What parts of you became less visible while you were holding this role?

And now, the most important question:

### **If this role made sense then, what does it say about you... your intelligence, your values, your willingness to care for others?**

Sit with that for a moment and honor yourself for showing up the way you did.

## When Normal Shifts So Far No One Notices

I want to share a personal story with you. It's an event from my own life that demonstrates what happens when you normalize exhaustion for too long.

It was September 2019; three years after my husband died. My youngest son had one year clean at that point, but my oldest son, Dusty, was still in active addiction.

I was driving Uber 300 miles a day just to survive the high cost of living in California. I was still trying to process the grief of losing my husband, but I had struggled to really deal with that grief in a healthy way because I was also still managing one crisis after another with my oldest son.

I was desperately trying to hold everything together but I could tell my grip was slipping.

And then one day—five years after Sharon asked the “Who takes care of her” question—my mind and body shut down.

I was in the process of moving from one apartment to another when the crack I alluded to in Chapter 2 became a giant break. I have fragmented memories of cleaning the old apartment... of driving back the next day to turn in the keys... and then nothing.

Five days of my life are missing.

No memory. No functioning. Just darkness.

When I finally came back to myself and realized I'd lost five days, I didn't have time to evaluate what had happened or process the significance of the collapse. My new leasing office and the electric company didn't care that I'd had a breakdown. The bills needed to be paid, so I got up, got dressed, and drove 100 miles that day.

A few weeks later, I was talking to Dusty, and I don't remember what made me bring it up, but I said, “I had what I would consider a major breakdown two weeks ago, and you didn't even notice.”

He looked at me, perplexed, and said, “Well, Mom, how were we supposed to know? You just didn't come out of your room for five days.”

He rarely left the house, so he had been home pretty much the whole time, and he didn't even notice I was having a major crisis.

Not because he didn't care, but because my normal had shifted so far out of whack that no one—including me—could tell the difference between “fine” and “collapsing.”

I had been running on empty for so long that empty looked like functioning. Exhaustion was my baseline. A breakdown looked like a long weekend.

And that's when it became abundantly clear I needed to make some changes.

I had been waiting for my sons to get better so I could start living again. I thought I needed to wait for them to be okay before I could be okay. I was waiting for someone to notice I was drowning and to throw me a life vest... but it never happened.

Not because they didn't love me, but because I had gotten so good at faking "fine," no one realized I wasn't.

## **The Knight on the Beach**

A few weeks after the collapse, I was walking alone on a dark stretch of Mission Beach. The grief was still heavy, but over the past several weeks I'd tried to be more consciously aware of it and rather than push it aside, began to actually process it.

The bone-deep exhaustion was still a constant companion, but I was trying to make more time for self-care, which was why I was walking on the beach that evening.

When I glanced up to check the path in front of me, I saw a white knight on a white horse charging toward me.

I didn't feel fear or confusion... I felt overwhelming relief and thought, *Finally! The cavalry is coming. Someone is finally coming to save me.*

And then he vanished.

As I froze in my tracks, trying to process what I'd just seen, I heard that small, still voice say, *"No one is coming to save you. But you don't need them to. You already have the roadmap. Use it."*

I drew in a shuddering breath and dropped to my knees and sobbed. Subconsciously, I had spent years waiting for someone to come and rescue me. I know it sounds crazy, but I always believed my husband could do anything, and because I hadn't really processed my grief, I hadn't allowed myself to truly accept he was gone. I had spent years waiting for him to somehow, miraculously return and fix everything.

I'd been waiting for both of my sons to get clean so I could breathe again. I'd been waiting five years for someone to answer Sharon's question. I'd been waiting for someone—anyone—to step in and make my life okay.

And standing on that beach, I finally accepted that no one was coming. If my life was going to get better, it was up to me to make it happen.

And while that thought seemed overwhelming and a little terrifying, I also took the voice's words to heart and acknowledged I'd always had the power to rebuild my life—I just kept giving that power away.

But that night on the beach became my turning point.

The next morning, I pulled out my Canfield Success Principles training manuals and started at the very beginning, just like I had a couple of years before when I started my training and used the Principles to find a way to cope with my sons' addictions.

Only this time, rather than figuring out a way to co-exist with my sons and navigate their addictions without destroying myself, I switched the focus to me and building a life I loved... a life that placed me in the center, rather than me circling everyone else and always putting myself last.

Step-by-step, I created a roadmap that became the 5-step Graceful Rise Method.

I learned to reframe responsibility so it became a reclamation of my power. I also realized I had choices. Even if they weren't always good, I could choose my direction. I was able to consciously decide if I wanted to put my needs first or step in to help someone else that needed me.

### **Responsibility Reclaimed as Power**

I want to help you understand that taking responsibility for your life actually means you get to start creating your life the way you want.

Taking responsibility isn't about having power or control over other people. It's about remembering you have the power to choose what you do and how you respond to each situation.

This doesn't mean you have to change everything right now or that you need to create a plan or a strategy or a five-year roadmap.

It just means recognizing you have more power and influence in your life than you thought. It's seeing you do have choices, even if you didn't previously recognize the options... and it's about reframing the way you look at less-than-ideal choices you're forced to make.

It's about creating the space for you to start listening to yourself again so you can begin living consciously instead of automatically.

### **Integration: Relief, Not Resolve**

Right now, you may be feeling a combination of sadness, grief, relief, anger, hope... and it's important to know that whatever you're feeling is okay.

This chapter isn't asking you to resolve anything or to make any drastic decisions or set goals regarding your future.

It's asking you to breathe, to honor what you've been carrying, and to let go of anything that no longer serves you.

Understanding in itself is a shift. You don't have to do anything else with it today.

Rest is not only allowed, it's encouraged. Please be kind, compassionate, and gentle with yourself.

You've spent so long being strong and holding everything together for everyone else—take this time to allow yourself to just *be*, without needing to *do* anything.

### **What Becomes Possible**

When the weight lifts, even just a little, something shifts, and that shift allows you to start hearing yourself again.

Not through the filter of obligation or guilt, or a voice telling you what you should or shouldn't be doing. Just a small inner voice, like the one I heard on the beach—the one that pops in every now and then when you slow down enough that it has a chance to get through.

Your voice. The one that's been there all along. Quietly, patiently, waiting to get through.

And when you can finally hear yourself again, you can begin to ask:

*What do I actually want?*

Not what makes sense or is practical or what is expected or what everyone else needs.

*What do I want?*

And that's where we're headed next, because once you start hearing yourself again, everything becomes possible.

# CHAPTER 5: Hearing Yourself Again

When you start making changes and the weight lifts, even just a little, you might expect to feel immediate relief. Or excitement. Or a burst of clarity — like a bright, shining sun breaking through dark storm clouds — telling you exactly what you should be doing next.

But sometimes, while you can sense an internal shift, you find yourself surrounded by an uncomfortable silence.

And if you're someone who's spent years in constant motion, the quiet can be unsettling. I used to wake up having panic attacks because I was so used to chaos, I didn't know how to handle calm.

When you've spent years living on autopilot, it takes a while for your nervous system to re-adjust to a different mode of operation. It also takes a while to reconnect with yourself. And that reintroduction happens slowly, in small moments of awareness that build over time.

This chapter is about creating the space that allows you to start learning to hear yourself again.

## **Why It's Been Hard to Hear Yourself**

If the only feedback you're getting right now sounds like the still of the night, and you're not getting any clarity about what you want or what's important to you, that's okay. It doesn't mean you're doing anything wrong. And it doesn't mean the connection has been completely severed.

It means you've spent years focused outward, and outward focus, while necessary, dulls inner listening.

Think about it.

When you spend years responding to other people's needs, you get really good at reading external signals.

You notice when someone else is upset. You sense when tension is building in a room, and you know what needs to happen to keep things stable.

That's a valuable skill that you've learned over time, but it came at a personal cost.

Because the more you tune into external signals, the less you tune into internal ones. The more you prioritize responsiveness, the less you practice reflection.

The more you focus on what everyone else needs, the quieter your own needs become.

It's not that your needs disappeared or that your desires vanished. It's just that you stopped hearing them. You were so focused on everyone else's wants and needs, you turned the volume down on your own.

And even though you're making space to listen now, the signal might seem really faint (or non-existent). But that doesn't mean it's not there—you're just out of practice listening.

You didn't lose your voice—you just stopped tuning in—so recognizing it again might take a little time. Please be patient with yourself.

### **Inner Voice vs. Inner Noise**

Another thing that might be making it hard to hear yourself is the overwhelming static and outside noise.

When you start switching your focus to yourself, you might have a lot of voices in your ear saying things like:

- *You should...*
- *You need to...*
- *What will people think if...*
- *This is selfish...*
- *This doesn't make sense...*
- *You can't afford to...*

That's not *your* voice. That's a lifetime of conditioning, and years of expectations and obligations. That's the internalized voice of everyone who's ever had an opinion about how you should live your life.

Your real voice, the one that knows what's best for you, sounds different. It's not loud and judgmental and never condescending.

It's calm and steady... It's an internal knowing that gently and lovingly reminds you there's more for you. And you deserve everything you've ever wanted and dreamed of.

Your real voice might sound like:

- *This feels right.*
- *This doesn't fit anymore.*
- *I want this.*
- *I don't want that.*
- *This matters to me.*

It's not loud or argumentative, it won't try to convince you of anything. It'll just lean in and gently whisper to remind you of how amazing and deserving you are of every wonderful thing you've ever wanted.

And learning to distinguish that voice from all the noise takes time.

### **Values as Anchors (Not Goals)**

One of the gentlest ways to begin hearing yourself again is through your values. That might seem strange because we're used to setting goals and making decisions based on the steps we should take to "get there."

But by declaring our values, we can switch our focus from constant hustle to defining what matters most.

Some examples of values are:

- Connection.
- Ease.
- Honesty.
- Creativity.
- Peace.
- Freedom.
- Growth.
- Simplicity.

These aren't things you check off a list. They're touchstones that help anchor and orient you as you're starting to hear yourself again.

Values don't require action or demand change. They just allow you to ask, *What feels important to me now?*

And sometimes, just answering that question — even quietly to ourselves — is enough to begin reconnecting.

## **A Moment To Reflect**

I want to invite you to pause here for a moment of reflection.

You don't have to write anything down. You don't even have to come to any conclusions.

Just read these questions and see what surfaces.

### **What feels important to me now?**

- Not what *should* feel important.
- Not what used to be important.
- What actually feels important now?

### **What drains me?**

- What feels heavy?
- What feels like it's taking more than it's giving?

### **What brings quiet relief?**

- Not excitement.
- Not joy (yet).
- Just... relief.

### **What feels like "me" — even in small ways?**

Maybe it's:

- A certain kind of conversation.
- Your favorite time of day.
- A way of moving through the world.
- A small choice that feels aligned.

What rings true, even if it comes through as the tiniest nudge?

At this point, you're just beginning the process of listening, because hearing doesn't require action. It doesn't mean you have to disrupt your life or make big decisions or figure everything out.

It just means you're starting to pay attention again and you're willing to start listening. And for now, that's enough.

### **Permission to Not Know Yet**

If you're reading this and thinking, *I still don't know what I want*, that's okay.

Not knowing is normal at this stage. The old patterns and way of being have had a hold on you for a long time, possibly even a lifetime, and that kind of grip doesn't just dissolve because you've read a few pages and completed a couple of exercises.

But that doesn't mean there aren't internal shifts taking place. If a necklace has a really tight knot in it, it takes a while of working with it to loosen the knot and create space for the ends of the necklace to slide through more easily.

That's what's happening with you! Those old patterns are loosening their grip and creating space for freedom.

Give yourself time and be on alert for a gentle internal nudge, or a feeling that encourages you to take a different route than you normally drive. On that new route you may see a yoga studio that looks interesting or a garden shop that reminds you how much you used to love to work in the garden.

Right now, those small nudges may not have words yet, but they're still guiding you just the same. Your job is to not only be aware of them, but to listen.

Stay curious and trust that the signal will get stronger when you're ready to hear it.

### **Reconnection Without Performance**

You might be thinking, this sounds great, but:

- *What if I don't hear anything?*
- *What if I listen and there's nothing there?*
- *What if I don't like what I hear?*
- *What if it asks me to change everything?*

Let me address these individually.

### **What if I don't hear anything?**

A voice that's been silenced for years doesn't always show up the first time it's invited. Just keep listening, especially in the early morning hours, or sometimes even in the middle of the night.

At my lowest point, that was the only time my mind was quiet enough for that inner voice to have a chance of getting through. So, I used to get my strongest messages before my eyes were open, or shortly after I woke up, before I started my day.

Don't try to force anything, just be open and willing and give it time.

### **What if I listen and there's nothing there?**

It might help to think of this voice as an internal guidance system, like a GPS you've had muted for years.

It's always been with you, and it used to clearly guide you. It knew exactly what you wanted and where you wanted to go and it offered recommendations like "take that job" or "decline that offer." But somewhere along the way, when life got busy and hectic, you found the guidance distracting so you turned it off.

Now that you're ready to start listening again, you just need to let it know you're ready to start living your life differently. That you're ready to start living for yourself, instead of everyone else, and you would like its help in designing your amazing future.

And then you wait. It's still there, you just have to get used to hearing it again and keep turning the volume down on everything else, and turning the volume up on your inner GPS.

### **What if I don't like what I hear?**

Listening doesn't mean you have to agree with what you hear... or that you have to agree right now. It doesn't mean you have to take action based on what you're hearing. Just be willing to listen and acknowledge the truth it's speaking, even if you don't like it or don't agree with it at this moment.

### **What if it asks me to change everything?**

It might, but probably not all at once and not right now. Hearing is different from taking action. You can listen without making any major decision. You can know something without causing disruption. You can be honest with yourself without needing to be honest with everyone else until the time is right.

Back in the early 90s, I was a single mom living in Tucson, Arizona. For several years, I'd had the feeling I was supposed to move from the big city to a smaller town, but the thought of leaving my mom and friends was terrifying.

I also had no idea where I would go.

But even though the thought of leaving the life I'd built in Tucson seemed crazy, the nudge to move was a constant companion. In late 1991, I visited a friend in North Carolina and the second I got off the plane in Raleigh, I knew: *This is it. This is where I'm supposed to go.*

It took me years to figure out "*the where,*" but while I was waiting for further instructions, I acknowledged the voice and trusted I would be given more information when the time was right.

But I had that deep level of trust at that time, because I'd spent *years* building that connection.

Where you are right now, reconnection doesn't require action or courage or an announcement that you're working to build this new relationship with yourself.

It just requires a willingness to listen, to notice the nudges, and to let yourself be known — to yourself.

### **A Quiet Orientation Inward**

Here's what I want you to take from this chapter:

Hearing yourself again is not a dramatic event and won't be loud like a cymbal clap. It's a gentle reorientation and a quiet tuning inward, and the willingness to listen without needing immediate answers.

You don't have to know what comes next. You don't have to create a plan and you definitely don't need to make any decisions today (in fact, I'd recommend you don't).

Just be willing to hear yourself, to notice what's true for you, and to acknowledge what really matters.

And when you do that—when you create even a little space for your own voice—something begins to shift. Because once you start to hear yourself again, you start to notice you have aligned choices that feel good, choices that get you excited... choices that don't have anything to do with obligation. You start to trust yourself again to do what's best for you.

And when that trust begins to return—even quietly—something else becomes visible: Choice.

# Chapter 6: You Still Get To Choose

In Chapter 3, we talked about constraints limiting your options—and how your responses shaped your outcomes. Now that you're starting to hear yourself again, I want to talk about something that's becoming visible... maybe for the first time in a long time: choice.

Like "responsibility," "choice" can feel like a loaded word, especially to someone who's spent years living on autopilot.

For some women, the word represents freedom and possibility. But for others, especially those who have had to mold and adapt to everyone else's needs, "choice" may hit a little different.

It can carry a weight that feels like pressure to figure out yet one more thing. Or, it can feel like a subtle accusation that somewhere along the way you should have done something differently. Or, if you feel like I did as a single mom, you may be a little resentful because you didn't think you really ever had choices.

This chapter isn't about making major decisions that change your life overnight. It's not about proving you're finally setting firm boundaries and making sure everyone knows you're finally "choosing yourself."

This chapter is about understanding that you have choices available to you, even if it seems like you don't. Choice isn't something you have to earn, and you didn't lose the right to make choices just because you didn't exercise that right in the past. It's just a gentle reminder that it's always been there, even when it didn't feel like it.

And now that you can hear yourself again, choice becomes visible in a way it might not have been before.

## **Why Choice Didn't Feel Available Before**

As discussed in Chapter 3, there have been moments, maybe years, when choice seemed completely out of reach. When you're in survival mode, choice becomes invisible. When you're holding everything together, options narrow. When you're managing crisis after crisis, there's no space to step back and ask, *What do I actually want?*

And in those states, choice felt like a luxury you couldn't afford.

But now, as things begin to shift, the weight starts to lift, and you focus on hearing yourself again, choice becomes visible.

Not because it suddenly appeared, but because you finally have the space and capacity to see it.

## Choice as a Spectrum (Not a Switch)

Now that you're starting to open to the possibility of having choices, that realization can be overwhelming because we tend to think in terms of all-or-nothing.

Either you make a big, dramatic change, or you do nothing.

Either you leave the job, end the relationship, and move across the country, or you stay exactly where you are.

But that's not how choice actually works. Choice isn't an on-off switch, it's a spectrum. And it starts much smaller than most people realize, because choice doesn't begin with action. It begins with awareness.

It begins with:

- Noticing what's true in this moment.
- Acknowledging what you feel.
- Recognizing what you want, even if you're not ready to act on it yet.

Here are a few examples of what choice can look like as small, internal shifts:

**Choose honesty with yourself.** You don't have to tell anyone else what you're thinking. You don't have to make any changes. You just acknowledge what's true for you in each moment or situation.

- *I'm not happy here.*
- *This doesn't feel right anymore.*
- *I want something different.*

That's a choice.

**Choose to say, "I need to think about it."** This is a biggie that I learned from my mom. Instead of answering as soon as someone makes a request of her, she says, "Let me think about it and I'll get back to you." That gives her time to check in with herself to decide if she really wants to say yes or decline.

Instead of automatically saying yes, which may have been your default mode because you're used to working around what's best for everyone else, pause and give yourself time to really consider what you want to do.

This gives you a double-stack of choices because you're choosing to delay giving an answer, and then you get to choose whether you say yes or no based on your internal feedback.

**Choose to express yourself.** I can't tell you how many times I sat in office meetings, knowing I had something of value to add to the conversation, but kept my mouth shut rather than speaking up. I believed my boss wouldn't agree with my thoughts and was afraid of the backlash that might follow.

But not honoring my voice took an internal toll too. Each time I stayed quiet, I lost a little more faith in myself — and over time, that silence turned into resentment. Not just toward the situation, but toward myself for not speaking up.

Sometimes we make assumptions about how things will play out, so we stay quiet rather than expressing ourselves and giving others the chance to actually respond. We negate ourselves before anyone else has the opportunity to.

So start small.

Choose one low-risk situation and practice expressing yourself. The goal isn't to convince anyone. The goal isn't agreement.

**The goal is to rebuild your relationship with your own voice**—to remind yourself that what you think and feel deserves to be expressed.

Each time you speak when you normally would have stayed silent, you strengthen self-trust. And that trust becomes the foundation for bigger, more aligned choices later.

**Choose to let someone else help—even if they do it differently.** If you've been the one who manages everything for a long time, it can feel easier to just do it yourself. You know how you like things done, and following up behind someone else is more work than it's worth.

But constantly taking responsibility for everything sends a quiet message—to them and to yourself—that you don't need support.

Try choosing one small place to let go. Maybe it's allowing your partner to do the dishes without hovering or redoing them afterward. Not because they'll do it your way, but because you're choosing to allow support.

The goal isn't efficiency. The goal is to practice receiving.

**Choose rest.** Why is it so difficult for women to say, "I need a minute?" Rest is important and it's not something you need to earn. You don't have to complete every task on a never-ending to-do list before you sit down and put your feet up.

Rest is critical for allowing your nervous system to reset from the constant fight-or-flight state you've been living in, so it's important to break the cycle of constantly pushing yourself to the point of exhaustion and allow yourself to do nothing every now and then.

This may be incredibly uncomfortable at first because not only have you been accustomed to being on the go non-stop, but society pushes for us to be that way too. But just because that's the way it's always been done, doesn't mean it's the best or healthiest way to live. So allow yourself to choose rest.

**Choose to acknowledge a desire.** Did you know it's okay for *you* to want things too? Women often become so accustomed to putting ourselves last that we feel guilty expressing a want or a desire. It's okay to want. You don't have to justify it. And you don't have to figure out how to make it happen right now. It's okay to just acknowledge, even if only to yourself, that you're choosing to *want this*.

**Choose to take a walk alone.** Being outside in nature is the perfect way to reset. You don't have to walk for exercise or to reach a specific destination. It's okay to mosey through a park or the woods

and just take in the sights. Listen to the birds or the gentle sound of flowing water or the rustling of leaves blowing on the trees.

When we're rushing through life, we miss the simple pleasures that exist all around us. This is something I learned from my dad while visiting him one time in Florida. He always said a blessing before every meal. So as we sat around the table on the sunporch holding hands, I expected the typical, "Thank you for this food..." But Dad said, "Thank you for this food, and for this day, and for the entertainment you've provided us today with the moss blowing in the trees and the birds splashing down in the lake."

I remember sitting there thinking, *I haven't noticed any of that stuff*. I was busy helping with household projects and working on my computer... I completely missed the "free entertainment" the universe provided.

So take a walk outside and make friends with the birds and squirrels.

None of the previous examples entail big, life-altering decisions. They're small, quiet, internal shifts, but just like the free entertainment my dad observed, small things not only matter, they can make a big difference.

Those small choices remind you that you have authority over your life and you do have choices. And once you start making small choices, bigger choices become less overwhelming.

A friend called me one day and said, "I need your opinion on something. I used to be able to make decisions for myself, but somewhere along the way, I stopped trusting myself."

She spoke in a very matter-of-fact way... she wasn't beating herself up or coming from a place of self-recrimination. In fact, I don't think she even really felt the full weight of her words, at least not to the extent I did.

Not trusting herself had just become a way of life for her, and I think many of us feel the same way. This process is designed to change that. It's designed to get you reconnected with yourself, to start hearing yourself again, so you can start trusting your own judgement and decisions.

You don't have to make big choices right now, but small choices help you remember you do have options when it comes to the big things too.

## **A Moment To Reflect**

Let's pause for a moment to reflect. You don't have to make any decisions or commitments. You don't have to write anything down. You don't have to share any insights with anyone, just notice what comes up for you with these prompts.

### **Where do I already have more choice than I realize?**

- Maybe it's in how you respond to someone.
- Maybe it's in how you spend an hour.
- Maybe it's in what you say yes or no to.

Where does choice already exist — even quietly?

### **What feels like an internal yes or no lately?**

- Not a logical yes or no.
- Not a "should" or "shouldn't."
- Just a quiet knowing.

What feels like a yes in your body? What feels like a no?

### **What would choosing myself look like in this season — even quietly?**

- Not dramatically or with a public proclamation.
- Not with explanations or justifications.
- Just quietly, internally, for yourself.

What would it look like to choose you?

## **Reclaiming Trust in Yourself**

One of the reasons choice can be scary is because we doubt ourselves. This is especially true if we've spent years circling everyone else's life but haven't been invested in our own.

We're afraid we'll make the wrong choice and regret it later. Or we're afraid of rocking the boat. Life might look *exactly* the way we hoped it would by this stage of the game, but there's nothing *really wrong*. So what if we start making choices that cause things to go off-track and create conflict within the household or with our relationships?

There is a risk of some of that happening, but the thing to remember is you're not making knee-jerk choices out of spite or just because you've suddenly developed a new sense of freedom.

This entire process is designed to slowly awaken your sense of self, to gradually start listening to yourself again, and to gently remind yourself that you are the only one who can change anything about your life that you don't like... and you have choices about how you go about it.

And that's not something to be afraid of. That's something to honor.

## **Choice Without Reinvention**

Please remember: Choice doesn't require dramatic transformation or blowing up your life. You don't have to explain yourself to anyone, and you don't even have to let anyone else know you're choosing to do things differently.

The work you're doing here is all about making internal shifts, and that can be done quietly and under the radar. This type of work can not only be done gradually—I recommend you take it slowly.

Just start by being honest with yourself. Stop pretending you're fine when you're not. Acknowledge what feels right (or doesn't). And recognize you always have choices (even if they're not ideal).

Choice isn't about performance, it's about alignment. And alignment doesn't require disruption. It requires awareness, honesty, and a willingness to view things differently.

Choice isn't a one-time event. It's not a crossroads where you have to pick a path and commit to that way forever.

Choice is ongoing and adjustable. You get to make a choice today, and if you choose to change your mind and go a different direction tomorrow based on the data and feedback you receive today, that's okay!

Choice isn't about getting it right, it's about staying conscious instead of reacting automatically. It's about switching off the autopilot and living intentionally. It's about staying connected to yourself and listening to the internal guidance you receive.

# CHAPTER 7: Where You Go From Here

Let's take a moment to celebrate how far you've come.

You've been willing to pause and take an honest look at your life. That's not always easy, so please acknowledge yourself for being brave enough to take that first step.

You've looked back and made sense of how you got here. You've reconnected with yourself and reclaimed your voice.

This process wasn't about proving you were broken and needed fixing. It wasn't about becoming someone new... it's about remembering that even though you've spent years, possibly decades, being who everyone else needed, *you're still in there*.

## **What May Feel Different Now**

If you're wondering whether this book "worked," or whether you did it right, let me suggest a different way of viewing this type of work.

There is no finish line here. There's no moment when you suddenly realize you're "done." The progress you experience here is more subtle. You might notice some internal shifts or something no longer looks the way it used to. Maybe you find yourself reacting differently in certain situations than you did before.

You might feel calm, even if nothing around you has changed. You have less urgency to figure things out. You're more comfortable taking your time in making decisions. You tune out the external noise more often and are more comfortable checking in with yourself. You give yourself more grace and ease if you make a decision that doesn't work out.

You might notice changes that are more difficult to name. The autopilot has been disconnected, so maybe you're feeling more present in your own life—noticing small moments you would have rushed past before, or actually tasting your coffee instead of gulping it down. Or maybe there's a quiet confidence that wasn't there before. Or maybe you're feeling a little adrift because the autopilot has been shut off.

Whatever you're noticing, or not noticing, is okay because there's no "right" way to feel. You don't have to feel inspired or energized or ready to change everything. You don't have to have a vision or a plan or a perfectly articulated next step.

## **The Truth About Moving Forward**

Here's something I want to be honest about: *Awareness* doesn't automatically create a new life. Understanding patterns doesn't make them disappear overnight, and reconnecting with yourself doesn't mean you'll never drift again.

As I said before, personal empowerment work is a gradual process. It's a waltz with ourselves, and sometimes we're in sync and the flow is effortless and beautiful. And sometimes, the old patterns slip back in and we cut off the connection and we stumble a little.

The secret is to stay conscious and aware enough that we recognize when we've lost our balance so we can pause, reframe, and reconnect.

Old patterns have momentum. Autopilot is a habit, not a one-time event. And even though you've made tremendous progress, you might still find yourself slipping back into old ways of being.

The difference is, you won't be starting from scratch each time it happens. You'll be starting from awareness and that's a powerful shift.

It's also just the beginning.

## **Two Paths Forward**

So where do you go from here? How do you continue to build on the new momentum you've created? There are two paths forward, and you have the choice to take which one feels right for you.

### **Path One: Continue on Your Own**

Many women choose to take what they've learned here and continue on their own. They use the insights from this book as a foundation and let their awareness unfold naturally. They follow their own pace and trust themselves to figure it out.

If this is your path, please know you've done the foundational work and you have what you need to continue reconnecting with yourself and leaning into the alignment you've started to build. It's a matter of practicing what you've learned and making one conscious choice at a time.

The challenge with continuing alone isn't capability. It's consistency.

### **Path Two: Walking a Proven Path with Support**

Some women prefer not to travel alone... not because they can't, but because they've spent enough years figuring things out on their own.

And now they prefer guidance, and the structure of a proven framework that reduces the guesswork and the tendency to drift.

Awareness is powerful, but structure makes it sustainable and reduces the risk of getting lost in the weeds. Clarity opens the door, but guidance and support helps you walk through it without second-guessing every step.

This is where I can help. The Graceful Rise Method is the framework I built using proven principles, like the *Success Principles* and the *Passion Test* methodology I was trained in, combined with my lived experience of rising from grief, chaos, and autopilot into peace, clarity, and intentional living.

It's designed specifically for women at this exact stage of life who are ready to move from the beginning stages of awareness to full connection with themselves so they can create a life that feels aligned, meaningful, and truly their own.

## **My Role as Your Guide**

If you choose Path Two, here's what you need to know about how I work:

- I don't do the work for you.
- I don't have all the answers.
- I don't position myself as the hero of **your** story.

I provide the structure and perspective and walk alongside you to help you see what you might not see on your own. I hold space for your clarity to emerge because having a guide can make the journey clearer, steadier, and less isolating.

I'm a Certified Canfield Trainer and a Certified Passion Test Facilitator. I've been trained in a process that works. I adapted that process and framework and created a roadmap to rebuild my life after loss, exhaustion, and years of living on autopilot.

That roadmap is what I now offer to women who are also ready to quit living an uninspired life and are ready to create a life filled with passion and purpose... a life that excites them and gets them jumping out of bed each morning, ready to truly *live* another day.

If Path Two resonates, if you want structure, support, and a proven framework to guide you forward, I would love to have you join us in **Your Map To Intentional Living— a step-by-step course that helps you define your purpose and take your first intentional steps in just one week.**

## **A Gentle Forward Gaze**

Here's what I want you to take from this book: In your journey up to this point, you've always been doing the best you could with the awareness, knowledge, and skills you had available at the moment to meet a basic human need.

You were adapting and surviving, and always doing your best. And now you're waking up. Not because you have to, but because you're ready for more.

You don't have to know exactly where you're going. You don't have to have it all figured out. You don't have to make any big decisions right now.

Just know you're allowed to want more for yourself. You have a wise inner voice that is always available to help guide you—you just have to tune in and start listening. And you're allowed to ask for support and make choices that are right for you.

You're allowed to live consciously instead of automatically, and that's when your life starts to feel like yours again.

# Life on Autopilot

**You've done everything you were "supposed" to do. You've raised the kids. Shown up. Been responsible.**

**So why does life suddenly feel... flat, confusing, or unfinished?**

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**If you've been asking yourself, "Is this it?" – this book is for you.**

Life on Autopilot is a compassionate guide for women who've spent years adapting, caregiving, and putting themselves last. It's for women who are ready to move from disconnected autopilot to intentional living—without blowing up their lives or having it all figured out first.

Inside, you'll discover how to:

- Understand why autopilot happens (and how to turn it off)
  - Recognize the patterns that kept you safe, but stuck
  - Start hearing your own voice again after years of tuning it out
  - Reclaim responsibility as power, not a burden
  - Make small, internal shifts that lead to aligned choices
- 


**This isn't about fixing what's broken. It's about reconnecting with what's been there all along.**


**You're not lost. You're just ready to wake up.**



Alannah Lynne is a New York Times Bestselling Author, Certified Canfield Trainer, and Certified Passion Test Facilitator. After rebuilding her own life following loss and years on autopilot, she created the Graceful Rise Method to help midlife women reconnect with themselves and live intentionally.

Connect with Alannah:  
[www.AlannahLynne.com](http://www.AlannahLynne.com)

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