

Sometimes, Sis, It's YOU!

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It's you!

HIDDEN THINGS THAT PREVENT US
FROM LOVING AND HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS



LoVetta Jenkins

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"One day you will tell your story on how you overcame what you went through and it will be someone else's survival guide."

~ Brene Brown

For the little girls in us all and the daughters we birth. For the little boys inside the man. For my daughter, yours and theirs. May we all do the work to fix our wrongs.

For my mother who allowed me to hold her hand while she took her last breath. She was my loudest cheerleader and the best friend anyone could have.

Look mom. . . I wrote a book.

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Intro: I Wouldn't Tell You to Do Anything I Hadn't Done Myself

Before I start getting in your business, I feel that it's important for me to introduce myself. My name is LoVetta Jenkins and I'm a single mother who was raised in church and knows the power of prayer. I'm a radio personality by day and an Entertainment News blogger, journalist and podcaster at night. I'm a former Early Childhood Educator. I have a Master's Degree in Entertainment Business and I'm a certified health and wellness life coach.

I've lived an amazing life and, if God allows, I'm not even halfway done. This life, although charmed at this point, hasn't always been a bed of roses. I've experienced grief, loss and heartbreak in unimaginable ways. Some of it, I brought on myself through my own ignorant actions. Those are the things we're going to address in this book. The things we bring on ourselves.

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If you're anything like me, you've experienced a few instances where you've had to reap what you've sown. Whether it's getting cheated on after you've cheated. Having something stolen from you after you've stolen or being lied on after you've lied. Karma, or reciprocity, can be a bitch if you've been one but, she's your best friend if you've been on your best behavior.

I'm an avid reader and one of my favorite authors is Stephen King. In several of his novels he references a fictitious religion god called Gan. Ka is the "will" of Gan, roughly synonymous with fate. Ka, like destiny, has a way of turning like a wheel. If you put good onto the wheel, it will, in turn, bring good back to you. Put it out, get it back.

Right now you're probably wondering how sowing and reaping, my failed relationships and Stephen King have anything to do with you. Hold up. I'm getting there. In my quest to find love, which I thought would bring me peace, I accidentally found myself. Not the self who's writing these words but, the rough draft of her. So, check it, this is how I found her. . .

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I had been in an unstable off and on relationship for literally decades. Neither one of us was willing to leave the other alone. It was toxic and loveless but, familiar. I spent hours each day wondering if I was being cheated on. Spent thousands of hours talking to a brick wall. Racked up so many sleepless nights to the point where my eye bags had eye bags.

On one occasion I remember saying to him "Why am I always saying the same thing? Why do I have to ask you to do the simplest things?" I was probably teary-eyed but, we're going to skip that part. Do you know this man had the nerve to look me square in my face and say to me "You want all of this stuff but, did I change? I've been the same person since the day you met me." That's when it happened. A lightbulb went off.

In all of the years we'd been going in circles on the relationship merry-go-round. In all of the ups and downs. He had never changed. He was consistently a man who didn't keep his word. He never wrote cute notes, said "I love you" first or even brought me flowers. He never did anything for my birthday or holidays. He never performed small, caring, gestures. NEVER. Our love languages were polar opposites and I was the only one trying to bridge the gap.

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In all of our time together he hadn't changed one bit but, I had. I cared more about the little things. I'd changed professions. I'd watched my friends and family get into beautiful relationships and get married. Although I never felt marriage was a choice I wanted to make personally, I wanted a healthy relationship and he wanted complacency.

The realization hit me like a ton of bricks. Not only was he stating some hard facts but, I was . . . *gasp* . . . WRONG! That's when I decided that enough was enough. If I wanted something more, something different, I was going to have to do something different. I was going to have to quit accepting less than I felt I was worth. I was going to have to cut this all the way off.

1. Draw a Line in the Sand: “Dassit! Dassall!”

At some point along your journey you're going to have to quit some things or some people. No announcements, no grand finales. Just make a mental note that this last time, was indeed the last time.

“Dassit and Dassall”! Draw a line in the sand and be done. The key to moving on is just as simple as moving. No more standing in one place demanding to be seen and heard but moving to a better vantage point.

I'm not going to lie to you at all. Moving on from, actually letting go of, the person you've made memories with, built a shaky foundation with and invested your “good years” into can hurt! It can feel very similar to a death, especially if you've created a “soul tie”. Not familiar with the term “soul tie”? A “soul tie” is a connection with someone sexually that leaves some of that person's spirit with you —

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whether good or bad. The more sexual connections you have with different people, the more a bit of each person is left with you, and pieces of yourself become a part of them. Much like death, you have to take time to mourn the loss. It's the loss of a person you were attached to. The loss of who you expected them to be and, the loss of who you were. However, just as it happens with natural death, life must go on. Take all the time you need to fully get it out of your system but remember, when you're done this time, you're done!

Now, let's define done. Done is the past participle of "do". It is defined as no longer happening or existing. If you're truly done with whatever situation you're tired of, don't go back to it. It's done as in "no longer existing". My grandfather was a pastor and he used to give me the best advice. He told me once, somewhere in my early twenties, "When you break up with someone, break up all the way." He went on to explain that when you're done there's no need to check on them and see how they're doing. You don't need to drive by their house. Let them go, completely.

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Let me explain to you what not breaking up all the way can lead to from personal experience. As previously mentioned, the ex and I had super long history. Always off again or, getting ready to be off again. Here's how that "entanglement" happened. We'd break up, not speak for weeks or months but, inevitably one of us would have to "check in" with the other to make sure they were okay. That would start small conversation then, as always, an "I miss my friend" text. Those texts are traps! It's bait sis! You can respond one of two ways. "I miss you too" being the first or, silence being the second. If I'd been silent, you probably wouldn't be reading these words.

Not breaking up all the way leaves room for the ex, the situation or the "entanglement" to start up again. It's like finding your way out of the woods after being lost for months only to stand with one foot still on the forest's edge. It's easy to go back if you leave a foot in the door. Don't do it. Unless you have small children together, run! If you do have children, you don't need to be calling each other for senseless reasons. Nobody needs to be checking on their kids after 9 o'clock at night or, calling you to see if you've moved on. It's not just fathers that specialize in this type of call either. Mothers do it too. You don't need to discuss anything with him when you know

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he's potentially otherwise engaged. We're focusing on getting better not bitter and rising above phony entrapment. We'll get into this a little more later on.

Making the conscious choice to be done with a situation that no longer suits you, empowers you or uplifts you is hard. Possibly one of the hardest things you'll do on your personal development journey. Hard but, not impossible, and definitely worth the work. I justified it to myself like this "If I keep standing exactly where I'm standing, I'm going to always see what I'm seeing." Imagine standing in an alley facing a brick wall. Would you choose to stand there and only see that wall for the rest of your life? You've heard of beaches, you've heard of islands, meadows and mountains. You've heard of foreign lands with the most beautiful scenery but, you can't see any of them because you're choosing to stare at a brick wall. Staring at it just because it's what you've always done.

It doesn't seem right, does it? Mentally gather your stuff and tell your brick wall you're done! Leave that alley and don't come back. You don't need to check on the bricks to see how they're doing. You're done. "Dassit! Dassall!"

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2. Let's Ignore Them. . .

Thus far I've told you about myself and what I was doing that had me in a rut. Of course, there were other parties who were partially to blame for things but, just as you can't control the weather, you can't control other people. I can't control the way I was raised just the way I adapted because of it. I couldn't control being a Black woman in today's society but, I can control how I move and exist in it.

You can't control how people have treated you but, you can decide how you react. Remember the first time you saw a child touch something hot? They quickly draw their hand back, looking at their fingers, look back at the source of heat and then at their fingers again. That child, in that moment, has connected dots that it takes adults months to decipher. "I'm not going to touch something that hurts me."

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If a child continually touches a hot iron do we blame the iron or the child who repeatedly touches it? Yes, an adult will come along and move it but, wouldn't a reasonable person question the sanity of a child who kept touching something they knew was hot? Let's flip that scenario and apply it to ourselves. How crazy must we look going back repeatedly to something that is causing us pain. Let's forget the iron in this situation and draw our attention to the fact that we keep touching it.

If you keep going back to something that hurt you, you're not allowed to complain about the pain. Don't blame me, I don't make the rules. Think about how many times we've watched someone else make what we'd call a "dumb decision" and said to ourselves "If they like it, I love it", or "Couldn't be me" knowing good and well it has been us a time or two. The truth of the matter is, we all come to the point of realization at different times. Some babies learn to walk at nine months, some don't. Some fall and bust their heads before they learn it's better to stand and get their balance before they take their first step. They both learn to walk but, at different times.

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It took me years to stop blaming the iron that was hurting me and ask myself why I kept touching it. Picture it, Sicily. . . never mind, just picture me crying my eyes out asking an iron why it was hot? That's about how dumb I looked. Irons are made to be hot but, we should also know how to safely handle them! If you see the handle but choose to pick up the iron by the hot plate, guess who doesn't have good sense? That's right. You!

I use analogies a lot because, one, I grew up in church and everything had a parable and two, I'm a former educator and most people absorb information when it's fun. Somewhere in the fun, you'll find the lesson. The lesson in all of this is for us to quit blaming the thing, or person, that's been hurting us and ask ourselves why do we keep allowing it to happen? You see the handle but choose the hot plate. You see the fact that this person should be left alone, or stay in the friend zone but, you try to make them a partner. That's not what they're in your life for. Let things, and people, be who they're supposed to be not what you want them to be.

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Irons will never be pillows. They'll never be a soft place to lay your head at night and share your dreams. They'll never offer comfort when you're having a hard day. They'll never be a soft place to land. Irons are meant to press out wrinkles. Dassit. Dassall. Don't blame the iron for not keeping it real with you when you knew it was an iron inside the box. Of course, there are occasions where a person will come to you pretending to be a pillow but, in time, proves to be an iron. Don't demand that they go back to masquerading as a pillow just because you've grown attached to the idea of them. You've got to pay attention to the red flags. Wasn't this pillow hot when it should have been cool? Wasn't it hard when it should have been the soft place that you'd hoped for? See them for what they real are and treat them as such. If you choose to stay, remember, it's on you.

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3. Grab a Mirror Cuz Sometimes, Sis, It's YOU!

Probably the hardest part in finding out what I was doing wrong was admitting that sometimes, the problem was me! I had communication issues. I had unrealistic expectations and I had a horrible “my way or the highway” sense of leadership. Yes. I used the word leadership. Let me tell you why.

I'm the second born of four siblings in the household and the oldest girl. There's a large age gap between myself and my younger siblings so, coming from a household where my parents worked many jobs, I was always in charge. Let my mother tell it, I was never a very affectionate child. I didn't like being rocked to sleep instead, she said once, I'd take my bottle, crawl into bed and put myself to sleep. I guess I needed to be in charge even then. Having to be responsible for my younger siblings I learned to keep the house in line. Feed them, bathe them and, on occasion, spank them. I was a

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ruler at 13. I barked orders and they did what I said. Somewhere along the line, I decided to use this approach in relationships as well.

Things happened when I said they'd happen. I was uncompromising and unreasonable. The ex said once "You control everything! You pick me up and put me down when you want to. We don't do anything unless you say so!" At the time, I was thinking "Duh! I'm the boss" but, I've learned, there is no boss in a partnership. My behavior was atrocious and now, looking back on things, I can see why we were never happy.

Coming to the realization that I'd been wrong was horrific discovery. I pride myself on being educated, competent and smart. . . how could I be wrong? Here's how:

If you knowingly treat people like they should be thankful you allow them to be in your presence, you're wrong. If you run your relationship like a Trump community college, limiting admission, taking their money then leaving them with nothing, you're wrong. If compromise is a bad word, you're wrong. If you expect people to understand things you've never articulated, you're wrong. Here's the hard one, if you say you've forgiven someone but you still hold their transgressions against them, you're wrong.

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Basically, if you've done any of the previously listed things, you're wrong but, I'm going to try and help you make it right. Realizing you're wrong isn't bad. In fact, it's actually a good thing. We can't fix anything we're not willing to face and if you won't face it, you'll never flourish the way the good Lord intended.

If I asked you to close your eyes and touch your face you'd be able to immediately identify every scar, every beauty mark and every wrinkle. Why? Because it's your face and you're familiar with it. Now, if I asked you to close your eyes and touch the face of a stranger, it would feel odd. You might be hesitant because it's unfamiliar. What if the stranger was you? That's what it's like realizing you are the one who's been wrong all along. It can be . . . alien.

I was one of those women that men talk about, you know, the ones that don't apologize. In my mind, I wasn't wrong. EVER. You were offended by my rightness. You were your own problem. It couldn't be me. . . NEVER. . . could it? Yeah girl, it could. I was as wrong as 45's administration and it was starting to show.

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My grandmother used to say “Everybody ain’t lying on you.” If several people all have the same story of experience with you, and they have never met, honey, you are what they say you are. I had to look at my own face in the mirror and realize I was abrasive and cold. I wanted love and attention when I wanted it and anything more was a nuisance. Writing that just made me see how absurd that was. What about my partner’s needs? What about the needs of everyone else around me?

I have no clue how I lasted in life as long as I did. Being in a state of assumed perpetual rightness is damaging. Not only to those around you but, to you as well. Relationship “entitlement” is trash thinking. Feeling entitled to someone putting up with your foolishness is toxic and, just as you don’t deserve anyone playing with your feelings, others’s don’t either. Coming to grips with being wrong really threw me for a loop. The old “this is just how I am” wasn’t going to work anymore. I couldn’t hope to grow while still holding fast to old, rotten, roots.

“This is just how I am” had me out here frustrated and #ForeverAlone. Holding on to ways that were undesirable had me emotionally unavailable for anyone who wanted to try and engage with me. I was too committed to the idea that someone had to take me “as I am” when the way I was, was the actual thing blocking my

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blessing. Let's be honest here, we all know that we have a few undesirable ways about us. I'm not talking about the way you snore or the way you slurp your soup. I'm talking about the way you shut down when some one is telling you something about yourself that you don't want to hear. I'm talking about the way you interrupt people when they're talking so you can make your point without really listening to their plight.

These things may seem small but, let's put on the other person's shoes for a second. Would you keep talking to a person, trying to get them to see your side if they are committed to drowning you out? No, you wouldn't. None of us want to be "that girl" or "that guy". You know, the one that is so evil that they end up alone, living an unfulfilling life and who is so stuck in their old ways that they might as well be the fifth head on Mount Rushmore. Old ways are familiar and can be as comfortable as your favorite old sweater but. . . if they're hindering your growth, they've got to go.

Just like women get mammograms to detect early disease, we need to examine ourselves mentally just the same. Take a magnifying glass and examine your life. Are there hidden parts of you that are hindering you from growing? Is there something that you're holding on to that is doing you more harm than good? If there are, we've got to unearth them and get rid of them. Fast. Not only for the

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sake of future relationships but also for our own mental, emotional and physical wellbeing. Not addressing what's ailing you mentally can eventually have a physical effect on you.

A study done by the University of Minnesota says that “negative attitudes and feelings of helplessness and hopelessness can create chronic stress, which upsets the body's hormone balance, depletes the brain chemicals required for happiness, and damages the immune system.” These imbalances can actually shorten a person's lifespan! Now, let's think about it this way, is holding onto something negative really worth you losing a day or two of your life? Is being upset at someone who wronged you really worth it? Here comes another analogy:

We've all probably been guilty of throwing away a penny once or twice in life. If you've done it several times over a month, you've probably thrown away an entire dollar by the end of a year or two. That's what it's like being mad and holding negative feelings. We're literally throwing away a day of our life. Speaking for myself, in the past, I've probably thrown away a good month or two holding onto a grudge. That's completely insane! When I learned that not letting go was shortening my life, I dropped everything like it was a hot rock.

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No one, and no situation, is worth you shortening your lifespan for. Let that stuff go. I was told by a spiritual teacher once that “forgiveness is for you” not the other person. It never made sense to me until I had to cross the bridge of forgiving someone who wasn't apologetic. I had two choices 1) continue to be mad or 2) allow myself to accept the fact that the event happened, couldn't be changed and move on. For a while I stayed with the first option because I was committed to being angry at them then, I realized I was hurting myself more than I was hurting anyone else. It took some time but, I was able to forgive the person and myself.

I say that I had to forgive myself because I had been so committed to being angry that I had failed to really live. When you wake up carrying a burden, it's hard to pick up joy, happiness and peace throughout the day. Make a decision to lay the burden down and never pick it up again.

4. Figuring it Out: Digging Up Old Bones.

After the hard realization that I was part of the problem, I had to figure out why. One of my biggest problems was snapping on anybody who “ghosted” me. Listen, if you didn’t answer my text, I assumed you were dead in a ditch and went into panic mode. You could legit be taking a nap or left your phone at home and I’d assume the worst.

Once, my daughter didn’t answer my phone call when I was out working a job. I stopped what I was doing, jumped in my car and sped home. I ran up the stairs to find her chilling on her bed, playing a video game with her headphones on. I stood there, out of breath, looking at her with wide eyes. She looked up at me, picked up her phone and registered the ten missed calls. “I’m sorry. My music was loud” was all she said. I turned and left.

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Why had I assumed my child had been taken hostage by a drug cartel? Why was the worst scenario always my go-to? What the heck makes a person conjure up extremes every time someone didn't answer the phone? You know what it was? Old bones.

When I was younger I lived in a lot of different places. I'd leave for school in the morning from one house and, come home to find my mother waiting in the car to take me to another one. I was the new kid in almost every grade from kindergarten to sixth and I always had to make new friends. Nothing was permanent in my life but church. Bouncing around gave me somewhat of an abandonment issue. Objects, and sometimes people, had no permanence for the first eleven years of my life.

I grew up not trusting people to stay so, as I aged, I expected them not to. If you know anything about manifesting, you'll know that what you expect is what you will get. You expect a bad day, you get one. You expect someone to leave. They will. You keep saying negative things about yourself, you're going to keep getting negativity. What comes out of your mouth, the kind of thoughts you have inside, are the vibrations that shape your reality.

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How can you fix this? It's literally as simple, or complex, as retraining your brain. Retrain the way you see yourself. Retrain the way you view the world around you. For the first few weeks of this process I had to talk to myself out loud. I'd say, "Oh gawd, this is gonna suck" then quickly say "ok, this seems difficult but, I can do it." I'd counter "I'm broke as a joke today" with "my money isn't in my pocket but, it's on the way!" It sounds super crazy but, I promise you, it worked!

While I was single I never said "my next man won't be broke like the last one." Never. Not one time didm I mention the former with the future. I'd simply say "the love that is coming to me is the best I've ever known. He's stable. He's attentive and kind." I focused on the positive qualities that I wanted and not the negative things I'd experienced. Not only the negativity I'd experienced but also the negativity that I was embodying.

As much as I'd held on to the fact that I was strong and stubborn, those weren't necessarily good attributes all the time. I had to learn to be softer in a relationship and trust that the man, that was to come, would be a strong partner and allow me to rest in the femininity I longed for. I learned to give up the idea that everything had to go my way or it wasn't right. Compromise isn't a bad word. Love

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itself is a compromise with yourself. You have to be willing to give in to a part of yourself that wants to allow another person space inside of your heart.

Allowing someone in after you've won awards at keeping people out can be a battle. After I had the "dassit, dassall" moment, I noticed that I was building a wall around myself. This wall would have made 45 proud. I'd just about gotten it completed when I realized that, if I was ever going to allow anyone new into my life, I'd have to be free of boarders and barricades. Here's the thing though, walls are tricky. On one hand they keep out the bad guys and keep us safe inside out "better off single" bunkers. On the other, they keep EVERYBODY out. Everybody, including Prince Charming. If you eventually want to welcome love, you've got to be able to let love in. I let the wall stay half finished. I wasn't going to be super hard to get but you sure weren't just going to walk in the front door, have a seat and put your feet on my heart-shaped coffee table either. A little effort never hurt anybody.

While we're on the subject of effort, let's talk about the level of effort you're going to have to put into yourself before you can expect someone else to put in any. On my journey I decided to take a solid six months to "get to know" myself. After all, I'd spent a decade in an "entanglement" that was neither healthy nor fulfilling. I'd gotten

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into a rut of my own making. Did I even remember what I liked to do in my spare time? Did I know what kind of dates I'd like to go on? Was I going to be cool if I opted to stay out of the dating pool altogether? These were real questions I had to ask myself, out loud, and answer them honestly. I had no clue what I liked anymore so, I started trying new things until I did. I took myself out, or went to unusual places with friends, to see what kind of atmosphere I felt most comfortable in. And no, I found out, I was NOT going to be ok if I opted to stay single. Now, I never said I'd get married but every Oprah needs a Stedman!

Putting in some physical, mental and psychological effort on myself is a part of digging up old bones. In order to guide a better you, you've got to start off with a stronger foundation. Let's look at it this way; if you wanted to grow a vegetable garden would you go out into your backyard and randomly throw seeds? I hope you wouldn't! The proper way to start a garden is to first lay out your blueprint. Decide where you're going to put it then till the earth in that area. You've got to disturb and shift the ground. Sometimes that process is hard to do so, you add a little water. Water down something that's too strong for you. Dilute it but, still do the work.

Dig up the old things that have caused you to not fully be who you're supposed to be. Get rid of old hurt. It's not useful. It doesn't

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have a purpose and it doesn't benefit you. Get rid of self doubt. It has no place in your new self garden. Get rid of every weed of insecurity. Pull up every deep rooted thing masquerading as "just who you are". You were fearfully and wonderfully made. You were created to be a walking, talking, masterpiece. You were created to be an amazing universe in and of yourself. Anything that is not benefitting your new garden, your new self, has to go.

Excavate and demolish everything that you're trying to get rid of. No parts of the undesired you should remain standing. In purging your personhood, you're going to inevitably come across something you've kept hidden. If you're like me, you keep birthday cards, handwritten notes and other mementoes. Guess what? Those will possibly have to go too. If you can hold on to the thing, without the feelings for the person, cool. If they are going to have you sending late night texts. Let 'em go.

Seriously, no one wants to keep something that's going to be an emotional trigger. Holding on to a trigger could possibly undo all of your hard work. Purging triggers is the same reason ex-addicts stay away from their old friends and places. It's the same reason people who are trying to quit smoking have to change up their routine.

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They don't want to do anything that is going to make them use or smoke again. Staying away from a trigger protects your growth and, you have to protect your new growth at all costs.

Removing road blocks, triggers and digging up old bones is the best way to start something new. Don't worry about getting everything done in a certain timeframe. Don't worry about how you'll be viewed for starting over. In the words of the famous shoe company "just do it". I didn't make any announcements when I decided to change. I just did it. No accountability partner needed. I had to be accountable to myself. In the end, you build where you've prepared and planned. You build on something new in a place free of old bones.

Another issue that we need to take a look at that falls in the "old bones" category is some of us having "parental issues". In a few cases a woman who's grown up with an absent or emotionally unavailable father may find herself seeking the approval of multiple men (not always but, in these cases it's better to fix the cause than search for a cure). A man who has had a disapproving, unloving mother may seek the attention of women. Growing up without the love and attention from a parent can oftentimes create a void in an adult.

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If you can't have a "come to Jesus" conversation with your parent then you'll need to come to grips with the fact that "it is what it is" and understand two points. Number 1) yes, that is how they behaved then and Number 2) No, I can not change the past. Really understanding these two points will help you put things into perspective. We can't change them and what they did but, we can change the way we move forward. Just because your parent treated you poorly doesn't mean you're going to get that void filled by another person. I strongly suggest that you don't even try that method. Instead, fill that void with all of the love you can give that neglected young child. Find reasons to celebrate the young, inquisitive and ambitious you. There's no shame in speaking to that child warmly NOW.

Give yourself the love you should have been given and watch how your life turns around. None of us want to admit we've got "mommy issues" or "daddy issues" but, I promise, if you face it, you can conquer it. You don't need to keep collecting "mother figures" or "sugar mamas". The pseudo love you get from a "sugar daddy" isn't going to ever give you what you should have gotten from your father.

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We've all got a child inside of us. That child is either content or crying out. Much like soothing a crying baby, love that part of yourself that needs a parent so much that you quiet its cries.

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PAUSE TO AFFIRM YOURSELF

Everyday take a moment to look in a mirror and say these affirmations to yourself. If you're really committed, record yourself saying them and play it several times throughout the day. Affirmations can literally reshape the way you think about yourself and the world around you. Including more positive "self speak" into your life is one of the best things you can do. Below are just a few positive affirmations. Feel free to add to them to suit your life goals.

I am strong.

I am loved.

I am whole.

I am worthy.

I am loved.

I am enough.

I bless others and I'm blessed in return.

I am loving, caring and kind.

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I am filled with light.

I am filled with positivity.

I speak only good things about myself and others.

I am living a life of abundance.

I am healthy mentally, physically and spiritually.

I live a life of peace with all people.

I live in harmony with the elements around me.

I use my time wisely and I make good decisions.

Saying these affirmations to yourself daily, or several times throughout the day, will help you stay on your journey. They will empower you. Say them until you believe them. Say them until you become them.

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5: Cleaning Out the Closet: If It Doesn't Fit, Get Rid of It

Just like you have to dig up old bones and settle old issues, you've also got to look at old attributes. I mentioned briefly in the last section how old survival tactics can masquerade as "just who I am". Those "just who I am's" will surely keep you from the good things you're looking for if you don't address them.

I'm not going to attack you so, let's talk about my foolishness. I'm a Taurus. I'm stubborn. I mean HARD HEADED and, I like to get my way. I was also hot tempered and sort of a loose canon when I was angry. You want to know what that got me? A bad name! Yes, I was known for being mean. Now, ask yourself, if you were a man would you want a mean, hot headed, woman? Hell no! The only man that was willing to put up with my behavior was my father and even he would tell me to cut it out occasionally. I subscribed to the ideology

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that, because I'd always been this way (as far as I could remember), THIS must be the way I am. Thankfully that wasn't true.

I'd displayed this behavior as a response to things in the past. This didn't mean that, because the behavior had been there for decades, I'd have to settle for keeping them. Absolutely not. They had to go just like every other bad habit, or article of clothing, that didn't fit who I was becoming. The "just who I am's" keep you from being who you need to be so, they've got to go. No matter how old you are, you're NEVER too old to create a new and improved version of yourself.

So, how are you supposed to clear out your emotional closet? The same way you clean out your wardrobe. Piece by piece. Take a few minutes to really think about what you want in a partner. You probably want someone who listens, is considerate and kind, possibly romantic and thoughtful. The list of good attributes can get pretty long when mapping out who you want. Now, take a look at your list and apply all of those attributes, except the ones pertaining to anatomy, to yourself. Are you loving? Are you kind and considerate? Are you thoughtful? We should never require something of our partner that we aren't willing to give as well.

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If you want a kind partner, practice kindness daily. Do something kind for your friends, or even complete strangers, without taking photos or expecting anything in return. Put yourself in a position to show more grace to those around you. Something as simple as buying a cup of coffee or a slice of pizza for someone else can have a rippling effect on your life. I mentioned life, or karma, as being a wheel earlier. If that wasn't clear enough think of it this way. You're sitting at a large table with an empty lazy-Susan in the middle of it and you put a \$100 bill on it. The more you turn the lazy-Susan, the closer the \$100 bill gets to coming back to you. It might take a while but, all good seeds that we sow will bring a bountiful harvest.

If you want a good partner, you've first got to BE a good partner. While you're doing the work on yourself you've also got to make room for what you're asking for. Let's use an analogy again. Imagine you have a refrigerator full of leftovers and expired food. Every single thing in your fridge is inedible but, you keep it because you don't want to have an empty fridge. Now imagine someone comes along to give you fresh produce and prime cuts of whatever meat you love the most. The only catch is, you have to have space for it NOW! Not in five minutes, not in an hour, now! They can't wait

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around until you've got the fridge cleaned out, they need to deliver now. . . or never. You'll miss this once in a lifetime opportunity because you weren't ready.

This is exactly what happens when we hang on to an expired relationship just for the sake of not being lonely. Someone who is genuinely interested in us may come along but not stay because we're not ready to receive them. When you know your old thing is over, throw it out and clean out the places in your heart that used to be their spot. Have you ever seen a piece of fruit go bad in a fridge? It withers and oozes and the shelf under it becomes stained. Sure, you can throw it out but, you've got to wash the shelf before you put something else in its place.

Don't miss a good man because you were holding on to the leftovers of the one you had. Remember when I said I took six months to be "with myself" after a long relationship ended? In that time I wasn't sitting and reminiscing over the past. I wasn't being petty on the internet and pretending my life was good without him. I was busy making sure my life *was* good without him. I wasn't just working on my mind, I was cleaning out my heart. When love showed up, I wanted to be 100% ready for it. No cobwebs left, no residue, no past relationship dust. I wanted to be "move-in" ready.

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What took me six months, may take you a year or two. Maybe it'll only take a month. The key is to remember that everyone grows and goes at their own pace. Don't get down on yourself if you don't feel you've made any progress in the first thirty days. It took me just as long to really come to terms with the changes I was asking myself to make. If you're going to be committed to change, be committed to also being gentle with yourself while you're changing.

"Making room" for the love you're asking for can, and should, take some time. While you're cleaning out your mind and your heart, you should also be crystal clear about who you want to occupy the space. Verbally set your intentions on what you want. Write down everything and read it aloud. Words have life and speaking them gives them legs. If you're the kind of woman that needs a lot of attention, ask for an attentive man. If you're the "low maintenance" type, who doesn't need a lot of quality time, ask for a busy man who makes you a priority.

"Making room" isn't always about past relationships either. Sometimes it's about clearing space of the things that have occupied your time and kept you from relationships at all. I recently was given the chance to screen a film called "Christmas in Carolina" before it premiered. The main character Elle, played by Joslyn Y. Hall, wasn't going through past break-up issues, she was a workaholic.

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Her schedule didn't allow time for love and when love showed up, she almost missed her chance. Don't be "that girl" who's always super busy and unapproachable. We've all got to make a living but, when you're with someone, give them your undivided attention. Focusing on the person in front of you will help you pay attention to context clues and make you aware of any red flags. Don't be so caught up in relishing the moment that you forget to keep your eyes peeled for inconsistencies and untruths.

Be mindful and in the moment as much as possible. Sometimes all it takes is a split second to either recognize your soulmate or a potential disaster. Take notice of your own intuition as well. How does your spirit feel about them? Is their energy off? Do they give off "creep" vibes? Look in their eyes when you speak to them. Are their eyes kind or . . . psycho? Paying attention while serial dating helps you to gain the data you need to either continue or let go.

Whatever you decide, be ready when love comes knocking.

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6. Let's Go Shopping: Auto Supply vs Super Stores and Full Carts!

Remember when I told you about the ex telling me he hadn't changed? I swear that moment was pivotal for me. I had to realize, in my own time, that I was asking, begging, pleading for someone to give me something he absolutely didn't have to give. It's crazy when you think about it. How could a person NOT love, not show affection, not want to give you everything you've been giving to them? I'll explain it to you as simply as I can:

Storytime:

Let's go shopping. Say you need tampons but you decide to stop into the first store you see to get them. You've been going to this store a while picking up little things like windshield wiper fluid, air fresheners and brake fluid. Sure, it's an auto parts store but, the

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cashiers are cool and you always have great conversations with them. You walk into the store that you've been coming to for months, years maybe, and start going up and down each aisle. You see jumper cables, windshield wiper blades, batteries, even towels but, no tampons. You think about leaving but, change your mind.

This is your store. You always shop here. They should give you what you want.

You speak to your favorite cashier and ask them to get you some tampons. They tell you the store doesn't carry them. You get angry, go full Karen and ask to speak to their manager. You go through your song and dance giving them the full riot act about how you've shopped here forever. You deserve to be able to purchase your tampons here!

Finally, after throwing a tantrum, you leave. You sit in your car and actually go over the events that just occurred. Your favorite store, the one closest to you. The one you've bonded with, has let you down.

Imagine going back the next month demanding the same thing. Then the next and the next. Finally, you get fed up. Yes, you've been shopping here for a while. Yes the cashiers are friendly and

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they have some of the things you want. Yes it's close to you but, it doesn't have everything that you need. It's never going to have everything on your list. With your last bit of energy you drive to a super store. You've never been here before, it's all new, big and intimidating but, after strolling a few aisles, you find every single thing you ever needed.

One store has tampons, air freshener, brake fluid and even things you didn't know you needed like comfy blankets and orange juice. Everything you've ever wanted right under one roof. Who would have thought that some place so wonderful existed?

This is how we look when we keep going back to a man who can't give us what we want because he doesn't have it. We've begged them to love us but they can't because they don't **have** love for us. You want him to be romantic and chivalrous but he can't because he doesn't possess those qualities. You can cry until you're blue in the face but a man can't give you anything he doesn't have for you. Period!

If a man, or woman, was never shown a healthy, loving, relationship in their life it's kind of hard to be in one. I'm not saying that it's im-

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possible because it's absolutely not but, they have to **want** to do better than they've been shown. There are countless men who are excellent fathers after not having a father of their own. There are millions of women who are amazing wives who were raised by single mothers. It's not rocket science to those who want to do better. They simply choose to be better than what they've seen.

If someone wanted to do better, they would. Begging won't make them, ultimatums won't make them and nagging won't either. Repeatedly asking for the same thing gets you drowned out and aggravated. It's pretty pointless and, in the end, you are the only one who suffers. Do you see where we go wrong? Of course you do. Now let me show you where else we can pull up.

Storytime. . . AGAIN:

I absolutely hate shopping for clothes in stores. I've got boutiques that I frequent for my "good" clothes but, every now and then, I have to go to an actual store. When I do, I wander around picking up things and putting them in my cart. I'm not necessarily going to buy them but I need to make sure A) Nobody else gets them and B) Should I decide to buy them, I already have them on lock.

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See, I really like these items I have. They fit well, are the perfect color and they look beautifully on me. So, what's the problem? I'm not sure about them.

I've literally walked around a shop for an hour with clothes draped over my arm, or in a cart, and still hesitated on buying them. Sometimes, I leave the whole cart where it is, and leave the store in frustration because I couldn't commit to buying anything. Most times I look back in regret, wishing I'd bought one particular thing that I thought was especially pretty. Other times I go to a completely different store and fall in love with the first thing that catches my eye and I rush to buy it.

Can you imagine (no, seriously, try to imagine) how the clothes at the other store must feel? (If they could feel.)

What I've just described to you is what some of us have allowed men and women to do to us. Imagine the person shopping is a really handsome guy and the clothes in his cart are women. There's a variety of us in there. Different skin tones and a variety of body types. All vying for his attention and praying to be bought. We're all so busy trying to prove that we're better than the next woman all

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the while forgetting that he is still adding to the amount of women in the cart. Some, he'll put back, some he'll pick up, try on and put back in his cart. These women really think they're gonna get chosen like the martians in that toy movie!

Meanwhile, none of us have noticed that, because we're in his cart, no one else can have us. He hasn't purchased us, meaning "put a ring on it", but he's got us in a position where we aren't available to other men. He may purchase one of us, he may just leave us all and go to another store where he'll find "The One" and put a ring on her in a shorter amount of time than he spent stringing us along. How many of us know someone who broke up with his girlfriend of more than three years then proposed to a woman he met six months after meeting her? A lot of us do!

Unlike clothes, women have the capability to get out of the cart. If you know a man has you in his cart, but he's still shopping, and you choose to stay in it. . . Don't blame him for wasting your time. You sat there and gave him the time to waste. Any man that is not certain about you doesn't deserve you. It doesn't take years for a man to know when he's found "The One". If you feel like waiting, do so

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while dating. . . someone else. No one said you couldn't have a shopping cart of your own. **GASP!** Yes, I said it! Now, let's talk about it.

A famous female comedian once said that she dated multiple men at a time until one of them separated himself from the pack. See, here's the thing, there's nothing wrong with dating multiple people at a time as long as everyone knows what's going on. Dating IS NOT a relationship. Once a relationship starts to form, you need to trim the fat and focus on just one. Going into a dating scenario knowing that you are in it for the fun and with the intention to get to know someone better takes a lot of pressure off. It's perfectly fine to have three different dates in one weekend as long as boundaries are clear. Listen, I said DATE not "sleep with" but, if you choose that route, you're an adult and "that's your business". Just protect yourself. We don't need any Maury episodes due to carelessness.

It's not "cart hoarding" if everyone in the situation knows that you are dating for fun and to "see where it goes". It IS "cart hoarding" when the other parties don't know that there is no exclusivity on your end. If we're not going to be in exclusive then we all need to be free to roam around. Don't lead anybody on. Let the people

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you're dating know that you are dating others UP FRONT. This gives them an out, a chance to date others as well and prevent your life from becoming a Lifetime movie.

Another point I want to touch on briefly is "dating expectations". I did something that was very unconventional for a lot of women and it proved to be the best thing I ever did. I dated a man without expecting anything from him or the "dating relationship". I was grateful to have someone to go to dinner with, who didn't care that I talked in the movie theater and who genuinely cared about how my day was going. I didn't expect him to do anything for me that I wasn't already doing for myself. If he offered to do something for me, I accepted. No strings attached. Not expecting anything other than what was freely given gave me a peace I'd never had before.

Of course it was completely alien for me not to want to expect him to behave a certain way or to do a certain thing. Just as I retrained my mind to speak more positively, I trained myself to stop expecting men to behave the way I wanted them to. After all, it's the way I **want** them to behave, not what comes naturally to them. I don't

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want anyone who has to make themselves do something that isn't natural to them. They either have what I'm looking for or they don't. If they don't, there's a super store somewhere else that does!

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7. Hey, I Know You're Working on it but, Let's Add Some Therapy.

Take a deep breath in for four seconds. Hold it for seven seconds then, blow it out for eight seconds.

Feel more relaxed? Good. We're going to talk about a subject that has been very taboo in certain communities. Therapy.

For generations certain ethnic groups, or cultural communities, have been told to "just pray about" whatever is ailing them. Broken heart? Pray about it. Dangerous thoughts? It's a demon. Pray about it. Self-sabotaging behaviors? Pray about it. Yes, prayer DOES work but, (getting a little preachy here) Faith without works is dead (James 2:26). You can pray for a job all day every day but, if you're not actively seeking one by submitting applications and resumes, even asking who's hiring, you're not going to get one.

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None of us want to be emotionally broken. None of us wake up in the morning and decide that we're going to spend the day depressed and down in the dumps. Mental health and emotional stability are REAL things that a lot of people shy away from talking about. Everyone, no matter who they are, has had a run in with a thought about themselves that they wouldn't want to express out loud. The key to overcoming negative thoughts, like we discussed in "Digging Up Old Bones", is to first acknowledge the thing is there then, do the work to remove it.

Sometimes it takes more than just addressing the issue and retraining the way you think. Sometimes the thing is so deep rooted that you have to call in some heavy equipment to dig them up. That's where therapy comes in. No one walks into a gym on the very first day of weight lifting and picks up 300 pounds without someone to "spot" them. Think of a therapist as a "spotter". Someone who is capable of lifting the heavy object should you find yourself stuck under too much weight.

Yes, your pastor, or spiritual covering, is cool but there's something to be said about a licensed professional who has done spent time studying ways to help others lift the heavy objects. Some of the BEST therapists are people who have both spiritual and textbook

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training and, if you can find one, you've hit the jackpot! Also, professionals can't legally tell your business and, sadly, some pastors do.

I always suggest people seek help from a professional they HAVE NOT known their entire lives and who doesn't know any of the people who may come up during a therapy session. Talking to your pastor is all fine and dandy until you want to bring up your soul-tie with the church's musician. Things can get pretty awkward. During sessions, you want to be able to speak freely and not worry about how they're going to react when they run into "your baggage" at Bible Study.

In my line of work it can be pretty hard to find a doctor, therapist or other support professional who doesn't either A) know who I am or B) thinks my voice sounds familiar. For this reason alone I tend to choose medical doctors who are "out of the way" and oblivious to who I am. There's something I don't like about discussing my personal life and body with someone who can connect "work me" with "W.A.P. me". Let's be honest, those personal questions they ask at the Ob/Gyn can be a bit much and, although they're not supposed to tell your business, everybody has somebody they "pillow talk" with. That's just me though. You do what you feel is best for you but, please, get some help while you're helping yourself.

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Another reason I often suggest people seek professional help is, they're trained to handle the heavy lifting. I'm not saying your pastor is "green" but, not everyone who is "called" gets trained to handle suicidal thoughts and childhood trauma. Also, biblically speaking, the Bible states in Proverbs 15:22 "without counsel purposes are disappointed." Without someone to advise you on your journey, you'll find yourself disappointed. Literally.

Let's get into this analogy. Have you ever tried to put together a piece of furniture without reading, or at least glancing at, the instructions? It's pretty hard. Sometimes you actually can put the item together but, you may find yourself with one or two nuts and bolts left over. That means something isn't as secure as it should be.

The instructions are there for you to read over thoroughly before you begin the project. If you end up confused along the way you can consult with them again to get back on track. Reading the instructions insures that you put every single washer, bolt and screw where it should be so that, when you're finished, your product is exactly the way the manufacturer designed it.

Now, let's factor this in. . . the person who wrote your instructions

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possibly will never have to put the item together themselves. They studied it well enough to know how to handle it even if they make different furniture choices for themselves. It's fine if they don't own your dresser, they still studied it well enough to tell you how to assemble it.

Yes, you can grow through stages without having a therapist but, why not consult someone who knows a good plan? It's true a particular therapist may have never been in your shoes but, that doesn't mean they haven't studied a way to help you. I've never worn six inch heels but I can tell you that you're going to need good balance and to stay away from ice to walk safely!

When you find a professional to help, your foundation is stronger. I've watched a million D.I.Y. videos on home improvement but I'm still not going to break out a wall myself. There are a million things you **could** do on your own but, why not let those more equipped to handle it do so? It can be difficult for us independent people to ask for help, especially if you've been handling tough situations all alone for years. Constantly carrying that weight isn't good. It can be stressful and cause physical damage over time.

Just as you'd need help lifting something heavy, you also need help

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putting it down. Navigating the dark waters of your past can be hard. You might as well enlist the help of someone who knows the way out. Whether it's a therapist or a life coach, bring in someone who can help you sort things out, even if it's only for a short time. Get a therapist if you need help with past trauma. Get a life coach if you need help getting started in the right direction. Get both if you need to. Journeys are a lot better when you travel with a map even more so when you've got a guide.

If you don't know where to start looking for a therapist, I suggest you start with 1-800-273-TALK (8255). They can connect you with local organizations that you can meet with in person. If you're tech savvy, try looking into BetterHelp.com or TalkSpace.com. I'm going to be offering some life coaching seminars in the future but, in the meantime if you're in the market for a life coach try RosettaThurman.com or bark.com. I don't mind spreading the love around especially if it's going to help someone else be great.

Speaking of being great, did you know that you were already a masterpiece? You might be a masterpiece in pieces but you're still a masterpiece nonetheless. If you made a puzzle out of a prized Picasso, isn't it still a Picasso? Right. It is. Just because you may not have it all figured out right now doesn't mean that you never

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will. You most definitely will. When it's time. Staying committed to the work and getting help along the way is the recipe for creating a better version of yourself. And remember, if you fall off the wagon, or have to pause, it's okay. Nobody learns to drive a train in one day. Your life, like that train, has many different compartments and tons of different moving parts. Master them, and yourself, in your own time. You've got this!

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8. Walk Like You Own It!

Have you ever watched an episode of any modeling competition or any fashion show? If you have then you'll know that models don't timidly take to the runway. The moment their foot hits the runway, sometimes moments before, they hold their heads up high, shoulders straight and completely own every single step they take with confidence. That's exactly how I want each of you to enter each room from now on. Like you own the air in the room and you deserve to be there.

Doing this kind of work on your personal character isn't a small fete and you should be commended for even trying to do better. It's not easy to take a long, hard, look at yourself in the mirror and realize that at times, you've been the toxic one. It's hard to face but even harder to address it in terms of changing. I don't care if you've had

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to put this book to the side five times before you decide that this last try is the final try. You've come a long way and, if no one else tells you, I'm proud of you!

If you've read through these essays then, by now, hopefully, you feel a little differently about the path you're on. I hope you're doing the work to become a more fulfilled and whole version of yourself. I hope you stand a little taller and hold your head a little higher. I pray that your confidence level has doubled and that you've extended a measure of grace to yourself just as you would a young child who is learning something new.

In the pursuit of uncovering the hidden things that prevent us from loving and healthy relationships, I pray you find peace. Peace is the one component that can change a "not ready yet" type of person into an "always ready" one. When you've got peace with who you are and where you're going, you'll never view the world as you did before. While I was on my journey I found it extremely helpful to appreciate every moment. Not only did I want a better life, I wanted to make sure I was consciously enjoying my life.

I wanted to savor the moments that I had to myself. Moments where I didn't have to be "on" and entertaining others. Moments of silence that prefaced a busy day. I learned to be mindful of every-

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thing I did and not just coasting on autopilot all the time. The art of mindfulness was a new and exciting practice to me. According to the Mayo Clinic Health System, mindfulness meditation “is the practice of purposefully focusing our attention on the awareness of the present moment as it relates to our thoughts, feelings, sensations in our body and our sense of the environment around us.”

Being fully present and aware of yourself, your feelings and your environment all the time can get pretty overwhelming to some of us who suffer with sensory issues. For example, when I first started practicing mindfulness for the first time, I was sitting on my couch in the middle of the day. I instantly became hyper aware of the sounds of the television, cars outside, the dog panting and the hum of the air conditioner. It was overwhelming! I quickly learned that mindfulness and meditation need the same type of peaceful environment as prayer.

When you're preparing to set your intentions, detail the kind of love you want or write out what you want for yourself, do so in a place where you can think quietly. You don't have to do it all at once, actually, it's better if you don't. More ideas and attributes tend to come to mind over time. Let it be a running list of wants. Add to the list as

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your life changes. Today you may want a partner who's an entrepreneur but, six months from now you may decide that a hard working laborer is best. You might decide that you're comfortable with your current life station but, have a complete change of heart next year. Be flexible, yet firm.

It sounds like an oxymoron, I know but, hear me out. You have to be flexible in your methods but firm on the goal. You may want to lose twenty pounds by jumping rope every day. Three months in, nobody is going to hold it against you if you start riding a bike. You're still on the same weight loss journey but, you're just using a different mode of transpiration to get there. No matter how you look at it, you're still going to get there.

From here on out I want you to walk your path as if you are certain of every step. Yes, you'll have moments of doubt but, if you've set your intentions, spoken your affirmations and laid out your plan, you'll know that every step will lead you where you should be. Pray along the way, meditate along the way, look at yourself in the mirror and tell yourself how amazingly capable you are. Tell yourself you are worthy of the life you want and worthy of the love and blessings that you are attracting. These seemingly small acts make a big difference.

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You are more than enough. You are worthy of every good thing that is coming to you. You are complete as you are. There is nothing that you need on your journey that you haven't been equipped with from the start. It's okay to ask for help, this is new territory but, one day, you'll be able to help someone else.

"We rise by lifting others"

~Robert G. Ingersoll.

I hope I've helped to lift you.

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About The Author



LoVetta Jenkins is a native of Youngstown, Ohio. During the day she's a radio personality on the city's leading Urban Adult Contemporary radio station. By night she's a social media strategist, entertainment and news blogger and a certified health and wellness coach. Her morning radio show is what lead her to start encouraging others which, in turn, led her to write this book. Coupled with her love of reading and speaking, she's become a successful motivational speaker.

In her spare time she enjoys binge watching independent films with her daughter and spending time with her family.