

NEVER MAKE A PERMANENT DECISION
IN A TEMPORARY EMOTIONAL STATE.

15 MORE MINUTES



A TRUE STORY.
A SIMPLE PROMISE.
A LIFE-CHANGING PHILOSOPHY.

RUSS WARD

15 MORE MINUTES

*Never Make a Permanent Decision
in a Temporary Emotional State*

RUSS WARD

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Temporary Emotional State

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Introduction: The Nine Words That Changed Everything

I sat alone staring at my phone, exhausted.

Not angry. Not even particularly emotional anymore. Just tired.

Tired of the conversations that never seemed to end. Tired of replaying the same misunderstandings. Tired of wondering whether we were ever going to find our way back to each other. There comes a point in emotional exhaustion when you stop looking for the best answer and start looking for the fastest escape. That was where I was.

The screen glowed in my hand as I read through our conversation one more time. Nothing about the room felt extraordinary. There was no dramatic music playing in the background. No shouting. No slammed doors. No audience watching one of the most important moments of my life unfold. It looked like an ordinary day. That's the thing about life-changing decisions. Most of them don't announce themselves. They arrive disguised as ordinary moments.

I began typing.

I read the words once. Then I read them again.

Finally, I pressed send.

"To be clear. This is me breaking up with you."

Nine words.

That's all they were.

Nine ordinary words sent from one ordinary phone on one ordinary day.

Yet those nine words permanently altered the direction of my life.

What happened next is something I never expected.

Within seconds, the certainty I had been carrying for days began to disappear. The emotional pressure that had been building inside me started lifting almost as quickly as it had arrived. My chest tightened. My stomach sank. I stared at my phone, wishing I could reach through the screen and pull those words back before they reached her.

It was as though the person who had sent the message and the person who had to live with it were no longer the same person.

The emotion faded.

The consequences didn't.

I didn't have language for what had just happened. I couldn't explain it. I only knew one thing with absolute certainty.

I had made a permanent decision in a temporary emotional state.

At the time, I didn't understand how important that realization would become. I simply knew that something inside me had shifted, and whatever had just happened couldn't be explained by the breakup alone.

The two weeks that followed were some of the hardest of my life.

Sleep became almost impossible. Food lost its appeal. My mind replayed every conversation, every misunderstanding,

every missed opportunity to say something differently. I negotiated with memories as though I could somehow rewrite history if I examined it from enough angles.

I thought I was grieving the loss of someone I loved.

Eventually, I realized I was grieving something else too.

I was grieving the version of myself who had made a life-changing decision while emotionally overwhelmed. I couldn't understand how someone who genuinely loved another person could make a choice he regretted almost immediately.

That question haunted me.

At first, I asked the question most people would ask.

"How do I get her back?"

But over time, a different question began demanding my attention.

Why do intelligent people make decisions they regret almost immediately?

That question changed everything.

It sent me on a search I never expected to take. I found myself reading psychology and neuroscience, revisiting my own history, reflecting on my faith, and examining patterns I'd witnessed in business, leadership, friendships, and families. I wasn't searching for an excuse. I wasn't trying to justify my decision or erase my responsibility for it. I was searching for an explanation.

Months passed before I began to recognize the pattern.

When I looked back at the biggest regrets of my life, I discovered they all had something in common.

They weren't made because I lacked intelligence.

They weren't made because I lacked character.

They weren't made because I wanted to hurt the people I loved.

They were made because I was emotionally overwhelmed.

Every single one of them happened in the storm.

Once I saw that pattern, I couldn't stop seeing it. I noticed it in conversations, in businesses, in marriages, in friendships, in families, and in leadership. Different stories. Different people. Different consequences. Yet underneath them all was the same invisible force: temporary emotions trying to make permanent decisions.

My own story did not end with the breakup. After everything those difficult weeks had put me through, there came a moment when I picked up my phone and sent three more words.

"15 more minutes?"

For a long time, I believed those three words were the moment that changed my life. I thought that one desperate little text was what saved everything.

Eventually, I realized I was wrong.

The decision that mattered had happened much earlier.

The fifteen minutes I was desperately asking someone else to give me were the exact same fifteen minutes I had refused to give myself.

That realization became the foundation of everything you're about to read.

This is not a book about staying in unhealthy relationships. It is not a book about avoiding difficult conversations, refusing to leave when leaving is necessary, or pretending that every relationship, job, or opportunity should last forever. There are times when ending a relationship is wise. There are times when quitting is courageous. There are times when walking away is exactly the right decision.

This book is about something different.

It's about learning when **not** to decide.

It's about recognizing emotional storms before they quietly convince us that urgency is wisdom. It's about creating enough space for the calm version of ourselves to have a voice before we make decisions that cannot easily be undone.

My hope is that by the time you finish this book, you'll never look at an important decision the same way again. You'll begin recognizing the subtle moments when emotion starts writing a story that reality hasn't confirmed. You'll learn how to pause long enough for perspective to return. And perhaps most importantly, you'll carry one simple question with you into every major crossroads of your life.

Has the calm version of me had a chance to vote?

There will be another storm.

For you.

For me.

For all of us.

When it comes, I hope the calm version of you gets a vote.

15 More Minutes

PART I

THE STORM

Chapter 1: The Day I Burned My Life Down

By the time I met Nicole, I had stopped believing that the kind of relationship I wanted was actually going to happen.

I hadn't given up on love. At least, I wouldn't have admitted that to anyone. But somewhere between years of dating, relationships that ended with more questions than answers, and the quiet accumulation of disappointment, something inside me had changed. Hope hadn't disappeared; it had simply lowered its expectations. I learned to protect myself by wanting less. It felt safer that way.

Like many people, I reached a place where I convinced myself that "good enough" was probably as good as life was going to get. Maybe lasting love was something other people found. Maybe some people were fortunate enough to build a life with someone who truly understood them, while the rest of us learned to be grateful for companionship, even if it never quite felt like home. It wasn't a belief I announced out loud. It was simply one I carried.

So I focused on building a life. I worked hard. I invested in my career, my friendships, and my faith. I stayed busy enough that I rarely had to think about what was missing. Life wasn't bad. It just wasn't the life I had once imagined.

Then Nicole walked into it.

Looking back, I can't point to a single moment when everything changed. Love rarely works that way. It doesn't usually arrive with dramatic declarations or unmistakable

certainty. More often, it introduces itself quietly, through ordinary conversations that become the highlight of your day and simple moments that somehow begin to matter more than they should.

I remember one afternoon when we sat talking long after we had finished our coffee. Neither of us seemed interested in leaving. The conversation drifted effortlessly from childhood memories to dreams for the future, from serious topics to laughter that seemed to arrive without effort. Hours passed without either of us noticing. It wasn't because the conversation was extraordinary. It was because being together felt easy.

I noticed little things about her that revealed the kind of person she was. She treated waitstaff with genuine kindness, not performative politeness. She remembered details from conversations weeks earlier that I had forgotten I had shared. When someone else was speaking, she listened without waiting for her turn to respond. She made people feel seen. Those moments told me far more about her character than any grand romantic gesture ever could.

The more time we spent together, the more I realized I wasn't exhausted by the relationship. I wasn't wondering whether I had said the wrong thing or trying to become someone else to earn her affection. Around her, I felt like I could simply exist.

For years I had mistaken excitement for compatibility. Excitement is intoxicating, but it can also be unstable. What I experienced with Nicole was different. It was quieter than excitement and infinitely more valuable.

She didn't make me feel excited.

She made me feel home.

There is a difference.

Home isn't the absence of problems. It's the presence of peace. It's the feeling that you don't have to perform, impress, or constantly prove your worth. It's the place where your shoulders relax because you know you're accepted as you are. That's what being with her felt like.

Without realizing it, I stopped imagining my future as an individual story and began imagining it as a shared one. I pictured Saturday mornings when we'd linger over coffee because there was nowhere else we'd rather be. I imagined making dinner together, laughing over small mistakes in the kitchen that would become stories we'd tell for years. I pictured family holidays, vacations that wouldn't go according to plan, evenings on the back porch after long days, and eventually the kind of quiet companionship that only decades together can create.

Sometimes my imagination wandered even further. I could see us growing old together. I imagined watching grandchildren run through the backyard while we smiled at each other, grateful for the ordinary life we had built. Those weren't extravagant dreams. They were beautifully ordinary, and that's exactly what made them so meaningful.

Looking back now, I understand something I couldn't have articulated then.

I wasn't simply falling in love with a person.

I was falling in love with a future.

Like every real relationship, ours wasn't perfect. We brought different histories into it. We carried different fears, different expectations, and different wounds we hadn't fully healed. Sometimes we misunderstood each other. Sometimes we reacted to old experiences instead of present conversations. There were moments when one of us heard criticism where none had been intended and moments when the other struggled to communicate what was really happening beneath the surface.

None of it felt catastrophic.

There wasn't a betrayal.

There wasn't a single explosive fight.

There wasn't one dramatic event that pointed toward an inevitable ending.

Instead, the relationship slowly became heavier.

Conversations that had once felt effortless began requiring more energy. Small misunderstandings lingered longer than they should have. We both wanted to feel understood, but too often we walked away feeling unheard. Emotional fatigue has a subtle way of accumulating. It doesn't usually arrive in one overwhelming wave. It settles over a relationship one difficult conversation at a time until you no longer remember what it felt like before carrying the weight.

As the emotional pressure increased, something else changed.

A story began taking shape in my mind.

At first it sounded reasonable.

Maybe this isn't going to get better.

Then it became more convincing.

We've already tried.

I already know how this ends.

Eventually another thought appeared, quieter than the others but far more powerful.

If I leave first, I can't be abandoned.

I didn't recognize those thoughts as fear. They felt like wisdom. They sounded responsible, even protective. The more often I rehearsed them, the less they felt like opinions and the more they felt like facts.

Then came the day that would divide my life into a before and an after.

Nothing about the morning suggested it would become one of the defining days of my life. There were no warning signs, no dramatic confrontation, no sense that history was quietly waiting just around the corner. It was simply another difficult day inside a relationship that had become emotionally exhausting.

I picked up my phone and opened our conversation. I stared at the screen for a long time before I began typing. Every word felt deliberate. When I finished, I read the message once. Then I read it again. I knew exactly what those words meant. I knew that once I pressed send, there would be no pretending they had never been written.

For a brief moment, my thumb hovered over the screen.

Then I pressed it.

"To be clear. This is me breaking up with you."

The message disappeared from my phone.

For a second, everything was still.

Then, almost immediately, something shifted inside me.

The certainty that had carried me to that moment began dissolving. My chest tightened. My stomach dropped. The emotional pressure that had convinced me ending the relationship was the only way forward suddenly began to lift, and as it did, a different awareness quietly took its place.

I stared at the screen, wishing I could reach into the conversation and pull those words back before they reached her.

One thought settled into my mind with startling clarity.

I had made the decision at the wrong time.

I didn't understand why.

Not yet.

But one question refused to leave me.

Why did someone who loved another person make a decision he regretted almost immediately?

Chapter 2: Temporary Feelings. Permanent Consequences

For weeks after the breakup, I couldn't escape a single question.

At first, it was the obvious one. I wondered whether I had made the biggest mistake of my life. I replayed the text message in my mind so many times that I could see every word without looking at my phone. I thought about conversations we had shared, moments I wished I could relive, and alternate endings that existed only in my imagination. Like anyone carrying fresh regret, I wanted to know if there was still a way to undo what had been done.

But as the days passed, another question quietly pushed the first one aside.

Was this just me?

Had I simply made one terrible decision that I would carry for the rest of my life? Or was there something more universal happening? Did intelligent, well-intentioned people regularly make decisions they regretted almost immediately? Was there something about being human that made us vulnerable in ways we rarely understood?

That question refused to leave me alone.

I wasn't interested in finding an excuse for what I had done. Excuses protect our pride, but they rarely change our future. I wanted something far more valuable than justification. I wanted understanding.

So I began replaying my life—not just the breakup, but everything.

I revisited old arguments and asked myself what had really been happening beneath the surface. I thought about friendships that had quietly faded because neither person was willing to make the first move toward reconciliation. I remembered business decisions I had rushed because waiting felt unbearable. I thought about opportunities I had abandoned too early, purchases I had made under pressure, conversations I wished I could take back, and moments when I had reacted first and reflected later.

Every significant regret I could remember found its way back into my thoughts.

At first, they seemed completely unrelated. A failed business decision had nothing in common with a broken relationship. A strained friendship didn't resemble a financial mistake. A difficult conversation wasn't the same as a career choice.

Or so I believed.

The more I examined them, the less interested I became in the circumstances surrounding each decision and the more interested I became in the condition I was in when I made it. Instead of asking, *What happened?* I started asking, *Who was I in that moment?*

That shift changed everything.

One by one, the pattern emerged.

None of my biggest regrets happened when I was calm.

Not one.

Every decision I wished I could take back had been made while I was emotionally overwhelmed. Sometimes it was anger. Sometimes fear. Sometimes shame or loneliness. Other times it was exhaustion, disappointment, anxiety, or the crushing pressure of believing I had to act immediately.

The stories were different.

The emotions were not.

That realization stopped me in my tracks.

For years, I had treated every regret as though it were an isolated event. Now I was beginning to see that they weren't isolated at all. They were connected by something invisible. Every one of them had been born inside an emotional storm.

I hadn't noticed it before because I was focused on the decisions themselves.

The real story was happening long before the decisions were made.

The more I sat with that thought, the more a simple truth began to take shape. It didn't arrive as advice, and it certainly didn't feel like something I had invented. It felt more like discovering a law that had always existed, whether I recognized it or not.

Never make a permanent decision in a temporary emotional state.

Those words didn't come from a motivational quote or a leadership seminar. They emerged from the evidence my own life kept placing in front of me. Every regret pointed toward

the same conclusion. Every painful memory quietly echoed the same warning.

The emotions had been temporary.

The consequences often weren't.

That distinction became impossible to ignore.

Anger fades.

Fear subsides.

Embarrassment loses its grip.

Loneliness changes.

Anxiety settles.

Even hopelessness, as convincing as it feels in the moment, rarely lasts forever.

Our emotional state is constantly changing because that's what emotions are designed to do. They move. They rise and fall. They respond to new information, changing circumstances, and the passing of time.

Yet we often allow those temporary experiences to make decisions that permanently reshape our lives.

A marriage ends after one unbearable argument.

Someone sends a breakup text they'll spend years wishing they could unsend.

An employee resigns without another opportunity waiting because one difficult meeting convinced them they had no future there.

A business owner sells a company after months of discouragement, only to watch someone else succeed with the very idea they abandoned.

A public post written in anger becomes a permanent part of someone's reputation.

A lifelong friendship ends because neither person waited long enough for perspective to return.

None of those decisions are automatically wrong. Sometimes ending a relationship is necessary. Sometimes leaving a job is the healthiest choice. Sometimes selling a business or walking away from a dream is the wisest decision available.

The problem isn't the decision.

The problem is allowing a temporary emotional state to decide when the moment has arrived.

Once I recognized that pattern in my own life, I began seeing it everywhere.

I thought about the father who comes home after the hardest day of his week. His boss has criticized him. Traffic was miserable. He's mentally exhausted before he even walks through the front door. His child spills a glass of milk at the dinner table, and suddenly years of accumulated stress pour out onto someone who had nothing to do with creating it. The anger lasts only a few moments. The child's memory of that moment may last for years.

I thought about the entrepreneur who spends years building a business only to experience another disappointing month. Discouragement whispers that the dream is over, so she closes the doors. Two months later, someone else launches a nearly

identical idea and succeeds because they stayed in the game just a little longer.

I thought about the person who writes a social media post late at night because they're tired, hurt, and angry. Pressing "publish" brings immediate relief. Morning brings a different perspective, but by then thousands of people have already seen what emotion insisted needed to be shared.

I thought about the employee who resigns after one humiliating conversation with a supervisor. Relief arrives before they even leave the parking lot. Panic arrives a week later when they realize relief doesn't pay the mortgage.

Different stories.

Different people.

The same pattern.

This wasn't a relationship problem.

It was a human problem.

As I continued reflecting, another insight emerged. Emotional pain has a remarkable ability to create urgency. When we're hurting, our minds become convinced that something must happen immediately. Waiting feels irresponsible. Reflection feels unnecessary. Action feels like wisdom.

But those are two very different things.

Pain doesn't simply make us uncomfortable.

It persuades us that relief is the highest priority.

Without realizing it, we begin confusing two completely different questions.

Instead of asking, *What is the wisest thing to do?* we start asking, *How do I make this feeling stop?*

Those questions are not the same.

Sometimes the answer to the second question leads us directly away from the answer to the first.

That realization forced me to revisit my own story from an entirely different perspective. I hadn't sent that breakup text because I had carefully concluded it was the wisest decision for my future. I had sent it because ending the relationship felt like the fastest way to end the emotional pain I was experiencing in that moment.

The relief I wanted disguised itself as certainty.

Perhaps you've experienced something similar.

As you've been reading these pages, I wonder what memories have quietly surfaced for you. Not because I want you to relive your regrets, but because curiosity is far more useful than condemnation.

Which decisions still visit your thoughts years later?

What emotional state were you in when you made them?

Were you choosing a future...

or escaping a feeling?

If you had waited until the emotional storm passed, would you have made the same decision?

Don't answer those questions too quickly.

Just carry them with you.

Because by the end of my search, I had begun to suspect that I had been asking the wrong question all along.

The question wasn't, *How do I stop making mistakes?*

The better question—the one that would change everything that followed—was much simpler.

**What if the biggest problem isn't the decision...
but when I make it?**

Chapter 3: Your Brain Was Never Built for This

Imagine this for a moment.

You're having an ordinary day when your phone vibrates. You glance down and see a message from someone important in your life.

"Can we talk?"

That's it.

Three words.

No explanation. No context. No emoji to soften the tone.

Within seconds, your body begins responding before your mind has had time to interpret what you've actually read. Your stomach tightens. Your heart beats faster. Your breathing becomes shallow. A dozen explanations race through your mind, and almost all of them are negative.

Something's wrong.

They're upset.

I did something.

This is going to end badly.

What's remarkable is that none of those things have actually happened.

You're sitting safely in your home, your office, or your car. No one is threatening you. Nothing dangerous is taking place. Yet your body reacts as though you've just encountered a life-threatening situation.

Have you ever noticed your body making a decision before your mind even had a chance?

Most of us have.

We just don't realize what's happening.

For a long time, I assumed this was a character flaw. I thought my emotional reactions said something about my maturity, my self-control, or my ability to handle difficult situations. When I sent that breakup text to Nicole, I blamed myself entirely. Surely a wiser person wouldn't have made a decision they regretted almost immediately.

Then I began learning how the brain actually works.

What I discovered didn't remove my responsibility, but it did remove a great deal of unnecessary shame.

The human brain wasn't designed for text messages.

It wasn't designed for difficult performance reviews, social media arguments, breakups, layoffs, or unanswered emails. It certainly wasn't designed to interpret silence through a glowing screen.

It was designed to keep you alive.

For most of human history, survival depended on responding quickly to physical danger. If our ancestors heard movement in the bushes, hesitation could be fatal. The people who survived weren't always the ones who gathered the most evidence before acting. Often, they were the ones who reacted first.

That survival system served humanity remarkably well.

The challenge is that while the world has changed dramatically, the wiring of our brains has changed very little.

Today, the threats we face are rarely physical. They're emotional.

A difficult conversation.

A broken relationship.

Public embarrassment.

Financial uncertainty.

Rejection.

Failure.

The loss of someone we love.

Although those experiences are very different from encountering a predator in the wilderness, the brain often responds as though the danger is exactly the same.

The system isn't broken.

It's outdated.

Deep inside your brain is a small almond-shaped structure called the amygdala. You don't need to remember its name, but understanding its role can change the way you see yourself.

Think of the amygdala as your brain's smoke alarm.

A smoke alarm has one responsibility above all others: speed.

It doesn't pause to investigate whether the smoke is coming from a house fire or from someone who burned dinner. It doesn't interview witnesses or gather additional evidence. Its

purpose is to sound the alarm as quickly as possible because it's far better to create a few false alarms than to miss the one that actually matters.

Your amygdala works in much the same way.

Its priority isn't accuracy.

Its priority is survival.

The moment it detects what it interprets as danger, it begins preparing your body to respond. Stress hormones surge through your bloodstream. Your heart rate increases. Your muscles tense. Your breathing changes. Your attention narrows. Your body prepares to fight, run, freeze, or shut down.

All of that can happen before you've consciously decided what the situation actually means.

Psychologist Daniel Goleman introduced the term "**amygdala hijack**" to describe these moments when our emotional alarm system temporarily overwhelms our capacity for careful reasoning. It's an apt description because that's exactly what it feels like.

One moment you're having a conversation.

The next, your perspective disappears.

Your mind races toward worst-case scenarios. Nuance evaporates. Every problem feels urgent. Every disagreement feels permanent. Every emotion demands immediate action.

You become convinced that something has to happen right now.

This isn't because you've suddenly become irrational.

It's because your brain is doing exactly what it evolved to do.

One of the most surprising discoveries I made during my research was that emotional pain doesn't simply make us uncomfortable.

It also predicts.

When we're emotionally overwhelmed, our minds quietly begin telling stories about the future. We don't just feel hurt. We become convinced that we'll always feel hurt.

This relationship will never improve.

They'll never change.

I'll never recover.

I'll always be alone.

This opportunity is gone forever.

Pain has a remarkable ability to disguise temporary emotion as permanent reality. It convinces us that because we feel something deeply in this moment, we'll feel it forever.

But emotions are remarkably poor fortune tellers.

The fact that you feel hopeless today doesn't mean your future is hopeless.

The fact that you feel trapped today doesn't mean there isn't another path.

The fact that you feel alone today doesn't mean you'll always be alone.

Yet when we're emotionally flooded, those distinctions become almost impossible to see.

This also explains why relief can be so deceptive.

When emotional pain reaches a certain intensity, the brain quietly changes the question it's trying to answer. Instead of asking, *What is the wisest thing to do?* it begins asking, *How do I make this feeling stop?*

Those questions sound similar.

They're not.

Sometimes ending a relationship creates immediate relief.

Quitting a job creates relief.

Sending the angry text creates relief.

Posting your thoughts online creates relief.

Walking away creates relief.

The emotional pressure decreases, and because it decreases, we naturally assume we made the right decision.

But relief isn't proof.

It's simply relief.

The feeling that something hurts less doesn't necessarily mean we've chosen wisely. It only means the immediate pressure has changed.

Fortunately, the brain contains another remarkable system.

Just behind your forehead sits the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for planning, perspective, empathy, long-term thinking, and sound judgment. If the amygdala is the smoke alarm, the prefrontal cortex is the wise counselor. It asks questions the emotional brain rarely considers.

What am I not seeing?

How will this decision affect me next month?

Is there another explanation?

What would I advise someone I love to do in this situation?

The problem is that during intense emotional flooding, this thoughtful part of the brain temporarily loses influence. It doesn't disappear, but its voice becomes much quieter.

That's why people often say, "I wasn't thinking."

In reality, they were.

They simply weren't thinking with the part of the brain that sees the widest picture.

Once I understood this, I began noticing the pattern everywhere.

I saw it in parents who regretted words spoken in anger. I saw it in leaders making decisions during moments of crisis. I saw it in businesses that abandoned promising ideas because discouragement masqueraded as wisdom. I saw it in road rage, online arguments, political debates, addictions, broken friendships, and marriages hanging by a thread.

Everywhere I looked, I saw people reacting before they reflected.

Including myself.

Understanding the brain this way comes with an important caution.

This isn't permission to blame biology for every poor decision we make. Our brains explain our behavior; they don't excuse it. Nor is this an argument against emotion itself.

Emotions are essential.

Fear alerts us to genuine danger.

Grief reminds us of what we love.

Joy teaches us gratitude.

Anger can reveal injustice.

Emotion carries valuable information.

It simply shouldn't have exclusive voting rights.

That realization changed the way I approached my own emotional storms. I stopped trying to eliminate them because that isn't possible. Instead, I learned to recognize them.

Recognition is where wisdom begins.

The moment you can pause and say, *I'm emotionally flooded right now*, you've already interrupted the cycle. The storm may still be raging, but you're no longer completely inside it. You're beginning to observe it instead of obey it.

I'd like to invite you to do something before moving on.

Think about the last time you completely overreacted.

Can you recognize the storm now?

What was your body doing before you made your decision? What story was your mind telling you? What felt so urgent that waiting seemed impossible?

If that exact situation happened today, would it still feel just as urgent?

You might also take a few moments to write down your answers to these questions:

What situations trigger your emotional flooding most often?

What physical signs tell you you're entering the storm?

What thoughts seem to repeat themselves every time?

What permanent decisions are you most tempted to make when you're emotionally overwhelmed?

For the next week, don't try to suppress your emotions or pretend they aren't there. Simply notice them. When you feel overwhelmed, resist the urge to ask, *What should I do?* Instead, ask yourself a different question:

What is my brain trying to protect me from right now?

You may be surprised by the answer.

The storm isn't the enemy.

The mistake is believing the storm can see the future.

And that raises an even more important question.

If emotion can't actually predict the future, why are we so convinced that it can?

That's where we're headed next.

Chapter 4: Premature Certainty

One of the most dangerous things that can happen during an emotional storm isn't the emotion itself.

It's the certainty.

Imagine four different people in four different places.

A husband walks out of another painful argument, gets into his car, and grips the steering wheel a little tighter than usual. He doesn't cry. He doesn't yell. He simply stares through the windshield and thinks, *This marriage is over.*

Across town, an entrepreneur sits alone in a dimly lit office long after everyone else has gone home. Sales have slowed, another investor has declined to participate, and the numbers on the screen seem to confirm what she's been fearing for months. She leans back in her chair and whispers to herself, *This company is never going to work.*

A teenager closes the bedroom door after another argument with a parent. Earbuds go in. Music goes up. The conclusion forms almost instantly. *No one will ever understand me.*

Meanwhile, a father watches his son ignore him for what feels like the hundredth time. Frustration gives way to resignation, and before he realizes it, another sentence settles into his mind. *My child is never going to change.*

Different people.

Different lives.

Different circumstances.

Yet every one of them is making the same mistake.

They are predicting the future while standing in the middle of pain.

Pain has an extraordinary ability to convince us that it sees farther than it actually can. It whispers conclusions that feel objective, even though they're born almost entirely from emotion. We mistake the intensity of the feeling for the accuracy of the prediction. The stronger the emotion becomes, the more convinced we are that we've reached an undeniable truth.

That is what I call **Premature Certainty**.

Premature certainty isn't confidence. It isn't wisdom. It isn't discernment.

It's the moment emotional pain convinces us the story is already over before reality has finished writing it.

Looking back, I can see that this trap was already operating in my own life long before I recognized it. I thought the breakup with Nicole happened because I had reached a thoughtful conclusion. I believed I had objectively evaluated the relationship, weighed the evidence, and accepted what was obvious.

I hadn't.

What I had accepted wasn't reality.

It was certainty.

The strange thing about premature certainty is that it never introduces itself as emotion. It doesn't announce, *You're*

exhausted, or You're reacting from fear, or You should probably wait until tomorrow before deciding.

Instead, it sounds remarkably reasonable.

It says things like, *You've seen enough.*

Why bother trying?

This isn't going to change.

I'm done.

I've already made up my mind.

Notice what those statements have in common. None of them leave room for curiosity. None of them acknowledge uncertainty. None of them admit the possibility that tomorrow might reveal something today cannot.

The voice never says, *I might be wrong.*

It says, *I already know.*

That's why it's so convincing.

Fear rarely disguises itself as fear. More often, it disguises itself as certainty.

In the previous chapter, we explored how emotional storms activate ancient survival systems inside the brain. Those systems are designed to respond quickly, not thoughtfully. But emotional pain does something even more subtle than accelerating our reactions. It changes our beliefs.

When we're hurting, we don't simply experience pain.

We begin believing things because of pain.

If today's conversation was disappointing, we quietly conclude that every future conversation will be disappointing too. If someone lets us down once, we begin imagining they'll always let us down. If our business struggles through one difficult season, we start assuming struggle is its permanent condition.

Our minds quietly exchange observation for prediction.

Without realizing it, we stop saying, *This is difficult*.

Instead, we begin saying, *This will always be difficult*.

That's a profound difference.

One statement describes the present.

The other claims to know the future.

The problem is that emotional pain has no special access to tomorrow. It cannot see around corners. It cannot predict healing, growth, reconciliation, opportunity, or change. Yet when we're emotionally overwhelmed, it speaks as though it can.

I often ask people to think back over their own lives and remember predictions they once believed with absolute certainty.

Many remember a breakup that convinced them they would never love again. At the time, it didn't feel like a possibility. It felt like a fact. Yet years later, they look back from a healthy marriage and struggle to remember why they were so convinced their story had ended.

Others remember careers they thought were over after being fired, only to discover that losing one job positioned them for work they never would have found otherwise. Some believed a

friendship could never be repaired until an unexpected phone call changed everything. Others were certain they would never recover from grief, addiction, depression, or failure, only to discover that healing rarely announces itself when it first begins.

Most of us have lived long enough to prove our own certainty wrong.

The question isn't whether we've been mistaken before.

The question is why we continue trusting certainty every time it appears.

Premature certainty steals possibilities long before reality has a chance to reveal them. It convinces couples to stop fighting for a marriage that might have healed. It persuades entrepreneurs to abandon businesses one season before a breakthrough. It convinces parents that a difficult chapter defines an entire child. It whispers to recovering addicts that one relapse erases years of progress. It tells leaders that one setback means the vision itself was flawed.

Sometimes those conclusions are true.

Often they are not.

Premature certainty never waits long enough to find out.

When I revisit my own story, I no longer believe the breakup happened because Nicole and I were hopelessly incompatible. That was the explanation I gave myself at the time because it fit the emotion I was experiencing.

The deeper truth is more uncomfortable.

I became convinced I already knew how our story would end.

I believed I had seen enough evidence.

I believed more conversations would change nothing.

I believed the future had already revealed itself.

Looking back, I realize I didn't know any of those things.

I guessed.

And I made those guesses while emotionally overwhelmed.

There are few combinations more dangerous than certainty and emotional exhaustion.

Once I recognized premature certainty in my own life, I couldn't stop seeing it everywhere. I saw it in marriages, businesses, leadership teams, political conversations, friendships, churches, recovery groups, and families. Everywhere I looked, people were confusing confidence with correctness. The louder the certainty became, the less likely anyone was to ask another question.

Perhaps that's why curiosity is such a powerful antidote.

Curiosity doesn't demand that we abandon conviction. It simply reminds us that we may not yet possess the entire story. It interrupts certainty with humility.

Instead of saying, *I know*, curiosity asks, *What if I'm wrong?*

Instead of concluding, *Nothing will ever change*, it wonders, *What information don't I have yet?*

Instead of insisting, *This is the end*, it quietly asks, *What would the calm version of me think if I waited before deciding?*

Those questions don't weaken wisdom.

They protect it.

Chapter 5: The Story You're Telling Yourself

Several years ago, a friend told me about a conversation he never actually had.

He had sent his wife a text message in the middle of the afternoon. It wasn't anything urgent, just a simple question about their evening plans. Normally she responded within a few minutes. This time, nothing came back.

Five minutes passed.

Then fifteen.

Then thirty.

Before an hour had gone by, his mind had already written an entire story.

She's upset with me.

I must have said something wrong this morning.

She's pulling away.

Maybe she's just tired of trying.

By the time he walked through the front door that evening, he had rehearsed the conversation they were probably going to have. He had already anticipated her disappointment, prepared his defense, and quietly convinced himself that something had changed between them.

She looked up from the kitchen and smiled.

"I'm so sorry," she said. "My phone died this afternoon. I forgot my charger at work."

That was it.

Nothing had changed.

Except the story.

It's remarkable how often we suffer because of stories that never turn out to be true. We've all experienced some version of it. Someone walks past us without saying hello, and we assume they're upset with us. A coworker responds with a short email, and we begin wondering whether we've done something wrong. A friend cancels dinner, and we quietly conclude the friendship isn't as important to them as it is to us.

The event itself is often small.

The story we attach to it is enormous.

One of the most important discoveries I made while trying to understand my own regret was this: we rarely react to reality itself. We react to our interpretation of reality.

Two people can experience the same event and walk away with completely different conclusions. One person receives difficult feedback at work and hears, *I'm failing*. Another hears, *I'm learning*. One entrepreneur sees a disappointing quarter and concludes the dream is over. Another sees the same numbers and decides it's time to adjust the strategy. One couple experiences conflict and assumes the relationship is broken. Another sees conflict as an invitation to understand each other more deeply.

The circumstances may be identical.

The stories are not.

That distinction matters because stories shape decisions. Long before we act, we've already explained to ourselves what the situation means. Once we've settled on an explanation, our actions almost always follow.

The challenge is that the human brain dislikes uncertainty. It has an extraordinary need to make sense of the world. When information is incomplete, it doesn't comfortably sit with the unknown. It fills in the blanks.

Imagine reading the first half of a mystery novel with the final chapters torn out. Most of us wouldn't patiently wait forever for the missing pages. We'd begin making guesses. We'd form theories about who committed the crime and why. Some of those guesses would eventually prove correct. Many would not.

Our minds work the same way in everyday life.

When someone doesn't explain their behavior, we explain it for them.

When a conversation feels unfinished, we finish it in our imagination.

When we don't know why something happened, our brains create a reason.

The remarkable part isn't that we make these guesses.

The remarkable part is that we usually forget they're guesses.

Instead, they begin feeling like facts.

Psychologists have identified several common thinking patterns that shape the stories we tell ourselves. You don't

need to remember their names, but recognizing them can change the way you interpret your own thoughts.

One of the most common is what psychologists call **mind reading**. Without realizing it, we assume we know what another person is thinking.

They're disappointed in me.

They think I'm a failure.

They don't respect me anymore.

What's interesting is that we often reach these conclusions without a single piece of direct evidence. We've never asked. They've never said it. Yet the story becomes so convincing that we begin responding to it as though it were unquestionably true.

Another common pattern is **fortune telling**. This is where we begin predicting the future based almost entirely on our current emotional state.

This relationship will never work.

I'll always be alone.

Nothing is ever going to change.

They'll never forgive me.

Notice how confidently those predictions speak. The future hasn't happened yet, but the story behaves as though the verdict has already been delivered.

Then there's **catastrophizing**, the habit of allowing one difficult moment to become the definition of an entire life. A mistake at work becomes evidence that your career is ruined.

One disappointing conversation becomes proof that a marriage is ending. A financial setback transforms into the belief that you'll never recover.

The event grows larger than reality because the story keeps feeding it.

Perhaps the most subtle pattern of all is **confirmation bias**. Once we've accepted a particular story, our minds begin collecting evidence that supports it while quietly ignoring evidence that doesn't.

If you become convinced someone doesn't care about you, every delayed response becomes proof. Every forgotten detail strengthens the case. Meanwhile, the acts of kindness, the thoughtful conversations, and the evidence pointing in the opposite direction quietly fade into the background.

The story becomes self-reinforcing.

Looking back at my own relationship with Nicole, I can now see the stories I was telling myself long before I ever picked up my phone.

This relationship is doomed.

We're never going to figure this out.

I'm protecting both of us.

If I leave first, I can't be abandoned.

At the time, those thoughts didn't feel like stories.

They felt like reality.

That's what made them so persuasive.

Today I understand something I couldn't see then. Those weren't objective conclusions drawn from perfect information. They were narratives being written by fear, exhaustion, disappointment, and uncertainty. My emotional state had quietly become the author, and I never questioned whether it was a reliable narrator.

That's one of the greatest dangers of emotional storms.

They don't simply influence the stories we tell.

They choose the storyteller.

Fear writes fearful stories.

Anger writes angry stories.

Shame writes stories of inadequacy.

Loneliness writes stories of rejection.

Discouragement writes stories of defeat.

The emotion itself becomes the narrator, and because we're experiencing that emotion so intensely, we mistake its perspective for truth.

One of the healthiest shifts we can make is learning to observe our thoughts instead of immediately believing them.

For much of my life, I assumed every thought deserved my trust. If it appeared in my mind, I accepted it as evidence. I rarely stopped to ask where it had come from or whether it deserved a vote.

Over time, I learned a different approach.

Instead of asking, *Is this true?* I first began asking, *Who's telling this story?*

Is this the calm version of me?

Or is this my storm?

That simple question creates distance between you and your thoughts. It reminds you that not every conclusion deserves immediate acceptance. Awareness doesn't eliminate the story, but it weakens its authority.

When I notice myself creating a narrative today, I try to test it before I trust it. I ask questions that my emotional brain would rather avoid.

What evidence do I actually have?

What evidence am I assuming?

Am I observing facts, or am I interpreting them?

What else could explain this situation?

If someone else described these same events, would they tell the story the same way I am?

Those questions don't guarantee perfect judgment, but they make it much harder for fear to quietly rewrite reality.

Learning to tell a different story doesn't mean pretending everything is fine when it isn't. It doesn't require blind optimism or ignoring genuine problems. Sometimes relationships truly are unhealthy. Sometimes businesses fail. Sometimes difficult endings are necessary.

The goal isn't to invent a happier story.

The goal is to become humble enough to admit that you may not yet have the whole story.

Curiosity replaces certainty.

Humility replaces prediction.

Truth becomes more important than being right.

As you reflect on your own life, consider the stories you've been telling yourself recently.

What story feels absolutely true right now?

How much of that story is built on observable fact?

How much is built on interpretation?

If someone who loved you deeply described the same situation, would they tell the story exactly the way you do?

You may find it helpful to spend a few minutes writing through these questions:

What story has fear been telling you lately?

Which story has shaped your biggest decision during the past year?

What evidence genuinely supports that story?

What evidence challenges it?

What would change if you stopped treating your interpretation as reality?

For the next week, pay attention to certain phrases that quietly slip into your thinking.

They think...

They always...

They never...

This means...

Whenever you notice one of those thoughts, pause before accepting it. Finish the sentence differently.

The story I'm telling myself is...

Those six words create remarkable freedom because they remind you that you're holding an interpretation, not necessarily the truth itself.

The story isn't the problem.

The problem is forgetting that it's a story.

When you remember you're holding a story instead of a certainty, you become free to write a different ending.

15 More Minutes

PART II

THE DECISION BEFORE THE DECISION

Chapter 6: The Decision Before the Decision

For a long time, I believed I knew the moment that changed my life.

I could picture it with perfect clarity. I was sitting alone with my phone in my hand. I typed nine words, read them twice, hesitated for a brief moment, and then pressed send.

"To be clear. This is me breaking up with you."

That text became the dividing line in my memory. Everything before it belonged to one version of my life. Everything after it belonged to another. It seemed obvious that the breakup text was the decision that changed everything.

Eventually, I realized I had been looking at the wrong moment.

The text wasn't the decision.

It was the evidence that the real decision had already been made.

Days—perhaps even weeks—before I ever picked up my phone, something quieter had happened inside me. Somewhere along the way, I had accepted the belief that I already knew how the story would end. I stopped approaching our conversations with curiosity and began approaching them with confirmation. Every disagreement became another piece of evidence supporting a conclusion I had already reached.

By the time I sent the text, I wasn't making a new decision.

I was simply acting out one I had made long before.

That realization changed the way I began looking at every major regret in my life.

Most of us focus on the visible decision because it's easy to identify. We remember the resignation email, the signed divorce papers, the angry conversation, the public post, or the business that closed its doors. Those are the moments everyone else can see. They feel dramatic, decisive, and obvious.

But visible decisions are often like receipts.

The real purchase happened earlier.

Once you begin looking for that earlier decision, you start seeing it everywhere.

A resignation email rarely begins the day someone leaves a company. More often, it begins months earlier when they quietly decide, *I'm done listening*. After that, feedback becomes criticism, opportunities become obligations, and every frustrating day confirms the conclusion they've already accepted. The email simply formalizes what happened internally long before.

Divorce papers are seldom the first decision in a marriage. Long before documents are signed, one spouse may quietly decide, *I've stopped believing this can improve*. Once that belief takes root, every disagreement feels permanent, every disappointment feels predictable, and every attempt at reconciliation seems destined to fail.

The breakup text isn't the first decision.

The first decision is often something much quieter.

They don't deserve another conversation.

I've already seen enough.

There's no point in trying anymore.

Those thoughts may seem insignificant in the moment, but they quietly shape every decision that follows.

I've become convinced that our lives are influenced far more by these invisible decisions than by the dramatic ones we remember.

We make hundreds of tiny choices long before we make the obvious one.

We choose certainty over curiosity.

We choose assumptions over conversations.

We choose silence over honesty.

We choose pride over humility.

We choose avoidance instead of understanding.

We choose to stop asking questions because we believe we already know the answers.

Each choice seems too small to matter.

Until one day they all do.

Life rarely changes because of one enormous moment. More often, it changes because countless small moments quietly accumulate until they eventually point in only one direction.

I sometimes picture it as a trail through a forest.

When people imagine life-changing decisions, they tend to picture one dramatic crossroads with a giant sign pointing left

or right. In reality, life feels much less dramatic than that. Instead of one enormous intersection, there are dozens of tiny forks in the path. Most are so ordinary that we barely notice them. A small assumption here. A conversation avoided there. A conclusion accepted without question. A hurt left unspoken. A fear allowed to grow.

Each fork seems almost insignificant.

But every fork changes the direction of the trail.

By the time you reach what appears to be the major crossroads, you've already been walking toward it for weeks, months, or even years.

The destination didn't begin at the final turn.

It began with the first unnoticed one.

The reason we miss these smaller decisions is simple.

They're invisible.

No one applauds them.

No one argues with them.

No one posts about them online.

Most of them happen silently inside our own minds, where no one else can challenge them.

That's what makes them so powerful.

Invisible decisions rarely receive careful examination because they never feel like decisions at all. They feel like observations.

This relationship is different now.

This business isn't going anywhere.

My child doesn't listen anymore.

My friend doesn't care.

I've done everything I can.

Those statements don't sound like choices.

But they are.

They're choices about what we believe, what we expect, and what we stop being willing to question.

Once those invisible decisions settle into place, the visible ones become surprisingly predictable.

Think about relationships.

People often assume a breakup begins with the conversation that ends it. In reality, many relationships begin ending much earlier. They begin when one person quietly stops believing another conversation is worth having. They stop asking questions. They stop revealing what's happening inside them. They stop risking vulnerability because they've already decided it won't matter.

By the time the relationship officially ends, much of the emotional ending has already taken place.

Business works the same way.

Companies rarely collapse because someone suddenly quits believing in them one afternoon. More often, the decline begins when hope quietly gives way to resignation. Innovation slows because someone decides improvement isn't possible. Creativity disappears because discouragement becomes more convincing than possibility.

The visible failure simply reveals what happened internally long before.

The same pattern appears in parenting.

Very few parent-child relationships are damaged by one angry sentence. They are shaped by hundreds of small moments of emotional presence—or emotional absence. Every decision to listen or not listen, to remain curious or become dismissive, to repair after conflict or pretend nothing happened, slowly determines the relationship that eventually exists.

Friendships are no different.

Most friendships don't end because of one conversation.

They end because of dozens of conversations that never happen.

Once I recognized this pattern, I started asking myself a different question whenever I faced an important decision.

Instead of asking, *What should I do?*

I began asking, *What decision have I already made that's leading me toward this one?*

That question has changed my life more than almost any other.

It forces me to look beneath the surface. It reminds me that today's dilemma probably didn't begin today. Somewhere beneath the visible decision is a quieter belief, an assumption, or a conclusion that deserves far more attention than the obvious choice sitting in front of me.

The beautiful thing about recognizing invisible decisions is that they can often be rewritten.

Changing your life rarely begins by changing the loud decision.

It begins by changing the quiet one.

Instead of concluding, *They'll never change*, you become willing to admit, *I don't know yet*.

Instead of saying, *I'm done*, you ask, *Am I willing to understand before I decide?*

Instead of believing, *I already know how this ends*, you remind yourself, *I may not have the whole story*.

None of those shifts appear dramatic.

Most people would never notice them.

Yet those small changes quietly redirect the path long before the visible decision arrives.

Sometimes I wonder what might have happened if I had recognized my own invisible decision before I ever reached for my phone.

Not the breakup text.

The earlier one.

The moment I decided I already knew where our relationship was headed.

Would everything have turned out differently?

I honestly don't know.

Perhaps the relationship still would have ended.

Perhaps it wouldn't have.

But I know this much.

The story would have remained open long enough for reality to finish speaking.

That alone would have changed everything.

As you think about your own life, I want to invite you to revisit one regret.

Not the obvious moment.

Go back earlier.

Then earlier still.

Keep asking yourself where the path first began to turn.

What belief quietly made every later decision feel inevitable?

What assumption did you stop questioning?

What invisible decision quietly shaped every visible one that followed?

You may find it helpful to reflect on these questions in writing:

What major decision in your life was actually preceded by a quieter one?

What invisible belief shaped the outcome?

What assumption did you stop questioning?

If you could revisit only one earlier decision, which would it be?

For the next week, before making any important decision, ask yourself one simple question:

What decision have I already made that is leading me toward this one?

Don't rush to change anything.

Just notice.

Awareness always comes before transformation.

The biggest decisions in your life are rarely made in one moment.

They're made one unnoticed choice at a time.

If you learn to recognize the quiet decision, you can often change the loud one before it ever happens.

Chapter 7: The Calm Version of You Deserves a Vote

Imagine, for a moment, that there are two versions of you sitting across a table from one another.

Both of them care deeply about your life. Both of them want to protect you. Both of them want what's best for you. One of them is emotional. The other is calm. They have access to the same memories, the same experiences, and the same circumstances. The difference isn't what they know. The difference is the condition they're in when they're asked to decide.

Now imagine you have to place the biggest decision of your life in front of one of them.

Which version do you trust more?

Most people don't hesitate before answering. They instinctively choose the calm version. They know that the calm version is more thoughtful, more patient, and less likely to confuse temporary pain with permanent truth.

Yet here's the strange part.

Although we trust the calm version more, we rarely wait for that version to arrive. Instead, we allow the emotional version of ourselves to cast the only vote.

That realization became one of the most important turning points in my own life.

For years, I believed I had one self. I was either making good decisions or bad ones, being wise or foolish, patient or

impulsive. But the more I reflected on my own regrets—and the more I studied the way people make decisions—the more I realized that all of us have different versions of ourselves that show up under different circumstances.

There's the angry version of you. The one that wants to say the thing you'll regret ten minutes later.

There's the fearful version of you. The one that sees danger around every corner and desperately wants certainty, even if the certainty isn't true.

There's the exhausted version of you. The one that mistakes fatigue for clarity and concludes that walking away is easier than staying engaged.

There's the lonely version of you, willing to settle for almost anything to avoid feeling alone. The grieving version, convinced life will never feel normal again. The anxious version, constantly searching for control in situations that refuse to be controlled.

And then there's the calm version.

None of these versions are fake.

They're all you.

They all carry pieces of your story. They all have something valuable to say because every emotion carries information. Fear often alerts us to danger. Anger can reveal that a boundary has been crossed. Sadness reminds us what we've loved and lost. Joy points us toward what gives life meaning.

The goal isn't to silence those voices.

The goal is to make sure they aren't speaking alone.

One of the greatest misunderstandings about emotional health is the belief that maturity means becoming emotionless. Nothing could be further from the truth. The healthiest people I know aren't people who never feel deeply. They're people who have learned how to feel deeply without allowing every feeling to become a final decision.

Emotion deserves a seat at the table.

It simply shouldn't occupy every chair.

Think about what happens when only one emotional state gets to decide.

The angry version of you wants justice immediately. It believes ending the conversation, sending the text, or proving the point will finally bring peace.

The lonely version wants relief. It whispers that any relationship is better than no relationship, even if that relationship slowly diminishes who you are.

The fearful version wants certainty. It would rather accept a painful conclusion today than tolerate the uncertainty of waiting for tomorrow.

The exhausted version wants escape. It confuses restlessness with wisdom and begins believing that quitting is the same thing as freedom.

The anxious version wants control. It constantly searches for ways to eliminate uncertainty, often by making decisions before enough information has arrived.

None of those versions are trying to ruin your life.

Each one believes it's protecting you.

The problem is that each one sees only part of the picture.

The calm version sees more.

The calm version isn't immune to emotion. It simply isn't controlled by it. It has enough distance from the storm to notice things the emotional versions cannot. It asks questions instead of rushing toward conclusions. It remains curious when fear wants certainty. It considers long-term consequences when anger is focused only on the next five minutes. It understands that today's feelings, however intense they may be, are not always reliable forecasts of tomorrow.

Most importantly, the calm version is willing to tolerate uncertainty.

That may be one of the rarest forms of courage.

We often think bravery means taking immediate action. Sometimes it does. But sometimes bravery looks like refusing to act until clarity returns. Sometimes courage is found in waiting long enough for your wisest self to enter the conversation.

When the calm version gets involved, something remarkable begins to happen.

Perspective returns.

Empathy returns.

Patience returns.

Curiosity returns.

Problems that felt impossible begin looking more manageable. Conversations that seemed hopeless become worth having

again. The future no longer feels trapped inside the emotions of the present.

The storm doesn't necessarily disappear.

It simply stops controlling the forecast.

Over the years, I've developed a habit that has saved me from more poor decisions than I can count. Whenever I find myself standing at an emotional crossroads, I begin asking myself a series of questions.

What would the calm version of me say about this?

If I slept on this decision, would I still make it tomorrow?

Am I trying to solve a problem... or escape a feeling?

Will the version of me that's sitting here a week from now thank me for what I'm about to do?

Those questions don't instantly eliminate emotion, but they do something almost as valuable.

They create distance.

And distance creates perspective.

Perspective gives wisdom room to breathe.

When I think back to the day I ended my relationship with Nicole, one realization stands above all the others.

The breakup wasn't written by the calm version of me.

It was written by the frightened version.

The version terrified that nothing would ever improve.

The version exhausted by uncertainty.

The version trying to protect itself from future disappointment
by creating certainty in the present.

That version picked up the phone.

That version typed the message.

That version pressed send.

The calm version never had the opportunity to speak.

Looking back, that's what grieves me most.

Not simply that I made a decision I regretted.

But that I never invited my wisest self into the room before I
made it.

It's important to understand what the calm version isn't.

The calm version isn't passive.

It isn't afraid of difficult conversations.

It isn't weak, indecisive, or endlessly hesitant.

Sometimes the calm version leaves a relationship because
staying would require abandoning its own dignity.

Sometimes the calm version resigns from a job because the
environment has become unhealthy.

Sometimes the calm version establishes firm boundaries, ends
partnerships, says no, or walks away.

The difference isn't what the calm version decides.

The difference is how it arrives there.

Its decisions grow out of clarity rather than panic.

Out of conviction rather than reaction.

Out of wisdom rather than urgency.

I often imagine decision-making as an election.

Every part of you gets one vote.

Fear gets a vote.

Anger gets a vote.

Hope gets a vote.

Love gets a vote.

Experience gets a vote.

Logic gets a vote.

Your values get a vote.

Even your pain deserves a vote because pain often carries information worth hearing.

But before the ballots are counted, there is one rule.

The election cannot end until the calm version of you has arrived.

Only then is the process complete.

Only then can you be confident that your decision reflects the whole of who you are instead of the loudest emotion you happened to be feeling in that moment.

As you reflect on your own life, I want to invite you to consider a few questions.

Which version of yourself has been making your biggest decisions lately?

When you think about your most significant regrets, who was holding the pen?

Which version of yourself do you trust most?

And when was the last time your calm self actually got a vote?

You may want to spend a few moments writing through these questions.

Which emotional version of you shows up most often?

What decisions has that version made in the past?

How would your calm version describe your current situation?

What advice would your future self give you today?

This week, I want you to begin practicing one simple habit.

Before making any important decision, pause and ask yourself one question.

Has the calm version of me had a chance to vote?

Don't rush to answer.

Wait.

Listen.

Notice what changes after the first wave of emotion begins to settle. You may discover that the decision itself changes. Or you may discover that the decision stays exactly the same, but your reasons for making it become wiser, clearer, and more deeply rooted.

Either outcome is a victory.

You don't need to eliminate fear.

You don't need to eliminate anger.

You don't need to eliminate sadness.

You simply need to make sure none of them gets to make permanent decisions alone.

The calm version of you deserves a vote.

Maybe not the only vote.

But always a vote.

Chapter 8: What Fifteen Minutes Really Means

One of the first questions people ask me after hearing this idea is surprisingly practical.

"Why fifteen minutes?"

It's a fair question. If the phrase has become the title of this book, surely there must be something special about that number. Is fifteen minutes the amount of time it takes for emotions to settle? Is there science behind it? Is it a rule everyone should follow?

I usually smile before I answer.

Because the truth is...

It was never really fifteen minutes.

Not in the way most people think.

The phrase came from one of the most painful moments of my life. After the breakup with Nicole, I reached out with a simple request.

"Fifteen more minutes?"

At the time, I believed those three words represented my last chance. I thought if I could just have fifteen more minutes of conversation, maybe I could explain myself better. Maybe we could untangle the misunderstandings. Maybe the story wasn't over after all.

For a long time, I believed those fifteen minutes were the moment that changed my life.

Eventually, I realized they weren't.

The moment that mattered had happened much earlier.

The fifteen minutes I was desperately asking someone else to give me were the exact same fifteen minutes I had refused to give myself before making one of the biggest decisions of my life.

That realization changed everything.

The title of this book isn't about a clock.

It's about creating space.

It's about recognizing that when emotions are loud, wisdom often struggles to be heard. The solution isn't always more time. The solution is enough distance between emotion and action for clarity to return.

Sometimes that distance happens in fifteen minutes.

Sometimes it takes much longer.

That's why it's important to understand what this philosophy is not.

It is not a rule that says you should always wait exactly fifteen minutes before making a decision. It is not an argument against acting quickly when circumstances genuinely require immediate action. It isn't permission to avoid difficult conversations, postpone uncomfortable responsibilities, or endlessly delay decisions that need to be made.

It certainly isn't saying you should never leave a relationship, resign from a job, or end something that's unhealthy.

That's not wisdom.

That's avoidance.

The principle is much simpler.

Create enough space between your emotions and your decisions for your wisest self to return.

The amount of time required will be different for every person and every situation.

One of the biggest misconceptions people have is believing that time itself creates wisdom.

It doesn't.

We've all met people who stayed angry for years. Others remain resentful for decades. Some carry fear from one season of life into the next without ever questioning the stories that fear has been telling them. Simply allowing days to pass doesn't automatically produce clarity.

Time changes very little by itself.

Reflection changes us.

Honest conversations change us.

Prayer changes us.

Rest changes us.

Perspective changes us.

Sometimes the most important thing that happens during a pause isn't that the emotion disappears. It's that another voice finally has the opportunity to speak.

That's why the emotional storm has its own clock.

Sometimes fifteen minutes is enough. A short walk around the block, a few deep breaths, or stepping away from an argument may completely change the way you see a situation.

Other times, one night's sleep makes all the difference. Anyone who has ever sent an email the next morning instead of the night before understands this instinctively. What felt absolutely urgent at eleven o'clock often feels surprisingly manageable after eight hours of rest.

There are seasons, however, when the storm runs deeper.

Sometimes clarity comes after a weekend away. Sometimes it arrives through a conversation with a trusted friend who isn't emotionally invested in the outcome. Sometimes it emerges during counseling. Sometimes it comes while praying. Sometimes it finds you on a long walk when your mind finally becomes quiet enough to hear something other than your own anxiety.

Sometimes it arrives while writing words you never intend to send.

The amount of time isn't the lesson.

Recognizing the storm is.

Once you recognize you're in the storm, your goal shifts. Instead of trying to solve the problem immediately, you begin creating space for perspective to return.

Over the years, I've found several practices that help me do exactly that.

Sometimes I simply sleep on it. Fatigue has a remarkable ability to disguise itself as certainty, and I've learned not to trust every conclusion I reach late at night.

Sometimes I go for a walk without my phone. Movement has a way of slowing thoughts that feel impossible to untangle while sitting still.

Sometimes I pray, not because prayer magically removes every difficult decision, but because it reminds me that I don't have to carry every burden alone.

Sometimes I write everything I'm feeling in a journal. The simple act of seeing my thoughts on paper often reveals how much of what felt like certainty was actually emotion searching for a conclusion.

Sometimes I call someone I trust—someone who loves me enough to tell me the truth instead of simply agreeing with my emotions.

Sometimes I write the email.

Then I close the laptop.

Sometimes I type the text.

Then I don't press send.

Each of those practices serves the same purpose.

They invite the calm version of me back into the room.

Our culture doesn't celebrate this kind of patience very often.

We admire speed.

We praise people who make quick decisions, respond immediately, and always seem certain about what comes next.

Fast action is often mistaken for strong leadership. Immediate responses are treated as signs of confidence.

But wisdom has never been in a hurry.

Some of the best decisions you'll ever make won't be made because you acted first.

They'll be made because you waited long enough to see clearly.

Patience isn't weakness.

Patience isn't indecision.

Sometimes patience is one of the most courageous acts available to us because it requires resisting the pressure to relieve emotional discomfort with immediate action.

That doesn't mean every pause is healthy.

There's an important difference between pausing and avoiding.

A pause has a purpose.

Avoidance has an excuse.

A pause says, *I'm going to decide this when I can think clearly.*

Avoidance says, *Maybe if I ignore this long enough, it will disappear.*

A pause moves toward clarity.

Avoidance moves away from responsibility.

One creates wisdom.

The other simply postpones reality.

Learning the difference is essential because the goal of this book has never been to encourage hesitation for its own sake. The goal is to help you make important decisions from your healthiest place instead of your most emotional one.

When I think back to my own story, I no longer believe the relationship was changed because fifteen minutes possessed some kind of magical power.

The time itself wasn't the miracle.

The pause was.

Those few minutes created enough space for another conversation to happen. That conversation made room for understanding. Understanding opened the door to possibilities that emotion had already declared impossible.

The pause didn't solve everything.

The pause simply made wisdom possible.

That's why I kept the name.

Fifteen minutes is memorable.

It's simple.

It's something almost anyone can picture.

But every time I hear those words now, they remind me of something much deeper than a specific amount of time.

They remind me to ask one question before making any permanent decision.

Has wisdom caught up with my emotions yet?

Whether the answer arrives in fifteen minutes, fifteen hours, or fifteen days doesn't really matter.

The principle remains the same.

As you think about your own life, consider what helps your storm begin to settle.

Is it sleep?

Exercise?

Prayer?

Silence?

A conversation with someone you trust?

Writing your thoughts before speaking them aloud?

How do you know when the calm version of you has returned?

You may find it helpful to write through these questions.

What practices help you regain clarity?

What situations in your life require more than fifteen minutes?

When have you confused waiting with avoiding?

What creates healthy space between your emotions and your decisions?

The next time you face an important decision, resist the urge to ask, *How long should I wait?*

Instead, ask a better question.

What do I need in order to think clearly?

Then give yourself that gift.

It may be fifteen minutes.

It may be longer.

The greatest gift fifteen minutes ever gave me wasn't more time.

It was more perspective.

And when perspective changes, decisions often change with it.

Chapter 9: The Difference Between Waiting and Avoiding

One of the questions I've been asked most often since I began sharing the idea behind *15 More Minutes* is also one of the most important. "How do I know I'm creating space for wisdom instead of simply avoiding a difficult decision?" It's a thoughtful question because, from the outside, waiting and avoiding can look remarkably similar. In both cases, nothing appears to happen. Time passes. Decisions are postponed. Conversations remain unfinished. Yet beneath the surface, they couldn't be more different. One creates clarity. The other postpones responsibility.

Imagine someone who knows they need to have a difficult conversation with someone they love. They wake up intending to make the call, but work becomes busy. A few emails need attention. Then another meeting appears on the calendar. By the evening they're mentally exhausted, so they decide they'll deal with it tomorrow. Tomorrow arrives, but now they're distracted by errands, household responsibilities, and the thousand small demands that fill ordinary days. Before long, tomorrow has quietly become next week. Next week becomes next month. The conversation never happens, not because the need disappeared, but because delaying it became more comfortable than facing it.

Was that patience?

Or was it avoidance?

The answer matters because avoidance often disguises itself as wisdom. It feels responsible to tell ourselves we're waiting

for the right moment. It sounds mature to say we don't want to act impulsively. Sometimes those things are true. But sometimes they're simply more acceptable ways of saying, "I don't want to feel uncomfortable today."

That's what makes avoidance so deceptive. It offers immediate relief. The difficult conversation disappears—for now. The uncomfortable decision moves safely into tomorrow. The anxiety softens because our brains temporarily believe we've solved the problem. Of course, nothing has actually been solved. The conversation is still waiting. The decision is still waiting. The consequences are still waiting. We've simply moved them to another place on the calendar while convincing ourselves we've made progress.

Relief and progress are not the same thing.

One of the central ideas of this book is that emotional relief should never be confused with wisdom. That principle applies not only to acting too quickly, but also to delaying too long. Just as fear can push us toward impulsive decisions, it can also persuade us to postpone necessary ones. In both cases, the goal is the same: escape discomfort.

Healthy waiting has an entirely different purpose. A pause is never about escaping a decision. It's about preparing to make that decision well. When you choose to wait wisely, you aren't moving away from responsibility. You're moving toward it with greater clarity, greater self-awareness, and a healthier perspective than you currently possess.

That's why the questions behind these two behaviors are completely different.

A healthy pause quietly asks, "What do I need in order to make this decision wisely?"

Avoidance asks, "How can I avoid making this decision today?"

At first, those questions sound surprisingly similar. Both involve waiting. Both delay action. But their intentions couldn't be more different. One seeks wisdom. The other seeks relief.

Over the years, I've found one question that helps me distinguish between the two whenever I'm uncertain about my own motives. I simply ask myself, "If complete clarity arrived today, would I be willing to decide?"

That question has exposed me more than once.

If my answer is yes, I'm probably creating healthy space. I'm not resisting the decision itself; I'm waiting for the emotional storm to settle so I can approach it wisely.

If my answer is no, then I have to acknowledge a harder truth. Perhaps I don't actually need more clarity. Perhaps what I need is more courage.

That distinction has changed the way I approach difficult decisions because fear wears more than one costume. Earlier in this book, we explored how fear can become impulsive. It whispers, "Send the text now. Quit today. Walk away immediately." But fear is equally capable of becoming passive. It quietly says, "Not today. Wait another week. Maybe this will solve itself."

Both voices are attempting to accomplish the same thing.

Neither wants to sit with discomfort.

Wisdom behaves differently. Wisdom is willing to wait when waiting creates perspective, and wisdom is equally willing to act once perspective has arrived. It neither rushes nor hides. It simply refuses to let fear determine the timing.

You can see this distinction in almost every area of life. In relationships, waiting might sound like this: "We're both too emotional to have this conversation well. Let's take some time to calm down, and then let's finish it." Avoidance sounds very different: "Maybe if I never bring it up again, things will somehow get better." One creates the possibility of healing. The other quietly guarantees distance.

The same pattern appears in business. Waiting might mean sleeping on an important contract before signing it because you recognize the decision deserves your clearest thinking. Avoidance means refusing to make the decision at all because every possible outcome feels uncomfortable. In parenting, waiting may mean recognizing that you're too angry to discipline wisely and deciding to revisit the conversation after you've calmed down. Avoidance means ignoring the behavior entirely because confrontation feels exhausting. In leadership, waiting means gathering the information necessary to make a thoughtful decision. Avoidance means hoping someone else solves the problem so you never have to.

The actions may look similar from the outside.

The intention changes everything.

When I think back to my own story, I realize that asking Nicole for fifteen more minutes wasn't an attempt to avoid reality. I wasn't asking to escape the conversation. I was asking to continue it. I wasn't trying to delay the truth. I was hoping to

create enough space for the truth to emerge more clearly than it had in the middle of our emotions.

That distinction has become deeply important to me.

The pause wasn't valuable because it postponed the decision.

The pause was valuable because it invited understanding back into the room.

I've come to believe that the purpose of every healthy pause is resolution. Eventually, every important conversation must happen. Every major decision must be made. Every relationship either grows stronger or comes to an end. Every leader chooses a direction. Every parent addresses difficult behavior. Every business signs the contract—or doesn't. Waiting is never meant to eliminate those moments. It exists to improve the quality of them.

As you think about your own life, I want to invite you to consider something you've been postponing. It may be a difficult conversation, an overdue apology, a career decision, or a boundary you've needed to establish for months. Ask yourself honestly whether you're creating space or creating distance. If complete clarity arrived today, would you move forward? Or would you immediately find another reason to wait?

Those answers may reveal whether you're practicing patience or protecting fear.

Take a few moments to reflect on these questions:

What difficult conversation have you been avoiding?

What decision genuinely needs more clarity?

What decision actually needs more courage?

How do you know the difference?

This week, choose one decision you've been postponing and ask yourself a simple question: *Am I waiting, or am I avoiding?* If you're waiting, identify exactly what you're waiting for. Is it another conversation? A night's sleep? Better information? A calmer emotional state? If you're avoiding, don't pressure yourself to solve the entire problem immediately. Instead, take one honest step toward it. Schedule the meeting. Make the phone call. Write the apology. Begin the conversation. Courage rarely arrives all at once. More often, it grows through small acts of faithfulness.

Waiting isn't the absence of courage. Sometimes waiting is courage because it refuses to let emotional urgency make permanent decisions. But avoiding isn't patience. It's fear disguised as tomorrow. The goal of *15 More Minutes* has never been to postpone your life. It's to make sure you're fully present when you decide how to live it.

Chapter 10: There Is a Time to Leave

By now, you may be wondering whether this philosophy has a limit.

If emotional storms can distort our thinking, if premature certainty can convince us we already know the ending, and if the calm version of ourselves deserves a vote before we make permanent decisions, does that mean we should always stay? Should we always wait longer? Should every relationship be saved? Should every business be preserved? Should every difficult season simply be endured until it somehow improves?

The answer is no.

Imagine someone trapped in an abusive relationship where every day brings another cycle of fear, manipulation, or violence. Should that person remain indefinitely because they're trying to be patient? Of course not.

Imagine someone working in an environment that is physically dangerous or deeply unethical, where staying places their well-being or integrity at risk. Should they ignore reality because this book encourages thoughtful decision-making? Again, no.

Imagine someone whose life is being slowly consumed by addiction—not their own addiction, but the exhausting cycle of enabling someone who refuses help, rejects accountability, and continues causing harm. Should they continue sacrificing themselves indefinitely because leaving feels difficult?

No.

So where does *15 More Minutes* fit?

It fits in the space between emotional urgency and lasting wisdom. It asks us not to avoid difficult decisions, but to make sure those decisions belong to the healthiest version of ourselves. That distinction is essential because one of the biggest misunderstandings about this philosophy is the belief that it encourages people to stay no matter what.

It doesn't.

Some readers may assume this book is a plea for endless patience or unconditional endurance. Others may worry that it discourages people from making painful but necessary choices. Neither is true. If anything, this philosophy encourages hard decisions—it simply encourages making them well.

Throughout this book, I've argued that emotional storms should not make permanent decisions alone. I have never argued that permanent decisions should never be made.

Those are two very different ideas.

In fact, there are moments when leaving is not only wise but necessary. There are relationships that become unsafe. There are environments that slowly destroy our peace. There are patterns of manipulation, abuse, and chronic disrespect that do not improve simply because we hope they will. There are seasons when remaining faithful to another person's dysfunction requires betraying ourselves.

Staying is not always an act of love.

Sometimes staying is fear.

Sometimes it's comfort disguised as loyalty.

Sometimes it's denial wearing the mask of hope.

Sometimes staying allows destructive patterns to continue because confronting reality feels more painful than tolerating it.

Leaving, on the other hand, is not always failure.

Sometimes leaving is the healthiest expression of self-respect.

Sometimes it's the first honest boundary someone has ever established.

Sometimes it's the beginning of healing.

One of the most important truths I've learned is that the calm version of you may ultimately reach exactly the same conclusion as the emotional version.

The difference isn't always the destination.

It's the journey that gets you there.

The emotional version of you leaves because it desperately wants relief. It wants the pain to stop immediately, and leaving appears to be the fastest escape. The decision is driven by urgency, frustration, resentment, or fear. It often leaves conversations unfinished, bridges burned, and words spoken that cannot easily be taken back.

The calm version may leave as well.

But it leaves differently.

It leaves after reflection rather than reaction. It leaves because clarity has replaced confusion, not because panic has replaced peace. It communicates honestly. It accepts responsibility for its own choices. It establishes boundaries

without seeking revenge. It closes the door without trying to slam it.

From the outside, those two decisions may appear identical.

Inside, they are worlds apart.

That's why this philosophy has never been about what you decide.

It's about who is making the decision.

There are situations where leaving is unquestionably an act of wisdom. Abuse should never be endured in the name of patience. Manipulation should never be mistaken for love. Repeated betrayal without genuine accountability slowly destroys trust. Addiction without any willingness to pursue change eventually consumes everyone around it. Chronic disrespect, emotional cruelty, and environments that consistently erode your physical, emotional, or spiritual well-being deserve to be taken seriously.

15 More Minutes should never become an excuse to tolerate abuse.

If anything, it should help people distinguish between reacting emotionally and recognizing reality.

That distinction also applies to boundaries.

Healthy boundaries are often misunderstood because they can look similar to ultimatums from the outside. Both involve saying no. Both establish limits. Both communicate that something must change.

The difference lies beneath the surface.

A healthy boundary is rooted in self-respect. It defines what you will or will not participate in without attempting to control another person's choices. It says, "This is what I need in order to remain healthy." It leaves responsibility where it belongs.

An ultimatum often grows out of emotional urgency. It attempts to force immediate change through pressure or fear. Instead of protecting your own well-being, it seeks to control someone else's behavior.

Boundaries create clarity.

Ultimatums often create conflict.

Learning the difference requires honesty because both can sound similar if we're only listening to the words instead of examining the heart behind them.

Over time, I've adopted another simple question whenever I'm wrestling with the possibility of leaving something important.

I call it the peace test.

I ask myself, *If I removed today's emotion, would I still choose to leave?*

It's a surprisingly revealing question.

If the answer is yes—if the decision continues bringing peace after the anger has settled, after the fear has quieted, after the exhaustion has lifted—then the path may already be becoming clear.

If the answer is no, then I know I owe myself more time, more reflection, and perhaps another conversation before making a permanent decision.

The peace test isn't perfect.

No framework is.

But it has protected me from confusing emotional urgency with lasting conviction.

When I think about my own relationship with Nicole, I sometimes wonder what the calm version of me would have decided if I had given him the opportunity.

Would he have stayed?

I honestly don't know.

Would he have eventually reached the same conclusion?

Perhaps.

Life rarely gives us the privilege of knowing the ending to stories that never happened.

But I do know this.

That version deserved the opportunity to decide.

Instead, fear voted first.

For years, I believed my greatest regret was the outcome itself.

Now I see it differently.

My greatest regret wasn't necessarily where the relationship ended.

It was when I chose to decide.

The timing mattered.

The condition of my heart mattered.

The version of myself making the decision mattered.

That's the regret I've spent this entire book trying to understand.

One of the beautiful things about healthy endings is that they don't always leave us with regret.

Sometimes they leave us with peace.

Healthy endings are rarely perfect, but they are marked by honesty, respect, compassion, and ownership. They acknowledge reality without unnecessary cruelty. They establish clear boundaries without abandoning dignity. They grieve what has been lost while accepting what can no longer be changed.

Some endings become freedom.

Some become healing.

Others become the first chapter of the life you were always meant to live.

As you think about your own circumstances, I want to ask you two questions.

Is there something you're staying in that your calm self has already outgrown?

Or is there something you're trying to leave before your calm self has even arrived?

Can you tell the difference?

Those questions aren't always easy to answer, but they're worth sitting with.

Take a few moments to reflect on them.

What relationships, jobs, or situations have you stayed in too long?

What have you left too quickly?

Which decisions still bring peace when you think about them?

Which ones still feel like they were made in the storm?

If your calm self were making today's hardest decision, what would change?

The next time you're tempted to leave something important, resist the urge to ask only one question.

Don't ask, *Should I stay?*

Don't ask, *Should I go?*

Instead, ask something deeper.

If my calm self made this decision today, would I still be proud of it a year from now?

If the answer is yes, then walk with peace.

The goal of *15 More Minutes* has never been to keep every story alive.

Some stories need to end.

The goal has simply been this: don't let the storm decide which stories deserve another chapter.

Sometimes wisdom says stay.

Sometimes wisdom says go.

Either way, make sure wisdom is the one speaking.

15 More Minutes

PART III

THE ARENAS OF LIFE

Chapter 11: Relationships

Relationships have a remarkable ability to make us believe we know things we couldn't possibly know.

A text message goes unanswered for several hours, and suddenly our minds begin filling in the silence. A spouse forgets an anniversary they have remembered every year before, and disappointment quickly becomes a story about feeling unimportant. A close friend cancels dinner at the last minute, and what began as an inconvenience quietly transforms into a conclusion about the future of the friendship. A simple comment is misunderstood, a difficult conversation ends awkwardly, and before long we aren't responding to what actually happened—we're responding to what we've decided it means.

Let me ask you a simple question.

Have you ever decided what someone meant before asking them what they meant?

Most relationship damage begins there.

Very few relationships collapse because of a single misunderstanding. They begin to weaken because assumptions quietly replace conversations. We stop asking questions. We stop checking our interpretations. We stop allowing the other person to explain themselves because, somewhere along the way, we've convinced ourselves that we already understand the story.

One of the greatest lessons relationships have taught me is that they rarely create our deepest wounds.

They reveal them.

Long before someone disappoints us, many of us already carry fears that have been quietly shaping the way we experience love. Some fear abandonment. Others fear rejection. Some worry they will never be enough. Others are terrified of losing their independence or being controlled. Still others fear being alone so deeply that they tolerate relationships they know are unhealthy because loneliness feels even more frightening.

Those fears rarely begin with the current relationship.

They often began years earlier.

Relationships simply expose them.

That's why relationships feel so intensely personal. They don't merely involve another person's words or actions. They awaken old experiences, old disappointments, and old beliefs we thought had been left behind. The person standing in front of us becomes connected to stories that were written long before we ever met them.

The closer someone is to us, the greater their ability to awaken those hidden fears.

A stranger usually can't hurt us the way someone we deeply love can. A casual acquaintance doesn't possess the same emotional access as a spouse, a parent, a child, or a lifelong friend. The more significant the relationship becomes, the higher the emotional stakes become as well.

When the stakes rise, emotional storms become stronger.

That's why the smallest moments in close relationships can produce surprisingly powerful reactions. One delayed

response, one misunderstood sentence, or one forgotten promise can awaken fears that have very little to do with the event itself.

Once those fears become active, our minds immediately begin telling stories.

They don't love me anymore.

They're pulling away.

They're choosing someone else.

They'll never understand me.

I don't matter to them.

Sometimes those stories are true.

Often they are not.

The problem is that we rarely pause long enough to find out.

Instead of asking what happened, we begin explaining why it happened. We assign motives to people who have never shared them. We assume intentions they never possessed. We become so certain of our interpretation that curiosity quietly disappears.

By the time the conversation finally happens, we're no longer trying to understand.

We're trying to prove our story was right.

That's one of the reasons premature certainty is so destructive inside relationships.

Long before people officially separate, many relationships begin ending internally. One person quietly decides, *This will*

never change. Another concludes, *I'm done trying.* Someone else accepts the belief, *They'll never understand me.*

Those invisible decisions begin changing everything.

Conversations become shorter.

Patience becomes thinner.

Grace becomes harder to extend.

Hope slowly disappears.

From the outside, the relationship may still look intact. Inside, however, one or both people have already stopped believing a different future is possible.

By the time the breakup, divorce, or permanent distance arrives, the emotional ending often happened weeks or months earlier.

That's why one of the healthiest habits I've learned is replacing conclusions with questions.

Whenever conflict appears, I've stopped asking, *What does this mean?*

Instead, I try to ask, *What do I still need to understand?*

That single shift changes the entire direction of a conversation.

Curiosity slows the storm.

Certainty accelerates it.

Curiosity creates room for another person's perspective.

Certainty leaves room only for our own.

When I look back at my relationship with Nicole, one of the things I grieve most isn't simply the breakup itself. It's how many opportunities I had to understand what she was trying to communicate before I became convinced I already knew what she meant.

After everything happened, I eventually heard things I had been unable to hear while I was emotionally overwhelmed. Not because she suddenly changed what she was saying, but because I finally became capable of listening differently.

That may have been one of the most painful lessons of my life.

Sometimes fifteen more minutes isn't about changing another person's mind.

Sometimes it's about finally understanding what they've been trying to say all along.

That realization permanently changed the way I listen.

Today, when someone I love says something that immediately triggers a defensive reaction, I've learned to become suspicious of my first interpretation. Instead of assuming I understand their intentions, I try to become curious about their experience. I ask more questions than I once did. I interrupt less. I spend less energy preparing my response and more energy trying to understand theirs.

I've discovered that understanding often arrives just after certainty lets go.

Healthy relationships are not relationships without storms.

Every meaningful relationship will experience disappointment. Every marriage will encounter conflict. Every

friendship will face misunderstanding. Every family will experience moments when emotions run high and communication breaks down.

The presence of storms does not mean the relationship is failing.

It means the relationship involves two imperfect human beings.

The difference between healthy relationships and unhealthy ones isn't the absence of conflict.

It's what happens after the conflict arrives.

Healthy relationships understand the power of repair.

For years, I believed successful relationships were built by people who somehow avoided hurting each other. Experience has taught me something different. Every close relationship includes moments of failure. Words are spoken carelessly. Assumptions are made. Feelings are overlooked. Expectations go unmet.

What separates healthy relationships is not perfection.

It's repair.

Healthy people apologize.

Healthy people listen.

Healthy people own the impact of their actions without becoming trapped by defensiveness.

Healthy people remain curious enough to believe they may not yet understand the whole story.

Repair requires humility because it asks us to value understanding more than winning.

As you think about your own relationships, I want to leave you with a handful of questions that have become guideposts in my own life.

Before ending a relationship, have I had the conversation I've been avoiding?

Am I reacting to today's emotions or responding to a long-term pattern?

What story am I telling myself?

Has the calm version of me had a chance to vote?

If I already felt at peace, would I still make this decision?

Those questions won't remove every difficult choice.

They won't save every relationship.

But they will help ensure that your decisions are shaped by wisdom instead of emotional urgency.

Take a moment to think about someone who matters deeply to you. It doesn't have to be a spouse or romantic partner. It may be a parent, a child, a sibling, a lifelong friend, or someone with whom the relationship has quietly become strained.

Ask yourself honestly.

What conversation have I been replacing with assumptions?

What certainty have I mistaken for truth?

What relationship deserves fifteen more minutes?

You may find it helpful to reflect on these questions in writing.

Which relationship has taught you the most about yourself?

What stories do you tend to tell yourself when conflict appears?

Which emotional storm visits your relationships most often?

What conversation have you been avoiding?

What would curiosity sound like instead of certainty?

This week, choose one relationship and practice something different. Instead of making an assumption, ask a question. Instead of preparing your defense while someone else is speaking, become genuinely curious. Instead of deciding what they meant, ask them what they meant. You may be surprised how often clarity appears in conversations that almost never happened.

Give the relationship fifteen more minutes before writing the ending.

The strongest relationships aren't built by people who never experience storms.

They're built by people who refuse to let the storm write the ending.

Love isn't sustained by certainty.

It's sustained by curiosity.

Chapter 12: Parenting

Few moments test our emotional maturity quite like parenting.

Imagine this familiar scene. You've just walked through the front door after one of the hardest days you've had in weeks. Work has been overwhelming. Traffic was miserable. Your phone hasn't stopped buzzing. You're mentally exhausted before you even hang your keys by the door.

A few moments later, you hear a glass fall to the floor.

Milk spreads across the kitchen.

Or maybe it's your teenager answering your question with sarcasm after you've already repeated yourself three times. Perhaps it's your toddler throwing a tantrum over something that seems completely insignificant.

In those moments, it feels as though you're reacting to your child.

Most of the time, you're not.

You're reacting to the storm you carried home.

Have you ever realized your child wasn't arguing with you...

they were colliding with everything else you carried into the room?

That realization changed the way I think about parenting.

Children learn far more from watching us than they do from listening to us. We spend years trying to teach them the right words, the right behaviors, and the right choices, but they are

quietly studying something much deeper. They are watching how we respond when life doesn't go according to plan.

They notice how we handle disappointment.

They notice how we handle conflict.

They notice what happens when someone hurts our feelings or when we don't get our way.

They notice whether we apologize after making a mistake or pretend nothing happened.

They notice whether we repair relationships or simply move on without addressing the damage.

Most of all, they notice whether we pause...

or explode.

Whether we realize it or not, we are constantly teaching. Every emotional response becomes part of our children's education. Long before they understand our lectures about kindness, patience, or self-control, they are absorbing our example.

Children are remarkable observers.

They don't simply remember what we tell them.

They remember what we show them.

One of the hardest truths about emotional storms is that they rarely stay contained within the person experiencing them. Emotions spread. A stressful day at work becomes tension at the dinner table. An unresolved argument follows us into the living room. Anxiety quietly fills a house without anyone ever mentioning it.

Children are especially sensitive to these emotional climates. They often absorb tension they don't understand and assume responsibility for emotions they didn't create. Sometimes they begin carrying emotional patterns they never chose because those patterns slowly become normal.

This isn't something I say to create guilt.

It's something I say to create awareness.

Awareness is where change begins.

One of the greatest gifts we can give our children is not the absence of conflict.

It's showing them what healthy recovery looks like.

That's where 15 More Minutes becomes a parenting principle.

Sometimes fifteen more minutes looks like saying, "I'm too frustrated to have this conversation well right now. I need a few minutes, and then we'll talk."

Sometimes it means stepping outside for fresh air before responding.

Sometimes it means taking a deep breath, saying a prayer, going for a short walk, or simply sitting quietly long enough for your heartbeat to slow down.

To a child, that pause may look insignificant.

In reality, it may save the relationship from words that would otherwise linger for years.

The pause isn't abandoning your child.

It's protecting your connection with them.

Over the years, I've come to think about parenting through another distinction that's helped me tremendously.

Children need discipline.

They do not deserve emotional discharge.

Those two things are often confused because they can happen in the exact same moment.

Discipline is intentional.

Emotional discharge is reactive.

Discipline exists to teach.

Emotional discharge exists to relieve the parent's frustration.

Discipline asks, "What lesson does my child need to learn?"

Discharge asks, "How do I make myself feel better right now?"

One builds trust.

The other creates fear.

Children can usually tell the difference, even when they don't have the words to explain it.

I don't believe great parents are parents who never lose their patience.

I don't believe they never raise their voices, never make mistakes, or never say something they wish they could take back.

Perfection has never been the standard.

Repair is.

The healthiest parents I know apologize.

They admit when they were wrong.

They take responsibility for their words.

They model humility instead of pretending they always have the right answers.

Ironically, some of the most important parenting moments happen after the mistake.

When a parent says, "I shouldn't have spoken to you that way. I'm sorry," they're teaching something no lecture could ever accomplish. They're showing their child that love includes accountability, that strength includes humility, and that broken relationships can be repaired.

Those moments leave a lasting impression.

As I began reflecting on my own emotional patterns, I eventually realized that many of them didn't begin in adulthood.

They began in childhood.

My own upbringing included instability, uncertainty, and the pain of abandonment. Those experiences quietly shaped the way I interpreted relationships long before I was old enough to recognize what was happening. They planted fears that followed me into adulthood, influencing the way I responded to conflict, disappointment, and uncertainty.

For years, I thought I was reacting to the people in front of me.

In many ways, I was still responding to experiences behind me.

That realization changed how I think about parenting.

Children grow into adults.

Adults carry childhood into every relationship they will ever have.

The way we respond to our children today may quietly shape the way they respond to spouses, coworkers, friends, and even their own children decades from now.

Parenting is never only about raising children.

It's about helping shape future adults.

Even if you don't have children, this principle still matters.

Some readers have grown children.

Some have never had children.

Some wanted children and never had the opportunity.

Yet every one of us carries something from childhood into adulthood.

We all have an inner child that still remembers moments of fear, rejection, embarrassment, loneliness, or insecurity. Sometimes the emotional storm we're experiencing today isn't entirely about today's circumstances.

Sometimes it's yesterday asking to be noticed.

Healing often begins when we become the calm, compassionate adult our younger selves needed but didn't always have.

In many ways, that's a form of parenting too.

Before responding to a child—or to anyone you love—I want to encourage you to pause and ask a few simple questions.

Am I correcting them...

or releasing my own frustration?

Will this moment matter next week?

What lesson do I hope they remember from this conversation?

Is my calm self in the room?

Am I teaching fear...

or am I teaching wisdom?

Those questions have changed the way I approach conflict because they remind me that every difficult moment is also a teaching moment.

The lesson my child remembers may not be the one I intended.

As you reflect on your own life, think about the emotional patterns you inherited growing up.

What did your family teach you about anger?

About forgiveness?

About conflict?

About vulnerability?

Which of those lessons have served you well?

Which ones have quietly shaped reactions you've never stopped to question?

And perhaps the most important question of all:

Which emotional patterns end with you?

Every generation inherits something from the one before it.

Not all of those inheritances are visible.

Some are emotional.

Some are relational.

Some are simply habits of responding to life's storms.

The beautiful truth is that inheritance doesn't have to become destiny.

You have the opportunity to interrupt patterns that have existed for generations.

Take a few moments to reflect on these questions.

What did your parents teach you about handling emotions?

Which of those lessons still shape your reactions today?

What emotional patterns do you hope your children—or the next generation—inherit from you?

Where do you most need to practice the pause?

The next time conflict enters your home, resist the temptation to focus only on correcting behavior.

Instead, focus on modeling it.

Ask yourself one question.

If my child handled conflict exactly the way I'm handling it right now, would I be proud?

If the answer is no, give yourself permission to pause.

Take fifteen more minutes.

Then come back.

Children rarely become who we tell them to be.

They become who they watch us become.

The greatest gift we can give the next generation isn't perfect advice.

It's a living example of what it looks like to pause before letting the storm decide.

Chapter 13: Business

If you've ever built a business, led a team, or carried the weight of making payroll, you know something people on the outside often don't.

Business is emotional.

I learned that lesson the hard way.

There was a season in my life when everything I had worked to build seemed to be unraveling at once. The financial pressure was relentless. Every decision felt heavier than the last because it wasn't just about numbers on a spreadsheet—it was about my family, my future, my reputation, and the people depending on me. There were moments when I wondered whether everything I had built would disappear. I knew the embarrassment of watching plans fail, the fear of wondering whether I would recover, and the quiet shame that often accompanies professional setbacks.

What surprised me most wasn't the financial stress.

It was how deeply the experience affected my thinking.

Fear began writing stories.

Pressure began making decisions.

Every problem suddenly felt permanent.

Looking back, I realize I wasn't simply trying to save a business.

I was trying to protect my identity.

That's one of the reasons I struggle when people casually say, "Business isn't personal."

For most entrepreneurs, leaders, and business owners, nothing could be further from the truth.

Business is deeply personal.

Entrepreneurs pour years of sacrifice into ideas that begin as little more than hope. Leaders carry the responsibility of employees who depend on them to make wise decisions. Small business owners lie awake wondering how they'll make payroll. Sales professionals experience rejection week after week while trying to maintain confidence. Executives carry the pressure of shareholders, customers, and teams that rarely see the weight resting on their shoulders.

Business isn't just about revenue.

It's about responsibility.

It's about purpose.

It's about identity.

That's why emotion is always present.

The real question isn't whether emotion belongs in business.

The question is whether emotion is driving the business.

Emotional storms show up in the workplace just as they do in every other part of life. A major client leaves unexpectedly. Cash flow tightens. A new product launch falls short of expectations. A trusted employee resigns. Negative reviews begin appearing online. A business partner disagrees with an important decision. Sales decline for reasons you can't immediately explain.

Every one of those moments creates pressure.

Pressure creates urgency.

Urgency tempts us to react before we've fully understood what's happening.

The pattern is remarkably familiar because it isn't really about business.

It's about being human.

I've seen leaders fire exceptional employees during moments of frustration, only to regret it after emotions settled. I've watched entrepreneurs abandon businesses that were only months away from turning a corner because discouragement convinced them success would never arrive. I've known people who accepted unhealthy partnerships because desperation felt more manageable than uncertainty. Others have taken on the wrong clients, made unrealistic promises, or sent emotional emails that damaged relationships built over many years.

Those mistakes weren't caused by a lack of intelligence.

They weren't caused by a lack of ambition.

More often than not, they were caused by emotional overwhelm.

Business disasters rarely begin with spreadsheets.

They begin with emotional states.

That's why the idea of premature certainty applies just as powerfully in business as it does in relationships.

Every struggling entrepreneur eventually hears a familiar voice.

This company will never make it.

The market is dead.

No one wants what I'm building.

My employees don't care.

I'm a failure.

Those thoughts feel convincing because they arrive during seasons of disappointment. But just because they feel true doesn't mean they are true.

They're stories.

Not facts.

The danger is that temporary setbacks often convince us we've reached permanent conclusions. We mistake one difficult quarter for a doomed company. We interpret one failed launch as evidence that we'll never succeed. We begin believing that today's circumstances have already written tomorrow's outcome.

They haven't.

One of the realities of entrepreneurship is that it naturally amplifies emotion.

A single week can feel like an emotional lifetime.

On Monday, you're convinced you've found the idea that's going to change everything.

By Wednesday, you're questioning your competence and wondering whether you've made the biggest mistake of your career.

By Friday, you're already imagining what it would look like to quit.

If you've ever started a business, you probably smiled because you've lived some version of that story.

Entrepreneurship magnifies both hope and fear.

It creates extraordinary highs and equally powerful lows.

The goal isn't to eliminate those emotional swings.

The goal is to stop allowing them to make permanent decisions.

One lesson I've learned over the years is that leadership requires far more than strategic thinking.

It requires emotional stability.

People don't simply follow your vision.

They follow your emotional example.

If a leader panics every time circumstances become uncertain, the organization eventually learns to panic as well. If a leader reacts impulsively, the culture slowly becomes reactive. If those at the top allow fear to dictate their decisions, fear eventually becomes part of the organization's identity.

Leadership multiplies emotion.

The emotional state of one person often becomes the emotional climate of many.

That's why one emotionally driven decision at the top can quietly influence an entire team.

The opposite is also true.

A calm leader creates room for everyone else to breathe.

Over time, I've developed a handful of questions that help me recognize when I'm making business decisions from the storm instead of from wisdom.

Am I reacting to pressure...

or responding to reality?

Would I make this same decision after a good night's sleep?

Am I solving a genuine problem...

or simply trying to escape today's discomfort?

Is this true urgency...

or is it anxiety pretending to be urgency?

Those questions don't eliminate pressure.

Business will always involve uncertainty.

Markets change.

Customers leave.

Plans fail.

Unexpected challenges arise.

The goal isn't to remove uncertainty.

It's to prevent uncertainty from becoming your decision-maker.

Looking back over my own career, I can clearly identify moments when waiting created better outcomes than reacting ever could have. Some of the best business decisions I have ever made happened because I refused to let urgency rush me into action. Taking another day to think. Asking another question. Seeking another perspective. Sleeping on a difficult decision instead of forcing an immediate answer.

I've also experienced the opposite.

Some of my greatest professional regrets were born from speed. I believed that decisive leadership always meant quick leadership. I confused motion with progress. I assumed that making a decision immediately was better than making it thoughtfully.

Experience has taught me otherwise.

Wisdom isn't measured by how quickly you decide.

It's measured by how well you decide.

As you think about your own professional life, consider the business decision you regret most.

What emotion was present when you made it?

Was it fear?

Pride?

Embarrassment?

Pressure?

Desperation?

Would the calm version of you have made the same decision?

Perhaps the answer is yes.

Perhaps it isn't.

Either way, the question is worth asking.

Take a few moments to reflect on these questions.

What business decision still makes you cringe when you think about it?

Where does fear most influence your professional life?

Which decisions deserve another conversation before another conclusion?

How do you personally recognize an emotional storm at work?

The next time pressure begins building in your business, resist the temptation to ask, What's the fastest decision I can make?

Instead, ask a better question.

What decision would my calm self make?

Then give that version of yourself enough time to answer.

The businesses that survive aren't always the ones with the best ideas.

More often, they're the ones whose leaders learned not to confuse pressure with clarity.

Success isn't built by never facing storms.

It's built by refusing to let the storm become the CEO.

Chapter 14: Leadership

Every leader eventually faces a moment when the numbers don't look the way they hoped they would.

The quarterly results come in below expectations. A major client leaves. A project fails. Revenue drops. The room grows quiet as everyone waits for someone to speak. At that moment, the facts are already established. The report has been printed. The outcome cannot be changed.

What can still change is the atmosphere.

Everyone in the room instinctively looks toward the leader. They aren't simply looking for information. They're looking for emotional direction. They want to know whether this moment is a reason to panic or an opportunity to respond wisely. Long before the leader offers a strategy, the team has already begun reading something else.

The leader's emotional state.

That raises an important question.

What are people really following?

Your strategy?

Or your emotional stability?

One of the greatest misconceptions about leadership is that it is primarily about making decisions. Decision-making is certainly part of leadership, but it isn't the heart of it. Leadership is about influencing people, and influence is never limited to words or plans. Every leader communicates emotionally long before communicating verbally.

Emotions are contagious.

Confidence spreads.

Fear spreads.

Hope spreads.

Frustration spreads.

Calm spreads.

The emotional state of a leader rarely stays confined to that leader. It quietly moves through teams, organizations, families, churches, classrooms, and communities. Whether we recognize it or not, every leader functions as an emotional thermostat. Instead of merely responding to the emotional climate, they help create it.

That's why leadership carries such enormous responsibility.

The higher someone leads, the greater the emotional pressure they experience. Leaders often carry burdens that few people fully understand. They shoulder financial responsibility, difficult personnel decisions, uncertain markets, impossible deadlines, competing priorities, and the expectations of people who depend on them.

Pressure becomes a constant companion.

When that pressure builds, the temptation to react quickly becomes almost overwhelming. Not because leaders are weak, but because so many people are waiting for them to do something. Silence can feel irresponsible. Waiting can feel risky. Action feels safer than uncertainty, even when the action itself isn't wise.

I've learned that one of the greatest disciplines of leadership is resisting the pressure to confuse movement with progress.

Many leaders believe they must always have an immediate answer. They assume confidence means certainty and that admitting uncertainty somehow weakens their credibility.

I've discovered the opposite.

People rarely expect perfection from their leaders.

They long for stability.

There have been moments in my own leadership journey when saying, "I don't know yet," created far more trust than pretending I already knew the solution. Honest uncertainty delivered calmly often inspires greater confidence than false certainty delivered with confidence.

People can usually tell the difference.

A leader who admits, "We're still gathering information, and we're going to make the best decision we can," often creates more security than a leader who rushes toward an answer simply because the silence feels uncomfortable.

Premature certainty is just as dangerous in organizations as it is in relationships.

A disappointing quarter becomes, "This strategy doesn't work."

A difficult employee becomes, "We have to let them go."

One failed initiative becomes, "Our culture is broken."

A changing market becomes, "The business will never recover."

Sometimes those conclusions are accurate.

Sometimes they aren't.

The challenge is that emotional pressure often disguises assumptions as observations.

Great leaders learn to distinguish between the two.

An observation says, "Sales have declined over the last three months."

An assumption says, "Our business is failing."

An observation says, "Our team is struggling with communication."

An assumption says, "These people don't care."

One invites investigation.

The other shuts it down.

Leadership requires the discipline to separate what we know from what we merely fear.

That distinction becomes especially important because leaders are paid to make decisions.

They are not paid to react.

Those may sound like the same thing, but they are profoundly different.

Reaction seeks immediate relief. It attempts to remove discomfort as quickly as possible. It often protects the leader's emotions before considering the organization's long-term health.

A thoughtful decision serves something larger than the leader's emotional state. It weighs consequences, considers people, gathers perspective, and asks difficult questions before moving forward.

Reaction is fast.

Leadership is intentional.

Over the years, I've begun thinking about leadership through another image that has helped me tremendously.

Every leader leaves an emotional wake.

Just as a boat leaves waves behind it wherever it travels, every leader leaves something behind after every interaction. Every meeting creates a wake. Every difficult conversation creates a wake. Every email, every decision, every announcement, every unexpected challenge sends emotional ripples through the people being led.

Some leaders leave people feeling hopeful.

Others leave people feeling anxious.

Some create clarity.

Others create confusion.

Some leave people believing the future is still worth pursuing.

Others quietly drain confidence from every room they enter.

The remarkable thing about an emotional wake is that leaders often become so focused on where they're going that they forget to notice what they're leaving behind.

Great leaders pay attention to both.

One of the most misunderstood qualities in leadership is the willingness to pause.

Our culture often celebrates decisiveness as though speed itself were evidence of strength. Leaders who make quick decisions are praised for being bold. Leaders who pause are sometimes criticized for being hesitant.

But wisdom and hesitation are not the same thing.

Some of the strongest leaders I've ever known were completely comfortable saying, "Let's sleep on this."

Others would say, "I'd like another perspective before we decide."

Still others were willing to admit, "We don't have enough information yet."

None of those responses reflected weakness.

They reflected discipline.

The pause wasn't indecision.

The pause protected the quality of the decision.

Looking back over my own leadership journey—from my time in the military to building businesses, leading teams, working with clients, and navigating seasons of both success and failure—I can clearly identify moments when my emotional state influenced far more than my own experience.

There were conversations I handled poorly because pressure narrowed my perspective. There were decisions I made too quickly because urgency convinced me action was more important than wisdom. There were also moments when I

resisted that pressure, waited, gathered counsel, and discovered that perspective changed everything.

Ironically, my greatest leadership lessons rarely came from my victories.

They came from my storms.

Success often reinforces what we're already doing.

Failure forces us to examine why we did it.

Over time, I've developed a handful of questions that help me lead from wisdom instead of emotional urgency.

Am I solving today's pressure...

or tomorrow's problem?

How will my team feel after this conversation?

Am I leading from fear...

or from purpose?

Would the calm version of me communicate this differently?

What emotional wake am I about to leave behind?

Those questions don't remove difficult decisions.

Leadership will always require courage.

They simply ensure that courage isn't confused with emotional reaction.

As you think about your own life, remember that leadership isn't limited to job titles. You may lead employees, but you may also lead children, volunteers, students, friends, family members, or a community that quietly looks to you for guidance.

Who are you leading?

How would those people describe your emotional leadership?

When they leave a conversation with you, what atmosphere do they carry with them?

Those questions matter because influence is measured not only by what people accomplish under your leadership, but also by who they become because of it.

Take a few moments to reflect on these questions.

When do you become most emotionally reactive as a leader?

How does pressure change the way you communicate?

What kind of emotional wake do you consistently leave behind?

Where do you need to slow down before leading others?

This week, before every important conversation, pause for a moment and ask yourself one simple question.

What atmosphere am I about to create?

Remember that leadership begins long before the first word is spoken. By the time a conversation starts, your emotional state has often already entered the room ahead of you.

People rarely remember every decision their leader made.

They remember how their leader made them feel.

The greatest leaders don't eliminate uncertainty.

They simply refuse to let uncertainty eliminate their calm.

Chapter 15: Health

Have you ever noticed how different life feels after a terrible night's sleep?

Nothing around you has changed. You wake up in the same home, with the same family, the same job, the same responsibilities, and the same problems you had the day before. Yet somehow everything feels heavier. The smallest inconvenience becomes irritating. Conversations that normally wouldn't bother you suddenly feel personal. Decisions that seemed manageable yesterday now feel overwhelming. It's tempting to believe life has gotten worse overnight, but often the only thing that has changed is you.

More specifically, your nervous system has changed.

One of the greatest misconceptions about emotional decision-making is that our emotions exist only in our minds. They don't. Every emotional storm is also a physical experience. Anxiety tightens your chest. Fear quickens your heartbeat. Anger tenses your muscles. Grief steals your appetite—or sends you searching for comfort in food. Stress interrupts your sleep long before it ever changes your circumstances. Your body carries emotions long before your conscious mind has found words to describe them.

That's why emotional wisdom is never just a mental exercise. Your brain doesn't operate independently from the rest of your body. Every thought you have, every decision you make, and every conclusion you reach is influenced by the physical condition of the body doing the thinking. When you're sleep deprived, chronically stressed, dehydrated, burned out, or

physically exhausted, your brain doesn't process information the same way it does when you're rested and healthy. The part of your brain responsible for perspective, patience, and long-term thinking becomes less effective, while the emotional centers become louder and more reactive. In other words, the storm arrives faster and stays longer.

I've often wondered how many decisions people have blamed on poor judgment when the real culprit was simply exhaustion. How many relationships have suffered because someone tried to solve a marriage problem after three consecutive nights of poor sleep? How many careers have been abandoned during seasons of burnout? How many dreams have been buried because chronic stress convinced someone they were incapable of continuing?

Sometimes what feels like hopelessness is actually fatigue.

Sometimes what feels like anxiety is a nervous system that has been under pressure for far too long.

Sometimes what feels like certainty is simply burnout wearing the mask of wisdom.

That realization changed the way I evaluate my own thinking. Instead of assuming every emotion was telling me the truth, I began asking a different question: Is this really wisdom—or is my body asking for help?

There have been seasons in my own life when I neglected nearly every habit that made clear thinking possible. Stress became normal. Sleep became inconsistent. Exercise disappeared. Meals were rushed or skipped altogether. Like many people, I convinced myself I'd take better care of my health once life slowed down. Of course, life never slowed

down. Instead, my ability to think clearly slowly deteriorated while I kept expecting myself to make excellent decisions under increasingly unhealthy conditions.

Looking back, it's remarkable how much clearer life became once I started taking care of my body again. None of those changes magically solved my problems. Sleeping more didn't eliminate difficult conversations. Exercise didn't erase financial pressure. Eating healthier didn't remove uncertainty. What those habits did accomplish, however, was something equally valuable: they gave my calm self a chance to return.

I've noticed another pattern that seems almost universal. When people enter emotional storms, they often abandon the very habits that would help them weather those storms. They stop exercising because they're too tired. They reach for comfort food because it offers immediate relief. They sleep less because anxiety keeps replaying tomorrow's worries. Some begin drinking more. Others isolate themselves from the people who usually help them stay grounded. The emotional storm damages healthy routines, and the loss of those routines makes the next storm even more intense.

It becomes a vicious cycle. Emotional overwhelm leads to unhealthy habits. Unhealthy habits reduce emotional resilience. Reduced resilience makes the next emotional storm even stronger. Unless something interrupts that cycle, every storm feels larger than the last.

Fortunately, the interruption doesn't have to be dramatic. Sometimes wisdom begins with surprisingly ordinary decisions. Go for a walk before responding to the email. Drink a glass of water before making the phone call. Eat a healthy

meal before deciding whether to quit. Spend time outside. Get some sleep. Take several slow, intentional breaths before continuing the conversation. None of those actions solve the underlying problem, but they create the conditions your brain needs to think clearly instead of merely reacting.

This chapter isn't really about fitness.

It's about readiness.

You don't have to become an elite athlete to make wise decisions. You don't need the perfect diet, the perfect workout routine, or the perfect body. What you need is a body that isn't constantly working against your mind. Every healthy habit becomes another way of inviting your calm self back into the conversation.

That's why I've learned to ask myself a few simple questions before making important decisions. Have I slept enough? Have I eaten today? Am I physically exhausted? Am I carrying an unusual amount of stress? Would this situation look different after a full night's rest?

Those questions sound almost too simple, but I've been surprised by how often they expose the real issue. Sometimes the wisest decision isn't deciding at all. Sometimes the wisest decision is admitting that your body is in no condition to help your mind think clearly and choosing to revisit the decision tomorrow.

As you reflect on your own life, consider the moments when you've made your poorest decisions. Were they late at night? During a season of burnout? After weeks of stress? When you were hungry, exhausted, or emotionally depleted? Can you see

the connection between the condition of your body and the condition of your thinking?

Take a few moments to reflect on these questions:

What physical condition most often precedes your emotional storms?

How does your body tell you that you're approaching overwhelm?

Which healthy habits consistently help you feel emotionally grounded?

What simple change could help your calm self return more quickly?

For the next week, before making any significant decision, pause for a brief check-in. Ask yourself four simple questions: Have I slept? Have I eaten? Have I moved? Have I breathed? Care for your body first. Then return to the decision.

You may discover that the problem wasn't nearly as urgent as it first appeared.

Sometimes the most important decision you make isn't about your future.

It's about whether you'll get enough sleep tonight.

Because the healthier your body becomes, the easier it is for the calm version of you to find its voice.

Chapter 16: Faith

One of the most honest prayers I've ever prayed came after one of the worst decisions I'd ever made.

I was sitting alone, replaying the breakup text over and over in my mind. My emotions had finally begun to settle, but the consequences remained. I wasn't sure what came next. I didn't know whether the relationship was over, whether it could be repaired, or whether I had permanently changed the course of both of our lives. The uncertainty was overwhelming.

I remember trying to pray, only to realize I didn't really know what to say.

For years, many of my prayers had sounded the same. I would ask God to change my circumstances, fix the problem, open a door, or remove an obstacle. But that day was different. I wasn't asking God to change Nicole. I wasn't asking Him to erase the consequences of my decision or somehow make everything work out the way I wanted.

For perhaps the first time in a very long time, I found myself asking something much simpler.

"God, change me."

More specifically, I prayed for clarity.

I wanted to see myself honestly. I wanted to understand why I had made a decision I regretted almost immediately. I wanted wisdom more than I wanted comfort. Looking back, I think that prayer marked the beginning of a completely different journey. It wasn't the moment my circumstances changed. It was the moment my heart became willing to change.

One of the greatest misconceptions about faith is that it eliminates uncertainty.

It doesn't.

If anything, faith often asks us to remain faithful while uncertainty is still very much alive.

When I read the stories throughout Scripture, I don't see people who always knew how things would end. Abraham left his homeland without knowing exactly where he was going. Moses stood before an impossible assignment with more questions than answers. David spent years waiting between being anointed king and actually becoming king. The disciples left familiar lives without fully understanding where Jesus was leading them.

Faith has rarely meant certainty.

More often, it has meant trust.

That's an uncomfortable truth because we live in a culture that doesn't value waiting. We expect answers immediately. We want healing now. We want broken relationships restored as quickly as possible. We want clear direction before taking the first step. We want certainty before commitment.

Waiting feels like failure.

Silence feels like abandonment.

Uncertainty feels like something to escape.

Yet over and over again, life teaches a different lesson.

Some of the most important things in life refuse to be rushed.

Healing takes time.

Forgiveness takes time.

Character takes time.

Trust takes time.

Wisdom takes time.

Growth almost always happens more slowly than we wish it would.

Looking back over my own life, I can't think of a single defining lesson that arrived overnight. Every meaningful change happened gradually. Every season that shaped me required patience I didn't initially want to practice. God seemed far less interested in giving me immediate answers than He was in becoming the kind of person who could carry those answers wisely.

I've come to believe there's a profound difference between giving up and surrendering.

At first glance, they can appear similar because both involve releasing control. But underneath the surface, they're entirely different responses.

Giving up says, "It doesn't matter anymore."

Surrender says, "I trust that I don't have to control everything."

Giving up abandons hope.

Surrender releases ownership.

Giving up grows from despair.

Surrender grows from trust.

One quits.

The other rests.

That distinction changed the way I began approaching both prayer and difficult decisions. I realized I had spent much of my life treating prayer as though it were primarily about receiving instructions or changing outcomes. While God certainly answers prayers in remarkable ways, I've also discovered that prayer often accomplishes something even deeper.

Sometimes prayer changes the person praying.

Sometimes nothing around you changes at all.

The relationship is still complicated.

The diagnosis remains.

The business challenge hasn't disappeared.

The uncertainty continues.

Yet somehow you leave prayer seeing the same circumstances differently.

Not because the problem became smaller.

Because your perspective became larger.

I've begun to think of prayer less as a way of convincing God to adopt my plans and more as an opportunity for Him to reshape mine. It becomes a place where my fears slow down long enough for wisdom to catch up. My emotions still have a voice, but they no longer dominate the conversation.

That's one of the reasons the pause has become so meaningful to me.

Throughout this book, we've explored the pause through the lenses of psychology, neuroscience, emotional regulation, and decision-making. But for me, there has always been another dimension to it.

The pause creates space for God.

It creates room for wisdom that panic cannot hear. It invites discernment into conversations that urgency tries to rush. It allows conviction, peace, and quiet confidence to emerge where anxiety once demanded immediate action.

Whether you understand that quiet voice as God's leading or simply as the clarity that comes through deep reflection, the principle remains remarkably similar.

Noise makes discernment difficult.

Silence makes it possible.

One prayer from that season has stayed with me ever since. Before Nicole and I sat down for lunch during one of the most difficult seasons of our relationship, I prayed words I had never prayed before.

"God, if Your plan is for us not to be together, give us the grace to part kindly."

At first, those words surprised even me.

They weren't bargaining.

They weren't manipulating.

They weren't trying to force a particular ending.

For the first time, I wasn't asking God to guarantee the outcome I wanted.

I was surrendering the outcome altogether.

That prayer didn't instantly answer every question. It didn't erase uncertainty. It didn't hand me a roadmap for the future.

What it did was change my posture.

Instead of demanding certainty, I began learning to trust.

That may have been the greatest miracle of all.

When people hear the phrase 15 More Minutes, they often imagine waiting for another person. They picture giving someone else more time to explain, apologize, or change.

Sometimes that's exactly what it means.

But I've come to realize it often means something much deeper.

Sometimes fifteen more minutes isn't about waiting for someone else.

It's about waiting long enough to hear the still, quiet voice that panic keeps interrupting.

Fear usually shouts.

Faith almost always whispers.

The louder voice isn't necessarily the wiser one.

That's why the quieter voice deserves a vote.

As you reflect on your own life, consider where you're demanding certainty. What outcome are you trying to control? What decision are you trying to force because waiting feels unbearable? What would it look like to trust without pretending you know how the story ends? What would change

if you surrendered the outcome while continuing to give your best effort?

Take a few moments to reflect on these questions:

When has waiting strengthened your faith?

What decision are you trying to force?

What are you afraid will happen if you don't control the outcome?

How has uncertainty shaped your character?

What would trusting look like today?

Over the next week, whenever you find yourself demanding certainty, pause before demanding an answer. Instead of asking, What should I do? ask a different question.

What is this season trying to teach me?

Sit with the question.

Don't rush the answer.

Sometimes the greatest lessons arrive quietly, and only after we've stopped insisting that they arrive on our timetable.

Faith isn't believing you'll always get the ending you want.

Faith is believing you don't have to write the ending before it's time.

Sometimes the greatest act of faith...

is giving God fifteen more minutes.

15 More Minutes

PART IV

**BUILDING A FIFTEEN
MORE MINUTES LIFE**

Chapter 17: The Promise

What good is wisdom if you forget it the moment you need it most?

That question stayed with me long after I understood the ideas you've been reading throughout this book. Understanding why emotional storms happen is valuable. Recognizing premature certainty is valuable. Learning how our brains work under stress is valuable. But none of that matters if those lessons disappear the moment emotions become overwhelming. Wisdom that only exists in calm moments isn't enough. It has to survive the storm.

The difficult reality is that emotional storms never announce themselves. No one wakes up in the morning thinking, Today I'm going to destroy an important relationship. No one plans to send the text they'll regret, resign from the job they'll wish they had kept, or say words they'll spend years trying to take back. Storms arrive unexpectedly. They interrupt ordinary days with extraordinary emotion, and before we realize what's happening, urgency begins masquerading as wisdom.

That's why the most important decision isn't the one you make during the storm.

It's the one you make before it.

For years, I believed that once I understood my own patterns, I would naturally stop repeating them. Like so many people, I would leave a painful experience determined that it would never happen again. After an argument, I'd think, I'll never say something like that again. After sending an impulsive

message, I'd promise myself, I'll never send another text like that. After reacting emotionally, I'd quietly resolve, I'll never lose control again.

Those promises were sincere.

Until the next storm arrived.

That's the problem with emotional flooding. When emotions become intense, our brains don't simply process information differently—they temporarily lose access to lessons that seemed perfectly obvious while we were calm. The philosophy still exists. We just can't hear it over the noise. That's why understanding alone isn't enough. Insight matters, but commitment matters more. We need something stronger than memory. We need a promise we've already decided to keep before our emotions begin negotiating with us.

That realization eventually led to the tattoo on the inside of my wrist.

People often ask me about it. Some assume it's branding. Others think it's connected to a business or a speaking career. A few imagine it's simply a design I liked. The truth is much quieter than that. I didn't choose that location because I wanted other people to notice it. I chose it because I knew I would.

Every time I reach for a cup of coffee.

Every time I shake someone's hand.

Every time I pick up my phone.

Every difficult conversation.

Every emotionally charged decision.

Every ordinary day.

I see it.

That's why it's there.

The tattoo isn't meant to impress anyone else.

It's there to interrupt me.

When my emotions begin convincing me that immediate action is the only reasonable response, I wanted something that would quietly ask me to stop. Not forever. Just long enough for my calm self to catch up. It isn't decoration. It isn't marketing. It's an interruption built into my daily life—a reminder of a commitment I made to myself after recognizing the pattern behind so many of my greatest regrets.

The symbol itself carries meaning that continues to remind me of why the promise matters. It's a circle, but not a complete one. There's an intentional opening. Inside that opening is the number fifteen. People often ask what the design represents, but for me, it has always pointed to something larger than the artwork itself. The incomplete circle reminds me that the story is rarely finished, no matter how convinced I feel that I already know the ending. The opening represents possibility. It reminds me that another conversation is still possible, another perspective may still emerge, another chapter has yet to be written. The number fifteen reminds me to create space before deciding that the ending has already arrived.

The symbol doesn't represent certainty.

It represents openness.

It reminds me that life deserves a little more room before I declare the story over.

But the tattoo itself isn't the point.

The promise is.

The promise I made wasn't written for anyone else. I don't expect everyone to adopt the same words or express it the same way. This was simply the commitment I needed after seeing the damage emotional urgency had caused in my own life.

I promised myself that I would never again make a permanent decision while standing inside a temporary emotional storm. Not in anger. Not in grief. Not in fear. Not when loneliness convinces me I already know how the story ends. Not when shame tells me I'll never recover. Not when exhaustion whispers that quitting is my only option.

The next time I feel the urge to burn something down, I will pause first.

Every time.

No exceptions.

That's what I tattooed onto my wrist.

Not a logo.

A promise.

The reason that promise has become so important is because promises are made before they're tested. You can't negotiate effectively with yourself in the middle of emotional flooding. By the time the storm reaches full strength, your emotions have already become remarkably convincing. They know

exactly how to argue their case. They will explain why this situation is different, why waiting isn't necessary this time, and why immediate action is the wisest choice. The storm always sounds reasonable while you're standing inside it.

That's why wisdom prepares before it's needed.

We don't fasten seatbelts after an accident has already happened. Fire departments don't practice drills while the building is burning. Pilots don't learn emergency procedures during turbulence. Preparation always comes first because once the crisis begins, there isn't time to invent the plan.

The same is true emotionally.

The promise has to exist before the storm arrives.

Not everyone needs a tattoo to remember that promise. In fact, most people probably shouldn't get one simply because I did. The reminder itself isn't what matters. What matters is finding something that interrupts the pattern before the pattern takes over.

For some people, that reminder might be a note taped to the bathroom mirror. For someone else, it may become the wallpaper on a phone that's checked dozens of times every day. It could be a bracelet, a ring, a card tucked into a wallet, or a journal that's opened each morning. For others, the reminder may simply become one question they've committed to asking whenever emotions begin rising: Has the calm version of me had a chance to vote?

The object has no power.

The remembering does.

As we've walked through these chapters together, my hope has never been that you would borrow my promise. My hope is that you'll discover your own. The words matter far less than the commitment behind them.

So let me ask you something.

What commitment do you need to make before your next storm arrives?

What reminder will help you remember it?

What future regret are you determined never to repeat?

Those questions aren't really about this book.

They're about your future.

They're about becoming the kind of person who prepares for emotional storms instead of being surprised by them every time they arrive.

Take a few minutes to reflect before moving on. What pattern are you ready to end? What promise would your future self thank you for making today? If you forgot everything else you've read in these pages, what one commitment would you carry with you for the rest of your life?

Then write it down.

Write your promise in your own words. Sign your name beneath it. Write today's date. Not because ink changes people, but because commitments become more meaningful when we choose to make them tangible. As you write, consider these questions:

What storm visits you most often?

What permanent decision are you most tempted to make during that storm?

What reminder would help interrupt that pattern?

What promise are you willing to make to yourself today?

When you finish this chapter, don't simply turn the page.

Create your reminder today.

Not tomorrow.

Today.

Whether it's a note, a bracelet, a calendar reminder, a lock-screen image, or something even more permanent, choose something your future self won't be able to ignore. One day, perhaps sooner than you expect, another storm will arrive. When it does, you won't be thinking about this chapter. You'll be feeling fear, anger, grief, disappointment, or uncertainty. That's exactly why the reminder needs to be waiting for you before the storm begins.

I don't know what your next storm will look like.

I only know that it's coming.

For all of us.

When it does, I hope you remember this promise—not because I wrote these words, but because of the life waiting for you on the other side of one wiser decision.

Fifteen more minutes.

For the rest of your life.

Chapter 18: Create Your Pause

No one plans to make the worst decision of their life.

That's what makes emotional storms so dangerous. They don't send invitations or warnings. They don't wait until we've had enough sleep, finished our coffee, or gathered our thoughts. They arrive in the middle of ordinary days, and before we realize what's happening, we're trying to solve tomorrow's problems with a brain that can barely think clearly about today.

Most people don't fail because they don't know what to do.

They fail because they're trying to figure out what to do while they're emotionally overwhelmed.

But what if you didn't have to improvise?

What if your pause already had a plan?

That question changed everything for me. Throughout this book, we've explored why emotional storms distort our thinking, why certainty can be deceptive, and why the calm version of ourselves deserves a vote. Those ideas are powerful, but they only become useful when they move from theory into practice. The goal isn't to admire the philosophy. The goal is to live it. That requires preparation.

Nobody becomes emotionally wise by accident.

If you've ever trained for a marathon, learned a musical instrument, or built physical strength in a gym, you understand this principle. You don't wake up one morning with endurance or discipline. You build it through repetition.

Emotional wisdom works the same way. The pause isn't something you magically discover when life gets difficult. It's something you practice long before life demands it.

The people who appear calm during a crisis aren't usually calmer because life has been easier for them. More often, they've learned to recognize the storm sooner. They've built habits that interrupt panic before panic takes over. They've practiced returning to themselves.

The first step is learning to recognize your own storm.

Every person has warning signs, but they don't all look the same. For some people, the first clue is racing thoughts. Their mind begins jumping from one worst-case scenario to another. Others notice a tightness in their chest or a racing heartbeat. Some become restless and can't sit still. Others become unusually quiet and withdraw. You might notice your breathing becoming shallow or your shoulders tightening without realizing it. Maybe your warning sign is the sudden need to solve the problem immediately. Maybe it's the moment you begin thinking in absolutes: They always... I never... This will never change... I already know how this ends.

Those thoughts aren't the storm.

They're the weather report.

The sooner you recognize them, the sooner you can choose a different response.

You can't interrupt a storm you don't recognize.

That's why awareness is always the first step toward wisdom.

Once you know what your storm looks like, the next step is creating a pause plan before you ever need one. Think of it as an emergency response plan for your emotions. We make plans for fires, medical emergencies, and financial setbacks because we know we'll think more clearly if we've already decided what to do. Emotional storms deserve the same preparation.

Your plan might sound something like this:

When I notice my thoughts racing, my chest tightening, or the overwhelming urge to make a permanent decision, I will not act immediately. Instead, I will sleep on it, take a walk, pray, write in my journal, call someone I trust, exercise, or simply wait until tomorrow before deciding.

The details will be different for each person.

What matters is that you've already decided what you'll do before your emotions begin making decisions for you.

Preparation is always stronger than improvisation.

One of the simplest tools I've found is what I call the Five-Minute Reset. It's not complicated, and that's precisely why it works. When you notice yourself entering a storm, stop moving for a moment. Sit down if you can. Take several slow, intentional breaths and allow your nervous system to begin settling. Then ask yourself, What am I actually feeling? Be specific. Are you angry? Embarrassed? Afraid? Lonely? Ashamed? Disappointed? Naming the emotion often weakens its grip.

Once you've identified what you're feeling, ask a second question: What story am I telling myself? Are you assuming

someone doesn't care? Are you predicting the future? Are you confusing fear with certainty? Finally, ask the question that has become the heartbeat of this book: Has the calm version of me had a chance to vote?

Five intentional minutes won't solve every problem.

But they may prevent decisions that create problems you'll spend years trying to undo.

Another lesson I've learned is that major decisions are rarely meant to be made alone. Emotional storms isolate us. They convince us that no one else understands, that asking for advice is weakness, or that we've already figured everything out. That's exactly when we need other voices the most.

Every person needs a personal board of advisors.

Not a large crowd.

Just a handful of people whose judgment you trust when yours becomes clouded.

Who are the people in your life who stay calm when you become emotional? Who tells you the truth instead of simply agreeing with you? Who has earned permission to challenge your certainty without threatening your dignity? Who knows your patterns well enough to gently say, "I think this is the storm talking"?

Choose those people now.

Don't wait until you're desperate.

Another factor we often overlook is the environment surrounding our decisions. We like to imagine that our thinking is completely independent, but it rarely is. Think

about the moments when you're most emotionally vulnerable. Maybe it's late at night when you're exhausted and scrolling through old messages. Maybe it's after a few drinks when your emotions feel louder than your judgment. Maybe it's during long stretches of isolation, chronic stress, or constant exposure to social media. Sometimes the environment quietly amplifies the storm.

Changing the environment can change the decision.

That might mean putting your phone away after a certain hour. It might mean refusing to send important emails late at night. It could mean taking a walk before responding to conflict or choosing to have difficult conversations face-to-face instead of through text messages. Small environmental changes often create enormous emotional benefits.

As we've moved through this book together, we've asked dozens of questions. I want to gather the most important ones into one place because they form a practical checklist you can return to for the rest of your life.

Before making any permanent decision, ask yourself:

What am I feeling right now?

What story am I telling myself?

Am I emotionally flooded?

What decision have I already made that's leading me toward this one?

Has the calm version of me had a chance to vote?

Am I waiting... or avoiding?

Would I still choose this if I already felt at peace?

Is this pressure... or reality?

What might change if I gave this fifteen more minutes?

You don't need to memorize every question.

You simply need enough of them to interrupt the momentum of the storm.

Over time, those questions become habits, and habits are strengthened by rituals. That's why I encourage you to create a daily rhythm that keeps your calm self close. Your ritual doesn't need to be complicated. It could be spending a few quiet minutes in prayer each morning, writing in a journal before bed, taking a daily walk without your phone, practicing deep breathing, meditating, reading something that grounds your perspective, or reviewing your promise before beginning the day.

The ritual itself isn't what changes you.

Consistency does.

It's the repeated act of returning to wisdom that gradually rewires the way you respond to life's storms.

It's also important to remember what this book has never promised.

It has never promised perfection.

You'll still become angry.

You'll still become discouraged.

You'll still have moments when fear feels louder than faith and urgency feels more convincing than patience. Emotional

storms are part of being human. The goal isn't to eliminate them.

The goal is to recognize them sooner.

To recover more quickly.

To give wisdom more opportunities to speak before emotion casts the deciding vote.

As you think about your own life, ask yourself a few simple questions. What would your personal pause actually look like? Where do you think most clearly? What helps your nervous system settle? Who can you call when your emotions become louder than your judgment? How will you remind yourself to pause before reacting?

Take a few moments to write your answers.

What are your earliest warning signs?

What helps your calm self return?

Who belongs on your wisdom team?

What situations deserve an automatic pause?

Most importantly, write your personal pause plan. Don't leave it as an idea floating around in your mind. Put it on paper. Make it specific enough that your future self won't have to guess what to do.

Before you finish this chapter, create your pause.

Not mentally.

Physically.

Write it. Print it. Save it. Put it somewhere you'll see it before your next storm arrives. Don't wait until you're overwhelmed to decide how you'll respond. Build the habit while you're calm, because that's when preparation is possible.

Wisdom isn't built during the storm.

It's built in the quiet moments before the storm arrives.

The pause doesn't happen by accident.

You create it...

long before you ever need it.

Chapter 19: Your Personal Storm Forecast

If you hear on the evening news that there's an eighty percent chance of severe thunderstorms tomorrow, you probably won't panic. You'll prepare. You might grab an umbrella before leaving the house. You may cancel plans that can wait, move the patio furniture inside, charge your phone, or check that your car is parked somewhere safe. None of those actions stop the storm from coming. They simply change the way you enter it.

Now imagine treating your emotional life the same way.

What if you knew there was an eighty percent chance that tomorrow's circumstances would make you impatient, discouraged, reactive, or emotionally overwhelmed? What if you knew you were entering a season where your judgment would be more vulnerable than usual? Wouldn't you prepare for that too?

The forecast doesn't prevent the storm.

It changes how you walk through it.

For most of my life, I treated emotional storms as though they appeared out of nowhere. I believed they simply happened to me. Looking back, I realize that wasn't true at all. The storm didn't arrive without warning. I just wasn't paying attention to the forecast.

One of the greatest lessons I've learned is that emotional storms almost always leave clues before they arrive. They rarely appear without warning. There are conversations that

consistently unsettle us. Certain people have a way of activating old wounds. Particular environments make us more reactive. Some disappointments linger longer than others. There are days when we're physically exhausted, mentally overwhelmed, emotionally isolated, or spiritually depleted, and yet we still expect ourselves to make life-changing decisions as though nothing has changed.

The problem isn't that our storms are unpredictable.

The problem is that we've never learned to notice the patterns.

Every person has emotional weather patterns unique to them. Some people become most vulnerable after several nights of poor sleep. Others notice their emotional resilience disappear during seasons of financial pressure. Some react strongly to rejection or criticism. Others struggle when they feel ignored, misunderstood, or excluded. Loneliness becomes the forecast for one person. Chronic stress becomes the forecast for another. Social comparison quietly drains someone's confidence, while uncertainty sends someone else searching for immediate relief.

None of those experiences automatically lead to poor decisions.

But they do increase the likelihood that our emotions will begin speaking louder than our wisdom.

That's why knowing your own patterns matters so much.

The goal isn't to eliminate your storms.

The goal is to recognize your weather.

Some storms are connected not just to circumstances but to seasons. Every year, certain dates carry emotional weight whether we consciously acknowledge them or not. Holidays can magnify loneliness. Birthdays can stir regret. Wedding anniversaries after divorce can reopen grief. The anniversary of a parent's death may bring emotions you thought had already healed. Even positive transitions—a new job, a move across the country, retirement, becoming a parent, or watching children leave home—can create emotional turbulence.

Life moves in seasons.

So do our hearts.

When we recognize those patterns, they lose some of their power to surprise us. Awareness doesn't eliminate grief or anxiety, but it prevents those emotions from quietly becoming invisible decision-makers.

I've also discovered that every storm has early warning signs.

The challenge is learning to recognize yours before they become overwhelming.

For me, one of the earliest signs is that my thoughts begin speeding up. I become increasingly convinced that immediate action is necessary. My curiosity shrinks while my certainty grows. I become less patient. My internal dialogue becomes harsher. Small frustrations suddenly feel enormous. Sleep becomes more difficult. My body carries tension I don't immediately notice. The language in my mind shifts from possibility to absolutes.

They always.

I never.

Nothing is going to change.

I already know how this ends.

Those thoughts aren't reality.

They're radar.

They're telling me a storm is forming.

The earlier I recognize those signs, the easier it becomes to interrupt the cycle before it reaches full strength.

Think about weather forecasters for a moment. They don't wait until the tornado touches the ground before issuing a warning. They monitor changing conditions. They recognize patterns. They understand that preparation is most effective before the storm arrives.

The same principle applies emotionally.

If you already know next week will be unusually stressful, prepare differently. Protect your schedule instead of overloading it. Prioritize sleep instead of sacrificing it. Exercise even if you don't feel like it. Spend more time in prayer or quiet reflection. Delay unnecessary conflict. Avoid making major life decisions if you know your emotional reserves are already depleted.

Preparation isn't fear.

Preparation is wisdom.

That's why I encourage you to build what I call a personal storm plan. Think of it as your emotional emergency protocol.

While you're calm, decide what you'll do when the warning signs begin to appear.

Your plan might include something like this:

When I notice my warning signs, I will postpone major decisions. I will reach out to someone I trust. I will exercise, pray, journal, review my promise, and work through my decision filter before taking irreversible action. I will remind myself that clarity is more important than urgency.

The details will look different for everyone.

What matters is that you've already decided how you'll respond before your emotions begin making demands.

When I look back at my relationship with Nicole, I can now see warning signs that were completely invisible to me at the time. The emotional exhaustion didn't appear overnight. My thinking had gradually become more rigid. I stopped asking curious questions and started reaching confident conclusions. I became increasingly convinced that I already knew how the story would end. Fear quietly replaced openness. My body carried more stress than I acknowledged. Instead of interpreting those experiences as signs that I needed to slow down, I mistook them as evidence that I needed to decide faster.

Today, if I noticed those same patterns returning, I would respond very differently.

Not because I now believe storms can be avoided.

Because I've learned they can be recognized.

That may be one of the greatest gifts wisdom offers us.
Yesterday's storms become tomorrow's forecasts.

Every regret leaves behind information.

If we're willing to study it.

Over the years, I've come to believe that storms aren't simply
obstacles.

They're teachers.

Every emotional storm reveals something that calm days often
conceal. They expose our deepest fears, our oldest wounds,
our hidden beliefs, and the habits we've been carrying for
years without realizing it. Storms show us where we still need
healing. They reveal the places where fear still speaks louder
than wisdom.

If we approach them with curiosity instead of shame, they
become some of life's greatest teachers.

The goal isn't to eliminate emotional storms.

The goal is to stop allowing them to become emotional
destroyers.

As you think about your own life, ask yourself a few honest
questions. What storms visit you most often? Can you predict
them before they arrive? What situations consistently make
you less like the person you want to be? What patterns have
you ignored simply because they've become familiar? How
might your life change if you stopped being surprised by your
storms and started preparing for them instead?

Take a few moments to reflect.

What are your biggest emotional triggers?

What time of day, season, or circumstance makes you most reactive?

What physical warning signs appear first?

Who notices your storms before you do?

What would your own personal storm forecast include?

Then take the next step.

Create it.

Write down your biggest triggers. List your earliest warning signs. Identify your healthiest responses. Write the names of the people you'll call when your judgment becomes clouded. Decide which kinds of decisions you'll automatically postpone whenever you recognize you're emotionally flooded.

Don't keep the plan in your head.

Put it somewhere you'll see it before—not during—your next storm.

Because when the rain begins, it will be too late to build the shelter.

You don't have to fear the storm when you know it's coming.

The strongest people aren't the ones who never experience emotional storms.

They're the ones who learned to recognize the forecast before the rain began.

The forecast won't stop the weather.

But it just might change what survives it.

Chapter 20: The Story Isn't Finished Yet

The journey that led to this book began with nine ordinary words typed into a phone.

"To be clear. This is me breaking up with you."

At the time, I believed those words represented the ending of my story. I thought they marked the loss of one of the most important relationships of my life. I believed the pain was about heartbreak, regret, and the consequences of one irreversible decision.

Looking back now, I realize I was wrong.

That moment wasn't the end of my story.

It was the beginning of a question.

A question that eventually became a philosophy.

And that philosophy became the reason you're holding this book.

Sometimes our deepest pain isn't simply something to survive.

Sometimes it's the doorway to discovering why we were meant to walk through it in the first place.

When I think back over the journey we've taken together, I don't see twenty separate chapters. I see one idea examined from twenty different angles. We began by stepping into the storm itself and learning how emotion quietly changes the way we see the world. We explored the danger of premature certainty and the stories our minds invent when pain demands

an explanation. We discovered that every major decision is preceded by a quieter one, often made long before we're aware of it. We learned that the calm version of ourselves deserves a vote and that 15 More Minutes was never really about time—it was always about creating enough space for perspective to return.

We explored the difference between waiting and avoiding, recognizing that wisdom sometimes tells us to stay and sometimes tells us to leave. We walked through relationships, parenting, business, leadership, health, and faith, discovering that emotional storms do not respect the boundaries between different areas of our lives. They appear everywhere. Finally, we built a promise, created a pause plan, and learned to recognize our own personal storm forecast before the rain begins.

Those weren't twenty different lessons.

They were twenty different ways of looking at the same truth.

If I could reduce everything you've read to one sentence, it would be this:

Most of our greatest regrets aren't caused by making the wrong decision. They're caused by making a permanent decision while standing inside a temporary emotional state.

Everything else in this book simply helps us live that truth.

I don't know when your next storm will arrive.

It may come tomorrow.

It may come years from now.

It may involve your marriage, your children, your career, your health, your finances, your faith, or a dream you've carried quietly for decades. It may arrive in the form of one unexpected conversation, one phone call, one diagnosis, one disappointment, or one opportunity that feels too urgent to ignore.

It will come.

Not because you've failed.

Not because you've done something wrong.

Because you're human.

The purpose of this book has never been to help you avoid emotional storms. That's impossible. Storms are part of the human experience. They visit every marriage, every family, every business, every leader, every parent, every believer, and every person who has ever cared deeply about something that could be lost.

The goal has always been something much simpler.

To recognize the storm before it begins making decisions for you.

Every storm will eventually ask you the same question.

Who gets to decide?

Will fear decide?

Will pride decide?

Will anger decide?

Will loneliness decide?

Will exhaustion decide?

Or will the calm version of you finally have a chance to vote?

That question is no longer just an interesting idea.

It's a choice you'll make again and again for the rest of your life.

Long after you've forgotten specific stories from this book, I hope you remember that question.

Throughout these pages, I've occasionally mentioned the symbol on my wrist. Before we finish, I want to return to it one last time—not because of the tattoo itself, but because of what it reminds me every day. The circle is intentionally unfinished. There's a small opening that interrupts what would otherwise be a perfect shape.

For me, that opening has become one of the most meaningful images in my life.

It reminds me that the story isn't finished.

No matter how convinced I become that I already know how something will end, the circle reminds me to leave room for another conversation, another perspective, another act of grace, another opportunity to grow. It reminds me that certainty often arrives before truth and that wisdom leaves the door open just a little longer.

The unfinished circle has become a quiet invitation to resist writing endings before life has finished telling the story.

When I think about Nicole now, I don't think first about the breakup.

I think about the gift.

Whether our relationship lasted forever was never the point. The relationship gave me far more than companionship. It held up a mirror that allowed me to see patterns I had carried for years without recognizing them. It exposed fears I thought I had hidden. It revealed the ways I confused urgency with wisdom, certainty with truth, and relief with peace.

For that, I will always be grateful.

The relationship was the catalyst.

The philosophy became the gift.

Had everything unfolded exactly the way I thought I wanted, I honestly don't know whether I would have discovered what this journey had been trying to teach me all along.

Sometimes life gives us answers disguised as heartbreak.

Before we part, I'd like to speak to you personally.

I don't know what you're carrying as you read these final pages. Maybe you're standing at a crossroads in your marriage. Maybe you're considering walking away from a career you've spent years building. Maybe you're grieving someone you've lost or trying to decide whether to trust again after being hurt. Maybe you're exhausted from parenting, overwhelmed by financial pressure, questioning your faith, or wondering whether a dream you've carried for years is finally over.

I don't know your circumstances.

Because I don't know your story, I won't pretend to tell you what decision you should make.

That's never been my goal.

My hope is something much more modest—and, I believe, much more important.

I hope you make your decision wisely.

I hope you refuse to let today's emotions write tomorrow's regrets.

I hope you become curious before becoming certain.

I hope you ask better questions before demanding immediate answers.

Most of all, I hope the calm version of you has a chance to speak before the storm casts the deciding vote.

Before you close this book, I want to leave you with a few final questions. Sit with them. Don't rush to answer them. Let them do their work.

What decision have you been rushing?

What ending have you already written in your mind?

What certainty deserves another question?

Who deserves another conversation?

What part of your story have you quietly declared finished that may still have another chapter waiting to be written?

As you reflect on everything we've explored together, consider writing down your answers to these final questions.

What has changed about the way you think since you began this journey?

Which chapter challenged you the most?

Which framework do you want to carry into the rest of your life?

What promise are you making to yourself today?

What story are you no longer willing to end prematurely?

Then, when life eventually places another difficult decision in front of you, don't try to remember every page of this book.

Remember one question.

Has the calm version of me had a chance to vote?

If the answer is no...

Pause.

Then give yourself fifteen more minutes.

As I finish writing these words, I find myself doing something I've done countless times over the past few years. I glance down at my wrist. I see the unfinished circle. I see the number fifteen. I don't think about the breakup anymore. I don't replay old conversations or revisit old pain.

I remember the promise.

I remember the person I'm committed to becoming.

I remember that no temporary emotional storm deserves the authority to make permanent decisions about the rest of my life.

That's what the symbol means to me now.

Not regret.

Not loss.

Not even fifteen minutes.

A promise.

This book was never really about me.

It was never really about Nicole.

It was never even about fifteen minutes.

It has always been about protecting the future version of yourself from decisions the hurting version of yourself was never meant to make.

If these pages have done that—even once—then every difficult moment that led to writing them has been worth it.

There will be another storm.

There always is.

When it comes, I hope you remember that you don't have to decide while the rain is falling.

Your story is still being written.

Leave the circle open.

Give the calm version of you a vote.

And before you make a permanent decision...

Give it fifteen more minutes.

Epilogue: Fifteen More Minutes Later

Quite some time has passed since I first looked down at my wrist and saw the small, unfinished circle with the number fifteen resting inside it. I still notice it almost every day. Sometimes it's when I reach for my morning coffee. Sometimes it's in the middle of a difficult conversation. Sometimes it's while I'm sitting quietly, trying to make sense of a decision that doesn't have an obvious answer. The tattoo hasn't changed, but what it means to me certainly has.

When I first got it, it represented one relationship. It reminded me of the worst decision I had ever made and the lesson that grew from it. Today, it reminds me of something much bigger. It reminds me of the promise I made to myself—that I would never again allow a temporary emotional storm to make a permanent decision for me. The tattoo is no longer about regret. It's about intention. It isn't a reminder of who I was on my worst day. It's a reminder of who I want to be on every day that follows.

By now, you've probably been carrying the same question since the opening pages of this book.

"So... what happened with Nicole?"

The answer is beautiful, but probably not in the way you expect.

Before I tell you where we are today, I have to tell you how close we came to never getting here. And I have to correct

something, because the part of this story most people remember is the part they get most wrong.

By the time those two weeks had finished with me, I was no longer the man who had typed those nine words. I had stopped reacting and started reflecting. I was humbled. I was sorry. And I understood, with painful clarity, exactly what I had thrown away.

So when Nicole agreed to meet me for lunch, I did not go there to be civil. I went there to fight for her.

And sitting across the table from me, gently and kindly, she told me no.

We said a warm goodbye. Then I walked back to my car carrying the full weight of a decision I could not undo. I had finally asked. The answer was no. It was over.

I started to drive. A few minutes down the road, a song came on the radio. Pink, "Just Give Me a Reason." And the composure I had held together all through that polite lunch simply broke.

So through tears, I picked up my phone, and I sent her three words.

"15 more minutes?"

I need to be honest about what that text actually was, because for a long time I believed it was the hero of my story. It was not. It was not wisdom, and it was not some clever last-minute rescue. It was a grown man falling apart to a love song in his car, begging for something the woman he loved had told him no to only minutes earlier, to his face.

The decision that truly shaped everything had been made weeks before that drive, in the nine words I sent at the height of my pain. That was the permanent decision. That was the storm. There is always a decision before the decision, and I had made mine in the middle of the worst of it. The text in the car did not cause anything. It was the evidence of it.

And then she replied.

Except she did not send words back.

She sent a place. An address. A Starbucks at 3715 South US Highway 301, in Riverview, Florida.

It was not yes. It was not no.

It was, quite simply, *come*.

So I went. And that turned into the two of us sitting in her car for six hours. Not fixing anything. Not solving anything. Just talking, the way we should have talked long before I ever typed those nine words.

I need you to understand how close all of it came to never happening. Not the lesson itself. The two weeks that took me apart had already forged me into a different man, and if she had never replied, every word I have written here would still be true. I would still have become someone I am grateful to be.

But it very likely would have stayed a quiet lesson I carried alone for the rest of my life, one I might never have said out loud. Her reply is the reason it didn't. All of it came down to a single door left open, on an afternoon when it would have been so much easier to close it.

We did find our way back to each other. And the life we were dreaming of before I sent those nine words — we are still building it, one beautiful day at a time.

Because of one reply I did not deserve — from a woman who responded to my worst moment with grace I will never fully comprehend — I get to spend the rest of my life beside the woman I love.

Not because we ignored what happened. Not because we pretended the breakup had never existed. And certainly not because fifteen minutes magically fixed everything. The relationship we lost had to end so that something healthier could begin.

When we started talking again, we didn't spend our time trying to erase the past. We spent it trying to understand it. We had conversations that lasted for hours. Sometimes we laughed about things we once thought would destroy us. Sometimes we cried over the pain we had both carried. Sometimes we simply sat together in silence, realizing how much both of us had changed during the time apart.

One conversation, in particular, has stayed with me.

Nicole had been reading early drafts of what would eventually become my TED Talk. There was one section she struggled with—not because she disagreed with the message, but because she didn't want my purpose to become dependent on our relationship. She told me something I hadn't expected to hear. She said she hoped I would continue sharing this idea whether we ended up together or not. She wanted the message to matter even if our story didn't unfold the way either of us hoped.

In that moment, I realized she wasn't trying to protect herself. She was protecting the idea. She wanted this philosophy to belong to anyone who might need it someday, not just to the two people who had lived it.

Later, she told me something I'll never forget. She said that conversation was the moment she decided she wanted to move forward with me. Not because I had convinced her. Not because I had found the perfect words. But because, for the first time, she saw someone who was no longer trying to win. She saw someone genuinely trying to understand.

Looking back, that's what fifteen more minutes had become.

Not convincing.

Understanding.

Today, we're still building the life we once thought we had lost. We still disagree. We still misunderstand each other sometimes. We still experience emotional storms, because that's what happens when two imperfect people choose to build a life together. But the storms no longer get to write the ending. We've learned to recognize them, respect them, and most importantly, refuse to let them make decisions that belong to calmer moments.

For a long time, I believed the miracle of this story was getting another chance. Looking back now, I don't think that was the miracle at all.

The miracle was becoming someone different.

Someone slower to react.

Quicker to listen.

Less certain.

More curious.

Less interested in being right.

More interested in understanding.

The greatest transformation didn't happen around me. It happened within me. Ironically, that inner transformation became the very thing that made reconciliation possible. Even if our relationship had never been restored, I still would have become someone I am deeply grateful to be.

When all of this began, I thought I was trying to save a relationship. I had no idea I was discovering my life's work.

One painful season eventually became a TED Talk. The TED Talk became this book. The book became conversations with thousands of people from every walk of life. I've met people who almost quit their jobs, almost ended their marriages, almost walked away from lifelong friendships, almost gave up on dreams they now cherish, and almost made decisions they later thanked themselves for postponing.

Again and again, people have shared stories that begin with the same sentence:

"I was about to..."

I was about to send the text.

I was about to file for divorce.

I was about to quit.

I was about to walk away.

Then they paused.

Sometimes the outcome changed. Sometimes it didn't. But almost every person told me the same thing: they were grateful they gave the calm version of themselves a chance to be heard.

That's when I realized this philosophy no longer belonged to me.

It belonged to them.

People sometimes assume that because I wrote this book, I no longer struggle with emotional decision-making. I wish that were true. It isn't.

I still have storms.

I still become impatient.

I still feel fear.

I still catch myself wanting certainty before wisdom has had time to arrive.

The difference isn't that I've stopped being human. The difference is that I recognize the weather sooner. I notice the familiar thoughts before I believe them. I recognize the tightening in my chest, the urgency in my mind, and the quiet temptation to mistake relief for wisdom.

Most importantly, I know the questions to ask.

Has the calm version of me had a chance to vote?

What story am I telling myself?

Am I reacting to reality, or to fear?

Those questions don't eliminate the storm.

They simply keep the storm from making the decision.

I've also learned to be grateful for things I once prayed would disappear.

I'm grateful to God for His patience when I demanded immediate answers. I'm grateful for healing that came slowly instead of instantly, because it lasted. I'm grateful for painful seasons that forced me to become someone I never would have become otherwise.

And I'm deeply grateful for Nicole.

Not simply because she gave me another chance, but because she unknowingly became the catalyst for everything that followed. Without her, there would have been no breakup. Without the breakup, there would have been no question. Without the question, there would have been no philosophy. Without the philosophy, there would have been no movement.

Sometimes the greatest gifts arrive disguised as the moments we would have given anything to avoid.

Not long ago, I found myself in the middle of a difficult business conversation. The pressure was building, emotions were rising, and every instinct in me wanted to respond immediately. I could feel that familiar urgency telling me that something had to happen right now. As I reached across the table, I caught a glimpse of my wrist.

I smiled.

I took a breath.

I asked for a little time to think.

The conversation resumed later that day, and it unfolded completely differently than it would have if I had spoken from frustration instead of clarity. Walking away afterward, I realized something that made me laugh.

I don't just teach this philosophy anymore.

I live it.

Every single day.

If I could leave you with one final thought, it would simply be this.

I don't know what chapter you're living in right now. I don't know what conversation you're avoiding, what relationship you're grieving, what dream you're questioning, or what decision feels unbearably urgent. I don't know what storm you're standing in.

But I do know this.

Your future self deserves a voice.

Don't let today's pain become tomorrow's regret. Don't allow fear to convince you that the story has already been written. Don't mistake urgency for wisdom or certainty for truth. Some decisions truly need to be made. Others simply need another conversation. The challenge—and the opportunity—is learning the difference.

Before you close this book, I want to ask you for one final favor.

Don't turn the page just yet.

Sit quietly for a moment.

Take a breath.

Think about the decision you've been rushing.

The relationship you've already declared finished.

The dream you've quietly buried.

The conversation you've convinced yourself isn't worth having.

Then ask yourself one question:

Has the calm version of me had a chance to vote?

If the answer is no, perhaps that's all you need to know today.

As I finish writing these final words, I find myself looking down at my wrist once again. I see the unfinished circle. I see the opening that reminds me the story is never over as long as there's still room for grace, growth, understanding, and another conversation. I see the number fifteen, and I remember that this was never really about a number.

It was about a promise.

I once thought fifteen more minutes would save my relationship.

Looking back, I think it saved the person who was in that relationship.

This book was never really about me. It was never really about Nicole. It was never even about fifteen minutes.

It has always been about protecting the future version of yourself from decisions the hurting version of yourself was never meant to make.

There will be another storm.

There always is.

When it comes, I hope you remember that you don't have to decide while the rain is falling.

Your story is still being written.

Leave the circle open.

Give the calm version of you a vote.

And before you make your next permanent decision...

Give it fifteen more minutes.

For the rest of your life.