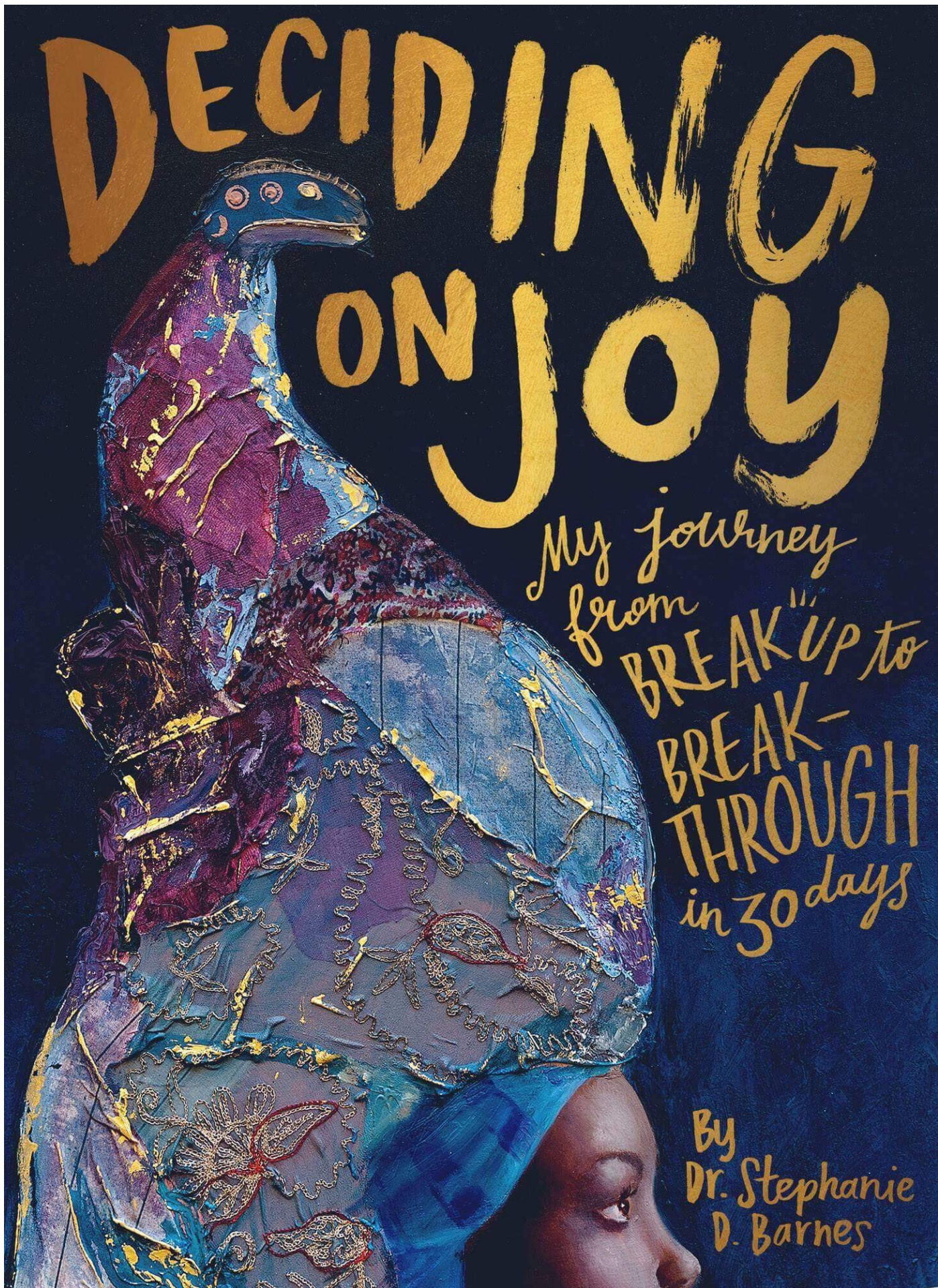


DECIDING ON JOY

My journey
from
BREAK^{UP} to
BREAK-
THROUGH
in 30 days

By
Dr. Stephanie
D. Barnes



Stephanie D. Barnes

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DEDICATION

*For all the women who ever asked the question,
“Will I ever get over my broken heart?”*

(by the way the answer is,
Absof***inglutely Yes!)

FOREWORD

by Dr. Tamara Pizzoli

It is my sincere belief that with the exception of a few reality television stars, no one gets married expecting to get divorced. Anyone who has experienced a separation or actual dissolution of a marriage can attest that the feelings associated with splitting from one's spouse can be some of the most intense and volatile imaginable. Disappointment, regret, fear, misunderstanding, anger and even rage are to be not only expected, but managed—it's a lengthy process that many find overwhelming, at best.

In 2014, I unexpectedly became a member of the Thirty-Something and Divorced set. Navigating the practical and personal end of my marriage sent me to the self-help section of my local bookstore on several occasions. Though I found many literary gems that assisted in my transition out of what was a marital union with my ex-husband, I can say that after reading *Deciding on Joy* by Dr. Stephanie D. Barnes, having access to her thoughts and reflections during such a difficult point in my life would have been helpful indeed.

In all of the triumphs and setbacks I've experienced in the last few years, I have developed a strong belief in the following creed: There's no wisdom in keeping what you know to yourself. In fact, the media maven and communicative wonder Oprah Winfrey has been quoted as saying the following: "Everything you know is better when you share it."

Deciding on Joy is a nod to this philosophy. By sharing in great detail her own experiences and responses over a thirty day period to receiving the unanticipated news that her then husband no longer desired to be married, Dr. Barnes offers a sincere and thorough reflective framework for processing, planning, and powering through marital separation. Because each reader's story is varied, Dr. Barnes included interactive components to the text, which invite reflection and thoughtful review.

Witnessing *Deciding on Joy* develop during each stage to finally reach publication has been a wonderful experience. A few summers ago, Dr. Barnes was a guest for the evening at my home in Rome, Italy. As we exchanged our personal narratives, comparing and contrasting aspects and tools of getting through splitting up, I listened attentively as Dr. Barnes described her plan to heal quickly and healthily from divorce in great detail. I was in awe of her resolve, but also quite convinced by the practical exercises she'd already begun. "This sounds like a book," I offered.

What a full circle moment it is to have the privilege to write the foreword to a personal account that, based on its authenticity, content,

context and delivery, is sure to change the minds, hearts and perspectives of countless individuals. It is my hope that you, dear reader, are one of them.

Grab a pen for note taking, and enjoy the process and promise of it all.

INTRODUCTION

On April 16, 2016, my whole world turned upside down. As it turned, I began to write. I wrote in my journal to keep my head from exploding. I had no one to talk to, so I talked to myself. For the next 30 days and beyond, I wrote what I was feeling in raw and visceral form. There was no filter and no need to be anything other than open and honest, regardless of how dirty, ugly, and offensive my emotions may have been.

I am an attorney and business coach by trade, but I am a writer and poet by heart. I heal my soul through my words. Shortly after my divorce was final, I revisited the words I'd penned during our separation and was able to read what I had written. Reviewing the words I had scribed instantly served as a reminder to myself of just how far I had come, and I saw the beauty in the ugliness of my story. It was then that I decided to transform my words from mere journal entries into a complete narrative. I wrote an essay and shared it with a dear friend who remarked, "I believe there is a book here." I breathed greater life into my story and created a roadmap from my journey from breakup to breakthrough. You are invited along to live and learn and experience what is meant for you.

Each chapter shares my actual journal entry edited for clarity (in italics) and the lesson learned (in bold). My reflections on the lessons that follow were written one year later and share powerful revelations that have shaped my journey and can prove illustrative for others. I had the privilege of experiencing my journey figuratively and literally. It just so happened I traveled to Rome three days after my marriage ended. It was a blessing that accelerated my healing and allowed me

to truly experience a catharsis. I was blessed to return to Rome one year later to complete my journey in spirit and in print. Our lives are truly beautiful stories and I am grateful to have the ability to transform my life through the power of my pen.

I also believe our transformation takes place in our actions, so I have identified powerful actions that can bring the change to life. What we think shapes what we do, so I have expressed the powerful beliefs that can emerge. The thirty-one chapters represent the beginning of my journey over the 31 days that followed me hearing those fateful words that ended my marriage of 21 years. Your journey will take the time it takes—just be committed to the destination.

This book is intended to be interactive. Grab a pen and get ready to take notes and participate in your own breakthrough. This text is a tool to learn as well as heal. Your breakthrough will not happen by faith alone. It will happen by the actions you take and the beliefs that shape your actions. Every thought creates an action. Every action informs an outcome. Every outcome gives way to a future. Be deliberate about the future you create. Give power to your thoughts and write down what you are thinking and how you feel. Don't apologize or sugar coat or make your emotions pretty. Be real.

This is for you. Give your thoughts a voice. Begin to write your own story. And just like Dorothy¹, I hope you discover you had the power all along.

¹ At the end of the Wizard of Oz, Dorothy discovers she did not need magic or assistance to get back home, but she had the power to return home when she decided to do so.

Be Still and Find Your Power!

I never thought in a million years I would feel the devastation of hearing my husband of twenty-one years say, “I am not happy. I do not want to be married to you anymore.” It was that simple, yet that complex. Those words fell on my ears like a ton of bricks. I was surprised, but not shocked. Our marriage had become a terminal illness with many promising remissions that was finally on hospice. I was not happy either, but I hung on to hope with a death grip that would not give up despite the obvious dejection. I thought we would work things out. I truly believed that we were finally at a point in our lives and marriage where we could fix our issues once and for all. I believed that love never fails. But in the end, love was not enough for us. He loved me, but he did not want me. The reasons are irrelevant. Hearing I was no longer wanted was devastating. I felt discarded. I felt worthless. I felt betrayed. I felt like my life was over. My life, however, was in no way over. In fact, it was just beginning.

Whether the end is the end or the beginning rests in the power of choice—the choice to lie down and give up or the choice to claw your way out of the pit of your loss.

It is dark and despondent at the bottom of a pit. But a pit is a deceptive place of possibility. When you are lying on the cold and barren floor of your glorious fall with the breath knocked out of you and the fight in you covered into the recesses of your soul, there is only one way to look...up.

Loss is a beautiful thing in the end. Whether it is the heartbreak of divorce, a bad break up, a career loss, a financial downturn or the death of a loved one, a loss is a moment in time when you possess enormous capability in the midst of what seems to be powerlessness. Whether it remains a loss is your choice. When you decide to focus on the possibility of renewal, you begin to create the beauty. Nature teaches us this lesson. After the forest fire burns away the debris, new life is created. The fire seems horrid, but the rebirth is miraculous.

I recall experiencing Hurricane Katrina. The vast devastation and debris that remained immediately after the storm are still etched in

my memory. It was unsightly. It was painful. It was chaotic. It did not seem that anything would be right again. As I began to clean up my home piece by piece, the vast destruction was cleared away and I could begin the cleansing process. After the entire catastrophe was cleaned, I was able to begin rebuilding. And day-by-day, my home transformed from a barely recognizable heap of damage into a renovated and rebirthed abode, even more beautiful than it was before. My loss became something unique and precious, and there were no traces of the devastation the storm left behind. And that's how losses transform.

Even though the world may be spinning around you like a Category 5 hurricane, you are at the center of it all. You cannot control the whirls, the destruction or the debris hurling about, but you *can* stand still in the middle and gather strength. At the center of every storm is a peaceful center. Be still. Be still. Peace. Be still.

There is power in stillness. This is not a moment of inaction, but an opportunity filled with intense energy. Stillness calls for great restraint, great control, and great concentration. It is easy to submit to the chaos of the storm around you. It is easy to surrender to the overbearing pain of what has been done to you and taken from you. It takes strength to be still and build up a peaceful resistance rather than caving in, crumbling, and being sucked into the raging winds of the world around you.

There is power in the stillness of your reserve. There is power in the stillness of your thoughts. There is power in the stillness of standing firm in the center until the storm subsides.

And the storm always subsides. A perpetual tempest does not exist. Even the tempest of all tempests that raged against for the ark ended after forty days and forty nights.

Be still in the center and find yourself.

Powerful Actions

Close Your Eyes.

Stop thinking.

Stop thinking about what was. Don't focus on the past.

Stop thinking about what could have been.

Look beyond your regrets.

Quiet your mind.

Imagine yourself in the calm of your storm.

See the winds whirling around you. See the waves crashing about you.

Realize you are still standing. Acknowledge you have not been washed away by the waves. Recognize you are indeed still standing. You are firmly planted in all of your strength. You are planted in the peace of knowing that "This too shall pass."

Believe it will.

Powerful Belief

State the following affirmations aloud to yourself until you believe them:

I am still standing.

I will not be blown away.

I will not drown beneath the waters.

I am still and gathering strength.

I am strength.

I am strong.

I am powerful.

I am gaining more power every day.

I am stronger than any tempest.

I am stronger than any wind that blows.

This too shall pass.

And I will be standing when it does.

Powerful Thoughts

Write down what you are thinking and how you feel.

[illegible]

Eat. Pray. Love. A Roman Holiday for One

One great thing about being a speaker is the opportunity to travel. I had the grand opportunity to present at WIN Conference, an outstanding women's conference, in Rome, Italy in 2015. It was an awesome experience and I was able to gain a global perspective of issues affecting women in leadership. I stayed a couple of days afterward to tour the Eternal City. I visited the Colosseum, the Palatine Hill, the Vatican Museums, St. Peter's Basilica and I even traveled to Pompeii to view the ancient ruins and climb Mount Vesuvius. Neither words nor images can truly capture how spectacular the paintings, architecture, statues, frescos, tapestry, and artifacts were. I thought nothing could top the magnificence of that visit. But I was wrong.

I was invited to come back to the same conference to be hosted in Rome again in 2016. I could not pass up this opportunity! I decided to come early and do a little sightseeing before the conference this time. When I booked the trip, it was just a business trip. Later my husband decided to join, but in the end things did not work out, so it reverted to another solo adventure abroad. I had booked the tours when it was a trip for 2, but a day trip to Venice by myself was not appealing. Being the hopeless romantic that I am, I have always dreamed about a gondola ride with my love. But dreams don't always come true...so I decided, in true Stephanie style, to create an adventure of a lifetime. Instead of, *A Roman Holiday*, I decided to live *La Dolce Vita* minus the tragedy and dip in the Trevi Fountain. I decided to create a wondrous version of *Eat Pray Love*!

Eat

Due? No, just one. Solo, Signorina? Si, Solo. In Italy, food is an experience. Meals are a way of life. I remember last year when I went to a restaurant to "grab a bite to eat" how strangely the waiter looked when he realized I was alone. I enjoyed an awesome meal and glass of wine. I tried cacio e pepe pasta, a traditional dish. It was delicious! As I ate, I looked around at all the great conversations, laughter, and experiences created at the tables around me. Although there was no one else at my table, I was creating an experience of my own.

On my second Roman tour, I looked forward to creating new experiences through the food of Italy. I went back to that same

restaurant and had a delightful caprese salad and cacio e pepe pasta again. I had gelato—pistachio and hazelnut are my favorites. I had ravioli with porcini mushrooms and truffles that was truly incredible. My favorite dish was a sumptuous pumpkin and sage ravioli. I could have eaten an entire pan! I worked out every day so I wouldn't eat my way out of the clothes I packed!

But it was about more than the meal. It was the experience. As I enjoyed the savory and sweet, I watched the people around me. It was great to see the couples and groups and imagine what they were talking about. I am an avid observer of people so I constantly toe the line between polite observation and intrusive staring. I love to watch people and the stories they tell--stories of love, disappointment, dreams, disaster, daring, service, loss, wins, and so much more.

Some of the greatest stories are written alone. Even when we are alone, we are not alone. We can be alone in a crowded room of people. How alone we are depends on how, if at all, we connect to people. I don't mean talking to people, but *connecting* with people. Sometimes this happens through silent acknowledging glances, at other times through physical touch. Sometimes it's through experiences. Sometimes we are connected by chance. Sometimes we are connected by force. We can always connect by choice.

I have been blessed to travel abroad. Each time I have realized I have more in common with my surroundings than differences. It is truly amazing to speak with women from all around the world and understand the common challenges and triumphs we have. It is awe-inspiring to watch families that look different from my own share the same love, laughter, and connections that mine shares. But you don't need to travel abroad to do that. You can meet someone new where you live. You can meet someone again for the first time. Sometimes we are foreigners in our own homes. Sometimes the people who are closest to us know us the least. Being connected is a choice. Being present is a commitment. Being alive is an experience. It is a choice to either be a part of the experience or merely exist in it.

Pray

Rome has some of the most beautiful churches in the world. It is hard to believe that people can worship in such opulence. I'd be marveling at the beautiful tapestries, frescos, and statutes instead of

listening to the priest! I decided to create a personal pilgrimage and visit seven churches and say seven prayers. I plotted out a walking tour all over Rome—a 20-mile route in total! I began at the Basilica of Saint John Lateran. I decided to bring my book of prayers and read them in the chapel. It was quite a pitiful scene as I cried my way through my prayer book. But I didn't really care; I allowed my tears to be cathartic. At the Papal Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, I read my gratitude prayer and affirmation, this time with less tears. At the next three churches, I read Psalm 20, Psalm 23, and Psalm 40—each followed by a prayer. By the third psalm, I was not crying at all. My spirit was renewed. At the last 2 churches, I said prayers thanking God for my experiences up until this point and for the great experience the day had become.

It was more than the churches. It was more than the paintings and frescos and tapestries. It was more than the prayers. It was the experience of being in the presence of God. As I marveled at the surroundings in the church, I remember reflecting that God was there in the beauty of that church and He was with me in the ugliness of any circumstance. He is with me, and that is why when we are alone, we are never really alone. Prayer is a great way of connecting with the possibilities in life. Prayer is the pause between the pain and the purpose. Prayer is the path from tumultuousness to peace. Your life begins in your thoughts. Your life can also be trapped in your thoughts.

But you don't need to go to Rome to find peace. There is peace wherever you are when you choose to create it. There is peace in the power of your thoughts and actions. You must be open to it. Peace often comes in silence. Prayer and meditation is a prelude to peace. In a world of noise and noisiness, there is a great power in silence. You can hear yourself. You can hear your own voice. You can hear the answer that has been there all along. Listen to yourself and you can create possibilities. Listen to yourself and you can hear truth. Listen to yourself and you can see clearly.

Love

Well, for a number of reasons, this one is complicated. I did not know how I would find love in Rome alone. Of course, there is always self-love. The eating and praying were certainly a form of self-love. Certainly, I thought about love. How could one not think about

love in such a romantic place? While out for a walk on the first night, I had a self-appointed tour guide who was trying his best to be my Romeo. *Nah, pahdna! No thanks! I'm good.* Finally, on the third day of the conference, I found the love I was looking for. I attended a session on “Making the Dual Couple Thrive.” Lawd Jesus, this was a topic that was too little, too late in many respects, but I went anyway. I did not know what to expect, but it turned out to be more than I expected. The presenter, Blanca Vergara, revealed the magic potion to love—Learning to see things in the very moment.

This advice is so simple, yet so complex. Sometimes in love, we spend too much time missing from the present. We are caught up in the past or terrified by the future. The only moment you can do anything about is the present. In fact, what you do every day is the best indicator of what your love in the future will look like. You cannot predict the future of your love, but you can influence it. The more present you are in your present, the more likely your desired future will be a reality. The magic of love is embracing the time you have together *this* very moment because it is the only moment that is guaranteed. If you forfeit the opportunity to fully embrace your love today because you are worried about a future challenge that has not materialized yet, you are wasting precious time and you are wasting the magic of love.

Blanca also urged us to “let go of stuff.” She poignantly exposed how we disguise our fear of the “what if” with the overstuffed baggage—literal and figurative. We are so focused on the “what ifs” that we burden ourselves with worries that are not really real. Blanca wisely admonished us to focus on the fundamentals. Anything outside of the fundamentals is just stuff and should be let go. Love is **the** fundamental.

Oh, Love! As the hopeless romantic, I have always believed love prevails. Love is not a real life fairy tale. Love is more than just a feeling. It is more than the tingling in the pit of your stomach or the way your heart skips a beat or speeds up. It is more than the warmth in your loins or the fire in your heart. There is a reason love is the greatest of faith hope and love. You must believe. You must have hope. But faith and hope without action is just a setup for failure. You must have love. You must act like love.

Love is an action. Love is how faith shows up. It is the expression of hope. Many artists, poets, and singers have asked what love is, but

we do know. We know how love acts. It is patient and kind. It does not envy nor boast, nor is it proud. We know how love acts. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. We know love lasts. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. Love is a heart action. It does not always make sense, but it always makes sense of things. But I have learned that sometimes, love is not enough.

And in the end, love made my Roman holiday complete. As was fitting, the last workshop on the last day led to the answer I needed to hear. Love transcends feelings. Love makes sense yet it makes no sense at all. Love transcends seasons. It is the act that binds when all else is falling apart around you. Love is the transformation of faith and hope into the everyday experiences that create a lifetime. *And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*

CHAPTER 1 - FOCUS

Day 1

On the morning he told me he wanted to end our marriage, I was scheduled to give a talk to a group of women leaders on resilience. And I thought to myself, “God, what a cruel joke! God, you are really tripping! Do you seriously expect me to tell these women how to be resilient when my whole world is falling apart?” But God does not trip. The message I was to deliver to those women leaders that day was the very message I needed to hear. God used my own words and my own voice to help me help myself when no one but He could help me. Focusing on showing up to present saved my sanity and forced me to focus on survival instead of falling apart. Having to hold it together for someone else helped me to hold myself together for me.

Focus on something else. Find something that is bigger than what is happening to you.

Show up when you want to disappear.

What you focus on is what you’ll see. The immediate response is to focus on the devastation. The initial shock is protective so embrace it. Embrace the feeling of “this is not really happening,” and then pretend that it is not really occurring. You are not employing a strategy of denial, but of temporary suppression—a self-induced coma of consciousness.

But denial, while comforting, is not sustainable. It is really happening. And you must face it. You must deal with it. You must



accept it. Even though you do not want to accept it, you must. If it is repairable, you cannot fix what you have not acknowledged is broken. If it is irreparable, you cannot bury what you have not acknowledged is dead. And you cannot know the difference if you will not allow yourself to deal in facts and not feelings.

The fact is life must—and will—go on. And in times when all you want to do is fall apart, it is precisely the time when you need to hold it together.

But you are falling apart! How can you hold yourself together? Divert your attention—temporarily—to something that is bigger than what is happening to you. It is not really a diversion, but a redirection. Directing your focus to something else allows you to build up your strength to deal with your mess.

And deal with it you must...but not today. Today, you are not ready. When the emotion is fresh, the logic and reason you need to prevail are absent. Today, you are too deep in your feelings to do yourself any good. So, defer dealing with them. They'll be there waiting. Today is the day to breathe when your chest is crushed with heartbreak. Today is the day to exhale when you are choking on your own pain. Today is the day to inhale when it hurts to believe you are still in the world.

And while you may want to crawl into the darkest corners and retreat from the world, today is not the day to do so. You need to show up. You need to be in the world to remind yourself that you belong in the world. Show up anyway.

Show up and be strong for someone else to remind yourself that you can be strong for you. See in someone else the strength that is truly inside of you. Be who you think you cannot be to show yourself who you still are. You are not crushed. You are not cut off. You are still here.

Focus on what you cannot see until you see it.

Powerful Actions

Think about what is in your current line of vision.

Now decide what should be.

Decide this is not the time for you to fall apart.

Acknowledge how easy this decision is because it is simply not the time.

Think about all of the people who are counting on you to pull it together. WRITE THEM DOWN.

Think about what happens to them when you don't get your sh*t together.

Now recognize that the most important person on the list is YOU!

Write your name at the top of the list. (*Go on and write it because I know you left you off!*)

Now act like YOU are worth living for.

Now act like YOU are the one worth fighting for.

Get focused on getting your sh*t together.

Now!

Powerful Belief

State the following affirmations aloud to yourself until you believe them:

I do not have the luxury of falling apart.

I am counting on me to survive.

I am not infallible, but I am invincible.

Today, I will focus on all that is within me that powers my rise.

I cannot fix what is broken today.

So today I will not focus on what I cannot fix.

I am more than this moment.

I am more than this fall.

I am more than this brokenness.

I am more than a conqueror.

I am all I need to be the most powerful me.

I am focused on my victory.

What I see is what I will be.

Victory is all I see.

Powerful Thoughts

Write down what you are thinking and how you feel.

[illegible]

CHAPTER 2 - FORGIVENESS

Day 2

*I am in shock. I went to see Barbershop: The Next Cut at the movies and during the confrontation scene between Terry (played by Eve) and Rashad (played by Common) on the steps of their home, I have an epiphany about how it was all my fault. I recount everything I ever did wrong and I realize I was the cause of our demise. I even go to him ask for forgiveness when I get home. He gives it. I am at peace, but not really. I really was not completely to blame. I had my faults and they had a role in the demise of our marriage, but it was not all my fault. I feel like I was not worth working out what went wrong with us. I feel like I was not worth the fight. I realize my request for forgiveness was not reciprocated. I feel like a bigger piece of sh** than when I asked for it in the first place. I listen to my power song, Masterpiece, by Jazmin Sullivan. I need to be reminded I am not worthless. I need to believe I have value.*

Understand your role. Ask for forgiveness. Move on.

There are always two sides to a story. You are always an agent in the change. It is helpful to acknowledge that. It is healthy to recognize that half of the “blame” is yours and half of the “blame” does not belong to you. Most times it is not really half, but the proportions are irrelevant. It’s the process of recognizing what is in your control and what is beyond it. You cannot change anyone but you. Start there. Think about what you could have done or not done. Not for the point of berating yourself or otherwise making



yourself feel worse than you already do, but for being accountable for your behavior, actions, and outcomes. It is important to do this through a lens of possibility. If it is reparable, you must acknowledge what needs to be fixed. You must also acknowledge who can fix it. Likewise, you must accept whom and what you cannot fix and what you cannot force.

Forgiveness is powerful. It is the gift you give to yourself. Forgive him. Forgive her. Forgive them. Most of all, forgive you. Be honest with yourself about what you did “wrong.” Be honest with yourself about what you did “right.” Be honest with yourself that despite any unfavorable decisions, mistakes, or shortcomings, you are still a good person. Even if you f***ed it all the way up, you are not a f***up. You are still good. You still have value.

Your worth is not anchored in another person’s definition of your worth. Your worth is not anchored in another individual’s choices. Your worth is not anchored in another person’s decision to acknowledge or deny your value. Your worth is anchored in your decision to see your own value. Even a diamond with occlusions is valuable. You must be willing to see your value in all of your flaws. Even if there is something for which you need to be forgiven, you can be redeemed. Even if forgiveness is not given, you can be redeemed. Even if there is much for you to forgive, you are redeemed when you give it.

Forgiveness is not a concession, but an opening for the clarity you need to redeem yourself. You need a clear delineation between what you need to change and what is immutably good about you. The things that others cannot accept about you are the products of their choices. What others find “wrong” with you is not an indicator of who you are or who you are not. You are who you are. Who you are is either enough or it isn’t. It is either something you can improve or something that cannot be contorted to fit the mold someone else has created for you. Forgive them for not finding you worthy so you can realize your worth that was never theirs to decide.

Forgiveness is freeing. Forgive yourself. Ask them for forgiveness. If they give it, accept it. If they don’t, accept it. Acceptance is a power you use for yourself. Accept the things you cannot change. Change the things you cannot accept. Accept there is a difference between the two. Embrace the change you need may not be the change you want, but it is the change you need.

Recognize that sometimes God will remove what you will not let go. Let it go. Be open to what is next.

Forgiveness is Freedom.

Powerful Actions

Write down all the reasons why it is your fault.

Write down all of the reasons it is not.

Say “F*** it!” to the second list and forgive him for anything you wrote.

Decide if it is worth it to say it to his face.

Say it to the imaginary him anyway.

Look at the list you control.

FORGIVE YOURSELF.

Decide what you will do to change the things you can control.

Decide to release the things you cannot.

Be honest enough to decipher between the two.

Powerful Belief

State the following affirmations aloud to yourself until you believe them:

I am not perfect.

My imperfections are in good faith.

I forgive myself for any pain or hurt I have caused.

I forgive myself for what I did not do, could have done, should not have done, did not do, or would not do.

I forgive myself for what I woulda, coulda, shoulda done.

I forgive myself for any failures—be they perceived, imagined, or factual.

I accept my failures as lessons for how I will create a new life, a new relationship, and a new me.

I accept responsibility for my behaviors, actions, and inactions.

I accept responsibility for me.

I release myself from any guilt or shame.

I stand firmly in the decisions I make to disavow choices to do the same things again.

I forgive him.

I forgive him for not being who I wanted him to be.

I forgive him for hurting me.

I forgive him for not finding me to be enough.

I forgive him for not seeing my greatness.

I forgive him for not celebrating my strengths.

I forgive him for causing me pain.

I forgive him for not being who I needed him to be.

I forgive him.

I forgive us for not making it.

I release us both from this relationship.

I release my life from the pain and hurt of unhappiness.

I release myself from the hold of brokenness.

I release myself from the bondage of regret.

I release him.

I release me.

I am free.

Powerful Thoughts

Write down what you are thinking and how you feel.

[illegible]

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Stephanie D. Barnes is a woman who sees the possibility in life and embraces the opportunity to excel. Professionally, she is the CEO of The Fruition Group, LLC, a company that specializes in personal excellence, leadership and strategic planning solutions. She is a Harvard-educated attorney and former healthcare executive. Fueled by her passions to equip women to be highly joyful CEOs, Dr. Barnes created the C-Suite Women's Network—where women (and a few good men!) are the CEOs of their lives. Being a CEO is walking in the power of your decisions to create the life you desire and deserve. Her mission is to get you to your C-Suite—where **you** make the decisions to elevate your life and accelerate your revenue!



Dr. Barnes received her law degree from Harvard Law School and her PhD in Organizational Leadership from The Chicago School of Professional Psychology. She upholds a long tradition of community service and is a Life Member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. as well as a member of Jack and Jill of America. She is the mother to two sons, Nicolas and Marcus, and an awesome Portuguese Water Dog, Zara.

Dr. Stephanie D. Barnes is a published author and has been featured in the Harvard Business Review, Personal Excellence Magazine, and the Huffington Post. She is an internationally recognized speaker, leadership expert, TEDx presenter, and media personality. More information can be found at www.decidingonjoy.com.

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