

A MORE Beautiful LIFE

A Simple Five-Step Approach to Living Balanced Goals with HEART





A More Beautiful Life

© 2022 Whitney English

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, scanning, or other—except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Published in Nashville, Tennessee, by W Publishing, an imprint of Thomas Nelson

Thomas Nelson titles may be purchased in bulk for educational, business, fundraising, or sales promotional use. For information, please email SpecialMarkets@ThomasNelson.com.

Scripture quotations are taken from the ESV* Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*). Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Any internet addresses, phone numbers, or company or product information printed in this book are offered as a resource and are not intended in any way to be or to imply an endorsement by Thomas Nelson, nor does Thomas Nelson vouch for the existence, content, or services of these sites, phone numbers, companies, or products beyond the life of this book.

ISBN 978-0-7852-5192-7 (HC) ISBN 978-0-7852-5195-8 (audiobook) ISBN 978-0-7852-5193-4 (eBook)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021947723

Printed in the United States of America
22 23 24 25 26 LSC 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To David, Birch, Truitt, and Charley, the people who make my life more beautiful.



CONTENTS

PAR	RT I
Chapter 1: Goals Gone Wrong	3
Chapter 2: HEART Explained	19
Chapter 3: "It's Like Riding a Bike!"	35
PART II	
Chapter 4: H-Help Yourself	49
Chapter 5: E-Empower Yourself	65
Chapter 6: A-All Your People	85
Chapter 7: R-Resources and Responsibilities	105
Chapter 8: T-Trade and Talent	121
PART	
Chapter 9: The Power of Your HEART	135
Chapter 10: Is This Thing Broken?	149
Chapter 11: Small Wins and Lasting Change	159
Chapter 12: HEART in Action	169
Notes	179
About the Author	185

Introduction ix





INTRODUCTION

"Beauty is a promise of happiness."

ALAIN DEBOTTON¹

t was Thanksgiving break, 2010—although I use the word *break* here quite loosely. I sat on the edge of the bed at my in-laws' house, looking at my work schedule from that day forward through Christmas. I distinctly remember the deep aubergine walls, my distorted image in the beveled mirror, and the crippling dread in the pit of my stomach. I knew what I was facing. I'd be working extra hours while my family was enjoying turkey dinners and other pre-Christmas festivities. The next month looked like eighteen-hour days and sleeping on the sofa in my office. Something was seriously wrong.

At the time, I owned a stationery business, and holiday cards were our biggest money-maker

of the year. This year, we had more orders than ever—which was a good thing, right? As a business owner, you want more orders. But every part of my life was over-leveraged.

My energy.

My time.

My capacity.

My finances (especially my finances).

The stress and uncertainty had thrown my life off-balance. Everything felt like trauma to an already sapped resource. I was discouraged and too tired to do anything about it. I had dreamed of being it all: the perfect wife, mother, daughter, business owner, homekeeper. That's what living the dream meant, right? Doing it all, perfectly, and winning?

But the dream wasn't translating to life. Somebody was missing some memos somewhere. Most of the time, I was stretched, stressed, and steps behind. Life had become a chore. I wondered why on earth I did this to myself.

The most confusing part of all this was: I loved my life—every bit of it! When I wasn't tired, I was grateful for my job, family, home, and projects, even the challenges. I didn't want to quit. I wanted to do it all. But I was missing out on the good life in front of me. Sadly, I wasn't my best self for my family or my job.

A decade has passed since that low point, and during that time I've learned I'm not the only one who has felt the pain of rock bottom. Nearly every woman I talk to has felt something similar. We may not all run businesses, but we all run incredibly complicated, busy lives. We manage our schedules, our kids' schedules, our family's commitments, and our finances. We're the ones coordinating playdates and pick-ups and drop-offs and dinner. For many of us, in addition to working part-time or full-time jobs, we're scheduling doctor's visits, organizing family vacations, and hosting friends for dinner.

We love our families and lives. We're even thankful for the responsibilities! But the reality is, we all have difficult days that somehow stretch into weeks and months, and it all feels like too much.

The day before Thanksgiving, 2010, I felt like the walls of life were closing in on me. I couldn't see a way out. With my fourteen-month-old sleeping in the walk-in closet one wall

x INTRODUCTION

over, I felt dread, disgust, and discouragement. With a business to run, no energy to do it, and hormones to battle, I began to doubt if I had what it took to live a beautiful life.

How HEART Was Born

I wish I could say I had an epiphany that day in 2010, but even at that low point, I stayed trapped in the turmoil of my own life for a while. However, something inside me was whispering a quiet truth—that life doesn't have to be this frantic. Clinging to this hope helped me reimagine the possibilities of my days, my weeks, and my years. Since then, I've committed to pursue beauty and limit chaos.

Another life is available to you too. It's a joyous life, a meaningful life, deep and full of grace. It isn't tidy, but it shimmers, hollering an invitation and waving a welcoming hand. It won't be as well-curated as the images on social media, but it's full of energy and purpose. It's long-lasting, life-giving, and lovelier than what you've been chasing. It's a life free from the fear of what others will think. It's an abundant heart, overflowing and world rocking.

As I share my story with you, I hope you see yourself and find tangible solutions for quieting your life. Life is beautiful and messy and full of lessons for both of us.

As you read, you'll find stories and strategies about how I turned my life around, using a series of choices that create the acronym HEART: Help yourself, Empower yourself, All your people, Resources and Responsibilities, Trade and Talent. HEART was born out of a deep desire to balance my life. It has evolved into tools, techniques, and tricks that help me plan my day, week, and life. Now, when I see the red flag of chaos I default to HEART. It reminds me to prioritize the present. Because let's face it: life's chaos often obscures what really matters. And when we lose our vision for what could be, our focus on what is, and the motivation to take action, we lose what makes life significant, worthwhile, and beautiful.

HEART represents my attempt to reclaim my life. It's an idea much larger than my imagination. It has gifted me with this not-perfect, always-messy, never-certain life I adore. I want it to be as beneficial to you as it has been to me.

INTRODUCTION xi

What Is HEART?

We need a new approach to life if we want to live a more beautiful one. After all, the road map we've been following has left some of us in a state of chaos, confusion, and burnout. We can't expect the wrong map to lead us in the right direction: to the deep, fulfilling, peaceful, joyful life we desire. We need a different, simple way to draw our attention away from the noise of everyday life and toward a more balanced and beautiful existence.

My solution was to use the HEART system to prioritize my life. You might call it a method or a framework. Ultimately, it's a way to organize your thoughts that will recharge your imagination, give you hope for the future, and help you stay focused in the present. If you're having a hard time putting your finger on what's wrong with your life—because there's so much that's right—welcome. That's exactly how I felt during that awful Thanksgiving season. As much as I disliked the season, there was still so much to be grateful for.

HEART will help you *design a life you want to live* and help you *live a life designed for you*. It works because it shifts emphasis away from long-term objectives and toward current needs. It works because it's holistic: accounting for both day-to-day life and what's going on in the outside world.

Implementing HEART will help you:

- · discover and prioritize what matters most,
- · avoid burnout by nourishing your heart,
- make your days meaningful and manageable,
- feel comfortable being who you were created to be,
- develop and grow healthy relationships, and
- dream better, not bigger.

I believe HEART is a straightforward strategy you'll enjoy learning and living out every day.

I'm excited to show you how to clarify and organize your dreams and ambitions, with easy

XII INTRODUCTION

and meaningful exercises. Say goodbye to battles of will and scavenging for motivation. Taking action will seem like second nature. You'll feel like your ambitions advance the battle lines for you, as you move forward in reclaiming your beautiful life.

I know this because it worked for me: I still run a business, mother three kids, maintain a marriage, and keep my house (relatively) clean. Even with more obligations and anxieties than ever before, I can wake up with a positive outlook for the day ahead of me (most days). When I'm feeling discouraged, I can get back to the basics. My life is still unruly, but I don't *feel* the chaos in my body and heart the way I used to. Even when things are hectic, I'm okay.

When I look around at my people, my work, and even myself, I see a messy but beautiful thing. It's realistic and authentic, and I wouldn't trade it for the world.

If you're skeptical, I get it. If you had told me about this book back in 2010, I would have rolled my eyes at you (and wondered when a person has time to read books). But if you apply what I show you in this book, I promise you'll get a return on your time. Promise.

You'll uncover ideas for routines, hacks for habits, clarity on what to cut and what to keep. You'll discover a cadence in your life, a consistency, a rhythm to your days and weeks and months, a discipline that doesn't feel like drudgery or punishment, and a structure that will delight your inner child. HEART will give you permission to quiet self-judgment, grow your belief in yourself, and open your eyes to the idea that we've been hurting ourselves by running after things that won't satisfy our souls.

Goal-Setting vs. Goal-Living

Although the idea for HEART was born out of my desire to set better goals (more on that later), this book is more about goal-living rather than goal-setting.

Goal-setting is about getting or achieving something you don't already have. It's a destination—a new house, a better car, a promotion, a marathon finished—as if more is the answer. I came to this realization slowly: for those who already have so much (maybe even too much), more is rarely the answer.

INTRODUCTION xiii

Goal-living is different. Goal-living is about peace of mind and personal internal reward. Goal-living is about seeing your life with a fresh perspective. It offers grace, and with it the confidence that you've done your best and are living out your purpose. Goal-living comes with the knowledge that you're helping others while enjoying your journey. You won't feel imbalanced or off-center as you pursue one arena of your life, left with a nagging feeling you've forgotten something and will pay for it later.

I don't want to mislead you. I'm not saying goals are bad, but I do want to shake up the subculture surrounding them. There's a whole host of lingo: "breaking down goals," "setting" them, "tracking" them—this is the stuff I'm telling you to step away from. The language of productivity and focus is not a prerequisite for living a beautiful and fulfilled life. And for many of us, it's become a distraction.

Say you've always wanted to lose fifteen pounds, and in your mind you'll be miserable until you do—and if you don't, then that's just it. But what if, instead, you focused on what makes you feel good today? Instead of your desired final weight, what if you focused on the next best choice? Maybe eating a healthy meal or moving your body? Before you realize it, you're living out your goal, rather than waiting in agony for the end result to materialize.

It's not about the absence of goals, or the presence of goals. Our focus should be on our *lives*, not our goals. When we look at it that way, we don't need goals as much as we thought we did.

Achieving our goals is not a onetime choice and a big jump forward. It's loads of little decisions that add up over time. The good news is, when we step into understanding our needs, we'll have the proper mindset in place to make it easy to keep going.

Goal-living isn't the path of more. It's the path of better.

Our Roadmap

In Part I, we'll meet HEART and I'll share more about how it came to be. We will discover the skills necessary to reveal our current thought processes, empowering us to design a strategy that

XIV

works with our personalities and aligns with our priorities and intentions. We'll get things out of our heads and onto paper so we have clear minds and a clean slate for Part II.

In Part II, we will review each letter of HEART, the Life Segments. The questions in the prompts at the end of each chapter will pinpoint our needs and inspire our goal ideas. Work through these as you go. You'll have five lists, and you may want to compile them before moving to Part III.

Part III is practical and chock-full of ideas for our systems, schedules, and lives. Using our five lists from Part II, we'll transfer our needs and goal ideas onto the Goal Grid. The Goal Grid is a handy one-page tool for keeping our schedules organized and on track. We'll use HEART to look at both long-term goals and a daily to-do list. HEART can simplify our weeks, months, or decades. I've also compiled my favorite organizing hacks to help you in your most overwhelmed moments.

I want this to be easy and enjoyable for you. My desire is to get you on the right track, because so many of us are off track due to how we've been setting our goals. You don't need anything except this book and your favorite pen to get started. Along the way, if you feel prompted to write more, grab a journal. If you want to take it a step further, pull out your planner when you get to Part III.

At the end of each chapter is a section called "Write It Down, Make It Beautiful." The questions and exercises vary by chapter. I encourage you to pull out a journal and use these as writing prompts. Journaling has been a big part of implementing HEART into my life, and I think it will work for you as well. These questions will lead you through reflection, brainstorming, and planning.

You might be tempted to jump straight ahead to the implementation chapters. But hold on there, speed racer. You are smart enough to resist the quick-fix sales pitch of perfectly productive lives. If you want lasting results, you know this will take some heart work, some soul-searching, and (dare I say) some navel-gazing. We are talking about finding the good life in the here and now, not in some far-off destination you think will make you happy. We will unpack what you need to embrace this present moment.

INTRODUCTION xv

I want you to meet yourself on these pages. I encourage you to write in the book, in the margins, or on the endpapers. "When we write, a unique neural circuit is automatically activated," says psychologist Stanislas Dehaene. "There is a core recognition of the gesture in the written word, a sort of recognition by mental simulation in your brain."

There is no right answer to the questions I'll offer. I'm simply asking them to get you thinking and help you shift your perspective. Within these pages, you'll find answers within yourself you didn't know you had. You'll discover solutions to and acceptance of the things that have been plaguing you. Your path out of chaos and into a beautiful life will be unique. Make this book yours.

The Path to a Beautiful Life

You purchased this book because you're looking for a strategy that works. Maybe you tried goal-setting and failed, and you don't want to try again. Or maybe this is your first time attempting the goals.

If this book does anything for you, I want it to give you encouragement and inspiration to chase a life designed by you, for you—your one and only exquisite, priceless, all-too-short life. I want it to help you see the magnificence in the world, and in your community, but also your potential—which, by the way, I believe is almost infinite. And I want it to give you hope, because that is what we need far more than a fully executed to-do list.

Self-help books on how to identify your priorities, set goals, break them down, create an

xvi INTRODUCTION

action plan, and schedule everything are plentiful. The problem is, I've yet to find a book that tells me how to do this in a way that fits with an actual Tuesday.

And yes, life is hard no matter how well we organize it. But in my view, there are two kinds of hard—necessary hard and unnecessary hard. This book will alleviate (some of) the unnecessary hard. In that way, I do believe it will make the process seem easy. It will become a rich resource for finding motivation and perspective when our journey gets dark.

I wrote this for busy, tired women struggling to design a life they love. This book is for anyone who has ever struggled to balance profession and play, people and projects, pets and provisions. Productivity advice is overflowing, but I wanted to pave a clear path for those who want to manage everyday duties while staying connected to the HEART of what they do. Whether you are employed or an entrepreneur, fur-ball mom or kid mom, or a combination of all the above, I know you've (at times) felt frustrated and trapped inside the chaos of a life that you know could be beautiful. Me too.

With the help of this book, you can learn to run a business, a dishwasher, and a marathon simultaneously (but only if you want to). More importantly, HEART can show you how to love yourself, your people, and your circumstances.

Whatever you choose to do, you'll be doing it with HEART.

We need to see our lives through the lens of possibility. We deserve a life that doesn't burn us out in a month or work just long enough to make us look good on Instagram. HEART will direct us to that life: not a perfect one, but a balanced one that will lead us to rich, meaningful abundance.

This is your path to a more beautiful life.

INTRODUCTION xvii



PART I





Chapter 1

GOALS GONE WRONG

"My goal is no longer to get more done, but rather to have less to do." $FRANCINE\ IAY^{1}$

remember where I was sitting when the mail came on July 17, 2012. The scrappy office building where my company set up camp was formerly a flooring showroom. The carpet changed every twenty feet, with wood or tile options interjecting. When the mailman came, he hopped inside over a circle of tile, dropped the mail, and waved. From a heavily decorated kidney-shaped desk (thanks to the scratch and dent at the local furniture mecca), I waved back.

Without a budget for new flooring, we made do. I stepped onto the orange oak, crossing a confused matrix of brown walnut and yellow pineslabs. Mahogany bookcases behind me clashed in contrast, waiting for our financial situation to improve.

For almost two years, maybe three, I'd been living paycheck to paycheck—except that's not really accurate because I hadn't been paying myself. Whatever was in the business checking

account went to employees, vendors, bills, and credit cards. There simply wasn't anything left over for me. As a business owner, wife, and mom, it was a nightmare.

Rifling through the stack of mail, I remembered when the business used to have energy and excitement and cash flow. All that was gone now. Dreams of old victories had kept me going, hoping for better days. I was afraid to face reality or acknowledge the operation was failing, the wheels attached to the car with paper clips and string.

After the friendly carrier dropped the mail that day, I got up from my desk to riffle through it. Every invoice-I-could-barely-pay and past due notice reminded me that I was failing. And then I came across a thicker, linen-textured envelope. It was distinctive—heavier, foreboding. I did not want to open it.

My admission that the company was in a vulnerable position had come only weeks earlier. Daily, my straggling team and I managed to hold the rattletrap together, but I knew if we were to unexpectedly get a flat or the transmission were to go out or the muffler fell off, the charade would be over. Maybe you've found yourself in a position like this—not with a business but with a marriage or finances or a challenging relationship. Where it feels like you're barely hanging on. If you can relate, you'll know what I mean when I say: we could handle any setback, but only one setback at a time. More than two disasters at once had the potential to take down my already-weak operation.

I held the ecru envelope with an attorney's address printed in tan ink on the top left-hand corner and drew out the trifold paper. Unfolded, I recognized the gist of it in an instant.

Years prior, one of our largest customers had allowed their invoices to accumulate well past due dates, and in the ninety days prior to filing bankruptcy, they had tried to settle their account with my business. It was for less than the amount they owed, but still significant, so we took it and counted our blessings.

This notice came bearing bad news about that big check. Since the company had filed bank-ruptcy less than ninety days after sending the settlement check, the trustee of their bankruptcy legally had the right to come to us and ask for that money back—even though it had been years since the transaction. It's what they call a "bankruptcy rollback."

Here was the problem: we didn't have the money. I sat, staring at the reality in front of

me—the trustee was demanding we pay this large sum of money back, money we simply didn't have. I knew what this meant. I didn't want to believe it yet, but I knew.

I was usually fairly resourceful about coming up with answers, finding alternatives, and maneuvering my way to desired results. But this time, this problem, well, I don't think even MacGyver had enough paper clips to keep the car together.

We had only one choice: file bankruptcy on the business and close. I would have to call our creditors—many of whom I considered friends—and admit we were broke. I offered pennies on the dollar before finally closing the doors. The whole thing felt dirty and plain wrong.

You likely haven't filed for bankruptcy before. Although it is devastating for those who have, it's not a universal problem. But the devastation I felt is universal. Deep shame. Crippling fear. And the general sense that somewhere, somehow, I had made a massive, uncorrectable mistake.

Something had to change. Not just closing the business—something else. But I couldn't put my finger on it. Life wasn't going as planned, and I couldn't figure out why.

It wasn't the bankruptcy that leveled me as much as it was what the bankruptcy revealed for me. I was beyond burnt-out, way past stressed, and my life wasn't one I was proud of or could enjoy. I was disappointed with myself and frustrated with my circumstances, so far from what I pictured for my life. Despite having the beautiful family I had always dreamed of, a home that was messy but comfortable, and pursuing the career of my (I thought) dreams, I was miles and miles away from any sense of peace.

Every day was fraught with fear and plagued with panic, as I rushed about, trying to do it all, and doing none of it well. It was chaos.

And the business was only part of it. I was behind on bathroom cleaning, burning dinners, and battling depression. I didn't feel in control—and I didn't feel like me.

Maybe this was just motherhood? Being an entrepreneur? Maybe everyone else felt this overwhelmed and out of control but wasn't saying anything? Or maybe *I* was the problem.

Sitting at my desk, weary, discouraged, and facing a string of problems I didn't know how to manage, the one thing I knew for sure was that I wanted a different life. It didn't even matter what kind of life—as long as it wasn't this one.

I wanted to feel empowered to accomplish everything on my plate. I wanted to know

everything was going to be okay. I wanted to feel present instead of distracted, successful instead of like a deadbeat, caught up instead of behind. I wanted time at the end of the day to enjoy my family and friends. I aspired to be the person I had promised my family I could be.

What was I doing wrong? How had I arrived here? How could I be failing so epically?

Failure is painful, but long ago I decided that if I could find a lesson in a harrowing experience, then it would at least count for education. I sat at my desk, staring at that fancy envelope, dreading the next few weeks of embarrassing phone calls, and mentally resolving not to waste this failure. I call it an MBA from the School of Hard Knocks. Experience is the best teacher, and I decided to believe—as absurd as it sounds—that this was my chance to take a step back and analyze what went wrong and why.

I might have failed at everything else. But that much I got right.

As I reflected, I pulled out my goal notebook—a binder I've kept since college—and reviewed my past goals. I've always been career-oriented, as evidenced by several of my ambitions: the desire to hit a specific dollar amount in sales, be featured in the national press, build a website, and grow the blog. I had some personal goals recorded too: run a 5k, lose ten pounds, read more books. Pulling out my planner, I saw a list of memories I wanted to make: family Easter, the neighborhood Halloween shindig, our murder mystery New Year's Eve party, and a family road trip.

These were all good things, things I believed I could do. So how did the list of dreams before me—things that made me feel excited and energized and creative and in love—add up to a life I loathed?

What's Possible?

The world is short on fairy godmothers and pixie dust, and I've been to enough estate sales to say with confidence that brass oil lamps don't come with genies. Or magic. It's up to us to make it happen in this life. We all recognized this at one point or another in our lives, and when we asked someone to tell us how to do it, they told us to set goals.

As if goal-setting is the answer.

Somewhere along the line, I picked up the belief that if I achieve as much as possible, I'll be happy. As women, we daily take on this challenge with impossible expectations of ourselves—and because we're incredible, we crush them.

We dash from responsibility to responsibility, hoping to reach the finish line before we collapse. Frankly, we're good at managing it all. Watch any of us in action: people, projects, deadlines, and dishwashing fill our days. We plan meetings, drive car pool, juggle clients, sign up for Pilates classes, and check email. We schedule doctor, dentist, and hairdresser appointments. We compose grocery lists that sound like sonnets.

We are capable of doing it all. But in the frenzy, we forget to ask ourselves: *How are we doing?* Like, *really* doing?

The answer to this question is where we've gone wrong.

We've said we're fine, and we're not.

In setting our goals, we've also set ourselves up for failure.

To be fair, I'm not saying we shouldn't have ambitions. I'm a woman with big dreams and I don't plan on letting those go anytime soon. But if we're setting our goals without HEART, then even if we achieve them, we might lose ourselves in the process. Achievements make for a great first impression, but when we prioritize them ahead of our needs, we run the risk of waking up in the middle of the night, plagued by the question: *Do I even like my life?*

No matter how many productivity apps we try, we still end the day worn out. Time-management strategies provide short-term relief, but then a sick day throws a wrench in our plans and a crowbar on our dreams. We stay on track with our goals for a month, and then we're derailed by life's infamous hiccups: a sick kid, a fender bender, or getting snapped at by someone else who also has a full plate.

With a typical goal-setting method, these curveballs threaten to steal our joy and permeate our souls with remorse and regret. Because, again, we're focused on the goal. What I want to share—and what I've learned since that fateful day in 2012—is that these curveballs don't have to change the way we feel about ourselves.

Because it's not about the goal, it's about the HEART.

The solution to our exhaustion may not be as simple as taking things off our already overflowing plates. Aside from reducing the volume of tasks, let's examine and ask ourselves whether the way we organize and prioritize our days is beneficial or detrimental. Often it's not the elements of our lives making us unhappy, but our approach to them.

Our goals are not the problem. The way we try to achieve those goals needs to change.

SMART Goals and Why They Fail Us

When I was in high school, the state of Oklahoma hosted a workshop retreat for seniors. The top seniors from schools across Oklahoma gathered at a camp for a two-night retreat to talk leadership, goals, ambitions, and the like. Students were selected based on athletic involvement and grade point average.

Translation: not me.

But it just so happened that the retreat weekend coincided with a series of other events so that *every other student in my class* could not attend the retreat. The smart kids had an event, the athletes had a tournament—which meant the school was left with the challenge of selecting a student who was neither smart nor athletic.

Enter Whitney, stage left.

There's nothing like getting to hang out with smart and athletic people when you are neither smart nor athletic. But in short, the weekend was fantastic. Turns out, smart and athletic kids liked me anyway! Maybe I'm funny, who knows. New friends exchanged addresses to write letters (because it was the 1900s, as my kids say). I drank all the leadership, goal, and ambition Kool-Aid served. I've been a retreat, conference, and workshop junkie ever since.

I soon learned the universal fact that all conferences, workshops, and retreats have a goal-setting talk, session, or speaker. During this segment, the speaker says, "Imagine what your life will look like in ten years." You look at your paper, or notebook, swag pen poised to write, and go straight for the big guns: family, spouse, dream house, dream car, solid bank account, great body, world travels, contentment, and happiness. Big dreams.

The speaker then asks you to write five-year goals. "A few," he says, and you question the ambiguity of the task. Looking at your big dreams, you chop them in half: save money for the dream house/car, work some overtime for savings, join a gym?

The speaker asks you to repeat the task.

"What's your one-year goal?" Ideas are roughly chopped in half again, and at this point you are wondering when the plan and to-do list will magically appear.

If you've ever done anything like this (at a conference or at home sitting on your bed), welcome to the club. We're following this template for a reason.

Whether knowingly or not, we can trace our approach to personal achievement back to a prominent method that has defined the goal-setting space since the eighties. This system asks for discipline and promises results. It's extremely popular, and its memorable acronym has made its way into everyday vernacular.

It's SMART goals. The methodology created by George Duran debuted in the November 1981 issue of *Management Review*, a business journal. In the two-page article, he explained that in corporate culture, there is a "SMART" way to write goals and objectives, with details of what each letter stands for:

Specific: target a specific area for improvement.

Measurable: quantify or suggest an indicator of progress.

Assignable: specify who will do it. (Later interpretations changed this to "Achievable.")

Realistic: state what results can realistically be achieved, given available resources.

Time-related: specify when the result(s) can be achieved.

Even if you're not explicitly using SMART goals, chances are, your approach to life goals have been influenced in some way by this acronym. It's popular and it seems straightforward. Pick a place you want to go, divide it up into parts, and see where you need to be at each increment of time.

We've been told that goal-setting is the only way to achieve what we want, so we've applied SMART liberally. We've turned it into an acquisition strategy. This method must be the key to

the next promotion, bigger house, better relationships, and healthier physique. I want to run a marathon next June, so I break down the goal. I want to make a million dollars next year, so I project quarterly. I'd like to be married by thirty-five, so I turn it into a numbers game.

These achievement techniques may work in the sense that they do tend to get us to an identified goal. But what we miss in this kind of goal-setting is how we feel about our lives in the process. How much does reaching the objective matter if we don't feel good about our lives along the way (or even at the finish line)?

What if there's something missing that could make all this function and feel better?

Before my business took a downhill turn, I made a choice I now believe cost me greatly. I googled "SMART goals" and made a list in the hopes that it would get me out of the pickle I was in.

As my life became busier and felt more out of control, instead of stopping and checking in on myself, I did what I had been taught to do: I doubled down on my goal-setting efforts. I looked at where I wanted to be, I set goals, I broke down those goals into smaller pieces, and I finished the tasks I'd been told would make these dreams come to pass.

And this set me up for disaster.

The SMART goals theory touts itself as a tried-and-true life strategy, but one of the most frequently cited studies about goal-setting in general is an urban myth. It goes something like this: "Less than 3 percent of Yale's graduating class of 1953 documented their post-graduation goals. Thirty years later, that 3 percent had a higher net worth than the other 97 percent." Except it's not true; no such study ever existed. Yale's own library web page dispels the myth.²

Even if it were true, I'd want to know about the quality of life of that 3 percent as much as I'd want to know about their net worth. Do they have a loving spouse? Feel connected to their kids? Enjoy their profession? Feel supported by their extended family? This goes without saying, but there's more to life than net worth.

Even if you want to die on the hill of traditional goal-setting, the fact remains, even the most committed among us don't always act on our goals in a way that helps us achieve them. A University of Scranton study found only 8 percent of people who set goals took enough action on their goals to achieve them. The other 92 percent failed.³

There were several reasons why participants failed:

- The participant procrastinated on taking steps to make progress.
- The goal implementation plan was inflexible and did not allow for adjustment.
- The participant did not have the physical or emotional capacity for the goal.
- The participant became bored with their goal.
- The participant's goal was based on other people's expectations.
- The participant made no plan as to how to achieve the goal.
- The participant did not create any accountability for themselves.

Does any of this sound familiar to you? It does to me. Procrastination, lack of accountability, lack of capacity, lack of personal connection to the goal, life getting in the way—this pretty much describes my 2012 demise. So why did I keep turning to this method that was clearly not working?

Goal-setting is a win-lose, zero-sum game of me versus my goals. If I fail, the goal wins. If I succeed, I win. No in-between, and points for effort are not allowed. Not to mention, I can't control the curveballs, further increasing the odds of goal failure. I'm tired of failing at my goals!

But consider this: What if it's not our goals that are failing us, but the way we're managing our goals? What if we approached goals (and life) differently, focusing less on the outcome and more on the process? Could there be a more flexible method to priorities and progress?

Maybe there can be.

On some level, I get it: the SMART goals acronym is catchy. In fact, it's so catchy that it comes in almost endless iterations. Some goal gurus have gone so far as to add letters: you can now set SMARTER goals! It's memorable.

I will even admit that SMART goals can be useful in some situations. Think about this for a second: Duran wrote SMART goals for a business publication, to help managers better monitor and improve employee performance. SMART goals are meant for business and career—and in my humble opinion, that's where they belong. It's not that SMART goals won't get us anywhere; it's that they don't guarantee us a more beautiful, meaningful, fulfilling life. They're "head goals," not HEART goals filled with hope and truth and joy.

GOALS GONE WRONG 11

Call it goal-setting, goal-living, prioritizing, or productivity. HEART is a new and refreshing way to frame our tasks, to-dos, and troubles, because let's be real: SMART goals aren't cutting it. We've been sabotaging ourselves since 1982, you guys. We are in desperate need of an upgrade.

It might be helpful to know before we dive in that I'm a Christian. My faith influences how I process my circumstances and what I believe makes life meaningful. If you're also a Christian, you'll be more familiar with the examples I use, the way I talk about God, and how I've ordered my priorities. If you're not a Christian, know that I've done my best to make this book just as welcoming and relevant to you, while staying true to my convictions. Please feel free to replace my words or examples with ones that make sense to you in your faith perspective.

Faith and spirituality may be a sensitive subject for some. I'm not here to debate the existence of God; I'm simply here to declare that my life is less chaotic when I accept that I'm not in charge. This material is intended to help you identify and eliminate any obstacle to living beautifully. The wonderful part about pursuing Truth is that Truth isn't afraid of your questions. If you pursue it, you'll find it.

A Vision, Not a Goal

If you're like me, right now you are questioning a book that steers you away from goals. After all, you're an ambitious person who *wants* to do it all (zero shame). You just don't want to feel like an empty shell at the end of the day because your goal drained your soul. I promise I won't

ask you to give up your dreams—or your idealism—about all you can accomplish in life or how amazing you hope it will be. I want to help you achieve those goals without selling your soul.

If you're willing to go on this journey with me, I'll show you how you can achieve everything you wanted to achieve (and probably more) while staying grounded, connected, and energized from the inside out.

It's not about thinking small. Quite the opposite. It's about thinking bigger than ever before. We do this by using visions rather than goals.

Andy Stanley describes vision as something "born in the soul of a man or woman who is consumed with the tension between what is and what could be." Visions don't come to those distracted by daydreams, nor do they come to those racing through reality. It takes a willingness to slow down and reflect—recognizing *what is* and *what could be*—to have a vision. (Which, by the way, is exactly what we'll learn how to do in this book.)

To further explain what he means by vision, Stanley tells the story of Nehemiah from the Scriptures.⁵

Nehemiah was a Jew living abroad, serving as a high servant to the king. The city of Jerusalem was in ruins, and the people had drifted away from their beliefs, customs, and laws. Nehemiah didn't justify the situation, or ignore it by busying himself with tasks. Instead, he recognized it for what it was: the relaxed practices had weakened the people, and the physical ruin had left the city vulnerable and exposed.

Nehemiah asked how the city and people were faring (i.e., he sought to know what was).

Moreover, Nehemiah anticipated *what should have been*: those walls and gates should have been strong, solid, and high—a physical form of protection, as well as a symbol of strength and unity. The people should have followed their laws and customs, prospering instead of suffering. This dichotomy between what was and what should have been gave him a vision for restoring Jerusalem to its previous glory.

Let's apply this to our lives, looking first at *what is*. Be honest with yourself about where you are, and don't be afraid to dig deep.

What are your highlights and achievements, your moments of pride, joy, or contentment? Where do you struggle or fall short? How are you hurting? Lastly, what is the middle ground,

GOALS GONE WRONG 13

your day-to-day grind? We're all complex, and life isn't all extremes. No one's list should be all good or all bad. If your list skews one way or another, bring in people you trust to help you round out the picture.

Now, let's talk about what could be.

Looking at your *what is* list, is anything heartbreaking, embarrassing, or causing a guilt trip? Do you ever feel like you've settled for far less than you're capable of or deserve? What could this list look like instead? (Note that Andy Stanley didn't say *what would be agreeable*, or *what we think would be best for us*, or *what isn't possible even in a perfect world*. He said *what could be*.)

Once you've examined *what is* and determined *what could be*, you can begin building your visions on that dichotomy.

Nehemiah's vision was for a restored Jerusalem, both its walls and its people. Given the state it was in, that must have seemed remarkable. Yet, he shared his vision by asking the king to allow him to return to Jerusalem and restore it. He fought fiercely against all the forces that wished to fail him. And he succeeded. The wall was rebuilt in only fifty-two days, and the people were restored to their former practices, success, and unity.

Nehemiah was successful because he saw what was, sought what could have been, and acted on the vision in his heart.

What are your hopes and dreams for your life now that you've thought about what is and what could be?

When you feel connected to a greater purpose and other people, when you have a sense of gratitude and meaning, and when you have the strength to handle stress and unforeseen circumstances, you will have the energy and stamina to build a beautiful life.

What We Lose When We Set Goals the Old Way

From my point of view, the biggest mistake we make when we set goals is that we sacrifice a beautiful present for the sake of an arbitrary future.

Let me explain what I mean.

Onstage, the speaker asks you to write down your goals. "What do you want?" they prompt. Then, "Where do you want to end up in life?" So, you reflect, and write what comes to mind (the goal weight, the goal house, the perfect party, the promotion).

However, no matter how thoughtfully or intentionally we approach this task, the process still leads us to set what I refer to as *arbitrary goals*. Influenced by the culture around us, the goals we scribble in those few minutes likely are not things that would bring us true, rich, and deep fulfillment. They're things that you think you should have, things that you've been told will make you happy, things other people have, or things other people want you to have.

Arbitrary goals can also be called comparison goals: goals based on what other people are pursuing or what other people tell us we should do. These goals have little to no connection to the life we are actually living. They have little to no connection to who we *are*. They do not consider the very real limitations of our lives (how much free time we have, how many kids we have, what our home responsibilities are, if we're taking care of our aging parents).

Our goals set us up for failure if we create them without first considering if they would enhance our lives or make us happy as we work toward them. Traditional goal-setting positions us for failure because it begins with the head and belittles the heart.

Furthermore, setting the goal (naming it) is often where we stop. We spend our energy on naming what we want (or what we think we're supposed to want) without spending any energy on how we will get there.

Allow me to use an example from *South Park*: one character makes a business plan, illustrated on a board in three phases. Phase 1 is to collect underpants. Phase 3 is to turn a profit. But as the character is questioned about the plan, the viewer realizes that there is no phase 2. They have no idea how to turn their collection of underpants into a profitable business—and yet, they have started phase 1 with enthusiasm (as evidenced by the characters eagerly throwing underpants into a pile).⁶

Not many of us are trying to turn a profit from underpants (and maybe even fewer enjoy *South Park*), so let's try another example.

Suzy decides she's going to lose eighteen pounds. This doesn't seem like an arbitrary goal,

GOALS GONE WRONG 15

at first glance. She has calculated inches, pounds, calories, macros, workouts, and weeks, and her doctor told her this was essential. She plans, dividing the goal into weeks, pounds, and days, and posts the number eighteen around the house in circumspect alcoves to remind herself. After seven days, the scale doesn't show a decrease—the darn thing must be broken, because it can't be possible that it would go the other way! Suzy looks at her calculations and frowns. She is not on track to achieve her goal. In fact, she is going the opposite direction.

To ward off the emotions of failure, Suzy decides this whole goal thing, weight loss thing, and general self-improvement thing is a marketing hoax. She knows that next week she'll feel so bad about herself, she might as well order the donuts now.

What went wrong for *South Park* and Suzy isn't that they lacked vision: both parties knew what they wanted (profit up, pounds down). It wasn't that they lacked focus, even if *South Park* was missing a step. It was that neither of them addressed the process—the messy middle part with all the obstacles.

- How would the process look and feel to them?
- How would this fit in their actual (not hypothetical) life?
- How would they cope when life got in the way and progress didn't happen as planned?
- How did they want to feel—regardless of the outcome?

We've set ourselves up for failure by committing to arbitrary goals, by ignoring crucial aspects of our lives, and by not considering how the achievement method fits into our everyday lives. We blame ourselves for lack of effort or discipline, beating ourselves up and compounding our anxiety. This is not an "us" problem. Failure to reach our goals is often not a failure of our efforts or discipline. The root of the issue resides in the relationship between brain function and goal-system.

When we believe that the "good life" will only come after we have achieved some certain goal (especially an arbitrary one), our brains tell us we're unsafe. What happens is that our

amygdala (aka the lizard brain)—the part of our brain responsible for fear—perceives that we won't be safe until we achieve the goal. Until we accomplish the goal, the amygdala will keep sending us warnings.⁷ You've probably gotten some of these.

It whispers, *You have not arrived yet; it's not time to rest yet.* No wonder we're tired! Our brains won't let us rest until we've achieved our goals. Worse yet, we keep trying to solve this problem by setting more goals!

You might say to yourself, Well, I've achieved several of the goals I set—and I never could have done that without the SMART goals method. Of course, that's partly true (for me too). But have you ever noticed how, when we achieve success, the bar goes up? It's not like you achieve something great (running a half-marathon, for instance) and then suddenly feel better about yourself. No. You feel better about yourself for a moment, but it fades, especially when the flyer for the full marathon shows up.

You recalibrate, walk through another goal-setting session, track the goals, and raise the bar. Again.

Perhaps you've felt like me, finding it difficult to find joy and contentment and a meaning-ful life in that process. And why should we have to wait until we achieve or accumulate or arrive to be happy? Why can't we enjoy our lives *right now*?

The good stuff of life, the stuff the good Lord intended for us (fulfillment, love, joy, meaning, happiness, growth, beauty) are not locations at which we can arrive. Wonder, adventure, and abundance are part of the process, not prizes we win when we've checked the boxes. These rich delights were not intended to be pursued as payoffs.

We are designed to *live* a beautiful life. Not spend all of our time and energy chasing after it.

When used for personal goal-setting, SMART goals can be a recipe for disaster. You may feel like living proof of that right now. But this is where HEART has a secret sauce: it's not built upon destination or arbitrary wants. It doesn't hinge on a specific outcome. Instead of asking what I want or where I want to go, it asks a simple, alternative question, empowering me to chart a course and embrace the process: *What do I need?*

GOALS GONE WRONG 17

Write It Down, Make It Beautiful

Take a minute to respond to the questions below. Reflect on your earlier experiences with goal-setting, what has worked for you, and how you feel about your life now.

- 1. How do you feel about your life right now? Consider what is and what could be.
- 2. Have you achieved any big goals in the past? What has worked and what hasn't?
- 3. Do you have a current goal list? If so, what does it look like?



Chapter 2

HEART EXPLAINED

"And so, rock bottom became the solid foundation on which I rebuilt my life."

J.K. ROWLING¹

beautiful life doesn't come from accomplishments: from a perfectly clean house, finishing a marathon, a career promotion, or even from the dream vacation with your family. Ordinary, everyday moments are the building blocks of a beautiful life. Each and every moment, no matter how mundane or unexceptional, serves as the foundation for an extraordinary life. When we are fully present we can appreciate and find joy in those moments. Only then will we discover a truly beautiful life.

It's not that accomplishments can't be meaningful.

The problem is when we let an arbitrary goal become more important than the life that's in front of us. The one we're living now. Perhaps you can relate.

- We stay up late, then get up early until we're exhausted—without ever evaluating why
 we want to achieve the goal in the first place.
- We sacrifice ourselves and time with the people we love for the sake of the project.
- We're so focused on the accomplishment that we let the little tasks pile up.

Eventually, those little tasks become the chaos in our days (no clean clothes, the car runs out of gas, the house must be cleaned for company thirty minutes before they arrive, there's no food in the fridge).

If working toward these accomplishment-driven SMART goals is causing you to feel anxious, out of control, and continually frustrated with your present life, then these goals aren't making your life better—even if they're helping you achieve the end objective.

To reiterate, I'm not asking you to give up your dreams. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to try this HEART thing on for size. See if it makes your life less chaotic and more balanced, leaving space for goodness and love and joy and simple pleasures.

As cliché as it sounds, it's true: a beautiful life is a result of finding fulfillment in the journey. That means less chaos, more peace, more of what fills you up, and more of what makes a difference in your days. Rather than focusing on what we want to achieve, we should look at what we need to discover these essential components for a rich and fulfilling life.

Human Needs: What Runs Our Lives

What do I mean by "needs"? Very simply, needs are whatever keeps you going and whatever makes your life run. Needs are the activities that keep you, a human, surviving and thriving. What's crazy is how many of us (myself included) are *ignoring* our needs in favor of our wants (the marathon, the promotion, the vacation). This is backward, of course, and I wonder why it didn't dawn on me sooner.

When we neglect our needs, life slowly slips into more chaos.

Yet, in our frenetic pace, we frequently push our needs aside or don't even allow them to register. Consider this: how many times have you skipped a meal, gone an entire day without drinking enough water, slept less than eight hours per night, or told yourself to suck it up and be an adult when all you needed was a good cry?

When was the last time you talked to a therapist or counselor, read a self-help book, or humbled yourself to ask for help from a mentor or wise friend? When did you last spend time meditating, praying, or reading to renew your spirit and transform your mind?

What about setting a necessary boundary with a demanding coworker or friend? How often have your kids asked to spend time with you lately? How many times have you said yes? When was the last time you went on a date with your significant other? How long has it been since you met up with a "pick up where you left off" friend and had a meaningful, rich, soul-filling conversation?

Do you ever procrastinate on tasks that help you manage your life and care for yourself and your family? The chores, the bills, the honey-do list, the tidying?

When was the last time you evaluated your work or your passion projects? Have you neglected something that brings you energy and joy? Is your career overtaking your life?

Health, emotional stability, relationships, life responsibilities, and work: these are all examples of what keep us, as humans, going.

I didn't make this up. If you think back to your Psychology 101 class, you'll likely remember a guy named Abraham Maslow and his pyramid: the Hierarchy of Needs. Each of the pyramid's levels represents a set of human needs. The central idea is that some needs are more fundamental than others. He grouped these essentials into five categories:

Level 1: Physiological needs: food, rest, clothing, water, air

Level 2: Safety and security: resources, health, shelter

Level 3: Belonging: love and acceptance

Level 4: Esteem: prestige and accomplishment

Level 5: Self-actualization: creative fulfillment²



Maslow proposed that you can't advance to the next level until you've met your needs at the previous one. That is, if my basic sense of safety and survival is jeopardized, I cannot seek more advanced needs like love and acceptance. And if I don't feel loved and accepted, I can't achieve creative fulfillment or reach my potential.

And yet, we regularly attempt to bypass Maslow's first three levels to attain levels four and five. The effect it has had on us is obvious. The hierarchy of needs provides a common foundation for all people, regardless of circumstances, successes, or failures. We have needs, and disregarding them will have a negative impact on our well-being.

Addressing needs rather than desires will lead to a happier and more fulfilling existence. This may come as a surprise to those who have been told you can "be anything you want to be" and all you have to do is "put your mind to something and you can achieve it." This is sound advice, but it won't help if you don't first attend to your needs. There is a deficit until needs are met: one step forward, two steps back.

So, how do we break free from our natural tendency to pursue our desires without first satisfying our needs? Enter: HEART.

HEART

This is where HEART can help us. Born out of the need for a flexible, forgiving system, and developed through a chaotic season, HEART has been fine-tuned and adapted over the years.

I prefer to think of HEART as a checklist of essentials rather than a goal-setting system. Even more, it has evolved into a life management system for weekly and monthly planning, as well as daily self–check-ins.

HEART quickly reminds us of our basic needs when we're feeling off-track. HEART maximizes our time, energy, talents, and resources, empowering us to achieve the things we *want*, *after* our needs have been met. The journey may surprise you, though. Have you ever gotten what you wanted, only to realize it wasn't what you wanted at all? Start with what you need, not what you want, to get what your heart truly desires.

In simplest terms, HEART is a life management system. The structure adheres to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, but that was an accidental discovery on my part. Each letter in the HEART acronym represents an area of your life—the Life Segments.

HEART asks:

- What do I need to manage my physical well-being?
- What do I need to meet my emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being?
- What do I need to do to enrich my relationships?
- What do I need to steward my resources and responsibilities well?
- What do I need to do with my gifts and abilities to serve my community best?

It's important to note the order: basic, primitive, and daily physical needs are first—needs we often ignore! Imagine the strong foundation you could build if you recognized these requirements, satisfied them first, and then moved your way to the next level.

Life Segment 1: Help Yourself: Physiological and safety needs; including food, rest, health, and well-being

- Life Segment 2: Empower Yourself: Emotional, mental, and spiritual needs; some hobbies, education, personal development, mindset
- Life Segment 3: All Your People: Social needs; needs related to your family, spouse, and community; belonging, love, and acceptance
- Life Segment 4: Resources and Responsibilities: Household chores, transportation logistics and responsibilities, and financial tasks
- Life Segment 5: Trade and Talent: Prestige and accomplishment, career, ambitions; the stuff of traditional goal-setting

It's hard to see in the pyramid (since it's upside down) but the acronym looks like this:



HEART MODEL

H-Help Yourself

Four checkpoints foster a strong base in *Help Yourself*. Each component is essential for our physical well-being: sleep, nutrition, water, and movement.

Think about what you can accomplish when your body is well-nourished with the essentials for life. Can you visualize yourself well-rested, nourished, hydrated, and fit? How does your

current reality differ from that visual? Sleep gets pushed to the wayside for "when things slow down"; you somehow make it to 3:00 p.m. forgetting to eat anything (except a chocolate chip cookie leftover from last night); you forget to drink water and binge on coffee and wine instead; and before you know it, you're weary and worn out.

The quickest way to burnout (and subsequent chaos) is to neglect your physical needs.

E-Empower Yourself

Once we address our physical needs, we can focus on the needs of our inner world. *Empower Yourself* is where the heart, mind, and soul are tended; where we examine our emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs—and implement a plan to meet those needs. This might involve booking a therapy session, taking a class, finding a church or small group, or reading books.

With objective awareness of our emotional needs, on our best days, we could freely savor the goodness in our journey. On the most difficult days, we could pursue solutions to heal what hurts.

With tended hearts, sharp minds, and nourished souls, we avoid stalling out in life, laying crucial groundwork for the Life Segments to follow.

A-All Your People

With our physical and emotional needs satisfied, we can think about relationships. This may sound counterintuitive, given that women have been educated for millennia to put the needs of others ahead of their own. Our people deserve our best, but we can't offer it to them until we've first become our best selves. All of us want to do our best for our families and friends.

People are the most valuable resource on the planet, and they require special care. With a solid physical and emotional foundation, we can give these relationships the respect they deserve.

As a wife and mother, the four people closest to me are my husband and three kids. Regularly, I ask myself what I can do to care for and support them. The first two things on the list? Maintaining my physical and emotional well-being. After I've taken care of my basic needs, I can focus on making lunches, lending an ear, or helping study for a spelling test.

After I've taken care of my immediate family, I move on to my extended family and friends, team, customers, and finally my audience. Prioritizing *All My People* helps me invest in relationships that make life worthwhile.

Visualize a life where you regularly assess what your people need from you—what they need to prosper—and prioritize giving it to them.

R-Resources and Responsibilities

Our lives revolve around the three checkpoints of *Resources and Responsibilities*: home, transportation, and finances. To prevent unwanted surprises, our homes need a system for cleaning and repair; our vehicles need a maintenance schedule; and our bills, taxes, and budgets must be paid, filed, and managed.

In this Life Segment, you'll find the less glamorous parts of life. Procrastination in this area usually results in an emergency: a broken appliance, kitchen fire, flat tire, or late fee. Putting off general maintenance throws us off-balance: waiting until Tax Day to file taxes, waiting until the light is on to get the oil changed, waiting until the day of a party to shop for food. It's in these moments of emergency that we find ourselves donning our fireman's gear and sacrificing something else: sleep, a workout, time with family, or reliable transportation.

Normally, when I'm having a day where I feel like I'm coming unglued, it's because I haven't allocated my resources properly.

Disaster can usually be avoided if resources and responsibilities are properly managed. My day isn't ruined by minor mishaps if I perform a few simple tasks daily or weekly.

T-Trade and Talent

For some, *Trade and Talent* is a profession: what puts food on the table and money in the bank. For others, it's a side-hustle or artistic expression. Sometimes it's volunteer work: hours spent as a classroom aide or tending the community garden.

No matter what your work life looks like, there is a world where you feel energized and empowered to make decisions and can set boundaries and be effective with the time you have allocated—when a bad day at work doesn't ruin your week. Think about what it would feel like to be fully engaged with your job and duties and log off when you're finished.

It's tempting to bump the Trade and Talent Life Segment up on the to-do list. I still catch myself saying yes to a client, knowing it will create chaos at home during dinner. It's hard to say no, because I don't want to disappoint people! Or sometimes I'll be excited about a creative brief and dive into research on my phone instead of being present with my family. But the second we put work first, the framework fails.

Maybe it's not your work life that is out of whack. Maybe it's relational stress or a flat tire, or maybe you forget to manage your physical or emotional health. Whatever the imbalance, HEART will quickly bring us back to center.

Take a moment to consider: Which Life Segment feels the most out of balance for you?

FUN STUFF? Ξ

Am I saying you should go to a party, because it falls under A, before you manage your bills? Not necessarily. Whether you should attend the party hinges on the benefit you stand to derive from it. Will attendance at the party deepen important, non-toxic relationships, and have you set aside and committed time to pay your bills? Then by all means attend. But if the party won't move you forward to becoming the person you want to be, why attend? Worse yet, what if it surrounds you with people who don't encourage or positively influence you? It would be wiser to go for a walk or read a book. Ask yourself why you want to go and, more importantly, what you need right now. If the fun thing doesn't satisfy an unmet need, then you have a clear answer whether or not to attend the event.

Yes, the Order Matters

Just as Maslow's hierarchy of needs builds from physical needs to self-actualization, so, too, do the Life Segments have an intentional order: H, E, A, R, then T. The sequential ordering of HEART establishes balance, rooting us in self-care and resulting in quality of life, joy, and real contentment.

Your physical needs come first for the reasons Maslow noted. We must care for ourselves to be in the best shape to care for our people. It's a cliché example, but put your own oxygen mask on first.

After physical needs come our emotional needs. We can't serve others if we're having an emotional meltdown or are running on empty. Addressing the needs of our inner worlds prepares us to next focus on our relationships and responsibilities.

People matter and they need to come before finances, chores, and work.

Each Life Segment acts as a building block for the next. When you prioritize self-care, you position yourself for personal growth. When you're healthy emotionally, mentally, and spiritually, you'll form deeper, more meaningful relationships.

With our relational well-being steadied, we can shift our attention to financial obligations and household duties. When we have stewarded these material responsibilities, we can ask ourselves the most meaningful question of all: How can I use my talents and skills to best serve my community and our world?

Notice how using HEART goals (especially as opposed to SMART goals) changes the way we approach organizing our lives.

HEART pulls in emotion, subsequently tying in purpose and meaning. By building on our needs, HEART prevents chaos from the beginning. By focusing on the present, instead of constantly trying to manage future results, we're free to explore our beautiful journeys. On the practical side of things, HEART prompts us to anticipate obstacles, better preparing us to overcome them, when they arise. HEART doesn't require willpower and brute force to make progress, but attends to our emotional and mental needs, fostering motivation and compelling us to action.

Traditional goal-setting usually treats the symptoms of our lives—"What is wrong with my life?"—while HEART takes a more holistic approach: "What is right, and how can we build on that?" While traditional goal-setting methods ask you to make your goals achievable and realistic, the process itself isn't flexible enough for everyday life. Most goal-setting systems don't specify what *types* of goals to set to enjoy a fulfilling life, or *how many* goals are too many. There is no instruction on how to prioritize your goals; measuring and tracking is complicated, cumbersome, and one more thing on your to-do list. Because this type of goal-setting is rooted in comparison, it doesn't account for your identity as an individual. Traditional goal-setting comes with a warning label: you might achieve what you don't want, whereas with HEART, you will get what you need—which is ultimately what your heart desires.

How to Use HEART

I use HEART in four ways:

- Long-term, big-picture planning (some people call this goal-setting).
- Monthly and weekly planning (not every week—because once you find balance you can coast for a bit). We will learn how to do this in Part III.
- Daily check-in (especially helpful when life's storms arise). When life becomes chaotic,
 I find it helpful to pull away and center myself by quickly walking through each letter:
 H, E, A, R, and T. When life gets out of control, I pause, evaluate whether I am using
 HEART, and start at the beginning of the acronym with my physical needs.
- A reflection tool. Using HEART in hindsight can give us an objective perspective on our actions and choices. Reflection creates personal growth, inspires change, informs our narratives, and deepens our understanding of ourselves and others.

HEART helps us identify what's going wrong in our day, week, month, or year. If I'm feeling off, I run through the Life Segments to figure out what's bothering me, and I adjust.

Whether you're using HEART for long-term visioning, weekly or monthly planning, or daily check-ins, the order remains the same.

In 2019, I was invited to speak about HEART at an entrepreneurs' workshop. I handed out workbooks, and hopped onto a cute brass barstool in a swanky co-working space. After working through the exercises, one woman raised her hand. She was pregnant, with a toddler at home, running a new business, and, I found out afterward, stressed about expenses. Work was pulling all her time and energy away from her family. Hesitantly, she asked, "What if you're in a season where you have to prioritize work first?"

I felt compassion for her as I responded, shaking my head, "It won't work." I continued on with my personal story: "Six years ago, with a young business, a stressful marriage, and financial burdens, I took two months off to spend time with my daughter when she was born. I didn't forget my work responsibilities, but I never let it pull me away from her. When I felt work tug, I maintained balance by working my HEART list in the right order. I focused on my vision to decrease work time, increase revenue, and spend more time with my family, while taking care of myself.

"As my fledgling business took off, I focused on 'quality of life decisions.' I decided I wouldn't sacrifice my own personal health or sanity or relationships for money or work. As we were putting the systems in place for the new business, this decision forced us to build margin around different operations.

"We shipped in cycles. We were selling planners, and we'd turn the cart on, sell for a week, and then turn the cart off, ship and rest for a week, then do it again."

My point was: the right choice is in many cases the counterintuitive choice. Life has a way of surprising us with solutions. We must trust the process.

But the process is messy and can often be scary.

You might think, Sometimes things fail, right? Sometimes our goals don't work. And then what? What if you're the only breadwinner in your family, and you have to provide?

You're right. Maybe you're in a demanding season of start-up. Stepping away from work responsibilities may feel impossible or like a sure death sentence for your career. Moving from commitments you've already made to a HEART lifestyle—which focuses on quality of life—will take practice and time.

To clarify, I'm not telling you to skip work! Prioritize your primary needs first. Make sure the baby has adequate care. Or if you're home when you work, don't take a conference call if the baby is crying. Learn how to say no. Resist the urge to sacrifice family to hustle. Set boundaries. Avoid time suckers, coffee dates with people who want to "pick your brain." Don't pull all-nighters. Don't sacrifice your health. Refuse to compare yourself to others. Celebrate what you *have* accomplished and give yourself grace where you haven't met up with your hopes and expectations.

Also, think of what's at stake if you *don't* stop and refocus: your kid's first goal at a soccer game, your daughter's sixth birthday, healing laughter over dinner with friends, and your own mental, emotional, and physical health. You can be selective about what you commit to, but if you let work and career or the desire for more stuff or money overtake your life, these are the prices you will pay.

When we prioritize our needs in order of importance, everything else balances out. If we reverse or mess with the order, we cannot expect the same results. The order matters. You can't prioritize Trade and Talent first, then Resources and Responsibilities, and then Help Yourself. Work won't *work* if you've neglected your basic needs. And in the most counterintuitive way, work will work itself out if you take a small amount of your time to focus on what matters most.

I'll coach you through identifying your needs in each Life Segment (part II) and how to use HEART (part III) soon. For now, get to know the many ways HEART orients your life and gets you back on track toward what matters.

Adaptable and Fit to You

Goals—SMART or not—are no substitute for a life management system. And we need a life management system. Our lives are spinning faster than ever before—while throwing us a fair share of curveballs, restarts, and do-overs.

Screaming babies, the passing of a friend, an unexpected hospital visit, fatigue.

PMS, a kid's forgotten homework.

Local crises, national crises, natural disasters, or the occasional parking ticket.

This is the stuff traditional goal-setting does not take into account. It's impossible to anticipate all the trappings a year will throw at us 365 days in advance. If we mapped out every appointment for our entire year on January 1, can you imagine the mess our planners would be? I'm all for messy planners, but the cross-outs, strike-throughs, and paper smudges from erasing so many times would drive me crazy.

HEART takes real life into account in two ways:

One, there are no deadlines. You can assign a deadline to a desire; you can't assign a deadline to a need. If you miss a deadline or your life gets chaotic (which, spoiler, it will), you simply give yourself grace and start again. Each Life Segment is a continual process, in constant improvement.

Second, as surprises interrupt your day or life, specific tasks can shift, but the basic need categories remain the same. Because HEART centers on the categories, the tasks within those segments can adapt to every situation.

Imbalance can befall us in any season. A young mother with an infant is sacrificing sleep, and exercise, but she can focus on nutrition and water. A project at work, an unexpected health crisis, a book deadline (*ahem*) can all throw our focus off of our HEART priorities. Taking care of an elderly parent can be demanding on a normal sleep and exercise schedule, but you can take small steps to care for yourself, and those small steps will contribute to helping you maintain as much balance in life as possible.

When we address our needs we address the root of stress and comparison.

And because HEART is needs-based, it fits uniquely into your life, so you won't end up with arbitrary goals.

Going back to our needs helps us meet ourselves where we are. If you haven't had enough sleep, HEART prompts you to remedy that. If you have five kids or no kids, your relational needs change accordingly. If you work full-time or part-time or at your own discretion, your needs will meet you there. Instead of picking an achievement from another person's life and superimposing it onto yours, look at your needs. Your needs will always direct you to ambitions that highlight your abilities, minimize your limitations, and maximize your strengths.

We know what makes life beautiful: the love, joy, and goodness we feel from day to day. The way we experience those emotions is directly tied to how well we address our needs. Because HEART is based on your needs, your efforts will automatically help you move toward that beautiful life.

Write It Down, Make It Beautiful

- 1. What would it look like to stop asking what you want and ask what you need?
- 2. Where have you been ignoring your needs?
- 3. How is neglecting your needs affecting other areas of your life?
- 4. What is one thing you know you need right now?
- 5. What Life Segment does this represent?
- **6.** What steps could you take to meet that need?

