Rebuilding the Man

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Strength After Prison

A Reentry Companion for Men Coming Home

Angela D. Martini

Rebuilding the Man: Strength After Prison
A Reentry Companion for Men Coming Home
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To the men in reentry:

This book is for you — every man who made the decision to come home and stay home. I see your strength, I honor your story, and I believe in the man you are becoming.

As staff support at R.S. Eden, I am deeply honored to be part of your journey. I am passionate about standing beside you — encouraging you and guiding you where I can, and reminding you of what you must never forget on the hard days: keep hope, never give up, stay strong. I believe in your success in every way it can come, and I will be cheering for you all the way home.

And to the staff of R.S. Eden:

You inspire me to continue doing everything I can to be supportive, caring, and compassionate toward people and their stories. Thank you for treating everyone with equality and fairness, and for all you do to encourage and guide. I feel blessed to work for and with such amazing people. I look forward to seeing their success stories as they exit reentry and step into their new lives.

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Also by Angela D. Martini

Unyielding Grace

Rebuilding the Pillars

Introduction

I want to tell you why I wrote this book for you.

My name is Angela, and I know what it feels like to have to rebuild a life from the ground up — because I have done it myself. I am a woman in recovery. I have been sober from alcohol for fourteen years, and I am twenty months sober from meth. I do not say that to impress you. I say it because I want you to know that the person talking to you in these pages has walked through fire and come out the other side.

In January of 2025, I was found unresponsive and placed in an induced coma. The doctors did not know if I would make it. My family gathered around my bedside and prayed. When I woke up, I understood something I had been circling for years: I had been given another chance, and I was not going to waste it.

That second chance changed everything. I became a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist, because I wanted to take everything I had survived and turn it into something that could help somebody else. Today I work with men in reentry, and I can tell you honestly: there is no work I would rather do. I get to watch men walk through the door carrying the weight of their past, and I get to watch them put it down, one day at a time, and pick up something better.

This work is personal to me in a way I want you to understand. I am not writing to you from some office far away from your life. I am in the room with men like you every single day. I see the man who walks in guarded, arms crossed, daring the world to give him one more reason to quit. I see the man who is quiet because he is ashamed. I see the man who is angry because anger is easier than grief. And I want you to know something: I see past all of that. I see the man underneath — the one who got up this morning and showed up. That took courage, whether you feel courageous or not.

I live for the small moments. The day a man’s shoulders drop because he finally believes somebody is actually in his corner. The first honest paycheck. The phone call that says, “I got the apartment.” The moment he looks me in the eye — really looks — because he is starting to believe he might make it. Those moments are why I do this work. They are proof of what I already know: a man who decides to rebuild can rebuild. I have watched it happen, and I will never stop believing it can happen for you.

I need you to hear this part, because it matters: I am not going anywhere. There will be days you want to quit on yourself. On those days, I am still in your corner. I will tell you the truth even when it is uncomfortable, because respecting you means not lying to you. And I will keep

believing in the man you are becoming until you can believe in him yourself. That is my promise to you, from my heart to yours.

Here is what I believe with my whole heart: your past does not get to decide your future. I do not care what your record says. I do not care what your worst day looked like. I care about who you decide to be starting today. I have seen it happen too many times to doubt it — a man decides he is done going backward, and his whole life starts to turn.

That is why I wrote Rebuilding the Man. This book is a companion for men in reentry — for the man who is coming home and wondering if he can really do this. Maybe you are holding this book in a reentry program. Maybe you are in the first strange weeks of freedom. Maybe you have been out for a while and you are still finding your footing. Wherever you are, this book was written to walk beside you.

I wrote this book because I cannot be there at two in the morning when the old life starts whispering. But this book can be on your nightstand. When the doubt comes, when the anger rises, when somebody offers you the fast way back to the slow death — open these pages. Let them remind you of what you already decided. You are not alone in this fight. I am with you in these words, and there are men all around you fighting the same fight.

And hear me on this: I know what you are capable of. Not because I am guessing — because this is what I do, and I know what a man can become when he refuses to quit. You are capable of holding a job and being proud of it. You are capable of being the father, the son, the brother your family needs. You are capable of walking past the old corner without stopping. You are capable of a quiet, steady, honest life — and that life is worth more than anything the streets ever promised you. Do not let anyone, including yourself, tell you otherwise.

It is about letting go of the past without pretending it did not happen. It is about building real strength — the kind that shows up in how you work, how you love your family, how you handle your anger, and how you spend your money. It is about hope, the practical kind, the kind you can act on today. And it is about the future: the man you are becoming is already in you, waiting for you to decide.

Each chapter has reflection questions with space to write, because honesty is where rebuilding starts — and nobody grades this, so write the truth. Each chapter ends with affirmations: short, strong sentences to speak out loud. I know it might feel strange at first. Do it anyway. The voice you listen to most is your own, so make it say something worth hearing.

One thing you should know: this book is spiritual, but it is not religious. I am not here to preach at you or hand you a doctrine. I am here to talk about the deeper things every man needs — purpose, stillness, strength, hope, and connection to something greater than himself. Call it your Higher Power, the quiet, the better man inside you waiting to come out. Whatever name you give it, feed it. A man with a fed spirit can survive anything.

I believe in you. I believe in the man you are becoming, even on the days you cannot see him yet. So turn the page. Let us rebuild him — together.

How to Use This Book

Read it your way. You can read straight through, one chapter at a time, or you can open to whatever chapter speaks to where you are today. There is no wrong way to use this book — only your way.

Write honestly. Each chapter has five reflection questions with space to write. Be blunt. Be real. Nobody will grade your answers, and the only person you would be fooling with a pretty answer is yourself.

Say the affirmations out loud. Every chapter ends with seven affirmations. Speak them — in the morning, in the car, in the mirror. Your own voice is the one you hear most. Train it to build you up instead of tear you down.

Go slow where you need to. Some chapters will hit harder than others. That is the chapter you need most. Sit with it. Come back to it. Growth is not a race.

Bring it to your circle. If you are in a group, a program, or working with a mentor, bring this book with you. Talk about what you wrote. A man grows faster when he does not grow alone.



Chapter 1

Your Past Is a Chapter, Not the Whole Story

“I am not my worst day.”

Let us get the hardest truth out of the way first, man to man: you cannot change what you did. The record exists. The time was served. The people who were hurt carry their own version of the story, and some of them will never update it. That is their business. Yours is what happens next.

Here is what I need you to understand, because everything else in this book stands on it: what you did is not who you are.

Read that again. What you did is not who you are.

There is a difference between guilt and shame, and knowing it will save your life. Guilt says, “I did something wrong.” Guilt is useful — it is your conscience doing its job, pointing at an action so you can make it right or make sure it never happens again. Shame says, “I am something wrong.” Shame is a liar. Shame takes one chapter of your life and tries to convince you it is the whole book.

You are not a file folder. You are not a case number. You are not the worst thing you ever did on the worst day of your life. Those are facts about your history; they are not the definition of your worth.

Let me paint you a picture. Imagine a man — we will call him Marcus — who has been out for two years and still introduces himself by his charge. “I’m Marcus, I did five years for...” He leads with it on job interviews, on dates, meeting his kid’s teachers. He thinks he is being honest. What he is really doing is handing every stranger the pen and asking them to write his story. Now imagine someone in his corner finally tells him, “You keep reading people chapter four and wondering why they never get to chapter twenty.” So Marcus stops leading with his past. He starts leading with his work, his word, his presence. The past does not disappear — but it stops being the headline.

Letting go of the past does not mean pretending it did not happen. It does not mean you were not responsible. It means you refuse to keep serving a sentence that is already over. The gate opened. Walk out — all the way out, including in your mind.

So here is your work for this chapter. Name what happened, plainly, without drama and without excuses. Name what it taught you — because pain that teaches is not wasted. And then make a decision, here and now: the past gets to be a chapter. It does not get to be the author anymore.

You are holding the pen now. Write like it.

Pause and Reflect

Be honest. Nobody grades this — the only person you would be fooling with a pretty answer is yourself.

1. In one honest paragraph, what chapter of your past do you keep re-reading? Write it plainly — no excuses, no drama.

2. What is one thing that chapter taught you that you can actually use going forward?

3. Where in your life are you still "serving time" in your mind, even though the sentence is over?

4. Who in your life sees the man you are becoming — not just the man you were? What do they see?

5. Finish this sentence: “From today forward, my past is allowed to be a _____, but never again my _____.”

Affirmations for the Road

Speak these out loud. Your own voice is the one you hear most — train it to build you up.

1. **I am not my worst day.**
2. **My past is a chapter, not the whole story.**
3. **Guilt teaches me; shame does not own me.**
4. **I have paid my debt and I am free to build.**
5. **What I did does not decide what I do next.**
6. **I am a man of worth, right now, as I am.**
7. **I hold the pen, and I am writing forward.**

Carry This With You

“Your past is a chapter. You are holding the pen now.”

“You are not a file folder. You are not a case number. You are not the worst thing you ever did on the worst day of your life.”

Chapter 1

My Notes

My Notes



Chapter 2

The First 90 Days

“I build my new life one steady day at a time.”

Freedom is disorienting. Nobody tells you that part. You imagined this day for years — and then it arrives, and the world is louder, faster, and more complicated than you remembered. Everybody wants something from you at once: the parole officer, the family, the bills, the old friends who heard you were out. Breathe. You do not have to solve your whole life this week. You have to win today, then win tomorrow.

Research is blunt about this: the first months after release are the highest-risk window. Most returns do not happen in year three — they happen in the first year, and the first ninety days are the sharpest edge of it, when structure is thin and old habits are loud. That is not meant to scare you. It is meant to focus you. The first ninety days are where freedom is won or lost, and you get a vote every single morning.

So let us talk practical. In your first seventy-two hours, handle the unglamorous foundations: your ID, your reporting address, your first meeting with your parole or supervision officer. Show up early. Bring a notebook. Write down every condition and every date. Violations do not usually come from big dramatic failures — they come from missed appointments and misunderstood rules. Be the man who is never confused about what is expected of him.

Next: build a schedule before the street builds one for you. An empty day is the most dangerous thing you own right now. Fill it — work, program, gym, applications, helping somebody, rest. It does not have to be impressive. It has to be full. Structure is not a cage; it is scaffolding. It holds you up while the new life sets.

And hear me on this: the old life will call, and it will call soon. Old friends, old corners, old numbers still in an old phone. Every one of them is a test you already know the answer to. You do not owe anyone your presence. “I’m laying low and getting right” is a complete sentence. The ones who respect it might be worth keeping later. The ones who do not were never your brothers — they were your cellmates in a different kind of prison.

Ninety days. That is all I am asking you to focus on. Ninety steady days of showing up, staying clean, keeping your word, and building. On day ninety-one, look back at the man you were on day one. You will barely recognize him — and that is the point.

Pause and Reflect

Be honest. Nobody grades this — the only person you would be fooling with a pretty answer is yourself.

1. What are the three most urgent practical things you need handled in your first two weeks (ID, housing, reporting, etc.)? List them in order.

2. Describe your ideal daily schedule for the next 30 days. What fills the empty hours?

3. Who is most likely to pull you toward the old life? What exactly will you say when they call?

4. What does “winning today” look like for you, specifically — not in general, but today?

5. What is one rule or condition of your supervision you need to be 100% clear on? How will you get clarity?

Affirmations for the Road

Speak these out loud. Your own voice is the one you hear most — train it to build you up.

1. **I build my new life one steady day at a time.**
2. **I handle my business early and completely.**
3. **An empty day does not run me — I run my day.**
4. **I am done with the old life, and I prove it daily.**
5. **I show up early, prepared, and respectful.**
6. **Ninety days of steady wins changes everything.**
7. **I am free, and I protect my freedom fiercely.**

Carry This With You

“Win today. Stack the days.”

“Structure is not a cage; it is scaffolding. It holds you up while the new life sets.”

Chapter 2

My Notes

My Notes



Chapter 3

Work: Dignity in the Doing

“My hands can build an honest life.”

A man needs to work. Not just for money — though the money matters — but for dignity. There is something that happens inside a man when he earns his own way: he stands straighter. He looks people in the eye. Work is not punishment. Work is proof — to yourself first — that you can build instead of take.

Now the honest part: the record will cost you some doors. Some employers will see the background check and move on. That is real, and I will not insult you by pretending otherwise. But here is what is also real: plenty of men with records work every single day. Warehouses, kitchens, construction crews, landscaping, driving, manufacturing — whole industries run on men who showed up ready to work. Your job is not to open every door. It is to keep knocking until the right one opens, and then to be undeniable once you are inside.

When the record comes up — and it will — keep it honest, brief, and forward-facing. Something like: “I made mistakes, I served my time, and I’m focused on working hard and being reliable.” That is it. No long story. No apology tour. Employers do not hire your past; they hire the man in front of them. Be that man: early, consistent, respectful, hungry to learn.

Start where you are. If the only door open right now is sweeping floors or loading trucks, take it with pride. Picture this: a man gets out, and two weeks later the only job he can find is a night-shift cleaning crew. He takes it. He is the first one there and the last to leave, every night, for a year. And one day, he is running that crew. Nobody handed him anything — he built it, one reliable shift at a time. Nobody can take that from him, because nobody gave it to him.

And protect your work like it is sacred, because right now it is. A steady job is the foundation under everything else in this book — the housing, the child support, the self-respect. Show up. Do the unglamorous thing excellently. Let your work ethic be the loudest thing about you.

Pause and Reflect

Be honest. Nobody grades this — the only person you would be fooling with a pretty answer is yourself.

1. What kind of work are you willing to start with right now, even if it is not your dream job? Be specific.

2. Write your 30-second honest answer for when an employer asks about your record. Keep it brief and forward-facing.

3. What is one skill you already have that an employer would value? What is one skill you want to build this year?

4. Who do you know — a mentor, a program contact, a working man you respect — who could point you toward an opportunity?

5. What would it mean to you, in one paragraph, to earn your own way again?

Affirmations for the Road

Speak these out loud. Your own voice is the one you hear most — train it to build you up.

1. **My hands can build an honest life.**
2. **I start where I am and I do not despise small beginnings.**
3. **I am early, consistent, and undeniable.**
4. **My record explains my past; my work ethic announces my future.**
5. **I take pride in honest labor.**
6. **Every shift I work is a brick in my new life.**
7. **I am employable, reliable, and worth hiring.**

Carry This With You

“Show up. That is the whole secret.”

“Nobody handed him anything — he built it, one reliable shift at a time.”

Chapter 3

My Notes

My Notes



Chapter 4

Rebuilding Trust

“I rebuild trust one kept promise at a time.”

You hurt people. Say it plainly, because dancing around it helps no one: the people who loved you paid a price for your choices. Your mother waited by a phone. Your kids learned to live without you. Your partner carried what you dropped. That damage is real — and if you are serious about rebuilding, you do not get to rush anyone’s healing.

Here is the rule about trust: it is rebuilt in drops and lost in buckets. One kept promise is a drop. A hundred kept promises is a cupful. A single lie, a single disappearance, a single relapse into old behavior — that is a bucket tipped over, and you start again near empty. This is not unfair. It is just how trust works. Accept the math and get to work.

Stop demanding trust and start earning it. “You need to trust me” misses how trust actually works. Trust is not owed to you because you are out now, or because you feel different, or because you said you changed. Trust is a response to evidence. Give people evidence: call when you say you will call. Be where you say you will be. Do it for months. Let your life do the talking — it speaks louder than any speech you could make.



If you have children, hear me carefully: do not make big promises. Do not show up after years and announce you are a new man and everything will be different now. Children have heard promises before. What they need is presence — steady, boring, reliable presence. Show up to the game. Call on the regular day. Remember the small things. A child does not need a perfect father; a child needs a father who keeps coming back.

And when you need to make amends, make them living ones. A real apology names what you did, owns it without excuses, and then — this is the part that gets skipped most often — changes the behavior. “I’m sorry I wasn’t there” means nothing if you are still not there. “I’m sorry” plus a changed life? That is an apology people can feel.

Be patient with their fear. Your family may flinch when the phone rings late. They may watch you a little too closely. That is not disrespect — that is the scar talking. Give them time. Keep showing up. One day you will realize they stopped flinching, and you will understand that you built that with a thousand small kept promises.

Pause and Reflect

Be honest. Nobody grades this — the only person you would be fooling with a pretty answer is yourself.

1. Who did your choices hurt the most? Name them honestly — this stays between you and this page.

2. What is one specific kept promise you can deliver to someone this week? Make it small enough to guarantee.

3. What big promise are you tempted to make that you should NOT make yet? What steady action replaces it?

4. If you have children: what does “steady, boring, reliable presence” look like in your life, specifically?

5. Write the apology you owe someone — not to send, but to get clear. Name what you did, with no excuses.

Affirmations for the Road

Speak these out loud. Your own voice is the one you hear most — train it to build you up.

1. **I rebuild trust one kept promise at a time.**
2. **I do not demand trust — I earn it.**
3. **My life speaks louder than my words.**
4. **I am patient with the healing of the people I hurt.**
5. **I show up steadily for my children.**
6. **My apologies are backed by changed behavior.**
7. **Every kept promise is a brick in the bridge back.**

Carry This With You

“Let your life do the talking.”

“Trust is rebuilt in drops and lost in buckets.”

Chapter 4

My Notes

My Notes



Chapter 5

Choose Your Circle

“I choose the men who lift me.”

Show me your circle and I will show you your future. That is not a slogan — it is one of the most reliable truths about human beings ever observed. We become like the people we spend our time with. Their habits become our habits. Their ceilings become our ceilings. Their definition of normal becomes ours.

So let us be honest about the old circle. Some of those men were your brothers inside — you did time together, you watched each other’s backs, and that bond is real. But bonds built in a cage do not always survive freedom, because some of those men are committed to the life that put you all there. When you get out and start changing, they will test you. “You think you’re better than us now?” “You changed, man.” Let me translate: you changed is the highest compliment a man rebuilding his life can receive. Wear it.

Learning to walk away is a skill, and it is one of the hardest you will ever learn. You do not have to make a dramatic speech. You do not have to condemn anyone. Distance is enough. Stop answering every call. Be busy building. “I’m laying low, focusing on my family and my job” — said kindly, repeatedly — will sort your circle faster than any confrontation. The ones who want the old you will drift. Let them.

Now build the new circle on purpose. You need men who are going somewhere — men in your program who are serious, a mentor who has walked this road, coworkers who show up, a sponsor or accountability partner if that is your path. Brotherhood is not optional equipment for a man in reentry. The research and the street both agree: nobody stays free alone. Find your people before you need them, because the night you need them is not the night to start looking.



And here is the deeper move: become the man you needed when you got out. When you are six months steady, there will be a newly released man looking at you the way you once looked at someone. Reach back. Nothing cements your own change like helping another man make his. That is how a circle becomes a brotherhood — and how a brotherhood changes a community.

Pause and Reflect

Be honest. Nobody grades this — the only person you would be fooling with a pretty answer is yourself.

1. List the five people you spend the most time with. Next to each name, write: lifting me, or pulling me?

2. Who specifically is most likely to test your change? What will you say — kindly, firmly — the next time they call?

3. What would your ideal circle look like a year from now? Name the kinds of men in it.

4. Who is one man you respect who is living right? What is one step toward bringing him closer into your life?

5. When you are steady, how do you want to reach back and help the next man coming home?

Affirmations for the Road

Speak these out loud. Your own voice is the one you hear most — train it to build you up.

1. **I choose the men who lift me.**
2. **"You changed" is a compliment, and I wear it proudly.**
3. **I walk away from what pulls me backward — kindly, firmly, finally.**
4. **I build my circle on purpose, not by accident.**
5. **I am never too proud to ask a strong man for guidance.**
6. **My brotherhood makes me stronger, and I make it stronger.**
7. **I am becoming the man the next man will look up to.**

“Show me your circle, I will show you your future.”

““You changed” is the highest compliment a man rebuilding his life can receive.”

Chapter 5

My Notes

My Notes



Chapter 6

Mastering the Fire Inside

“My strength is my control.”

Every man has fire in him. That fire is not the enemy — it is fuel. It is the same energy that can build a house or burn one down. The question was never whether you feel anger, pressure, disrespect, frustration. You will feel all of it. The question is what you do in the ten seconds after.

Let us name the truth: prison teaches a man to react fast. Inside, hesitation could cost you. Out here, reaction will cost you everything — your freedom, your job, your family’s trust. The instincts that kept you safe in there will get you violated out here. You have to retrain them, consciously, daily, until the new response becomes the natural one.

Disrespect is one of the biggest triggers coming home, so let us deal with it head-on. Someone disrespects you — at work, on the street, at home — and something ancient rises up: the need to answer it, to not look soft. Hear me: the strongest move is almost always to walk away. It takes no strength to explode. Reacting is easy. It takes a forged man to stand in the fire, breathe, and choose his response. Walking away is not weakness. Walking away is a man who has somewhere to be and refuses to trade his future for somebody else’s provocation.



Build your pause. When the heat rises: breathe in slow through your nose, out through your mouth. Feel your feet on the ground. Ask one question: “What does the man I’m becoming do right now?” Then do that. If you need to leave the room, leave the room. If you need to take a walk around the block, walk. There is no situation so urgent that it cannot survive your ten-second pause — but there are plenty of situations that cannot survive your explosion.

And deal with the pressure underneath. Anger is usually the bodyguard of other feelings — shame, fear, grief, feeling powerless. A man who only ever addresses the anger is mowing weeds. Get to the roots: talk to your mentor, your counselor, your brother. Write it out in this book. What you can name, you can master. What you bury will eventually bury you.

A man who masters himself masters everything. That is not poetry — it is the most practical sentence in this book.

Pause and Reflect

Be honest. Nobody grades this — the only person you would be fooling with a pretty answer is yourself.

1. What disrespects or provokes you fastest? Name your top three triggers honestly.

2. Describe your personal “pause” — what will you physically do in the ten seconds after something sets you off?

3. When was the last time you walked away from a provocation? What did it cost you — and what did it save?

4. Underneath your anger, what feeling is usually hiding — fear, shame, grief, powerlessness? Write about it.

5. Who is one person you can call when the pressure is building, before it becomes an explosion?

Affirmations for the Road

Speak these out loud. Your own voice is the one you hear most — train it to build you up.

1. **My strength is my control.**
2. **I pause before I react — every time.**
3. **Walking away is the move of a man with a future.**
4. **No provocation is worth my freedom.**
5. **I feel anger fully and I act on it wisely.**
6. **I am retraining my instincts, one calm choice at a time.**
7. **A man who masters himself masters everything.**

Carry This With You

“Real strength is control, not explosion.”

“It takes no strength to explode. Reacting is easy. It takes a forged man to stand in the fire, breathe, and choose.”

Chapter 6

My Notes

My Notes



Chapter 7

Staying Free on the Inside

“I stay free one honest day at a time.”

There are two kinds of freedom, and you need both. The first kind is the one the state gave you — the open gate, the bus ticket, the signature on the release papers. The second kind nobody can give you. You have to build it yourself, daily, inside your own mind. Plenty of men walk out of prison and stay imprisoned — locked up by cravings, by old habits, by the same thinking that put them inside. You get to build something different.

If substances were part of your story, let us talk straight. Triggers are information, not failure. A trigger — a street, a song, a paycheck, a bad day, an old friend’s voice — is your brain running an old program. Noticing the program run is not relapse. It is awareness, and awareness is the beginning of every victory. The danger is not the trigger. The danger is believing the lie that follows it: “just once,” “I’ve got this now,” “no one will know.” You know how that story ends. You have lived the ending.

Learn your HALT signals: Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired. Most cravings do not arrive out of nowhere — they arrive when the body is depleted and the defenses are down. A man who eats, rests, and stays connected is a man whose armor is on. Take care of the vessel and the mind follows.

And build your “reach out before you fall” list right now — not later, now. Three names. Three men you can call when the ground starts shifting under you: a mentor, a sponsor, a brother from your program, a counselor. Put their numbers where you can find them in ten seconds. The rule is simple: you call before you fall, not after. After is damage control. Before is victory. No one who has stayed free for years did it alone, and no one who fell planned to fall alone either — they just isolated first.

Make the daily decision. Every morning, before the world gets loud, decide: today I stay free. Say it out loud. It sounds small. It is not small. A man who decides every morning does not have to negotiate with himself every night. The decision is already made. All that is left is to live it.

Freedom on the inside is the only kind that lasts. Build it like your life depends on it — because it does.

Pause and Reflect

Be honest. Nobody grades this — the only person you would be fooling with a pretty answer is yourself.

1. What are your three biggest triggers — the places, people, feelings, or situations that pull at you most?

2. Write your "reach out before you fall" list: three names and numbers you can call in ten seconds.

3. Which HALT signal hits you hardest — Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired? What is your plan for it?

4. Describe the lie your old thinking tells you when a craving comes. Then write the truth that answers it.

5. What does your morning "daily decision" look like? Write the exact words you will say to yourself.

Affirmations for the Road

Speak these out loud. Your own voice is the one you hear most — train it to build you up.

1. **I stay free one honest day at a time.**
2. **Triggers are information, not failure — I notice them and I keep walking.**
3. **I reach out before I fall, never after.**
4. **I take care of my body so my mind stays strong.**
5. **The decision is made every morning: today I stay free.**
6. **I do not negotiate with my old life.**
7. **Nobody stays free alone — and I do not have to.**

Carry This With You

“Reach out before you fall.”

“You call before you fall, not after. After is damage control. Before is victory.”

Chapter 7

My Notes

My Notes



Chapter 8

Money: Building From Zero

“Small honest steps build a solid life.”

You are starting from zero. Maybe below zero — fines, fees, restitution, child support arrears, debts with your name on them from a life you are done living. Looking at the full mountain can paralyze a man. So do not look at the mountain. Look at the next step.

Here is the foundation: every dollar gets a job before it arrives. When that first paycheck hits — and it will — decide in advance where it goes. Roof over your head first. Food. Transportation to work. Then obligations: child support, restitution, the debts you are honoring. Then a small piece set aside, even if it is twenty dollars. A man with even a little saved walks different — he has options, and options are freedom.

Let us talk about child support and restitution, because dodging them eats a man alive. Paying what you owe is not just a legal strategy — it is honor. Every payment is a message to your kids, to the court, and to yourself: I am a man who handles his responsibilities. If the amount is crushing, get it reviewed, get on a plan, communicate — but do not disappear on it. Disappearing turns a debt into a warrant. Facing it turns a debt into dignity.



Beware the fast-money trap. It will come dressed as opportunity — a lick, a scheme, a “sure thing” from somebody who knows somebody. You know the real price of fast money. You have already paid it, with years of your life. Slow money is the only money that stays. A steady paycheck, honestly earned, builds something fast money never can: a life you do not have to look over your shoulder to enjoy.

And learn the difference between a need and a want, at least for this season. Right now is not the season for impressing anyone. Nobody you need to impress is impressed by new rims on a shaky foundation. Stack your money quietly. Let your stability be the flex.

Small honest steps compound. Twenty dollars saved becomes two hundred. Two hundred becomes a deposit. A deposit becomes a lease with your name on it. That is not a fantasy — that is arithmetic, and arithmetic does not care about your record.

Pause and Reflect

Be honest. Nobody grades this — the only person you would be fooling with a pretty answer is yourself.

1. List every money obligation you are carrying (fines, support, debts). Seeing it all in one place is the first step.

2. When your next paycheck comes, where does every dollar go? Write the plan now, before the money arrives.

3. What is one expense you can cut or pause for the next 90 days to build savings?

4. Who could help you understand your child support or restitution situation — a caseworker, legal aid, a mentor?

5. What does “slow money” look like for you this year? Describe the honest income you are building toward.

Affirmations for the Road

Speak these out loud. Your own voice is the one you hear most — train it to build you up.

1. **Small honest steps build a solid life.**
2. **Every dollar gets a job before it arrives.**
3. **I honor my obligations — my payments are my dignity.**
4. **Fast money is a trap I have already escaped.**
5. **I save steadily, even when it is only a little.**
6. **My stability is worth more than anyone’s approval.**
7. **I am building wealth the slow way: the way that lasts.**

Carry This With You

“Honor your debts. Build your future.”

“Slow money is the only money that stays.”

Chapter 8

My Notes

My Notes



Chapter 9

The Spirit of a Man

“I am connected to something greater than myself.”

A man cannot live on bread and paychecks alone. You can have the job, the apartment, the schedule — and still feel hollow inside if the deeper part of you is starving. I have watched men rebuild everything on the outside and fall apart because they never rebuilt the inside. Do not skip this chapter. It might be the most important one in the book.

This is not about religion. I am not here to hand you a doctrine or tell you what to believe. This is about the spirit — the part of you that knows right from wrong in the quiet, the part that feels awe at a sunrise, the part that asks what your life is actually for. Every man has it. Prison does not remove it. Time does not kill it. But neglect will starve it, and a starving spirit will look for food in all the wrong places.

Start with a Higher Power — yours, as you understand it. Something greater than yourself that you can lean on when your own strength runs short. For some men it is the universe, for some it is nature, for some it is the collective strength of good men, for some it is simply the better self they are growing toward. There is no wrong answer here except “just me, alone.” A man who answers only to himself will eventually negotiate with himself — and those negotiations rarely end well.

Then build a morning quiet. Two minutes. That is all I am asking to start. Before the phone, before the noise: sit still. Breathe. Notice that you are alive and free and that today is unwritten. Some men speak their intentions into the quiet. Some men simply listen. Some men give thanks — for the bed, the breath, the second chance. Two minutes of stillness will do more for your spirit than hours of noise.

And find your purpose — the thing your life is for beyond yourself. Maybe it is your children. Maybe it is the younger men coming up behind you. Maybe it is building something, protecting something, giving something. A man with a purpose can endure anything. A man without one will be endured by everything.

Feed your spirit the way you feed your body: daily, intentionally, without apology. The strongest men I know are not the hardest. They are the most rooted.

Pause and Reflect

Be honest. Nobody grades this — the only person you would be fooling with a pretty answer is yourself.

1. What does “Higher Power” mean to you personally? Describe it in your own words — there is no wrong answer.

2. When in your life have you felt most connected to something greater than yourself? What were you doing?

3. What would your two-minute morning quiet look like? Where, when, and what will you do in it?

4. What is your purpose beyond yourself — who or what is your life for?

5. What has been starving your spirit lately? What is one thing that feeds it?

Affirmations for the Road

Speak these out loud. Your own voice is the one you hear most — train it to build you up.

1. **I am connected to something greater than myself.**
2. **My spirit deserves daily care, just like my body.**
3. **In stillness, I find my strength.**
4. **I am guided by a purpose bigger than my past.**
5. **I give thanks for this day before it begins.**
6. **I listen to the quiet voice that knows the right path.**
7. **I am rooted, and what is rooted cannot be easily moved.**

Carry This With You

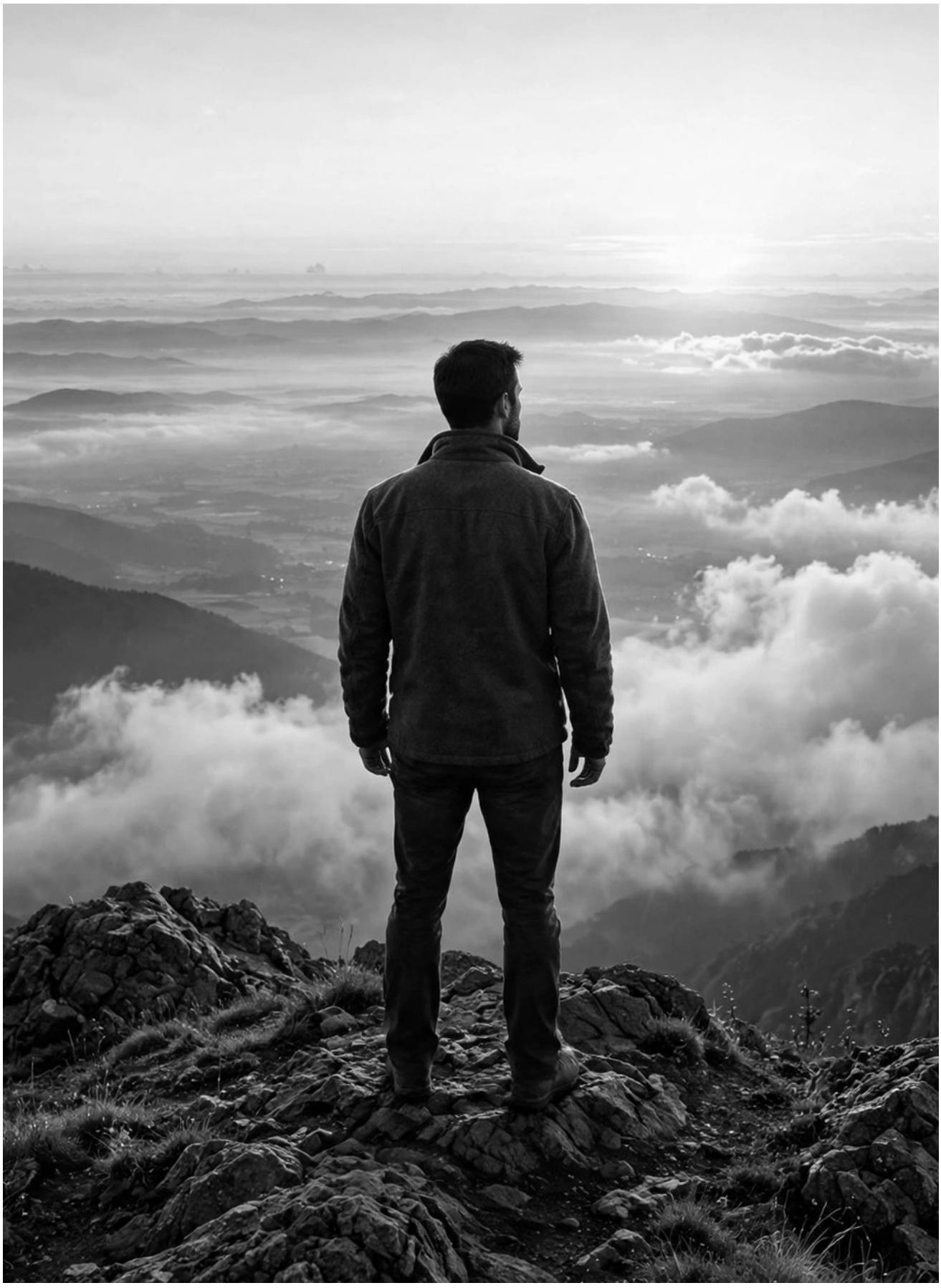
“Feed your spirit the way you feed your body.”

“A man with a purpose can endure anything. A man without one will be endured by everything.”

Chapter 9

My Notes

My Notes



Chapter 10

The Man You’re Becoming

“I am becoming the man I was meant to be.”

Close your eyes for a minute. It is five years from now. Where are you waking up? Who is in the next room? What work are you going to? What does your name mean to the people who know it? Hold that picture — because that man is real, and he is waiting on the decisions you make today.

Everything in this book has been about one thing: becoming. Not fixing, not hiding, not surviving — becoming. The man reading this page is not a finished product. He is a construction site, and that is not an insult. Construction sites are where the future gets built. The noise, the mess, the scaffolding — that is what building looks like from the inside.

So write the vision down. Not vague wishes — a picture. Where do you live? What work do you do? What is your relationship with your kids? What do people say about you when you leave the room? Men who write their vision down carry it with them into every decision. When the old life calls, the vision answers: “I know where I’m going, and that ain’t it.”

Think about legacy, too — because you are already building one. Legacy is not for rich men or famous men. Legacy is what your children tell their children about you. Right now, today, you are writing the story they will tell. Make it a story worth telling. The comeback. The rebuild. The man who came home and stayed home and built something that outlasts him.

And now the exercise I promised: on the next page, write a letter to your future self — the man five years from now. Tell him where you are today. Tell him what you are afraid of and what you are determined to do. Tell him what you need him to remember. Seal it with a date. When you are tempted to quit, read it. When you have made it, read it and weep — the good kind of weeping.

Here is my final word to you, and I mean it with everything in me: never give up. Not on the bad day. Not when the door slams. Not when the old voice says you are too far gone. You are not too far gone. You are too far in — too far into the rebuild to turn back now.

The best chapters are ahead. Now go write them.

Pause and Reflect

Be honest. Nobody grades this — the only person you would be fooling with a pretty answer is yourself.

1. Describe your life five years from now in vivid detail — where you live, your work, your relationships, your name's meaning.

2. What legacy do you want to leave? What will your children's children be told about you?

3. What is the biggest obstacle between you and that vision? What is the first step through it?

4. Who do you need to become, on the inside, to live that vision on the outside?

5. Write your letter to your future self below. Date it. Be completely honest — he can handle it.

Affirmations for the Road

Speak these out loud. Your own voice is the one you hear most — train it to build you up.

1. **I am becoming the man I was meant to be.**
2. **My vision pulls me forward stronger than my past pulls me back.**
3. **I am a construction site, and construction means progress.**
4. **My legacy is being written today, by my choices.**
5. **I know where I am going, and the old life ain't it.**
6. **I am too far into the rebuild to turn back now.**
7. **I never give up. The best chapters are ahead.**

Carry This With You

"Never give up. The best chapters are ahead."

“You are too far into the rebuild to turn back now.”

Chapter 10

My Notes

My Notes

Thirty Days of Affirmations

One for each day. Speak it out loud in the morning, carry it with you all day, and let it be the last thing you think about at night. In thirty days you will not recognize your own inner voice — and that is the point.

Day 1: I am not my past; I am my decision today.

Day 2: I build my new life one steady day at a time.

Day 3: My hands can build an honest life.

Day 4: I rebuild trust one kept promise at a time.

Day 5: I choose the men who lift me.

Day 6: My strength is my control.

Day 7: I stay free one honest day at a time.

Day 8: Small honest steps build a solid life.

Day 9: I am connected to something greater than myself.

Day 10: I am becoming the man I was meant to be.

Day 11: I am worth the work it takes to rebuild.

Day 12: I show up early, prepared, and reliable.

Day 13: My word is my bond — I keep it.

Day 14: I walk away from what pulls me backward.

Day 15: I feel pressure and I master it; it does not master me.

Day 16: I reach out before I fall.

Day 17: I honor my obligations with dignity.

Day 18: In stillness I find my direction.

Day 19: My children — born or yet to come — deserve my best, and I give it.

Day 20: I am employable, capable, and deserving of good work.

Day 21: I forgive myself and I keep moving forward.

Day 22: I am patient with my own rebuilding.

Day 23: No setback gets to rewrite my story.

Day 24: I am a man of purpose, and my purpose is bigger than my pain.

Day 25: I protect my freedom like the treasure it is.

Day 26: I am grateful for this day and everything in it.

Day 27: I lead my family by example, not by words.

Day 28: I am proof that a man can change.

Day 29: I refuse to quit on myself.

Day 30: The best chapters of my life are still ahead of me.

A Final Word: Never Give Up

You made it to the last page. That matters more than you know.

I want you to hear this from me, plainly: I am proud of you. Not for being perfect. For being here. For picking up this book. For doing the work in these pages honestly. That took guts, and guts is the raw material everything else is built from.

There will be a day — maybe soon, maybe a year from now — when everything in you wants to quit. The job falls through. The relationship strains. The old life whispers. On that day, I want you to remember this page. Remember that a woman who believes in you enough wrote you this book. Remember the letter you wrote to your future self. Remember the man in the five-year vision, waiting.

Quitting is the only true failure. Everything else — every stumble, every setback, every slow month — is just part of the rebuild. Get up. Dust off. Keep walking. The road does not require perfection. It requires persistence.

Never give up. Not today. Not ever.

Now close this book, stand up straight, and go build the life you were meant for.

I will be cheering for you. Always.

Minnesota Resources: Organizations That Walk With You

You do not have to rebuild alone. These Minnesota organizations exist for men coming home — jobs, housing, mentoring, legal help, and people in your corner. Reach out. Asking for help is not weakness; it is strategy.

R.S. Eden

(612) 782-2994 · 1931 W Broadway, Minneapolis, MN 55411 · rseden.org
Reentry services and housing for men coming home.

Better Futures Minnesota

612-351-8657 · 2620 Minnehaha Ave, Minneapolis · betterfuturesminnesota.com
Jobs and training for men with incarceration histories.

Amicus (Volunteers of America Minnesota)

612-877-4250 · 3041 4th Ave S, Minneapolis · voamnwi.org/community-justice
Reentry mentoring and one-on-one support.

180 Degrees

(763) 232-2253 · 180degrees.org
Shelter, transitional housing, and reentry services.

Volunteer Lawyers Network

(612) 752-6677 · vlnmn.org
Free legal help, including criminal expungement.

United Way 211

Dial 2-1-1 · 1-800-543-7709 · Text your ZIP code to 898-211
Free 24/7 referrals: food, housing, employment, and more.

If You Need Help Right Now

Some nights are harder than others. If you are in crisis, overwhelmed, or thinking about using or giving up — reach out right now. These lines are free, confidential, and answered by people who want to help.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or text 988 · 988lifeline.org
24/7 support for emotional crisis or suicidal thoughts.

Crisis Text Line

Text HOME to 741741 · crisistextline.org
Free 24/7 crisis support by text message.

SAMHSA National Helpline

1-800-662-4357 · samhsa.gov
24/7 referrals for substance use and mental health support.

Keep these numbers where you can find them — in your phone, on your fridge, in the front of this book. Reaching out is not weakness. It is how you keep going.