Standing Again

— The Workbook —

Step-by-Step Worksheets for Healing, Preparing for Release, and Starting Over Strong

Angela Dustine Martini

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Scripture quotations are from the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible.

This book is a companion for personal growth and reflection. It is not a substitute for professional counseling, legal advice, or medical care.

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To every woman who has carried more than anyone knows — the woman still inside, the woman counting down the days, the woman already home and still healing:

You are seen. You are loved. You are not your worst day.

Stand again. Your life is worth building.

Introduction

I want to tell you why I wrote this workbook 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. Addiction had hold of me for a long time, and it nearly took everything, including my life. I do not tell you that to impress you. I tell you so you know the woman talking to you in these pages has walked through the fire and come out the other side.

In January of 2025, I was found unresponsive and fell into a 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. I have been sober since February 5, 2025 — and that date is not lost on me, because February 5 is also the day I was saved, back in 1989. God knew what He was doing, even when I did not.

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 in reentry, and I can tell you honestly: there is no work I would rather do. I get to watch women walk through the door carrying the weight of their past, and I get to watch them set it down, one day at a time, and pick up something better.

This work is personal to me, and I want you to understand why. I am not writing to you from some office far away from your life. I see the woman who walks in guarded, arms crossed, daring the world to give her one more reason to quit. I see the woman who is quiet because she is ashamed. I see the woman who is angry because anger feels safer than grief. And I want you to know something: I see past all of that. I see the woman underneath — the one who got up this morning and showed up anyway. That took courage, whether you feel courageous or not.

I live for the small moments. The day a woman's shoulders finally drop because she believes somebody is truly in her corner. The first honest paycheck. The phone call that says, "I got the apartment." The morning she looks me in the eye — really looks — because she is starting to believe she might make it. Those moments are why I do this work. They are proof of what I already know: a woman 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 woman you are becoming until you can believe in her 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 woman decides she is done going backward, and her whole life starts to turn.

That is why I wrote *Standing Again*. This workbook is the hands-on companion to the book — the place where the reading turns into doing. Maybe you are holding it inside, preparing for a release date. Maybe you are in the first strange weeks of freedom. Maybe you have been home a while and you are still finding your footing.

Wherever you are, these pages were written to walk beside you, one honest page at a time.

I wrote this because I cannot be there at two in the morning when the old life starts whispering. But this workbook can be on your nightstand. When the doubt comes, when the shame rises, when somebody offers you the fast way back to the slow death — open these pages. Pick up the pen. Let the work remind you of what you already decided. You are not alone in this fight. I am with you in these words, and there are women 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 woman can become when she refuses to quit. You are capable of holding a job and being proud of it. You are capable of being the mother, the daughter, the sister, the friend your people need. You are capable of walking past the old places 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.

This workbook is about healing in every area — body, mind, heart, and spirit — because you are a whole woman, and every part of you deserves to heal. It is about letting go of the past without pretending it did not happen. It is about forgiving yourself and laying down the guilt and shame you were never meant to carry forever. And it is about the future: the woman you are becoming is already in you, waiting for you to decide.

Each chapter has teaching, writing pages, and affirmations — short, strong sentences to speak out loud. I know saying them might feel strange at first. Do it anyway. The voice you listen to most is your own, so make it say something worth hearing.

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

— Angela

How to Use This Workbook

Read it your way. You can work straight through, one chapter at a time, or you can open to whatever chapter speaks to where you are today. Every chapter stands on its own, so you can flip straight to your exact need. There is no wrong way to use this workbook — only your way.

Write honestly. Each chapter has five writing prompts with space to write. Be plain. Be real. Nobody will grade your answers, and the only person you would be fooling with a pretty answer is yourself. Honesty is where rebuilding starts.

Say the affirmations out loud. Every chapter ends with seven affirmations. Speak them — in the morning, in the mirror, on the walk to work. 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 land harder than others. That is probably the chapter you need most. Sit with it. Come back to it. Healing is not a race.

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

Keep it close. This workbook is yours. Write in the margins. Dog-ear the pages that hit home. When a hard night comes, it should look used — because it was.

Chapter 1: Your Past Is a Chapter, Not the Whole Story

I am not my worst day.

Let us start with the hardest truth, gently but plainly: 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 may never update it. That is theirs to carry. Yours is what happens next.

Here is what I need you to understand, because everything else in this workbook 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 can save your life. Guilt says, "I did something wrong." Guilt has a job — it is your conscience 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. So many of us women carry shame like a second skin — for the addiction, for the charges, for the years our children did without us, for the things we did to survive. Sister, you can put that down. Guilt can teach you. Shame only buries you.

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 woman — we will call her Denise — who has been home for two years and still introduces herself by her past. "I'm Denise, I just did three years for…" She leads with it at job interviews, at her kids' school, everywhere. She thinks she is being honest. What she is really doing is handing every stranger the pen and asking them to write her story for her. Then one day someone in her corner tells her the truth: "You keep reading people chapter four and wondering why they never stay for chapter twenty." So Denise stops leading with her past. She starts leading with her work, her word, her kindness. Her 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 door opened. Walk out — all the way out, including in your mind.

The Word of God says it this way:

> *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." — 2 Corinthians 5:17 (KJV)*

Old things passed away. All things become new. That promise has your name on it.

So here is your work for this chapter. Name what happened, plainly — no drama, no excuses, no hiding. Name what it taught you, because pain that teaches is not wasted. And then make a decision, right here: 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.

Write It Out

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 woman you are becoming — not just the woman you were? What do they see in you?

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

Say It Out Loud

1. I am not my worst day.
2. My past is a chapter, not the whole story.
3. Guilt can teach 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 woman 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.*

Special Worksheet Set: Loving Yourself Again

Do this set slowly. There is no deadline on healing. If tears come, let them — tears are not weakness; they are the heart letting go of what it has carried too long. If you need to stop and breathe, stop and breathe. You can come back to these pages as many times as you need.

So many of us women carry guilt and shame long after the sentence ends. We carry it for the addiction. For the crime. For the years our babies grew without us, for the birthdays missed, for the people who cried because of choices we made. We learn to smile on the outside and punish ourselves on the inside, day after day, year after year.

Hear me, sister: you were never meant to carry that forever. God does not ask you to keep punishing yourself for a past He has already forgiven. Listen to His word:

> *"It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness." — Lamentations 3:22–23 (KJV)*

New every morning. That includes this morning. And listen to how God describes what He made when He made you:

> *"I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well." — Psalm 139:14 (KJV)*

Fearfully and wonderfully made. That is not poetry about somebody else. That is God's word about you — the real you, underneath everything that happened.

Loving yourself again is not pretending the past was fine. It is deciding that the woman you were does not get the final say about the woman you are. You can take responsibility and still be kind to yourself. Those two things belong together. The pages that follow will walk you through it, step by step.

Page One: A Forgiveness Letter to Yourself

You have probably written apologies in your head a hundred times — to your children, your mother, your family. This letter is different. This one is to *you*: the woman who did the best she could with what she knew then, who made choices she would never make now, who has punished herself long enough.

Write it in your own words. Be honest, and be gentle. The prompts below will guide you, line by line.

Dear _____ *(write your own name — yes, really)*

The years I keep punishing myself for are...

What I did that I am most sorry for is... *(name it plainly — no excuses, no hiding)*

What I understand now that I did not understand then is...

What that season cost me — and what it taught me — is...

Today, I choose to forgive myself for... *(be specific — list them, one by one)*

From this day forward, instead of punishing myself, I will...

The woman I am becoming is...

Signed, with love,

_____ *(your signature)* **Date:** _____

Keep this letter. On the days shame comes back loud, read it out loud. You wrote it on a clear day. Let the clear day speak to the hard one.

Page Two: Laying Down the Shame

Shame stays powerful while it stays unnamed. Today we name it, write it down, and set it down — on purpose, in plain sight.

Step 1 — Write it. In the space below, write the shame statements you carry. The ones that play in your head. *"I am a bad mother." "I am ruined." "Nobody good could ever love me." "I am my record."* Write yours exactly as you hear them:

Step 2 — Name where it came from. Next to each statement above — or here in your own words — write where that voice came from. A person? A season? The addiction? The courtroom? Your own heart at 2 a.m.? A voice that hurt you is not the voice of truth.

Step 3 — Answer it with the truth. For each shame statement, write the truth that answers it. Example: *"I am a bad mother" "I am a mother who was lost for a season and is fighting her way back to her children. That is love, not failure."* Write yours:

Step 4 — Release it. Read this out loud, slowly, as many times as you need:

"I have carried this shame long enough. It is not my name. It is not my future. I lay it down today — every name I called myself, every sentence I kept serving in my mind. God has forgiven me, and I am learning to forgive myself. I am not who I was. I am who I am becoming. And she is worth loving."

One small act of kindness I will do for myself this week, as proof that I am learning to love the woman I am becoming:

Carry this with you: *You can take responsibility for your past and still be kind to yourself. Those two things belong together.*

Chapter 2: The First 90 Days

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

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

The research on this is plain: 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 identification (your ID), your reporting address, your first meeting with your 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 woman who is never confused about what is expected of her.

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, church, appointments, applications, time with your kids, 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 let us talk about safety, because for many of us women, coming home means coming back to places and people that were not safe. The old relationship that always ended in chaos. The house where everybody uses. The "friend" who only calls when she wants something. You do not owe anyone your presence — not an ex, not an old running partner, not anyone whose "welcome home" comes with a price tag. "I'm laying low and getting my life right" is a complete sentence. The people who respect it might be worth keeping later. The ones who do not were never safe for you in the first place.

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 woman you were on day one. You will barely recognize her — and that is the point.

Write It Out

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

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

3. Who or what is most likely to pull you toward the old life — a person, a place, a relationship? 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 percent clear on? How will you get that clarity?

Say It Out Loud

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.*

Chapter 3: Work — Dignity in the Doing

My hands can build an honest life.

A woman needs her own honest income. Not just for money — though the money matters — but for dignity. There is something that happens inside a woman when she earns her own way: she stands straighter. She breathes easier. She stops depending on people and situations that were never safe for her. Work is not punishment. Work is proof — to yourself first — that you can build instead of break.

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 women with records work every single day. Kitchens, clinics, warehouses, cleaning crews, retail counters, offices, factories, front desks — whole workplaces run on women 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 woman in front of them. Be that woman: early, consistent, respectful, willing to learn.

Start where you are. If the only door open right now is a night-shift cleaning crew or a kitchen sink, take it with pride. Picture this: a woman comes home, and two weeks later the only job she can find is cleaning offices at night. She takes it. She is the first one there and the last to leave, every night, for a year. And one day, she is training the new hires. Nobody handed her anything — she built it, one reliable shift at a time. Nobody can take that from her, because nobody gave it to her.

And if you are a mother, hear this: working and mothering at the same time is hard, and arranging childcare, rides, and shifts can feel like a second job all by itself. Plan for it like it matters, because it does — line up your childcare before the first shift, keep a backup name in your phone, and tell your employer the truth about your schedule up front. Steady is better than perfect.

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

Write It Out

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. If childcare, rides, or shift times could get in the way of a job, what is your plan for each one? Who is your backup person?

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

Say It Out Loud

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 work.
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.*

Chapter 4: Rebuilding Trust

I rebuild trust one kept promise at a time.

Let us say this plainly, because dancing around it helps no one: some people we love paid a price for our choices. A mother who waited by the phone. Children who learned to live without us. Family who carried what we 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. One lie, one disappearance, one slide back 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 asking for trust and start giving evidence. "You need to trust me" misses how trust actually works. Trust is not owed to you because you are home 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 sweep back in after years and announce that everything will be different now. Children have heard promises before. What they need is presence — steady, ordinary, reliable presence. Show up for the visit. Call on the regular day. Remember the small things: the favorite snack, the school play, the spelling test on Friday. A child does not need a perfect mother. A child needs a mother who keeps coming back. And if your children are being cared for by family right now, honor those caregivers — their steady love carried your babies when you could not, and gratitude will open doors that demanding never will.

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. Your children may cling one day and test you the next. 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.

Write It Out

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, ordinary, reliable presence" look like in your life, specifically? If family members are caring for your children, write one sentence of gratitude you could say to them.

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

Say It Out Loud

1. I rebuild trust one kept promise at a time.
2. I do not demand trust — I give evidence.
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.*

Chapter 5: Choose Your Circle

I choose the women 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 women were your sisters inside — you did time together, you looked out for each other, and that bond is real. But bonds built in a locked place do not always survive freedom, because some of those women are still committed to the life that put you all there. When you come home and start changing, some will test you. "You think you're better than us now?" "You changed." Let me translate: *you changed* is the highest compliment a woman rebuilding her 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 kids and my job" — said kindly, repeatedly — will sort your circle faster than any confrontation. The ones who only want the old you will drift. Let them.

Now build the new circle on purpose. You need women who are going somewhere — women in your program who are serious, a mentor who has walked this road, a sponsor or accountability partner if that is your path, women at church who will pray with you and tell you the truth, coworkers who show up. Sisterhood is not optional equipment for a woman in reentry. 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 woman you needed when you got out. When you are six months steady, there will be a newly released woman looking at you the way you once looked at somebody. Reach back. Nothing cements your own change like helping another woman make hers. That is how a circle becomes a sisterhood — and how a sisterhood changes a whole community.

Write It Out

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 women in it.

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

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

Say It Out Loud

1. I choose the women 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 woman for guidance.
6. My sisterhood makes me stronger, and I make it stronger.
7. I am becoming the woman the next woman will look up to.

Carry this with you: *Show me your circle, and I will show you your future.*

Chapter 6: Mastering the Fire Inside

My strength is my calm.

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

Let us name the truth: locked places teach a woman to react fast. Inside, hesitation could cost you. Out here, reacting can cost you everything — your freedom, your job, your children, your family's trust. The instincts that kept you safe in there can get you violated out here. You have to retrain them, on purpose, 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. Somebody talks down to you — at work, in the residence, at a family dinner — and something old rises up: the need to answer it right now, to not look weak. Hear me: the strongest move is almost always to walk away. It takes no strength to explode. Reacting is easy. It takes a forged woman to stand in the fire, breathe, and choose her response. Walking away is not weakness. Walking away is a woman who has somewhere to be and refuses to trade her 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 woman I'm becoming do right now?" Then do that. If you need to leave the room, leave the room. If you need 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 — grief, fear, shame, exhaustion, feeling powerless. A woman who only ever addresses the anger is pulling weeds off the top and leaving the roots. Get to the roots: talk to your mentor, your counselor, a sister from your circle. Write it out in this workbook. What you can name, you can master. What you bury will eventually bury you.

A woman who masters herself can weather anything. That is not poetry — it is the most practical sentence in this workbook.

Write It Out

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, exhaustion, powerlessness? Write about it.

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

Say It Out Loud

1. My strength is my calm.
2. I pause before I react — every time.
3. Walking away is the move of a woman 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 woman who masters herself can weather anything.

Carry this with you: *Real strength is calm, not explosion.*

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 on your release papers — the open door, the ride home, the date circled on the calendar. The second kind nobody can hand you. You build it yourself, daily, inside your own mind. Plenty of women walk out the door and stay locked up on the inside — held by cravings, by old habits, by the same thinking that put them there. 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 worn down and the defenses are low. A woman who eats, rests, and stays connected is a woman whose guard is up. Take care of the body and the mind follows.

And build your "reach out before you fall" list right now — not later, now. Three names. Three women you can call when the ground starts shifting under you: a mentor, a sponsor, a sister 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 woman who has stayed free for years did it alone, and no woman who fell planned to fall alone either — she 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 woman who decides every morning does not have to negotiate with herself every night. The decision is already made. All that is left is to live it.

Hear God's promise to you in this:

> *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." — Psalm 46:1 (KJV)*

A very present help. Not far away. Not only for other people. For you, today.

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

Write It Out

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.

Say It Out Loud

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.*

Special Worksheet Set: Healing in Every Area

At Pillars of Grace Healing Home, we believe a woman heals as a whole woman — body, mind, heart, and spirit, all of it connected. You cannot pour from an empty cup, and you cannot build a new life on a foundation you never tend. These four check-in pages will walk you through each area, step by step. Work one page a week, or return to them whenever you need to take honest stock. There are no grades here. There is only truth, and then the next kind step.

Check-In One: Physical — Healing in Your Body

Your body carried you through everything — the addiction, the stress, the years inside. It deserves care now, not punishment. Small, steady kindness toward your body is healing you can hold in your hands.

Where I am right now (circle or write honestly):

Sleep: I am sleeping _____ hours most nights. My sleep is: restful / restless / barely there.

Food: Most days I eat _____ real meals. The meal I skip most is: breakfast / lunch / dinner.

Movement: I move my body (walking counts!) about _____ days a week.

Medical and dental care I have been putting off:

One thing my body is asking me for right now:

My one kind, concrete step for my body this week *(small enough to actually do — a clinic appointment, a walk after dinner, water before soda, lights out by a set time)*:

When I care for my body, I notice this about my mind and my mood:

Check-In Two: Mental — Healing in Your Mind

Your mind has run some hard programs: survival thinking, worst-case thinking, the old voice that narrates every failure. Healing your mind means noticing the program — and slowly, kindly, teaching it a new one.

The thought that loops in my head most often lately is:

Is it true? Is it kind? Is it helping me become her? *(answer each — honestly)*

What I am learning or feeding my mind these days (books, classes, groups, work skills, God's Word):

One true and kind thought I am practicing on purpose:

My one kind, concrete step for my mind this week *(a class sign-up, twenty quiet minutes with a book, writing one page a day, asking a counselor about the looping thought)*:

Check-In Three: Emotional — Healing in Your Heart

Feelings are not the enemy, and they are not the boss either. They are messengers. A woman healing emotionally learns to let the messenger speak, hear what it is really saying, and then choose what to do — instead of letting the feeling drive.

The feeling that visits me most often right now is:

Underneath it, I think what I really feel is:

What I usually do when this feeling comes (numb it, explode, withdraw, eat, cry, pray, call someone):

One healthier thing I can do with this feeling instead:

Someone safe I can tell the truth to about how I am really doing — and when I will tell her:

My one kind, concrete step for my heart this week:

Check-In Four: Spiritual — Healing in Your Spirit

Your spirit is the deepest part of you — the part that knows you were made for more than survival. Coming home is a spiritual journey as much as a practical one. You do not have to have it all figured out. You only have to stay connected to the God who brought you this far.

Right now, my relationship with God feels: close / far / new / rebuilding / I am not sure yet

The way I connect with God best is *(prayer, Scripture, church, worship music, quiet mornings, nature, being honest with Him)*:

One thing I am honestly grateful for today:

Something I need to bring to God instead of carrying alone:

My one kind, concrete step for my spirit this week *(five quiet minutes each morning, one church service, reading one psalm a day, praying out loud for one person)*:

Read this over yourself, out loud:

> *"Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." — Isaiah 41:10 (KJV)*

Carry this with you: *You are a whole woman — body, mind, heart, and spirit. Every area deserves healing, and every small step counts.*

Chapter 8: Money — Building From Zero

Small honest steps build a solid life.

You are starting from zero. Maybe below zero — fines, fees, restitution, debts with your name on them from a life you are done living. Looking at the full mountain can paralyze a woman. 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: restitution, court costs, the debts you are honoring, support for your children if that is part of your plan. Then a small piece set aside, even if it is only twenty dollars. A woman with even a little saved walks different — she has options, and options are freedom. Options are also safety: money of your own means you never have to stay somewhere harmful because you cannot afford to leave.

Let us talk about restitution and the debts with your name on them, because dodging them eats a woman alive from the inside. Paying what you owe is not just a legal strategy — it is honor. Every payment is a message to the court, to the people affected, and to yourself: I am a woman who handles her responsibilities. If the amount is crushing, ask about a payment plan, get it reviewed, communicate early — 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 scheme, a "sure thing," somebody who knows somebody, maybe an old relationship offering easy cash with old strings attached. 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 nails on a shaky foundation. Stack your money quietly. Let your stability be your statement.

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 — your name, your key, your door. That is not a fantasy. That is arithmetic, and arithmetic does not care about your record.

Write It Out

1. List every money obligation you are carrying (fines, fees, restitution, 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 restitution or debt situation — a caseworker, a legal aid office, a mentor, a financial coach?

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

Say It Out Loud

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 the slow way: the way that lasts.

Carry this with you: *Honor your debts. Build your future.*

Chapter 9: The Spirit of a Woman

I am rooted in God, and what is rooted cannot be easily moved.

A woman cannot live on paychecks and schedules alone. You can have the job, the room, the routine — and still feel hollow inside if the deepest part of you is starving. I have watched women rebuild everything on the outside and still ache, because nobody told them the inside needed rebuilding too. Do not skip this chapter. It might be the most important one in this workbook.

Your spirit is the part of you that knows right from wrong in the quiet. The part that catches her breath at a sunrise. The part that whispers, *I was made for more than this.* Prison could not remove it. Addiction could not kill it. But neglect can starve it — and a starving spirit will go looking for food in all the wrong places: the old life, the old relationship, the old numbness.

Here is where I stand, and I will not be vague about it: God brought you through. Not around — through. The nights nobody saw, He saw. The moments you should not have survived, He carried. You do not have to perform for Him or clean yourself up before you come to Him. You come as you are, and He does the making-new. Listen:

> *"It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness." — Lamentations 3:22–23 (KJV)*

New mercies. Every morning. Including the mornings you wake up in a residence, on a bunk, in a halfway house bed, in a borrowed room. His faithfulness does not wait for your address to improve.

So build a morning quiet. Five minutes. That is all I am asking to start. Before the phone, before the noise: sit still with God. Read one verse. Say thank you for one thing. Tell Him the truth about one thing. Some mornings you will talk. Some mornings you will just sit and be loved. Five minutes of stillness with Him 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 women coming up behind you, the ones who will need a woman with lived experience to tell them the truth in love — and sister, that will be you sooner than you think. Maybe it is building something, mending something, giving something. A woman with a purpose can endure almost anything. A woman without one gets endured by everything.

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

Write It Out

1. Where do you honestly stand with God right now — close, far, new, rebuilding? Write it plainly. He can handle your honesty.

2. When in your life have you felt God's presence most clearly — that you were seen, held, carried? What was happening?

3. What would your five-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?

Say It Out Loud

1. I am rooted in God, and what is rooted cannot be easily moved.
2. God's mercies for me are new every morning.
3. My spirit deserves daily care, just like my body.
4. In stillness with God, I find my strength.
5. I am guided by a purpose bigger than my past.
6. I give thanks for this day before it begins.
7. I come to God as I am, and He is making me new.

Carry this with you: *Feed your spirit the way you feed your body.*

Chapter 10: The Woman You're Becoming

I am becoming the woman 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 getting ready for? What does your name mean to the people who know it? Hold that picture — because that woman is real, and she is waiting on the decisions you make today.

Everything in this workbook has been about one thing: becoming. Not fixing, not hiding, not just surviving — becoming. The woman reading this page is not a finished product. She is a garden in season — some things pruned back, some things just breaking ground, everything growing. That is not an insult. That is what becoming looks like from the inside.

God already told you the ending is good. Listen to His heart for you:

> *"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." — Jeremiah 29:11 (KJV)*

Thoughts of peace. Not of evil. An expected end — a future with hope in it. That is what He thinks toward you.

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 children? What do people say about you when you leave the room? Women who write their vision down carry it 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 women or famous women. 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 woman who came home, stayed home, healed, and then reached back for the women coming behind her — because that is the final proof of healing, when your lived experience becomes somebody else's lifeline.

And now the exercise I promised: on the next writing page, write a letter to your future self — the woman five years from now. Tell her where you are today. Tell her what you are afraid of and what you are determined to do. Tell her what you need her to remember. Sign it and date it. When you are tempted to quit, read it. When you have made it, read it and cry the good tears.

Here is my final word to you in this chapter, 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.

Write It Out

1. Describe your life five years from now in vivid detail — where you live, your work, your relationships, what your name means to people.

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 — she can handle it.

Say It Out Loud

1. I am becoming the woman I was meant to be.
2. My vision pulls me forward stronger than my past pulls me back.
3. I am growing, and growth 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.*

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 worst day, and I am not my past.

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 women who lift me.

Day 6. My strength is my calm.

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

Day 8. Small honest steps build a solid life.

Day 9. I am rooted in God, and His mercies are new for me this morning.

Day 10. I am becoming the woman God made me to be.

Day 11. I am fearfully and wonderfully made — and I am learning to believe it.

Day 12. I have forgiven myself, and I am free to move forward.

Day 13. Shame does not get to name me. God does.

Day 14. I am worthy of love — God's love, and my own.

Day 15. I show up early, prepared, and reliable.

Day 16. My word is my bond — I keep it.

Day 17. I walk away from what pulls me backward.

Day 18. I reach out before I fall.

Day 19. I honor my obligations with dignity.

Day 20. In stillness with God, I find my direction.

Day 21. My children deserve my best, and I give it one steady day at a time.

Day 22. I am employable, capable, and deserving of good work.

Day 23. I am patient with my own healing.

Day 24. No setback gets to rewrite my story.

Day 25. My purpose is bigger than my pain, and God is using both.

Day 26. I protect my freedom like the treasure it is.

Day 27. I am grateful for this day and everything in it.

Day 28. What I survived is becoming wisdom I can give away.

Day 29. I refuse to quit on myself — God hasn't, and I won't.

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 workbook. For doing the work in these pages honestly — the hard writing, the tears, the truth. 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 your name. On that day, I want you to remember this page. Remember that a woman who believes in you wrote you this book. Remember the forgiveness letter you wrote yourself. Remember the woman in your five-year vision, standing in her kitchen, in her life, waiting for you to arrive.

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

Never give up. Not today. Not ever.

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

I will be cheering for you. Always.

— Angela

Resources Across the Country

You do not have to rebuild alone. This book travels — so every resource here is national. Each one works from any state, or helps you find local help where you live: jobs, housing, food, legal help, and people in your corner. Reach out. Asking for help is not weakness; it is strategy. (If you are in crisis right now, the three lines in the next section are answered day and night.)

211
Dial 2-1-1 · Text your ZIP code to 898-211 · 211.org
One free, confidential call connects you to local help with housing, food, work, bills, and more — wherever you live.

findhelp.org
findhelp.org
Enter your ZIP code to find free and reduced-cost local programs — food, housing, transportation, work, and care.

National Domestic Violence Hotline
1-800-799-SAFE (7233) · Text "START" to 88788 · thehotline.org
Free, confidential support, safety planning, and local referrals, 24 hours a day, by call, text, or chat.

Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.)
aa.org
A.A.'s official site shows you how to find meetings near you, through your local A.A. office and the free Meeting Guide app.

Narcotics Anonymous (NA)
na.org/meetingsearch
NA's official meeting search finds in-person and virtual recovery meetings by location, anywhere in the country.

Celebrate Recovery
celebraterecovery.com
A Christ-centered recovery program for hurts, habits, and hang-ups — use the Group Finder on the site to locate a group near you.

CareerOneStop
careeronestop.org
The U.S. Department of Labor's career and job-search site, with a section for job seekers with a criminal record and a finder for American Job Centers — free, in-person help with résumés, job search, and training near you.

LawHelp.org
LawHelp.org
A national directory of nonprofit legal aid programs — pick your state to find free or low-cost legal help near you.

Clean Slate Clearinghouse
cleanslateclearinghouse.org
Explains each state's record-clearing rules — expungement, sealing, and pardons — and lists legal service providers who help with clearing a record, state by state.

Feeding America
feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-food-bank
Enter your ZIP code to find the food bank near you and the local pantries and meal programs it supplies.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
hud.gov · Housing counselors: 1-800-569-4287
Find a free, HUD-approved housing counselor near you, your local public housing agency, and affordable rental programs in your state.

National Low Income Housing Coalition — Direct Assistance
nlihc.org/direct-assistance
A public page that walks renters to housing help, legal aid for eviction and landlord problems, housing counselors, and help if you are facing homelessness.

CDC — Where to Write for Vital Records
cdc.gov/nchs/w2w/index.htm
The official Centers for Disease Control and Prevention page links to every state's vital records office, with how to order a certified copy of your birth certificate from the state where you were born.

Benefits.gov
Benefits.gov
The official U.S. government benefits site — its Benefit Finder questionnaire helps you discover federal and state programs you may qualify for.

National Parent & Youth Helpline
1-855-427-2736 (1-855-4A-PARENT) · nationalparentyouthhelpline.org
Free, confidential support for parents, caregivers, and youth — call, text, or live chat, 24 hours a day.

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.