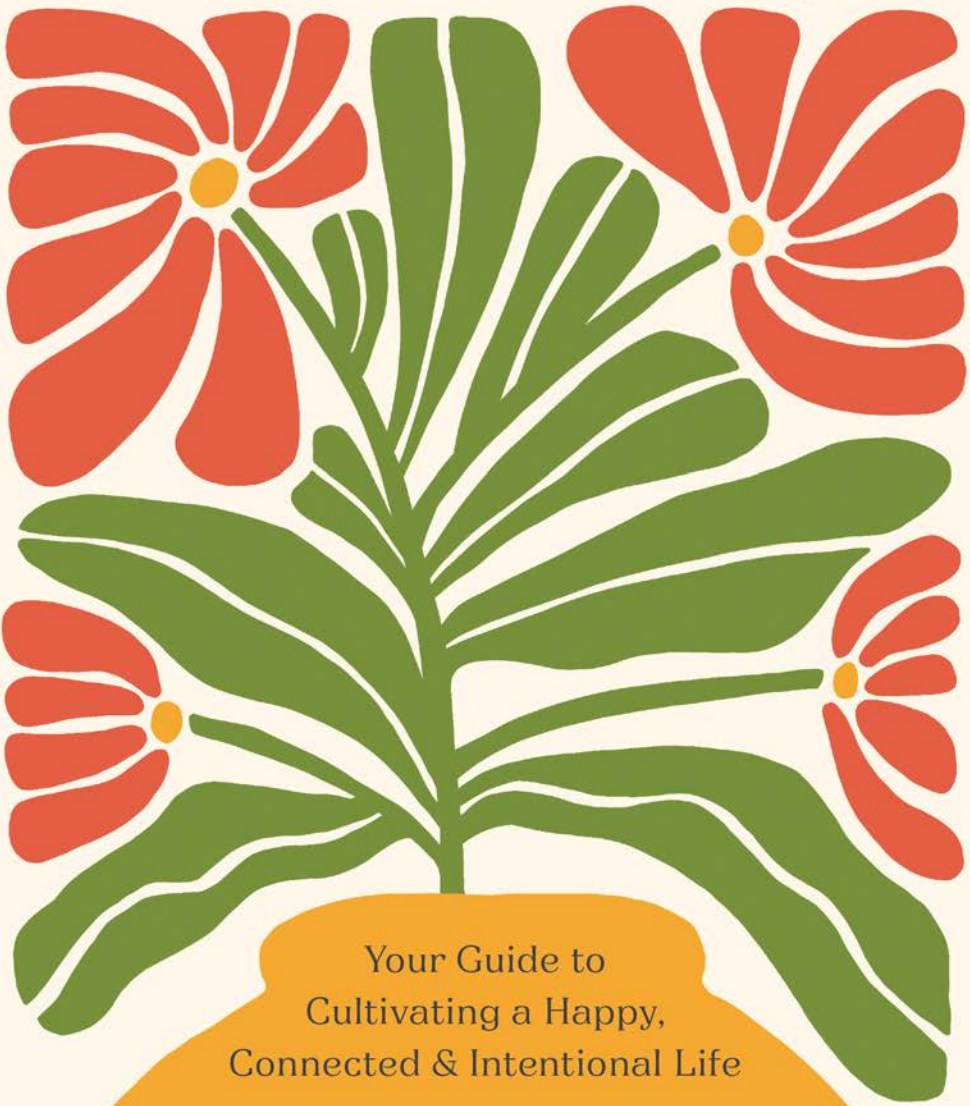
# *a* SIMPLY HEALTHY *life*



Your Guide to
Cultivating a Happy,
Connected & Intentional Life

CAROLINE FAUSEL
*National Board-Certified Health & Wellness Coach*

In *A Simply Healthy Life*, Caroline Fausel beautifully intertwines Christian principles with practical wisdom, offering readers a transformative guide to living intentionally and abundantly in every aspect of their lives. This book is a powerful reminder that true health encompasses not only physical well-being but also spiritual fulfillment and purposeful living.

KELLY LEVEQUE, founder of Be Well by Kelly

Sometimes starting healthy habits can feel overwhelming, but Caroline Fausel's friendly tone helps the most habit-resisting reader form a definition for a healthy life. I felt inspired to try healthy habits I'd stopped and to try some I'd been too scared to implement. Her challenges at the end of each chapter give the reader focused energy toward implementing food, home, mental, and relational practices that will give them a healthier, more lasting life.

BAILEY T. HURLEY, author of *Together Is a Beautiful Place*

If you're looking for the ultimate guide to finding balance, peace, and health in life, this book is for you! Caroline is great at giving tangible advice on how to juggle all life's responsibilities and challenges while remembering what is truly important.

MARY SMITH, owner of Mary's Whole Life and author of *Quick Prep Paleo* and *Real Food Weeknights*

I have found that movement is so critical to my whole-body health. I love how Caroline reframes exercise from being just a gym to doing whatever movement you love to do. That will help you keep moving your body in the long run!

TODD MCCULLOUGH, founder of TMAC Fitness

This book is an all-inclusive, accessible, actionable guide toward living your healthiest and happiest life. Whether you're looking for a total overhaul or to simply incorporate a few new habits—like mindset shifts, movement, or minimalism—Caroline gives you the blueprint to understand why it matters and how to integrate it into your life. This book can truly serve as a checklist for a life well lived—it's jam-packed with research, actionable suggestions, and helpful discussion topics to help you get there.

DANIKA BRYSHA, founder of Self-Care Society

In *A Simply Healthy Life*, Caroline Fausel teaches us to put self-care at the forefront of our busy lives. She outlines a simple formula that touches on many aspects of life, including how to find food that nourishes our bodies, how to free our homes from toxins, how to build meaningful friendships and lasting relationships, and best of all, how to create a life filled with intention, purpose, and faith. Caroline gently nudges us to create new habits and reminds us that it's never too late to change the course of our lives for the better. I, for one, am grateful for Caroline's loving advice, strong faith, and guiding wisdom, all of which shine through on every page of this book.

JENNY LEVINE FINKE, author of *Dear Gluten, It's Not Me, It's You*

Caroline has created the most thoughtful, encouraging, and informative road map to living your best and most fulfilled life! As a nutritionist, I really enjoyed the deep dive she offers on food and how food can truly act as medicine. And as a mom and a wife, I felt encouraged and supported as she walked through the other foundations of a happy, healthy, and fulfilled life. This is a must-read for everyone!

KATIE BRASWELL, MS, SPN, HTMA-P

*A Simple Healthy Life* is a must-read for anyone looking to make positive changes in their daily routine. Caroline provides practical tips on habit stacking to make healthy choices effortless, while also emphasizing the importance of nourishing your body with wholesome foods. This book is a game-changer for those seeking a more balanced and fulfilling life.

BLAIR HORTON, @holisticrendezvous

*A Simply Healthy Life* is an absolute must-have in your collection. Caroline's attention to detail makes my heart pitter-patter. From making simple, realistic goals and habits to creating your purpose and getting to the root of your new self, Caroline doesn't miss anything. Reading this book is like talking to a friend!

JENN BUMB, cookbook author and creator of Pretend It's a Donut

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*Think Well. Live Well. Be Well.*

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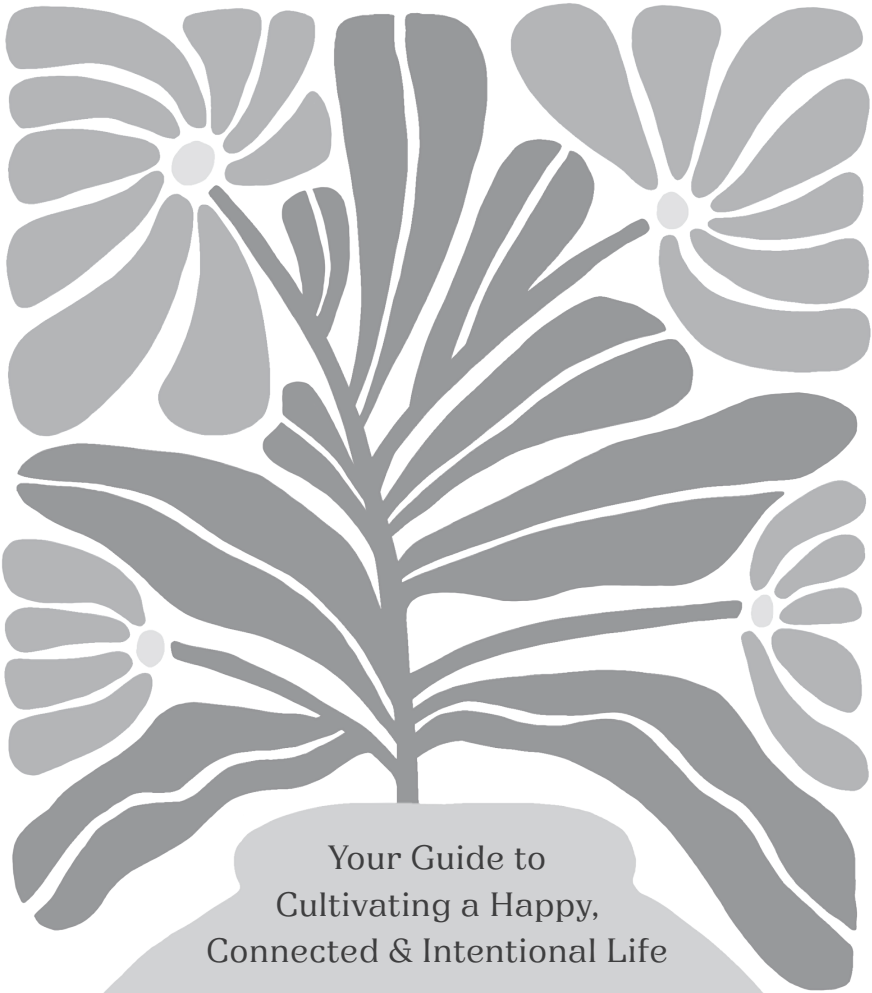

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CAROLINE FAUSEL

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INTRODUCTION

# HEALTHY MADE EASY

*When health is absent, wisdom cannot reveal itself, art cannot manifest, strength cannot fight, wealth becomes useless, and intelligence cannot be applied.*

HEROPHILUS

If you're anything like me and the women I interact with every day, I have a hunch you want to be healthier and feel better. But there's so much conflicting information that bombards us, whether on social media, in ads, from friends and family, or in the health and wellness world. It's easy to become confused and stuck, not knowing which choice is best.

You might want to eat healthier, get to a healthy weight, and feel alive with energy, but you have absolutely zero idea of how to make that happen. Any time you try to research to make your dream a reality, you get overwhelmed by all the contradicting information.

Maybe you drag yourself through every day. You want to be able to keep up with your busy life or with your children. You want to finally feel good, without a list of lingering symptoms and ailments, but you're not sure what the underlying problem is, let alone how to solve it.

You might look around at the clutter in your home (or in the storage unit you pay for each month), and the idea of simplicity feels out of reach, only found on Pinterest or Instagram. Your soul craves a life with less chaos, but as you look at your kitchen island cluttered with mail and Goldfish crackers, you have no idea how to get there.

You might feel lonely and disconnected from community, but part of you is terrified by the prospect of diving into deep relationships. You made friends easily when you were a kid, but now initiating new

relationships feels daunting. You're wondering where that village is that's supposed to be helping you.

Maybe you feel like there has to be more to life. You're longing for meaning and purpose, but it's hard to figure out what lights you up. You have a deep desire to grow closer to God, but you aren't sure where to even begin.

You might have young kids, and the days seem to blur together in an indistinguishable haze of dishes, laundry, errands, and meal prep. You worry you'll snap out of your motherhood trance when you drop your kids off at college, only to realize you have nothing left for yourself when they're gone. Or maybe you hustle so hard at work, and when the workday is done, you still find yourself working (or thinking about work). Your life is flying by, and all the ways you intend to care for yourself are on a future to-do list that never materializes.

Or maybe you're stuck in a life you don't love. You somehow ended up here, even though this isn't the career you wanted or the life you imagined. But you have no idea how to find your way to a new path.

In my health coaching sessions with women, I often start by asking, "What do you want for your life?" I'm often met with tear-filled eyes. Many people have buried their dreams long ago, or they haven't allowed themselves to dream in the first place.

It's easy to fall into automated routines just to get through our (very) busy days. With our lives going about a million miles an hour, it can be hard to take even an hour to ourselves to answer the question "What do I really want?" But here's the thing: without making a plan and intentional choices, we're unlikely to live the life of purpose we desire.

How about you? Have you taken the time to sit with this question of what you want for your life? Maybe you've never given yourself permission to really get to the deeper answer. Or maybe you know the answer, but you're scared to pursue it because it will rock the boat.

You may find yourself daydreaming of a new venture that won't stop tugging at your heart, but you already have too much on your plate. Or you may be thinking, *I'm way too busy taking care of everyone else to invest in myself.* But it doesn't have to be this way. We are designed to live a full,

healthy life—in heart, mind, body, and soul. We can care for others best when we are filled up ourselves.

## What Whole-Person Wellness Looks Like

I believe wellness is inherently holistic—it involves the connection between body, mind, and soul. When it comes to the medical realm, people tend to assume their symptoms have only a physical cause. And in the church, people may be encouraged to focus only on the spiritual. But in reality, humans are integrated beings. If we're not moving our bodies, we often feel stuck in our faith and our relationships. If we're thriving in our faith, it can help us thrive in other areas too. When we're fueling our bodies as they were designed to be, we feel more alive, and that energy sparks just about every other area of our lives.

This is how *The Message* captures 1 Corinthians 3:16-17: "You realize, don't you, that you are the temple of God, and God himself is present in you? No one will get by with vandalizing God's temple, you can be sure of that. God's temple is sacred—and you, remember, *are* the temple." No matter what worldview you're coming from, I think we can all agree that humans are awe inspiring. I believe that we are all created in the image of God. This belief is at the heart of my own health and wellness journey—I want to live with vitality and energy so I can live out my God-given purpose with as much impact as possible.

When I'm talking to Christian women about focusing on their own health, wellness, and relationships, I often get pushback. I've even heard people argue that "self-care is selfish." It's true that a meaningful life includes pouring into others and using our gifts for good. But we aren't meant to live on empty.

No matter where we are in terms of our faith journey, none of us are able to serve others well unless we're also caring for ourselves. Unfortunately, our faith communities don't always encourage this balance. In fact, some of the drive we feel to do and be everything to everyone else comes from within the church. But the destructive belief that we should ignore our own needs isn't from Scripture.

In Christian culture, there's a tendency to idolize a martyr mentality—we're taught that ignoring our own needs and wants is the path to holiness. But when Jesus gave the Greatest Commandment, he said we are to love our neighbor as ourselves (see Matthew 22:39). This implies a baseline of caring for our own needs. When we receive God's love and care, we can serve others out of that overflow. When we focus on everyone else's needs except our own, it is an entirely unsustainable lifestyle. We are left exhausted both physically and emotionally, and most likely bitter and resentful.

Jesus himself gave us an example of taking time to himself (gasp!) so he could be filled with his Father's love *before* he went into the crowds and poured out that love. Here's one of many examples in Scripture: "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed" (Mark 1:35). Jesus regularly removed himself from the chaos and the needs of the people around him to be with his Father. What I find so fascinating about this is that Jesus was fully human and fully God. He and God were one, but he still needed to set aside time to recharge and reset so he could be fully present and fulfill his calling.

"Sure," you might be saying, "but he wasn't giving himself a mani-pedi—he was praying!" I get it, but the point is that he took a break from caring for other people so he could be filled up before he poured out. (Also, there's more to self-care than a day at the spa, but we'll get to that later.)

When you are intentional about what matters most to you, you'll be a better friend, wife, mom, executive, or fill-in-the-blank. When you are filled up first, you will have the reserves to do the things that God has called you to. You'll soon find that self-care is a way to show love not only to yourself but also to the people around you.

When you prioritize your health and wellness, your spiritual formation, your relationships with friends and family, and God's purpose for your life, you will be able to flourish—and help those you love flourish too.

## My Journey to Wellness

As I'll share about later in this book, I was often sick as a child. A slew of unknown food intolerances combined with frequent antibiotic use led me to suffer from significant digestive issues. My stomach hurt nearly every night, and no one seemed to have answers. This lack of control about my body turned me toward health and wellness from a young age.

It wasn't until I was an adult and my husband, Chaz, and I had our little girl, Ella Rae, that I realized food can be medicine. If I ate clean, anti-inflammatory foods, I experienced zero stomachaches. Not only that, but I had more energy than ever before (and keep in mind, I had a one-year-old!).

When I found a way of eating that worked for my family, I wanted to share it with the world. That's how my company, Olive You Whole, was born. This was my mission: "I help you build a healthy, connected, intentional life that fulfills your greatest purpose," and that mission has never wavered. I love creating resources and recipes to help people live a simply healthy life. My passion to help people on this journey also led me to become a certified health and wellness coach. This book is another avenue for me to share what I've learned along the way (often the hard way!).

## Don't Let Life Choose for You

My hope is that reading this book will be like having a health coach in your pocket (or your crossbody bag or whatever you fancy!). I want to help you envision the life of your dreams and give you both the information and the tools to be able to achieve it. Little by little, thought by thought and habit by habit, you will begin to change your life.

Living intentionally includes both having a long-term plan and making intentional, on-purpose choices toward that goal every day. Either you will make choices about how you want your life to go and the legacy you want to leave, or life will choose for you.

As a health coach and wellness expert, I think of a thriving life being healthy in the most comprehensive sense of the word. It's another way of saying you're functioning at your prime. When it comes to your body, this means your systems are all functioning optimally. You're fueling your body in a way that meets its needs, which results in you feeling energetic, refreshed, happy, and thriving. When it comes to your environment, being healthy means cultivating a fresh, clean, life-giving home. The simplicity of your surroundings reflects an inner sense of peace. Your shopping choices make a positive impact on your community and the world. When it comes to relationships and community, being healthy means having friends who allow you to be the fullest and most genuine expression of yourself. It means having relationships in which you are free to both love and be loved. When it comes to your spiritual life, being healthy means you're able to pursue your connection with God and practice spiritual disciplines. When you're healthy, you feel alive as you live out the unique purpose God has called you to.

**Either you will make choices about how you want your life to go and the legacy you want to leave, or life will choose for you.**

## Creating a Strong Foundation

Over the past decade, I've focused personally and professionally on living intentionally in four areas: health and wellness, environment, relationships, and faith. In my training to become a health coach, I learned that all these areas make up the roots of the functional wellness tree. When you're healthy in these areas, you will be able to lead a fulfilling life and pursue your goals and dreams. You will also create a healthy foundation so you can live with vitality and avoid future disease.

In each chapter, we'll focus on the essentials, clearing away the clutter so you can make the choices that are best for you and your family. Each chapter ends with three levels of challenges so you can put this new knowledge to work right away.

Through these chapters, I want to empower you to do the following:

- build healthy habits and sustainable patterns
- eat in a way that makes you feel alive
- find a movement pattern that you love that gives your body energy
- free your body from harmful toxins
- create a healthy, simple, and inviting home environment that brings you joy
- manage your stuff so your stuff doesn't manage you
- take inventory of your thoughts and become more optimistic toward yourself and others
- find community and build healthy, uplifting friendships
- foster healthy, loving relationships and patterns within your family
- rest so you feel rejuvenated and able to love and serve others
- feel fulfilled by what you do

A healthy life starts with getting intentional. Making deliberate choices in these areas has made the greatest influence on my life—and I think it can do the same for you.

## How to Use This Book

Every day we make about 35,000 choices. Many of these choices may seem insignificant, but when they're added together, they make a dramatic impact. When we steer our choices in the direction we want, life won't just happen to us. We'll live the life we were meant to live—a healthy, intentional life.

With all the information bombarding us, it can be hard to cut through all the noise to get to what's most important and most actionable. In this book, I've tried to give you the lightning bolt version of what I've learned over the past twelve years in the health and wellness industry. In each chapter, I'll help you determine what's worth prioritizing and what's

best to let go of. You'll learn how to create lasting change and how to cultivate habits so you can slowly but surely put everything into practice.

There are a lot of suggestions in this book! You might read it cover to cover and then come back to specific sections as you're ready to tackle them. Or you can look at the chapter titles and decide which topic to focus on first. After reading the chapter, you can choose one of the challenges at the end and focus on it for thirty days. Once you've gotten a handle on that, you can move on to the next-level challenge or move on to another chapter.

The way you use this book is up to you, but know that every suggestion is invitational. Don't feel pressured to make every idea a reality if it doesn't work for you or for this particular season. No matter where you are on this journey toward a simply healthy life, the goal is to keep growing, one step at a time.

PART ONE

# Health and Wellness

CHAPTER 1

# CHANGING YOUR LIFE FOR GOOD

*Our thoughts become our words, our words become our beliefs, our beliefs become our habits, and our habits become our realities.*

JEN SINCERO

When it comes to health, we want change, and we want it *now*. We want the fairy-tale ending that takes zero work to get there. Unfortunately, that's just not how it goes down. We know we need discipline. But how can we be disciplined in so many areas at once?

It comes down to two things: goals and habits.

When we think about forming new habits, we often relegate this process to New Year's resolutions or expensive new gym memberships. But we can form new goals and habits absolutely any time!

Whether we realize it or not, our days are already made up of habits—some of them intentional and others we don't even think about. In this chapter, we'll lay the foundation for creating habits and making them stick. We'll start with one habit at a time, and then you can use this strategy to create lifelong habits in other areas of your life as well.

## Making Goals That Stick

If you want to change your life, the key is to make one choice at a time. You may have a massive dream, but every dream is built by small, quick wins that eventually add up to a big change. These step-by-step gains are like the first pebbles falling off a snowy mountain that, while initially tiny, eventually cause an avalanche.

In order to turn your big vision into small, achievable steps, you'll need SMART goals: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound.[1]

Let's say you have a goal to walk a certain number of steps every day for three months. A habit that might accompany that goal would be to consistently take the stairs instead of the elevator. Both your goals and your habits work together toward the same larger goal—in this case, being more active.

*Specific* means your goal is clear and precise. The reality is, a vague goal likely will not get accomplished. As you set your goal, you'll want to ask yourself questions like "What?," "When?," "Where?," and "How?"

*Measurable* means you have a clear way to define success. What metrics will let you know the goal is complete? The questions to ask here are "How much?" or "How many?"

*Attainable* means you can achieve this goal. Given your life stage, health, level of fitness, work and family situation, and time constraints, is this goal possible for you in this season?

### Magic Wand Exercise

When a new client comes to me for health coaching, one of the first things we do is the Magic Wand exercise. Let's do it together now! Get out your journal or a piece of paper, and answer this question: If you could wave a magic wand and your life, family, and health could be exactly as you wanted them to be, what would that look like?

Use a stream-of-consciousness style of writing. Don't edit as you go—just write what you're thinking. Try to be as detailed as possible. Where do you live? How do you feel every day? What's your financial situation? What are your relationships like?

Now it's time to take inventory of your life as it is right now. You can start by going to oliveyouwhole.com/inventory and ranking different areas of your life from 0 to 10.

What surprised you? Were there any categories that were higher or lower than you expected?

*Relevant* means this goal is in line with your values, your life purpose, and the direction you want to go. You can refer to the Magic Wand exercise to gain clarity about this.

*Time-bound* means your goal has a beginning and an end, and the time period has been decided in advance. When you put dates around your goal, it helps you get prepared and focus during this specific window.

Once you've decided on a SMART goal, write it down somewhere you will see it often. Anticipate setbacks, and have a plan in place to keep going when you hit these speed bumps. This knowledge that setbacks are part of the process will keep you going even when hiccups come along. Also keep in mind that your goals will evolve over time, so don't be afraid to make changes as necessary. Consider finding an accountability buddy or working with a coach to keep you on track as you work toward your goals.

As you achieve your goals, one at a time, you will eventually begin to change your life. Each small victory draws you closer to your long-term goals. And as habits become automatic, they will continue long after your goal has been accomplished.

## Why Habits?

Our brains are encouraged to create habits because we're lazy. Seriously! Habits take something that would otherwise take a lot of processing power and simplify it by making it automatic. It's kind of like my kids on the first snow of the season. They all bundle up until they look like the Michelin man and head to our favorite sledding hill, pulling their sleds with their friends behind them. The surface of the snow is completely smooth, except for some bunny prints here and there.

At this point, one of my kids has to volunteer to go first. Doesn't every kid want to go first? Usually—but not with sledding. Why not? Because when their sled sits on top of the freshly fallen snow, they have to scoot. And scoot. And scoot. It's not a fast, smooth, fun ride to the bottom. The path is paved with endurance, with the promise that the effort will eventually be worth it.

Our brains' neural pathways work in a similar way. When we're forming a new habit, it's like creating the sledding path. It's hard. It takes a lot of work. But when we stick with it, it eventually becomes a habit—something we can do without thinking about it.

It's tempting to think of habits as grand acts of discipline that other people (not you) do, like your friend who runs six miles every morning—rain, shine, or snow. But even if you don't feel like a particularly disciplined person, you still have plenty of habits. In fact, 45 percent of our daily behaviors are made up of habits.[2]

Think of the things you do the same way every day—making your coffee, choosing the spot you sit for breakfast, checking your email, packing your bag for work. So much of what we do is habitual, because habits make our lives easier.

Whether you realize it or not, the things you do over and over are essentially building the person you are. Habits affect what you think about and how you talk to yourself. Habits affect what you eat and when you eat. Habits affect your morning routine, the way you move your body, your nightly routine, and when you go to bed. When you tweak these habits to make them healthier, you can change your life!

## Forming a New Habit

If habits sound rather mundane to you, I have some exciting news. We can use the science of habit formation and behavior change to help us *mindlessly* become the people we hope to become. That's pretty amazing! Likewise, Scripture talks about how our character is often built in small, daily acts. It says in 1 Corinthians 10:31, "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (ESV). Little by little, we are being sanctified and becoming more like Christ. More often than not, those changes happen through the intentional habits we cultivate.

In his book *Atomic Habits*, author James Clear describes the four stages of habit: cue, craving, response, and reward.[3] This four-step process happens every time you perform a habit. If you want to analyze your

current habits, create new habits, or break bad habits, it's important to understand this process.

A cue is what sparks you to perform the habit, such as putting your Bible and journal on your coffee table to cue you to spend time with Jesus when you wake up. Craving is the second step. In this stage, you're desiring the reward on the other side of the habit. If you're a runner, although you might enjoy the run itself, the craving could be the endorphin rush or "runner's high" you experience. Response is the habit that you're performing, whether it's a thought or an action. The reward is the goal of every habit, and each of the previous three steps are in pursuit of this reward. Our brains are constantly scanning for rewards, trying to create more habit loops to simplify and automate our lives.

The reason we can form new habits and new ways of being is because of the brain's capacity for neuroplasticity—the ability to change connections and behavior in response to stimulation or information. This allows us to learn new things and create new pathways in our brains (like new habits!).[4]

### Use Blatant Reminders

Make the cue for your new habit so obvious that you practically have to do it. You can set up your environment to help make this happen. I've heard of people who want to read their Bible daily putting it on the floor by their bed, so when they wake up and get out of bed, they would literally have to walk over their Bible or move it out of the way if they didn't want to read it. You could also put healthy foods in the cabinet where you typically go when you're reaching for a snack, or you could set an alarm on your phone for several times throughout the day as a reminder to stand up and stretch.

### Consider Habit Stacking

Since so much of our life is already filled with habits, we can use the existing habits to our advantage! One strategy for creating a cue is called habit stacking—adding your new habit on top of another one that's already cemented in your routine. For example, maybe you want

to start applying a night cream before bed. You could add this on to a habit that you already do consistently, like brushing your teeth. So immediately after brushing your teeth, you would apply night cream. Or if you want to start changing your thought patterns, each time you wash your hands throughout your day, you could look in the mirror and say something positive or practice a moment of gratitude. Adding on a new habit to an already solid habit increases the likelihood that your new habit will stick.

### Implement Delayed Gratification

My husband, Chaz, doesn't get annoyed by much. But he recently shared with me that he was frustrated that when I made my espresso drink in the morning, I failed to dump the beans into the compost and clean out the portafilter. Since I usually make my coffee first, he had to dump it out and clean it before he could make his own drink.

I could see how annoying this was for him, and I really wanted to change. So I used my craving, which was to drink a delicious latte, to form my new habit. I told myself that I couldn't drink my coffee until I'd cleaned out my portafilter. Even though cleaning isn't typically a strength of mine, it worked, because my craving for good coffee was strong enough!

If there's something you don't want to do (such as making your bed in the morning), pair it with something you enjoy (such as starting the diffuser with your favorite essential oil blend so your room smells lovely all day).

### Start Tiny

This might seem obvious, but is this habit even possible for you? If I want my habit to be to run ten miles every day, I might be able to do that eventually. But could I do that consistently starting today? No, I could not. The first rule of habits is to make sure this habit is attainable in the first place.

BJ Fogg shares the "five ability factors": time, money, physical effort,

mental effort, and routine. Do you have enough time, money, physical capability, and mental energy to do this behavior? And does this behavior fit into your current routine, or do you need to make adjustments for it to work?[5] These are critical questions to ask, because they help you determine whether your habit is feasible or not. You don't want to set a goal that you're not capable of achieving.

When a task is massive, we have to rely on our motivation and willpower to make it happen. I don't know about you, but for me, motivation can be a fickle friend. We may start out with lots of ambition, but it's not long before that energy wanes. This may seem counterintuitive, but the way to achieve big goals is to break each goal into steps that are so tiny we don't need much motivation or willpower to complete them.

Ashley, a health coaching client of mine, shared with me that she had worked with health coaches in the past, but it had never worked out for her. She wanted to accomplish massive goals, like cooking everything she ate entirely from scratch, but she struggled to stick with these goals. When we sat down to create her first goal, she suggested that she stop eating out entirely. At the time, she was eating out once a week for lunch and almost every evening for dinner. Given that she'd struggled with accomplishing similar big goals in the past, we worked together to pare down her big goal to a smaller goal of not eating out only at lunchtime. This felt like a more manageable goal and provided her with an easy win after our first week of working together. This victory propelled her toward bigger goals and continued success.

So the goal isn't to run a marathon. That might be the end goal, but when you get started, this isn't what you're working toward (remember, we're thinking tiny here!). At first, the goal might be to just put on your tennis shoes. Maybe you'll end up walking, maybe you'll run for a little bit, or maybe you'll just put your shoes on and think about it. That's okay—we're talking about baby steps here.

Continue to ask yourself, *Could this goal be any tinier?* until the answer is no. Now *that* is your tiny habit. Once you make this small thing a habit, it becomes easier to add to it.

As you complete your new habit over and over again, you begin to trust that you are, in fact, capable of change. Your success leads to more success. You realize that you can do hard things!

### Remove Barriers

One way to make your new habit attainable is to remove anything that's in the way.

Chaz and I divide up the house chores, including the dishes. I load the dishes throughout the day, and he loads them after dinner, starts the dishwasher, and unloads the dishwasher in the morning. When we were doing our yearly check-in on our anniversary trip, it became clear that I wasn't keeping my end of our dish duties. I'm an Enneagram 7, and I don't love mundane things, so the dishes were piling up on the counters and in the sink. Chaz and I took a step back and thought about how we could ensure that this task got done. I remembered that my friend Alissa's kids put their dishes in the dishwasher after every meal and snack, and I thought, *Well, why can't our kids do that too?*

Then we asked ourselves, *Are there any barriers that are getting in the way of making this goal happen? What can we do about those barriers?*

We realized our barrier was that Owen, who was six years old at the time, couldn't reach the sink to rinse off his dishes before putting them in the dishwasher. There was an easy solution for this—we ordered a stool that would be there by the time we got home! Now our kiddos know the expectation, and they load their own dishes in the dishwasher. This may seem like a simple example, but the principle applies to larger problems as well.

#### Tiny Habits for Massive Goals

- Run a marathon: put on your running shoes
- Make yourself breakfast: take out the carton of eggs (or another ingredient)
- Get eight hours of sleep: get in bed at 10 p.m.
- Read one book a month: read one page at night
- Stay well hydrated: pour yourself one glass of water in the morning
- Tidy your kitchen every night: put one dish in the dishwasher
- Lower your stress: pray or meditate for thirty seconds after waking up

### Treat Yourself

The reward is why we're doing the habit in the first place. Be sure that the reward is something you're really excited about. If it's not attractive enough, the habit loop will fail, and your habit won't stick.

What works for me is to take something I already want and delay my gratification until I complete the habit. For example, I had a goal of using the squeegee to clean our glass shower walls after taking a shower. It keeps the glass clean for longer and removes the dried water droplets, but since it's a mundane task, I'm not naturally inclined to do it consistently. To motivate myself, I tell myself that I don't get my warm, dry towel until I squeegee the shower walls. Each person's rewards are different (the reward of a clean shower may be enough for some people, like Chaz!), but experiment until you find something that makes sense for you.

### Get Back on the Horse

Studies show that missing a day doesn't cause the habit to fail forever, but you want it to be more common to do the habit than not do it.[6] If you skip one day, the habit is likely still ingrained. But missing more than one day in a row makes it seem like skipping is the easier path forward. Track your habits, and try to be as consistent as possible. If you miss a day, recommit yourself to your goal. The faster you get back on the horse, the more likely you'll be successful in the long term with your new habit.

## Choosing Your Habit

Forming new habits has everything to do with our identity. As author Jen Sincero says, "Identities come equipped with matching habits."[7] Habits are often aspirational, because the whole point is the desire to become a better version of ourselves. The most successful habits are formed when we buy into the habit as part of our new identity.

I recently decided I wanted to start running again. I ran cross-country in high school, and running was my biggest form of exercise in college, even when I didn't have to anymore. But when I had Ella Rae,

it became harder to run. Either I'd have to run with a stroller or find childcare. But with both my kids in elementary school, it seemed like a good time to pick up this hobby again.

I knew that in order to make this habit stick, I had to make it identity based. I wouldn't keep up with it if my mentality was, *Oh, I'm not a runner, I just run occasionally.* Instead, I told Chaz that I was going to start identifying as a runner. Being a runner means I go on runs often. It means I like running, and I will even run on vacation!

**Forming new habits is fun because it's like deciding who you're going to be in the future.**

Forming new habits is fun because it's like deciding who you're going to be in the future. The first step is to believe that becoming that person is possible. You can decide now that you already *are* that person. That belief will fuel your ability to stick with the habits that reflect the new you.

As you begin thinking about choosing which habits you want to build into your life, it's important to start with the end in mind. What are you working toward, and why is that important to you? Maybe you want to get better sleep. But you don't want to get better sleep for kicks and giggles—you probably want to get better sleep so you have more energy for yourself, your spouse, your kids, or your friends. And why is that important to you? Maybe it's because as a tired, frazzled version of yourself, you feel like you're not showing up the way you want to and instead of showing love to others, you yell and lose your patience. Now *that* is your true motivation—your *why* for prioritizing sleep.

Write your why on a sticky note and put it somewhere you'll see it multiple times a day to keep you on track.

### High-Yield Habits

When my clients hire me as a health coach, they often have a particular reason—one area that feels most crucial to focus on. Maybe that's true

## High-Yield Habit Exercise

When it comes to change, we're often clear on the problem but hazy on possible solutions. Without committing to any specific action or habit, let's just get some ideas out on paper.

Grab your journal or a piece of paper. At the top of the page, write the area you want to focus on. Then set a timer for five minutes, and write down as many different solutions (behaviors) for your problem as possible. Don't edit as you go—just write, write, write!

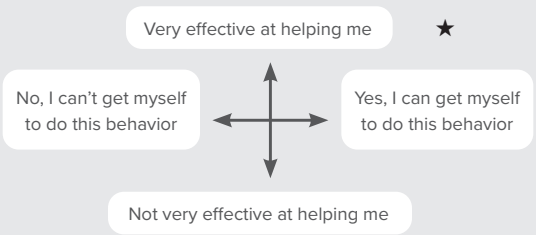
Next, set your timer for ten minutes. Do a little research about what the experts are saying about your problem and add those ideas to your list.

Draw a horizontal line and a vertical line to divide your paper into four quadrants. At the top of the vertical line, write, "Very effective at helping me." At the bottom of the vertical line, write, "Not very effective at helping me." On the left side of the horizontal line, write, "No, I can't get myself to do this behavior." On the right side of the horizontal line, write, "Yes, I can get myself to do this behavior."

Now look at each of the behaviors you brainstormed and find a place for them in one of the four quadrants, taking into consideration how impactful this behavior would be to help solve your problem or accomplish your dream, and how motivated you are to do this behavior.

After mapping every behavior, zoom out and look at the entire chart. The behaviors in the top right are the ones that are highly impactful and that you're motivated to do. These are called high-yield habits. When you're choosing your first habit to try to form, choose one in the top right quadrant.[8]

### High-Yield Habit Chart




## Habits That Have Positive Ripple Effects

- Regular exercise
- Positive morning routine
- Healthy sleep hygiene
- Getting enough sleep
- Stretching
- Cooking at home
- Keeping a food journal
- Meal prepping
- Making your bed
- Journaling
- Reading
- Prayer
- Tracking expenses
- Practicing gratitude[9]

for you too. Maybe you're experiencing significant stress, having trouble sleeping, feeling a lack of energy, struggling with digestive issues, or feeling lonely.

Choose just one area to focus on for now (but don't worry—you can use this process with other areas once you've mastered this one). Once you've chosen the issue you'd like to address, complete the High-Yield Habit exercise.

## Breaking Bad Habits

Habit formation isn't just about creating positive new habits. It's also about breaking bad habits. Just as we thought through why we wanted to start a new habit, it's crucial to figure out why we keep coming back to a bad habit. Usually we can look at the reward of the habit for a clue about why we're doing it in the first place.

The key to breaking a bad habit is essentially the opposite of how we form a good habit, and it revolves around the habit loop. For the cue, make it invisible. For the craving, make it unattractive. For the response, make it difficult. For the reward, make it unsatisfying.[10] We're most likely to experience success in breaking a bad habit if we keep the reward and swap out the bad behavior for a good behavior.

Let's take the example of social media. If I were to ask you how much time you spend on social media, you might estimate about an hour a day. Then you look at your screen time report and realize it's actually closer to four hours a day! I'm guessing that if you mapped out how you want to spend your time, spending hours on social media wouldn't make the list.

This is a problem for most of us. And while we might claim that social media makes us feel connected to our friends, in reality, we scroll social media because we're bored, we're avoiding another task, or it's an ingrained habit.

If you want to quit any habit, including mindless scrolling, the first thing you need to do is figure out *why* you're doing it. There may be lots

of different reasons, so try to be really honest with yourself and get to the root of it. Once you've nailed this down, don't just try to break the habit cold turkey—find a way to get the same benefit or reward from a different habit. If you determine the underlying reason for your scrolling is boredom, you could replace that habit by bringing a book in your purse to read when you get bored. If you discover you're doing it out of loneliness, you could call a friend instead.

As you reflect on the reason you engage in a bad habit, you may realize it's because you need better coping skills. If this is you, you are not alone! Almost everyone has some unhealthy coping patterns. The key is to recognize them so we can be intentional about making a change.

The first question to ask yourself is, *How am I feeling when I engage in this negative behavior?* Are you doing this because you're bored? Sad? Angry?

The second question to ask yourself is, *How can I swap this negative behavior with a positive new habit?*

Many people use food as a coping mechanism. Maybe you feel sad one night, and you eat an entire sleeve of Girl Scout Cookies. Your stomach may regret it later, but there's the immediate reward of receiving comfort and avoiding sadness while the Thin Mints hit your taste buds. If you *always* eat a sleeve of Girl Scout Cookies when you're sad, this becomes ingrained as a habit. To switch this habit, brainstorm positive coping strategies that could bring you comfort. For example, when you're feeling sad, you might call a friend, drink warm tea, take an Epsom salt bath, go to an infrared sauna, read a book, write in your journal, or go for a walk.

## Rule of Life

When you're working on changing your lifestyle through habits, it's too overwhelming to set twenty goals and try to work on them all at once. This is why New Year's resolutions often fail: it's impossible to

prioritize so many areas of your life simultaneously. The key to keeping momentum is to add just one new habit at a time. As you continue in this lifestyle of making wise choices, you'll be able to stack more habits on top of one another. This is the slow, steady process of building a healthy lifestyle.

John Mark Comer calls this kind of intentional habit stacking a Rule of Life. He defines it as "a schedule and set of practices and relational rhythms that create space for us to be with Jesus, become like him, and do as he did, as we live in alignment with our deepest desires."[11]

Rules are essentially habits that keep our lives and our actions integrated with what we say is important to us. Sometimes we *think* something is important to us, but when we take inventory of our actions, they don't align with that value.

Developing a rule of life gives us the structure we need to stay aligned with our values. Which habits are in line with your values? These are the habits you want to keep. Which habits aren't contributing to who you want to become? These are the habits you want to break. Are there new habits you want to adopt?

Your rule of life is all about rhythms. What rhythms do you want to create in terms of your health, your environment, your relationships, and your faith? What habits can you cultivate—daily, weekly, monthly, and annually—that promote what is most important to you?

These habits aren't set in stone. I recommend that you revisit them regularly to see how they're working for you and find out what needs to be tweaked. This rule should be life giving, not restrictive.

When we start small, with a tiny habit, we are able to achieve small wins. Those small wins give us the momentum to continue forming new habits for self-improvement. As we continue to evaluate and modify our habits, we build a healthy lifestyle and eventually become who we want to be.

## Habits Challenge

**Beginner challenge:** Choose one new habit to practice for thirty days. Remember to make your habit specific. What is your goal, broken into small steps? When and where will you do this task? How will you measure it? Why are you passionate about creating this habit?

**Intermediate challenge:** Choose one habit you want to break. Do some soul searching to determine the deeper reason you keep coming back to this habit. Then replace that behavior with a healthy habit that fulfills the same reward or longing.

**Advanced challenge:** Create a rule of life using the worksheet at oliveyouwhole.com/rule-of-life. This exercise will help you create a holistic plan to develop healthy habits in different areas in your life.