

9 TOOLS FOR AN
EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY YOU

STRONGER
Every Day

JANELL RARDON

“Every soul needs a little strength training. In *Stronger Every Day*, Janell Rardon takes a comprehensive approach to address the things that weigh us down emotionally. The nine tools she shares effectively combine both scientific research and spiritual truths to provide the guidance needed to help the emotionally overwhelmed find a place of health and healing. This is an excellent resource for anyone battling emotional burnout or if you want to protect yourself from experiencing it in the future.”

Sandra Dalton-Smith, MD, physician, speaker, and author
of *Sacred Rest: Recover Your Life, Renew
Your Energy, Restore Your Sanity*

“Janell Rardon’s new book *Stronger Every Day* reads like a letter from a trusted friend. Her love and care shine through, along with an effective synthesis of the last fifty years of psychological and clinical wisdom, not to mention many eternal and biblical truths. She has structured this offering as a toolbox, gently introducing each new self-care tool with stories from her own life as well as quotes from many of the leading scholars and researchers of psychology and personal growth. The overriding message of the book is about gentleness—leading ourselves from the pit of shame, self-judgment, and limitation to the heaven of self-forgiveness, empowerment, and connection. Janell speaks with authority as one who has brought both herself and her clients through this journey, and now she passes on the keys to this process for all to use. Her Heartlift method puts biblical truth alongside a solid grounding in affective, cognitive, and behavioral neuroscience. One is left with the impression that timeless wisdom has been proven and brought to life with modern scientific research. I am very pleased to see her work reach a larger audience, and I am sure that she will uplift and inspire many people with this well-written and enjoyable book.”

Benjamin Perkus, PhD, psychologist and creator
of the Aroma Freedom Technique

“Janell Rardon provides a pathway of transformation for people seeking to heal and grow by translating the key foundational aspects of a good psychotherapy process into practical tools and accessible language. She wisely puts a practical step-by-step method for addressing the heart and building emotional strength at the center of this process.”

Beatrice Chestnut, author of *The Complete Enneagram: 27 Paths to Greater Self-Awareness* and *The 9 Types of Leadership: Mastering the Art of People in the 21st Century Workplace*

“Janell Rardon’s book *Stronger Every Day* beautifully weaves Scripture, science, literature, and contemplative practices into a tapestry of tools to move us from a ‘history of hurts’ to a ‘vision of victory.’ Having worked in the field of child protection and family strengthening for nearly thirty years, I can’t wait for our staff to read this book together to learn and grow stronger for the sake of the children and families we serve. Emotionally healthy adults serve others better. Janell spent time with us in Thailand a few years ago, speaking at a conference to women from over thirty nations. Her authenticity and biblical insights inspired and challenged us to be the best healthy self we could be. Her new book does that as well.”

Kimberly Quinley, executive director,
Step Ahead Foundation, Thailand

“Janell Rardon presents an in-depth look at a much-needed subject—healing from trauma. Social psychologists have highlighted the deep wounds that life sometimes brings. Rardon’s book draws upon a broad and profound reservoir of spirituality to bring emotional health to a world in search of deep healing. Read this creative prose and enter into your own journey of strength for everyday life!”

Antipas L. Harris, PhD, president and dean of Jakes Divinity School and author of *Is Christianity the White Man’s Religion? How the Bible Is Good News for People of Color*

“Janell’s book *Stronger Every Day* is a powerful, detailed step-by-step process to healing the broken heart, leading one to wholeness and to a deeper, intimate relationship with Jesus. As always, Janell is passionate in her quest to see people healed and living the life Jesus died to give them.”

Allison Rolston, PA-C, brain health coach

“In *Stronger Every Day*, Janell Rardon offers practical tools for emotional healing that are grounded in biblical principles and offer encouragement for the arduous journey toward wholeness. Rardon weaves her own journey of healing throughout the book, assuring you there is hope and freedom in your future. Whether you struggle daily with emotional wounds or only occasionally feel their presence, *Stronger Every Day* will equip you to move forward toward emotional health and wellness.”

Kathy Howard, Bible study teacher and author of *Unshakeable Faith: 8 Traits for Rock-Solid Living*

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9 TOOLS FOR AN
EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY YOU

JANELL RARDON



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This publication is intended to provide helpful and informative material on the subjects addressed. Readers should consult their personal health professionals before adopting any of the suggestions in this book or drawing inferences from it. The authors and publisher expressly disclaim responsibility for any adverse effects arising from the use or application of the information contained in this book.

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Janell Rardon, Stronger Every Day

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*Dedicated with deep gratitude to my three remarkable children,
Candace, Brooke, and Grant.*

As Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky once said,
“The soul is healed by being with children.”
Each of you has healed my soul,
taught me the joy of living a wide-awake life,
and loved me unconditionally.
Because of you, I grow stronger every day.

Contents

Acknowledgments 13
The Heartlift Journey Chart 16
A Prayer for Strength: *From My Heart to Yours* 17
Introduction: *Where the Light Enters* 19

PART ONE: ENVISION 37

Tool 1: Step across the Threshold: *Meaningfulness* 39
Tool 2: Sit in God's Presence: *Secure Attachment* 59
Tool 3: Shape Healthy Thoughts: *Cognitive Reframing* 81

PART TWO: EDUCATE 103

Tool 4: Shift from Shaming to Gracing: *Self-Compassion* 105
Tool 5: Speak Healing Words to Your Future: *Healthy Assertiveness* 133
Tool 6: Soak in Living Water: *Spiritual Growth* 153

PART THREE: ESTABLISH 173

Tool 7: Send New, Positive Messages to Your Brain: *Memory Reconsolidation* 175

Contents

Tool 8: Soar in Healthy Skies: *Emotion Regulation* 203

Tool 9: Save Mental Energy for the Essentials: *Human
Connection* 225

Glossary 245

Resources 251

Notes 253

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To Rob, the love of my life. This work is our work. Together, we journey toward emotional health and wholeness and as a result *grow stronger every day*. I truly believe “the latter . . . will be greater than the former” (Hag. 2:9 AMP), and I know that the best is yet to come.

To my big brother, Mike, and big sister, Susan. We have overcome hurtful words and learned the power of speaking healing words and as a result, I believe we *are growing stronger every day*. I finished this book at a critical time in our mother’s life, and you gave me the support and space to put my heart and “our story” on paper. I think of the words of the great George Bernard Shaw, who once said, “If you cannot get rid of the family skeleton, you may as well make it dance.” Here’s to more years of dancing, laughter, and deep joy. I love you both.

Acknowledgments

To Mom. You kept the faith and fought the good fight. Your dying words to me were “Keep helping your ladies. They need to talk about their problems.” Your final blessing fuels my mission. Thank you for allowing me to share “our story” of emotional healing. I love you.

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To my clients, I say thank you. I’d love to name each one of you, but our work is kept in the vault of confidentiality. This book is a direct result of the hours and hours of our time together. On a daily basis, I am astonished by your commitment to transformation. Healing doesn’t have to be complicated, and you are living proof of that.

To the Sage and Grace Essentials Community. You welcomed me, loved me, mentored me in Young Living essential oils, allowed me to practice Aroma Freedom Technique, and most importantly, shared a connection that is true koinonia.

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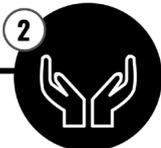
literally transformed my life, both personally and professionally. What an honor to be your student.

To Dr. Benjamin Perkus, founder of Aroma Freedom International. Your emotional healing modality, Aroma Freedom Technique, has been a direct answer to prayer. Witnessing men, women, and children break free from childhood trauma has been highly rewarding.

To the Stronger Every Day community, thank you. You heartlift me and call me higher. We are so much better together, aren't we? Here's to sharing our message of hope and healing with the world.

Finally, to Jesus, for helping me find my way home. There were times I felt I wouldn't make it, but you stayed by my side, caught my tears, and remained faithful. Because of you, I am clothed with strength and dignity and smile at my future (Prov. 31:25).

The Heartlift Journey



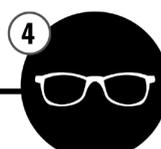
Welcome God into your space. Commit to becoming stronger every day.



Take the first step. Begin living your God-breathed life.



Find a therapist, certified life coach, wise mentor, accountability partner, or like-minded small group committed to emotional health and wellness.



Take a look at your history of hurts. Begin making peace with your past.



Implement the tool of memory reconsolidation.



Begin crafting your "Vision of Victory."



Breathe and believe your new intentions and affirmations.



Visit janellrardon.com

A Prayer for Strength

FROM MY HEART TO YOURS

You Are Stronger Every Day

Dear God,
Today is a brand-new day filled with endless possibilities.
Please come alongside my new friend.
May her heart and mind be healthy and whole.
May she lean in and know that she is not alone on this
journey.
As she picks up her pen to start writing new words, new
thoughts, and new vision,
assure her of your presence.
Help her as she begins using these brand-new emotional-
health tools.
May she speak healing words into her future.
Affirm her value, worth, and dignity, every single day.
Allow her to feel, in her deepest core, a profound sense of
security and strength,
and that she is getting stronger every day.
Remind her that when she is weak, you are strong.
May the unfolding of your Word give her the exact
amount of light she needs for today.

A Prayer for Strength

May the peace that passes all understanding quiet every
worry.
May joy unspeakable and full of glory rise up in her soul.
May she find herself laughing out loud and recognizing
beauty like never before.
May things that once bothered her now cause less
agitation, anger, or frustration.
May ease and calm follow her throughout the hallways of
her home.
May resilience and rest enable her to respond with
remarkable grace.
When the new healthy narrative feels strange and even
uncomfortable—and it will—
empower her to continue using her new tools until her
new normal is
established.
When fear tries to overtake her newfound sense of calm,
send your powerful Spirit
to conquer its hold.
At the end of the day, when her head hits the pillow, may
she sleep in peace.
Most importantly, may she always remember she is
clothed with strength and dignity,
smiling at her future (Prov. 31:25).
Amen.



Introduction

WHERE THE LIGHT ENTERS

THE INTENTION:

I commit to becoming stronger every day.

The wound is the place where the Light enters you.

Rumi

ne sunny May morning, I was lost in work when the doorbell rang.

I scurried from my upstairs office to find a big brown box on the front porch.

“Thank you!” I yelled to the UPS driver. “Have a great day.”

With Mother’s Day around the corner, I suspected it might be a gift from one of my three children. Having long ago identified gifts as my primary love language, I couldn’t help but sit down and open it right there on the porch. As I ripped off the outer layer of sticky mailing tape and opened the box, I saw a package tucked under protective shipping peanuts.

Gently, I lifted it out and placed it before me.

Inside I found a medium-sized mint-green box with the words *Kintsukuroi Lamps, Handmade with Love* printed on the top in bold black letters. As I brushed my fingers over the elegant imprint, I sensed something special was about to unfold.

I held my breath and opened the box.

Nestled inside was a simple little brown-and-tan bowl—small enough to cup in my hands. As I turned the bowl round and round in my hands, I noticed large cracks filled with some form of lacquer or glue.

A short note explained that this was no ordinary bowl.

It was a Japanese Kintsugi lamp.

A Better Repair Method

The ancient Japanese tradition of Kintsugi dates to the fifteenth century. Japanese shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu “accidentally

broke his favorite tea bowl and sent it to China for repairs. When it was returned to him, pieced together with ugly metal staples, he charged his Japanese craftsmen with finding a more aesthetic repair method.”¹ What resulted was sheer magic.

Their ingenious repair process, known also as “golden rejoining,” celebrates the brokenness of an object—embellishing the cracks with urushi lacquer and precious golden dust—with the grand intention to embrace the imperfections, not hide them.

I make no claim to be anything like those gifted Japanese craftsmen, but I can identify with the earnest shogun’s desire for a *better repair method*. As a trauma-informed therapist specializing in family systems, a great deal of my work is with brokenness—broken families, broken relationships, but particularly, broken hearts, souls, and minds. Many of my clients have spent years in counseling and therapy, so by the time they make their way to me, they are extremely tired of the entire process.

They too are looking for a better repair method.

Where the Light Enters In

Ever since receiving my own Kintsugi lamp, I’ve made it a tradition to place a new tea light in the center of my little tan-and-brown bowl and take a quiet moment to pray before every client session. With great reverence, I ask God to fill the cracks of my client’s heart with his light. Seeing the glow from every crack in my bowl is a holy reminder that beauty does indeed come from broken places. This simple, seemingly ordinary act empowers me to hold space—that is, focus on my clients and support them as they feel all their feelings and listen between the lines of their stories in order to hear the heartbeat of their struggle.

With sincere intention, I cup their tears in my hands and do my

best to repair the cracks of their hearts with the healing lacquer of God's lavish love and the precious golden dust of hope. As with a treasured Kintsugi lamp, the cracks are where the light enters, making their hearts even more valuable as they now shine with increased empathy, an enlarged capacity to love well, more grace and less shame, and a deep, abiding sense of personal value, worth, and dignity.

Emotional and Spiritual Synergy*

I'm so grateful for my clients' stories, for their willingness to endure their healing journey, and mostly, for their trust. Each client has led me to seek better repair methods for healing the broken places of the heart, mind, and body. As a result, this methodology, the Heartlift Method*—a fusion of counseling, coaching, and spiritual direction—and the nine tools of *Stronger Every Day* have been curated with great intention, study, observation, and prayer. Separately, each tool stands on its own merit, but when combined, the tools create an emotional and spiritual synergy that accelerates the healing process and optimizes the outcomes.

After years of putting my finger on the pulse of my clients' issues, common themes arose among their struggles. These themes were often rooted in the formative years of early childhood experiences and most often found where unhealthy patterns reigned over healthy ones:

Angry parents created angry households that instilled insecurity and instability.

Perfectionistic mothers passed on unrealistic standards and expectations.

* Asterisks indicate first use of terms included in the glossary.

Passive-aggressive parents repressed and mishandled dealing with conflict.

Secretive family histories brought confusion, hearttrifts,* and decades-long grievances.

Legalistic religious traditions and rules oppressed authenticity and freedom.

Culturally based pressures pushed “doing” more, not “being” more.

Silent witnesses to childhood trauma wreaked long-term havoc on little hearts.

I began to see my role in our therapeutic alliance as primarily a heartlifter*—an artisan of the heart—who wisely and carefully provides a nurturing presence and grace-filled space for hearts to heal. This transformed a typical fifty-minute session into several hours, which I now refer to as a “heartlift intensive.” You see, getting to the core of the matter is not for the faint of heart. It takes time, energy, vulnerability, and tremendous courage.

The Journey from Our Heads *into* Our Hearts

Each of the three phases of the heartlifting journey—reflect, reframe, and re-author—invites us to enter into a transformational process that brings our history of hurts* into the present long enough to make meaning from and peace with our past so that we can move forward into our vision of victory* (future freedom).

This process requires moving *out* of the land of unhealthy and *into* the land of “all things healthy.” Visualize it as the all-important journey from our head (head knowledge) *into* our souls (heart knowledge). How many times have you heard someone say,

“I know it here (pointing to their head), but I can’t get it to go here (pointing to their heart)”? This forward movement helps us navigate from thinking to feeling—as painful as that might be.

Rewiring the neural pathways of our brains takes time. What took years to nestle into the folds of our brains won’t suddenly disappear overnight. Yes, miracles happen; I never discount the power of God. But in my experience, change happens one changed thought process at a time. Very often, our skewed thought processes skew our perception of God and faith. Once we heal our mind, our perceptions—that is, our capacity for comprehension—heal, and we see more clearly. This doesn’t come quickly, but it does come. In other words, we can’t put it on our to-do list one morning and check it off later that night:

Stop belittling myself. Check.

Give up the grudge. Check.

Handle my anxiety better. Check.

Let go of my deeply rooted anger. Check.

Stop hating my coworker. Check.

Make peace with my father. Check.

Set mental and emotional boundaries. Check.*

Get over childhood trauma. Check.

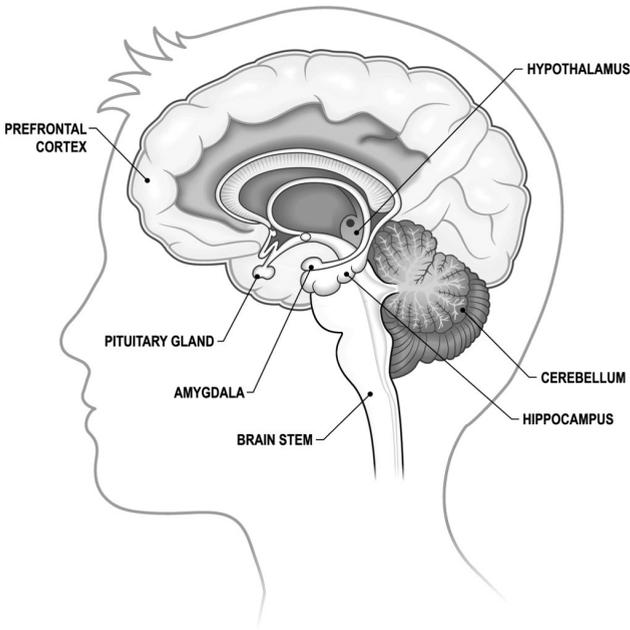
If it were only that easy! But it isn’t. If I had a magic wand, I’d swoosh it over you right now, but would that be the best thing? Transformation, from the inside out, invites us to participate. It asks us to take a risk, set aside valuable emotional energy, and find safe, healing communities where we can “unlearn” the unhealthy behavior patterns and communication skills we’ve developed over the years. Ultimately, it asks us to release our seeming control

of things, which for most of us is inextricably painful. But as we say yes to this movement within—from head space into heart connection—we allow God the much-needed room to move freely. When our yes comes from a sincere willingness to become all God created us to be, I really believe God smiles.

Turning the Lights On

God responds to our yes by endowing and equipping us with everything we need to make the changes. Our brains can be rewired. Scientists call this neuroplasticity—the brain’s God-given capacity to form new neural connections. Each one of our nine shiny new emotional-health tools is specifically designed to turn the lights on inside the limbic system* of our brain—the part of the brain “most heavily implicated in emotion and memory. . . . This system categorizes the experience of an emotion as a pleasant or unpleasant mental state. Based on categorization, neurochemicals such as dopamine, noradrenaline, and serotonin increase or decrease, causing the brain’s activity level to fluctuate and resulting in changes in body movement, gestures, and poses.”² On your Stronger Every Day journey, you will get to know the limbic system very well. See the illustration that follows.³

- The amygdala, responsible for multiple emotional responses, such as fear, love, sexual desire, and anger, is considered the brain’s watchdog⁴—housing our fight, flight, freeze, fawn⁵ instinctive survival mechanism.
- The hippocampus interacts with the amygdala and creates memories with emotional ties. It also regulates motivation, memory, emotions, and learning.



- The prefrontal cortex, located near the front of the head, involves decision making in response to our emotions. See this as command central as it controls empathy, insight, response flexibility, emotion regulation, body regulation, morality, intuition, attuned communication, and fear modulation.
- The hypothalamus feeds information to the amygdala and plays a role in the activation of the sympathetic nervous system, which is a part of any emotional reaction.⁶

Rewriting our stories—any and all of our unhealthy narratives*—and rewiring our neural pathways—living into a new, healthy narrative—won’t happen without sheer grit (as we say here in the South) and good ole fashioned sweat and tears. The

old, unhealthy behavioral patterns and communication skills have weaseled their way into deeply ingrained habits that don't want to change. The over one hundred billion neurons that make one hundred trillion neural connections inside our brains have gotten really comfortable traveling on those pathways.⁷ Without our knowing it, many of these unhealthy thought and behavior patterns, absorbed from the emotional atmosphere of our early childhood, settle in and become “who we are.” This happens on the subconscious level in our implicit memory,⁸ which makes our task more challenging.

But today, you are making an incredibly brave choice.

This choice will have eternally profound ripples in your own life and in the life of your legacy.

I'm so proud of you, and I want you to know I am cheering you on.

Before the Journey Begins

Before we begin our Stronger Every Day journey, I'd like you to do something. After you finish reading this introduction, find a few moments and a quiet place, go to www.janellrardon.com, and listen to “Pick Up Your Pen,” an audio meditative exercise that I recorded just for you. Imagine you're in your absolute favorite place in the entire world. It can be anywhere. The sky is the limit. Let the words of this story fill your heart with hope and peace.

I've included the meditation here, too, in case you don't have access to the internet. If you want to read it aloud, that is perfectly fine. Maybe you can ask a friend to join you and take turns reading it to each other. The most important part is that you read the words and let them soak deep into your soul.

Before you begin, take a deep breath and quiet your thoughts.
Okay, ready?

Pick Up Your Pen

The alarm rings at 5:45 a.m. and welcomes a brand-new day. It rings at exactly the same time every day, except Saturday and Sunday, when it rings at 6:45 a.m. and graciously gives you an extra hour of sleep. As you roll over to the side of the bed, you notice something—two beautifully wrapped packages. They weren't there when you went to bed.

Curious, you pick them up. *What on earth are these?* you wonder.

After untying the bright blue ribbon on the first box, you open it and see a beautiful fountain pen inside. Also bright blue, like the sky. You pick it up and see three words etched in gold lettering: Stronger Every Day.

You repeat them: Stronger Every Day.

A little piece of paper reads,

My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion forever. (Ps. 73:26 NIV)

Even more curious to see what is in the next box, you place the pen down and untie the bright green ribbon on the second box.

Carefully, you fold back a layer of shiny white tissue paper to find a stunning leather journal etched with the same three words in gold lettering: Stronger Every Day.

As you take the journal out of the box, little golden stars of confetti fall around the journal like a golden halo.

Tears well up in your eyes, and your heart seems to smile. Just saying those three words out loud, Stronger Every Day, feels good.

Very, very good.

Overwhelmed, you place the pen on top of the journal, fold your hands, bow your head, and pray.

God, thank you.

I am so grateful that you are a God who gives fresh starts, new beginnings, and second chances.

I am so grateful that you are a God who breathes life into seemingly dead places.

I am so grateful that you are a God who sees, loves, and walks with me.

I am so grateful that you never give up on me, no matter what. When I fall, you pick me up.

I am so grateful for your lavish, unlimited grace. I want to understand it better.

I know a meaningful life is not free from pain or suffering but is one filled with the power and strength to overcome.

I know a meaningful life is not free from resistance or negativity but is one in which we stay with and pray through the pain.

I know a meaningful life is not free from hard times, loss, or grief but is one empowered by the Spirit.

God, today I begin living into a new story—a brand-new, God-breathed healthy narrative based on truth and love and grace.

Together, we will fill each page of my new journal with great truth and bright light—just like you promised me so long ago.

I want to become stronger every single day.

Above all else, help me embrace the healing words of this journey so that I can live the meaningful life you have planned for me.

Amen.

In this book, the chapters will be referred to as “tools,” and at the end of each tool, you will be invited to “Strength Training for the Soul,” where together we will envision, educate, and establish ourselves to do the following:

- Gain understanding of the nine emotional-health tools in your shiny new toolbox.
- Experience the power of life-giving portions of Scripture through the ancient practice of *lectio divina*, contemplative prayer, and meditative exercises.
- Begin practicing another ancient tradition, St. Ignatius’s daily examen, and increase self-awareness, implement a daily connection to God and self, and deepen your faith journey.
- Set intentions and craft affirmations for overcoming obstacles and initiating new belief systems.
- Activate memory reconsolidation* by “breathing and believing.””
- Rest, recover, and collect strength by adding life-giving practices into our daily routine. When we move through life from a place of collected strength, our hearts have more to give.
- Write—and here’s where the fun begins. We get highly intentional about what we envision for our future and about implementing the threefold cord of emotional health and wellness: healthy sense of self, healthy behavior patterns, and healthy communication skills. This cord is our emotional-health legacy (Eccles. 4:12).
- PS: Don’t be afraid of the writing part. As a former writing teacher, I promise it will be both fun and freeing. I’ve witnessed firsthand that the most reluctant of students fall deeply in love with the creative process of putting words on paper.

Let’s get started.

Strength Training for the Soul

Today's Heartlift*: "Of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these, 'It might have been.'"

John Greenleaf Whittier¹⁰

Envision: A Time to Think

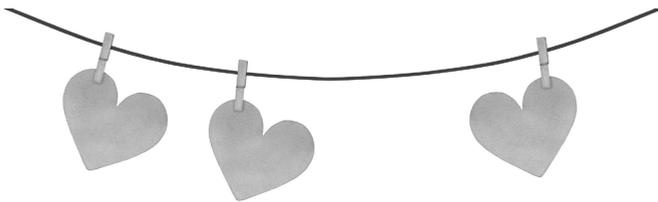
For years, I taught a middle and high school literature-based writing class. One of our favorite aspects of study was metaphors, especially those centered around the heart. Author Julie Beck writes about enduring literary metaphors of the heart:

The English language is full of metaphors invoking the heart. People wear their hearts on their sleeves; they have hearts of stone or hearts of gold; they have heart-to-heart conversations. So, in the late 18th and 19th century, the peak of the process by which the heart was becoming objectified, you've got the rise of the Romantic poets who reinforced the idea that there was something very heartfelt about what lurks in our chest. Those languages of emotions being heartfelt, hearts rising and sinking, being heavy-hearted, light-hearted, having the heart of a lion and so on—those metaphors and the language in which we talk about the heart, show that we still, even at the very peak of scientific medicine, have those associations of the heart being psychologically and emotionally, even spiritually important.¹¹

Your heart matters. It has value, worth, and dignity. In *Stronger Every Day*, you are going to experience real growth in the area of heart intelligence. Rollin McCraty affirms that "the most effective way to really reduce stress and anxiety and even feelings of overwhelm is to learn how to access the intelligence of the heart

and shift the rhythms of the heart, which sends a different neuro-message to the brain.”¹²

Before we go any further, I invite you to sit at a table, either alone or with friends, or host a special night for your small group, and create a vision-of-victory heart board. Some life coaches and counselors use dream boards. Some use vision boards. I like to use a heart board. That’s right, a simple heart. Proverbs 4:23 is at the core of our work: “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it” (NIV). So it seems fitting to use a heart-themed board. Be creative here. Use any type of board: foam board, poster board, wood, canvas, paper, and so on. This is *your* heart we are talking about. Use watercolors, magazine clippings, chalk, paint, mosaic tiles, jewels, seashells, rocks, and whatever else you would like. Create a heart in the center of the board or create a heart string (see the following illustration¹³). I suggest center placement because the heart is the center of everything in our lives. For more detailed information and creative ideas, visit www.janellrardon.com/resources.



As you begin your Stronger Every Day journey, take some time to do the following:

- Try to envision what you want your meaningful new story to be about. Old narratives, labels, and hurtful words don’t have a space in your heart anymore. There is no

room at the inn. It is time to write new narratives. Most importantly, there is no room for “it might have been” because we are pursuing meaningfulness and joy.

- Give some intentional thought to the “hows” and “whats” of your new narrative. Ask simple, thoughtful questions, such as “What does a healthy relationship look like?” or “Do I need to learn more about setting emotional boundaries?” This heartlifting work invites us to keep the threefold cord of emotional health and wellness in mind: healthy sense of self, healthy behavior patterns, and healthy communication skills. When we are healthy in these areas of our lives, everyone in our spheres of influence benefits. Consider these intentions (be as specific as you desire):
 - Heal a fractured friendship with _____
_____.
 - Spend less time on social media, especially _____
_____.
 - Learn to manage my anger. Yelling causes _____
_____.
 - Give time and space to a close relationship that needs emotional healing.
 - Really listen to the person talking to me. I hear my friend saying, _____
_____.
 - Volunteer for a nonprofit and expand my capacity to serve others.

Educate: A Time to Learn

Retention is one of the seven laws of the learner. You are learning an entirely new emotional-health language, the language of love, to help you live the life God designed just for you. Learning means reviewing repeatedly. Begin by taking a few moments to review the Heartlift Journey Chart and the glossary at the back of the book to familiarize yourself with the new heartlifting language. Refer to both as needed as you continue your journey.

Establish: A Time to Build

One of my favorite spiritual practices comes from St. Ignatius, a fifteenth-century Spanish Basque priest and theologian. At the center of his teachings is the daily examen,¹⁴ a method to review your day and examine/set intentions for the next. Set aside fifteen to twenty minutes, sometimes less as this becomes more of an attitude or mental process than an actual practice. I've done it while standing in line at the grocery store. Many different interpretations have been written, but I use the following.

Below, I've added personal examples to help you:

1. Become aware of God's presence. In the Heartlift Method, I've adapted this to "Welcome God into your whys" or into the present moment. *God, I welcome you into the whys of my mother's medical crisis. I welcome you into this moment. Help me to be right here, right now.*
2. Review the day with gratitude. *God, by your grace, I faced another emergency room visit with my mom. As I focused on being present, I was able to regulate my emotions. Thank you for sending two chaplains whose presence really helped.*

Above all else, guard your heart (Proverbs 4:23).

A DAILY PRACTICE

Reflections based on the spiritual practice, The Examen, taken from St. Ignatius of Loyola, a 15th century Spanish priest.

1

BECOME AWARE OF GOD'S PRESENCE.

In the Heartlift Method, I've adapted this to "Welcome God into your whys" or into the present moment. Take a few deep belly breaths to inhale God's love and exhale any stressors or anxiety from the day's activities.

2

REVIEW THE DAY WITH GRATITUDE.

As you reflect back on the day, make a mental list, or write in your heart journal, what you noticed as you moved through the day. Kind people? Beautiful scenes? A difficult, traffic-filled trip to work? A friend's call? A stranger's help?

3

PAY ATTENTION TO SHORTCOMINGS.

Notice those moments where you perhaps fell back into old, unhealthy behaviors or patterns. Offer yourself grace, not shame. Ask God to help you in that area. Know that God's mercies are new every single morning and that you are getting stronger every day.

4

CHOOSE ONE FEATURE OF THE DAY AND PRAY ABOUT IT.

Do you need to rewind and reset a situation? How can you reframe it and do better tomorrow? Do you need to ask for help in overcoming angry outbursts?

5

LOOK TOWARD THE DAY TO COME.

A simple prayer to end the day:
"Because of your great love I am not consumed, God, for your compassions toward me never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness toward me, God (Lamentations 3:22-23, NIV).
Thank you for today. Amen."



Janell Rardon, Stronger Every Day

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3. Pay attention to shortcomings. *I was impatient again, God, so I will collect strength in order to store patience in my weary soul. I lost my cool for a few minutes, but I went and sat in the hospital chapel and prayed for peace.*
4. Choose one feature of the day and pray about it. *Healing comes in various ways, God. Send nurses, doctors, or hospital workers to help my mother—and me—through this arduous journey.*
5. Look toward the day to come. *Tomorrow, I will wake up and go for a walk. This helps clear my mind for the day. I close the day now with the examen and pray for good sleep.*