



PROLOGUE

# The Great Awakening

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“You can’t go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending.”

- C.S. Lewis

## The U-Haul

I was twenty-two years old when I loaded everything I owned into a U-Haul and drove away from the only life I'd ever known.

Sizeable debt. No real plan. A college degree I wasn't sure how to use. Just a stubborn refusal to let where I came from decide where I was going.

Here's what that kid didn't know yet — what would have changed everything if someone had told him:

He thought he was driving away from the life he didn't want. He was actually carrying it with him in the truck. The shaking. The secrets. The unspoken script for how a marriage falls apart, how a father disappears, how addiction gets folded into a family the same way you fold the laundry — quietly, regularly, without anyone naming it. All of it was packed in there with the lamp and the milk crates of clothes.

I thought I was running. I was actually packing.

It would take me another decade — and a lot of damage I didn't need to do — to understand the difference.

## What I Was Actually Carrying

Here's the thing about cycles: they don't introduce themselves.

They show up disguised as your personality. Your default move when something gets hard. The thing you reach for when you can't sleep. The way you go quiet when you should speak, or speak when you should listen. The pattern you swear you'll never repeat with your own kids — and then catch yourself repeating in the school pickup line at thirty-four.

Some cycles you inherited from your family. Some you inherited from your culture. Some you've been running on yourself for so long you don't remember choosing them.

Here's what nobody told me. Every cycle ends the same way — when one person decides it ends with them.

That's what this book is about.

## The World You Were Handed

I'm not going to tell you the world is fine. It isn't. You know it isn't.

You're inheriting a country with a youth mental health crisis older generations don't fully understand because they didn't grow up inside it. A job market where AI is eating entry-level work before you've had a chance to do entry-level work. A housing market priced for an economy that no longer exists. A media ecosystem engineered to keep you angry and divided so somebody else can sell you something. And a generation of adults who, in a lot of cases, weren't given the tools to prepare you for any of it — because nobody gave them those tools either.

I'm not going to pretend you were handed a finished product. You weren't. You were handed a half-built house with a mortgage on it and called a starter home.

Most of the previous generation was trying. They meant well. But they confused kindness with preparation, comfort with growth, safety with strength. They built a culture that promised you could have everything without giving up anything — that you could be healthy without discipline, wealthy without work, loved without vulnerability, respected without earning it. They told you to follow your passion before you had the skills to charge for it. They told you you could be anything you wanted to be without telling you that being anything requires becoming someone first.

I tried to raise my own kids on a different set of rules. Some of it worked. Some of it didn't. But the rules I broke from are the ones the culture is still handing you. That's worth saying out loud.

Here's the good news — and there is good news. The wreckage of what doesn't work is also the clearest possible map of what does. You're standing on top of more useful information about what a real life actually requires than any generation in human history has ever had access to. You just have to be brave enough to use it.

## The Rules They Gave Us

Most of the advice handed down to my generation — and then to yours — was wrong. Not because the people giving it were bad. Most of them meant well. Because they were preparing us for a world that no longer exists. If it ever did.

I followed much of it. Here's what it cost.

*“Follow your passion.”* I followed mine into about thirty thousand dollars of debt before I figured out that passion follows competence, not the other way around. Master something valuable first. The passion shows up later, drawn in by the result.

*“Everyone’s a winner.”* This one is gentler than it sounds and more damaging than it looks. When everything counts as winning, nothing actually does. The kid who learns to lose well learns more than the kid who’s told it doesn’t matter.

*“College is essential.”* Learning is essential. College is one delivery mechanism for it, and an expensive one. Some of the sharpest people I know never finished a four-year degree. Some of the least prepared people I know have two of them. Decide what you’re trying to learn before you decide where to go learn it.

*“Be yourself.”* I “was myself” for years, and the version of me I was being was a worse version than I needed to be. The work isn’t to be yourself. It’s to become who you’re capable of being. There’s a difference, and it matters.

*“Avoid risk.”* The risk you were warned about — quitting the job, starting the business, moving across the country — is one type of risk. There’s another type nobody warns you about: the risk of staying. Staying in the comfortable lane doesn’t protect you. It gives you a front-row seat to your own stagnation.

These weren’t malicious lies. They were the best advice the previous generation had — and they were still wrong.

The cycle isn’t your fault. Continuing it is.

## A Personal Truth

I need to be straight with you from the start.

This is not a book where I have life figured out and you’re here to receive wisdom. That’s bullshit, and this is not that.

What you’re holding is a collection of battle scars turned into lessons. These fifteen rules are what kept me afloat when everything else was trying to drag me under. Tools I built — sometimes with my bare hands, sometimes through pure desperation — when conventional wisdom left me stranded.

I’ve been through some things. A childhood that would give therapists material for years. Business failures that had me questioning everything I thought I knew. Life sucker-punches that came out of nowhere and left me breathless. A marriage I almost lost because I was too proud to say what I needed. A father I

forgave on his deathbed for things I’d carried for twenty years.

But I’m still here. Not just surviving — actually living on my own terms. That’s worth something.

And here’s the most important thing I can tell you before you turn the page:

**I’ve failed at every principle in this book. Not some of them. All of them.**

The fifteen rules I’m about to give you? I’ve violated most of them, multiple times. Some recently. Some in ways that directly contradict what I’m about to teach you. Some I’m still fighting to live up to today.

I’ve cut corners I knew were wrong. Made promises I didn’t keep. Chosen comfort when discipline was what I needed. Walked away from hard conversations. Taken shortcuts when I knew better. Compromised my own code when it was inconvenient to keep.

These rules haven’t given me perfection. They’ve given me a clear standard. When I fall short, I know exactly how far I fell and what it cost me. The friction is immediate. I can’t pretend it didn’t happen, because the baseline is clear.

Most people don’t have that friction, because they never established a standard in the first place. They’re not failing to live up to their code — they don’t have one. Every decision is situational. Every choice is negotiable. There are no lines to cross because there are no lines.

This book is about establishing those lines. Building a code you can measure yourself against. Creating standards that show you when you’re drifting before you’re completely lost.

You’re going to fail at these rules. Probably all of them at some point. That’s fine. The problem isn’t failing. It’s drifting through life with no standard at all — where every failure looks like every other day because you never decided what success was supposed to look like.

These rules aren’t a checklist for perfect living. They’re a framework for imperfect people who want to get better. For people willing to face the gap between who they are and who they’re capable of becoming — and then do something about it.

I’m still closing that gap. Some days I make progress. Some days I backslide. But the gap is visible now. The path is clear. And that clarity — knowing where you are and where you need to go — is everything.

## You Are Not an Accident

The odds of you existing are approximately 1 in 400 trillion. I'm not great at math, but I know those are absurd odds.

Your DNA sequence has never existed before and will never exist again. Your specific combination of experiences, perspective, and potential is singular in human history. Among nearly 8 billion people on this planet, there is literally no other you.

That's not feel-good philosophy. That's math with serious implications.

If you're truly one of a kind — and you are — then what you do with your life matters in ways you may never fully understand. The capabilities you build or abandon, the standards you set or surrender, the courage you show or swallow — these aren't just personal decisions. They're opportunities that exist only because you exist.

Every day you choose comfort over courage, you waste something the world only gets once. That's the real cost of the cycle: extraordinary people convinced to live ordinary lives inside the wreckage they were handed.

Don't let that be your story.

## Why Bravery Creates Boundlessness

Here's the truth that few people want to admit: every limitation in your life exists because of fear.

Fear of failure keeps you from starting. Fear of judgment keeps you small. Fear of discomfort keeps you weak. Fear of rejection keeps you isolated. Fear of responsibility keeps you dependent. Fear of the unknown keeps you trapped in the familiar, even when the familiar is slowly killing you.

Cycles run on fear. The reason a parent could never leave. The reason a father never said the thing. The reason you keep almost-starting and not-starting. Fear is the engine. The cycle is just what fear builds when it's allowed to run unsupervised for long enough.

Boundlessness isn't about having no limits. It's about refusing to accept the limits that fear created.

The only antidote to fear is bravery. Not the absence of fear — that's stupidity, which I've been prone to. Bravery is feeling the fear and moving forward

anyway. It's the conscious choice to act despite the voice in your head listing everything that could go wrong.

Every breakthrough you've ever had started with a moment of courage. Every relationship that mattered began with the bravery to be vulnerable. Every achievement worth remembering required risking failure.

When you're brave enough to have the hard conversation, the relationship deepens or reveals itself as shallow — either way, you're free. When you're brave enough to start the business, you discover capabilities you didn't know existed. When you're brave enough to fail publicly, you find out failure isn't fatal — but living in fear of it is.

Bravery is a muscle. Use it and it gets stronger. One brave choice makes the next one slightly easier. That's how ordinary people become boundless — and how cycles get broken.

One decision at a time.

## The Brave and Boundless Path

This book contains fifteen rules for breaking the cycle and building what's next. They're not all easy. But they work.

Some will make you uncomfortable. Good — comfort is where dreams die.

(Note: my daughter Noelle said that line was too harsh, and that maybe I should soften it. She may be right. It made it through editing anyway.)

Some will contradict what you've been taught. Better — what you've been taught isn't working.

Some will require you to disappoint people who prefer the old version of you. Perfect — the people who want you to stay small aren't your people anyway.

You have two choices. Accept the wreckage you were handed and spend your life managing decline, making excuses, and hoping someone else eventually fixes it. Or become the person who breaks the cycle and builds the next one. Refuses to accept the limits. Builds real capability. Creates the life regardless of the circumstances.

The first is easier. The second is freedom.

Which one will you choose?

## How This Book Works

Fifteen rules can feel like a lot. Here's the simple overview.

Each chapter follows the same structure: a core principle explained through real stories (mostly mine, all true), Field Drills that give you something concrete to do starting today, a Scorecard to track your progress, and a Boundless Outcome that shows you what actually changes when you live this rule for real.

The book is built in four parts. Fire is about origin and first breaks — the brave moves that get you out of the wreckage and into motion. Forge is about the skills and systems that turn motion into capability. Foundation is about the core pillars — faith, work, relationships, character — that hold the rest of your life up. Field is what you do with all of it: the legacy, the impact, the people who'll cross the bridge you build.

You don't have to master all fifteen at once. Start with the one that irritates you, or scares you, or excites you most. That's usually the right one. Work the Field Drills. Track your scorecard. Move on when it starts to feel natural. Or don't. Even one of these rules, actually lived, will change your life more than reading a hundred books and doing nothing.

Brave at the start. Boundless at the end. That's the path.

## To the Parents Reading This

This book was written primarily for young adults — teens through their thirties — because that's when these principles have the most time to compound. But they work at any age. Life is long. We can pivot at any point and set new expectations of ourselves.

If you're reading this as a parent — maybe of a kid you're trying to figure out how to reach, or because you've started realizing some of these cycles are running through you, too — you're welcome here. You're not too old to repair what broke when you were raising your kids. You're not too late to model what growth looks like. I've watched fifty-year-old fathers rebuild relationships with adult children by finally becoming the person they should have been all along. Your kids might be grown, but they're still watching.

Your past is not your prison.

The only question is what you do next.

Chapter 1 is waiting.