THE GREATEST YOU
FACE REALITY, RELEASE NEGATIVITY, AND LIVE YOUR PURPOSE
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AND LIVE YOUR PURPOSE

Trent Shelton with Lou Aronica
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INTRODUCTION

Ten years ago, I couldn’t even remotely imagine that more than nine million people would view my latest video, share it more than two hundred thousand times, and make more than fifteen thousand often very personal comments. If you’d told me that I’d have six million people following me on Facebook, a million on Instagram, and an overall social media reach of fifty million, I would have said you were tripping. Back then, if someone had suggested that I would be considered one of the most inspiring people on the web and one of the biggest influences on positivity in this generation, I would have said that this person had in mind a different Trent Shelton. Because the Trent Shelton of ten years ago was super-introverted. He had a fear of public speaking and no experience with it. He also had tattoos all over his body, so he sure didn’t look the part of an inspirational speaker.

And the truth is, it couldn’t have been me, because I wasn’t ready for it to be me. Don’t get me wrong; I knew that I wanted to help people, and I knew that reaching out to others filled me
with a sense of purpose. But there was something I had to do first.

I had to get my own life together.

I had to do the work that I’m going to share with you in this book.

Ten years ago, I was in a terrible place in both my professional and personal lives. I’m going to get into this in detail in chapter 1, but for now let me just say that it felt as though I was losing every battle. I wasn’t helping myself, and I sure wasn’t helping anyone else.

Then, seemingly out of nowhere, I got an offer from a friend to speak in front of five thousand teenagers at his church. Public speaking was not my thing, and I worried that this was going to be just the latest in a series of disasters for me. But it was on that stage that I unlocked something in me, something I’d had deep inside all along—my true purpose. I almost blew it because, even though I’d prepared ridiculously hard, when I stepped onto the stage, I just went blank. So right then, when panic could have leveled me, I just started talking in what would become my straight-up, straight-from-the-heart, no-filter speaking style. I had no notes to lean on—just my truth and my experiences. Kids know what’s real, so I had to be real, and they really felt what I was saying and couldn’t stop asking me questions afterward. It was then that I realized a very important lesson about life: you don’t have to be perfect to help people; all you have to do is be real. The kids repeatedly told me how much they respected me, not just because they were inspired, but because they finally felt understood. Those kids made me
realize the power of transparency. My being honest about my life gave them the confidence to be honest about their own. I promised myself that I would always speak this way in the future. It felt incredible to witness how my transparency was the first step to their transformation. Affecting their lives made me feel alive again. It was the first time I actually felt a purpose outside of football, and what really tripped me out was how natural it felt to inspire those kids.

I knew this was the first step in rehabbing my own life. If I was going to preach it, I had to practice it. If I was going to talk it, I had to live it. Becoming the greatest me became my mission, and I dedicated myself to becoming nothing less. The responsibility I had to others—most importantly, my young son, Tristan—gave me an entirely new level of motivation. Taking my life to the next level was no longer an option; it was a must. I knew Tristan was going to follow my lead, so I had to give him a model that would put his life on the best possible path. And as I continued to work on myself, I started tweeting about it with the hashtag #RehabTime, recording my transformation through two-minute videos under the same name. I thought RehabTime was just for me, but I quickly realized it was bigger than me. Much bigger than me.

As RehabTime began to connect with people, I started interacting with my followers. The most unforgettable of these experiences was with Ashley, an encounter that showed me why God created me. It wasn’t for football, as I’d thought up to that point; it was for RehabTime. I met Ashley at an event, and she told me that not that long before, she’d been so ready to end
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her life that she had a gun in her hand, cocked and loaded. Her mind was made up, and nothing was going to change it. She was going on Facebook to say her goodbyes. Her plan was to press Post and then kill herself. But when she got on Facebook, a video popped up that I’d made at two o’clock that very morning. Something had woken me out of my sleep to make it, which I now realize was God telling me to get this message to Ashley. The video was titled “Don’t End Your Life,” and in it, I urged people to fight through, to just give tomorrow a chance. Storms suck, but storms don’t last forever. Ashley watched that video, and instead of killing herself, she wrote a positive Facebook message about her life and what she was dealing with. Her message helped others dealing with suicidal thoughts that night. While she thought she was alone in her struggle, she wasn’t. At that moment she understood there was a purpose greater than her pain, and the most painful moment of her life became her most purposeful one.

At another early event, two teenagers came up, hugged me, and started crying. They told me that I had helped save their mother’s life. Even though I didn’t want to take the credit, they insisted that if it hadn’t been for my video, they would be motherless. She was fighting drug addiction, and an overdose seemed to be in her near future. But she watched one of my videos, which sparked a change and encouraged her to face her reality. She realized that it was time to go to war and overcome her addiction—not just for herself, but also for her children.

The videos and speaking engagements were definitely helping people, but the desperation out there was bigger than I ever
imagined—millions and millions of people were convinced their lives were worthless, that they were stuck in a hole they could never climb out of, that their stories were over. These people needed to discover what I’d discovered for myself—that even though your story may have some bad chapters in it, it can still end well.

But let’s be real: it’s almost impossible to conquer your struggles alone. Everyone needs help, but the kind of help you get makes a big difference. You don’t need someone at the mountaintop, telling you how to get up there. You need someone next to you, climbing the mountain with you. Someone to give you the tools to overcome your pain. Someone speaking to your heart and urging you to never stop climbing.

That’s where this book comes in.

When your life is a serious mess, you don’t need someone to offer you a bunch of empty advice. You need someone who is going to be by your side as you work your way out of it. You need someone to say, “I understand where you’re at, I’m here for you, and we will conquer this together.” My videos get a ton of views, which is great, but what I love the most is how much interaction they create. When more than a hundred thousand people feel so connected to what I’m saying on a video that they respond in a deeply personal way, I know they understand that I’m on their side, that we’re fighting this battle as teammates. They understand that I’m not giving up on them, and they don’t need to give up on themselves. I’m not trying to be an oracle; I’m trying to be a colleague, a supporter, a friend. I call my followers; I respond to their messages; I even send some of them
personal encouragement videos. This is all very real for me, because I understand the consequences of desperation.

So, this book is a promise. You want to take your life to a better place? I’ll be there with you, inspiring you to become your greatest you. Are you ready to do the work necessary to become the best version of yourself? If so, I offer you the benefit of my experience and the experiences of others who have been so generous to share their stories with me. I’ll be there, coaching you up and giving you the tools you need to get out of a bad situation and on to something so much better.

There’s hard work coming in this book. You’re going to have to face some things that maybe you’d prefer not to face. You’re going to have to get rid of some things in your life that are going to be very hard to get rid of. But I’ll stick with you, every step of the way, sharing with you how I dealt with the same situations.

Throughout this book, I’ll be sharing parts of my personal journey and showing the lessons these experiences have taught me. I will also share lots and lots of stories from followers all over the globe—people who have gone through (and might still be going through) hard times and feel that their stories might offer others something to identify with and provide a sense of comfort. I’ve changed their names here for their own protection, but I promise you these stories are as real as they are raw.

Enough introduction. We have work to do.

Are you ready to become the greatest you? Then it’s RehabTime.

Let’s get it.
YOU’LL NEVER WIN YOUR WAR BY RUNNING FROM YOUR BATTLES

Let’s get right into this. Listen: If this book is going to work for you, you’re going to have to be real with yourself. And if I’m going to ask you to be real with yourself, the least I can do is start the process with some transparency of my own.

Ten years ago I was in a very dark place. My life was all about football, though the challenges in my life certainly didn’t end there. From the time I was a kid, I was always one of the best players on the field. I remember the first three times I ever touched a football; all three plays went for touchdowns. Before I was even a teenager, there was no doubt in my mind that I
was destined to play on Sundays in the NFL. My future seemed even more certain when I starred as a wide receiver for Baylor University. I was ready for a long career in the league. When Draft Day came around, I watched every pick of the draft. Experts had told me that I was likely to go in the later rounds, but it was possible I could go higher, so I stayed glued to ESPN from the start, waiting to hear my name called.

Except it never was. Two days. Seven rounds. Two hundred fifty-five players, thirty-four of them wide receivers, like I was—and not one of them was me. I’d be lying if I said that didn’t hurt. It did. But I had to hide my hurt behind a smile. I had to pretend I wasn’t worried that my lifelong dream wouldn’t be coming true.

Fifteen minutes after the draft, my worry started to fade, as multiple teams called, trying to sign me as a high-priority free agent. After getting counsel from my uncle George Stewart (who has been coaching in the NFL for more than twenty years), I decided to sign with the Indianapolis Colts. They were fresh off a Super Bowl title, and I knew I had the skills to help them get another ring. I just knew Peyton Manning and I were going to be making big plays all over the field. I just knew it.

I got to training camp, and things were going great. I started at the bottom of the totem pole because I wasn’t a returning player or a high draft pick, but I got off to a great start in the preseason, maybe the best in the NFL, and certainly the best among rookies. Undrafted free agents are always a long shot to make the team, but I was turning heads; I was balling out, and I was sure I was going to make the squad.
Then the Colts didn’t play me in the third preseason game. That didn’t make sense to me because I’d been playing so well. I asked some of the veteran players about it, and they told me that the team was trying to hide me because they didn’t want other teams signing me. That didn’t make one bit of sense to me; doing that would only make sense if they weren’t planning to sign me. And in spite of how well I’d played, that’s exactly what happened. They cut me and then re-signed me to the practice squad, which meant I wouldn’t suit up for games but could still get a call at some point. I figured I’d be in Indianapolis for the whole season, so I got an apartment and a car. Then, after week two, they cut me from the practice squad. All of a sudden, I’d gone from visions of being an NFL star to being right back in my room in my parents’ house, not wanting to go out because I was too embarrassed to talk to anyone about what had happened to me. Not getting drafted hurt, but this hurt even more. I’d been working for this since I was six years old. How could it be slipping away from me?

A week later, I was back on the practice squad, and a few weeks after that, Coach Tony Dungy told me I was going to be moved to the active roster for a Monday night game against the San Diego Chargers. Okay, I thought, this didn’t start out the way I wanted, but everything is turning around for me. Ten years from now, my friends and I will laugh about how I was worried that my long NFL career wasn’t going to happen.

But something wasn’t right with my knee. I’d been feeling it for a while, and I ignored it because I had to; I couldn’t afford to let an injury get in my way. The problem was that it wasn’t
getting any better. I had to pop a pain pill before every practice just to get on the field. I knew that if I sat out of practice, I would be going home. No team needs an injured guy on the practice squad, and they certainly don’t need an unproven guy that isn’t 100 percent healthy on the active roster. I tried to fight through it, but Coach saw me limping and he told me that the team couldn’t afford to activate me if I wasn’t able to go full speed. I knew in that moment that I had lost out on a huge opportunity. I stayed on the practice squad the rest of the year, but I never got another chance to get into a game.

The next season, I was invited to minicamp with the Seattle Seahawks. They wound up cutting me right at the end of preseason, but then a week later they called and said they wanted me to come back—that very day, in fact. I quickly packed some things, rushed off to the airport, and was just about to board my plane when I got another call from Seattle. They’d changed their minds.

I got one more shot with the Washington Redskins. I was completely healthy, and I ran the fastest time of my life—a 4.3-second 40-yard dash, which is superfast. The Redskins signed me to the practice squad, but I never got any further, even though I had great practices. By November, they had cut me and I’d learned firsthand the real meaning of the initials NFL: not for long.

I refused to believe that my dream was over. I just kept running from reality, because reality didn’t connect with the vision I had for myself. I was a football player—it was the only way I
knew to define myself—so I had to keep running from the fact that football wasn’t happening for me.

If the NFL didn’t want me—yet—there were other options. There was the Arena Football League, and they were happy to have me. The game was brutal on my body because the fields are small and the turf is laid over concrete, but at least I was playing. Then I got a call from my college coach to come play for the United Football League, a new professional league that had been trying to compete directly with the NFL. I had a great tryout and ran one of my fastest forties ever. They said they were going to sign me, and I thought this could be my ticket to the pros. Two weeks later, I got a call saying the league was going to fold. It had lost too much money, and football fans had made it clear they didn’t want a new league.

Reality had gotten right up in my face, but still I kept running. I was fast during tryouts, but I was even faster when I was running away from the truth. And while I was running, I was doing all kinds of other destructive things to my life. I started smoking and drinking, and I was partying all the time. I was running around with women even though I had an on-again, off-again girlfriend I’d met when I was with the Colts. I didn’t care about life. I was living reckless. I was doing anything and everything to fill me up inside, because I was feeling awfully empty in there. Living reckless meant that I didn’t have to face up to what was really happening. And I thought I could keep this going indefinitely.

Then I got a woman who wasn’t my girlfriend pregnant. I wasn’t ready in any way to have a kid, and I made this very, very
clear. Maria made it equally clear that she was keeping the baby, which freaked me out. Meanwhile, I had to tell my girlfriend (we were on again, sort of) that I’d gotten another woman pregnant. You can imagine how that went. Complicating the fact was that my mother and my girlfriend’s mother were close friends, and this had created a huge amount of friction between them. I was a jerk at the time because I didn’t want to be a man, but I was blaming everyone else. I just wanted to keep running.

And then I couldn’t run any longer. I got a call telling me that my college roommate, Anthony Arline, had committed suicide. He had made the Chargers but then had to leave for personal reasons, and the loss of his football dreams had a big effect on him, ultimately causing him to take his own life.

I was devastated, because Anthony was one of my closest friends. And I was even more devastated because I hadn’t been paying enough attention to see what he was going through. Maybe if I had, I could have convinced him to keep going. Maybe I could have helped him see a way out.

That was rock bottom for me. That was when I realized that I had to face up to my reality. It was at Anthony’s funeral that I finally understood that life isn’t promised, that we aren’t guaranteed tomorrow. If I wanted to leave a mark on the world, I was going to have to start working toward that. I had to do it for my newborn son. I had to do it for Anthony. I had to do it for all the people like Anthony who might still be able to make their lives work. By this time I had started RehabTime and released a few videos, but this was when I really decided to dedicate myself to helping people. Back then, I only had a few thousand Facebook
followers, and I would open my phone line up at night to them, saying that if they were going through a tough time, they should call. And here’s something I never would have imagined: doing this felt better than professional football had ever felt to me. When I was helping people, I felt that I was truly living my purpose, and if I was really being honest with myself, I didn’t have a love for the game anymore. Football wasn’t quite in my rearview mirror yet, but it was almost there. The most important thing was that I’d stopped running. I finally realized that I couldn’t win this war if I kept running from my battles, and this was a war I absolutely needed to win, not just for me but for everyone around me.

Preparing for Battle

Look: you and I both know that the truth can be very scary. Sometimes it’s just much easier to live with a difficult situation, one that is slowly draining us of everything we’re made of, than to see things exactly as they are and commit to doing the work to get out of that situation. That’s exactly what I was doing when I was bouncing from practice squads to arena football to leagues that never got off the ground. Rather than face the reality that was forcing itself on me, I ran from my battle. This was something I didn’t want to see, couldn’t let myself see. If I acknowledged that my football life was over, I was afraid that I wouldn’t have a life at all, because my significance, my identity,
and my confidence were all wrapped up in football. Without football, who would I be?

I was putting my life on hold to pursue a passion I no longer actually felt. And this was turning me angry and dark. But the truth was—and this is true for all of us—no matter how fast I ran, my reality was never going to get farther away. Your reality always keeps pace with you. Even while I was in the middle of this turmoil, I had some idea that running wasn’t going to help. But I was so afraid of acknowledging that my football career was over that I convinced myself it was better to keep running. And I kept thinking about some practical issues: How was I going to provide for my new family if I didn’t have football as a source of income? Looking back now, I can see that I was just delaying my healing, delaying my purpose, delaying my true identity. At the time, though, running truly felt to me like the only choice, but my life had become a complete mess because of it, and it was affecting everything and everyone around me.

Anthony was dead and my son was nearly two, and that’s when I finally realized that doing what I was doing wasn’t okay anymore. My son was one of the few bright lights in my life, and I had to face up to my situation if I was going to create a good future for him. I couldn’t let him get trapped in my darkness.

So, from that place, I allowed myself to look at the situation as it really was. I was never going to play football at the top level again, and if that was the case, I needed to find my true self. I’m not going to tell you this didn’t hurt—it did. Bad. But it was a temporary hurt, and until I allowed myself to feel it, I couldn’t go on to be the person God intended me to be.
So, yeah, I understand why people run from their battles; I truly do. But here’s the problem. If you feel that things aren’t right in your life, if you feel that your situation is getting a little bit worse all the time, if you feel that just getting up in the morning is becoming a struggle because it means you’ve got to live with your circumstances, then you really only have one of two choices: You can sink or you can swim. You can let things keep getting more and more miserable—or you can go to war. But if you’re going to go to war, then running from your battles is no longer an option. Yes, you might survive if you keep running, but how is that kind of survival working out for you? It’s time to stand and fight, and the first thing you have to do is understand what you’re fighting and why. You have to come face-to-face with your reality.

Why do so many of us run from our reality? It’s because there are so many roadblocks preventing us from getting to our goal of a more satisfying and more fulfilled life. These roadblocks come in many varieties, but there are four I hear from people all the time:

1. **Addictions.** Most of us have some sort of addiction that we’re battling in some way. It may not necessarily be one of the “big” ones, like drugs, alcohol, and sex, but other addictions can be just as troublesome. Maybe you’re addicted to sugar. Maybe you’re addicted to work. Maybe you’re addicted to social media or unhealthy relationships. Whatever your addiction, it is an enormous roadblock in your life and an impediment to facing
up to your reality. The truth is that addictions are a way of escaping reality, and yet, their very existence interferes with you reaching your goals. Now, obviously, if addictions were easy to break, they wouldn’t be addictions. Getting past this roadblock is going to be the toughest job you have in facing your reality, and it is very difficult to do this on your own. But that’s exactly why it’s so important that you do so.

2. **The past.** I’m going to tell you something right now that you might not realize: there isn’t a single adult walking around on this planet who doesn’t have something he or she regrets about the past. If you have lots of regrets, you are so completely not alone. Life is a complicated journey, and no one gets through that journey without a few things they wish hadn’t happened. Still, even if you understand this, it’s easy to convince yourself that the regretful or embarrassing or damaging stuff in your past is worse than most other people’s and is impossible to overcome. I’m here to tell you that this isn’t true. Your past may be filled with things you wish you could make disappear, but the only way to move forward is to face those things, accept the effect they had on your life, and then acknowledge that your past doesn’t need to define you forever.

3. **Your failures.** People fail. I’ve failed more times than I can count. Everyone I know and love has failed, in one way or another, on numerous occasions, and I’m sure I don’t know about all of their failures. If you’re
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alive, you’re going to fail many, many times. I understand how hard it is to come back from some failures. In the moment, they all seem awful, and sometimes it is truly difficult to recover from the damage that was done. Sometimes failure is so hard to accept that you just try to pretend it never happened. That’s a problem, though, because ignoring your failures makes it easier to repeat them. What you need to do instead is allow those failures and the lessons you learned from them to guide you toward your goals. But you can only do that if you face them head-on.

4. Opinions. “I don’t care what anybody thinks!” How many times have you said that in your life? Has it ever actually been true? If you’re like most people, not only do you care about what other people think, but their opinions have had a huge effect on you. Maybe your mother made you feel like a disappointment. Maybe a teacher told you you’d never get ahead. Maybe a coach told you that being a starter wasn’t in your future. Or maybe it wasn’t anything that black-and-white. Instead, you just have the sense that people think you’re only okay or not terribly smart or not particularly talented or kind of a bore. These opinions can create a huge roadblock for you, because you can begin to see yourself as you think other people see you. And this has gotten so much worse since social media came around. Now, I’m not going to suggest that you ignore what other people think, because that would be like me telling you not to...
breathe. But an important part of facing your reality is acknowledging others’ opinions, putting them in their proper context (who’s saying these things, and do they have an agenda?), and then deciding how much truth there is in any of these opinions.

Roadblocks are tough to get past, or they wouldn’t be roadblocks. If you could just drive right over them, they wouldn’t be blocking you at all. But unlike that roadblock that kept you off the highway the other day, you can get around these roadblocks. The first thing you have to do is acknowledge that the roadblock is there—face your reality—and then you can figure out how to get around it. I’m going to let a fellow Rehabber speak here to help us work on this.

Carly had lots of help in avoiding her reality. For twelve years, her family and her friends constantly told her that her man was the best thing that had ever happened to her. If she would complain about something abusive that he did, they’d take his side and then pile on by telling Carly that her issues were all in her head. She was with a great man who treated her right, they claimed; she was just going to have to get over herself.

And for a dozen years, Carly was convinced that this was the case. Deep inside, she knew something was terribly wrong with her life, that she was getting so much less than she deserved, and that the way she was being treated was slowly eating away at her. But it was so much easier to run away from this truth. Things weren’t that bad, right?

But one night, the situation got more physical and more
dangerous, and Carly’s young daughter—who’d had to witness all of the past abuse—asked her how much more she was going to take. Carly realized that she didn’t have a good answer for her child, and she couldn’t continue to put the two of them at risk any longer. So, she packed up what she could, took a twenty-dollar debit card and twenty dollars in cash, and left with her daughter for a shelter. There, she met with a domestic violence therapist who finally helped her see that she’d been a victim of abuse for more than a decade. Carly had convinced herself that she was worthless and somehow deserving of the emotional, verbal, and sometimes physical mistreatment she had received. But now that she was facing the reality of her situation head-on, she knew she could never go back to deluding herself again.

“It was difficult at first to face the truths,” she told me, “because I didn’t want to see what they really were about. I also knew that if I was going to live what is left of my life in peace, I was going to have to face them and either forgive or stay angry all the time.”

Leaving was the break that Carly needed to see the world as it really was, to understand what had been done to her and how she’d been forcing herself to live in delusion for so long. She started going regularly to therapy, which truly opened her eyes.

“It took me leaving to finally realize that I had always put myself last and took care of everyone else’s needs, and that I am worth much more than what he said I was. I started seeing things for what they really were and started seeing the things that should have been a warning sign for me. I had sacrificed so
much that it was hard to ask for help, but once I started asking for help I found myself in the process.”

The hard work that Carly has committed herself to has already paid off for her in a big way. Her relationships with her family, which had suffered considerable damage as the abuse she was suffering went on, are now getting back on track. She’s even managed to forgive the man who was so responsible for her misery.

“For the first time in my life, I’m in a much happier place. I’ve cut the negative people out of my life and I’m focusing on the positive. I’ve had a rough life. But now I feel better about myself and know that any issues that come along I will handle with my head held high and confidence in my stride.”

Carly was facing a huge roadblock in her life because of her friends’ and family’s opinion that she was the luckiest woman in the world to be with the man who was abusing her. And she convinced herself for a long time that their opinion was right. But when she faced the reality that their opinion was deeply wrong, she was able to get past that roadblock, to discover that she’d been surviving in an unacceptable situation, and to move on to a much, much better place.

It’s Time for Brutal Honesty

All of us need to move forward in our lives. If you aren’t moving forward—if you aren’t doing more to reach your goals, setting new ones for yourself, and trying your best to live in fulfillment of your purpose (which we’ll talk about a lot in the next
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—then I’ll be honest with you: you’re dying. If you stay stuck in the same bad situation indefinitely, then you’re letting your life waste away. On the other hand, if you take even a tiny step forward every day—even if you have to crawl—you’re making progress toward becoming the best version of yourself, to being the greatest you. There’s only one way you can take these steps, though: you have to be real with yourself.

Let’s work on this together. I want you to take some time right now to make an honest assessment of where you are in your life. For example, where do you stand with your family? With your other relationships? With your physical condition? With your job? How does where you are right now match up with where you want to be?

I’ve always heard that the one person you should never lie to is your anesthesiologist. If you’re about to go into surgery and you tell the guy putting you under that you haven’t had a drink in a year even though you took six shots the night before, the anesthesiologist can give you the wrong dosage and do some serious damage. Well, I would say there’s one other person you should never lie to, and that’s yourself. The reason is pretty much the same. If you’re trying to make moves to get your life going in the right direction and you lie to yourself about your situation, you’re likely to make the wrong moves that could affect you in the worst possible ways. The key to your success is being brutally honest with yourself.

I understand why you might not want to be super-honest with yourself. Sometimes some of the hardest truths to face are those that get to the very essence of how we define ourselves as human beings. Maybe you’ve spent the last fifteen years
defining yourself as a wife, but the brutally honest truth is that your marriage has been lifeless for a long time. You can barely stand being in the same room with your spouse, and you haven’t said a truly loving thing to each other in years. Your marriage is hollow, but you’ve so completely defined yourself by your marriage that you have no idea who you would be if you were honest enough to admit that it is in shambles.

Or maybe you finally see that the reason you hate getting out of bed in the morning is that you despise what your job has become—but when people ask you about yourself, the first thing you tell them about is your work. You know deep inside that you have to get out of that job before it kills you, but what are you going to say to people when they ask you about yourself in the future? Hey, you know what happened to me and football. When the Colts cut me, I was so deflated that I couldn’t even leave my parents’ house.

Often, we know something is over, but we can’t deal with what it means for it to be over. It has become such a part of who we are that we’re not sure who we would be without it, even though it’s causing us harm. That’s tough, I know. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I lied to myself about the fact that my football playing career was over for a long time before I finally faced it. I convinced myself I had to do anything necessary to keep playing football, because “football player” was the only thing I really thought I was as a person. I had to discover who I was underneath the NFL player, because that was the only way I could have a meaningful life going forward.

There’s a good chance that you’re reading these pages
You’ll Never Win Your War by Running from Your Battles

saying to yourself, “You don’t get it, Trent. You don’t understand what I’m going through. You don’t understand my struggle. You want me to be honest with myself and take steps to move forward, but you don’t know my situation, because in my situation moving forward is a lot easier said than done.”

Let’s make a deal right now: I’ll do everything I can to help you, but you’ve got to give up that easier-said-than-done mindset. It’s just a tool for allowing yourself to stay stuck, an excuse for why you can’t make things better. That’s fine if you want to live the rest of your life unhappy, in which case I’m not sure why you’re reading this book. But “easier said than done” is at the very best like taking an aspirin when you’ve dislocated your shoulder. It might be a tiny bit helpful briefly, but the pain is still going to be there and the cause of the pain isn’t going to get better until you give it some serious attention.

Yes, I get it. Facing your reality is hard, especially if it means losing your current identity. But what most people in this situation fail to understand is that while they might lose who they think they are by facing their reality, they’ll wind up finding out who they truly are instead. There’s a very good chance that the thing you’re hanging on to isn’t who you were meant to be at all.

This is probably a good time to tell you about how I became involved with motivational speaking.
Are You Scared?

Let me say this right at the top: the first time someone suggested that I speak in front of an audience, I thought he was mistaking me for someone else. Speaking was my biggest fear. I realize I’m not alone; many studies show that people fear public speaking more than they fear dying. As they say, people would rather be in the casket than giving the eulogy. At the same time, I had to do something to move forward in my life. I knew football was over, but I was hanging on to it out of fear and the belief that if I lost football I would lose my life. Would people still love me? Would they still support me? Would they still talk about me? Would I even really exist?

A guy I knew from Baylor named Jonathan Evans invited me to do my first major speaking engagement. My first thought was, He’s tripping. I’m a football player. I’m not a speaker. But he told me that he was sure that I had something inside of me that I didn’t even know about, something that he could see about me that I couldn’t see about myself. “I’m gonna give you an opportunity to speak at my church,” he said.

I was so afraid that I immediately came up with three questions I was sure would end this entirely unexpected conversation. I was doing what so many of us do when faced with an opportunity to change our lives: we give ourselves reasons not to be great. We live in our limitations. We think about all the reasons why we can’t do something.

“Who am I speaking to?” I asked.
“A bunch of teenagers.”
My eyes flew open. “I’m out of it. There’s no way I’m doing my first speaking engagement in front of a bunch of teenagers.” I remembered what I was like as a teenager, and I imagined standing in front of a group of people who were like I was back then—looking bored and as if they’d rather be anywhere else on earth.

Jonathan challenged me. “Are you scared, Trent?”

“No, I’m not scared,” I said defensively, though I was at least a little scared. “All right, let me ask you another question: How many am I speaking to?”

“Five thousand.”

“Five thousand for my first speaking engagement? No, I’m not doing it.”

Jonathan got this little smile on his face. “Are you sure you’re not scared? I’m telling you, I see something in you that you don’t even see in yourself. You gotta do this.”

I wasn’t about to admit how terrifying this was all starting to sound to me. I began to process the information I had. Okay, five thousand teenagers. I can talk football; that won’t bore them too much. I’ll go onstage for a minute and then get off.

“Okay, one more question: How long am I speaking for?”

“You’re speaking for five minutes.”

He may as well have said five hours. “Bro, that is way too long. What am I gonna say? I can give you two minutes; that’s it.”

“Five minutes. Do it, Trent. You’ll be great at it.”

This entire conversation had thrown me off, but I had to acknowledge that people had been suggesting similar things to me for a long time. Even when I was a kid, people told me that
they saw me in front of big crowds, inspiring others. I thought they were talking about me catching touchdown passes in big games. But maybe there was something more to my life.

As you already know, that speaking engagement went great. Even though it was one of the most fearful, confidence-shaking things I’ve done, it turned out to be the most impactful for my life. I don’t think I’ve ever had an audience so locked in—the kids weren’t even blinking. Afterward, they asked me all kinds of questions about life, about dreams, about purpose. They saw me as someone who could help them get the most out of their lives. I was shocked by their response. Now, this didn’t get me all the way to where I had to go; I still had to come face-to-face with the situations I told you about at the beginning of this chapter. But I was starting to get it. I was starting to accept that my current situation didn’t have to be my final destination. My current reality didn’t have to be my final one.

Right around this time, I went back to a Bible my mother had given me. On the cover was an NFL football, though the NFL in this case actually stood for “new found life.” On the first page of this Bible, my mother had quoted Jeremiah 29:11: “For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” The funny thing was, I never picked up that Bible when I was trying to make it in the NFL. But now it all made sense to me. My “new found life” was not football; it was RehabTime and helping people. To this day, that scripture fuels my faith more than anything.
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Taking the First Steps to Winning Your War

At this moment, I want you to make a real decision to stop running from your battles. You have to understand that you’re one choice away from a new beginning and one commitment away from a new life. This moment can be the first step to changing your life forever. Don’t let the “How am I going to win this battle?” question keep you from facing that battle. The how isn’t as important as the why. I’m living proof that the how will reveal itself during the journey. You simply have to start the journey. Go back and look at the stories in this chapter. Look at my story, or Carly’s. Do you see yourself in either of these stories? Even if you don’t, there’s a lot to be learned from witnessing what happened to us when we accepted our realities and began to move forward with our lives.

So, here’s how we’re going to do this. I’m going to end this chapter with a few questions that will help you focus on the task of facing your reality. Take the time to answer them—being super-real with yourself—before going further into the book:

• Where are you in your life today?
• What excuses have you been making for your situation that you can throw away right now?
• What are you hanging on to because of fear?
• What is the biggest lie you’re telling yourself?
• What kind of truth do you see once you get rid of the lies?
THE GREATEST YOU

Once you’ve answered these questions, you’ve taken a big step toward moving your life forward. You’re on your way, and I’m proud of you. Let’s keep it going now by taking a serious look at your purpose.

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