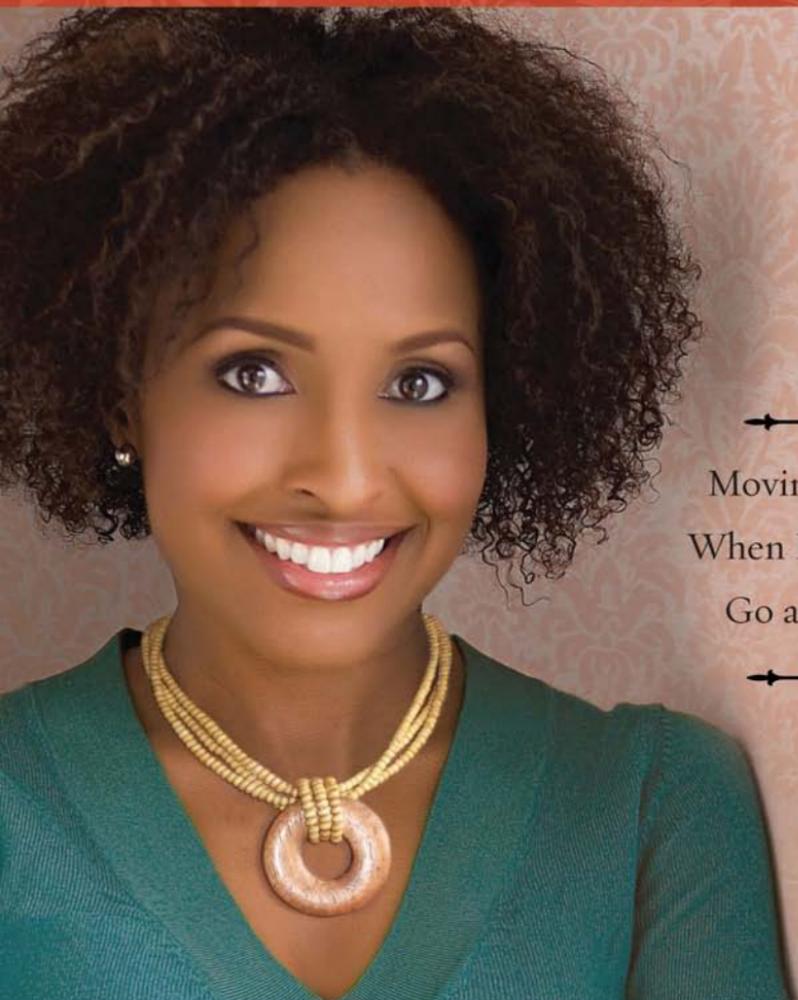


Where Will You Go from Here?



Moving Forward
When Life Doesn't
Go as Planned



Valorie Burton

CERTIFIED PERSONAL & EXECUTIVE COACH

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WATERBROOK
P R E S S

This Isn't the Way You Planned It

When Your World Turns Upside Down

Life has a way of taking us by surprise. One day everything seems fine. You're making progress toward your professional and financial goals, you're finally getting in shape, you and your spouse are making plans for the future, and *bam*, you're knocked senseless by some unexpected development. Suddenly everything you believed to be true about your life is in question. You're disoriented. You're scared. And you may feel as if you've landed in a foreign, lonely place.

My guess is you picked up this book because you know exactly what I'm talking about. Some unexpected turn in your life story has left you not only deeply disappointed but also unsure of what to do next. So my goal is to help you answer this vital question: where will you go from here? Whatever has sent your life plans careening off course—an unplanned career change, the death of a marriage, a health crisis, or something else altogether—I've written this book with your unique emotions, challenges, and destiny in mind.

As a personal and executive coach, I have worked with many clients around the world, and one thing I know for sure: when you ask the right

questions, you get the right answers. The answers you are looking for will require you to be honest, open, and courageous—courageous enough to rise to the challenges you face despite your fears. I believe you can do it. And I will walk with you every step of the way—from helping you assess where you are now to encouraging you to confidently step onto your new path and to pay it forward by serving others with your newfound wisdom.

In the following pages you'll encounter people who, like you, have smacked up against painful and unexpected challenges, yet they've found a way to not only recover from their setbacks but actually press through adversity to find a better path for their lives:

- Roland was on track in his career when he suddenly lost his job. From there life became a downward spiral: divorce, medical emergency, and bankruptcy fell like dominoes over the next two years. In his own words, he'll share how he made a seemingly impossible comeback. Better yet, he tells how his setbacks propelled him to higher heights than he's ever reached before.
- Jacqueline was a twenty-eight-year-old mom, recently separated, when she was blindsided by a devastating seizure that changed the course of her life, as well as her daughter's. Her dark, lonely journey to recovery lasted more than a decade—but it yields powerful inspiration for your own journey as you discover how the setback that almost ended her life ultimately saved her.
- Claire was a successful forty-something woman earning a six-figure salary when she met and married the man of her dreams—or so she thought. In the span of a year, she lost her life savings, her marriage, and her mother. How could she navigate it all—and even recover from her losses—

without becoming bitter or overwhelmed? The answer is one all of us need to hear.

- Kevin was an all-star athlete whose athletic abilities landed him a full-ride scholarship to college. But shortly after his arrival on campus, a devastating accident left him paralyzed. So how is it possible that he could confidently pursue—and achieve—the full and satisfying life he'd always dreamed of? The unforgettable story of Kevin's resilience will give you renewed hope for your future.

What does your own setback look like? Whatever it is you have experienced, I'm sure of two things:

1. Right now your life isn't the way you planned it.
2. You have the inner strength to get through this—and to grow through this.

How can I be so sure? Not only have I coached numerous others onto their own path to recovery, I have also personally learned from my own setbacks that all things truly do work together for good—when we walk on in faith.

MY STORY

As a personal and executive coach, people often come to me for a life makeover. But at times I've had to coach myself through my own makeover—forging into new territory, allowing my authentic self to emerge, and embracing frightening uncertainty with hope and faith. I understand what it feels like to have your world turned upside down and your dreams crushed, to be headed down a path toward the future you've long planned—and find yourself knocked completely off that path.

This isn't the way I planned it, I thought to myself as I reached for my third box of tissues, my eyes red, nose stuffy, and face puffy. I stood bent

over the kitchen counter, sobbing in desperation. So used to feeling in control of my life, I was suddenly and completely *not* in control.

This can't be happening to me, I thought. *This can't be the end*. But in my spirit, I knew it was. As *that* reality sunk in, my sobs turned into wails—uncontrollable and loud. If you'd been in the room, you would have recognized the unmistakable sound of grief that accompanies death. In this case I was mourning the death of my marriage. Reality overwhelmed me in wave after wave of sadness and uncertainty. I felt betrayed and fearful.

I knew what I had to do. But when you find yourself lying on a bed of thorns, remaining as still as possible seems less painful than attempting to extricate yourself.

As I sunk into utter misery, I was suddenly consumed by the fear that I might be having some sort of breakdown. I needed someone to hear me, to validate my despair. I picked up the phone and called my mother. She knew what I was going through, but she had never heard me like this. I couldn't get any words out, just sobs and gasps for air.

"Valorie?" she said anxiously. "What's wrong? What happened?"

"I can't stop crying," I finally muttered. "I feel like I'm going crazy. I feel like I'm losing my mind."

If I expected commiseration and comfort, I was in for a surprise. However, I should have known that my mother—a woman who has recovered from serious physical, financial, and family setbacks—wouldn't let me wallow in my misery. Looking back now, the situation reminds me of a scene in one of those old black-and-white movies where a panicked woman (that would be me) starts sputtering nonsense, her words coming faster and faster until finally someone (that would be my mom) slaps her across the face to bring her back to reality.

"You're not going crazy!" she declared. "You're human and you're in pain. Life and death are in the power of the tongue. The enemy wants

you to say you're losing your mind. *You're not.* Now go into the bathroom," she said firmly. "Wash your face, and then go take a walk. It's a pretty day outside. Call me when you come back."

My mother's jarring words rang with truth. After some deep breaths, I felt just a glimmer of hope—a sudden uplifting of my soul. Sometimes, a glimmer of hope is all you need to take that next step forward. That step, for me, was a simple declaration: "This will not destroy me. I believe God, and in the Word He says He is with me wherever I go. So I will walk through this fire, but it will not consume me. *It will not.* On the other side of this, I will be a better and stronger woman."

YOUR RECOVERY BEGINS TODAY

That day my mother reminded me of an important lesson—our first guiding principle for facing a setback: "*I will not feel sorry for myself.*" I had been knocked out, but her words were my wake-up call. Of course, it wasn't the last time I cried, but I never again cried from that woe-is-me place. In that pivotal moment, I chose faith over fear.

Today I want to help you make the same choice and embark on your own road to a better tomorrow.

It may be hard to believe now, but I'm convinced that on the other side of your difficult circumstances, something *good* is waiting, something better than you've previously thought or imagined. But to find it, you'll have to surrender your will and allow God's strength and grace to guide you.

Hebrews 11:1 says, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (NKJV). This truth gives you something to fiercely cling to when a setback pushes a dream so far out of reach that you start to lose hope. To the outside world, your hope may seem delusional. But that's when faith is most critical. That's when you are called to

believe in the things “not seen.” That’s when you must choose to trust God to give you the desires of your heart, in His timing—or to turn your desires toward something ultimately better.

God may restore everything you have lost—or He may open your eyes to a new life, one filled with greater purpose and fulfillment than you can imagine at this moment. Our definition of success often differs greatly from His. If you’re willing to let God realign your life to match His definition of success, you’ll be able to view your setback not as a disappointment or failure but as a positive part of His plan to mold you and shape you according to His perfect design.

TEMPERED BY TRIALS

Successfully recovering from a setback is not just about restoring the externals you may have lost—such as the job, the money, the physical ability, or the relationship—or just regaining your footing on the path to your goals. It also involves strengthening your inner resilience.

The essence of resilience is your ability to effectively navigate adversity and courageously face whatever life throws your way. Though you may be bruised and battered by challenges, your spirit still soars. In fact, you choose to believe that you can become a better, richer person because of your experience.

You may be familiar with tempered steel or tempered glass—elements made stronger by repeated exposure to heat and cold. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* cites one definition of *temper* as “to make stronger and more resilient through hardship.”¹ This is the opportunity your current setback offers: to have your character strengthened by the heat of battle so you emerge not only victorious but also forever changed for the better.

You may feel as if you’re just hanging on right now, trying to survive.

But I want you to do more than survive. My goal is to help you eventually *thrive*. So this book has two parallel goals: first, to help you rebuild the aspects of your external world that have crumbled, and second, to help you gain the tools you need to not only navigate current setbacks but also to deal effectively with future surprises—because we know that change is the one constant in life on a broken planet.

Despite our best plans, earnest preparation, and good intentions, the truth is we don't have as much control of our lives as we like to think we do. You will inevitably face other challenges in the future, so why not embrace the opportunity now to gain skills that will help you recover more quickly next time? If you can grow through this difficult season, expanding your character, faith, and wisdom, then the journey you are on right now may just be one of the most important turning points of your life.

THE JOURNEY MATTERS AS MUCH AS THE DESTINATION

A central theme in this book is embracing the process, not just the destination. Please don't rush through each chapter in an effort to get answers. Instead, let the words speak to you, prompting insight and reflection, transformation and hope.

We'll begin the journey together, right where you are—in the ditch of uncertainty, reeling from whatever unexpected shift has taken place in your life. Then step by step, as the pages turn, I'll help you get your bearings, determine your next steps, and begin walking a path toward a positive future.

The principles outlined in this book are rooted in solid biblical principles and proven research in the field of positive psychology. While traditional psychology, especially since World War II, has focused primarily

on fixing what's wrong with people (a crucially important endeavor), positive psychology focuses on what goes right with people. What is it that makes us happier? more resilient? more fulfilled? Recent discoveries in this area offer some compelling and extremely practical advice for how to navigate major life challenges and come out on the other side a happier and wiser person.

In my own graduate studies at the University of Pennsylvania, I was excited to discover that so much scientific research aligns with the ancient wisdom of the Bible. I used these strategies to navigate the unexpected turns in my own life; and in each chapter, I will give you practical steps to craft your personal comeback out of unwelcome circumstances, whether your challenge is in the area of finances, work, relationships, health—or has impacted multiple aspects of your life.

Each chapter includes further guidance in the form of coaching exercises to increase your confidence, help you draw on your strengths, and deliberately propel you toward progress. Please don't skip these exercises! Only through deliberate, thoughtful action will you generate real change in your perspective and your circumstances.

In addition, all along the way you'll be inspired by real-life stories of resilience. You'll hear from people who have been paralyzed, lost their jobs, been forced into bankruptcy, endured painful divorces, lost their homes and hundreds of thousands of dollars, endured the death of a spouse or child or both—and yet somehow not only survived but eventually thrived. They were able to move forward—and to discover the fulfilling life God had planned for them.

As I spoke with these individuals who have endured so much with tenacity and faith, I gained perspective on my own setback. In fact, I began to view my own experience less as a setback and more as an opportunity to learn and grow. I realized that my life experience had taken me to emotional and spiritual depths I would never have reached other-

wise. Would I have chosen to go through it? No. Am I a better person because I persevered and bounced back? Absolutely.

My sincere hope is that, one day, you'll be able look back and say the same of your own experience. I'm planting the seed of hope because I know this to be true: "All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28, NKJV).

Don't try to figure out how it's going to "work together" just yet. Simply believe that it will and let God guide you forward, step by step.

The Five Commitments

When life blindsides you, it feels like you've been knocked off your path and into a ditch. What determines whether you stay in the ditch or climb out is how you choose to *think* about your circumstances while you are going through them. To climb out of the ditch and step onto a level path, you need to come to an agreement with yourself, to make a personal commitment that will transform your thinking, and ultimately, your life.

So as we begin this journey together, I ask you to commit to five simple rules about your thinking. No matter what your circumstances, the Five Commitments will serve as guiding principles for every step of your recovery, preventing you from straying onto paths of doubt or despair.

Commitment 1: I Will Not Feel Sorry for Myself

For a person who has suffered a setback, few things are more debilitating than self-pity. Feeling sorry for yourself makes you a victim rather than a victor. Worse, self-pity gives you an excuse to stay right where you are—to let regret and fear hold you hostage. Certainly there is a time to be sad and a time to mourn; these are appropriate, healthy responses to a setback. But there is no time to wallow.

Commitment 2: I Will Not Stare at the Closed Door

Letting go of the past is a necessary precursor to moving forward. It is tempting to think fondly of what used to be—to believe that life cannot be fulfilling or worthwhile without that relationship, that job, that role, that measure of success you’ve now lost. If you are so focused on staring at the closed door that you refuse to face forward, you’ll never discover the open doors that lie ahead.

Commitment 3: I Will Dig Deep to Unearth All the Courage I Need

Without courage, a person knocked off course and into a ditch will stay there. Being afraid of making a wrong move, getting hurt, being embarrassed, or facing the future will paralyze you from taking action. The comeback process requires you to muster a great deal of courage. You need courage to believe better days are ahead. You need courage to ask for help. You need courage to let go of the past and deal with the uncertainty of the future. You need courage to start over—to take steps forward despite your fears. You may want to post 1 Corinthians 16:13 somewhere you’ll see it often: “Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong.”

Commitment 4: I Will Direct My Thoughts—My Thoughts Will Not Direct Me

The difference between those who come back strong and those who wither is how they think—or more precisely, how well they are able to manage self-sabotaging thoughts. Later we’ll look more closely at the significant ways your thoughts influence your mood, motivation, and actions. For now, keep in mind this key principle: resilient people choose to think differently. They *believe* they can bounce back, and that belief leads them to take positive action toward their recovery.

Commitment 5: I Will Choose to Believe All Things Work Together for Good

In the midst of a storm, it can be hard to believe anything good will come. But it will. Sometimes it takes years to see what God is doing in a particular situation, but with patience, time, and faith, the good becomes more obvious. Choosing to believe that God is orchestrating the final outcome for good can provide the motivation you need to persevere in the face of overwhelming odds.

Read through the Five Commitments once more, and then make them part of your own personal comeback plan. To signify your commitment, photocopy the section below, then sign it to establish your pact with yourself. Post this contract wherever it will serve as a daily reminder of your choice to move forward.

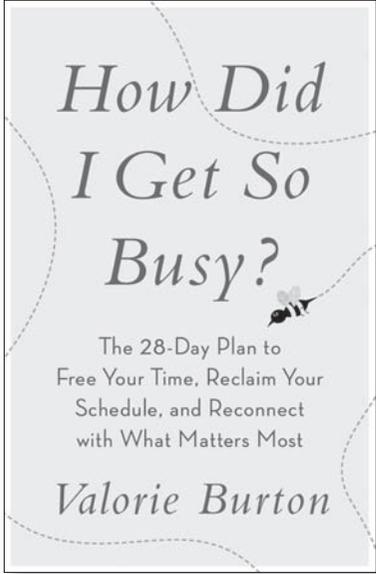
MY PERSONAL COMMITMENTS

By signing below, I choose to bind myself to the Five Commitments as part of my plan to recover from my setback and step onto the path to something better.

1. I will not feel sorry for myself.
2. I will not stare at the closed door.
3. I will dig deep to unearth all the courage I need.
4. I will direct my thoughts—my thoughts will not direct me.
5. I will choose to believe all things work together for good.

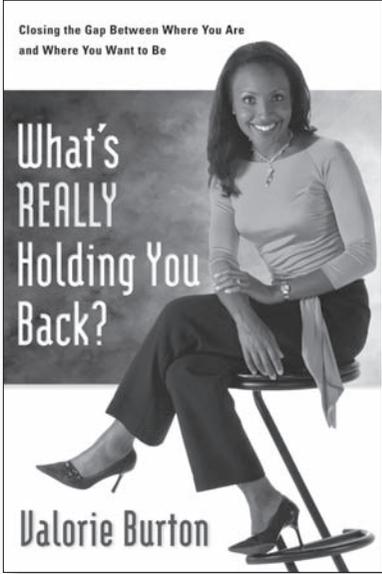
Name

Date



It's Time to Shed that Burden of Busyness.

Packed with realistic strategies for shifting out of overdrive, *How Did I Get So Busy?* will help you trim your to-do list and nourish your soul with the people and activities that matter most.



Get Unstuck. Become Unstoppable.

What is holding you back? Find out how you can identify and break through fear and other barriers in order to live fully, passionately, and freely.