

LARA CASEY



Choose PURPOSE EVER PERFECT



CHAPTER 1, EXCERPTED FROM MAKE IT HAPPEN BY LARA CASEY

WELCOME TO YOUR START

Shat EVERYTHING Changes.

can do this. It's my body. I can make this happen.

I tried to control the pain, but the more I fought, the more overwhelming it became. The tension came in waves with short releases between—not enough time to renew my strength, but enough time to doubt my ability to get through. Doubt turned to desperation. Why am I so weak? I can't do this!

I pleaded for a way out. Then another wave of pain hit, more intense than the last. I knew my life would completely change if I let go. And I was afraid of change, afraid of more pain, afraid not to be in control, afraid to trust in the unknown.

Exhausted from the battle against the inevitable, I realized there was no way out but through. I couldn't run from the pain or restrain it any longer. It had to come. It was part of the plan. So I took the leap and let go.

The day of Grace's birth was the day I learned a life-altering truth: my need for control was holding life back. New life would come not by my own might but through surrender.

In the same way, we all must let go of where we are in order for new life to come. We must die a little. Sometimes a lot. Making it happen—a life lived on purpose—comes by surrendering control.

But how in the world does surrendering help us realize big dreams? How does letting go help us *do* stuff?

Maybe you are in a dead-end job or a lifeless marriage. Maybe you are at the starting line with talent and passion, but you have no idea how to use them to make a life. Maybe the laundry keeps piling up, and your little one just won't stop crying, and you hardly have time to pee. Maybe your money and time feel beyond your control. Maybe you are lost and alone, and you sometimes feel like you might crack.

And maybe, without realizing it, you are exactly where you are supposed to be in order to take a leap of faith.

TAKE A DEEP BREATH

Imagine I'm sitting right in front of you, looking into your eyes. Hi.

Now take a deep breath. I think I know how you feel right now. You are overwhelmed, worried, or stressed—or all three squared. Either you know what you want and don't know how to make it happen, or you feel like you might explode trying to figure it all out. You're just not *sure*, and you want to be sure more than anything.

You want to make big things happen in your life, but you don't have time, patience, money, sleep, rest, or peace. You're burning the candle at both ends and in the middle. You feel pressured to keep going, be better, move faster, do more, and be

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perfect. You feel as though you'll never get there. In fact, you're not even sure where *there* is anymore.

You're often paralyzed by fear. Instead of taking action on the things that keep pulling at your heart, you get out your phone and look at what other people are doing. You may be considering doing that right this second because reading this is mildly uncomfortable. But stay with me here.

Perhaps someone once told you that you weren't enough—and you started to believe it. But now you're feeling restless. You know there is something bigger than the life you are currently living.

You skipped the deep-breath part a few paragraphs back, didn't you? Oh, friend. If it were possible for me to jump through the page and hug you, I would do that right now. I was there just a few short years ago. I spent most of my life stuck in the cement shoes of fear. I had become a burned-out workaholic buried by debt, depression, and a failing marriage.

I realized I had no idea who I really was. I would often ask myself these questions:

- · Who am I?
- What is my purpose?
- What am I supposed to be going after in life?
- I want to make it happen, but what is "it"?

Have you been asking yourself those same questions?

Are you feeling restless right now? Do you feel there's something bigger than the life you're living?

USE WHAT YOU HAVE RIGHT NOW

This book is your invitation to stop striving, be still, and let go of your struggles and fear. To surrender what *feels* like everything, to gain what really *is* everything. You were created to do more than what can possibly be held in your tiny world all by your lonesome.

You were created for a purpose. You were created to shine.

It's time to be free.

Free of shame.

Free of fear.

Free to fully live.

Friend, you don't need to be ready or perfect to make what matters happen. A life of purpose—living for something bigger than yourself—is not about achieving your dream job or the ideal circumstances or the perfect timing. Use what you have, where you are, right now, *on purpose*.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This is not a reading-only book. I'm going to ask you to *do* stuff, because just sitting with your thoughts hasn't been getting you anywhere. So let's shake things up together.

In parts 1 through 3, I'll share some of my personal story as a springboard to inspire and equip you to take intentional action. As you read chapters 1 through 12, I encourage you to interact with my story by journaling or talking out your thoughts as you read. Respond and personalize the truths you uncover by working through the application sidebars included in each chapter. Then begin to live out the life lessons as you "Take Action" in the section provided at the end of each chapter.

WELCOME TO YOUR START

The final section of the book, "Your Guide to Make It Happen," is a special workbook-style action guide created just for you. This section details five practical, doable action steps you can apply—starting right now—to step into the life for which you are longing.

Please note: there's no perfect way to read this book. If you see a chapter title that intrigues you, start there. Or if you want to skip ahead to "Your Guide to Make It Happen," that's okay. This book is *your* tool to make things happen and leap into a life of purpose.

What are you waiting for? What has been holding you back from fully living? Write it below.
Now draw a line through it to symbolize the fresh start you are

DON'T WAIT TO LIVE

making by reading this book.

As you go through these pages, don't wait to take action. Don't wait for *me* to say go! Don't wait for the right words or the best plan or the perfect time. Just start where you are. Read the stories, work through the sidebars, do the action steps, make it happen!

The enemy of taking action is the false belief in "someday." Do the good you know you ought to do—and start now. Do it

knowing that you might not have as much time as you think. The alternative is to do nothing, and that does, well, nothing. *Don't wait to live.*

This is the story of how I faced my fear, took the leap, and got a life. In my case, I got a perfectly imperfect, fulfilling, joyful life as a mama, a working woman, and a grateful wife. This is the story of how I chose to make "it" happen and how you can too. "It" is what matters. "It" is what lasts longer than you. "It" is a greater purpose than ours.

The time has come—your time has come—to take a leap of faith and live a life of purpose.

Welcome to your start.

P.S. I know you want answers, clarity, and a plan yesterday. Know that the best things in life come little by little. A truth to carry with you as you do the work ahead: "There are no shortcuts to any place worth going" (Beverly Sills).

P.P.S. I know "P.S." is meant for letters, but making it happen also means breaking the rules.

1

STOP CHASING PERFECT

Choose PURPOSE EVER PERFECT.

When asked what they are proudest of in life, many people describe honors or awards. My Grandpa Cecil would simply pull out a picture of his wife. They met in rural Alabama. Celeste Virginia—a fiery redhead—was the youngest daughter in a large Southern family of eleven, but she was ahead of her time; she earned a living as a traveling theater director. Cecil, one of eight children himself, signed up to be an extra in one of her plays with his brothers. It was love at first sight. But Celeste had to travel with the show, and Cecil was drafted into the army. They wrote epic love letters for two years before finally tying the knot in a tiny ceremony at her family home. Grandpa loved three things most, in this order: the Bible, his bride, and his vegetable garden. Well, and cheating at checkers, but that's another story.

Grandpa tended to his sweet tomato plants just as he tended to Grandma Celeste—with love. He loved his Early Girls so much that when my mom was in college, he would carefully wrap a handpicked selection in a newspaper-padded box and mail it to her to enjoy.

I have a vivid memory of being in the community garden with him as he watered his crops in his later years. Grandpa would sink his hands into damp, mineral-drenched soil and tell me what heaven was going to be like. Grandpa's life was like a beautiful creek, flowing with fresh water and trickling with a soothing sound that made everything all right. My life, on the other hand, was more like an avalanche: frozen water crashing down a mountain at breakneck speed.

I wanted the glamorous life I saw in movies: travel, adventure, and sweeping love. My focus in high school was theater, boys, and making my parents proud.

I loved the smell of sawdust from building sets, and most of all I loved the applause. When we saw the audience rise for a standing ovation, it felt like we were a part of something bigger. We were making people *feel* something. I relished the stage for its sense of wonder. Even at that young age, I knew art was important. Thanks to my parents, I knew my creative gifts mattered. So I lived and breathed painting, design, music, and theater.

During a high school English class, my proud mama swept into the classroom holding a Carnegie Mellon T-shirt and my acceptance letter. I was one of sixteen students chosen that year for their music theater program. I might have burst out in song.

At our convocation ceremony, we were told to look to our left and to our right: "One of you won't be standing here at graduation. If you can get through four years at CMU, you will be able to get through anything." I laughed naively and dove in to

fifty hours a week of dance, acting, voice, movement, speech, and music.

Five days a week, for hours, I scrutinized myself in the mirror as I would plié and relevé my heart out. I was terrible at ballet. Turns out, I was terrible at a lot of things. Suddenly I wasn't the best anymore. I was used to my parents telling me everything I did was great. I was used to getting every role I wanted in high school and being met with standing ovations. Then I got to college, and people started saying, "Work harder."

I refused to settle for mediocrity, so I tried to be the best in every area: performance, popularity, and physical appearance. I set my standards high and took action.

In my sophomore year I started exercising more. I spent extra time in the dance studio and rehearsal rooms. I did everything I could to keep up with the skinny, talented freshmen. I chased perfection for mile after mile on the treadmill, reading "expert" advice in magazines on how to "get slim by Sunday" and how to "be the life of every party." I looked to others to tell me whether I measured up. I hid my wild, curly hair and covered my freckles. I feared that if I let my true self show, I wouldn't be enough. I couldn't let my parents or high school friends think I was anything less than the star they expected me to be when I went away to college. I *had* to be the best at any cost.

My voice teacher pulled me into her office one afternoon, concerned about my sudden weight loss. "I'm fine," I assured her with a forced smile. "I'm just working out a lot for dance class right now. Trying to make it happen!" But I wasn't okay. I had an eating disorder. I couldn't get the image of the perfect girl I thought I was supposed to be to match who I actually was.

On the treadmill one day I suddenly felt my heart pounding erratically. The pit in my stomach from not eating and the stares

from others in the gym came to a head in an anxiety attack. I sensed God saying to me, *Lara, you are going to die from this if you don't get off now.*

God wasn't telling me just to get off the treadmill; He was telling me to stop "chasing perfect"—or at least my idea of it—or die. I got off, went to the locker room, and stepped on the scale. At 5'9", I had shriveled to a mere 116 pounds.

I could barely get the words out when I called my mom. I was afraid to disappoint her, but I kept hearing the echo of God's gentle voice. I needed help.

The hardest part of breaking the chains of fear, control, and the chase for perfect is seeing that you need help. The second, equally hard, step is asking for it. Until that night I hadn't let anyone help me because *I was in control*. That day in the gym, my irregular heartbeat revealed the truth: I was chasing the uncatchable. My mom flew to Pittsburgh to get me, and college was put on hold. I was ashamed that I couldn't control my life and embarrassed to leave school, but the alternative was clear, and it was much worse than a bruised ego.

Do you feel like you are "chasing perfect" in some ways—attempting to measure up to an impossible standard?

Write down or say aloud how that is making you feel.

CRUSH THE "SHOULDS"

Perhaps you are thinking that what you are chasing isn't *that bad*. You don't have an eating disorder or any other major problem. And maybe you don't want to be perfect; you just want to

live a good life and do your best. Still, you struggle at times, feeling like you are not enough. My chase for perfect may seem like the extreme, but the feeling of not measuring up is something shared by many of us—dare I say *all* of us?

I was doing what I thought I was supposed to do to be successful. In the race toward measuring up, we often don't realize we're being fueled by something harmful.

Give this question a chance, because it might ignite something you never expected: What are you really chasing?

Perhaps your struggle is not with chasing perfect. Maybe you're striving for success... for significance... for approval. What is the thing you are racing toward? Write it down or say it aloud.

Our chase for success so easily disguises itself as a "should"—because everyone around us is doing it. You *should* be working hard at the expense of time with your family if you want to be successful. You *should* be staying up late to get ahead if you want to make it. You *should* climb the success ladder now so you can live a joyful life when you retire.

You should, or you won't be enough.

Here's a wild question: What would happen if you threw out the "shoulds"? Who says you have to live by those rules? What if ending the chase and living on purpose means intentionally leaning in to what might feel imperfect? Maybe your laundry won't get done, or you will miss out on an opportunity for work. But your kids will be loved on, or you will have time for an undistracted dinner with your husband or a friend. Maybe you'll go to the park on your lunch break to get some

fresh air instead of scarfing down a protein bar at your desk.
Maybe you'll slow down enough to be able to listen to someone
who really needs it.

Take a moment and imagine: What would happen if you threw out the *shoulds*? What would your life look like? Be specific.

Maybe a purposeful life means you'll have fewer followers on social media because you're not glued to your phone as much anymore. Maybe you'll get out in your garden, or paint, or have a long coffee date with someone and build a lasting connection. Maybe you'll call your grandma to tell her you love her and make her day. Maybe a purposeful life means you will make less money, but you'll find you have all you need.

But...

But there are bills to pay.

But I have responsibilities.

But it's complicated.

What *but* comes to your mind as soon as you think about surrendering control and taking a leap of faith? Fill in the blank below:

But		
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Many of us fear that if we slow down even the tiniest bit, we will no longer be productive. We fear our lives will be meaningless if we aren't constantly striving for something bigger and

better. Yet when we finally stop chasing those impossible standards and surrender our fears, we become truly productive in what matters. We experience genuine fulfillment: an imperfect yet intentional life, driven by a clear core purpose.

And you know what else? When we share our struggles on this journey to contentment, we ignite purposeful action in others as well. It creates a beautiful domino effect. People look at our lives and think, *She is imperfect and content, so maybe I could be too.*

So how do you get there?

Begin anywhere. Begin right where you are.

HOW ARE YOU?

You know that feeling you get when a good friend asks, "How are you?" You instantly tense up, not wanting to reveal the stuff that is weighing you down. You think, *I can't tell her. It's too much. I won't be able to stop if I start. I don't want to burden her. She'll think I'm crazy. I can't!*

"I'm fine," you quip.

Your friend asks again, "No, really . . . how *are* you?" The tone of her voice somehow makes you relax, and you just know: she wants the real answer, not the socially acceptable short version. Like honey to your soul, this genuine question makes you take in a deep, knowing breath. With your exhale, you pour out your heart. The emotion in your voice surprises you—you didn't realize you were carrying such a burden. Moments later, as if you've exhaled bricks, you feel a weight lifted off of your shoulders.

When people used to ask me how I was doing, I would slap

on a smile and give them a resounding, "Great!" But my closed body language and the tone in my voice told them otherwise.

What happens when you answer someone truthfully? You give the other person an unspoken invitation to do the same. Perfect says, "I'm fine," and the conversation dwindles. Perfect keeps it all bottled inside, snuffing out a possible life-changing connection between two souls. *Perfect is boring.* When a friend answers me honestly, I feel invited to let go and do the same, and life starts to happen. A connection is formed. Trust is built. Our lives are shared.

How about I go first?

I am feeling nervous right now. I am not a trained writer, nor do I work in professional ministry. But I want to help people know the truth because every day—in my work as a magazine publisher, during speaking engagements, at the grocery store and the airport—I meet countless women who feel held back from really *living*. Their fire has been put out, and we need their fire.

Most days I feel like I'm still twelve and wonder why God has me totally outside of my comfort zone: running a business, being a mom, writing these words to you, and doing many things I never thought I would do. I feel ordinary. I feel unprepared and in way over my head about a dozen times an hour. And that's the thing: I am unprepared and in over my head. But God does extraordinary things with our broken pieces when we give them to Him. He is real and good. And I know that God has given me a story to tell you. "You" meaning you. Not the collective "you" who may pick up this book, but you—the individual, courageous, beautiful person who is reading this right this second. The you who has a story and hidden passions and a deep desire for change . . . and there, I just took a big deep breath.

Now it's your turn. How are you? Why not stop for a minute and really think about it?

How are you?

Let that question settle for a moment longer than is comfortable for you. Now answer the question honestly, as you would to a close friend. Write it out or speak it.

THE CHASE

Life moves fast. So fast sometimes that we don't slow down enough to take stock of how we are doing. We think, *It doesn't matter how I feel right now. I must keep striving toward success! I'll feel things some other day.* Left with what seems like no choice but to press on, we do. Pushing our feelings aside, we grasp at the nearest sources of comfort or inspiration—magazines, TV, the Internet—filling our minds and hearts with the world's definition of what we should be, do, and think.

What sources of inspiration do you feed yourself? (Examples include social media, magazines, Scripture, books, blogs, friends, Pinterest, television, shopping, music.)

Which sources of inspiration are fueling you to live an intentional life?

Which sources of inspiration crush you at times, making you feel you must live up to impossible standards?

Over time the impossible standards we set for ourselves become the measuring stick for our worth. We start to believe that if we don't measure up, we aren't enough. We begin to feel worthless.

I did. Lost in the throes of busy, fueled by quick fixes that didn't fix anything at all, I believed the lies about who I was and wasn't supposed to be. I chased the standard of perfect.

Chasing perfect is comparing our worth with someone else's.

Chasing perfect makes us believe we are bad moms or bad wives or bad friends.

Chasing perfect makes us believe we are average and insignificant.

Chasing perfect makes us believe we will never be content.

Chasing perfect makes us believe we don't have enough friends, enough fun, or enough adventures.

Chasing perfect makes us believe we will never be successful.

Chasing perfect makes us do unreasonable things, like starve ourselves and buy things we can't afford, to measure up to our perceptions of others.

What has chasing perfect—striving for impossible standards—made you believe? Fill in the blank below:

Chasing perfect has made me believe	
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The next time we feel down, we race back to the very things that caused this emptiness in the first place. We buy, look, covet, and idolize again, and perhaps more than before. Our

"inspiration" ends up intensifying the comparison and feelings of inadequacy that we were trying to escape. I'm speaking from my own heart, having fallen into these painful traps time and again.

The cycle continues until one day we find ourselves overwhelmed and overworked—or on a treadmill—thinking, *There must be a better way to live*.

There is a better way.

I thought my eating disorder would define me for the rest of my life. I feared my anxiety would hold me back from doing the things I was created to do. I feared I would *always* be stuck.

Are you there right now too? Do you fear that whatever it is holding you back—anxiety, fear, control, distrust, lack, or challenging circumstances—will always be there?

Be still, friend. Know that God's desire for you is a life of peace. He wants to free you from the chase. Wherever you are is exactly where you are supposed to be to ignite intentional change.

What would happen if you stopped chasing the uncatchable? What good could you do with your newfound time and energy?

The lies of perfection and shoulds tell us we aren't enough, but the truth paves a path for us to an abundant life of joy where we are more than enough. As my friend Emily Ley once told me, "I will hold myself to a standard of grace, not perfection."

Flaws, mistakes, and all—regardless of what you have done or where you have been—you matter. You were created for a purpose, and it's time to make it happen.

Making it happen means Choosing PURPOSE EVER PERFECT.

TAKE ACTION

► Write the following statement on a sticky note, and place it on your desk, refrigerator, or bathroom mirror:

I was created for a purpose, and it's time to make it happen!

 Go to www.LaraCasey.com/makeithappen and watch the video titled "Chasing Perfect."

READ MORE AND GET YOUR COPY HERE!























