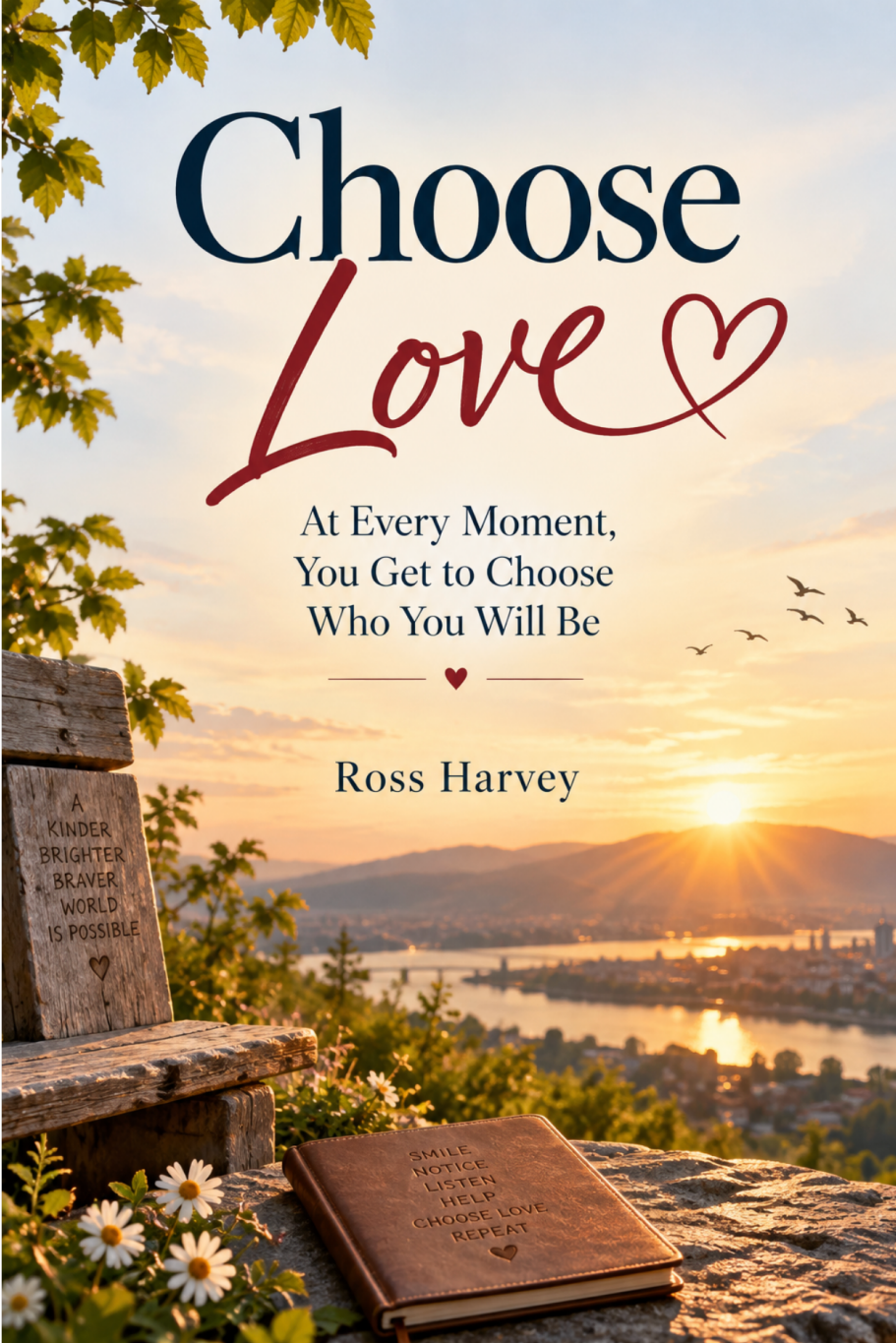




Choose *Love* ♥

At Every Moment,
You Get to Choose
Who You Will Be



Ross Harvey

A
KINDER
BRIGHTER
BRAVER
WORLD
IS POSSIBLE



SMILE
NOTICE
LISTEN
HELP
CHOOSE LOVE
REPEAT



DEDICATION

For the young man at the bus stop.

I don't know your name yet.

I don't know where you come from, where you're going, what you dream about, what difficulties you have faced, or what your life looks like when you step off that bus and disappear from my sight.

But for the past week, I have noticed you.

You are always smiling.

You are always friendly.

You seem unusually aware of the people and the world around you.

And there is something about the way you carry yourself that tells me you enjoy being alive.

You don't know it, but you inspired this book.

You reminded me that every one of us is constantly making choices about how we will meet the world.

We can choose anger or understanding.

We can choose resentment or forgiveness.

We can choose indifference or compassion.

We can choose to walk past someone—or stop.

We can choose to look away—or notice.

We can choose to tear down—or build up.

We can choose fear.

Or we can choose love.

This book is dedicated to you, young man.

Perhaps one morning soon I will finally ask your name.

But until then, you are simply **the young man at the bus stop**.

And without saying a word about it, you reminded an older man of one of life's greatest truths:

At every moment, we have a choice.

Choose love.

A NOTE TO THE READER

This book is for everyone.

But I especially hope it finds its way into the hands of young people.

Because if there is one thing I wish every young person could understand early in life, it is this:

You are becoming someone.

Right now.

Today.

Not someday.

Not when you graduate.

Not when you get your first job.

Not when you fall in love.

Not when you have children.

Not when you become successful.

Right now.

The person you will become is being created by thousands upon thousands of seemingly insignificant choices.

How you speak to someone.

Whether you include someone who is being left out.

What you do when somebody embarrasses you.

How you respond when you don't get what you want.

Whether you laugh when everyone else is laughing at someone.

Whether you tell the truth when lying would be easier.

Whether you help when nobody would blame you for walking away.

Whether you forgive.

Whether you notice.

Whether you care.

These choices may seem small.

They aren't.

They are your life.

And every one of them is another opportunity to decide who you are going to be.

My hope is that when those moments arrive—and they will arrive every single day—you remember two words:

Choose love.

INTRODUCTION

THE CHOICE THAT NEVER GOES AWAY

Life gives us many things we cannot choose.

We don't choose where we are born.

We don't choose our parents.

We don't choose the circumstances into which we arrive.

We don't choose many of the things that happen to us.

We cannot choose whether someone disappoints us.

We cannot choose whether somebody misunderstands us.

We cannot choose every illness, setback, rejection, loss, injustice, accident or heartbreak that crosses our path.

But there is one extraordinary freedom that life keeps handing back to us.

We can choose how we respond.

Again.

And again.

And again.

That choice may be the greatest power we possess.

Two people can experience the same disappointment and allow it to make them into completely different people.

One becomes bitter.

The other becomes compassionate.

One decides the world owes them something.

The other decides they have something to give the world.

One closes their heart.

The other opens theirs wider.

The event didn't make the decision.

They did.

That is what this book is about.

It isn't about pretending life is easy.

It isn't about smiling when you want to cry.

It isn't about allowing people to hurt you.

It isn't about agreeing with everyone.

And it certainly isn't about becoming weak.

Love can be incredibly strong.

Sometimes love says yes.

Sometimes love says no.

Sometimes love forgives.

Sometimes love walks away.

Sometimes love embraces someone.

Sometimes love stands between a vulnerable person and someone trying to hurt them.

Sometimes love speaks gently.

Sometimes love stands up and says:

This is wrong.

Choosing love does not mean avoiding difficult things.

It means deciding what kind of person you will be **while you face them.**

And that decision belongs to you.

Nobody can make it for you.

Not your parents.

Not your friends.

Not your teachers.

Not the crowd.

Not social media.

Not the person who hurt you.

Not even the worst thing that has ever happened to you.

There will always be another moment.

Another encounter.

Another decision.

Another opportunity.

Another choice.

And whenever possible, I hope you make the same one.

Choose love.

CHAPTER ONE

THE YOUNG MAN AT THE BUS STOP

I don't know his name.

Not yet.

I've been seeing him for about a week.

There is a bus stop near where I spend part of my mornings, and lately this young man has been there.

There is nothing particularly remarkable about that.

People stand at bus stops every day.

Thousands of them.

They wait.

They look down the street.

They get on the bus.

And they disappear into their lives.

But this young man caught my attention.

He smiles.

Not occasionally.

Not merely when someone speaks to him.

He seems to carry a smile with him.

He is exceedingly friendly.

And perhaps what strikes me most is that he seems to be **present**.

He notices what is happening around him.

He notices people.

He engages.

He seems interested in this strange, wonderful thing happening all around us that we so often forget to notice.

Life.

I know almost nothing about him.

And yet I find myself thinking:

This young man loves being alive.

Maybe I'm wrong.

Maybe he has struggles I know nothing about.

In fact, I'm certain he does.

Everyone does.

Maybe there are mornings when he doesn't feel like smiling at all.

Maybe there are problems waiting for him at home, at school, at work or somewhere else.

I don't know.

That's part of what makes this so interesting.

Because I haven't been inspired by his circumstances.

I've been inspired by his response to them.

Whatever is happening in his life, this is what he is putting into the world when I encounter him:

Friendliness.

Awareness.

Warmth.

A smile.

And I began wondering how many people he affects without ever knowing it.

Perhaps the bus driver notices.

Perhaps another passenger notices.

Perhaps someone having a miserable morning sees him smile and feels just a little better.

Perhaps someone lonely feels acknowledged.

Perhaps somebody smiles because he smiled first.

Perhaps nobody ever tells him.

And then something occurred to me.

I noticed.

Here I am, an older man watching this young person standing at a bus stop, and something about the way he meets the morning has stayed with me.

Enough that I wanted to write about it.

Enough, in fact, that I decided to write an entire book.

Think about that.

A young man whose name I don't even know may have inspired a book simply because of the way he shows up in the world.

And that means something much bigger than either of us.

It means **you don't know who's watching you either.**

You don't know who notices when you hold the door.

You don't know who remembers that you invited them to sit with you.

You don't know how much it meant when you asked someone if they were okay.

You don't know what happened inside another human being when you told them:

"I believe in you."

You don't know where your kindness ends.

Maybe it doesn't.

Maybe the person you encourage encourages someone else.

Maybe the person you forgive becomes a little more forgiving.

Maybe the person you include decides to include somebody tomorrow.

Maybe a smile at a bus stop travels farther than any of us could possibly calculate.

We spend so much of our lives thinking that changing the world requires enormous acts.

Sometimes it does.

But most of the world is changed in much smaller ways.

One person.

One encounter.

One decision.

One moment.

You walk into a room.

What will you bring into it?

You meet someone who is different from you.

How will you treat them?

Someone makes a mistake.

What will you do?

Someone needs help.

Will you notice?

Someone is alone.

Will you walk over?

Someone hurts you.

What will you become because of it?

These moments don't announce themselves.

There is no music playing in the background.

Nobody says:

"Attention! This is one of the moments that will determine the person you are becoming."

They just happen.

At school.

At work.

On the street.

At the dinner table.

In the hallway.

On the bus.

At the bus stop.

And suddenly there it is.

The choice.

You can make someone's world a little colder.

Or you can make it a little warmer.

You can add to the anger.

Or you can interrupt it.

You can join the cruelty.

Or you can refuse.

You can ignore.

Or you can notice.

You can hate.

Or you can love.

And tomorrow morning, life will give you another chance.

And another.

And another.

The young man at the bus stop probably has no idea that he taught me anything.

But he did.

He reminded me that we are teaching one another all the time — not primarily through what we say, but through **who we are**.

So perhaps the most important question isn't:

What do you want to become?

Perhaps it is:

Who are you choosing to become today?

And if you're not sure where to begin, I have a suggestion.

The next time life puts the choice in front of you—

Choose love.

CHAPTER TWO

YOU ARE CHOOSING ALL DAY LONG

You made choices today.

Hundreds of them.

Maybe thousands.

Most of them probably didn't feel important.

What time to get up.

What to wear.

What to eat.

Where to sit.

What to watch.

What to say.

Whether to answer.

Whether to listen.

Whether to smile.

Whether to help.

Whether to complain.

Whether to walk away.

Whether to join in.

Whether to speak up.

Whether to remain silent.

And somewhere among all those ordinary decisions were choices that were doing something extraordinary.

They were creating you.

We tend to think that our lives are shaped by the enormous decisions.

And certainly some are.

Who will I marry?

What will I do for a living?

Where will I live?

What will I believe?

What dreams will I pursue?

Those choices matter.

But I believe something else matters just as much.

The little choices we make when nobody thinks anything important is happening.

Imagine two people walking down a hallway.

They see someone sitting alone.

One keeps walking.

The other stops and says hello.

It takes five seconds.

Nothing dramatic happens.

No one applauds.

No newspaper writes about it.

But something happened.

The second person practiced becoming someone who notices.

And tomorrow, noticing may become a little easier.

Then the next day.

And the next.

Until eventually kindness isn't something that person occasionally does.

Kindness is who that person has become.

That is how character is built.

Choice by choice.

Moment by moment.

Day by day.

You don't suddenly wake up one morning and become generous.

You practice generosity.

You don't suddenly become courageous.

You practice courage.

You don't suddenly become compassionate.

You practice compassion.

You don't suddenly become loving.

You choose love until choosing love becomes part of who you are.

The opposite is also true.

Cruelty can become a habit.

So can anger.

So can selfishness.

So can dishonesty.

So can indifference.

Every time we choose something, we make it a little easier to choose it again.

That is why the tiny moments matter.

They are rehearsals for the person we are becoming.

So pay attention to the little choices.

Especially the ones nobody sees.

Because those may be the most important choices of all.

And when you're unsure what to do, ask yourself a simple question:

What would love choose?

CHAPTER THREE

SMILE FIRST

There is something wonderfully courageous about smiling first.

Think about it.

When two strangers pass each other, both can wait.

I'll smile if they smile.

I'll say hello if they say hello.

I'll be friendly if they're friendly.

And so two perfectly nice human beings can walk right past each other without either one discovering that the other was perfectly nice.

Someone has to go first.

Why not you?

Smile first.

Say hello first.

Hold out your hand first.

Introduce yourself first.

Welcome the new person first.

Tell someone you're glad to see them first.

You might not always get the response you hoped for.

Someone may look away.

Someone may not hear you.

Someone may wonder why you're talking to them.

That's okay.

You haven't lost anything.

You offered something good to the world.

And sometimes something remarkable happens.

The other person smiles back.

Then perhaps they say hello.

Perhaps a conversation begins.

Perhaps you learn a name.

Perhaps tomorrow you greet each other again.

Perhaps a stranger becomes an acquaintance.

Perhaps an acquaintance becomes a friend.

All because somebody went first.

This is one of the things I noticed about the young man at the bus stop.

There doesn't seem to be much calculation in his friendliness.

He simply seems friendly.

There is freedom in that.

Imagine walking through life without constantly asking:

What am I going to get back?

Instead, ask:

What can I give?

A smile costs nothing.

So does encouragement.

So does attention.

So does saying someone's name.

So does asking:

"How are you?"

And actually waiting for the answer.

You may be amazed by what happens when you become the person who goes first.

The world starts to feel different.

Not necessarily because everyone else has changed.

But because **you have changed the way you enter it.**

So tomorrow, try an experiment.

Don't wait for the world to be friendly.

Be friendly to the world.

Smile first.

CHAPTER FOUR

NOTICE PEOPLE

One of the greatest gifts you can give another human being is surprisingly simple.

Notice them.

We live surrounded by people we barely see.

The person cleaning the floor.

The person driving the bus.

The cashier.

The quiet student at the back of the classroom.

The elderly person sitting alone.

The child trying desperately to get an adult's attention.

The person delivering a package.

The person who holds the door.

The person everyone else seems to walk past.

Every one of them has a life.

Every one has a story.

Every one has fears.

Every one has dreams.

Every one has experienced disappointment.

Every one has loved someone.

Every one has lost something.

Every one wants, in some way, to matter.

And yet it is incredibly easy to move through the world as though other people are scenery.

They aren't.

They are the story too.

Try something.

The next time someone serves you, look at them.

Say thank you.

If you know their name, use it.

If you don't know their name and you see them regularly, learn it.

Ask someone how their day is going.

Remember something they told you yesterday.

Notice when somebody gets a haircut.

Notice when someone seems unusually quiet.

Notice when somebody hasn't been around.

Notice the person nobody else seems to notice.

There is tremendous love in paying attention.

Because attention says:

You exist.

I see you.

You matter.

You will never know how desperately someone may have needed that message on the particular day you gave it to them.

The young man at the bus stop caught my attention partly because he seems to understand this naturally.

He appears aware of his surroundings.

He seems to see the people around him.

And perhaps that is one of the secrets to loving life:

You have to notice it first.

Look up.

Look around.

There is an entire world happening right in front of you.

Don't miss it.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PERSON SITTING ALONE

Almost everyone knows what it feels like to be left out.

Perhaps it happened in a school cafeteria.

Perhaps at a party.

Perhaps on a playground.

Perhaps at work.

Perhaps everyone else seemed to know one another and you didn't.

Perhaps you entered a room and had no idea where to stand.

Perhaps you watched people laughing together and wished someone would notice you.

Loneliness can exist in a crowded room.

Sometimes it is even worse there.

Because when you're alone by yourself, at least there isn't a room full of people reminding you that you're alone.

So here is one of the simplest ways to choose love:

Look for the person sitting alone.

Sit beside them.

You don't need a speech.

You don't need to solve their problems.

You don't need to become their best friend.

You can simply say:

"Hi."

Or:

"Mind if I sit here?"

Or:

"Want to come with us?"

Five words can change someone's entire day.

Maybe more than their day.

Young people especially understand how powerful belonging can be.

There is enormous pressure to be accepted.

To dress correctly.

To speak correctly.

To know the right people.

To be invited.

To fit in.

And because everyone wants to belong, sometimes people become afraid to associate with someone who doesn't.

That is where courage enters.

Love sometimes means risking your own comfort to protect someone else's dignity.

If everyone is ignoring someone, notice them.

If everyone is laughing at someone, don't laugh.

If someone is always picked last, pick them earlier.

If someone is eating alone, sit down.

If someone is new, introduce yourself.

If someone is standing outside the circle, make the circle bigger.

You may think this is a small thing.

To the person standing outside the circle, it may be enormous.

Years later, they may not remember what anyone was wearing.

They may not remember what was served for lunch.

They may not remember what happened in class that day.

But they may remember:

You made room for me.

Be that person.

CHAPTER SIX

WHEN EVERYONE ELSE IS DOING IT

Choosing love is easy when everyone agrees with you.

The real test comes when they don't.

There will be moments in your life when a group of people is doing something you know isn't right.

Someone is being mocked.

Someone is being excluded.

A rumour is spreading.

A humiliating photograph is being shared.

A cruel comment is getting laughs.

Everyone seems to be joining in.

And suddenly you have a choice.

You can go along.

You can remain silent.

Or you can say:

No.

That little word can require enormous courage.

Because human beings desperately want to belong.

We want approval.

We don't want to be the strange one.

We don't want everyone turning on us.

And sometimes doing the loving thing costs something.

Maybe people roll their eyes.

Maybe someone calls you boring.

Maybe you lose an invitation.

Maybe someone asks:

"Whose side are you on?"

There is a good answer.

I'm on the side of not hurting people.

You don't have to give a lecture.

You don't have to humiliate the people doing it.

You don't have to start another fight in the name of stopping one.

Sometimes all it takes is refusing to participate.

Don't forward it.

Don't repeat it.

Don't laugh.

Don't pile on.

Walk away.

Or, if necessary, speak up.

Courage doesn't always roar.

Sometimes courage is a sixteen-year-old saying:

"Come on, guys. Leave him alone."

Sometimes courage is moving your chair beside someone everyone else rejected.

Sometimes courage is being the only person in the room who refuses to laugh.

And here's something worth remembering:

There may be someone else in that group who also thinks what is happening is wrong.

They are simply afraid to say it.

Your courage may give them permission to find theirs.

One person can change the direction of a crowd.

Why shouldn't that person be you?

CHAPTER SEVEN

LOVE DOESN'T MEAN WEAKNESS

This is important.

Choosing love does not mean allowing people to treat you badly.

It does not mean saying yes to everything.

It does not mean pretending something doesn't hurt.

It does not mean remaining in situations that are harmful.

It does not mean surrendering your dignity.

Sometimes the most loving word in the English language is:

No.

No, you may not treat me that way.

No, I will not participate in this.

No, I won't lie for you.

No, I won't hurt somebody to prove that I'm your friend.

No, I won't become someone I don't respect just so that you will accept me.

Love needs courage.

And that includes loving yourself enough to establish boundaries.

You can forgive someone without giving them permission to hurt you again.

You can wish somebody well from a distance.

You can disagree without hatred.

You can leave without revenge.

You can stand up for yourself without trying to destroy the person standing against you.

That is strength.

Anyone can return anger with anger.

Anyone can throw another insult.

Anyone can seek revenge.

It takes something stronger to say:

This stops with me.

I will protect myself.

I will tell the truth.

I will do what needs to be done.

But I will not allow what happened to turn me into someone filled with hatred.

That is choosing love too.

CHAPTER EIGHT

WHAT WILL YOU ADD TO THE WORLD TODAY?

Every morning, whether you realize it or not, you walk into the world carrying something.

Your attitude.

Your words.

Your energy.

Your attention.

Your choices.

And throughout the day, you leave little pieces of them behind.

A compliment here.

An impatient word there.

A smile.

A complaint.

An act of generosity.

A moment of indifference.

Encouragement.

Gossip.

Kindness.

Anger.

By nighttime, you have added something to the world.

The question is:

What?

Did you make someone's burden heavier?

Or lighter?

Did you make someone feel smaller?

Or taller?

Did you spread somebody's mistake?

Or protect their dignity?

Did you complain about everything that was wrong?

Or help make one thing right?

Did you enter rooms demanding that people make you happy?

Or did you enter wondering what happiness you might bring?

This doesn't require money.

It doesn't require fame.

It doesn't require power.

It doesn't require being the smartest person in the room.

It doesn't require waiting until you're older.

You can begin today.

In fact, you can begin with the very next person you meet.

Look at them.

Notice them.

Listen.

Smile.

Be kind.

Be curious.

Encourage them.

And remember:

You may never know what happens afterward.

The young man at the bus stop doesn't know what happened after he smiled at me.

He doesn't know that I went away thinking about him.

He doesn't know that I began thinking about choices.

He doesn't know that those thoughts became pages.

He doesn't know that those pages began becoming a book.

He doesn't know that someday someone he will never meet may read this book and decide to treat another person differently.

Think about that.

We have no idea how far love travels.

So don't worry about measuring it.

Don't worry about receiving credit for it.

Don't worry about whether anyone noticed.

Just put more of it into the world.

Again.

And again.

And again.

Until one day you look back and realize something extraordinary.

You didn't merely choose love.

You became loving.

And perhaps that is one of the finest things a human being can become.

CHAPTER NINE

CHOOSE LOVE WHEN YOU'RE ANGRY

Anyone can be loving when everything is going well.

The real question is:

Who will you be when it isn't?

You will get angry.

Someone will say something that hurts you.

Someone will misunderstand you.

Someone will accuse you of something you didn't do.

Someone will disappoint you.

Someone may betray you.

And sometimes your anger will be completely justified.

Choosing love does not mean you aren't allowed to be angry.

Anger is human.

The important question is what you do with it.

Because there is a dangerous moment between feeling anger and acting on it.

In that moment, you have a choice.

You can send the message.

You can shout the insult.

You can embarrass the person.

You can break something.

You can say the cruelest thing you can think of because you know exactly where the other person is vulnerable.

Or you can wait.

You can walk away.

You can think.

You can decide that although you are angry, your anger does not get to decide who you become.

There are words you can say in ten seconds that may take ten years to repair.

Sometimes they can never be repaired.

So when anger arrives, remember:

You don't have to act immediately.

Give yourself time.

Ask yourself:

Will I be proud of what I'm about to do tomorrow?

And perhaps an even better question:

What would love do with this anger?

Sometimes love will speak.

Sometimes love will confront.

Sometimes love will demand an apology.

Sometimes love will establish a boundary.

But love does not need to destroy.

You are allowed to be angry.

Just don't hand your anger the steering wheel.

CHAPTER TEN

CHOOSE LOVE WHEN YOU'VE BEEN HURT

This one is harder.

It is easy to talk about love when nobody has hurt you.

But eventually somebody will.

Perhaps they already have.

When someone hurts us, something very natural happens.

We want them to hurt too.

We want them to understand what they did.

We want justice.

Sometimes we want revenge.

There is a moment when pain whispers:

Make them pay.

Be careful with that voice.

Because pain has a strange way of multiplying itself.

Someone hurts you.

You hurt someone else.

They hurt somebody else.

And soon pain is travelling from person to person, long after anyone remembers where it started.

What if it stopped with you?

Not because what happened was acceptable.

Not because you are weak.

Not because the person deserves to escape responsibility.

But because you decide:

I will not turn someone else's cruelty into my cruelty.

That is power.

You can say:

What you did hurt me.

What you did was wrong.

I will not allow it to happen again.

And I will not become you.

There is something magnificent about that decision.

You may carry a scar.

But you don't have to carry the weapon.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

FORGIVENESS IS FREEDOM

Forgiveness is one of the most misunderstood forms of love.

People sometimes think forgiving means saying:

"It didn't matter."

It mattered.

Or:

"What you did was okay."

It wasn't.

Or:

"You may do it again."

Absolutely not.

Forgiveness means something very different.

It means deciding that what happened will not be allowed to control the rest of your life.

Sometimes forgiveness happens quickly.

Sometimes it takes years.

Sometimes you forgive someone and still decide they cannot be part of your life.

Sometimes you forgive someone who never apologizes.

Sometimes the person you need to forgive most is yourself.

Forgiveness does not erase the past.

It changes your relationship with it.

Imagine carrying a heavy stone everywhere you go.

At first, you carry it because somebody handed it to you.

Eventually, however, you are the one choosing to keep carrying it.

Forgiveness is putting down the stone.

Not because the stone wasn't heavy.

Because it was.

Not because somebody didn't hurt you.

Because they did.

You put it down because you have somewhere else to go.

There is too much life ahead of you to spend it carrying yesterday.

Forgive when you can.

Heal at your own pace.

Learn what you need to learn.

And keep walking.

CHAPTER TWELVE

WHEN YOU ARE THE ONE WHO WAS WRONG

There is another side to forgiveness.

Sometimes you aren't the person who was hurt.

Sometimes you are the person who did the hurting.

You will make mistakes.

You will say something you regret.

You will disappoint somebody.

You will be selfish.

You will misunderstand.

You may break someone's trust.

You may look back at something you did and wonder:

How could I have done that?

Welcome to being human.

The question isn't whether you will make mistakes.

You will.

The question is:

What will you do next?

There are two words that require remarkable courage:

I'm sorry.

Not:

"I'm sorry, but..."

Not:

"I'm sorry you were offended."

Not:

"I'm sorry, but you did something too."

Simply:

I'm sorry. I was wrong.

Those words don't make you smaller.

They make you bigger.

Taking responsibility is one of the clearest forms of love.

It says:

I care more about truth than protecting my ego.

I care more about repairing this relationship than winning this argument.

I care enough about you to admit that I hurt you.

Then, if possible, make it right.

An apology without changed behaviour is only a collection of words.

Learn.

Change.

Do better.

And then forgive yourself too.

You are not required to spend the rest of your life being the worst thing you ever did.

You are allowed to grow.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

CELEBRATE SOMEONE ELSE

Someone else will eventually get something you wanted.

They will win.

You won't.

They will get the position.

You won't.

They will receive the award.

They will get the attention.

They will be invited.

They will fall in love.

They will succeed at something you have been struggling to achieve.

And something uncomfortable may appear inside you.

Jealousy.

Don't be ashamed of noticing it.

But don't feed it.

Someone else's success does not diminish your worth.

Their light does not make yours darker.

There is enough room in this world for more than one person to shine.

Learn to say:

Good for you.

And mean it.

Celebrate your friends.

Applaud people who succeed.

Tell someone when they did something brilliantly.

Give compliments without needing one in return.

There is tremendous freedom in no longer treating life like a scoreboard.

Imagine how different the world would be if we stopped asking:

"Am I doing better than them?"

and started asking:

"Am I becoming better than I was yesterday?"

That is the competition worth having.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

WHAT YOU SAY WHEN THEY AREN'T THERE

Here is a powerful test of character:

How do you talk about people who aren't in the room?

Gossip can feel harmless.

Sometimes it even feels like friendship.

Two people become closer by talking about a third.

But words travel.

Stories change.

Private pain becomes entertainment.

A mistake becomes an identity.

And somebody who isn't there to defend themselves becomes smaller with every retelling.

You have a choice.

You can add another sentence.

Or you can stop the story.

You can say:

"Maybe we don't know the whole situation."

You can change the subject.

You can refuse to repeat something told to you in confidence.

You can even say something kind about the person everyone else is criticizing.

That may not make you the most interesting person at the table.

But it may make you the safest.

And being a safe person is something beautiful.

Become someone others can trust with their weakness.

Become someone who protects people's dignity when they aren't present.

Because love isn't only how you treat people face-to-face.

Love is also how you treat their name when they aren't there to hear you.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

WHEN NOBODY IS WATCHING

Imagine that nobody will ever know.

No parent.

No teacher.

No boss.

No friend.

No camera.

No audience.

Nobody.

What would you do?

That question reveals something important.

Because character is not what we perform for other people.

Character is who we are when there is no applause.

You find money nobody saw someone drop.

What do you do?

You could cheat and never get caught.

What do you do?

Someone tells you something private.

You could share it and they would never know it was you.

What do you do?

You accidentally damage something.

Nobody saw.

What do you do?

These moments are invitations.

They ask:

Who are you when the only person who will know is you?

Make that person someone you respect.

Because you have to live with yourself for your entire life.

Build a relationship with yourself based on trust.

When you say you will do something, try to do it.

When you fail, admit it.

When temptation appears, remember who you are trying to become.

There may be no applause.

That's okay.

Some of the finest things you will ever do may never be known by anyone else.

Do them anyway.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

DON'T LET THE WORLD MAKE YOU HARD

Life can harden people.

It happens slowly.

A disappointment here.

A betrayal there.

A dream that didn't work.

Someone takes advantage of your kindness.

Someone laughs at your hope.

And eventually a person decides:

I'm never doing that again.

Never trusting again.

Never loving again.

Never hoping again.

Never allowing anyone close enough to hurt them.

It feels like protection.

But walls don't only keep pain out.

They keep love out too.

Be careful about becoming so protected that you can no longer be reached.

You can become wiser without becoming colder.

You can learn without becoming cynical.

You can establish boundaries without building a fortress.

You can recognize that some people cannot be trusted without deciding that nobody can.

You can experience heartbreak and still believe in love.

You can see terrible things in the world and still believe the world is worth helping.

In fact, perhaps the people who have seen darkness are precisely the people who understand how valuable light is.

Stay soft enough to care.

Stay strong enough to act.

Stay hopeful enough to try again.

The world does not need another person explaining why nothing can change.

It needs people willing to change something.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

BE THE ONE WHO GOES FIRST

Apologize first.

Smile first.

Introduce yourself first.

Forgive first.

Say thank you first.

Tell someone you love them first.

Invite the lonely person first.

Offer your hand first.

Admit you were wrong first.

Why do we spend so much time waiting?

"I'll call if they call."

"I'll apologize if they apologize."

"I'll be friendly if they're friendly."

"I'll forgive them when they deserve it."

And sometimes two people who care about each other spend years standing on opposite sides of a tiny distance neither one is willing to cross.

Cross it.

Not always.

Not when doing so puts you in danger.

Not when someone has repeatedly demonstrated that contact is harmful.

But in the ordinary misunderstandings of human life, don't allow pride to steal years from you.

Someone has to go first.

Let it be you.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

YOUR WORDS BECOME SOMEONE ELSE'S INNER VOICE

Be careful what you say to people.

Especially young people.

Especially children.

Especially people who trust you.

Words have a strange ability to remain long after the person who spoke them has forgotten.

Someone may remember for thirty years that a teacher told them they were talented.

Someone may also remember for thirty years that a teacher told them they would never amount to anything.

A parent says:

"I'm proud of you."

It stays.

A coach says:

"You've got something special."

It stays.

A friend says:

"Nobody likes you."

That can stay too.

We leave sentences inside one another.

What sentences are you leaving?

Tell people what is good in them.

Not falsely.

Not as empty praise.

Notice something real.

"You were really kind to her."

"You worked hard on that."

"I like the way you think."

"You make people feel welcome."

"I trust you."

"I'm glad you're here."

You may say something in five seconds that another human being carries for the rest of their life.

Make it something worth carrying.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

YOU DON'T HAVE TO SAVE THE WORLD TODAY

Perhaps you want to make a difference.

Good.

Perhaps you look at the problems in the world and feel overwhelmed.

War.

Poverty.

Loneliness.

Hunger.

Hatred.

Climate disasters.

Violence.

Division.

People suffering everywhere.

And you think:

What could I possibly do?

Here's an answer.

Do the next loving thing.

You don't have to solve everything today.

Help one person.

Make one call.

Give one meal.

Pick up one piece of garbage.

Encourage one child.

Visit one lonely person.

Forgive one mistake.

Plant one tree.

Stand beside one person being mistreated.

Do one thing.

Then tomorrow, do another.

The world is enormous.

But every enormous thing is made of smaller things.

Oceans are made of drops.

Forests are made of trees.

Communities are made of people.

And lives are made of moments.

Never underestimate your moment.

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE RIPPLE YOU WILL NEVER SEE

Imagine dropping a tiny stone into still water.

The stone disappears almost immediately.

But the water keeps moving.

A circle forms.

Then another.

Then another.

The stone is gone.

The effect isn't.

Kindness works like that.

So does cruelty.

You may never know where either one ends.

Maybe you encourage someone who was about to give up.

They continue.

Years later, they help somebody else.

That person helps another.

You never meet them.

You never know.

But your little stone is still moving through the water.

Perhaps this is one of the reasons we should choose love even when there is no reward.

Because we cannot possibly measure the consequences.

The young man at the bus stop smiled.

That was all.

He didn't write a book.

He didn't give a speech.

He didn't announce a philosophy.

He simply showed up as himself.

Friendly.

Smiling.

Present.

And somewhere nearby, someone noticed.

Someone thought about it.

Someone began writing.

And now you are reading these words.

Maybe you will do something differently because of them.

Maybe you will smile at somebody tomorrow.

Maybe that person desperately needs it.

Maybe they will pass it along.

And perhaps somewhere, years from now, something beautiful will happen because one young man once stood smiling at a bus stop.

He may never know.

Neither may I.

Neither may you.

That's okay.

Love doesn't need to know how far it travelled.

It only needs someone willing to send it.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

WHAT KIND OF PERSON ARE YOU BECOMING?

There will be many things people ask you throughout your life.

What do you want to be?

Where do you want to go?

How much do you want to earn?

What do you want to own?

What do you want to accomplish?

These are reasonable questions.

But I hope you occasionally ask yourself a different one:

What kind of person am I becoming?

Because one day you may have the career.

The house.

The money.

The awards.

The followers.

The recognition.

And still discover that none of those things answered the most important question.

Who did you become while acquiring them?

Did success make you generous?

Did disappointment make you wiser?

Did suffering make you compassionate?

Did power make you helpful?

Did knowledge make you humble?

Did age make you kinder?

These are different measurements of a life.

Maybe better ones.

At the end, perhaps the greatest accomplishment isn't something you can hang on a wall.

Perhaps it is becoming the kind of person people were glad to encounter.

Someone who noticed.

Someone who listened.

Someone who encouraged.

Someone who stood up.

Someone who forgave.

Someone who made room.

Someone who loved.

That person isn't created at the end of life.

That person is being created right now.

By the choice you make next.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

YOUR LIFE IS HAPPENING NOW

There is a dangerous word we use all the time.

Someday.

Someday I'll do something meaningful.

Someday I'll tell them how I feel.

Someday I'll become the person I want to be.

Someday I'll help.

Someday I'll forgive.

Someday I'll begin.

Someday is a wonderful place to hide.

Because someday never asks anything of us today.

But your life is not happening someday.

Your life is happening now.

This morning was your life.

The conversation you had at lunch was your life.

The person you passed on the street was part of your life.

This moment is your life.

We sometimes imagine life as though we are standing backstage waiting for the real performance to begin.

When I finish school.

When I get the job.

When I find the right person.

When I have enough money.

When everything settles down.

Then I'll really live.

But there is no backstage.

This is the performance.

Don't wait to become loving.

Love now.

Don't wait to become generous.

Give something now.

Don't wait until you are important to treat people as though they are important.

Notice them now.

The life you are waiting for has already begun.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

YOU ARE NEVER TOO YOUNG TO MATTER

Young people are often told:

"One day, you can make a difference."

I disagree.

Why one day?

Why not today?

You don't need to be eighteen.

You don't need a degree.

You don't need money.

You don't need a title.

You don't need permission to be kind.

A ten-year-old can notice the child nobody wants to play with.

A fourteen-year-old can refuse to join in when someone is being bullied.

A sixteen-year-old can encourage a friend who feels hopeless.

A teenager can volunteer.

A student can start something.

A child can teach an adult something about forgiveness.

A young person standing at a bus stop can inspire an older man to write a book.

You matter now.

Your choices matter now.

Your voice matters now.

Your kindness matters now.

You don't have to wait until the world calls you important.

Act as though your life matters, because it does.

And act as though other people's lives matter too.

Because they do.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

ONE PERSON CAN CHANGE A ROOM

Have you ever noticed how one person can change the feeling in a room?

Someone walks in angry and everyone becomes tense.

Someone begins complaining and soon everyone is complaining.

Someone starts gossiping and suddenly the conversation turns cruel.

But it works the other way too.

One person starts laughing.

One person says something encouraging.

One person welcomes the newcomer.

One person changes the subject when the conversation becomes unkind.

One person says:

"What can we do to help?"

And the entire room changes.

Never underestimate the atmosphere you carry with you.

You don't need to dominate a room to influence it.

Sometimes the quietest person changes everything.

Bring peace.

Bring curiosity.

Bring humour.

Bring kindness.

Bring encouragement.

Bring love.

Not because every room deserves it.

Because **you have decided what you carry.**

You cannot always choose what is waiting for you when you enter a room.

But you can choose what enters with you.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

WHEN THE WORLD TELLS YOU LOVE IS FOOLISH

There may be times when people tell you that kindness is naive.

That everyone is out for themselves.

That nice people finish last.

That you have to become hard to survive.

That caring too much will get you hurt.

There is some truth hidden inside those warnings.

Kind people do sometimes get hurt.

Trust can be betrayed.

Generosity can be exploited.

Love involves risk.

But what is the alternative?

To become so afraid of being hurt that we stop caring?

To become cruel before somebody can be cruel to us?

To assume the worst about everyone?

To go through life protecting our hearts so completely that nobody can enter them?

That isn't strength.

That is fear wearing armour.

Be wise.

Learn from experience.

Pay attention.

Protect yourself when necessary.

But don't let cynicism convince you that love is foolish.

Look at the people who have made life worth living.

Someone loved you.

Someone taught you.

Someone encouraged you.

Someone believed in you.

Someone helped you.

Someone forgave you.

Someone made you laugh.

Someone stayed.

The world has always depended upon people willing to care.

Be one of them.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

YOU WILL FAIL AT THIS

I should tell you something.

You will not always choose love.

Neither will I.

You will lose your temper.

You will say something selfish.

You will walk past someone you could have helped.

You will judge too quickly.

You will become jealous.

You will say something about somebody that you shouldn't have said.

You will know the loving thing to do and choose something else.

What then?

Choose love again.

That may mean apologizing.

It may mean repairing something.

It may mean forgiving yourself.

It may mean trying again tomorrow.

This book is not asking you to become perfect.

There are no perfect people.

It is asking you to become **intentional**.

Notice your choices.

Learn from them.

Correct them when you can.

And keep moving.

One bad choice does not have to become another.

One terrible day does not have to become a terrible week.

One mistake does not have to become your identity.

Every moment contains another door.

Open it.

Begin again.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

CHOOSE LOVE AGAIN

Maybe this is the entire book in three words.

Choose love again.

You chose it yesterday?

Wonderful.

Choose it again.

You failed yesterday?

That's okay.

Choose it again.

Someone rejected your kindness?

Choose it again.

Someone misunderstood you?

Choose it again.

You are tired?

Choose it again.

You are disappointed?

Choose it again.

You are frightened?

Choose it again.

Not blindly.

Not foolishly.

Not without boundaries.

But whenever life asks you what kind of person you intend to be, answer again.

Love is not one enormous decision we make once.

It is a direction.

And every day we adjust our compass.

Sometimes we wander.

Sometimes we get lost.

Sometimes we walk in completely the wrong direction.

Then we look again.

Find our direction.

And take another step.

Choose love again.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE LIFE YOU LEAVE BEHIND

Someday, people will tell stories about you.

Not necessarily publicly.

Probably not in newspapers.

Perhaps around a dinner table.

Perhaps at a family gathering.

Perhaps two old friends will remember something you did fifty years earlier.

What will they remember?

Maybe they won't remember your job title.

Maybe they won't remember what car you drove.

Maybe they won't remember how many followers you had.

Maybe they won't remember how much money you made.

But they may remember how they felt around you.

"He always made me laugh."

"She believed in me before I believed in myself."

"He noticed everybody."

"She never let anyone sit alone."

"When things were bad, he showed up."

"She was kind to me when she didn't have to be."

What a legacy.

You don't need a monument to leave something behind.

You leave something behind every day.

Memories.

Words.

Examples.

Stories.

Love.

You are writing your legacy while you are living your life.

Write something beautiful.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

THE WORLD YOU CREATE AROUND YOU

Perhaps you cannot change the entire world.

But you are always changing **your part of it**.

Think about the places you inhabit.

Your home.

Your classroom.

Your workplace.

Your street.

Your neighbourhood.

Your team.

Your circle of friends.

What happens there is partly shaped by you.

Every time you welcome someone, your world becomes more welcoming.

Every time you forgive, your world becomes more forgiving.

Every time you tell the truth, your world becomes more trustworthy.

Every time you share, your world becomes more generous.

Every time you defend someone, your world becomes safer.

Every time you choose love, the little piece of the world surrounding you becomes more loving.

And then something interesting happens.

People carry that experience elsewhere.

Your friend goes home.

Your classmate enters another classroom.

The bus driver meets another passenger.

The cashier serves another customer.

The child grows up.

Love moves.

So perhaps changing the world isn't always about standing on a stage and addressing millions.

Perhaps sometimes it begins with changing the three feet surrounding you.

Then somebody else changes their three feet.

And somebody else changes theirs.

Until eventually the circles touch.

CHAPTER THIRTY

WHAT IF WE ALL DID IT?

Imagine a school where students looked for the person sitting alone.

Imagine workplaces where people celebrated one another's success.

Imagine neighbourhoods where strangers knew each other's names.

Imagine social media where people asked before posting:

Is this true?

Is this necessary?

Is this kind?

Imagine political disagreements without hatred.

Imagine religions competing to see who could love most rather than who could condemn most.

Imagine communities where elderly people were never forgotten.

Imagine children growing up knowing that asking for help was courageous.

Imagine success measured partly by how many people we helped succeed.

Imagine millions of people waking up each morning asking one question:

What can I add to the world today?

Would every problem disappear?

Of course not.

But would the world change?

Absolutely.

And here's the wonderful thing.

We don't have to wait for everyone else.

We can begin without them.

You can begin.

I can begin.

Today.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

THE NEXT PERSON YOU MEET

Before you continue reading, think about something.

Who is the next person you are likely to encounter?

Your mother?

Your father?

Your husband?

Your wife?

Your child?

Your brother?

Your sister?

A friend?

A teacher?

A colleague?

A cashier?

A bus driver?

A stranger?

You have no idea what that person is carrying.

Perhaps they received bad news this morning.

Perhaps they are worried about money.

Perhaps they are lonely.

Perhaps someone they love is sick.

Perhaps they are questioning whether they matter.

Perhaps they are having the happiest day of their life.

You don't know.

So treat the encounter as though it matters.

Look at them.

Smile if appropriate.

Say hello.

Listen.

Thank them.

Be patient.

Perhaps nothing remarkable will happen.

But perhaps something will.

You may never know.

That is one of the recurring themes of this book:

You may never know.

Love anyway.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

BACK AT THE BUS STOP

And so we return to where this book began.

A bus stop.

A young man.

A smile.

When I began writing these pages, I didn't know his name.

I knew almost nothing about him.

I had simply seen him for about a week.

Always smiling.

Always friendly.

Always seemingly aware of what was happening around him.

There was something about him that made me think:

He loves life.

Maybe someday I will learn his story.

Perhaps tomorrow morning I will finally walk over and say:

"I've been seeing you here every morning. My name is Ross. What's yours?"

Perhaps I will discover that my impressions were right.

Perhaps I will discover things I never imagined.

But in one sense, none of that changes why this book exists.

He did something without trying to do anything.

He showed up.

He smiled.

He was friendly.

He noticed the world.

And somebody noticed him.

That is extraordinary to me.

Because somewhere today, somebody may be noticing you.

A younger child.

A colleague.

A stranger.

A neighbour.

Someone who never tells you.

Someone who sees how you treat the waiter.

Someone who notices whether you hold the elevator.

Someone who watches what you do when a vulnerable person needs help.

Someone who sees whether you laugh when everyone else laughs at someone.

Someone is learning from the way you live.

You are teaching without knowing you are teaching.

So teach something beautiful.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

CHOOSE LOVE

Here we are.

The final chapter.

And after all these pages, I have very little left to say.

Perhaps that's appropriate.

Because the message was never complicated.

Life will give you choices.

Thousands of them.

Some enormous.

Most tiny.

Sometimes you will know immediately what to do.

Sometimes you won't.

Sometimes love will mean saying yes.

Sometimes love will mean saying no.

Sometimes it will mean staying.

Sometimes it will mean leaving.

Sometimes it will mean speaking.

Sometimes it will mean listening.

Sometimes it will mean forgiving someone else.

Sometimes it will mean forgiving yourself.

Sometimes it will mean standing alone.

Sometimes it will mean sitting beside someone who is alone.

You will get some of these choices wrong.

So will I.

Then life will give us another one.

And another.

Until eventually our lives become the sum of all those moments.

So wherever you are reading this, I want to leave you with something very simple.

Tomorrow morning, when you wake up, remember that you have been given another day.

Another collection of people.

Another collection of moments.

Another collection of choices.

Look around.

Notice.

Listen.

Help.

Encourage.

Forgive.

Stand up.

Be grateful.

Laugh.

Tell people you love them.

Make room.

Go first.

And somewhere along the way, perhaps you'll encounter a stranger.

Maybe at a bus stop.

Smile.

You never know.

Someone might write a book about you.

ONE LAST THOUGHT

You will never know how far your kindness travels.

You will never know every life you touch.

You will never know which smile mattered.

Which encouragement arrived at exactly the right moment.

Which act of forgiveness broke a chain.

Which invitation made somebody feel that they belonged.

Which courageous decision inspired somebody watching from across the room.

And you don't need to know.

Your job is not to calculate the ripple.

Your job is to throw the stone.

So when life puts the next choice before you—and perhaps it already has—

remember the young man at the bus stop.

Remember that somebody is always becoming someone.

Remember that you are becoming someone too.

And choose carefully.

Choose courage.

Choose kindness.

Choose forgiveness.

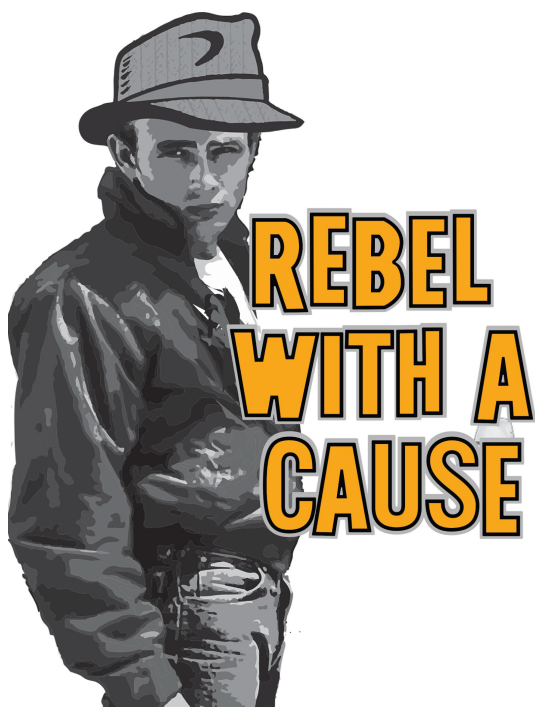
Choose hope.

Choose compassion.

Choose joy.

And whenever you possibly can—

CHOOSE LOVE.



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