

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *OWN YOUR EVERYDAY*

JORDAN LEE DOOLEY

# EMBRACE YOUR ALMOST

SNEAK  
PEEK



SAMPLE  
ONLY

UNCORRECTED  
PROOF

FIND CLARITY AND CONTENTMENT  
IN THE IN-BETWEENS, NOT-QUITES,  
AND UNKNOWNNS

PRAISE FOR  
*Embrace Your Almost*

“We all know what it feels like to have an expectation of what we hoped our life would look like, only to have it veer off onto a different path. In times like these, we need some help keeping our eyes up as we move forward. That’s exactly what Jordan Lee Dooley does for us in *Embrace Your Almost*. If you are like me and need practical steps, hard-won wisdom, and a friend to help lead the way into a new season of promise, this redirection resource is what you need.”

—Lysa TerKeure, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author  
and president of Proverbs 31 Ministries

“Rather than reinforcing the pervasive shoot-for-the-moon rhetoric that our boss babe culture pushes, Jordan is a part of the resistance. Her book *Embrace Your Almost* tactically guides us on how to redefine success so that we can faithfully steward the good that God sends our way. This book heralds the message that this generation desperately needs.”

—Amanda Pittman, founder of Confident Woman Co.

“Whether we’ve had the wind knocked out of us when a dream fails or we are finally breathing deeply after we release a dream that wasn’t right, Jordan guides us with compassion and clarity to liking—or at least making peace with—our lives long before we reach the celebratory finish lines. *Embrace Your Almost* champions a life that is always

under construction instead of one only satisfied at a completion that never truly comes. Jordan intimately invites us to join her in the space between disappointment and possibility, heartbreak and hope—whether in our home, motherhood, career, or faith. She reminds us that a life of almosts is one in which we’re endlessly striving and never celebrating the fact that where we are today may in fact be beautiful enough, if only we see it through her lens.”

—Hilary Rushford Colyer,  
host of the *You're Welcome* podcast

“Jordan Lee Dooley is a perfect mix of wisdom and work-hard, and this book brings both. For when you don’t understand and when you need a guide, *Embrace Your Almost* will walk with you, teach you, and lead you to the confident life you want.”

—Annie F. Downs, *New York Times*  
bestselling author of *That Sounds Fun*

“*Embrace Your Almost* is for anyone who finds themselves in the awkward season of in-between. Jordan has gifted us with an insightful guide filled with biblical and practical steps that lend future clarity, even as they help us experience contentment when we are not yet quite there.”

—Lisa Bevere, *New York Times* bestselling author

“I’m grateful for the way Jordan shares her honest journey and helps anyone who’s had to wait or adjust their expectations in the season they’re in to redefine success and contentment right where they are.”

—Ruth Cho Simmons, *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author,  
artist, and founder of [gracelaced.com](http://gracelaced.com)

Embrace  
Your  
Almost

# Embrace Your Almost

*Find Clarity and Contentment in the  
In-Betweens, Not-Quites, and Unknowns*

JORDAN LEE DOOLEY



WATERBROOK

EMBRACE YOUR ALMOST

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Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

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To Matt—  
my teammate through every curveball  
this life has brought and will inevitably bring.

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# Introduction



Even though I didn't like running, I joined the track team when I was in high school. Since several of my friends were on the team, I decided that I would sign up too. However, I secretly swore that I would quit if the coach made me run the four-hundred-meter dash. All-out sprinting for a full lap around the track? No, thank you.

But then, after the first few practices, the coach told me that I would indeed be competing in the dreaded four-hundred-meter dash in an upcoming meet. *You have got to be kidding me.* I considered backing out, but my competitive nature dared me to give it a shot.

The day of the track meet arrived. With my heart beating out of my chest and adrenaline pumping through my veins, I took my place at the starting line of the event. I heard the starting gun, and with six or seven competitors, I took off. As I rounded the last corner and entered the final hundred

meters of the race, I was surprised to find myself neck and neck with an opponent, vying for first place.

*Oh my gosh, I can actually win this!*

As we approached the finish line, an image of Olympic runners on television popped into my brain. I remembered seeing them lean over the line to cross just milliseconds before their opponent. Despite having absolutely no experience with that tactic, I decided to try it.

And *that* was a terrible idea.

I leaned too early and too far, and instead of crossing the line, momentum carried me forward and I face-planted on the track, with my arms stretched out in front of me, fingertips just inches short of the finish. Everyone blew past me as I lay facedown in disbelief, with skinned elbows and knees.

The official leaned over and asked whether I still wanted to finish. I looked up to see all the other runners on the other side of the line, high-fiving teammates and grabbing sips of water. As humiliated as I was, I managed to bring myself to my feet and take a step over the line.

Just when I *almost* finished first, I ended up finishing dead last. I have seldom been as embarrassed as I was that day.

## Almost

Have you ever found yourself in a situation like that? You know, where you're so close to accomplishing something great or reaching a milestone you've dreamed of, only to end up facedown on the ground, just short of where you expected or hoped to be?

I don't tell you this embarrassing story for the fun of it.

Trust me—I'd rather keep that tucked away in the archives of my bad memories and never speak of it again. However, I share it because I want to give you a picture of why I believe this book is necessary. Doesn't it seem that everywhere you look, there's another message telling you to go for the gold, achieve your goals, and take over the world? But what if your best efforts end in what feels like a face-plant, landing you *almost*—but just short of—where you hoped to be? Then what? Can you still be successful?

Look. I know that it's devastating—or at least incredibly frustrating—when you *almost* achieve a goal, *almost* reach a dream, or *almost* get to where you wanted to be, only to feel as though it all fell apart at the last minute. I know what it's like to think you've got the world at your feet one minute, then it's against you the next. I get how exhausting it is to hear cliché phrases about getting up and trying again when all you want to do is lie down and take a break.

Don't get me wrong. I'm a goal-oriented person . . . until I'm not. I tend to be a planner and a go-getter when I'm starting out on a new pursuit. I get a vision, and I swiftly take action to see it through. I chug along, chipping away at my plan day by day. If nothing interrupts me, I cross the finish line with a big dorky grin.

However, now and then something comes along and throws me off course just when I'm inches from the finish line of a professional goal or a personal aspiration. Whether it's an unexpected world event, a heartbreaking family crisis, or tripping over my own two feet, countless factors can come along and blow up my plan. Sometimes when that happens, I wonder if the goal I was pursuing was even the right goal

for me in the first place, and it often forces me to rethink my pursuit entirely.

*Why* am I doing what I'm doing? Is this *really* what I want to fight for or work toward? If it is, how can I go about it in a different way? If it's not, what steps do I need to take to let it go or make a change?

Maybe you're a planner too. Or maybe you're not. You might be a fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants kind of gal, and I can appreciate the beauty of a spontaneous spirit. Regardless of whether you're achievement oriented or more of a go-with-the-flow type, I'd be willing to bet that the life you have now might look a little different from the one you thought you'd have.

You may have thought that by now you'd be married with two kids and a dog, that you'd be at a certain level in your career, that you'd have the four-bedroom house, or that you'd be experiencing something else that just hasn't quite panned out (even if, at one point or another, you were so close you could taste it). Maybe you've faced one of these situations:

- That guy was *almost* Mr. Right . . . but then he changed his mind.
- That promotion was *almost* yours, until you unexpectedly lost a loved one and had to take time off, which caused the position to go to someone else.
- That marathon you were training for was *almost* a thing, until your kid got sick and you had to focus all your attention on caretaking instead of training.

Or maybe you're *almost* where you want to be but the finish line seems to keep moving.

And sometimes, when we *do* get what we want, we don't feel the satisfaction we thought we would. Perhaps the idea of "When I finally get XYZ, I'll be successful" is a half truth at best and a flat-out lie at worst.

Crazy as it sounds, I've learned that sometimes it's only during moments of heartbreak or disappointment that we have the "opportunity" to collect ourselves, consider all that we're doing, and clarify what we value and what success truly means to us.

Contrary to popular belief, maybe rethinking dreams isn't always a bad thing. That said, I'm not sure the answer to life's disappointments and devastating moments is as simple as "Just get up and try again." Instead, sometimes the answer is to redefine what success looks like for *you* in a world that's constantly telling you what you should do. This seems obvious, right? So, then, why is it so difficult?

Perhaps it's because the world can make us feel that we should want it all and do it all, all at the same time: *Crush it in your career. Also be a good wife. Have babies. Be a good mom. But, also, you do you. Don't let a family hold you back, and enjoy a fun single life. Drink a gallon of water every day. Volunteer for everything because you need to be a good person. Buy your dream house. Make good money. Oh, but not too much money because then you're selfish and greedy. Go on nice vacations. Don't forget to work out. Show up to that gathering so people keep inviting you. Stay in touch with old friends. Post on social media so everyone can see how happy you are. Have a morning routine. Help your neighbor. Call your mom. Do all the things.*

It's a lot. Some of the messages even seem to contradict

each other. No wonder it's hard to feel satisfied by anything we do! The moment we get married or start a family, we begin to hear about why we need to reach our career goals. Or the moment we reach a career goal, somebody starts talking about a biological clock and why we need to hurry up, find a partner, and make babies. How's a girl to keep up? On top of our own expectations and hopes, we face constant pressure to perform, meet others' expectations, keep up with timelines, and prove ourselves.

That said, this book isn't about crushing life, achieving every goal, taking over the world, or winning a race. These pages exist to help you define what success looks like for *you*, focus on the right goals for *you*, and run *your* race well—even when things don't work out how you planned.

It's about finding clarity and contentment—even in the middle of those almost-but-not-quite-achieved dreams—and making the most of the unknowns and in-betweens.

Why?

Because if we live only for the mountaintop moments—the huge, obvious wins—we'll miss out on the refining that happens in the valleys and on the journey. When we're hidden, when nobody sees our efforts, when we work for what seems like forever only to *almost* achieve our goal? That's the tension we'll spend a lot of our lives in.

Life—real life, where we have to make and carry out our plans amid unexpected challenges—requires that we are clear on what is a priority and what is not, so we can redefine success and move in the right direction (even after face-planting).

## An Invitation

There's a question I want you to consider: Do you *like* your life? You may not love everything about it or be exactly where you wanted to be. But here in the middle, do you like the life you're curating each day? Do you feel connected with whatever it is you're doing?

I ask because I think sometimes when we find ourselves stuck between where we started and where we want to be, in those almost-but-not-quite seasons, we focus so much on the life we *want* to have that we fail to appreciate the one we *do* have. In fact, we may be tempted to dislike or even hate our one wild and wonderful life because it has let us down or broken our hearts in one way or another. It can seem nearly impossible to *love* our life when we're focused on what hasn't gone right. That's okay. I'm not asking you to love everything about your life. Life can be hard—and hard to love. However, I do believe we can at the very least *like* what we invest our time, talent, energy, and ambition in, even while we're in the middle—between where we started and where we hope to be.

I'm going to go out on a limb here and make an argument about something I've been learning in my own journey: sometimes unmet expectations and those devastating almost-but-not-quite moments are like unexpected (and often unwanted) invitations to reevaluate what we're doing, reconsider why we're doing it, and reorder our priorities so that we can steward the life we already have even before we get whatever it is that we want.

To be clear, liking your life doesn't mean you can't aim for more. It doesn't mean you can't hope, plan, or dream of possibilities. It doesn't mean you quit longing for whatever feels out of reach. It simply means you learn to sit with the tension of both disappointment and possibility. You allow yourself to simultaneously aim for what could be and make the most of what currently is. You know what you really value in a world that's constantly saying you should want it all. You redefine what success looks like for you, find contentment in what you do, and create a lovely existence, before you see the outcomes of your pursuits. You trade perfection for whimsy, delight, faith, and intention while tending to the life you've been given.

As I've learned to tend to life in the middle, I've discovered that our most devastating experiences and greatest disappointments can be either dead ends or defining moments. They can hold us back or they can clear away the distraction to help us see what matters most to us and how we will cultivate more of that.

When you allow your almosts (even the really painful ones) to clarify what you value and what success looks like for *you*, you might find that you can cultivate a life you truly like even before you get to where you want to be. You might find that you don't actually care about being the best on the track team or number one in your industry, you don't need to keep up with or outdo someone else to succeed, you don't want to break glass ceilings, or you don't need to have everything you're told you should want.

And those discoveries? The ones that show us what we truly care about, are called to, and can steward best? They

free us up to *live* our lives instead of chasing more for the sake of more.

Clarity about your future and contentment in your present—even in the face of the pain or uncertainty that can come with almos<sup>t</sup>s and unmet expectations—is ultimately what I want to help you discover in these pages.

If this resonates, pour a glass and let's hash this one out.

## *Redefine Success*



I felt sick to my stomach, like I was going to puke. As I blinked hard at the results of a project displayed on the computer screen in front of me, my heart sank to my toes. I had invested tens of thousands of dollars into this venture, willing to take the risk because conservative predictions had indicated that I'd make it back three to four times over.

However, the actual data was showing that I might not even break even.

*How is this happening?* I wondered as I tried to make sense of it. *Did I miss something?* I had done my research, planned, and made calculated moves. Everything was set up for success, and I was so sure the investment would yield a generous reward.

I looked over everything again and again, only to come to the same conclusion: this was *not* going well. I felt so stupid! How could I have been so off in my predictions? *Why am I always so overly ambitious?*

Realizing how big of a flop this project could turn out to be, I called my husband and expressed how worried I was. He offered some encouragement and suggested we go out to our favorite little Italian restaurant later that night to discuss possible plans of action. Still in disbelief that we were having this conversation, I reluctantly agreed, and he made a reservation.

As he twirled his linguine onto his fork and I bit into my gluten-free risotto that evening, he said something I didn't expect. "J, I know this feels like a big loss, and your frustration with it is valid. But I also want to remind you that you didn't *have* to do this project. It was something you wanted to go for, but it's extra. It's not essential to doing what you're best at. And maybe this is a lesson in contentment in a season when you've been saying you want to slow down. Maybe it's an opportunity to focus on what *is* working instead of constantly trying to make something new work."

I swallowed hard as I processed what he'd just said.

He was right. Perhaps I'd let my ambition for more, more, and more run away with me . . . again. In an unexpected way, it was as if on that day, at a tiny table over pasta, he gave me permission to reconsider all that I was chasing after and whether I would allow what *was* working to be enough.

After we paid our tab, we headed home, changed into comfortable clothes, and read books under the bistro lights on our patio. The sound of crickets filled the cool evening air, and I took a deep breath as I thought, *Wow, even with this project not panning out, I really like my life right now.*

Sure, I had a lost investment to make up, but strangely

enough, I was reminded to be thankful for all that *was* going well. I paused, looked around, and breathed it all in, noticing that I felt gratitude on a deeper level than I had in a while. Perhaps that's because when disappointment or loss strikes, it reminds us just how good the very normal things of everyday life really are.

## The Garden

A couple of days after our Italian dinner, I walked out my back door to see my husband preparing the garden boxes for planting, just as the sun was going down over the lake behind him. It was a late spring evening, and the golden light reflected off the water onto his athletic frame. I squinted as I walked toward him to offer a hand.

With my hands in the dirt, my mind jumped back to the previous August, the first time we had tried to start a garden, which I would later learn was well past planting season for most vegetables in the Midwest. The motivation to start one late in the season came after a hard summer for our family. I needed a hobby. Plus, I knew fresh, homegrown organic produce was so much healthier than days- or weeks-old store-bought food, so I decided to give gardening a try. Never mind that I'd never been able to keep even a simple houseplant alive for more than a week. (My poor succulents, one of the lowest-maintenance plants a person can own, always withered away because I was constantly on the go.)

But I felt empowered and determined to make that late-summer garden work. Dreaming about the bushels of spin-

ach, kale, and carrots I was going to harvest, I looked through cookbooks to find delicious new recipes to try with my eventual vegetables. And for added luck—or at least to complete the farming look—I wore my overalls on planting day.

Week after week, I faithfully watered and weeded my first little garden. I eagerly anticipated those little sprouts breaking through the ground. I even found myself pausing in the produce section at my grocery store, certain that I was going to harvest better produce than what I saw.

Except that's not exactly what happened. That first year, despite my hard work, my garden bounty amounted to four measly kale leaves. No, not four plants. *Leaves*. As in, one plant survived, and I got a few leaves from it. The rest of my crop was either eaten by grubs or killed by an early frost. I could barely even make a salad with my "harvest."

As I picked the four leaves off the plant, I looked at the ground where my carrots were supposed to have grown but sadly had barely even sprouted. Clearly I'd failed miserably.

Or had I?

If we're evaluating success by the physical harvest, then, yes, I failed. However, if we're talking about my own growth as I learned about timing, slowing down, sowing, and tending consistently, then my efforts could be deemed a massive success.

Maybe those few kale leaves didn't represent a failure. Maybe they illustrated what's possible. Instead of viewing the one plant that survived as a disappointment, I began to look at it as proof that I *could* grow something. With a few changes, such as planting earlier in the season and developing a better strategy for fending off hungry rabbits and

grubs, I knew I could get a better outcome. That one kale plant showed me that I can experience disappointment and see possibility simultaneously.

As my husband and I worked to plant our garden the following spring—ironically the same week my work project flopped and I felt like a total failure—reflecting on my first garden experience got me thinking about how we define success.

Many of us look at success as what we achieve: snagging a great job, getting a promotion, crushing a big launch, finding love and getting married, buying our dream house, and more. We achieve those things, and—voilà—we've succeeded, right?

That ideology suggests that if we don't reach our expectations, then we aren't successful at all. But what I discovered through my attempts at gardening—as well as through more significant pursuits that I'll discuss later—is that success actually goes deeper than attaining a specific outcome.

That's what I want us to consider as we walk together through the following pages—that we can be successful and create beautiful lives *even when* a specific goal or dream takes longer to achieve or doesn't work out exactly how we planned. We just have to look at success differently. We must dig below the surface to find what's most important and make sure that we grow more of it.

In other words, even if on the surface we seem to have failed, if we allow the experience to grow us into the women we were made to be, then we will have succeeded far beyond any superficial achievements.

We can experience great rewards even amid the hopes,

plans, and goals that *almost* work out but don't and even in the most difficult situations. In fact, I would argue that our most painful setbacks can set us up for the calling we were born to step into. That is, *if* we allow them to.

Please understand, I'm not trying to gloss over the very real grief and disappointment that accompany setbacks and letdowns. Trust me—I've had my fair share of the heartache that comes with them. But as you will see in the chapters to come, your biggest setbacks can become setups for success in the things that matter most to you. Success *is* possible—even if it looks different from what you initially envisioned.

## Success Isn't One-Size-Fits-All

Before we can move forward in redefining how we view and pursue whatever we desire, we need to tackle our understanding of what success is in the first place.

What comes to mind when you consider what a successful woman looks like? Perhaps you see her with vision boards, bold lipstick, an impressive salary, and an air of confidence you'd give just about anything for. It seems like everything she touches turns to gold, and she blazes through every goal she sets for herself. Somehow she manages to do it all, apparently holding her relationships and revenue-generating goals in perfect balance, never failing to beat out any competition who steps into the arena—all while gulping down one Red Bull after another because, as we're often told, *success doesn't sleep*.

Or maybe you envision a successful woman as someone who has a white picket fence, beautiful children, and an adoring husband. She cooks five-course meals that would make Martha Stewart envious. Her home is always neat and tidy, and she has a garden that produces award-winning fruits and vegetables, which she cans and then adorns with beautiful hand-lettered labels.

Or you may have some other vision of success. But whatever form you imagine, it's accompanied with a lot of outward accolades, right?

And if you don't quite match the image of the life you desire, you might be tempted to think, *I'm not successful enough.*

Yet maybe success isn't when we have it all or look the part. Instead, real success is found in stewarding what matters most and ultimately becoming who we were made to be. When we understand and embrace *that* kind of success, we can make the most of each moment—and that is true whether we're on the peaks of great achievement or in the depths of disappointment.

Preparing a garden in the middle of what felt like a massive failure in my career helped me reframe the disappointment I was experiencing. In terms of dollars and cents, my work project wasn't exactly a smashing success. But in the way it dared me to be present, appreciate the small things, tend to the life right in front of me, and reconsider what I was really chasing? It changed my approach and transformed how I channeled my ambition. *That* was necessary growth. And that is part of what success needs to be.

## Are You Ambitious?

Now that we've talked about success, let's look at how it relates to ambition.

When you hear the word *ambition*, what do you think? We could go with the official definition: "A strong desire to do or to achieve something, typically requiring determination and hard work."<sup>1</sup> But what does that mean exactly—especially as it relates to being successful women? I wonder whether you've noticed this: in some circles, ambition is considered a shameful thing for a woman to have too much of. Some view an ambitious woman as a highly competitive and determined female who steps over anybody who gets in her way. Others think of her as willing to take big risks, put herself out there, and even sacrifice her health or family to get the paycheck, promotion, or popularity she's after. After all, this seems to be what the girl boss movement, or hustle culture, that took over the internet for a while told us ambition looks like.

So, if we want to be successful, do we have to have *that kind* or *that level* of ambition—and if we don't have it, does that mean we have no shot at reaching our goals?

I don't think so. I don't think the type or amount of ambition a woman has should be the measure of her value or success, nor do I think ambition is something she should be ashamed of having. In fact, I believe ambition is a gift that God hardwired into our DNA. After all, it's ambition that gives us the resilience to get back up when we're knocked down and the determination to do something meaningful

with our lives—whether that’s in a business, career, or personal sense.

For example, that drive we have to finish a project, see a health goal through to completion, or make an impact on others in the work we do? That’s ambition.

The truth is, we *all* have ambition. It just may look different for each of us. If you have a desire to care for others or make a difference in your corner of the universe, then you are a woman full of ambition. Can ambition get out of hand if left unchecked, causing us to overcommit, drive ourselves into burnout, or, as in my case, overspend in pursuit of more money or recognition? Of course. And some personality types are more susceptible to this than others (guilty).

Ambition is a good and necessary trait to possess. I would put money on the fact that you have a strong desire to do or achieve something meaningful, even if you couldn’t care less about big paychecks, platforms, or promotions. I certainly do. I’m a driven woman with a list of big goals I want to accomplish in both my personal life and my professional life. One of my greatest dreams growing up was to have a family. It isn’t something the world usually considers glamorous or sexy, but it’s meaningful to me. Many of my other dreams pale in comparison, although there have been times I’ve lost sight of that as I overworked myself to reach career milestones. That said, at the end of the day, I have a drive to build my career, but I’m even more determined to tend to my marriage and eventual family.

Maybe having a family isn’t one of your greatest ambitions. Maybe you want to be the first female governor of

your state, have a thriving business, change the health-care system, or even become a professional Ukrainian folk dancer. Great!

Maybe you have big dreams to change the world, or maybe you have small-town dreams of a simple life. Perhaps you find yourself somewhere in the middle (hi, me too).

Regardless, ambition is that push you feel to pursue those important dreams and goals. At its core, ambition is really about *determination*. Determination is what we use to get up and try again after disappointment, to keep caring for a sick family member when hope grows dim, to heal a broken marriage, to stick with a journey to better health, and so much more.

Determination—ambition—is a good thing. But herein lies the problem: we live in a world that tells us we can have it all and even implies we should *want* to have it all. We should want to do more, have more, and be more. We're told to create vision boards and manifest, or will, our big dreams into existence—to work things out exactly how we'd like—as if real life makes it that simple.

Don't get me wrong. I'm all about having a vision to aim for. However, sometimes I wonder whether our ambition gets derailed. Maybe we've gotten used to gluing arbitrary goals and dreams to our vision boards just because someone else has a fancy beach house, a seemingly perfect body, or a million-dollar business and we think we'd like to also. Or, more likely, because we're unsure of what we truly want out of our lives. So, we write down goals or stick pictures of what sounds good onto our vision boards and then drum up

determination to achieve those things—potentially setting ourselves up for discontentment in the process.

Even if they *are* the right goals, when we fail to achieve them, our disappointment can shake us to the core and make us question our direction. As a result, we may end up feeling lost, confused, discouraged, and utterly directionless.

When the world tells us that if we just check the right boxes and persist, we can have it all, it's disappointing—even defeating—when things don't turn out how we pictured. When our reality stubbornly refuses to match that expectation, what do we do with our ambition?

I've trudged through my fair share of disappointments as well as disrupted and delayed dreams, wondering how or whether I should go on. I've wondered how I can maintain my ambition—my determination to keep going—through frustrating disappointment, annoying discontentment, and even painful devastation. In the middle of those difficult yet refining experiences, however, I've uncovered an important truth: life is more like a garden to tend than a game to win. The more time I've spent working through this truth, the more I see how it's simultaneously simple and deeply complex.

So, let's go back to my first garden for a minute. At first, I looked at my gardening adventure as a game: I plant the seeds; I water them; they grow; I harvest and eat the vegetables—I win! After harvesting only four kale leaves that first fall, I wasn't sure I wanted to try again. But something within me—call it ambition—knew I couldn't quit on that note. It wasn't a game; it was a project that needed patience and attention.

Though planting a garden is a great endeavor, its failure obviously doesn't compare to seeing more significant dreams wither away. So, how do we move forward when we're stuck with failures and disappointments that perhaps we had no control over? We pause, fix our focus on what we're aiming for, remember why we're aiming for it, and either change directions if necessary or dig deep and find the courage to keep going—perhaps with a few adjustments in our approach the next time around.

As you'll soon learn, I know from experience just how frustrating it is to hit brick wall after brick wall, no matter what you do. I know how much it hurts to feel like your best efforts still land you in last place. I understand how hard it is to wait. And I know firsthand the sheer rage that bubbles up when something comes along and messes up all your hard work, perfectly laid plans, and should-be happily-ever-afters, making your life feel more like a story of happily-ever-almosts.

That's a thing.

I have also seen the growth that sprouts in the ruins. That kind of growth is often not fast, flashy, or fun. In fact, it's usually slow and almost always in secret, hidden from the world. It's the kind with roots that go deep—the kind that transforms ambitious women like you and me.

So, while I don't have all the answers about what to do when your hopes *almost* work out but don't or when your dreams are met with heart-wrenching disappointment, I do have a challenge for you. When you're faced with an almost-but-not-quite moment, dare to ask yourself these three questions:

1. **What do I truly want?** In other words, what does success truly look like for you? What do you value in a world that says you should want it all?
2. **Why do I want it?** In other words, why are you pursuing it? This is what I consider the single most important question because it will ground you and help you stay focused on what matters most so that you can pursue the right goals for *you*. This is so much better than striving to do something just because you saw someone else do it or because you feel like you have something to prove.
3. **How am I going to steward it?** In other words, how will you cultivate the life right in front of you—even if a certain milestone, goal, or outcome seems out of reach?

These three questions are essential in the face of disappointment because those almost-but-not-quite moments are often the only time we slow down and reevaluate. Of course, you can put your head down, power through, and try to pretend the letdown isn't happening to you. Or you can bravely choose to step into the invitation to gain perspective and find that you are indeed capable of creating a life you like, even in the tension of the in-between. Know why? Because as I said before, life is more like a garden to tend than a game to win. And you can grow only where you are planted, not where you think you should be.