AN *honest* GUIDE TO GETTING *unstuck*

How To Recognize the Patterns Keeping You From the Freedom God Promised

OK, I have to ask you something.

When's the last time you thought, *Wait … I've been here before*?

Not in a fun, nostalgic way. In that way where something happens, a past cycle restarts, and your stomach kind of drops because you recognize it. The feeling. The reaction. The version of yourself that shows up in that moment. And you think, *I really thought I was past this.*

Maybe you didn't do anything obviously wrong. Maybe nobody else would even notice. But you noticed. Because you know yourself. And you know this feeling. And you are so tired of this feeling.

I just want to sit across from you with my coffee — mine's an oat milk latte, just so you know — and say: same. I have been exactly there. More times than I would like to admit to you on the first page of a biblical resource like this one.

And I also want to say before we go any further: You are not broken beyond repair. You are not behind. You are not the woman who just can't get it together. You are a woman caught in a cycle. Living in *condemnation* for our sin and falling into a *cycle* are very different things.

Romans 8:1-2 tells us, *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ …"* But Scripture also acknowledges *"we all stumble in many ways"* (James 3:2) — and when we do, God gently, persistently, lovingly interrupts to get us back in step with Him.

So let's talk about it. For real. No fluff. No easy answers. Just the honest truth about what's actually happening and the even more honest truth that there is a way out.



With you in this,

Cailah Garcia

It's Not Random. It's a Pattern. And There's a Difference.

Here's the thing about cycles: They feel like just life. They feel normal because they're familiar. They feel inevitable because we've lived them enough times that they've started to feel like just who we are.

But they're not who we are. They're what we've been doing. And there is a big difference.

Throughout all of Scripture, God's people kept falling into the same struggle. In Exodus 16:28, God asked, *"How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws?"* And the answer was … a long time.

This is what spiritual drift actually looks like in real life. It doesn't happen dramatically. Rarely does someone wake up one day and suddenly decide to walk away from God. It happens in the small moments. The quiet compromises. The places where we chose comfort over obedience, control over surrender, what felt safe in the moment over what God was actually asking us to do. How easy it is to *"conform to the pattern of this world"* (Romans 12:2, NIV).

And then one day we look up and think, *How did I get here?*

Here's the shape of it, and I want us to really sit with this:

Something surfaces. A situation, a conversation, a quiet moment alone where God's Truth just shows up and looks you right in the eye. You can't quite ignore it, even though you really want to.

You feel it. That nudge. That little check in your spirit. That "something isn't right here" feeling that starts in your chest. You immediately start looking for a reasonable explanation for why it's probably not that serious.

You make a choice. You either lean into what God is showing you or you find a very reasonable-sounding excuse not to. You choose comfort. You choose control. You choose what feels safest in the moment and promise yourself you'll deal with the rest later.

You live with what comes next. The result follows. And if you've disobeyed God, it quietly reinforces the very problem you were trying to move away from.

Then before you've even caught your breath, you're right back at the beginning again.

Girl, that's a cycle. And the reason it keeps repeating isn't because you're not trying. It's because trying was never the actual solution.

So What's Actually Keeping You Stuck?

This is the part where I want to get specific because I think we've spent enough time in the land of vague spiritual concepts without ever actually seeing our own faces in them. So let's just name some of the real problems. See which one makes you set your coffee down.

THE AMBITION THAT'S QUIETLY GOTTEN AHEAD OF GOD.

You're a woman who wants to do something with her life. Something meaningful. Something that matters. And honestly? Good. That's not the problem.

The problem is that somewhere between the vision and the execution, you stopped checking in with God about whether He was actually leading or whether you just assumed He'd be fine with whatever you decided. The drive is real. The goals are real. But when you get honest and quiet enough to actually look at it, some of your ambition is less about bringing God glory and more about proving something. To yourself. To the people watching. To the voice that has been telling you for years that you need to do more, be more, accomplish more.

The prophet Jeremiah warned against this kind of internal drive for more, "... *do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not ...*" (Jeremiah 45:5).

The exhausting thing about ambition rooted in pride is that it never actually satisfies. You hit the goal. You need the next one. You get the thing. It feels emptier than you thought.

Can I ask you something? If you got everything you're working toward right now, would it point back to your striving or to His provision?

Sit with that one.

THE THING THAT STILL FEELS UNFAIR.

Something happened that wasn't right. Maybe someone let you down in a way that really cost you. Maybe a situation unfolded in a way it just shouldn't have. Maybe you were on the receiving end of genuine injustice — and you have prayed about it and journaled about it and talked about it with your best friend probably one too many times.

And it is still there.

You're not bitter exactly. You're just holding it. Turning it over occasionally. Bringing it back out when things get quiet, looking at it again like this time it'll make more sense.

What you maybe haven't let yourself acknowledge is how much this is shaping the way you move through the world. The way you trust. The way you engage. There's a low-grade guardedness you carry into anything that reminds you even a little bit of that past situation. You hear God's assurances of justice — *"the LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty … The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble"* (Nahum 1:3-7) — but you can't really feel assured with your fists clenched.

Here's the hard truth, friend: Holding on to what feels unfair feels like self-protection, but most of the time it's actually a prison, and you're the one with the key.

THE FALSE SECURITY YOU KEEP COMING BACK TO.

It probably doesn't look dramatic from the outside. It might look like staying really busy so you don't have to feel what you'd feel if you slowed down. Or you grip your circumstances so tightly that nothing can catch you off guard. Or you manage your image carefully enough that nobody ever sees the parts of you that feel uncertain or shaky, like you're barely holding them together with both hands.

You have a go-to source of security. And it's not God.

The sneaky thing about false security is that it's comfortable enough for us to go a really long time without noticing it's there. Until something shifts. Until the thing you were leaning on moves. God through the prophet identified this misplaced trust as pride of the heart, saying: "*The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, in your lofty dwelling, who say in your heart, 'Who will bring me down to the ground?*" (Obadiah 1:3).

What a gift it is from God when you finally realize *He's* the One who holds you.

THE DELAY YOU DIDN'T ASK FOR.

The waiting came. You didn't choose it. And somewhere between the faith-filled prayers at the beginning and right now, something shifted. You stopped waiting with open hands and started managing with clenched fists. Making decisions from impatience instead of trust. Doing the very thing God asked you to wait on because waiting felt like too much, and doing something, anything, felt better than being helpless.

Now you're not even sure how to find your way back to who you were with God before the delay.

Here's what I want to say gently: The waiting was never meant to make you more self-sufficient. It was meant to make you more dependent on Him. It's not about your own ability to figure it out. It's about trusting that God *"will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay … the righteous shall live by his faith"* (Habakkuk 2:3-4).

THE BROKEN PROMISE THAT CHANGED YOU.

Someone didn't come through. And you adapted because that's what you do. You moved on — mostly. But broken promises don't just hurt in the moment. They quietly rewire your operating system. The way you hope. The way you trust. The way you decide how wide to open your heart when something new comes along.

You're not necessarily closed off. You're just careful now. And you've made peace with calling it "wisdom," but in reality it may be hurt that never fully got to heal. It feels risky even to trust God's promises, though that's exactly what He's calling you to do: *"According to the covenant that I made with you … My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not"* (Haggai 2:5).

THE UNEXPECTED DISRUPTION YOU'VE BEEN MANAGING INSTEAD OF SURRENDERING.

Something came out of nowhere and blew your whole plan up. And you did what capable, faithful, pull-it-together women do: You survived. You kept showing up.

But surviving and surrendering are two completely different things. And if you're honest, you've done a lot more of the first than the second. You've been managing this thing, staying one step ahead of it, keeping it contained, making sure it doesn't unravel, when God is actually asking for your open hands.

The unexpected was never just meant to be survived. It is meant to be the thing that finally makes us stop trusting our own grip and start trusting His. God has *good* surprises in store — like He promised His people in Malachi 4:2, *"For you who fear [God's] name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall."*

Here's Why It Keeps Happening.

OK, I need to tell you something — with all the love in the world — that I really needed someone to say it to me a long time ago:

Maybe we haven't been responding to conviction. We've been managing it.

God's conviction often comes as a nudge. A tension. A recurring sense that something needs to change or come to light (Ephesians 5:11-14; John 3:19-21). Instead of letting it do what it's actually designed to do, we get incredibly creative about taking the edge off.

We explain it away: *It's really not that big a deal. I'm probably overthinking it. Other people deal with way worse than this.*

We spiritualize the avoidance: *I'm just waiting on God's timing.* Waiting is sometimes completely Spirit-led and exactly right. Other times, if we're being fully honest, it's the most spiritual-sounding way to avoid what God has been clearly asking us to do for the last eight months.

We white-knuckle it: *I just need to be more disciplined. Try harder. Do better. Get it together.* And then we exhaust ourselves trying to fix in our own strength the very thing that was always meant to be surrendered to God's strength.

We go quiet. We hope it stops coming up. We move on and tell ourselves we've dealt with it when really we've just gotten better at not looking at it directly.

Here's what happens over time: What used to feel like a clear signal starts feeling like background noise. We get so practiced at managing our conviction that we stop even noticing it's there. The nudge seems quieter. Not because God stopped speaking but because we've gotten so good at not hearing Him. As Malachi 2:2 says, we *"do not lay it to heart."* And the cycle just keeps going.

But here's what conviction actually is. And this is the part I really need you to hear:

Conviction is not God standing over you in ultimate disappointment. It is not shame wearing a spiritual outfit. It is not a sign that you're too far gone or too much work or that He's tired of waiting on you.

And it is not the same thing as shame. Not even close.

Shame says: *You are the problem. You will always end up back here. Nothing is ever going to change.* Shame pushes you down and keeps you there.

Conviction does the opposite. *"For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret"* (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Conviction is God leaning in, right into the middle of your actual life and your actual mess and your actual pattern, and saying: *I see something in you that's ready to be free. I've been gentle about this for a while now. Can we work on this together?*

That nudge you keep feeling? That recurring tension you've been trying to manage and minimize and explain away? That is not condemnation (Romans 5:16-17).

That is Him still showing up.

God is still speaking into the exact cycle you're stuck in. Still pursuing you in the exact place you keep ending up. Still refusing, with more patience and more love than any of us deserve, to let you drift further than you already have. *"Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts"* (Malachi 3:7b). *"'Yet even now,' declares the Lord, 'return to me with all your heart …'"* (Joel 2:12).

Conviction is the hand of God reaching out to tell you He hasn't given up.

And here's the thing about an invitation. You get to decide what to do with it.

You can explain it away. You can delay it. You can white-knuckle your way through one more time. Or, you can take a risk, respond to God's invitation and turn to Him.

Not perfectly. Not with a full plan. Not once you've figured everything out and finally feel ready.

Just respond. Right now. In this moment. With whatever you've got.

Because the cycle doesn't just break in the big, dramatic moments. It breaks in the small ones. The moments when you pause instead of react. The moments when you name the thing instead of manage it. The moments when you open your hands instead of tighten your grip.

That moment can be right now.

What To Actually Do With This.

OK, so here's where I want to get really practical with you. Because I think sometimes we get so good at understanding our patterns conceptually that we never actually do anything different. And I don't want that for you.

So here's what I want you to try.

Not a full overhaul. Not a brand-new routine. Not a complete spiritual reset that lasts four days before real life shows back up. Just this: Next time you feel that tension, that nudge, that "here we are again" feeling in your chest, stop long enough to ask yourself four questions.

Actually stop. Put the phone down. Step away from whatever you're in the middle of. Get quiet enough to hear yourself think. And then ask:

1. WHAT IS THIS MOMENT ACTUALLY CONFRONTING IN ME?

Not the surface thing. The real thing underneath it. Is it pride? Fear? A wound that never fully healed? An area of your heart you've been keeping God at arm's length from? Name it. Out loud if you have to. Without dressing it up or making it sound more spiritual than it actually is.

Just name it. Because you cannot interrupt a pattern you've never actually named.

2. WHAT IS GOD ACTUALLY TRYING TO SAY TO ME RIGHT NOW?

Not the shame-spiral version. Not the voice that says, *See, this is why you can never get it together.* What is God actually saying? Remember who He is: *"gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love"* (Joel 2:13). He might be saying something like, *Hey. I love you. I have been trying to reach you about this for a while. And I am not going anywhere.*

3. WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE TO RESPOND HERE INSTEAD OF JUST REACT?

Reacting is automatic. It's whatever you've always done in this situation, the version of you that shows up before you've even had a chance to think. Responding is a choice. It's God's prompting in Haggai 1:5: *"Consider your ways."* It requires a pause, just a small one, where you stop and breathe and actually ask God what He wants from you in this moment. That pause is where everything changes. You meet Him at the crossroads of Zephaniah 3:7: *"Surely you will fear me; you will accept correction."* That is where the cycle actually gets interrupted.

4. WHERE DOES THIS ROAD GO IF I STAY ON IT?

Follow the path. Not to spiral, not to shame yourself into changing, but to see clearly that the road you're on right now is going somewhere. And it's worth knowing whether that's actually where you want to end up.

You don't need all the answers before you take a different step. You just need to take one different step.

That's it. Just one. That's how you live out Micah 6:8: *"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"*

You Don't Have To Keep Carrying This.

You don't have to keep repeating what you're ready to be free from.

Not the ambition that's gotten ahead of God. Not the thing that still feels unfair. Not the false security you keep returning to when things feel uncertain. Not the exhaustion of managing the delay, carrying the broken promise, holding together the unexpected entirely on your own.

And I really need you to hear this next part:

God is not surprised by where you are right now. He is not tired of this conversation. He has not quietly moved on or decided you're too much work or checked out while you were busy trying to figure it all out on your own. The fact that this keeps surfacing, that you are still feeling God's nudge, still finding yourself in some version of this same place and sensing that something needs to change, is not evidence that you are doomed to failure.

God lovingly calls His people back.

That's why He sent prophets to His people throughout the Bible. Men like Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Hosea, Zechariah, and more showed up with hard truths and uncomfortable messages that were also persistent, relentless, won't-quit calls to come home. They weren't just trying to make God's people feel terrible about themselves. They were trying to wake them up. Because God loves His people too much to watch them drift and say nothing.

He loves you too much to watch you drift and say nothing.

Don't Let Go is a guided journey through those exact stories in Scripture — a journey through the books of the Minor Prophets in the Old Testament. Real people in the past were caught in the same cycles you're sitting with right now, wondering if anything was ever actually going to change.

And every single time, God showed up.

Not to shame them. Not to write them off. Not to ultimately condemn them for everything they'd gotten wrong.

To call them home.

God is not done with you either. He is not distant from you. He is right here, in the nudge, in the tension, in the quiet awareness that something needs to be different, saying:

Don't let go. I've got you. Let's do this together.

THE CYCLE STOPS HERE. YOUR NEXT STEP STARTS NOW.

You don't have to stay stuck in the cycles of sin that've held you captive. You don't have to keep repeating what you're ready to be free from.

This could be the moment everything actually starts to shift.

Join us for our next First 5 study, *Don't Let Go: The Prophets' Hard Truths, the People's Hard Choices, and the God Who Restores Us.*

Order your study guide today!