

WHAT THEY TAUGHT ME

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CHAPMAN**



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To my mom—

Thank you for being the best role model I could ask for.
And at the same time,
thank you for allowing space for other women to step in
so I could double up on wisdom.
That is the real lesson here.

To my mentors—

Thank you for so generously investing in me,
for passing along the wisdom you gained the long and hard way,
and for allowing me to shortcut the distance to a full and free life
because of your willingness to open up yourselves to me.

And to my Young Life girls—

Thank you for entrusting the most sacred places of your lives to me.
I'm forever changed because of each of you.
Thank you for showing me how to love sacrificially.

To My Parents

Before I go on to honor the women who have taught me as mentors in the chapters to come, I want to begin by honoring my parents. Without their limitless belief in me, I would not be who I am today.

Mom and Dad, thank you for believing in me and continuously reminding me that it's not *the sky's the limit*; it's more like *there are no limits*. Thank you for teaching me to believe I can do anything.

Dad, you championed me as a daughter could only hope her daddy would. You taught me how to work hard and have fun along the way. Our 4,672 nights watching *101 Dalmatians* were probably not the most fun for you, especially before smartphones were invented, but your constant presence and love in my life have never gone unnoticed.

Mom, my greatest gift is that you are my mother. Because of you, I am who I am today. You taught me how to achieve my dreams, showing me what it means to be a strong, powerful woman with no dream too big. You showed me how to be a woman with a drive and passion that can be funneled into a career she loves. Thank you for showing me that I am capable. By seeing you rise to the top in your career, even amid major setbacks, you've shown me I can too.

At the same time, thank you for never presuming to have it all figured out. Thank you for creating space for other women to step in as guides for me. Thank you for never instilling in me the belief that moms are the only women who can invest in the next generation. When I step into motherhood myself in the years to come, you will have already helped take the pressure off; I'll know other women will come alongside my daughter and help instill wisdom in her at just the right time. And I hope to parent her with the openhandedness with which you have parented me.

Thank you for never competing with my mentors because you understood what parenting with open arms looks like. You understood that other women speaking into my life didn't detract from your success as a mother but created an environment for me to learn, grow, and thrive. And while there have been seasons where we both felt that you weren't getting it right and these other women were playing a larger role than you, we were wrong; no one has played a larger role in my life than you. You were and are just the mother I needed.

Lastly, thank you for teaching me that there is always room for healing. You and I have been on a quest toward healing for the better part of our lives. We weren't dealt the easiest cards, and it's taken an incredible amount of work to get here, but you've shown me that healing is possible.

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INTRODUCTION

You know the phrase *It takes a village*? Well, it took a village to raise me into the woman I am today. I'm fortunate to have had more than one woman notice me, come alongside me, and say, "You don't have to do this alone."

Those moments when we're scared about what's next? Those moments when we don't know which path to take? I wasn't alone in those moments. When each season of life invited me into new discoveries, new concerns, new relationships, and new understandings of who I was, I had a guide with me every step of the way.

This book is a love letter to the women who guided me. And it's a love letter to you as you do your own discovering and understanding in whatever season you find yourself.

Through this love letter, I hope not only to teach and encourage you but inspire and shed light on the potential that lies within you and women around you. I wish I could teach you all the things—but there are not enough pages in this book. Yet I hope you'll see

my passion for mentorship and that at the very core of my being is the belief that women are unstoppable when we support one another.

I hope you'll learn that it's okay to ask for help. Going at it alone is not a badge of honor—it's really a badge of stubbornness. It might feel good in the moment to be on your own, but life in isolation is not sustainable. We were made to be in relationship. We need one another. So find your village. Find your mentors. Wherever you are on your journey, seek women who are ahead of you on the road and are willing to give you directions. And be willing to ask for them!

Once you have your road map, don't keep it to yourself. Share generously. Look in the rearview mirror and find women a few steps behind you—women who could benefit from the wisdom you've learned or earned. No matter how far you are on the journey, you have something to offer others.

It's never too late or too soon to start pouring into those around you. Because of the women in this book who patiently loved and championed me along the way, I began mentoring younger women when I was just 19 years old. As you can imagine, I still had a lot to learn

myself at that point. But you'll be amazed to see what can happen when your heart is willing and when you trust that the kinks will work themselves out along the way.

Before we dive in, you need to know my story starts out a little rocky. My family, like most, has been no stranger to pain; we've experienced divorce, heartache, and loss, and maybe these types of pain have knocked at *your* door too. As a family of three, we did our

Mentors are ready to invest in you. And you're capable of being a mentor to someone else.

best to navigate all this, and my parents made the most of the skills they had in their tool belts. But a village of women stepped up and stepped in, teaching me how to grow through the pain. From them, I learned lessons I might not have picked up otherwise. I learned to face pain head-on. I learned to walk forward in freedom. I learned to invest time in people. And because mentors invested so generously in my life, I learned the gift of investing in others.

My story contains one instance after another of God bringing just the right people to guide me through each season of life. No one woman featured in this book had it all together—just as you and I don't—but each woman was willing to share what she could. I had no expectation that any of them would provide the answers to all my problems or questions. I simply recognized one thing I admired about each of them and asked them to share it with me.

If you're not sure you have time to mentor in an already busy schedule, if you don't feel equipped to mentor, or if you're not sure why mentorship even matters, then keep reading because I'm here to show you how mentorship can take shape in your life. Think of me as your mentorship mentor!

And here's a challenge as you get started: Don't read this book alone! At the end of each chapter, you'll see a list of questions for discussion and reflection, followed by a tangible action step you can take with you into your week. Yes, you can work through these questions on your own, taking time to reflect on them in a separate journal. But your time will be so much richer if it's shared. Enlist a friend or a small group to read this book alongside you, using these questions as prompts to guide your discussion, perhaps once a week. The impact is always bigger when we grow alongside and learn from each other, and sharing this book with a friend or a group is a great way to get the most out of the experience.

As you look forward to investing in other women, you might

God does tremendous work with a willing heart, and He works out the kinks along the way.

find there are days when you feel discouraged, ready to give up, or as though everyone else is farther down the path toward mentorship than you are. Do not be discouraged! We all wonder if we're unqualified or incapable sometimes. But our shortcomings don't define us, and they don't dictate our future. The fact that God has put this desire in your heart is enough for you to claim the truth that now is the time to start! You are on your way. This journey is one that will lead you toward more beauty, more growth, and more of God's heart. You're at the exact right place to start. Let's get going!

MENTORS LEAN IN... EVEN WHEN IT HURTS

Lynell

Of all the women who could have stepped in and played a role in my formation as an adult, Lynell was perhaps the most unlikely. She was never meant to love me. But God knew what He was up to when He wove our stories together.

Lynell is the mother of my oldest and dearest friends, Liala and Emily, and even when I walk up to her glass-paneled front door today, I'm home. After three decades, her house is the one fixture from my childhood that hasn't changed.

Her oldest daughter, Liala, and I met in preschool. We became fast friends and lived two streets apart. We spent summers outside playing with Polly Pockets, pulling each other's hair, and fighting like sisters. We tagged along with each other's families on holidays and vacations, and I was often referred to as her parents' third daughter. Because I was an only child, membership with this duo of sisters and their family felt like all my Olsen twin movie dreams come true.

However ideal this arrangement was for us kids, though, our parents couldn't have felt the same. After a decade of being as close as sisters, as Liala and I were proclaiming our forever friendship, my dad thought it would be funny to casually let us in on the family secret: He and Lynell, Liala's mother, had dated in college.

This bit of information could have been awkward or embarrassing—we were teenagers, after all—but we thought it was the coolest thing ever. This news only strengthened the narrative that we were totally destined to be BFFs. Somehow those two things just had to be correlated, and we had the most unique story of friendship to ever grace God's green earth! The stars had aligned, and here we were, best friends who not only felt like sisters but actually could have been sisters.

I know, this was a little dramatic, but you remember what it was like to be 13—*everything* is a big deal. From our icy roll-on eye-shadow to the latest screen name update on AIM (beachblondie126 for the win) to the new cute boy roaming the halls at school, making a big deal of things was what we did.

Little did we know that Lynell was about to throw us another curveball.

When we brought up her dating history later in the day, at first she looked shocked; it seems there had been some unspoken agreement between our parents to leave the past in the past. Yet my dad had just opened Pandora's box. As Lynell recovered from the surprise, though, she said, "Well, if he opened *that* can of worms, I'll tell you right here that we were engaged."

Engaged! Talk about the unexpected. In our teenage minds, this made our story even cooler. Liala and I loved nothing more than to tell people her mom and my dad were once engaged, as if it solidified our bond.

But it can't have been easy for Lynell to hear that story told

over and over. And at 13, we didn't consider that our favorite story had come at a cost. That engagement ended with heartbreak, and Lynell had to sit with the pain before the healing came (which it did—she married an amazing man). Then ten years after the fact, a little blond-haired girl, the daughter of her former fiancé, walked into her life in the form of her own daughter's new best friend. I must have been a constant reminder of her painful past.

As with many childhood friendships, there were sleepovers, drop-offs, and phone calls between parents. Our parents couldn't just ignore one another, especially since our families lived in the same neighborhood. They could have chosen to shut down our friendship, but instead, they chose to face the inconvenience of it, putting aside their pride to let something beautiful blossom between their daughters. This paved the way for Liala's family to become a second family to me, a family that loved me unselfishly despite their past hardships.

One thing I know for sure is that she never expected her path to continue crossing with my dad's world on a regular basis. But because these two little girls were now attached at the hip, she chose to make peace with a not-so-glamorous past. Lynell welcomed me into her family, displaying deep emotional maturity. How would you feel welcoming the daughter of your ex-fiancé into your family and being reminded of your heartbreak on a daily basis? I can imagine that my first inclination would probably not be to treat my ex-fiancé's daughter like my own. Thank goodness for Lynell. She cast off any lingering bitterness in order to model radical action; she loved me despite the fact that I was a constant reminder of her pain. By doing this, by backing up her words with action, and by not allowing bitterness and pain to overtake her, Lynell taught me how to love unconditionally.

It's easy to hold on to feelings of bitterness. It's easy to scorn

people who have hurt us and left us with no resolution. I know I certainly wouldn't want to find myself at a playdate with a past love whom I now call Voldemort (jokingly, kind of). But Lynell showed me it's hard to hate people up close, and that it's really tough on everyone to hold on to bad feelings. As the pain begins to dull, then, we're able to see people's humanity in the little day-to-day moments, like weekend drop-offs for sleepovers.

It's hard to hate people up close.

While it wouldn't have been appropriate to hold the hurts from her relationship with my dad over my head, Lynell didn't have to foster the friendship blossoming between me and Liala. And she *certainly* didn't have to nurture and love me as if I were her own. But Lynell embodied grace. She loved me from the get-go without treating me any differently from the way she would treat any other classmate Liala may have brought into her family's lives. Lynell has consistently shown me, even into adulthood, what it looks like to love when it hurts.

Loving Through the Pain

Not only did Lynell model this grace in the form of loving me to begin with, but she did so even when I was the one causing her pain. A few years back, we talked about a time when, as a teenager, I deeply hurt Liala. My regret about that had lingered with me for years, and I'd had the chance to bring it up and apologize to Liala a few months prior. But I hadn't yet discussed it with Lynell.

The moment for which I was apologizing happened during my "baby Christian" years, perhaps better called my "Bible thumping" years. Leaning into my newfound faith was everything my soul needed. My expression of that faith, though, wasn't what the world

needed. I was overzealous, lacking in kindness and compassion. I projected my newfound life principles onto anyone within breathing distance, and judgment was the name of the game. I hadn't yet grasped the kindness of God, and my zeal left broken relationships in my wake. I was clueless as to how to walk out my beliefs in a tactful and noncritical way.

Friendship fumbles marked that season of my life. And on one particular day, I left a long note on Liala's car explaining that we couldn't live together during college because we weren't on the same page. To that note I attached "God's Love Letter"—a cheesy Christian pamphlet. Essentially, I left a friendship breakup letter paired with a Scripture handout on my friend's car.

And Lynell forgave me. I'd hurt her daughter, and she kept loving me. In those years—and particularly on that day—I wasn't just a reminder of her painful past, but a person causing her fresh pain.

So much time has unfolded since then, and Lynell has become more and more of a friend. Even now I can almost feel the two chairs we always sit in to talk or the breeze on my face as we sit on her porch. As much as her home was a fixture in my childhood, it is now a fixture in my adulthood.

On the particular day we sat to discuss this painful season, we sat in these exact two chairs. As usual, the floor was open to discuss anything and everything. I knew it was finally time to apologize to Lynell for how I treated Liala. I knew I had acted a lot more like a Pharisee than a loving follower of Jesus.

"Oh, yes, I was mad at you," she said.

"But you still loved me like your own!"

She smiled at me. "Kelsey, you could have gone totally off the deep end, embracing the party-hard lifestyle of your peers. Instead, you became deeply committed to your faith. While your zeal for

your beliefs caused my family pain, I also knew it was saving you. It was what you needed to live a healthy life.”

I still regret how I handled my faith in my teen years. I regret how this family, every member so special to me, received the brunt of my judgment. I regret how I misrepresented God as being condemning and without grace instead of grace-filled. But I will never forget how, through that time, Lynell offered *me* unmerited grace.

Another beautiful part of our story is that my grandmother was a mentor to Lynell. Just as Lynell took me under her wing, my grandmother took Lynell under hers. It’s not a coincidence that my grandmother played a huge role in Lynell’s life and Lynell in mine. It’s beautiful to see this legacy of relational investment between our families, first by my grandmother and then by Lynell. In a way, it feels like destiny.

Lynell loved me when I was difficult to love. When I was judgmental, she welcomed me into her home. When I was scared, she left the door unlocked for me to come inside at all hours of the night. When I was sad, she offered me cookie dough and an armchair to watch Jimmy Fallon reruns. When I was figuring out my faith, she offered me grace to explore different beliefs, knowing that would be what ignited my soul. She loved me when my actions hurt her. And when I was first given the role of *mentor* in a formal capacity, I looked back to her example.

Stepping Up

When I was just 19, I inherited a batch of wild 14-year-olds through Young Life, a parachurch ministry to high schoolers who

wouldn't typically be interested in attending a local church youth group. Young Life played a significant, stabilizing role for me during my tremendously rocky high school years. Upon entering college, I was eager to go through their leadership training so I could give back to young women in the same way older women had invested in me.

I was a few months into the training when one of the leaders at my alma mater quit. It was a bit premature for me to tackle a mentorship role, but this felt like one of those divine moments when I knew it was my time to step up to the plate. I had a sense that these specific girls were *my* girls and that my role as their leader would give me the opportunity to extend love and care to young women in the same way Lynell had extended love and care to me, even when it was difficult. I also knew I was in for a wild ride—and, boy, did I have a lot to learn!

But I was sold on this little girl gang from the get-go. I remember driving in my car, beaming from ear to ear, filled with hope and excitement for what could play out in the years to come. Of course, I didn't even think to imagine the hard seasons we would navigate. And it wasn't too long before I had my own taste of learning to love when it hurts.

The beauty of my role in these girls' lives was that I hovered somewhere between the roles of sister, friend, and second mom. I received the transparency a friend would receive, the directness a sister might encounter, and the harsh words a mother often absorbs. And very early on, I received all three. One of my girls plunked down in front of me and dove into a diatribe about why one of my family members was going to hell. I believe the lead-in to the conversation was, "How do you feel about [so-and-so] going to hell?"

My facial expressions and body language probably reflected my

shock at her lack of tact. But the shock was quickly drowned in a wave of compassion. This was the only lens through which this girl knew to view the world. And it wasn't too long before this conversation that I had been the one delivering harsh blows of judgment across the table toward someone I loved.

I saw myself in her shoes, figuring out her beliefs, wrestling with the big questions of faith, and riding the tension between judgment and the kindness of God. I saw myself in her, and I knew I had an opportunity. My job wasn't to teach her exactly what to believe but to guide her as she navigated her own process—and to hopefully show her that painful questions should be asked with gentleness and compassion.

Moment after moment like this reminded me of Lynell's grace as she loved me through my own not-so-grace-filled moments. She acted as a guide as I arrived at my own values and beliefs, only rarely stepping in and exerting her opinion if needed to preserve my well-being. The beauty of an effective mentor is that they're there for the good, the bad, and the ugly moments—not only for the easy.

Leaning In

The roles of mentor and mentee both come with their fair share of heartache. All relationships can have tough times, and mentoring relationships can have particularly high peaks and particularly low valleys. It's easy to lean in when togetherness is fun—summer nights with my ragtag group of girls are some of my favorite mentoring memories. But the hard moments—the ones that come down to loving, listening, and walking alongside one another even when it's hard to lean in and love, *especially* when it's hard to love—are the moments that build trust and connection that last a lifetime. Who wants a mentor who bails when things get tough?

Certainly, leaving would be the easier choice in some situations. Having lived through hard chapters in both the roles of mentor and mentee, I understand the temptation to give up and run for the hills. But if we truly want to propel each other forward through our mentor and mentee relationships, we have to be willing to stick with it even when it hurts. Weathering hard seasons brings a depth, a richness, and an unmatched value to the relationship. Time and time again I've learned the reward for leaning in during the difficult seasons.

Let's commit to leaning in when it hurts, to loving our people with longevity.

So my challenge to you and to me is this: Let's commit to leaning in when it hurts, to loving our people with longevity. Ask yourself if you're willing to show up time and time again, both in the good times and in the hard times, to show what unconditional love looks like.

If I've learned anything from my relationship with Lynell, it's that true mentors lean in when it hurts. She could have taken five enormous steps back when I showed up, but instead, she stepped toward me with arms opened wide, embracing me and everything I brought to the table. She became a shoulder to cry on, an ear to listen, and the person who still makes my day all these years later when she yells up to Liala and Emily, "Girls, your sister is here! Come downstairs!"

— Questions for Reflection and Discussion —

1. True mentors don't run away from pain; they lean in. What does "leaning in" look like to you? What thoughts, feelings, or emotions surface when you

read this phrase? Can you think of someone who has loved you at your worst? How does that experience encourage you to stick with it when a mentoring relationship grows painful?

2. Mentorship can be uncomfortable. What are some places of discomfort or potential pain points in your own life as a mentor? Can you turn some of them into a mentoring conversation, redeeming them? If so, how?
3. Evaluate your progress when it comes to leaning in through hard times. Are you doing well in this area? In what ways can you improve? With whom have you avoided the tough questions and conversations?
4. Celebrate your people. Make a list of three women whose lives shaped yours in a positive way. Jot down three one-word attributes of each one of these mentors. How were those attributes lived out in their lives? How can you cultivate these attributes in your own life?



Action Step: This week, schedule coffee with someone you know who's going through a hard time. Lean in and really listen. Embrace what they're bringing to the table, even if it's painful. Be present and offer permission for them to be vulnerable by being vulnerable yourself about your own experience.