ALWAYS & NEVER

When Words Turn Moments Into Truths

Includes a Guided Companion Workbook

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Published by Mind Magic LLC

ISBN: _____

A Note to the Reader

This book is not about banning words like always and never.

It is about noticing when a word turns one moment, one mistake, one fear, or one person into a permanent truth.

Listen for the absolute. Then question it.

You do not have to replace every difficult thought with a positive one. You only have to make room for what is accurate, what you know now, and what may still be possible.

The Daily Permission remains part of each chapter. Let it close the reading, then use the guided pages to explore what the chapter means in your own life.

Write what is true, not what sounds good. Skip a question when you need more time or information. Return when you are ready. There are no perfect answers here.

Each chapter is followed by two workbook pages. The first helps you slow down and look more closely. The second helps you turn what you noticed into one practical next step.

How to Use the Guided Pages

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Chapter One

When a Moment Becomes an Always

Somewhere along the way, we learned to speak in absolutes.

I always mess things up.
They never listen.
Nothing ever works out for me.
Everyone leaves.
I'll never be able to do that.

We say these things so easily that we rarely stop to ask whether they are actually true.

Usually, something *is* true.

Someone didn't listen.

Something didn't work.

We made a mistake.

Someone left.

We tried something and failed.

Those things happened. The feeling attached to them is real. But somewhere between what happened and how we describe it, one moment can become *every moment*.

One disappointment becomes *always*.

One hurt becomes *never again*.

One person's behavior becomes *everyone*.

One failure becomes *I can't.*

That small change in language can make our world much smaller than it really is.

Our Words Teach Us What to Expect

Words don't simply describe what happened. They can influence what we expect to happen next.

Imagine you've asked someone for help several times and they weren't there when you needed them.

Eventually you might think:

They never help me.

Maybe that's accurate. Maybe there really is a pattern that deserves your attention.

But before turning the pattern into a permanent truth, there's another question worth asking:

What actually happened?

Perhaps they helped twice and disappointed you three times.

That doesn't mean you should ignore the disappointments. It means you can look at them accurately.

There's a difference between:

“You never help me.”

and:

“The last few times I needed help, I couldn't count on you.”

The second statement doesn't excuse anyone.

In fact, it may tell the truth more clearly.

It gives us something specific to look at.

When we remove *always* and *never*, sometimes we discover that the problem hasn't disappeared at all. We've simply stopped making it bigger than it is.

And sometimes we discover something else.

The story we've been telling ourselves isn't completely true.

We Do It to Ourselves, Too

We don't save these words for other people.

Sometimes the harshest absolutes are the ones we use on ourselves.

I always make the wrong decision.

Really?

Every decision?

I never finish anything.

Never?

I can't talk to people.

Can't—or is it difficult in certain situations?

Nothing I do is good enough.

Nothing?

These questions matter.

Because if I tell myself, *"I always make the wrong decision,"* why would I trust my next decision?

If I believe, *"I never finish anything,"* why would I feel confident beginning?

If I decide, *"Nobody understands me,"* I may stop trying to explain myself to the person who actually might.

We can repeat a conclusion so many times that eventually we stop examining it.

It becomes part of who we think we are.

A Pattern Is Information

This doesn't mean we should ignore patterns.

Patterns matter.

If someone repeatedly mistreats you, you don't need to pretend each incident exists in isolation.

If you keep making the same choice and getting the same result, pay attention.

If something consistently leaves you exhausted, frightened, angry, or unhappy, there may be something important there.

The goal isn't to make everything positive.

The goal is to make it **accurate**.

That accuracy leaves room for this permission:

You are allowed
to notice patterns
without turning them
into permanent truths.

That's the difference.

A pattern gives us information.

A permanent conclusion tells us there is nothing left to learn.

The Past Likes to Introduce Itself to the Present

We've all walked into a new situation carrying an old one with us.

A previous relationship taught us not to trust.

A friendship ended badly.

Someone laughed at us when we tried something new.

We failed at something important.

We were embarrassed.

We were rejected.

Those experiences become information our minds use when something similar happens again.

Sometimes that's useful.

We learn not to touch the hot stove twice.

But people and situations are more complicated than hot stoves.

The person standing in front of you today isn't necessarily the person who hurt you yesterday.

And you aren't exactly the same person you were then either.

One Daily Permission captures this in two sentences:

The past is not
a prediction.
It is information.

Our past matters.

It teaches us what to notice.

But there's a difference between saying:

“This happened before, so I'm going to pay attention.”

and:

“This happened before, so I already know how this will end.”

One leaves room for observation.

The other has already written the ending.

Nature Doesn't Need Forever

Look outside.

A tree doesn't decide after one storm that the sun will never return.

Winter doesn't apologize for not being summer.

A river encounters a fallen branch and changes course around it.

Nature responds to what is happening now.

Nature gives us another way to see it:

Nature doesn’t live that way.
It changes.
It responds.
It adjusts.

Maybe we can learn to do the same.

We don't have to deny yesterday.

We don't have to pretend everything will work out.

We don't even have to stop using the words *always* and *never.*

We can simply learn to notice them.

And when one appears, ask:

Is this true?

Is it true right now—or am I describing the past?

Is this a pattern I should pay attention to, or a conclusion I've stopped questioning?

What changes if I describe what actually happened instead?

That's where this book begins.

Not by telling you what words you're allowed to use.

By helping you notice when a word has quietly turned a moment into a lifetime.

Daily Permission

A single moment
does not define you.
Or anyone else.

Today, notice one *always* or *never*.

You don't have to correct it.

Just get curious.

Is it really true?

Work With This Chapter

Living Like Nature

A storm may bend one branch without defining the whole tree.

Look More Closely

Write one always or never statement you have used recently. What happened? What part is fact? What part became a larger story?

What Do I Know?

Facts I can confirm:

Meaning, prediction, or assumption I may have added:

Put It Into Practice

Try This

Rewrite the sentence using only what you can honestly confirm today.

Carry It Forward

What do I want to remember when this situation appears again?

Chapter Two

When Yesterday Starts Predicting Tomorrow

Sometimes *always* and *never* aren't really about what is happening today.

They're about what happened before.

Something hurt us.

Someone disappointed us.

We trusted someone and regretted it.

We tried and failed.

We were embarrassed, rejected, ignored, or misunderstood.

So when something similar appears again, our minds reach backward for information.

I know how this goes.

This always happens.

People always leave.

Every time I trust someone, I get hurt.

Nothing ever works out.

There's a reason we do this.

The past teaches us.

The problem begins when yesterday stops being information and starts becoming a prediction.

Our Minds Look for Patterns

Imagine walking down a trail and slipping on a wet root.

The next time you come to that spot, you'll probably look down.

That's useful.

You learned something.

But imagine deciding after that fall:

Every trail is dangerous.

Now the lesson has changed.

Instead of helping you navigate the trail, it may keep you from walking at all.

We can do the same thing with life.

One painful relationship can teach us something about relationships.

Several painful relationships may reveal a pattern worth examining.

But somewhere along the way, “I’ve been hurt before” can become:

I will always be hurt.

Those are not the same statement.

A Daily Permission says it simply:

Just because it happened before
does not mean
it will happen again.

It doesn't say it *won't* happen again.

That's important.

We aren't replacing one prediction with another.

We're admitting that we don't know yet.

Expecting the Worst Can Feel Like Protection

There can be a strange comfort in expecting something to go wrong.

If I expect disappointment, maybe it won't hurt as much.

If I assume someone will leave, I won't be surprised.

If I don't get excited, I can't be let down.

If I don't trust anyone, nobody can betray my trust.

It can feel like preparation.

Sometimes it even feels like wisdom.

But there is a difference between being prepared and deciding the outcome before it happens.

When we expect the worst, we may start responding to something that hasn't happened yet.

A delayed text becomes rejection.

A mistake becomes proof.

A disagreement becomes the beginning of the end.

A difficult day becomes:

Here we go again.

That is where this permission helps:

You are allowed
to stop assuming
the worst outcome
is permanent.

Maybe what is happening right now really is difficult.

But *difficult now* and *difficult forever* are two very different things.

New Doesn't Always Mean Dangerous

Our past can also affect how we interpret discomfort.

Something unfamiliar can make us nervous.

A new job.

A new relationship.

Speaking up when we normally stay quiet.

Setting a boundary.

Going somewhere alone.

Trying again after failing.

Changing an old routine.

Our bodies may react before we've decided what we think.

The feeling is real.

But the meaning we give that feeling deserves a second look.

This permission helps us separate discomfort from danger:

Not every discomfort
is danger.
Sometimes it is just new.

That doesn't mean ignoring warning signs.

If something feels wrong, look closer.

Gather information.

Pay attention.

But discomfort itself doesn't tell us the whole story.

Sometimes we're uncomfortable because something is unsafe.

Sometimes we're uncomfortable because we're doing something we haven't done before.

Learning the difference matters.

Old Conclusions Can Outlive Their Usefulness

We make conclusions throughout our lives.

Some are necessary.

I shouldn't trust that person.

I don't want to do that again.

That situation isn't good for me.

I need to be more careful next time.

Those conclusions may have been exactly right when we made them.

But circumstances change.

People change.

We learn.

We change.

And sometimes a conclusion that once protected us keeps running long after the situation that created it is gone.

Maybe you learned as a child that speaking up caused trouble.

That information mattered then.

But decades later, you may still find yourself staying silent even when speaking would help.

Maybe someone ridiculed something you tried.

Years later, you still hear:

I'm not good at that.

Maybe you failed at something when you were twenty and quietly decided:

I can't do it.

But the person you were then didn't have the knowledge, experience, resources, or choices you have today.

The permission here is to update what we know:

You are allowed
to stop carrying
old conclusions
into new moments.

We don't have to throw away what we've learned.

We can update it.

What Happened Is Information

This may be one of the most important ideas in this entire book:

The past is not
a prediction.
It is information.

Information is useful.

It helps us ask better questions.

If someone broke my trust before, I can pay attention to whether their behavior has actually changed.

If I failed at something before, I can ask what went wrong and what I could do differently.

If a situation hurt me, I can recognize similar warning signs.

If I made a poor decision, I can learn what information I was missing when I made it.

That's very different from saying:

I already know what will happen.

The past can help us make better decisions without making those decisions for us.

What Is True Today?

Here's a small question that can interrupt a very old story:

What is true today?

Not ten years ago.

Not in your last relationship.

Not when you were a child.

Not the last time you tried.

Today.

Maybe some things haven't changed.

That's information too.

But maybe something has.

Perhaps you know more.

Perhaps you recognize the warning signs earlier.

Perhaps you have support you didn't have before.

Perhaps the person in front of you is behaving differently.

Perhaps **you** are responding differently.

We don't have to force ourselves to believe everything will be wonderful.

We can simply stop assuming everything must repeat itself.

Nature doesn't discard its history.

A tree carries evidence of drought, injury, fire, and abundant seasons in its rings.

What came before becomes part of what it is.

But the newest ring isn't required to look exactly like the one before it.

Neither are we.

Daily Permission

You are allowed
to take things
as they are
not as they were.

Today, when something feels familiar, notice what your mind predicts.

Then ask:

What happened before?

What is actually happening now?

What information from the past is useful here?

And perhaps most importantly:

What might be different this time?

Work With This Chapter

Living Like Nature

A tree keeps its rings, but each new season still brings new growth.

Look More Closely

What does your past lead you to predict? What useful information does it offer? What may be different this time?

What Do I Know?

Facts I can confirm:

Meaning, prediction, or assumption I may have added:

Put It Into Practice

Try This

Name one way you can prepare without deciding the ending in advance.

Carry It Forward

What do I want to remember when this situation appears again?

Chapter Three

The Absolutes We Use Against Ourselves

Sometimes the person who uses *always* and *never* against us the most is the person we hear all day long.

Ourselves.

I always screw things up.

I never finish anything.

I can't make good decisions.

I always choose the wrong people.

Nothing I do is good enough.

I'll never get this right.

We may say these things jokingly.

We may say them when we're frustrated.

Sometimes we don't say them at all. They're simply thoughts that have been around so long we barely notice them anymore.

But there's something strange about the way we talk to ourselves.

We can take one thing we **did** and turn it into something we **are**.

I Made a Mistake Is Not I Am a Mistake

Suppose you forget an appointment.

You might say:

“I can't remember anything.”

But that's probably not true.

You remembered hundreds of things that day.

You remembered where you lived.

You remembered people's names.

You remembered how to make coffee, drive a car, use your phone, feed the animals, find your shoes, or do whatever else filled your day.

But you forgot the appointment.

And because the forgotten appointment caused a problem, that's the thing your mind noticed.

“I forgot something important” became “I can't remember anything.”

Now imagine another response:

“I forgot that appointment. What would help me remember the next one?”

Same mistake.

Completely different direction.

One becomes a judgment.

The other becomes information.

Be Careful With “I Am”

Always and *never* aren't the only absolutes worth noticing.

There are two tiny words that can quietly turn an experience into an identity:

I am.

I am stupid.

I am lazy.

I am terrible with money.

I am bad with people.

I am a failure.

Sometimes we're describing something much more specific.

Maybe you don't understand something **yet**.

Maybe you're exhausted.

Maybe nobody ever taught you how to manage money.

Maybe social situations make you uncomfortable.

Maybe something you attempted didn't work.

Those things can be examined.

But once we turn them into **who we are**, where do we go from there?

Compare:

“I'm terrible with money.”

with:

“There are things about managing money I haven't learned yet.”

The second statement doesn't pretend you're secretly a financial genius.

It simply leaves the door open.

You can learn something you don't know.

It's much harder to change something you've decided is part of your identity.

Where Did That Sentence Come From?

This is one of my favorite questions:

Who taught you that?

Not everything we believe about ourselves started with us.

Maybe somebody repeatedly called you lazy.

Maybe a teacher made you feel stupid.

Maybe you were compared with a sibling.

Maybe someone laughed when you tried something.

Maybe you struggled with something other people seemed to do easily.

Eventually their words became your words.

Years later, the person who originally said them might not even be around.

But the sentence stayed.

I'm not smart enough.

I'm too much.

I'm not good at anything.

Nobody wants to hear what I have to say.

At some point it is worth asking:

Is this something I discovered about myself—or something I was taught to believe?

And then:

Does the evidence still support it?

Look for the Evidence You Forgot

Our minds can be funny collectors.

We remember the evidence that supports a belief and overlook the evidence that doesn't.

If I believe:

“I never finish anything,”

my unfinished projects stand out.

What about everything I finished?

It doesn't count.

If I believe:

“I always make bad decisions,”

I remember the decisions I regret.

The ordinary good decisions disappear into the background.

This doesn't mean we should replace negative absolutes with positive ones.

I always make wonderful decisions!

Probably not.

None of us do.

The goal isn't to create a prettier distortion.

The goal is to see ourselves more accurately.

Maybe:

“I've made some decisions I regret, and I've made some good ones too.”

That's less dramatic.

It's also probably closer to the truth.

And truth gives us somewhere to work from.

“I Can't” Deserves a Second Question

Sometimes *I can't* is absolutely appropriate.

There are things we genuinely cannot do.

There are physical limitations.

Financial limitations.

Time limitations.

Legal limitations.

Responsibilities.

Circumstances we cannot simply think our way around.

This book isn't about pretending limitations don't exist.

But *I can't* can also become a habit.

So when you hear yourself say it, add one question:

Why can't I?

Maybe the answer is:

Because my body cannot safely do that.

Good information.

Maybe:

Because I can't afford it right now.

Also useful information.

But maybe the answer is:

Because I've never done it before.

That's different.

Or:

Because I'm afraid I'll fail.

Different again.

Or:

Because somebody once told me I couldn't.

Now we have something worth looking at.

We don't have to turn every *can't* into *can*.

We simply need to know what kind of *can't* we're dealing with.

Failure Is an Event, Not an Address

Something didn't work.

That's going to happen.

Probably more than once.

We make a plan.

It fails.

We choose someone.

It doesn't work out.

We try to build something.

It falls apart.

We make a decision with the information we have and later discover we were wrong.

We can turn that into:

I failed.

And then:

I am a failure.

Those two statements aren't the same.

One describes an outcome.

The other describes a person.

A Daily Permission offers another possibility:

Learning
is not failure.
It is adjustment.

That doesn't mean failure never hurts.

Some mistakes are expensive.

Some cost relationships.

Some cost time.

Some require apologies.

Some have consequences we can't undo.

But even then, the question remains:

What can I learn from this?

That question doesn't erase responsibility.

It creates the possibility of doing something differently next time.

Talk to Yourself Like Someone You Are Teaching

Imagine watching someone learn to ride a bicycle.

They wobble.

They put their foot down.

They wobble again.

They fall.

Would you walk over and say:

“Well, obviously you'll never be able to ride a bike.”

I hope not.

You'd probably say:

“Try again.”

Maybe you'd adjust the seat.

Maybe you'd show them something.

Maybe you'd hold the bike for a moment.

You'd expect learning to look imperfect.

Yet when we're learning something ourselves, we often expect immediate competence.

One mistake and:

I'm terrible at this.

Three mistakes and:

I can't do this.

Five mistakes and:

I knew I couldn't do it.

What would happen if instead we asked:

What am I learning?

What part is difficult?

What do I need to understand better?

Is there another way to do this?

Now we're working with ourselves instead of against ourselves.

You Have Been More Than One Version of You

Think about yourself ten years ago.

Twenty years ago.

Maybe fifty years ago.

You aren't exactly that person anymore.

You've learned things.

Changed opinions.

Survived things you didn't expect.

Made mistakes.

Changed your mind.

Lost people.

Found people.

Developed skills.

Forgot things.

Started over.

Changed direction.

If you have changed before, why would you assume you've reached the final version of yourself now?

Growth leaves room for this permission:

You are allowed
to not be the same person
in every moment.

That's a powerful permission.

Because we sometimes hold ourselves prisoner to old descriptions.

I've always been this way.

Maybe.

But *always* doesn't tell us what happens tomorrow.

Give Yourself the Same Room You Give Nature

We don't look at a bare tree in January and decide:

Well, that's it. That tree is obviously never growing another leaf.

We understand seasons.

We understand dormancy.

We understand recovery.

We understand that growth isn't visible every day.

We understand it in nature because we expect nature to change.

Maybe we can begin expecting change from ourselves too.

Not demanding it.

Not pretending it happens overnight.

Simply leaving room for it.

You don't have to declare:

I can do anything.

You don't have to stand in front of a mirror and convince yourself that everything about you is wonderful.

You can start somewhere much more believable:

I don't know what I'm capable of yet.

I can learn.

I can change my mind.

I can make a different decision.

I can try another way.

And perhaps:

What I did yesterday does not have to become who I am forever.

Daily Permission

You are allowed
to trust yourself
even if you've been wrong before.

Today, listen for one sentence you use to define yourself.

I always...

I never...

I can't...

I'm just...

Then don't replace it with something prettier.

Ask something better:

Is this completely true?

Where did I learn it?

What evidence doesn't fit the story?

And who might I become if I stopped treating yesterday's version of me as the final one?

Work With This Chapter

Living Like Nature

A plant struggling in poor soil is not a failed plant. It may need different conditions.

Look More Closely

Complete one sentence you often use against yourself. Where did you learn it? What evidence does not fit it?

What Do I Know?

Facts I can confirm:

Meaning, prediction, or assumption I may have added:

Put It Into Practice

Try This

Replace the label with an accurate description of this moment.

Carry It Forward

What do I want to remember when this situation appears again?

About the Author

Lissa Gilmore is the founder of Mind Magic LLC and the creator of Living Like Nature, a growing collection of books and resources built around awareness, understanding, self-care, and finding practical ways to move through life with more clarity. Her work uses everyday language, questions, and lessons from nature to help readers look at what they believe, what they carry, and what they may be ready to see differently.

Back-Cover Copy

One bad day becomes “everything is wrong.”

One mistake becomes “I always mess things up.”

One disappointment becomes “nothing ever changes.”

We use words like always, never, everyone, no one, everything, and nothing so easily that we may not notice when they turn a moment into a permanent truth.

Always & Never is an invitation to notice those absolutes and question them—not with forced positivity, but with accuracy, curiosity, and better information.

Through everyday examples, gentle questions, and lessons from nature, Lissa Gilmore explores how old experiences can shape expectations, relationships, fear, boundaries, regret, and the stories we tell about ourselves and other people.

The goal is not to erase the past. It is to stop asking the past to decide every future moment.

Each chapter closes with a Daily Permission and is followed by guided reflection and practical workbook pages, giving readers room to bring the lesson into their own lives.

Listen for the absolute. Then question it.