

“All of us want to improve and grow, and the world offers no shortage of answers and products to try. Tieler Giles embarked on a journey to try ‘self-help’ and came up wanting. But in the process, she learned about herself, and more importantly about her relationship with her Savior. This book is the fruit of that journey, and it’s one that will serve anyone who has believed that self-help books and tactics are the answer to their needs. Giles has been in your shoes, and she is a friend who invites you back to God’s purposes for you.”

**COURTNEY REISSIG**, Author, *Teach Me to Feel: Worshiping Through the Psalms in Every Season of Life*

“With precision and skill, Tieler Giles identifies why self-help promises much but delivers little, and points us instead to the person of Christ in whom all things are done, not to-do. I appreciated her wealth of experience as a life coach; the acknowledgement of where self-help can have value; her honesty and her witty observations. This book is joyful, real, comprehensive and practical. Don’t just put it on your to-do list—read it!”

**LINDA ALLCOCK**, Author, *Deeper Still: Finding Clear Minds and Full Hearts through Biblical Meditation*;  
Staff Member, The Globe Church, London, UK

“Truth and grace mark the ministry of our Lord, and they also mark Tieler’s perceptive book on ditching the endlessly exhausting pursuit of self-help. Full of insight into the human heart, *How to Ditch the How-to* will expose your need—and Christ’s perfect, abundant grace.”

**KRISTEN WETHERELL**, Author, *Help for the Hungry Soul and Hope When It Hurts*

“This book offers nothing short of grace to the strive-weary among us. In its pages, Tieler Giles helps us all ease off our own go-go-go agendas and offers a road toward living as God intended.”

**CARYN RIVADENEIRA**, Author, *Saints of Feather and Fang*

“So many of us are seeking inner healing and transformation. Yet, there comes a point when we desperately need more than the latest trendy tools or tried-and-true religious rituals. In *How to Ditch the How-to*, Tieler Giles shows us how we change and grow best: as we experience a sincere, deep relationship with the greatest Helper.”

**LAKESHIA POOLE**, Author, *Faith Beats Fear*

“Take it from someone who’s been there: Tieler Giles really has put all the latest self-help trends to the test (manifesting, meditating, setting intentions, positive self-talk—you name it, she’s done it!). In *How to Ditch the How-to*, Tieler takes us with her on her years of trying to find happiness and fulfillment within herself. She shares candidly the effort and exhaustion, the high hopes and deep disillusionment. And then she shares with us the relief, peace, and soul-deep joy she finally found in Jesus. No doubt every reader will see some of herself in Tieler’s story. Who among us hasn’t succumbed to self-help? But Tieler tells us the better and truer story of who we are, in light of who our Creator is and how he made us to find abundant life in him. Tieler’s story is authentic, transparent, and ultimately full of the best news there is. If you’re tired of trying to keep up, then take up this book and find real rest.”

**JEN OSHMAN**, Author, *Enough About Me and Cultural Counterfeits*

**TIELER GILES**

*How to  
Ditch the  
How-to*



**Embracing Grace in Place  
of Self-Improvement**

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*To all those searching for more*



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# INTRODUCTION

“**W**hen will it be enough?”

That was the question that brought to an end a four-year journey to find myself, fix myself, and live my best life. I was living in Brooklyn, New York. Spring had sprung, and my discontentment was as pervasive as the pollen. Here I was yet again, scrutinizing other people’s lives, wondering where I went wrong and what I needed to do differently to make life work.

I knew there was more to life than what I was experiencing.

“I just need to refocus and recalibrate,” I thought as my feet hit the floor.

But that morning, I could not summon my “higher self,” nor could I create another personal development plan: *journal more, read more, run more, cook more; be more grateful, mindful, positive, and open.*

I wanted none of it. I was done. I had spent years up to my eyeballs in self-help strategies, methods, and tools, hoping to reach my “fullest potential.” My vision? That wondrous day when I would stop chasing

change, finally content with myself and my life. Yet all my striving and searching had not brought more satisfaction but less.

Maybe you're in a similar place. You've been working hard but don't feel any closer to the life you imagined. Maybe you feel stuck and unsure of what to do at this point. You wonder if life is *this* hard for other people. Or perhaps life is improving, and you want to make sure change sticks this time. You want to finally get over the hump to stay motivated and consistent. You understand real change takes time, but you're willing to do what it takes.

Lying in bed that morning, I could no longer ignore the longing in my heart for something more. I had come to the end of the road—and to the end of myself.

Then I heard an unmistakable answer.

*"When will it be enough?"*

*"It won't."*

I would never find "enough" by doing more of the same thing. There was something bigger, *someone* bigger, whose help I needed.

Whether we identify as a Christian or not, I think we all get to points in our lives when we feel outmatched. Wherever you are spiritually—if you're walking with Jesus, have wandered away, or find faith to be altogether complicated—this book is for you.

*How to Ditch the How-To* is about letting go of self-help and receiving God's grace to live life well. You won't find strategies or tips to believe in yourself more, love yourself more, or overcome your limitations. Instead, I want to point you to the one whose grace is more than enough. I believe the good news that Jesus shared

some 2,000 years ago is the answer to what we've been searching for.

Part 1 of this book examines our striving to change. We'll unpack the real problem at hand, God's plan, and our dilemma. Part 2 delves into the pursuit of happiness, love, and everything in between. I share some self-help stories (brace yourself), and we'll uncover what the Bible has to say. Part 3 explores what awaits on the other side of striving and what we stand to gain when we let go.

Along the way, we'll consider what self-help advice you might have come across on the subject before comparing it with what God has to say on the matter in the Bible. I believe the word of God not only inspires, but it also has the power to transform. Given that, you will also find at the end of each chapter one key takeaway to help you embrace grace and a Bible verse for reflection.

When Jesus preached what's known as his "Sermon on the Mount," he invited those gathered that day into a new way of living. Many of them were struggling and tired, and in desperate need of hope and healing. Notably, Jesus did not call for them to fix themselves or save themselves but instead to turn from themselves and turn to God. That same invitation is available to you and me today.

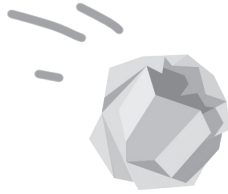
As you journey through this book, I pray that the pressure to work harder and achieve more will subside—that you will shift from feeling discouraged and unsatisfied to experiencing gratitude and joy. I believe that you really *can* have peace, wholeness, and fulfillment on the inside—well before one single thing

changes on the outside. Yes, the path to change is challenging. But you don't have to walk it alone.

Together, let's explore how to ditch the how-to and embrace grace in place of self-improvement.

PART ONE

# Striving





## CHAPTER 1

# THE CHANGE

*“Nothing changes if nothing changes.”*

Anonymous

I read my very first self-help book when I was eleven or twelve: *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. I assume now it must have belonged to my mother, although when I found it, it had yet to be opened. First published in 1993, this popular book—and eventual series—featured a collection of inspirational true stories that taught life principles that readers could apply to their own lives.

There I was, a middle-school student—dealing with cliques, crushes, and mood swings—reading stories about empty-nesters, guardian angels, and cats who rescued their owners. On the surface, I couldn’t relate to any of it.

Yet these stories, in some strange and magical way, put my pre-teen troubles in perspective, offering courage and hope. If Susan could find happiness after a heartbreaking divorce, I thought to myself, surely I could survive a friend being upset with me because her

boyfriend told his friend who told our other friend that he had a crush on me. (I think that's how that went.)

For the first time, I realized I had a say in what I thought and how I felt. In other words, I could change.

## **READY FOR CHANGE**

We all want change, one way or another. Whether it's a more fulfilling career, greater financial stability, healing from past trauma, or better gut health—our desire for change is a natural response to areas of our lives that aren't working well. And that desire is not a bad thing. In fact, that impulse and ability to exercise agency over ourselves and our environment is part of what makes us human. So, if you've picked up this book in hopes of change, you're in good company.

The billion-dollar question, though, is *how*? I mean that literally. From books to programs to workshops to conferences, there is a multi-billion-dollar industry ready to help us help ourselves. The hope of change is the promise that lies behind every self-help strategy. Indeed, there is no shortage of principles and advice to learn, grow, and live life well.

Yet change is hard. Maybe, like me, you've discovered that already. We want to wake up an hour earlier, but instead we stay up an hour later. We want to be kinder, but instead we criticize others. We want to save money, but instead we buy things we don't really need.

We convince ourselves that the next time will be different, if only we try a little harder. So we give it another go, employing a new method or technique to change our lives and ourselves for the better.

But real change isn't just about changing behavior.



Willpower will only get us so far. If we want change to last, we need to go beneath the surface. That's why some self-help experts focus on what's called "mindset"—your mental attitude. Our mindset determines things like how we view challenges, rebound from setbacks, and respond to feedback. The key thing about mindset is that it's something we can learn, and therefore it can be improved—and sometimes the results are impressive.

When most people set out to change their lives, they tend to focus on the tangible, external goal: save more money, for example. A better alternative, according to scholars, is to focus on the attitudes and beliefs that will help you reach your goal. Whether it's letting go of comparison, embracing contentment, or celebrating small wins, these are all mental habits that can be built—and that in the long term will help you save money.

I don't know what changes you're looking to make in your life. But I do know that all the mindset champions are onto something. Indeed, we find a similar idea in the Bible. One of its writers, the apostle Paul, said this to a group of Christians he was concerned about: "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:2). You see, our mindset can be a help or a hindrance to living the life God desires for us—a life that is "good," in the fullest sense of the word.

If we want change, instead of focusing solely on the outer world, we need to start paying attention to our inner world. What is happening on the outside of us is often connected to what is happening on the inside.