

CHARLIE MIKE

PUSHING FORWARD THROUGH THE DEMONS



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Introduction: Why this Book?

This is not a perfect system. It is not a step-by-step plan that fixes everything in your life. It is not something that makes the pain disappear overnight. This is real life, and real life does not work that way. What you are about to read comes from hard days, long nights, and moments where just getting through the next hour felt like a mission all by itself.

Some days you win. You wake up, you move, you get things done, and for a little while you feel like yourself again. Those days matter, and you should hold on to them when they come.

But there are other days too. Days where your mind turns on you, where your thoughts feel heavy, and where everything feels like too much. On those days, winning might just mean you made it through without giving up.

That is what this book is about. It is about staying in the fight, even when the fight is inside your own head. It is about learning how to live with the things that do not just

go away. It is about finding ways to keep going when quitting feels easier. This is not about being perfect. It is about being here, still breathing, still trying, and still moving forward.

You Are Not Alone

Listen, you are not alone in this, even if it feels like you are. A lot of people carry things they do not talk about. A lot of veterans come home and find that the battle did not end when they left. It just changed. The noise is different, but it is still loud. The danger is different, but it still feels real. And the hardest part is that most people around you cannot see it.

There is something important you need to understand right now. There is nothing wrong with you for feeling this way. Your mind is reacting to things it went through. It is trying to protect you, even if it does not feel like it. The problem is that sometimes it stays stuck in that mode.

It keeps you alert when you do not need to be. It brings back memories when you are trying to move forward. It makes you feel like you are still in danger, even when you are safe.

That can wear you down. It can make you tired in a way that sleep does not fix. It can make you feel disconnected from people, even the ones you care about. It can make simple things feel hard. And when that happens, it is easy to start thinking something is wrong with you. It is easy to think you should be stronger or that you should be over it by now.

But that is not how this works. This is not something you just turn off. It does not follow a schedule, and it does not ask for permission. It shows up when it wants to, and sometimes it hits hard. That is why the goal is not to eliminate it completely. The goal is to learn how to live through it, how to manage it, and how to keep moving even when it is there.

What to Expect

There will be moments when your thoughts get loud. You might replay things in your head that you wish you could forget. You might feel anger that comes out of nowhere. You might feel sadness that you cannot explain.

These moments can feel overwhelming, and they can make you feel like you are losing control. But you are not losing control. You are reacting to something real, even if it is coming from inside.

One thing that helps is understanding that these thoughts do not define you. They are part of what you are dealing with, but they are not who you are. You are still the same person underneath all of it. You still have value. You still have purpose. Even if you cannot see it right now, it is still there.

There will also be times when you feel nothing at all. That can be just as hard. You might feel numb, like you are going through the motions without really being present. You might stop caring about things that used to matter to you. You might pull away from people because it feels

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easier than trying to explain what is going on. This is part of it too, and it does not mean you are broken.

Many people who deal with trauma try to shut things down so they do not have to feel the pain. It is a way of coping, even if it does not feel like a good one. The mind is trying to protect itself, but in doing so, it can also block out the good along with the bad. That is why some days feel empty. That is why it can be hard to feel connected.

You are going to have good days and bad days. That is part of the process. The goal is not to have only good days. The goal is to learn how to get through the bad ones. That is where strength really shows. It is not in the moments where everything is easy. It is in the moments where everything is hard and you still choose to keep going.

What is Charlie Mike?

There is a phrase in the military, Charlie Mike. It means continue the mission. It does not mean the mission is easy. It does not mean everything is going according to plan. It means no matter what is happening, you keep moving forward. You do what you can, with what you have, right where you are.

That is the mindset you need here. You are not trying to fix everything all at once. You are not trying to solve your entire life in one day. You are focused on the next step. The next hour. The next decision. You keep it simple, because simple is what works when things feel overwhelming.

There will be days when the only thing you can do is get out of bed. That counts. There will be days when all you can do is sit quietly and try to calm your mind. That counts too. You do not need to measure your progress against anyone else. You just need to keep going.

Sometimes, doing nothing but staying alive is enough. That might not sound like much, but it is everything. There are people who do not make it through those days. There are people who give up when it gets too heavy. If you are still here, still fighting, still trying, that means something. That matters more than you think.

Over time, you will find things that help. They might be small at first. Writing something down. Taking a walk. Talking to someone who understands. Doing something creative. Helping someone else. These things might not fix everything, but they can make the weight a little lighter. They can give you a break from the noise.

Writing, for example, has helped many veterans take control of their thoughts instead of letting their thoughts control them. Putting things on paper can help you process what is going on inside your head and make it easier to understand . It does not have to be perfect. It just has to be honest. Even a few words can help you get through a hard moment.

Knowing What Works for You

There is no single answer that works for everyone. What helps one person might not help another. That is why this

is not a rule book. It is a guide. It is a starting point. It is a collection of things that have helped someone who has been in the fight and is still in it.

You are going to have to find what works for you. That takes time. It takes patience. And it takes effort. There will be times when you try something and it does not help. That is okay. You try something else. You keep going. You do not stop just because one thing did not work.

The most important thing is that you do not give up on yourself. Even when it feels like nothing is changing, things are happening. You are learning. You are building strength. You are finding ways to deal with things that used to feel impossible. It might not feel like progress, but it is.

You are Still Here

That means the mission is still going. It means there is still time to change things. It means there is still a chance to build something better, even if it is just one small step at a time. You do not have to have it all figured out. You just have to keep moving.

This book is not going to give you all the answers. But it will give you tools. It will give you perspective. And it will remind you of something very important. You are not done. Your story is not over. No matter what you have been through, there is still a next chapter.

So take a breath. Slow things down. Do not try to carry everything at once. Focus on right now. Focus on getting through today. That is enough. Tomorrow will come when it comes. When it does, you will deal with it then.

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For now, the mission is simple. Stay here. Stay in the fight.

Keep going.

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CH 1

The War That Never Ended

When you leave the military, people expect things to go back to normal. They think you come home, take off the uniform, and step right back into regular life. They believe the mission is over and the war is behind you.

On the outside, it may look like that is true. You might have a job, a home, or even a family waiting for you. But inside, something feels very different, and it does not just shut off.

For many veterans, the war does not end when the deployment ends. It follows you home in ways that are hard to explain to someone who has never lived it. It shows up in your thoughts, in your sleep, and in the way you react to things around you.

You may hear a loud noise and feel your body tense up before your mind even understands why. You may find yourself scanning rooms, watching people, and staying on alert even when you are safe. This is not weakness, and it is not something you chose.

The truth is, your mind was trained to survive in dangerous situations. It learned how to stay sharp, how to react fast, and how to keep you alive when things were not safe. That training does not just disappear because you are home now.

Your brain does not always know that the danger is over, so it keeps doing what it was trained to do. It keeps you on guard, even when there is no threat in front of you. That is why it can feel like the war never really ended.

Life After Service Feels Different

Coming home can feel strange in ways you did not expect. People around you may be going about their lives like nothing ever happened. They talk about small problems, daily routines, and things that seem simple. You might sit there and listen, but inside, it feels like you are on a different planet. The things that once mattered may not matter the same way anymore.

You may also notice that you have changed, even if others do not see it right away. The way you think, the way you react, and the way you feel about the world may all be different now. Some days you may feel numb, like nothing really hits you the way it should.

Other days, everything hits you all at once, and it feels overwhelming. This back and forth can be exhausting, and it can make it hard to feel steady.

It is also common to feel like you do not fully belong anywhere. You are not in the military anymore, but you do not feel like a regular civilian either. You may miss the

structure, the purpose, and the people who understood you without needing long explanations.

At the same time, you are trying to build a new life, and that can feel like starting over from scratch. This in-between place can be one of the hardest parts of coming home.

Why the Battle Follows You Home

The reason the battle follows you home is not because you are doing something wrong. It is because your mind and body went through things that most people will never experience.

Trauma changes the way the brain works, especially in how it handles fear, memory, and stress. Your brain learns to stay alert, to watch for danger, and to react quickly to protect you.

Even when you are no longer in danger, your brain can still act like you are. It can replay memories, bring up images, and create feelings that seem to come out of nowhere. You might have flashbacks, bad dreams, or moments where you feel like you are right back in it. These experiences are not random, and they are not your fault. They are part of how the brain holds onto trauma.

On top of that, your body also carries the stress. Your heart may race, your muscles may stay tight, and your sleep may not come easy. You might feel tired all the time but still unable to relax. This is because your system has been running in survival mode for a long time. It does not

always know how to slow down on its own. That is why the battle can feel like it is still happening, even years later.

You Are Not Broken

One of the most important things to understand is this. You are not broken. It may feel like something is wrong with you, especially on the hard days. You may wonder why you cannot just move on or why you cannot feel normal again. But what you are experiencing is a human response to extreme situations. It is your mind trying to make sense of what it went through.

Many veterans deal with these same struggles, even if they do not talk about it openly. Some feel shame, some feel anger, and some feel like they should be able to handle it on their own. That silence can make it seem like you are the only one going through it. But you are not alone in this fight, even if it feels that way at times.

It is also important to remember that these reactions do not define who you are. They are part of your experience, but they are not your identity.

You are more than what happened to you, and you are more than the thoughts that come into your mind. Even on your worst days, you are still here, still standing, and still fighting. That matters more than you may realize.

You Are Still in the Fight

The mission may look different now, but it is still a mission. Instead of fighting an enemy out there, you are dealing with battles inside your own mind. Some days, that fight is quiet, and you can move through your day without much

trouble. Other days, it feels loud, heavy, and hard to carry. Both kinds of days are part of this process.

Being in this fight does not mean you are failing. It means you are still showing up, even when it is hard. It means you are pushing through moments that would make others stop. It means you are doing the work, even if it does not feel like progress. Every time you get through a tough moment, you are proving that you can keep going.

This book is not about fixing everything overnight. It is not about pretending the demons are not there. It is about learning how to live with them, how to face them, and how to move forward anyway. The goal is not perfection. The goal is to keep going, one day at a time, one step at a time.

You are still in the fight, and that is not a bad thing. It means you are still alive, still aware, and still capable of change. The war may not have ended the way you expected, but your story is not over. There is still more ahead, and there are still ways to make each day a little better. For now, the mission is simple. Stay here. Keep going. Charlie Mike.

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CH 2

What These Demons Really Are

When people hear words like PTSD, depression, and anxiety, they often think of labels. They think of something that belongs in a doctor's office or in a book. But what we are talking about here is not just a label.

It is something you feel in your body and in your mind every single day. It shows up when you wake up, when you try to rest, and when you are just trying to live a normal life. These demons are not always loud, but they are always there in some way.

For many veterans, this started during service, but it does not end when you come home. Your body and your mind learned how to survive in a dangerous place. Now, even when you are safe, your system does not always get the message.

You can feel stressed or on edge even when nothing is wrong around you . That is one of the hardest parts to explain to people who have never been through it. You

look fine on the outside, but inside, it feels like something is always about to happen.

These demons are not a sign that you are weak. They are a sign that your brain learned how to protect you, but now it is stuck in that mode. It is like a switch that got flipped on and never fully turned off. You are not broken. You are responding to things that were real at one time. The problem is that your mind does not always know the difference between then and now.

PTSD, Depression, and Anxiety Made Simple

Let's break this down in a simple way. PTSD is when your mind keeps bringing the past into the present. It can feel like the event is happening again, even if it is not. You may have memories, dreams, or strong reactions that come out of nowhere. These are not just thoughts you can push away. They feel real, and your body reacts like you are back in that moment. That is why it can be so overwhelming.

Depression is different, but it often shows up at the same time. Depression is heavy. It can make everything feel slow and hard. You may lose interest in things you used to enjoy. You may feel numb or empty, like nothing matters. It is not just being sad. It is feeling like the light has gone out, and you are stuck in the dark with no clear way forward.

Anxiety is the part that keeps you on edge. It is that feeling that something bad is about to happen, even when you cannot explain why. Your body stays tense. Your mind keeps scanning for danger. You may have trouble relaxing

or sleeping because your system is always on alert. This is called being on edge or hyper aware, and it can wear you down over time .

All three of these can happen together. They feed off each other. PTSD brings the memories, anxiety keeps you on alert, and depression makes it all feel heavy and hopeless. That is why it can feel like too much. It is not just one thing. It is a mix that hits you from different angles.

Intrusive Thoughts and Triggers

One of the hardest parts of this fight is something called intrusive thoughts. These are thoughts that come into your mind without your permission. They are not thoughts you choose. They are not thoughts you want. They just show up, and they can be disturbing or painful. They can repeat over and over, and they can be hard to stop .

These thoughts can be memories, images, or even fears that do not make sense. Sometimes they are tied to things that happened in the past. Other times they are just your brain trying to process stress in a way that feels out of control. The key thing to understand is that these thoughts do not define you. They are not who you are. They are something your mind is doing, not something you are choosing.

Triggers are what set these thoughts off. A trigger can be anything. It could be a sound, a smell, a place, or even a time of day. You might hear something like a loud noise and suddenly feel like you are back in a different place. Your body reacts first, and your mind follows. This is

because your brain connects certain things to past experiences, even if you are not aware of it.

When a trigger hits, it can feel like you are right back in that moment. Your heart may race. Your breathing may change. You may feel fear or anger without knowing why. This is not you losing control. This is your system reacting the way it was trained to react. The problem is that it is reacting to something that is not happening right now.

Mood Swings and Emotional Shifts

Another part of these demons is how fast your emotions can change. You can go from feeling okay to feeling overwhelmed in a short amount of time. One minute you are calm, and the next minute you are angry, anxious, or shut down. This can confuse you and the people around you. It can make relationships hard because others may not understand what is going on.

These mood swings are not random. They are tied to what is happening inside your mind and body. When your system is under stress, your emotions can move quickly. You may feel anger because your body is in fight mode. You may feel fear because your mind thinks there is danger. You may feel numb because your system is trying to protect you from feeling too much at once.

There can also be guilt and shame mixed in. You might think you should be stronger or that you should be over this by now. You might feel like you are letting people down. These thoughts can make the depression worse and make you pull away from others. It becomes a cycle that is hard to break.

It is important to understand that these emotional shifts are part of the process. They are not a failure. They are a sign that your system is overloaded. When too much is happening inside, your emotions will move fast. Learning to notice these shifts is a big step in taking back control.

Why Your Brain Won't Shut Off

One of the most frustrating parts of all this is when your brain just will not stop. You try to relax, but your mind keeps going. Thoughts keep coming. You replay things from the past. You worry about things that have not even happened. It feels like there is no off switch.

This happens because your brain is trying to protect you. It is scanning for danger, even when there is none. It is replaying events to try to make sense of them. It is staying active because it thinks it needs to be ready. Trauma can make your brain feel like the threat is still there, even when it is not. That is why it feels like you are stuck in a loop.

Sleep can be one of the hardest times. When everything gets quiet, your mind gets louder. You may have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. You may have dreams that bring everything back.

Your body may stay tense even when you are trying to rest. This can leave you feeling tired all the time, which makes everything else harder.

It can also be hard to focus during the day. Your thoughts may jump from one thing to another. You may forget things or lose track of what you are doing. This is not

because you are careless. It is because your brain is busy trying to manage everything at once.

The truth is, your brain is not broken. It is doing what it learned to do. The problem is that it has not learned how to stand down. It does not know that the mission has changed. That is where this book comes in. We are not trying to erase these thoughts. We are learning how to live with them, manage them, and keep moving forward anyway.

This is what the demons look like. They are not always visible, but they are real. They show up in your thoughts, your feelings, and your body. They can make simple things feel hard. They can make good days feel far away. But understanding them is the first step. Once you see them for what they are, you can start learning how to face them and keep going.

CH 3

The Quiet Isolation

There is a kind of silence that follows you home. It is not the kind of silence you get when the house is empty or the TV is off. It is deeper than that.

It sits inside your chest and stays there no matter where you go. You can be in a room full of people and still feel it pressing down on you. That silence is where isolation begins.

When service ends, most people think the hard part is over. They think you come home, settle down, and move on with your life. What they do not see is that the mission does not really end.

The environment changes, but your mind does not switch off the same way. You are still alert, still watching, still scanning. That constant awareness can make normal life feel strange and even unsafe.

At first, pulling away does not feel like a problem. It can feel like relief. After everything you have been through,

being alone can seem like the only place where your mind can rest.

Many veterans feel that stepping back from people helps them calm down in the moment . It feels like control, like you are protecting yourself. But over time, that space gets bigger and harder to step out of.

You might start by skipping a few events. Maybe you avoid a crowded place or a loud room. Then you stop answering calls or messages. You tell yourself you just need time, just a little space to get your head right. Before long, that space becomes your normal. What started as a break becomes a way of life.

Not Having the Words

Another reason veterans pull away is because it is hard to explain what is going on inside. You can try to talk about it, but the words never seem to match the feeling. People listen, but you can tell they do not really understand. That gap between what you feel and what others hear makes it easier to just stop trying. So you stay quiet instead.

There is also a fear that comes with opening up. You wonder how people will react if they really knew what goes on in your head. You worry they might judge you, or worse, look at you differently.

Some veterans begin to expect rejection, even when it is not there. That expectation alone can push you further away from people who actually care.

Sometimes it is not fear. Sometimes it is numbness. You want to feel connected, but the feeling just is not there.

You sit with family or friends and feel like you are watching from the outside. You laugh when they laugh, but it does not feel real. This kind of emotional shutdown is common, and it can make it hard to stay close to others .

This is where the phrase “alone in a crowd” becomes real. You can be surrounded by people who love you and still feel like you are the only one in the room. That kind of loneliness is hard to explain. It is not about being physically alone. It is about feeling like no one else lives in the same world you do.

Part of this comes from the fact that your experiences are different. The things you have seen and felt are not easy to share. Even if someone listens, they cannot fully step into those moments with you. This creates a sense that your experience is yours alone, and no one else can truly understand it. That feeling can build a wall between you and everyone else.

There is also the loss of connection from your time in service. The people you served with understood you without words. There was a bond there that is hard to replace. When that connection is gone, it leaves a gap that is not easy to fill. Civilian life can feel distant compared to what you once had.

Isolation Begins

Daily life can also start to shrink. You go to fewer places. You talk to fewer people. Your world becomes smaller without you even noticing it. Many veterans describe their life becoming a simple loop of home, work, and very little else . It feels safe, but it also keeps you stuck.

Isolation can also come from trying to avoid triggers. Loud sounds, crowded spaces, or certain situations can set off your mind. To prevent that, you start avoiding those places altogether. While that helps in the short term, it slowly cuts you off from normal life. Avoidance can turn into isolation before you even realize it .

Another part of isolation is not wanting to be a burden. You may feel like your problems are too heavy to put on someone else. So you carry them alone. You tell yourself that it is better this way, that you are protecting the people you care about. But in doing that, you also cut off the support that could help you.

Isolation can feel normal after a while. It can even feel comfortable. You get used to the quiet and the distance. You build routines that do not involve other people. You learn how to get through the day on your own. But even if it feels normal, it does not mean it is helping you.

Over time, isolation can make everything harder. It can increase feelings of depression and make anxiety worse. It can make your thoughts louder because there is nothing to break the cycle. Without connection, there is no outside voice to balance what is going on inside your head. That can make the bad days feel even heavier.

The hardest part is that isolation feeds itself. The more you pull away, the harder it becomes to go back. Social situations feel more uncomfortable. Conversations feel more difficult. The gap between you and others keeps

growing. What once felt like a choice starts to feel like a trap.

Understand the Response

But it is important to understand one thing. This reaction is not weakness. It is not failure. It is a response to what you have been through. When something inside you is hurting, pulling back can feel like the only way to cope. In many ways, it is your mind trying to protect you.

The problem is that what protects you in one moment can hurt you over time. Isolation may reduce stress in the short term, but it also removes support, connection, and understanding. Those are the very things that can help you heal. Without them, the fight becomes harder.

There is also a truth that many veterans carry but do not say out loud. Even when you are around people, you may feel like you have to wear a mask. You act normal, say the right things, and keep your real thoughts hidden. That takes energy. It can leave you feeling even more alone because no one sees the real you.

This is why isolation is not just about being alone. It is about feeling unseen, unheard, and disconnected. It is about carrying thoughts and feelings that you do not know how to share. It is about standing in a room full of people and still feeling like you do not belong.

The good news is that recognizing this is a step forward. When you can see the pattern, you can start to understand it. You can begin to notice when you are

pulling away and why. Awareness does not fix everything, but it gives you a starting point.

Pace Yourself

You do not have to fix it all at once. You do not have to suddenly become social or open up to everyone. This is not about forcing yourself into situations that feel overwhelming. It is about small steps. It is about understanding that the wall you built can be lowered, even if it takes time.

There will be days when isolation feels easier. There will be days when reaching out feels impossible. That is part of the process. The goal is not perfection. The goal is movement, even if it is slow. Even one small step toward connection matters.

At the end of the day, isolation is part of the fight, but it does not have to be the end of the story. You are not the only one who feels this way. Many veterans walk this same path, even if they do not talk about it. That means you are not as alone as it feels.

This chapter is not about fixing isolation. It is about understanding it. It is about seeing it for what it is and knowing that it comes from a place of survival. And most important, it is about remembering that even in the quiet, even in the distance, you are still here.

And that means the mission is still going.

CH 4

The Pull Toward Destruction

There are days when the fight inside your head gets so loud that you just want it to stop. It is not about being weak. It is not about not caring.

It is about being overwhelmed by thoughts that do not give you a break. When that happens, your mind starts looking for any way out, even if that way hurts you. That is where the self-destruct cycle begins.

Self-destructive behavior is not always obvious at first. It does not always look like something dangerous right away. Sometimes it starts small, like avoiding people or shutting down.

Other times it looks like anger, risky choices, or doing things you know are not good for you. These actions often come from a place of pain and a need to escape it.

For many veterans, this cycle is tied to deeper wounds. The stress, the memories, and the emotions do not just go away after service. They stay, and they build pressure over time. That pressure has to go somewhere. If it is not

released in a healthy way, it finds a destructive path. That path can feel like relief at first, but it always comes with a cost.

Risky Choices That Feel Like Relief

When you are in the middle of the storm, risky behavior can feel like control. It can feel like you are finally doing something instead of just sitting with the pain.

That is why people turn to things like drinking too much, driving too fast, or pushing themselves into dangerous situations. In that moment, it feels like power. It feels like you are taking charge of something.

The problem is that these choices do not fix anything. They only add more problems on top of the ones already there. Research shows that risky behavior is common in people dealing with trauma and can actually make symptoms worse over time. That means the very thing that feels like relief can keep the cycle going.

This is not about judging those choices. It is about understanding them. When someone is hurting deeply, they are not thinking about long-term outcomes. They are thinking about right now. They are thinking about how to quiet the noise in their head for even a few minutes. That is a very real and very human response.

But over time, those moments of relief come with bigger consequences. They bring more stress, more regret, and sometimes more trauma. That feeds right back into the cycle. The mind learns that pain leads to risky behavior,

and risky behavior leads to more pain. That loop can become hard to break.

Numbing Out to Survive

Sometimes it is not about risk. Sometimes it is about shutting everything off. Numbing out can look like sitting in silence for hours or losing yourself in a screen. It can look like drinking just enough to not feel anything. It can look like pushing people away so you do not have to deal with emotions at all.

Numbing feels like relief because it takes the edge off. It lowers the volume of the thoughts and the feelings. For a little while, it can feel like peace. But it is not real peace. It is more like putting a blanket over a fire. The fire is still there underneath, still burning.

Many veterans deal with deep feelings of guilt, shame, or confusion about what they have been through. These emotions can be hard to face. They can make you feel like you are not the same person anymore. Because of that, numbing becomes a way to avoid facing those feelings.

The problem is that when you numb the bad, you also numb the good. You stop feeling joy. You stop feeling connection. You stop feeling anything that reminds you that you are still alive. Over time, that can make the emptiness feel even worse. Then the cycle continues, because now you are trying to escape the numbness too.

Chasing Relief Instead of Healing

At the center of the self-destruct cycle is one simple truth. You are not trying to hurt yourself. You are trying to feel better. Every risky choice and every numbing behavior comes from that place. It is a search for relief. It is a way to get through the moment.

The problem is that relief and healing are not the same thing. Relief is quick. It is temporary. It gives you a break, but it does not fix the root of the problem. Healing is slower. It takes time. It takes effort. It does not always feel good right away, but it moves you forward.

When you are stuck in the cycle, your brain learns to chase relief. It learns that certain actions can change how you feel fast. That becomes the goal. Over time, that pattern gets stronger. It becomes a habit, even when you know it is not helping in the long run.

Studies show that self-destructive behavior can actually lead to more stress and more traumatic experiences. That means the cycle feeds itself. You do something to feel better, but it creates more problems, which leads to more pain, which leads to more of the same behavior.

Breaking that pattern starts with understanding it. It starts with seeing that the goal is not to judge yourself. The goal is to recognize what is happening and why. Once you see that clearly, you can begin to make different choices, even if they are small ones.

Breaking the Cycle One Moment at a Time

You do not break the self-destruct cycle all at once. You break it one moment at a time. You break it by noticing when the urge hits. You break it by pausing, even if it is just for a few seconds. That pause can be the difference between repeating the pattern and choosing something different.

This is not easy work. There will be times when you fall back into old habits. That does not mean you failed. It means you are human. The goal is not perfection. The goal is progress. Each time you choose a healthier path, even in a small way, you weaken the cycle.

It also helps to replace destructive actions with something that still gives you relief but does not cause harm. That could be writing, moving your body, or talking to someone who understands. These are not instant fixes, but they are steps in the right direction. Over time, those steps add up.

You are not broken because you have struggled with this. You are not weak because you have tried to escape the pain. You are someone who has been through a lot and is trying to find a way through it. That matters. That effort matters.

The self-destruct cycle is real, but it is not permanent. You can learn to see it. You can learn to interrupt it. And slowly, you can build a different path. One that is not about running from the pain, but about moving through it. That is what it means to keep going. That is what it means to Charlie Mike.

CHARLIE MIKE

CH 5

When It Hits Hard

There are days that start wrong before your feet even hit the floor. You wake up and something feels off, but you cannot explain it. Your chest feels tight and your mind is already racing. It is like your body knows something is coming before you do. You try to shake it off, but it sticks to you like a shadow that will not leave.

On these days, everything feels heavier than it should. Small things feel big and big things feel impossible. Even simple tasks like getting dressed or making coffee can feel like too much. You look around and nothing has changed, but inside you feel like everything is falling apart. It is confusing and exhausting at the same time.

Some people think a bad day is just feeling sad or tired. This is different. This feels like a storm inside your head that you cannot turn off. Your thoughts move fast and loud, and they do not ask for permission. They just show up and take over.

This is what it means when it hits hard.

When Your Mind Turns on You

One of the hardest parts is when your own mind becomes the enemy. The same mind that is supposed to protect you starts working against you. Thoughts come in that you did not ask for and do not want. They repeat over and over again like a broken record.

These are called intrusive thoughts, and they can feel very real and very strong. They can come out of nowhere and bring back memories, fear, or pain . You might be sitting in a quiet room, and suddenly your mind is not there anymore. It is somewhere else, somewhere you do not want to go.

Sometimes it feels like you are reliving things instead of just remembering them. Your body reacts like the danger is still there. Your heart beats faster and your breathing changes. Even though you are safe, your body does not believe it.

Your mind may also start telling you things that are not true. It might say you are not good enough or that you are broken. It might tell you that things will never get better. These thoughts can feel real, even when they are not.

You may try to fight these thoughts, but the harder you fight, the louder they get. That can make you feel stuck. It can make you feel like you are losing control. And that feeling can be scary.

The Weight of the Moment

When it hits hard, time feels different. Minutes feel like hours and hours feel like days. You look at the clock and wonder how it has only been a short time. It feels like you have been fighting all day, even if it has only been a little while.

Your body feels it too. You might feel tired even if you just woke up. You might feel tense like you are always on guard. Some people feel numb, like they cannot feel anything at all. Others feel everything at once, and it is too much.

This constant state of alert is common. It is like your body is always watching for danger, even when there is none . That kind of stress wears you down. It takes energy just to sit still.

You may also feel the urge to pull away from everything. You may not want to talk to anyone or go anywhere. Being around people can feel like too much work. Even people you care about can feel far away.

It is not that you do not care. It is that you are trying to survive the moment.

Just Getting Through the Next Hour

On these days, you are not trying to win anything. You are not trying to fix your whole life. You are just trying to get through the next hour. That is the mission.

You break the day down into small pieces. You do not think about tomorrow or next week. You think about right now. You ask yourself one simple question. What do I need to do to get through the next hour.

Sometimes the answer is very simple. It might be getting out of bed. It might be drinking water. It might be stepping outside for fresh air. These small things matter more than you think.

You may not feel strong in that moment, but choosing to keep going is strength. Even if all you do is sit there and breathe, that still counts. You are still in the fight.

There will be times when the thoughts come back again and again. That is okay. You are not failing. You are dealing with something real. You keep bringing yourself back to the present, even if you have to do it over and over again.

This is not about being perfect. It is about not quitting.

Staying in the Struggle

The truth is, these moments will come. There is no way around that. But just because they come does not mean they win. You are still here, and that matters more than anything else.

SHAWN HIBBARD

You may not feel like yourself when it hits hard. You may feel lost or tired or overwhelmed. But that feeling is not who you are. It is something you are going through, not something you are.

Each time you get through one of these moments, you prove something to yourself. You prove that you can handle more than you think. You prove that even on your worst days, you do not give up.

Some days, getting through the next hour is the victory. Some days, just staying here is enough. You do not need to do anything big or impressive. You just need to keep going.

That is what Charlie Mike means. It means continue the mission, even when it is hard. It means take one more step, even when you are tired. It means you are still in the fight.

And if you are still in the fight, you have not lost.

CHARLIE MIKE

CH 6

Recognizing Your Triggers

There are moments when everything feels fine, and then suddenly it is not. You might be sitting in a quiet room, driving down the road, or just trying to relax, and something shifts inside you.

Your chest tightens, your thoughts race, and your mood drops fast. It feels like it came out of nowhere, but it did not. Something set it off, even if you did not see it at first.

A trigger is anything that reminds your brain of something hard from your past. It does not have to be big or obvious. It can be small, quiet, and easy to miss. It can be a sound, a smell, a place, or even a feeling. When that reminder hits, your brain reacts like the danger is happening again, even when you are safe .

This is why it feels so real and so strong. Your brain is trying to protect you, but it does not know the difference between then and now.

It only knows that something feels familiar, and that familiar feeling once meant danger. So it reacts fast,

without asking questions. That reaction is not weakness. It is your brain doing its job, just at the wrong time.

Most people do not realize how often they are being triggered. They just think they are having a bad day or that something is wrong with them. They feel angry, tired, or shut down, and they cannot explain why. That confusion can make everything worse. When you do not understand what is happening, it feels like you have no control.

Internal Triggers

Some triggers come from inside you. These are called internal triggers. They are thoughts, emotions, and physical feelings that show up without warning. You might feel your heart start racing, your stomach tighten, or your mood drop fast. These things can happen even when nothing around you has changed.

Internal triggers can be thoughts that pop into your mind. A memory can show up without asking. A feeling like fear, anger, or sadness can take over quickly. Even something like feeling tired or stressed can set things off. These inner signals can bring back the same emotions you felt during a hard time .

Sometimes the trigger is a feeling you do not even notice right away. You might feel on edge, irritated, or overwhelmed, and not know why. Then your thoughts start to spiral, and everything builds from there. By the time you realize what is happening, you are already deep in it. That is how internal triggers work. They sneak in quietly and hit hard.

Your body can also trigger you. A fast heartbeat, tight muscles, or even pain can remind your brain of something from the past. These physical feelings can send a signal that something is wrong, even when it is not. Your brain connects the feeling to a past event and reacts like it is happening again. That connection can feel automatic and hard to stop.

Internal triggers are often harder to spot because they are not right in front of you. They live inside your thoughts and your body. You cannot walk away from them the way you can walk away from a place or a person. That is why learning to notice them matters so much. Once you see them, you can start to understand them.

External Triggers

Other triggers come from the world around you. These are called external triggers. They are things you can see, hear, smell, or touch. They are people, places, and situations that remind your brain of something from your past. These triggers can feel more obvious, but they can still catch you off guard.

A loud noise can set you off in seconds. A crowded room can make you feel trapped or anxious. A certain smell can take you back to a moment you do not want to remember. Even a song, a voice, or a time of year can bring up old feelings. These outside reminders connect to your past in ways that are not always clear .

You might also notice that certain people affect you more than others. It may not be anything they are doing wrong. Something about them might remind your brain of

someone or something from before. That connection can make you feel tense, angry, or distant without a clear reason. Again, it feels real because your brain believes it is real.

Places can be strong triggers too. You might avoid certain streets, buildings, or even whole areas without thinking about why. Your body remembers what your mind tries to forget. When you enter those places, your system goes on alert. It is trying to protect you, even if the danger is no longer there.

External triggers are sometimes easier to manage because you can see them. You can choose to leave, step away, or change your environment. But you cannot avoid everything, and you should not have to. The goal is not to hide from the world. The goal is to understand what affects you so you can respond in a better way.

Why It Feels So Strong

When a trigger hits, it can feel like you are back in that moment again. Your thoughts speed up, your emotions rise, and your body reacts fast. You may feel panic, anger, or deep sadness all at once. It is not just in your head. Your whole system is reacting.

This happens because your brain stores memories in a powerful way. When something reminds you of a past event, your brain pulls that memory forward. It does not just show you the memory. It makes you feel it again. That is why it can feel overwhelming and hard to control .

You may also notice that your reactions feel bigger than the situation in front of you. A small problem can feel like a major threat. A simple comment can feel like an attack. That is because your brain is not just reacting to what is happening now. It is reacting to what happened before.

This can make you feel like you are losing control. You might ask yourself why you are reacting this way. You might feel frustrated or even ashamed. But there is a reason for it. Your brain learned to protect you in a hard situation. Now it is trying to use that same system in everyday life.

The problem is that the system does not always fit the situation anymore. What helped you survive before can make things harder now. That does not mean you are broken. It means your brain needs new ways to respond. And that starts with understanding what is setting you off.

Awareness Is Step One

You cannot fix what you do not see. The first step in dealing with triggers is learning to notice them. Not judge them, not fight them, just notice them. When something shifts inside you, pause and ask what just happened. What changed in that moment.

Start paying attention to patterns. When do your bad moments happen. Where are you when they show up. Who are you around. What are you thinking or feeling right before it hits. These questions help you connect the dots. Over time, those dots start to form a clear picture.

CHARLIE MIKE

You may not get it right every time, and that is okay. This is not about being perfect. It is about becoming aware. The more you notice, the more control you begin to feel. Awareness does not stop the trigger, but it gives you a chance to respond instead of react.

When you begin to see your triggers, something important happens. You start to separate yourself from them. Instead of saying something is wrong with you, you begin to see that something set you off. That small shift changes everything. It gives you space to breathe and think.

This is where the fight starts to change. You are no longer just reacting to everything around you. You are starting to understand it. And once you understand it, you can begin to handle it in a better way. That is how you keep going. That is how you Charlie Mike.

CH 7

Stop Trying to Win the Whole War

There is a trap that a lot of us fall into, and it feels normal at first. We wake up and think we need to fix everything at once. We think we need to beat the depression, silence the anxiety, and shut down the thoughts all in one day. That pressure builds fast, and it makes everything worse. The truth is, trying to win the whole war in one day will break you down every time.

Your mind does not work like a switch that you can flip off. You cannot just decide that today is the day everything disappears. Healing is not something that shows up all at once. It happens slowly, and sometimes it feels like nothing is happening at all.

But small changes are happening, even when you cannot see them yet . The problem is not that you are failing, it is that you are expecting too much all at once.

When you think about everything at the same time, it becomes too heavy to carry. Your brain starts to spin, and your body starts to feel it too. Your chest tightens, your thoughts race, and you feel like you are losing control.

That feeling is not weakness, it is overload. You are trying to carry a weight that was never meant to be carried all at once.

The shift starts when you stop thinking about the whole war. You stop thinking about next week, next month, or how long this will last. You bring it back to right now. Not later today, not even the next hour. Just right now. What do you need to do in this moment to stay steady and keep going.

Focus on the Moment

Focusing on the moment sounds simple, but it is not easy. Your mind wants to run ahead or go backward. It wants to replay things that happened or worry about what might happen. That is what it does, and it will keep doing it if you let it. But you can pull yourself back, even if it is just for a few seconds at a time.

You do that by grounding yourself in what is right in front of you. You look around the room and notice what is there. You feel your feet on the ground and your hands where they rest.

You pay attention to your breathing and slow it down. These small actions may not feel like much, but they bring you back to the present where you have control.

There is a reason this works. When you focus on the present, your brain has less space to run wild. It gives your system a chance to calm down and reset. Even something as simple as controlled breathing or noticing your surroundings can help reduce the intensity of what you are

feeling . It does not fix everything, but it gives you a break, and sometimes that is enough.

You are not trying to feel great in this moment. You are just trying to feel stable enough to keep going. That is the goal. If you can bring your mind back even a little bit, you are already moving in the right direction. That is how you start to take control back, one moment at a time.

Small Wins Matter

Most people overlook the small wins because they do not feel big enough. They think that unless something major changes, it does not count. That way of thinking will keep you stuck. The truth is, small wins are everything when you are dealing with this kind of battle.

Getting out of bed on a hard day is a win. Taking a shower when you do not feel like it is a win. Going outside for a few minutes, making a phone call, or writing something down are all wins. They may not look like much from the outside, but they matter more than people realize. They are proof that you are still moving forward.

Recovery does not happen in giant leaps. It happens in small steps that add up over time. It is a daily process, and it builds little by little . When you stack enough small wins together, you start to build strength without even noticing it at first. That strength becomes your foundation.

You have to give yourself credit for those moments. You have to stop telling yourself that it is not enough. It is enough, and it is exactly how this works. Every small step

you take is a step away from being stuck. It may not feel like progress, but it is.

The goal is not perfection, and it is not some perfect version of yourself. The goal is movement. As long as you are still moving, no matter how slow it feels, you are still in the fight. That is what matters.

Survive Today

Some days are not about growth or progress. Some days are about survival, and that is okay. There will be days where everything feels heavy, and nothing seems to help. On those days, the mission changes. The mission becomes simple. Get through the day.

You do not need to solve your life on those days. You do not need to figure out your future or fix your past. You just need to make it to the end of the day. That might mean doing less, resting more, or just staying quiet and steady. There is no shame in that.

Survival is not failure. It is strength. It takes effort to keep going when everything inside of you wants to shut down. It takes discipline to not give in to the worst thoughts. Even if all you do is make it through the day, you have done something important.

You also have to remind yourself that bad days pass. They feel like they will last forever, but they do not. The intensity comes and goes, even if it feels like it stays too long. Your job is to ride it out without letting it take you under. That is what surviving looks like.

There is power in lowering the mission when you need to. When everything feels too big, you make it smaller. When it still feels too big, you make it even smaller. You keep breaking it down until it becomes manageable. That is how you stay in control when things feel out of control.

Stay in the Fight

This is where it all comes together. You are not trying to win the whole war today. You are not trying to fix everything at once. You are staying in the fight, one moment at a time. That is what Charlie Mike really means.

You keep going, even when it is hard. You keep moving, even when it feels slow. You keep showing up, even when you do not feel like yourself. That is the mission now. Not perfection, not control, just forward movement.

There will be days when you feel stronger and days when you feel weak. That does not change the mission. You keep going either way. Strength is not about how you feel, it is about what you do despite how you feel. That is what builds resilience over time.

You are not alone in this, even if it feels like it. Many veterans go through the same fight, and many of them learn how to manage it one step at a time.

Focusing on present challenges and solving what is right in front of you helps you regain a sense of control . That control builds confidence, and that confidence keeps you moving forward.

CHARLIE MIKE

So stop trying to win everything at once. Stop putting that weight on yourself. Bring it back to now. Take the next step, no matter how small it is. Then take another one after that.

That is how you stay in the fight. That is how you keep going.

CH 8

Doing Something With the Pain

There are days when the noise in your head gets loud and will not stop. It feels like pressure building inside your chest, like something has to come out but you do not know how. You try to sit still, but your thoughts keep moving.

You try to distract yourself, but it comes right back. This is where many people start to break down or shut off. This is also the moment where you have a choice, even if it does not feel like one.

Pain does not just go away because you ignore it. It sits there and grows if you do nothing with it. It turns into anger, sadness, or fear that shows up at the worst times. Many people try to push it down or numb it out, but that only works for a short time.

What you do instead matters more than you think. If you can take that pain and turn it into something, you begin to take back control.

Doing something with the pain means giving it a place to go. It means taking what is inside you and moving it outside of you. That can sound simple, but it is not always easy. It takes effort, and some days you will not feel like doing it. Still, even small actions can help. You are not trying to fix everything, you are just trying to move the pressure out of your head.

This is not about being perfect or talented. You do not need to be a musician, a writer, or an artist. You just need a way to express what is already there. When you start doing this, something changes. The thoughts may still come, but they do not feel as trapped. You begin to breathe a little easier, even if just for a moment.

Creative Outlets Give the Pain a Voice

Creative outlets are one of the most powerful ways to deal with what is inside you. When you create something, you are taking your thoughts and turning them into something real. That could be music, writing, drawing, or anything that lets you express yourself. You do not have to explain it to anyone else. It only has to make sense to you.

Music is a strong tool because it connects to emotion in a deep way. You can listen to it, or you can make it. Some people pick up a guitar or use an app to build songs. Others just write lyrics in a notebook. The act of creating sound or words can help release what you have been holding in. It gives your mind something to focus on that is not the chaos.

Writing works the same way, but it is quieter. You can sit with a notepad and let your thoughts come out. You do not need to worry about grammar or structure. Just write what you feel, even if it does not make sense at first. Over time, patterns start to show. You begin to understand what is really going on inside you.

Research has shown that creative activities like music and art can help people manage stress and process emotions in a safer way. When words are hard to say out loud, creative work gives you another path. It allows you to express fear, anger, and pain without having to explain it. That matters more than most people realize.

The goal is not to escape your feelings. The goal is to face them in a way that does not destroy you. Creative outlets give you that space. They let you work through what you are dealing with instead of running from it. That is a big step forward.

Turning Chaos Into Something Real

When your thoughts are spinning, everything feels out of control. One idea leads to another, and before you know it, your mind is racing. This is where chaos lives. It makes you feel stuck, like there is no way out. But chaos can be shaped if you give it direction.

When you sit down and write or create music, you start to organize that chaos. You take a thought and turn it into a sentence. Then another sentence follows. Before long, you have something you can see or hear. It may not be perfect, but it is real. That alone changes how it feels inside your head.

Creating something gives you a sense of control. You decide what stays and what goes. You decide how the story is told. Even if the subject is painful, you are the one shaping it. That is a powerful shift from feeling like a victim of your thoughts. You become the one in charge of what comes out.

Many veterans have found that writing songs or creating art helps them process things they could not talk about before. It gives them a way to face those memories without being overwhelmed. The act of creating becomes part of the healing process. It is not about forgetting what happened, but about understanding it in a new way.

You may notice that after you create something, the intensity drops a little. The thoughts are still there, but they are not as loud. You have taken some of that energy and moved it somewhere else. That is how you begin to manage it instead of letting it manage you.

You Do Not Need to Be Good at It

One of the biggest things that stops people from trying this is the idea that they are not good enough. They think they cannot write, or they are not musical, or they have no talent. That does not matter here. This is not about performance, it is about release.

No one needs to hear what you create unless you want them to. This is for you, not for anyone else. Your words do not have to rhyme. Your music does not have to sound

perfect. Your thoughts do not have to be clear. They just need to come out.

When you remove the pressure to be good, it becomes easier to start. You can sit down with a simple notepad and write one sentence. Then another. Some days that is all you will do, and that is fine. Other days you may write more or create something bigger. There is no rule you have to follow.

Creative work is personal. It reflects what you are going through at that moment. That means it will change over time. What you create today may look different from what you create next month. That is a good thing. It shows that you are moving, even if it is slow.

The point is to keep going. Even when it feels hard. Even when you do not want to. Because every time you do something with the pain, you take a step forward. You are not stuck, even if it feels like it.

Making It Part of Your Daily Fight

This is not something you do once and forget about. It becomes part of how you deal with life. Some days you will need it more than others. On the hard days, it can be the thing that gets you through. On the better days, it helps you stay balanced.

You do not need a lot of time. Even ten minutes can make a difference. Sit down, write a few lines, or work on a piece of music. Let your thoughts come out without stopping them. When you are done, take a breath and

notice how you feel. It may not fix everything, but it can take the edge off.

Over time, this becomes a habit. Instead of letting your thoughts build up, you release them as they come. That keeps them from stacking on top of each other. It also helps you understand yourself better. You start to see what triggers you and how you react.

Creative work can also give you something to look forward to. It becomes a part of your day that is yours. In a life that often feels out of control, that matters. It gives you a small space where you are in charge.

You are not trying to eliminate the pain. You are learning how to live with it in a better way. You are learning how to move through it instead of being stopped by it. That is what this fight is about.

Keep Creating, Keep Moving

There will be days when nothing feels like it is working. The thoughts will still come. The weight will still be there. On those days, doing something small matters more than ever. Even one sentence written down is a step forward.

You may not see the progress right away. That is normal. This is not a quick fix. It is something you build over time. Each time you create, you are training your mind to handle things differently. You are giving yourself another option besides shutting down.

Creative outlets are not the only tool you will use, but they are an important one. They give you a way to express what cannot always be said. They give you a way to release pressure before it builds too high. Most of all, they remind you that you are still capable of creating something, even in the middle of a fight.

You are not your worst thoughts. You are not your hardest days. You are someone who is still here, still trying, and still moving forward. That matters more than anything else. Keep creating, keep pushing, and keep going. That is how you start to take control of your life again.

CHARLIE MIKE

CH 9

Getting It Out of Your Head

There are days when your thoughts feel like they are trapped inside your head with no way out. They bounce around, get louder, and start to take over everything. You try to ignore them, but they keep coming back stronger. It can feel like pressure building inside your chest and your mind at the same time. That is where writing comes in, and it can change everything.

Writing is one of the simplest tools you will ever have, but it is also one of the most powerful. You do not need training, you do not need special skills, and you do not need anyone else involved.

All you need is something to write on and the willingness to be honest with yourself. When you put your thoughts on paper, something shifts. What was stuck inside your head now has somewhere to go.

Many people find that writing helps them calm down and think more clearly. When your thoughts are on paper, they stop spinning as fast in your mind. They become something you can look at instead of something that

controls you. Studies have shown that writing can help people process stress and trauma and even reduce emotional intensity over time . That means this is not just a feeling. It is something real that can help.

When you are dealing with PTSD, depression, or anxiety, your mind can feel like it is working against you. Writing gives you a way to push back. It gives you a way to take control, even if it is just for a few minutes. And sometimes, a few minutes is all you need to get through a hard moment.

The Notepad Method

You do not need a fancy journal or a perfect system to start writing. In fact, simple is better. Shawn talks about starting with a notepad, and that is exactly where you should begin. Open your phone or grab a piece of paper and just start writing whatever is in your head. Do not worry about grammar, spelling, or making sense.

This is not about writing something pretty. This is about getting it out. If your thoughts are messy, your writing should be messy too. If you are angry, write angry. If you are sad, write sad. Let it come out the way it feels inside.

Sometimes you might only write a few lines. Other times you might fill a whole page without even realizing it. That is okay. There is no right way to do this. The only goal is to move what is inside your head onto something outside of you.

When you write things down, you start to see patterns. You begin to notice what triggers you and what thoughts

keep coming back. This kind of awareness is powerful because it gives you insight into your own mind. You are no longer just reacting. You are starting to understand.

Over time, writing can become a habit that you turn to without even thinking about it. When things get heavy, you reach for your notepad instead of letting the thoughts build up. That small shift can make a big difference in how you handle your day.

Turning Pain Into Words

One of the most powerful forms of writing is turning your pain into something creative. For Shawn, that means writing lyrics. For someone else, it might mean journaling or even writing short stories. The format does not matter as much as the honesty behind it.

When you take your thoughts and turn them into words, you are doing more than just writing. You are giving your pain a voice. You are taking something that feels out of control and shaping it into something you can understand. That process alone can bring relief.

Creative writing has been shown to help people deal with trauma and emotional stress. It allows you to express things that are hard to say out loud and gives you a safe place to put those feelings. You are not holding everything inside anymore. You are letting it out in a way that makes sense to you.

When I write music, I am not just making songs. I am working through what I feel in that moment. I am taking the chaos in my head and turning it into something

structured. That structure helps bring order to something that feels overwhelming.

You do not have to be a songwriter to do this. You can write a few lines, a paragraph, or even just a list of thoughts. The key is to keep it real. Do not filter yourself. Do not try to sound strong. Just be honest.

That honesty is where the healing starts.

Rewrite Tomorrow

I've talked about one of my songs called "Rewrite Tomorrow," and that idea is bigger than just a song. It is a way of thinking. It is a reminder that your past does not get the final say in your life. You still have a say in what comes next.

When you write, you are not just looking back. You are also shaping what comes forward. You are taking your thoughts, your mistakes, your pain, and turning them into something that can guide you. That is what it means to rewrite tomorrow.

Your past may be filled with things you wish you could change. Moments you regret. Choices you wish you could take back. Writing gives you a way to face those things without being trapped by them. You can put them on paper, look at them, and decide what they mean moving forward.

That does not mean you forget what happened. It means you take control of how it affects you now. You are no longer just reacting to your past. You are learning from it and using it.

This idea is powerful because it puts you back in control. Even on your worst days, you still have the ability to take one small step forward. Writing can be that step. It can be the moment where you say, “I am still here, and I am still moving.”

Each time you write, you are building something. You are creating a record of your fight. You are proving to yourself that you are still in it. That matters more than you think.

Clearing the Noise

One of the hardest parts of dealing with mental health struggles is the noise in your head. The constant thoughts, the doubts, the memories, and the fear can all blend together. It becomes hard to focus, hard to think, and hard to feel any sense of peace.

Writing helps clear that noise. When you put your thoughts on paper, your mind has less to hold onto. It is like taking a crowded room and slowly emptying it out. You can finally breathe again.

Many people notice that after they write, they feel lighter. The problems are still there, but they do not feel as heavy. That is because writing helps you process what you are feeling instead of holding it inside. It gives your brain a break.

There is also something important that happens when you see your thoughts written down. You realize that not all of them are true. Some of them are just fear. Some of them are just habits your mind has developed. When they are

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on paper, you can question them instead of believing them.

This is how writing helps you take back control. It creates space between you and your thoughts. You are no longer trapped inside them. You are looking at them from the outside.

That space is where change begins.

Writing will not fix everything overnight. It will not make the hard days disappear. But it will give you a tool you can use anytime, anywhere. It will give you a way to fight back when your mind starts working against you.

And sometimes, that is all you need. A way to get through the moment. A way to keep going. A way to stay in the fight.

That is what this is about. Not being perfect. Not having all the answers. Just finding something that helps you take one more step forward.

That is how you Charlie Mike.

CH 10

Move Your Body, Calm Your Mind

There are days when your mind feels like it will not stop. The thoughts keep coming, and they come fast. Your chest feels tight, your breathing gets short, and your body feels like it is always on edge.

It can feel like you are stuck in a loop that you cannot break. On those days, thinking your way out of it does not work. That is when you need to stop trying to fix your mind and start moving your body.

Your body and your mind are connected in ways most people do not think about. When your mind is under stress, your body holds that stress. Your muscles tighten, your heart rate goes up, and your system stays in a high alert mode.

This is the same fight or flight response that kept you alive in the past. The problem is that now it does not turn off when it should. Movement is one of the fastest ways to help your body reset and come back down.

You do not need a perfect plan or a full workout routine to get started. You just need to move. That can be walking, stretching, lifting weights, or even just pacing back and forth.

The goal is not to become an athlete. The goal is to give your body a way to release what your mind is holding on to. When you move, you are telling your system that it is okay to let go of some of that tension.

Your body was built to move, not to sit still with stress all day. When you stay still, that energy has nowhere to go. It builds up and starts to turn into anxiety, anger, or deep sadness. Movement gives that energy a place to go. It turns something that feels trapped into something that is being released. That alone can change how you feel in a short amount of time.

Why Movement Changes Everything

When you start moving your body, things begin to shift inside you. Your breathing changes, your heart rate adjusts, and your muscles begin to loosen. These physical changes send signals to your brain that you are not in danger. Over time, your system starts to calm down. This is not just a feeling. This is your body doing exactly what it was designed to do.

Exercise also helps your brain release chemicals that improve your mood. These are often called feel good chemicals, and they help reduce stress and improve how you feel overall. Even a small amount of movement can make a difference. You do not need hours in a gym to see

change. Just getting up and moving for a short time can begin to shift your state.

For people dealing with PTSD, anxiety, or depression, this matters even more. Movement can help reduce the intensity of symptoms and make it easier to handle the day. It can help lower anxiety, improve sleep, and give you moments of relief when your mind feels out of control. This does not mean everything goes away. It means you get a break, and sometimes that break is enough to keep going.

There is also something powerful about doing something physical when your mind feels weak. It reminds you that you are still in control of something. Even if your thoughts are a mess, you can still take a step, lift a weight, or go for a walk. That builds a sense of strength that starts in your body and carries into your mind. Over time, that strength becomes something you can rely on.

Movement also helps you stay in the present moment. When you are focused on your steps, your breathing, or the way your muscles feel, your mind is not stuck in the past or worrying about the future. You are here, right now. That is one of the hardest things to do when you are struggling. Movement gives you a simple way to come back to the present.

Simple Ways to Get Started

You do not need to overthink this. In fact, overthinking is what stops most people from starting. You do not need the right clothes, the right shoes, or the right plan. You just need to begin. Start small and keep it simple. The goal is to build a habit, not to be perfect.

A simple walk can be one of the most powerful things you can do. Step outside, breathe the air, and just move forward. You do not need a destination. You do not need a time limit. Just walk until you feel a small shift inside you. Some days that might take five minutes. Other days it might take longer. Either way, it counts.

If walking is not your thing, find something else that works for you. You can do push ups, stretch your body, or lift something heavy. You can go to a gym or stay at home. You can even turn on music and just move around. The type of movement does not matter as much as the fact that you are moving. What matters is that you are doing something instead of staying stuck.

It is also important to listen to your body. Some days you will have more energy, and some days you will not. On hard days, even a little movement is enough. You do not need to push yourself to the limit. You just need to show up and do something. That builds consistency, and consistency is what creates change over time.

If you can, try to make movement part of your daily routine. It does not have to be long or intense. Just make it something you do each day. Over time, your body will begin to expect it, and it will become easier to start. You

will also begin to notice how much better you feel after you move. That becomes its own motivation.

When It Feels Like Too Much

There will be days when moving feels impossible. Your mind will tell you to stay where you are. It will tell you that nothing will help and that there is no point in trying. Those are the days when movement matters the most. Even if it feels small, even if it feels pointless, it is not.

On those days, lower the bar. Do not think about a full workout. Do not think about going far or doing a lot. Just stand up. Just take a few steps. Just stretch your arms. Start with something so small that you cannot talk yourself out of it. Once you begin, it often becomes easier to keep going.

You are not trying to win anything in that moment. You are just trying to break the pattern. When you are stuck in your head, staying still keeps you there. Movement interrupts that cycle. It gives your brain something new to focus on. It creates a shift, even if it is small.

It is also okay if it does not feel amazing right away. Sometimes you will move your body and still feel off. That does not mean it is not working. Change does not always happen instantly. What matters is that you are building a habit that supports you over time. The more you do it, the more you will start to feel the difference.

You are not failing if you only do a little. You are not failing if you have to stop early. You are not failing if it feels hard. You are winning because you are doing something instead

of nothing. That is what matters in this fight. Small actions add up, even when it does not feel like it in the moment.

Building Strength Inside and Out

Over time, movement does more than just help you in the moment. It begins to build strength inside you. Your body gets stronger, but so does your mind. You start to see that you can push through hard moments. You start to trust yourself more. That trust is something many people lose, and it is something you can build back.

Exercise and movement can also improve your sleep, which is a big part of mental health. When you sleep better, you think more clearly and handle stress better. It becomes easier to deal with the things that used to feel overwhelming. This creates a cycle where one good habit supports another.

There is also a long term effect on your system. Regular movement can help reduce the intensity of symptoms over time. It helps your body learn how to come back to a calm state more easily. This does not mean everything disappears, but it does mean you have more control than you did before.

You also begin to feel a sense of accomplishment. Each time you move, you prove to yourself that you are still fighting. You are still showing up. You are still pushing forward. That matters more than you may realize. It builds confidence in a quiet but powerful way.

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At the end of the day, this is not about becoming someone new. It is about giving yourself tools to get through the hard moments. Movement is one of those tools. It is simple, it is available, and it works. You do not need to wait for the perfect time to start. You can start right now, right where you are.

Keep it simple. Keep it real. When your mind gets loud, move your body. When the weight feels heavy, take a step. When you feel stuck, do something small. This is part of how you keep going. This is part of how you Charlie Mike.

CHARLIE MIKE

CH 11

Structure Saves You

There is something that happens when your life has no structure. Days start to blur together, and you stop knowing what comes next. One moment you are sitting there, and the next moment hours are gone and you do not even remember what you did.

Your mind fills in the gaps with worry, stress, and thoughts that will not stop. When you are dealing with PTSD, depression, or anxiety, that lack of structure can make everything worse. It is not because you are weak, it is because your brain needs something solid to hold on to.

Structure gives you something to lean on when everything else feels shaky. It is not about being perfect or having a strict schedule that never changes. It is about having a rhythm to your day that your mind can trust.

When you wake up at the same time, eat at the same time, and move your body at the same time, your brain starts to settle down. It stops asking what is next because it already knows. That simple shift can take pressure off your mind and give you space to breathe.

Many people think routine is boring, but for someone in a fight with their own mind, routine is freedom. It removes the chaos that feeds anxiety and stress. Research shows that having daily routines can reduce stress and give you a sense of control in your life .

When your world feels out of control, even small habits can remind you that you still have power over your day. That matters more than most people realize. It can be the difference between falling apart and holding it together.

The truth is simple. When your life has no structure, your symptoms get louder. When your life has structure, your symptoms get quieter. You are not fixing everything overnight, but you are creating a foundation.

That foundation gives you a place to stand when things get hard. And things will get hard, because that is part of the fight. Structure does not remove the fight, but it helps you stay in it.

Routine Creates Stability

When you build a routine, you are building stability in a world that often feels unstable. Your brain is always looking for patterns, even when you do not realize it. When there is no pattern, your brain starts to work harder to figure things out. That extra work creates stress and can make anxiety worse. A routine gives your brain a break from that constant guessing.

Think about it like this. If you wake up every day at a different time, your body never knows what to expect. If you eat at random times, your energy goes up and down

all day. If you sleep whenever you can, your mind never fully rests. Over time, that lack of rhythm builds up and makes everything feel harder. It is not just in your head, it is happening in your body too.

Studies show that people with less daily routine often have higher levels of anxiety and depression . That is because routine creates predictability, and predictability creates safety. When your brain feels safe, it does not stay on high alert all the time. It starts to calm down, even if just a little. That small amount of calm can make a big difference in how you feel during the day.

Stability does not mean everything is easy. You can still have bad days, and you will. But when you have a routine, those bad days do not throw you off as much. You still wake up, you still eat, you still move forward. That consistency becomes your anchor. When everything else feels like it is slipping, your routine holds you in place.

Sleep, Food, and Daily Rhythm

The basics matter more than people think. Sleep, food, and daily rhythm are not small things, they are the foundation of your mental health. When these are off, everything else becomes harder. When these are steady, everything else becomes a little easier to manage. It sounds simple, but simple is what works when life feels complicated.

Sleep is one of the biggest factors. When you do not sleep well, your mind becomes louder and harder to control. Thoughts race faster, emotions hit harder, and your patience gets shorter. A steady sleep routine helps your

body know when to rest and when to wake up. Over time, this can improve your mood and reduce stress levels . You do not need perfect sleep, but you need consistent sleep.

Food is another piece that often gets ignored. When you skip meals or eat at random times, your energy crashes and your mood follows. You may feel more anxious, more irritable, and more drained. Eating at regular times helps your body stay balanced. It gives you steady energy instead of highs and lows that make your day harder. It is not about eating perfect meals, it is about eating consistently.

Your daily rhythm ties everything together. This is the pattern of your day, the flow from morning to night. When you have a rhythm, your brain knows what is coming next. You wake up, you move, you eat, you rest, and you repeat. That rhythm becomes familiar, and familiar things feel safer. For someone dealing with mental health struggles, that sense of safety is powerful.

Why Chaos Makes It Worse

Chaos feeds the very things you are trying to fight. When your day has no structure, your mind fills in the gaps with worry, fear, and negative thoughts. You start thinking too much because there is nothing else guiding you. Your brain goes into overdrive, trying to solve problems that may not even be real. That is exhausting, and it can wear you down fast.

When you have too many choices and no plan, your brain gets overwhelmed. Even simple decisions feel heavy. What should I do next, what should I eat, when should I go to bed, all of it becomes too much. This is called mental overload, and it drains your energy. A routine removes many of those decisions because they are already made. That frees up your mind to focus on getting through the day.

Chaos also affects your body. Your internal clock gets thrown off, which impacts your sleep, your energy, and your mood. When your body does not know when to rest or when to move, it struggles to stay balanced. This can increase stress and make symptoms worse. A structured day helps align your body and mind, which supports better emotional stability.

There is another side to chaos that people do not talk about enough. It can pull you into isolation. When you have no structure, it becomes easier to do nothing. You stay in the house, you avoid people, and you disconnect from the world.

That isolation feeds depression and makes everything feel heavier. Structure pushes you to move, even when you do not feel like it. That movement matters more than you think.

Build Something You Can Follow

You do not need a perfect routine to start. You just need something simple that you can follow. Start with the basics and build from there. Wake up at the same time each day, even if you did not sleep well. Eat something at the same time, even if it is small. Move your body, even if it is just a short walk. These small actions create a pattern that your brain can learn.

The key is consistency, not perfection. You are going to mess it up some days, and that is okay. What matters is that you come back to it. Every time you return to your routine, you are reinforcing it. You are telling your brain that this is the path, even when things get hard. Over time, it becomes easier because it becomes familiar.

Do not try to build everything at once. That will overwhelm you and make you want to quit. Start with one or two things and stick with them. Once those feel normal, add something else. This is how you build a routine that lasts. Slow and steady wins this fight, not fast and perfect.

Your routine should work for you, not against you. It should fit your life and your needs. There is no one right way to do it. The goal is not to create a perfect schedule, it is to create a stable one. Something you can rely on when your mind is not cooperating. Something that helps you keep going, even when you do not feel strong.

At the end of the day, structure is not about control, it is about support. It is a tool that helps you manage the chaos inside your head. It gives you a path to follow when everything feels uncertain. It helps you stay in the fight,

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one day at a time. And sometimes, that is more than
enough.

CHARLIE MIKE

CH 12

Your People Matter

There is a point in this journey where you start to realize something important. You cannot fight this battle alone forever. You may try, and most of us do, but isolation only makes the weight heavier. The demons get louder when there is no one else around to challenge them. What feels like strength at first slowly turns into silence, and that silence can become dangerous.

Being around the right people does not fix everything overnight. It does not erase the past or shut off your thoughts. But it does something powerful that many of us forget we need. It reminds you that you are not the only one fighting this fight. And sometimes, that reminder is enough to get you through the day.

There is a difference between being around people and being around the right people. You can be in a room full of people and still feel completely alone. You can talk, laugh, and go through the motions, but inside you feel disconnected. That happens because most people do not

understand what is going on in your head. They are not wrong for that. They just have not lived it.

The people who matter in this part of your life are the ones who understand without needing a long explanation. They may not have lived your exact story, but they have walked through something close enough. They know what it feels like when your mind will not slow down. They know what it feels like to be tired but unable to sleep. They know what it feels like to carry something heavy that no one else can see.

Finding People Who Get It

When you find people who understand, something shifts inside of you. You do not have to pretend as much. You do not have to explain every detail just to be heard. You can speak in a few words, and they already know the meaning behind them. That kind of connection is rare, but it is real, and it matters more than most people realize.

Veterans often connect faster with other veterans because of shared experience. There is a bond that comes from going through intense situations together. Even if your paths were different, there is a common understanding of pressure, stress, and survival. That shared ground creates trust faster than anything else.

This is why veteran groups can be so powerful. They give you a place where you do not feel like an outsider. You are not the only one dealing with intrusive thoughts or emotional swings. You are not the only one trying to figure out how to live a normal life after everything you have

seen. When you hear others talk about the same struggles, it starts to break the lie that you are alone.

At first, it can feel uncomfortable to step into these spaces. You might not want to talk. You might not trust anyone. That is normal. You do not have to walk in and share your whole story. You can sit there, listen, and take it in. Even just hearing others speak can help you feel less isolated.

Over time, something begins to change. You may start to open up a little. You may find yourself nodding along when someone else speaks. You may even share a small piece of your own story. That is how it starts. Not with a big breakthrough, but with small steps that build trust.

Why Isolation Makes It Worse

Isolation feels safe in the moment. It gives you control. It keeps you away from situations that might trigger you. But over time, it does more harm than good. The more you isolate, the more your thoughts take over. There is no one there to challenge them or help you see things differently.

When you are alone too much, your mind becomes the only voice you hear. And that voice is not always kind. It can remind you of past mistakes. It can replay things you wish you could forget. It can tell you things about yourself that are not true. Without other people around, those thoughts can start to feel real.

Peer support helps break that cycle. It gives you another voice to listen to. It gives you perspective that you cannot always see on your own. When someone else shares their

experience, it can help you understand your own. When someone else talks about how they cope, it can give you ideas to try.

Research shows that being around others who have gone through similar experiences can reduce feelings of isolation and help improve mental health. It does not replace professional help, but it adds something that therapy alone cannot always provide. It adds connection, and connection is a powerful tool.

Another important part of peer support is that it builds trust over time. Many veterans struggle with trust after their experiences. Being around people who understand your background can make it easier to open up. You do not feel judged in the same way. You feel seen in a way that is hard to find elsewhere.

Learning From Each Other

One of the biggest benefits of being around like minded people is learning from each other. Everyone has different ways of coping. What works for one person may not work for another, but hearing different approaches gives you options. It gives you tools to try when things get hard.

In these groups, people share real life strategies. They talk about what helps them on their worst days. They talk about what does not work. They talk about mistakes they have made and lessons they have learned. This kind of knowledge is not found in a textbook. It comes from lived experience.

Peer support is built on shared experience. It is people helping each other because they have been through similar struggles. That creates a level of understanding that is hard to match. You are not just hearing advice. You are hearing from someone who has been in the same place.

Another powerful part of this is accountability. When you are connected to others, you are more likely to keep going. You know someone might check in on you. You know someone is expecting to see you. That can be enough to push you to take one more step forward on a day when you do not feel like moving at all.

There is also something important that happens when you start helping others. When you share your story, you are not just helping them. You are helping yourself. You begin to see your own strength. You begin to realize how far you have come. Helping someone else can give you a sense of purpose that you may have lost.

You Are Not Alone

This may be the most important message in this entire chapter. You are not alone, even if it feels like you are. There are others out there who understand what you are going through. There are people who have felt the same weight, fought the same thoughts, and made it through another day.

Sometimes the hardest step is reaching out. It can feel uncomfortable. It can feel like you are admitting weakness. But it is not weakness. It is one of the strongest

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things you can do. It takes courage to let someone else into your world, even just a little.

Peer support groups are not about fixing you. They are about connecting with others who understand. They give you a place where you can be yourself without having to explain everything. They give you a space where you can talk or just listen, depending on what you need that day.

You do not have to go through this alone. You were never meant to. The mission now is not just to survive by yourself. It is to stay in the fight with others who are walking a similar path. Together, you can carry some of that weight.

At the end of the day, your people matter more than you may realize. They may not have all the answers. They may not be able to take away your pain. But they can stand with you in it. And sometimes, that is exactly what you need to keep going.

Stay in the fight. Stay connected. And remember, there are others out there who are fighting right alongside you, even if you have not met them yet.

CH 13

Finding Purpose Again

There comes a point where the noise inside your head does not go away, no matter how hard you try to shut it down. You sit there and feel empty, even when everything around you looks fine. You may have a roof over your head, food on the table, and people who care about you, but inside it still feels like something is missing.

That missing piece is not weakness, and it is not failure. It is purpose, and when purpose is gone, everything else starts to feel hollow. Many veterans face this after service because the mission that once drove them is no longer there.

In the military, your life had direction every single day. You woke up knowing what needed to be done and why it mattered. You were part of something bigger than yourself, and that gave meaning to even the hardest days. When that structure disappears, it can feel like you are drifting with no clear path. That feeling can lead to frustration, anger, and deep sadness. It can also make the

demons louder because now there is nothing pushing back against them.

Purpose is not something you find overnight, and it is not something that looks the same for everyone. It is something you build, one small step at a time. It starts with doing something that matters, even if it only feels small at first. Over time, those small actions begin to stack up and create something bigger. That is how you begin to fill the empty space that once felt impossible to reach.

Helping Others Helps You

One of the fastest ways to begin finding purpose again is by helping someone else. This may sound simple, but it is powerful in ways you might not expect. When you take the focus off your own pain and put it on someone else, something shifts inside you.

The noise in your head does not disappear, but it gets quieter for a while. That small break can be enough to help you breathe again.

Helping others does not have to be a big or complicated thing. It can be as simple as checking on a friend, giving someone a ride, or listening when someone needs to talk. These small acts remind you that you still have value and that you can still make a difference.

Over time, those moments start to build confidence again. You begin to see that you are not just surviving, you are contributing.

There is also something deeper that happens when you help others who understand what you have been through.

Being around people who have walked a similar path creates a connection that is hard to explain. You do not have to say everything because they already understand parts of it. That shared understanding helps break down the feeling of isolation that many veterans carry.

Community support plays a big role in improving mental health because it creates a sense of belonging and understanding .

Helping others also gives you a reason to get up on the days when you do not want to. When someone is counting on you, even in a small way, it creates accountability. That accountability can be the difference between staying stuck and taking one step forward. It reminds you that your presence matters, even when your mind is telling you it does not.

A Mission That Matters

Many veterans struggle because they no longer feel like they are on a mission. The truth is, that feeling does not go away because it is part of who you are. You were trained to be mission driven, and that does not just turn off when you leave service. The key is not to get rid of that mindset, but to redirect it into something new.

A mission does not have to look like what it did before. It can be something as simple as helping other veterans, working with a community group, or building something that supports others. Some veterans find purpose through organizations that bring people together, whether it is on the water, in the gym, or through shared activities. These

environments create space for healing while also giving people a reason to show up.

When you are part of something that helps others, you begin to feel that sense of purpose again. It may not feel as intense as it did before, but it is real. You start to see that your life still has direction, even if it looks different now. Helping others can also lead to better mental health because it improves mood and reduces stress while giving you a sense of identity again .

A mission gives structure to your days, and structure is something the mind needs. Without it, your thoughts can spiral out of control. With it, you begin to regain a sense of control over your life. It does not fix everything, but it gives you something to hold on to when things feel unstable.

Turning Pain Into Purpose

The pain you carry is real, and it does not just disappear. Trying to ignore it or bury it only makes it stronger over time. What you can do is learn how to use that pain in a different way. Instead of letting it destroy you, you can turn it into something that helps others. That is where real purpose begins to grow.

There is a concept called growth after trauma, where people take what they have been through and use it to become stronger. This does not mean the pain goes away. It means you learn how to live with it while also building something meaningful from it. Many veterans who find purpose again do so by sharing their experiences and helping others navigate similar struggles. This kind of

growth often leads to a stronger sense of identity and a deeper appreciation for life .

When you share your story or help someone else through a hard time, you begin to see your pain differently. It is no longer just something that happened to you. It becomes something that can help someone else survive their own battle. That shift in perspective can be powerful because it gives meaning to what once felt meaningless.

You do not have to have everything figured out to help someone else. You just have to be honest about where you are. Sometimes the most powerful thing you can say to someone is that you can relate to how they feel. That connection can create hope, and hope is something that many people are searching for.

Purpose Replaces Emptiness

That empty feeling does not go away all at once. It fades slowly as you begin to build a life that has meaning again. Purpose does not remove the demons, but it gives you something stronger to stand on. It creates a reason to keep going, even when things are hard.

When you have purpose, your days start to feel different. You wake up with something to do, something that matters. That does not mean every day will be easy. There will still be bad days where everything feels heavy. The difference is that now you have something pulling you forward instead of just trying to push through the pain.

Research shows that having a sense of purpose is linked to lower levels of stress and better mental health. When people feel like their life has meaning, they are better able to handle difficult situations. Purpose gives direction, and direction helps reduce the chaos that can take over the mind . It becomes a stabilizing force in a life that once felt out of control.

You do not need a perfect plan to find purpose. You just need to start somewhere. Help one person, do one thing that matters, and build from there. Over time, those small actions turn into something bigger. They create a life that feels worth living again, even with the struggles that come with it.

Purpose does not mean the fight is over. It means you have a reason to stay in the fight. It means you are no longer just trying to survive the day. You are working toward something that matters, and that changes everything.

CH 14

Rewrite Tomorrow

There is a moment that comes for many of us when we look back and feel stuck in what we have done, what we have seen, or what has been done to us. That moment can feel heavy. It can feel like everything behind you is still sitting on your chest, making it hard to breathe.

You might think that your past is who you are, and that nothing will ever change that. That belief can keep you frozen in place, even when your life is still moving forward.

The truth is simple, even if it does not feel simple. Your past is part of your story, but it is not your whole story. What happened to you shaped you, but it does not own you.

Many people who deal with trauma feel like their identity got tied to their worst moments, but that does not have to stay that way. It is possible to carry your past without letting it control your future . You are still here, and that means your story is still being written.

Think about that for a second. If your story is still being written, then the next page is not decided yet. That means you still have a say in what comes next. You are not locked into one version of yourself forever. Even if your past feels loud, it does not get the final word. You do.

There are going to be days when your mind tries to pull you back into old memories. There will be times when you feel like nothing has changed at all. That is normal. That does not mean you are failing. It means you are human, and you are still working through things that matter. Healing is not about forgetting the past. It is about learning how to live with it without letting it run your life.

Your Next Step Matters

A lot of people think they need to fix everything all at once. They think they need to figure out their whole life, solve all their problems, and become a completely different person overnight.

That kind of thinking can crush you. It can make you feel like you are already behind before you even start. The truth is, you do not need to fix everything today. You just need to take one step.

That step might be small. It might not look like much from the outside. It could be getting out of bed when you did not want to. It could be going outside for a few minutes. It could be writing down one thought instead of letting it stay stuck in your head.

Small steps matter more than big plans that never happen. Every step forward, no matter how small, is movement.

When you focus on the next step, you take away some of the pressure. You stop trying to win the whole war in one day. You start to understand that progress is built over time. One step leads to another, and another, and another. Before you know it, you are not where you used to be. You are somewhere new, even if it is only a little bit different.

You may not always feel strong when you take that step. You may feel tired, angry, or numb. That is okay. Strength is not about feeling good. It is about moving anyway. It is about doing something, even when your mind is telling you not to. That is what real strength looks like. It is quiet, and it is steady.

Your next step is also your choice. That matters more than anything. When you choose to take a step, you are taking control back from the things that tried to take it from you. You are saying that your life still belongs to you. That is powerful, even if it does not feel like it right away.

You Do Not Need to Be Fixed

There is a trap that many people fall into. They believe they are broken and need to be fixed before they can move forward. They think something is wrong with them, and that they have to become perfect before they can live a good life. That kind of thinking can keep you stuck for years. It can make you wait for a version of yourself that may never come.

You are not broken. You are responding to things that were hard, painful, and real. The way you feel makes sense, even if it does not feel good. You adapted to survive. Those adaptations may not serve you the same way now, but they helped you get through something. That matters.

Healing is not about fixing yourself. It is about understanding yourself. It is about learning what helps you and what hurts you. It is about making small changes that allow you to live better over time. You are not a machine that needs repair. You are a person who needs space, time, and the right tools.

There will be parts of you that you do not like. There will be habits that you want to change. That is normal. Everyone has those things. The goal is not to erase them overnight. The goal is to work with them, to understand them, and to slowly build something better. You are allowed to grow without being perfect.

You are also allowed to move forward while still healing. You do not have to wait until everything is figured out. You can take steps even when things are messy. In fact, that is how most people do it. They move forward while they are still working through things. They do not wait for a perfect moment. They create momentum instead.

Keep Moving, Even When It Is Hard

There will be days when everything feels heavy. Days when your mind is loud and your body feels tired. Days when you question if anything is changing at all. Those days are part of the process. They do not mean you are going backward. They mean you are still in the fight.

On those days, your goal is not to do everything. Your goal is to do something. Even the smallest action can break the cycle of staying stuck. It might not fix everything, but it creates movement. Movement is what keeps you from falling deeper into the same patterns. Movement is what keeps you going.

You will also have better days. Days when things feel lighter and clearer. It is important to notice those days. Not to compare them, but to remind yourself that they exist. They are proof that things can shift. They are proof that you are not stuck forever, even if it feels that way sometimes.

The path forward is not straight. It is not clean. It is not perfect. It moves in different directions, sometimes forward and sometimes sideways. What matters is that you keep moving in some way. You do not quit. You do not give up on yourself, even when it is hard.

You are building something, even when you cannot see it yet. Every step, every effort, every moment you choose to keep going is part of that build. Over time, those moments add up. They create change. They create a different version of your life.

Rewrite Tomorrow

You have more control than you think, even if it does not feel that way. You may not control everything that happens to you, but you do have control over what you do next. That is where your power is. It is in the next choice, the next step, the next moment.

Rewriting tomorrow does not mean forgetting yesterday. It means choosing not to let yesterday decide everything. It means taking what you have been through and deciding how you will carry it. You can carry it in a way that weighs you down, or in a way that pushes you forward. That choice may not be easy, but it is yours.

Every day you wake up is another chance to write something new. It might be a small change. It might be a different thought, a different action, or a different response. Those small changes are how new patterns are built. They are how you slowly become someone who is not controlled by the past.

You are allowed to become someone new. Not a completely different person, but a version of yourself that is not stuck where you used to be. Growth does not erase who you were. It adds to who you are becoming. It gives you more options, more strength, and more understanding.

Tomorrow is not promised, but if it comes, you get a say in how you meet it. You do not need to have everything

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figured out. You just need to show up and take a step.
That is enough. That has always been enough.

Charlie Mike. Keep going.

CHARLIE MIKE

Closing: Stay in the Fight

There is a phrase in the military that sticks with you long after you hang up the uniform. That phrase is Charlie Mike. It means continue the mission. It is simple, but it carries weight. It means no matter what just happened, no matter how bad it feels, you keep moving forward.

When you are in the middle of a hard moment, this phrase matters even more. Your mind may feel like it is under attack. Your thoughts may be loud and painful. You may feel tired in a way that sleep cannot fix. But even then, the mission does not stop. Your mission now is your life, and your job is to stay in it.

Some people think the mission ends when you leave the military. That is not true. The mission just changes. It becomes about getting through the day. It becomes about learning how to live again. It becomes about finding a way to stand up even when your mind tells you to stay down. That is your mission now.

You do not have to win every day. You do not have to feel strong all the time. You do not have to have it all figured out. All you have to do is keep going. That is what Charlie Mike really means. It means you are still in the fight, and you are not quitting.

Some Days Are Ugly

There will be days that feel heavy from the moment you wake up. Days where your chest feels tight and your thoughts will not slow down. Days where everything feels like too much. These are the days that test you the most. These are the days where you have to remind yourself that you have been here before.

On those days, your mind may try to lie to you. It may tell you that you are failing. It may tell you that nothing is getting better. It may tell you that you are alone. But those thoughts are not the truth. They are just part of the fight. They are part of the noise that comes with what you have been through.

Some days you will not feel proud of how you handled things. You may snap at someone. You may shut down. You may feel like you went backward. That does not mean you failed. That means you are human. That means you are still in the process of learning how to deal with what is inside of you.

The goal is not to have perfect days. The goal is to get through the hard ones without giving up. Even if all you did was make it to the end of the day, that still counts. Even if all you did was breathe and hold on, that still matters. Some days survival is the win.

You Are Still Here

The fact that you are still here means something. It means you have already made it through things that could have broken you. It means you have faced moments that most people will never understand. It means you have strength, even if you do not feel it right now.

There were times in your life where things could have gone a different way. There were moments where you could have given up. There were days where it would have been easier to walk away from everything. But you did not. You stayed. You fought. You kept moving forward, even if it was slow.

You may not give yourself credit for that. You may brush it off like it is nothing. But it is not nothing. It is everything. Staying here takes strength. Waking up and trying again takes courage. Facing your own mind and choosing to keep going takes more strength than most people will ever see.

You are still here, and that matters more than you think. It means there is still a chance to build something better. It means there is still time to find peace in small moments. It means your story is not over yet. As long as you are here, the mission is still alive.

Keep Moving Forward

Moving forward does not always mean big steps. Sometimes it is the smallest things that matter most. Getting out of bed when you do not want to is a step. Taking a walk is a step. Writing your thoughts down is a step. Reaching out to someone is a step.

CHARLIE MIKE

You do not have to fix everything at once. You do not have to solve your whole life in one day. That is not how this works. This is done one step at a time. One moment at a time. One decision at a time. That is how progress is made.

There will be times when you feel stuck. Times when it feels like you are not moving at all. But even standing still and choosing not to go backward is still progress. Even holding your ground when things feel hard is still a form of strength. You do not always have to move fast. You just have to not quit.

Keep your focus on what you can do right now. Not tomorrow. Not next week. Just right now. What is one thing you can do to move forward, even a little bit. That is your next step. That is how you keep going.

Charlie Mike

At the end of the day, this all comes back to one simple idea. Continue the mission. No matter what the day looked like. No matter how you feel. No matter what your mind is telling you. You continue.

Charlie Mike is not about being perfect. It is not about being fearless. It is not about having everything under control. It is about showing up again and again, even when it is hard. It is about choosing to stay in the fight, even when you are tired.

You are not alone in this. There are others who understand this battle. There are others who are walking

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the same path. You may not always see them, but they are there. And just like you, they are choosing to keep going.

So when the days get heavy, and your mind starts to turn on you, remember this. You do not have to win the whole war today. You just have to keep going. You just have to take one more step. You just have to stay here.

Charlie Mike.

And that counts.

CHARLIE MIKE

About the Author

Shawn Hibbard – Founder & Director of **Nautical Salute**

Shawn Hibbard's life is a testament to resilience, courage, and service. From a challenging childhood to a distinguished military career, his journey has shaped his dedication to helping fellow veterans heal and find peace.

Born into a difficult environment, Shawn faced early adversity that few could imagine. At just three years old, he and other family members fled their home due to trauma and instability. This marked the beginning of a tumultuous childhood spent in foster care.

Between the ages of 3 and 18, Shawn lived in 15 different foster homes, 2 group homes, and even a detention center. Despite these challenges, his determination remained unshaken. He graduated from Sherando High School in Virginia in 1997, proving his strength and commitment to his future.

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Following high school, Shawn pursued a path of service by enlisting in the United States Army. After completing Advanced Infantry Training (AIT), he served in various capacities across the globe, including assignments in Germany, Fort Irwin (California), and Fort Bragg (North Carolina), where he underwent additional specialized training.

His military career is marked by excellence and bravery. In 2003, Shawn attended Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) School and completed Sniper School that same year. He deployed to Afghanistan two times - from 2004 to 2005 and again in 2009. Then he served a six-month deployment to the United States Pentagon.

His valor in combat earned him the prestigious Bronze Star Medal with Valor in 2009 for his actions in Afghanistan. In 2012, his dedication and heroism were recognized when he was selected as a Hero Soldier for the U.S. Army All-American Football Team.

After 22 years of Honorable service, Shawn retired from the Army in 2018. Transitioning into civilian life, he works as a government contractor while seeking new ways to give back to the veteran community.

Inspired by his own journey of healing and the challenges many veterans face, Shawn founded Nautical Salute, a non-profit organization dedicated to providing restorative and therapeutic experiences for military members.

Nautical Salute's mission is to offer veterans the opportunity to reconnect with themselves and others

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through maritime adventures and support programs designed to promote mental and emotional well-being.

Through his veteran's organization Nautical Salute, Shawn Hibbard continues his lifelong commitment to service, ensuring that those who have given so much for their country receive the healing and support they deserve. And though books like this, *Veteran Isolation*, *Self-Destruct*, *Shadow Wounds*, *The FOB*, and others, Shawn is living his *Mission Delta*.

Shawn is available for speaking to your organization, company, place of worship, and other events. Reach out to him at nauticalsalute@gmail.com

CHARLIE MIKE

Glossary of Terms

Anxiety

Anxiety is the feeling that something bad is about to happen, even when nothing is wrong. It keeps your body on edge and makes it hard to relax or feel safe.

Avoidance

Avoidance is when you stay away from people, places, or situations that make you uncomfortable. It can feel helpful at first, but over time it can shrink your world.

Awareness

Awareness means noticing what is happening inside you without judging it. It is the first step toward gaining control over your thoughts and reactions.

Bad Days

Bad days are times when your thoughts feel heavy and everything feels harder than normal. These days are part of the process and do not mean you are failing.

Breathing Control

Breathing control is slowing down your breath to calm your body. It helps your nervous system settle when things feel overwhelming.

Burnout

Burnout is deep emotional and physical exhaustion from long periods of stress. It can make you feel drained and disconnected from everything around you.

Charlie Mike

Charlie Mike means continue the mission. It reminds you to keep going, even when things feel hard or uncertain.

Coping Mechanism

A coping mechanism is something you do to handle stress or pain. Some help you move forward, while others may only give short-term relief.

Creative Outlet

A creative outlet is a way to express what you feel through writing, music, or art. It gives your thoughts a place to go instead of staying stuck inside.

Depression

Depression is a heavy feeling that makes everything seem slow and empty. It can take away interest in things you once cared about.

Disconnection

Disconnection is the feeling of being separate from others or even from yourself. It can make it hard to feel present in your own life.

Emotional Numbness

Emotional numbness is when you stop feeling strong emotions, both good and bad. It can feel like you are just going through the motions.

Fight or Flight

Fight or flight is your body's natural response to danger. It prepares you to react quickly, even when the danger is no longer there.

Flashbacks

Flashbacks are moments when past events feel like they are happening again. They can bring strong emotions and physical reactions.

Grounding

Grounding is focusing on what is happening right now to calm your mind. It helps bring you out of overwhelming thoughts and back to the present.

Guilt

Guilt is the feeling that you did something wrong or should have done something differently. It can stay with you even when you were not at fault.

Healing

Healing is the process of learning to live with what you have been through. It does not mean forgetting, but it does mean moving forward.

Hypervigilance

Hypervigilance is when you are always on alert for danger. It can make it hard to relax, even in safe environments.

Identity

Identity is how you see yourself and your place in the world. Trauma can make you question who you are, but it does not take that away.

Intrusive Thoughts

Intrusive thoughts are unwanted thoughts that show up without warning. They can feel strong and hard to control, but they do not define you.

Isolation

Isolation is pulling away from others and spending more time alone. It can feel safe at first but often makes things harder over time.

Mission Mindset

Mission mindset means focusing on what needs to be done right now. It helps break down overwhelming problems into smaller steps.

Mood Swings

Mood swings are quick changes in how you feel. They can happen without warning and can be hard to understand.

Movement

Movement means using your body to release stress. Even simple actions like walking can help calm your mind.

Negative Thoughts

Negative thoughts are thoughts that tell you things will not get better. They feel real, but they are not always true.

Numbing

Numbing is shutting down emotions to avoid pain. It can help in the moment but often blocks positive feelings too.

Overwhelm

Overwhelm is when everything feels like too much at once. It can make even simple tasks feel impossible.

Panic Response

Panic response is a sudden feeling of fear that takes over your body. It can cause fast breathing, a racing heart, and a sense of danger.

Present Moment

The present moment is what is happening right now. Focusing on it helps reduce anxiety about the past or future.

Progress

Progress is moving forward, even in small ways. It often happens slowly and may not always feel noticeable.

Purpose

Purpose is having a reason to keep going. It gives direction and meaning to your daily life.

PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder)

PTSD is a condition that can develop after experiencing or witnessing trauma. It can cause anxiety, flashbacks, and emotional distress long after the event.

Relief Seeking

Relief seeking is trying to escape pain quickly. It may feel good at first but often does not solve the real issue.

Resilience

Resilience is the ability to keep going through hard times. It is built through experience and small daily efforts.

Routine

Routine is a daily structure that brings stability. It helps reduce stress by creating predictability in your day.

Self Destruction

Self destruction is behavior that harms you in an attempt to escape pain. It often comes from feeling overwhelmed or stuck.

Shame

Shame is the feeling that something is wrong with you as a person. It can be heavy and hard to talk about.

Small Wins

Small wins are simple actions that move you forward. They may seem minor, but they build strength over time.

Stress Response

Stress response is how your body reacts to pressure or danger. It can stay active even when the threat is gone.

Survival Mode

Survival mode is when your body stays in a state of alert. It focuses on getting through the moment instead of long-term thinking.

Support System

A support system is a group of people who help you through hard times. This can include friends, family, or others who understand your struggle.

Thought Patterns

Thought patterns are repeated ways of thinking. Some patterns can keep you stuck if they are not recognized.

Trauma

Trauma is a deeply distressing experience that overwhelms your ability to cope. It can have lasting effects on how you think and feel.

Triggers

Triggers are things that remind your brain of past trauma. They can cause strong emotional or physical reactions.

Trust

Trust is feeling safe with yourself or others. Trauma can break trust, but it can be rebuilt over time.

Uncertainty

Uncertainty is not knowing what will happen next. It can create anxiety and make it hard to feel stable.

Validation

Validation is recognizing that your feelings are real and matter. It helps reduce shame and builds self-acceptance.

Veteran Identity

Veteran identity is the part of you shaped by military service. It is important, but it does not define your entire life.

Withdrawal

Withdrawal is stepping back from people or situations. It can be a response to stress but may lead to deeper isolation.

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Appendix A:
Rewrite Tomorrow Song Lyrics

Below are the lyrics to my song *Rewrite Tomorrow*. You can listen to the song at NauticalSalute.com.

Rewrite Tomorrow

Shawn Hibbard 2026

[Verse 1]

I've been walking through the echoes of mistakes I
couldn't hide
Every quiet conversation with the parts of me I tried
To bury deep but carried on like fire in my chest
Thinking who I was before was all I'd ever get

[Pre-Chorus]

But something in me is shifting, like the night begins to
break
A voice I almost silenced says I still get to choose my fate

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[Chorus]

I'm learning how to rewrite tomorrow
By laying down the weight of yesterday
Every regret, every borrowed sorrow
Don't have to follow me this way

I carried ghosts I couldn't outrun
Let them define the steps I'd take
Now I'm choosing who I become
Rewrite tomorrow... no more yesterday

[Verse 2]

All the roads I took were broken, but they led me here
somehow
Through the truth I kept avoiding, I can finally hear it now
There's a line I never crossed, like I was too afraid to
change
But standing in the wreckage, I've got no one else to
blame

[Pre-Chorus]

And every step behind me doesn't have to define
The man I decide to be this time

[Chorus]

I'm learning how to rewrite tomorrow
By laying down the weight of yesterday
Every regret, every borrowed sorrow
Don't have to follow me this way

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I carried ghosts I couldn't outrun
Let them define the steps I'd take
Now I'm choosing who I become
Rewrite tomorrow... no more yesterday

[Bridge]

I forgive the man I used to be
But I won't let him keep control of me
He got me here, but he's not who I am
I'm done letting go slip through my hands

No more living in what's gone
No more holding where I don't belong
I'll draw the line, I'll make it clear
The past stops now—it ends right here

[Final Chorus]

I'm rewriting tomorrow—starting now
Not letting the past decide me anymore
Every regret loses power somehow
When I stop keeping score

I carried ghosts but I cut them loose
They don't get the final say
I'm not who I was—I get to choose
Rewrite tomorrow... no more yesterday