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The Oprah Winfrey Show Finale

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On September 8, 1986, the first national episode of The Oprah Winfrey Show was broadcast into homes across America. Now, 25 years later, Oprah steps onto the stage for the last time to share her greatest lessons and hopes for her viewers.

"After deliberating for some time, we decided to do what we do best, and that is a show about and with everyday people. This show always allows people, hopefully, to understand the power they have to change their own lives. If there's one

thread running through each show we do, it is the message that you are not alone. Twenty-five years and I'm still saying thank you, America. Thank you so much. There are no words to match this moment. Every word I've ever spoken from this stage of *The Oprah Show* for 4,561 days of my life is what this moment is all about.

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"When I came here, I was about to turn 30 years old. I didn't have a vision or a lot of great expectations. Stedman talks about vision all the time, but I didn't have one when I came here. I just wanted to do a good job and cause no harm. ... That first day was a shock to me. There was no audience. There I am in my best Anne Klein II velour outfit, my guests were a few Chicago football players, New Year's Day, 1984. ... I needed people. I needed to have you to gauge how things were going during the show, if you were responding, if you were laughing, if you were tracking with me. So after that first show, we put up some folding chairs in the audience. We brought in the staff. Secretaries. Anybody we could find in the building and filled the first rows with staff people and the rest with people off the street that we bribed with doughnuts and coffee, and we'd say, 'Come in.'

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"Two years later, when we went national, I remember at the time, Roger King told me that one station manager said that he'd rather put a potato in a chair in his market than have a big black girl with a funny name. And in spite of that, from Memphis to Macon, from Pittsburgh to Pensacola, from New York to New Orleans, you all let me in."



"The first week we went national, I remember I got a letter from a woman named Carrie in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Carrie said, 'Oprah, watching you be yourself makes me want to be more of myself.' That was and still remains one of the nicest things I ever heard. What Carrie felt is what I wanted for every single one of you. I wanted to encourage you to be more of yourself just as you all encouraged me, and you cheered me on and occasionally complained about my outfits, my big hair and earrings the size of napkins. Now I see you had every reason to.

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"Soon after I started the show, something shifted for me. It really did. I started the show as a job and was very happy to get the job, but it was not long before I understood that there was something else going on here. More than just job satisfaction. Something in me connected with each of you in a way that allowed me to see myself in you and you in me. I became your surrogate—to ask the questions, deliver the answers, learn, grow, expand my thinking, challenge my beliefs and the way I looked at the world. I listened and grew, and I know you grew along with me.

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"Sometimes I was the teacher, and more often, you taught me. It is no coincidence that I always wanted to be a teacher and I ended up in the world's biggest classroom. And this, my friends, will be our last class from the stage.

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"What I knew for sure from this experience with you is that we are all called. Everybody has a calling, and your real job in life is to figure out what that is and get about the business of doing it. Every time we have seen a person on this stage who is a success in their life, they spoke of the job, and they spoke of the juice that they receive from doing what they knew they were meant to be doing. We saw it in the volunteers who rocked abandoned babies in Atlanta. We saw it with those lovely pie ladies from Cape Cod making those delicious potpies. ... We saw it every time Tina Turner, Celine, Bocelli or Lady Gaga lit up the stage with their passion. Because that is what a calling is. It lights you up and it lets you know that you are exactly where you're supposed to be, doing exactly what you're supposed to be doing. And that is what I want for all of you and hope that you will take from this show. To live from the heart of yourself. You have to make a living; I understand that. But you also have to know what sparks the light in you so that you, in your own way, can illuminate the world."



"When I started, not even I imagined that this show would have the depth and the reach that you all have given it. It has been a privilege for me to speak to you here in this studio, in this country and in 150 countries around the world on this platform that is *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. You let me into your homes to talk to you every day. This is what you allowed me to do, and I thank you for that. But what I want you to know as this show ends: Each one of you has your own platform. Do not let the trappings here fool you. Mine is a stage in a studio, yours is wherever you are with your own reach,

however small or however large that reach is. Maybe it's 20 people, maybe it's 30 people, 40 people, your family, your friends, your neighbors, your classmates, your classroom, your co-workers. Wherever you are, that is your platform, your stage, your circle of influence. That is your talk show, and that is where your power lies. In every way, in every day, you are showing people exactly who you are. You're letting your life speak for you. And when you do that, you will receive in direct proportion to how you give in whatever platform you have.

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"My great wish for all of you who have allowed me to honor my calling through this show is that you carry whatever you're supposed to be doing, carry that forward and don't waste any more time. Start embracing the life that is calling you and use your life to serve the world."



"Time and time again, the theme that kept showing itself in our early years on this show was people making bad choices. I look back at those tapes, I can't believe I did it. People were making bad choices and then blaming everybody but themselves for the state of their lives. We started to learn by watching others how self-destructive that really was.

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"Here's what I learned from all of that, besides not to do that anymore: Nobody but you is responsible

for your life. It doesn't matter what your mama did; it doesn't matter what your daddy didn't do. You are responsible for your life. ... You are responsible for the energy that you create for yourself, and you're responsible for the energy that you bring to others. One of the best examples of this was Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor who was on the show talking about the book *My Stroke of Insight*. She was a 37-year-old, Harvard-educated brain scientist who suffered a massive stroke in the left part of her brain. She couldn't speak or remember her own mother, but when doctors and nurses walked into her room, she knew from the right brain who was on her side. She could feel their energy.

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"Dr. Taylor sent me a sign that I have hanging in my makeup room. It says, 'Please take responsibility for the energy you bring into this space.' And I ask the same thing in my home and at my companies. Thank you, Dr. Taylor, for that simple but powerful lesson. All life is energy and we are transmitting it at every

moment. We are all little beaming little signals like radio frequencies, and the world is responding in kind.

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"Remember physics class? Did you pay attention to Newton's third law of motion? Let me tell you, that thing is real. It says for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. That is the abiding law that I live by, articulated to perfection by Miss Celie in *The Color Purple* when she finally gets the courage to leave her abusive husband, Mister. ... 'Everything you done to me already done to you.' It is the Golden Rule to the 10th power."



"When I started this show, it was a revelation to all of us how much dysfunction there was in people's lives. I grew up with *Leave It to Beaver* and *Andy Griffith*. I thought everybody's family life was like that, even though I knew mine was not. Well this show, and our guests, began to paint a different picture and allowed us to drop the veil on all the pretense and do exactly what we envisioned in that first show: to let people know that you are not alone.

"One of the most poignant moments I remember was in one of the first shows we did about alcoholism. We moved in with a family for a week. The mother felt her husband had a drinking problem, and it was destroying the family. What moved me the most was this moment in that show where the mother's being consoled by her 3-year-old daughter. That, to me, was the real picture of what alcoholism does to a family. And that was just the beginning. People started coming on this show saying things they couldn't say to their own family members. Little by little, we started to release the shame."



"What amazes me when I look back at the volume of 4,561 shows is not just that we did this, but the variety and the complexity of the things that we did. One day we're LOLing with *Chris Rock*, and the next day we're at *Walter Reed* spending time with soldiers who have lost their limbs. And the day after that, we're sitting with an entire family of *heroin addicts*.

"I learned from the guests on this show, no need to feel superior to anybody. Because whether it's heroin addiction or gambling addiction or shopping addiction or food addiction, work addiction, the root

is all the same. The show has taught me there is a common thread that runs through all of our pain and all of our suffering, and that is unworthiness. Not feeling worthy enough to own the life you were created for. Even people who believe they deserve to be happy and have nice things often don't feel worthy once they have them.

"There is a difference, you know, between thinking you deserve to be happy and knowing you are worthy of happiness. That never became clearer to me than this year in a moment I shared with *Iyanla Vanzant*, an expert who had been a regular on our show 12 years ago, and we were trying to develop a show for her, for her own show, and she left to do a show with somebody else and we hadn't spoken since.

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"What I got was we often block our own blessings because we don't feel inherently good enough or smart enough or pretty enough or worthy enough. From Jacqui Saburido—her face literally melted by the flames ignited from a car accident with a drunk driver—to Monica George—remember her? The mother with a young daughter and a brand new baby who lost both her arms and both legs—the show has taught me you're worthy because you are born and because you are here. Your being here, your being alive makes worthiness your birthright. You alone are enough."



"I've talked to nearly 30,000 people on this show, and all 30,000 had one thing in common: They all wanted validation. If I could reach through this television and sit on your sofa or sit on a stool in your kitchen right now, I would tell you that every single person you will ever meet shares that common desire. They want to know: 'Do you see me? Do you hear me? Does what I say mean anything to you?'"

"Understanding that one principle, that everybody wants to be heard, has allowed me to hold the

microphone for you all these years with the least amount of judgment. Now I can't say I wasn't judging *some* days. Some days, I had to judge just a little bit. But it's helped me to stand and to try to do that with an open mind and to do it with an open heart. It has worked for this platform, and I guarantee you it will work for yours. Try it with your children, your husband, your wife, your boss, your friends. Validate them. 'I see you. I hear you. And what you say matters to me.'"



"People often ask me, What is the secret of success of the show? How have we lasted 25 years? I nonjokingly say, 'My team and Jesus.' Because nothing but the hand of God has made this possible for me. ... I know I've never been alone, and you haven't either. And I know that that presence, that flow—some people call it grace—is working in my life at every single turn. And yours too, if you let it in. It's closer than your breath, and it is yours for the asking."

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"I have felt the presence of God my whole life. Even when I didn't have a name for it, I could feel the voice bigger than myself speaking to me, and all of us have that same voice. Be still and know it. You can acknowledge it or not. You can worship it or not. You can praise it, you can ignore it or you can know it. Know it. It's always there speaking to you and waiting for you to hear it in every move, in every decision. I wait and I listen. I'm still—I wait and listen for the guidance that's greater than my meager mind."

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"The only time I've ever made mistakes is when I didn't listen. So what I know is, God is love and God is life, and your life is always speaking to you. First in whispers. ... It's subtle, those whispers. And if you don't pay

attention to the whispers, it gets louder and louder. It's like getting thumped upside the head, like my grandmother used to do. ... You don't pay attention to that, it's like getting a brick upside your head. You don't pay attention to that, the whole brick wall falls down. That's the pattern I've seen in my life, and it's played out over and over again on this show.

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"A couple weeks ago, we brought back Carolyn Thomas whose face was literally shot off by her boyfriend. You ask Carolyn now: 'Were there whispers? Were there bricks before the disastrous bullet?' What Carolyn would say to you? 'Don't wait for your face to get shot off before you hear your own life speaking to you.'

"What I've gleaned from this show: Whispers are always messages, and if you don't hear the message, the message turns into a problem. And if you don't handle the problem, the problem turns into a crisis. And if you don't handle the crisis, disaster. Your life is speaking to you. What is it saying?"



"People ask, Do I have regrets? I have none, really, about this show. But the one thing I feel I was not able to bring enough attention to, although I tried in 217 shows, was the sexual seduction, molestation and rape of children, worse now with the Internet than it was 25 years ago when I first spoke publicly in November of 1986 of my own sexual abuse. Even though I was able to speak about it because I felt safe enough with you as an audience, I still hadn't released the shame of it.

"It wasn't until many years later on a show with child molesters, one of them shared how they calculate and artfully manipulate to seduce children, when I finally realized, like so many of you, it really wasn't my fault.

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"We had a lot of frank conversations on this show about child sexual abuse, and it opened a floodgate for millions of you all over the world, all of you claiming, with courage, the same thing: It happened to me too. And it's continued for 25 years. One of the proudest moments in the history of *The Oprah Show* was when my friend Tyler Perry joined me on this stage and gave us his testimony of abuse and then was joined by 200 men.

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"What a full-circle moment. I felt safe enough with you all 25 years ago. This season they felt safe enough with me. Thank you, Tyler, and every man who had the strength to stand up for the little boy inside of him."



"You all have been a safe harbor for me for 25 years. It's strange, I know, but you have been. And what I hope is that you all will be that safe harbor for somebody else—their safe place to fall. Do for them what you all are telling me the show has done for you. Connect. Embrace. Liberate. Love somebody. Just one person. And then spread that to two. And as many as you can. You'll see the difference it makes.

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"So, audience, I want to keep in touch. I want you to jot down my new email address: Oprah@Oprah.com—easy to remember, huh? This is going to be my personal email account for all of you. When you get something in your in-box from me, it will be from me directly, and I'll be reading as many of your emails as I can as I move to my next life on OWN. I want you to know that what you have to say matters to me. I understand the manifestation of grace and God, so I know that there are no coincidences. There are none. Only divine order here.

"I am truly amazed that I, who started out in rural Mississippi in 1954 when the vision for a black girl was limited to being either a maid or a teacher in a segregated school, could end up here. It is no coincidence that a lonely little girl who felt not a lot of love, even though my parents and grandparents did the best they could, it is no coincidence that I grew up to feel the genuine kindness, affection, trust and validation from millions of you all over the world. From you whose names I will never know, I learned what love is. You and this show have been the great love of my life."



"Every single day I came down from my makeup room on our Harpo elevator, I would offer a prayer of gratitude for the delight and the privilege of doing this show. Gratitude is the single greatest treasure I will take with me from this experience. The opportunity to have done this work, to be embraced by all of you who watched, is one of the greatest honors any human being could have. And I thank each of you for allowing me to speak in such a way that, no matter what was happening in your life, you could see the best of your selves. For everything there is a season, we know, and our time together

on this platform is coming to a close. In a few moments when the final credits roll, I see it not as an ending, but as an extraordinary beginning. One chapter closed. The next chapter beginning for all of us.

"I've been asked many times during this farewell season, 'Is ending the show bittersweet?' Well, I say all sweet. No bitter. And here is why: Many of us have been together for 25 years. We have hooted and hollered together, had our aha! moments, we ugly-cried together and we did our gratitude journals. So I thank you all for your support and your trust in me. I thank you for sharing this yellow brick road of blessings. I thank you for tuning in every day along with your mothers and your sisters and your daughters, your partners, gay and otherwise, your friends and all the husbands who got coaxed into watching *Oprah*. And I thank you for being as much of a sweet inspiration for me as I've tried to be for you.

"I won't say goodbye. I'll just say...until we meet again."

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