AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF
WHAT I KNOW FOR SURE by Oprah Winfrey

Who is Oprah Winfrey?
Oprah Winfrey, born on January 29th, 1954, is known for quite a lot of things, but she’s most famous for her work as a philanthropist. She gained recognition through her famous “The Oprah Winfrey Show” and today she is North America’s first black woman to become a billionaire. Also known as one of the most influential and richest women in the world, she has also worked as a producer, actress and media proprietor. Oprah shares her experiences candidly in this book: What I Know For Sure.

Preston and Stig’s General Thoughts on the Book
I’ll admit it right away: I haven’t watched an Oprah show in one sitting. But perhaps I need to. I simply loved this book from the very beginning and having Oprah herself narrate it (I listen to all of my books) was highly entertaining too. You really feel safe with her, and as you progress in the book you feel like you are having a conversation with a dear friend that you fully trust.

You shouldn’t be reading this book for the billionaire financial advice. Instead, you should be read this book for vital life advice. The book is a goldmine of reflections and sound principals of how you can become more effective and happy in this difficult world.

Few people have tried, failed, and succeeded as many times as Oprah, and while her life has been a rollercoaster ride, it deeply touched me how much love and sincerity she shares. It’s clear from reading the book that her biggest fear is to live a life full of regrets – but that is the one thing no one can take away from her. She lives life to its fullest, and hopefully after reading “What I Know for Sure”, you’ll be doing the same.

Chapter 1: Joy
In this chapter, Oprah says that it’s critical to question ourselves whenever there’s a nagging feeling of doubt and fear. Am I really doing everything I really can to lead my life to the fullest? Life throws a lot of opportunities at us but it’s up to us to either grab them with both hands and flourish, or abandon them and sulk in a corner while leading a life filled with regret. We have the choice right this moment and that’s the only moment we know for certain.

There are many people who get so caught up in their lives that they forget to smile. However, there are others who take it one step at a time and live the moment, even if it’s just enjoying a walk with their dogs. Oprah says that it’s all about relishing each hour as though there’s never another. In simple words, it’s about living every day as if it’s our last day on earth and enjoying every moment of it.

Oprah talks about never ignoring your own needs. Sometimes, we tend to care more towards others but neglect ourselves in the process. Oprah reminds the readers that it’s important to value yourself. In addition, she further talks about creating five-star experiences or pleasures that define our life. Whether it’s enjoying a hot cup of coffee or a good meal, or deriving happiness by lending a helping hand to a random stranger, our lives are defined by these pleasures that offer satisfaction like none other.
Chapter 2: Resilience
At the beginning of this chapter, Oprah talks about her childhood that made her feel unworthy and alone. As a single, unwanted kid, Oprah was left to fend for herself. Later, upon the insistence of John Bradshaw – a counselor and author – Oprah thought about her childhood and how she had gone through many awful experiences. Although she was abused as a child and became pregnant when she was only 14, Oprah realized as an adult that she could heal herself.

Similarly, each of us has our own journey no matter where we are from. Our memories could be filled with pain, shame and regret even if we are innocent and it’s indeed very hard to cleanse our heart and mind free ourselves from such memories. Oprah asserts that it’s our responsibility to give ourselves the love we were deprived of. Each and every individual is responsible for his/her own life and that’s an irrefutable fact.

If you’re blaming someone else because of your unhappiness, you’re simply wasting time. So, the only way to forget and heal is to pick your pieces up and move on because there’s a silver lining to every difficulty you face today. Leave your worries behind and embrace the future that gives you more opportunities at every step.

However, there are times when you do everything and it still seems like it isn’t enough. In such situations, Oprah says that it’s best to stand and encounter problems head on. Your strength is about your ability to face adversities and keep walking through it. Successful people also feel fear and doubt, but what makes them stand apart is that they have faith. If you have the faith that you will go at least one step more than you think you can, you’re already walking in the right direction.

Chapter 3: Connection
In this section, Oprah talks about connection – the connection we all want to feel and have. We want to be valued by somebody else and yearn to be loved. When an individual doesn’t feel respected or loved, he/she will do anything to get that from someone else, even if it’s immoral and unethical. This driving urge to feel loved makes you undervalue yourself and thereby settle for something that’s not worthy for you.

If there’s a lack of affection or intimacy in your life, it isn’t springing up because of distance or lack of social meetings, but it’s because you’re not giving yourself the respect you deserve. You can feel loved and expect love from others only if you first love yourself. Needless to say, if you have a low self-esteem, there’s no boyfriend, lover, sister or mother in the world who can make you feel better. What you become in the future depends on what you are today, so don’t be bogged down by the past. Never underestimate your strength no matter how beaten you feel.

Chapter 4: Gratitude
Oprah begins this chapter by stressing on the importance of gratitude. When a person becomes too busy, he fails to notice the little things that contribute towards the joy he feels and he ultimately stops being grateful for everything he has. Although he might earn more money in his career, he will eventually find something missing. Therefore, it’s essential to dedicate a little bit of time to appreciate everything you have.

Further, Oprah talks about her struggle to lose weight. Although she joined dieting programs and did lose weight, it was a never-ending vicious cycle of frustration because she only ended up gaining more weight. Thanks to the lessons she learned, she says that it’s important to accept your body the way it is, even if you think that you’re out of shape. It’s about being grateful for the precious gift you have received – your body. Instead of fighting with it and becoming frustrated, the best option is to embrace it lovingly and make peace with it.
Chapter 5: Possibility
Here, Oprah talks about how fear can immobilize a person and prevent him from exploring several possibilities that can contribute to his growth. If you stick to your job only because you don’t want to get out of your comfort zone, you might let many possibilities slide by. One needs to have the courage to let go and move on and also make that bold move that invariably brings the best in an individual. No matter how fearful you feel, you need to keep your anxiety away and surge ahead.

Oprah also talks about the fear she had while growing up. She feared that people would reject her because they assumed that she was arrogant. Over the years, she says she has learned to not pay heed to such naysayers who can never be satisfied with anything. Since they are unhappy with themselves, they try their best to pull others down and will try everything to succeed in that. Therefore, the best thing to do is to ignore them. You are created to be extraordinary and nothing should stop you from achieving all your dreams.

Chapter 6: Awe
We often confront situations we aren’t sure about. However, we all see miracles that seem unbelievable and surprise us to a great extent. Oprah says that a miracle is all about viewing the world with a light in our eyes. It’s simply about acknowledging the fact that there’s always possibilities and hope even if they seem to have vanished.

Of course, there are others who don’t believe in miracles and won’t acknowledge them even if it happens right in front of them. They are so closed to such miracles that they term them as mere coincidences and move on with their lives. However, Oprah says that miracles act as a confirmation that there’s something larger than life at work. In fact, they occur every day and sometimes right in front of us, but we will see them only if we want to see them.

While many people believe in miracles, it’s quite possible that you stop believing in them because you have too many problems in your life. Granted, when you have way too many problems, you tend to stop believing. However, Oprah urges you to think about the bigger picture. Each and every one of us has our own problems and agonies we go through every day, but the point is to learn from them. Once you treat the world as a huge classroom, you will learn to appreciate more and learn where you went wrong.

Chapter 7: Clarity
Over the years, Oprah has been bombarded by requests from people who have always asked for help in some form or the other. Although she helped many people by donating a lot of money, it quickly wore her down because she was no longer thinking doing it for herself, but was only doing it to please others. She found that it was difficult to say “No” to people. However, once she realized that she would help only if she really felt like helping from the bottom of her heart, things changed for her. Similarly, one should only do something if there’s a clear intention that’s pure. It shouldn’t be done to please others.

Continuing further, Oprah talks about how essential it is to take care of yourself. Although it might seem selfish to put your needs ahead of the others you love, it’s also necessary to understand that you need to be fit in order to take care of others. This doesn’t make you selfish at all, but instead it gives you more strength to care for the others you really need in your life.

Oprah also talks about instincts and how critical they are. She describes a near-death experience she had when flying over the ocean. Although she had initially wanted to postpone the trip, she had ignored her instincts. Stuck in the plane at 40,000 feet above, she learned to tune everything out and focus on being calm. Likewise, you need to trust
your instincts when you feel that something’s amiss. Never underestimate what your inner voice is trying to tell you because it’s your own radar or compass that’s trying to direct you in the right direction.

Chapter 8: Power
In this chapter, Oprah talks about her strong feelings when it comes to people spreading negativity. Gossip – the coward’s way, according to Oprah – is something an individual adopts only when he’s feeling insecure about someone else. Since he is envious or jealous about another individual’s success, he will try to malign him in the worst way possible. As a celebrity, Oprah has heard gossip about her and also confesses that she did feel a strong urge to defend herself in such situations, but after she learned that it wasn’t worth it, her life has become far more stress free.

Most of us live in a society where we spend inordinate amounts of time on gossiping about somebody who’s better than us. What would happen if we stopped ridiculing others and focused on our lives and career? Wouldn’t our lives be far more peaceful? Oprah urges the readers to not get bogged down whenever they hear negative rumors about them. At the same time, she says that there’s a lot of power in the words we utter. Instead of using powerful words to hurt someone, we can use the same to heal someone.