



# Small Habits

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**For Greater Emotional Healing  
and Growth**

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**This book is dedicated to  
each person who has overcome the odds, persevered through  
the darkness, and who is seeking emotional healing from the  
Lord.**

## Small Habits = Big Healing

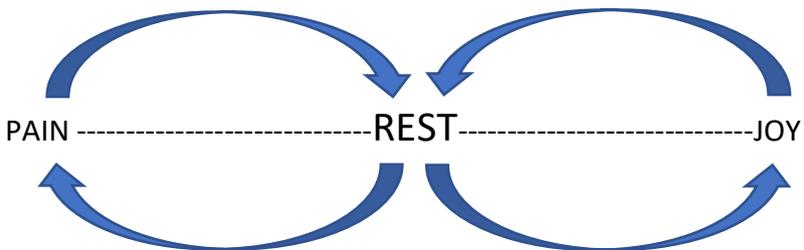
### Healing is a Lot of Work

God made us to be body, soul, and spirit, and each of these three areas will need healing at various points throughout life. Three types of healing that every person will need at some point include: physical healing for injuries and illness, spiritual healing for sin and shame, and emotional healing for relational wounds and trauma. While each of these healing processes look a little different, they are certainly intertwined. The focus for this booklet will be emotional healing.

Emotional pain is one of the most challenging kinds of pain to heal. One of the things that makes emotional pain so difficult to heal is the fact that it is invisible. Invisible pain cannot be measured, it cannot be easily described to another person, and it is very challenging to know the depths to which it is impacting your life. Many people feel it is impossible to heal from emotional pain and put great efforts into managing the effects of this pain. While other people spend their entire life focused on understanding their pain and finding healing for every area impacted. Perhaps there is a response between these two.

### Pain – Rest – Joy

God designed humanity to be unique and complex, yet he wired us to gain powerful benefits from simple habits and acts of faith. To fully engage with these simple tools, it is important to understand the Pain/Rest and Rest/Joy cycles.



Throughout all of life there will be experiences that produce pain, experiences that produce rest, and experiences that produce joy. It may seem like living in the rest - joy end of the spectrum would be the best, but truly, so much of our growth happens when we experience and heal from pain.

Scripture is filled with examples of the value of each one of these experiences. John tells us that “in this world you will have trouble,” and in Ecclesiastes 3 we are told there is a “time for to weep” and “a time to mourn.” We are given instructions on responding to this pain when we are told to “weep with those who weep” and “to mourn with those who mourn” in Romans 12.

Throughout the Psalms we are taught to rejoice in the Lord, and Galatians 5 lists joy as a fruit of the Spirit. In Hebrews 4, the importance of resting on the Sabbath is discussed, and Matthew 11:28 says God will give rest to the weary. These are just a few of the common verses that talk about the importance of joy and rest. Jesus, in his time on earth, experienced pain, rest, and joy. This alone tells us that these are healthy human responses to our lives. Not only is pain, rest, and joy part of life, but they are essential elements for brain growth and development.

**PAIN** – No one likes to experience emotional pain, but as each painful experience comes and passes, maturity and growth can happen. Learning that “I can do hard things” and “failing is part of growing” are now mottos at any institution that promotes a growth mindset. These lessons help people grow resilience and capacity to handle pain. But pain cannot be experienced perpetually. There must be a break from the pain for the body and soul to recover.

**JOY** – Likewise, there is a limit in capacity that human nature has for joy. Feeling of deep happiness or strong healthy connections to people are intense experiences that one must build capacity to contain. No one can live in a place of joy. The brain will always return to rest when the capacity for experiencing joy has been reached.

**REST** - In the space of rest, the brain is able to grow, our hearts are able to relax, and our body can heal both physically and emotionally. When the mind is at rest, the body, soul, and spirit, can grow and heal more

efficiently than any other time. It is to your advantage to allow this time, and even to schedule this time into your regular routine.

### REST – JOY Cycle

This cycle is discussed in depth in Warner and Hinman’s book Building Bounce. It is a natural cycle that most people do without even realizing it. You experience this cycle when after a fun night with friends you come home and have a sense of satisfaction or completeness. You might experience this rest when you get off the phone with a good friend and smile at the memory of the call. A sense of contentment lingers.

Rest is where joy naturally lands when the capacity for joy has been reached. It is healthy and allows the brain to increase its capacity for just a little more joy next time. Rest always pulls you back and allows you to nestle in the comfort it provides, but this is not the only cycle our brain experiences.

### PAIN- REST Cycle

In this cycle, the pain draws the heart and the mind. It can be hard to escape, in fact, at times it may feel as if there is no escape. This is a normal experience in emotionally painful moments. It can be healthy to allow yourself to acknowledge the pain, the source of the pain, and your need for healing. Your experience of emotional pain should always land on rest, but for many, this has to be learned.

If your emotional pain is overwhelming you on a regular basis, it would be a good idea to find a counselor or prayer minister that can help you process and heal from your pain. The pain is an important part of the journey, but there must also be rest. The pain-rest cycle must be completed to heal and grow from the challenges of life.

Sometimes rest comes naturally like in the joy-rest cycle. After a really good cry, you might take a nap. After venting to a friend, you may have a sense of relief from being heard. Each of these experiences is an experience of the Pain-Rest Cycle. But what happens when you get stuck in the pain? When you so overwhelmed that you are unable to exercise or even get out of bed? This isn’t rest. It feels more like

darkness. But there ARE small habits you can do – even in those terribly dark moments – that will begin to create a pathway of light back to the place of rest.

Neurologically, creating space for these three simple habits creates new pathways in the brain that allows you to more easily complete the pain-rest cycle. As you continue to use these pathways, they will become stronger and easier to access. Before long, you will be able to complete the pain-rest cycle and you will begin to notice healing and resilience in ways you have never before experienced them.

### THREE HEALING HABITS

#### Gratitude

The ability to experience gratitude is one of the beautiful emotions God has given us. However, the power that gratitude has on our brain goes so much deeper than just acknowledging the things we are thankful for. Gratitude has the power to shape who we are and to create healthy perspectives and new brain pathways.

If you are inexperienced with expressing gratitude on a regular basis, here are two important things to note:

- 1) You may not always *feel* thankful. That's ok. It isn't necessary to have a *feeling* of gratitude, especially as you are starting out. You are developing a new way to think, and sometimes you have to get in the habit of recognizing things to be thankful for before you ever *feel* grateful.
- 2) It is ok to start really, really small. You may only be able to think of basic things that you have to be thankful for like running water, a roof over your head, or the sunshine. That's ok. Just start there. Your heart of gratitude will develop over time – not overnight.

When you find yourself overwhelmed by the thoughts of the past and all that has happened or the thoughts of the future and the worries of what might happen, it is a good time to rest in the present. You can do this simply by searching for something in this moment that is good. Are you wrapped in a warm blanket? Are you in a car that gets you where

you need to go? Is there rain falling outside taking care of the earth? These are simple things you can look for in the moment. Take a minute to thank the Lord for these things.

Again, you may not feel anything, that's ok. You are building new brain pathways to get you from pain to rest. How many small things can you name? Can you find two? Maybe you can find five things to be thankful for. Call them out. Name them, and thank the Lord for them.

You should do this many times a day. The more you practice searching for things to be grateful for, the stronger the pathway in your brain will become.

### Grounding

There are times when the emotional pain and racing thoughts may be too much for you to break free. They may cloud your ability to see anything good. In these moments, there are some useful grounding tools you can use to rescue yourself from the place of pain and bring yourself to a place of rest.

**\*\*If you find your place of pain so deep you cannot find your own way out, please call a counselor, friend, pastor, or 911 for help.\*\***

In short, grounding is a helpful way to keep your thoughts from holding you hostage in the past or threatening you with the future. God gave each person the ability to choose what to believe. This is great news, since not everything you think is true. It may feel true, but really it just feels intense. The intensity gives the thought a sense of credibility that it can be difficult to navigate away from, but it is not impossible.

Grounding allows us to create pathways – or new thought patterns – that lead us into the present moment. When we are in the present, we are able to take care of our present-day needs, and we are less likely to miss important deadlines and events. We also have more strength when we are in the present.

Much like a rubber band, it is the strongest when it is not being stretched. You exist in this present moment, but when your mind is consumed with the past or the future, you are stretching yourself beyond what you are capable to handle. This creates a weakness in your

ability to function. Just like the rubber band, if stretched too far and for too long, you will snap.

Grounding your mind in the present moment is as simple as being very aware of your surroundings. Use your five senses and focus on what is happening around you in the space where you are right now. How many pictures are on the wall? What is the temperature? What sounds do you hear? Take a moment and focus on whatever information your five senses can gather about your space right now.

As you do this, you will find your mind coming back to the present. Don't just observe, but really think about what you are noticing. Describe it out loud if you can. This will help your mind come to a place of rest. This would be a good moment to practice gratitude. After you are grounded in the present, move on to the third small habit you are developing: receiving grace.

### God's Grace

As Max Lucado put it in his book *Grace*, "God answers the mess of life with one word: grace." Few things we go through in life will be perfect, and many of them won't even be pretty. This is one reason why gratitude is important, so we can train our minds and hearts to find the good and the glory in the mundane and the ordinary. But grace, God's grace, is there for the messy, painful, and just awful parts of life.

Receiving God's grace happens when we receive salvation, but walking in God's grace is an entirely different thing. We categorize so much of life in black and white or right and wrong terms, that the concept of grace completely escapes us. Grace isn't about being perfect or even about being good enough. Grace is about being God's children. Imperfect, messy, wounded, mistake-making children.

When we realize the impact of grace on our lives, we no longer live in the shame that keeps us tethered to the mistakes of the past or threatened by the potential failures of the future. We can live, content and peaceful, in this present moment.

Pain/Rest/Joy Cycle

As you practice the three small habits of gratitude, grounding, and grace, you will find it becoming easier to complete the PAIN/REST Cycle. Invite the Lord into this process with you, and ask him to bring healing to the emotional pain you are experiencing. He is amazing with providing resolution by comforting our hearts, correcting our beliefs, and guiding forward with grace and love.

The more you practice, you may even find yourself slipping into a figure 8 on the pain/rest/joy cycle. If it is one of the first times you have experienced joy, don't be surprised if you don't stay there very long. Your capacity for joy is likely very small. It is ok to land in rest pretty quickly. When this begins you have entered a new aspect of your healing. Continue practicing these three small habits and inviting the Lord into each aspect of this cycle. Always aim for REST of your heart and mind, and trust God to help you through the Pain and increase your joy.

## Organizations You May Find Helpful

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Deeper Walk International – [www.deeperwalkinternational.org](http://www.deeperwalkinternational.org)

Creatively Attached – [www.creativelyattached.com](http://www.creativelyattached.com)

Lydia Discipleship – [www.lydiadm.com](http://www.lydiadm.com)

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## Books You May Find Helpful

\*\*The Trauma Healing Center has produced another booklet describing the process of grounding. You can find that booklet here: [www.traumahealingcenterkc.com/booklets](http://www.traumahealingcenterkc.com/booklets)\*\*

[Building Bounce](#) by Marcus Warner and Stefanie Hinman

[Building Bounce with Kids](#) by Stefanie Hinman

[The Body Keeps the Score](#) by Bessel van der Kolk, M.D.

[Grace: More Than We Deserve, Greater Than We Imagine](#) by Max Lucado



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