



*radical relaxation*

Releasing the Stress You  
Were Never Meant to Carry

TRACIE BRAYLOCK



InterVarsity Press  
ivpress.com

Taken from *Radical Relaxation* by Tracie Braylock.

Copyright © 2025 by Tracie Braylock.

Published by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL.

[www.ivpress.com](http://www.ivpress.com).





# Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	1
1 Wonderfully Made	3
2 Stress Invasion	11
3 Signs and Symptoms of Stress	21
4 The Relaxation Remedy	34
5 Respond Holistically	45
6 Resuscitate Your Power	58
7 Review Your Surroundings	73
8 Renew Your Mind	84
9 Refuel Your Body	97
10 Rest Your Body	112
11 Recondition Your Body	126
12 Realign Your Spirit	137
13 Revive Your Relationships	149
14 Discharge Instructions	161
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	165
<i>Appendix A: Simple Ways to Release Stress</i>	167
<i>Appendix B: When It Might Be Time to Change Your Care Provider</i>	169
<i>Appendix C: You're Not Alone</i>	173
<i>Glossary</i>	175
<i>Notes</i>	179





## *Wonderfully Made*

THERE I AM, STANDING ON A PLATFORM, peering over the blue surgical drapes into the body of a patient having open-heart surgery. While watching the heartbeat and blood pulse through the vessels within this cavity, I didn't consider the various life circumstances that led this person to the operating room table, the trauma and pain endured, or the stressors that weighed heavily upon them throughout their lives. I simply loved witnessing the intricacies that comprise the human body. Each organ, vessel, and body system divinely positioned to make one's existence possible. With every pulse, breath, and nerve signal comes a new possibility, a chance to co-create with God and leave your fingerprints on eternity.

Taking what was formless and void, God created the heavens and the earth, the wonders of which have been studied for millennia and still are not fully understood. With the same divine imagination, he formed the human body and called it good, creating systems that can function with, and without, your participation, and processes that enable healing to occur whether or not you are aware of your own wounds. God breathed into you the breath of life while weaving wisdom into every cell. You are indeed fearfully and wonderfully made, and it's vital that you learn how.

Whether you find yourself in awe of how your body works, or if discussions about the human body make you feel a bit awkward, I'm here to help you take a deeper look into your masterful design. I'm here to remind you that before you were formed in your mother's



womb, God knew you. You are so valuable that God has numbered the very hairs on your head. Your body, including every curve and challenge it may carry, is considered God's temple, and the Holy Spirit dwells within you. Therefore, it's critical that you learn what your body is capable of. Acknowledging your body's delicacy and divinity, as a museum curator appreciates works of art. Tending to and preserving it with care and dedication. Adopting healing practices and identifying the underutilized gems woven into your physical being as if your life were on exhibit. A reflection of your Creator, a faithful steward and safe handler of the precious gifts within you. A soul wrapped in the form the Potter's hands deemed good for you to journey in. Skin, bones, muscles, and nerve fibers working in collaboration to produce life within and through you. You, my friend, are holy.

## YOU ARE THE LIGHT

A patient was having a laparoscopy, the type of operation that gives the surgeon access to the abdomen or pelvis through small incisions in the skin while using the aid of a camera.

Once the camera is inside the body cavity, images of the interior of the abdomen or pelvis are relayed to a monitor. As an operating room nurse, my role in this particular operation was to hold the camera. The camera holder is required to have a steady hand and must remain attentive to the operation, guiding the camera as directed so the surgeon can see the area of the body they're working on.

Every now and then, the laparoscopic camera can touch something inside the body cavity, obscuring the lens and obstructing the view. When this happens, the camera must be removed from the body and cleaned off so that the light and internal structures are visible again.

No matter how steady my hand, how skilled the surgeon, or how safe the procedure typically is, without the light source that shines through the scope, the operation could not take place. The light is necessary because the space where the work takes place is dark and, in



many cases, has never been exposed to light. Without the light, the operation, healing, and restoration wouldn't happen.

When you seem to keep bumping into one stressor after another in your life, you have to take some time to remove it and clean yourself off from its effects. If you don't, the stress can obstruct your view, resulting in the dimming of your light, and may even cause you to forget your own worth and wonder. Although your light is still present, stress can act as a distraction, leaving you discouraged or experiencing feelings of defeat. So let this be your reminder: You are the light of the world, designed to shine into the darkness and illuminate the lives of people and spaces, including some that have yet to be exposed to the light. Your light enables others to see your good deeds and glorify God in heaven, so don't allow stress to stop you from shining and sharing who you are.

#### INNATE HEALING WISDOM

The human body has the capacity to heal itself, working on your behalf, often beyond your conscious awareness. Your body constantly adapts for you, seeking a state of balance among all of your body systems, called homeostasis, which is necessary for your survival and the proper function of the body.

Whether you're undergoing a surgical procedure or you cut yourself in your kitchen, as soon as you are wounded, your body takes action. Your platelets begin to clot and the blood vessels that have been cut begin to constrict. This phase, called hemostasis, keeps you from losing too much blood.

Your mast cells also release substances filled with enzymes and histamine that cause inflammation and the characteristic signs of redness, heat, swelling, and pain around the wound site. Your white blood cells move into the wound, acting as infection control agents dispatched to fight off bacteria and clean the wound of debris. These are functions of the inflammatory phase.

Next is the proliferative phase, when the rebuilding process begins. Your cells start to multiply and spread. New cells start filling in the



wound, forming new tissue known as granulation tissue. Your body forms new blood vessels to deliver a sufficient amount of oxygen and nutrients to the new tissue. Your wound edges are pulled together as the new granulation tissue forms. Your wound is then layered with epithelial cells, the type of cells that cover the surface of your body.

Your wound then enters the maturation, or remodeling, phase. Your wound achieves maximum strength and flexibility at this stage. Cells that are no longer needed in the healing process are removed, reducing the thickness of the scar, and a process called cross-linking occurs in which collagen fibers align to thin and strengthen the skin.

This very intricate and complex cascade and overlapping sequence of events displays the human body's resilience. Your body is innately designed to fight for you and built to bounce back when faced with challenges and stressors that disrupt its normal equilibrium. You see, your body has been divinely programmed to keep you alive, so it doesn't wait for your permission, and in many cases, it doesn't even require your participation before responding.

And still, in the midst of this deeply rooted wisdom, you can influence and improve your physical resilience and the speed at which you cycle through the healing process. Because the efficiency of your healing and your body's sense of harmony are heavily impacted by your ability to remain well nourished, rested, and relaxed.

## WHO GOD SAYS YOU ARE

Every patient who requires hospital care is given a new ID wristband containing all of the information about who they are and who's in charge of their care. This ID efficiently communicates sensitive data to hospital personnel within a demanding health care environment so that each patient is correctly identified and able to receive their customized care. Becoming a believer in Christ also gives you a new ID that communicates your identity to the world. Your ID says that you are created in the image of God and your identity is solely found in him. If you've ever struggled to remember that I want to remind you of who God says you are.



**Your God-given identity.** Years ago, hospital personnel identified patients by their illnesses—the kidney stones in 405 or the heart murmur in 211. Not only did this practice lack compassion, it dehumanized the individual, dismissing and devaluing their wholeness, blinding caregivers to deeper levels of empathy, and trivializing an autonomous person down to a problem to be solved.

Describing someone by the type of illness they're experiencing doesn't take valuable characteristics into account, such as their age and overall health status, and often leads to errors in patient identification.

Patient misidentification has repeatedly led to medication, testing, and transfusion errors. It's caused patients to receive the wrong procedure and infants to be discharged to the wrong family.

The misidentification of patients, and the well-documented history of errors that have resulted because of it, caused the identification process to undergo a shift. Health care workers now involve the patient in the process and use two patient identifiers, such as one's name and date of birth, when identifying their patients. This greatly improves the reliability that the correct patient will receive the correct treatment or service.

Misidentification can also take place in your life. It occurs when you begin to conform to the patterns of this world, or when you're confused about who you are because of the stories that you have heard from yourself and from others.

So if we were together right now, I'd look into your eyes and ask, "How are you identifying yourself? Are the narratives and names you're applying to yourself true?" Because, my friend, any misidentification taking place in your life is contributing to your stress and your ongoing wounding. It's causing preventable errors in judgment and keeping you in cycles of stress that could be healed if you properly identify and treat them.

If you recognize that you have misidentified yourself in one way or another, there are two spiritual identifiers that can help bring you back into alignment with your true, God-given identity. The first is who



God says you are. Very good (Genesis 1:31), healed (Isaiah 53:5), chosen (John 15:16), redeemed (Hebrews 9:15). The second is what God has told you to do. Fear not (Isaiah 41:10), cast all of your anxiety upon him (1 Peter 5:7), do not be anxious or worried about anything (Philippians 4:6), trust in the Lord with all your heart (Proverbs 3:5). These spiritual identifiers remind you not to misidentify yourself by a condition in your body or by the circumstances in your life, but to consult with and keep your confidence in God always.

Because your mind, body, and spirit are interconnected, each influenced by and influencing the others, your mental and spiritual health can have physical consequences. This means that something that is unseen, such as your thoughts, can produce tangible, visible changes to your body. Emotions such as fear, anxiousness, and worry can cause processes to take place in your body that your body wasn't designed to experience, yet because it fights for you, your body attempts to correct the dysfunction.

This is why an ongoing awareness of God's Word and his desires for you is essential to your physical health and well-being. This doesn't mean that all physical illness is due to some aspect of your spiritual life. This is a reminder about the importance of examining all aspects of who you are in order to expand your understanding of the many ways stress and sickness can appear in your wonderfully made vessel. It's my hope that this reminder also opens your eyes to the many ways healing can take place.

***You are not your diagnosis.*** Because nursing taught me to address a patient by name, I cringe every time I hear someone begin a conversation with their illness or list the hereditary diseases in their family, suggesting that they don't have a fighting chance because of it.

Your identity doesn't change because some condition exists that requires your awareness and care. You don't become the disease simply because its existence requires you to tend to your needs differently and on a deeper level. The condition one faces can take up lots of mental space. It can become a distraction from the things you



enjoy and would prefer to give your time and attention to. It can also alter the way you work and the lifestyle you had become accustomed to. But what you cannot do is begin misidentifying yourself because of it.

It's true that you can't choose where you came from, but you can absolutely choose where you're going. Even when you're experiencing an illness, you can take steps toward your healing. Even though others in your family have experienced a disease, it doesn't mean you're doomed to experience it too, so you must refuse to use this as an excuse to not try to improve your chances of healthy, vibrant living.

There are modifiable lifestyle practices—such as the foods you eat, the way you handle stress, the quality of your sleep, your social network, cultural beliefs, and physical activity—that can decrease the chances of experiencing disease and improve the chances of healing what may already be present.

Just like every other aspect of this world, your thoughts, your behaviors, and the characteristics your genes express can be changed. Don't want grandma's pill case and medicine cabinet to be in your future? There are things you can do to avoid it. Don't want to constantly worry about that disease that impacted half the women in your bloodline? There are things you can do to minimize your chances. Don't want to leave this life prematurely like your loved one? There are options to help extend your life.

It all begins with what you believe. If you're already convinced that you have no chance, chances are you won't behave differently in a way that helps and supports you to achieve your goal of long, healthy living. This belief then becomes an internal limitation, resulting in excuses about why you cannot succeed in changing your health or any other area of your life. And this is less than the ideal God intended.

Now that you know you absolutely do have a fighting chance, what are you going to do about it? You get to choose. You get to influence your thoughts, your health, your lived experience, and add as many healthful practices to your life as possible.



No, my friend. You are not your diagnosis. And to address any remaining concern, let's explore the meaning of a diagnosis. A diagnosis is the process of identifying the nature of a disease, illness, or condition that explains the signs and symptoms. Therefore a diagnosis offers information that can be used to make decisions about your next steps, including the beneficial pathways you can take toward healing as you continue living. A diagnosis gives you the opportunity to find the root cause of whatever you're facing and work to return your body and your being to homeostasis, that state of balance in your body. A diagnosis is not who you are.

Whether you picked up this book and have no signs or symptoms of sickness, or you're already experiencing less-than-ideal health conditions, I'm here to remind you that you're wonderfully made. There are tools that you can take advantage of, and armor that you can protect yourself with, to help you utilize your body for your own benefit and for God's glory.



**BUY THE BOOK!**

[ivpress.com/radical-relaxation](http://ivpress.com/radical-relaxation)



InterVarsity Press

*Copyrighted content.*