

THE COMPLETE COMPANION WORKBOOK

Reluctant Warrior

The twelve tools from the book, gathered in one place — to print, write in, and return to.

This workbook contains every tool from *Reluctant Warrior: A Memoir & Breast Cancer Emotional Survival Guide*, one for each chapter, in the order they appear in the book.

You don't have to work through them in order. You don't have to do all of them. Start with the one that matches where you actually are today — and come back to the others when you're ready.

Print the whole thing, or just the pages you need. Write in the margins. Skip what doesn't fit. There is no right way to do this.

You don't have to finish. Just start.

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These worksheets are free. Please share them with anyone who needs them. They are reflective exercises, not therapy or medical care — if any of this brings up more than you expected, that makes sense, and it is worth bringing to someone who can sit with you in it.

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WORKSHEET 1 · CHAPTER ONE · SAY IT WITH ME: THIS IS TRAUMA

Name It to Tame It

Because what you've been through matters — and you were probably never given the language for it.

Before we go any further, I want to invite you to pause. Too often, breast cancer is framed as a medical experience instead of what it truly is: a traumatic one.

From the moment you heard the words *"It is cancer,"* everything changed:

- Your sense of safety
- Your trust in your body
- Your plans for the future
- Your identity
- Your relationships

And yet many women move through diagnosis, treatment and survivorship without ever being given the language for what they've experienced.

So let's start with naming it. When we name what we've been through, something changes. The confusion softens. The self-doubt quiets. And we begin to understand our reactions not as weakness, but as human responses to something hard.

So, when you're ready, try this.

STEP 1

Name What Happened

Complete the following sentences. Take your time here — there's no right or wrong answer.

What happened to me was...

The hardest part for me has been...

What I didn't expect was...

What still affects me today is...

STEP 2

Notice What You've Minimized

Now read back what you wrote. As you do, notice if there are places where you softened your experience — where you told yourself:

"It wasn't that bad."

"Other people have it worse."

"I should be grateful I'm alive."

"I should be over this by now."

If you notice that happening, gently underline those parts. Minimizing your experience doesn't make it less painful. It makes you feel more alone in it.

What did you underline, and why do you think you softened it?

STEP 3

Say It with Me

Take one of the sentences you wrote and rewrite it using this phrase:

This was traumatic because...

For example:

“This was traumatic because my body stopped feeling safe.”

“This was traumatic because everything happened so fast.”

“This was traumatic because I didn’t know if I would live.”

Now write your own:

Take a breath. Read that sentence again. Notice what you feel as you say the word *traumatic*. For some, it brings relief. For others, resistance. Both are completely normal.

A Gentle Reminder

Calling something traumatic doesn’t mean you’re broken. It doesn’t mean you won’t heal. And it doesn’t mean your story ends here.

It means something painful happened, and your mind and body responded the way we humans do when we’re trying to survive. There is nothing weak about that.

In fact, recognizing trauma is often the first step toward healing. Because once we name what we’ve been through, we can begin to view ourselves with more compassion. And from there, healing becomes possible.

REFLECTION

After You Finish

Take a moment to notice:

What did I feel while doing this?

What surprised me?

What felt validating?

What felt difficult?

Write anything that comes up. You don't have to rush this process. You don't have to figure everything out today.

For now, just begin here by saying with me:

This is trauma.

And you are not alone in it.

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WORKSHEET 2 · CHAPTER TWO · WHEN MORTALITY BECOMES REAL

Sitting With the Reality of Mortality

You don't have to answer the question all at once. You simply have to begin to sit with it.

Most of us aren't prepared to face our mortality. I had to learn to do it slowly. A cancer diagnosis forced me to look directly at the question I spent most of my life avoiding:

What if I don't have as much time as I thought?

You don't have to answer that question all at once. You simply have to begin to sit with it.

STEP 1

Name the Fear Beneath the Fear

When you think about your diagnosis, what is the fear that sits underneath everything else?

The thing I'm most afraid of is...

Often, the deepest fear is not dying, but something connected to it — leaving people behind, losing control, or not finishing what matters most.

STEP 2

What Would It Mean?

Now gently ask yourself: if that fear were true, what would it mean?

If that happened, it would mean...

This step helps uncover what matters most to you — your relationships, your values, and the life you care deeply about.

STEP 3

What Still Matters — Right Now?

Even with that fear present, what still matters to you today?

Today, what matters most is...

One thing I still want to show up for is...

This is where fear and meaning exist together. You don't have to resolve the fear to recognize what still matters.

STEP 4

One Small Way to Live What Matters Today

You don't have to change your whole life. Just choose one small way to live in alignment with what matters.

Today, I will...

This could be a conversation, a moment of rest, a boundary you set, or simply being present with someone you love.

A Gentle Reflection

Facing mortality doesn't mean eliminating fear. It means allowing fear to point you toward what matters most.

When we acknowledge what we're afraid of losing, we often discover what we value most deeply. And when we live according to those values — even in small ways — we reclaim a sense of purpose and presence.

You do not overcome mortality by pretending it isn't there. You move through it by choosing what matters today.

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WORKSHEET 3 · CHAPTER THREE · THIS FEELS LIKE GRIEF

Creating Your Loss Timeline

Often we're not grieving one thing. We're grieving many things, all at once.

To anyone just starting this journey, I want you to understand something I didn't know at first: your grief is not too much. **You're not too much.** There is no "right" way to do this. There is no timeline.

You don't ever have to get over it. You do have to learn to get through it. You can cry, scream, bargain, or accept. And then do it all again, as many times as it takes.

When everything changes, it doesn't happen all at once. It happens in waves.

One loss.

Then another.

Then another.

Some are obvious, like losing your health, your body, or your sense of safety. Others are less obvious, like losing energy, independence, confidence, or your old sense of self.

And when losses stack up, it can become overwhelming. Heavy. Hard to make sense of. That's why creating a loss timeline can be so helpful.

EXERCISE 1

Create Your Loss Timeline

Take a few slow, deep breaths. Then think back to your earliest loss. Make a mark near the left edge of the line below and write the age you were beneath it. Describe the loss in a word or two above the line. Continue for all the major losses in your life.

Include not only the death of a loved one or a pet, but also the loss of a job, a big move, loss of safety or innocence from abuse, major mental or medical health crises — and, of course, your diagnosis and every loss that came with your treatment.



You may want more room than this. A clean sheet of paper or a spread in your journal works just as well — draw one long horizontal line and begin.

Losses You Might Notice

At diagnosis

- Loss of innocence
- Loss of control
- Loss of safety
- Loss of feeling healthy

Around surgery

- Loss of your body
- Loss of identity
- Loss of physical strength
- Loss of privacy

During treatment

- Loss of energy
- Loss of independence
- Loss of normal routines
- Loss of feeling like yourself

After treatment

- Loss of your “before” life
- Loss of feeling safe
- Loss of confidence in your body
- Loss of future expectations

You may also notice losses connected to relationships, work or career, parenting, social life, finances, faith, and identity.

You weren't just dealing with cancer. You were dealing with grief.

Why This Helps

When you name your losses, something shifts. Your struggle finally makes sense. You stop judging yourself for not “moving on.” You stop feeling like you’re overreacting. Because you can finally see:

Of course this is hard.

Of course you’re grieving.

Of course you’re still processing.

You’ve lost so much. And grief is a natural response to loss — even when that loss isn’t obvious to others.

EXERCISE 2

Grieve Your Losses

Creating your loss timeline is only the first step. The next — and often the harder one — is allowing yourself to sit with each loss and grieve it.

Many of us move from one loss to the next without ever giving ourselves time to process. We keep going. We push forward. We tell ourselves to be strong. But grief doesn’t disappear just because we don’t stop to feel it. It waits. It shows up as exhaustion. As irritability. As anxiety. As sadness without a clear cause, or a feeling of being stuck.

When you feel ready, go back through each loss and notice which ones still haven’t been grieved. Then ask:

What did this loss take from me?

How did this change my life?

What was hardest about this?

What do I still miss?

You may notice emotions coming up — sadness, anger, fear, even relief. All of it is valid. You don't have to force anything, do it perfectly, or do it all at once. Sometimes simply acknowledging the loss is enough.

I lost my health.

I lost my sense of safety.

I lost the life I thought I'd have.

EXERCISE 3

Use TEARS to Grieve

Once you've identified and begun to sit with your losses, you may find you need help letting the grief come. The TEARS method can help.

- T** Talk about it — over and over, as many times as you need, for as long as you need.
- E** Exercise or move your body — pouring your grief into each movement.
- A** Artistic expression — creativity is another great way to access and work through grief.
- R** Record or write — your feelings, thoughts and experiences — in a journal, or even a voice memo.
- S** Sob — And sob. And sob. Let yourself feel every feeling you feel. Tears truly are healing.

Grief isn't something to rush through. It's something to move through at your own pace. And when you allow yourself to feel and grieve each loss, something important happens: you begin to carry the grief differently. It may still be there, but it feels less heavy. Less confusing. Because you're no longer pushing it away — you're making space for it. And that space is where healing begins.

A Gentle Reminder

You don't have to complete all of this at once. You don't even have to finish it. Just start.

Sometimes seeing a few of your losses written down can bring clarity — and compassion — for yourself. Because when you see what you've been carrying, it becomes easier to understand why you feel the way you do. And that's often where healing begins.

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WORKSHEET 4 · CHAPTER FOUR · WHO AM I NOW?

Rebuilding Your Self-Worth

It's not about what you do. It's about who you are.

When cancer strips away everything you've relied on to define yourself, it can feel as if you're standing in an empty space — unsure of who you are or where to begin.

Over time, I realized I couldn't rebuild my sense of self all at once. I had to start at the foundation — by seeing where I was, accepting it, and slowly choosing a kinder way forward. I didn't rebuild all at once. I rebuilt in layers — slowly, imperfectly, and often with resistance. You can do the same.

As you stand in the “empty lot” of your own life, remember that this process is not destroying you; it is rebuilding you. The Pyramid of Self-Worth is the blueprint for the palace within you.

STEP 1

Self-Awareness — Seeing What Is

This is the first step: being willing to see yourself as you are. Not the version you wish you were. Not the version you used to be. But the version of you that exists right now.

Who am I today?

What feels hardest right now?

What have I been trying not to look at?

If it helps, write a few simple truths:

I feel...

I'm struggling with...

I'm doing my best with...

There is no need to fix or change anything yet. This step is simply about seeing clearly.

Strengths & Weaknesses

A strengths and weaknesses list can help you see whether you're feeling stronger or weaker right now, by forcing you to look for both. Write down your strengths — those you've seen in yourself, and those others have told you about — and then do the same for your weaknesses.

Be honest. We all have the good, the bad, the ugly and the exceptional in us, I always say. So search out the truth of all these qualities.

My strengths

My weaknesses

You can keep adding to this list as you move through treatment, survivorship, and life after cancer.

STEP 2

Self-Acceptance — Ending the Inner Fight

Once you begin to see what's there, the next step is learning to stop fighting it. Acceptance doesn't mean you like what's happening. It doesn't mean you're giving up. It means you stop adding resistance to something that already hurts.

This is where I am. And I still matter.

Notice what comes up when you say that.

What came up?

Then, using your strengths and weaknesses list, sit in front of a mirror and say aloud: "I am ____." Work through the list, one quality at a time.

For both exercises, if there's any pushback — judgment, guilt, frustration — that's normal. That's part of the process. Just note it and move on to the next item.

Which ones did I resist most?

Revisit those when you feel up to it. They're likely the things you find hardest to accept. Keep sitting with each one until you can accept it about yourself. And remember: acceptance often happens in moments, not all at once. It's a lifelong pursuit we engage in over and over, as we change and grow.

STEP 3

Self-Love — Choosing a Kinder Way

Self-love isn't something you suddenly feel. It's something you practice. Often quietly. Often imperfectly. There are four main ways to practice it:

- Self-care
- Self-compassion
- Self-kindness
- Letting love in

Choose one to begin with, and set a goal to practice at least one act of self-love each day. Begin by asking:

What do I need today?

What would feel supportive right now?

That might look like:

- resting instead of pushing through
- saying no to something that's unhealthy for you right now
- speaking to yourself with more patience
- allowing someone to help you

These are small things. But they matter. Over time, these small choices begin to change how you relate to yourself.

Letting Love In

For many of us, this is the hardest part. You may be used to being the one who holds everything together — the one who doesn't need help. But rebuilding often requires letting others come closer.

Is there someone I could allow to support me, even in a small way?

Is there love coming my way that I haven't truly allowed in?

What might I do to reach out in love to someone else?

It doesn't have to be big. Even letting someone check in, or sit with you, is a beginning.

A Gentle Reflection

You are not starting over. You are beginning again — on a different foundation.

This process is not quick or linear. You may find yourself returning to these same steps again and again. That doesn't mean you're failing. It means you're doing the work.

You don't have to rebuild everything today. You just have to take the next small step.

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WORKSHEET 5 · CHAPTER FIVE · IT’S NOT OVER WHEN THEY SAY YOU’RE DONE

When “Done” Isn’t Done

An invitation to step away from the pressure to be better, and honestly notice where you actually are.

One of the hardest parts of life after cancer is realizing that the finish line you expected may not exist. Treatment may end, but your body, mind, emotions, relationships and spirit may still be catching up.

This exercise is an invitation to step away from the pressure to be “better” and honestly notice where you are now — not where you, or anyone else, thinks you should be.

PART I

The Finish Line Myth

Complete these sentences honestly.

I thought I would be “back to normal” by...

I told myself that once _____ was over, everything would settle.

Other people expected me to be better by...

I feel pressure to finish...

The voice in my head says, "You should be over this by now because..."

Pause. Now ask yourself:

- Who set that timeline?
- Was it realistic?
- Did my body ever agree to that timeline?

What has my body actually needed instead?

PART 2

What Still Hurts (Without Judgment)

Instead of asking "*Why am I not better yet?*" ask:

- What still feels unfinished in me?
- What still flares up physically?
- What still triggers me emotionally?
- What conversations am I still avoiding?
- What losses have I not fully grieved?

What's still hard

List without filtering.

What my body might be saying

"I'm exhausted" might mean "I need rest, not discipline."

This is not a list of failures. It's a map of what still needs care.

PART 3

Identifying Invisible Timers

Many survivors live under invisible countdown clocks. Tick any that resonate.

- ☐ I feel guilty when I talk about my pain.
- ☐ I minimize my symptoms so others won't feel uncomfortable.
- ☐ I compare my healing timeline to someone else's.
- ☐ I feel pressure to "be inspiring."
- ☐ I pretend I'm better than I am.
- ☐ I push myself to prove I'm okay.
- ☐ I avoid talking about lingering symptoms.

What would happen if I stopped pretending?

What am I afraid would change?

What would it feel like to remove the timer completely?

PART 4

Redefining Progress

In this chapter, healing was no longer measured by "normal." Write your own definition.

Healing *meant*...

Healing *now means*...

For example:

- Telling the truth about my limits.
- Resting without apology.

- Saying no.
- Asking for help.
- Living honestly in a changed body.
- Allowing grief to resurface without shame.

PART 5

A Commitment

Keep these short. Specific. Livable.

I release the expectation that I should be done with...

Instead, I give myself permission to...

For example: move at my body's pace · grieve without rushing · speak honestly · stop performing recovery.

A Gentle Reflection

Place your hand on your body and ask:

If my body could speak without interruption, what would it say right now?

Write the answer without editing it.

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WORKSHEET 6 · CHAPTER SIX · BUILD YOUR TEAM AND TRUST YOURSELF

Advocate for Yourself

You don't have to become an expert or say everything perfectly. You simply need the courage to begin.

Advocating for yourself can seem intimidating, especially when you're already overwhelmed, afraid, exhausted, or unsure what questions to ask. These exercises are designed to help you reconnect with your voice, identify your needs, and practice communicating more clearly with the people involved in your care.

EXERCISE 1

Reclaiming Your Voice

There is a moment for many cancer patients when they realize: *"I don't actually feel in control of what's happening to me."* This exercise is about gently taking some of that power back.

The moments I've felt most unheard during my care are...

The things I wish I had said in those moments are...

The things I'm afraid might happen if I speak up are...

Now pause. Read what you wrote with compassion, not judgment. Then remind yourself:

My voice matters here. My body, my life, my decisions.

EXERCISE 2

The Advocacy Script

When we're overwhelmed, it's hard to find the right words. So let's give you some. Practice saying these out loud — yes, actually out loud if you can.

"What are all of my options?"

"Can you explain that again in a different way?"

"I need more time to decide."

"What happens if I don't do this right now?"

"I'd like a second opinion."

"This doesn't feel right to me."

Now write your own.

One sentence that feels hardest for me to say...

One sentence that feels empowering...

You don't have to say everything perfectly. You just have to begin.

EXERCISE 3

Medical Visit Prep Sheet

When everything feels urgent, it's easy to forget what matters most to you. Use this before and after your next appointment. Print a copy for each visit.

BEFORE YOUR APPOINTMENT

My top questions

My current concerns

Symptoms or changes I've noticed

AFTER YOUR APPOINTMENT

What I heard

What I understood

What I'm still confused about

Next steps, in my own words

A Gentle Reminder

Advocating for yourself doesn't mean you're being difficult. It means you're being involved.

It's entirely normal if this feels uncomfortable at first. Most of us were never taught how to do this. But this is part of your healing too — learning to trust your voice again.

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WORKSHEET 7 · CHAPTER SEVEN · WHEN CANCER BECOMES CHRONIC

Expanding Your Life

When you can't shrink your symptoms — what if you expand your life around them instead?

There's a moment in chronic illness that feels like a breaking point. When you realize this might not be something you can fix. Not something you just push through. Not something you can outwork or outsmart.

It might just... be.

And that realization can feel devastating. Because if your symptoms don't go away, then what happens to your life?

For a long time, I believed the goal was to shrink the illness — to reduce symptoms enough that I could get back to who I was before. But eventually I realized something: if I waited to feel better before I lived my life, I might never live it at all.

What if I expand my life around my symptoms instead of waiting for them to disappear?

STEP 1

Identify Your Current Limits

Be honest with yourself. Not your old limits. Not what you should be able to do. What is true right now.

What are my current physical capacities?

What are my current physical limitations?

What activities trigger symptoms?

What time of day is hardest?

How long can I be upright, or out of the house?

STEP 2

Assess the Other Four Realms

Along with accepting your physical capacities and limits, it's important to do the same for your mental, emotional, social and spiritual situation.

What emotions do I regularly experience because of my physical state?

What thoughts do I have about my chronic issues or my cancer?

How is my current physical state affecting my relationships?

What do I believe spiritually — or, if that word doesn't fit, what do I believe about my worth, my purpose, or the meaning of my life?

STEP 3

Ask, “What Can I Do?”

As you accept your limitations, it's equally important to recognize your remaining strengths. You might not be able to go on long hikes as you once did — but you might still be able to go on short walks. You may not be able to return to life exactly as it was, but you can still build a meaningful life within your new reality.

What do I *want* to do that my body can still do?

What do I *need* to do that my body can still do?

How might I expand my life, even if my symptoms stay the same?

STEP 4

Build Life Within Your Capacity

Instead of asking “What can I get back to?” ask “What is still possible inside my current limits?” That might look like:

- Shorter outings
- Modified routines
- Rest built into everything
- Different ways of connecting

Not less meaningful. Just different.

STEP 5

Redefine Strength

I used to believe strength meant pushing through, doing, and enduring more. Now I’m learning that strength can also look like:

- Stopping before you crash
- Saying no
- Leaving early
- Resting when you need to
- Practicing self-care and self-compassion

Strength isn’t always forward motion. Sometimes it’s gentle restraint.

What would strength look like for me this week?

STEP 6

Make Room for Both

You don't have to choose between:

- Grief *or* gratitude
- Hope *or* disappointment
- Strength *or* struggle
- Faith *or* fear

You can hold both. You can say:

"This is not the life I wanted."

And also, "I'm still here."

You can grieve what's been lost. And still create something meaningful inside what remains.

What am I holding both of right now?

A Gentle Reminder

You are not failing at life. You are living inside a body that has changed. And that requires a different kind of strength. A quieter kind. A more honest kind.

Not the kind that pushes through — but the kind that learns how to stay.

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WORKSHEET 8 · CHAPTER EIGHT · FEEL WHAT YOU FEEL

Feel What's Underneath

The emotion we notice first isn't always the emotion we're actually feeling.

One of the most important things I learned in my own healing — and one I've taught my therapy clients for years — is that the emotion we notice first isn't always the emotion we're actually feeling.

Anger, anxiety, irritability, numbness and frustration are often **secondary emotions**. They serve a protective purpose, helping us survive overwhelming experiences. But they can also keep us from recognizing the deeper emotions our hearts are trying to express.

This exercise will help you move beyond those first reactions to identify what's underneath. You don't need to judge them, fix them, or make them disappear. Simply noticing them is often where healing begins.

STEP 1

Notice What Shows Up First

Start with what's loud, immediate, and hard to ignore.

What am I feeling right now?

What is coming out — anger, anxiety, frustration, guilt?

These are often secondary emotions — the protective layer. For example: "I'm so angry right now." "I feel anxious and on edge."

STEP 2

Get Curious, Not Critical

Instead of judging the reaction, pause and ask:

What might be underneath this?

If this feeling could speak, what would it say?

Shift from *“Why am I like this?”*
to *“What is this trying to show me?”*

STEP 3

Name the Primary Emotion

Look beneath the surface for the quieter, more vulnerable truth. Common primary emotions include:

- Fear
- Grief
- Sadness
- Loneliness
- Hurt
- Loss
- Uncertainty
- Hope

For example:

Anger **Fear**

Frustration **Grief**

Anxiety **Fear of loss, or of lack of control**

Naming it won't fix it. But it will clarify it.

What is the primary emotion underneath?

STEP 4

Say It Honestly

Practice expressing the deeper emotion — first to yourself, then to others if needed.

Instead of:

“What were you thinking?!”

Try:

“I was scared.”

“That really hurt.”

“I feel overwhelmed, and I don't know what to do.”

Healing begins not in control, but in truth.

How could I say it honestly?

STEP 5

FEEL with Compassion

Once you identify the primary emotion, let yourself FEEL it.

FEEL — Freely Experience Emotion with Love

- Freely experience the emotion — let it come, fill your body, and acknowledge what it feels like.

- **Do it with love** — place a hand on your chest, tell yourself it will be alright, and let yourself be there in that moment, knowing you can handle it.
- **Afterwards, do something nice for yourself** as a reward.

Healing is not about eliminating the feeling. It's about staying with it long enough to understand it.

REFLECTION

The Emotion Beneath the Emotion

Think of a recent moment when you felt overwhelmed.

What was my immediate reaction?

What might have been underneath it?

What did I actually need in that moment?

How might I better FEEL the underlying emotion next time?

A Gentle Reminder

It's not easy to identify and allow feelings to exist in your body, but it is essential to healing.

Go slowly. Give yourself grace. There's no timeline for these exercises. Simply do them as you feel the need, or as they feel helpful.

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WORKSHEET 9 · CHAPTER NINE · BREAST CANCER IS NEVER AN INDIVIDUAL DIAGNOSIS

Building a Support System That Holds

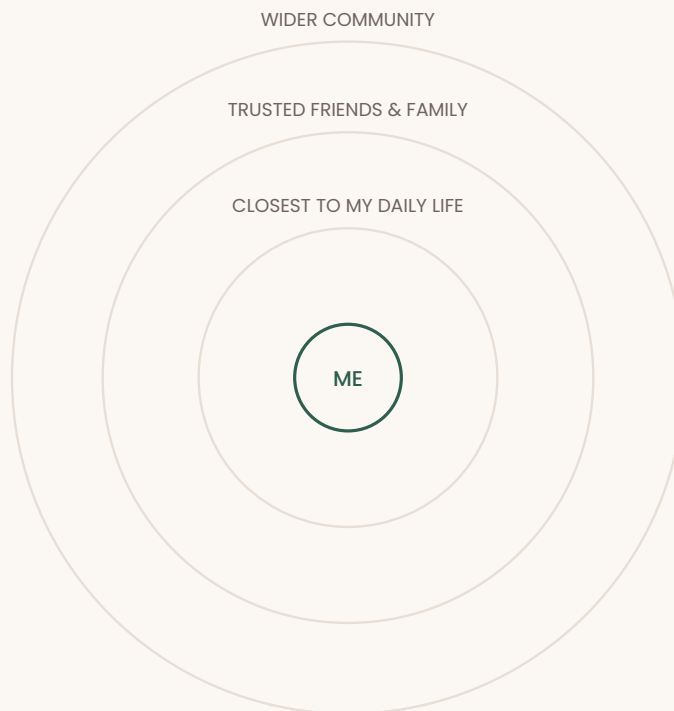
Not the perfect system. One that is honest, sustainable, and real.

I thought support would just show up. Sometimes it did. Sometimes it didn't. This tool is not about creating the perfect system. It's about building one that is honest, sustainable, and real.

STEP 1

See the Shape of Your Support

Write your name in the centre. In the second ring, the people closest to your daily life — partner, children, those in your home. In the third, trusted friends and family — the ones you can call when things fall apart. In the outer ring, your wider community: neighbours, church, coworkers, acquaintances.



Pause and look at what you've drawn.

- Who is closest to you?
- Who do you rely on most?
- And who might be relying on you?

There is no right configuration. Just clarity.

STEP 2

Name What You Actually Need

We often wait until we're overwhelmed to admit what we need. Start sooner.

Practical — meals, rides, childcare, cleaning, errands

Emotional — someone to listen, check-ins, presence without fixing

Spiritual — prayer, faith support, quiet, meaning-making

Then widen the lens.

Who in my life might also need support right now? Who is carrying this alongside me?

STEP 3

Match Needs to People

Support works best when it is specific and shared. Instead of hoping people will know what to do, ask:

Who is good at showing up consistently?

Who listens well?

Who organizes?

Who brings lightness when things feel heavy?

Assign small, clear roles where you can. Not everyone will be able to do everything. That's not failure — it's reality.

STEP 4

Let Support Be Organized

You don't have to manage everything alone. Be willing to ask for help organizing your support system. If possible:

- Create a group text or shared thread
- Use a meal train or a simple calendar
- Ask someone you trust to help coordinate

Asking for the support you need isn't weakness. It's wisdom.

STEP 5

Keep Asking — and Let It In

This can be the hardest part for many of us. You may feel like a burden. Like you should be able to handle it. Like it's been "long enough."

But support is not a one-time event. It's something that must be revisited, reshaped, and received again and again.

You are allowed to keep asking. You are allowed to need more.

What I Had to Learn

People don't always understand what support needs to look like. They may understand parts of it — but they usually don't grasp its full weight. People don't always know how to help, even when they want to. And support often fades over time. Not because you don't matter, but because life keeps moving on for everyone else.

That doesn't mean you are unsupported. It means you may need to build support more intentionally than you expected.

A Final Reflection

Support is not merely getting through this. It's not disappearing inside of it.

Turning toward each other — asking, receiving, staying connected — doesn't take the struggles away. But it does change how they are carried.

And often, it's that change that makes things feel not only bearable but possible.

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WORKSHEET 10 · CHAPTER TEN · HORMONES MATTER

Understanding Emotional Earthquakes

Emotional earthquakes rarely begin the moment the ground cracks open.

For a long time, I thought my emotional collapses came out of nowhere.

One bad week.

One hormonal crash.

One moment when I couldn't cope anymore.

But eventually I realized emotional earthquakes rarely begin the moment the ground cracks open. The pressure has usually been building quietly beneath the surface for years.

This tool is not about blaming yourself for struggling. It's about learning to understand what your body, brain and emotions may have been carrying all along.

STEP 1

Identify Your Tectonic Plates

The Earthquake Model is built around three constantly shifting areas of emotional health. None of these exists separately from the others. When one shifts, the others respond too.

LIFE STRESS AND EXPERIENCES

Loss, trauma, grief, chronic stress, caregiving, illness, relationships, financial distress, fear, survival mode.

THE BRAIN AND NERVOUS SYSTEM

Mental health history, trauma responses, anxiety, depression, neurodivergence, sleep deprivation, burnout.

HORMONES AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

Menstrual cycles, pregnancy, postpartum, perimenopause, menopause, cancer treatment, surgeries, chronic illness, inflammation, pain.

Write what has been happening in each category for you lately. Not just the major events — the smaller stressors count too.

STEP 2

Look for Your Tremors

Tremors often precede earthquakes. So do emotional collapses. Tick the warning signs you recognize.

- ☐ Trouble sleeping
- ☐ Irritability
- ☐ Brain fog
- ☐ Panic
- ☐ Fatigue
- ☐ Withdrawing from people
- ☐ Crying easily
- ☐ Feeling emotionally numb
- ☐ Snapping at loved ones
- ☐ Hopelessness
- ☐ Physical symptoms flaring

What usually happens right before these appear?

STEP 3

Notice What You've Been Pushing Through

Many of us become experts at overriding ourselves. We tell ourselves:

I'm fine.

I need to push harder.

Other people have it worse.

I don't have time to fall apart right now.

But ignored stress does not disappear. It accumulates.

What have I been surviving that I haven't fully acknowledged yet?

You may discover grief, fear, anger, loneliness, exhaustion, or trauma that has never had space to breathe.

STEP 4

Build Reinforcements Before the Quake

You cannot prevent every emotional earthquake, but you can strengthen the support around you before the pressure becomes unbearable.

What actually helps my body and mind feel safer, steadier, or more supported?

This might include: therapy · rest · medication · hormonal support · nutrition · movement · time outside · spiritual practices · asking for help · less stimulation · more sleep · boundaries · connection · quiet.

Small forms of care matter more than most people realize.

STEP 5

Stop Fighting Your Body

One of the hardest lessons I learned was that my body was not betraying me. It was responding to everything it had lived through.

Sometimes symptoms are signals. Sometimes exhaustion is information. Sometimes anxiety is the nervous system begging for safety. This does not mean every feeling should control your life. But it does mean your body deserves curiosity, not shame.

What changes when I stop seeing myself as broken and start seeing myself as overloaded?

A Gentle Reflection

Emotional earthquakes do not happen because you are weak. They happen because human beings can only carry so much pressure for so long before something begins to crack.

Understanding your tremors does not erase the pain. But it can help you respond with compassion instead of confusion.

You are not dramatic. You are not weak. You are not failing to adjust. You are a woman whose body has been through something enormous, and whose hormones are trying to tell you something true. Listen.

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WORKSHEET 11 · CHAPTER ELEVEN · HEALING IS POSSIBLE

The Healing Compass

Time, work and grace — noticing where healing may already be unfolding.

Throughout this chapter, I kept trying to measure healing by whether I felt “better.” I wanted proof that all the work was paying off. But healing often happened in ways I couldn’t immediately see.

As you move through this reflection, use the word *grace* in whatever way feels most fitting to you — divine help, mercy, compassion, love, support, or allowing yourself to be imperfect.

This exercise is meant to help you notice the places where healing may already be unfolding in your life, even if your circumstances still feel painful or unfinished.

PART 1

Time

Healing rarely happens all at once. Often it unfolds slowly through seasons, setbacks, repetition, and small moments that only make sense in retrospect.

What wounds or struggles have softened over time, even slightly?

Where have I become more patient, honest, gentle or self-aware than I used to be?

What pain still resurfaces in cycles or spirals?

What expectations have I had to release about how quickly healing should happen?

Write about a time you realized healing was happening slowly rather than suddenly.

PART 2

Work

Healing usually asks something of us. It often requires effort, honesty, vulnerability, boundaries, support, therapy, grieving, rest, or difficult conversations.

What healing work have I done that no one else fully sees?

What coping patterns, defenses or survival habits have I had to confront?

Where am I still trying to push through instead of listening to my body, emotions or needs?

What relationships need honesty, repair, or deeper conversation?

List the kinds of work your healing has required — emotionally, physically, spiritually and relationally.

PART 3

Grace

Some parts of healing cannot be forced. There are moments when effort alone is not enough. Grace is what carries us when we are exhausted, disappointed, grieving, or unable to fix what hurts.

What does grace mean to me?

Where do I most struggle to give myself grace?

What would it look like to stop treating myself like a problem to solve?

Who has offered me grace during difficult seasons?

What would change if I believed healing did not require perfection?

Finish these sentences:

Right now, grace for me looks like...

One thing I need to stop hiding is...

One thing I need to accept about myself is...

One way I can care for myself more gently this week is...

The Spiral Check-In

Healing isn't linear. It circles. It spirals. Think of something related to healing that has resurfaced recently — anger, depression, a memory of trauma.

What did this bring up?

Is this truly backsliding, or is it deeper integration?

What did I know this time that I didn't know before?

“Even though this resurfaced, I now understand that...”

A Gentle Reflection

Healing is not always dramatic. Sometimes it looks like surviving another day. Sometimes it looks like asking for help, telling the truth, resting, grieving honestly, or allowing yourself to be loved exactly as you are.

What if healing is not about becoming who I used to be, but learning how to care for the person I am now?

Healing may be private work, but it's not meant to happen in isolation. We reach out to each other — sometimes quietly, sometimes desperately — and in that reaching, something shifts.

So if you're hurting, still waiting to feel better, still aching for "the end" of all this, please know you're not failing. You're not behind. Healing isn't something we manufacture. It's something we allow. Warrior-like, we show up, and we do the work.

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WORKSHEET 12 · CHAPTER TWELVE · WHEN CANCER CHANGES YOU, YOU CAN'T GO BACK

Welcome Home

Sometimes healing isn't about going back. It's about getting acquainted with the person who is here now.

One of the hardest parts of breast cancer, chronic illness, grief, trauma, or any life-altering experience is that we often spend years trying to get back to who we were before.

I know I did. I kept waiting for the old me to return. The energetic me. The healthy me. The productive me. The carefree me. The me who didn't need to think about medications, scans, symptoms, appointments, surgeries, grief, trauma, or survival.

But healing isn't always about going back. Sometimes healing is about getting acquainted with the person who is here now.

STEP 1

Honor Who You Were

Take a few minutes to write about the version of yourself you miss.

What do I miss most?

What did she love? What did she do easily?

What did she believe about herself?

What losses still hurt the most?

Allow yourself to grieve as it comes. Don't force it. Don't push it away either. Sit with whatever you feel, and don't rush this part. Loss deserves to be acknowledged.

STEP 2

Meet Who You Are Today

Now write about the person you are today. Try not to judge this version of yourself. Simply get to know her.

What strengths have emerged? What have I survived?

What weaknesses have I felt? How have I coped?

How have I become more compassionate, wise, resilient or authentic?

What do I understand now that I didn't before?

What am I still struggling to understand?

STEP 3

Notice the Parts

Think about the different parts of yourself — those that were there before, and those that have appeared along the way. Tick the ones you recognize, and add your own.

- ☐ A Warrior — or a Patient, a Survivor, a Thriver (use your own word)
- ☐ A Caregiver
- ☐ A Protector
- ☐ A Perfectionist
- ☐ An Angry Part
- ☐ A Grieving Part
- ☐ A Scared Part
- ☐ A Tired Part
- ☐ A Hopeful Part

What parts have shown up to help me survive?

What has each part been trying to do for me? How has it tried to protect me?

What does it need from me now?

Remember: even the parts you dislike usually began with good intentions.

STEP 4

Write a Letter

Write a short letter to yourself. Tell yourself what you most need to hear. Offer yourself the same compassion you would offer a loved one. What would you say if your best friend had survived everything you've survived? Write those words to yourself.

Dear Me,

STEP 5**Finish This Sentence**

Read your answers slowly. Notice what feelings arise.

I am no longer...

I am still...

I am becoming...

A Gentle Reminder

Integration doesn't mean you stop grieving. It doesn't mean you love everything that happened. It doesn't mean you stop wishing things were different. It means you're no longer trying to exile the parts of yourself that showed up to survive.

You are allowed to miss who you were. And you are allowed to welcome who you've become.

Both can be true. And perhaps that is what healing is.

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