Mini Habits
Smaller Habits, Bigger Results

by Stephen Guise

www.deepexistence.com
Primary blog – focusing, habits, small steps, etc.

www.minihabits.com
Supplemental book information
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Preface

I had experimented with personal development strategies for a decade. When I accidentally started my first mini habit—and the changes I made were actually lasting—I realized the prior strategies I relied upon were complete failures. When something works, that which doesn't work is exposed. The science in *Mini Habits* exposes the predictably inconsistent results of most popular personal growth strategies, and reveals why mini habits create remarkable consistency.

A mini habit is a very small positive behavior that you force yourself to do every day; its "too small to fail" nature makes it weightless, deceptively powerful, and a superior habit-building strategy.

This strategy will better equip you to change your life than 99% of the people you see walking around on this globe. People so often think that they are the reason they can't achieve lasting change; but the problem isn't with them—it's with their strategy. You can achieve great things without the guilt, intimidation, and repeated failure associated with strategies like "getting motivated," resolutions, or even "just doing it." To make changes last, you need to stop fighting against your brain. When you start playing by your brain's rules—as mini habits show you how to do—lasting change isn't so hard.
Other Products By Stephen Guise

Books

Coming in 2016: *Mini Habits for Weight Loss*


Mini Habit Mastery Video Course

To expand the reach of Mini Habits and cater to varied learning styles, I locked myself in a room for seven months and created the *Mini Habit Mastery Video Course*. It’s 4+ hours of paradigm-shifting, highly-entertaining information in HD video.

As a *Mini Habits*’ reader, you get a discount on the course! Visit [Mini Habit Mastery on Udemy](http://www.udemy.com/course/mini-habit-mastery/) to preview the course. Enter the coupon “minibook” to save instantly (or click on [this link](http://www.udemy.com/course/mini-habit-mastery/) to have the discount automatically applied).
How This Book Is Structured

There are seven major parts in Mini Habits. The end goal of this book is to help you permanently add healthy, habitual behaviors to your life. The first three parts discuss habit-building, the brain, willpower, motivation, and how they relate to one another. The next two parts discuss logical and scientific conclusions about how to best utilize this information. The last three parts show you how to apply it. Here are the seven parts in greater detail:

1. Introduction To Mini Habits

Here, you'll find out what a mini habit is. This part includes the story of how I first made one push-up a full workout (which became a mini-phenomenon called “The One Push-up Challenge”). We'll also explore why habits are so critical to actively develop.

What it establishes: what a mini habit is, the importance of habits, and how I stumbled upon my first mini habit.

2. How Your Brain Works

In part two, we're going to take a look at the human brain. Understanding the brain can help tremendously in new habit formation, because you can employ superior strategies with this knowledge. We'll learn about the active and passive (i.e. conscious and subconscious) parts of the brain, and how they work together to shape our daily behavior.

What it establishes: the inner workings of the human brain as it relates to behavior change and creating new habits.

3. Willpower Vs. Motivation

We have two strategies for taking action—either get motivated so that we want to complete the task or force the issue by using willpower. Is one better than the other? Do we use both? Science reveals the winner and suggests the single best way to apply it.

What it establishes: why it's best to use willpower exclusively (with mini habits) and ignore motivation altogether.

4. The Strategy of Mini Habits

The first three parts laid the foundation for this concept of tiny, daily actions; in the next two parts, we’ll discuss why that is the case and how it should work. Mini habits are most effective with the proper mindset, and this part gets you into that mindset.

What it establishes: the connection between the Mini Habits strategy and everything we've learned about habit change to this point.

5. The Mini Habits Difference
This part delves into the advantages of the Mini Habits strategy’s differences and how it can work for you when others haven’t.

What it establishes: all that makes mini habits uniquely effective.

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6. Mini Habits – Eight Steps To Big Change

These eight steps will show you how to choose your habits, plan your journey, and take your first small steps forward. Each step is broken down into detail, explaining exactly why it's necessary, different strategies to employ, and how to best execute.

What it establishes: how to apply mini habits to your life, from the “I want to create a new habit” stage to success.

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7. Eight Mini Habit Rules

This last part covers the eight rules of the Mini Habits strategy. These rules will keep you on track and ensure you maximize your potential and results.

What it establishes: the rules of mini habits that will help you get great results while avoiding habit-breaking mistakes.

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Are you ready to discover how smaller habits lead to bigger results? I sure hope so, because I'm excited to show you. Let's go!
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Introduction To Mini Habits

“The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.” — Lao Tzu

Let's begin your first mini habit.

Read at least two pages of this book every day until you finish it. You may read more than that, but never less. It won’t require much time or effort to read two pages, so there are no excuses. Now you can experience what it's like to have a mini habit as you read about mini habits.

Touch your nose right now. I'm serious. I’ll explain later. Ok, now think about what the following truths mean for your life:

1. Big intentions are worthless if they don't bring results. For example, I can say that I will exercise for two hours every day, but if I never do it, the size of the intention doesn't matter. In fact, intention without action harms self-confidence.

2. People have been shown in studies to chronically overestimate their self-control ability.¹

These two simple points reveal why so many people struggle to change. They have big ambitions, but overestimate their ability to make themselves do what it takes to change. It's a mismatch between desire and ability.

Here are two more facts to consider:

1. Doing a little bit is infinitely bigger and better than doing nothing (mathematically and practically speaking).

2. Doing a little bit every day has a greater impact than doing a lot on one day. How much greater? Profoundly so, because a little bit every day is enough to grow into a lifelong foundational habit, and those are a big deal, as you'll see.

If these statements seem reasonable to you, the main conclusion to draw is that small intentions are better than big intentions. Interesting, right? We're just getting started.

Have you ever felt stuck? Have you ever tried to change yourself for the better and failed? Have you done it over and over again, and even stopped trying for long periods of time?

We've all been there, I think, but let me ask you these more interesting questions.

What if your failure to take action and stick to your plan was never a problem with you, but a problem with your strategy—the strategy that most of the world uses and endorses? And what if the science about human behavior, willpower, and the brain suggested a better alternative for sticking to your plans—one that is rarely practiced or promoted? And what if a shift to this new strategy changed everything for you, and no matter how you felt, you knew you could take action, reach your goals, form good habits, and change your life?

Welcome to the world of mini habits.

It all sounds overblown, I know, but you just read my mini-autobiography up there. This is the exact reality and the revelation that transpired for me starting in late 2012. The previous ten years of my life were a constant search and struggle to grow, with disappointing results. But then I tried something that produced a breakthrough unlike I had ever experienced before, so I scrambled to understand exactly why this odd strategy worked so well, and I was (and am still) amazed at how everything fits together. And now here's this book.

We're quick to blame ourselves for lack of progress, but slow to blame our strategies. Then we repeat them over and over again, trying to make them work. But here's the thing—if you fail using a particular strategy more than a few times, you need to try another one. It doesn't matter if it works for everyone else if it doesn't work for you! This is a lesson I wish I had learned years ago.

I asked you to touch your nose earlier because I wanted you to prove something to yourself. First, notice that there's no reward for touching your nose. Second, consider that you did it anyway because you can. If you didn't do it then, do it now so the following words apply to you (or choose another small action if you're one of those stubborn types).

You were able to touch your nose because the resistance you felt was not stronger than your willpower. Congratulations! You are now Mini Habits approved.

That was a rudimentary exercise in willpower. If you can force yourself to touch your nose, then you can have success with this book's strategy. I’m not joking. This book exists because I did one push-up on December 28, 2012. My ability to do 16 pull-ups in a row and my improved physique result from that same push-up. I read and write every single day because of that push-up. That one push-up was the first step that led to all of these great changes in my life.

Every great accomplishment rests on the foundation of what came before it; when you trace it back, you'll see one small step that started it all. Without that one push-up, I'd still be struggling to get motivated to go to the gym, and to read and write consistently. That push-up lead me to discover this new strategy, which turned into these great benefits. Are you ready to hear the story of the one small action that changed everything for me?
How It Began: The One Push-up Challenge

I'm thinking about naming it “the golden push-up.”

It was December 28, 2012 and the new year was near. Like many others, I reflected on 2012 and was not impressed. I wanted to live better in 2013; my top desire was fitness. I wasn't about to set a New Year’s resolution though—I had decided against them years ago, because they have an abysmal 8% success rate.²

I felt like I had better odds of winning in Las Vegas than in life. Ever since my later years of high school, I had tried to make exercise a habit. But for ten years it never stuck, despite my efforts. Those aren't the types of results that instill confidence in oneself! My motivational bursts to change would usually last me about two weeks before I'd quit for one reason or another. Sometimes there was no reason; I'd just stop. Wanting to do something before the arbitrary January 1st starting point associated with resolutions, I decided to start by exercising right there on the spot for 30 minutes.

But I stood motionless. I couldn’t get motivated. I went through my usual “get motivated” routine. Come on Stephen. True champions put in the extra work. I tried listening to up-tempo music, visualizing myself with a great beach body, etc. Nothing worked. I felt out of shape, lethargic, and worthless to the point that I couldn't do anything. A 30-minute workout looked like Mount Everest. The idea of exercise was wholly unappealing. I felt so defeated, and I was.

It wasn't just the time or the effort of a 30-minute workout that intimidated me, it was the total amount of work I needed to put in to reach my fitness desires. It was the vast distance between here and there. A year's worth of workouts weighed on my mind. I felt guilty, overwhelmed, and discouraged before I had even done anything!

The Turning Point

Months earlier, I had read a fantastic creative thinking and problem-solving book called Thinkertoys by Michael Michalko. One of the creative thinking “toys” he talks about is called False Faces. In False Faces, you consider the opposite of what you're currently thinking, and see what creative ideas emerge from that. A crude example: instead of building a skyscraper, what if you built a structure deep into the earth? This generates creative ideas by forcing your mind to zoom out and see the spectrum of possibilities.

I had a problem to solve, and this technique popped into my head, so I thought about the opposite of a 30-minute workout. Eating ice cream and watching TV would be one opposite of exercise. Then I considered that a full 30 minutes just seemed like such a huge challenge in that moment (i.e. Everest). Another opposite, I decided, could be the workout's size. What if, instead of this big 30-minute commitment of sweat and discomfort, I did a single push-up? I would have no

requirement to do more—just one push-up. It was the true opposite of my Mount Everest workout.

I laughed off the idea, literally. How pathetic! One push-up isn't going to help anything. I really need to put in more work than that! But every time I switched back to my first plan, I couldn't do it. After I got tired of failing to do the 30-minute workout, I thought, Whatever, I'll do one push-up. I got down on the ground, did one push-up, and changed my life for good.

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When I got into push-up position, I noticed it was exactly the same as the start to an actual 30-minute workout. I did my push-up; my shoulder popped, my elbows needed WD-40; it felt like my muscles were waking up from a 24-year nap. But I did a few more since I was already in position. Every push-up was an annoyance to my underused muscles and stubborn brain.

As I stood up, I concluded that it was better than nothing. Mind you, I still felt like quitting at this point. But then I had the idea to set another small challenge of one pull-up. It was too easy to turn down. I got my pull-up bar set up and did one. Then I did a few more. Interesting, I thought, this is hard, but not as hard as I was making it out to be.

My muscles were warming up. My motivation to do more had definitely increased, but it was so low to start with (and I was so out of shape) that I still had plenty of internal resistance. I continued on with the same strategy, going as small as necessary to continue. During one push-up session in my workout, I had to set seven micro goals like so: ok, one more, ok, two more, now one more. Every time I baited myself with a beyond-easy challenge, I met or exceeded it. It felt nice to hit my targets, however small.

When I finished, I had exercised for 20 minutes, and felt great about it. Usually at this point in a workout, I'd complete a 10-minute ab exercise video. But when the thought crossed my mind, my brain promptly shot it down like a bird crossing the screen in the video game Duck Hunt, saying, “You had your fun, but don't push your luck.” You can probably guess what I did next.

I decided to set up my floor mat. Brain accepted that. Then I decided to find an ab video. Brain accepted. Then I decided to press play. 10 minutes later, my abs were ablaze. It's important to note that these were individual decisions. At no point did I have the full weight of completing a 10-minute ab-ripping program on my mind. If I had, I would have never done it.

The day after I had turned one push-up into the impossible-seeming 30-minute workout, I wrote “The One Push-up Challenge.” It turned into one of my most popular posts to date. I still receive messages from people telling me how it's helped them to exercise consistently.

As 2013 went on, I continued to require one push-up per day from myself. Usually, I did more than one. But one day I forgot until I was already in bed. So I flipped over onto my stomach and did my one push-up in bed. I laughed at the thought of meeting the daily requirement at the last second. It sounds meaningless, but it actually felt amazing to succeed so easily and keep the
streak alive. Later, I would see how important this was for my success.

I noticed two things. First, just a few push-ups a day does make a difference in how you feel. I felt stronger and my muscles were better conditioned. Second, I realized that exercise was becoming habitual; even with such a wimpy challenge, I was doing something every day. Regular workouts were becoming easier. After this positive experience which lasted, I wondered if a scientific explanation existed for why “stupid small” steps work better for me than larger goals. Research showed that there are indeed answers, and you'll see them peppered throughout this book. There's no single study that says “Mini habits are the answer.” Instead, this philosophy of habit-building rests on the shoulders of dozens of studies that have revealed the nature of willpower and the brain, and what it takes to take consistent action.

Starting in late June, I made the jump from home to gym, and I've built a few pounds of muscle since then. On September 20th, I realized the potential of this formula for other areas of my life, such as reading and writing. I've amazed myself since then by increasing my writing output fourfold and my reading tenfold, all while staying in great shape. All of the things I've been wanting are happening now. I’ve even started eating mega salads just because I want to do it. When you invest in yourself in key areas like fitness and learning, you tend to do it in other areas too.

For Good Habits Only

Before we get any further, I want you to understand that this book will not help you quit smoking or control a gambling addiction. Mini habits are for good habits only—adding positive behaviors to your life to enrich it for years. Breaking bad habits and making good habits do have the same goal—replacing a default behavior with a better behavior. With bad habits, your primary motivation for change is an away response from something bad. With good habits, your primary motivation for change is a toward response to something good. Mini habits focuses on the toward response.

Changing deeply-rooted active bad habits like substance addiction involves a different psychological process and may require professional assistance. That said, if you're looking for a long-term play to help with passive bad habits such laziness, fear, or wasting time, then this book can help you tremendously. Passive bad habits can often be marginalized by incorporating good habits into your life. How can you continue with your bad habits if you spend all of your time on good ones? And honestly, adding good habits this way is pretty easy to do. Quick fixes are often bogus, but when you've literally been fighting against your brain for a decade (or more for some of you), then a strategy that works with your brain will be easy in comparison. With the right knowledge and strategy to change, what previously seemed impossible becomes rather straightforward and possible. It's like trying to open a locked door—it's only easy if you have the right key (or are a locksmith or thief, but now the analogy is too complicated).

That said, those covered in darkness (probably because of their bad habits) need light in their life
too. If your life is a complete mess of bad habits, adding in some good habits can change you. Darkness is not something that exists on its own—it's the name we give for the absence of light. Perhaps people have bad habits because they lack the light of good habits, which permits a dark void in their life. When you add good habits into your life, it illuminates another possible path, restores your confidence, and gives you hope. It also serves as a brilliant foundation from which to build.

This information doubles as a life philosophy that demonstrates, explains, and celebrates that the first step forward is always the most important one...by far. In other words, it can help you in other areas besides your habits. I don't merely hope that this book will help you, I'm confident that it will...as confident as I am that most people’s New Year's resolutions will fail. That is, it's a high statistical probability. With mini habits, you can join the ranks of people who change their lives in the most unbelievable way.

**A Brief Synopsis Of Mini Habits**

Since I refer to mini habits throughout the book, I want to briefly explain the concept. A mini habit is basically a much smaller version of a new habit you want to form. 100 push-ups daily is minified into one push-up daily. Writing 3,000 words daily becomes writing 50 words daily. Thinking positively all the time becomes thinking two positive thoughts per day. Living an entrepreneurial lifestyle becomes thinking of two ideas per day (among other entrepreneurial things).

The foundation of the *Mini Habits* system is in “stupid small” steps. The concept of small steps is nothing new, but how and why they work have not been adequately dissected. Of course, small steps are relative too; a small step for you could be a giant leap for me. Saying “stupid small” clarifies it, because if a step sounds stupid relative to the most you can do, it's perfect.

The power of the *Mini Habits* system is in the application, mindset, built-in positive feedback looping, naturally increasing self-efficacy, and of course, leveraging small steps into habits. This will be explained, but it's also built in; it's a simple system with a complex, smart backing.

The way we act on these mini habits is by using a small amount of willpower to force ourselves to do them. It doesn't take a lot of willpower to do one push-up or come up with a couple of ideas.

The benefit from following the *Mini Habits* system is surprisingly big results. First, there's a great chance that you'll do “bonus reps” after you meet your small requirement. This is because we already desire these positive behaviors, and starting them reduces internal resistance. The second benefit is the routine. Even if you don't exceed your small requirement, the behavior will begin to become a (mini) habit. From there, do bonus reps or scale the habit up. Another benefit is constant success. A bank may be too big to fail, but mini habits are too small to fail; and so they lack the common destructive feelings of guilt and inadequacy that come with goal failure.
This is one of the very few systems that practically guarantees success every day thanks to a potent encouragement spiral and always-attainable targets. Mini habits have made me feel unstoppable; prior to starting mini habits, I felt unstartable.

To summarize, a mini habit is a VERY small positive behavior that you force yourself to do every day. Small steps work every time, and habits are built by consistency, so the two were meant to be together. Hey, it’s still a better love story than Twilight.

About Habits And The Brain

Why not just use small steps in daily life? Well, you absolutely should! But habits are the framework of your life, so to ignore them is a pretty big mistake. When I discovered the power of small steps from the One Push-up Challenge, I felt like a superhero who had just discovered his superpower and wondered, How can I use this for the greatest good? Habits were the answer.

This book focuses on using small steps for habits because there is nothing more important than your habits. A Duke University study concluded that about 45% of our behavior is from habit. They are even more important than this 45% stake suggests, because habits are frequently repeated behaviors (often daily), and this repetition adds up to big benefits or big damage in the long run.

The habit of writing 1,000 words per day would result in 365,000 words written a year. That's equal to seven 50,000-word novels. Though it would be shy of Leo Tolstoy's 580,000-word behemoth, War and Peace (that guy sure had a lot to say).

Consider these classic novels that weigh in at about 50,000 words each:

- Douglas Adams' The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy (46,333 words)
- Stephen Crane's The Red Badge Of Courage (50,776 words)
- F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby (50,061 words)

Now, you may not write a novel of such world renown on the first try (or the first 100), but if you write seven per year, you'll have quite a few attempts to perfect your craft, right?

More potentially life-changing habits:

- The habit of exercising 20 minutes a day is enough to change your physique.

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• The habit of eating healthier foods may add years to your life (and give you more vitality throughout).

• The habit of rising one hour earlier each morning to read would give you 365 extra hours more per year. At the average reading speed of 300 words per minute, this extra time would allow you to read 6,570,000 words, or 131 more 50,000-word books per year. That's a LOT of books, and a sure way to increase your knowledge.

There are also less concrete examples such as thinking positively and being grateful that can have a dramatic impact on your life. With mini habits, this “store” of life perks is now open for business. Choose your favorite habits and add them to your cart. For more mini habit ideas, visit minihabits.com. But wait, come back here! You've got to finish the book before you get too carried away. There's important information ahead that will help you succeed.

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Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines a habit as “a usual way of behaving: something that a person does often in a regular and repeated way.” Since I tend to think in terms of resistance and willpower, I say it’s “a behavior that's easier to do than not to do.”

Habits are not directly accessible—you can't immediately create or remove one right now. They are molded over time by repetition.

What Do Habits Look Like In The Brain?

Neural pathways are communication channels in the brain, and these pathways are what habits “look like” in the physical world.

Here's how it works: once a habit's assigned neural pathway is triggered by a thought or external cue, an electrical charge fires along the pathway in your brain, and you'll have an urge or thought to engage in the habitual behavior. For example, if you take a shower immediately after waking up every day, you'll have a neural pathway associated with that behavior. You'll wake up, the “shower neurons” will fire, and you'll walk to the shower like a zombie—no thinking required! This is the magic and the curse of having habits, depending on if they are good or bad. As a habit becomes more ingrained, the associated neural pathway will literally get thicker and stronger. Yikes!

Knowing this information simplifies and clarifies our goal. We want to create and strengthen specific neural pathways with repetition. It sounds easy when put this way, but we'll have to overcome innate human limitations to do it. Many standard habit strategies you'll find don't take these proven limitations into account, underestimate how severe they are, or make vague and unhelpful statements like, “It's going to be hard; you've got to want it.” Without a solid plan to handle these limitations, you'll suffer from burnout or inconsistency and give up early, even if you go in “fired up.” Can you tell I'm a bit anti-motivational? That's because it failed me for ten years, but we'll get to that later.
**Habits Are A Matter Of Life And... Stress?**
While we're discussing the importance of habits, consider stress.

Today's world runs at a faster pace than ever before, and we all seem to be more stressed out as a result. Life is imperfect, and it’s impossible to navigate it without some stress. The question that most people never think to ask is, “How does stress impact my habits?”

Stress has been shown to increase habitual behavior—for better or worse! Two experiments at UCLA and one at Duke University found that stress increased people's gravitation toward habitual behavior. Based on her study in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* Professor Wendy Wood argues: “People can’t make decisions easily when stressed, are low in willpower or feeling overwhelmed. When you are too tired to make a decision, you tend to just repeat what you usually do.” This holds true for both good and bad habits and is a crucial insight for their importance in our lives.

Just imagine for a second now what can happen if your bad habits stress you out. It's the perfect recipe for a negative feedback loop. Your stress triggers a bad habit, which triggers guilt, internal angst, and more stress, which triggers the habit again. But now imagine what could happen if your habits are naturally stress-relieving, such as exercise. In this case, your stress will chauffeur you to the gym, and the exercise will help you to relieve tension. The difference in impact on your life is mind-blowing, as one puts you in a positive position to succeed despite life's harsh occurrences, while the other constantly threatens to drop you into a negative spiral. Being a football fan, I think of the big swings in games where one team is about to score a touchdown from the one-yard line, but the quarterback throws an interception that the other team returns for a touchdown. That's not just seven points for the other team, it takes away the probable seven points his team was going to gain! It's a 14-point swing. Because of stress, all habits tend to be “14-point swings.”

The other implication this has for us is in the difficulty of change. Higher amounts of stress make it more challenging for us to change our lives. As Professor Wood says, “You tend to just repeat what you usually do.” If stress makes us run to our habits, then it also makes us run away from everything else, including that new positive behavior that we'd like to make into a habit. You can't see it, but I'm smiling right now. The standard habit formula crumbles when we're stressed because our existing habits get stronger, but the *Mini Habits* system won't fail you here.

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That's part one! I hope you enjoyed it. These are the remaining chapters of the book.

Part 2 - How Your Brain Works

Part 3 - Motivation Vs. Willpower

Part 4 - The Strategy Of Mini Habits

Part 5 - The Mini Habits Difference

Part 6 - Mini Habits – Eight Small Steps To Big Change

Part 7 - Eight Mini Habit Rules

Final Words

Mini Habits has been a phenomenon in the book world. It's sold over 120,000 copies worldwide and is in 14 languages and counting. This is almost unheard of for a first book, and it's not due to my writing skills. *Mini Habits* is highly rated all over the world simply because the strategy changes lives!

If you'd like to read the full book and implement this powerful strategy right away, it's available for purchase at all major retailers for less than the price of a good sandwich (it's also available in [audiobook](https://www.audible.com), [paperback](https://www.amazon.com), and an [acclaimed 4-hour video course](https://www.youtube.com)).

**You Can Buy Mini Habits (Full Book) via these links below:**

[Amazon](https://www.amazon.com) | [iBooks](https://www.apple.com) | [Nook](https://www.barnesandnoble.com) | [KOBO](https://www.kobobooks.com) | [Google](https://play.google.com)

Thanks so much for reading and I’ll talk to you on Tuesday!

Cheers,

Stephen Guise