

embracing the raw

PILGRIMAGE OF A
HEALING HEART

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Introductions



Hi! I'm Kami and I'm the face behind Living Grace. There on the blog I share from the heart on dreams, illness, navigating loss and pursuing light and life in the midst of difficult circumstances.

My heart is invested in connecting with others on their own path toward healing and finding fullness in life. This whole life thing is just so much better together!

If you want to stay in touch, you can click on an icon below to follow me on your favorite social media channel! Or shoot me an email at kami@livinggraceblog.com.

I hope to to connect soon!

xoxo
Kami

This Beating Heart

In the middle of the night last year, I jolted awake in bed. Something felt terribly off. I slowly climbed out of bed, only to slide to the floor after a few slow steps. I was very dizzy so I sat for a moment while I surveyed the rest of my body. My legs were now too weak to move.

I tried pulling myself by my arms to the bathroom (it made sense in the moment somehow), but I was feeling worse by the minute. I finally called to my husband for help and he was there in a flash. This middle-of-the-night scare business isn't new to us. But what happened over the next hour would haunt us for months to come.

Within minutes I had passed out on the bathroom floor and it was not like other times. As soon as I woke I sensed a very clear voice say "Call 911." I told my husband I felt God was urging us to go to the hospital so he ran for his phone. A little while later an ambulance rushed me to the ER, where nurses began the usual blood samples and hooked me up to all-the-beeping-things.

20 minutes after arriving at the hospital, I told Trevin that I felt like I was going to pass out again. I slowly closed my eyes and that's all I remember from what happened next.

This Beating Heart

He watched the monitor as my heart rate began steadily decreasing.

53...32...21...14...everything flatlined.

My heart had stopped.

For years I've been battling late stage Lyme disease and it has drastically changed my life. It has kept me home-bound for the majority of the last 3 years, redefining how I'm able to function and limiting the ways I'm able to engage with others. It's made pain and a long list of symptoms my norm, my constant.

I've had many visits to the ER over the years, most them highly unproductive. Sent away because "nothing's wrong," even though I'd be writhing in pain and my body felt anything but okay.

This time our trip to the hospital was gravely different. This trip would shake us to our core.

As soon as all the feeds on the monitor flat-lined, the nurse slammed down an alarm button and jumped on the hospital bed to begin performing CPR.

This Beating Heart

My husband watched as nurses piled in and surrounded the bed, hooking me up to countless cords and starting another IV line.

After the longest minute or two of Trev's life, they had my heart pumping again. Oxygen refilled my lungs. My eyes fluttered open.

In that moment I had zero clues as to what had just happened. I thought I was waking up after passing out again, but as my husband approached my bedside both his expression and words told a very different story.

My heart had STOPPED. At 28 years old.

The reality of how close I had been to death hit me like a ton of bricks. I knew it was no accident we were in the ER that night when it happened. I might not have made it had any number of details been different about that night. That thought was heavy.

In the days and weeks following, I wrestled with all the normal emotions and questions one does after coming so close to death's door. Questions of why it happened, gratitude I was still here, fear of it happening again,

This Beating Heart

renewed purpose.

My soul-shift in the months following were simple, but deliberate: to care for my heart. Beyond whatever wisdom my medical team had for this beating heart, this was a focus of caring for the soul.

I would embrace the rawness of my emotions. Give myself space to process the hard stuff. Endeavor to look for the good that was buried within the present darkness of my situation.

I would resist the habit of confining myself to society's idea of "hide to survive". No hiding away in shame with the harder things I feel and struggle with. Instead, I would open my heart to heal on it's own time. I would support it with loving friends, quiet hours, and the freedom to work through the muddy mess that is pain.

These pages are part of my story of embracing this new posture. The challenges, the fear, the frustration, the light, the hope - all of it.

I am not going to be ridiculous and tell you I've got this

This Beating Heart

all figured out because I absolutely do not. I think that's part of the beauty of this though...it's where the raw honesty comes out and wrestles with the spiritual world. It reminds me I'm pursuing more, pursuing life - no matter how messy it gets.

And I am confident in this: it's been worth every ounce of effort and every awkward stumble.

These are my stories of finding the beauty of the raw. Of embracing the unrefined hope, strength and purpose that exist in the corners of our heart and we feel have no place. That we feel aren't enough.

This is a quest for cultivating the heart. One honest moment at a time.



Breaths of Beauty

Never lose an opportunity of seeing anything beautiful, for beauty is God's handwriting.
- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Some days the monotony can wear us thin.

The same routine day after day. The hum drum of standing in line at the DMV. The commute in traffic to and from work. Paying the bills. Another grocery store run.

In sickness, my mundane is manifested in how much time I spend at home, facing the same two walls as I often lay on the couch or in bed. A solid 90% of my time is spent here. Working on healing, managing pain, writing, spending time with Trev and hoping for the future.

That repetitive nature of my day to day can feel a lot like a blanket of grey. Some days I'm holding on, waiting for a splash of color to come in the form of a bit more energy, better test results, a note in the mail, or the energy to cook a basic meal.

Breaths of Beauty

I can place so much value on the big gestures of beauty as if they're the only real signs of goodness. The ones that seem worth recognizing.

But you know where I have found the most beauty this past year? In the act of embracing the small gifts. The ones that often go overlooked as "part of the mundane."

It can be something I've looked at the same way 10 times without fully acknowledging it's sparkle.

A text from a friend that reminds me I'm not alone.

A short drive through the countryside with my Trevs, connecting with God through enjoying the colors and patterns of the skyline and hillsides.

A simple fresh bloom of a dandelion sprouting up from the greenest Oregon grass. Every small petal unique and full of life.

Each color that is splashed across the canvas of my day can be the most light-filled expression of beauty...if I let it.

Breaths of Beauty

It doesn't mean my challenges are gone. It doesn't mean that my response must be to hide away my pain, my struggle, or my reality of illness.

It simply means that by soaking in the beauty I find, I take a step further into this moment. It gives my soul permission to fully be present right here. Right now. However I am. Broken, tired, numb.

In time, I've seen that finding the beauty in my day is like taking a deep breath in. I see the cloud formation in the sky and it fills my soul with light. I experience God in the heart of a caring friend. I take in the colors of spring forming on a hillside.

This mission of seeking out the good can coexist with the frustrations of bearing the weight of pain, loss and circumstances outside of our control.

It isn't about telling ourselves to "shake it off" or "push through" whatever our hard is. Neither is it about shaming ourselves into hiding away the struggles we're facing. It's about finding the beauty right where we're at.

It's about learning to navigate the hard with grace,

Breaths of Beauty

kindness and with a heart ever seeking out and sharing what is truly of value. Beauty that extends kindness, light, and purpose. Beauty that also bears the grit, the rawness of our heart, and real, everyday stories of perseverance.

You may find the good in an act of kindness from a stranger letting you merge in front of them in 5 o'clock traffic. Or in a fresh bouquet of flowers on the receptionist desk. It may show up in the bright smile of satisfaction on your child's face after showing you their job well done. Maybe in the kindness of a doctor, secretary, professor or the clerk at the grocery store.

Determine today to find a treasure of beauty. Friend, I guarantee something is there. As real and palpable as the hard is, there is real goodness to be found. There is light to be soaked in, warmth to be felt.

There are opportunities to see the beautiful if we would only take the time to look.

If you're reading this and can feel your heart bristling at this whole idea...you're not alone. I hold zero judgment as I've been in that very place my fair share. Wondering how in the world I was supposed to find the beauty in

Breaths of Beauty

the midst of what I go through. It's too dark, too much, too hard.

Have grace on yourself as you navigate this one, dear heart. Trying is a beautiful starting point. Some days this is the furthest thing from my mind as I barely survive the pain of a day. At times it's all we have the strength to do and there's no shame in that.

Please don't bully yourself into viewing this as a pass or fail project...this is an exercise. A gentle stretching of the soul, a softening of the hard edges of pain, grief, loss. These are stepping stones, my friend. Help on the path of healing.

Know I'm here, struggling alongside you. Believing this is possible and praying for strength on your journey. So much love to you, reader.



On the Horizon

On a recent drive home from Trader Joe's (the grocery giver of good things) my husband pointed out the spectacular sight of the Oregon sun setting over the hills. It was the most glorious painting of orange and pink, casting a soft pink blush down the sides of the hills and shading the surrounding clouds in a soft, grey-tinted purple.

I immediately begged Trev to stop for a moment to snap a picture for me. Being the oh-so-generous hubby that he is, he pulled up to the stop sign and snapped a few shots. And then agreed to take several more on my phone, because a girl needs OPTIONS. (He really is a keeper).

The view was like balm to my soul. Serene. Inviting. Majestic.

I've looked at those photos many times since. The contrast of the dark landscape below the sun-graced hilltop. The cool colors of the clouds and sky mixed with the warmth of the sun's descent.

I've breathed in the beauty each time I've scrolled to that shot in my phone. A simple moment driving home,

On the Horizon

but one that offered a grand artistic view. Never to be seen exactly the same way again. It was beauty strung across the horizon, just waiting to be soaked up by all who would stop to drink in the masterpiece.

The simple treasures have come to mean so much to me in my current stage of life. As I fight a disease that has stripped much of my normalcy from me, my active lifestyle has been replaced with one that finds me near the couch most of my days.

This is definitely not the life I envisioned for my late twenties, but it's the life I'm living. As I work to accept that this is part of my reality, at least for now, my soul is able to embrace deeper moments of rest.

Not because I'm healed or even seeing glimpses of getting better, but because I'm not struggling as hard to resist the process of healing. And when I can fully do that, I find myself focusing more on the moment. I'm more free to care for my health, both physically and emotionally.

Instead of spending all of my time trying to maintain a surface-level "always sunny" persona, I can find a balance

On the Horizon

of truth and grace as I navigate the landscape of struggle and pain.

It's not a seamless effort, but it's one I believe becomes more beautiful the more honest I am throughout the process. The more I allow myself the space to heal, whatever that looks like for me.

The pain we endure throughout various circumstances in life can shake our very core. Disease is life-changing. Singleness can be lonely. Miscarriage and infertility are devastating. Making ends meet when you have no means can feel impossible.

Each heavy situation brings with it its own array of very real, very deep emotions. Emotions that naturally come with the territory of hardship, grief, and pain.

No one enjoys feeling any of these. We don't invite them over for dinner or plan parties in their honor. They aren't the highlight of our day, or week or year, but they're here just the same. And they'll demand to be felt eventually if we won't give them time now.

We aren't going to live in the depths forever. So instead

On the Horizon

of only ever fighting the flood of feels, let's give ourselves the room to breathe. To face the harder feelings with grace, patience and courage, because they need to have their place here, too.

It won't always feel so consuming. We will continue to find beauty, and humor and happy moments. But the feelings must air out in order for our wounds to begin healing; in order for us to be free to fully embrace our life in this moment.

For we are brave. Strong. Passionate.

We are marked with scars, but full of empathy. Limping from battle, but determined to press forward. Reaching for hope and gripping tightly to whatever measure of faith we possess.

Let's choose to believe that the glorious view of the sun setting on the horizon is our gift of hope. A message that beauty is still here, even if we're sitting in the ashes.

We've made it this far, my friend. And this is not the end for our stories.

On the Horizon

This is just a glimpse of our horizon.



Further Reading

Thank you so much for downloading this ebook! I hope somewhere in these pages your soul was able to find a piece of comfort, encouragement or even a sigh of "YES, someone else has felt this, too."

If you're not familiar with my blog, below are some of my most-read posts that can be a starting point for you. Just click the title for a read!

[Authentic Love: An Open Letter to Husband](#)

[Learning the Art of Letting Go](#)

[Land of the Broken](#)

[Five Things I've Learned About Miscarriage](#)

[Some Things Can Only Be Carried](#)

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