

REMEMBER  
G O D

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# Introduction



What say we all just take a deep breath.

I need one.

I bet you do too.

When you pick up a new book, there's a reason. You're looking for something. You may not know what exactly, but something. And with all my heart, I hope you find it.

When I start typing, I'm looking for something.

And with all my heart, I hope I find it too.



I've kind of gotten into yoga lately. This new studio opened in my neighborhood, and lots of my friends began to practice there. They play loud music, mostly pop and hip-hop, and I'm almost guaranteed to have a friend in any class I take. That's pretty much all the push I need to exercise—great music and my pals.

As I started to attend classes, I really began to love it, but . . . I need a lot of guidance. So rather than being the annoying gal in the back row who needs a personal tutor, I chose instead to watch some YouTube videos with

instructions and bought a mat (also with instructions, like showing me exactly where to put my hands and feet).

I try to mostly sign up for Emmy's classes, because we're friends, and if someone is going to make me do a standing split (Google it, and then die a little at how hard it is), I want to at least believe she likes me as a person. I also frequent the Wednesday night class taught by Koula, but it is VERY HARD and sometimes makes me feel like crying. Whatever.

The start of each class is the same. Child's pose, which is like you're bowing to someone, arms stretched fully in front of you, shins on the mat, body folded over your bent legs. Then Emmy tells us to breathe in through our nose and sigh out through our mouth. It feels silly the first time, making a loud sighing sound, but now it feels natural. It truly is like pushing out whatever has been aching inside of me that day, then sighing about the things I tried to hold in during a busy morning or a stressful meeting or a hard FaceTime conversation.

It's cleansing, it really is. The breathing and sighing prepares me for the work ahead that my body is going to do. Yoga hurts as we go, it stretches me, but it's always worth it, even if I end class collapsed down again into child's pose. Covered in sweat. Muscles aching.

Breathing. Sighing.

I'm breathing now. Sitting here, writing, wondering how this thing is going to turn out. For the first time in my writing life, I don't see the end of this book yet, because I don't know the end of the story. And it is so scary to me. You've probably heard me say before how, when I write books, I don't feel like my job is to create them out of thin air but to "find" them. The books I'm meant to write are already sitting on a heavenly shelf, and my job is to find each one, almost like mining for treasure as God directs me, whispers to me, and brings themes and stories to my mind. (I also like to think my grandmothers, since they missed seeing my books published on earth, have dedicated a portion of their bookshelves in heaven to my works—the ones already in print and the ones that none of us know yet.)

But this one? This book is different.

I'm writing it, but I'm reading it too. I'm listening and learning and figuring out with each stroke of the key that I need this. I need to remember God.

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Andrew asked me to come over to record a podcast one day—a Thursday. His wife, Alison, one of my best friends, was there with us, sitting on the couch drinking coffee. Their three daughters, Ella, Sadie, and Charlotte, were all

at Vacation Bible School . . . much to my sadness because I find them endlessly entertaining.

Andrew and I sat down at the dining room table, each to our own microphone. He started with some basic questions about my job and how I got here professionally. Then we started talking about this book, the writing I was soon to be doing here.

And we talked about who I was writing it for.

With each of my books, I know exactly who I hope is on the other side of these words. In fact, I do more than just picture them in my mind. I frame a picture on my desk of the exact person or people I'm thinking about when I'm sitting there, typing my brains out.

Except I hadn't done it yet this time. The person, or people, weren't clear to me. I'd thought about it a few times but hadn't landed on the photograph I wanted to frame on my desk. But as soon as Andrew asked me, about *this* book, I suddenly knew exactly who I've been writing for all along.

"This one is different than anything I've ever written," I said, as tears loosened and began streaming down my cheeks, "because this one, I think I'm writing . . . for me."

And that makes me cry.

Because if I don't come out of this thing ruthlessly believing, then you may not either. So I'm trying—gosh, I'm trying so hard—to grab on and not let go, to believe with all my guts even when my life is just not turning out

like I thought it would. I thought I would be somewhere totally different as I start into this book. And yet, here I am. Here *you* are. And here we go.

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What I do know so far of this story has been as shocking and beautiful as anything I've ever lived. But I think I'm as surprised about the next pages as you are. Which, side note for those of you hoping to be authors: THIS IS THE WRONG WAY TO WRITE A BOOK. It isn't safe. It isn't fun. It is borderline terrifying and possibly unwise. (My agent and editor will let me know soon enough.) It's like I'm driving a train down a set of tracks that God is building right in my line of sight, barely in front of the fast-moving train—engine, caboose, dining car, and all. Not the most comforting view because . . . *Hi!* Trains need lots of tracks. And I feel like I don't have them.

But even with this fear, I'm breathing. I'm breathing in what I know to be true, and I'm sighing out the parts I can't reconcile between what my heart knows and what my eyes see. Because they just aren't always the same, are they?

I'm afraid this story is going to break my heart. And you're going to see it. And I'll be too far in it to get any of us out. I'm afraid I'm going to spend the next chapters telling you of His provision and kindness, and then we'll get

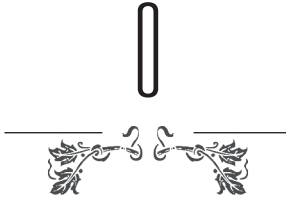
to the end and it won't look the way we thought it would, and it will hurt. I'm afraid it's going to shift and turn and the tracks are going to fall off a cliff or just disappear—and it's not that I will be mad at God for building them wrong; I'll be mad at me for getting on the train and convincing you to ride along with me.

But as much as I wish this were an easier story to tell, I also think this is where we are meant to go. We are just so much better suited living a life where He is in control and we are not. Christians love to talk about how “God is in control.” It's a kitschy thing to say. But it's a much different thing when you see the train tracks of your life are absolutely not going where you thought they would and you can't do anything about it. So it's beautiful. And terrible. And I'm scared.

But I hear Him in the back of my mind, reminding me that we finish every story we start together, He and I. It's actually one of the things God is really known for: Finishing. Completing. Not leaving things undone. And that will be true here as well. This story of His kindness, the one I'm about to tell you, WILL have an ending. And by the time we get there, God will have done it all, and I will know it and you will know it. And we will never forget Him.

Remember that.

Remember God.



I'm at a new coffee shop today in Nashville, one I haven't visited before. It's Monday after a busy work weekend and I'm just exhausted. My brain wants to rest; my calendar says to write. I'm not only struggling to find the words, I'm struggling to find the pictures in my mind that I want to describe for you. So I've pulled out photographs today, to see with my eyes what I can't conjure up in my mind.

To see Notre Dame.

I was fourteen years old the first time I saw the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. I remember the exterior as being lighter in color than I thought, this edifice of barely gray stone that traveled up into the sky higher than I imagined.

Seeing it was different than standing at the base of a skyscraper in New York City, because I knew the cathedral was built by hand. The height of the spires, the flying buttresses, the detailed statues, the gargoyles, all built and hand-carved hundreds of years ago. They first broke ground on it in 1163 and Notre Dame was completed in 1365. Yes, it took two hundred years to build that building. That's unfathomable to me. I can't envision anyone in our day starting any project knowing it likely wouldn't be completed until five generations into the future.

I have pictures of my high school best friends and I, sitting outside the cathedral, waiting on a bench. I'm wearing a pink sweater and purple hiking boots, which should just tell you everything you ever wanted to know about my teenage self. I also have a picture printed out and labeled in a scrapbook of the moment I walked inside.

The north rose stained glass window was like nothing I had ever seen. There it was, straight ahead, what seemed like miles away—the blues and pinks and yellows—a bright spot in a darker massive room. I couldn't stop staring at the light shining through it or marveling that someone had created every piece, stained it, sealed it in place, and then (and I seriously do not know how someone using thirteenth-century equipment could do this) raised it and positioned it so many stories up.

You can't get close enough to see this feature with your bare eyes, but the center of the north rose is Jesus as a baby and His mother, Mary. It's an incredible piece of art. The whole window is. The whole room is. The whole building is.

(To be fair, all of Paris is, isn't it?)

I've been back to Notre Dame a few times since. And every time I'm there, I can't help but think about the centuries of people who have sat in those pews before me. I think of all the people who have gathered there for one reason.

Because they believed in God. And wanted to remember Him.

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My assistant, Eliza, and I travel together quite a bit, about three weekends a month for roughly eight months of the year. We rarely get tired of each other (separate hotel rooms is clutch), and we never run out of life stories or God stories to tell.

A few years ago, we realized that every city where we went for me to speak at a conference, church, or event began to look the same—just the inside of a plane, the inside of a hotel, the inside of a church or event space. It felt like we were wasting these opportunities a bit. We thought, hey—we're in ARGYLE, TEXAS, for heaven's sake. We should see it! We're in BOSTON. We're in INDIANA, PENNSYLVANIA. We're in LEWISTON, IDAHO. But we weren't seeing cities; we weren't experiencing culture; we weren't eating local. We were missing the best parts of the travel side of our jobs.

So we created a little something called Tour de Tastebuds. (Probably better known to some of you as #tourdetastebuds.) It started out simple. In every city where we traveled, Eliza and I would try to find the most hole-in-the-wall, local, delicious restaurant. We didn't want

a chain; we didn't want fancy. We wanted the place we would pick on a Tuesday night with our family or friends if we lived in this particular city. And after eating, we would ask ourselves: Is this place in middle Alabama better than the meal we had last week in middle California? Up-or-down vote. On to the next place.

Then one fateful day, a few months into the competition, standing outside a barbecue restaurant in Fort Wayne, Indiana, we disagreed. I said the meal was the number-two restaurant experience of our fall season; she said it was number-one. I was floored and we were out of sync.

So we created a scoring system: 1-5 in three different categories.

1. *Atmosphere.* How's the decor? How's the service? What kind of experience do the other patrons seem to be having? Does the look and feel of the place match the food being served?
2. *Taste.* Simply, how is the food?
3. *How do you feel?* Do you feel satisfied? Full? Dizzy? (Yes. Dizzy. It happened once after some fried pies in Oklahoma.)

We now had a system, and suddenly felt like we'd accidentally started an Instagram version of *Diners, Drive-Ins, and Dives*. Which was fine with me because I love that show. It just meant that in addition to all the other ways we prep before heading out on a trip, we now have another line item to check off: finding the right restaurant for the tour. We want variety and local, so we ask online or ask friends from the city. Fairly often the host of the event has a Tour de Tastebuds recommendation for us, but only about half the time is that the one we actually judge.

Last spring we were speaking outside of Pittsburgh, and multiple people had told us the same place—Pamela's—for breakfast. It is also President Obama's favorite breakfast, so that said something to us as well. We arrived in town the night before and didn't need to be at the event until the next afternoon, so Eliza and I got up that morning, put Pamela's into our GPS, and headed out.

As we drove, part of what we were talking about was a really sad text conversation of mine from earlier that weekend, a miscommunication with a man who mattered to me. "It feels like things are falling apart, Eliza," I said to her, "and I'm fine if that's what happens. I really am. It just makes me worry that I've missed God somehow in this." It's that train track thing again, you know? I thought I had some good direction from the Lord of where these

tracks were going to go, until things went way off the rails and I was confused.

We turned left to head up a hill, and there, at the top, sat a cathedral. We both gasped and tears came to our eyes. I pulled over on Elm Street and stopped the car right there on the incline, and we stared in silence.

“A cathedral,” I whispered to Eliza.

“I know, I know,” she said back. “And I know what it means.”

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For months, God kept putting me in the path of cathedrals. I’ve loved them my whole life actually, but in recent months I couldn’t seem to get away from them. In other countries, like Scotland, this is pretty normal. Old churches built centuries ago are around every corner. But in America, not so much. I love them because, more than anything else, they remind me of the history of God.

Here’s a confession: I am easily awed. Which is both a gift and a curse. Sometimes it makes me look like a country bumpkin who’s never left home for the big city because, “Wow, y’all, look at that!” It means I’m too easily entertained and probably shouldn’t be quite so impressed with our planet as I am. “A BUTTERFLY! THAT’S AMAZING!” says no normal person who has

ever seen butterflies before. But I do. Often. I mean, did you know during their transformation inside the cocoon, they actually become sort of like goo before emerging? Mind-blowing.

I actually don't mind being awed. I like that I really like life. I like how often I'm just happy to be here and can look for lovely all around me. If you're familiar with the Enneagram, I'm a 7, and we 7s pretty much just love life most of the time . . . or are trying to love it so we can avoid pain.

But cathedrals, for any of us, are awe-inspiring.

Churches are great. I go to one. But my church is a cement box with cement floors. Though it's been our church home for a while, it used to be a storage facility for Goodwill. Cathedrals, on the other hand, never used to be anything else. They were built with a purpose. They continue with that purpose. You never look at a cathedral and wonder what it used to be or what it is now. "Is that a cathedral I see in the distance or an Ikea?"

Cathedrals are monster buildings with minute details around every corner. Tall ornate ceilings, tiled floors, pews, pillars, Latin words inscribed across the walls. Designed in the massive shape of a cross, cathedrals are the way humans have always offered sanctuary and a place to gather to worship an invisible God. They're how

we've invited others to come here and believe that there is more to this life than what any of us can see.

They're monuments to God's presence with His people.

People build monuments all the time, to a variety of different things. They all exist to mark a place or a time that doesn't need to be forgotten by the human race. And typically they're accompanied by some kind of historical marker that describes what this statue or building is commemorating.

I LOVE reading historical markers. In fact, walking from my house to my local coffee shop, I pass two historical markers on the sidewalk, and I read both of them word for word every time. It feels mildly insane because DIDN'T I JUST READ THOSE YESTERDAY? But it also matters to me. Someone carved letters out of cement so that the people who lived and did something important in this spot, in this little corner of the universe, would not be forgotten.

It happened in the Bible too. Repeatedly when God rescued His people or healed them or restored them, the Israelites would mark it. Whether with a stack of stones or an altar or a name, they would make a place of remembrance so that God's power and work would not be forgotten. Think of Jacob, for instance—Genesis 32:30—giving a name to the place where he wrestled all night with God. (We'll come back to him later. Mark that too.)

And throughout time, at least throughout the modern ages, the most prominent marking has become cathedrals, which people built to remember God.

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I walked into Frothy Monkey, a little eatery in the 12 South area of Nashville, to meet our former intern, Sarah, for breakfast. You just cannot go wrong eating breakfast at Frothy. I usually get “The California”—toast and sprouts and avocado slices and two over-medium eggs. I go a little diva and ask for gluten-free toast and a side of crispy bacon. And seriously, it is the breakfast of my dreams.

Someday we can talk about how I used to think runny eggs were the grossest thing in the world until I had these runny eggs at Flat White Kitchen in Durham, England, and they changed my life and I’ve never been the same. Scrambled eggs are legitimately a memory for me because why would you eat those when you could have eggs over medium? That’s where I stand on eggs.

I’d gotten back just a few days before from that trip to Pittsburgh with Eliza. I couldn’t wait to tell Sarah how God had shown up, right there on a hill in Pennsylvania. I came in the back door of Frothy and walked up the stairs. The walls inside are decorated with local art which they change out randomly. (Well, it may not be random

to them, but it is certainly random to me.) And get this. EVERY picture on the wall was a drawing of a cathedral. YES. FOR REAL. Big regal buildings from around the world.

Sarah was sitting at a table for two along the wall, where a church pew runs the length of the room, creating about seven “tables for two.” Sarah looked up at me as I walked toward her. My hand was over my mouth.

“Sarah . . .” I said, almost more a gasp than actually talking. “Look at the walls. It’s all cathedrals. How long have these been here? Are they new? Who made them? Is this a joke?”

I didn’t sit down. I just walked all around the coffee shop and looked at every picture. A few were labeled “churches” instead of cathedrals, but they had the same look. The same regal build. The same hard-as-stone, not moving, not shaking, survived-fire-and-doubt-and-wind-and-pain look.

God did not want me to miss this. Clearly. He was saying something to me . . . because the heart of this book and the heart of cathedrals seem to be about the same. This may be why God brought the theme to me in the first place. The heart of my struggles involves holding tight to what cathedrals have always meant.

God is who He says He is. Kinder than you imagine. And people have gathered together in cathedrals for

decades to be reminded of who He is. That's the only reason those cross-shaped buildings were even created. To remember Him.

When Eliza and I turned that corner in Pittsburgh, and the cathedral rose over the hill, we both burst into tears. And days later, as I sat down with Sarah and looked at the cathedrals lining the walls of Frothy Monkey, tears came to my eyes again.

Because there He was. Again and again. Reminding me to remember Him.

