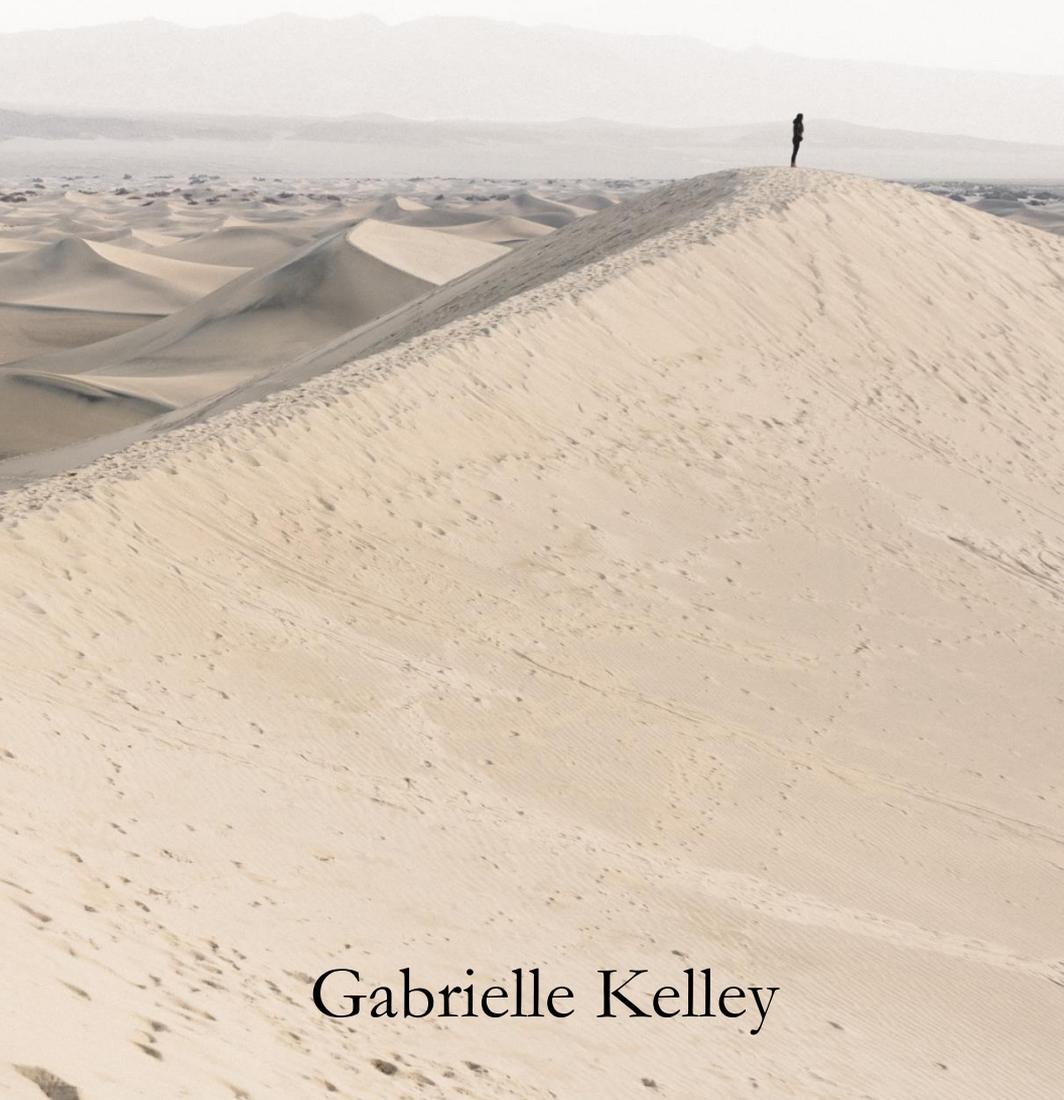


Fully Alive

A Handbook for the Heart of a Dreamer



Gabrielle Kelley

The List

There was a time in my life when I began to really lose hope in my dreams. I was living in China (which I thought was going to be a dream fulfilled), but everything was going wrong. My teammates and I were not getting along well, ministry was not going as I had expected, and to top it all off, I was physically feeling awful. I had moved into my own studio apartment in hopes that it would ease some tension, and one night I hit a very low point. There in my apartment, all alone, I realized my heart was cold and dying. I felt nothing. I wanted nothing. I hoped for nothing.

For years I had held onto this quote as my mantra:

“The glory of God is man fully alive.” –Saint Iranaeus

If that was true, I was definitely was NOT bringing God glory. I felt dead in my heart, not alive. In that moment, I cried out to God and begged him to please bring me back to life. Right then and there, He spoke to me. “Gabi,” He

said, “I want you to write down all of the things that make your heart feel alive.”

So I did. I went down the street to the stationery store (they have the CUTEST stationery supplies in Asia), bought a brand-new notebook and some pens, and began to make a list of everything that made my heart feel alive:

-Dancing

-Missions

-High-top shoes

-Ethnic music

-Singing

-Cross-cultural friendships

-Talking about my dreams

-Colorful clothes

-Long one-on-one conversations with close friends

-Learning different languages

-Writing

-Cute Asian stationery and pens (wink wink)

The list went on like this. There were silly things like pink hair and serious things like international politics, but when I looked at the list, I realized that all these things made up...*ME*. After I finished my list, I prayed and asked God to tell me why He had me write it. That's when He said to me, "This is who I made you. These things that make your heart come alive are the things that I wove into your personality before you were even born. I love who you are. I love your pink hair and I love how you love the nations. Don't be afraid to pursue these things that bring you life because when you do, you'll be fully YOU, you will fulfill your destiny, and you will bring me glory."

I felt so much freedom when He spoke that over me. For a long time I had been suppressing my personality and

trying to fit into the mold that the people around me wanted me to fit into, and it was *killing me*. I realized then that the first step to seeing my dreams fulfilled was *accepting and valuing who God had created me to be*.

Psalms 139 says:

*You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body
and knit me together in my mother's womb.*

Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!

Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it. (v. 13-14, NLT)

God did not make any mistakes when He formed you. Not. A. Single. One. He made you so wonderfully complex. He wants to spend your whole lifetime with you helping you find out all of the amazing things that He knit inside of you!

Recently I was watching this show called *Treehouse Masters*. Have you seen it? It's wild! Basically people around the country call up this guy named Pete Nelson and have him come and design and build these outrageous treehouses for them. Pete is one of those people that looks like he's always jumping out of his skin with excitement. He's sooooo excited all through the design process of the treehouses ("Oh, let's put a viewing balcony here! Let's put a rope bridge here and a zip line here!"), then he's sooooo excited about the building process ("Oh my gosh, this wall is AMAZING!!!!"), and then he's sooooo excited about the interior decorating ("Shoot, this is the COOLEST CHAIR EVER!!!!"). I just giggle when I see Pete because he's so giddy and excited about what he's creating.

Now, we all enjoy the process aspect of these shows, but let's be real, our favorite part is the BIG REVEAL. When the people who requested the treehouses in *Treehouse Masters* come to see the completed product, they are invariably anxious and excited, but PETE – yo – Pete is

jumping up and down like a child at Disneyland!!! Pete cannot wait for these people to discover all that he created for them, inside and out.

There's just *no way in the world* that God is not even more excited when He's making YOU. Can't you just imagine it? "Ohhhhhh, Angel Gabriel! Check out this hue of brown!! Oh my SELF, it's GORGEOUS!! I can't wait to put this in her hair. And man, I'm designing her knack for biology and it's going to blow her MIND. And here, here look at this. HAHahaha! She is the funniest with this sense of humor I made for her. I'm so excited for her to see herself and discover all of this!" And then – the BIG REVEAL. You are born. You come to know Him. He starts revealing who you are...*to you*. This is God's favorite part!!

But how many of us completely shut down God's joyful excitement by ignoring or rejecting who He's made us to be? I mean, can you imagine poor Pete Nelson if at the big

reveal, his customers looked up and said, “Gross! We hate this treehouse!”? That would be horrible! Pete would be *heartbroken!* But we do this all the time to God. I know that I spent a LOT of time in my past dismissing who I was because I didn’t fit in, because I didn’t mesh with certain people, or because I was embarrassed. What a waste! What a tragedy! God made you perfectly you – from the freckles on your nose to the way you feel when you smell flowers. BE YOU. REVEL in the things that He’s placed in you that bring your heart to life. Invest yourself in them. It’s not a waste of time. This discovery of you, this care for your heart and your personality, is your first step in finding your destiny. When you, like David, can say to God of yourself, “*Body and soul, I am marvelously made! I worship in adoration—what a creation!*” (Psalm 139:14b, The Message), you are positioned for God to work through you fully. Because it’s when you know who you are in God and when you decide to live fully as exactly who He’s created you to be, that you are truly free.

And once you discover freedom, you discover destiny:

For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Galatians 5:22, NLT

Long story short – the most incredible thing about a person who embraces the identity God has given her and who walks fully free in that revelation is that her footsteps will follow the example of Christ into the service of others. Serving others is the central to the purpose of all Christ-followers. So when you figure out how you're gifted to serve others and you follow that gift by the leading of the Holy Spirit – you will find yourself walking into your dream and fulfilling your destiny.

Period.

Don't Become Numb

I mentioned a few moments ago this feeling of numbness that was taking over me when I was in China. I wanted to get away from all of the painful things that were happening in my life. I was feeling irreparably disappointed by the way things were turning out, and it just felt safer to let myself go numb.

I wish I could say that's the only time in my life I ever experienced something like this. But it was not. I've felt this pain turned to numbness over and over again. I think almost everyone has. It's a natural response to too much pain, grief, or disappointment. It feels better to feel nothing than to feel something that hurts, especially if it seems like there's no light at the end of the tunnel.

Ok, now listen to me closely. I am convinced – *totally convinced* – that this *numbness* is one of the biggest weapons the enemy is using against the people of Jesus to keep us

from fulfilling our destinies. I cannot even tell you how many people I've encountered, especially in my generation, who have become so numb that they have stopped pursuing their callings. Because here's the problem – if you become numb, you can block out pain, *but you also block out joy, excitement, and the desire to dream.* And with no desire, there is no pursuit. And with no pursuit – well – the dream gets left to wither away.

This is the whole reason I am writing this right now. I cannot let this happen to YOU. Far too many of us have had our purposes hijacked by the enemy because he's convinced us it's best to become numb. We have to recognize this for what it is – an attack on our lives – or we will drown in this numb despondency. Friends, I dare you – *dare you* - to let yourselves remain tender and open, even in the midst of pain and disappointment. For only hearts that are alive can allow the Holy Spirit to come with His comfort, His compassion, His vibrant Love, and His

purposes. Jesus bled for you – *will you take a risk and let yourself bleed for Him, too?*

Don't confuse a heart that is alive with a heart that is happy and carefree. That is also a lie which our culture has proliferated. We've been told to do whatever makes us happy, so when happiness cannot be found, we think our hearts are dying and we become numb. Or worse, we pursue something that makes us feel good momentarily, but ultimately ends up leaving us empty. But that is the way of culture. The way of Christ says that the more we allow Him to join with us in our suffering (and we with His), the more Christlike and alive we will become, and the more we will find ourselves walking into our destinies.

Don't believe me? Then please look at these words penned by Paul in the scriptures:

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an

eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, NLT

Did you see that? *We do not lose heart.* Paul is saying so eloquently here what I am trying to say to you – *don't let your heart die.* And these “light and momentary troubles” Paul is talking about? Let’s remember that by the time he wrote these words, he had been imprisoned, endured shipwrecks, beatings, scorn, betrayal, and utter loneliness (want to see for yourself? Check out 2 Corinthians 11:21-29!). These were some of the “light and momentary trials” he was referencing. He claims that while these seemingly horrible things were happening to him, an inward renewal was happening in him every single day. He was encountering a glory that could not be expressed or seen. He was fixated on these things, for they were eternal, they were things that truly mattered. These “light and

momentary trials” – they are like dust in the wind. But if we let them pull us down into numbness and darkness, we are falling into the trap that what we see and know in the here and now is all that matters. *And we are wasting the opportunity to experience and to impact eternity.*

Oh, my friends, what a shame that would be!! Let’s not be complacent. *Let’s embrace pain with expectancy!* What a shock that would be to the enemy and to the hurting world that is watching you – you who claim to have hope in Christ. Let’s allow the Savior of our souls to cultivate a secret garden of life within us when what we are experiencing outwardly is hard and painful and lonely and sad. Those outward things are temporary. The Life growing within you is eternal. I want you to meditate on this passage. Maybe you need to take a moment to repent of trusting your circumstances more than you have trusted your King and your Lord. Let’s make a commitment, starting today, to open our hearts fully to the One who has

saved us, the One who has called us. Let's commit to Him that we won't become numb, but that we'll choose to grow in maturity by allowing Him to partner with us in the midst of our pain, to keep us tender and soft no matter what we are experiencing, and to believe that the eternal reward of this partnership will far outweigh any suffering we endure now.

I want this to sink deep into your souls. So let's look at this passage again, this time in The Message version. Read it. Pray it. Believe it. *Live it.*:

So we're not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace. These hard times are small potatoes compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared for us. There's far more here than meets the eye. The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. But the things

we can't see now will last forever. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, The
Message

Discipline

Something God has been teaching me recently is how important it is for Him to discipline His children so they can mature in their character. After all, *we can only handle a purpose as great as our character can support.* So the more we grow up in God, the more trust and responsibility He can give us.

Recently, I have been in the midst of a season of intense discipline. It's been one of the hardest and one of the most beautiful seasons I have ever endured. I wouldn't trade it for anything, because even though my heart has been hurting, I have also had the opportunity to come to know the Lord in a deeper and more intimate way than ever before.

Sadly, I think discipline is one area of suffering that many believers opt out of. I know I almost gave up in this most recent season of discipline I was in. I don't think we necessarily mean to opt out of discipline from God, I just think that we've gotten so used to this lie of "if it hurts, it's bad", that we tend to walk away from painful situations to save ourselves. But God is so often found in the midst of this pain, drawing us deeper into Himself with His compassionate love and discipline (*the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.* Prov. 3:12, NIV).

When we have the power to walk away from the hardship, often our immediate response is not to ask, "Lord, is this you?", but instead to say, "There's no reason to put myself through this", so we quit the job, break off the friendship, leave the team, take things back into our own hands, or whatever it is that we can do to get out of the painful situation. In our minds it makes sense to do this to protect ourselves! But just because it makes sense doesn't mean it's the right thing to do. We need to wrestle with the idea that

maybe, just maybe, it's absolutely the wrong thing to do. Consider this: if it requires less growth to leave than to stay, I'd suggest that maybe you need to stay, no matter how hard it is.¹ Keep in mind that if you don't pass the test here, you'll have to take the retest later.

We need to stop reacting so quickly out of our own reason and emotions. We need to have the foresight before we make decisions based out of pain and hardship to come to God and ask Him if He's trying to teach us something. If He is, I can assure you that He will let you know, for "*...God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished.*" (Philippians 1:6, NLT) If He's doing something in you to mature and grow you, He's not going to leave it to you to figure out. It won't be a mystery! In my life, I have found that He always makes known not only that He is disciplining me, but also

¹ I am not suggesting you stay in an abusive relationship or situation. There is no excuse for abuse. If you are in an abusive relationship, please seek help and pastoral counsel immediately.

exactly what He is trying to help me learn, just as long as I am remaining consistent in my relationship with Him. He gives me the insight and wisdom I need through my time in the Word, through a book, a sermon, or a timely conversation with a friend. It's absolutely amazing! I have gone from utterly despondent and depressed because of a situation to rejoicing and exceedingly encouraged in a matter of minutes because the Lord has shown me what He's doing and how I should respond. Sometimes, it's a blatant, "Gabi, you're viewing this all wrong. Here's what My Word says about this." When that happens, even though He's telling me how wrong I've been, I feel so much JOY because I get the chance to mature in an area where I was immature! Sometimes, He simply gives me a key from scripture about how Jesus responded to a situation like the one I'm going through, allowing me to respond in the same way and become more like Christ in the process. In this way, I get to join Christ in His suffering by responding in the midst of my pain with the

love, mercy, patience, or humility that Christ responded with in His. This is how the discipline of the Lord is. It can be hard and painful, but it's so beautiful and full of love and joy that the pain almost doesn't even matter! In John 15 we read these words spoken by Jesus:

“I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more.” (vv. 1-2, NLT)

What comfort and hope is found in these words when we are in the midst of discipline! If your Father in Heaven sees that you are bearing fruit, you will be pruned (i.e., disciplined) so you can bear even more! So if you're being disciplined/pruned, feel honored! You wouldn't be disciplined if God saw you as a dead branch unable to produce fruit. He disciplines you because He sees your potential to be and to do even more. If you are a true dreamer, one who desires to fulfill the call on your life no

matter what, you should expect a lifetime of beautiful discipline. These are the seasons when words like this will ring most true for you:

We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love. Romans 5:3-4, NLT

Application and Thought Questions: Time to Make a Decision

You may have some difficult decisions to make after reading this booklet. Perhaps you've been resisting the Lord's discipline. Perhaps you're about to walk away from a difficult situation to get away from the pain. But now

after reading this, you realize that God is inviting you into a season of discipline through the situation you're facing.

Will you accept the invitation?

Will you submit to His discipline?

There are others of you who have been showing disdain toward the way God has created you. You have been trying to be someone you're not. You've been ignoring the gifts God has given you and have been trying to cultivate gifts that were not meant to be yours. I would challenge everyone reading this booklet to make his/her own list – a list of all of the things that bring your heart to life. Then take that list to the Lord, and let Him remind you of who He has created you to be. Let Him tell you what things on the list to spend time developing. Let Him show you things that are not on the list that you need to let go of in your life because they were never meant for you. *There has never been and never will be another YOU.* Please do not squander this life you've been given by not giving in fully

to the wonder of who He has created you to be. You will have to answer in eternity for how you have lived your life.

The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. 1

Peter 4:7-11, NIV

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