

[00:00:00] <music>

Intro: Hey friends! Welcome to Girls Night. I'm Stephanie May Wilson and I am so happy that you're here. Each week I have a girlfriend over and we talk through one of the biggest questions we have about our lives as women.

We're talking about friendships and faith and relationships and self-confidence, about our calling in life, and how to live every bit of our lives to the full. Life is so much better and easier and absolutely more fun when we navigate it together as girlfriends. And I cannot wait to get started.

Today's episode is a hard one, but a really, really important one. Today we're talking about what to do if you or someone you love is having suicidal thoughts. We're also talking about how to heal and move forward after a tragedy.

You guys know I'm all about mental health — I want to talk about it as often as possible. But you may not know that I've lost several friends to suicide throughout my life. And the thing is I know I'm not the only one. That's why I wanted to talk about it here on the show.

Our guest for today is Kayla Stoecklein. Kayla is an author, speaker, and mother of 3 little boys. Kayla became an unexpected widow in August 2018 when her husband, Andrew, the pastor of their large church in California, died by suicide. With three young boys also grieving and a heart full of pain, it became her mission to bring hope and help to others who have faced unexpected hardships.

She recently wrote a book called, *Rebuilding Beautiful: Welcome What Is, Dare to Dream Again, and Step Bravely into What Could Be*. I cannot wait for you to hear more about it!

Here are just a few of the things that we're gonna be talking about in this episode. First, Kayla's gonna talk us through some of the stigma surrounding mental health, and why it's so important for us to check in on our loved ones.

Next, she'll talk us through what to do if we know someone who is struggling with their mental health or suicidal thoughts. She's going to talk to us about how to seek help.

And then finally, she shares how to start healing and rebuilding your life after you've gone through a hardship or tragedy.

Guys, this episode is incredible. The things that Kayla shared with me were just amazing. I am so deeply grateful for the work she's doing. Seriously, the second we

hung up the phone, I immediately texted several of my friends about the conversation. This is one I know I'm going to be sharing and re-sharing for years to come.

I'm praying that this conversation is as helpful for you as I know it's been for me.

Without any further ado, here's my conversation with Kayla.

[00:02:20] <music>

Stephanie: Hi friends! I'm so excited for who you get to meet today. I'm sitting here with my new friend Kayla Stoecklein. Kayla, thanks so much for being on the show

Kayla: Thanks for having me. It's a joy to be here with you.

Stephanie: For women who haven't gotten to meet you yet, can you tell us who you are, what you do, and a fun fact about you?

Kayla: Yeah. I am an author. I am a mom. I have three little boys. They are six, eight, and nine. I always have to think about it for a second because there's birthdays all the time but they're six, eight, nine.

Stephanie: You're like, "I swear I know how old my kids are but it's-

Kayla: It always takes me a minute.

Stephanie: It changes.

Kayla: They just went back to school so I have a little more time now. I'm an author. I'm a speaker. I have a book coming out in September called *Rebuilding Beautiful*. I released a book in 2020 called *Fear Gone Wild*. That really is a memoir. It just tells our story. I became a widow at 29 years old. So I'm raising these boys on my own and we've gone through a lot. But it's been about four years since then and we're doing well. So that's the gist of who I am.

I'm in Southern California. I live in San Clemente, a cute little surfer town right by the coast. So we love it. It's the dream place to raise kids.

And a fun fact: since we moved here—we moved here about two years ago—my boys have become avid skateboarders. They are at the skate park every day. We have a little ramp in our backyard. So fun fact about me is I am trying to learn how to skateboard.

Stephanie: That is a very fun fact. I was so impressed. I think I've tried to stand on a skateboard like twice and something about it... Like I can ski, I can snowboard for a minute there. Skateboarding... totally different thing. Like how's it going?

Kayla: It's not going well.

Stephanie: Not good. Not good.

Kayla: It's really hard. They make it look so easy. I think we have the height disadvantage too because they're a little and they're closer to the ground. It's like they fall and they pop right back up. When I fall, I fall hard. Like, kaboom. It's hard. So I have big scrapes on my arms. I'm bloody. I'm going down the tiniest, littlest baby ramp in the skate park and still completely falling on my [back?].

Stephanie: Oh my gosh. People are like, "What happened to you?" And you're like, "I mean, I was skateboarding."

Kayla: Yes. And all the teenage boys are pointing and laughing. It's the funniest thing. But I'm trying to take advantage when my kids are little and they're still not embarrassed, you know, mom being with them at the skatepark. So taking advantage while I can. It's super fun.

Stephanie: That's so awesome. Oh, that makes me so happy. I have two little girls. They are going to be two in November. I mean, they might be into skateboarding. But that has me wondering like, "What are they going to be into that I can learn how to do with them?" That's so fun.

Kayla: Yeah, yeah, it's the best.

Stephanie: That's awesome. Well, now everyone knows that you're cool skater chic.

Kayla: Hardly. Hardly.

Stephanie: You mentioned that you have a new book coming out soon. Again, it's *Rebuilding Beautiful: Welcome What Is, Dare to Dream Again, and Step Bravely into What Could Be*. And you mentioned this a little bit, but I know that your first book and this book come from a really, really painful time in your life.

I was wondering if you would just share with us a little bit of the backstory of what you've been through in the last handful of years. Because I know that so much of what we're going to talk about comes from the experiences that you've had.

Kayla: Yeah. So, goodness, about over four years ago, I was living the life of my dreams. Like really, truly living the life of my dreams. I was married to my dream guy. We were doing ministry together. He was the lead pastor of our church, large church, 4,000 people, a big responsibility at a very—We were young—at a very young age.

We were raising these three boys together, had my dream home, I had the dream mom car. On paper, I had everything I could have ever asked for and more. If you would have asked me where I was headed, what my life would have looked like 30 years down the road, I would have confidently told you exactly what I thought my life was gonna look like 30 years down the road.

Then my husband got sick. He started having panic attacks, which led to a depression diagnosis, which led to a very fast journey with depression. Started in about April 2018 that he was diagnosed. We were wrestling and seeing doctors and taking the right medication and doing everything we knew to do to treat his depression.

He was taking time off work. We were spending time together. We went away together just the two of us, he's sitting with mentors, he's going to therapy. Like everything we could have tried, we tried it.

The doctors thought he was getting better and so he was released to go back to work in August of 2018. And being the kind of driven, passionate guy that he was, you know, he was pumped, he was so excited to be back to work and he was excited to share what he had been learning and this season with mental illness.

And he realized that mental illness isn't something that the church talks about a lot. So he was so pumped to talk about depression and talk about suicide, gave out the suicide hotline number and did two powerful weekend messages on depression, on mental health, gave up quote from the NAMI website. Like he had done his research. Out of anybody, he would have known where to go for help.

And then headed into the third weekend, he just had a really awful day at the office and his mind wasn't fully healed. His mind was still so fragile. He had a complete... Like only way I can describe it is a complete mental breakdown. It was unexpected and it was enough to where our family and our board of directors kind of realized like, "Okay, maybe he wasn't ready to go back to work."

So the following day, while we were trying to take some time to call the right people and take the right next steps and figure out who's going to speak on Sunday because he can't speak on Sunday. You know, we're trying to figure out all these things and tidy everything up and then just go tell him this is what we're doing.

And while we were away from him for a little bit, he attempted suicide. And it was an absolute blindside. A total blindside, the worst horrific day of my entire life. He was rushed to the hospital and there was nothing that they could do.

We got the gift of one last day with him at the hospital and we got to say goodbye. On August 25th 2018, he took his last breath. And with that I took my first in this brand new life that I never saw coming as a widow at 29 years old with three little boys who were two, four, and five years old.

Stephanie: I am so sorry. [inaudible 00:09:43] just sitting here for a second.

Kayla: Yeah. Thank you.

Stephanie: I love that you said that a lot of people don't talk about mental health. And I think that that's been changing in the last handful of years. I mean, you've been a part of that. But can you talk to us about like, why don't we talk about mental health more? What are some of the stigmas that you guys encountered? Or as you've been doing this work for the last four years, you know, what are some of the things that you've... like some of the misconceptions that you've heard? Talk to me about that.

Kayla: I think you're right. I think it really has shifted and changed in the last four years since Andrew died and there's been other pastors that have died by suicide since then. So I think it really has just opened up. Even the pandemic and going through COVID-19, people are dealing with isolation, depression is on the rise, you know, a lot of health issues out of the pandemic that weren't even about Coronavirus.

So I think there's a mental health pandemic and mental illness pandemic happening at the same time. So I think it is a conversation that is happening and that pastors are willing to open up more, and they're seeing that there's power and vulnerability.

I think when Andrew was alive and at the beginning of our journey, you know, even as I began to grieve, there was just so much I didn't know about depression, and there was so much I didn't understand about suicide.

I remember one thing in particular, just one of those myths that a lot of people believe about suicide, that I held and that I believed about suicide before he passed away, we were in the hospital, we had just taken him off life support. We didn't know how much time he had left.

And I remember I was bawling and I leaned over the hospital bed and I asked my mother-in-law, will he go to heaven? I had this misconception that when somebody dies by suicide, they don't get to go to heaven. I picked it up somewhere along the way that suicide totally shifts with the way that what happens after you die.

So my mother-in-law leaned back over the hospital bed and told me, "Of course, he's going to heaven. His relationship with God and his salvation doesn't hinge on the way he died. It hinges on his relationship with Jesus. That was so comforting to me in that moment.

But I think it is one of those things where we believe if you have enough faith, if you read your Bible regularly, if you're spending time with God, if you're plugged into a local church, if you're in a small group, if you're doing all the Beth Moore studies, if you're doing all the right things, then your mental health shouldn't suffer.

And for some reason, I think that we forget that mental illness is just as much a physical illness as any other illness. It's just as physical as cancer. It's just as physical as Coronavirus. It's just as physical as breaking your arm.

You know, mental illness is an invisible illness. It isn't something that you can see and so it's so hard to understand. And I think it's harder for us to have empathy because it's something that we can't see. We can't get inside the mind of another person. We have no idea what it's like to live with a mind that anybody else who is living with, except for our own.

I think that was one of the biggest misconceptions right away that was debunked for me that I was so grateful that that myth was debunked right from the beginning. And then I think also, like I said, if you are close enough to God and if you're reading the scriptures and you're spending time in prayer, then you'll never suffer from depression or suicidal thoughts. That's just not true.

All that does is for people that are struggling with depression, people that are struggling with anxiety, people that are struggling with other mental health disorders, saying that to them, all that does is heap more shame and blame onto their shoulders and make them feel more isolated and more alone.

So I think the most loving thing we can do is to come alongside people and to try our best just to crawl into that dark space with them, and just to hold them and to leave our agenda at home, to leave our agenda out the window.

We don't have to have all the right things to say. Sometimes I think all people want is our presence. And our presence speaks volumes, and our presence is enough.

There were so many things I did wrong when Andrew was struggling with his mental health that looking back, I just truly didn't understand. And my life was full. I was chasing these three boys and trying to give him space to rest. And I was experiencing what our therapists described as co-burdening his depression. So I

was getting just a taste of his depression with him as I was trying to care for our kids and create space for him to heal.

There were moments where he tried to tell me. There were moments where he tried to tell me that he was struggling with suicidal thoughts, that he was up in the middle of the night and he was thinking about suicide and I just totally missed it. I said all the things you're not supposed to say.

You know, I responded with like, "That's the most selfish thing you could ever say. You would never do that. Like totally reacted out of my own emotion." And now I know better. Now I know when someone tells you that they're struggling with suicidal thoughts, it's time to lean in, it's time to ask questions. Questions like: "Do you have a suicide plan? What problem are you trying to solve through suicide? How far have you researched it? How often did you think about it?"

I wish I would have asked him those questions every single day. I wish I would have picked up the phone and included other people. You can't treat mental health alone. And I think I was putting too much of the pressure on myself when we had this team of people around us and I didn't understand or didn't realize that I had all these resources.

So when he said those things to me, I should have picked up the phone and I should have called her therapist and said, "Hey, he just said this to me, he was telling me that he's struggling with suicidal thoughts. What do I do? What do I say? How can we support him?"

I should have picked up the phone and called his psychiatrist and said the same thing. I should have picked up the phone and called some of his best friends and clued them in and told them so they could come alongside him and check in with him so it wasn't just me that was checking in on him, because I already had so much on my plate.

So I think that's the struggle too when you're walking alongside somebody that's struggling with their mental health. You have to create space for your own cup to fill back up, because you're pouring out, pouring out, pouring out, pouring out. And you can get to a place where you're super empty and you have nothing left to give.

So I wish I would have created space for myself too to do individual therapy, to spend time alone, to go away and do solitude, to do all the things that he was doing. I wish I would have created space for myself to do those things, too.

That's a really loaded answer. I think there's just so much that we do not understand. And I think, you know, I did the best that I could in that situation. And

of course, hindsight is 2020, I wish I could go back and change a million things. But there's so much grace in our journey.

But I think the biggest takeaway is that if anybody tells you they're struggling with suicidal thoughts, it's time to take it seriously and it's time to pick up the phone and call somebody, it's time to clue in other people and it's time to respond and not react out of your own emotion.

Stephanie: There's so much that you said that I'm like, "Oh, I want to talk about that more - the 'think about filling up your own cup'. Of course, you're gonna react emotionally to that. Everyone would. But it makes sense that...

You know, I found this in smaller ways in marriage and in friendship, you know, that when you're going through something hard, or when you're going through something with someone else, sometimes it's really helpful, often it's helpful to have another person who you can talk to you about it.

That's one of the reasons that therapy in general is just so powerful. Because if you're in a fight with someone or you're in an argument or disagreement with someone, you may have your first reaction of what you want to say to them. But generally, that's not the most helpful one. And so having just more people in your corner that you can process with, where you're processing isn't going to like... it's hard to process with the person you're processing about, if that makes sense.

Kayla: Yeah, absolutely. It's so important to have that neutral space, that neutral space where they're not a friend, they're not a family member, they're not somebody that you see every single day, they're truly there to sit with you and ask questions and be neutral.

Stephanie: And like they don't care about the answer. Like they do but it's not... You know, one of the things that we've been talking about in our community kind of lately is the decision to start trying to have kids. That's a huge decision that is really hard to make. And I feel like processing it with your mom is kind of a hard thing to do because she has some skin in the game.

Kayla: Absolutely.

Stephanie: She may have some strong opinions about wanting some grandkids and so she's not a neutral party, and it really affects her. And so talking with someone who doesn't actually personally impact.

How do we know if someone in... I guess other than them telling us, how do we know that a family member or a friend is struggling with their mental health? Is it

always obvious? What are some maybe warning signs? If we're looking out for the people in our lives, which we should be doing, how do we know if something's off?

Kayla: I think every single situation is so different and every mental health journey, mental illness journey, depression journey is unique to that person. But I think there were some warning signs in our situation that I totally missed too.

We went through four very hard years. Really our first four years of marriage were some of our most difficult years. His dad was diagnosed with leukemia one year into our marriage. He was the lead pastor of our church and so Andrew, at the time was probably 23, 24 years old and he felt this pressure to step up. He felt this pressure to be there for his dad, to help lead the church with his dad, to speak regularly on Sundays, to be the guy his dad would call on Saturday night when he was too sick to preach on Sunday.

So he was running on fumes for four years, as he's watching his best friend, his mentor, the person that he loves and looks up to the most suffering and dying from this horrible disease.

I think through those four years, in those four years, there were moments where he didn't want to get out of bed. There were moments where he was isolating or he was not wanting to spend time with friends, where he was sleeping more than he normally had. So I think there were some whether he was maybe drinking more than he should have been drinking, too.

I think there were some of those warning signs, and those red flags. I think isolation is a huge red flag — when someone is not wanting to hang out, maybe they're not returning your phone calls, maybe they're not returning your texts, maybe they're just not responding the way that they normally respond in relationship with you.

I think if you notice that someone is reaching for, you know, something to numb out, if they're reaching for alcohol more than they normally do, if they're reaching for their phone, and they're just on their phone scrolling more than they normally do, if they're laying in bed watching Netflix more than they normally do. You know, I think there's things that we do to numb some of the pain that we're feeling and to kind of try to escape from some of that pain that we're feeling instead of embracing it.

I think mood swings and mood changes, too. You know, we saw that with my husband. His depression often came out in anger. It wasn't like I thought it would look. I think we think depression and we think sad. And I think depression looks a lot different than just sad. It can look like anxiety, it can look like someone that's

experiencing more anxiety than they normally do. It can look like someone that's feeling more anger than they normally do.

So I think just asking questions and getting curious and not trying to label anybody, not trying to diagnose anybody, not trying to say, "Hey, I think you're struggling with depression." I think it's more asking questions like, "Why do you think that you are so tired all the time? Or why aren't you answering my phone calls? What's going on? What are those deeper feelings that you're feeling? What is happening within your mind and within your heart? How can I walk alongside you? What can I do to support you? How can I serve you? That's a really powerful question to ask somebody we think they're struggling with their mental health. Like, How can I serve you?"

And I also think if you feel like you have a friend or a family member that you think is struggling, like do your best to show up in the ways that maybe are the out-of-the-box ways. Like if they're not answering the phone, you can leave them an encouraging voicemail.

If they're not responding to your text or they're not picking up the phone, you can stop by and leave something on their porch. There are non-invasive ways where you aren't overbearing, where you can love and support people. Or even sending a pizza, like DoorDashing of pizza on a Tuesday night. Maybe they already have dinner made but pizza is a really great thing to reheat the next day as well.

I think there's lots of different warning signs — and it's a case-by-case thing. You know, every diagnosis looks so different, and the way that everybody responds to mental illness and depression and anxiety looks so different too.

But I think just getting curious and asking questions can be one of the biggest blessings that we can give somebody else is just to get curious, ask questions. Give them our presence, not showing up with an agenda, just showing up and giving them our full attention, looking them in the eyes, putting away our phone, and really, truly being present.

And I think when we're fully present, we can pick up on things that we may have missed when we're not. When we're trying to have a conversation, but also like holding our phone in our hand or when we're trying to have a conversation but there's also a show on the TV. I think it's like getting rid of everything else and giving somebody your undivided attention.

I also think something that we can do too is to be vulnerable about our own struggles—is to open up about the things that we're struggling with. If maybe we're struggling with anxiety or we're feeling depressed or we're struggling with

whatever it is, you know, I think that that swings open the door for other people to be vulnerable too.

I think sometimes when we go first, other people are willing to go too and open and share what they're really going through. I think vulnerability creates space for vulnerability.

Stephanie: Yeah, 100%. If we know that someone in our life isn't doing well... I want to ask more about suicidal thoughts in a second. But just if we recognize that someone in our life or they are recognizing that they're struggling with depression or anxiety or just with any part of their mental health, what help is available? How do we help them? You know, we're present with them, but what should they do next?

Kayla: Like I said earlier, I think mental illness needs to be treated as a team. So I think, you know, coming at it with a team approach, and that it's not just something that you keep in the dark. I think the enemy loves when we keep things in the dark. And I think it's so important to bring some of that stuff out and shed light on some of those dark thoughts.

I think picking up the phone and calling the suicide hotline number. I know they made it easy. Let me look it up real quick. They made it easy now too where they changed the text. There's a suicide text. It's like 988, I think is what it is.

And there's even a crisis text line. You can just shoot a text. Don't even have to pick up the phone and call. You can literally just shoot a text on your phone. I think the thing too is that when someone is struggling with suicidal thoughts, they're feeling shame. And so if you ask them if you can tell other people, if you ask them, "Hey, can I tell your mom?" or "Can I fill in your brother? Can I fill on your best friend?" or "Can I call the doctor and fill them in?" they may say no.

So I think avoiding that question too. And just knowing that you can't handle this on their own, they can't handle this on their own, and that it has to be treated as a team and that that's a non-negotiable. So sending a text is a very discreet way to do that as well.

I think filling in the therapists, filling in whoever's on the team. And if you don't have a team of people, if you don't have a therapist and a psychiatrist, and maybe a pastor from church, or a close circle of friends, find those people, reach out to those people. It's so easy to find a therapist. You can go on Psychology Today, put in your zip code, put in your insurance information, and find a therapist within like a 10-mile radius of your home. There's online now with the Zoom, with the technology that we have. I do therapy online.

Stephanie: So do I.

Kayla: I moved two years ago and I still have the same therapist so I meet with her over Zoom, you know, every couple months now. But that I think including and keying in other people that can also be checking in with your loved one so all the pressure is not you to be carrying the weight of their suicidal thoughts with them.

I think in order to lift and share the pain, it needs to be lifted and shared into more than one person. And so reaching out to a therapist. If you don't have a therapist, find a therapist. Maybe it's making an appointment with a psychiatrist. If we don't have a psychiatrist, maybe it's important to go get evaluated and sit with the psychiatrist.

Maybe it's time to call the care pastor at your church and say, "Hey, can we set up a meeting with you? My husband is really struggling and we would love prayer." I think oftentimes, too, on Sunday mornings, there's like that prayer time after service and there's prayer room where you go up to the front and get prayer.

I think prayer is powerful. I know that God can supernaturally heal people from depression and suicidal thoughts. And I totally believe in that. And I think that prayer should always be a part of the plan, you know, the healing plan. Prayer should always be a part of the healing plan.

Mental illness is also a physical illness. It's not just a spiritual illness like the stigma with mental health. And so it has to also be treated by professionals in the medical field. And so that's where the therapist and the psychiatrist comes into.

And then I also think if you have close family members or you have a close circle of friends that you can trust. You don't need to tell a lot of people, but cluing in like one or two people that are this person's best friend, that can also be checking in with them and asking them.

And encourage those people. Say, "Hey, I need your help. I can't handle this on my own. I can't carry this on my own." And they're not going to tell you. My loved one may not tell you, they may not text you, or call you and tell you that they're struggling with suicidal thoughts, but I wanted to tell you for them. And I need your help to support them and to love them and to be there for them."

I think just sharing the responsibility is the biggest thing we can do to support our loved one, and including and other people and treating it as a team.

Stephanie: I love that. I love the reminder that this is more than this person can handle on their own and it's more than you can handle on your own. Like this is beyond our

paygrade as a friend, as a sister, as a wife. This is not something that we can handle by ourselves. But as a team and with some really, really good professionals in on that team, that makes this lighter but better I guess. Like that's the path forward.

Kayla: More manageable. It also just takes the weight and the pressure off the closest loved one. It lifts some of that weight and that pressure, especially like, what if the suicide does happen? You know, in our case, the suicide did happen. And looking back, that's one of my biggest regrets is not telling anybody that asking him more about it, and not taking it seriously.

I think that's the biggest thing too is just to take it seriously. Don't think that it won't ever happen. I think that we love our person so much. And because we're not struggling with suicidal thoughts, we can't imagine ever being that close to the edge. And we oftentimes don't understand what it feels like to be that close to the edge.

I remember reading a blog that Ann Voskamp wrote, and she talked about depression and suicidal thoughts like being trapped in a burning building and the only way to escape the flames is to jump out the window. And we may not know what it feels like to be trapped in the burning building. And so don't assume that it's something that's never going to happen, because it does.

Stephanie: I think that there are so many situations where people do feel this weight of responsibility for their loved one. You know, I think it happens a lot and for lots of different reasons. And I know that we shouldn't wear that responsibility. You know, we do need a team to be helping this person. But can we prevent this? Like, if someone in our life is suicidal, can we stop them?

Kayla: I absolutely believe that we can. I think that suicide is so complicated. I think that we can do the best that we can do with the resources that we have and the people that we have in our lives to support this person.

Something that's been really helpful for me... I'll never forget what Andrews psychiatrists... You know, the team of doctors that he did have surrounding him were shocked when the suicide happened because they, just like me, had no idea how bad it really was.

His doctor was actually there when he took his last breath at the hospital. And I'll never forget her face and her tears and just her emotion in that moment. She was so shocked.

I think the one thing that Andrew's psychiatrists did share with us is that 90% of suicides are impulsive. 90% of suicides are impulsive. So it really is this

in-the-moment overwhelming flood of pain—pain that is so overwhelming that we can't understand. I talked about earlier we just fully can understand it.

And so I think that that part is what makes suicide hard to prevent — is that it is 90% of the time impulsive. You don't know what's happening, you don't know how bad that person is struggling. You just have no idea because you're not in their body, you're not in their mind. You don't know what it feels like to live in their shoes.

So I think we can do the best that we can with the resources that we have to love and support the person that we love that's suffering. You know, I describe Andrew's death like a child drowning in a swimming pool at a birthday party. He was surrounded by people that loved him and we just had no idea that he was drowning. We had no idea how bad it really was. And if any of us would have known we would have jumped in the water and saved him. We just had no clue.

And so yes, I believe suicide can be prevented, I believe there's ways we can love and support and use the resources that we have to love and support our loved one that suffering. But I also know that suicide is a it's an impulsive in-the-moment thing that can't always be prevented too.

Stephanie: I mean, you guys were there for him. You did have him surrounded. You were taking care of him. There's so much to process as the loved one who's lost someone. You know, is there something more that I could have said? And I think that being proactive and taking care of our people and listening and really taking any mentions of suicide really, really seriously. Like everything that you've been saying, but then also knowing that it's also never our fault.

Kayla: Absolutely. Something that's been so helpful for me too and my healing journey is talking about suicide differently and talking about the way that Andrew died differently. Before I would have used the word "committed." I would have said "he committed suicide." And since he's passed away, I use the phrase "died by suicide."

And what that does... Changing our language... You know, our words matter. Our words are so powerful. And even that small shift in language can be a powerful tool to the way that we grieve and our healing journey moving forward.

Removing the word "committed" and saying "died by suicide" it takes the blame and shame off of Andrew's shoulders. I truly believe if Andrew was in his right mind, if he was in his healthy mind the suicide would have never happened. I don't believe that it was Andrew's fault. I don't believe that it was a doctor's fault. I don't believe that it was my fault. I don't believe it was therapist's fault. I don't believe that it was God's fault.

You know, I believe the suicide was a tragic accident, just like a child drowning the swimming pool. A tragic accident. And truly no one is to blame. And it's just as much a tragedy as any other tragedy, as any other shriek accident. I really truly believe that seeing suicide that way, talking about suicide that way, saying he died by suicide, seeing suicide as the villain, not my husband, suicide is the bad guy. That small shift in language can be so healing and so helpful.

And even the way that I communicate it to my boys, too. You know, just last year I talked about the word "suicide" for the first time. They knew. You know, when I sat them down, I waited a week to tell them. I talked to child life specialists. You know, I was in shock and I was grieving and I wasn't sure like, "How in the world am I going to sit down with two, four and five year olds and tell them that this happened."

I didn't want to lie and I didn't want to hide the truth. So I sat them down and I told them, "You know, your dad's been really sick and he's been going to the doctor a lot, and he's been sleeping a lot." And they're like nodding their head because they knew he wasn't well. And we were all taking care of him and that he had been sick for months.

And I told them, "Daddy did something that caused him to die." So I really started the conversation then. And then just recently, as they're getting older, you know, they're almost... My oldest is almost 10, my middle guy is eight, my youngest is six, they're hearing the word suicide. They're hearing more about depression and mental health. It's coming up more.

So I try to take those moments when I can lean in, those teachable moments when I can lean in and tell them more about what that means and why we talk about it this way, and help them shift their language. And because I've done the work myself, because I've shifted the language myself, because I've approached the healing journey the way I've approached the healing journey, and I'm not blaming their dad, and I'm not mad at their dad, and I'm not blaming the doctors, and I'm not mad at the doctors, and I'm not blaming myself or his family. Really, truly no one is to blame.

And because I've done the healing work myself, I'm able to help my boys see it in that light too, I'm able to help my boys have empathy and compassion for their dad, to have empathy and compassion for other people that have died by suicide or other people that are struggling with their mental health.

So the biggest gift we can give our kids is a healthy... someone said that. That's a quote for somebody. But the biggest gift we can give our kids is a healthy you, is a

healthy us. So doing the hard work of healing and embracing our pain and looking at it from a whole perspective really shifts the way not only that we can grieve and heal and move forward, but also the way that our kids can grieve and heal and move forward too.

Stephanie: I'm trying not to cry. I love that so much. And I think when we're grieving the loss of someone, it is so easy to be mad at them and to feel like they are the one who took your loved one. But it's not like that.

And I love the way that you said, you know, like, "Your dad's been sick for a long time." When we use that language, we're usually talking about something like cancer, like you said. And we don't have any blame for that. There's no like, "Well, you gave yourself cancer." Obviously, that's not the case.

Saying that we have so much more empathy for, you know, this person has been sick. And sometimes that ends in or sometimes that chapter ends in victory and healing and then sometimes that chapter ends in us losing that person, but it's never their fault.

When someone is struggling with their mental illness or with their mental health, it is a sickness. It is something that is not as it should be, and exactly like cancer. So just that phrasing of you know, "he's been sick and then died by suicide," I absolutely love that. Because you're right, that language instantly helps you feel empathy for the person and what life must have felt like in their... like how much the house was burning for them to feel like they had to jump out of it.

We totally haven't even talked about your new book yet, but I really want to. So it's called *Rebuilding Beautiful*. What has that looked like for you? When we go through something really tragic or just a really low season, is it possible for us to have a beautiful life after that? And what does that look like?

Kayla: So like three years ago, I was about a year into my healing journey, I was sitting on my front porch swing talking to my friend on the phone and I was explaining to her how I had this beautiful life. Like I said earlier, I really truly had everything I could have ever asked for and more. And I loved my life. I loved being a pastor's wife, I loved the work that we were doing. I was so proud of my life. I truly loved my life.

I told her it felt like that whole entire life died with Andrew and I was handed this life that I never saw coming. And I so deeply believe that this life can still be beautiful, that this new life, this unexpected life can still be beautiful. And I said the words "it's as if I'm rebuilding beautiful."

So that's really when those words were born. And I think it's just such a hope-filled perspective. It's such a hope-filled mantra for anybody that's in a season of rebuilding, for anybody that was handed a life that they didn't see coming, for the person that their job took them to a whole new city, for the person whose marriage they thought was going to last forever and did a divorce or there was an affair, there was some kind of breaking in the relationship, for the person that like me that lost somebody that they love and now life moving forward is going to look completely different than it would have if that person was in their life.

I deeply truly believe that life after loss, life after the death of a dream, life after the loss of a career, life after whatever hard fast curveball comes hurtling our way can still be beautiful. And it's just going to be a completely different version of beautiful than it was before. It's never going to be the same.

I think that's important to say and that's important to understand. That I'm not trying to build the same version of beautiful. I'm rebuilding beautiful. It's a completely different kind of beautiful, but I deeply believe it can still be breathtakingly beautiful.

And that it's a work in progress. That I have not arrived. I don't think we ever arrive. I think we're constantly evolving and changing and rebuilding and stepping in and out of different versions of ourselves, learning new things about ourselves and learning new things about God.

I think if we're fully alive and fully present and fully invested in our life and what God wants to do in and through us that our life is going to be constantly changing and evolving and growing. And that it can be breathtakingly beautiful. And not despite pain. I think that's also one of those myths that somehow we leave the pain behind or it's something we just move... we move on or we move past it. And it's like no, I'm gonna carry the pain of Andrew's death with me for the rest of my life. And it's this sacred part of me and it's this amazing teacher.

Pain has been one of the greatest teachers of my life and it's also a heavy load sometimes. This week, in particular, tomorrow, and the next day are two of the hardest days in the whole year. The anniversary days, the anniversary of the death, you know, some of those dates are the hardest days ever. And there's unexpected pain that comes with that.

Just yesterday I was feeling off and I just sat and I started journaling and praying and I started weeping. And I'm like, "Oh my gosh, I'm feeling all this emotion that I didn't even know or expect." I think that that's gonna happen four years in, that's gonna happen eight years in, that's gonna happen 20 years in.

So pain isn't something that we leave behind. It's something that we move forward with us. Pain is part of that beautiful landscape. Pain is part of the rebuilding beautiful journey. And pain is the sacred part that I hate and I'm also so grateful for because it's taught me so much.

[00:44:30] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Our Girls Night sponsor for today is a company I just love. It's [ZocDoc](#). I know you can totally relate to this, but my life is busy, especially during the summer and fall months. As a result, if there's something that's gonna make my life easier, I am all ears.

So when ZocDoc reached out and told me that using their app to find a doctor is as easy as getting takeout delivered to your house, I was instantly intrigued.

If this is your first time hearing about them, ZocDoc is a free app that shows you doctors who are patient-reviewed, take your insurance, and are available when you need them. Seriously, you just go to [zocdoc.com](#), type in your information, and you can find any kind of specialist you're looking for, from dentists to chiropractors to dermatologists to psychiatrists. ZocDoc has you covered.

I've been trying to be really intentional about taking care of my health and my body these last few years. And that's hard to do, you know? It's harder to make time for yourself. It's hard to take time away from work for all the appointments we're supposed to have every year. The whole thing is just inconvenient.

It's infinitely more inconvenient and easier to put off when taking care of ourselves requires hours of research first. You find a doctor you think you might like but then they don't take your insurance or they do take your insurance but they're not accepting new patients or they don't have an appointment available for months. It's a whole thing.

But the reason I love ZocDoc is because it makes all of this so much easier. You can instantly book an appointment with a doctor who suits your needs, fits your schedule, and is within your insurance network. You even have the option to book an appointment remotely if that works best for your schedule.

One of the best parts about the app is that it has verified patient reviews from real people who've made real appointments with these doctors. And I love that. Every month millions of people use ZocDoc and I'm so happy to be one of them. It's my new go-to whenever I need to find a quality doctor in my area. It has saved me so much time.

Friends, finding the right doctor does not have to be stressful or complicated. Go to zocdoc.com/girlsnight and download the ZocDoc app for free and then you can start your search for a top-rated doctor today. Many are available within 24 hours. That's zocdoc.com/girlsnight. [Zocdoc.com/girlsnight](https://zocdoc.com/girlsnight).

[00:46:47] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! I want to take a quick pause for my conversation with Kayla to thank our sponsor for today. Our sponsor for today's episode is an amazing company called [Prose](https://prose.com).

Now, most of you have probably heard me sing the praises of Prose, the world's most personalized haircare. But for those who haven't, I want to tell you about the incredible results I've been seeing since using my customized Prose products.

Prose has given over 1 million consultations with their hair quiz. And that's how the process started for me. The quiz was so much fun. It felt like one of those magazine quizzes I used to love. It was easy, but also totally in-depth.

They asked me questions that I wouldn't have thought to answer, like, "How much does your hair shed?" or "Is your hair oily at the ends or just near your scalp?"

So I did the hair quiz and I placed my order, and just a few days later the package showed up on my doorstep. I have a pre-shampoo mask, shampoo and conditioner. I've been using these products for a while now and it's made such a difference. My hair feels silky and soft and looks even shinier.

And the other thing I like is that you can continuously customize your formula. They'll help you tweak things depending on your lifestyle changes or even changes in the weather. Prose is also focused on providing clean and responsible products. Every product is free of parabens, sulfates, phthalates, mineral oils, GMOs, and is always cruelty-free.

Also, if you're not 100% positive that Prose is the best haircare you've ever had, they'll take the products back no questions asked. But I have a feeling that won't be an issue for you.

Friends, Prose is the healthy hair regimen with your name all over it. You can take your free in-depth hair quiz and get 15% off your first order today. Just go to prose.com/girlsnight. That's prose.com/girlsnight for your free in-depth hair quiz and 15% off. Prose, thank you so much for sponsoring our Girls Night. We just love having you.

[00:48:41] <music>

Stephanie: What are some of the beautiful things in your life, in this new version of your life that you... What are some of those breathtakingly beautiful things?

Kayla: I think for us the biggest thing, the best thing that I've done for my healing journey was to move. We lived about an hour, just only an hour. I didn't move across the country or move to a different country. I only moved an hour.

We were inland an hour so I moved closer to the coast and it has been such a gift to be living in a city where there's no memories—There's no memories of Andrew. We never really spent time here. Maybe visited here one or two times together—where it's really truly a fresh start, where our story isn't being told for us, where I'm not driving past the cemetery on the way to the grocery store like I was in the home that I used to live, where I'm not bumping into people that used to go to our church, you know, everywhere I go where I'm not passing the spot we used to go for date night when I'm just trying to go pick up my kids from school.

So it's been so helpful and so healing to have a fresh new start. And that's just been something for me especially that I just needed. You know, not everybody... People can stay in the house and they can stay in the city. And for me, I knew that I couldn't stay. I knew that I had to go.

So listening to the Holy Spirit and listening to the voice inside that's saying, "It's time. It's time to go. It's time to pack up." So we moved about two years ago and that has been the most beautiful, incredible gift I could have given myself and my kids.

I gave them back the power of their story. Their story isn't being told for them. If I would have stayed where we lived before, their story would have been told for them. They were at a private Christian school, a lot of the families, a lot of the teachers went to our church. It would have followed them as they grew up.

So they get to tell their story on their own terms, to who they want to, when they want to, how they want to. And it's not being told for them. And I think that's true for me, too. And the new friends... I have two of my best friends live here. So that was the draw to move here. But even with the new friends that I've made here, too, it's like I get to share what I want, when I want, how I want.

And also it's just a completely blank canvas. So it's empowered me to try new things, it's empowered me to step into different versions of myself that I maybe would have never stepped into before. I completely remodeled our house. So that's been really fun. Something that's totally beautiful.

We bought this little fixer-upper, and we had just finished remodeling our other house. So I was like, "I wanna get a fixer Upper. But we did. We bought this little fixer-upper that literally needed everything. It was infested with termites. Termites had eaten the hardwood floors. There were strips of the floor that were missing. The shower was leaking. There was warped flooring in the bathrooms, just like moldy kitchen. Everything was just disgusting.

So little by little we've been tackling projects together, me and my boys. I've been handing them hammers, and they helped me rip out flooring. I have videos of us knocking out walls. Literally, my kids are like kicking through the drywall in the living room. They helped me knock out the tile in the bathroom. They're helping me cut stuff and glue stuff. And so it's been really, really cool the parallel of like, yes, we're rebuilding our life but we're also rebuilding our house.

And it's all the parallels that come with that. Like sitting on the subfloor, and my kids are drawing on the subfloor of our house, which was so cool. We all left that little love notes all over the subfloor. No one will ever see them because we glued our floor down. But it was so cool to be sitting on the subfloor and looking around my living room and staring at all these two-by-fours and like oh my gosh, this is such a metaphor for my life.

It really takes like stripping away... You know, Andrew's death stripped away so many things. It stripped away my pride. It stripped away my future than I thought it was gonna have. It stripped away my identity because so much of my identity was wrapped up in who he was that I'd kind of lost my sense of self.

And so in this new life, it's like I've been discovering so many things. I've been discovering who am I. Asking the question: Who am I now that he's gone? And the answer to that question has been so surprising. It's like I truly get to live into whatever God's calling me to be. And I'm doing all these things. I'm using power tools and using a jigsaw. I'm cutting stuff with a table saw and putting in flooring, my hands and knees covered in glue, like covered in paint, like doing all these things that I never thought I would do.

So all of it is beautiful. All of it is just surprising too. It's like I really most days just shake my head and sit back in just complete awe at the mystery of it all. And I think that's the best posture we can take. And in any season of life, it's just sitting back in the mystery of it all: in the mystery of the things that I will never be able to understand, in the mystery of the loss and the pain that I was handed that I still carry with me, and then the mystery of the beauty and joy that I still have, that I'm still finding here on the other side of loss. And that it's all of it. It's Both/And. It's all of it.

My son—right after my husband passed away, it was the first Mother's day after he passed away—He just described this journey of both of it, of all of it so well. We were in the classroom that all the moms were invited for Mother's Day makeovers. We literally like brought our makeup bags and our mirrors and the kids got to like put on our makeup and do our hair and it was hilarious.

On the little table after we all got like our crazy makeovers, my hair's all done, like eyebrows on my forehead, and after our makeover, I'm sitting at the table and there's all those little cute, little "fill in the blanks" that they do at school for the Mother's Day. It's like, "My mom's favorite food is salad. My mom loves to watch TV. Like the silly things that they fill in.

And one of those things my son had written, "I love it when my mom takes me to..." And there was (a blank) and (a blank). And he wrote, "I love it when my mom takes me to the cemetery and takes me to Disneyland." Literally the saddest place on earth and the quote-unquote, happiest place on earth in the same sentence.

So even my kids understand the duality of our life. That it's both/and. That, yes, it is hard and it's painful, and it sucks and it hurts and it's also amazing and beautiful and I can't believe we get to live where we live, and I can't believe we get to do what we get to do, and I can't believe we have a family and the friends that we have and the life that we have. Like it's all of it.

So I think that's the biggest thing that pain has taught me too is that it really allows you to enter into this deeper stream of humanity. It allows you to see things that you've never seen before. It allows you to see other people, you know, the person that's driving crazy on the road, the person that's yelling at the lady at the grocery store. It allows you to have empathy and compassion, because you really, truly...

When you're the person that's walking through the grocery store with pain that nobody can see, it helps you to know that there's other people also walking through the grocery store or walking down the street or driving down the street or sitting on the sidelines of the soccer game that have pain that you cannot see. So it gives you this new empathy and compassion and love for everybody.

There's just so many things. I know that's a loaded answer. There's just so many things that I've learned here that I'm still learning here. And it's beautiful, and incredible, and hard and painful and amazing, all wrapped together.

Stephanie: Oh, I think probably everyone else is crying too right now. Kayla, just as we're finishing up, would you pray for us? I know that there are women sitting here who have recently lost something important to them or someone important to them. I

know that so many of the women in our community, myself included, have... suicide has touched their lives, they've lost people that they love.

And I know that there are women sitting here who are struggling with their mental health maybe in ways that feel, you know, maybe it's like a small flame, maybe it's like a match or maybe it feels like the entire house is on fire. So yeah, I just would love to finish out by having you pray for us.

Kayla: Sure. God, thank You for the gift of today. Thank You for the gift of this conversation with Stephanie. Thank You that You promised to be with us in the really hard, awful, terrible things and the really beautiful, incredible, amazing things too. God that Your presence is always with us. That You see us when we feel like no one sees us. That You hear us when we feel like no one hears us, no one's listening.

God I pray for my friends that are listening to this today, God, that are in that place, that are in that place where they feel like no one sees them, no one understands their pain, where they feel isolated and alone. God, I pray that You would just meet them there. That they would know that You are there with them, that they would know that there's hope, that there's help, that there's people surrounding them even now, God, that would love nothing more than to be invited into the depths of their pain.

Got I pray that You would make them brave, that You would make all of us brave enough to reach out for help when we need it. Thank you for your love. Thank you for the love that we have and the community that surrounds us, God.

Help us to search for those lifelines of love. Help us to fill our days with your joy and your beauty, God, to look for the things that we can't always see, to uncover the gifts that You've given us right here right now. God, I pray that You would give us eyes to see it.

We thank You for your grace that sustains us and carries us through. I thank you for your love that sustains us and carries us through. And I pray that you would just bless my friends that are listening to this today. God, that You would meet them right where they're at, and that You would carry them through their darkest days. God we love you. We thank you. We bless you. Amen.

Stephanie: Thank you, Kayla.

[00:59:37] <music>

Outro: Friends, thank you so much for listening to this episode. I can't tell you how much it means to me to have you here at Girls Night.

Before you go, I would love it if you do two quick things. The first is to subscribe. Subscribing to the podcast is the best way to make sure you never miss an episode. It's also a way easier way to listen because it's a way of sort of bookmarking the podcast. You'll never have to go looking for it again, your Apple just automatically download the next episode when new one's released.

The other thing is that it would mean so much to me if you would take just a quick second to leave a rating and a review for the podcast. The way that iTunes knows to suggest the podcast to new people is by the ratings and the reviews. That's how we invite new friends to our Girls Night.

So would you do me a huge favor and take a quick second to leave a rating and a quick comment about how you like the podcast so far? It would help us out so much. And thank you to all of you who have left us beautiful five-star reviews already. I can't tell you how much it means to me.

All right, friends, that's all we have for today but we'll be back next week with another episode of Girls Night. And I have to tell you, you are going to love this next one. I'll see you then.