

# Grief Journal

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It is with mixed emotions that I begin to write this journal. I have put this off for a few years and really did not think this was something I would do, but I really am thankful it's a requirement for this course to force me to have to put the hard parts of my story on paper and really to have to process again or at a deeper level. My background is that, up until about 5 years ago when God began to move deeply in me and my husband and opened us to the gifts of the Spirit and we experienced renewal, I had no idea how to process pain and loss. I had no tools for how to grieve and my theology did not leave room for this. My idea of the Christian view of grieving was to just move on and trust God. While parts of this view can be helpful, I can now see throughout scripture so many biblical models of grieving, especially in the Psalms, but in many other places as well. I have come to see people, like Hannah, who just came to the end of their own strength and cried out to the Lord in deep desperation. By God's grace, I have started the journey of learning this for myself and have seen the benefits and freedom it's been producing in my life. I have found that, when I grieve well, Jesus meets me in my pain and despair and speaks his love, affirmation, and comfort to the deep recesses of my soul.

As I thought about how to best write this journal and where to begin, I thought it best to not move chronologically through my life but rather begin in the order that I began to learn how to grieve. I am not sure there is a right or wrong way to go about this, but this makes the most sense to me. I love that God has worked so gently in this area of my life. I often relate this to the layers of an onion. God does not chop me to the core, but rather He gently peels back a layer and we go to that place and talk and process. This is helpful to realize things are not just once and done. Instead, it's an ongoing process of placing the details of my life into the hands of the One who loves me more than I could ever imagine. As I have come to know more and more the depths of the Father's love for me, the more I can go to the hurt and the pain while knowing He is with me. For years I had a lot of head knowledge about God's love, but I have now experienced His love in real and deep ways that I never knew possible. It's from this place that I write this journal.

As I think about my journey of learning to grieve, it really began as I experienced one of the most confusing, and at the time, hurtful situations. Michael and I were good friends with a couple, but there were some strange things that happened with the wife at times that consisted of manipulation and lies. We went to church together, and we were all in leadership at our church. Our church was coming alive to the gifts during this time. The wife evidenced the gift of prophecy and would often use it to shame people. She would also manipulate

people for information and then present it as having been discerned from the Lord. Our friends had some hard circumstances happen in their lives and the wife got very strange with me. At this time, I became pregnant with our fourth child, and God encountered me in a vision for the first time. There was a huge storm that woke me up with lots of lightening. I was laying in bed around 3:00am just watching the sky light up every few minutes. Our youngest at the time, Carter, came into our room and stood near our bed. I scooped him up in my arms and held him close and could tell he had come in because he was afraid. As I held him close, I felt as if I heard God's voice saying, "This is how it is with you. Carter could have stayed in his own room alone and afraid or he could come to you. You would never ever turn him away. You will always scoop him up and hold him close. It is the same way with Me. When the storms come you can stay by yourself, alone, or you can come to Me and I will ways scoop you up into my arms and hold you tight." The very next night, 12 weeks into my pregnancy, I had a miscarriage. I awoke in the night right at that same time as the night before and went into the bathroom. I knew right away that I had lost the baby. I went back to our bedroom and told Michael. We called our doctor and were told to come to the hospital in the morning. We decided to get more rest until then and laid in bed. Immediately, I had that beautiful picture from the night before coming to mind and God spoke again. He said, "Brooke I am here with you. I am holding you right now. Rest in my arms." And I did. I was now walking through the pain of loss for myself and our family.

During this season of grief for me, that other woman seemed to want to be back in relationship with me and she almost seemed glad that I had something painful of my own to deal with. I recieved her comfort, but it was mixed again with lies, inconsistencies and gossip with other women, which was so strange and hurtful. The entire time I was in this journey, I tried to protect other women and the church and had no framework to process pain, so I continued to stuff this hurtful relationship. I had tried to address things with her alone, but nothing seemed to help, and things just seemed to get worse. Michael and I talked, and we decided to get together with both her and her husband as he had been Michael's best friend growing up and the four of us had been close before. The talk seemed to go well as we shared our hearts and concerns. We owned our failures and tired to reconcile. There was agreement in what was said, apologies were made, forgiveness was given and received, and we left on good terms. But then things got way worse. She turned things around again and made accusations against us and other people. She twisted up the stories so many ways that it was difficult to discern much of anything. We were dumbfounded. At that point, I really came to the end of myself and had nowhere else to go but Jesus. I remember two very distinct and powerful ways that God showed up during this time of pain and loss. One day, I was grieving and not sure what to do and God gave me this vivid picture in my mind's eye of me sitting on the hillside across the street from their house. I had my hands around my knees and Jesus

was sitting next to me in the same position and He spoke to me. He knew I was just waiting for things to change and that He was waiting with me. However long it would take, he would sit by my side. It was so healing. The second encounter I had was when I found out that she signed up to teach a Sunday school class on reconciliation. I was livid and so confused. I just could not believe that she would do that considering the number of broken relationships that she had. I was so annoyed with myself for letting this get to me and felt so frustrated with the thought that I had already dealt with this, so why did it hurt so much? I went for a run, which I have found to be a place that God meets me and that I hear His voice me clearly. I was worshipping during the run and, when I got home, I sat on the step of my house and began to cry to God about this. He gave me a vision of a wound. In this vision I pictured a large gaping wound that needed to be healed. I felt I had dealt with this pain so many times and that I should be done. God showed me that this was a large wound and I was trying to put a band aid into the middle of it. He told me that I needed to bring the wound to him, my Great Physician, and that He would put His healing balm on that wound and wrap it. For as long as it was open and tender, this would need to be done a few times a day. As it healed, that would become less and less, but I needed to go through the process. He also spoke that there would be things that would rip this wound back open because it is a tender place and, when that happened, I needed to bring it back to Him and start over again, but it would not be as big each time. He also said there would be a scar at that place in the end , and it would never fully go away, but that it would be ok.

In 2017, I believe God protected the church movement and even me specially by moving this couple away from our area. Michael and I had been so private about all of this that we went to counseling for about four sessions. We spent each session mostly recalling all the strangeness of what happened over the years and recalling what we had suppressed. We would laugh as we would finish each week and realize how much we had pushed away. We processed together and with the counselor, and it was helpful to hear that we were not crazy. The counselor gave us an analogy that was so helpful. She said that it seemed like this couple was on a stage and most people were in the audience, only seeing the show of their lives that looked great. Michael and I were standing in the wings off stage and got to see all of the chaos and mess, and were left with the tension of being in relationship with people only seeing the show. It made sense, and this was another tool in grieving and healing the loss of this close friendship. I have also been able to deal with the lies the enemy wanted me to believe that I cannot be a friend, that something was wrong with me or even that I am the crazy one. All of these lies needed acknowledgment and the truth to heal the pain.

The next big grief I dealt with was with a couple that I was helping to sell a home and purchase another one. I'm a real estate agent, and this couple went to our church. The wife was a friend of mine, but also connected with the woman who had hurt me so much. I met with them but found that their credit was not in good shape, so I helped them get credit restoration to be able to proceed. I am clear that I never talk to other people about these things as I know they can be embarrassing and painful. After a few months they were ready to proceed. Staging was a challenge because they had four kids and their stuff was everywhere, so it took a lot to get it ready. Even when I went to get pictures, it took a few hours to clean and rearrange. The woman told my sister-in-law that I did nothing. It was very strange. I sold their home in a few days and helped them begin the process of purchasing another home. The morning of closing for their house was a mess. My assistant and I learned that the house was very dirty and not in acceptable condition for the buyers, so we cleaned the house they were selling before the final walk through. At the closing, the wife became hysterical at the mortgage numbers. I called their lender, and he came to the closing. It was all the same numbers they had signed all along, but she was convinced it was not. We had to remove the sellers from the room and work through the issue. She was crying because they would be homeless if they didn't buy the new house and she felt forced to move ahead. I have nothing to do with anything related to the mortgage, but she was most mad at me for what she felt were deceptions and misinformation related to their mortgage. They closed and went to leave, and I handed the husband their gift. I went back again to their first house to clean some more and remove a truckload of trash that they had left in the house. I was so hurt that, not only could she not see I was going above and beyond, but that she was mad at me. I asked the Lord what I should do because I wanted to try to fix it and I felt like He said to wait. Two days later, I was with my sister-in-law who brings the subject of their home sale up to me and shows me a text she got from this woman.

This is the text: "What I will say is when Craig and I voiced concerns with Brooke Witterman. We should have walked away from her then. You must trust that the Brooke we saw was not the Brooke you know. She does not give a shit about us and single handedly set us up to get fucked. I am sure that sounds harsh and crazy to you Rachel. It is not. There were a million red flags from the get-go, and we trusted that she would have our best interest in mind. She really screwed up. Bad. And who pays, us. I have actually never had so much anger towards someone. I am giving myself the weekend to stay angry. Then moving on. We have not slept in 2 days because of being so physically worked up over what she did to us. We have sought legal council and other real estate council, and all have confirmed she screwed us, and there is nothing we can do. She is not like you, or Mark, or Michael. She is not a Witterman. She is evil."

This was so painful, and I realized the enemy was going for my weak spot which is what people think of me. I had no choice but to grieve and I had to do it immediately. I had learned in the previous year the process of forgiving mostly through a random article on forgiveness written by Rob Reimer. I knew nothing about Rob at the time, but the article made so much sense and I must have read it 100 times and used it in the situation of my friendship gone bad. He taught the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation and that forgives is unilateral and reconciliation is bilateral. He talked about doing this even if you do not mean it, that the feelings will come again, and he shared that we need to bless them. As this came to mind, I first shared this pain with some close and trusted people and then I started forgiving, releasing, and blessing. I, like Rob said, did not mean a word of it at first, but God did begin to change my heart.

The next grief that I walked through was with three of the closest couples in my life leaving our church. Our church began to come alive to the role and work of you Holy Spirit. We began to dig deep into seeking after the manifest presence of God in our lives. Our heart as all this began was to bring people along with us. One couple, Amy and Mike, who we had been in each other's weddings and raised our kids together, felt they could not continue at the church. They said that they just felt they could not bring people to the church because of how it looked. Michael and I felt like we had never seen anything so beautiful. So many broken people were coming to faith and being changed by the power of the Gospel. As the church was changing, we had become a place of refuge for those people that often no one else wants, and they often come with very messy lives and look a little different from who has been drawn to the church in the past. For Michael and I, this is the most exciting thing we have ever experienced in the church as the Gospel is radically changing lives. People are coming to faith almost each week from some of the darkest and most broken and unexpected places. It is so hard for us to reconcile that, as this is happening, some of our closest friends (as well as others) are leaving. We had lunch with them and they seemed receptive to talking more. When I called Amy a few days later to check in, she told me they were leaving. The other couple that left was Michael's brother and his wife. This was very painful. They had some questions as well and we went and met with them. We talked about what the gifts looked like in our lives and in the lives of our kids. They seemed to be tracking. We invited them to come to our missional community again and they also seemed receptive. That Sunday they did not come to church. We reached out in a text to ask if they were okay and Michael's brother texted to say that they were not coming back. It was a short and harsh message, and they never did come back.

As I began to grieve these losses, the Lord has shown me that the decisions that Michael and I are making to stay firm in this calling are decisions for our core family unit and for the generations to come. We have done

church for a long time where we have often seen our theology far outpacing our practice. As I considered my feelings through this situation, I was hurt at the beginning and then angry and then confused. In the beginning, I wanted to control the situation and bring it to a resolution. As I have sat with the Lord, I have been challenged to allow the Lord to change my heart. The Lord showed me “in the quiet place and the dark night of the soul” that He is bigger than those words and as He is in the movement that is happening. I came across this passage in Acts 5:34, 38-39:

But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while...Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”

These passages calmed my concerns and just gave me a confidence that God was so much bigger. God has been healing my heart in His presence and I feel that I don't have to try to control or change this situation, but I just need to keep running after God with all my heart and leading our kids and those God brings into our lives in the same way. I have seen that as my heart is set and filled with mission, the pain of this conflict is fading away and a love and compassion for these couples is beginning to well in my heart, which is a miracle and so freeing.

The next time of grieving came a few months after these couples left our church and I had breakfast with a woman named Deb who had been a mentor to me for over 10 years. We sat down to have breakfast and she brought up the conversation of people leaving our church. I had avoided this topic with her for a while. Amy and Mike were now going to her church and Rachel, my sister-in-law, was connected to her from years ago through her daughter. As I began to carefully share the situation, I realized that she knew things from someone else. She began to tell me that Rachel had come to her and shared that we were using a curriculum from Bethel Church in CA for the kids and all the things that this author believed that were crazy. I could tell Deb was abhorred that we would be using that as she is a strong Calvinist and believes the gifts has ceased. I could tell this conversation was not going to a good place. We sat there and with tears she said I hope this does not change our relationship and that we just “need to stick to the Word and not our experiences.” We cried and decided to continue to meet but I knew in my heart there was a change. I was angry with Rachel for sharing with Deb and had to grieve. I asked the Lord to meet me in my pain and tell me what I should do. God has given me forgiveness for Deb and a passion to continue in relationship that one day she could come to new

places of believing in the Holy Spirit and the gifts. I have also walked through forgiving Rachel and have had to allow God over and over to well up love and compassion for her as well.

The next thing I needed to grieve was a situation that came up that same summer with my older brother, Andrew. He is my only sibling, and we have been close over the years. Each summer we vacation with Andrew's family and with our parents. In the summer of 2016, we were in Deep Creek, MD, and I got upset about something and reacted. I had restrained myself for most of my life and finally broke and confronted his selfishness. It was not received well. In the end, I apologized for getting so upset, and I realized that the presenting problem is not always the root issue. Later that night, I pulled Andrew outside to talk and shared my heart again and repeated that I was sorry. Things were left with the awkward tension between us.

I came home and did not know what to do. I had now officially lost some of the closest relationships in my life, and the enemy was working hard to destroy me. Michael and I met with two other couples, and I shared what had happened and they prayed over me. As we prayed, we invited Jesus to surface a memory. The memory that came to mind was from about 10 years earlier, and I had not thought about it for years. I was a vivid memory of my dad and brother meeting with Michael and I at the office of our home to let us know that Andy was going to be taking over my dad's company. They wanted to tell us in person, but also asked if we wanted to be a part of the business. We asked what this would look like, and they said that I could maybe be a salesperson and that I would be working for Andy. For us, it was quite easy to decide that it would not make sense to leave for a job that was just working for Andy and him being the company owner. Over the years, I felt jealousy and resentment, at times, at the wealth that Andy had and the company that he was given. In this memory that God brought to mind, He spoke to my heart that He wanted us in Aliquippa. He said that it was not about the money but that His plan was so much richer in what He wanted to do for us and through us. This past Thanksgiving, I felt led as a part of my healing process to reach out to Andy. I had been away on a girl's weekend for work at the same place we had been on vacation those years back and had that blow up. I felt like God was wanting me to grieve some more of what had been lost. During that weekend, I bought Andy a gift at a local artisan shop and drafted a letter to share my heart with him. I wrote about how much I loved him and wanted things to be restored and asked him to forgive me for the anger and bitterness that I had held toward him in that area. I shared the story of the memory from our house of the business going to him and what God had confirmed and done to reveal and heal. I shared how I have come to not only know the love of the Father for me, but how I have experienced God's love for me and how that has healed and changed my life. I gave him the gift and the letter, and he responded a few days later with, "Thank you for the letter. I am not feeling

equipped or ready to respond right now. I do love you and your words mean a lot. Thank you.” I felt a peace that I had obeyed what I had been prompted to do and that the results were not up to me. We saw each other a few times and talked, but nothing came up. In March of 2020, Andy, his wife, Heather, and I were talking and he brought up the letter and wanted to know what I meant about the time they came to our house and the business conversation and what I had been upset about. I told him it was hurtful to me that in that conversation I was only offered the opportunity to come and work for him and that for Michael and I it was a clear decision not to move. He was confused at first but then realized that how it had been presented to us was not what my dad’s heart and intentions were. He said that my dad’s heart was to offer the company to both of us together, but because Andy was already working there, he would be the President and they would find a role for us but that he intended co-ownership. I let him know that the conversation never communicated that at all. He admitted that he did not want us to be a part of the company as he felt in his heart that he deserved it, but that he could see how hurtful that would be. I was able to tell him that my heart had been healed. I felt it was dad’s choice of how to handle the disbursement of his company. This conversation led me to have a conversation with my parents. This was immeasurably more than I ever could have asked or imagined. I had already been healed so much and had released that situation to the Lord and now He brought it full circle to show me that my dad’s intention was for both Andy and I to have things equally even though it had not been communicated that way all those years ago. I love how God worked to show me my dad’s heart even though my healing had happened.

I am now learning that my emotions lead me to areas that God wants to heal. This really is new for me because I spent most of my life stuffing emotions and pain, which makes it hard for me to identify my emotions at times. As I have been going through counseling at ATS, Kathrine will often ask me, “What were you feeling?” or “How did that make you feel?” I have found that this is hard for me to identify because it is such a new experience to attach feelings to events of my life.

This summer I saw this play out in a beautiful way. We had some family coming to stay at our house for a few days. I felt anger and annoyance because they like having access to our stuff, but they don’t want to have a relationship. As I pressed into this with the Lord, I was hearing “rejection.” I began to let God surface what rejection this was and where this began. God recalled a time in junior high when our church went through a major split and things began to unravel at the church. The children’s pastor had an affair with a girl in the youth group and the senior pastor was embezzling money. My dad, who was the head elder and president of the school board, was the one who brought the embezzlement to the attention of the other elders. Between these two

things, the affair and embezzlement, the church and school began to decline. In the next year, our lives were radically turned upside down. Then, over half the people left the school and the church, including our family. I was going into my sophomore year and my brother was entering his junior year. It has hard for my brother and I to start over with both a new church and a new school.

As I was processing this memory, I called a friend and told her what was going on and asked her to pray with me. We began with the pain of the church and school which I had never grieved before. I forgave the pastor and his daughter and everyone that God recalled. God showed me the lie that I had attached to that pain was that I was not going to let people get too close to me so that if or when they leave it will not hurt. I could see how I held people away from me. I then asked God to continue showing me places over the years where rejection happened and went through forgiving, releasing and then blessing each of these people. In the end, I really think the situation with the family at our home was not a big deal. It ended up leading me to see something was off in myself and, instead of stuffing the emotions, I actually allowed the emotions to lead me to the healing that God wanted to do in my life.

Just last week, I was sitting in my living room and God recalled an incident that had happened with my mom shortly after our second child was born. She put me in an awkward and hurtful situation that made me feel like she cared about herself more than me, but my grandparents had stepped in and showed kindness. Now, years later, as this memory came to mind and I processed it with Jesus, I realized that how my mom treated me was not okay. I knew in my heart that I didn't do anything wrong. I cried as this all came together in my mind. I forgave my mom for how this was handled. I cried some more. I felt such joy at the role my grandparents played in my life and my grandmother always loving me so well and being so patient with me. I blessed those thoughts of her as she has died this summer.

I know there are so many more layers that God wants to reveal to heal. I am so thankful for how gentle God has been in the process with me. His pursuit of my healing and freedom is amazing, and I am so grateful. I can see how, in my healing journey, God has met me in visions, in His Word and His speaking directly to my heart. I never knew I could experience such joy. As I am writing this, I am reflecting about the Pain Joy Continuum and have now been able to see that I have been dealing with the pain and grief of my past and God has been restoring my joy. This is so amazing for me to experience, and I cannot fully comprehend the connection, but I know it to be true in my own life. I desire that this grief journal I am turning in for this class is just the beginning of a larger grief journal that will continue over the next weeks, months and years as I trust God with my pain

and I sit with Jesus to process my hurt. I know this process has and will continue to lead me to new levels of depth in my intimacy with God the Father, and I am so excited to see what that continues to look like in the years to come.