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Grief Journal My Progress in the Process¹

In all honesty, this journal was not easy to write not because I am *all that and a bag of chips*, but because I could not get passed the title. Grief seemed like such deep, enormously emotional word and at first did not seem to apply to any of my current thoughts or emotions that I am experiencing. I have been through so much in my life and have been delivered, redeemed, covered, and loved by the LORD through them all that the word grief was not resonating with me. If I were to go into details of my various life experiences and encounters it would take more than this journal and probably the world's biggest cup of coffee to have this conversation. However, over the weeks, I talked the LORD (which I do all the time anyway) and we talked about several things. These things were not so much things that I did or did not grieve, but rather they are things that I acknowledge that cannot be undone. Things that I will never have. From that perspective, I was able to come to terms with the word *grief* and understand how it applies to me.

So where do I start? Since you said this is not a traditional paper and just to write, I am taking you at your word. The following is not written in the order of importance/significance. It's in the order that each came to me.

One thing that I have accepted and know that will not be - is my physical looks. I am not and will be pretty of very attractive. That does not mean that I am bemoaning this fact, or I do not get dressed up, wear make-up etc. It's a fact that I am now more comfortable with and no longer expect it to change. For as long as I can remember, especially if I get "dressed up," I have an image in my head of what I should look like. Then when I look in the mirror and the reflection does not match. When I was growing up, I remember asking GOD to make me pretty, not forever, just long enough for people to get to know me and then HE can turn back to looking like I look. I figured if I were pretty, people would get to know me, like me so that when I turned back they would still be my friend. I may be

¹This subheading came as a result of my conversations with the LORD about my journey and what to write for this paper. Please be aware that I plan to submit a copyright application for this subheading. I do not know how or where else it will be used, only that it will be.

getting ahead of myself in reference something else I will write about shortly, but I never felt pretty. I do not recall anyone telling me I was pretty or cute or anything like it. What I rationally understood much later as an adult was that my mother was raised in a home where compliments were not given. I believe because the thought was that if you paid someone a compliment it would make them prideful or conceited. Additionally, my mom had and still has a lot of shame and low esteem issues. I am not sure that she knows how to very well. My whole life I was different from others, I was too tall or too fat or just too..... The interesting thing about being too fat is that I was really a skinny child. And not that we ever talked about it (being honest about issues does not run in my family, unless the conversation is about someone else's issue, but I do not want to digress too far). But one of the things that the LORD revealed to me later in my adulthood was what my mother did was based upon her own insecurities and her upbringing (my mother is from the Barbados, WI and from the Brewster family where there seems to be a judgement and competition). As I started to say, I was a skinny child. I believe that it affected my mother because she saw it as a personal failure that she could not feed/support me. If that were true, then it also meant that she was not a good mother. What is important to note here, which I will detail later, is that my mom was a single parent, who was ostracized from her family because of that and a few other things my grandmother and other elders did not approve of. I remember, my mother giving me vitamins, elixirs, home treatments to make increase my appetite. (What I should point out here is that I was a child. I was less than six years old.) Well, she was successful. How do I know this? Because she started calling me "greedy guts." Now to my mom, this was her way of "joking," but to me it was something else. This was exasperated by the idea that we were poor. I joke (and it is a joke because it does not bother me), we were poor, and I knew it! (Some people make references to their poverty and tell happy poor stories and how they really did not really feel poor. No, we were poor, and I did not it.) I did not have a lot of clothes and what I had was cheaply made. So, the image of an ever-gaining weight, too tall, poorly dressed child, I guess stayed with me. I never liked taking photos. I hate and hated the way I looked. I think part of it goes back to what I said in the beginning that I had a way in my head that I thought I looked once I dressed up, but a photo would show the "real" me. And it was a permanent reminder. There are decades in my life where there are no photographs of me. What also did not help was there were times when people would tell me that I looked just like *So and So*. For them it was a compliment, for me, not so much. I did not think *So and So* was attractive. It only helped to cement an unattractive image in my head.

I am trying to be less fixated now about that because I promised the LORD that I would come to terms with and respect how HE made me. To that end, I no longer run from cameras, I do kind of sort of walk quickly away (LOL). Now, let me say this. There have been a few photos of me that I have actually liked and a few that did not make me nauseous. As I became more secure in my relationship with the LORD and started receiving my validation through and because of JESUS, things started and continue to get better. I was just thinking the other day how irrational my viewpoint was. How can I explain it. If I have a picture of me at 15 where I am a few pounds too heavy, another at 25 where I weigh even more and so on. If I were truly a fat, overweight person in each photo then I would be morbidly obese now! No, it meant to someone else (sometimes me, I was too fat, too tall too something). How was I judging too fat??? No, in actuality was I little overweight, yes, but if I thought I was too fat at 150 lbs. How could I have the same thought at 180 lbs.? 150 lbs. is 30 lbs. less than 180!! Now, I can laugh. However, the reality is that I will never be pretty. Especially now, I am getting older and I look it. Because of my current financial situation, I have not been able to get the dental care necessary. As a result, over the years, I have lost some teeth and need gum work. It is only through the healing power of Jesus that my gums are not worse. I know I am fearfully and wonderfully made. I know that GOD loves me. I know that I am more than what is on the outside, but it is what it is. This has not been an easy realization to live out. I know it may not be the most horrific grief entry for you to read, but this coming to terms with my physical image is significant. I no longer have to agonize over what to wear, what should be hidden, covered etcetera. So that I am clear, I am learning to appreciate the way I look. I am trusting GOD for me to take more pictures. I am trusting GOD to continue to see me through HIS lens. Now when I look at my self in the mirror, I can look and not so much appreciate, but be okay with the reflection staring back. And having said it out loud and on paper only strengthens me.

With that said, what I also am coming to terms with is my mom. Again, this paper cannot reflect the all of this relationship. I love my mother. I am coming to terms that the mother that I needed growing up, is never going to be. I am not a child and she is not in her twenties. I am her first born. There are things about my mom that my siblings do not know. Ours is our very own unique relationship. Some things we have very briefly talked about, many we have not. My mother is consumed with guilt and shame over some of her choices. Regrettably, some of her early choices had catastrophic effects on me. What I am still growing in and working through

is because of those choices. I will never know the joy of having a childhood. I will never know or have have the opportunity to know how it feels for a child to be safe. Having listened to Pastor Walker's lecture, I am now inserting here that the six or seven things he mentioned that a child needs to grow emotionally, I experienced NONE as a child, as a young teen or adult. Not from my mom or my home life. It was quite the very opposite, in most cases. Let me say at the onset, I am no longer angry about my mom's inability to protect me that has been handled by the LORD and some long-ago counseling. But what I do grieve is the fact that I never had the mother that I needed and now that she is 91, I never will.

I grieve the loss of having a parent or not having a parent be one in every respect, not just providing food and a roof. I grieve the sense of loss, knowing that I never will. For reasons I will mention later, I was the adult even as a child. I had to figure out what to do about college. I had a merit scholarship that I never followed up on. There too many other things going on in my home. I wanted to go to a state college, but I did not. Why, because my mother did not want me to leave. She counted on me. I was the voice; the- *fill in the blank* - I do not know what the word is in the family. If something came in the mail that looked like bad news or looked official, I was the one that opened, read it, and would tell/suggest what my mother should do. In the time of telegrams, I remember one came to the house, my mother waited for me to come home from school to open it. If a question had to be asked at a doctor's office or in the emergency room, it was generally me that I asked.

For most of my childhood into young adulthood, I had to form coping mechanisms. Again, there are not enough pages, time, or desire to go through the decades of history. As I have been writing this, I am grateful to be alive. My mother never married my father. Even the short story is too complex. But my father was involved with his high school sweetheart who dumped him for his best friend when he went off to fight in the Korean Conflict. (An aside, he was the only survivor of an attacked that he only survived because he was literally buried under the dead bodies of his comrades. So, suffice it to say, he came back with issues! He also came back with the nickname "Lucky," which knowing parts of his life, "Lucky" was a name that made no sense. I never understood it. It was not until a few years ago that I found out about how he survived in Korea.) Anyway, this along with the fact that the money he was sending home every month for my grandmother to save was given to his older brother to attend college. So, he came back with what we now know as PTSD. He meets my mom, (another long story), he's happy, she's happy. Apparently, his old high school girlfriend isn't and decides she wants him back. My mother decided

pregnancy was her best strategy (I found out in my 30's the pregnancy was intentional to "keep" him). Fast forward, his ex-girlfriend wins. But my mom did not realize it. They were living together (scandalous for the 50's , scandalous for my mom's family), my father had brought her an engagement ring, we were going to move to a different borough, my mom co-signed applications to get new appliances, blah blah blah. Fast forward, he did not come with us, he went to his ex-girlfriend, my mom and I were alone (without new appliances -they may have gone to Muriel, but my mom paid for them - her check was garnished!). I had no dad, although I was only three I recall the move and the longing for a dad. (Others had one). Fast forward, my mom's choice in partners did not improve. She married my stepfather which for me started an eight-year hell of my mom being beaten on a regular basis, my being beaten, molested, abused which eventually escalated to full blown rape at fourteen. My mom had a clue, but either chose to ignore it or more than likely since she was a battered spouse was afraid to confront him. I think the rape was what did it for her. To say we, probably more me, lived in a constant state of terror is an understatement.

Long story short, I developed all kinds of coping mechanisms, some mentally healthier than others. In many ways, I knew I had no clue. I was smart, but was insecure in my knowledge. (Being smart did not help me with some family members and others). One of the downsides of all of this was that I was not secure about me. Perhaps that is why for decades I thought others, almost anyone else was smarter than me and knew more than I did. Or the other extreme, those times that I thought I knew because I explored, researched, thought through what I thought I needed to know. Or those times when based upon previous experiences directly with a specific person or experience that I already knew the outcome. (However, this last one is probably more of a defense mechanism. By deciding the account of an experience or interaction with someone beforehand, I was able to control my world. This meant, any number of destructive and self-destructive behaviors, anything from being too docile and having not opinion to being incredibly sarcastic and condescending. This was probably a combination of knowing that I was *crazy as all get out*, knowing that my choices were not always successful or healthy.

There were brief moments and times that were okay. I had a great aunt in Boston that loved me, and I would spend some summers with her. It would take another journal to write about what happened when I was shipped off to my dad's who shipped me off to literally one his crazy relatives whose idea of discipline was a cat of nine tails. But again, I digress, and again. I am all right. I can talk about these incidences

without the terror, visceral emotions. Trust me GOD is a healer!!!!!!!!!!!!!! This is a long way to get to get to say. I will never know or have the innocence of childhood and that is sad. Another long story that I will make short, I remember one year when the LORD was showing me that HE was Father. HE did so many things to help me adjust and grow. I am so grateful. As for my mom, one of the many critical things that has helped me, even as I now speak about the loss of trust and childhood, is how the LORD has healed so many areas of our relationship. Decades ago, each in a separate occasion, HE pointed out to me: 1) It was my mom who told me all about Jesus, taught me the 23rd Psalm and the Lord's Prayer. It was because of her, I was able to recognize and accept Jesus as my Savior at the age of about four. And it was Christ in me, the hope of glory that help me get through it all (even when I did not know it or understand anything) and 2) as HE was repairing our relationship and HE still has to remind me now again, my mom is not just my mom. She is my sister in Christ. And as such, if I am willing to be patient, and "put up with things" from my sisters in Christ then stop seeing my mom as my mom - see her washed in the blood, forgiven and your sister.

Just to sort of wrap this up, intertwined with my mom is the sense of loss of innocence, trust, and the looming thought of betrayal. Of course, trust is built on knowing a person/people and you do not bear your soul to just anyone. But for me, not with everyone, but for the most part is why is this person interested in me? Do they want to hear what I am saying? What do they want from me? In the brokenness of my early years, I trusted based upon emotions that were fractured and maldeveloped from my childhood. I was so needy in so many ways. So, in my life and especially in my early in my adulthood, if you should any interest in me, I was your friend. As I trust you know that all things are not 100% all of the time. So, it was not every person in every situation. But the underlying inability to make emotionally sound choices was always there. For so many decades, I successfully compartmentalized my life. You know the mask exercise that we do in Intro to Personal Formation? Well for a large part of my life, my masks had masks all of which were hidden behind a broad mask.

One of the many reasons that I love the LORD and am so strong in my faith is because the only reason that I am literally still here, functioning, alive and speaking English is because of the love of GOD. It is only because of Him by direct experience (The Word, prayer, inner witness), the seemingly happenstances that were all GOD (Proverbs 16:33 AMPC), the people that He put in my life to either at the exact right time and the people that HE has in my life who are in varying degrees part of my inner circle. Although even now when I meet someone who becomes important to me, I

have to address the thoughts of me not living up to their expectations, ticking them off, they no longer thinking that I am capable or smart. The difference now is those thoughts no longer send me in a panic, I do not act upon them. For decades, when those thoughts would occur, I would live in terror. If they didn't call, terror. If I had an opinion that differed, either I wouldn't express it, dialed it down, et cetera. At worst, I would just act like I agreed with them. Now, I recognize what the thoughts are thoughts. I remind myself that those thoughts are not my thoughts and even if they are - I am not my thoughts. More importantly, I no longer give anyone that much power to define, validate or judge me.

What you are hearing now is a decades long journey. A journey of crying out to the LORD. A journey of failing miserably over and over again and learning over a period of time, each time - that its okay to fail, but it is more important to get up. It is a journey of being completely transparent before GOD. There is so much to say about this ongoing journey. I remember about 20 -25 years ago; I had a horrible day at work (another long story). I remember keeping it in all in until I could get home. I remember getting home and standing by my dresser. Holy Spirit said to me (internally), something like "You allow just enough to stop the pain, but not to be healed." Holy Spirit was absolutely right. I couldn't see healing, I just wanted not to be living in anger, terror, fear, anxiety, It took me years to get from there to lying on the floor of my bedroom one Sunday afternoon crying out with gut wrenching cries, "I want to change." I cannot begin to write or articulate all of the ways or things that occurred, there have been so many. I have come to know that there was a small part of my fear was what if GOD for whatever reason wouldn't or what if I was misinterpreting the scriptures and my experiences and the GOD that I am serving wasn't all what I thought. Until I could let GOD help me let go of that - I would not be able to believe, trust and say to GOD - I trust YOU with me.

I am grateful for almost every single thing in my life. I say almost, because sometimes I forget something and then when I remember, I thank GOD. It is not a pitiful woe is me, it is just clear flat-out LORD I KNOW, I have successfully proven I cannot nor do I want to do anything without you. And the time that I do, I recognize it immediately and ask HIM 1) to forgive me 2)thank HIM for HIS mercy and 3) what do I do now. One of the greater lessons about the process that I learned and have to stand firm in is the understanding that it is not if, GOD will do it, but when. Because I am walking in the submission of "Lord, I trust YOU with me. It took sooooooooooooo long to know that was a place I had to get to and the work for me to stay there. Ultimately, the only ONE that I can have my safety,

validation, all the thing the Pastor Kelvin spoke about is through my reconciliations with GOD through my relationship with Jesus Christ and sensitivity to HOLY SPIRIT. Ultimately, even though my trust of people will never be pure and childlike, that shipped has long sailed and the bridge has been torched (primarily because I will never be a child again). And even though, I can experience all these things or will have the opportunity to possibly have or feel these things as an adult. I WILL NEVER HAVE A CHILDHOOD. I WILL NEVER KNOW WHAT IT MEANS OR FEEL LIKE TO HAVE THAT FREEDOM, TO BE CAREFREE, TO DEPEND UPON ADULT PARENTS. I WILL NEVER, NEVER, NEVER, EVER HAVE IT. As sad as that is, it is the reality of my life and nothing will change that. But what has changed is knowing that the visceral pain of not ever having that has been taken away. The whole idea that I am writing this, and tears are streaming down my face, they are just tears. I am not sobbing controllably (though I have done that at times in the past). It's just the acknowledgement that it will never happen, it's a time gone, but I am here and for the most part much better than I was and getting better all the time because of JESUS. And again, with such a rock solid knowing:

ABBA I TRUST YOU WITH ME!
and together
WE PROGRESS IN MY PROCESS!

