

Growing up, I had always expected myself to be married by the age of twenty-three and by twenty-five I thought I would be raising a family. Maybe it is due to growing up in a broken family, I envisioned myself to create a perfect one. Fast forward to today, I have ended a six year relationship and am not even close to being married even at the age of twenty-five. Growing up without a father meant a lot of things to me and my family. I was bullied and judged for many things that I now know caused trauma for me emotionally and mentally. However, I actually turned out a lot better than I expected to and am proud to say that I am truly searching for my individual identity and walking this spiritual journey one day at a time.

Originally, I thought that my grief journal would be about my biological father and how my parents' divorce affected me in the long run. However, there were certain events in my life that seemed more drastic and traumatising than the divorce of my own parents. In this grief journal, I will be talking about my first and last boyfriend and how the ending of my relationship with him made me more secure with my relationship with the Lord. Also, I will be discussing how the end of that relationship has opened my eyes to the many ways that God held onto me during those years.

I had never had a boyfriend before until I met my ex at church in college. I was a sophomore looking for a college church to attend because going back home every weekend became redundant and exhausting. During a Tuesday worship service on campus, I ended up making friends with a few people who all went to the same church. They invited me to their Sunday worship and suggested I see how I like it there. Sunday rolled around and I ended up going to the church that my new friends suggested. I was a little late going because the bus was delayed so I quietly entered, not expecting much. As soon as I entered, I saw my ex playing the electric guitar on the stage. The light was falling from the ceiling directly at him, shining on him

as he showcased the solo that he had prepared for that day. That's when I knew that I had to get to know him more. At the time, I really thought that it was love at first sight.

I spent one week wooing him, taking him out to fancy dinners and buying him gifts to try to win him over. That should have been the first red flag for me, now I know that men who play hard to get are not worth a single second of my time. After trying my best to get him to like me, I asked him out. Long story short, we ended up dating in the year of 2015 and lasted until up to a few months ago. Our six year relationship was never for a second peaceful and the constant anxiety that I had truly ate me alive.

For me, I feel like the biggest regret that I have is the time and money I spent on this one human being. It actually never occurred to me that this feeling of constant self consciousness was abnormal. I always thought that it was something that all couples go through. However, I am thankful and grateful for my ex because he was there for me through very difficult times. Reflecting on these times made me realize that God had sent him to me for a reason, maybe just not as a life partner.

Instead of bad mouthing my ex about all of the things that he had triggered for me, I thought I would discuss some of the experiences that I went through that he had helped me recover from and how God was there in our presence. The very first thing that I had to learn to grieve about was my experience with various eating disorders. Around the time my father had left our family (age 9), I had started losing self control of my eating habits. I started to turn to food to fill the void that I had felt inside of my heart. I was never allowed to join any physical activity classes or after school activity programs because my mother did not have the funds and financial capabilities. Therefore, I was eating without releasing energy which I should have been through physical activity. Due to the increase of my calorie intake, I started to gain a lot of

weight. Then, in middle school, I was bullied for it for years. It started with name calling then to some physical abuse. At the time, I did not label it as being bullied because I always thought that being bullied should have been more dramatic like it was in movies. It wasn't until college that I decided I wanted to create a change in my life and make myself beautiful.

I started to exercise everyday and ate less and less. At one point in my freshman year of college, I was eating at most three hundred calories a day and was working out for six hours daily. I had lost more than half of my starting body weight and ended up being addicted to my physical image. My addiction to working out and restricting my diet continued throughout the early years of my relationship with my ex. This went on for years and it wasn't until my junior year in college that things started to change.

I was studying abroad in the summer of 2017 in England. My routine consisted of going to classes in the morning and then going to the gym until late at night. I purchased salads to take photos of them to reassure my family that I was taking care of my health but would later throw out the salad after a good picture. I was an undiagnosed anorexic, bulimic, and struggled with obsessive compulsive eating disorder. My ex at the time was still in New Jersey, spending his summer at home with his friends and family. However, after realizing how much I was struggling abroad by myself, he flew over right away and introduced me to the joy of food.

Everyday after my classes, he would take me to a restaurant and we would tour London and many other places. Every weekend, we would make a trip outside of my school campus and stay at luxurious hotels and stuff our faces with delicious foods and donuts. To this day, our stay in the UK was probably the most memorable time of my life. That is when I realized that my physical body is not the most important and that looks are not everything. Did this allow me to forgive all of the things that my ex had done? No, it did not. However, it did help me to accept

myself for who I am. Now, many pounds gained, I love myself for who I am and know that God created me for me and not my physical body. At the time, I did not think much about this event but now that I had reflected and grieved about our relationship, I understand that he was in my life for a specific reason. Although it is sad and heart breaking to know that he is not meant to be my husband, it is reassuring to know that he was there at that point in my life to allow me to love myself. To a certain extent, God was working through him to show me my worth and value.

Another aspect where I felt that God was really working through my ex was when I decided to teach in Korea after graduating from my University. In 2018, I had completed my Bachelor's education and decided to leave for Korea. I had never been to Korea since I immigrated to the USA at the age of five. As a permanent resident of the USA, I felt like it was time for me to explore my home country and after going through a difficult time with my eating disorders, I wanted to take the time to be away from my toxic environment and heal in Korea. Moving to Korea was probably one of the most difficult and biggest decisions that I had ever made. Without my ex, it would have been nearly impossible. Adjusting to the lifestyle and working as a teacher was something that I had to get used to. However, communication and other burdensome aspects that I had to deal with in Korea were things that my ex had helped me with.

My ex was there for me for every move and was always there whenever I had to face something major such as phone plan changes, internet installations, hiring cleaning services, and etc. Although to others, it may not seem like much, it was all new to me so having him by my side gave me a lot of strength. I expected my time in Korea to be very lonely and difficult but I realized that God had planned everything for me already. I was meant to have my ex in my life during that time because of all of the experiences that I went through for the past six years, living in Korea was one of them. It is a shame that my relationship with my ex had to come to an end

after moving back to America. However, I know that my decision to become closer with the Lord by taking this time to focus on my studies at ATS will be the most beneficial and life changing times. Even though our relationship came to a close, I still have great love for my ex since he was part of my life for so long. Ultimately, I respect him and truly believe that he was there so that God can physically show me fatherly love through my ex.

Growing up with divorced parents was definitely difficult for me because it made me feel less confident and unloved. Although I knew in my brain that God was there for me and that He loves me, it was difficult for me to feel that in my heart when everything around me was falling apart. Therefore, meeting my ex during college really helped me to build the confidence that I was missing and allowed me to feel true love. Finding myself through my relationship allowed me to find my identity and find my passion again. I know now how God sees me and how much God loves me. Therefore, I no longer feel the need to find validation with human relationships, especially romantic relationships. Being able to discern my identity from my ex was difficult because we had been together for so long and so many people associated me with my ex. Now, I am able to find myself and my own individual identity without being identified as so-and-so's girlfriend.

Throughout my relationship with my ex, I experienced many highs and many lows. The lows were really heartbreaking and traumatic for me, things that I will have to continue to reflect upon and learn to let go. However, the highs were amazing and it made me realize why he was meant to be in my life during that period of my life. Do I regret being with him for such an extended period of time? Slightly. However, I am happy to have had the experiences that I had with him because it made me find my own identity and understand my own worth. Ultimately,

God was there for me through him and I was able to receive the fatherly love that I had not been able to experience growing up.