

Grief is a powerful thing! All my life, I associated grief only with death, and the impact it had on my family and myself. I have never imagined that grief could be a present norm in my life. H. Havelock Ellis said, "The art of living lies in a fine mingling of letting go and holding on." In fact, the dichotomy of these two extremes presents an ever-present irony for me. That is, that letting go, for myself, has not always meant forgiveness, yet forgiveness does mean releasing a thing or person. As I now reflect on grief in my life, three significant experiences resonate: 1) My Grandfather's death; 2) My Archbishop's death and 3) The impact of my Stepfather's abuse towards my mother on my family. In this reflective journaling process, I hope to share how grief has led to a positive outcome for myself.

My Grandfather

James Lovett, was my maternal grandfather. He died in 1970, while I was at the very tender age of six (6) years old. I still remember him, dressed in his blue overalls, smoking either his cigar or pipe filled with cherry tobacco, and always working on or detailing his pristine white Cadillac car, in front of our family residence. Daddy, as my siblings and I called him, was my superhero. His voice and love for me will forever be etched in my heart and memory.

Daddy was the first and only paternal love that I can recall identifying with in my youth. I did know my biological father, but it was Daddy's fathering that I clearly remember. I remember him once telling me to go and play. The tone was somewhat harsh. I remember starting to cry and then Daddy consoled me. When I think about that moment, a big smile comes over my face. I knew Daddy loved me.

Life would suddenly change for my family. Daddy became sick. As a child, I really did not know why. All I remember is our last visit with Daddy, at St. John's Hospital in Brooklyn, NY, and seeing Daddy alive for the last time. I vividly recalled him dressed in his pajamas and a bathrobe. He hugged my sisters and I and told us that he loved us. The next day, Daddy died. I was devastated!

I remember the day of his funeral; it was jammed pack. Interestingly, when I looked at him in his casket, I thought I saw him in the same pajamas and house robe, that I last saw him in at the hospital. I

never understood that. Fifty-three (53) years later, it still feels like yesterday. For years I would have dreams of myself standing on Daddy's grave and hearing his voice coaching me into manhood. When I reached the age of twenty-one (21) years old, all the dreams stopped. The ironic thing about my grieving process over Daddy, I often believed that if Daddy was alive during the years of my Stepfather's abuse of my family, it would have all been prevented. The lesson learned for me from this grieving process is that I was love paternally from birth, though my biological father was absent.

Archbishop McKinley

This man was, in a real sense, was the continuation of my grandfather. He was the father I needed, and I was the son that he needed. He taught me about life, ministry, and business. He laid the foundation which helped me to forgive my stepfather. He helped me to identify my spiritual gifts and calling into ministry. He developed me as a leader, positioned me for succession, then suddenly he died.

For many years I could not cry, I had a job to do in continuing the legacy and the ministry. I dream of him regularly, to this very day. His voice in the dreams seemingly guides me in difficult times.

Archbishop McKinley's death caused continuous grief for me, at least for twelve (12) years. This was intensely wrapped up in my transitional period. My grief became compounded by a combination his family and church issues. However, I am happy to state that the greatest lesson I learned from this process of grief, is forgiveness. The more I forgave those who were involved in this grief process, I continued to recognize that I was released to continue forward. My problem, in this grief, was never with Archbishop McKinley, but the fact that his death caused me to grieve, due to others.

My Stepfather

From the day I first saw him at about four (4) years, or five (5) years of age, I knew that he was no good. His constant abuse, physical, mental, and emotional, of my mother, created a devastating impact on my family. I hated him, only until about seven (7) years ago. For many years, I would have flashbacks of

his abuse. I would often have to blink my eyes to deflect from the memory, both visually and mentally. I was saved, preaching and pastoring, but I was full of hate for my stepfather. He lived on Staten Island, and whenever I would go on to Staten Island, I could be on the island for any longer than 15 minutes, before I start feeling uncomfortable. I felt his presence. I once told him that I hated him!

The greatest lesson that I learned from this is, again, forgiveness, confession, and confrontation. The Lord, challenged me to contact him, confront him and confess my heart of anger, hatred, and regret towards him, and forgive him with a heart of sincerity. In that process, I was also challenged to thank him for his presence in my life. I did what was required of me, and I was released and freed of the hatred in my heart towards him. Three months later, he died. Today, I am free!

Grief without a process of appropriate engagement to heal is a life filled with continuous sorrow, mental, emotional, and physical pain, and ultimately, spiritual darkness. This grief journal was one of the best tools for me to reflect on how much a loving God has helped me to help myself.