ALLIANCE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

LEARNING EXPERIENCE 2: GRIEF JOURNAL

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INTRODUCTION

One of the exercises in DML801 was to prepare a grief journal containing unprocessed past disappointments, hurts and regrets to enable students to move into the season of ministry and life that God has next for them. The enclosed grief journal identifies significant moments from each decade of my life and presents reoccuring themes that served as the basis for group discussions and healing ministry during the DML801 module. This grief journal concludes with reflections on the processing of my grief and a statement about how processing has impacted on my life.

SIGNIFICANT MOMENTS

70's (0-9 years)

- Sexual abuse - Fondling by a trusted adult and a family member exposing themselves to me.
- When I was four, we moved away from my grandparents in Hamilton. My grandparents had been part of my primary caregiver group. This loss caused me not to have a lot of attachments.
- For the first four years of my life, I had always been cared for by my family. In Regina, mom worked, and dad went to school while working part-time; this necessitated my being in daycare. Daycare was a traumatic experience, and I spent most of the time crying. My earliest memory is of dad pulling up to the daycare in his electrical van and dropping me off at daycare, him walking away from me. Daycare heightened my feelings of abandonment and rejection.
- Moving five times by the time I was 5, I was constantly making and losing friends.
- There was a parade of foster children through my home as my parents were foster parents. Some of the children, like LJ, I became close very with and was very upset when they left.

80's (10-19 years)

- Rejection by girls I liked, especially CB, who rejected me repeatedly in grades 7 and 8.
- Criticism by friends' parents after getting kicked off the Quiz Team (dealt with previously).

- Friendship with Jordan, I wasn't loyal or caring but discarded him whenever another friend came along, following the same pattern I experienced with foster children and CB.
- Pre-marital sex and inappropriate sexual behaviour (dealt with previously).
- Jack's affair, my parent's silence and my aunt's involvement caused deep hurt in me. Jack was the man who led me to Christ, was my pastor and someone I looked up to for many years; I was also close friends with his children. For many years I felt like Jack's sin tainted my relationship with Jesus (dealt with previously).

90's (20-29 years)

- After graduating from Bible College, I watched as my friends were hired, but I was not. About a year after my graduation, a church began talking with us, and we had dinner with the senior pastor, but in the end, they rejected us, so I began pursuing other careers (dealt with previously).
- When one of my groomsmen got married, Britton and I were not invited even though it was in Regina.
- My groomsmen often joked with each other as they thought about marriage: "Don't do what Kirk did." Meaning do not have kids as quickly as Kirk and Britton did. Even though I was proud of our daughter Alix, their comments produced shame in me.
- We experienced a couple of miscarriages (Joshua and Samantha). I was not with Britton for Joshua's, neither physically nor emotionally. When Samantha was miscarried, I was supportive and caring for Britton but did not grieve the loss myself (dealt with previously).

00's (30-39 years)

- In my late 20s and through my 30s, I overworked, which caused me to miss out on experiences with our kids. While we took big vacations together, many photos from this period are of Britton and the kids doing things together while dad was at work (dealt with previously).
- Moving from Regina to Calgary meant we left behind our extended family and support system, which created challenges for us. For the first two years, we felt their absences deeply. However,

the eight years we lived in Calgary united the five of us as a solid and connected family group that benefits us today.

- The move from Ambrose to RockPointe was a great move that affirmed my gifting and calling. At the same time, the move meant the end of close relationships with colleagues (Greg Needham, Tory Schroeder, Chris Boelkhe) and the unfulfilled dream of helping them to build their new campus.
- Not being allowed to plant a site for RockPointe because the District didn't feel I was the right choice, even though Brent and Lorne supported me fully. I then felt forced out by the District and felt like we retreated to Regina. I feel like I left in disgrace and have been trying to prove myself ever since. Thankfully the relationships with my closest colleagues have continued (Brent, Lorne, Irene and Geoff).

10's (40-49 years)

- We moved away from Calgary and left Alix (oldest daughter) in college in Rosebud. Alix came home for the first summer but did not return home after that as she never felt like our home in Regina was her home. I felt rejected and disappointed that I had not instilled in her a desire to be with us.
- Alix and Conrad – moving in together and the revelations about their sexuality. Conrad revealed that they are non-binary and pan-sexual, and Alix has told us she is a queer female. I did not respond well to either, and while I have apologized, I feel like this hangs over my head. My relationship with Conrad is fragile; I feel on eggshells, although it does show some signs of getting better. While they are in a monogamous relationship, Alix and Conrad's relationship is not what I dreamed of for my daughter. My relationship with Conrad is not what I'd dreamed of for a person-in-law. The idea that they aren't going to get married bothers me. I dreamed of walking her down the aisle and having a close relationship with her spouse. While my daughter professes faith, she does not belong to a faith community or show many signs of having faith.

Conrad and Alix's perceived lack of faith made me feel like a failure as a father (dealt with previously).

- In 2014-15 Larry Hurst and I transitioned positions; I became the senior pastor, and he became the associate. Larry was meant to stay on staff for another two years but departed four months after the transition. While this cleared the path for me to establish a new pastoral team, it also raised questions amongst congregants about the transition. I felt rejected and abandoned.
- Living Hope had a Filipino congregation led by Barry Bruce and was not thriving. Barry resigned a month after Larry Hurst's departure. Members of the Filipino congregation convinced him to stay. I allowed him to rescind his resignation, and he stayed for two more months before he took most of the Filipino congregation and went to Glencairn Alliance Church to be their lead pastor. I tried to restart the Filipino congregation with a Filipino pastor, but the District would not let me because Glencairn was now the Filipino church. I felt betrayed and rejected. The wound has caused a deep rift between Barry and me and the two churches.
- Peter Ralph served as my Associate Pastor for three years before becoming the lead pastor of Kindersley Alliance Church. While I knew Peter needed to make this move, the loss of the friendship and how he resigned hurt. Peter and I have remained close friends, but it took significant work to overcome the rejection I felt.
- When we moved back to Regina in 2011, I became close friends with the pastor of Rosewood Alliance Church (the church I grew up in). Jerven and I had lunch regularly, prayed, learned, and travelled together. However, the relationship was not healthy. Over time I realized the friendship was not good for me and distanced myself from him. A year later, Jerven was accused of having inappropriate relationships with women in his church. The District suspended him while he was investigated but reported back he had one inappropriate conversation with a woman in his church, for which he repented, and no further discipline was required. I asked the District directly if there was anything to the accusations and was told there wasn't, so I supported Jerven and offered to help him be restored. A year later, five women came forward with the same story and proof of

grooming and clergy abuse. I was accused by some of the women at Rosewood of supporting Jerven's behaviour, even though I had no idea what was going on. When everything became public, a group of C&MA workers met with the women who had made the accusations. We intended to see how we could help and make amends for the denomination's handling of the situation. As a result, I was singled out by DEXCOM and reprimanded for getting involved, and my character was attacked. Two of my friends were on DEXCOM, and they did not defend me, speak up for me, or even question me about it. I felt embarrassed, betrayed and hurt.

- When our District Superintendent (DS) changed, I looked forward to a new and good working relationship with our as I had had with the previous 2 DSs. Bernie sent an email to all senior pastors saying he would meet with each of us to hear what God was doing in our church and our dreams. When it was Living Hope's time, Bernie walked in and said, "this is where I grew up; I know all about Living Hope" he did not recognize any of the changes that had taken place over the previous eight years or the contributions Living Hope, and I had made to the District. Instead of listening, Bernie told me that the other churches in the District felt we were "favoured" and that that would end. Bernie left without hearing anything about Living Hope or the dreams we had. I was disappointed and filled with shame.

20's (50+ years)

- In 2020, my son was married, and before that day, we were going to go on one final road trip together. The COVID lockdowns began the night of his engagement. I was too busy to enjoy our last summer together, and there was no last road trip because of COVID. I feel disappointed over the lost opportunity to be with Liam (dealt with previously).
- In 2021 one of my associates, Colin Turner, resigned without warning, which caused hopes and plans to be derailed. Colin was hired to work on a specific initiative, and after two years, we still had nothing to show for it; just as he was about to make progress, he resigned. I was disappointed with him and myself for trusting him, so I cut him out of my life.

- During COVID, Moose Jaw Alliance Church asked me to be their lead pastor and merge with Living Hope. A week before the vote to merge, Colin resigned, and two younger staff decided to move home to live with their parents outside Regina. Because of the transitions, the merger had to be put on hold and later fell apart. I feel disappointment and shame over the failed merger attempt.
- In the fall of 2021, David Hearn resigned as president of the denomination because he would not abide by the personnel policy to be vaccinated against COVID-19. I had grown close to David over the previous five years. During COVID, I had advocated for Living Hope's board to have a vaccination policy for staff, and I was fully vaccinated. I felt betrayed when it was announced that David refused to be vaccinated, and the C&MA board allowed him to stay. Then when David announced his resignation, I felt abandoned. We tried to connect to talk, but it never happened, and now I feel ashamed of how I felt.
- In 2022, my worship pastor of 7 years, Eric, left to become worship pastor at Foothills Alliance Church. I am proud of Eric but have missed him terribly as we spoke almost every day for seven years, and he and his wife were like family. When he resigned, I knew I would need to grieve, so I intentionally took time to do that.
- In June 2022, I was considered for the position of lead pastor of Foothills Alliance Church but was rejected at the last minute. My family and I attended Foothills for three years, and it holds an important place in my family members' spiritual journeys. The rejection by Foothills hurt incredibly and stirred up doubt about my ability to hear God's voice and resurrected feelings from my teenage years about being rejected. I spent six weeks processing the grief with God before I felt a release.
- When I informed the District that I was resigning from Living Hope to move to St. Albert, the DS called me names and told me that I would have more influence at Living Hope than at St. Albert. I was angry and disappointed with their reaction.

- As Britton and I move from Living Hope to St. Albert Alliance Church, I am grieving the loss of relationships with Shauna, Mark, Al, Lynda, and Kevin G.
- My father and father-in-law are both experiencing declining health which started during the summer of 2022. My father-in-law will likely pass away from cancer within the following year. I feel like I am letting my parents and in-laws down by moving to St. Albert, and I am torn between my calling and God's leading and pleasing my parents.
- Our move to St. Albert prompted our daughter Emma and her fiancé to move in together five months before their wedding. Emma is marrying someone who says they are Agnostic. While I know she has faith in Jesus, I feel like a failure for not passing on a more robust faith to her and ensuring she understood the importance of having a spouse who is like-minded in their faith. I am disappointed with myself.

MAJOR THEMES

After reviewing the decades of my life and significant events and relationships where I felt loss, disappointment, hurt, and regret, the following themes began to surface:

Disappointment in Friendships

- Jerven – feeling used, being put down by him, lying to me about people and himself. The scandal associated with him and being dragged into it.
- Bernie – kept me close and used me when it benefited him but also made me feel insignificant. I had a great relationship marked by mutual respect with the previous DSs but never felt that with Bernie.
- Brad C., Mark T., and David W. – each ended our friendship and left the church because of my views on women as elders and the direction of the church.
- Colin thought we were closer than we were, but he never really engaged with me.

- Daniel & Adele — relationship started great but went sour; Daniel was not satisfied with my mentoring, and Adele was angry that I didn't hire her. I attempted to mend the relationships and made missteps that worsened the problem; they left Living Hope angry and hurt.
- David Hearn — I felt like he abandoned me; we were in the same boat, rowing together, and he jumped ship by resigning as president.

Dreams not Accomplished – Disappointment with self.

- Launching of missional communities — promised, raised money for, but never happened. This disappointment caused me to treat Colin poorly after he left because he had been hired to head this initiative.
- Moose Jaw / Living Hope merger – I'm embarrassed that we even tried; this is a black mark on my resume.
- Living Hope – Even though I have helped lead the church to renewed health because of COVID, I don't feel like I'm leaving on a high note, even though people have been incredibly loving and had great things to say. My measure of success is causing me to feel like a failure because, numerically, it's not over 500.

Losses Due to Transition to St. Albert

- The loss of relationship with Al, Shauna, Mark S., Kevin G. and Lynda who are trusted friends.
- Realizing I will not be present with Rod in his final months and likely days, but the next time I see him will likely be to do his funeral.
- Recognizing I will not be present to care for my parents and feeling the disappointment from my parents that I am leaving them.
- We are leaving Emma before her wedding and transitioning to a new stage of the father-daughter relationship. We are now empty nesters.
- We are leaving our home of 12 years, and potential buyers do not appreciate it the way we do.

- I do not feel like I can celebrate the change because Living Hope is hurting and because Mike S. (Associate in St. Albert) is upset he didn't get the job.

Childhood Wounds

- When I was four, we moved from Hamilton, ON, to Regina, SK. The transition was difficult for me; I couldn't understand the reason for the move. As there was no family support structure in Regina, I was placed in daycare. Dad worked part-time and went to Bible College, and mom worked full-time, so it was the only way to care for a four-year-old. I felt abandoned whenever I was left at the daycare. I cried non-stop when I was left at the daycare. My experience in daycare formed the root wound that has defined me. It has caused a fear of rejection and a desire to please authority figures (predominantly male), and it has caused me to have unhealthy relationships (putting up walls, being too close, or not knowing if we are friends).
- When I was 9, my brother exposed himself to me, a neighbour girl, inviting us to touch his penis. My brother always referred to me as the favoured one and never accepted me. I wanted a brother, but he didn't want me around, and I knew this by how he treated me and what he said. My relationship with my older brother has caused mistrust, distance, dysfunction between our families and us, and anger within me.

REFLECTIONS AND RESOLUTIONS

During the lecture on Forgiveness by Dr. Rob Reimer, I began to hear the Spirit's whisper of names of people that I needed to forgive. Many of the names listed were past friends. The list was significant, with more than 20 names. Over the rest of the module week and for eight days following my return home, I began to work through each name, recalling my relationship with them and any hurts or disappointments I was holding. After reflecting on the relationship, I verbally declared forgiveness and prayed a prayer of blessing over them and their family. One by one, I erased the names from the list until eight remained.

On the sixth day of being home I still had eight names on the list. The eight names were of people I did not feel I could forgive. I awoke in the night and spent some time in prayer. In that prayer time, the Spirit revealed that I could not forgive them because I could not forgive myself for trusting them, caring for them and allowing them to be in my life. I began to pray through the names on the list, forgiving myself, then forgiving them and praying a blessing over myself and them. With each name I removed from the list, I felt a release and the Spirit filling me afresh. Finally, I came to the end of the list and I felt free and able to move forward. As a result of this exercise, I feel like I have a practice I can use when I experience disappointments with friends in the future.

As I reflected with God on the dreams that were not accomplished and the disappointment I felt, I began to see how God had protected and prepared the church and me for my transition to St. Albert. If my plans and dreams had been accomplished, I would not have been able to pursue St. Albert. The merger would have locked me into a five-year contract, even though I had heard God in 2020 whisper that transition was coming. The missional communities had been my vision and required my continual effort to move forward; had Colin done what we hired him to do the groups would have likely languished and died when I left Living Hope and a new leader came in. The transition of staff in 2021 caused me to think about what the church needed for a team coming out of the pandemic and prepare for the possibility of my transition. God's hand was evident, and the disappointments were in reality his hand of providence.

As I have reflected on the dreams that were not accomplished, God has also reminded me of those that have been accomplished. While the church is not where I would like it to be, I can appreciate how different Living Hope is today than when I arrived. I can see how God has used me to lead Living Hope to renewal and health. God has given me a new perspective and I see that I am not a failure. Through this, God has reminded me that the issue of my value is not determined by what I do, my accomplishments or failures; it was determined long ago on the cross.

Concerning the relationship losses, I have taken some actions to deal with and grieve them since returning from New York. In my last two weeks in Regina, I have been intentional about connecting with those close to me over a coffee or a meal and saying the things I feel and the gratitude I have for their

relationship. I have also connected with some of the people whose relationship with me ended negatively to repent, seek forgiveness, and find reconciliation. I have also begun processing the losses, disappointments, and joys that I am experiencing in this time of transition in my journal each week. Lastly, my spouse and I are continually reminding each other that while there is loss, God has led us to this point and will carry us forward through the loss into the future he has envisioned for us.

The most significant breakthrough I have experienced in this grief journal exercise and group discussion has been in the area of childhood wounds. As I read what I wrote about my childhood wounds to my group, grief began to sweep over me, and I began to cry uncontrollably. The group prayed for me and over me. As they prayed, I saw Jesus come into each situation where childhood wounding had occurred, he picked me up and carried me out of that situation. Those events happened, but I am no longer stuck in them; they no longer hold me, Jesus has set me free—that was the meaning of the images. As the group was praying Dr. Reimer moved behind where I was sitting and put his hands on my shoulders. In some of my earlier healing of inner wounds, I saw Jesus standing behind me as a child in the moment of wounding, but as Dr. Reimer put his hands on my shoulders, I saw Jesus standing with me as an adult and knew he was there to help me move forward. The learned behaviour from those wounds remains, but the wounds that triggered those behaviours are gone, and now I can work to build new behaviours and habits to replace the broken ones.

CONCLUSION

In Personal Spiritual Formation, Dr. Ron Walborn teaches that failure to grieve deadens the heart by shuts out pain; you do not feel pain anymore, but you also close yourself off to joy. Conversely those who grieve, according to Walborn, find healing for the pain and hope for what God has next.[1] As I have processed my grief in this journal, with my small group, and received prayer ministry, I have experienced hope for continuing relationships, hope for new relationships in St. Albert, and healing and release from past wounds. While there is still work to be done, and grief to be processed, I feel a greater sense of the

[1] Ron Walborn, *Personal Spiritual Formation*, DMin Video Collection (180 Media Group, 2010).

Spirit's presence and joy. I also feel equipped to deal with the disappointments and losses that are still to be processed or that lay ahead.

WORKS CITED

Walborn, Ron. *Personal Spiritual Formation*. DMin Video Collection. 180 Media Group, 2010.