

# **GRIEF JOURNAL**

Jennifer Skeete

SF505.NA/NOS: Formation for Ministry (FFM)

March 5, 2023

## GRIEF JOURNAL

My Christian journey started at a very young age. I never knew anything else but church life. My mother was a Christian, and my father sang in every choir in Barbados. I went to church four (4) times on any given Sunday. My Sunday started with Sunday School, then Junior Church in the morning. Sunday School in the early evening and then back to Sunday night service with my mother. Wednesday night was church, and Friday night was again church with my mother. I was there if there was a tent revival in the neighborhood or an open-air meeting. Even though I didn't see many kind Christians or a reflection of God in any, I believed Christians were supposed to be the eyes and ears of God here on earth. My mother was the only Christian I ever saw come close to living out the first and second commandments on which "hang all the Laws and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40). My mother never looked out for herself (Philippians 2:4).

Even though the church was my life, all my hurt and grief came through the body of Christ; People that were supposed to live good lives, but not use their freedom as a cover-up for evil but do good deeds to glorify God and show God's love and compassion to everyone to win them over to the Kingdom of God (1 Peter 2:12, 16 & 17). Instead, these Christians showed judgment, rejection, the harshness of heart, and prejudice.

One of my most hurtful encounters came with my best friend's father, Mr. Vaughn. Mr. Vaughn was a pastor. I have known Mr. Vaughn since I was in elementary school. However, I had never interacted with him because even though he was a pastor and my best friend's father, he was unfriendly and mean-looking. As a young child, Mr. Vaughn reminded me more of Jonah, angry and unforgiving, than Jesus. I don't remember him smiling once, not even when he saw his daughter.

I got pregnant at 16 years old. When the doctor told my mother I was pregnant, and because of my weight and my bone structure, she didn't believe I would be able to carry the child to term; my mother told her, "I am a Christian, and I will not put my hand to murder." She was woman enough to get it; she will be woman enough to carry it," and my mom stood beside me every step of the way.

One day after one of my monthly prenatal visits, my mother took me into the city to buy fruits (she accompanied me to every doctor's appointment). After we got the fruits, we went to catch the bus home, and Mr. Vaughn's bus was the only bus at the bus stand, so my mom said, "let's wait for another bus." I replied, "I am not hiding from anyone; I didn't kill anyone." We got on the bus, and Mr. Vaughn was very cordial to my mother, and they engaged in conversation. Mr. Vaughn never said a word or acknowledged that I was present. Later that evening, my best friend called me and told me her father said I wasn't worthy of being her friend. I asked her, "What do you think," She replied, "he is right." I told her, so you think pregnancy is contagious because I got pregnant, you will get pregnant too? I hung up that phone, devastated.

This pastor that every Sunday got up in the pulpit every week and preached from the Word of God about Jesus that hung on the cross in love for people, who looked down from it with compassion, and asked His Father to "forgive them for they know now what they have done." (Luke 23:34) This pastor/father that was supposed to embrace me and talk to me, about God's love and forgiveness, condemned me because I got pregnant. I was not worthy of love, compassion, or forgiveness. I wasn't a decent human being, and I had no worth.

Mr. Vaughn's words and rejection held me, prisoner, for many years until I got into a terrible car accident that should have taken my life but brought me back home to my first love. I realized I had allowed Mr. Vaughn and his words of rejection to control my life and keep me in

bondage for too long. I had to forgive Mr. Vaughn and set myself free, for he knew not what he had done. I decided to take that pain and turn it into power. I was not going to allow another teenager who got pregnant to feel the pain of rejection I felt. I asked God to take my mess and make a message. Use me as a witness to encourage teenage mothers and broken women.

My mother, who stood beside me through my pregnancy and when I got married to the father of my child, was there again, paying for the entire wedding on her meager salary, turned on me two (2) years after that when the marriage went downhill. When she saw that I was considering leaving my mentally and physically abusive husband, again, her Christian belief stepped in. She never said it, but she did not believe in divorce. She said, "I stayed with your father for you all." I never saw any love or affection in my parents' marriage; they lived miserable lives, so I told her, you shouldn't have stayed.

I left Barbados and migrated to the United States of America, running for my life. I left my children (I had a second child) with my mother until I got myself straightened out. My mother, who lived in the church's four walls from when I knew myself and fed and cared for everyone she met, treated my children and her grandchildren worse than rodents. She abused them mentally and physically. She sent them to school without money and scandalized our names, telling people my daughter was a thief and I had two husbands (I had divorced my first husband and remarried). She would wake my daughter up very early in the morning and have her call me and, in front of her, ask me to come to get them out of her house. Yet when I had a friend's mother give her money to give my daughter, she still didn't give it to her.

I filed for US residency for my children, and my mother hid the envelope when the documents arrived at her house. One day when my daughter was going through a drawer, she found an unopened envelope addressed to me. She went to a neighbor's house and called me. I

had her take the envelope to my friend's house, who went through the documents and advised me on what they contained and my next move. When my mother realized the documents were missing, she became outraged. When it was time to take the children to the embassy, I told my mother my husband and I were coming home; she didn't say anything to me, but when I hung up the phone, she called her friend and told her she didn't want my husband in her house, even though my husband and I had stayed there before. We stayed at a friend's house, which made my mother angry. How angry no one knew.

I forgave my mother because the Word of God says, "Honor your father and your mother that your days may be long in the land, and it will go well with you" (Deuteronomy 5:16). I repaired her home. I went home and threw her a birthday bash; I went again when I found out she needed to see an ophthalmologist. In the ophthalmologist's office, she said, "Jennifer, you know the best place for me is with you?" I left the doctor's office and booked her flight to travel with me the very next day. God worked it that she got the last two seats on both planes I was traveling on. All the time my mother lived with me, she never told me she had changed her Will and was with me consistently. She was my American Express; I never left home without her. My son dropped out of college to care for his grandmother because the home health aide we were paying was not taking good care of her. When she died, my family took care of all the funeral arrangements. We took her body back to Barbados for burial. When I took the Will, she had given me to her attorney. He told me he found a handwritten Will he knew nothing about, dated the day my husband and I took the children my mother didn't want in her house to the US Embassy, leaving my greedy and selfish brother as the executor. My brother said as executor, everything is his, and he has not given my sister or me anything that was left for us. One morning while praying, God said to me, "What would it profit a man to gain the whole world and

lose his soul" (Mark 8:36). I released my mother and my brother from the anger and bitterness that had set in my heart so that I could be free from the pain and the prison.

If there is one place I never thought I would see prejudice, discrimination, and favoritism, was in the halls of Christian academia, where ministers, priests, and missionaries train to go into the world and make disciples of all men, regardless of ethnicity, racial origin, gender, nationality, or any difference.

My soul grieved, and I was disillusioned when I walked into Alliance Theological Seminary (ATS) and faced discrimination. I said I don't believe God sent me here. There is no way God would have sent me here. Sitting in classes week after week and seeing the blatant institutional racism and sexism, I went to the Lord and said, "Lord, are You sure this is where you want me to be because what I see here is not of You." He said, "Didn't you ask for this? Stay focused; stop looking at the people. Wherever you go, there will be people." He gave me Ezekiel 2, but I still could not focus; seeing the discrimination and sexism and hearing my classmates discussing it was depressing. I decided to drop out. I was out two semesters, and then one day, my prayer partner prayed and, without knowing that I had dropped out, prayed answering my every query and sending me back. I put my tail between my legs and went back, but I still couldn't handle what I saw, but God kept saying, "be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10), so I stayed. When Covid 19 hit and we were forced to work online, I was ecstatic to leave the halls of ATS and work from home; I no longer had to sit and endure the weekly pain only to go online and see it even in the zoom classroom. Again, God spoke to me, saying, "I am setting you free from the fear of people and their rejection and the need for their acceptance. People will disappoint you in many ways, but you must be determined to do My Will." As difficult as it is to accept, God has brought me to Alliance to heal me so that I can stop running, and He is using the

people, problems, and pressures to prune me and scrape away all distractions hindering me from fulfilling His purpose. By bringing me face to face with people, He is highlighting my unresolved issues to transform me so I can become a master at mending the broken. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28 NIV).

## **Bibliography**

Holy Bible, New International Version, Zondervan Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011