

The first thing that I am grieving is not missing the soccer season during my sophomore year of university because of injury. I moved to America from Ireland to play soccer at Concordia University in Nebraska. Soccer was the main reason that I moved and my freshman year went great. I started the last eight or nine games and I was convinced that I would be starting for the rest of my time in college. But, in the summer of 2013, I was playing five-a-side soccer with my brother and some of his friends to get ready for the upcoming season and I tore the Anterior Cruciate Ligament in my left knee. This was the second time that I tore this ligament. Tearing it meant that I had to have surgery and that I missed my entire sophomore season.

Because of this, my sophomore year in college was just bad. I had been playing soccer since I was six years old. I was living on a different continent than my family, I wasn't able to play the sport I loved, and I had to rehab daily on my own. It was bad enough just not playing, since playing was what I loved to do the most, but it no longer felt like I was part of the team. I worked out daily on my own. I didn't get to travel with the team to games very much, so I missed the camaraderie of that. I was hurt, depressed, and lonely. Thinking back on this time, it was one of the worst years of my life. And, I don't think that I dealt with it very well. I spent a lot of time watching tv.

Growing up I always wanted to play soccer. That's all I ever wanted to do. I know that I found my identity in being a soccer player. I think my two ACL injuries helped me to realize that having your identity in something other than God wasn't good. But, it still feels unfair that it happened to me twice. God gave me this ability to play and I really really loved it. I was alive when I was playing. I have so so so many good memories from playing soccer, but, this injury is one of the worst memories in my life. Not only did I miss my sophomore year, but I lost my

starting spot and I was never able to get it back in my junior or senior year either. So, it really feels like this injury ruined my entire college experience. I'll never get the moments back that I could have had if it weren't for this injury. Once you leave college, the type of soccer that you get to play isn't the same. It is just for fun. It isn't as competitive. It's just not the same. And so missing all those opportunities to play because of an injury and then losing my spot in the team, it just really sucks.

Even though I am married and enjoy my job now, I wonder if God offered me the chance to go back and do it all again, or just stay where I am. I think I might choose to do it again. To have the opportunity to play soccer competitively again, I would do almost anything for a chance to do that. I don't think I've ever found anything else that I love as much as being out on a soccer field. It doesn't really make sense to me that God would want me to not be able to do the thing that I love most, so I don't really know why he allowed my injury to happen.

The next thing that I am grieving is my relationship with my dad. I don't know if I would consider it a big "loss" but my relationship with my dad has never been great. Not that he has treated me poorly really. But, we just have never had much of a relationship. When I was growing up my dad worked a lot. He and my mom are missionaries in Ireland. But, for some reason, he was always in his office. Which, I don't really understand what he was doing, aren't missionaries supposed to be out meeting people? But, I often didn't understand as a kid why he was at home, but when I tried to get him to hang out he couldn't. But, even in the evenings and the weekends it felt like he was always working a lot. So, while my dad was present in my life, he wasn't really present.

One thing that would always get to me was that my friends at church would always say how nice my dad was. I always wanted to say back to them, "well it's because he talks to you

more than he talks to me!” It never really made sense because it always felt to me that my dad was nicer and talked to my friends more than me.

Another thing that always bothered me, and it still bothers me today, is that it feels like if I want to talk to my dad I have to talk about the things that he is interested in. Otherwise, it feels like we have nothing to talk about. Why am I the one who has to be intentional with him? Why can't he be the one who is intentional with me?? I've noticed this be an issue for other relationships and friendships as well. I have a hard time being around my father-in-law because it is the same way. But, rather than try to talk to my father-in-law I just kind of shutdown because there isn't as much incentive to get to know him and be close to him as my dad. But, this does kind of suck knowing that the reason it bothers me so much is because of my relationship with my dad. It feels like my dad should want to get to know me right? Shouldn't he want to connect with his son? But, it doesn't feel that way very much.

This was particularly apparent to me in the fact that my dad barely went to watch me play soccer growing up and he never really talked to me about it. He was more of a golfer or liked football. But soccer was my thing, it was what I loved the most. But, he was never interested in it. Why not? Wouldn't you want to care about what your son cares about? I think that this really drove a wedge in between me and my dad. It was an unspoken wedge. But, when you can't really talk about the thing you love most with your dad, then what is the point in talking to him about anything? At least that is how I felt.

Our relationship now is still not really how I would want it to be. I live in America and he lives in Ireland. I Skype or video chat with my mom often, but my dad only gets on sporadically. It does seem like he is a little bit more interested in my life than he used to be, but it still doesn't feel like enough. I think in a lot of ways I still haven't forgiven him. He has probably watched

more soccer now since I've left the house than he ever used to. He still cares more about watching golf than talking to me, it seems. But, I know that I can always go to him if I have questions about the Bible, which is nice. I think he is happy because I work at a church since he is a missionary, but there is an element where I wonder if he would be as proud of me if I did something else.

Anyway, I look at my relationship with my dad and I just wish it was different. I wish we were closer. I think one of the things I feel I need the most is an older man to help me with life, a mentor, or something. I'm 29 years old and there are still so many things that I don't know, and I wish that my dad was someone whom I felt like I could go and talk about those things with. I wish that He had been more of a guide than He was.

I understand now that my dad was going through a lot when I was a kid. He was struggling with things that I didn't know about, so I do have a little bit more compassion for him than I used to. But, I still wish he tried harder than he does.

The last thing that I am grieving is just a loss and lack of close friendships. I graduated college in 2016, and ever since then, I have felt a void of close friendships in my life. In college I had a lot of really close friends, but once we graduated we all moved away from each other. And since then I have never really been able to find the type of friends who were there for me like these guys were.

Specifically, one friend that I have lost has been really difficult. To explain a little, when my wife was in college she had walked away from the Lord for her first three years. When I met her, she had rededicated her life to God, and she was pursuing Him again. So we met, and started spending time together and it was amazing!! Unfortunately, due to her emotionally abusive ex-boyfriend, her reputation wasn't very high. And so when I met her, my best friend and his

girlfriend, who incidentally went to High School with Sarah, weren't very happy about it. Which was super difficult for me to deal with. Because, on the one hand, I thought Sarah was awesome and we were getting on super well. But, on the other hand, JD was my best friend and I really cared for his girlfriend Chelsea. I was often known to be their third wheel and we all got along super well. And so I was caught between a rock and a hard place.

As Sarah and I continued to date, she got more and more hurt about the fact that my closest friends were not getting over their issues with her and still weren't that excited that we were dating. And so, I was kind of stuck in the middle. Eventually, they got married and moved away from Nebraska. And Sarah and I got married. We tried to figure things out a little bit, but ultimately it felt like Chelsea and Sarah could never really get past their differences. But, we never really concluded or ended the friendship, it just kind of drifted away.

But, I've been in a spot since college where I am needing close friends. And so, at this moment in time, I'm imagining what life would be like with JD still as my best friend. What would that be like? Would I have someone whom I could walk through life with? Would I have someone I could talk to anyone about? Would I have someone that I could laugh and have fun with?

It is also difficult because Sarah and I got in a bunch of arguments about JD and Chelsea when we were first together and early in our marriage. Sarah finds it rather easy to hold a grudge and I've never been able to encourage forgiveness by her without sounding like I am "taking their side". And so it feels like I lost this friendship specifically because I got married to Sarah. Which is just really tough to think about. I love Sarah and I want to be with her for the rest of my life. But I miss my friends. I didn't realize that choosing Sarah would lead to this.

But, I also get frustrated with my friends because I feel that if they really loved me they would have made more of an effort to stay in contact with me and more of an effort to get to know Sarah from a blank slate and be more willing to forgive her for any past grievances. I thought that they would love me enough to trust that I wasn't making a poor decision. That they would know my heart enough to know that I wanted to date a woman who was pursuing God. But it feels like they didn't and they didn't love me enough to try very hard either. Which really really sucks.

And so now, here I am, looking for close and intentional friends and it doesn't feel like I have many. Which is a tough spot to be in. God has been showing me that if I want people to be intentional with me, then I have to be intentional with them. He's showing me that sometimes we have to step out of our comfort zone and be the ones to engage first and that when we do that we give permission to do the same. So hopefully that happens and God provides people for me to grow close to!