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### Grief Journal

Throughout the past 26, going on 27, years of my life, I have been able to look back and reflect often. Thankfully about three years ago, I began a journey of healing and self-reflection. I had just entered a new relationship and realized that I had an immeasurable amount of anxiety and rejection issues to work through as well as unresolved sexual sin that continued to come up as a pattern in my life. Regardless of how much I would attempt to work on myself, I was left hopeless at the thought of never being able to fully heal or walk in the purity I knew the Lord was calling me to. Over the past three to four years, I have taken time to walk through the hurts, pain, and shame that I have walked through in order to heal and become the man God is calling me and forming me to be today.

As I began my journey through counseling, I began to realize how many of my current stresses or pains were largely because of how I grew up in a broken home. Growing up, I never saw my parents in a relationship with one another or at least I cannot remember them together. They broke up when I was 3 years old and have not been together since. My earliest memories of them were memories of them either arguing over the phone or talking poorly about each other on the drive to and from both dropping and picking me up. Both parents would talk about how inconsiderate the other was and how if they really cared they would not have done x, y or z. They would both explain how the other was just out to spite them or hurt them. My mom would speak with hurt and unresolved pain while my father would speak passive aggressively about things my mom did. As a young boy, it was always hard to balance their emotions or what they felt. I loved them both and did not want them to speak that way about each other, especially to me. Oftentimes, this would leave me feeling like I could not help to make things better, but also

a longing to see healthy relationships happen in my own life. I can remember early on marrying my sister's barbie dolls or desiring relationships as a way to cope with the hurt and pain I saw in my parents with the desire of wanting something better for myself.

The pain of growing up in a broken family was also trying to live up to the expectations of parents who were incredibly performance-based. One parent had a high expectations for one to be excellent in school. There was a lot of attention toward grades with the goal of making sure that I would be successful in making money and taking care of myself. As a man, my dad would explain, it was my responsibility to get a good education so I could get a great job and supply and provide for myself and my family. Anything below an A in my classes would lead to an argument where I was called lazy. My dad was paying for a private school education and would use that as an excuse for his high expectations. I was constantly told that if I was going to continue to underperform in school that he would take me out of getting my private education so that I could go work at a Mcdonald's somewhere. This led to a large insecurity about my worth and a feeling that I would not amount to anything if I wasn't successful. The older I got the more I realized I was only applauded or told I am proud of you as I would complete a big task like getting good grades, winning awards, being a play, etc. The pride of my father was found in what I could do rather than who I was. It felt as if my character was found and based in the ways that I was able to perform rather than who I was becoming as a young man.

Ultimately, this led to always striving to make sure that on the surface I looked the best. I did just enough in school to make sure that there was not a complaint, I would strive to make sure my grades were in a good place and that I was the perfect shining son while realizing I would never be able to fully do that. It would lead to argument after argument of how lazy and

ungrateful I was because I was not taking advantage of the opportunities that were being handed to me.

As I got older this became more and more apparent as I gave my life to the Lord and started to feel called into ministry. This was not received well because it seemed to be a waste of money and there was a wonder if there would ever be any type of success. We would fight back and forth on whether or not I would be able to provide for myself and my family.

Years later and after a ton of therapy, but also the Lord providing for me and healing me and our relationship. My father and I have been able to work through some of these issues. We have taken steps towards healing by having deeper discussions where I have been able to tell him that I felt his pride was more wrapped up in what I did rather than who I was. It is really amazing to watch him come to an understanding of what I do and my passion and joy for it. It has also been incredible to see him take steps toward me and growing in showing me more love and pride in who I am rather than in what I do.

With my mom, I tended to face a lot of rejection. Growing up, my mom married a man who was incredibly verbally and emotionally abusive to her. Almost every day there was typically a statement about how much of a b\*\*ch she was or she was being told to shut the f up. Not understanding as a child, my mom would often withdraw herself from us and was practically in survival mode while her kids still needed her emotionally. Over time I learned that as much as I would want to receive love and affection from her, I would not be able to get it from her which lead me on a wild goose chase attempting to receive that love from any woman who was willing to give me the time of day. This led to making older women mother figures and looking to them to provide the emotional support she could not or attempting to find that love in relationships with girls as a way to cope with the lack of affection I was receiving at home. The older I got the

more that evolved from just being in simple relationships with girls to becoming more and more sexual with them in an attempt to finally receive the affection that I had been craving all of my adolescent years.

As I have reached adulthood and have been more intentional about walking in wholeness and purity as well as looking for someone to not just date, but to marry this come up more and more specifically in my dating relationship. I have learned that due to the amount of rejection, I have faced I have an anxious attachment style which has caused me to have a skewed view of healthy relationships. As I am in a dating relationship it has forced me to come face to face with this rejection while attempting to find healing on my own and with the Lord. If I am honest with you, it in many ways feels incredibly hopeless and at times has caused me to ask my counselor if this is something I will ever fully be able to heal from or if I will I carry it into my marriage and parenthood which is not a desire of mine. At certain times, I trust that God can heal all things, but I am still attempting to fully see how and when He will do that in my life.

Another significant wound that happened during my adolescence was finding out that the man who my mother had married after my father was inappropriately touching my older sister. To this day, I'm not sure what exactly that means because it was never fully explained to me at that young age, but for a long time it impacted my relationship with my older sister as well as with my siblings. Growing up in a house full of eight kids we spent a ton of time together, but quickly because of this incident my older sister moved to live in Washington with her dad while my mom was being forced to move out of a house that was being foreclosed on, all the while my grades were suffering because of it. Within almost six months, my young teenage years had been flipped upside down after finding out this information, I moved in with my dad, my mom, and younger siblings moved to TN and I was left to process those events by myself. There was an

incredible amount of anger and pain to work through while not having anyone to work through it with. There was guilt that I did not take care of my older sister and even more so a pang of guilt that I had never woken up and known what was happening. My stepfather would have had to go through my bedroom in order to get to hers. There was deep-seated anger on why the Lord would allow this to happen to my older sister and family. For years, I dealt with this regret and feeling of failure that I could not protect my sister or my family from what happened. At times, this would fill me with rage or deep sadness that seemed overwhelming especially because we had never fully talked through any of it as a family.

As I got older, I began to see the Lord come through on what He says in Romans 8:28, that God will turn all things to good for those who love Him and are called according to His purposes. Though my sister is still recovering from the incidents that have occurred and living a gay lifestyle. I have watched my family grow closer together in a way that we were not when all of this first occurred. The distance forced my siblings and me to grow in communication and support of one another wanting to make sure that we continued a relationship even though we were all miles and miles apart. My mom, now freed from such emotional trauma began to live from a place of love rather than just simply trying to survive the next day. As stated above, we are still waiting to see full restoration in my sister and pray that one day she would allow Jesus to heal her from the pain she has gone through, but we trust that God will continue to do the work He started in her when she gave her life to Him twelve years ago.

Over the past 26 years, I have seen and experienced some pretty hard things. They have shaped who I am both good and bad. Yet, I hold onto the fact that God is not done writing my story or done with my healing process. I am excited to see the potential of what He will do as I continue to lean on Him in all things and allow Him to shape and form me into the man of God

He has called me to be. I know it is not easy, but allowing Him to heal while I do the work and processing is worth it even when I think it's not. I have learned time and time again that He is a faithful God and that He will use all things good and bad in order to receive glory AND for me to experience His love and grace whether it is for myself or for other people. I am hopeful for what the Lord is going to continue to do in my life and expect that He will come through on being an Ephesians 3:20 God.