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SF505

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Grief Journal Assignment

Natalie

I've been grieving the loss of a friendship/relationship for several months. I thought that I was over the grief, but I'm learning that this isn't a one-stop shop or find an answer and move on. It's a slow ache. It's a burning in my chest, it's frustration and loss. It's painful and it tarnishes my faith. While this grief tarnishes my faith it also renews it. I decided that a year ago I would feel instead of run. I thought I had become a scholar in the study and art of emotive self-counsel. I'm learning that I don't understand that either.

My grief started in 2019 when I met this beautiful, aspiring, complicated, gifted woman at a conference here in NYC. The conference was called, "Cultivate Revival" it was sponsored by Global Awakening the healing ministry of Randy Clark. Previous to this event had no idea who Randy Clark was or what healing ministries were. I simply thought of them as political guises to sway evangelicals to vote a certain way in November every four years. I was shocked and encouraged to learn that God does move still. I'm getting ahead of myself.

Her name was Natalie, and I loved her. From the moment I met her, I was finished. In 2016 I experienced a divorce and I was sorting through my life and health to see if I was able to love again. I had numerous crushes but I didn't meet anyone that I connected with. That I saw a vision with. To this day I still don't understand why we are not together anymore. I'm happy for her. But, late in the night. My heart aches. It grieves. I feel, like it, my heart bleeds. My heart

bleeds for her. I know that's not true. I know there is more than this. But, I get caught up in the feelings and they feel so very real. They feel so authentic.

When I lay down at night it's hard to lie down. It's hard to sleep. It's hard to move forward. Every day I move forward with my life. I'm experiencing a great semester. I'm learning so much and seeing God's hand in my spiritual formation. But, then that ache hits me again. It's like I want to have some kind of solace. I want to have some kind of peace. I desire a relationship and to be married again. I desire to partner with a woman and champion God's kingdom message for the world. I also desire some kind of closure.

We went through so much together. My memories. I have so many. I was in the hospital after a fatal accident and she nursed me back to health alongside the Lord of course. She visited me every day. Perhaps she visited me because it was her house that I was traveling from when the car hit me. I don't remember the accident. I don't remember that night after I said bye to her. But, I do remember thinking and praying, "ok Lord, this is it". We both agreed that night that she would pursue counseling and inner healing for her past and I would pursue graduating from seminary. I woke up three days later in University Hospital's trauma unit in Newark, NJ.

I was in a coma for three days. I don't remember anything. I just remember as I gained consciousness, I was saying, 'help us, Jesus, help us.' As I gained more and more conscience I saw that my body was mangled. I saw a picture of myself and I had a wound on my head. My left eye was fractured and my lungs were punctured. I was pretty banged up. She was there. She would call my mom every day and have her on facetime so that she was aware of the moment. I of course was unconscious for the initial three days. I'm not sure how the doctors were able to contact her. But, she found out and was there by my side.

Andy

Andy is my stepfather and he has stage five Parkinson's disorder. Andy was diagnosed in 2018. He fell into a depression after my grandfather passed away. Andy wasn't able to head up north to be there with my mom and he never recovered. What seemed like an altruistic behavior has seemingly meant the mental break of my stepdad. I love him and I'm submitting this to the grief journal because experiencing this in real-time has been very hard.

I have seen how my mom had to become his 24/7 caregiver. Until late January of this year. I was visiting from New York City and my parents live in Florida. While I was there I saw how much Parkinson disease had progressed. It's an ugly disease. It totally changes you. It takes away the person and replaces them with a shell of themselves.

It's been really hard to watch him change. He was always the breadwinner of our home. He provided an amazing life for my mom, stepsisters, and even myself. I was often in trouble but when I wasn't I enjoyed a safe, comfortable life. I couldn't accept that it's ok, to have better things. It's ok to have parents that love you and want to be there for you. No matter what I was interpreted their love or support as because they have to. I was jealous of my step sisters. They after all were my stepfather's daughters. I was a stepson. I represented my mom's past, her previous marriage, etc.

I'm getting off-topic. But what I wanted to stress is that seeing my stepdad and recently I've been addressing him as my father has really impacted me emotionally. I'm concerned for his health. I'm concerned for his life. How long will he live? It's been an incredibly painful time for my mom. She loves him so much but sometimes and recently it's all the time. My mom simply doesn't recognize her own husband. So how have I been handling this?

I'm owning it. I'm owning the pain. I'm showing up for my mom in prayer and connection. I'm there for her. While I was in Florida I was there for him too. We watched the

Pink Panther and talked about my classes and my vision for ministry. He's an incredible man. It's sad to see him like this. It's hard. But, it's proving to be so beautiful. It's truly amazing. I love that God has loved on him in this way.

Now he is in a home for advanced parkinson's disease. We found a facility that accepts my mom's insurance and there is a pond with ducks, trees with squirrels, etc. Still, in all it's hard for him, he's confused about why he is always there and can't go home. He's learning to appreciate his new home.

In January he had a psychotic break and the state baker acted him. Which is an involuntary civil commitment. After being cleared by the doctor he was moved to the nursing home that he is in now. When my mother was asked about him coming home she said that it was no longer an option. He had become 24/7 care. She's currently the senior pastor of her church and has multiple responsibilities so it was time. I learned about his transition two days after I returned home to New York City. It was hard but it was timely. The Lord is in control and He knows what my dad needs.

Prison

When I was 18 years old I was sent to prison. I was sentenced to 7 years. I served five inside prison and two on parole. I was completely lost when I was arrested but by God's grace, I was saved a year later. God did great things in that time period. I often reflect on that time of my life. I sometimes cry. I also sometimes laugh and smile. That was the initial formative years of my Christianity.

At the time of my release, I was so lost. I was paroled to NYC because my father was missing and my mother was in Florida. I learned that my dad was homeless and living in his car. Soon after that, I learned that he was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. He was in jail and

was charged with some crimes that my dad never shared with me. After being arrested he was given five years probation and a social worker. The social worker helps with his bills and keeping his apartment. My dad now works at Price Chopper and has had more than 10 years with no run-ins with law enforcement in Albany, NY.

The reason I'm writing about prison and my dad is that being in prison is hard. I slept with one eye open most days before I gave my life to Christ. I saw people get murdered right next to me. I saw a lot. Then I came home to NYC because I had no one to live with so my buddies that I got saved with gave me their address. I was living in the city with known felons. That's an automatic parole violation. God kept me through.

I wanted to share about that because life has been very very hard. I have faced numerous refusals and missed opportunities because of my felony record. The nature of my offense was violent so it disqualifies me for most things in the helping profession. I tried to look to other things but I'm called and wired a certain way and I believe that God will make a way where there seems to be no way.

In closing on my left forearm is Jeremiah 29:11. With every refusal, every broken relationship, every denial for gainful employment, every challenge from churches in the city. I looked at my arm and I read the words of Yahweh. The promise of God for me and all those who would call on his name and seek his face. The words say, "***for I know the plans I have for you,***" ***declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future...*** Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord..."