

Henry Williams

Grief Journal

I want to explore relational loss in my grief journal. To begin, I'm adopted, so my relational loss starts with my birth father and mother. My birth father was never really in the picture, and my birth mother gave me up the day that I was born. Obviously, I don't remember any of that, but it was something that was explained to me as a kid; one of my bedtime stories. To add to this, my mother travels a lot for work (she did and still does), and my father had very strong emotions when I was a kid. He would never lay a finger on someone else, but he would also fly off the handle a lot when I was younger. Thankfully he has been doing a lot better for a good couple of decades or so. My mother has always prioritized work. I still remember when I was in elementary school she would go on long trips, and I would look at family photo albums because I was afraid, I would forget what she looked like. By the time I was in high school, her trips were frequent enough that I gave up trying to remember where she had gone on each trip. Either way it was hard to get close to my parents, who on top of the things listed, we're both busy people with little time on their hands and not much interest in children's things. Even on the few vacations we took as a family we would end up going to museums (my mother is a curator), and only museums. My physical needs as a child were met, I always had clothes, food, and a warm bed, but I never developed a close relationship with my family. By fifth grade I was going to school by myself, and by sixth grade I was allowed to roam on my own with friends, as long as I called if I was going to be home after nine or ten.

When I was in middle school, around seventh grade I developed severe eczema and a wheat allergy, that I didn't learn about until eighth grade. This led to very a few rough years. I spent a lot of time at home, the eczema as itchy and painful, it wasn't pleasant to look at and it was messy, there was always pus or discharge, and I had to always sleep on a towel to keep my bedding clean. I remember strangers talking about me in whispers when I was out in public, little kids asking their parents what was wrong with me. I lost a lot of friends during that time, and it felt like I was letting everyone down, especially my parents, who had to pay for doctor visits and had to deal with me. I distinctly remember one of the few times that my dad got time off work to come to the doctors with me we took a taxi home. I remember leaning on my dad, but in doing that I left a mark on his jacket, and I remember feeling terrible that I couldn't even be near my dad without marring his nice clothes.

I took two years off during my studies in college, to live in Korea and study Korean. It was a wonderful time that culminated in a search for my biological mother. I was lucky enough to know a lot of older Korean adoptees at the time who all warned me to be ready for the worst. The adoption agencies have a unique way of reaching out to birth mothers, as a lot of the time, even if they do have information on them, the agency can still be in the dark as to their current status (have they remarried, does the husband know they gave up a kid for adoption etc.). I was fortunate that they were able to get in touch with my biological mother, but she didn't want to meet. Despite the warnings I had received, I don't think I was ready for that answer. I think I had readied myself for the case that they were unable to find her, but it didn't occur to me that she wouldn't want to meet. My time in Korea ended soon after that, and it was a very bittersweet ending because of this.

All of this has made me into a person who is afraid of commitment, rejection, and abandonment. Of course there are other events that have chipped away at my confidence in others; our head pastor was caught having an affair about ten years ago, I've had a few very close friends just disappear out of my life. It makes building relationships difficult, especially in a city where it's already hard because of how busy everyone is. It's hard to want to invest the time, money, and energy in people who may just leave in a year. I don't have a lot of any of those things these days. However it's lonely not having a group that you feel truly comfortable around. I know that I'm lucky to have a small handful of people I'm really comfortable being honest around. I'm also lucky to have some incredibly long-lasting friendships. I really am thankful for them even though it may not seem like it in this journal.

That's something that this grief journal has made me realize I internalized. In my interaction with people, my goal is generally to not be a bother. Even with my oldest friend, when I visit his house, I have to help with around the house projects or errands. That comes into play in my relationship with God as well. I don't really expect my prayers to be answered unless they're convenient for God, or unless they benefit other people. I know that this isn't Biblically correct, but it's something that I think I've subconsciously convinced myself of. Serving in church is something that I enjoy because I'm able to be a benefit to the people I love, and when I mess up, I'm really burdened by it because I've become a problem again. My parents love me even though I'm kind of a screw up, and I'm so thankful for that, but it's hard for me to be open and honest with them, and I think it's also hard for me to be open and honest with God as well. In a lot of ways, it's even harder to be open and honest with God because I know that He's perfect and I'm so not. I know that God has really blessed me through a lot of my past pains, but

I'm also coming to realize that I never really processed the pain, and that it's just been kind of a festering wound in my heart.

I know that God has been working in my life, since before I knew Him. I can recognize that He was working through my past. I've been really blessed with a very special friendship due to my adoption. My closest friend is a guy named Josh, who I met when I was 5 months old. His mother helped look after me because my mother was so busy. I've grown up with him, and he was the one that God used to bring me to church for the first time in eighth grade. I've been really blessed to have such a good friend who is family to me. His kids are my niece and nephew, and he is someone who I can trust, and I have a lot of trust issues. I've been blessed with this close friendship. I've been blessed with a unique perspective on the church community, and an easy ability to accept people as family. Even though I'm sad about my lack of connection with parents, at the same time, I'm so thankful for my individuality. I'm capable when it comes to cooking, cleaning, and working with tools. None of that was learned from my father (except how to change a light switch) and seeing friends who don't know how to do any of that, I'm so thankful for the experiences and knowledge that God has blessed me with. I'm also very aware of how blessed I am to be healed, of both the eczema and the wheat allergy at this point! (I still have minor flare ups once in a while, but it's absolutely nothing compared to back then.)

Even though I recognize that God used the eczema to bring me to church, I don't know that I understand why that much pain was needed. I have a very serious fear of rejection and abandonment, and it really restricts my ability to have deep relationships with people. I guess I still have questions as to if this kind of emotional scarring was worth the benefits, or if there was a better way? I think there are a lot of times where I have my doubts as to if this was the best way. I have a lot of trouble opening up to people and expressing myself in a healthy way and I

think that this both hinders my ability to create deep, long-lasting relationships with people, as well as my ability to receive God's love, as I feel so unlovable and unworthy. Our church is one where the main body feels like it changes every few years, and this, alongside a fear of abandonment, makes me not want to invest in people who I feel will just leave in a couple of years. Obviously, I am not just a recluse, and am still trying to pour out into people, but there are times that it feels like I'm just pouring out and these people leave with pieces of me. Even this past week I just got word that a beloved pastor at our church is stepping down in a couple of months, but his presence missing at the staff meetings is noticeable and I'm just starting to mourn his loss.

I do still recognize that God has/is moving in these areas of my life. I don't hold any resentment against the people who have left. I guess I just wish that there was an easier way. Doing this grief journal has made me realize that I'm not good at processing my own emotions. Having to talk through all of this with a counselor has been helpful. Having to write it all out has been challenging. I'm thankful even for being forced to do this journal and the mandatory counseling. I can see how, even in this God is working to develop me, even as I'm being recalcitrant to the process.