

Grief Journal

The first major loss of my life was when my father passed away in 2001. I was ten years old when my dad breathed his last breath in our home in Greenwich, CT. I still remember my mom walking over to me that morning with tears coming down her face, to tell me that dad had gone to heaven. This was not an unexpected result as he was suffering from brain cancer since 1993. He had lived many years longer than the doctors expected but the cancer finally was too much to handle. He had earlier that year suffered from a stroke which resulted in him losing all function on the right side of his body. He no longer could speak, write, walk or smile. This was my dad who I thought was invincible, my hero. By the time he was on his deathbed a few months later he was frail, ghostly looking and barely responsive.

I don't have many memories of dad before that stroke. He worked long hours in asset management and was constantly traveling overseas for business. The memories I do have consist of listening and dancing to Rolling Stones, receiving gifts from his travels to Germany, family vacations out west for skiing and praying the Lord's prayer each night. When he suffered the first stroke, the inner reality of his cancer became clear to my eyes. I remember him spending hours learning how to write left-handed so he can better communicate. I remember him throwing his cane down the stairs. I remember how frustrated he would be with his wheelchair and the Stairmaster. I remember his attempts to smile with half his face drooping. I remember his stern face when we would be talking back to mom. I remember his vice grip on my wrist if I was misbehaving. His fight and determination to beat cancer was inspiring.

When his funeral came around, I remember throwing the football around in the cemetery with family and friends. It was like the death of my father triggered a decision to take on a

carefree attitude to life. At ten years old, I didn't know how to process what just had happened. But somehow, I decided that day that if I didn't care too much about life then I wouldn't be hurt deeply. I didn't cry about dad dying. I didn't mourn. I took on a way of reacting to life with a 'whatever' response. I see how being carefree has both positively and negatively affected my life throughout the years. The fact of the matter is I DO CARE! I care about God, and I care about myself and others. Through Christ, I'm learning how to live out of my true self, not my wounded childhood.

I have subconsciously blamed dad for abandoning me. I wrote a letter to him back in 2012, forgiving him for leaving. I read it aloud, fighting through tears, in front of hundreds of people which gave me some freedom to feel. I hope to find that letter again or maybe I should write another one. I blamed dad for all my shortcomings, like my mediocre approach to academics and sports. If he was around, he would have encouraged me and taught me to apply myself and reach my true potential. If he was around, I would have been a Christian earlier in life and wouldn't have experienced so much heartache with alcohol and drugs. If he was around, I would be more decisive. If he was around, I wouldn't have suffered from depression and anxiety. If he was around, I would have learned how to transition from a boy to a man successfully. That is still one of my great fears; that there will always be a 10-year-old, lost Chase inside me, holding me back from living into my destiny as a man of God.

Of course, it's not fair to put all this blame on dad. He didn't choose to have cancer and die at the age of 43. The difficult choice he did have to make, was to work extremely hard in business so that our family would be taken care of. Instead of spending face-to-face time with us, he secured our future financially so we can go to college and mom wouldn't have to work a job. I

couldn't imagine the pain that brought my dad. I understand his decision now, but as a little boy, I just wanted to be with him. Part of me is scared to put the blame on God, but my pastor said to me recently that it might be good to get angry at God. I should take a page out of the Psalms as an example in processing unwanted emotions with God.

The silver lining, I do see is my mom remarrying in 2008. I have a great relationship with my stepdad (David) and stepsisters (Sam and Kim). They are truly family to me and without the loss of my dad, they wouldn't be a part of my life. But this leads to another loss.

My mom and David have never had a great marriage. It was full of emotional distance and arguments. Not a lot of love in the air. This past summer they decided to take a six-month separation, which is leading to a divorce. David is holding on as my mom is the one pushing the divorce through. So, the anticipation of family being broken up is difficult. My brother Reed lives in the Philippines and my brother Beau lives in Switzerland. My mom lives in CT. Kim lives in NYC. David, Sam and I are living in SC. My family is all over the map and its usually only special occasions where we all gather. With a divorce, that will likely never happen again. I also don't know how my relationship with David will change. He has been one of my best friends over the years and I don't want the divorce to change that.

Another great loss was my golf dream. Back in 2017, I believed God spoke through my friend one evening, saying that I should become a professional golfer on the PGA Tour. I truly thought God was speaking to me, so I decided later that week to resign from my job of three years and to start practicing my golf game. It would truly be a Cinderella story of a 10-handicap recreational golfer becoming a top 150 player in the world. And God would get all the glory! That first year of training and competing, I saw dramatic improvement. The following years, I

continued to improve but at a much slower pace. It was not until 2021 that I started to have serious doubts about this golf dream.

On my road trip down to SC in 2021 for winter training, I believed God spoke to me saying that I would win on the PGA Tour. I was certain it was his voice. With this new assurance, I decided to take my training to the next level for the upcoming 2022 season. I switched swing coaches to one of the best in the country. I worked one-on-one with a PGA level strength coach. I started training each day at 5:00am. I was reading golf mental books. I was all in. But after a few months, my performance on the golf course was worse than before. This drove me to my knees and eventually to a retreat center to spend time alone with God. It was here, that God gave me this new desire for ATS and to begin a transition away from golf to ministry full time. I was at peace about it and excited for this new chapter in my life. However, the dream of playing golf professionally still lived deep inside me. So, I decided that while I wait for seminary to start in the fall, I would continue playing in tournaments. When I started competing in the spring of 2022, I was devastated with my performance. All that hard work had resulted in worse scores than the years prior. I was missing cuts left and right. While attempting to qualify for the US Am in June, I played so poorly that I decided to cancel all future tournaments. I was disgusted. Embarrassed. Defeated. Sick and tired of failing in golf.

I guess I didn't hear God speak those couple of times. It must have been just selfish ambition. I so wanted to prove to the world that I could overcome all the odds with God's help. I wanted to make a name for myself under the disguise that I was doing it for God's glory. I was deceived. In the process, my identity was tied to my performance which saw way more failure than success (just the nature of the sport). I always felt like I had to prove that my dream was

from God, especially when people would hurl their doubts at me. There was so much pain and loss from this sport that I still have a hard time playing or even watching. I spent five years, living off my father's money, to fail miserably. My dad secured a future for me to pursue my dreams of education and a family, but I'm sure he would have thought this golf dream was naïve. However, I know the time wasn't wasted as my faith grew immensely during those five years. The discipline learned from golf, carried over to my devotional time with the Lord. I was baptized in 2018, joined a church in CT and SC (because I spent six months of the year in each location). I began leading Alpha groups and bible studies. My relationship with God was growing each year. I remember winning the club championship in 2020 and talking about Jesus in my speech and how much he loves everyone. God was working amid all this golf and I'm grateful for his patience and grace.

The most recent loss was with my girlfriend Hayley. We met on a blind date over Labor Day weekend in 2022. She lived in NC, so we were in a long-distance relationship, driving six hours to visit each other. We spent countless hours texting and facetimeing. A couple months into our relationship, we both felt like God was telling us to spend a week of no communication. One of the main reasons was because she had been married twice before and we weren't sure if she was free to remarry. After hours of research during that week, I concluded that she was free. When we reconnected, she had come to the same conclusion. It was that night after hanging up the phone that I realized that I loved her with all my heart. I couldn't sleep that night. I mailed her a love letter and then the following week she visited me in SC. She wanted to know what I was getting at in the letter, so I awkwardly said that I love her. Our relationship grew stronger and stronger from that night forward. So much so, that I was planning on proposing to her before she left on her six-week mission trip to Kenya in January.

Fast forward to Christmas time, and Hayley was visiting me and my mom in SC. I had asked my mom to bring some rings down for me. I chose a ring out of the selection and was going to give it to Hayley before she left for Kenya. Hayley and my mom got along nicely the first few days until a situation happened where Hayley felt uncomfortable around my mom. Hayley was getting mad at me for defending my mom and not taking sides with her. This led to a big argument where she was threatening to leave the relationship. She was giving me an ultimatum between her and my mom. I decided I needed space from Hayley and was seriously considering breaking up with her. The next day I ended up following through on ending things even though Hayley was very apologetic and was asking for reconciliation. I forgave her, but I didn't want to move forward with her.

In hindsight, I ended things because I was afraid of this new side of Hayley I hadn't seen. I was afraid I was ignoring all the red flags of her personality and actions. I thought that since we both loved Jesus and we loved each other, we would overcome any differences. I began to solidify my decision to end things, by talking to my family and friends about why I ended things. This was uncomfortable because I was talking poorly about the woman I loved. Was I just making excuses for the decision I made? Was I just covering up my insecurity of intimacy with another person? Was I acting out of fear?

Well, now Hayley is back from Kenya, and she is living in my town in SC because she had accepted a new job while we were dating. It has been difficult to navigate but we are attempting to be friends. I still love her but I'm doing my best to hide my emotions from her because I'm afraid of being hurt. This probably stems from losing my dad. I'm attempting to take our friendship one day at a time and trust God for the future.