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# This Season of My Life

I think it's safe to say that I haven't grieved anything up until this class had started, at least not in the manner that I should. While I can say that "everybody grieves in different ways," I for one, have not grieved at all and it only comes out when it gets bottled in for too long. There's a lot that you don't know about me and so I have been mentally preparing myself to write this all down on a Google doc the night before it's due. It's crazy to think that I am able to simply travel the world with you two and I am blessed to know that I shouldn't be afraid to say what's on my mind. Given that you and your wife have shared so much during our trip to Greece and even during our short encounters on campus, for the past eight months, I think it's only fair that I can trust my secrets with you.

Part of the reason why I feel so comfortable is because of my desire to be mentored by people I genuinely look up to. You see, I serve a Vietnamese Alliance church on W166th st in Washington Heights and we are actually celebrating our 40th anniversary this year! Funny enough, they moved the dates back and forth enough times to where it landed on the very Sunday we are going to Spain, go figure! But my first grief is actually not the fact that I'll miss this celebration. Sorting through the photos in preparing for the church's presentation, it's really had me reflecting the other night on a few things. Something that I believe is important to share is that our church has experienced a lot of transition and even loss within the past ten years that I've been there. Something that my pastor mentioned during one of our infrequent talks was that

“the New York Church is like a transit, people hop and would eventually hop off once they have reached their destination.” What he means by this is that we’ve truly seen a lot of people come, stay for a short number of years, and then leave due to one of two reasons, financial stability or becoming young families who need an extra set of hands back home. I’m not just grieving the fact that our close friends and leaders have to pack their things and say their farewells, but it’s more of the fact that it’s now my turn to take up that position as the church’s leader. I’m starting to see and even experience what kind of struggles they had to go through while serving our youth at our local church.

I feel alone at this church. And not to say that I don’t have a wonderful community to back me up–but they’re all too far away to see on a regular basis. Given that this responsibility had been gently laid out on me, I still feel as if the burden is too much because of how ill-equipped I am to serve in this leadership role. The youth group at my church is fairly small with there being seven on a good Sunday, two of those being my sisters. But on average, I have been present with just two or three, as I would jokingly even say that my sisters rotate on Sundays because of how tired they’d be from the night before, which leaves us with two others. I’ve grown discouraged by the headcount on a given Sunday and it makes it even more difficult to necessarily reach out to them because of how far I am from the city. Don’t get me wrong, there would be good Sundays where I would get just about everyone to show up for Sunday service but I would oftentimes not even know how to lead the class. I sometimes feel like I’ve failed them because I don’t feel like I’m getting through to them.

On a more pleasant note, I have grown closer to the younger folks who are in middle school! Albeit, they are not my students as of right now, I would like to think that I am much closer to them because of our common interests in video games. Just boys doing boy things.

However, I had just found out that two of the three boys that I spend time with are going to be moving away while we are going on the Spain trip. It's hard to think that after making a lot of progress with them, it would soon be over because they'd no longer be here at our little church in New York City. I'm back to square one when June hits.

It's been seven months since my youth leader, Samee, and his wife Kathy, had to pack up their things and move back to California to be with their families, as you can probably tell, they've just had a baby. Once his wife Kathy had moved over from California after getting married, I kind of saw that this was coming. Samee had prepped me for the inevitable and because of the challenges that he'd shared with me, it'd be too hard to stay in New York. I look up to him because of the many challenges that he faced and how God had humbled him–transforming his life into what is now serving God but also winning over his lovely wife. I miss them and think about how they're doing from time to time. And while Samee and I catch up every few weeks via Facetime, it's obviously not the same as I genuinely enjoy his company and attitude when it comes to serving God at our church. He's not the first one to go or even the second, but maybe the fifth young couple that had to move out of the city to be close to their families. New York is quite a lonely journey in serving God and His people.

I haven't really experienced a loss through death until about twelve months ago. On March 18, 2022, our church lost a friend who was only 18 years old. Kenny was a bright kid who wanted to show off his musical talents and was someone who got along with just about everyone. He kept to himself a lot and it's hard to imagine what had been stirring through his mind before his family found him in their house that Friday night. I don't know what happened but I've put enough of the pieces together to figure it out. I miss him and I think about him really often. It truly felt unreal to hear his brother utter the words of Kenny no longer being around

anymore–even to this day. And it's hard to share this because I'm afraid to live through this again with someone else, especially if it were one of my siblings. I think about the fact that I wasn't able to be there for his burial because of prior commitments for a client's one-year-old son. I ended up taking the pictures for his funeral and a celebration for a child that same day…

After Kenny had died, I really got intentional about reaching out to my youth kids, and although they don't really reply over text, I still try my best to do so. Even reaching out to my classmates has really been something that I try to be consistent with because I've truly grown to appreciate my time with people. I'm not sure what fully triggered this but maybe it's the fact that Aaron had invited me to eat lunch with him. During my time on campus, I would typically visit the library and have really made a community of friends there which has been amazing. But I'm actually not sharing this part specifically for that reason, I was in the library because I was spending time with Prarthana while we were still dating during that Spring semester.

I quite honestly don't know where to begin because I don't want to make it seem like I am bad-mouthing anyone for any reason. Prarthana and I had our really great moments during the relationship and I even thought about wanting to marry her for reasons that I would still hold true to this day. I've learned a lot from her but how I learned these things are the reason why I bring it up. I think I've grown sensitive to the things people say and it has made me so insecure that I start to doubt even myself. Words of affirmation have become something I truly value within any friendship ever since and it's because her last words to me really brought me down. I'm not entirely sure how this came to be, but the fact that I overthink and even worry about the smallest details brings me to a point in my life where I wish it did not happen this way. I'm honestly still processing what happened.

I lost my virginity at the age of 18. Being a few years older has made me realize that I'm not proud of what I've done because it's also caused emotional damage to a close friend and to myself. I think back to these moments and I feel convicted by how distorted sex had become to me and how I've ruined for myself something that God's created, which was supposed to be a beautiful and intimate thing. I became addicted to porn in middle school and would constantly struggle for as long as I can remember. It took some time, and by the grace of God, I have been able to fight it lately but there are a lot of things that linger in my mind and even images that I cannot forget. I've grown close to a friend who truly loves Christ. I think her efforts to show modesty and a hunger for a righteous life have really brought me the conviction that I needed. It goes back to how Samee wanted to change because of his convictions, but he also knew that he had to work hard for his wife to trust him when they first met. Not to say that I am changing my ways just for her, but I know that I want to change to be more like Christ. Of course, that's easier said than done but I know I should at least humble myself for it is through God that I can change.

On a similar note, I think I really desire to always be with someone. I really like this close friend of mine, Cindy, for all of the right reasons. Something that's been challenging me is having a sense of self-control and independence from women. I have been in relationships back-to-back since middle school (you can see where the patterns started) and I never spent adequate time being single. I don't actually know how to be single and Cindy's really been encouraging me and even challenging (us) to be single. I'd love to be with her because she really brings me closer to God and I could see a future with us together, but I'm sharing this because it's mutual. I want to raise a family of my own and being patient has really brought me to a point in my life where God has truly humbled me and told me to slow down. With that being easier said than done, I know that I should be patient in this time of being single and especially celibate.

Part of being single also means that I have no excuse to not reflect on these past moments. I have anger issues and I oftentimes relate myself to Moses because of it. Something that I have recently read was about his moment on top of the mountain with God. Just having received the Ten Commandments, God also threatens to punish the Israelites. But Moses wanted to step up and be the leader that God asked him to be. In doing so, he pleaded with God to remember His covenant with the descendants of Abraham. Once Moses came down to the foot of the mountain, probably excited to share all these things that God had told him to share with the Israelites, what does he see? A bunch of his people danced around a golden calf. With anger, he threw down the tablets, shattering them into a bunch of little bits and pieces. I really relate to Moses because he gets excited for his people and what's to come, but once they don't follow up with his expectations, he acts out of anger. While I thankfully have never killed an Egyptian, it's safe to say that I can be mildly aggressive when I get angry.

Going back to spending time with Aaron and the others at the library, I joined Aaron in his small group, using the infamously amazing Spiritual Journey book, written by the one and only Dr. Wanda Walborn. Can I just say that her book is considerably different the second time around, especially after getting to know Dr. Wanda Walborn on the trip? There were a lot of things that I was able to process with them and part of that is already mentioned in this journal. I misplaced part of my identity when Prarthana and I had broken up and part of that is because of the hurtful words that didn't exactly bring closure. If anything, it added more salt to the wound and it's most likely because I knew she was hurting through the things I have done and she wanted me to feel how she felt. The thing is, I don't exactly know what I have done which is why I have a hard time processing this, even to this day…