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DML921: Following in the Steps (Spiritual Pilgrimage)

Grief Journal

I've never been good at processing pain and loss. Attending Alliance has been critical towards me taking proper steps to reflect and heal from the significant wounds and losses in my life. To map this journal, I will chronologically walk through the different phases of my life and identify the major events across the years.

I was born in Arlington Heights, Illinois; I grew up here the first 8 years of my life. I am the youngest of three, with two older sisters. My parents were devout followers of God who raised me to know and love God. We attended church every Sunday and Friday and served faithfully. During this time, I went to a large Korean church called Hebron Presbyterian church outside the Chicago area. At a young age, I got involved with the rebellious kids who would often skip services or burn trash behind the church. It's strange, I recall being very well behaved and proper at some times, but incredibly reckless and wild at other times. When I was six years old, these older rebellious kids introduced me to one of my first sexual experiences. They encouraged me to get on top of an eager 13 year old girl and kiss her heavily. At the time, I really didn't know what I was doing and thought it was fun so I just went along with it. Honestly, I remember encouraging others my age to do it too. There were a few other moments like this where I recall being bullied into kissing other girls and I always felt powerless and manipulated. It was strange and looking back on it now, I can pinpoint these moments as times that brought a

lot of shame, confusion, and lust in to my life. Especially after this, from a young age, I recall being filled with lustful thoughts and feeling a lot of shame.

In 2002, my family moved to Marlboro, New Jersey where I spent the rest of my childhood and adolescence. I attended All Nations Mission Church in Dayton, NJ. It was at this church where I had a powerful encounter with the Lord at a young age. As I mentioned earlier, my parents were extremely devout followers of the Lord. Very quickly, our entire family became heavily involved in serving at the church. I actually loved serving. I felt that it not only was the right thing to do, but that it pleased my parents. But during these formative years, I picked up a lot of unhealthy ideas of what it meant to be a leader. My parents were amazing people but they were not perfect. They had their fair share of hardships in their life; as immigrants who had left South Korea at a young age and independently worked their way through college in the USA, they were just trying to survive. It was not in their paradigm to consider how to be emotionally healthy. Almost every other day, there would be explosive fights in the house. Sometimes, it would end with some of our furniture being destroyed. My father rarely hit my mother, but fights would escalate just shy of physical violence most of the time. My father had a volcanic temper and my mother had years of bitterness towards him. The house was not stable, and I recall getting beaten badly a few times growing up. I had a lot of admiration towards my father because he was my father. But I also had a lot of anger and fear towards him. My parents were emotionally unstable and quick to fight, especially with one another. Yet they still served diligently at church and truly did cry out to the Lord. Sometimes, this would deeply confuse me. How could people who spent so much time praying and seeking the Lord continue to be filled with so much hate and anger? Growing up, they often taught me to never show weakness, which seemed to be “weaker emotions” such as sadness, fear, or instability. They told me I was a leader

and a strong leader couldn't show weakness to those who were following me. So, I grew up generally burying my "weaker" emotions of anger, fear, and sadness. I usually had a pretty good smile and poker face and serve diligently as worship leader at church; but I had a lot of frustration and anger inside. I carried on like this for many years and was often forced to serve or lead in my church because I was actually very capable. People looked up to me. I did genuinely care for God and people. I knew what to say and how to lead. However, there was this loneliness I felt inside that I often could not shake, share, or understand. I found a lot of comfort in pornography and talking to lots of girls. A lot of my childhood woundings ended up manifesting in to pornography addictions and reliance on befriending and flirting with girls as I grew older.

In my college years, I initially sought after the Lord intensely. I went to YWAM in 2016 and had powerful encounters with Him. I also received a strong vision of the Lord calling me to church plant. However, even at YWAM, I fell into sexual sin. My outreach team leader, who was one of our school's teachers, flirted with me, the outreach student leader, while we were in Zambia. This led to several inappropriate encounters and flirting while in Africa. We did not have sex or commit any sexual acts, but we very explicitly told each other we wanted to. I was filled with a lot of confusion, anger, and guilt because I had once again, fallen in to sexual sin and had felt like I had failed deeply even while at YWAM. I tried to draw boundaries but she would literally follow me around to the point where my team members were even aggravated about this ordeal. Following YWAM, I left with a lot of shame, confusion, and guilt again. I truly felt like I failed. Coming home, my parents told me I had wasted 6 months of my life and that it looked like I had not changed at all. Over time, the loneliness, confusion, guilt, and shame became overwhelming and I spiraled down in to whatever comforts I could find to not feel anything. While I was still serving the Lord and leading worship, teaching Youth Group

students, and even preaching on occasion, I began to live a double life. I began to drink heavily, smoke cigarettes and marijuana, snort cocaine, party, and mess around with girls regularly. The self-hatred and disgust towards myself grew. I knew right from wrong and the Holy Spirit was still inside me, but I could not break free from my sin. Soon, I stopped caring about my double life and everyone, except my parents, began to see the wild living that I participated in regularly. Up until now, I was a well-respected, looked up to leader in several Christian circles. However slowly, people began to look at me differently and soon, I had a rather heinous reputation as a manipulative, unhealthy that people should guy stay away from. During this time, I fell in to such deep sin and to my regret, I was inappropriate with several Christian girls from many different circles. I actually found entertainment in seeing if other girls had as much sin, evil, and pain inside them as I had inside of me. I rarely slept and I was constantly filled with anxiety. In hindsight, I was very demonized.

A significant wounding happened at the lowest point of this season. I had an inappropriate relationship with one of my close friend's girlfriends. During one drunken night, I advanced on her inappropriately and although I did not rape her or was forceful, I touched her against her will. This was an extremely gray encounter and one of the lowest moments of my life. There were many mixed signals and disgusting amounts of alcohol leading up to this encounter, and we also shared inappropriate sexual history. But at the end of the day, this encounter was still against her will as she confronted me in distress following this. After a few weeks, her boyfriend, my friend, found out and told his pastor that I sexually assaulted her. The next thing I knew, my pastor called me and told me that I had been accused of fully raping her and that this wasn't the first time. I still remember receiving this phone call while I was driving in the heavy rain. For a few years after this moment, I had a fear of receiving phone calls from

people or when I would hear “hey I need to talk to you about something”. Because of my sincere confusion regarding the situation, I vehemently began defending myself in this moment. I selfishly could only see myself and felt deep betrayal. I was confused because the encounters I had with other women were consensual. I even thought that the encounter with this girl was consensual (I truly did). Around this time period, the Me Too movement escalated and I was filled with deep shame, inner turmoil, and disgust. I felt like another Harvey Weinstein. Nearly all of my friends and school community (aside from my church and parents) disassociated from me, as the rumor that I had raped her spread. What hurt the most in this time was that my best friend, who I had known for over 10 years, a brother I had lived with for about four, ghosted/cancelled me. Although we talked it out several months later after I demanded he speak with me at least once, we are not friends anymore. There is a lot of detail to this friendship, but he was truly my closest brother. We literally were like David and Jonathan. We even looked alike, did sports, and were known in middle school, high school, and all college as the closest of brothers. Despite my perceived sins, I could never get past how he could just completely ignore me for almost four months.

The story does get worse. After a few weeks, my pastor actually said that he needed my help in leadership and asked me to come back and serve. I did not have anyone to process any of this with and was deeply troubled. However, I came back because I felt God needed me. I was finishing up my last year in college and serving as a youth group teacher and a high school senior girl began flirting with me and asking me sensitive questions. To my deepest regret, I entertained these questions and her and I began inappropriately being vulnerable with one another about sexual behaviors. Fast forward to a few months later, I was leaving the church and she asked for a ride home. When I dropped her off, her and I kissed and I suggested we do more. In that split

moment, I had a deep fear and realization of what I was doing and I literally ran away and drove home. I sat in my room and was hearing voices telling me to kill myself, that I'd gone too far, that I was truly no better than Harvey Weinstein, and that I was beyond forgiveness. I contemplated biting my tongue off from about 4pm to late in the evening. I did not go through with killing myself because I did not want my mother to find my dead body.

From this moment on, I left the Lord for about three years, and although I attended a separate church to not worry my parents, I spent nearly every day getting drunk, high, and partying. I had so much shame, disgust, hatred, anger, and bitterness towards myself. I can confidently say that through a few close brothers and even Deborah, the Lord has brought me on a long journey of healing and restoration. I have been transparent with Deborah about everything and her response to my brokenness was supernatural grace. I see God's hand in these past events. It's hard to explain as I'm already past the page limit, but there were moments where He would immobilize me physically and utterly grip my attention. I'm also grateful that He exposed my lust and sexual addictions at an earlier age to free me from double-life Christianity. I had a Savior mentality, like the church body needed me to lead them. Now I know exactly how broken I am and was, and how deep the grace of God goes for my life. I used to think, growing up, that I was ready for seminary and to respond to the call of the Lord. I can now say that going to seminary was one of the hardest decisions in my life. I know the Lord called me to come, however I honestly have a fear of "being exposed", betrayed, abandoned, or blocked from preaching His word. I know it's irrational, but sometimes the thought still creeps in that has me wondering if I just messed up too badly and may not be able to serve God and people in the fullest way I want to.

I'm way beyond the page limit and I don't want this to drag on, but the Lord has been deeply healing me. I will be honest; I have a hard time trusting people and their intentions for me. I also have found myself emotionally distant in relationships, aside from my wife. The Lord is healing this for sure. I struggle understanding the hand of God in the ways I was manipulated and taken advantage of by several people when I was a young child. However, I trust that He was and is good. And that He can use what the enemy meant for evil for good. I truly do love God, love people, and have also established boundaries in the ways that I interact with women aside from my wife. I know the ways the enemy has attacked my sexuality all my life, and the ways that I have fallen in to temptation; I will not be naïve and give him any sort of foothold. I have been delivered from porn. I do not struggle with the old temptations that I used to. Dr. Reimer has also done deliverance on me! And although it is not a sin, the Lord has called me to stop drinking and smoking, and I have responded faithfully so. I am still healing, processing, learning, and really beginning to grieve these wounds and losses in my life; especially the losses of my own making. I hope to learn to do this more faithfully and honestly through this course.