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Personal Spiritual Formation

Grief Journal 4/2/23

I'm not sure how honest I will be able to be in filling out this grief journal but I'd like to be. I can't say this assignment is easy because I've never really dealt with grief or the emotion of grief as it came up in my life. My escape routes were always going out to see friends, driving alone or smoking marijuana. Prayer and reading the Bible was part of dealing with grief too but whenever the answers seemed to take longer than my urgent desire for it, I admit I turned to myself or to the world for second-rate alleviation. All along though, I kept on living as a Korean-American Christian, pastor's son, and even youth pastor during a certain time period in my life. I often struggle with purpose and calling in my life. I think that this may be because I haven't given all of myself to Jesus, whatever that may truly mean. I come from an immigrant family with a strict patriarchal father, loving Christ-like mother, and a terse and tough, 8-year older brother. This is my family background and for the first time in my life, I will try to analyze and come forward honestly about where I stood, stand, and hope to stand for this family of mine.

I think the first place from which my grief stems from is from the feeling of having failed my parents and family. Coming from a Korean family, individualism was never an option for me growing up. As much as I denied the reality of being part of a family or was ignorant to it growing up, one of the strongest advantages for me has become reason for one the greatest pressures of my life. I don't think I properly take enough time to address how sad or defeated I feel about not being able to support or help out my family financially. I know I am trying my best now, studying in school and working in ministry but there is always this lingering feeling of

regret about how much time I had wasted in the past and if I am honest, struggling to not waste now.

I hope this journal doesn't become "10 Things I Hate About My Pastor Father." That isn't my intention, I respect him as a man, have hopes of him as a son, but I do think he is a lousy husband and terrible teacher. Before becoming a reverend, my father was a teacher- a school-teacher. He struggled very much as a young boy and as a young man in post-WW2/Korean War South Korea. He lost his best friend in the military, never had much of a father, and was always harassed both in dreams and in real life through visions by a dark red cloud chasing after him to swallow him up until Jesus saved him, called him by name and he became a reverend. Still yet, I see from my father the phrase: "to deny oneself and take up the cross daily" is something that may take an entire lifetime.

I wish my father did not have to deal with his old self so much.

I wish he was proud of me and could see that I am different from him and how he grew up.

His old self is filled with an inferiority complex, a sense of desperation, and anger management.

What's difficult to admit now is that this father of mine is now old and weak. It may sound stupid but I'm not sure what I wanted. I think I had always wanted my father to be a little more lenient but now that he is softer in his old age it just brings up a sense of worry and urgency in me.

When our family was in Korea I was too young. We came to America in 2001 led by our father leaving behind a community, a literal plot of land with houses, where we would live with other Christians in the mountain valleys of Gapyeong Province worshipping, providing refuge

and rehabilitation for those hurt and injured by the society and the world. We left in 2001, my father, with certain faith that it is God's calling. After a while, my brother left home, my cousins who came to live with us in America lived in fear and anxiety of my father who lived by the ideology of Confucianism and elderly respect our culture was founded on. I think this ideology turned out to be more detrimental than constructive because after awhile, life in America was not as prosperous as we had hoped. My brother being the eldest felt a certain responsibility to support our family and could never do so under my father because communication was impossible. I spent my teenage years with a loving Christ-like mother, playful but ambitious cousins, a father with great expectations and hopes who favored me as long as "yes" was the answer he heard most and a tough and scary older brother who, never to this day, speaks about how he really feels but I think his pains have become a scab that has healed with only a scar to leave behind. I think this is the way things are in most Korean families. We call this HAN-unexpressed pain. My father has it, my brother has it, Christ knows my mother has her fair share, and perhaps I do as well.

My parents kept themselves so busy with ministry as they had to, and I was just into having a good time during my teenage years while my brother was busy working in shady karaoke bars and restaurants in Koreatown. After growing up and becoming an adult in the United States this past our family shared started to seem strange to me. My brother and I could never be honest with my father because it was "disrespectful".

There was a rough patch about 5-6 years ago during a period of time when I was heavily smoking, and my parents' relationship was becoming toxic. I would counsel my mother and father individually about the problems they had with one another. My mother would confess her pains and my father would "teach" me about which type of woman I should meet and I would

listen and give them the answers to look with a different perspective all the while I was not okay with it. Marijuana. It is fun, it is relaxing, it is elevating and then it seems to bring you down under and deeper than where you were before you did it. This was going on daily for those 3 years of my life. I had school, I was serving in ministry, struggling with my sinful nature, protecting my mother from my father, bearing with my father's complaints about his spouse which I think really damaged me and my hopes and desires of marriage.

I don't know how I feel right now, writing this much. There were good times. Grateful times. I even went hiking once a week with my father after the 3-5 year period. However, there are triggers. My father has these triggers. They remind me of this past. It tempts me to dive back into that life of living behind a mask. I used to be afraid of my father, of physical pain but now I'm not. I'm not afraid of him, in fact, if causing me pain or perhaps serious harm would lead him to guilt which would lead him to change then I'm willing to take it all. I'm not sure if this is okay but I feel free-er than when I was younger. I'm not grinding my teeth against my father but I've become someone who firmly believes more than I "love" or "respect" my father to tell him what I believe needs to be told. I'm not sure if this is okay though. I feel like God lets things happen so we learn and we heal and we overcome. However, I just don't feel like I used to with God, with my father. I feel like I've lost a certain innocence but gained individualism.

I know God can be merciless and brutal. I know sometimes in order to even teach a lesson, God may leave things to be as they are. However, I also know that it is by the grace of God that I am where I am today and am who I am today despite these things. A university student, in America, studying, not worrying about food, clothing or shelter. I also know that it is by the grace of God working through my mother that our family is still in-tact today. Also, to have a father, is this not the grace of God as well, when my father himself grew up without his

biological one? I will make my father proud, and my mother pleased. How can I be a good Christian if I cannot even honor my earthly parents? Just writing this journal has made things better. I want my pain to become a scab, then a faint scar so that I will have something to remind me not to make the same mistakes if God permits me to have a family and the same blessings he has granted my father. To be a healer for others and to be more Christ-like is my life's purpose but today, I feel drier and more barren than at other times.

For me, grief is a difficult topic to process because it is not something I am used to embracing. I think it was always something I "overcome" or something always "passes through". Dwelling on grief always made me feel weak. As much as many of the things I've written in this journal are in the past, these days I feel as though my life is like walking on a tightrope where no more slips and strikes are allowed. This is more so pressure and burden than grief and to be honest, I am both stressed and excited about it. What caused me grief in the past has been transformed into an opportunity for me to end things right with these next few upcoming years. Graduation as well as ministry, as well as new experiences and new subjects of study are all on the horizon on which the sun is rising. I think the important thing is for me to be able to learn from the darkness of the past which at this point, is fading away. I just pray that it was not something to be forgotten but rather lessons and emotions I remember how to overcome in the future.

I know I am not invulnerable to grief in the future and to be honest, I am afraid about this. I think one of the reasons life on Earth sucks is that sorrow and toil will never end. Often times I wish so much that I could be fully developed (glorified, sanctified... whatever the word is) here on this Earth. I REALLY do sometimes. So I'm afraid sometimes of living my life to the fullest. This is one of my weaknesses that I am working on continually. My child-self had no

trouble living life to the fullest, unafraid of loving and showing vulnerability. However, I realize that some mistakes can hurt more than other and sometimes other people's mistakes will hurt me too. This is one of my biggest dilemmas. I know one option I can choose is avoidance. To live in oblivion of who I could really be and what's happening to the people I love around me but also, as afraid as I am to live loving people, sometimes I don't think life is really worth living unless I've lived it loving people as much as I can. One of the reasons this class and counseling has been good for me is that I'm learning to accept that fact that grief will never be painless but also, I don't have to let it knock me down as hard every time it comes around. After all, the sacrifices of the Lord are a broken spirit. But all jokes aside, I think as long as grief is processed and digested properly it is the best opportunities to see and testify of the goodness of God.