Grief paper

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I am a 47-year-old Asian woman born in South Korea and I came to America in 2003. Now I live with my two teenage sons and my husband. I never had a chance to reflect on my losses throughout my entire life until I took this course. I thought about the death of my loved one whenever it happened but did not think of the maturational loss as a loss in my life. So this paper gives me a chance to reflect on my whole life regarding losses, and reminisce good memories with my lost loved ones.

The first loss in my life was breaking up with my boyfriend when I was in college. It was an ambiguous loss because he broke up with me over the phone while he was in the army, but his message was unclear enough to accept. So I waited for him for more than a year, hoping he might return to me. During that time, I was preoccupied with obsessive thoughts about him and how to recover from the lost relationship; at the same time, I experienced sleep disturbances, eating disturbances, and crying. I remember I did not tell anyone in my family because it was not easy for me to share my hardships with my family. Only a few church and college friends knew and supported me. Even though my condition was not healthy physically and emotionally, I kept doing the work I had to do at school and church, brought all my sorrow before God, and repented for what I did wrong when I had a relationship with him. I wanted to move forward, not stay the same. The religious resource was the most significant copying resource for me then. I did not know what kind of grieving process I did at that time. After I took grief therapy, I realized that I experienced five stages of grief by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. It was not the death of my loved one, but it was an ambiguous loss for me. I processed denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance for two years (Boss, 2022).

The second loss was losing my loved friend when I was 30 years old in the United States. She devoted her life to God to prepare for being a missionary in China from college. Suddenly, I heard she had colon cancer, and a few months later, she said God healed her cancer miraculously. However, a few months later, cancer spread all over her body, and she died. I was shocked because her death left a question of why God took her so early. She was a faithful Christian who wanted to live for God as a missionary. It was a mystery then; I had to live with the question for a few months. I prayed to God to answer my question and mediated the Bible to cope with the loss. According to Sacred Marriage, the author had the same question as me when famous musician Keith died young. He realized that service is not essential for God; faithfulness is a matter before God. Many other extraordinary Christians die young, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Blaise Pascal, and even Jesus (Thomas, 2015). His realization reassured me of my thoughts about Christian death. Psalms 116:16, "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful servants." My friend went to the heavenly father's embrace as a faithful servant. God taught me the truth about death through my loved Christian friend. I found meaning in what kinds of death matter before God. Reframing my friend's death gave me a chance to see a perspective on death as a Christian.

My brother's unexpected and off-time death when he was 30 was the third loss in my life. He died in a car accident due to driving under the influence, leaving three children and a wife. I never expected the death of my family member. It was hard to believe I had lost my brother, who I spent my childhood with. I immediately visited South Korea to support my family and returned in one month. I had no time to mourn or grieve due to caring for little nieces and nephews. Also, sadly, there were misunderstandings and conflicts between my parents and my sister-in-law over the management of life insurance compensation. My sister-in-law cut off the connection with my

family, so my parents could not see their grandchildren for a few years until my sister-in-law lost all life insurance compensation. That time was harder than my brother's death. I kept praying and trying to contact my sister-in-law to adjust to a new situation, but the only way was praying for God to recover the problem because I could not control it. As a result, my family experienced multiple losses, like my brother and grandchildren. I coped only by praying for changing situations, while I kept trying to contact my sister-in-law.

The fourth loss was my father-in-law, who had Parkinson's disease for five years and spent the last two years in bed. He could feel, smell, and hear, but could not move or speak. It was an anticipatory death for his family members. I sometimes expected his death here and thought about what I could do for him, so my husband and I visited South Korea and supported him and his family for one month. I was pregnant then, but I did my best to support him with massaging, talking, and singing. After we came back to America, my father in law passed away. I could not go to South Korea again, so only my husband went. I just had a moment to reminisce about that time in South Korea with my father-in-law. Because of proximity, I feel he still lives in my heart and in South Korea. I am sure the time spent with my father in law in South Korea helped me to cope with a new situation. I do not feel guilty or regret it because I did what I could, and he is with my heavenly father in heaven.

The fifth loss was my grandmother, who passed away at 98. It was a maturational death so every one of the family members expected her death at a certain point. However, her last moment of death was unexpected because she was sent to an elderly hospital due to dementia during the pandemic. Therefore, nobody visited there and saw her while she was there. Only one month later, the hospital called to say that my grandmother had died in the morning. It was sad news for the family. I remember her children kept telling her we would spend time together

when she returned from the hospital, but there was no next time. I was sad thinking my grandmother passed away alone in the room. She spent her whole life for her family, but nobody was there at her last moment. I realized that nobody knows what is going to happen next. We can not assume we have enough time or not to spend with families. Therefore, we should love and care for each other right now; next time is not guaranteed. This loss led me to find meaning about the time I can spend in life. I lost my grandmother, but I gained the truth that life is short and we do not know what will happen next.

The Sixth loss is losing control of my time as a married woman. I was a single woman who loved and served God, so I spent most of my time at church. I was happy and joyful. However, as a married woman with children, I lost control of my time and energy whatever I wanted, primarily because I could not serve God as much as I was single. It made me feel behind spiritually, so sometimes I blamed my children. I kept reading books on marriage and parenting from secular and sacred perspectives to cope with this new situation. During that time, I found a book called *Scared Parenting;* it says if you want to devote your life to God physically, be a single. Being in marriage and parenting is training to live like Jesus (Thomas, 2017). I cried a lot that night and thanked God for allowing me to be trained to be like Jesus. I realized how God treats a family worthy and wants me to resemble his image to my children. I felt relieved from that time and spent much time reflecting on myself as a Christian in the family and God's heart as a parent. I know the training never ends until I die, but I do not get stressed like before. I am thankful to have a family to feel God's heart and reveal His love toward the world.

The last loss I want to share is the separation from my family of origin because of my marriage. I have been living here for twenty years with my only immediate family. I gained something like children, education, and new culture, but I also lost my family of origin. I cannot

spend holidays, anniversaries, and any special moments with them. I missed them a lot during the holiday season. In order to cope with this situation, I tried to keep contacting them by letter and telephone for ten years; thankfully, now I can use Facetime by phone, so I feel we live in the same land. It helps me to feel I am one of the family members. Also, I have another perspective about family in faith. Jesus said in Luke 8:21, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice." So, I am trying to treat church members like family.

When I think about my seven losses, I found my strength in loss is redefinition or reframing of the loss. I mostly tried to find the meaning of the loss and apply it to my life quickly. This positive part helped me to adjust to a new situation smoothly. However, paradoxically, my weakness is not grieving enough and expressing negative emotions. I have a small moment of grief, but I do not think I have enough time to grieve. I do not want to be stuck being sad for some reason, so I intensely go back to normal life in general. I think this attitude partially came from both my family of origin and ethnicity.

In my family of origin, my parents mainly expressed their negative emotions whenever they wanted. My parents are strict and authoritarian, so we already know what behaviors would be acceptable. Also, I never had to be asked about my feelings and emotions from my parents. I understand why their parenting is like that because my mother's mother passed away when she was six months old, and she had three stepmothers in order. My father was the oldest son of seventh siblings in 1947. Their parents were not supporting their children emotionally either, it was usual at that time period. Growing up in this environment, I unconsciously avoid expressing my negative emotions.

As well as my family of origin, Asians live based on collective culture. We value social relationships, groups, and unity. Also, obligations toward an individual's needs are virtue

(Gardiner & Kosmitzki, 2011). So it is not easy to express our thoughts and feelings as compared to Western culture. People, who talk and express their emotions whenever they want, are considered rude and selfish. This cultural background formed me not to express my thoughts and feelings freely. So it was hard to tell my negative emotions and bad news to my family also, I did not want them to worry because of me. I can express my variety of emotions with my immediate family, but still, with my family of origin, I do not do it. I talk to God about everything instead.

I never had time to think seriously about loss and death, so this course gave me a unique opportunity to learn about the loss in different developmental stages. The most significant point of learning about grief therapy is enlarging my perspective and depth about people who lost their loved ones and lost their functions as they age. In the past, I thought bereaved people should stop grieving at certain times to live their lives. How heartless of a person I was. However, as I read books and listened to lectures, I realized there could not be a limitation to bereaved one's grieving process. They need enough time and support from people around them.

The second part I learned from this course is that I can face death as a part of life. Many people are scared to face the death of their loved one as I did, but death is part of our lives, and we should talk and prepare for it like other topics related to life. Once I started this course, I thought about my death and my family members' death every week; what if I died now, or other family members? At first, it was hard to imagine living without them, or me not being here, but it is getting better to think about that. Now we love and care for each other more in order to not regret what we should have done when they were alive with us. We share instructions on how we want bereaved ones to live. Now death is no longer a vague fear; it is one’s part of life.

The last thing I learned from this class is what kind of love is healthy for my family. When I think about my children's death, I immediately decide to love them more, but what kind

of love is helping them live without me? I realize I should give love to guide them to think, decide and be responsible for their actions. I should love them by not just giving them what they want, but by guiding them to live independently in whatever situation.

People say that a blessing is to live a long healthy life; otherwise, it is cursed when people die by accidents, diseases, and suicide because no one wishes that kind of death. However, when and how we die is not under our control. It belongs to God in his time. So what I can do is live faithfully before Him, love people around me, and enjoy every moment God allows me.

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