

Grief Revisited

“Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak knits up the o-er wrought heart and bids it break.”

~Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

Shakespeare seems like the perfect go-to person when it comes to listening to advice. With his extraordinary ability to see into the human heart, it is no wonder we consider him one of our greatest writers. I have always loved how his use of iambic pentameter mirrors the sound of our heartbeat...ba bum, ba bum, ba bum. So I slowed myself down when I read his words from *Macbeth*. Shakespeare was reminding me to acknowledge what grief was saying and stop dismissing her like a child that just needed too much attention.

Consequently, after Lukas was born, I went to a therapist where I could lay down my grief and process what was lost when we learned he had Down syndrome. Although it all felt like an overwhelming bundle at the time, I tried to unravel what was impacting me most. One of the main things to emerge was the loss of a familiar path for Lukas (medically, educationally, socially, etc.). I allowed my heart and mouth to name these losses in the safe place created by my therapist, Jennifer. I felt like I could go into the deep waters because she was there to guide me back to shore. The depth felt too unsettling to navigate alone, so I was grateful to have her as my life guard.

Since I wanted Lukas to have a home of celebration, I tried to suspend any moments of grief that crept up on me and keep them for Jennifer's haven. (I admit, I was only mildly successful at this!). However, like me, grief seemed to appreciate knowing it had a safe place to say unspeakable things.

For our last meeting, Jennifer had me write a letter to myself. I was to purge all of the lies and accusations that had consumed me. Then we put a flame to this letter's corner and watched it all burn away. Because of Jennifer, I had new words and thoughts to fill my mind, as well as a new relationship with grief. I was no longer so afraid of her.

I felt hopeful as I walked out of Jennifer's doors. Grief was given lots of opportunities to be heard and cared for, so she wasn't pounding on my door so much anymore. It was as if she laid down on the welcome mat and decided to get some rest.

What I was not prepared for, however, were all of the future losses and grief that would continue to come. My naïve understanding was that if I grieved the loss upfront, I would be done and she could just take up residency outside my door, satiated and content to leave me be. But as Lukas grew older, I started to notice *new* losses and hear grief's familiar taps at my door.

The first loss I noticed was that his grandparents were no longer inviting him for sleep-overs. Each year he becomes so much stronger and faster. Couple this with his distinct talent for finding ways to escape, and we all agreed it just felt too dangerous. Now he watches his sister's excitement about sleep-overs while he remains at home. That loss has a sting.

I am also keenly aware that I no longer take him places as freely as I once did. When he was small, I could just pick him up and carry him to the car if he dropped and didn't want to leave. But as he grew bigger, I could no longer do this, which meant there were places and occasions that we had to pass by. As we stopped attending certain functions, we stopped getting invited to them. At times it feels like a growing isolation.

And then there is the emerging loss of friends. Playing tag and dancing to music are not as gripping to boys his age now. They might engage with Lukas briefly with such activities, but they are on to more sophisticated endeavors, rightfully so. As they play video games, Lukas tries to snatch the devices out of their hands (vying for their attention), and what may have been cute when he was younger may now be slightly annoying. These are losses that I didn't grieve when he was a baby, so I now had to open that door to grief's knocking and listen to her once again. She had new things to tell me.

Sometimes I listen and just allow the tears to fall. *Yes*, I acknowledge with her, *these losses grab at my heart*. I can't shuffle or rearrange the story any other way. I just have to sit in a reality that is different from what I envisioned. The loss can't always be transformed.

And sometimes I listen to grief and then invite wisdom into our circle to speak to me as well. I ask her, "What am I not seeing?" God's created order is often the opposite of what we might expect. For example, He says the last will be first, and laying down our life is saving our life, and blessed are those that mourn. Such ideas run counter to my sensibilities. So I figure He has something to say to me in my circumstances with Lukas that I would miss without His wisdom.

I want my son to be lavished with love and experiences, so it hurts when those opportunities are diminished. Yet God reminds me to hold fast to my good desires...and then begin to re-envision what they might need to look like. For example, my desire for Lukas to spend time with family and friends is good; however, rather than the adventure being out in the world, maybe I need to create the adventure right in our home. Pitching a tent in the woods becomes pitching a tent in the playroom. Watching fireworks at an Orlando theme park becomes watching those fireworks on YouTube. And maybe just curling up in a grandma's lap is all that Lukas really needs.

Just like I had to let some of my vision for Lukas' life fall away when he was a newborn, I continue to have to revisit that surrender. Yes, I grieved it then, but I continue to grieve it now as well because its shape is a little different, more nuanced, maybe even more complicated. I now know that this grieving process is not something I will outgrow. Grief may sleep at my door most of the time, but she is still there, and she can awaken with a startle.

As I watch for where Lukas thrives, I witness how the world shrinks. His footsteps don't roam far and wide; he most often thrives when he is treading familiar ground. At first glance, I find this disheartening. It feels like yet another loss. I want the world to feel as large as possible to Lukas since I somehow equate grandness with a more meaningful life.

But Jesus didn't come in grandness. He shrank his world and still found glory there. He went from roaming the heavens to walking just a small portion of his creation. His footsteps were confined. He, too, was bound by human limitations. That is the upside-down economy of God. We think we want endless possibilities for our children. All of the platitudes – the sky's the limit, dream big, etc. But God gave his own son limitations and watched him thrive there, do miracles there, change hearts and lives there.

It didn't look like what the Jews expected when Jesus came; they imagined him riding in on a horse fit for a King, yet there he was on a small donkey. And it doesn't look like what I expected when Lukas came. I imagined him boundlessly afoot in this world, yet he is most often very close to home.

So after grief is done talking to me and wisdom takes a seat, I am able to see that Lukas' limitations are real, yet they don't have to stop him from impacting his world. This is the gift that grief has led me to... Lukas' footsteps can remain small, but his impact can remain grand. Even in his shrunken world, glory remains.