

22 The Grief You Were Given Permission to Feel

June 02, 2026

Last month we said goodbye to someone we love.

And grief – that uninvited, necessary, deeply human thing – arrived right behind it.

It always does.

What surprised me wasn't the grief itself.

It was how differently it arrived for each of us.

I've seen this before. I've experienced this before.

And each time it reminds me that grief is as unique as the person carrying it.

We Don't Grieve the Same Way

Some people cry immediately.

Others go quiet for days.

Some need to be surrounded by people.

Others need to disappear.

Some process out loud – talking, remembering, telling stories.

Others process in silence – thinking, writing, staring out windows.

Some feel relief when the suffering ends.

Others feel guilt for feeling relieved.

Some grieve loudly and visibly.

Others carry it so quietly that no one around them even knows.

None of these are wrong.

They are just different.

And one of the cruelest things we do to grieving people is hold them to a standard of grief that was never theirs to meet.

“You should be over it by now.”

“You're not crying – did you even care?”

“You're too emotional.”

“You need to be strong for everyone else.”

We say these things – sometimes out loud, sometimes just with our eyes – and in doing so we hand the grieving person one more weight to carry on top of the one they’re already struggling under.

Grief doesn’t need a standard.

It needs space.

The Loss We Don’t Talk About

Not all grief looks the same because not all loss feels the same.

There is the loss that comes after a long life well lived – expected, peaceful, a gentle exhale at the end of a full story.

There is the loss that comes without warning – sudden, violent, leaving questions that never fully resolve.

There is the loss of someone young – the grief that feels wrong in its very bones because the order of things has been violated.

There is the loss of a complicated relationship – someone you loved and struggled with, someone you never fully reconciled with, someone whose death leaves both grief and unfinished business tangled together.

There is the loss of what never was – a dream, a pregnancy, a relationship that ended before it should have.

There is the grief that arrives years later – triggered by a song, a smell, a date on the calendar – reminding you that some losses don’t resolve, they just become quieter over time.

Each of these is real.

Each deserves to be honored.

And the grief you feel for one may look nothing like the grief you feel for another.

That isn’t inconsistency.

That is the complexity of love.

What the Castle Does With Grief

I write about the castle in my book – the emotional fortress we build to protect ourselves from pain.

And grief has a way of revealing exactly which rooms we’ve been living in.

The storerooms are where most of us put our unprocessed grief.

We pack it away.

We tell ourselves we'll deal with it later.

We stay busy, stay distracted, stay moving – because stopping means feeling, and feeling means facing something we're not sure we can survive.

But stuffed grief doesn't disappear.

It festers.

It leaks out sideways as anger, as anxiety, as a low-grade sadness we can't quite name.

It fills the storerooms until there's no more room and it starts seeping under the doors.

And the tower.

Grief drives us to the tower too.

That high, isolated place where we watch life continuing around us – people laughing, making plans, carrying on as if the world didn't just shift beneath our feet.

And we can't understand how everything looks so normal out there when nothing feels normal in here.

The tower of grief is one of the loneliest places in the castle.

Because grief isolates.

It makes you feel like no one else could possibly understand what you're carrying.

Like the loss is yours alone.

Like the rest of the world has moved on and left you behind in a room they forgot to unlock.

But God Knows This Room

Here is what I have learned about grief:

God is not uncomfortable with it.

He doesn't need you to have it together.

He doesn't need you to arrive at hope before you've finished mourning.

He doesn't need you to perform strength when you are broken.

Look at Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus.

He knew what He was about to do.

He knew the resurrection was moments away.

And He wept.

John 11:35 – the shortest verse in Scripture – carries more pastoral weight than entire volumes of theology.

“Jesus wept.”

Not because He didn’t know what was coming.

But because the people He loved were in pain.

And that mattered to Him.

Your grief matters to Him.

Not as a problem to be solved quickly.

Not as a lack of faith to be corrected.

As something real, and human, and worthy of tears.

Look at David in the Psalms.

“How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?”
(Psalm 13:1)

That is grief.

Raw, unfiltered, brought directly to God without a filter of acceptable Christian emotion.

And God didn’t rebuke him for it.

He preserved it in Scripture.

As if to say: this is what honest faith looks like sometimes.

This is allowed.

Look at Job.

Thirty-seven chapters of a man wrestling with loss so profound it had stripped everything from him.

His children. His health. His certainty.

And God’s response wasn’t “stop grieving.”

It was to show up.

To be present in the wrestling.

To meet Job not with answers but with Himself.

Sometimes that is all grief needs.

Not answers.

Presence.

You Were Designed to Grieve

Here is something the church doesn't always say clearly enough:

Grief is not a lack of faith.

It is the evidence of love.

You grieve because you loved.

The depth of the loss is proportional to the depth of the connection.

And a God who designed you to love also designed you to grieve when love is interrupted by death.

1 Thessalonians 4:13 says: "Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope."

Notice what Paul does not say.

He does not say "do not grieve."

He says grieve – but not without hope.

There is a profound difference.

You are not asked to skip grief.

You are not asked to pretend the loss didn't happen.

You are not asked to be strong or move on or count your blessings before the tears have dried.

You are asked to grieve with hope as your foundation.

Not hope that removes the pain.

But hope that outlasts it.

Give Yourself Permission

If you are grieving today – whether the loss is fresh or whether it has been years and still catches you off guard –

I want to say something directly:

You have permission to grieve.

Permission to cry.

Permission to be angry.

Permission to feel relief and guilt about feeling relieved.

Permission to grieve quietly while everyone around you moves on.

Permission to still miss someone years after the world has stopped acknowledging your loss.

Permission to grieve differently than the person next to you who loved the same person.

Permission to bring the whole unfiltered mess of it to God.

Don't pack it into the storerooms.

Don't retreat to the tower and carry it alone.

Bring it into the light.

Not because it will immediately hurt less.

But because grief carried in community – even if that community is just you and God in a quiet room – is grief that can eventually move.

Psalm 34:18 says: “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”

Not close to the ones who have it together.

Close to the brokenhearted.

That is where He positions Himself.

Right there.

In the room where you are most broken.

Waiting not to fix you.

But to be with you.

Grief Doesn't Have a Timeline

One more thing before I close.

There is no correct schedule for grief.

No point at which you should be over it.

No milestone at which it becomes inappropriate to still miss someone.

Grief has its own rhythm.

Sometimes it comes in waves.

Sometimes it goes quiet for months and then arrives unexpectedly at a dinner table when someone uses a phrase your person used to say.

That is not weakness.

That is love with nowhere left to go.

And the God who designed you to love – who wired you for connection and relationship and the profound, aching beauty of belonging to someone –

He understands what it costs when that is taken away.

He is not rushing you.

He is not checking a calendar.

He is close to the brokenhearted.

And He will remain close for as long as you need Him to be.

If you're struggling:

- Christian Faith-Based Resources: <https://mentalhealthhotline.org/christian-faith-resources/> or call 1-866-903-3787 (24/7)
- Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988 (call or text)

You matter. Your grief matters. And the love behind it matters most of all. Please stay.

William James Meyer is the author of “Do You Live in a Castle? Breaking Free from the Walls That Hold You Hostage.” He writes from a Christian perspective as a fellow traveler – someone who is still learning that grief and faith were never meant to be opposites.

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