

February 18, 2021

My mother spent the last eleven years of her life living in my home. She was a vibrant, active individual who loved to garden, sew and cook – the epitome of a 1950s housewife! When she came to live with me, however, she left behind 60 acres of North Michigan farmland, where rolling hills spread out before a backdrop of Sugar Maples and Elms.

She could have become quite bitter. The circumstances in which she left her home were not at all ideal, and blame could have easily been assigned to other parties. Yet for eleven years, she lived with me and cultivated an **attitude of gratitude**. This is, perhaps, the greatest gift she ever gave me; the example of counting blessings no matter the circumstances she found herself in.

February 2019 found her in the Valley View Rehabilitation Center after a devastating stroke. The doctors warned me that this had been a severe stroke, and even they could not understand how her speech remained intact. I sat in her room and watched two nursing assistants turn and position her, carefully protecting her skin from pressure injuries, and inquiring after her comfort. I was overwhelmed at the amount of work every little aspect of her life now required, and was convinced I would not be able to care for her at home.

“I don’t think I can do it, Mom,” I told her.

She took my hand in hers. She looked me in the eye and with startling conviction said: “You can do anything! You are smarter than you know, smarter than anyone I know.”

So I brought her home and tried to emulate that same attitude of gratitude. When the days were especially hard, I chose to be grateful that I could be with her in my own house and not have to travel to the nursing home. When she was suffering in pain, I was grateful that there were other nurses I could call who gave me pain management techniques to employ. I was very grateful when she qualified for respite care, a benefit that allowed my husband and I to accompany our son and his Robotics team to the Worlds Robotics Competition in Houston, Texas.

It has been nearly three years since she passed away in my home on a Monday morning. Even then, I had to be grateful because God had prepared me for that moment, and sent my brothers to share the burden. While I cannot claim that it was easy -- losing my mother, taking care of her in my home, watching her suffer and feeling so very helpless in my smallness – I know that I was blessed with the very presence of God and His angels, day by day, and moment by moment. *I am with You always*. He was with me.

I do not believe I succeeded in loving my mother as Jesus loved her -- but by remembering His constancy with us through that time, my love for God has grown. In this same way, love for God will flourish and grow with each and every praise we give to Him. The **attitude of gratitude** lifts burdens and brings peace and love in its wake.

Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?

Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. Psalm 42:11