

LAUGHTER IS A PRECIOUS GIFT



INTRODUCTION

Many of us shortchange ourselves when it comes to realizing our gifts and talents. We all received something of great value from God, and it is our duty and honor to share our gifts and talents with others. Obvious talents such as athletic, artistic, or musical ability; working with your hands; and leading others are often celebrated. We fail to recognize more subtle talents, such as having a joyous spirit, offering the gift of hospitality, or being a great listener. Over the years, I have recognized the gift of encouragement that I have been given. This blessing was not realized right away but was revealed to me over time. Just like Melissa, we may have to do some soul-searching and praying to find out what gifts our Lord has blessed us with.

INSPIRATIONAL VERSE

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

ROMANS 12:6-8

MESSAGE

I talked to Mom this morning and got the usual guilt trip; no one ever calls, no one ever visits, all of her friends have died. As she continued on and on about how bad everything is, I was thinking that she's right, I don't call or stop in as often as I should. I could stop more often but have chosen not to because she's gotten so grumpy over the years. In my usual fashion, I joked with her: "Well, Ms. Merry Sunshine, maybe if you had nicer things to say, more people would call or visit. C'mon, Mom, less gloom and doom, it's not *that* bad."

She laughed and told me to quit being such a jokester. But that's who I am and it's all that my mom and siblings have come to expect from me. I am not the child who manages her money. I am not the one who does her yard work. She does not ask me to drive her to

doctors appointments or to the store. I am the one they ask to bring store-bought dinner rolls and beverages for the holidays. One year they let me make the green bean casserole! But I was never asked again. I am and have always been the class clown, the prankster, and the family entertainment.

After our call today, I felt frustrated with Mom. Why do I even bother? I thought. She never asks about me, my kids, or work. During our call, she mentioned that one of my brothers who lives out of state calls her four times a week. When she said that, I thought: So much for her claim that no one ever calls, . . . and, man, is he a glutton for punishment or what?

She went on to tell me about their new house and what his kids were all doing, that his golf game is getting better. They are going to his wife's family for Christmas this year, but he'll be home for her birthday. He even asks her what the sermon was about on Sundays. Geez, how could I possibly compete with that?

It suddenly hit me. *I wasn't even really listening to her!* And Lord, if you were responsible for that, thank you! I needed it. When Dad died, we all agreed we'd each do our part in caring for Mom, but what had I ever done? Put in my time just enough to stay off the list of people she complained about. What could I do for her anyway? They all had it covered.

It's hard to admit that I have been so selfish. Deep down, I've resented the fact that I was so quickly dismissed from any real responsibility by my siblings. I know I bear the responsibility for that. I've gladly accepted the role of being the one who could always make

Mom laugh but could never really be counted on for anything else.

Had I been listening to her all these years, I would have known that her grumpiness is just to disguise her loneliness. She never was one simply to ask for help when she needed it; she was always the strong and proud matriarch.

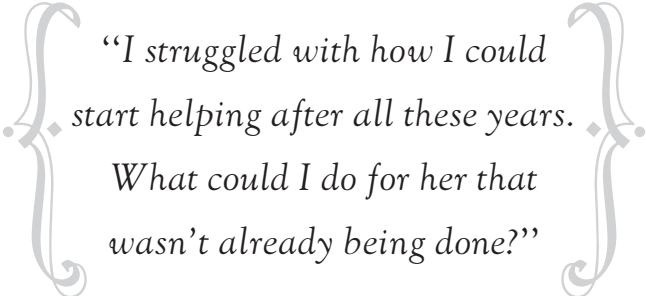
The fact is, I haven't done my share in caring for Mom, and it's up to me to change that. I'll work on my relationship with my siblings another day. Today is about Mom. I struggled with how I could start helping after all these years. What could I do for her that wasn't already being done?

Aha! I've got it. I can do what I've always done, make her laugh. How long has it been since I've sat with her and told her the funny stories of my life? How long has it been since I've made her really laugh?

I showed up on Mom's doorstep tonight with a bottle of her favorite wine and asked if she had time to visit. I poured her a glass and didn't ask what she's been up to because I knew the answer to that. Instead I just started telling her stories, and in no time she was laughing. I've missed hearing her laugh; she has a really great laugh.

It may not seem like much, but I asked her if she'd like to make this a weekly date, and she was thrilled to accept. Maybe my role in caring for Mom is to keep her laughing. That's the one thing I know I can do for her.

Melissa Collier



*“I struggled with how I could
start helping after all these years.
What could I do for her that
wasn’t already being done?”*

CAREGIVER’S PRAYER

Giver of Abundant Life,

Thank you for the precious gift of laughter! Please lift the burdens I feel today and let me lift the spirits of those for whom I care. I thank you and praise you, Father, for the unique gifts you have blessed me with and those you have yet to reveal. Continue to use me boldly for your honor and glory.