Don’t miss those special moments

One of the most special gifts in my life was the day that I had an anticipated connection with my mother in the nursing home. By that time, she was deeply immersed in dementia, usually confused, to the extent that I wasn’t sure if she remembered my name or not.

On that particular occasion, I walked into her room and greeted her. She gave me the warm, “I love, Jim,” and smile that she always flashed, indicating that she realized a special bond. Beyond that, admittedly, I didn’t understand what all she perceived.

On this day, I got the loving smile and then she said, “How are you doing?” A bit mystified, I responded, “Good, Mom, how are you?”

She affirmed the same and THEN she said, “How is Julie, is she still in Fort Wayne? How is Sandi, is she still in college (Taylor-Fort Wayne)? Is Jason still working at Smith Brothers (as he was at the time)? How is Joyce getting along?”

Now that was a different realm than I had realized for months, perhaps even a year. I suddenly realized that for some reason, at that moment, I totally had my mother’s understanding. Quickly I replied, “Oh, Mom, I’m still pastoring in Ohio and writing for the paper; Julie is working in Fort Wayne, Sandi is still at ‘Fort Wayne Bible College’ (as she would understand it) and Jason is still working at Smith Brothers. Joyce is doing well; she is working in Fort Wayne, too.”

For perhaps five minutes at the most, we totally interacted with clarity and expressed our love; it seemed as though my mother had “come back” to me; I was totally overwhelmed by the unbelievable moment. Then, gradually, she started to fade back into confusion and soon, the understanding communication was gone.

As I left the nursing home that day, I looked to the sky, tears dripped down my cheeks and I said, “Thank you, Jesus; thank you for giving me my mommy just one time. What a gift.”

I wasn’t sure what had happened, but I was sure as I walked across the parking lot that I would have turned down a million dollar check for that moment, without question. I thanked God over and over for one of the most special gifts I had ever received in my life. For days I could hardly think of the moment without warm, moist tears coming into my eyes. I had actually visited with my mother one more time.

During the time that my mother went through difficult hospitalizations and eventually nursing care, I did all that I knew to do as a loving son to assist her. I would visit the nursing home several times a week, usually at meal time and help feed her. When she was in mental health care in Fort Wayne, I spent every afternoon with her so she wouldn’t feel like she was part of a dark world. I prayed with her, I visited her in the morning and we had devotions together.

During her final week, I continued to read a devotional book with her, hold her hand, and had prayer each morning just like we did in our home when Dad was still alive and we had devotions around the breakfast table.

It was during her final week that another very memorable moment occurred. I was sitting by her bedside. Earlier, I had connected with Sharon, a woman in her 60s with a very simple childlike personality, who was somewhat mentally disabled. She loved pictures so I would take pictures and give them to her. She, in return, would color pictures and give them to me.

One morning as my mother was nearing the end of her earthly journey, Sharon visited my mother’s bedside in her wheelchair.

“Is she sick,” she said.

I assured her that she was very sick.

Then she said, “Is she about ready to see Jesus,” and again I said, “I think so.”

She said, “I sing to her?”

I replied, “Oh yes, Sharon, that would be wonderful.”

With childlike faith displaying trust of the deepest kind, she sang, “Jesus loves me, this I know. For the Bible tells me so. Little ones to Him belong, they are weak, but He is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me; yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me, the Bible tells me so.”

It was one of the most heart-rending solos I had ever heard. I thanked Sharon and said, “She really liked that. She loves Jesus.”

“I love Him, too,” said Sharon.

Following Mom’s passing, I realized all of the golden moments I would have missed had I not made the visits and spent extra time with her. My heart sorrows for all of those in nursing homes whose relatives and friends don’t take the opportunity to visit their loved ones who still have so much to give in life’s simply moments – like the day I stopped to see my mom and the nurse asked her if she knew who I was.

She hadn’t said my name in months and I wasn’t prepared for what was about to come.

She looked at me, looked at the nurse, and said, “Why that’s Jim,” as if to say, “Why wouldn’t you think I would know his name,” a precious moment I would have never experienced if I wouldn’t have been there; what a great reminder to remember those dearest to us, spend time with them and receive their heartfelt gifts in return.

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The opinions stated are those of the writer, and do not necessarily reflect that of the newspaper.