



article

Thank Goodness

Tuesday, November 22, 2011 | Written by Laura Z. Sowers

When I was in grade school, I had a wonderful friend named Gwendolyn. She was four years my senior and as beautiful as her name. Gwen had luscious brunette hair that fell well below her shoulders. She was born with a cleft palate, and even after several surgeries, she purred a little when she spoke. As the adopted only-child of older, wealthy parents, she was given the very best money could buy.

At the time, my family lived in a two-bedroom apartment, and I shared a room with my brother. Gwen's family, however, lived on Denver's Sixth Avenue Parkway in a regal two-story brick Victorian home with a copper weathervane spinning at the peak of the turret. A vast lawn spilled from the house, and a magnificent weeping willow tree graced it like the centerpiece on a banquet table. Inside, the house seemed a bit dreary to my young eyes, as it was filled with what I considered to be "old stuff." Gwen's bedroom, however, was fit for a princess, decorated in shades of lavender and white with a graceful canopy bed (the first I'd ever seen) facing a bay window perched above a lush back yard.

Gwen was the kindest person I'd ever met. She loved the Lord and talked about Him with absolute adoration. And for some reason, she doted on me as though I were her beloved little sister. Once I admired a beautiful barrette she was wearing, and she took it out of her lovely hair and clipped it into mine. To my annoyance, she also seemed to love my brother, Steve, as much as she loved me. She laughed at everything he said and couldn't seem to get enough of his antics and stories.

When we moved to the other side of town, we didn't get to see Gwen as often. But Mom began telling us upsetting news about trouble in their family: betrayal, financial deception, and, finally, divorce.

It was Christmas time when Mom, Dad, Steve and I visited Gwen and her mom in their tiny one-bedroom apartment. The furniture was minimal, and Gwen was now sleeping in a twin bed in a room shared with her mom. A tiny tree sat on a table with three or four gifts underneath. Gwen was working at a nearby drugstore after school to help her mom pay the bills.

My heart broke for them. But Gwen was just like always, smiling and laughing. She talked about Christmas, her thankfulness for her mom, and how God was providing for them.

As we left that evening, I saw Dad press money into Gwen's mother's hand. I pretended not to see it, but I was so proud of him.

In the car on the way home, I leaned my head against the window and thought about Gwen, and love, and pain, and God. It was the first time I understood how fleeting prosperity could be. I'd never before witnessed anyone going from one such extreme to another. I would have understood if Gwen had been angry and bitter, but the only thing that had changed about her was her outward circumstances. She was steady in her kindness, purring her praises to God, and thankful for what she had.

There are moments that stick with us forever and help shape our values and decisions. That experience with Gwen was one of those times in my life.

I've since learned that hard times come to everyone, but I will always remember Gwen counting her blessings when she had gone from riches to rags. In the most difficult of circumstances, we have so many blessings and reasons to be thankful.

Ten things I'm thankful for:

1. **Family.** I'm so grateful that our daughter and son have turned out the way they have, both because of and in spite of our parenting. I'm thankful they each chose godly spouses and are raising their wonderful children so well. (Oh, and I'm thankful for my dog.)
2. **Friends.** I've learned some wonderful and some painful lessons through my friends. I'm thankful for those who stick around both in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I'm particularly grateful for friends who believe the best about me, know the worst about me, and love me anyway.
3. **Home and pantry.** I'm grateful that I can walk through my front door and close out this hard world for a while. I have food in the freezer and clothes to wear. Not all people do, and I know it.
4. **Getting older.** Sounds funny, but for a while when I was fighting leukemia, I wasn't sure I would get older. I am thankful for every day of my life. I want to embrace it and meet it with enthusiasm rather than dread.
5. **Strength.** I am thankful for the energy and strength God has granted me. I want to be like Caleb in the Old Testament who at eighty-five professed to have the strength he had at age forty. "Give me this mountain,..." he proclaimed. You go, Caleb!
6. **Giving.** During my illness, I reached a critical point. Chemotherapy couldn't cure me, and the disease had delivered a second potentially deadly punch. I needed healthy bone marrow and a perfect DNA match from a donor. A man in Upstate New York responded eagerly to the Red

Cross's request, checked into a hospital, and had bone marrow extracted from his hip. The marrow was flown across the country and dripped into my vein at 2:00 a.m. on June 2, 2004. That's giving, and I'm alive because of it.

7. **Technology.** I love it and hate it. I love being able to record TV programs and fast forward through commercials. I love the anywhere/anytime contact through cell phones. I love facebook (most of the time), emails, and google. I'm thankful I live in this extraordinary time in human history.

8. **Love.** I'm still crazy in love with my husband, Craig. We're coming up on our 40th anniversary, and he still makes my heart beat a little faster when I see him in a crowd.

9. **The Bible.** Incredibly, God has made Himself known through the covers of this Book. Reading it is like being hungry and finding nourishing food in the fridge. Help, hope, insight - the plan from the past - the plan for the future. Such incredibly easy access to the Savior who died for me so that I might live with Him forever. I'm thankful for the hope of knowing that the rapture could occur at any moment. It's like having a wonderful trip coming up that puts daily life and work into perspective and gives meaning to today.

10. **Gwendolyn.**