

Submitter:

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On Behalf Of:

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My father's story may give some food for thought. When he suffered a stroke at age ninety-five, it slurred his speech, affected his ability to swallow, and paralyzed his entire left side. Worst of all, however, was that it knocked out the part of his brain that regulated fear. Every few minutes, his panic escalated until he began screaming in terror. Day and night he screamed, finding relief only in short segments of sleep.

The agony of watching Dad suffer like that was unbearable. I begged God to give him a quick end. But Dad was otherwise robust and exhibited a fierce will to live. The doctor said that death did not look imminent. I absolutely did not want to hear that. How could someone live in such a state? But God had an important lesson in store for me. Dad lived for nine more months, and we would have missed an incredible blessing had he died when I wanted.

As I said, Dad's panic attacks led to terrified screaming. To help himself in those out-of-control moments, he began shouting memorized scriptures or prayers for his family. Then he began singing songs with fervor, his good right arm raised in worship, gesticulating with emphasis.

When an attack subsided, he'd have a few minutes of rest. Then off he'd go again, singing at the top of his lungs—hymns, Sunday School songs, folk songs, his entire repertoire of music. Day and night, with each attack, he sang and sang. I have memories of walking down the hall to his room at the nursing home, and already I'd hear him belting out yet another tune. And I, being a trained musician, could have cared less that he was terribly off-key now. To me, his songs, his prayers, and his unbelievable faith under these circumstances were beyond beautiful.

Despite the losses and indignities Dad faced as a result of his stroke, he was not a complainer. Instead, he continually expressed his appreciation to those around him. He prayed for and spoke blessings over people as they came to his room. It was not uncommon for him, in the middle of a conversation, to grasp your hand and say, "Let's give thanks" or to tell a staff member, "I'm praying for you."

Mom spent a lot of time with him, and in the evenings, they kept to their habit of

having devotions together. She'd read a Bible passage and devotional, they'd pray, and then as always, they'd sing together. Dad's favorite song in those grueling nine months had become, "Oh That Will Be, Glory For Me." As the end neared, it was the only song that he still sang. All the others in his repertoire seemed forgotten.

The day came when his voice gave out, but I noticed that his lips kept moving as over and over he mouthed the words: "When all my labors and trials are o'er, and I am safe on that beautiful shore, just to be near the dear Lord I adore, will through the ages be glory for me . . ."

I shed many tears as I witnessed Dad's suffering. Throughout those nine months, however, I came to see that great blessings can ride alongside great suffering.

Is assisted suicide really the right answer for suffering? We have many other options to address suffering such as pain and mental health management. I fear that by embracing this death cult, we will slide further and further into a dehumanizing abyss. Life is a mystery. And it is a sacred gift that deserves to be honored to the end.