Soul Seeing



(Unsplash/Jason Blackeye)



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It was an unseasonably cool day in autumn 2020. My husband, brother and I had just finished a full day of cleaning out my dad's house, the house my brother and I grew up in. My dad had unexpectedly passed away almost a year before, but coronavirus prevented my brother from coming home any sooner. So here we were, almost a year after his death, cleaning out and emptying his home, my childhood home.

I don't know what it was about that particular day, but when we got home, I was completely exhausted. I felt physically exhausted from spending another full day of moving things from the house to the truck for donations, or to the dumpster, or to our "keep" pile. I was emotionally exhausted from the mix of memories and grief that stirred as I went through each room, each closet, each box of my childhood home. I was mentally exhausted from the guilt of having so little to give my children after our day of cleaning and sorting.

With no quick dinner in the house and no energy to cook, my daughter and I went to pick up takeout. During that quick drive, I let guilt consume me. A flood of thoughts went through my mind: A lot of families have two full-time working parents and their kids go to aftercare every day. They still come home to cook dinner; they aren't ordering take out. What is wrong with me? How will I ever feed them, bathe them, make sure all their homework is done and get them to bed on time?!

Just as I felt the first tear fall down my cheek, my daughter said, "Mama! Look at the sky!" I looked over and, immediately, I was in awe. The sun was beginning to set, and the sky was a beautiful mix of pink and orange. We crossed the top of an overpass which put us just above the trees. No buildings blocked our view. The sun, which seemed almost larger than life, floated effortlessly in the perfectly painted sky. It was breathtaking. I couldn't stare in wonder and amazement as long as I would have liked since I was driving, but God made God's presence known to my soul. My daughter, not typically one to say much about a sunset, continued to talk about its beauty.

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As we went inside to pick up our dinner, I caught a quick glimpse of a huge smile on my daughter's face before she put on her mask. When we got back in the car, I asked her why she was so happy. She answered: "The sun was really pretty, I like

that it's just the girls picking up the food, and we haven't had Thai food in a really long time!" I may have still felt exhausted, but in that moment, I no longer felt the guilt. My children did not feel unloved or uncared for. They were excited for something different for dinner, and my daughter was happy for those rare moments of one-on-one time when you have three younger brothers.

On our drive home, my daughter noticed the moon peeking its way out from the horizon. "Mama, I'm glad we ordered out. We got to see the sun in the pink and orange sky and the moon!" Suddenly my exhaustion was replaced with gratitude. Even after a particularly hard and tiring day, I was able to gaze at God's goodness in nature in the beautiful sunset and in the moon rising. I saw the face of Christ in my daughter's smile over simply having time with me (and getting to eat Thai food on a school night!). I savored the presence of the Holy Spirit as feelings of gratitude and awe replaced feelings of guilt and exhaustion.

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After the kids were in bed, with the image of the beautiful sunset still in my mind, I was able to continue to look past my exhaustion and reflect on other ways God was present during my day.

God was present in the unconditional love my brother, husband and children showed me, even on this hard day. Christ was present in my dad's elderly neighbor as he came over each day to check on us. I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit throughout the day as I smiled or wept or laughed or became overwhelmed at memories of childhood. Even during those deep emotional swings, because of God's unconditional love and presence in my life, I never felt alone.

That day may have been particularly exhausting, but I ended the day full of gratitude, not only for God, but for the great gifts God has given me in my family and in a pink and orange sunset that left my daughter and me in awe of God's creation.

A version of this story appeared in the **Oct 1-14, 2021** print issue under the headline: To remember God's grandeur, look to the sky.