

For Broadcast: 17th February 2019

I REMEMBER WHEN

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I grew up on a dairy and potato farm with my family which included my grandparents. I loved spending time with dad and grandpa working on the farm. We'd go out fixing fences, feeding the animals, and digging up the potatoes.

Often during those times my grandpa would reminisce about the past. He'd begin by saying "I remember when..." Often it would be about how the farm used to be and how daily life was back when he was younger. There was less farm machinery and reliance on technology back when he was young. He'd share how hard he had to work to make a living. But how he enjoyed it too. He'd often end the story with a smile and get back to working hard on the task at hand again.

My Grandpa taught me a lot about life and it was evident through his life about what helped him live. He taught me values like working hard, persistence, enjoying who you are, and most importantly family. He also taught me about believing in Jesus. My grandpa had a strong faith and often prayed for us. Lunch times at his place were always started and finished in prayer. Some days he'd read some bible verses and pray the Lord's Prayer. He'd teach us about Jesus and who God is for us.

As the years went by and we grew up. Grandpa's memory started showing signs of deteriorating. I was in my teenage years when I became aware of it but I wasn't really sure what was happening. I noticed that he got frustrated with himself more and more. Grandpa's memory was fading and I wondered how our friendship might look into the future. I wondered if Grandpa would tell anymore stories or even be able to spend time with us. And what if he stopped remembering who we were all together?

Grandpa's fading memory was a mystery to me at first. I noticed that he slowly stopped working as hard as he once did. He also stopped doing his regular farm work and dad started doing more on his own. I could see the frustration on my grandpa's face. He was a proud and gentle man who loved us. He often wanted to help but then found himself in a muddle and couldn't remember what to do. One of his favourite tasks he continued to do was to feed the young calves. That required taking milk from the cows, warming the milk up in a bucket and pouring it into the feeding trough. That seemed to give him joy.

Grandpas' memory loss was not only affecting him though. It was frustrating for grandma and for my parents. The constant questions from Grandpa when he couldn't remember, including asking the same questions every couple of minutes was wearing Grandma down. Something had to be done but it wasn't going to be easy.

Grandpa loved the farm and you could see that it was hard for him to let go. He'd always still wonder what we were up to on the farm and he wanted to help. Sadly, grandpa's memory loss was taking away his personality. There was this vagueness on his face like he had resigned to the fate of his memory loss. He wasn't telling stories anymore and the prayers and bible readings at lunch times had stopped.

As a result, Grandpa was diagnosed with Alzheimers. The disease had taken away his memories and mind. It was if he was a different person. He stopped telling stories and it made me wonder about who was going to look after grandpa. He had looked after all of us for many years. Keeping us together as family and working hard on the farm to pass on to his children. But now it was his turn to be cared for. Who was going to look after him?

Grandpa had spent many years looking after us, but who was going to look after him now? Especially if he couldn't remember who we were. There were many family discussions about what to do and how to care for Grandpa. The decision was made for him to go into a nursing home. They would be able to provide better care and also allow my Grandma to recover and not wear out. However, what was more important, was Grandpa's memories and where God was for him?

Believing in Jesus was very important to Grandpa. You could see this by the way he taught us through the stories he used to tell and also what he did. He was a family man and loved us because he knew he was loved too. He lived in God's love and forgiveness. This same God had not abandoned and left my grandpa because he had Alzheimer's. He was with him and carrying him.

In the bible stories Grandpa used to read, I heard of not just us believing in God, but more importantly, how God is always faithful to us. God loved my Grandpa and saw him as special. He showed compassion to him and did not leave him. Even though my Grandpa had lost his memory, God had not forgotten him. God promised him that he would never leave him and that same promise is for me and you. This is what gave me hope when I saw my Grandpa lose his memory. I knew God was with him.

God's love and faithfulness to my grandpa was now more evident than before. Because the relationship God had with my grandpa didn't rely on my grandpa or his memory of God, the relationship was a gift that God had given him. A gift he gave in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Not only did God remember him here, he would also remember him into eternity.

The joy this also gave my Grandpa was evident in how he used to react to the worship services in the nursing home. The services would give him comfort and joy and he would often smile at the bible readings and during the hymns. A pastor would come in and visit and read Bible verses, reminding him that he is a baptised and loved child of God. And that even though he can't remember who God is, God remembers him.

You might not have memory issues like my Grandpa experienced but you may have issues in your life where you've lost your way or you've forgotten what path you're actually on. It might be because of conflict or illness, where there's brokenness in your life or hurt. Here's where we need to hear again and again how God remembers us and he's with us through all these times. We can hear through his words in the Bible what he means for us and that he wants to help us through these difficult times. My Grandpa lost his memory but God didn't forget him. God remembered him and loves him. So when we can't remember, who will remember for us? God does. I encourage you to rest in him and the fact that God remembers us.

Are you facing the possibility of Alzheimers or caring for someone with the disease?

Contact us for the free booklet, DEMENTIA. It has personal reflections from a carer, and their partner who has Alzheimers. When we can't remember anymore, God still remembers and cares for us. For your free copy of DEMENTIA phone FREECALL 1800 353 350, or order your free copy at messagesofhope.org.au.

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