

We arrived at the nursing home where my mother-in-law was “actively dying” to find her frail body tucked into bed, surrounded by many family members already. She was no longer capable of talking. I remember noticing how strained her face looked as each child, grandchild, and great-grandchild took her hand in theirs and assured her that they loved her. We gathered closely, held hands, and began to pray for her. Our tears began to fall, and that distressed look still persisted.

A granddaughter began to quietly sing “Amazing Grace” and the room fell silent. I saw that face, so troubled by the sadness, soften slightly as the dulcet sound of that one sweet voice filled the room. It made me smile. Another granddaughter who had daily cared for Grandma in the final weeks of her illness got out her phone and said she was going to play some music. “I can’t stand the quiet,” she said. “These are some of Grandma’s favorites.”

The music lightened my heart a little, and around the room, I saw fleeting smiles as we listened to songs from our childhood days in church. The music assured us that there was hope beyond this life and lifted our spirits a little.

And then it happened. I was looking at Mom, this very faithful servant of Jesus Christ, when “I Can Only Imagine” began to play on the smartphone. Suddenly her face radiated a peace that, as the Bible says, passes all understanding. She smiled. And we cried. “This was her favorite,” her granddaughter told us softly.

When the song came to an end, the light faded from her face. We listened to more songs until the playlist ran out. She looked calmer and as if she was waiting for something. The playlist started over, playing “I Can Only Imagine” again. And the light returned. I think she left us somewhere during that song, but I can’t say for sure.

I've always known the power of music, but never as much as that day. It brought peace to a dying woman and fellowship to those of us left behind. And that one song will always bring me memories of a very special woman.