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By the time I am 65, my children will be in early adulthood. I imagine that we had already talked about grief and loss. I hope that I taught them to process their grief and losses because we experience both developmental and ambiguous losses in the course of life. My husband and I would call for a family meeting, as we typically do from time to time, to share with them our retirement plans (if we have any) and update them with some thoughts about what we wish for in regards to our death. I would share a prayer request, provide some funeral details, and suggest a couple of rituals to help my family grieve well.

One of the things I learned from my grandmother was that she often shared specific prayer requests with her children. Several years before she passed, my grandma asked her first child to pray that she would pass away in her sleep. God answered those prayers, she passed away peacefully without much discomfort or pain. This prayer request could be overwhelming for one person to bear, so I would ask my children if any one of them, or all of them would be willing to pray for their parents to die peacefully. I would ask them to pray for the kind of peace where we forgive those who we need to forgive, and receive forgiveness from those who need to forgive us. If we make any reconciliation, then that God would help us to be a blessing to those people. While we might not be able to reach everyone, I hope that my husband and I could work out those areas faithfully in our last phase of life.

For the wake, I would request that there will be a worship playlist of just instrumentals, preferably piano instrumentals, to set the tone of the venue. We would designate an area for light refreshments so people can talk to each other, and there will be a photo montage playing on the screen in another area. The doors will be open for a window of time, maybe a few hours, and people can come and go as they need to pay their respects and say their goodbyes. The funeral will take place the next morning, as a short service for my family and close friends. I plan to provide a list of people to invite. The service will start with singing my favorite hymn, Christ is Mine Forevermore, followed by a short sermon on my life verse, Psalm 27:13. Instead of a eulogy, I would ask that one of my children would read a prayer that I wrote for those attending this service, and then the pastor would close the service with a blessing. I hope to be cremated and for my family to scatter my ashes at sea. I would hope that whenever they see the ocean, they would be reminded of me, or find some comfort seeing the ocean.

During the wake and the funeral, if any of my family members feel sad, I would remind them that it's okay to cry and to cry with others. There will be others who will cry with them. I would ask that they pay attention to how they feel, where they feel it, and give themselves permission to feel those things. If they feel out of place, and it's difficult to be present with others, then that's okay too. I would ask that they do what they need in the moment to take care of themselves because it's not a selfish thing to do, but a basic human need they need to meet. There will be a separate funeral director or planner who will execute and take care of all the logistics, so that my family can be present with our family and friends. I hope to encourage my family not to be afraid of the changes in roles and routines for our family, as these changes are a natural part of growing. I would affirm in them the character that God developed over time and their experiences with God to help them embrace the transitions to come.

Finally, I would reassure my children that I do not want to end our relationship. While I may not physically be here, we carry a bond through memories and we can still build upon our connection. I still want to be in their lives! In my family of origin, we had an unspoken rule about not talking about anything sad or negative. If we need to bring it up or if it comes up in conversation, it needs to be framed in a lighthearted or positive way. But I hope to discontinue this pattern because this rule made me feel isolated and dismissed by my family. I hope that my children will talk to each other, other family members and friends, and simply check in with each other. I want to equip my children with a couple rituals to help them in their mourning.

The first ritual is writing a letter to me. If my children think of me and want to tell me something, they can write it in a journal, preferably pen and paper. They can keep this letter private, or if they feel led to, they can share it with another family member. I'm not sure what technology would look like 30 years from now, but if there is an online journal or storage that my children have access to, I would love for them to share this platform and write the things they'd like to share with me or with each other. I hope that my children will have a good relationship with each other in order to do this well. If my children prefer not to write letters, then they can leave photos and voice recordings of their stories and thoughts instead. It would be like a memory scrapbook.

Another ritual I would suggest is to include me in Thanksgiving dinner. Thanksgiving is my favorite holiday. It was the one time of the year that my family of origin valued and prioritized. Growing up, we used to invite friends over to our house and join with other families for extended Thanksgiving celebrations. Even though there was a lot to do, it was one of the few times our family seemed happy. While there are things I want to break from my family of origin, I would like to keep this holiday as a special time for my family, as a part of our legacy. I would ask my children to frame a 4x6 photo of me and put it anywhere on the table during the meal. Afterward, they can put me away, but I would love to join the meal with my family. If it's easier for them to just hang a photo of me on the wall, as part of Thanksgiving decorations, I would appreciate that too.

If any of these two rituals were to stop at any point, then we can let it be because these rituals are more for my children than they are for me. I would remind them that they can keep doing this for as long as they need. In the case where the grief becomes too difficult to process, I would encourage my family to seek out help and work through their grief with a counselor or therapist. I hope that I spent many decades in the counseling field, so that my children are familiar and comfortable with seeking the help they need.

My life has meaning - and I hope that I had the opportunities to share stories with my children of how God has made my life significant to live. I hope to inspire them to see how God has also given them purpose and meaning for their lives. I believe that even my loss could provide meaning for my family, but it can also be sad for them. If they feel sad, it further confirms that we really did have a meaningful relationship worth celebrating and thanking God for. I hope to explain to them that grief is a personalized experience and unique to each person. But one of the blessings of family and community is the power to heal with each other and to support one another in our vulnerable moments. I may not know when or how I will die, but the main takeaway for my family is to know that God will turn our mourning and pain into joy, if we let Him. It is a transformative work that God can do, and it is a gift that we can receive.