

The Gospel According to Mamma

One mother's philosophy on love, money,
God, aging, decisions, change, and much more!

Annette Bridges

The Gospel According to Mamma
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Lesson 10

Be thankful



My first lessons in overcoming challenging financial crises came from my mamma, who fully believed the first step in working your way out of a need begins with appreciating what you have and not fretting so much about what you don't. Mamma was never an expert in economics, but she survived difficult times and prospered in spite of having little money.

When Mamma divorced my dad, she lost the financial security he had provided. This meant that this woman—without a formal work history or higher education—had to find a way to support herself and her remaining child at home—me. She had given up pretty much everything she owned when we fled to seek a new life.

Mamma's faith-filled prayers came from her confidence that God would care for his beloved children—a lesson she learned from her own grandmother and one she never questioned. Her story may not be a rags to riches one, but Mamma was always able to provide the necessities and essentials.

Remember the children's song about Henry who announced to Liza that he had a hole in his bucket? I've always been amused by Liza's response, "Well, fix it, dear Henry."

That's the type of solution my mamma would suggest today to Henry or anyone else. She would be certain there was a way to fix any situation. She would never give up. Panic was not a reaction natural to her. I think her calm assurance and resilience came from her spiritual resolve, based on her faith in God's care for his creation.

She loves the Biblical example of supply that is told in the Bible (2 Kings 4:1-7). A woman whose husband had died was in financial trouble. Her husband had some unpaid debts, and the creditor demanded payment from her even if he had to take her two children as slaves.

This woman went to the prophet Elisha for help. Elisha asked her, "What do you have in your house?" Her first response was, "Nothing." But then she corrected that answer to, "Well, I do have a little oil." She had some oil in a small container. But that was all she had.

Elisha told her to borrow jugs and bowls from all her neighbors. After this was done, Elisha instructed her to pour oil from her small container into the borrowed ones. She followed his advice—and the oil kept pouring. It filled all the containers, and she even had oil left over. Elisha told her to sell the oil and make good on her debts, and the leftover oil would be sufficient for her and her sons to live on.

How many times do panic, fear, and doubt blind us into believing there is nothing we can do, that the problem is too big or impossible to fix? My mamma believes Elisha's question—"What do you have in your house?"—is a very poignant one. She says it points us in the direction where we can find our answers. Elisha's question assures us that whatever answer we need is within our grasp—that a solution is indeed reachable. It is saying, "Don't panic. Don't get trapped by your fears."

His question reminds me of Mamma's way of solving every financial crisis she faced. She'd approach the problem with certainty, expectancy, and creativity. She confronted each challenge step by step, being grateful for and valuing any progress—whether big or small. She never became daunted by any single task that was required. She never took her eye off the ball—her goal, her destination, her dream.

This was illustrated to me when watching her slowly but surely buy furniture after our move to Dallas. Remember, we had left everything in Georgia. She didn't have the money to buy a whole house full of furniture when we finally settled down.

When she did get her first full-time job, she only made \$75 a week. Even in 1969, this was not a lot of money. She couldn't afford to buy a house until 1974, after a few years of saving what she could and building up her credit. But Mamma was the queen of layaway. It didn't take her long to build up her credit. She would buy one item, pay it off little by little, and then buy another. This method worked for her, and she was happy with every purchase she made. She didn't fret if she couldn't get something at the time she wanted it because she knew she could get it eventually.

Her life example created within me the same financial confidence. Whether I have abundant money in the bank or not, I never doubt I will have the means to do whatever is needed—eventually. I've found that confidence often opens unexpected doors. This confidence is what enabled me to go to college as well as find employment all through my college years.

I never thought I would not go to college, but I had no idea how I was going to pay for it. Mamma would help all she could, but it was not going to be enough. Still I headed off to college on what some would call a leap of faith. My way of affording college was a semester-by-semester process accomplished

in countless ways. What grounded me was Mamma's faith that anything was possible and that God would help me find a way to meet my needs. I believed her, and she was right.

I wonder if financial crises can sometimes be exacerbated by the overreaction that can come from emotion-driven decisions. It seems that fear too often carries a danger all its own as it breeds panic. It can be helpful to ponder the choice between fear and confidence. Both are contagious. Both can lead to different outcomes and results.

When faced with a financial challenge, I've learned from my mamma to take some deep spiritual breaths while remembering there is a divine and infinite source for all our needs. You may find, like my mamma proved, that confident resolve will lead to fixing any "hole" that your "bucket" has.

Remember, patience, perseverance, expectancy, and hope are needed to give you the confident resolve that moves you forward. Much of what my mamma accomplished and achieved took her many years. It was not easy. But along the way, she was certain she could accomplish her goals. Mamma says it is imperative to appreciate every step of progress. Never fail to recognize what is good in your life and what you do have.

I had another opportunity to put her wisdom into practice after I married. I learned from her how I could view my life through the lens of gratitude, helping me to see what was there instead of what was not. Gratitude had the power to broaden my vision and to help me see options that were obscured by a limited point of view.

My most vivid example of this came with the remodel of the little farmhouse where my husband and I have lived for over thirty years. It began as our starter house and grew into the home where we would raise our only child. Now, it has become the place where we may spend our retirement years.

For most of these years, I wanted to move out. I dreamed of building a new house. Consequently, I spent much of my time unhappy about where I was and looking forward to something that might never be.

My friend Linda Read, a talented artist with an interior decorator's eye, began pointing out the various unique features she saw in our little farmhouse. She saw details I had never appreciated and valued before—mostly because I was consumed with focusing on what I didn't like. My heart was so set on building a new house, I wasn't even considering how to improve where I was.

A truly miraculous thing happened—something I didn't expect, wasn't looking for, and would never have imagined. My view of my little farmhouse changed. As my appreciation for it grew, I began to imagine ways to remodel. Very soon, the idea of building a new house was no longer even a consideration. I wanted to stay where I was. I was happy and satisfied for the first time. Now with the remodeling complete, I can't imagine living anywhere else.

Gratitude helped me to see present possibilities, and that new view changed my life. Appreciating what you have may be a good way to begin in just about any situation.