

2025 Grade 8

Earlier this year I believe that God communicated with me through a scratch ornament. Although this might sound ridiculous to some, the amount of comfort you can bring through a small action can be life changing. You never know the way someone else feels unless you make an effort to reach out to them, even with something as small as a piece of paper and a wooden stick.

This moment occurred on Saturday December 14, 2024. A group of kids from our school's National Junior Honor Society and Girl Scouts troops went to a local nursing and rehabilitation center to sing Christmas carols and decorate scratch ornaments with the residents. I truly believe that God led me to change someone's life through a scratch ornament. The scratch ornaments led me to reach out to someone in pain.

Upon entering the nursing facility, I and a group of students from the middle school walked into a large meeting room. There as we set out ornaments on the table to do with the residents and handed out song sheets for carols, wheelchairs and walkers began getting pushed into the room. Background music was turned on and we began to sing with our song sheets to the tune of the carols. Once we finished singing around seven songs we were all given scratch ornaments to fill out with the resident so that they would have a displayable souvenir for their rooms afterwards. This craft made me able to go around the room to different residents and ask their name to make them a customized ornament as well as holding a conversation with them about their interests.

One person in particular stood out to me—a woman, sitting on a chair in the corner of the room all by herself. Having no signs of injury or restricted movement, she didn't look like a resident. Walking over to her I asked if she would like to make an ornament, handing her a small wooden stick and a piece of special scratch paper. Gratefully, she accepted. After showing her how the craft works and how you could scratch the paper with the stick to release colors underneath and make any design or message you wanted, she immediately began to get to work. Once I saw that she understood and started working independently, I went to go chat with other residents and help them begin on their ornaments. After a few minutes I saw that the woman I spoke to had broken out into a burst of tears. My mother immediately ran to go comfort her. The woman told my mother that she came there for her husband who had a stroke. They moved to this area earlier this year and hadn't had a chance to join a church yet. With the whole family being upset over the situation, her daughter released her emotions out onto her mother, telling her that this happened to her father because the mother hadn't bothered to join a church. With the daughter being her only family, she was left with no one to turn to to comfort her in this time of pain. My mother comforted her, telling the woman not to blame herself because she couldn't have prevented this from happening to her husband and assuring her that God would not punish her for not joining a church. She showed us the ornament she made that said, "Jesus I love you" in big letters. The woman told us that she had been upset watching her husband in his room and something told her she should come to watch the activity today. She said that she felt God sent her there for a reason, so someone could comfort her and tell her that He isn't upset with her. On her way out of the room, she thanked me for reaching out with a big smile on her face and showed me the beautiful ornament she had made to hang above her husband's bed as he recovers.

This experience helped my family and me give hope and comfort to someone who needed it. God works quickly and in mysterious ways. Never blink twice or you could miss the ways He helps you every day in situations big or small.

God's Strength in My Life

"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10) Most feel that God is closest to them when they are older in age. Well, I can be a witness and say that you can feel the closeness of God at any age, time, shape or form. I have specifically felt his closeness this year. I felt deeply connected to God in this moment, surrounded by peace and wisdom.

The time that I felt close to God was this year when my mom died. On January 3rd, I woke up and called my mom in the normal way I did everyday. She didn't answer but I didn't think anything of it. My father came home from work early and he called me downstairs in an awkward manner. My Dad told me to sit down and that's when he told me that my Mom had died. In that hard and devastating moment I felt God's love and closeness to me the whole time.

I know God was close to me because of my strong faith. My faith has helped me through many hardships in my life but especially during this time. My mother was a good person and lived a good life. She loved everyone and ministered to people about God to strengthen their relationship. I know that her soul is in heaven because of the life that she lived and how she loved people. God saw me through that time and gave me strength.

Peace and wisdom surrounded me during my closely connected moment with God. My strong faith during the time that my mother died made me feel even closer to God. Without him, I wouldn't be strong enough to write this paper. He has blessed me with wisdom and strength to get through this life. All in all, during the worst time of my life God was right there with me. "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'" (Hebrews 13:5 NIV)