

Season 6 | Episode 6

## The Power of Generational Love: The Best Gift a Mother Can Give

### Celeste Sharpe

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Crystal Keating:

I'm Crystal Keating, and this is the Joni and Friends Ministry Podcast. Each week we're bringing you real conversations about disability and finding hope through hardship, and sharing practical ways that you can welcome and include people living with disability in your community. Be sure to subscribe wherever you listen to podcasts so you don't miss any of our encouraging conversations. You can also find all of the helpful resources that we've talked about at [joniandfriends.org/podcast](https://joniandfriends.org/podcast).

Stephanie Daniels:

Hi, I'm Stephanie Daniels. I'm so glad you're here. Celeste Sharpe works in human resources at the ministry and she lives with cerebral palsy. She's joined us today to talk about the role her grandmother played in her life, as well as the impact we can have on others when we pour into their lives. Celeste, thanks for joining us.

Celeste Sharpe:

Thank you so much for having me.

Stephanie Daniels:

It's hard to think of anyone who's had more impact in our lives than our mothers, but you were blessed with a bonus mom. Can you tell me about the moms in your life?

Celeste Sharpe: I have the wonderful gift of having two of the strongest, most dedicated mothers in the world. My biological mother, who I usually refer to as Mommy, was very young when she had me. She was about 21 years old and was destined to go on orders to the military, and so she needed someone to look out for me. And she thought of no one other than her own mother, my grandma, who I affectionately call Mom.

So, Mom, after having raised her own five children, poured into me in a way that I still feel the fruits of it every day. I wouldn't be who I am without both of them. I am so grateful that even though it was painful for my mommy to make the decision to allow my grandparents to raise me, I'm so grateful that she chose to do that.



That is the most loving thing she could have done in the situation. She gave me the best resources she had, and I am so proud to be her daughter. I'm so glad I get to tell you that because I spend a lot of time praising Mom, Grandma. And my Mommy doesn't get enough flowers because I have no idea how hard that must've been how hard it was to visit me and not be able to say things and not be able to share her opinions because she had chosen to allow my grandparents to make the decisions that they thought were best for me, whether she agreed with them or not. She stuck to that decision every day for years.

Stephanie Daniels:

I can't imagine how difficult it was for her, but it really did take humility and selflessness.

Celeste Sharpe:

She made that decision without knowing that I had a disability. I wasn't diagnosed with cerebral palsy until I was 18 months old.

Stephanie Daniels:

God knew what you needed. I understand that one of her favorite scriptures is a prayer from Genesis 31 known as the Mizpah. It says, "May the Lord watch between me and thee while we are absent one from the other." Can you tell me what the scripture means to you as it relates to your mom?

Celeste Sharpe:

Well, it's the way that my grandmother and I used to say goodnight to each other. Every night before we went to bed, we would say, "May the Lord watch between me and thee as we are absent one from another."

She had a heart attack in 2015 around Thanksgiving, and she lived for another three weeks. But the day that she passed, I was at work, and my uncle came to pick me up. He said, "You have to come with me to the hospital."

And I didn't know whether she had passed already or not. It's like those scenes you see in a movie. You're hoping that you get there in time. I was about a half an hour late. But God knew what he was doing in that, too, because she probably wouldn't have gone if I had been standing there.

I remember one of my aunts was standing in the hospital hallway and she was notifying other family members. And I walked past her and I walked into the room and I saw that everyone was crying already. And I called out to my Mom twice and she didn't answer. So I realized that she had already gone to be with the Lord.

For a moment, I couldn't think of anything to say. And then I just took her hand and I said, "May the Lord watch between me and thee as we are absent one from another." I said that about three times.

It was like saying goodnight to her. It wasn't like saying goodbye necessarily, but it was like saying goodnight. And then I stopped and I realized, wait a second. My heart's still beating. Because I thought that the moment that she left, I would leave too, because we were so



connected. She used to say I was her sidekick and that she could keep me in her hip pocket. I actually put my hand over my chest and I said, “My heart's still beating. I'm still here. God, you have something for me to do.”

Stephanie Daniels:

Absolutely. He's watching over you.

Celeste Sharpe:

That's what she always told me. She said, “If something happens to me, you know where I am and God's going to take care of you.” And he has been doing that.

Stephanie Daniels:

Absolutely. And I just have to say, it's such a privilege to work with you and to know you because you are a whole ball of encouragement and sunshine and sweetness. Anybody who gets to just move through your orbit is really blessed. That Mizpah, she spoke that over you.

Celeste Sharpe:

She was my biggest cheerleader and taught me how to cheer for others and taught me how to encourage. And people say I give really good hugs. It's because I got those hugs for 35 years. Nobody hugged like Mom.

Stephanie Daniels: Oh, I love that. I love her. I love her because of you.

Celeste Sharpe:

I'm glad. I'm honored to be able to introduce her to you, even if it's just with my words.

Stephanie Daniels:

Yeah, she sounds like an amazing woman. Can you tell me a little bit about your relationship with your grandmother or capital M, Mom?

Celeste Sharpe:

She was my person. Anything happened in life, you talk to Mom about it. Any advice you needed, it was like, I've got to tell Mom first. I remember the day that I met Joni, the first person I wanted to tell was my Mom. I couldn't wait to get home. I didn't want to tear another ticket. I was like, I have to go tell Mom that because without Mom, I would have never heard Joni's story to begin with.

And I heard Joni's story. And I remember telling her, I said, “Mom, if God can use Joni with her disability, he can use me with mine.” And I thought to myself, I'm going to tell her that one day. And in 2014, Joni rolled into the movie theater and I was like, “Lord, you have got to be kidding. Is this really happening right now?”

But it happened. And I would have never imagined how God orchestrated that as a six-year-old sitting, listening to Joni's story with my mom. And then, 20-something years later, Joni rolls into my movie theater of all places.



Stephanie Daniels:  
Did you have a fangirl moment?

Celeste Sharpe:  
Actually, I really didn't want to have a fangirl moment because I recognized her, but I said, "God, if that's who I think it is, please have somebody come back and tell me that I'm right, because otherwise I won't say anything because I didn't want to bother her." And so within seconds of that prayer coming out of my mouth, Ken was standing next to me because they needed 3D glasses for their movie.

So I said to him, "Sir, you look familiar. Do I know you from somewhere?" And he says, "No, I don't think you know me, but I think you know my wife." And I went, "Oh my gosh, it's really her." And then they saw their movie and came out and Joni asked me the simplest question. She goes, "So Celeste, what church do you go to?"

And I couldn't remember the name of my church because I was so stunned that I was having a conversation with Joni.

Stephanie Daniels:  
I love that. I absolutely love that. How did your Mom just cultivate confidence in you and really foster security in you living with this condition?

Celeste Sharpe:  
She taught me to be grateful for the things that I could do and that the only thing was I had to do them differently. It didn't mean I couldn't do them, whatever it was, if I had to lean against the counter to wash the dishes or hold on to the furniture to vacuum my bedroom or whatever it was.

Just because I had to do it differently doesn't mean I couldn't get it done. The most important thing that she taught me was that what really cripples you is your attitude about your disability, not your disability. Because you can have something like cerebral palsy, and it can be terrible, you can be in pain. It can manifest in all different sorts of ways. What controls it is how you see it.

We work at Joni and Friends. All we have to do is walk down the hall, and we see somebody with an even more crippling disability who is not crippled at all. Her spirit is so free, and she loves Jesus so much. She's not bound to that chair, and I'm not bound to my canes just because I have cerebral palsy.

Stephanie Daniels:  
That's so, so good. So I know the Lord helped you with that mindset, but it sounds like Mom really helped cultivate that in you.

Celeste Sharpe:  
She made it okay to be who I was because sometimes when you go out into the world, you minimize your disability to make other people feel comfortable.



I spent a lot of time as a kid trying to convince other kids that I was more like them than different. And with Mom, she knew me from the time I was born. She knew who I was. And I didn't have to hide anything. I didn't have to minimize it. She loved me completely for who I am.

And I can say that both my Mom and my Mommy do that, and I love working at Joni and Friends because everything about me is accepted here.

Stephanie Daniels:  
Yeah.

Celeste Sharpe:  
It's not a workplace where I'm like the token disabled person. My disability is an asset here because it gives me a different perspective that gives me the opportunity to do what I'm doing now.

Stephanie Daniels:  
You are so encouraging. I feel like I'm hanging on every word that you're sharing because it's so rich and there's so many things that I feel like I can take from your story and just move forward with in my own life because your mom really sets you up for success. Can you tell me a little bit about your relationship with your biological mom?

Celeste Sharpe:  
My Mommy is amazing. She's just as strong as Mom. She always points me to Jesus. She always says that even though she couldn't raise me, she's happy to be here for me now, and I'm happy that she is here for me now, because both my grandma and my granddad are in heaven now.

So Mommy is now the biggest cheerleader and I'm so glad that my Mom taught me how to love my Mommy. She explained to me at a young age that I had a physical disability that people could see, but she explained to me that my parents, as young parents who weren't really prepared for having a kid with a disability, had a disability too. I just couldn't see theirs. Now that I'm grown and I understand, to some extent, how hard it was, I am so grateful that I get the chance to honor her and to appreciate her for the decision that she made.

Stephanie Daniels:  
You are so well adjusted to come from the situation that you've come from and for all the relationships to be healthy. I think that's just a huge testament to the power of God and that you have a great relationship with Mommy. With her just like surrendering you to her mom, it makes me think of Moses. Moses got to go back to his biological mom and she still got to take care of him.

You mentioned you met Joni at the movie theater. How did you get to Joni and Friends after that meeting?

Celeste Sharpe:  
I was looking for somewhere to volunteer. Joni and Ken had actually invited me and said if ever you want to come and volunteer, we'd love to have you. So I started volunteering in April of 2015 and Mom was still doing well. Every morning, I would leave the house and I'd come back and I'd

talk to her about what happened and who I met and what I was doing. And she was still my biggest cheerleader.

Stephanie Daniels:  
I bet she was so pumped for you.

Celeste Sharpe:  
Yes. Always. Always.

Stephanie Daniels:  
You start volunteering at Joni and Friends and then what happened next?

Celeste Sharpe:  
What happened next is one day I was volunteering stuffing envelopes and it just happened to be Joni's recording day and she said, "Celeste, have you ever seen me record?" And I ended up staying the entire day. It was another thing that was a gift to me from God, because my dad, my grandfather was a broadcaster for armed forces radio and television for 30 years.

And I remember as a kid going to work and visiting him and seeing him behind this board. And I was like, only God could allow the granddaughter of a broadcaster to be in a recording studio with Joni Eareckson Tada. Only God could do that.

Stephanie Daniels:  
I love how he does that. God is in so many details. It's so beautiful. So you're in the studio with Joni. You end up applying for a job here.

Celeste Sharpe:  
I became an employee officially on January 17th, 2017.

Stephanie Daniels:  
Not too long ago, Joni, on her four-minute radio program called you her Deuteronomy Pal.

Celeste Sharpe:  
As I was grieving the loss of Mom, I found myself asking, "Why couldn't she stay longer? Why? Why didn't you let her live to be 100? Why didn't you?" I thought she'd never die. She's my mom. She can't go anywhere. And then one day I was reading and I spotted Deuteronomy 33:25 that says, "As your days are, so shall your strength be." And I went, "Oh, you gave Mom enough strength to live 84 years."

That was it, 84 years and two days' worth of strength. Then I was like, "Okay, God, I understand." And then it was easy for me to transition to, "Okay, I can be sad because I don't have Mom anymore or I can be really grateful that she spent 35 years pouring into me." And that choice was very easy.

Stephanie Daniels:  
That's so beautiful just to think, really our days are numbered and God has purpose for us and



each one of those numbered days. Mom did all that she was called to do. And I think she did such an incredible job pouring into you. It's so beautiful.

Celeste Sharpe:

I wish you could meet the rest of my family because all the women in my family rock exactly like her.

Stephanie Daniels:

I believe it. If they're anything like you, I'm sure. When you look at just moments of profound loss, what helped you weather that storm of grief?

Celeste Sharpe:

I think allowing myself to feel it all, because there are moments when you feel like, "Oh, I shouldn't be sad." But you have to. You have to go through it. The only way you're going to get on the other side of it is to go through it. Something that helped me a lot was being able to just write my feelings down.

I would write letters to Mom about how I felt about her not being with me anymore and trying to navigate relationships with other people in my family who she had always helped me to understand them so that I would know how to relate to them. I made myself a promise that no matter how sad I was feeling at the beginning of a journal entry, I would always end it with hope because that was what Mom would want me to do. It's okay to feel, it's okay to cry, it's okay to be sad, but we have something other people don't. We have the hope of Jesus. And Mom's not gone, she just moved. She just got a new address.

Stephanie Daniels:

That's right.

Celeste Sharpe:

And I just can't go yet. So when you think about grief like that, it's just a temporary goodbye. It's a painful one and you've got to go through it, but it's only temporary because we will see each other again in heaven.

Stephanie Daniels:

Absolutely. I love that. Like you said, you have to go through the grief, but the Lord is so faithful to meet us and really be an anchor for our lives. And that's what I'm seeing in your story. That's so, so beautiful. So if you could say one thing to Mom right now, what would that be? And then what do you think she would say to you in response?

Celeste Sharpe:

I would say thank you. Because she's still giving me gifts every day. She's still giving me her wisdom every day. I still think of her every day and want to talk to her. But I know what she would say. She would say, "Keep going, run the race."

She got to the finish line and she's waiting for me at mine. And she'd want me to do exactly that. Do whatever God calls me to do. I'll do the best that I can to honor God and to honor her.



Stephanie Daniels:

That is so incredibly powerful. I can't tell you how much I love her, for the nuggets and the wisdom that you're sharing. I'm sure some of our listeners are moms with children who might have disabilities. What message do you have for them as they steward those young hearts?

Celeste Sharpe:

I would say as you steward the hearts of your children, steward yours, as well. Take care of yourself because you can't be everything you want to be for those little beautiful hearts if you are broken or if you need support.

Do the things, even if it's just going and getting a coffee. Go get your coffee. You deserve a coffee. Don't neglect yourself to love your kids.

Stephanie Daniels:

That is so huge. And that also makes me think of things that I share with our friends that comment on our social media. And we tell them if you find yourself in a place where you need encouragement, a way to take care of yourself is to reach out to our Response team. And they can do that by emailing our team at [response@joniandfriends.org](mailto:response@joniandfriends.org). And I'm telling you, that team is so solid and I get to work with them every day.

And what we do is we point people to Jesus and to scripture, and that's a great way to take care of yourself. But I have loved everything that you have shared with us, Celeste. You are a breath of fresh air, just a wealth of wisdom. And you are so precious. I love you.

Celeste Sharpe:

I love you too, my friend.

Stephanie Daniels:

If you ever question the impact of motherhood, just remember that in 2 Timothy 1:5, Paul tells Timothy, "I'm reminded of your authentic faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois, in your mother Eunice. I'm sure that this faith is also inside you."

A mother's or a grandmother's faith can have such a great impact, we're still reading about it 2,000 years later. May this be a reminder that the daily stresses of parenting and caregiving store up a treasure in heaven that pays eternal dividends.

Crystal Keating:

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