I woke up one morning during my junior year in high school in a rotten mood. It was 5:30 a.m., it was cold, and it was a Tuesday—a day with a heavy class load. I’d already decided it was going to be a miserable day.

I bumbled around the kitchen and got my lunch ready. Then I plopped down at the table for some plain cereal and milk. Grumpy, I dug my spoon into the bowl and took a huge bite of breakfast. I scowled at the wall.

A small plaque caught my attention. My mother had received it from her visiting teachers. In cheerful letters it said, “Blessings brighten when you count them.”

“No,” I thought darkly. “I’m in a bad mood today and nothing is going to change it.” In my head, I started an argument with the plaque.

“Absolutely nothing can brighten this day,” I thought. I took another bite of cereal and crunched it angrily. But my eyes were drawn back to the white writing: “Blessings brighten when you count them.”

“You won’t work,” I told the plaque. “You can’t work. I’m pretty sure even a box of puppies couldn’t make me happy today.”

“You don’t like puppies,” my brain argued.
“Exactly,” I said.
I like to be right all the time, and the plaque was challenging me. “Fine!” I said out loud, “I’ll prove you’re wrong.”

I looked around the kitchen, daring myself to find something I was grateful for. The obstinate part of me was still being unreasonable.

“It is 5:43 in the morning. I have nothing to be grateful for.”

I crunched another bite of cereal. Then suddenly I had a thought.

“It would be mighty hard to eat your cereal without a spoon.”

I stopped. I looked at my spoon. Then I looked at the cereal in my bowl.

“I guess you’re right,” I thought reluctantly. “It would be pretty hard to eat cereal without a spoon.”

“Now,” the thought came to mind, “imagine trying to eat your cereal without a bowl.” I actually smiled a little at the thought of a big puddle of milk and cereal on the table.

“What about without a chair to sit in?” I thought.

I felt the chair beneath me and gripped my spoon a little tighter, looking at the simple utensil with appreciation. My gaze drifted back to the plaque that still said, “Blessings brighten when you count them.”

This time, I gave a tiny smile.

“I have a spoon. I have something to be grateful for. And a bowl. And a chair.”

I started to see dozens of things I was thankful for. Not only did I have food, but there was also food in the pantry and downstairs in the storage room. I would probably never have to go hungry. My parents worked hard to feed my siblings and me. They also worked hard to create a safe house for us to live in. And they loved me.

All of a sudden, many things gained new meaning: It was cold outside, but I lived in a warm house. It was early in the morning, but I had the opportunity to go to seminary and to school. I was eating breakfast alone, but Tuesdays were my dad’s temple days, so I could rejoice that he was in the house of the Lord. I could be grateful that I had parents who were devoted to the gospel. Many times they got up early to go and serve.

“So, plaque, I guess you were right. My blessings did brighten as I counted them.” The dark mood from minutes before had evaporated. It had been replaced with a spirit of peace.

“No hard feelings,” I thought.

I realized that I’d only scratched the surface of understanding how blessed I am. In fact, I was so busy feeling blessed that I was nearly late for seminary. As I walked out of the house, I was full of gratitude—for my family, my Heavenly Father, a wooden plaque, and the women who had given it to my mother.

And, yes, I was grateful for something as small and easily overlooked as a spoon.