

Caregiving

A Path Toward God

DIANNE L. TAYLOR

Caregiving: A Path Toward God

Copyright © 2023 by Dianne L. Taylor

Editors: Nicole Geiger, Fran Geiger Joslin, Erin Ensinger, Kristin Dain,
C. Owens

ISBN Paperback: 978-1-958127-11-7

ISBN eBook: 978-1-958127-12-4

Authenticity Book House
c/o 705 West Filmore Street
Winterset, IA 50273 USA

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

All characters in this publication, other than those described in Scripture, referenced through a bibliographic source, or the author's personal experience are fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Because of the dynamic nature of the Internet, any web addresses or links contained in this book may have changed since publication and may no longer be valid.

Formatting and cover design: Schechner & Associates

Cover photo: David Edmonson



AUTHENTICITY
BOOK HOUSE

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Published by Authenticity Book House
Printed in the United States of America

The Ministry of Authenticity Book House

Authenticity Book House (ABH) publishes **Simplified Biblical Training in Bite-Sized Books**. We supply theologically sound books to pastors, church leaders, and others who have little or no access to formal in-depth Bible training. ABH simplifies content to reach an appropriate reading level without watering down major truths needed for spiritual growth and leadership. The small size of our books allows easy transport and more affordable publication. Since they often journey beyond their initial drop points, we include a clear gospel message in each manuscript, spreading the good news as far as a book may travel. Our team approach to publishing includes qualified theologians, professional editors and writers, highly qualified translators, and cultural consultants. ABH strategically plans a full curriculum for educating pastors and church leaders. We also publish materials to help supplement their ministry to new believers and hurting congregants.

ABH offers bite-sized books to audiences in multiple languages. To learn more about ABH, how to access our books, or how to translate for us, visit www.abhbooks.com or email us at abhinfo@abhbooks.com.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my many mentors in caregiving, including Georgia Basko, Lynda Kile, and my late mother-in-law, Billie Taylor. Special thanks to Marcia Strauss, whose prayer, friendship, and insight helped shape this book. Thank you to those who taught me about unceasing prayer: Joyce Allen, Pastor Jeff VanGoethem, and Pastor Daniel Jordan. Thank you, Pastor Will Pierce, for faithfully teaching the Word, reviewing the theological content of this book, and caring for this caregiver and the ones I serve. Thank you to Ray Wheeler who continues to help our family through countless joys and sorrows. Deepest love and appreciation to my husband and sister who allow me to help and help me back as we journey together.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Chapter One: What Is Caregiving?

Chapter Two: Change and Adaptation

Chapter Three: The Motivation to Love

Chapter Four: Rich Relationships

Chapter Five: When the Well Runs Dry

Chapter Six: Prayer

Chapter Seven: When Those We Love Leave

Conclusion

Endnotes

Caregiving:

A Path Toward God

God created man in His own image...

male and female he created them.

God blessed them;

and God said to them,

“Be fruitful and multiply,

and fill the earth,

and subdue it;

and rule over the fish of the sea

and over the birds of the sky and

over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Genesis 1:27-28

Introduction

My husband Mark unexpectedly spent his fifty-fifth birthday in the hospital. As I drove him home two weeks later we felt hopeful about his recovery. We anticipated a couple months of healing and return to life as usual. That did not happen.

Three seizures battered Mark's body one evening as I changed his bandages. Back to the hospital he went. After returning home a second time, new health problems popped up, confusing even his doctors. Mark and I realized these changes were not temporary. Rather, the health changes God asked us to face would require us to adopt a whole new way of life.

Before Mark got sick our young adult children had left home to focus on marriage, family, and education. Mark and I enjoyed the freedom of living as just the two of us. We took opportunities to visit my family across the country and became more involved in church ministry. We spent

wonderful time with our first two grandchildren and Mark's elderly parents.

Mark and I easily fell into a routine. We shared chores, often making a date out of a simple trip to the market. We visited our favorite coffee shop where we dreamed about the future. We discussed hopes of moving closer to my family and the possibility of starting a small business near them.

In addition, Mark realized his dream of becoming a full-time bookseller while I poured myself into work as a counselor. We felt thankful for what we had and our future that lay before us.

We didn't see that God had other plans. When Mark's seizures occurred, our lives changed forever. Mark lost his ability to drive, work, and handle household decisions. Our plans for a future business fell to the ground. The household we ran as a team became a task I bore on my own.

The hospital became our second home. Loneliness set in as doctor appointments took over our time and even church activities lessened. We desperately worked to figure out what

was happening to Mark's health, but answers remained few.

Every loss hurt. The loss of Mark's job, the loss of brain functions affecting his balance and memory, the loss of his ability to drive, and especially the loss of working as a team.

Along with taking care of the everyday necessities of life, I now took on the task of making sure Mark stayed safe. We lived day by day not knowing what would come next. Gradually, I began to function as Mark's caregiver.

Seven years into all this, my parents died in a car accident. The event was so startling and huge we could barely take it in. As a result of their deaths, Mark and I moved north to help with my parents' house and possessions. We moved into their home with my younger sister who occasionally needs help due to chronic effects from an injury.

Shortly after our move, both of Mark's parents died from age-related illness. Mark's needs continued to multiply, and I decided to retire early. I wanted to focus full-time on caregiving.

As I lived through these changes and then started research for this book, I realized God gives us multiple examples of caregiving in the Bible. When God created Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, he gave them the task of caring for all his creation, from the “fish of the sea,” to “every living thing that moves on the earth,” (Genesis 1:28). This command followed Adam and Eve even after sin sent them out of their perfect home in the Garden of Eden. It remains a command we follow today.

Our lives provide many opportunities for caregiving. Some of us care for children. Others care for gardens that yield food and flowers. We care for our health, our homes, and those in our communities. As we mature we learn to take care of our thoughts and actions.

Many caregiving tasks feel like a natural part of life. We prepare meals to keep us full and strong. We work jobs to help support our families. We train and comfort our children as they grow. Moments arise, however, when major events force us out of these natural routines. This book addresses those times when life feels like it turns upside down and the paths we knew so well turn to mystery.

Why is this topic worth writing about? Across the world people face similar circumstances to the ones Mark and I face. If you are one of these people, you understand the complexity of taking on responsibility for someone else's welfare or unexpectedly needing help yourself. Physical routines change, incomes change, relationships change. Concerns about the future and our own ability to endure surface.

Even as I write, I find myself facing the toll of increased isolation. I see a time coming when I may not have the strength to keep up.

This book explores the role of caregiving and how it can affect our relationships with God and with others. I hope it will encourage all of us to persevere and see our caregiving roles as paths that take us directly into our heavenly Father's arms in deeper ways.

Applications for readers as well as insights for pastors and other spiritual leaders—often the caregivers of caregivers—are included at the end of each chapter.

Chapter One

What Is Caregiving?

Caregiver [noun]. *one who takes care of a child, invalid, etc.* ¹

Beth shifted her infant daughter on her lap. The child's dark hair felt moist from her sobs. Beth knew Sara wasn't hungry; she had just nursed her. What caused the tears? She lifted the baby gently to her shoulder and patted her back. Beth smiled as a bubble of air escaped. Sara relaxed into Beth's arms and settled into a nap.

Weariness crept over Beth. Sara required several feedings around the clock, making deep rest almost impossible. Beth kissed her daughter's head, watching her steady breathing. Contentment filled her despite tiredness. She knew it would seem like no time at all before Sara fed herself and then ran to join her friends in games. She accepted her own exhaustion as a small price to pay for Sara's growth.

While Sara slept, on the other side of the village Paul searched in the dark for his father

who had wandered away from home just after sunset. Paul's frustration grew with every step. Each hour he spent chasing after his father meant less sleep and less energy for work. These types of nights occurred more and more often. "What happened to the strong and steady man who raised me?" wondered Paul. "Why can't he remember to stay in bed? Why can't he find his way home?"

Paul feared he would lose strength to care for his wife and children if this nightly game of hide and seek continued. What if his father's condition worsened?

Paul saw movement by the lakeshore and relief surged through him. As he ran to his father and guided him home Paul remembered the many lessons his father had taught him. Ironically, these lessons included one about not leaving home without telling someone. Paul smiled. His love ran deep for this man even if keeping him safe threatened to overwhelm him. He hugged his father briefly as he led him back to bed, then quickly lay down himself.

These stories of Beth and Paul echo the simple definition of a caregiver: one who cares for the

daily needs of a child or invalid. Children and invalids represent those who can't fully meet their own needs.

Beth's caregiving fits into the normal role of those who choose to raise children. Parents care for their children's physical and emotional needs, teaching them how to grow and live independently. Most parents around the world gladly commit to this care, even with sacrifice, to see their children mature.

Paul faces a different kind of caregiving. The father who raised him now lives with limitations Paul can't understand. Paul experiences anxiety about meeting his father's needs over the long haul. He realizes the elderly never regain their youth, the ill may never heal, and terminal illness ends with death.

Paul didn't choose his path of caregiving. It came to him unexpectedly in the form of his father's illness. When we face Paul's type of situation, we feel the full impact of the unknown. We wonder what will happen next and how we will find the courage to meet overwhelming needs.

Many roles of caregiving fit in between the experiences of Beth and Paul. In any caregiving position we take something of ourselves to give to another. No matter what the circumstance, God gives his children this promise of protection to lean on:

O LORD, You have searched me and
known me...

You have enclosed me behind and before,
and laid Your hand upon me.
(Psalm 139:1,5)

It is comforting to know that when we believe in God and become his child, his hand rests upon us in every path we walk and in every change we face. The Lord never loses touch with our thoughts and actions. He promises his presence forever.

Application:

1. Describe your own role of caregiving. Does it feel like a familiar path such as Beth's or a path leading to unknowns like Paul's?
2. What do you fear in your caregiving role?

3. In what ways do you put aside your own needs to meet the needs of others?

Spiritual Leaders:

As pastors and spiritual leaders, you most likely handle a host of requests for help from people God asks you to shepherd. The needs of caregivers sometimes go unnoticed. This happens either because their duties require them to remain at home or the number of tasks they face hampers their ability to reach out. How can you stay aware? How can you care for caregivers?

Application for Spiritual Leaders:

1. Do you have caregivers under your spiritual care? If so, make a list of them.
2. How might you encourage caregivers this week? A list of possible ways to do this follows:
 - a. Pray with them.
 - b. Write out a meaningful verse and give it to them as a tangible reminder of God's care.

- c. Connect them with other caregivers so they may pray for and encourage each other.
- d. Provide something they need physically. Examples include providing food or taking on a task they may not have time to accomplish. Ask people in your congregation to help. This gives your congregants an opportunity to join you in ministry.
- e. Ask each caregiver what they need. Needs are not always evident from an outside perspective.

Chapter Two

Change and Adaptation

*But if any of you lacks wisdom,
let him ask of God,
who gives to all generously
and without reproach,
and it will be given to him.*

James 1:5

On a wet December day, I headed to church to prepare for a community Christmas program. I joined a group of church members rehearsing songs which tell of Jesus' birth. The joy of the music filled me and I looked forward to taking part in sharing this joy with others.

During a break, I received a message from my younger sister. "Mom and Dad haven't arrived home from a friend's funeral. A snow squall is creating hazardous driving conditions." Less than twenty minutes later I learned that my father had died in a car accident and my mother lay unconscious on her way to the hospital. My strength completely failed me as I tried to soak in this new reality. I sank onto a pew in shock.

With help from friends, I left church, called my older sister to tell her what happened, and struggled to create a plan. I needed to fly home. Mark needed care while I traveled. I needed to absorb a change so sudden, so massive, I felt it would crush me.

It seemed no one on earth could hurt as deeply as I hurt. Yet, this type of circumstance affects lives around the world every minute of every day. None of us lives immune to loss and pain. How do we keep moving, especially when change hits suddenly?

While Mark's illness progressed over a period of years and our adjustments came one-by-one, the deaths of my parents presented our family with immediate loss and major decisions. How would my sisters and I deal with my parents' house and all they left behind? Could we locate a place for my younger sister to live where her needs could be met? Would Mark and I need to move to my parents' home? As we considered these questions and more, waves of anxiety threatened to overwhelm me.

In the background I sensed God's hand guiding and supporting. For example, the

friend who drove me home from church had recently experienced a loss of her own. After a year of taking care of her husband who battled aggressive cancer, my friend was left with uncertainty. At a fairly young age she faced life without her husband and ministry partner. Through her grieving she sought God about how to go forward—how to provide for herself. Her faithfulness to God’s leading inspired many in our church, including me.

I knew this friend fully understood my frailty. She stayed close as I called my older sister to tell her of our loss. She booked airline tickets for my daughter and me to get us home. She prayed for us over the next hours and days as I packed, took Mark to a place where he could receive care, and then flew north with my daughter. I felt God’s care through her care. I felt God’s presence through her presence.

When I think back to those moments and the immediate choices we faced as a family, I am reminded of the book of Ruth in the Old Testament of the Bible. This book begins at a time of great loss and change in another family. Elimelech and his wife, Naomi, left their home in Bethlehem of Judah because of a famine. They

settled in Moab with their two sons hoping to find food and stability. Sorrow met them instead. Within ten years, Naomi's husband and both of her children died. Naomi found herself alone in a foreign land with only her two daughters-in-law, both women of Moab.

Naomi desired to return to Judah but urged her daughters-in-law to stay, stating she had nothing to offer them. In Ruth 1:11 she tells them:

Return my daughters [to your families].
Why should you go with me?
Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may
be your husbands?

In verse thirteen we learn Naomi believed the hand of the Lord had “gone forth against her.” Her heart turned bitter, and she resisted company on her journey home.

The other daughter-in-law left Naomi but Ruth insisted on going with her to Judah. She acted on her loyalty to Naomi and God. Ruth said:

Do not urge me to leave you or turn back

from following you;
for where you go, I will go,
and where you lodge, I will lodge.
Your people shall be my people,
and your God, my God.
Where you die, I will die,
and there I will be buried....

(Ruth 1:16-17a)

Ruth, who came into Naomi's family through marriage, didn't want to leave her. She also didn't want to leave the true God she came to know through her marriage. Naomi and Ruth returned to the town of Bethlehem together. Once there, Ruth took on the care of Naomi, seeking to find them food.

Naomi and her daughters-in-law faced great loss and big decisions. What choices did each make? Naomi chose to return to Judah because she heard the famine had ended—but she returned with a resentful heart. One daughter-in-law chose to return to her prior life and former gods in Moab. But Ruth made a choice based on loyalty. Ruth willingly walked with her mother-in-law to a land she didn't know. She willingly chose to care for her and to worship God.

Ruth's story shows how faith in God helps us

walk through change in a godly way. Ruth didn't think twice about following Naomi to Bethlehem. She did it because of her trust in—and love for—God.

When my parents died Mark and I faced similar faith choices. Like Ruth and Naomi we had to consider a move. We needed to live near my sister to help her with the things our parents left behind, decisions about the house, and to help with her needs.

We had much to lose with such a long-distance move. Because our choice didn't immediately look clear, we focused on God.

1. Remembering God's sovereignty and timing

How would our faith grow or lessen within our circumstances? If the Lord asked Mark and me to move across the country, would we go willingly, believing God prepared this path for us? Would we trust him with the loss of living near three of our children and several young grandchildren? We struggled thinking about leaving Mark's elderly parents who had multiple health problems and helped care for Mark.

The idea of a move created anxiety. Acts 17:26-27 reminded us that God appoints our times and the boundaries of the places we live.

And He made from one man every nation
of mankind to live on all the face of
the earth,
having determined their appointed times
and the boundaries of their habitation,
that they would seek God,
if perhaps they might grope for Him
and find Him,
though He is not far from each of us.

This passage demonstrates that God decides when we live and where we live. He wants us to “grope for Him” and find him wherever he places us. Mark and I both believed in God at early ages. We sought to grow in our personal relationships with him as we matured. Now, in this moment, we needed his wisdom. Where did God want us next?

2. Seeking God’s wisdom

James 1:5 tells us God gives generously to those who seek wisdom from him. He does this without shaming us for needing direction. Mark

and I prayed about whether or not to move and what a move would bring to our family. Then we started looking for answers.

My younger sister and I searched for places she could live given her unique needs. We found nothing suitable.

I talked with my employer about working from home if we did end up leaving the state. She graciously agreed.

As we proceeded down our list, God's wisdom slowly emerged. The only way to fill the voids and meet the obligations left by my parents' deaths meant moving across the country. Although the reality of this action overwhelmed us, we experienced God's peace in recognizing his direction.

3. Depending on God

We leaned heavily on God's love, presence, and strength as we headed into our preparations. These verses helped settle our minds:

For great is Your love, reaching to
the heavens;

Your faithfulness reaches to the skies.

(Psalm 57:10)

Our soul waits for the LORD;

He is our help and our shield. (Psalm 33:20)

Trust in Him at all times, you people;

pour out your hearts before Him;

God is a refuge for us. (Psalm 62:8)

Be anxious for nothing,

but in everything

by prayer and supplication

with thanksgiving

let your requests be made known to God.

And the peace of God, which surpasses

all comprehension,

will guard your hearts and your minds in

Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-8)

All our preparation didn't make the move perfect. As a family we grieved at the thought of separation. We cried freely as we kissed Mark's parents goodbye, knowing it might be the last time we could express our love for them in person. The thought of missing important moments in the lives of our children and grandchildren bit into the joy of moving to my family home.

Mark and I knew we faced additional unknowns. Yet we believed God would lead us and walk with us. Our journey began.

Application:

1. At what point in your life did you become a caregiver? How did taking on this role change your life?
2. How did you sense God's presence as you began your new role?
3. How can you lean on God as you face the challenges of your days? Write a prayer here describing your current need for God's care, including thankfulness for his presence and provisions you've already received.

Spiritual Leaders:

All of us experience change. You could probably list ways your own life has shifted over the years. How did God encourage you in these times?

God fills his word with the truth of who he is

which allows us to absorb change and adapt over time. He tells us he is always with us and will give wisdom when life feels uncertain. Knowing we are safe in him wherever he takes us provides us with confidence to accept unknowns. His presence offers deep comfort as we learn to adapt.

In my story, our long-distance move took us to a place familiar to me in childhood; however, I experienced challenges returning as an adult. The pastor and members of a church we visited in the past swept in with prayer and practical support. My sister helped us settle into new routines and adjust to cultural differences in our new location.

You have this same opportunity to help when you come across those in your flock who face a slow or sudden unraveling of familiar life patterns. Rethinking your own experiences of change can help you understand how to offer support in their situations.

Actions for Spiritual Leaders:

1. Contact those taking on the role of caregiver. Remind them they don't walk

alone while trying to adapt.

2. Think of a time when God brought something unexpected into your life. How did the promises of God help? Share your experiences with others as a way of teaching by example.
3. Remind those in your care that changes in life can't remove them from the presence of God. His care for his children abides forever.

Chapter Three
The Motivation to Love

*Be kind to one another,
tender-hearted,
forgiving each other,
just as God in Christ has also forgiven you.*

Ephesians 4:32

Anna's feet dragged as she walked through the village. Even though she considered herself youthful her muscles lacked strength from exhaustion. She wondered if she could gather the energy to reach home. Her heart, hard as a rock, felt like a weight in her chest making her journey more difficult.

Years before, women in the village nick-named Anna "Sunny." She shared her smile freely, radiating warmth to all she met. Now she wore a frown. The smile that used to come naturally seemed forced—if she remembered to share it at all. Anna didn't like this change in herself.

She paused on the path to watch children

splashing in the lake. She wished for their energy and playfulness. At the same time, she wanted to throw down her bundles of laundry and shout at them, “Stop having fun! It won’t last! Don’t you know life hurts?”

Anna’s thoughts shocked her. How could she even think these words? She remained still, realizing she couldn’t offer a smile to the children. Frowning, Anna turned away and continued home.

She dreaded what she knew waited for her there. She would find her husband, Joseph, pacing the floor, full of anxiety. It would take her at least an hour to calm him down. That meant an hour delay in hanging clothes and another delay in preparing food.

Anna shifted her bundle. If only Joseph hadn’t had his accident. Instead of fighting physical pain—especially in his back and now useless arm—he would have spent his days working beside friends on a boat. Anna would have waited for him to burst into their home at the end of the day, full of stories, making her smile all the brighter. Oh, how she loved those times before his injury. Oh, how she still loved Joseph even with

all their troubles. Why did it feel so hard to keep showing her love?

Their days played out differently now. Joseph waited for her to return from errands, needing her care. Instead of telling stories, he ranted about losing his livelihood. Before she could comfort him, he turned away, hurting her even more. The loss of the laughter and shared dreams of their marriage tore at her heart. Even though they shared a home, she felt like he lived in a different world, rarely inviting her in.

Her feet continued their rhythm on the path. How could she keep her heart soft? How could she find ways to continue showing Joseph her love? Anna prayed in time with her steps, “Lord, fill me with your kindness.” “Lord, I feel empty and lost.” “Lord, help me.” Over and over she said these prayers until she reached home.

Anna’s story reveals what many caregivers experience. The energy required to meet the needs of each day—along with the loss of emotional closeness—can create tension and sadness. In the story above Anna experiences some classic caregiving moments:

- **Tiredness.** Losing Joseph's help in daily life and adding his care to her load brings Anna to a point of exhaustion.
- **Sadness.** Anna remembers the emotional closeness she and Joseph experienced before the accident. Now she grieves the loss of their special moments. Her smile feels smothered beneath pain.
- **Burdened.** Anna knows Joseph will not get better. Her life will continue to revolve around meeting his needs. How will she bring joy into this future?
- **Inadequacy.** Anna's prayers reveal her knowledge that she can't deal with this situation alone.

Whether you care for a spouse, child, parent, or friend you most likely can relate to these feelings. Caregiving requires hard work. It's easy for our hearts to feel heavy and for the tasks of daily life to drain us. In this story, Anna calls out to God. She needs help to carry out her mission of caregiving.

Anna goes directly to the source of endurance.

It's tempting to hope that when we cry out to God he will take away whatever hardship we face. He doesn't always do this. Instead, he comforts us, brings strength, and asks us to do something difficult—to become more like him.

The Psalmist tells us the Lord provides for us. He will not run dry as we do.

I will lift my eyes to the mountains;
from where shall my help come?

My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.

He will not allow your foot to slip;
He who keeps you will not slumber.

Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither
slumber nor sleep. (Psalm 121:1-4)

In the New Testament Jesus invites us to come to him with our tiredness. He promises to give us heart-rest. He reveals this part of himself in Matthew 11:28-30. Jesus says:

Come to Me, all who are weary and
heavy-laden,
and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you
and learn from Me,
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.
For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

When we find ourselves weary and heavy with burdens, we have somewhere to go. Jesus invites us to come to him. And when we come, we find our Savior, one who is gentle and humble in heart. He will not berate us for being tired or sad, for feeling burdened by the broken world, or for not having all the answers. Instead, he says he will bring rest to our souls.

As we depend on the Lord to provide us with strength and soul-rest we may also serve as an encouragement to others. Remember how Anna inspired those in her community with her sunny smile? As she continues to seek the Lord for help and remains steady in serving Joseph with kindness and tenderness, she will display the heart of Christ to others. Perhaps an even deeper smile will emerge.

We must remember that the help God gives us provides two things:

- Strength to carry on with our tasks.
- A heart that grows to reflect Christ.

Life brings trouble God doesn't always choose to remove. He wants our faith in him and our love for him to grow over our lifetime more than he desires us to live trouble-free. God gives us the opportunity to seek his joy both in happy circumstances and in difficult ones. James describes growth during hard times in this way:

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect [mature] and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-3)

Application:

1. Do you identify with Anna's tiredness, sadness, concerns for the future, or need for help? Which struggles feel most challenging to you? Talk to the Lord about your fears and concerns.

2. Sometimes it helps to set a specific time of day to come to the Lord in prayer. Anna used her travel time, walking from one task to another. When can you set aside time to talk to the Lord and ask for his strength and wisdom?

3. Remember the Lord does not slumber or sleep. We can always reach him through prayer. I often pray when:
 - a. Cooking

 - b. Washing dishes

 - c. Cleaning

 - d. Taking a break and looking at God's creation

 - e. Waking up or falling asleep

Can you add to this list times you might intentionally choose to pray?

4. Keep a record of moments you come to the Lord each day. You may be surprised to see how often you pray and how completely

available he is throughout your daily routine. He is our source of love. He will also motivate us to pass our love on to those who need us.

Spiritual Leaders:

When a caregiver faces some of the challenges Anna expresses in this chapter, he or she may feel guilt regarding how they handle these difficulties. Caregivers need assurance that responding to their circumstances in the ways described above doesn't indicate a failure in their walk with the Lord. Quite the opposite. These reactions can trigger a desire to find deeper dependence on the Lord every day.

Offer reassurance that God doesn't judge. He opens his arms to offer himself as their place of refuge and their source of strength.

You might feel like caregivers isolate on purpose or prove unreliable if they volunteer for a task and then cancel. Caregivers typically face unpredictable schedules. They may need to stay close to home as Anna stayed close to Joseph. Encourage them to interact with the body of Christ while giving them permission to remain

flexible.

Building a relationship with a caregiver will build trust and deepen awareness of how the body of Christ functions together. Even though Anna feels alone with her thoughts and feelings, those who choose to interact with her can lessen that loneliness and increase her hope.

Christ exhorts us to encourage one another in the work he has called us to do on earth. You and others in your flock can show encouragement to caregivers in simple ways.

Actions for Spiritual Leaders:

1. Make a point of recognizing the unique work caregivers are called to do in the body of Christ. The intensity of their responsibilities may cause them to teeter on the brink of anger or hopelessness. We see this in Anna's story when she wants to lash out at the playing children.
2. If a caregiver misses a gathering or task in the church, pause and pray for the caregiver and the person for whom they care. They may need extra support at that moment.

3. When visiting a caregiver, brainstorm ways that person can contribute to the body of Christ which don't depend on their having free time. Perhaps you can provide them with a short prayer list so they can pray for specific functions and needs of the church. Perhaps they can provide ideas for community gatherings even if they can't attend. Remember caregivers, in some cases, may feel too burdened to add anything more to their already heavy loads and this is okay.

4. Pray for the hearts of the caregivers in your community. Pray that they may grow in Christ and take on their tasks with strength and refreshed faith.

Chapter Four

Rich Relationships

Love

*bears all things,
believes all things,
hopes all things,
endures all things.*

1 Corinthians 13:7

So far this book focuses on the caregiver. What about the relationship we share with the person(s) receiving our care?

As we saw in the story of Anna, she feels far from her husband even though filling his needs occupies most of her time. Their hearts rarely touch. Think back to Chapter 1 where Paul cares for a father who forgets time and place. Perhaps this father doesn't even remember Paul is his son. As caregivers, we all live in different stories. Within these variations, how can we keep the relationships with those in our care rich and vibrant?

The nature of caregiving means we often focus on mundane, repetitive tasks. These tasks

may naturally pull us away from nurturing close relationships. Learning more about God's care for us and the kind of love he provides—one hundred percent of the time—teaches us to find ways to love others better.

Romans 5:8 gives us a picture of God's love:

God demonstrates His own love toward us,
in that while we were still sinners,
Christ died for us.

Ephesians 5:2 teaches us to:

...walk in love,
just as Christ also loved you....

When God asks us to imitate him in our everyday life, this includes loving others with his kind of love. First Corinthians 13 shows us what Christ's love looks like in practical terms. Verse seven says love:

- bears all things,
- believes all things,
- hopes all things,
- endures all things.

Loving as Christ loves demands a lot from us! Christ's kind of love sticks around when life gets hard. His kind of love asks us to face every reality with belief and hope in the trustworthiness of God himself. A love that imitates Christ's love never gives up regardless of circumstances.

Will we always succeed in demonstrating Christ's kind of love? I wish I could say, "yes," but I have to say, "no." We live in a harsh world. We live with sinful hearts even if we've accepted God's salvation. Add to that the task of caregiving. Our task brings enormous exhaustion which may affect how we show love.

Our human limitations and our ongoing struggle against sin can lead us to less-than-ideal responses when faced with everyday snags. Yet God provides a way for us to keep growing more like him every day. How can each of us grow and how can this growth help us love more like Christ loves us?

Growing in Love:

I often start my day with prayer and Bible reading, asking for God's work in me to show up in the way I love others. An hour later I may find

myself slamming a cupboard door or expressing frustration as I clean up blood from a fall. My frustration reaches new heights as I try to repair mistakes left from interruptions. Amid these reactions to life, can we still attempt to grow more like Christ each day? Yes. The Holy Spirit continually works in us to help us mature.

In my own life I didn't always realize how my frustrations kept me from closeness and friendship with Mark. I often withdrew as meeting his needs took more and more of my energy.

I struggled with jealousy as I watched couples our age enjoy life in ways we couldn't—and still can't. I saw others taking trips to visit family or taking a few days to explore new places. I saw them working together to set up community events at church. “Wait for us!” I wanted to call, but then remembered our limitations.

God didn't leave me alone in this struggle. Instead, he brought it to the surface. He showed me how to bring my cares and burdens to him through prayer. As I practiced communicating with God about my burdens, I felt more free to open my heart again. God provided a deeper joy

in my work and forgave me for my jealousy of others. He taught me how much I need him every day and helped me see new ways to connect with people in my community.

The action of giving my cares to the Lord and paying attention to the sin in my life goes on daily. It's not a one-time effort. But each time I hand a care to the Lord or ask for forgiveness for wanting what others have, I feel the Lord draw me closer to himself. I experience an assurance of God's gifts of strength, comfort, and forgiveness. I equate it to receiving a very big hug from someone who loves me unconditionally.

God keeps up this work in my life as I continue facing the hardships of our situation. He helps me stay aware of how my heart responds and then intervenes to keep me growing. God does this through his Word, his Spirit, and his people.

Restoring Changed Relationships:

When we realize we've lost something in a relationship, we may find opportunities to restore what was lost—just in different ways. Remember how Anna recalled life before Joseph's accident and how they enjoyed each other's company?

This kind of remembrance can spark ideas for how to rekindle a deep relationship in new and difficult circumstances.

As Mark's health changed I sensed us growing apart. I tried to think of a way to reconnect and decided to focus on our mutual love of books. This shared interest played a part in our initial attraction to each other when we dated. Remembering our shared passion prompted me to initiate reading books out loud in the present. Some days we do a short Bible study and other days we read from a book we both find enjoyable. This creates discussion and a rekindling of regular connection beyond meeting medical and other daily needs.

Mark also is gifted with a great sense of humor. Laughing together helps us grow closer in our relationship. Mark requires several rounds of eye drops each day. Some days these drops go in each eye perfectly on the first attempt. Other days I miss and have to try again and again. I berate myself for wasting the drops. Then Mark makes jokes about my aim as if putting drops in his eyes is a sporting event. Soon we both laugh and the tension of the moment disappears.

Challenging Situations:

What if your relationship with your loved one is different? What if the person in your care resists your efforts or doesn't remember the relationship you once shared? Paul faced these types of complications with his father. Paul chose to focus on memories of his father's care for him as he grew up. These memories then influenced the way he cared for his father in the present.

Paul and Anna face different kinds of challenges. In Anna's situation, Joseph can remember their marriage prior to his accident. Paul is trying to connect with a man who doesn't remember. His attempts to love his father depend only on his personal memories. Stay patient with yourself as you try out different ways to connect in this type of relationship.

When caring for someone with memory loss, you may feel tempted to try to change their thinking. We may believe the person has a choice about withholding or giving memories. Most memory loss comes from physical changes in the brain. The person can't give more because they no longer have more to give.

Where does this leave the caregiver? We can ask God to help us accept these types of limitations without demanding what can't be given. When we do this we can offer patience rather than pressure. Patience and acceptance have the potential to provide a more calm relationship. This calmness may then help with connection.

Sometimes our past relationship with someone contains painful memories. Asking God for help to express the type of love he shows us—"bearing all things...enduring all things"—provides extra strength to offer care when we receive nothing in return (1 Cor. 13:7). Giving with no expectation represents a sacrificial love. In this scenario, prayer for yourself and the person for whom you care becomes even more critical.

Creating a connection within what each person can or cannot give helps us live more fully in the present and prepare for the future.

- Present: Evaluating the past reminds us of times shared with our loved one before our circumstances changed. These memories can help us create new ways to connect in the present like Mark and I do by studying

the Bible and discussing books together.

- Present to future: As we make loving choices in the present, we grow spiritually. Our capacity to care increases. This maturity helps us prepare for further change. Sometimes people in our care die before we do. If we know we have tried to love them well, we can find added comfort in our grief. How? We will hold good memories of successful connections and service and not carry an overwhelming burden of regrets. None of us can control how long our relationship with those in our care will last. Only God knows that part of our stories.

Sometimes God gives us time to prepare for the increasing limitations our loved one will face as their health worsens. If you have this kind of preparation time, ask yourself practical questions. Will the person for whom you care eventually need more help than you alone can provide? What type of help is available to you as caregiving routines become more complicated? How will your life change after your loved one dies? Do you have a team of people praying with—and for—you and your loved one(s)?

As you plan ahead remember God knows each of us intimately and he wants to guide us. Psalm 31:14-15a states: “As for me, I trust in you, O LORD. I say, ‘You are my God, my times are in Your hand.’”

Allow yourself to lean on God’s wisdom and care for you as you think of the past, live in the present, and prepare for the future. We can trust him with our lives.

In rare cases a loved one may try to hurt a caregiver. If you find yourself in this situation, seek help immediately. Different locations provide different resources for assistance. If you feel unsure who to contact, start by talking with your spiritual leader or a counseling professional.² Finding safety for everyone comes first.

Application:

1. Name some of your favorite memories with the person in your care. Example: Recently my sister and I talked about fun holiday memories we shared from childhood. This led us to enjoy working together to recreate one of my mother’s favorite meals on the American holiday of Thanksgiving.

2. How might you use past memories to help you engage with someone now? Possible actions:
 - a. Tell stories from the past and let the person know your favorite parts of the stories.
 - b. Sing songs you both know. This may help especially if your loved one feels restless.
 - c. Read Bible verses together and talk about them if the person has this capacity. If they can't respond, still recite or read. Hearing Scripture may help with pain or strong emotions.
 - d. Make up a new story together and add to it each day.
 - e. Look for things in your surroundings that require observation. For example, we have a very active front yard in the fall season. Birds flock to our apple tree. Chipmunks and squirrels play on the rocks along the woods while gathering acorns. Turkeys tromp past and sometimes perch in the tree, displacing

the other birds. My husband and I often look out together and laugh at all the activity right outside our door. We talk about what each of us sees and what makes us laugh. Perhaps you have a similar place nearby. Discuss your observations and talk about what's new or unexpected.

- f. Ask the person in your care what they think about when they feel bad or when they feel good. Some days Mark feels out of sorts. He can't always pinpoint what's wrong nor can I always accurately guess. When I ask him to describe what he experiences he often tells a story. For example, he may talk about the last time he drove his truck and how hard it is to remember he will never drive again. This makes him feel stuck. When I understand this we can brainstorm together about ways to get him where he would like to go.
3. Ask the person in your care what they enjoy most about your care and what they enjoy least. Sometimes we can get so involved in our routines we forget to find out how the

other person feels about it all. Make a list of their responses.

Spiritual Leaders:

The daily life of a caregiver looks different in every situation and over time. When circumstances change, support needs may change too. How can you help?

Actions for Spiritual Leaders:

1. Check in with caregivers and ask if their routines or needs have changed.
2. If changes occur, ask how you or other members of your spiritual community may help with physical aid or specific prayers on their behalf.
3. What resources might you suggest if a person suffers abuse from the person in their care? (Support in these cases will vary from location to location and even culture to culture. However, it is always important to stay aware of resources in your area along with required reporting to protect anyone you suspect is experiencing abuse

from another person.)

4. Offer a listening ear and seek God's wisdom with caregivers as they contemplate future needs.

Chapter Five
When the Well Runs Dry

*God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear,
though the earth should change and
though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea....
Cease striving and know that I am God.*

Psalm 46:1-2, 10a

Anna sat alone in the village church. She hadn't meant to leave the house, but she couldn't bear for Joseph to see her cry...again.

Anna sensed someone behind her and quickly scrubbed away her tears.

“Anna?”

She turned and recognized Emmie, Paul's wife. Anna shifted her thoughts, remembering the extra duties piled on Emmie with Paul's father in her care.

“How are you, Emmie? How is your father-in-law?”

Emmie sat down. “He can’t remember anything! He looks well on the outside but on the inside he lives somewhere else.”

Anna understood this kind of pain. “I’m sorry. That must be hard on you and the children.”

Emmie laughed. “True. We never know what to expect.” Her expression saddened. “The children remember the grandfather who taught them gardening skills and teased them endlessly. They don’t understand why he doesn’t know them anymore. They stay away from him now. I find it hard to keep peace in the house.”

Anna’s tears returned. “I often can’t find peace either. I don’t know how to talk to Joseph anymore, and I miss him. And then his suffering overwhelms me. Today I left just to get away from his moaning about the pain in his arm.” Anna paused. “I feel guilty saying that. He didn’t ask for this injury, and I know he’s afraid and sad.”

Emmie listened, then spoke. “My exhaustion comes because I’m always on guard. I worry,

‘Will Paul’s father sneak out of the house? Will he trust me without lashing out when I bring a meal?’ This constant watching for trouble wears me out. And the kids—they have to grow up so fast with Paul and me less available.” She sighed. “I often come here to have a moment alone with God. Why did you come?”

“I guess I wanted that too. I want to know how to keep going when I know Joseph will never get better. I feel angry about all our lost dreams. I worry about what will happen if he dies. I don’t remember how to smile and my love feels weak.”

Emmie took her hand. “That’s a heavy load! We both came here to talk to God. Let’s do it together.”

As caregivers we often reach moments like those Anna and Emmie describe— moments when what we face seems too big for us to handle. These days generally happen when we feel we can’t refuel our energy. A technical term for this is burnout.

Webster’s New World Dictionary and Thesaurus defines burnout as “a state of emotional exhaustion from mental stress.”³ Just

as a fire needs fuel to keep burning, people need heart-fuel to stay productive and balanced. When our fuel runs low, we feel unable to keep the fire of our care bright.

Common symptoms of burnout include:

- Lack of energy
- Lack of interest in activities or relationships enjoyed in the past
- Difficulty imagining better days ahead
- Feeling isolated
- Anxiety or sadness
- Stress about adequate resources for things such as money or food

These symptoms come and go as a caregiver's circumstances change. What puts one person into burnout may differ from what affects another. In my life burnout often emerges when my daily routines get interrupted too often or when I lack sleep. When I'm overtired, I make more mistakes. As I try to fix my mistakes, I use up even more time which causes even more exhaustion. This seems like a never-ending cycle.

Caregivers often fall into a trap of blaming themselves for feeling burned out. Thoughts such

as “I must do better,” or “Why can’t I keep up and stay happy?” or “I feel like a failure,” plague us.

Burnout doesn’t define us as failures, however. In fact, it reminds us of our humanity. Each of us only has so much time, so much energy, and so many resources.

Regaining energy requires that we acknowledge and accept our limitations. At certain times our lists of things to do appear longer than the hours available in a day. This is a fact. After we acknowledge this or other limitations, what comes next? The path to new energy looks different for each person. It usually includes coming to a stop for a short time or directing our attention to an activity unrelated to the usual tasks of giving care.

Remember that on certain days even taking a few moments away is not possible. When this happens I find filling my mind with prayer and asking for an extra serving of God’s strength helps me finish my tasks.

Examples of taking a break:

- Pausing to pray
- Reading a favorite verse of Scripture
- Stepping outside to regain perspective or to experience a change of scenery
- Deliberately taking several deep breaths
- Taking ten or fifteen minutes to listen to music
- Singing or playing an instrument
- Reading a chapter or two in a book
- Creating a special meal
- Writing in a journal
- Talking with a friend

Give yourself permission to do something different. It may take a few tries to find out what energizes you personally. When you find a strategy that works, attempt to carve out time for it. Ask for help if you need it.

One friend who cared for her husband over several years asked a family member to take on her tasks a few hours per week. This allowed my friend to refresh herself by staying home to rest, running errands, or attending a Bible study.

Another caregiving friend told me she and her husband enjoyed a “date night” when a member of their church arrived with a special meal. My

friend's husband could no longer dine out so this meal represented an opportunity for them to eat and talk at home without the usual added tasks of cooking and cleaning up.

Taking a break may feel difficult and wasteful; however, these breaks renew our strength and calm our minds. Breaks allow us to remain more effective in our tasks over the long haul.

Let's go back to Anna's story as she completes her visit with Emmie at the church:

Anna and Emmie finished talking with the Lord. Anna felt stronger and less alone. She and Emmie carried different kinds of burdens but sharing them helped.

Anna passed the lake on her way home. She stopped to watch men pulling boats up on shore after a day's work. Men like Joseph. The sun set behind them in an array of color. One fisherman waved to her, smiling. He held up a large catch. Anna laughed, recognizing this man as one of Joseph's friends. She continued walking, a smile forming inside. Today she would burst into the house with a story to tell Joseph.

Application:

1. Have you ever experienced a time when you felt overwhelmed? If so, what circumstances led you to this place?
2. Write a prayer telling God about this time.
3. Think of two ways you have found refreshment in the past. If possible, give yourself a way to experience one of them today.

Spiritual Leaders:

As a spiritual leader you probably understand burnout firsthand. The role of a spiritual leader/pastor is much like the role of a caregiver. Your hours of ministry may change at a moment's notice. You may find yourself running short of energy as needs flow in day after day.

Spiritual leaders and caregivers alike must remain aware of their own limitations. Caregivers may find comfort in remembering that many callings in life demand more than human effort alone can provide. Consider the actions below as you think of ways to identify with, and

encourage, the caregivers in your flock.

Actions for Spiritual Leaders:

1. Answer the questions in the above application for caregivers section and apply them to your own experience.
2. If an appropriate opportunity arises, share your answers with a caregiver who struggles with burnout. Brainstorm ways to refuel, taking into consideration the resources available to you and the caregivers you serve.
3. Take this as another opportunity to invite members of your church to help you in your ministry. Teach them to better understand their own experiences and use this understanding to minister to others, including caregivers in your congregation.

Chapter Six

Prayer

*Therefore let us draw near with confidence
to the throne of grace,
so that we may receive mercy
and find grace in time of need.*

Hebrews 4:16

Paul searched the shore of the lake for what seemed like the one hundredth time. His father wandered off twice in one night. Paul stomped along the path. Thankfully the moon reflecting on the water provided adequate light. Paul paused to observe the shimmering ripples. How could such beauty exist beside the deep pain of watching his father's health grow worse?

A shadow caught his attention. "Dad!" Paul shouted. "Don't you know I have to work in the morning? Can't you stay in bed for one night?" Paul tugged at his arm. "We need to go home."

His father looked confused. "Is it still night?"

Paul wanted to scream but took several long breaths instead. "Yes," he said.

When his father finally drifted off to sleep Paul fell into his own bed. It scared him to think about how he yelled at his father as if he could actually control his illness. Paul remembered the encouragement he received when the pastor of their village church came and prayed with him the week before. The pastor told him he could pray anytime whether all alone or with someone else. He reminded Paul that his heavenly Father desired Paul's prayers whether he experienced joy or despair.

Paul quietly slipped off his bed and to his knees. "Dear Father," he began.

Even in his tiredness and frustration, Paul acted on a truth taught to him by his pastor: God hears and desires our prayers. First Peter 3:12 says, "For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and his ears attend to their prayer." This statement not only describes the Lord's attention to the righteous, but we also get a hint about the meaning of prayer. Prayer initiates a conversation with the Lord. He waits for us to pray. He then listens and acts.

This verse states that the Lord sees and hears the righteous. Let's step back and ask, "Who are

the righteous?” We become one of the righteous, a child of God, when we see and acknowledge that we sin and then ask for the forgiveness God offers us through Jesus Christ.

Some people believe they don't have a sin problem. They see sin as an issue only if it is big, like murder or cheating in a marriage. However, God tells us we all sin. If we look closely we can see our sins. Perhaps we gossip about someone and ruin their reputation. Maybe we tell little lies to make ourselves look better. We may experience jealous feelings toward those whose lives seem simpler than our own.

Any sin separates us from God because he is righteous and has no sin in him. How can we become righteous and become God's child forever? God tells us that when Jesus came to earth he came to pay the penalty for our sins. He took on the punishment we deserve when he died on the cross, a painful, humiliating type of death reserved for criminals in Jesus's day.

Because Jesus never sinned, he alone was qualified to make this payment for our sins and offer us forgiveness. When we believe and accept the forgiveness Jesus offers we become part of

God's family, one of the righteous.

When Jesus came to life again, he showed us for certain that our sin debt is paid. John 1:12 says, "...as many as received Him [Christ], to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." Our position as a child of God remains for eternity. When we die we will go home to God in heaven.

The following two verses give us a summary of our sin problem. They explain how God changes us from sinners separated from him to righteous people who live with him forever:

Romans 3:23: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

If we have prayed to accept forgiveness from Christ and belong to him eternally, why do we need to continue to pray now? Living in a world broken by sin requires our communication with God to increase rather than lessen. We continue

to sin. We encounter difficult circumstances beyond our control that may lead us to despair. We grieve. We often feel praise for God's goodness. Prayer becomes our daily conversation with the One who sees and hears us—the One who walks with us each day.

As a young girl I found myself drawn to a plaque hanging in my grandparents' home. It read, "Prayer Changes Things." Eventually this plaque came through the family to my father and now it hangs over the kitchen window in our home. We have seen how a humble prayer asking for forgiveness results in a place in God's family forever. We change from an enemy of God because of sin to a child of God.

What kind of prayers do we pray after salvation? Do our prayers change things as this plaque implies?

The New Testament book of Matthew describes a conversation between Christ and his disciples regarding prayer. The disciples asked how to pray. Jesus gave them a sample prayer teaching them what it means to communicate with God the Father.

The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13)

...Our Father who is in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your Kingdom come,
Your will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our debts, as we also have
 forgiven our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation, but
 deliver us from evil.
For Yours is the kingdom and the power
 and the glory forever.
Amen.

Let's look at how this prayer applies to Paul's story and our own:

Prayer of Praise

"Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name." (Matthew 6:9)

While searching for his earthly father, Paul paused when the beauty of his heavenly Father's creation struck him—the moon reflecting on the water of the lake. In that moment he wondered

how beauty could exist beside pain. Paul may reflect on this conflict as he talks to God. He may marvel that God concerns himself with the beauty and needs of his creation even though broken by sin. These reflections may prompt him to offer a prayer of praise.

I often marvel in the same way as I look at the woods surrounding our house. Today as I write, a cool breeze comes to me through the window. I pause to look for leaves changing color as the fall season gets underway. My pleasure in God's beautiful creation erupts into a brief prayer of praise and joy.

The view also reminds me of a characteristic of God—not only is he creator of all, but he is also completely holy, totally pure, and untouched by sin. “Hallowed be Your Name.”

God's handprints exist all around us. Sometimes we find them in nature; other times we find them in the birth of a child or in watching the miracle of food growing out of the earth. Our moments pausing to see God's beauty and holiness can lead us into a prayer of thanksgiving for God's position in heaven, his majesty, and his care for us.

How do you see God's presence around you?
Does it create a song in your heart?

Prayer Acknowledging the Future

"Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:10)

In our story Paul tackles the challenge of multiple nights of lost sleep. His tiredness affects his responses to his father. He has to fight to remain calm, and on this night he bursts out in harsh words.

When Christ gives his disciples this sample prayer, he encourages them to look to the future while they live in the present. One day Christ will return to earth to rule. One day we will see his will done in heaven and on earth. How does this apply to Paul and to us? As hard as any given day may seem now, a day comes when we will experience a reality where sin and brokenness no longer exist. We will not face the frustrations we face here.

When we think of the kingdom of God coming and Christ reigning, we can embrace joy even in our exhaustion. We ponder God's plan

for an eternal future for us. This brings his peace to our minds as we come to him.

Prayer for Daily Needs

“Give us this day our daily bread.” (Matthew 6:11)

I can only imagine that when Paul dropped to his knees, he felt the pressure of daily needs. He had barely slept. He knew he had to work the next day. He needed strength.

In verse eleven Christ teaches his disciples (and us) to pray for daily bread. Sometimes we literally need bread. But bread here reflects a broader view. It relates to everything that gives us life such as rest, money, spiritual growth, and friendship.

Asking for our daily needs as caregivers reminds us that we must depend fully on the Lord to take care of us each new day. Prayer can take us from anxiety to thankfulness as we ask our Father for help. He is our heavenly caregiver who understands our needs better than we do. And he holds the power to meet them.

Prayer for Daily Forgiveness

“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” (Matthew 6:12)

We may think of owing money when we think of debts, but this part of Jesus’s prayer instruction refers to asking for forgiveness for our daily sin and forgiving those who sin against us. Let’s go back to Paul’s story to explore this concept.

In his exhaustion Paul spoke harshly to his father. Paul’s experience is not foreign to any of us. At any moment we may snap and do or say something that doesn’t honor the Lord. This happens especially when feeling the pressure of taking care of others. How do we make this right? Prayer. Prayer can change the rift sin creates between us and God. First John 1:9 tells us, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” As we imagine Paul’s prayer, we can hear him confessing his harshness, asking for forgiveness.

Our daily sins make us dirty before God, although God promises nothing—not even our sins—will remove us from his family or keep us out of heaven once we become his child. Daily sins look like stains on our clothing. Just

as we remove stains by washing our clothes, God washes our hearts and minds through our decision to pray and confess. When we confess, we change from dirty to clean immediately. We reopen our ability to talk to God which becomes temporarily blocked by our sin.

Christ also tells us to forgive others. Just as we sin, others sin against us. For instance, we may experience a lack of thankfulness or rudeness from those in our care as they struggle to deal with their own pain and losses. Christ instructs us to act as he acts. Like him, we need to stay ready to forgive. He teaches us to repair broken relationships that come from sinful behaviors.

Prayer for Right Living

“And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” (Matthew 6:13a)

Each day we make decisions about how to live. Will we yield to the temptation to move away from God’s plan for us and try to make life work on our own, or will we trust God? Matthew 6:13 instructs us to pray that we do not give in to temptation to sin nor allow ourselves to get pulled into evil thinking or behaviors. James

1:13-14 reminds us that God doesn't tempt us. Our own lustful hearts lead us into temptation:

Let no one say when he is tempted,
"I am being tempted by God;"
for God cannot be tempted by evil,
and He Himself does not tempt anyone.
But each one is tempted when he is carried
away and enticed by his own lust.

Perhaps Paul fell into the temptation of feeling jealous of his friends who didn't have caregiving responsibilities as he wrestled with sleeping that night. Paul could choose to give in and become bitter about his life, or he could choose to pray for help to remain gentle toward his father.

Satan would love for us to ignore God's desire that we follow him and grow more like Jesus. Satan loves for us to act in evil ways. Jesus tells us to pray for a way to stay away from evil. Evil in these verses refers to the lies of Satan and the ways his lies make us think and act (vs. 13).

Staying away from evil means we must stay aware of our thoughts and actions. Then we can ask God to keep us on a path free from Satan's lies and based on God's truth.

Keeping our Minds in the Right Place

“For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.” (Matthew 6:13b)

The end of this sample prayer is similar to its beginning. It tells us of God’s ownership over all things, his power, and his glory. We can find great comfort in these truths about God. As disordered as our households may feel at times, we have access through prayer to the God who continues to reign and holds the whole world together. We can pray anytime, day or night. What a privilege!

Although Jesus provided a sample prayer for his disciples, he instructed them not to memorize this prayer and keep saying it over and over: “And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words,” (Matt. 6:7).

Jesus clearly tells us our relationship with him and God the Father, through his Spirit, is an intimate one. Our prayers should reflect this close relationship with God. Just as our conversations with friends grow deeper over time, our prayers deepen as we grow closer to God.

Even if God doesn't choose to change our circumstances, he constantly changes our hearts. Heart growth helps us love better and helps us hear God as he directs our lives. Prayer does change things—our closeness to God and the maturity of our hearts.

When Paul fell to his knees to pray, he entered God's throne room as God's child. He entered as a child distressed, in need of strength. Paul found reassurance that not only did his heavenly Father see him, he could provide help. As Hebrews 4:16 states, God invites us directly into his presence and promises to provide help in our time of need.

Application:

Take a moment to communicate with your heavenly Father. Below are prompts to help start a conversation. Finish the sentence where you see lines, honestly answering according to your experience, thoughts, and feelings.

Heavenly Father, thank you for who you are.
Today I specifically thank you that you _____
_____. Thank you for sharing
your future plans for heaven and earth. I feel

comforted by this because _____
_____.

I know my life and very breath depend on you.
Today I ask you to meet this need: _____
_____.

Thank you for forgiving my sins. Today I
confess _____
_____.

Your forgiveness creates a desire in me to
forgive others. Today, through your power, I
forgive _____
_____.

I often feel tempted to give in to something I
think will make life easier but goes against your
will. I ask you to remove the desire to _____

_____.

Thank you for helping me discern good from
evil. Please help me _____

Thank you for the comfort of knowing you rule over all, your power never ends, and you deserve all the glory.

Spiritual Leaders:

I'm sure you as a spiritual leader have experienced the necessity of constant communication with the Lord. Connecting with God daily allows us to keep our hearts pure and tap into the power of God as we teach others about him.

Sometimes prayer may move into the background, especially as our worlds get more complex or demands on our time increase. Since prayer is personal communication with God, we often pray in private. Others around us can't see whether our prayer life is or isn't growing. We must take responsibility to stay constant in prayer so we can understand God's plans for our days. Then we can deliberately lean on him as we face each new challenge.

Actions for Spiritual Leaders:

1. Assess your current prayer patterns. Has prayer fallen to the background in your relationship with the Lord, or do you remain in a daily conversation with him? Talk to the Lord about what you find.
2. Pray through the Lord's Prayer above, not in repetition but filling in the blanks with your own praise and needs of the moment.
3. Pray with those you serve. This can help others who may still feel like beginners in the area of prayer. They can hear an example of what mature conversations with the Lord sound like. The experience may inspire them to deepen their own prayer life.
4. Pray with other spiritual leaders if you have the opportunity. Meeting with other believers in prayer can strengthen everyone's faith and renew dedication to serving the Lord. It's good to have a trusted few with whom you can share accountability to stay faithful in prayer.

Chapter Seven
When Those We Love Leave

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the Father of mercies and
God of all comfort,
who comforts us in all our affliction
so that we will be able to comfort those who are
in any affliction
with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted
by God.*

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Anna stretched out her hand to touch Joseph as he slept. Five years had passed since his injury. Through these years Anna had watched Joseph become weaker. She watched him change from a strong, energy-filled man, able to handle the demanding work of a fisherman, to a weak, skinny shadow of his former self. He could barely pull himself out of bed without her help now.

Anna lay still choosing to think about the good things. Over time she and Joseph had learned to talk to each other about his pain. They even cried together sometimes. Joseph said this made him feel closer to her and the closeness helped

him handle the days when pain threatened to overwhelm him. They created a pattern of praying together on days when he could focus on something other than his aching body. Anna and Joseph worked hard to reignite their friendship and accept their new way of life.

Anna glanced at the table opposite the bed. A special jar sat in the middle. A couple years earlier she and Joseph decided they would put a slip of paper into the jar each day. On the paper they wrote one thing they were thankful for or one thing that reminded them of God's faithfulness. Some nights only Anna did this—the nights Joseph's pain left him quietly moaning. The jar now overflowed.

Anna nodded to sleep, tired from the day's work. She woke as the sun rose. A coldness filled her. Joseph's hand felt like ice. She quickly touched his chest.

“Joseph, Joseph,” she cried. He remained cold and silent.

Anna grabbed her shawl and ran for help. She gasped with each step. Over and over her brain told her Joseph was dead, but her heart refused to

accept this reality.

The next weeks went by in a blur. Anna accepted hugs from friends, meals from neighbors, and prayers from her pastor and others. But nothing could make her new world without Joseph feel real.

One evening, as Anna put her soup bowl on a shelf, the jar she and Joseph filled together fell to the floor. The pottery shattered and papers flew everywhere. Anna burst into tears. She had not put anything in the jar since Joseph died. Now the jar lay broken.

She could not stop sobbing. She bent in half, reaching out for God in her heart. Slowly calm returned. Anna swept up the shards and piled the papers on the table. Exhausted, she fell into bed.

The next morning Anna forced herself to go through her morning routine. Before heading to work in the garden she glanced at the papers. A couple had blown to the side. She grabbed them and stuck them in her pocket. Anna touched them throughout the day as if this action could make Joseph alive again. “Will the ache of his absence ever go away?” she wondered.

Make Room for Grief:

Grief such as we see in Anna's story is a natural response when we lose someone we love. The absence of a person can feel just as strong or sometimes stronger than their actual presence. When Joseph went home to the Lord Anna felt like a huge hole opened inside her—a hole that wouldn't fill up.

Anna not only grieved the loss of her husband, she grieved the loss of her routine of caring for him. Without these helping tasks her days sometimes seemed pointless and empty. Other times she experienced relief at not facing endless chores. Then confusion and guilt would take over.

Jesus gives us several examples of his own grief while on earth. He cried for the city of Jerusalem knowing that the Jews in that city would betray him and not believe he came as their savior from sin. Jesus wept at the death of his friend Lazarus even though Jesus knew he would resurrect him. Jesus also felt compassion for Lazarus's sisters, whom he loved, and the others coming to weep and comfort them. John 11:33-36 says this:

When Jesus therefore saw [Lazarus's sister] weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, and said "Where have you laid him?"

[Lazarus's friends] said to Him, "Lord, come and see."

Jesus wept.

So the Jews were saying,

"See how He loved him!"

Grief is a natural way God gives us to work through loss. Most grieving people experience at least some of the following emotions: wanting to believe the loss didn't happen, anger, sadness, and eventually a level of acceptance. Just as our stories of life and caregiving differ, so will our grieving differ.

We must remember that grief doesn't happen on a predictable timetable. Certain memories or even a scent may make us feel like a loss from years ago happened only yesterday. Outbursts of sadness may occur over and over when we least expect it.

Although we can't predict how our grief might look or how long certain aspects of it may last,

we do know we can depend on the Lord to stay with us and comfort us. He continually invites us to share our grief with him. Psalm 62:8 tells us to “trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.” Let’s return to Anna’s story as she grows in her trust in God.

As evening came, Anna left the garden, still fingering the papers from the jar. She took them from her pocket after entering her home. Tears threatened but she forced herself to open the papers and read them. The first slip contained Jesus’ words from John 14:1-3:

Do not let your heart be troubled, believe in God, believe also in Me.

In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.

If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.

Anna remembered back to the night Joseph wrote these verses out. He told her he didn’t

know how much longer he would live on earth. Anna allowed herself to remember the pain of his words and the hope Joseph expressed as he anticipated going home to Jesus.

Anna paused. She realized she had been so consumed with grief that she forgot Joseph no longer felt pain. He now lived in the place Jesus prepared for him. A flicker of hope entered her heart as she pictured a healthy Joseph finally seeing Jesus.

Anna read the second slip which contained Psalm 94:19: “When my anxious thoughts multiply within me, Your comfort delights my soul.”

Anna smiled at her own handwriting. She wrote this verse on a night when Joseph moaned with pain. She had prayed for the Lord to ease his pain and still her anxiety.

Anna pondered all the ways in which the Lord helped them through the long years of Joseph’s suffering. She thought back to the multitude of answered prayers. She allowed herself to think of the empty days she now experienced. Then she prayed:

Lord, thank you for taking Joseph home and for freeing him of his suffering. Thank you for giving us time to pray and grow in you even though our whole marriage changed as Joseph worsened. Joseph is home, but you left me here for now. Please help me to find my role in life again as you heal my heart.

Anna felt a spark of purpose. Could she possibly give comfort to others who grieved as she was grieving? Anna thought of Emmie and Paul still caring for Paul's forgetful father. Anna and Emmie continued to pray together. She knew Paul's father was near death. Anna rose from the table and began packing some food for them. She knew it wouldn't solve their sorrows but perhaps it would ease the burden of cooking one more meal. Sharing again felt good, and a smile came to her face as she crossed the village.

Preparing for Change:

Sometimes we as caregivers have an idea of when our loved one may die. If so, we have an opportunity to prepare our hearts for separation. We can choose to share our thoughts about this with the one we love. Other times death comes suddenly and we reel from the surprise. Both kinds of separation remind us we cannot foresee the future.

Anna knew Joseph might die young from his injuries but she didn't know exactly when. She and Joseph used each day to deal with their suffering and to grow their relationship with the Lord and with each other.

When Joseph died, Anna still had to deal with her grief and adjust to life without him. All her preparations couldn't fully make her ready for the reality of living alone. Over time she steadied herself in the truth of the Lord's presence with her. She also found ways to bring purpose back into her life. Anna realized the Lord expected more of her while she remained on the earth. She took on tasks that brought comfort and help to others, much like my friend who stayed by my side after my parents' deaths.

Remember again the truth of Psalm 31:15. The Lord numbers our days. We may live to experience the death of the one in our care. On the other hand, we may die before him or her. In either circumstance we know the Lord orchestrates the number of our days. He will continue to care for those left on the earth after their loved one dies. We can also take great comfort in knowing that when our fellow believers enter the Lord's presence, their suffering ends.

Application:

1. How might you prepare your heart to experience loss knowing that God's presence and help will never leave you?
2. How do your thoughts about losing the one in your care affect the way you take care of him/her in the present?
3. If the one in your care is able, how can you prepare for the future together?
4. Whether you lose this person sooner or much later, how will you move forward after his or her death?
5. How will you fill your days with new tasks and ways to serve the Lord? (The answer to the second part of this question may depend on how and when death occurs.)
6. Think about the possibility that the Lord may call you home first. Brainstorm ways in which the one in your care may have their needs met after your death.

All of the points above give us ideas about

how to prepare for the future. As we do our best to take care of our loved one(s) and ourselves, we must keep our trust and hope in the Lord. Even though we plan, we may still face events we couldn't expect.

Take comfort in remembering that nothing we face escapes the Lord's notice. Nothing we face takes us out of his care. We can trust him to comfort us as we lose loved ones and to take care of those we leave behind if he calls us home first.

Spiritual Leaders:

The circumstance of death is often a place of ministry for a spiritual leader. Offering comfort to those who grieve becomes a natural response over time. Caregivers may grieve differently than those you encounter who haven't served in this role. Consider the following:

1. While a caregiver may sense relief from their intense role of caring when death occurs, this person may also experience a loss of purpose. Along with grieving the loss of their loved one, they may grieve the loss of a day filled with meaningful and predictable service.

2. Caregivers may feel a sense of guilt for experiencing the relief of a lightened load. This guilt could make it hard for them to redefine their purpose.

When you comfort a person in this position remember these added layers of grief.

Actions for Spiritual Leaders:

1. When comforting a caregiver who feels several layers of grief—loss of purpose and loss of a person—you can help by talking about these layers. Not everyone will feel the loss of purpose, so you may want to start with questions. Ask the person how they fill their days now that their loved one has died. Ask how they think about their future. The answers to these questions will help you understand their grieving process.
2. Remind a person suffering from loss of purpose that God sees them. He gave them the role of caregiver and he will provide a new role for them as they move through their grieving.

3. Offer to think through possible work or service in which they can participate while they try to understand what God has next for them in their life.
4. If you encounter a caregiver feeling guilt for a lessened load, below are some guidelines for helping this person talk about these feelings and release the guilt.
 - a. Gently ask if this person senses guilt related to the relief of a lightened load. They may not immediately find words to talk about this. Remain patient and engage with the feelings they can express.
 - b. If—and when—caregivers bring up a sense of guilt, assure them this feeling is normal in their situation. Caregiving requires great energy so it is normal to need and desire time to recuperate. Their brains and bodies need a chance to recover from extended overuse.
 - c. Encourage grieving caregivers to allow time for a change of mindset. Shifting your mind from repeated caregiving

tasks to looking for new purpose is a process.

- d. Pray with them about entering a new phase of life while grieving the loss of someone they loved.
 - e. Encourage them to spend time with others in your flock who may have already walked this path of grieving. They can share experiences and support each other in prayer.
5. Remember to care for your own spiritual well-being and health as you support those God has put into your realm of care. Allowing others to join you in these kinds of ministry efforts can bring blessing to you and those who serve with you.

Conclusion

*A new commandment I give to you,
that you love one another,
even as I have loved you,
that you also love one another.*

*By this all men will know that you are My disciples,
if you have love for one another.*

John 13:34-35

Shortly before Jesus's crucifixion he tells his disciples about the suffering he will endure to bring salvation to the world. The disciples don't fully understand what he tells them. They need time to comprehend what his death and resurrection mean. They also need time to learn how to live out the commandment above: to love one another and realize this action shows the world they are disciples of Jesus.

God gives caregivers a unique opportunity to put Jesus's words into practice. We can't escape the tasks that arise when we move into the role of caregiver, but we can choose how we fulfill these tasks. Will we let our work define us as disciples of Jesus, or will we allow bitterness to take over our hearts? The stories in this book bring many

examples of how this choice comes to us and how we can stay faithful to loving well.

As we face the options of love or bitterness over and over, let us remember that the God of the universe loves us and sacrificed to save us. Remember too, he remains aware of our needs, our hearts, and our service. This God who loves us never slumbers or sleeps. He invites us into his throne room to find help any time of day or night. We don't walk this path alone. Great joy comes as we deepen our relationships with those in our care and with our Savior.

God designs each of his children with special purpose. His command to love as he loves applies to all believers. Let us live in unity within the body of Christ. Let us not forget to thank those who give us comfort and encouragement as we labor, specifically those who take on the role of spiritual leader. In pain and joy let us invite others to salvation through our acts of service, prayer, and kindness. When we struggle let us lift each other up with the help of our Lord.

Endnotes

1. *Webster's New World Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2nd ed.*, s.v. "caregiver."
2. If you find yourself facing abuse from someone you care for, it is time to find help from a spiritual leader or possibly a social worker, depending on the resources you have available to you. You cannot adequately care for someone when you find yourself hurt in the process.
3. *Webster's New World Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2nd ed.*, s.v. "burnout."

