

COMFORT FOR Caregivers

100 Devotions
to Lift Your Spirit



Editors of *Strength & Grace*

A Note from the Editor

“There are only four kinds of people in the world,” said former US First Lady Rosalynn Carter. “Those who have been caregivers. Those who are currently caregivers. Those who will be caregivers, and those who will need a caregiver.” If you’re reading these pages, chances are you fall into one or more of these categories. The 100 inspiring and insightful devotions herein were taken from *Strength & Grace*, Guideposts’ bimonthly devotional magazine focused on caregiving. They will help you chart your course as you tackle one of life’s most difficult challenges: caring for an aging parent. The devotions brim with hope and inspiration, layered with hard-won and heartfelt advice, both practical and spiritual.

Topics we explore in this book include transitioning into a caregiving role; dealing with a parent’s memory loss, dementia, or Alzheimer’s; asking God for strength and hope; experiencing burnout and knowing when to ask for help; finding unexpected joy and connection in caregiving; transitioning your parent to

full-time care in a nursing home or other facility; and, finally, dealing with the loss of your parent and coming to the end of a caregiving season.

As someone who was recently a caregiver for my mother, who passed away after a long bout with multiple myeloma, I now have an even greater appreciation for the challenges caregivers face, from the monitoring of medications, to the planning of meals, to the ever-important and often difficult job of keeping up morale—both yours and your loved one’s.

Ultimately, God supports you in this endeavor, and He will give you strength, courage, and confidence for the journey. He lifts you up just as you are lifting those you’re caring for. And the caregivers writing in these pages will lift your spirits too with their willingness to take on the tough acts of compassion. They walk you through their experiences, their successes, and even sometimes their failures. They tell you that it’s OK to ask for help, to receive care just as you give it.

Guideposts writer Cookie Cranston has coined the phrase “life interrupted by life itself,” and what could be more perfect to describe the season of caregiving? Interruptions, one after another—to our days, our nights, our routines, sometimes our very sanity, as the task demands. Not to mention the interruptions to our spiritual lives. But over the course of the 1,440 minutes in each day, we can find small moments of joy and slivers of insight. These “big little moments” are what you’ll find in these devotions: from receiving a kind word spoken in gratitude, to enjoying a favorite television show together, to discovering a new hobby that can be enjoyed by the caregiver and their loved one. So be on the lookout for those big little moments among the 1,440 in your day today

and bask in their firefly glow. After all, moments—not days or even hours—are where we live, as God intends.

Yes, it can be a tough road, but you'll see there are also many opportunities for emotional and spiritual growth, times of unsurpassed poignancy, deepening bonds with your loved ones, and, believe it or not, sometimes even a few laughs along the way. We aim to help light that path for you. Always remember that between our sunrise and our sunset, there are still so many colors in the day. You just have to look heavenward to see them.

Take care,

Kimberly Elkins
Editor, *Strength & Grace*

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All Made in God's Image

Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

—ROMANS 12:10–11 (NIV)

Human beings, made in God's image, are all worth honoring. The word *honor* means to “treat with great respect.” As a caregiver, it can be challenging at times to respect the wishes of a family member. Particularly if that person does not express gratitude or is childish and demanding. The following three principles may be helpful in difficult situations:

Remember: This person was not always the way they are today. Trauma, illness, and aging all have a way of reducing a human being to negative, possibly irritating behaviors. Choose something positive to cling to, and know you are not just serving them, you are serving the Lord.

Empower: When possible, respect and honor a person's choices, no matter how silly you might think them, as long as no one's safety is compromised. We are all unique and feel best when we have the freedom to choose.

Listen: Everyone has a story. One of the best ways to honor another person is to ask to hear their story. Be present and interested. The insight you receive into the person they are today may prove to be an unexpected blessing.

Dear Father, help me to remember we are all made in Your image and are thus deserving of honor. Show me practical ways to extend respect to those in my care.

CATHERINE MADERA

Silent Night, Sleepless Night

As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you.

—ISAIAH 66:13 (NIV)

Moonlight peeks through the window blinds, streaking the shadows of my darkened room. I lie in bed and listen for the sound of my mother through the baby monitor placed in her bedroom. Alzheimer's has left her unable to navigate well on her own, especially at night.

"Mom!" she yells for me.

"I'm coming," I tell her.

I'm not sure when she began calling me Mom, but our roles have reversed. Now it's me who prepares her meals just as she did for me when I was a child. Now I'm the one who soothes her back to sleep.

She is lying on the carpeted floor of her room, unhurt but scared, having fallen trying to get out of bed. She holds her arms up for me to help her. I struggle to get her back onto the mattress.

"Can I get up?" she asks.

"Let's try to sleep some more. It's the middle of the night."

"But I'm not tired."

We've gone over this same scenario night after night. I try not to cry. I haven't been this tired since my children were newborns. My exhaustion is becoming debilitating. I think back to what soothed my own children when they were restless. I begin singing "Silent Night" while rubbing her back.

Mom is asleep before I get through the second stanza. Although I'm still tired, the song has also comforted me. Singing it brought back happy memories, but I'm also making new memories that give me comfort throughout sleepless nights.

*Lord, help me to accept comfort wherever
I find it on my caregiving journey.*

JEANNIE HUGHES

A Different Lens

Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.

—NEHEMIAH 8:10 (NIV)

As my father's Alzheimer's progressed, he began having trouble with tasks that required multiple steps. He would call to ask me to help him remember the order of changing his clothes. Each time, I'd slowly talk him through the steps, pausing after each step so he could put the phone down to perform it. When we'd finished, I'd hang up the phone and cry. It was painful when I'd think about this man who'd once been a college administrator having to struggle just to get dressed.

But then one day he called me back, telling me the list I had written up and posted in his bedroom had solved the problem. He was happy to say he had successfully readied himself for the day without having to make a phone call. "Thank you, babe," he said, his voice triumphant.

I realized that what might seem sad and tragic at first glance could become a positive if I looked at it through a different lens.

I had to learn that I couldn't place my expectations—or my memories of the way things used to be—on my dad. When I finally let that go, his accomplishment ended up bringing both of us joy and reminding me that no matter our situation, God always provides.

Dear God, help us to relish every victory, no matter how small.

MISSY TIPPENS

The Keys

Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it.”

—ISAIAH 30:21 (NIV)

Sharon, I was dizzy and almost passed out driving home from the grocery today. I don’t think I should be driving.”

I took a deep breath before responding. “Well, Mom, we have the initial appointment with your cardiologist next week. If you can get by without driving until we see the doctor, maybe we’ll have more answers then. Do you have enough groceries in to tide you over?”

Years ago, when Mom was a young mother, an elderly man ran his car onto a sidewalk not far from where we lived. A toddler was killed. That stuck with my mother. She had told me the story several times. She didn’t want to be that person. Ever.

This wouldn’t be easy. But I was glad Mom recognized the danger she might be to herself and others if she continued driving. For many of my peers, taking car keys away from elderly parents caused rifts.

We worked out a plan. If Mom needed anything before I got to visit her again, she would call one of her friends. She had a wide circle of friends; finding someone shouldn’t be a problem. But this was only a patch. A more permanent plan was needed. “Let’s pray on this, Mom. We’ll get it figured out.”

Dear Lord, be with caregivers and patients facing life-altering decisions. Let them be open to Your voice of love and reason when hard choices loom.

SHARON DRACH MANGAS

Little Things Mean a Lot

He will yet fill your mouth with laughter and
your lips with shouts of joy.

—JOB 8:21 (NIV)

It's all the little things that our loved ones need that seem to be the hardest things to do sometimes. It's those things that often help the most.

I traveled to see Mom every few months, staying a few days to a week as my schedule allowed. Missy, my sister-in-law, was Mom's main caregiver. Missy welcomed a break when I could take over for a bit, especially since Mom could no longer walk.

"Would you wash my hair today?" Mom asked on my first day there.

"Certainly. Do we use the kitchen sink, or do I need to get you in the shower?"

"No, you do it right here in my recliner." I raised my eyebrows at that. "Call Missy! She knows how to do it."

"I need help already," I told Missy dejectedly on the phone. She came over and shampooed Mom's hair with a washrag and a bowl of warm water while she sat in her chair. I could do that.

A few days later, I wrapped a towel around Mom's neck and another over the back of her chair—just like Missy had done. I dipped a washrag into the water but forgot to wring it out. Water gushed over Mom's head, down her face, and onto the front of her shirt. She started laughing. I did too. We couldn't seem to stop. Ah, there she was. Mom before Parkinson's. Oh, how I missed her.

*Lord, thank You for sweet moments of comfort. Let me
never forget the battle my loved one is fighting.*

PAMELA HASKIN

Encouragement for Caregivers of Aging Parents

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