

Care for the caregiver

By Robin Schultze

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Iwould like you to think for a few minutes about caring for the caregiver.

My father is 92 years old and has dementia, diagnosed as Alzheimer's disease. He can no longer live alone. He doesn't remember how to do many simple but needful things, and I've been caring for him full-time in his home since January 2020. I am tired, exhausted really, because I own a home nearby that needs my care and attendance. I also run a business that still needs my touch and presence. I have several other vocations that require my time and care, many of them involving my community and my home congregation.

So when I say caring for the caregiver, am I talking about taking care of the man who gave me life and cared for me growing up? Because after all, he was my caregiver. Or am I talking about someone providing care for me, because I am now the weary caregiver? Yes to both. My situation is but one example of caregiving. Others include caring for a young child, an adult child with genetic or developmental disorders, a spouse with a new and devastating medical diagnosis or anyone who cannot care for himself.

The first thing I do to find help is read my Bible. There are Scripture verses scattered throughout the Bible on taking care of others. The first that comes to mind is Ex. 20:12:

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

We have all read and even recited this verse many times. Is taking care of a beloved old man — who must be reminded how to hold a spoon, brush his teeth and clean himself after toileting — what God means by honoring my father?



Yes, it most certainly is. And so I do this, sometimes with joy and often with frustration and grumbling. But always with love and care.

What about me? Read what Paul wrote to the Hebrews:

For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for His name in serving the saints,

as you still do. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Heb. 6:10-12

I know that the work I do in caring for my earthly father doesn't earn me anything toward my own salvation. But I have learned that my endeavors, accomplished through faith, are but a small part of my newest vocation as a daughter — caregiver for the man I've called Daddy my whole life. While the work can be mundane and tiresome, I find that if I focus on what God has ordained for me in this vocation, the caregiving becomes part of the self-care I so desperately need.

There are multiple resources available to both the one who needs care and the caregiver who needs some respite. The saints at Memory Care Home Solutions (memorycarehs.org) have lists of resources for both. A physician referral

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is needed to access their resources, but that is a task easily accomplished when a patient has been diagnosed with any form of dementia. They pointed me to St. John's Community Care in Collinsville, an adult day center for Alzheimer's and other dementia patients. Dad has been attending that program since the end of August and as best I can tell, he loves it. They engage him in activities, encourage him to socialize, provide meals and snacks, and allow me to work in my shop or do chores around both of our homes without worrying if he has fallen, wandered away or injured himself trying to fix something to eat (that is, if he remembers to eat).

The company also helps locate support groups and counseling for me, both in person and via Zoom.

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Those professional services are a wonderful benefit. In our own circle of friends and family, caregivers are often reluctant to communicate what we need. Sometimes we don't even know what we need, or if we do know, we can't articulate it because we feel so overwhelmed. Another hindrance in expressing that we need help is that we don't want to be thought of as complaining or needy.

Pray if you know someone in this situation. Pray for the caregiver, the person being cared for, and for yourself to find a way to help. There are many small tasks friends and family can do to help ease the burden of full-time caregiving. Offer to sit with the care recipient while the caregiver goes grocery shopping or go to the

market for them. Volunteer to do some yardwork or, as one of my friends from church did the other day, take the care recipient out for lunch.

But what can we do as a congregation for God's children outside our church? How do we let others know we care? We have to show them! Most communities have nearby nursing homes that have recently reopened to visitors. Let's take a group of people to the care center and sing hymns with residents in the common room. Then each of us can sit with one or two of these saints to chat and pray with them. We can take the Gospel to them while we give their families a break to engage in other activities.

And always, pray. That cannot be overstated. Eph. 6:18 reminds us:

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

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