



CAREGIVERS DAY CULTURAL RESOURCES

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Lection – 1 Thessalonians 5:11 and Philippians 2:4

I. History

Although caregiving has existed as long as humankind has existed, the word “caregiver” only permanently entered our cultural vocabulary around 1980. The term caregiver is a well-known but broad term that encompasses the self-giving actions of one person for the health and welfare of another. Typically the person in need of care is unable to take care of himself or herself because of poor mental health or physical disability or because he or she has had his or her health impaired by sickness or old age.

The online blog “Next Step in Care: A Web-based Caregiver Manual for Navigating Transitions” says that you are a caregiver if you:

- Take care of someone who has a chronic illness or disease.
- Manage medications or talk to doctors and nurses on someone’s behalf.
- Help bathe or dress someone who is frail or disabled.

- Take care of household chores, meals, or bills for someone who cannot do these things alone.¹

For the purposes of this cultural resource unit, we will focus mostly, but not solely, on the caregiving of elderly members of our society by their loved ones. Today, now more than ever, because of the growing population of the elderly (the oldest members of the Baby Boomer Generation), many families are presented with the task of caring for their children as well as for their aging parents. Society has coined the term “The Sandwich Generation” for those who are sandwiched in-between two generations and who are also providing care for more than one generation at a time. Because of this growing norm, the Church is called to bring the needs of caregivers to the forefront.

Caregiving can be difficult, tiring, isolating, and exhausting, and this reality deserves recognition by the Church. It needs to be preached about, discussed, and made part of our Christian education classes. Caregivers are special people who need the love and support of their church family and leadership to enable them to continue the important work they do on a daily basis. The Church can be helpful to those who are already in a caregiver roles and also to those who are on the cusp of having to make the extremely difficult decision of whether or not to become a full-time caregiver to a loved one or a caregiver who assists an institution who is caring for their loved ones. The Church can be helpful in this decision-making process and can help the potential caregiver think through the ramifications of being a caregiver.

In *Eldercare 911*, Susan Beerman and Judith Rappaport suggest that the potential caregiver make a list of pros and cons to becoming a caregiver. Each situation of course will result in articulating what is a pro or a con for themselves. They also assert that when we think of taking care of aging parents we place the “emphasis on caring, loving, and fulfilling” instead of also thinking about the responsibilities of the actual “hands on” work of financial planning, doctors’ visits, laundry, and the like. It is better for all parties if the decision to be a full-time caregiver is given great consideration. If you decide that caregiving is for you then Beerman and Rappaport suggest the following:

- Seek guidance from professionals who will teach, support, and encourage you.
- Think about reorganizing your work, childcare, or other obligations.
- Involve your siblings in the planning process and empower them to help.
- Think about possible crisis situations.
- Learn the importance of saying No.
- Forgive yourself and decide not to be self-critical or self-deprecating.
- Try to maintain peaceful thoughts.
- Journal your experiences as an outlet for your thoughts.²

II. Songs That Speak to the Moment

Joseph M. Scriven suffered many tragedies in his life. He lost his first love when tragically the day before his wedding his fiancé died in a drowning incident. He would later love again only to have his second fiancé die of an illness before they were to be married. Around the same time this was happening his mother became ill in Ireland and he was unable to get home to see her, at which time he wrote “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.” This song shows us perseverance in the face of tragedy and tribulation. Thank goodness we can rely on Jesus to sustain us through the uncertain times in our lives.

What a Friend We Have in Jesus

by Joseph M. Scriven

What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
Oh, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged—
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful,
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy-laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge—
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In His arms He'll take and shield thee,
Thou wilt find a solace there.

Blessed Savior, Thou hast promised
Thou wilt all our burdens bear;
May we ever, Lord, be bringing
All to Thee in earnest prayer.
Soon in glory bright, unclouded,

There will be no need for prayer—
Rapture, praise, and endless worship
Will be our sweet portion there.³

The beautiful hymn “Breathe on Me Breath of God” by Edwin Hatch has the reader asking for a fresh breath from God that her life might be made pure and new. During times of stress and anxiety and in our daily walk we often need God to be as close to us as an intimate breath. We desire to be so entwined with our God that we don’t know where one breath begins and the other ends.

Breathe on Me Breath of God

by Edwin Hatch

Breathe on me, breath of God,
Fill me with life anew,
That I may love what Thou dost love,
And do what Thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, breath of God,
Until my heart is pure,
Until with Thee I will one will,
To do and to endure.

Breathe on me, breath of God,
Blend all my soul with Thine,
Until this earthly part of me
Glows with Thy fire divine.

Breathe on me, breath of God,
So shall I never die,
But live with Thee the perfect life
Of Thine eternity.⁴

It will be hard to find a revival service in the African American community during which you do not hear people sing “Revive us Again!” It is an upbeat traditional piece that allows people to praise God for Jesus Christ who died for our sins. Through His death we are revived again and again. Caregivers, who have given their all for another person’s well-being, will enjoy singing this up-tempo song and may well need revival.

Revive Us Again!

by William P. McKay

We praise Thee, O God!
For the Son of Thy love,
For Jesus Who died,
And is now gone above.

Refrain

Hallelujah! Thine the glory.
Hallelujah! Amen.
Hallelujah! Thine the glory.
Revive us again.

We praise Thee, O God!
For Thy Spirit of light,
Who hath shown us our Savior,
And scattered our night.

Refrain

All glory and praise
To the Lamb that was slain,
Who hath borne all our sins,
And hath cleansed every stain.

Refrain

All glory and praise
To the God of all grace,
Who hast brought us, and sought us,
And guided our ways.

Refrain

Revive us again;
Fill each heart with Thy love;
May each soul be rekindled
With fire from above.

Refrain⁵

III. Poetry for Caregivers

A Prayer for the Caregiver

by Bruce McIntyre

Unknown and often unnoticed, you are a hero nonetheless.
For your love, sacrificial, is God at his best.
You walk by faith in the darkness of the great unknown,
And your courage, even in weakness, gives life to your beloved.

You hold shaking hands and provide the ultimate care:

Your presence, the knowing, that you are simply there.
You rise to face the giant of disease and despair,
It is your finest hour, though you may be unaware.

You are resilient, amazing, and beauty unexcelled,
You are the caregiver and you have done well!⁶

Special People

by Phyllis Porter Dolislager

I think there will be a special place in heaven for caregivers.

You who have loaded wheelchairs into cars or vans
or cut up food and gently placed it into your mate's mouth,
or emptied bladder bags or positioned sleep machines.
There must be a special place for you.

Have you stood in line to buy take-out
or stopped for groceries on your way home from work?
There's a special place in our hearts for you.

Have you held the hand of your ill, loved one and reminded them
of why you chose to marry him/her in the first place?
And then added the reasons why you'd do it all over again?
There's a special reward in heaven for you.

You may think that no one knows and no one cares or
understands, but you're wrong, my friend.

Remember, Scripture says, "Show mercy and compassion
to one another." Zechariah 7:9

This week hold your head a little higher
and place a smile on your face.
For someone sees your acts of kindness—
He cares, and He remembers.⁷

IV. Cultural Response to Significant Aspects of the Text(s)

The first of today's Scriptures, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, speaks of the need of Christians to build up one another and lauds them for doing it. We all know that caregivers provide the care that they do whether those for whom they care are Christian or not. However, this is to be expected because their example befits those who are Christian.

The second text, Philippians 2:4, tells every caregiver that their actions are expected, as they live like Christ, who was more concerned about the needs of others (humanity) than his own. The humility of Christ in caring for others is our signal example.

Like our biblical directive of caring for the sick and the poor, caregiving is not only for those who take care of other family members but for everyone who will be placed into a caregiving role at some point in their lives. According to the National Alliance for Caregiving⁸ the term caregiver should not be limited to only family members who take care of other family members, but rather to any person who “cares for relatives and loved ones including his or her family of choice; a friend, neighbor, support group member, or life partner.”

African Americans especially know about extended-family caregiving. The notion of extended family and the “village” approach to living has always been integral to our everyday living and survival. Because of this approach to living, many African Americans are often in caregiver roles and because of this are in need of great support. The Church is familiar with its people being caregivers and has always suggested that giving care is a Christian directive. And so with so many of our fellow believers being in such Christ-directed roles, we must praise them but most of all support them for their ministries of care. How can we do this?

Supporting Caregivers

The “ministry of care giving” is a strenuous and often overwhelming experience. Many of us can remember parenting our own children, nieces, nephews, or neighbors, and remember how guilt, isolation, and feeling overwhelmed can lead towards our own lack of self-care and spiritual connection. It is the same, if not even more strenuous, when our parents need care. In *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Caring for Aging Parents*,⁹ Linda Colvin Rhodes has great suggestions for the caregiver in need of support:

- Ask for help even if you have to hire help.
- Join a support group.
- Take advantage of community services like Adult Day Care.
- Obtain respite care where the focus is on “you,” the caregiver.
- Know when you can no longer provide care.
- Take care of your physical and mental health.
- Know that you have a right to a life of your own.
- Take joy in the good you’re doing.

Virginia Morris, author of *How to Care for Aging Parents*,¹⁰ also suggests the following 12 steps for caregivers to maintain a healthy mindset:

1. Take break(s).
2. Maintain friendships.
3. Slow down to help your stress level.
4. Set aside one hour for worrying.
5. Love to laugh.
6. Stay connected with the world.
7. Stop complaining and take action when needed.
8. Avoid regrets or daydreaming about what might have been.
9. Pursue other interests.
10. Have spiritual support.
11. Use meditation, massages, and other stress-busting modalities.
12. Indulge in something that pampers you, like a hot bath or shopping spree.

The Church must provide spiritual support and hands-on support to caregivers. By providing not only an annual Caregivers Day, but also through consistent programs and prayer for these special people, the Church can strengthen and empower these warriors for the Christian work ahead.

V. Audio/Visual Aids

Here are some suggestions for a Caregivers worship service:

- Put on screens or bulletins images of everyday people who may not “look” like the typical caregiver. We often see middle-aged to older women as caregivers, but caregivers are both young and old, male and female, and from various socioeconomic backgrounds. Children are often caregivers for physically disabled parents, mentally disabled parents, and parents who are addicts and or alcoholics.
- Use audio/visual clips that discuss caregiving and the importance of what caregivers do. I suggest the following you tube videos:
 - Family Caregivers. YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b6SIz_GaZPE
 - Caregiving: Cathy’s Story. YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3gdnbv63aZw>

- Caregiving: What Is It. YouTube:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNOMLx4qNx8>
- Coping with Care Giver Stress. YouTube:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVx15LGAQwo>

V. Illustrations from Our Congregation

In our congregation we have a family whose daughter, at the age of 17, became severely disabled because of a medical error. It was extremely difficult on the parents and sibling of this beautiful, smart, and gifted young woman, but it was also hard on the congregation who had watched her grow up and just begin to thrive. Her parents, of course, became caregivers, but so did many of our church members. The parents were supported from day one and after seven years, they still are supported.

Communion visits with this beautiful child have become a testament to what it truly means to be a community of believers and preaching the Word of God through the “ministry of care giving.” These visits have not only been used to break the bread and drink the wine of forgiveness, but to also give support to each other and celebrate life to its fullest. This dear girl is also blessed to see so many people continuously coming to her aid in prayer, fasting, and caring.

In our congregation we have a couple in which the husband is ill and the wife is his caregiver. After running into them at the store one night, the wife expressed that she was exhausted and she looked as if she was bone-weary tired. Through our conversation, I learned that it was hard for her to have any time for herself or to leave the house without him because she was afraid that he might pass out. Our elder, who was with me, came up with the brilliant idea of having our newly formed Men’s Ministry offer to visit with him at home, at which time she could go out and run errands or even have time for self-care. As a congregation we are excited about how we can live out the Christian directive to care for others in whatever way we can.

VI. Making It a Memorable Learning Moment

- Have a guest come in from a caregivers organization to discuss the reality of caregiving.
- Choose persons from the congregation to share their stories of caregiving.
- Consider starting a Christian Caregivers Support Group like Caring Connections (see <http://www.caringinfo.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3289>) or Caring Bridge (see <http://www.caringbridge.org/>).
- Consider receiving extensive training in Caring through an organization like Stephen’s Ministry, which provides congregations with training, resources, and ongoing support to organize and equip a team of lay caregivers in your congregation. They can be found on the web at <http://www.stephenministries.org/>.

- Consider starting a Caregivers blog as part of your website so that caregivers will have another outlet for their thoughts and feelings.
- Have literature at your church for people to take and read at home.
- Support caregivers who may have to make the hard decision of putting their loved ones in institutions that can help them more.
- To better understand the plight of caregivers, read books on the subject. One with which you can begin is *How to Care for Aging Parents* by Virginia Morris.
- Preach at least two sermons on caregiving each year.
- On Caregivers Sunday, lift an offering, all of which will be used to assist those who are struggling financially as they provide care for others.
- If you are a pastor, attend, and have all of your associate clergy attend, workshops on ways that churches can support caregivers. The resources that I have given above as well as several of your local and state agencies can assist you.

Books

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Pamphlets and Brochures

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- Meditations and Prayers. Friends of Hospice, San Antonio. 1995.

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Websites

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Notes

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2. Beerman, Susan and Judith Rappaport. Eldercare 911: The Caregiver’s Complete Handbook for Making Decisions (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2008). (See especially pages 29–42.)
3. What a Friend We Have in Jesus. By Joseph M. Scriven. Tune by Annie Lowery. African American Heritage Hymnal. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2001. #430
4. Breathe on Me Breath of God. By Edwin Hatch. African American Heritage Hymnal. #317
5. Revive Us Again. By William P. McKay. African American Heritage Hymnal. #569
6. McIntyre, Bruce. “A Prayer for the Caregiver.” Today’s Caregiver. 1995.
7. Dolislager, Phyllis Porter. “Special People.” Online location: http://www.caregiver.com/articles/careverses/special_people.htm (accessed 6 May 2013).
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