

In the Caregiver's Role

A caregiver has been defined as a person who has accepted responsibility for looking after a vulnerable neighbor or relative, or an adult who cares for an infant or child. The definition suggests that the nature of caregiving is to give—maybe more than they seem to receive. We have learned that every healthy human relationship should be in balance of giving and receiving. I asked friends to describe their experiences with caregiving—what have they given and what have they received.

Caring for a Spouse

An elderly sister is caring for her husband. They have been happily married for decades. She says:

“What has helped me an awful lot during his illness is having hobbies. I sew or do crafts to keep my mind occupied so I don't dwell on these trials life has brought us. I tell people this [crafting] is my sanity!

“It's also a great help when someone is willing to take over his care so I can get away for a few days or even a few hours. This is very important as caregiving can be mentally draining. I also recommend that caregivers take advantage of things like in-home care or adult day care facilities. They can be a lifesaver!

“One day each week I have six hours to do errands while he is at day care. God has taught me that I need to trust in Him from day to day and to pray for strength and patience to cope with what each new day brings. I have also been reminded of our wedding vows over 50 years ago to love each other in sickness and in health. God has certainly blessed us with many happy years together. We have much to be thankful for.”

Caring for a Grandmother

Children and grandchildren of various ages tell about their connection to their grandmother, who was being cared for at their home:

“I loved her ready and welcoming smile whenever we came into the room. Whenever we came home she'd guess, and was generally right, where we were coming from. Our attire probably gave it away somewhat. She asked about school, work, and so on.”

“I enjoyed sitting with her and listening to whatever audio story she was listening to. Sometimes she would tell me about something.”

“When I got my tonsils out, I liked sitting with Grandma when everyone else was off playing.”

An adult daughter spoke concerning her mother: “I have thought while watching these new moms care for their babies, how much time, love, and patience it requires. The little that I did for Mom was not a bother or problem because in comparison she has tipped the scales by a long shot when she cared for me as a child. And she was always appreciative.”

Another adult daughter said: “For several years our life centered around Grandma's needs. As the years went by her level of care increased to the point of her being totally dependent. We were extremely tied down. It became increasingly more difficult to leave her in someone else's care because they needed to know how to transfer her, feed her, and care for her personal needs. It was a two-person job. There were many times that I was out and about when I got a call and needed to hurry home. Luckily I was nearby.

“Our lives were blessed in many ways, too. We received visitors from afar that probably wouldn't have been able to visit. They made a special effort to come see Grandma and then we were able to visit with them, too. My children became very comfortable being with the elderly. Several worked with the elderly in their teen years. Two of my daughters were with Grandma when she took her last breath. They were very comfortable with the situation. It was very beautiful and

peaceful to feel the presence of angels carrying her away.

“Thinking back to those years, I remember the difficulty, but more so, I remember the feeling of being taken care of. It felt as if God was with us, giving us wisdom and strength to perform our daily tasks.”

Each Experience Is Unique

Every caregiving situation is unique. What causes burdens in one situation may not be an issue at all in another. Similarly, what works in one place, may not work somewhere else. My own situation when living with an independent and loving daughter with Down Syndrome has felt like a blessing from God.

That wasn't so clear, however, when she was born. We were a young couple, eagerly expecting our first child. It wasn't so easy to foresee what a blessing God had given us in her. But she was so sweet that she soon won our hearts. Our friends didn't know if they dared to congratulate us or express their condolences.

If your close ones are given a special child, congratulate the family with the fullness of your hearts! How true is the saying: “What requires most of us, gives the most back.”

Blessings in Each Situation

It seems that God is able to hide a secret blessing in every situation. It unfolds from there like a precious aroma, when we accept the burden which God in His goodness and wisdom has given. The Bible tells us: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights” (James 1:17). God doesn't make mistakes. His ways truly are way higher than our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts (Isa. 55:8,9). I firmly believe that at the end of our lives, we will have no questions or quarrels against God's wise guidance, but we will join with the others in praising Him for His wisdom and faithfulness.

Jouko Haapsaari

Questions:

1. What are the dangerous consequences of becoming bitter in the role of a caregiver?
2. How might I help someone with a need?
3. How can I help and support the one who is caring for someone else?

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