

HOME-BASED ELDERCARE

Stories and Strategies for Caregivers

MARCIA K. WASHBURN

Christian Family
ELDERCARE

Generations

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*Dedicated to all those who love others into their old age
and desire to enhance their remaining days.
May the Lord bless you as you bring love, light, and hope to
your loved ones.*

FOREWORD

Christian Family Eldercare is Faith 101. This is where the rubber hits the road when it comes to living out the Christian life. The Apostle Paul uses the strongest possible language when discussing the importance of young men caring for their mothers and grandmothers in 1 Timothy 5:8. Even while suffering an agonizing death on the cross, Jesus Christ treated this as a matter of supreme importance. He took the time to ensure that His close associate John would care for His aging mother. In Matthew 15, Christ condemned the Pharisees for their system of *Corban*, which purportedly relieved the Jews

from caring for their parents in their old age.

Our modern systems of eldercare have generally failed to emphasize the responsibilities of children to their elderly parents, yet the honor of parents as commanded in the fifth commandment must include this care of the elderly, according to our Lord's words in Matthew 15:4-5. Every one of us should be asking ourselves in Jesus' words, "Is there anyplace where we have made the commandment of God of none effect, by our traditions?" (Matt. 15:6).

In more ways than one, human relationships, and the opportunities for personal service and the expression of love have been displaced by professionals, bureaucrats, government-funded programs, and *quid pro quo* business arrangements. Billions of dollars of inheritance that would have been passed on to children have been transferred to the state. Trillions of dollars of government money is expended on elderly care. Moreover, our nation is facing an overextended Social Security Fund and a worker-to-retiree ratio that is quickly shrinking (soon to be one-third of what it was in 1950, when the Social Security Fund was much healthier).

The next twenty years will be the most defining years in this nation's history, as we look at major socio-economic changes. The important question for us, however, is this: Will family relationships disintegrate across the generations, or will families re-integrate the generations? Will the relationships between children, parents, and grandparents be closer or farther apart than ever? Will we find cross-generational churches, where the eighty-year-old and the eight-year-old-sit in the same pew?

X **HOME-BASED ELDERCARE**

Now is the time to restore relationships across the generations. There is no better way to do this than by restoring home-based eldercare as the Lord leads in various families across this country and around the world.

There are many wonderful benefits in home-based eldercare, most of which are on the intangible side. The world doesn't understand these intangibles. How does a thousand hours of back-breaking, sacrificial service result in blessings, except that we have a God who can supernaturally turn sacrifice into blessing?

Marcia Washburn can tell of these blessings by personal experience. The reader will benefit from her practical advice as well as her enthusiastic, upbeat, grace-filled manner that is always so contagious.

Kevin Swanson
Director, Generations.org
Elizabeth, Colorado
December 2015 AD

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INTRODUCTION: ROLE REVERSALS—HELPING YOUR PARENTS IN THEIR LATER YEARS

The patient neither speaks nor comprehends the spoken word. Sometimes she babbles incoherently for hours on end. She is disoriented about person, place, and time. She does, however, respond to her own name. I have worked with her for the past six months, but she

still shows complete disregard for her physical appearance and makes no effort to assist in her own care. She must be fed, bathed, and clothed by others. Because she has no teeth, her food must be pureed. Her shirt is usually soiled from almost incessant drooling. She does not walk. Her sleep pattern is erratic. Often she wakes in the middle of the night, and her screaming awakes others. Most of the time she is friendly and happy, but several times a day she gets quite agitated without apparent cause. Then she wails until someone comes to comfort her.¹

Most of us cannot imagine caring for someone so demanding, and yet, as parents, we all have done so. The above quotation describes a six-month-old infant.

Nearly all of us eagerly anticipated becoming parents. We looked forward to the joys of watching a child grow into the person God created him or her to be.

But few of us imagined a future that includes caring for a chronically-ill loved one—or one who has been injured in a car wreck or in military service, who suffers from a stroke or ALS, or who has a dementia-related disorder such as Alzheimer's.

It is hard to envision that the mother who raised you and your siblings, efficiently ran a household, and organized church dinners for three hundred could ever need your assistance. Likewise, it is hard to imagine that the father who tossed you high in the air to your delighted squeals

1. Excerpt from article in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* by Paul E. Ruskin, M.D. Quoted in *Caring for Your Elderly Parents* by Patricia H. Rushford, p. 131.

and who worked long hours to support his family could ever be too frail to get out of bed.

But few of us escape the ravages of time. Even our parents, those stalwarts of strength, may someday need our help in the greatest role reversal of a lifetime.

How can we best prepare for the knowns and unknowns of that future? That is what this book is about.

Full disclosure: I am not an expert on eldercare. I am not a medical professional or an attorney. I am simply a woman who, much to my surprise, has cared for several adults in my home over the years.

As I write this, my mother-in-law lives with us. We are still in the midst of learning to meet her ever-changing needs. But I am confident of this: “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”²

God has proven His faithfulness through the years as He has shaped me into the person I need to be to care for our loved ones. He will do the same for you.

Herein you will find stories, strategies, and encouragement for your own journey in caregiving. Some of you will be caring for one or both parents. Perhaps it will be another older relative, or even a close friend.

You may even be caring for your child. I have two friends who have spent their lives caring for their sons. One son was born severely disabled and the other was severely injured in a bike accident with a vehicle. The

lives and Christian testimonies of these caregivers were an inspiration and encouragement to me, even before I entered my own caregiving adventure.

Each caregiving situation is unique because each caregiver, each patient, and each health situation is unique. Family dynamics, finances, personal health, and temperament all play into how caregiving will look for you and your loved one.

No matter how your own caregiving story develops, remember that God knows what you are facing.

Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days
ordained for me were written in Your book
before one of them came to be.³

He challenges us to be a generation who will honor our parents.

Honor your father and your mother, that your
days may be long in the land that the LORD
your God is giving you.⁴

“Honor your father and mother” (this is the
first commandment with a promise).⁵

Abraham J. Heschel states:

A test of a people is how it behaves toward the
old. It is easy to love children. Even tyrants
and dictators make a point of being fond of
children. But the affection and care for the old,

3. Psalm 139:16 (NIV)

4. Exodus 20:12

5. Ephesians 6:2

the incurable, the helpless are the true gold mines of a culture.

I pray that this book will encourage you as you care for your loved ones. One by one, family by family, let us restore a culture of caring—one that celebrates life from conception to natural death.⁶

6. Note to readers: Although I understand that many of you will be caring for men, I will often refer to the loved one you care for as “she” or “her.” This is a literary convenience to avoid the awkward “he or she,” “him or her” verbiage.