



CAREGIVING

A PRIVILEGE, NOT A PRISON



HOPE
for the Heart

June Hunt

CAREGIVING

A Privilege, Not a Prison

JUNE HUNT



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The information in this resource is intended as guidelines for healthy living. Please consult qualified medical, legal, pastoral, and psychological professionals regarding individual concerns.

For more information on Hope For The Heart, visit www.hopefortheheart.org or call 1-800-488-HOPE (4673).

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Dear Friend,

Years ago, when my mother was in the throes of liver cancer, I thought back on the impressionable words my good friend Jimmy shared with me. For decades Jimmy, this intelligent, Christian business man, served as his wife's caregiver during her struggle with multiple sclerosis.

In my early 40s, I asked my friend, "How have you handled this burden, especially with her being bedridden?"

"Oh, June" he responded, "She's not a *burden*. She's a *blessing*!"

I'll never forget his words. His perspective made a huge impact on me. As her disease progressed, I watched his wonderful wife cope with her losses: loss of mobility, loss of speech, loss of independence. With each limiting transition, her caring husband met every need. Even when he had to be out of town for a speaking engagement, he arranged excellent care for his bride. Jimmy clearly considered her a *blessing*, not a *burden*.

Then when I was in my 50s, for three weeks my mother was unable to speak. One evening, as I was driving home, I called the home care nurse and asked, "How's Mom?"

"June, your mother has become uncharacteristically 'fidgety'—and even tried to pull out her IV! She hasn't slept for three days." Then she exclaimed

“Oh, no, Mrs. Hunt!”

Whatever it was, I yelled, “I’ll be right there!”

Immediately, I made my way to her home and bedside. When my efforts to calm her failed, I kicked off my shoes and climbed into the bed with her—fully clothed. I can still see the scene in my mind. I placed my right arm around her and started singing.

Quickly, her restlessness ceased. As I sang, I kept my eyes on her and she kept her doe-like eyes on me. For hours I sang every song I could think of. She smiled as I sang “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” “How Great Thou Art,” and “In the Garden.” By the time I got to “It Is Well with My Soul,” she was mouthing the words. Eventually, during “Amazing Grace,” she placed her head on my shoulder—comforted and still—and finally fell asleep.

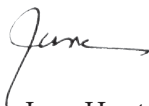
That memorable night on my mother’s bed—connected by the love we had for the Lord and each other—the ministry of music praising her Savior ministered to her soul. God’s love touched us both that night, and I wouldn’t trade anything in the world for that precious memory. My mother was not a *burden*—she was a *blessing*.

I’ve learned that caregiving is a calling to model the care of Christ. As Jesus said, He “*did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*” (Matthew 20:28).

When you are called to be a caregiver, to find a caregiver, or to help a caregiver, remember that God is your unceasing Caregiver. He says, *“I will be your God throughout your lifetime—until your hair is white with age. I made you, and I will care for you”* (Isaiah 46:4 NLT).

My prayer is that God will use the biblical truths found in this book to give you the help, strength, and hope needed to give and receive care. At those times when you feel legitimately burdened, may God bless you as you receive His care and model His care.

Yours in the Lord’s hope,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "June". The signature is written in black ink and has a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.

June Hunt

CAREGIVING

A Privilege, Not a Prison

Caregiving is a calling of the highest order.

Caregiving becomes the hands and feet of Jesus in the lives of others. Caregiving pours out the love of Jesus upon the weak and weary. Caregiving reflects the heart of Jesus before the helpless and hurting.

Caregivers are our “unsung heroes,” serving selflessly and sacrificially. Caregivers are on stage day and night—but far from the spotlight and applause. Yet the cool cloth placed on the warm brow, the spoonful of soup slipped between two lips—all these acts of kindness are unseen here on earth, but heralded in heaven.

And yet to some, caregiving can feel like a prison, a confining duty that squeezes the joy out of life, that siphons the last drop of emotional energy. This is why caregivers must take care to avoid a crisis. Those who minister to others must be ministered to as well.

Ultimately caregiving is a calling, a calling to model the loving heart of Christ.

**“And walk in the way of love,
just as Christ loved us and gave himself up
for us as a fragrant offering
and sacrifice to God.”
(Ephesians 5:2)**



DEFINITIONS

Pansy came to live with her daughter, Becky, and son-in-law, Ziff. She was not even five feet tall, very slender, and always had a gentle smile and kind disposition. Casual and close friends appreciated how Becky and Ziff treated her with the utmost respect and attentiveness, demonstrating loving examples of caregiving.

Becky was surprised at how caring for her mother, who was in her late 80s, dramatically altered her family's life. At times, pulled down by the weight of responsibilities, Becky felt a loss of freedom to participate in activities such as calligraphy and crafts that were personally fulfilling.

For Becky, time seemed to evaporate. There were never enough hours in the day to meet all the needs. She realized her need to establish better priorities for her time and eliminate some activities that were not absolutely critical. Becky trusted that God had given her time to do everything that was essential.

**“There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity
under the heavens.”
(Ecclesiastes 3:1)**

WHAT IS Caregiving?

When Pansy came to live in Becky and Ziff's home, the whole family became involved in the caregiving process. Many normal activities needed to be scheduled around Pansy because of her medical needs, such as transportation to and from the doctor's office and the administering of medication at the appropriate times. One person could not do it all. One person could not be totally responsible for Pansy 100% of the time and still maintain a sense of healthy well-being.

However, Becky never indicated that having her mother at home was too much of a burden. Instead, her emphasis focused on the privilege of all she learned and how God was using that time in all of their lives and drawing them closer to Him. As Becky sought many ways to help her mother, she experienced the Lord as her help.

**“Surely God is my help;
the Lord is the one who sustains me.”
(Psalm 54:4)**

- ▶ **Caregiving** is the act of providing emotional and physical support to someone unable to live independently.
- ▶ **Caregiving** involves a choice of the heart and mind to give needed help to a dependent person.
- ▶ **Christian Caregiving** is offered in the spirit of Christ's love, compassion, and by those who have committed their lives to Christ.

▶ **Christian Caregiving** is an extension of the ministry of Christ, empowered by His Spirit. Christians are to provide the *care*, but God alone provides the *cure*.¹

**“Carry each other’s burdens,
and in this way you will fulfill
the law of Christ.”
(Galatians 6:2)**

WHAT Does It Mean to Care?

Becky Young felt that serving her mother was a privilege. She expressed her thoughts this way:

If I am a servant of the Lord, then I don’t get to choose where or how or who I serve, He chooses. What I learned is that God gave me more of a servant’s heart. I never wanted to be a nurse or a caregiver. I never had a heart for that. It just wasn’t me, but through caring for my mother, God built within me a compassion for others that I never had.²

Pansy went to be with the Lord at age 92.

For whatever period of time, if God calls you to be a caregiver, then He wants you to become His hands and feet so that as you serve others, Christ is seen in you. And, as you serve others, the very character of Christ is developed through you.

**“If anyone speaks,
they should do so as one
who speaks the very words of God.
If anyone serves, they should do so
with the strength God provides,
so that in all things God may be praised
through Jesus Christ.”
(1 Peter 4:11)**

Caring for someone can take on many forms, depending on the relationship in which the care is given. To care means...

- ▶ To have a personal interest in
- ▶ To be affectionate toward
- ▶ To be concerned about
- ▶ To give serious attention to
- ▶ To be watchful over
- ▶ To look out for
- ▶ To provide for
- ▶ To keep safe

**“LORD, you understand;
remember me and care for me.”
(Jeremiah 15:15)**

WHAT ARE Levels of Caregiving?

We all have a need to feel that we are contributing to others, especially to those who are meaningful to us. This is why Becky allowed her mother do as much as she could for as long as she could. Sweet Pansy would help set the dinner table and later help clean the dishes. She also ironed Ziff's shirts. Eventually, Pansy became so frail, she could only stand about three minutes then she needed to sit down and rest before resuming the ironing. Even though it took her a while to complete the task, this work enabled her to feel like she was contributing to the family and fulfilling the Lord's plan for her.

**“Commit to the LORD whatever you do,
and he will establish your plans.”
(Proverbs 16:3)**

The need for caregiving can begin suddenly with a serious accident or illness or increase gradually with a slow deterioration in health. Likewise, the need for caregiving can be reduced gradually as a patient recovers or the need can end abruptly if a care receiver dies. Both the extent and duration in the levels of care are dependent on various factors.

- ▶ **Infant/childcare**—meets the needs of otherwise healthy little ones until they outgrow the need for care.
- ▶ **Acute care**—fills a temporary need to treat a sudden illness or injury until adequate recovery is achieved.

- ▶ **Respite care**—provides temporary care to allow the primary caregiver a time for relief and rest.
- ▶ **Special needs care**—addresses temporary or permanent needs, depending on the nature of the disability.
- ▶ **Chronic illness care**—supplies minimal to extensive treatment, according to the needs of the patient and the progression of the disease.
- ▶ **Elder care**—escalates over time as the elderly person's needs typically increase.
- ▶ **Memory care**—generally becomes more intense if cognitive memory problems impact physical health.
- ▶ **Hospice care**—is designed to be palliative, which focuses on relieving pain, stress, and other symptoms of terminal illness without treating the underlying cause.

Because physical and emotional needs vary so greatly, we need to pray for God's wisdom as to the right type of care to meet the needs of those whose hearts are heavy.

**“For there is a proper time
and procedure for every matter,
though a person may be
weighed down by misery.”
(Ecclesiastes 8:6)**