

FOCUS<sup>®</sup>  
ON THE FAMILY

THE  
Caregiving  
Season

FINDING GRACE TO HONOR YOUR AGING PARENTS

Jane Daly

FOREWORD BY JIM DALY

Jane Daly has done all of us baby boomers with aging parents a huge favor. She has allowed us into her life as she and her husband, Mike, faced the challenges of “being there” during the declining years of her parents’ lives. Full of empathy and practical advice, this book is a must for readers who are living through the caregiving season of life.

**NICK HARRISON**

*Author of *Magnificent Prayer* and *Power in the Promises**

*The Caregiving Season* does exactly what you’ve hoped for: It encourages your soul through practical and personable advice and timely counsel. Jane Daly’s honesty, well-thought-through experiences, and careful considerations of the Scriptures and a variety of other valuable resources make this book the best I have seen on how to care for our loved ones—specifically the elderly among us. It has become my go-to book when counseling those who are in “the caregiving season.”

**DR. MARTY TRAMMELL**

*Humanities chair, Corban University; worship and family pastor, Valley Baptist of Perrydale; and coauthor of *Redeeming Relationships*, *Spiritual Fitness: A Guide to Biblical Maturity*, and *Communication Matters**

For all of us who have aging parents this book provides much-needed insight into how we can be our best for them in this challenging stage of life. Jane’s stories ring true in every chapter. How do you explain to your father that it’s not safe for him to drive anymore? Will your mother understand when you need to bring in additional care for her so that you can go out of state for your son’s college graduation? The answers are here in this tenderly crafted book.

**ROBIN JONES GUNN**

*Best-selling author of the Sisterchicks series and *Victim of Grace**

Experience is the best teacher . . . especially other people's experiences! I've had the wonderful privilege of getting to know Jane and Mike Daly and then reading this book cover to cover in a single evening. Both provide generous doses of good humor and practical wisdom. I so appreciate learning from their realistic, grounded, and ultimately hope-filled experiences. You will too!

DAVID SANFORD

General editor, *Handbook on Thriving as an Adoptive Family*

*The Caregiving Season* is an excellent story that will be understood by families who, at some time in their lives, will accept the responsibility of eldercare. For those who are just entering into it, this book will give them an idea of how to prepare. For those in the midst of their caregiving season, it will be reassurance for decisions they must make. And for those who finally say their last good-bye to a loved one, the life lessons gained from Daly's mentoring spirit will confirm to them that their extra measure of care was worth it.

J. STEVEN HUNT

Author of *Love and Deception: One Family's Encounter with Dementia*

This is a very practical and useful tool. After providing eighteen-plus years of pastoral care, I can say that I will use and give this book to others. Well done!

DAN WADE

Pastor of Congregational Care, River City Christian Church, Sacramento, CA

In this excellent read about caregiving for aging and dependent parents, Jane describes the bittersweet moments, heartfelt dialogues, and tearful moments she's had with her own parents. A beautifully written book that is filled with numerous anecdotes that will have you laughing or in tears and ultimately growing more compassion for the aged and oneself.

CHARLENE HONG

Licensed marriage and family therapist

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Jane Daly



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## FOREWORD

They say growing old isn't for sissies. Caring for elderly parents might be in that same "not-for-sissies" category.

Watching your mom grow dependent or realizing your dad's mind isn't what it used to be is difficult on so many levels, and the added responsibility of caregiving creates a unique kind of stress. If you're caring for your parents, chances are you've added several time-consuming tasks to your schedule. And those tasks seem to be tied to a complex set of emotions.

As you drive your mother to the doctor, handle your father's finances, and shop for their groceries, you might be mourning the life they—and you—used to have. Then again, you might be angry with your folks, your siblings, or even God. Maybe you feel guilty that you live far away and are questioning every decision you must now make for your parents. Or you simply may be depressed and overwhelmed by finding yourself in a new, unexpected role. Plenty of caregivers are!

If you have this book in your hands, you are probably well aware of this stress. Yet you desire to honor your parents, even when it's difficult.

My brother Mike and his wife, Jane, understand. They've wrestled with a long list of emotions and difficult situations as they've spent years caring for Jane's mother and father. Early on, Jane decided that she wanted her caregiving to be characterized by grace, not resentment, bitterness, or impatience.

If you feel the same way, then this is the book for you. Whether you're just entering into the caregiving season or you're in the thick of it and feeling weary, this book can help you gain (or regain) a godly perspective.

I think that like me, you'll appreciate Jane's total honesty about her emotions and struggles. She isn't the perfect caregiver, and she's willing to admit that here. By the way, I hope you know that there's no such thing as a perfect caregiver. Instead there are simply people like Jane and Mike, who commit themselves to honoring their parents as God commands us to do in Exodus 20:12.

But how do you honor a parent who accuses you of stealing, upsets your household, or expects more than you can give? Jane not only addresses these challenges, she encourages caregivers to bring everything before the Lord, recognizing that His grace-filled love, unending strength, and promise of provision are vital to this mission.

In *The Caregiving Season*, Jane humbly shares what she learned as she was blindsided by her father's declining health. She reveals how she needed to examine certain attitudes and hand them over to Jesus. She invites you to cry, laugh, mourn, and seek the Lord with her as you both make your way through changing familial landscapes. As Jane did, you may also come to see this season as an opportunity to become more Christlike and dependent on

God. After all, it's only by seeking His grace that you can, in turn, offer it—over and over again—to your loved ones.

Over the years, I've seen how Jane and Mike have committed themselves wholeheartedly to this caregiving season. They have faithfully acted in love, giving their time, emotional support, and resources to honor Jane's folks in a tender, sacrificial way. Day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year, this couple has paid the bills, made the meals, provided loving reassurance, sat at the doctor's office, and hauled the walker and wheelchair to and fro.

All this is to say that Jane has been where you might be now. So come sit with a friend who understands. I'm confident that you'll come away with a renewed sense of purpose, a refreshed spirit, and tools that will help you honor your aging parents with grace.

*Jim Daly*

*President, Focus on the Family*



## INTRODUCTION

If you're a baby boomer as I am, chances are you're finding yourself in a new phase of life and it's a bit of a shock. As a boomer, you've been leading a busy life, perhaps holding down a career as you enjoy your teenagers' last years in high school. Or maybe you've been reveling in your empty nest as you travel, visit grandchildren, and pursue personal interests that were put aside during the child-raising years. Then Mom fell, or Dad developed dementia, and everything changed. You never expected to be tethered to your parents. Neither did I.

Yet according to a recent CNN report, caregiving for loved ones is the new normal for boomers.<sup>1</sup> That's not surprising, considering that the number of older Americans increased by 18 percent between 2000 and 2011, compared with an increase of 9.4 percent for those under 65. And the older population is increasingly older: In 2011, the 65–74 age group was almost ten times larger than in 1900; the 75–84 group was sixteen times larger, and the 85-plus group was forty times larger.<sup>2</sup>

Even though I knew the Greatest Generation (those who came of age during the Great Depression and fought in World War II)

was living longer, this reality didn't hit home until I saw my mom's and dad's health declining. Would I have to begin making choices for them? Choices they weren't able to make for themselves? Yet the caregiving season begins whether or not we're ready for it.

As Christians, we don't take lightly God's command in Exodus 20:12, "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you."

Again in Matthew 15:4, Jesus said, "For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.'"

If I lived in Old Testament times, I could expect to be dragged into the street and stoned if I didn't fulfill the law. These days, no one holds us accountable, and it's human nature to read these commands and simply pass over them, maybe giving a nod to their timeless truth.

*Yes, I think, I should honor my father and mother . . . until they get on my last nerve!*

Jesus goes on to say in the same passage that if a person isn't willing to help his parents with physical needs, he is a hypocrite.

*Lord, am I a hypocrite? I do want to do right and take care of my parents. But won't it require too much of my time? And money? And take away my freedom?*

Interestingly, other cultures don't seem to struggle with this as much as natural-born Americans do. In many Asian and Hispanic households, it's common to find two or three generations living under one roof. It's expected that the younger ones will care for their elders. Independent Americans don't as readily consider others when making decisions about where to live, or whether to take a job that would require moving away from family.

I've had many conversations with my husband, Mike, about moving closer to his family, rather than staying close to mine. We've always circled back to the reality of my parents' needs. We couldn't go anywhere else. Who would take care of Mom and Dad? Even now at times I want to jump in the car and go, leaving behind the caregiving responsibility. It's a perpetual tug-of-war between God's will and mine. You may be struggling with the same emotions and questions.

As our parents' health declines and our care for them increases, we may find ourselves battling with guilt, negotiating new boundaries, and dealing with exhaustion. Often we're the brunt of our parents' anger and frustration over their dependence on others. And even if we rarely doubt ourselves when making decisions for our own children, making decisions while caring for elderly parents is especially difficult.

Nevertheless, I've discovered through my caregiving season that we *can* find help from the Source of Peace throughout this emotionally wrenching experience. We can turn from dependence upon our own strength, and even from dependence upon our parents, to dependence upon Christ. Isn't that we hope for in this and every circumstance?

The more I thought about this season in which I found myself, the more I became convinced this was the greatest opportunity yet for God to transform me into the image of His Son (2 Corinthians 3:18). Learning to be caregivers for our mothers and fathers *can* be a journey of spiritual growth if we allow it. As I fought against giving up my empty-nest lifestyle and accepting my altered relationship with my parents, God taught me how to continue through this season with grace.

I've also learned that just as changing leaves herald the fall and flying snow signifies winter, there are certain signposts of the caregiving season. First come feelings of denial and loss. It's not always easy to accept the reality of your parents' mortality and acknowledge their losses—and ours. As caregivers, we may lose some independence for a season. Yet if we compare those losses with the changes our parents are facing and take our frustrations to the Lord, we have the opportunity to grow in grace while discovering the beauty of interdependence.

After we move beyond denial, we may find ourselves trying to make bargains as we work through the adjusted schedules and emotional pitfalls that caregiving can bring. We might try to strike bargains with ourselves, our parents, our siblings, and even God. Yet will we seek God's grace when we most desperately need it and when we most desperately need to offer it to our parents and ourselves?

If we're able to do so, we can learn to accept our new roles, transform more deeply into the likeness of Christ, and help our parents make their final decisions before they exit this world.

This season is difficult, yet rewarding. You will find yourself stretched beyond measure, yet blessed in many surprising ways. Come along with me on a journey through the caregiving season. May my experiences and those of others encourage you as you move into this new stage of life with your aging loved one.



PART I



ACKNOWLEDGING  
LOSS



# 1

## SEEING THE SIGNS

---

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:11



Our world finally seemed perfect. After a long season as parents of two amazing, happy kids, we no longer had the responsibilities that came with having them at home. I'd started a new job with a huge pay increase. We traveled, ate out, and spent a lot of time with friends.

Life was good. Until things changed. One day several years ago, I noticed some damage to my parents' garage door.

"Did you see my folks' garage?" I asked my husband, Mike.

"No, why?"

Mike and I live in the same townhome complex as my parents. They live at one end of the row, and we live at the other.

"One side of the door is splintered," I explained.

Mike walked down to look. He reported that it looked like someone had clipped the side of the garage.

A few days later at dinner, Mike asked my dad about the damage. Dad harrumphed a few times. Mom told us Dad's foot slipped off the brake when he pulled in.

"I wouldn't have expected it to gouge the side like that," Mike pressed.

After some roundabout explanation, Mom said that perhaps Dad wasn't exactly pointed straight when pulling into the garage. Mike and I exchanged a look, but we laughed it off, ignoring the first warnings of my father's diminishing capacity. Small dings and bumps on the car could happen to anyone. I'd been known to back into parking lot pillars. As simple as that, we slipped into the river of denial.

Later, I learned that many senior drivers don't realize their eyesight, hearing, and reflexes aren't as sharp as they used to be. They may be taking medication that impairs judgment, memory, or coordination, or they may suffer from arthritis or Alzheimer's disease. They may not realize it when they blow past a stop sign, forget to signal a turn, or confuse the gas pedal with the brake.<sup>1</sup>

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention cites some scary statistics: more than 500 older drivers are injured daily in car accidents, with an average of fifteen killed *every day*.

- > Per mile, fatalities increase at age seventy and notably after age eighty-five, "largely due to increased susceptibility to injury and medical complications among older drivers."
- > Declines in vision, cognitive function, and physical abilities affect many older adults as well.
- > "Across all age groups, males [have] substantially higher death rates than females."<sup>2</sup>

## KING OF THE ROAD

My dad grew up on a farm in rural Pennsylvania in the early 1930s and learned to drive a tractor when he was twelve. He and his younger brother worked hard alongside their father, an immigrant from Germany, and driving young was a given.

When the United States entered World War II, my dad enlisted and my parents were stationed in Arizona. Whenever my father had a three-day pass, my folks would drive from Arizona to Los Angeles to visit my grandparents. From that time until he died, road trips were my dad's favorite pastime. After the military, his job as a salesman for General Electric gave him the opportunity to be on the road three or four days a week during my childhood. He'd think nothing of loading us kids into the station wagon and driving somewhere on the weekend. Perhaps that's why I love riding in the car.

I was twenty when my parents decided to visit Germany and buy a car there. Their plan was to pick it up in Stuttgart, then drive it around Europe for a month before having it shipped back to the States. They invited my grandma, Nini, to go along, and she invited me. Nini didn't want to be a fifth wheel, as she called it. In Europe, Dad confidently took control, driving us from Germany to Austria, Switzerland, France, Italy, and Spain. There was no question about who the driver would be.

When my parents were sixty years old, they built their third motel an hour and a half from their home. To give the manager a day off, they made the drive to that motel every week for twenty years. After they retired, Dad and Mom enjoyed frequent day trips to some of the beautiful places in northern California. When the four of us would take a day trip, my dad always drove.

It was his thing. In his generation, men drove; women were the passengers. I can't remember ever seeing my mom take turns driving on a long trip.

Dad became the family taxi driver when my mother's macular degeneration worsened to the point where she was legally blind. They climbed into the car almost every day to run errands. I'd see their red Jeep pass by my living room window and I'd think, "Where are they going this time?"

I was proud my folks were independent. Dad and Mom continued to take their trips to the mountains, they played bridge every week with a group of other retired folks, and they met regularly with friends for dinner and bridge. It seemed like they were always on the go.

After reading a newspaper article about a 101-year-old woman who backed up and plowed into eleven elementary school children, I was grateful my dad could still get around safely without help. Even into his eighties, Dad was robust. He was quick-witted and laughed easily. His interests were varied. He read voraciously, loved using the computer, and knew enough about electricity to be dangerous. His greatest joy was to come home from a morning of garage sale shopping with a bargain. I'd often have lunch or coffee with him, and he always asked about my work. "You're the Queen Bee there," he'd tell me.

## DETOUR AHEAD

Several months after the garage door incident, we were having dinner with my parents when my mom asked, "Do you know how to get hold of Henry? We need him to do some work." Henry is the maintenance man for our townhome complex.

“What are you having done?” Mike asked as he gave Mom the phone number.

My parents exchanged a look. “Dad crashed into the side of the garage.”

“Again?” I exclaimed.

No matter what the relationship was between the parent and child—whatever it was—[caring for your parents] is going to be extremely challenging because *it is not logical*. There’s no way to deal with it rationally or directly. You don’t reason it out. What I’ve said to so many people is: we always must lead with our love.

DR. STEPHEN HOAG

*A Son’s Handbook: Bringing Up Mom  
with Alzheimer’s/Dementia*

Mom told us that Dad couldn’t get his foot from the gas pedal to the brake pedal in time to stop.

We knew Dad had been having some issues with weakness and pain in his legs, but I didn’t realize it had become that bad. Fear swept over me, as did a premonition that life was about to change. Was there more to this than just a small fender bender? Was my eighty-five-year-old dad losing his mind? Would he turn into someone I didn’t recognize?

I’d seen this happen to other people as they aged. When my grandmother suffered a series of small strokes, her short-term

memory and some of her long-term memory disappeared. Our conversations went like this:

“What’s new in your world?” Nini would ask.

I’d tell her about my job, the kids, and Mike. When I was finished, she’d sip her coffee, looking off into the distance.

After a few seconds of silence, she’d turn to face me again and ask, “So what’s new in your world?”

Eventually she forgot who I was.

Would Dad become forgetful too? I couldn’t seem to face Dad’s diminishing capacity. In my mind, step one was to quit driving, step two would be moving directly to an assisted-living facility, and step three was death.

In the next few days and weeks, Mike and I talked endlessly about what we should do. Was it time to talk with Dad about giving up his driver’s license? What would that mean for us? Mike worked thirty minutes away from home. I was still in the early months of my new job. Who would take Mom and Dad to the doctor, the pharmacy, the grocery store? My biggest fear was this: telling my dad that I was taking away his driver’s license—his ticket to independence and freedom.

Millions of older drivers have never had so much as a speeding ticket in years of driving. Many self-regulate themselves by driving less often and avoiding frightening high-speed highways. But they can still be a menace on neighborhood streets. A *Consumer Reports* article I read states, “People eighty and older are involved in 5.5 times as many fatal crashes per mile driven as middle-aged drivers.”<sup>3</sup> I was terrified Dad wouldn’t be able to stop at a crosswalk filled with children.

I could see Dad being responsible for some gruesome traffic

accident with dead bodies strewn on the street. Or he'd hit a light pole and be killed. I remembered one time when Mom told me Dad had drifted into oncoming traffic and she had to yell at him. He jerked back into the correct lane, but Mom was frightened. We had to do something. But if Dad couldn't drive Mom around, who would? Did I have to give up my life to become a taxi service for my folks?

My prayers were requests for strength to find the words to say to Dad and wisdom in saying them. I prayed for peace, for relief from my fears, and for God to keep me from being selfish. I was worried that more would be required of me than I was willing to give.

My dad always called me "Chickie" and "Queen Bee." His encouragement through the years gave me the will to succeed at whatever I put my mind to. He repeatedly told me, "You can do anything you want." Whether he was dispensing advice ("When it stops being fun, quit") or asking his usual question ("Do you need any walking-around money?"), his love for me was evident.

How could I ask my dad to stop doing the one thing he loved doing above all else? I wanted my oldest brother to step up and call a family meeting so I didn't have to lose my place as the adored baby of the family. Giving up this role would be the first of the losses I would face.

One of my friends reported her dad to the Department of Motor Vehicles because she was afraid for his safety. When it came time to renew his license, he was informed it was cancelled. To my friend's chagrin, her father continued to drive. He totaled his car, bought another, and had a fender bender in that one.

She tried taking the keys away. Her dad had a spare set. She

took those, too. He walked across the street to his neighbors' house and borrowed their car! He finally gave up driving, but the process involved a lot of "kicking and screaming"—on both their parts.

Would Mike and I have to go through the same thing to get my dad to stop driving?

### **BE ANXIOUS FOR NOTHING**

Over the following weeks, there would be many such moments of questioning and preparing myself for the changes to come. As I suspected, this was only the start of losses for Dad . . . and for me. I felt the beginning of the end of my father's vibrant life. I knew my life would change, and I was anxious. My dad was anxious too, though he didn't show it outwardly. He hated to depend on anyone, especially his Chickie. As my distress over my dad's loss of function mounted, I was brought back to 1 Peter 5:7: "Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you."

Since that time, I've learned that it's vital to have discussions with our elderly loved ones about how they view their final years. Consider their vision of the future and see if it matches reality. It's also important to talk about how much care you can reasonably provide. Talk about the "what-ifs." What if they need in-home care? What if one or both parents need to move into an assisted-living facility? What if you're not available to help? As you begin to consider the questions, be ready to present your parents with various options to help alleviate any fears about the future.

Most states and counties offer services for seniors. The website [SeniorAdvisor.com](http://SeniorAdvisor.com) compares housing options for most states and

Canada. The cost of public transportation is discounted for the elderly, and many counties offer door-to-door service for visually impaired or disabled seniors. Taxis and private transportation companies like Uber and Lyft are also an alternative to driving. Many grocery stores deliver. Once you've seen the warning signs, it's time to consider what services your parents may need to continue living independently.

### *Grace Growers*

1. Has your elderly loved one shown signs of loss of function? Consider how you can prayerfully begin a discussion about the changes you and they can expect as the months and years progress.
2. It's difficult to watch your parents growing older. Consider your relationship as their child, and ask yourself how that role may change. How will you show them grace as they begin to expect more from you? Read 1 Corinthians 13:11. Consider ways in which you still think or act like a child. Ask God to show you how you can, with grace, begin to come alongside your parents in this season of loss.
3. Meditate on 1 Peter 5:7. Make a conscious effort to take your anxiety to Jesus, and allow Him to carry it. Picture Him walking beside you, holding your hand as you journey into the caregiving season.