

CAREGIVING: A BURDEN OR A BLESSING?

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TEXT: Luke 10:30 -37



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INTRODUCTION

Two men looked
out of prison bars
one saw dirt,
The other saw stars

The difference in the two was not in where they were, but how they thought and the direction in which they looked. One looked down, so he had only despair. The other looked up, so he had hope.

IT WAS A MATTER OF ATTITUDE: 'What is an attitude?

It is the "advance man" of our true selves.
It is more honest and more consistent than our words.
Its roots are inward but its fruit is outward.

It is an outward look based on past experiences.
It is a thing which draws people to us or repels them.

It is the librarian of our past.
It is the speaker of our present.
It is the prophet of our future.
It is our best friend or our worst enemy.

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, the word "attitude" means "an internal position or feeling with regard to

something else." Other words often used as synonyms are: "disposition, feeling, mood, opinion, sentiment, temper, tone, perspective, frame of mind, outlook, view, or morale."

Airplane pilots often use "attitude" to describe their horizontal relationship with the runway then they land. If their attitude isn't aligned properly, the plane will make contact with the ground at the wrong angle and it will cause them to crash.

In essence, your attitude is your inward disposition toward other things, such as people or circumstances.

GOD BLESSES YOU TO BE A BLESSING TO SOMEBODY ELSE

Luke 10:30-37

- REARRANGED HIS SCHEDULE
 - RENDERED HIS SERVICE
 - RELEASED HIS SILVER
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I. DEALING WITH CAREGIVER RESPONSIBILITY

Caregivers come in all shapes and sizes. They can be adult children, spouses, siblings, friends or neighbors, who help with daily activities such as bathing, feeding and clothing. The caregiver may be the only person who can take a loved one to doctors' appointments. The long-distance caregiver may call weekly, help with expenses or support the main caregiver.

AARP says that about 65 million people give care each year. More than one relative helps out in some families, but most caregivers go it alone.

Caregiving can be a truly rewarding experience. It can be a time to heal old wounds, end conflicts and improve relationships. It can be a chance to serve a loved one. But caregiving also can be demanding and time-consuming. It may even raise your risk of stress-related disorders.

"Many of us believe in honoring our parents and take our marriage vows seriously," says Suzanne Mintz, co-founder and president of the National Family Caregivers Association (NFCA). "But the work of caregiving goes well

beyond what we can do. Asking for help is a sign of your love and caring, not of weakness and shame. It is much more than a one-person job." [1]

How to succeed:

Don't go it alone

- Ask others for help. Start with family and friends. Keep less engaged family members informed. Set up a family conference, seek suggestions and talk about disagreements.
 - Ask families with similar problems how they handled them.
 - Involve the person you're caring for. If possible, help the person take responsibility and join in decisions.
 - Learn about your loved one's condition. Find specialists for information and guidance.
 - Tap local, state and national resources. They can offer help with transportation, nutrition or day care.
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Watch for problems

Mental and physical signs of caregiver stress:

- A lot of anger or fear
 - A tendency to overreact
 - Feeling depressed, isolated or overburdened
 - Thoughts of guilt, shame or inadequacy
 - Taking on more than you can handle
 - Headaches
 - Digestive upsets
 - Weight loss or gain
 - Trouble sleeping
 - Fatigue
 - Illness
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Take time out

Be good to yourself. Take time away from caregiving and don't neglect your personal and professional needs:

- Get lots of rest and exercise.
 - Enjoy relaxing music.
 - Eat nutritious meals.
 - Visit with friends, plan leisure activities.
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- Do deep breathing.
 - Read a magazine.
 - Don't abuse alcohol or drugs, or overeat.
 - Keep a sense of humor.
 - Write your feelings in a journal.
 - Do spiritual meditation.
 - Set limits on what you can and cannot do.
 - Realize you're doing the best you can.
 - Join a support group.
 - Use community resources for help.
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Get help

It's OK not to have all the answers. Seek help when you need it most:

- Call a support hotline. Just having someone listen may help.
 - Speak with a counselor. A professional can help you understand your situation.
 - Talk with your religious adviser.
 - Attend a support group. Groups can explain your loved one's condition, ease tension and provide a sense of what's important.
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General assistance

- AARP: advocacy group with publications on aging, including recent legislation. www.aarp.org
 - Administration on Aging: access to statistics, fact sheets and booklets. www.aoa.gov
 - Children of Aging Parents: information on caregiving and referrals to support groups, care managers and other resources. www.CAPS4caregivers.org
 - Eldercare Locator: a service of the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging with local services, including home-delivered meals, transportation, legal assistance, housing options, recreation and social activities, adult day care, senior center programs and abuse prevention. www.eldercare.gov
 - Family Caregiver Alliance: covers medical, social, public policy and caregiving issues linked to brain impairments. www.caregiver.org
 - National Council on the Aging: information and advocacy. www.ncoa.org
 - National Family Caregivers Association: dedicated to aiding caregivers through education, research and support. www.nfcacares.org
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- National Institute on Aging: conducts and supports research, training and information on aging. www.nia.nih.gov
 - Older Women's League: focuses on issues unique to women as they age and offers fact sheets on caregiving. www.owl-national.org
 - Well Spouse Foundation: offers support to people caring for a sick spouse who need emotional care themselves. www.wellspouse.org
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Specific ailments

- Alcoholics Anonymous: referral and treatment program with a 24-hour helpline. www.alcoholics-anonymous.org
 - Alzheimer's Association: www.alz.org
 - American Cancer Society: www.cancer.org
 - American Heart Association: www.americanheart.org
 - National Parkinson Foundation: www.parkinson.org
 - National Stroke Association: www.stroke.org
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II. DEALING WITH CAREGIVER STRESS

Caregivers provide care for a family member who has health problems, a disability, or a chronic illness. They provide many kinds of help, ranging from assistance with shopping to help with daily tasks such as bathing, dressing, and eating. Most people who need help from caregivers are elderly. Providing care can be time-consuming and emotionally, physically, and psychologically draining. Stress builds up and can result in poor health and depression for the caregiver.

It is common for caregivers to feel stress, as well as anger, guilt, frustration, isolation, unhappiness in marriage, and dissatisfaction with life.¹ Caregiver stress can be so overwhelming that older caregivers who live with the person they are helping have a higher chance of dying early.² However, even though it can be quite demanding and is linked to serious stress and health problems, being a caregiver can also be rewarding. Providing for the needs of someone you care about can be very satisfying and can deepen family bonds. The key to being a successful caregiver is to avoid stress and burnout by seeking support and taking good care of yourself.

Seek social support for yourself and your loved one

Positive support from family, friends, and the community is important in relieving caregiver stress and helping the person you are caring for. There are several steps you can take to increase social support:

- Ask family members for help and include them in decision making.
- Stay involved with social activities, and help the person you are caring for stay involved as much as possible. Friends can offer support and help reduce stress.
- Join a support group for caregivers in your situation. Many support groups are available on the Internet.
- Look for caregiving resources in your community. If your family member has a limited income, he or she may be eligible for special programs. Help for caregivers is often offered by:

 - Employers.
 - Churches or other religious organizations.
 - Organizations such as your local Area Agency on Aging. [3]

Take care of yourself

As a caregiver, it is important to put your own health first. Take the following steps to take care of yourself:

- Set aside personal time to do things you enjoy and things you need to get done.
 - Eat a nutritious diet that is low in saturated fat and includes plenty of fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
 - Get enough sleep.
 - Get regular exercise.
 - Take a break. To maintain your physical and mental health, it is essential to periodically take time off from caregiving responsibilities. Respite care programs are available to provide temporary care.
 - It is common for caregivers to become depressed. If you think you may have symptoms of depression, such as lack of interest in things you enjoy, lack of energy, or trouble sleeping, talk with your health professional.
 - Plan for what you will do when your caregiving ends.
 - Try to respond to problems when they occur with solutions rather than emotions. [3]
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III. DEALING WITH CAREGIVER BURNOUT

Caregiver burnout is a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion that may be accompanied by a change in attitude -- from positive and caring to negative and unconcerned. Burnout can occur when caregivers don't get the help they need or if they try to do more than they are able -- either

physically or financially. Caregivers who are "burned out" may experience fatigue, stress, anxiety, and depression. Many caregivers also feel guilty if they spend time on themselves rather than on their ill or elderly loved ones.

What are the symptoms of caregiver burnout?

The symptoms of caregiver burnout are similar to the symptoms of stress and depression. They include:

- Withdrawal from friends, family, and other loved ones
 - Loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed
 - Feeling blue, irritable, hopeless, and helpless
 - Changes in appetite, weight, or both
 - Changes in sleep patterns
 - Getting sick more often
 - Feelings of wanting to hurt yourself or the person for whom you are caring
 - Emotional and physical exhaustion
 - Irritability
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What causes caregiver burnout?

Caregivers often are so busy caring for others that they tend to neglect their own emotional, physical, and spiritual health. The demands on a caregiver's body, mind, and emotions can easily seem overwhelming, leading to fatigue and hopelessness -- and, ultimately, burnout. Other factors that can lead to caregiver burnout include:

- ***Role confusion*** -- Many people are confused when thrust into the role of caregiver. It can be difficult for a person to separate her role as caregiver from her role as spouse, lover, child, friend, etc.
- ***Unrealistic expectations*** -- Many caregivers expect their involvement to have a positive effect on the health and happiness of the patient. This may be unrealistic for patients suffering from a progressive disease, such as Parkinson's or Alzheimer's.
- ***Lack of control*** -- Many caregivers become frustrated by a lack of money, resources, and skills to effectively plan, manage, and organize their loved one's care.
- ***Unreasonable demands*** -- Some caregivers place unreasonable burdens upon themselves, in part because they see providing care as their exclusive responsibility. Some family members such as siblings, adult children, or the patient himself/herself may place unreasonable demands on the caregiver. These individuals also may disregard their

own responsibilities and place burdens on the person identified as primary caregiver.

- **Other factors** -- Many caregivers cannot recognize when they are suffering burnout and eventually get to the point where they cannot function effectively. They may even become sick themselves.
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How can I prevent burnout?

Here are some steps you can take to help prevent caregiver burnout:

- Find someone you trust -- such as a friend, co-worker, or neighbor -- to talk to about your feelings and frustrations.
 - Set realistic goals, accept that you may need help with caregiving, and turn to others for help with some tasks. Local organizations or places of worship may provide support groups (either in person or online) for caregivers or family members of those suffering from diseases such as cancer or Alzheimer's. These organizations may also provide respite care to allow the caregiver to have time away from the patient.
 - Take advantage of respite care services. Respite care provides a temporary break for caregivers. This can range from a few hours of in-home care to a short stay in a nursing home or assisted living facility.
 - Be realistic about your loved one's disease, especially if it is a progressive disease such as Parkinson's or Alzheimer's. Acknowledge that there may come a time when the patient requires nursing services or assisted living outside the family home.
 - Don't forget about yourself because you're too busy caring for someone else. Set aside time for yourself, even if it's just an hour or two. Remember, taking care of yourself is not a luxury. It is an absolute necessity for caregivers.
 - Talk to a professional. Most therapists, social workers, and clergy members are trained to counsel individuals dealing with a wide range of physical and emotional issues.
 - Know your limits and be honest with yourself about your personal situation. Recognize and accept your potential for caregiver burnout.
 - Educate yourself. The more you know about the illness, the more effective you will be in caring for the person with the illness.
 - Develop new tools for coping. Remember to lighten up and accentuate the positive. Use humor to help deal with everyday stresses.
 - Stay healthy by eating right and getting plenty of exercise and sleep.
 - Accept your feelings. Having negative feelings -- such as frustration or anger -- about your responsibilities or the person for whom you are caring is normal. It does not mean you are a bad person or a bad caregiver.
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- Join a caregiver support group. Sharing your feelings and experiences with others in the same situation can help you manage stress, locate helpful resources, and reduce feelings of frustration and isolation.
 - e-mail messages, letters or phone calls.
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Where can I turn for help for caregiver burnout?

If you are already suffering from stress and depression, seek medical attention. Stress and depression are treatable disorders. If you want to prevent burnout, consider turning to the following resources for help with your caregiving:

- Home health services -- These agencies provide home health aids and nurses for short-term care, if your loved one is acutely ill. Some agencies provide short-term respite care.
 - Adult day care -- These programs offer a place for seniors to socialize, engage in a variety of activities, and receive needed medical care and other services.
 - Nursing homes or assisted living facilities -- These institutions sometimes offer short-term respite stays to provide caregivers a break from their caregiving responsibilities.
 - Private care aides -- These are professionals who specialize in assessing current needs and coordinating care and services.
 - Caregiver support services -- These include support groups and other programs that can help caregivers recharge their batteries, meet others coping with similar issues, find more information, and locate additional resources.
 - Agency of Aging -- Contact your local Agency on Aging or your local chapter of the AARP for services (such as adult day care services, caregiver support groups, and respite care) that are available in your area.
 - National organizations Look in a phone directory or search online for local agencies or chapters of national organizations that are dedicated to assisting people with particular illnesses, such as Parkinson's disease or stroke. Such organizations can provide resources and information about subjects including respite care and support groups.
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END NOTES:

1. Caring for the Caregiver June 05, 2006 Staywell Custom Communications

2. Tips were drawn from professional, government and charitable groups: the American Society on Aging, the federal Administration on Aging, the Family Caregiver Alliance, Children of Aging Parents and the NFCA.

3. Shannon C (1996). Dealing with stress: Families and chronic illness. In CL Cooper, ed., Handbook of Stress, Medicine, and Health, pp. 321–336. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.

Schulz R, et al. (2000). Association between depression and mortality in older adults: The cardiovascular health study. Archives of Internal Medicine, 160(12): 1761–1768.

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