



Called to care

Help from the Scriptures for caregivers

Called to care

*Help from the Scriptures
for caregivers*



bible society
of south africa



CALLED TO CARE

First digital edition 2013

Copyright of this publication held by © Bible Society of South Africa
2013

The Bible text is quoted from the Contemporary English Version

© American Bible Society 1995

All rights reserved. No part of this book may, without prior written permission of the publisher, be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical or otherwise, either through photocopying, writing, audio recording, or any other system for information storage and retrieval.

Published by the Bible Society of South Africa, P O Box 5500, Tyger Valley 7536, Bellville

www.biblesociety.co.za

ISBN 978-0-7982-1727-9 (Epub)

ISBN 978-0-7982-1728-6 (Mobi)

ISBN 978-0-7982-1729-3 (PDF)

Contents

	Introduction	4
1	Caregiving as a calling	5
2	Caring as fulfilment of the most important commandment	7
3	God is the source of all caregiving	9
4	The wounded Healer	11
5	Attitude	12
6	Encouragement from the Scriptures.....	13
7	The Holy Spirit and your caregiving	14
8	The gift of caregiving	15
9	The rewards of caregiving.....	16
10	Caregivers are blessed	18
11	Caregiving and relationships.....	20
12	Caregiver burnout.....	22
13	Time to let go and move on	24
14	Caregiver renewal.....	26
15	Perseverance	27
16	A negative response to your work	28
17	Guilt and forgiveness	29
18	Facing suffering.....	31
19	Growing through suffering.....	34
20	Peace and joy.....	35
21	Prayer.....	36
22	Faithfulness.....	38
23	Wisdom.....	39
24	Safety in God's presence.....	41
25	An invitation to rest in the Lord	43
26	Thoughts.....	45
27	A manifesto for caregivers	46
28	A prayer for caregivers.....	47
29	Love, above all else	48
30	A vision of eternity.....	51



Introduction

Caregiving is a calling which yields many rewards. To you, as a caregiver, it can add profound meaning and a deeper dimension to your life. However, caregiving can also drain the caregiver. There is so much illness all around us – people with HIV/AIDS, cancer sufferers, the elderly, and those who are terminally ill. The Holy Scriptures will bring hope, encouragement, and perspective to your caregiving. We pray that these Scriptures will challenge you to grow spiritually and so deepen your own faith. Their life-giving words apply to caregivers from all walks of life: ordinary people taking care of a family member, lay workers, professional caregivers, or trained counsellors and therapists who provide support and guidance.

This booklet contains thirty themes with selected Scripture passages highlighting the different aspects of caregiving. Each theme will be followed by questions for reflection, and these will help you study the Scriptures and apply their message to your life and your caregiving. You can read one theme each day, using the booklet as a series of reflections for one month. Alternatively, it can be used for weekly group discussions, for example at prayer meetings for caregivers in your institution.

May you and your caregiving be a channel of God's love and compassion.

Caregiving as a calling

Through the Holy Spirit, Christ proclaimed the Good News to the oppressed, the brokenhearted, prisoners and those who mourn.

The Spirit of the LORD God
has taken control of me!
The LORD has chosen and sent me
to tell the oppressed the good news,
to heal the brokenhearted,
and to announce freedom
for prisoners and captives.
This is the year
when the LORD God
will show kindness to us
and punish our enemies.

The LORD has sent me
to comfort those who mourn,
especially in Jerusalem.
He sent me to give them flowers
in place of their sorrow,
olive oil in place of tears,
and joyous praise
in place of broken hearts.
They will be called
“Trees of Justice”,
planted by the LORD
to honour his name.
Then they will rebuild cities
that have been in ruins
for many generations.

Isaiah 61:1-4

Christ also calls us to offer a helping hand to those in need.
You obey the law of Christ when you offer each other a helping
hand.

Galatians 6:2



For further reflection:

- How did God call you to the ministry of caregiving?
- List the ways in which you can relate to the above-mentioned Scriptures in terms of your caregiving.
- How can you reaffirm your calling as a caregiver?

Personal notes:

Caring as fulfilment of the most important commandment

The most important commandment is all about love – loving our Creator and loving those around us.

One of the teachers of the Law of Moses came up while Jesus and the Sadducees were arguing. When he heard Jesus give a good answer, he asked him, “What is the most important commandment?”

Jesus answered, “The most important one says: ‘People of Israel, you have only one Lord and God. You must love him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.’ The second most important commandment says: ‘Love others as much as you love yourself.’ No other commandment is more important than these.”

Mark 12:28-31

Jesus explained the most important commandment with the following story about someone helping and taking care of a person in need:

An expert in the Law of Moses stood up and asked Jesus a question to see what he would say. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to have eternal life?”

Jesus answered, “What is written in the Scriptures? How do you understand them?”

The man replied, “The Scriptures say, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind.’ They also say, ‘Love your neighbours as much as you love yourself.’ ”


Jesus said, “You have given the right answer. If you do this, you will have eternal life.”

But the man wanted to show that he knew what he was talking about. So he asked Jesus, “Who are my neighbours?”

Jesus replied:

As a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, robbers attacked him and grabbed everything he had. They beat him up and ran off, leaving him half dead.

A priest happened to be going down the same road. But when he saw the man, he walked by on the other side. Later a temple



helper came to the same place. But when he saw the man who had been beaten up, he also went by on the other side.

A man from Samaria then came travelling along that road. When he saw the man, he felt sorry for him and went over to him. He treated his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put him on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next morning he gave the innkeeper two silver coins and said, "Please take care of the man. If you spend more than this on him, I will pay you when I return."

Then Jesus asked, "Which one of these three people was a real neighbour to the man who was beaten up by robbers?"

The teacher answered, "The one who showed pity."

Jesus said, "Go and do the same!"

Luke 10:25-37

For further reflection:

- List the ways in which caregiving is a fulfilment of the most important commandment.
- The Samaritans were despised by the Jews. In Jesus' parable, a Samaritan man helps a wounded Jewish man. What does this mean to you as a caregiver?
- How can you deepen the spiritual significance of your caregiving in fulfilment of the most important commandment?

Personal notes:

God is the source of all caregiving

Caregiving involves giving comfort – trying to make someone else's suffering more bearable; physically, emotionally and spiritually. The Bible talks a lot about this, and especially about God comforting his people or ordering someone to comfort them.


Our God has said:
“Encourage my people!
Give them comfort.
Speak kindly to Jerusalem
and announce:
Your slavery is past;
your punishment is over.
I, the LORD, made you pay
double for your sins.”

Isaiah 40:1-2

Tell the heavens and the earth
to celebrate and sing;
command every mountain
to join in the song.
The LORD's people have suffered,
but he has shown mercy
and given them comfort.

The people of Zion said,
“The LORD has turned away
and forgotten us.”

The LORD answered,
“Could a mother forget a child
who nurses at her breast?
Could she fail to love an infant
who came from her own body?
Even if a mother could forget,
I will never forget you.
A picture of your city



is drawn on my hand.
You are always in my thoughts!

“Your city will be built faster
than it was destroyed –
those who attacked it
will retreat and leave.
Look around! You will see
your people coming home.
As surely as I live,
I, the LORD, promise
that your city with its people
will be as lovely as a bride
wearing her jewellery.”

Isaiah 49:13-18

In his second letter to the Corinthian church, the apostle Paul explains where the source of our own comfort lies, as well as our ability to comfort others.

Praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! The Father is a merciful God, who always gives us comfort. He comforts us when we are in trouble, so that we can share that same comfort with others in trouble. We share in the terrible sufferings of Christ, but also in the wonderful comfort he gives. We suffer in the hope that you will be comforted and saved. And because we are comforted, you will also be comforted, as you patiently endure suffering like ours. You never disappoint us. You suffered as much as we did, and we know that you will be comforted as we were.

2 Corinthians 1:3-7

For further reflection:

- Have you ever wondered how you will keep going when it feels as if your own physical, emotional and spiritual resources are totally depleted? Can you think of a time like this when God comforted you, and enabled you to continue giving comfort to those you are looking after?
- List the ways in which you can remind yourself that, ultimately, God is the source of all comfort.
- How can you share God’s love in your caregiving?

The wounded Healer

Isaiah's prophecy about God's suffering servant who heals others, gives a moving description of the ministry of the wounded servant who heals despite his own pain.

Like a young plant or a root
that sprouts in dry ground,
the servant grew up
obeying the LORD.
He wasn't some handsome king.
Nothing about the way he looked
made him attractive to us.
He was hated and rejected;
his life was filled with sorrow
and terrible suffering.
No one wanted to look at him.
We despised him and said,
"He is a nobody!"

He suffered and endured
great pain for us,
but we thought his suffering
was punishment from God.
He was wounded and crushed
because of our sins;
by taking our punishment,
he made us completely well.

Isaiah 53:2-5

For further reflection:

- Can you relate to the "wounded Healer" in your caregiving?
- Have you been "wounded" as a caregiver?
- If so, how do you think the "wounded Healer" can heal you?

Attitude

As Christians, we are called to have the same attitude that Jesus had.

Think the same way that Christ Jesus thought:

Christ was truly God.
But he did not try to remain
equal with God.
Instead he gave up everything
and became a slave,
when he became
like one of us.

Christ was humble.
He obeyed God and even died
on a cross.
Then God gave Christ
the highest place
and honoured his name
above all others.

So at the name of Jesus
everyone will bow down,
those in heaven, on earth,
and under the earth.
And to the glory
of God the Father
everyone will openly agree,
“Jesus Christ is Lord!”

Philippians 2:5-11

For further reflection:

- What do we learn about Jesus’ attitude from this passage?
- List the ways in which you can “think the same way that Christ Jesus thought” in your caregiving.

Encouragement from the Scriptures

The Bible offers many words of encouragement to those who seek it. After Moses' death God spoke to Joshua, whom he had chosen to lead the people of Israel into the promised land of Canaan. In the following passage we read God's words of encouragement to Joshua:

“Long ago I promised the ancestors of Israel that I would give this land to their descendants. So be strong and brave! Be careful to do everything my servant Moses taught you. Never stop reading *The Book of the Law* he gave you. Day and night you must think about what it says. If you obey it completely, you and Israel will be able to take this land.

“I've commanded you to be strong and brave. Don't ever be afraid or discouraged! I am the LORD your God, and I will be there to help you wherever you go.”

Joshua 1:6-9

In line with God's words to Joshua, the apostle Paul writes that “the Scriptures were written to teach and encourage us by giving us hope” (Romans 15:4).

For further reflection:

- Can you think of a time when you were encouraged by Scripture?
- According to what God told Joshua, how does obedience tie up with the encouragement offered to us in the Bible?
- What role can the Bible play in keeping you “strong and brave” in your caregiving?

The Holy Spirit and your caregiving

Jesus promised his disciples that the Father would send them the Holy Spirit:

“If you love me, you will do as I command. Then I will ask the Father to send you the Holy Spirit who will help you and always be with you. The Spirit will show you what is true. The people of this world cannot accept the Spirit, because they don’t see or know him. But you know the Spirit, who is with you and will keep on living in you.

“I won’t leave you like orphans. I will come back to you. In a little while the people of this world won’t be able to see me, but you will see me. And because I live, you will live. Then you will know that I am one with the Father. You will know that you are one with me, and I am one with you. If you love me, you will do what I have said, and my Father will love you. I will also love you and show you what I am like.”

John 14:15-21

For further reflection:

- List the ways in which the Holy Spirit can help you in your ministry as caregiver.
- Can you think of a time when you were aware of the Holy Spirit helping you in your caregiving?
- How can you become more open to the leading of the Holy Spirit in your care work?

Personal notes:

The gift of caregiving

We have said that caregiving is a calling. The Bible teaches us that God gives spiritual gifts and abilities to people to enable them to fulfil their calling.

I realize how kind God has been to me, and so I tell each of you not to think you are better than you really are. Use good sense and measure yourself by the amount of faith that God has given you. A body is made up of many parts, and each of them has its own use. That's how it is with us. There are many of us, but we are each part of the body of Christ, as well as part of one another.

God has also given each of us different gifts to use. If we can prophesy, we should do it according to the amount of faith we have. If we can serve others, we should serve. If we can teach, we should teach. If we can encourage others, we should encourage them. If we can give, we should be generous. If we are leaders, we should do our best. If we are good to others, we should do it cheerfully.

Romans 12:3-8

So I ask you to make full use of the gift that God gave you when I placed my hands on you. Use it well. God's Spirit doesn't make cowards out of us. The Spirit gives us power, love, and self-control.

2 Timothy 1:6-7

For further reflection:

- In your own life, can you recognise any of the gifts mentioned in the Scriptures? If so, which ones?
- For whose benefit have you been given this gift or gifts?
- How can you "make full use of the gift that God gave you"?
- Do you sometimes feel afraid to apply your gift or gifts? What encouragement do you find in the second passage from Scripture?

The rewards of caregiving

When Jesus talked of the day when he would judge the people of all nations, he also spoke about the reward which would come to those who took care of the sick.

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory with all his angels, he will sit on his royal throne. The people of all nations will be brought before him, and he will separate them, as shepherds separate their sheep from their goats.

“He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘My father has blessed you! Come and receive the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world was created. When I was hungry, you gave me something to eat, and when I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink. When I was a stranger, you welcomed me, and when I was naked, you gave me clothes to wear. When I was sick, you took care of me, and when I was in jail, you visited me.’

“Then the ones who pleased the Lord will ask, ‘When did we give you something to eat or drink? When did we welcome you as a stranger or give you clothes to wear or visit you while you were sick or in jail?’

“The king will answer, ‘Whenever you did it for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me.’

“Then the king will say to those on his left, ‘Get away from me! You are under God’s curse. Go into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels! I was hungry, but you did not give me anything to eat, and I was thirsty, but you did not give me anything to drink. I was a stranger, but you did not welcome me, and I was naked, but you did not give me any clothes to wear. I was sick and in jail, but you did not take care of me.’

“Then the people will ask, ‘Lord, when did we fail to help you when you were hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in jail?’

“The king will say to them, ‘Whenever you failed to help any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you failed to do it for me.’ ”

Then Jesus said, “Those people will be punished for ever. But the ones who pleased God will have eternal life.”

Matthew 25:31-46

For further reflection:

- What will be the reward of those who pleased the Lord by – among other things – taking care of the sick? Why will they be rewarded in this way?
- What does receiving “the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world was created” mean to you?
- Jesus says that what you do for any of his people, no matter how unimportant they seem, you are doing for him. How can knowing this fact influence your caregiving?
- What rewards (physical, emotional, relational and spiritual) have you already received through your work as a caregiver?

Personal notes:

Caregivers are blessed

Scripture teaches us that God blesses those who care for other people.

You, LORD God, bless everyone
who cares for the poor,
and you rescue those people
in times of trouble.
You protect them
and keep them alive.
You make them happy here
in this land,
and you don't hand them over
to their enemies.
You always heal them
and restore their strength
when they are sick.

Psalm 41:1-3

Jesus' disciples gathered around him, and he taught them:

God blesses those people
who depend only on him.
They belong to the kingdom
of heaven!
God blesses those people
who grieve.
They will find comfort!
God blesses those people
who are humble.
The earth will belong
to them!
God blesses those people
who want to obey him
more than to eat or drink.
They will be given
what they want!

God blesses those people
who are merciful.
They will be treated
with mercy!
God blesses those people
whose hearts are pure.
They will see him!
God blesses those people
who make peace.
They will be called
his children!
God blesses those people
who are treated badly
for doing right.
They belong to the kingdom
of heaven.

God will bless you when people insult you, ill-treat you, and tell all kinds of evil lies about you because of me. Be happy and excited! You will have a great reward in heaven. People did these same things to the prophets who lived long ago.

Matthew 5:1b-12

For further reflection:

- What do you think it means when the Bible says that God blesses someone?
- Jesus says that “God blesses those people who are merciful”. What special blessing does he mention for such people? How does that relate to caregiving?
- List some other ways in which you as a caregiver experience God’s blessings.

Personal notes:

Caregiving and relationships

In our broken world, it is a reality that relationships sometimes do not work out the way we would like them to. In the book of Acts we read about Barnabas, whose name means “one who encourages others” (Acts 4:36-37). He is the man who took Paul – then called Saul – under his wing at the beginning of his ministry:

Then Barnabas helped him by taking him to the apostles. He explained how Saul had seen the Lord and how the Lord had spoken to him. Barnabas also said that when Saul was in Damascus, he had spoken bravely in the name of Jesus.

Acts 9:27

Later we read of how they parted ways:

Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, “Let’s go back and visit the Lord’s followers in the cities where we preached his message. Then we will know how they are doing.” Barnabas wanted to take along John, whose other name was Mark. But Paul did not want to, because Mark had left them in Pamphylia and had stopped working with them.

Paul and Barnabas argued, then each of them went his own way. Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus, but Paul took Silas and left after the followers had placed them in God’s care.

Acts 15:36-40

However, the Bible calls us to do our best to mend relationships in a spirit of love.

God loves you and has chosen you as his own special people. So be gentle, kind, humble, meek, and patient. Put up with each other, and forgive anyone who does you wrong, just as Christ has forgiven you. Love is more important than anything else. It is what ties everything completely together.

Each one of you is part of the body of Christ, and you were chosen to live together in peace. So let the peace that comes from Christ control your thoughts.

Colossians 3:12-15a

Caregiver burnout

The Scriptures acknowledge that we can sometimes reach the end of our strength and want to give up, like Elijah the prophet did when the evil Queen Jezebel let him know that she intended to have him killed. In times like those, we can be sure that God understands and that he will have mercy on us and renew our strength.

Elijah was afraid when he got her message, and he ran to the town of Beersheba in Judah. He left his servant there, then walked another whole day into the desert. Finally, he came to a large bush and sat down in its shade. He begged the LORD, "I've had enough. Just let me die! I'm no better off than my ancestors." Then he lay down in the shade and fell asleep.

Suddenly an angel woke him up and said, "Get up and eat." Elijah looked around, and by his head was a jar of water and some baked bread. He sat up, ate and drank, then lay down and went back to sleep.

Soon the LORD's angel woke him again and said, "Get up and eat, or else you'll get too tired to travel." So Elijah sat up and ate and drank.

The food and water made him strong enough to walk forty more days. At last, he reached Mount Sinai, the mountain of God.

1 Kings 19:3-8

We have a great high priest, who has gone into heaven, and he is Jesus the Son of God. That is why we must hold on to what we have said about him. Jesus understands every weakness of ours, because he was tempted in every way that we are. But he did not sin! So whenever we are in need, we should come bravely before the throne of our merciful God. There we will be treated with undeserved kindness, and we will find help.

Hebrews 4:14-16

Time to let go and move on

We learn from Scripture that there is wisdom in knowing when to embrace and when to say goodbye, when to search and when to give something up as lost, when to hold on and when to let go.

Everything on earth
has its own time
and its own season.
There is a time
for birth and death,
planting and reaping,
for killing and healing,
destroying and building,
for crying and laughing,
weeping and dancing,
for throwing stones
and gathering stones,
embracing and parting.
There is a time
for finding and losing,
keeping and giving,
for tearing and sewing,
listening and speaking.
There is also a time
for love and hate,
for war and peace.

What do we gain by all our hard work? I have seen what difficult things God demands of us. God makes everything happen at the right time. Yet none of us can ever fully understand all he has done, and he puts questions in our minds about the past and the future. I know the best thing we can do is always to enjoy life, because God's gift to us is the happiness we get from our food and drink and from the work we do. Everything God has done will last for ever; nothing he does can ever be changed. God has done all this, so that we will worship him.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-14



For further reflection:

- What does this Scripture mean to you in terms of your caregiving?
- What has been your experience of “a time ... for death, ... for crying, ... for parting”? How did you handle that?
- Are there situations that you need to let go of in order to move on? What do you think is the best way of doing this?

Personal notes:

Caregiver renewal

All of us go through times where we get tired, but in his Word God promises us that He will give us new strength.

You people of Israel say,
“God pays no attention to us!
He doesn’t care if we
are treated unjustly.”

But how can you say that?
Don’t you know?
Haven’t you heard?
The LORD is the eternal God,
Creator of the earth.
He never gets weary or tired;
his wisdom cannot be measured.

The LORD gives strength
to those who are weary.
Even young people get tired,
then stumble and fall.
But those who trust the LORD
will find new strength.
They will be strong like eagles
soaring upward on wings;
they will walk and run
without getting tired.

Isaiah 40:27-31

For further reflection:

- Can you think of a time when you felt the same as the people of Israel, a time when it seemed that God paid no attention to you, that He did not care about what happened to you? How did you come through that time?
- In which area or areas of your caregiving do you need new strength?
- What does this Scripture teach us about God’s reaction towards those who are tired and weary?
- What must you do to make this promise of renewal your own?

Perseverance

Scripture encourages us to keep going and not give up.

Such a large crowd of witnesses is all around us! So we must get rid of everything that slows us down, especially the sin that just won't let go. And we must be determined to run the race that is ahead of us. We must keep our eyes on Jesus, who leads us and makes our faith complete. He endured the shame of being nailed to a cross, because he knew that later on he would be glad he did. Now he is seated at the right side of God's throne! So keep your mind on Jesus, who put up with many insults from sinners. Then you won't get discouraged and give up.

Hebrews 12:1-3

For further reflection:

- The Bible teaches that "endurance builds character, which gives us a hope that will never disappoint us." What does this mean to you in your caregiving?
- List the things that slow you down and that you need to get rid of.
- How will keeping your eyes on Jesus help you to persevere as a caregiver?

Personal notes:

A negative response to your work

You may at times have to face people who do not approve of what you are doing as a caregiver. The Bible gives us guidelines as to how we can handle such confrontations.

Can anyone really harm you for being eager to do good deeds? Even if you have to suffer for doing good things, God will bless you. So stop being afraid and don't worry about what people might do. Honour Christ and let him be the Lord of your life.

Always be ready to give an answer when someone asks you about your hope. Give a kind and respectful answer and keep your conscience clear. This way you will make people ashamed for saying bad things about your good conduct as a follower of Christ. You are better off to obey God and suffer for doing right than to suffer for doing wrong.

1 Peter 3:13-17

For further reflection:

- Sometimes we can become very concerned about other people's opinion of us. Have you ever battled with this concern? How has it influenced your caregiving?
- Have you had negative responses to your care work? What was your reaction?
- How can you deal with negative reactions and behaviour towards you and your care work?

Personal notes:

Guilt and forgiveness

We all make mistakes from time to time. Most of us have also experienced being wrongly treated.

I, the LORD, invite you
to come and talk it over.
Your sins are scarlet red,
but they will be whiter
than snow or wool.

Isaiah 1:18


The LORD is merciful!
He is kind and patient,
and his love never fails.
The LORD won't always be angry
and point out our sins;
he doesn't punish us
as our sins deserve.

How great is God's love for all
who worship him?
Greater than the distance
between heaven and earth!
How far has the LORD taken
our sins from us?
Further than the distance
from east to west!

Psalms 103:8-12

So if you are about to place your gift on the altar and remember that someone is angry with you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. Make peace with that person, then come back and offer your gift to God.

Matthew 5:23-24



If we say that we share in life with God and keep on living in the dark, we are lying and are not living by the truth. But if we live in the light, as God does, we share in life with each other. And the blood of his Son Jesus washes all our sins away. If we say that we have not sinned, we are fooling ourselves, and the truth isn't in our hearts. But if we confess our sins to God, he can always be trusted to forgive us and take our sins away.

1 John 1:6-9

Instead, be kind and merciful, and forgive others, just as God forgave you because of Christ.

Ephesians 4:32

For further reflection:

- Why do you think forgiveness is such an important topic in the Bible?
- Is there someone you need to forgive?
- Is there something you need to ask forgiveness for (from God, or other people)?
- Do you perhaps need to forgive yourself for something?

Personal notes:




Facing suffering

As caregiver, you are faced with suffering on a regular basis: the suffering of those you take care of, the pain of their loved ones, and even your own pain. We do not understand all the suffering we see and sometimes we feel like Job who cried out in his agony, trying to understand why such things were happening to him.

Why is life so hard?
Why do we suffer?
We are slaves in search of shade;
we are labourers longing
 for our wages.
God has made my days drag on
 and my nights miserable.
I pray for night to end,
but it stretches out
 while I toss and turn.
My parched skin is covered
 with worms, dirt, and sores,
and my days are running out
quicker than the thread
 of a fast-moving needle.

I beg you, God, don't forget!
My life is just a breath,
 and trouble lies ahead.
I will vanish from sight,
and no one, including you,
 will ever see me again.
I will disappear in the grave
or vanish from sight
 like a passing cloud.
Never will I return home;
 soon I will be forgotten.

And so, I cry out to you
 in agony and distress.
Am I the sea or a sea monster?



Is that why you imprison me?
I go to bed, hoping for rest,
but you torture me
with terrible dreams.
I'd rather choke to death
than live in this body.
Leave me alone and let me die;
my life has no meaning.
What makes you so concerned
about us humans?
Why do you test us
from sunrise to sunset?
Won't you look away
just long enough
for me to swallow?
Why do you watch us so closely?
What's it to you, if I sin?
Why am I your target
and such a heavy burden?
Why do you refuse to forgive?
Soon you won't find me,
because I'll be dead.

Job 7:1-21

But the Word of God also offers us hope in suffering. In his Word, God teaches us the appropriate response to suffering.

What can we say about all this? If God is on our side, can anyone be against us? God did not keep back his own Son, but he gave him for us. If God did this, won't he freely give us everything else? If God says his chosen ones are acceptable to him, can anyone bring charges against them? Or can anyone condemn them? No indeed! Christ died and was raised to life, and now he is at God's right side, speaking to him for us. Can anything separate us from the love of Christ? Can trouble, suffering, and hard times, or hunger and nakedness, or danger and death? It is exactly as the Scriptures say,

“For you we face death
all day long.
We are like sheep
on their way
to be butchered.”

In everything we have won more than a victory because of Christ who loves us. I am sure that nothing can separate us from God’s love – not life or death, not angels or spirits, not the present or the future, and not powers above or powers below. Nothing in all creation can separate us from God’s love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Romans 8:31-39

For further reflection:

- How does having to witness so much suffering affect you as a caregiver? How do you deal with the suffering you face so regularly?
- What hope can you offer those who suffer? How does this help you when you yourself suffer?

Personal notes:

Growing through suffering

Although we do not always want to hear it, it is true that we grow through suffering. The Bible also teaches that suffering helps to build our character.

By faith we have been made acceptable to God. And now, because of our Lord Jesus Christ, we live at peace with God. Christ has also introduced us to God's undeserved kindness on which we take our stand. So we are happy, as we look forward to sharing in the glory of God. But that's not all! We gladly suffer, because we know that suffering helps us to endure. And endurance builds character, which gives us a hope that will never disappoint us. All this happens because God has given us the Holy Spirit, who fills our hearts with his love.

Romans 5:1-5

For further reflection:

- Can you think of an example of how you have grown through suffering?
- Are you in a situation where you are suffering at present? Can you think of ways of growing through this suffering?
- List the ways in which the growth that you have experienced through suffering may be an encouragement to others, and specifically to those you take care of.

Personal notes:

Peace and joy

We read in the Scriptures of where true peace and joy may be found.

Jesus said:

“I give you peace, the kind of peace that only I can give. It isn’t like the peace that this world can give. So don’t be worried or afraid.”

John 14:27

Always be glad because of the Lord! I will say it again: be glad. Always be gentle with others. The Lord will soon be here. Don’t worry about anything, but pray about everything. With thankful hearts offer up your prayers and requests to God. Then, because you belong to Christ Jesus, God will bless you with peace that no one can completely understand. And this peace will control the way you think and feel.

Philippians 4:4-7

For further reflection:

- What would you say is the role of peace and joy in the life of a caregiver?
- Are there any changes that you have to make in order to bring your life in line with the teaching of these Scripture passages?
- Can you think of an example where the peace and joy which come from God, helped you in your care work?

Personal notes:

Prayer

Prayer has been described as the breath of the Christian life. The Bible places a lot of emphasis on prayer.

Jesus said:

“When you pray, don’t be like those show-offs who love to stand up and pray in the meeting places and on the street corners. They do this just to look good. I can assure you that they already have their reward.

“When you pray, go into a room alone and close the door. Pray to your Father in private. He knows what is done in private, and he will reward you.

“When you pray, don’t talk on and on as people do who don’t know God. They think God likes to hear long prayers. Don’t be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask.

“You should pray like this:

‘Our Father in heaven,
help us to honour
your name.

Come and set up
your kingdom,
so that everyone on earth
will obey you,
as you are obeyed
in heaven.

Give us our food for today.
Forgive us for doing wrong,
as we forgive others.

Keep us from being tempted
and protect us from evil.’

“If you forgive others for the wrongs they do to you, your Father in heaven will forgive you. But if you don’t forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

Matthew 6:5-15

First of all, I ask you to pray for everyone. Ask God to help and bless them all, and tell God how thankful you are for each of them.

1 Timothy 2:1

In certain ways we are weak, but the Spirit is here to help us. For example, when we don't know what to pray for, the Spirit prays for us in ways that cannot be put into words. All our thoughts are known to God. He can understand what is in the mind of the Spirit, as the Spirit prays for God's people. We know that God is always at work for the good of everyone who loves him.

Romans 8:26-28a

For further reflection:

- List the ways in which the model prayer that Jesus taught, is significant for caregivers.
- What role does prayer currently play in your care work? What role do you think it should play?
- Have you ever had an experience where you did not know what to pray for, and then the Spirit prayed for you “in ways that cannot be put into words”?
- Is there something that you need to bring before God in prayer right now?

Personal notes:

Faithfulness

One of the important characteristics of a caregiver is faithfulness: faithfulness to God as well as faithfulness to other people. Read how Paul urges Timothy to remain faithful.

Try your best to please God and to be like him. Be faithful, loving, dependable, and gentle. Fight a good fight for the faith and claim eternal life. God offered it to you when you clearly told about your faith, while so many people listened. Now I ask you to make a promise. Make it in the presence of God, who gives life to all, and in the presence of Jesus Christ, who openly told Pontius Pilate about his faith. Promise to obey completely and fully all that you have been told until our Lord Jesus Christ returns.

1 Timothy 6:11b-14

For further reflection:

- Why do you think faithfulness is so important in a caregiver?
- What effect would being unfaithful to God have on your care work? And unfaithfulness to other people?
- How can you ensure that you will remain faithful in your calling as caregiver?

Personal notes:

Wisdom

Caregivers often face difficult situations and choices. Wisdom is needed in these circumstances.

Respect and obey the LORD!
This is the beginning of wisdom.
To have understanding,
you must know the Holy God.

Proverbs 9:10

With all your heart
you must trust the LORD
and not your own judgment.
Always let him lead you,
and he will clear the road
for you to follow.
Don't ever think that you
are wise enough,
but respect the LORD
and stay away from evil.
This will make you healthy,
and you will feel strong.

Proverbs 3:5-8

My friends, be glad, even if you have a lot of trouble. You know that you learn to endure by having your faith tested. But you must learn to endure everything, so that you will be completely mature and not lacking in anything.

If any of you need wisdom, you should ask God, and it will be given to you. God is generous and won't correct you for asking. But when you ask for something, you must have faith and not doubt. Anyone who doubts is like an ocean wave tossed around in a storm. If you are that kind of person, you can't make up your mind, and you can't be trusted. So don't expect the Lord to give you anything at all.

James 1:2-8

Safety in God's presence


In this life, danger and tragedy could strike a person at any time without warning. That is why it is such a comfort to read in the Bible about God's protection.

Live under the protection
of God Most High
and stay in the shadow
of God All-Powerful.
Then you will say to the LORD,
"You are my fortress,
my place of safety;
you are my God,
and I trust you."

The LORD will keep you safe
from secret traps
and deadly diseases.
He will spread his wings
over you
and keep you secure.
His faithfulness is like
a shield or a city wall.

You won't need to worry
about dangers at night
or arrows during the day.
And you won't fear diseases
that strike in the dark
or sudden disaster at midday.

You will not be harmed,
though thousands fall
all around you.
And with your own eyes
you will see the punishment
of the wicked.
The LORD Most High



is your fortress.
Run to him for safety,
and no terrible disasters
will strike you
or your home.

God will command his angels
to protect you
wherever you go.
They will carry you
in their arms,
and you won't hurt your feet
on the stones.
You will overpower
the strongest lions
and the most deadly snakes.

The LORD says, "If you love me
and truly know who I am,
I will rescue you
and keep you safe.
When you are in trouble,
call out to me.
I will answer and be there
to protect and honour you.
You will live a long life
and see my saving power."

Psalm 91

For further reflection:

- As a caregiver, do you experience a need for protection in your work? If so, protection against what?
- In this portion of Scripture, are there any conditions to your living under God's protection? Do you need to implement any of these in your life?
- Can you think of a situation or situations where you experienced God's protection in the past?
- How can such experiences and the truths taught in Psalm 91 help you in your present situation?



An invitation to rest in the Lord

Being a caregiver can be extremely demanding. For that reason, rest is very important. Jesus invites us to come to Him to find rest.

If you are tired from carrying heavy burdens, come to me and I will give you rest. Take the yoke I give you. Put it on your shoulders and learn from me. I am gentle and humble, and you will find rest. This yoke is easy to bear, and this burden is light.

Matthew 11:28-30

Only God can save me,
and I calmly wait for him.
God alone is the mighty rock
that keeps me safe
and the fortress
where I am secure.

I feel like a shaky fence
or a sagging wall.
How long will all of you
attack and assault me?
You want to bring me down
from my place of honour.
You love to tell lies,
and when your words are kind,
hatred hides in your heart.

Only God gives inward peace,
and I depend on him.
God alone is the mighty rock
that keeps me safe,
and he is the fortress
where I feel secure.
God saves me and honours me.
He is that mighty rock
where I find safety.



Thoughts

The way a person thinks inevitably influences his or her words and actions. For that reason, the Word of God tells us to be careful about what we focus our thoughts on.

Don't be like the people of this world, but let God change the way you think. Then you will know how to do everything that is good and pleasing to him.

Romans 12:2

Finally, my friends, keep your minds on whatever is true, pure, right, holy, friendly, and proper. Don't ever stop thinking about what is truly worthwhile and worthy of praise.

Philippians 4:8

For further reflection:

- How can you let God change the way you think?
- Can you think of practical ways of focusing your thoughts on "whatever is true, pure, right, holy, friendly, and proper"?

Personal notes:

A manifesto for caregivers

The following Scripture passage can be seen as a manifesto for caregivers.

God loves you and has chosen you as his own special people. So be gentle, kind, humble, meek, and patient. Put up with each other, and forgive anyone who does you wrong, just as Christ has forgiven you. Love is more important than anything else. It is what ties everything completely together.

Each one of you is part of the body of Christ, and you were chosen to live together in peace. So let the peace that comes from Christ control your thoughts. And be grateful. Let the message about Christ completely fill your lives, while you use all your wisdom to teach and instruct each other. With thankful hearts, sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. Whatever you say or do should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, as you give thanks to God the Father because of him.

Colossians 3:12-17

For further reflection:

- Would you agree that this passage can be regarded as a manifesto for caregivers? Why or why not?
- According to this passage, what is the most important thing of all? Why is it more important than anything else?
- What effect will it have on your life and care work if you live according to these principles?

Personal notes:



A prayer for caregivers

The following prayer of the apostle Paul for the Ephesian Christians is very suitable for caregivers.

I have heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people. So I never stop being grateful for you, as I mention you in my prayers. I ask the glorious Father and God of our Lord Jesus Christ to give you his Spirit. The Spirit will make you wise and let you understand what it means to know God. My prayer is that light will flood your hearts and that you will understand the hope that was given to you when God chose you. Then you will discover the glorious blessings that will be yours together with all God's people.

I want you to know about the great and mighty power that God has for us followers. It is the same wonderful power he used when he raised Christ from death and let him sit at his right side in heaven. There Christ rules over all forces, authorities, powers, and rulers. He rules over all beings in this world and will rule in the future world as well. God has put all things under the power of Christ, and for the good of the church he has made him the head of everything. The church is Christ's body and is filled with Christ who completely fills everything.

Ephesians 1:15-23

For further reflection:

- Which prayer items mentioned in this passage are important in the situation in which caregivers find themselves? Why?
- Ask someone to pray for you on a daily basis. They can use this prayer as a guideline.

Personal notes:

Love, above all else

One of the most emphasised topics in the New Testament is love. Since care work involves a lot of love, it is important to take note of what the Word of God teaches about this topic.

What if I could speak
all languages of humans
and of angels?
If I did not love others,
I would be nothing more
than a noisy gong
or a clanging cymbal.
What if I could prophesy
and understand all secrets
and all knowledge?
And what if I had faith
that moved mountains?
I would be nothing,
unless I loved others.
What if I gave away all
that I owned
and let myself
be burnt alive?
I would gain nothing,
unless I loved others.
Love is kind and patient,
never jealous, boastful,
proud, or rude.
Love isn't selfish
or quick-tempered.
It doesn't keep a record
of wrongs that others do.
Love rejoices in the truth,
but not in evil.
Love is always supportive,
loyal, hopeful,
and trusting.

Love never fails!

Everyone who prophesies
will stop,
and unknown languages
will no longer
be spoken.

All that we know
will be forgotten.

We don't know everything,
and our prophecies
are not complete.

But what is perfect
will some day appear,
and what isn't perfect
will then disappear.

When we were children,
we thought and reasoned
as children do.

But when we grew up,
we stopped our childish ways.

Now all we can see of God
is like a cloudy picture
in a mirror.

Later we will see him
face to face.

We don't know everything,
but then we will,
just as God completely
understands us.

For now there are faith,
hope, and love.

But of these three,
the greatest is love.

1 Corinthians 13

A vision of eternity

The hope that the Word of God holds out to us is different from any other hope, in that it is eternal. As caregivers, we need to see our care work in an eternal light in order to understand its true meaning.

I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth had disappeared, and so had the sea. Then I saw New Jerusalem, that holy city, coming down from God in heaven. It was like a bride dressed in her wedding gown and ready to meet her husband.

I heard a loud voice shout from the throne:

God's home is now with his people. He will live with them, and they will be his own. Yes, God will make his home among his people. He will wipe all tears from their eyes, and there will be no more death, suffering, crying, or pain. These things of the past are gone for ever.

Then the one sitting on the throne said:

I am making everything new. Write down what I have said. My words are true and can be trusted. Everything is finished! I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will freely give water from the life-giving fountain to everyone who is thirsty. All who win the victory will be given these blessings. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

Revelation 21:1-7

For further reflection:

- What meaning does your caregiving have in the light of this vision of eternity? Apart from the immediate benefits to those who suffer, what does your caregiving offer in terms of eternity?
- What hope does this passage offer to caregivers and to all who suffer?
- Can you think of practical ways to make this hope more real to those that you take care of?

