

GUIDE
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SAFELY
HOME,
LORD

A caregiver's companion

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INTRODUCTION

I appreciate caregivers!

In my work as a hospice chaplain, I meet caregivers like you every day. Some are nurses and aides in hospitals or other facilities. Many are family members caring for loved ones in home settings.

As part of a hospice team, I go in and out of these various care settings to visit for short periods of time. Mine is the easy job. You who are caregivers do not have this luxury. While I can leave, you must remain, constantly on watch, always available. This has become your life, your reality 24/7. I find that the vast majority of you live it with grace and good humor.

Caregiving, however, is hard, and we all know it. It involves the complex, demanding work of tending to another human being in need. Those who are chronically or terminally ill require constant attention, and giving that attention can be backbreaking,

mind-numbing, spirit-shattering work. In the midst of what can truly be a daily grind, it can be easy to lose perspective on your high calling and how blessed you are to serve others in this fashion.

That is why I've written this book for caregivers. I hope it will provide a bit of encouragement and refreshment to your spirit as you do God's work.

The book is designed to be read over the course of four weeks. There are five meditations for each week. I thought of providing readings for each day, seven days a week, but then I remembered how important it is for caregivers to have regular respite from thinking about their tasks. Five readings a week will, I hope, prove sufficient to encourage you.

- Each reading begins with *a passage from the Bible* that sets the theme.

- Then comes the day's *meditation*, each one designed to encourage you about a particular aspect of caregiving.
- After my meditation, you'll find a place to write a *sentence prayer* of your own for the day. I considered writing a prayer for you, but thought better of it. I want you to have the chance to shape your own conversation with God so that you can pray specifically about how the day's reading applies in your caregiving situation. Write a prayer that is simple and only a sentence in length so that you can repeat it more easily throughout the day as you provide care. For example: "*Lord, this work is hard and heavy; please give my spirit rest.*"

Caregivers are my heroes, and I hope my respect and appreciation come through as you read this book. May the Lord bless you and strengthen you as you do his work.

YOU ARE DOING GOD'S WORK

Day One: There is no greater love

"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." » JOHN 15:13

I doubt that many of us grew up thinking, "When I get older, I want to be a *caregiver*." Instead, the job usually gets thrust upon us while we're doing other things. I meet exceptions, but they are usually folks who have been involved in caregiving since they were young; for them, the idea of caring for those in need became a normal part of life early. For others, however, it may come as an unwelcome interruption, an unexpected assignment, a vocation for which they have not prepared.

So here you are now. A loved one or friend needs help, and you are here to provide it. This person may have a chronic illness that requires extensive care. Perhaps he or she has become homebound or bedbound. Maybe you have been called to take care of someone who is dying.

Be honest. How do *you* feel about being a caregiver?

Answers to that question may run the gamut from “bitter” and “put upon” to “stressed” to “I’m handling it okay” to “privileged.” Your reply may depend on what day you are asked, or even what hour of the day the question comes to you. Caregiving can and usually does involve riding an emotional roller coaster. You may not even be aware of or able to put into words what you’re thinking and feeling.

On this first day of meditations, I want you to know what *God* thinks about caregivers.

I hope you realize that your heavenly Father is pleased that you are taking on this challenging role. You see, above all else, God

values love. He honors and blesses those who practice kindness and mercy, especially when they sacrifice and lay down their own lives to provide loving support and service to others. That's the very kind of love God has shown us, and he delights when his children follow his example.

This does *not* mean that the work of caregiving will always be easy. It *does* mean that God is with you and that you are doing God's work.

I hope you will find encouragement in knowing that.

My sentence prayer for today:

**Day Two: The world is torn
and you are mending it**

God blessed them and God said to them: Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. » **GENESIS 1:28**

Not long ago, I officiated at a wedding. The couple wanted to honor the traditions of their families, and the groom was from a Jewish background. Indeed, one elderly family member in attendance was a Holocaust survivor. So in the ceremony I included readings and emphases from the Jewish Scriptures, and we ended on a celebratory note with the groom breaking a glass, stomping on it while the crowd shouted, “*Mazel Tov!*”

In my remarks to the bride and groom I made reference to a specific Jewish teaching called *Tikkun olam*, which means “*to repair the world.*”

During the reception, we sat with members of the groom’s family. One was a doctor who has devoted his life to caring for women and their babies. Another was a nurse who serves in an inner-city hospital. Yet another

was an epidemiologist who travels all over the world consulting on public health matters. As for us, my wife is a nurse as well as a mental health counselor, and I have been a pastor and now serve the dying and their families as a hospice chaplain.

We were a table of strangers, coming from different places with a variety of religious commitments and having very different life experiences. Yet we came to see that our hearts are one and we are walking in the same direction. All of us place a high value on service to others, and we find not only personal satisfaction but hope for the world in God blessing our works.

We each believe that the fabric of the world has been torn, and that God has called us to be part of the solution. Through God's gifts of faith, hope, and love, we have been handed needle and thread and invited to participate in mending some of its damaged places.

As a caregiver, please know that you too are one of those whom God has called to

repair the rent fabric of life. You may think your work small, hidden, and insignificant, but nothing could be further from the truth.

God is mending a torn and tattered world through people like you.

My sentence prayer for today:

**Day Three: The world is dark
and you are gathering the light**

*All the families of the earth will find
blessing in you. » GENESIS 12:3*

Yesterday, we introduced the concept of *Tikkun olam*, the idea that many contemporary Jews and others have embraced in their vision of the religious life. It means “to repair the world.”

This idea of “repairing the world” was developed in the sixteenth century by the renowned mystic Rabbi Isaac Luria of Safed,