

A CHRISTIAN'S RESPONSIBILITY IN CARE GIVING

By: John R. Bair

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Since Pentecost of 1998 with the death of my wife's father, we were plunged into full time care giving for her invalid mother until her mother's death in January 2003. Although this was a very stressful time for us, it helped us as a couple to bond together in fulfilling our responsibilities to our parents and has better equipped us to serve. II Cor. 1:3, 4 tells us to comfort others with the same comfort that we have been comforted.

In this article we'll share the valuable lessons which we learned in care giving for our elderly parents in their final days.

I. The scriptural motivation for care giving.

We all know the fifth commandment; honor your father and mother that your days may be long upon the land. (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16) Most think these verses mean "children obey your parents". While this certainly is true (Eph. 6:1; Col 3:20), Christ applied this commandment primarily to care giving for elderly parents. See Matt. 15:4; Mark 7:10.

One must be aware however, that most parents will not want to be a burden to their children because, according to II Cor. 12:14, it is the parent who normally lays up for the children. So knowing when to insist on giving care to your parent and how to respectfully respond when they resist should be prayerfully considered.

II. You will need help.

Obviously the first place you need to turn for wisdom in care giving is to God, but your most important resource is your family. Accept all the help and input you can get from any family members. Care giving usually falls to the closest, most mature daughter, but that should not eliminate the responsibility of the rest of the family members from contributing to the care. Try to equitably divide the labor. Each care giver needs a period of respite. This can not be over emphasized. Beware of burn out in anyone who is involved in the care giving. Their service will be lacking love.

If you are employed and unable to give full time care, outside hired help will be necessary. You must, however, realize that for them it is just a job. They may not have the love and concern that you do. Christ even mentions this in John 10:13 – "Hirelings flee" at the first sign of trouble.

You will want to interview prospective care givers carefully and prayerfully. Finding a loving, dependable, qualified person is not easy.

It may seem untrusting, but if your loved one is unable to speak for themselves, some form of monitoring is essential for their well-being.

Many forms of help are available from the government. Areas to investigate: Medicaid or Medicare, Family resource networks, Helping Hands, Adult Day Care, AARP web site.

III. Finances are critical.

The first step is to have the legal power to sign for your loved one. This is called a Durable Power of Attorney. You should also get a Medical Power of Attorney. This should be arranged through a lawyer. Also be aware of any other legal documents your loved one possesses such as their will or a living will.

Next get control of the check book. You will need to be a co-signer on your loved one's checking account. This should be arranged with their bank.

After that you'll need to review their income, assets and expenses. If you pay employees directly, you must have a Federal Employer Identification Number as Medicare/Social Security and Unemployment taxes must be withheld and submitted to the government quarterly. These employees are considered "Household Employees". (Form 1040 Schedule H)

Remember, you will also be responsible for their taxes, bills, etc.

IV. Emotional Issues

You will have many emotional issues to deal with, so establishing the right priority is a must. The care of your loved one should be your first priority above: your house, garden, hobbies, entertainment, etc. The only factor that should receive higher priority is your health, and that of your immediate family. You cannot give care if you need to be cared for yourself.

In your loved one's latter days, memory loss is frequently involved. You must learn not to "take it personally". They may not realize what they are saying.

For their peace of mind, adopt this response in all situations – “your loved one is always right”. Particularly if dementia is involved. A brief pause and trying again is sometimes all that’s needed when resistance is met.

For us in the church not telling the whole truth may be difficult, but “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but...” may be unloving. Sometimes it is necessary to withhold information that may be emotionally upsetting to your loved one. This is not lying, but speaking the truth in love. Eph. 4:14, 15

We have a hope beyond this physical life. Care giving can be very stressful, but you need to realize, it is only for a short time. Life is fragile and short. Memory is volatile. Heb. 11:13 reminds us of the faithful who “died in faith not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” We likewise see the promise afar off.

I wrote the following poem for my mother-in-law.

"JUST TEMPORARY"

**As a body grows feeble, and "parts" do fail;
And your role is reversed; you've become so frail;
Just remember your Maker designed it this way,
For your children to learn:
Strength of youth doesn't stay.
And they have a lesson to gain from your plight:
To honor their parents will one day bring might;
So in frailness is beauty - it is wisdom to see:
This stage in your growth is just temporary.**

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