



Caregiving

Opening Prayer

O God, out of your love, care, and concern for all of creation, I believe you are active in the world. Help me to align my activity in the world with your activity in the world. Amen.

Scripture Theme

Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

Introduction

At certain times in your life you may have carried the assumption that God calls you *once*, for just one purpose. Don't miss the call, or you might spend the remainder of your days in meaningless mediocrity. In reality, it is safe to say that God calls us many times throughout the seasons of our lives, and each call challenges us to stretch further than we might have anticipated or imagined.

This is almost certainly the case for those who find themselves in the role of caregiver. As you reflect on this challenge (and invitation!), it's quite logical to seek deeper meaning from it. It's also normal to experience angst.

- ◆ What does this challenge mean for me?
- ◆ How does it change my outlook on life?
- ◆ What is my relationship with the one for whom I am giving care?
- ◆ How does it affect my relationship with others?
- ◆ Who is my role model?
- ◆ What is God doing in my life?

You are called to be a caregiver. You likely have a bit of anxiety, and a whole lot of wonderment for how this is going to go. One thing is certain. As you respond to this call, you will discover an aspect of God that you have not seen or experienced before. Place your trust in God, say 'yes' to the call as best you can, and give it your all.

What's Changing?

This call likely means a change in your life. In his book, *Managing Transitions*, William Bridges writes that transitions always start with an ending. Seems odd, yes, but he maintains that the first step toward a life change is identifying what you are losing and learning how to manage the losses.

View

Every day, more than forty million Americans wake up and care for loved ones. Watch the video *A Day in the Life of a Caregiver* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bs_7jWqSeIM). In what ways do you see yourself in this video? In what ways is your caregiving situation unique?

Write and/or Discuss

As you embrace this role, and respond to the call to give care . . .

- ✦ What are you losing?
- ✦ What must come to an end?
- ✦ What part of your life must you give up in order to take on this role?

Take a few moments to reflect on these questions. Jot down your responses, or discuss them with your group.

Reflect

You may feel some resentment over these losses. Normal. And you might direct some of that resentment toward the one for whom you are caring. Also normal. And then you might feel guilty for carrying resentment. Yep, that's normal too. It's part of the change process. But of course, you cannot carry resentment and guilt for very long before it becomes destructive. So, what to do? It's important to openly acknowledge your losses, grieve over them, and mark the endings as needed. They deserve your respect. God is present in these moments and in these feelings.

Take Heart

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? . . . I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me (Psalm 13:1-2, 5-6).

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning (Psalm 130:5-6).

What's Emerging in My Life?

Let's consider what might be emerging in your life as a result of these changes. As we do so, let us remember a few things that others have discovered about God's callings in their lives. We can say that responding to God's call will likely . . .

- ✦ Lead to happiness in the long run. Although it won't make you immune to all other emotions such as sadness, frustration, resentment, guilt, etc. But if there is no happiness whatsoever, somehow you are not aligned with God's desire.
- ✦ Not be easy. It will probably stretch you toward something you never thought you could do or be. But you can do it, especially if you have some help.
- ✦ Benefit others besides yourself. If it only involves you, it's not God's call. This is baked-in to caregiving.

- ◆ Not be overly complicated. You'll be able to explain it to others in just a few words.

View

Let's focus on the second bullet point: responding to God's call will likely not be easy. As a caregiver you are surely stretched to your limit physically, mentally, and emotionally. Watch the video *The Struggle of Being a Caregiver* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i6gRejq8qHo>).

Write and/or Discuss

Being a caregiver to a loved one can be exhausting and stressful.

- ◆ In what ways do you relate to this video? In what ways is your situation different?
- ◆ Have you ever felt depressed and on the verge of burnout in your role as caregiver?

Take Heart

Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have given me relief when I was in distress. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer (Psalm 4)!

Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. . . . Answer me, O LORD, for your steadfast love is good; according to your abundant mercy, turn to me. . . . I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving. . . . For the LORD hears the needy and does not despise his own people who are prisoners (Psalm 69:1, 16, 30, 33).

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul. . . who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as you live (Psalm 103:1-2, 4-5).

How Should I Live?

Now we seek to turn the corner and fully embrace the call as caregiver. We seek to develop fruitful patterns of behavior and action that can sustain us for the long haul.

View

Watch the video *The Joy of Now: A Caregiver's Tale by Phyllis Peters* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RHTh9C9qviw>). Caregiving can at times take over every part of your life. Phyllis shares her experience of caregiving for the five members in her family's older generation.

Write and/or Discuss

- ◆ How does Phyllis's story resonate with your own as caregiver?
- ◆ How can you embrace the joy of 'now' amidst the challenges and demands of your calling?
- ◆ What practices have you employed that sustain you as a caregiver?

Consider

Here are links to helpful practices and strategies for sustaining your response to the call of caregiver.

- ✦ “Family Caregiver Toolbox” (<https://caregiveraction.org/family-caregiver-toolbox>) from Caregiver Action Network.
- ✦ “Ten Tips for Family Caregivers” (<https://caregiveraction.org/resources/10-tips-family-caregivers>) from Caregiver Action Network.
- ✦ Caregiver Stories (<https://caregiveraction.org/resources/caregiver-stories>) from Caregiver Action Network. Here you can share your story and read other family caregiver stories.
- ✦ Caregiver Videos (<https://caregiveraction.org/resources/videos>) from Caregiver Action Network. Find comfort in knowing that you are not alone by listening to the experiences of your fellow caregivers.
- ✦ Caregiver Coping Strategies (<https://www.brainline.org/article/caregiver-coping-strategies>) from CORE Health Care.
- ✦ “Avoiding Blame and Guilt” (<https://www.brainline.org/article/avoiding-guilt-and-blame>) by Laura Taylor and Jeff Kreutzer, The National Resource Center for Traumatic Brain Injury.
- ✦ “Coping with Depression and Anxiety” (<https://www.brainline.org/article/caring-caregiver>) from CORE Health Care.
- ✦ “Preventing Caregiver Burnout” (<https://www.care.com/c/stories/5582/caregiver-burnout-coping-strategies/>) from Care.com, dedicated to helping people find their ideal care solutions.
- ✦ “Taking Care of You” (<https://www.caregiver.org/taking-care-you-self-care-family-caregivers>) from the Family Caregiver Alliance of the National Center on Caregiving.
- ✦ “Tips for Caregivers” (<https://www.seniorliving.org/caregiving/tips-for-caregivers/>) from SeniorLiving.org.

Take Heart

I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together! I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears (Psalm 34:1-4).

Oh sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth! Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised (Psalm 96:1-4).

Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations (Psalm 100:3, 5).

Blessing for Caregivers

This blessing may be used with a small group or with the entire congregation.

To the Caregivers:

Dear Caregivers, we thank you deeply for responding to God's call to give care to those in need. Your care is God's care. Your touch is God's touch. Your embrace is God's embrace. Today we bless you, and we pledge our prayers and support for you.

To the community gathered:

Please extend your hand in blessing over our Caregivers. Every day, 40 million Americans wake up and care for loved ones. Today we bless those among us who are caring for those in need. Please respond with "Amen" to each blessing.

To the Caregivers:

As you embrace the call to give care, may you also experience the blessing of inner growth and understanding.

All: Amen.

As you encounter struggles and confusion in this call, may you be open to the Spirit's guidance as you do everything for the Glory of God.

All: Amen.

As you minister to God's people whose needs are immediate, demanding, and constant, may you be blessed with good health and sustained energy.

All: Amen.

May God be a refuge to you on this demanding journey, shade in the heat, shelter in the storm, rest in weariness, protection in trouble, and a strong staff in challenging times.

All: Amen.

May you always serve God's people with compassion and humility.

All: Amen.

May God bless you with every heavenly blessing, and keep you safe and strong. Know that we carry you in our hearts each and every day. Through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.