The Woman of Christ Faces Daily Living

Assisting Our Disabled Loved Ones & Coping with Death in the Family

Genesis 48-50, Hosea 11:3 & 4, Lamentations 3:22 & 23, 2 Corinthians. 1:3-5

Lesson 6

Disability of a Family Member

The woman confronts many different problems in daily living that require her to be strong and firm in the faith. Dealing with the disabilities of family members can be difficult and can even test our faith.

Many of us have jobs that take us away from home. Taking time off to care for a family member with a disability can present stress on our marriages and family and can cause financial hardships. How we deal with those situations can mean the difference between positive results and ultimate chaos.

We might wonder how we would deal with the severe disability of our husband or children. Most of us repeat the vows "for better or for worse, and 'til death do we part," but could we truthfully deal with the type of situation that would require us to spend countless hours attending to one who may not even know who we are or the heart-wrenching task of watching as our disabled child tries in desperation to complete an action that would be simple for a normal child to perform? Here is where our faith and trust in God really come into focus.

"God, who is the Father of mercies and of all comfort, will comfort us in all our tribulation" (2 Corinthians 1:3 & 4) and Psalm 55:22 reads, "Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you. He shall never permit the righteous to be moved." If we are faithful, God will be with us.

Genesis 48 begins a narrative of Joseph's care of his father, Jacob. Though separated for many years, Joseph connected with his family and arranged to move his father as well as all his family, to live near himself and for them to be safe from the threat of famine. For seventeen years, Joseph provided his father's needs and at Jacob's death he lovingly arranged for his father's embalming and for a funeral procession back to Canaan for the burial. Pharaoh's chariots, horsemen and Egyptian elders accompanied Joseph's family back to the homeland and ancestral burial site. Genesis 50:10 records that for seven days the large group mourned there with a great and very solemn lamentation. The people of Canaan were touched by the expression of grief.

Most of us who are helping infirm family members don't have the support of servants that Joseph had, and we must shuffle a confusing schedule of medical appointments while helping a very weak loved one to just get in and out of the car and into a doctor's office which sometimes brings on more frustration. Many appointments give rise to frustrations: lost insurance cards; incorrect

appointment day; pharmacist can't fill the prescription until tomorrow and on and on. Then the caregiver returns home to attend to the needs of her waiting family. Many caregivers or retirement age themselves.

Note Jesus' consideration of His mother and her care when, even from the cross, he pointed to the apostle John and directed him to serve as son to Mary (John 19:25-27). From that moment John took Mary into his house.

If you aren't currently a caregiver, someday you will most likely be one. Learn patience now. A frail family member will probably move more slowly. Some patients tend to live in the past and repeat themselves. Families who care for ailing loved ones find it necessary to rearrange schedules. All these things require patience (1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Peter 1:5-11). Complaining and murmuring can be a temptation for those who assist others. Let's prepare our thinking processes so that we can graciously help our loved ones (Philippians 2:14 & 15). The word which translates murmur has been associated with "meow" and "moo" in continual, low repetitive tones similar to "Get my cat food" or "Where's my hay?" or in families: "I wish my brother and sister would help me with daddy."

Time spent as caregivers of our family members can be viewed as times of opportunity. My good friends Sandy and Steve cared for her dad. Their lives and influence paved the way for him to become a Christian in his last days. He asked Steve to baptize him. When he expressed his gratitude and love for them, Sandy responded, "Oh, no, Daddy! We should be grateful to you for the opportunity we've had to spend this time of your life with you and to be with you when you became a Christian."

Let's ask ourselves, "What if someday I will be the patient?" Am I cantankerous? If so, this is the time to work to eliminate crabby ways now before we become set in our ways. To be sure, today's irritating traits will only worsen with our age. Are you the kind of person for whom you would find joy in assisting?

There are some folks that we just don't ask, "How are you?" If we do, we'll probably hear all about their latest surgeries; their newly learned acronyms for medical tests and names of state-of-the-art diagnostic devices; a rundown of last year's medical encounters; and a full accounting of Aunt Hattie's recent attack of epizooties. We've also been with people who were silently throbbing with pain. Their strong faith was visible to all. They inspired us to count our blessings. When we're aching terribly, it's not always easy to cheerfully accept our plight. At those times, we might remember Paul's remark, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

Caregivers often see that patients appreciate an opportunity to talk with others, and this can be a major part of the day's work. For those who are assisting family members, these important periods of listening may be for a short time, or they can be through lengthy periods (Philippians 2:4). Just being a sounding board for a homebound or otherwise lonely, distressed person can be

a blessing. We don't have to worry about what to say -- just be there and listen. Psychiatrists, counselors and preachers are often thanked profusely for “your help” when they've done nothing but listen. A set of sincere ears will sometimes enable the patient or troubled person to feel much better and, perhaps, to work out a disturbing matter. Be quick to listen (James 1:19). There's a time to be silent and a time to speak (Ecclesiastes 3:7).

This week, try to visit with someone who is in poor health and encourage that person to talk. How well do you listen? Later, write down what you recall of your friend's remarks. There is an added factor for wives who assist their husbands through long years of marriage and his health decline. He had been her “rock.” Widows often relate their husband’s efficient handling of household concerns. She might remark, “He did everything.” As she watched her husband deteriorate, she realized his earlier planning was continuing to provide for their material needs. Financial advisors urge, “Do your planning now while he can help you.” These caregivers need our understanding.

Caregivers of spouses and others suffer from:

- Frustration related to personal disappointments and major changes in their lives.
- Patient’s mood swings and personality changes.
- Feelings of bewilderment.
- Endless concern and exhaustion.

One caregiver says, “Sometimes I can do for five minutes or for one day what I couldn't do if I thought I had to do it for a lifetime. Yet, I love my husband. I know that all we have is today. So just for now, I am trying to be patient and loving.”

Death of a Family Member

Whew! This is a tough subject. How do we cope with the death of a family member? How do we go on day after day when a loved one has passed? It's difficult to tell someone how to pick up the pieces and go on.

The story of David and Bathsheba and their newborn son is probably one of the best examples of how we should look at the death of a child. We read of David's sorrow and heartache when his son was sick and dying and his statement to his servants after the child's death. “But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me” (2 Samuel 12:23). We realize that when children have died, they have gone to a better place. It's difficult, though, to ease the longing of those who were left behind.

Those bizarre sounds and words: the emergency call for help; the distressing sounds of a siren coming ever closer until it halts; emergency medtechs racing into the house, up the stairs and with life-saving devices shouting, “Which room? Where is he?” It's after all that and more that understanding of grief comes.

God's tender love for his children is illustrated so clearly in Hosea 11:3 & 4. Our Father is compassionate and comforting in times of troubles (2 Corinthians 1:3-5).

We handle grief in various ways. Galatians 6:2 tells us to bear one another's burdens, so we should accept help from others when we are confronted with life's trials and sorrows.

Some things to do:

A reference to a Bible verse or passage accompanies each of the following remarks. Write out each reference.

1. Joy comes from accepting God's grace in our current reality, not from wishing for a different one. 2 Corinthians 12:9

2. God doesn't distance Himself from pain. He draws closer to us during our darkest moments. Psalm 34:18

3. Relying on human strength leads to burnout. Prayer invites God's help for endurance. Isaiah 40:29-31

How can you extend compassion to a grieving person?

What can you say to those who are grieving? Proverb 25:11

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