

May God bless you this day...with a love that shines!

Caregivers – An Extraordinary Encouragement

By Hal Harris, Director, Ciloa

We eventually accepted that Mom had Alzheimer's. For a time Dad was her primary caregiver and as we watched him go about the difficult responsibility of caring for her, we learned what we had never truly understood before. There was, of course, the sheer difficulty of the task, but that was just the beginning.

Caring for the Caregiver. The caregiver needs encouragement. As Mom became progressively less able to take care of herself, Dad was more and more consumed with caring for her growing needs, even to the point becoming isolated from his friends and family. All this was occurring as he tried to deal with both of their emotional states.

As my brothers and I looked on, we began to realize that Dad, the caregiver, needed encouragement and support. It did not matter that he had not asked for any. His focus was on Mom, not his own needs. But there was a problem. We didn't know how to help him.

To you, friends and family of the Caregiver: It's really not that hard to help and encourage. You can be the lifeline that a caregiver needs. My encouragement to you is to be their encourager...learn about the disease or injury of the one they care for...learn about the caregiver's day, what has to be done, what time there is for rest...learn about their anxieties and fears...and look for resources that can help.

The three most important ways you can support and encourage a caregiver is to:

Spend some time - just be with them, talk with them, listen to them, sit with them;

Take some time - do something nice just for them, offer to run errands, bring a meal, give them a call, stay in touch; and

Give some time - if possible, be the caregiver for just a little while, let them have a break, send them to a movie, gather some friends and clean the house, mow the yard, find a way to relieve some of their time demands.

What a wonderful God we have---he is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the source of every mercy, and the one who so wonderfully comforts and strengthens us in our hardships and trials. And why does he do this? So that when others are troubled, needing our sympathy and encouragement, we can pass on to them this same help and comfort God has given us. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (TLB)

The Extraordinary Encouragement. Love is found in what we do. I want to share a remarkable insight that was an extraordinary encouragement both to my Dad and to his friends and family. Dad's deep care and devotion for Mom had a powerful impact on those around them. One day, my daughter revealed this lasting spiritual "goodness" in her observation, "Daddy, that's what true love is, isn't it!"

An encouragement to Caregivers and to us all: Let your love shine. In times such as these we struggle to understand why and how such things can happen to us and what good is in it. But Christ gives us at least one reason - you are always being watched by those around you. As children of God, we can show the extraordinary love Christ has for us by the love and care we show for one another, whether as the caregiver or as those who care for the caregiver.

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:14 - 16 (NRSV)

A Special Note: Here are a few resources for caregivers, family and friends of Alzheimer's patients:

- A movie, *The Notebook* - a slightly over-dramatized but educational view of the love between the caregiver and the cared for.

- A book, *The 36-Hour Day* by Nancy L. Mace and Peter V. Rabins - a very insightful book from John Hopkins Press. Every caregiver, family member and friend should read this.
- Help from a local Church and Alzheimer's support groups.
- Our website, www.Ciloa.org. Click on "Care for the Caregiver", then "Alzheimer's Disease", to find more useful information, new ideas, peace of mind, and encouragement.

Take care and be God's,

Hal

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