

Is Care-giving a Spiritual Challenge?

These are some of the signs of the spiritual challenges which care-givers experience.

Rate your own experience using the following scale:

0=Never 1=Rarely 2=Once in a while 3=Fairly often 4=Very often 5=All the time

1. I feel angry at God because of my care-giving responsibilities..... _____
2. I can't pray..... _____
3. When I pray I pray for miracles or things I know are impossible _____
4. I don't feel like going to church..... _____
5. When I do go to church I feel detached, uninterested, and out of place..... _____
6. I feel like God has abandoned me..... _____
7. I feel like God is punishing me..... _____
8. I blame people for my situation, even though I know it isn't their fault..... _____
9. I get angry and impatient with people even though I know they don't deserve it..... _____
10. I feel resentful for having to give so much and receive so little _____
11. I feel angry about the loss of freedom and the time to do the things I like to do..... _____
12. I feel like care-giving is draining the life out of me..... _____
13. I feel like my thoughts and feelings about care-giving are sinful..... _____
14. I have doubts about the strength and sincerity of my faith..... _____
15. I feel like I don't have the strength to endure this..... _____
16. I try to distract myself by staying busy doing things that are not important..... _____
17. I don't have the energy or desire to do even the basic normal things of daily life..... _____
18. I avoid family members, friends and social activities..... _____
19. I am afraid to share my doubts and fears with family members or friends _____
20. I feel trapped in a situation I did not choose and cannot change..... _____

Your total score (add your numbers together)..... _____

The higher your score is the more spiritual stress you are experiencing from your role as a care-giver. A certain amount of spiritual stress is normal. However, if you are concerned about how care-giving is affecting your spiritual life you should visit with your pastor, a confessor, spiritual guide or counselor about your care-giving situation.

Responding to the Spiritual Challenges of Care-giving

Care-giving for a loved one, neighbor or friend can be a spiritual challenge. Even a person of faith who prays regularly and is active in their church may be surprised by some of the feelings they have about their role as a care-giver. If you are a person of faith who is experiencing some of the spiritual challenges of care-giving, here are some things you can do:

Make some changes in how you pray

○ If you find traditional prayers more difficult, try a more reflective prayer which shifts prayer from doing to listening. Here's one method:

Sit quietly and imagine you are in a room with Jesus ... Explain your worries, fears and problems to him ... Then sit quietly and listen ... To avoid distraction, focus on your breathing and pray this simple prayer: "My Lord and my God" (as you breathe in), "Have mercy on me" (as you breathe out) ... Do this for about five minutes or longer ... In time you will hear the Lord's reassurance, "I love you" and perhaps other insights which will be helpful and reassuring.

○ If it is difficult to pray the rosary on a regular basis, try to pray just one decade of the rosary regularly. Reflect on one Mystery of the Rosary each time you pray and ask yourself in what way you experience this mystery in your daily life as a care-giver.

○ If you have not done so before, try using a Prayer Journal. Each day write your concerns, fears, disappointments, hopes and dreams in your journal. Reflect for a few moments on what you have written, then write or say a short prayer.

Spend more time with the Bible

○ During difficult times, some people find it helpful to gradually read one of the Gospels from beginning to end. In most Bibles, the chapters are divided into short sections so you can read and reflect on just one section each day. Many people find the Gospel of John particularly helpful during difficult times because it contains so many reassuring words from Jesus himself.

○ The Psalms express the hopes and dreams and problems of real people often living in difficult times. Read and reflect on one psalm each day. Over time, make a list of your favorite psalms and use them for daily prayer.

○ The short book of Lamentations expresses the mood of people living in difficult situations, and many care-givers find its combination of grief and hope a helpful source of reflection and prayer.

○ The Old Testament prophets, like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are timeless reminders that no matter how bad things get, God is faithful to his promises and his people. Reading the prophets can also be a source of hope and encouragement for care-givers who may be tempted to give up hope.

Learn to Live One Day at a Time

○ The genius of the Twelve Steps used by alcoholics and other people addicted to self-destructive attitudes or behaviors is that it helps people realize that there are some things in our lives which we are powerless to change on our own, without God's help. A book or tapes like *Breathing Under Water* by Fr. Richard Rohr OFM can help care-givers appreciate the power of the Twelve Steps in their own lives.

○ Practice learning to "let go and let God" by praying the Serenity Prayer each day:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change ... Courage to change the things I can ... And wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time ... Enjoying one moment at a time ... Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace. Taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it ... Trusting that he will make all things right if I surrender to his will ... So that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever in the next. Amen.