

I grew up in an era when it was common for multiple generations to live together under the same roof and within walking distance from other relatives. When I was a young child, my mother, my brother, and I lived with my grandparents for a few years. Then we moved into our own home...a mile away! When I was a teenager, it was often my responsibility to “babysit” my ill grandfather so my grandmother could have a rest. Back then, we didn’t call it “caregiving” or “respite”; it was how families took care of each other.

Today, when it may not be as common for three or more generations to live together, many of us find ourselves assuming the role of a family caregiver. It may be a responsibility that develops over years or one that is thrust upon us as the result of an unexpected crisis. A family caregiver may be an adult child whose aging parent

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no longer recognizes their child's face, a spouse whose partner has a chronic illness, a parent whose child struggles with mental health issues, or a friend who runs errands and provides transportation for a neighbor. For the past ten years, I have been a caregiver for my elderly parents.

These prayers and self-care suggestions come from my personal experiences and address the range of emotions and concerns of a family caregiver. May you find comfort, affirmation, strength, and hope in these words. May God bless you and your loved one.

1. When I'm worried about what the future will bring

But Ruth said, "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God." RUTH 1:16

Jesus, I pray that today I remain in the present moment. My promise to love another—as a parent, a friend, a spouse, an adult child—has

brought me to places that I had not hoped for or anticipated. Yet, they are places that I have said yes to. Deep within my vow to love was a promise to care for the other: emotionally, physically, and financially. On days like today, I feel overwhelmed with sadness at what we once had, and I grieve that what we had hoped for will never be realized. Reflecting on the past and mourning unrealized dreams is painful. I pray, Jesus, keep my heart in the present so that I may love the person before me and celebrate who we are together, today. Amen.

SELF-CARE *Sit in your favorite chair, close your eyes, take a deep breath. Stay there for as long as you like.*

2. A day of “whys”...Why? Why my loved one? Why this? Why now? Why me?

Then Job answered the Lord: “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. ‘Who is this that

hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. ‘Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me.’” JOB 42:1-4

Father, like Job, I do not understand. I am consumed with wanting answers. What is happening is beyond my comprehension. Why must my loved one suffer? Why this illness? Why do I have to be the one who is responsible? Why do I feel this way? Perhaps there are no answers, no explanations, no reasons. Perhaps suffering does not have a “because”; perhaps there is no cause and effect to pain. Just as the power and beauty of your great wonders are beyond my intellectual knowledge, the pain and grief of this illness are beyond explanations. Lord, grant me the grace to accept all that you bring into my life and the strength to move forward. Amen.

SELF-CARE *Carve out some quiet time today to listen to the song “Blessings” by Laura Story (available on YouTube).*

3. Saying goodbye

Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” JOHN 20:17

Jesus, as I sit by my loved one's side, I wonder: Was that our last “goodnight”? Our last “goodbye”? I cry for another “hello,” just one more “good morning.” How my head and my heart are in conflict. Like Mary, I want to hold on to my loved one, keeping them beside me. But is that really what is best? I can see how illness and suffering have taken the vibrancy from this person I love so much. And, honestly, I, too, have suffered; my life lacks spirit. The time for my beloved to leave me and to return to you is growing close. Although I am overcome with grief and sadness, may my heart grow strong and my faith empower me to say our last goodbye and to carry my beloved into your welcoming arms. I trust that in time, my grieving the life lost will turn to a celebration of the life lived. Amen.

SELF-CARE *Find a picture of your loved one that portrays their aliveness and put it where you can see it.*

4. I feel at peace

This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. PSALM 118:23-24

Father, this is a good day! I don't know what makes today so different from others. Maybe it was the restful night's sleep or that my loved one is comfortable today. Whatever the reason, thank you. Too often, I am worried and anxious. On those days, I focus on what I feel is "wrong" in my life; on those days, all I can see is how my needs and desires go unmet. On those days, my eyes are blind to all the goodness that surrounds me. Today, I pray, may I see only the many gifts that bless my life. May I rest in the warmth of your love, staying present in the comfort of this day that you have made for me. You have made today; may I rejoice and be glad. Amen.