

Real Support for Women Spousal Caregivers

Amy Alexandria

Real Support

S.H.I.N.E. for Jesus!

Spouse Helpers In Need Everyday

CareGiver: One who daily 'gives care' to a loved one in need.

We are like 'Weebles.' (Remember the children's toy people?) Weebles wobble but they don't fall down! At least they don't stay down (too much yet to do). By the Grace of God. And be His encouragement to one another. You are not alone!

Support: under, to carry, to keep from falling, to encourage, the act of sustaining.

Support Groups are just that.



Like 'Green Berets' Weebles. The battle(or opportunity, depending on how you look at it, or how tired you are, ill yourself, or hormones out of whack) is becoming 1Cor:13 Ladies In Christ. You know, the scripture that says Love from God is all good things...patient, longsuffering, kind, not easily provoked, nor puffed up, does not behave un-seemly, never fails, thinks no evil, bears all things, hopes all things, believes in all things, endures all things. Whew, what a list. And that this Love is greater than even faith or hope. Without this Love we are sounding as irritating as a clanging symbol, so I can interject that if we have this Love from God, we are the sound of a beautiful old instrument such as a Stradivarius violin, in tune with the Will, Nature, and Love of God.

We become these Ladies by experiencing Rom.8:35-39. No distress, nakedness, peril, persecution, famine, sword, not death, or life, or angels, principalities, powers, nor things present, nor things to come, no height, depth, nor any other creation, can separate us from the Love of God that is In Christ Jesus our Lord. **Nothing** shall separate us from the Love of God. Love for God, Love for ourselves, and Love for all people.

Sounds funny, but it is not. Unless we live in God's state of Forgiveness and Love, and find humor in the small, simple things of life, we will die in this battle.

We need each other. We understand each other and appreciate each other.

"This Little Light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine..." is our simple child-like battle song. Not child-ish, but child-like. Only as children do we enter the Kingdom of God, and live in this earth situation with forgiveness, Love and Trust blazing in our hearts, believing that with God 'All is well,' even in the face of all the grim realities. Sing on... brave and tenderheart. God is so proud of you!

Real Self

Time for yourself, permission to shop for yourself, go to church and support meeting, the library, to get up early and have a healthy, happy, quiet time alone with God, and some coffee or tea and breakfast. Remember Jesus is our CareGiver. Here is a favorite quote out of "God Calling" by A.J. Russell. Two ladies prayed and listened to what the Lord had to tell them each day for a year and then compiled the messages. This was the Feb.6 reading.

God's Longing

"...Comfort Me, awhile, by letting Me know that you would seek Me just to dwell in My Presence, to be near Me, not even for teaching, not for material gain, not for even a message,- but for Me. The longing of the human heart to be loved for itself is a something caught from the Great Divine Heart..."

Most people are only interested in the ill spouse. So we as CareGivers like to call each other and ask, "How are you today?" since no one else usually does. So like this quote suggests, try and call upon Jesus, our Great CareGiver, and ask Him how is He today. You will make His Heart and yours happy. He has always been your CareGiving friend, will you be His?

Freedom to go to an exercise class. 'Curves' is for women only exercise, and a very positive experience. Check it out.

Go out to a meal with someone other than your spouse or a group once a month(first week after payday) and have fun. Guilt-free.

Respect yourself. Take time to take care of yourself, and you will have plenty to 'give'.

Ignore your needs and you will dry up, wear out, have nothing to give, be resentful, and die before your ill spouse does - as a bitter, yet well intentioned, caregiver. We, the other Caregivers, give you permission to not be a martyr. A CareGiver is difficult enough.

Real Spouse

Our Lord promised to be our Husband in Isa.54. Also, Song of Solomon 5:1 calls us so sweetly, "...my sister, my spouse....." Read it and get accustomed to holding Him to His promise. When the toilet leaks, the hot water heater quits, the car needs new tires, or the lawnmower needs starting(and the grass cut)...remind Jesus He Promised to be your husband! God can provide through all different people and sources to help you. He will prove He is a faithful husband who will provide, protect, and preserve you. Sometimes through your flesh mate, other times He motivates others. Humility is the key to receive the help coming your way. I had a lawnmower that would not start after a winter sitting(I did not know yet to put that red stuff in the gas to preserve it yet) and the grass was long and I could not start it. I pulled and pulled til my arm hurt. I stood up and said out loud, "Ok, this is a good time to prove you are my husband, Lord. You know the one inside the house is sick. You promised to be this for me!" I looked at the lawnmower and said, "I command you to start in Jesus Name. His Name is above yours." Well, I pulled that rope one more time and it started!!! Wow. I will always remember that lesson. He has provided people and many ways of helping me to do what I am not trained or equipped to do. Now we need someone to create more female friendly tools. Push button battery powered everything. No messy gas things or yanking your arm off trying to start it. We have much more important things to do with our energy. Probably more cooking, mounds of wash, wound care, and finding things for the spouse to do happily, other than suck ice and watch news on TV. Yeah! Do you relate to this?

Hold fast to the essence of the person you were first attracted to when you first met, and married. He is still in there somewhere in the sick body. Sickness had so changed my husband's personality for so long, that I forgot who I had married. I did not even realize this until he went to the hospital and I was relieved for a respite actually and did not desire to even go to the hospital to visit. I had cried so many other times, but this time I was dried up and exhausted. I had a dream and I heard my husband call my name. His voice was the voice of loving-kindness from when we were first married. He had doted on me and concerned himself with my comfort and happiness. He was

easy-going then. We had been so content together. I remembered this man! I woke up and was willing to go visit him. God had brought back to my remembrance the essence of the man He had given to me as a gift. I heard someone say this week that the word 'remember' is to 'bring back together'. It did.

Real Roles

The role reversal brought about by chronic illness creates quite a turbulence in the relationship and family. It took us by the Grace of God three years to slowly adjust and become patient, peaceable, and thankful in our ways. Waves of fears, insecurities, and loss of quality of life and finances, created blame, dis-respect, suspicions, accusations, dis-couragement, dis-appointment, and self-condemnation towards each other. We both wanted out, or at least something better. There was no way out, only the way through the middle of it. Our role was to Be people of Divine Love that goes beyond what you know about yourself and other people, and to do what you can. We both had to learn to do things we did not want to. I had to learn to budget and pay bills and he had to learn to clean up the kitchen, make coffee and cook for me. And do some wash when he could. Wow. After 35 years, that was God's Grace that helped make that change. Especially to do a good job. At first there was a crummy job done so that the other person would get disgusted and clean up anyways; the first hoping that he would be excused any further pressure to be asked to do that job again. Our washer 'walked' around the laundry room from so many clothes stuffed into it, and the dishes often came out worse than when they entered the dish washer and I was tempted to just throw them out, and checks bounced in our bank account, but eventually we began to adjust, balance on this tight rope, and cooperate with this new life. (weekends we use paper plates and cups) God is Good. We couldn't do this without Him.

Real Truth

You are a Caregiver and you do not get over it like a cold. Your spouse's illness will not go away like a cold either. It is usual that it slowly gets worse with more conditions to catch, learn how to respond to and juggle. God will help you accept it with His Grace.

The only burden we are to carry is Christ be formed in us. Jesus and The Completed Work of His Cross will get you through all things and situations. There is no ignoring it and it will go away. Denial will cost you. Things will just escalate and get worse. If you face all unpleasant things in yourself and those around you and put them Into

Jesus and the Completed Work of His Cross, He will carry it for you. He will be the Caregiver through you.

His Character will be formed in you though. His Love that passes knowledge (what you see, know and hear of another and yourself- and it is a tougher kind of Love) ,

His Joy that defies repression, and His true Peace that passes all understanding (yours and all others probably- no one will understand how you have Peace under these conditions!).

There is no turning back. Only going forward.

There is no quitting.

Real Hope

The holidays can be a challenge to accept the changes. The whole family has to adjust. Only one of our children had been around our severe changes and this had made me want to keep it nice and not expose all the disturbing truth to the family. I feared they would not ever come to visit again. Well, I found I could not cover it up or make it nice ever again. In one day, all our children, spouses, relatives, and city strangers, were in on it all. We went to a pancake place and my husband puked at the table, got diarrhea, and fell out headlong across the floor! My greatest fears had all come to pass! I will never be afraid to take him in public again. I know what to expect. Then after we had somewhat re-composed ourselves (and the horrified neighboring tables), I looked over and he had a looong string of melted cheese hanging from his chin to his shirt. I started to laugh...and I laughed till I cried. The people around me smiled and went back to eating (thankful it was not their problem-I am sure we inspired their thanksgiving this day). Whewww. God and His Grace does give relief valves. It wasn't the end of the world, but I wonder if they will all take their food and run next time...

There is only Triumph In Christ In us the Hope of Glory.

We are a Special Privileged bunch. (Kind of like the Green Berets)

Green Berets Weebles.

A serious battle with real un-funny situations, conditions, and issues with the only sure thing and ending is death. (if you'd like to compare job descriptions, just speak with the lady Caregiver who wrote in about having to scoop out her husband's bowels

with her own gloved hand every other day cheerfully. Now that could put a frown on anyone's face- except for the Grace of God that fills us with His Love and Joy and Peace passes all natural understanding. Not only that but the repercussions to deal with... such as a definite permanent turn-off for any future sexual interest... now that is a battle)

S.H.I.N.E.

Spouse Helpers In Need Everyday.

The Lord Loves us. We need Him more everyday and He proves He is with us, In us and works through us, by His Grace, and is oh, so faithful.

“This Little Light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine...” (the song) And, we need each other's encouragement. For God to get the credit.

Real Future

Consider and plan for a future alone realistically. Pray about this. Speak to your pastor, family, support group, insurance agent, college for classes, etc. Ask for prayer about this in advance. You know who and what you were as a wife, will you be something else as a widow(er)? Start seeking and planning. You have a future. You have a purpose. God and you had a plan before you were in your Mother's womb. He will be with you to fulfill it. You are not alone. Isa.49:1&5. Your dreams will come true.

If you haven't already, learn how to pay all the bills, keep a budget, and banking account. The online free banking helps alot to check on account maintenance. As well as making most of your payments into auto debits such as the electric Co., TV, phone, insurance, etc., that come out on a specified day from your bank account each month. Those are not late or forgotten then!

Real Humor

Readers' Digest jokes are great.

"Give a man a fish and he has food for a day; teach him how to fish and you can get rid of him for the entire weekend." Zenna Schaffer

This one struck me so funny! When you are first married you can't stay apart. When retired, plus one is chronically ill, the thought of someone taking my spouse for the weekend was delightful! I was giggling so loud reading in bed I thought I'd wake my

husband up and he'd ask what was so funny. How funny life's changes are. Oh please, someone come, take him and teach him to fish. Ha.

Personal humor, seemingly odd to anyone else but en'light'ning (as in litehearted) the heavy situation for the ill spouse and you - such as calling the ill spouse's foot with all toes amputated, 'Nubby'.

Funny movies. Share videos. One of our Support Group member has 400 videos. The Library has lots of old good ones. Miss Congeniality and Steel Magnolias always make me laugh.

Books on CD or tapes. IPAD downloads too.

E-mail jokes.

Here's a good one we enjoyed. I don't know who wrote it.

"Take all American women who are within five years of menopause - train us for a few weeks, outfit us with automatic weapons, grenades, gas masks, moisturizer with SPF 15, and Prozac, hormones, chocolate, and canned tuna - drop us (parachuted, preferably) across the landscape of Afghanistan, and let us do what comes naturally.

Think about it. Our anger quotient alone, even when doing standard stuff like grocery shopping and paying bills, is formidable enough to make even armed men tremble.

We've had our children, we would gladly suffer or die to protect them and their future. We'd like to get away from our husbands, if they haven't already left. And for those of us who are single, the prospect of finding a good man with whom to share life is about as likely as being struck by lightning. We have nothing to lose.

We've survived the water diet, the protein diet, the carbohydrate diet, and the grapefruit diet in gyms and saunas across America and never lost a pound. We can easily survive months in the hostile terrain of Afghanistan with no food at all!

We've spent years tracking down our husbands or lovers in bars, hardware stores, or sporting events...finding bin Laden in some cave will be no problem.

Uniting all the warring tribes of Afghanistan in a new government? Oh, please... we've planned the seating arrangements for in-laws and extended families at Thanksgiving dinners for years... we understand tribal warfare.

Between us, we've divorced enough husbands to know every trick there is for how they hide, launder, or cover up bank accounts and money sources. We know how to find that money and we know how to seize it...with or without the governments help!

Let us go and fight. The Taliban hates women. Imagine their terror as we crawl like ants with hot-flashes over their godforsaken terrain."

HA! Love it!

Real Humility

Humility in ill spouse to be sick and let others clean you and care for you as a sick child, and in the caregiver humble enough to be willing and able to do all the seemingly de-valuing and disgusting unending, and mundane repetitive things for one who is not thankful but angry, blaming, complaining, and accusatory at times, or for some, always. Grace abounds to us here in this place.

Real Solutions

Share in Support Group. Wound Care Centers. Hospitals (like Emory in Ga.) that specialize in your spouses illness or needs resulting from the illness. Dr.s you find were helpful and understanding. Clinic's that specialize in what you need.

Real Assistance

Social Services Worker at the Hospital, Hospice, or Clinic would have valuable suggestions for any type of help you need.

Possible places for Assisted Living. Temporary aftercare of surgery and long term.

Nurse program to check meds.

Americore helps. Shopping, cleaning helps.

Sr. Center. Helps from Sr.'s. Programs for neighbor 'rides', etc.

Catholic group. Knights of Columbus. St. Vincents.

Counseling for the family.

Counsel for caregiver.

Pastors.

Tv ministry telephone lines for prayer.

FB Prayer Groups.

Websites for specific Illness. Find lots of information there.

WellSpouse Foundation, book 'Mainstay', and website www.wellspouse.org. can have helpful info. And online support talk.

Knights of Columbus. They built our wheelchair ramp.

VA Services for eligible men and women for Dr.'s treatments, huge help with medicines, prosthetics, safety bars in the bathroom, a wheelchair...

Helps for widening doorways, getting 'lifts' for back of cars, etc.

Call your Support Group friends for ideas.

www.caregiver.org

www.homeinstead.com

Real Preventive Ideas

Share Preventative ideas from other caregivers with like problems. Like the foam egg crate like piece for sitting on and under feet during 5 hour Dialysis treatments to prevent sores. Do not use Lana cane on diabetic sore spots, it stops pain, but prevents healing. And the wrong kind of Band-Aids that when you pull it off a diabetic's foot can pull off all the skin and amputation results and guilt and discouragement in the dear caregiver meaning well. Pills to take before eating to control the potassium level, and therefore stop or at least slow down the fanatical itching and scratching in the same places all night. Muscle relaxers to stop the twitching. Nerve pills to help relieve the stabbing pains especially in the legs.

Vomit bags in your car.

Snacks, protein drinks like Ensure

Health Magazines, newsletters, Dr. Andrew Weil's Self Healing, is a good one.

www.drweilhealing.com

Dr. Lark is a lady doctor for women. She has online newsletters for women's health. Check the information with your Dr. if it is compatible with diabetes, or kidney failure, etc. or any medications you or your spouse is on. Some herbs clash with medications. Herbs seem to 'nip things in the bud', but long on-going ailments do not

seem to respond to just herbs. Echinacea is great for boosting your immune system at the first notice of a scratchy throat, runny nose, achy feelings. It will ward off many germs and sickness at the start, but once you have a raging cold- forget it, it won't help.

God gave us 'every herb and seed of the field' for our health. To maintain and to 'prevent' illness they are great. God wants us to be sensitive to our bodies when they are telling us at the first, when they hurt, are tired, ache, etc. Not to deny it, ignore it, or worse, figure it will tough it out. It will wear out and need expensive medications with then more side affects, and more meds etc. Prevention is the better route.

A relationship with the GodHead, Our Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, reading the Word of God, prayer, and praise, Forgiveness, Love, vitamins, herbs, good food, exercise, positive entertainment, friends to talk things through with to lift your attitude toward being positive, and helping others along the way outside of your small cocoon world, will keep you going stronger everyday.

It may not feel like it, but just like exercise, you get past the ache-y beginnings, and there are long streaks of time that it seems there is no difference. But you are firming up and getting in shape in ways not always seen by the eyes. Less fat, or re-distribution of it, and more ease in lifting the wheelchair into the car, etc.

Get flu shots, for you and your children if they still live at home.

Also, check into getting inoculations against hepatitis, or whatever your ill spouse has. My Mother in law 's husband had strep and he died of heart complications. She had strep too and got a heart problem for years. So protect yourself and other family members.

Use anti-bacterial hand cleaner. Keep one in the car, purse, and use it at home if your spouse is in bed long term. Keep their hands germ free without washing this way. At least wash your hands often as you can to keep germs at bay.

I think I am Lysol Lady. I use the stuff everywhere. Liquid and sprays. There are some natural mixtures for killing germs too, that you can make yourself and try too.

On FB there are pages of Health Hints to read. Natural Oils, etc.

Real Legalities

ADVANCED DIRECTIVES. A 'Living Will' would be an excellent start. Get the paperwork from a social worker at the clinic, or a lawyer. One copy for each of you to fill out. Fill out carefully, in agreement, and sign. Inform your children and possibly give them a copy if they are grown. A Power of Attorney form for the health issues should be filled out too. When the ill spouse cannot make decisions then you will be consulted.

A copy goes to your Dr., and one for the hospital, and the original stays with you.

I had an experience of seeing the spouse with a friend and it shocked me how old and sick he looked. I realized she needs to have all her papers in order, know where the key to the lockbox is, and make sure the banking accounts are in his or her name status(like Mary or Fred Smith). I was told the 'or' was the key to less trouble at the time of a death. My Mother-in-law went through an un-necessary process just to get the family car into her name. Houses, cars, accounts, P.O. Boxes, CD's, stocks, etc. Check it all out and be prepared. Even your current bills of TV, water, gas, phone, etc. should be in both names of husband and wife to have the least trouble in transition time when one spouse is gone. Better safe than sorry. One CareGiver said it seems negative to check out all the worst possibilities, but it is part of being informed and therefore PREPARED in a time of trouble.

You may run into resistance to getting all things in order. Insecurity and fear can make a spouse, in-laws, and even your children suspicious that you are planning on getting rid of this spouse. Do it anyways and speak to them of respect for the CareGiver who must be prepared to go on living - alone, no less. And probably worn out and in debt. This is where a support group could help you.

TITLE CHANGES: Some clinics are suing the patients for the 20% Medicare does not pay. This can add up to huge amounts of money. Get advice on what to do to protect your house and car titles from having legal liens put on them. Possibly put them in the CareGiver name or one of your children's names.

This area is where the Social Service Worker can help direct you to help.

If you are in a Support Group, or are considering starting one, you can ask the Social Worker to give a Talk to the Group. We found this very helpful. To even see what could be done about the mounting bills of the percentage we owed on Hospital, Dr., Rehabilitation Services, and EMT bills, after insurance paid their part. These agencies will work with the Caregivers.

Real Health

Exercise. With other women. Positive ones. 'Curves' for women only is great. ½ hour

and the endorphins in your brain get going and the stress is reduced and depression will not get a hold of you.

I have a nice DVD for Tai Chi, but it is one more thing to do alone. Maybe a group of ladies together following the DVD would be fun and relaxing.

Be Forgiving and Loving. Go to God for help, and ask for **His Divine Forgiveness and Love** for all people, especially your chronically ill loved one. Put all your hurts, anger, resentment, disappointments, into the Already Completed Work of Jesus' Cross. Keep going to God for His Forgiveness and Love and Diligence, ect. You will come to the end of your own ability to forgive and love. You will not wear out your welcome. You will be received, renewed, made healthy, and strengthened each time for one more day.

Rest. You must have your rest. Permission to have separate bedrooms is given. You can't go for long 24/7 without good rest or the Caregiver will get sick and die before the ill spouse.(Then who takes care of the spouse) Protect your health. Sleep deprivation will weaken you. A full night's rest is totally different and refreshing, than an hour here and there. Again, we are not to be martyrs.

Protect your health. Even from the ill spouse not understanding you have only x amount of energy and making continual demands. You have to say, 'no', or, 'I will do that for you when I can', or 'after I rest for a few minutes'. Allow them to grow in patience and wait on you at times for your own health sake.

Vitamins and herbs. Take them. Ask at a Health food store. Preferably one with an experienced person in it- not just a cash register youth. Take information given to Dr. first. Read up on vitamins and herbs. I have an old Adell Davis book I still use as a beginning reference for vitamins. Book stores, health stores, libraries have good books. Ask the person in the store for ideas. Nip every ache and pain, and indigestion in the bud. Listen to your body. You are well and going to stay that way! You do not have to get weak, sick and die because your spouse wants you to with them.(Don't want to leave you behind for a new spouse to enjoy)

For arthritis, Glucosamine and Chondroitin. Try it for 3 months (please check with Dr. first) and you will feel like your joints have been 'oiled'. We cannot feel creaky with all the lifting and carrying we have to do. Share what helpful information you learn.

Check into vitamins for heart health and strength. Our hearts are stressed living and coping daily with chronic illness in our spouse with little or no reprieve.

Again, exercise will be the last thing you want to put seemingly fruitless energy into, but it will get the serotonin levels up in your brain and you will feel more positive, energetic and capable.

Real Mindset

Positive thinking. Read positive thinking books, Christian books, Christian videos, DVD's, Bible Studies, talk with friends, especially Christian Caregiver friends. Even beautiful travel videos(mine are from the library or Netflix) help my mind. I always wanted to go to Switzerland and Austria...so I go by virtual visit. Or, TV has the travel channel now. It makes me happy. Turn the air conditioning low, wrap up in a throw, and go to Switzerland. Make a German meal for dinner. Put on polka music. That should be good for a laugh!

Find positive people. Even if one has troubles, traumas, trials, stresses, negative experiences, disappointments, disillusionments, one can be positive about the perceived outcome. Lessons learned, growth attained in Christian Character, gifts and Hope from living experiences to share with others to uplift them when their time of need comes.

Remember Weebles? The children's little toy people from 20 years ago? 'Weebles wobble but they don't fall down'. That's what we are. Real Weebles people. We get 'knocked down' a lot, but spring back up by the Grace of God. The Love of God in us, for ourselves and other people is stronger than any illness, disappointment, lack of appreciation, difficult situation,

Look for other Weebles. Only the strong survive and get stronger. Strength is multiplied in numbers. Strength can transfer by strong convictions, prayer and spoken, written, or even sung, positive, uplifting words of encouragement. Courage for one more day at a time, will transfer.

Confidentiality within the support group members is important. Discuss this and agree on it.

Real Respect

Teach them to respect your new position. The 'little woman' is now the one who is doing the work of ten men.

It takes time and talks to see and agree. You are not ‘taking over, or taking control’ to cut him out, or undermine him, or emasculate him. You are doing what needs to be done. Not because you saw the add in the paper and applied for the job with its high pay and great benefits! Character building is the only benefit. Don’t hide what you are doing or try to do it quickly while he is at a Dr.’s appointment so he does not have to see what he can’t do anymore. Let him see and learn to respect, appreciate, and be openly thankful for what you do.

This incident I will share here. We were going down our winding driveway and a tree had fallen across the drive. We stop and look at each other like, “Now what?” With my mouth hanging open, I get out of the car to move the tree. No one else is around, and this spouse has a cast on one leg, and only gets around in a wheelchair. Hmmmm Well, I start sputtering, and shoving and reminding God about the statement He made that the woman is the weaker vessel! Harumph! What is this little weaker woman doing moving a tree then? And why is that ‘strong man’ sitting in the car just watching???? By the Grace of God and probably adrenaline from being mad, the tree was shoved enough to get past. I got in the car and put it in gear, and started fussing...(probably too loudly) “ If you are supposed to be the stronger vessel and can’t be, and I have to do this stronger vessel stuff which I do not like to, want to, and I am not made for, BUT I have to adjust and learn to do it all, then you best determine to be **the most thankful**, agreeable, helpful, **co-operative**, pleasant companion on the face of this earth!!!” Oh, the silence on the rest of the trip there. So far he picked out THANKFUL. He has attempted to be thankful a lot since that day. For many little things I say and do that were really his jobs before. I used to help him. Now he needs to help me in the way he can that will help me. Trauma got us going in a new direction. That should not need to be. Noticing and saying ‘thankyou’ gives me energy to go on and do more. So teach your ill spouse to notice and say thank you. We took a big adrenaline leap past denial and into reality of acceptance of the complete exchange of job descriptions that day.

Remind him to, if you have to. It is a new training that you don’t know about till you come to this point. When first married you know you have to adjust to each other and are ‘training’ each other in the relationship. This is a new ‘round’ of that. An extension of the maturity in the committed relationship. A new flexibility you may not have had before in the relationship.

he well spouse does become the 'boss'. The ill one cannot be trusted to think fully anymore to make wise decisions, with the effects of all the treatments and medications, and results of illness to wrestle with.

Request that the spouse mentions, and insists on the Dr.'s respect for the Caregiver also. This caregiver knows the spouse better than anyone! They know better what will possibly work or not, and what the needs are and reactions will possibly be.

Real Encouragement

Read the encouragement cards in store sections, on www.Dayspringcards.com,

free e-cards online. Send some, or send them to yourself. Read them all, and you'll be encouraged!

Encourage other support group caregivers. Little gestures can be big helps to make someone's day. Share a joke you've read or heard. Whatever blessed you may bless them.

Give another CareGiver a call and ask how are you today?

Remember their birthday! Maybe no one else will.

Real Grace

One cannot be a Caregiver without the Grace of God helping, strengthening, encouraging, uplifting, informing. Not for long, anyways. You do this in your own strength, and you will surely wear out, and quickly find yourself in the hospital with the Dr. warning you to 'take better care of yourself.' Ha! Who takes care of the Caregiver? The ill spouse who said his vows to do so to 'the weaker vessel?' No.

God's Grace will help. Prayers from people who love God and you will help you. Ask for prayer. Pray and ask Jesus to forgive your sins and live in your heart and help you. Seek God and His Presence will wrap up like a soft warm comforting blanket of Peace. He will give you health, guidance on what to do to restore and hold your health. What to eat and drink, exercise, new friends, helping others, ect.

Buy or read your Study Bible. Look up all the health scriptures. For specific areas of sickness. If you have heart problems(which is common in caregivers) look up all the heart scriptures from the reference or concordance sections.

Receive all that Jesus died and rose again to give you by Grace of The Already Completed Work of His Cross over 2000 years ago.

John 3:16, & Isaiah.53 & Colossians 2:9-10.

Thank Him. Give Him credit for “ALL good things”.

Ask others for prayer, and Pray for others.

Real Friendship

Real friends are not happy time only people. Not shallow ones that express, “Oh, that was more than I needed to know.” Ones that disappear because you are working through adjusting to changes and are angry, resentful, hurting, and grieving many losses they do not experience or want to know about. Real friendship goes through hell and high waters together and comes out stronger by the Grace of God. They help with the ‘downright dirty stuff’.

Real Loss

We come to the acceptance we have lost our lovers (for most caregivers), companions, travel buddy, stronger vessel, our supporter, bill payer, protector..... that we thought we married. Gone and not likely to be seen again. Alive, but not the spouse we thought we’d had. Or the one we planned retirement with. Takes the Grace of God to live with a live, yet dead spouse. Dead to the plans you had together. Dead to the free and fun times you looked forward to after many years of childcare and careers. Some divorce, some die, but this is a ‘living death’ to not deny, but look at, accept and ask God for His Joy in the face of such severe disappointment and disillusionment and false guilt for both of you. A new life only other caregivers and their spouse understand. One friend said it was like living in God’s Cocoon.

God is creating two beautiful characters in there. Butterflies in the making. He is proud and thankful for you two.

(Read God Calling by A.J. Russell March 11 reading. This is a wonderful book. It would bless you to have a copy.)

"Draw beauty from every flower and Joy from the song of the birds, and the color of the flowers. Drink in the Beauty of the air and color. I Am with you. When I wanted to express a beautiful thought, I made a lovely flower. I have told you, Reflect.

When I want to express to man what I Am- what My Father is- I strive to make a very beautiful character.

Think of yourselves as My expression of attributes, as a lovely flower is My expression of thought, and you will strive in all, in Spiritual beauty, in Thought- power, in Health, in clothing, to be as fit an expression for Me as you can.

Absorb Beauty. As soon as the beauty of a flower or a tree is impressed upon your soul it leaves an image there which reflects through your actions. Remember that no thought of sin and suffering, of the approaching scorn and Crucifixion, ever prevented My seeing the beauty of the flowers.

Look for Beauty and joy in the world around. Look at a flower until its beauty becomes part of your very soul. It will be given back to the world again by you in the form of a smile or a loving word or a kind thought or a prayer.

Listen to a bird. Take the song as a message from My Father. Let it sink into your soul. That too will be given back to the world in ways I have said. Laugh more, laugh often. Love more. I Am with you. I Am your Lord."

Real Children

Children will not really be able to understand. Watch for resentment creeping into your heart through anger and hurt from your own expectations that are disappointed. Put those by prayer into the Already Completed Work of Jesus' Cross. He will help you with this. The ones who are close may get so accustomed to illness that they are hardened to helping you much. Or, they will be in denial of the illness's grim future realities and don't want to see what is coming. Those farther away may help in spurts. They have their own lives, and it should be that way. It is providing character building opportunities for them also. It is their choice. We are a blessing not a bother. Free them to be whoever God Created them to be.

Real Work

Train your spouse to do new kinds of work. You are a part time rehabilitation trainer. (Yet another hat to wear? We must have a closet full.)

Your spouse or loved one, can be given simple jobs they can do. Like fold the wash, put dishes in and out of dishwasher, blow leaves off drive from golf cart, computer projects like type and create Christmas cards (do this in short spurts), even a family website to share, or make creative photo albums and scrapbooks, type memoirs or funny memories for your children and grandchildren to remember the fun and healthy spouse/ parent/ grandparent/neighbor/friend/Christian/lover. Vacuum! Or use the shredder on all the mail that comes, other than the bills. A feeling of still having a purpose, a contribution, being useful, having an accomplishment is important.

You are teaching your spouse to be additionally considerate and sensitive. Allowing you to finish one thing at a time and not be demanding, but patient. Not to call you like a dog from where they are, expecting you to drop whatever you are doing already

(probably something for them because they can't or won't or are not able to anymore) and hop to their side and be their hands, feet, eyes, ears, etc.

We are not to be taken for granted. Not allow them to treat you as they feel about themselves- with anger, frustration... Kindly, do Not allow them to play helpless when in many times they are not. You are not their Mother! Or Father! Or full of self-pity. Or lazy. Or prideful. Or abusive. Depressed or not they are not to be allowed to abuse the only one willing to take care of them. To understand their situation is one thing, to allow them to abuse you, is another. Complaining, fear driven accusations, and self-pity, and guilt is abusive to themselves and you. And usually depressing to both people.

Also teach them to be willing to eat whatever you make to eat that is best for them, and to be thankful for the food as well as the cook - not to whine and complain like it is hospital food.

Other Support Group CareGivers can pray, give creative ideas to try, and encouragement. Call them.

Real Entertainment

Movies, eat in the car, \$1.00 menus, Sr. drinks, books, neighborhood golfcart trips.

Read Health magazines, newsletters for possible helps. Prevention, and Dr. Andrew Weil's Self Healing, are very informative. There are lots of good ones out there. Share with support group friends what you find are helpful. Bring copies for them to read that you are finished with.

I like 'GuidePosts' and also their 'Angels' Magazine . They are ones that give Hope through people's testimonies of the faithfulness of God. There is one of these magazines for teens, too.

Christian music CD's. Worship CD's. There are lots of good ones. Instrumental ones, or sing with the ones that have words. Play them in your car, on your computer, in your bedroom. Look at Christian bookstores, mall bookstores, any bookstore, or even Walmart. Play cheerful music, anyways.

Go out to eat monthly - first week after the 1st – payday, with Caregiver friends.

Books on CD from the Library. Or, download one to your IPAD. Playing them in your car, on your computer, or in the kitchen, or in your room to rest or go to sleep at

night. They catch your attention and relax you. The Ill spouse will like these too. Some listen while they are in treatment.

Real Deals

Again, the Social Service Worker may be some help if consulted. Phone co. gives deal to disabled.

Electricity bill will balance acct. and debit automatically monthly.

Electricity bill help from Salvation Army, local churches...

Sr. Center meal \$1.00 lunch.

City Recreation Center pool and exercise, and classes' deals.

Our city has a Ministry that gives people rides to the Dr. or drugstore that can no longer drive., or when the caregiver was ill.

Banks with free checking for over 50 or 55.

Home tax breaks. Over 65; VA disabled vet home tax break. A percentage cut to zero tax amount to pay.

Car tag cost break. For over 65, a vet, or disabled.

Medical prescriptions from the VA. This helps immensely.

Add to the list!

Consider Starting a Support Group

Speak to your Clinic Dr., Clinic Social Worker, Director, about the idea of meeting with other CareGivers informally.

Ask for a place within the Clinic, Hospital, Hospice, or local Library, etc, to meet. We were shown three options in case of other people using the room for training etc.

Think about a day and time that is convenient for the most CareGivers to come. We chose 11:00-12:00 noon, Wednesdays. The early shift people stay an hour longer, and the later shift people come an hour earlier. The ill spouses get to talk and know each other as they wait in the waiting area.

I think this can be a possible time to start a Patient Support Group as they wait for us, their CareGivers. We bring food for them to eat as they wait. Dollar burgers, chili,

jello, popcorn... Sometimes talking to others will allay the tendency to feel this is only happening to you, and stop self-pity from establishing itself. You are not alone! Helps a lot!

Put up a bulletin in the waiting room and on any bulletin boards in the facility, and in the Dr.'s office area.

Ask the Dr., Nurses, Social Workers, Dietitian, Head Director for names, or ask them to refer the people to your phone number.

I made some computer business cards to hand out as I met people I thought would come or knew someone who would.

The facility may have a NewsLetter you could write a simple Invitation to put in it. If you do not have a computer, the staff could put a simple Invitation in their NewsLetter of the Day and time and place to meet, with your name and phone number.

Many Support Groups are started and run informally by everyday people with the very problem they need support for. Cancer, MS, Dialysis are a few who do.

The Clinic Social Worker, and Dietitian, Dr., and Director, can give you ideas of helpful subjects and speakers to come to your Group to speak.

Be flexible. Some weeks the group may want to talk, some weeks have speakers, some weeks go to lunch, some have a party for a Birthday or celebration. Learn, share, cry, love, and have some fun.
