

Help for the Caregiver

Facing the Challenges with
Understanding and Strength

Michael R. Emlet



www.newgrowthpress.com

George is not the same man he used to be. A year ago he had a stroke that partially paralyzed him. Not only did the stroke affect George physically, it also affected his personality and behavior. Once a successful and competent, corporate attorney who faithfully served in his church, he now spends most of his day sitting in a chair. Most of the time he is passive and withdrawn, but he can also be impatient and demanding. Some days the littlest thing sets him off, and he explodes with rage or becomes tearful and clingy. Often his humor is coarse and sexually lewd. These are all new behaviors for George, and his family is struggling with how to respond. When they try to talk to him about his behavior, he is either oblivious or defensive.

His family is heartbroken, confused, discouraged, and angry. They want to have compassion for George's suffering, but they feel drained by his unrelenting neediness. They are grieving his change from a loving and humble husband and father to a man who doesn't seem to care much about them. And they have lots of questions. They are wondering how to understand the

changes in George's personality, how to love and help the "new" George, and how to live with hope under the pressure of constant caregiving.

If you are a caregiver for someone who is chronically ill, you are probably asking the same kinds of questions. This booklet will give you a framework to guide you as you care for someone with ongoing physical and mental problems. Although the specifics of providing care for stroke victims, Alzheimer's sufferers, or those with bipolar disorder are very different, there are general principles you can apply to your situation that will help you to think biblically, act lovingly, and persevere even when you feel like throwing in your caregiving towel.

Everyone Is Made in God's Image

When we use a phrase like, "he's the spitting image of his father," we usually mean that the son displays the physical characteristics of his earthly father. He looks (and perhaps acts) like his dad. In a similar, but far more profound way, we resemble the God of the universe, both in his character and actions. You

and the person you are caring for are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–28; Psalm 8:4–8).

God made us to reflect his image to the world. We don't do this perfectly because of sin and disease, but no matter what our disabilities, we never stop imaging God! George is no less an image bearer after the stroke than he was before the stroke. The person you are caring for also bears God's image.

The gospel is about renewing the true image of God through Jesus (Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10). This process is not derailed by illness and disability. Instead, God uses these things to make us more like him. God promises he will complete the work he began in each of us (Philippians 1:6). This means that God is doing his transforming work in the person you are caring for and also transforming you as you face the challenges of caregiving. He is perfecting the character of Christ in both of you in the midst of your struggles.

Everyone Has a Body and a Soul

You and the person you are caring for have a body *and* a soul (Genesis 2:7; Ecclesiastes 12:7; John 3:6;