

## How to Use The Caregiver's Notebook

One of the most constant roles of my life has been that of a caregiver. In

1959 my father was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis when he was twenty-nine. Mom, assisted by my sister, brother, and me, cared for Dad in our home for more than two decades.

In 1982, the year before Dad developed diabetes and went to a nursing home, my husband and I had our first child, Allen. Hours after his birth, he was diagnosed with a life-threatening birth defect that required immediate surgery at a university hospital far from where he was born. Though he was released from the neonatal intensive care unit three and a half weeks after surgery, our son's medical saga was just beginning. Over the next five years, Allen endured countless hospital procedures and tests, along with seven more corrective surgeries.

We'd barely recovered from that bumpy ride when our daughter, Anne, was born in 1988, and we marveled at how easy it was to care for our typically developing child. Still, the sleep deprivation, well-baby checkups, immunization schedules, and bouts of childhood illnesses were strikingly similar to what we experienced while raising her brother with special needs.

Anne entered middle childhood about the same time Allen required a final corrective surgery when he was fifteen. Then as a young adult, he was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) caused by the early invasive medical treatments he'd endured.

A few months before Allen's successful treatment for PTSD in 2008, my mother was diagnosed with early stage Alzheimer's. Mom sold her house and moved in with my brother and his family, about an hour from where I live. They continue to oversee her daily care. Weekly I run errands with her, take her to appointments, and manage her finances.

Though caregiving has been a nearly constant role in my life, I've not always been an organized caregiver. But as my siblings and I began to coordinate different and increasingly complex components of Mom's care—finances, medical treatments, insurance matters, legal concerns, and day-to-day assistance—I had to become more organized. Eventually it happened, accompanied by a fair amount of blood, sweat, and tears.

*The Caregiver's Notebook* is designed to jump-start your organizational skills—minus the blood, sweat, and tears. It can be tailored to meet your personal situation, whether you're caring for a typical newborn, a child or adult with special needs, or an elderly parent.

The notebook is designed to be small enough to fit in a diaper bag or briefcase, yet big enough to hold the important documents and information you want at your fingertips at all times. Each section contains directions for use, forms for recording pertinent information, and extra pages for notes. The three-year calendar is blank, waiting to be customized to match your time frame. Pockets in the back of the notebook allow you to carry insurance cards, legal documents, test results, and other important papers. Most sections offer management tips to relieve the stress that can develop as you try to become more organized.

However, *The Caregiver's Notebook* is designed to do more than meet your organizational needs. It's designed to meet your spiritual need for encouragement, too. You already know caregiving is hard work. It can also be discouraging work unless your eyes are fixed upon our caregiver and advocate, Jesus Christ. Therefore, each section begins with an excerpt from books written by caregivers about caregiving. Encouraging quotes and Bible verses are sprinkled throughout the notebook. Toward the back of the book, you'll find a Bible reading plan simple enough to use when you're waiting at the doctor's office, sitting with a hospitalized loved one, or caring for a family member at home. Another section offers monthly prayer guides to show caregivers how to pray through Scripture.

So find a pencil and start to make this notebook into the tool you need. Write in the margins. Jot down your own caregiving strategies on the blank, lined pages. Plaster the pages with sticky notes. Do whatever's necessary to make

this book a valuable organizational tool—one that will also encourage you to fix your eyes upon Jesus Christ, the ever-present caregiver of our hearts.

*If God didn't hesitate to put everything  
on the line for us, embracing our condition and exposing himself to the  
worst by sending his own Son, is there anything else he wouldn't gladly and  
freely do for us?*

**Romans 8:32**

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