

Precious Lord, Take My Hand:

Meditations for Caregivers

By Shelly Beach

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Psalm 139: 23—24

When Dan and I began our caregiving journey seven years ago, I believed it would be many things.

I believed it would consist of acts of care, service, and sacrifice.

I believed it would be a time of ministering to our loved one, perhaps set to a soundtrack resembling strains from *Little House on the Prairie*.

And while these things were true, except that the soundtrack sounded more like music from *Diary of a Mad Housewife*. I was to discover startling things about caregiving that knocked me off balance and left me breathless, as though I had been caught unexpectedly in a sudden summer shower.

I did not expect caregiving to expose wounds at the center of my being, where my identity had been shaped as a child and I had named myself *Unworthy* and *Unloved*.

I did not expect caregiving to be about childhood roles and hurts that had carried into adulthood and hidden themselves like dust bunnies behind the family refrigerator.

I did not expect caregiving to be a mirror that reflected my own broke image of myself. And I did not expect caregiving to be a path of restoration for my own heart and a journey of redemption in my relationships with others.

What I expected and what I got in my caregiving experiences were two entirely different things. Praise God.

What He gave me was the soul-searching opportunity to journey back into my childhood and find my true identity in Christ. He gave me the privilege of re-shaping my relationship with those around me as I learned

to establish healthy boundaries and a foundation of respect. He granted me new vision for those I love, and with that new vision, a new sense of compassion and grace.

The work of caregiving should be reserved for the truly courageous or the blindly naïve. It is soul-crunching, spirit-bending, body-wearying work because it is redemptive work. In caregiving we reflect Christ's love: unconditional love, unequivocal love, unreserved love. We are called to love in ways that will either change us or break us.

The day that Dan and I began our caregiving journey, we linked arms and plunged off a cliff. We didn't know that the hardest tasks we would face would be to allow our hearts to be molded, to be search, and to allow God to use the special time to conform us to His image in new ways. On days when I felt I was plunging toward earth in an out of control freefall, God showed me my agendas, my reservations, my fears, my vanities, my pride, my selfishness. He used my infirmities to show me His sufficiency.

My pastor has said, "The best day is the day you see yourself for who you are, desperate without Christ, then see yourself as He sees you, complete in Him." This was the blessing of caregiving in my life. As I saw who God had created me to be, I turned and ran weeping into His arms.

This is my prayer for you—that as you see yourself in the days ahead, that you, too, turn and run weeping into the open arms of God.

Dear gracious Father, may we recognize today our desperate need of You, that You are the source of all love, wisdom, and grace. We confess that we are wounded and broken, in need of Your love and forgiveness. I ask for Your forgiveness for my sin and for Your restoration of the broken places in my spirit. Search me and know my heart. Expose my anxious thoughts and offensive ways. You know my broken places so well, and You desire

to see me whole. Pour out Your grace and mercy in my life like a healing balm.

Are there wounded places in your heart that God has revealed to you? What do you believe are God's desires for healing these wounds in your life? What areas of your life do you believe God may desire to reshape?

(Note: This was taken from the book by Shelly Beach, Precious Lord Take My Hand:

Meditations for Caregivers. Shelly writes from personal experience as a family caregiver.

Each uplifting chapter contains thought provoking questions at the end. Discovery House is the publisher.)