

Coping With Alzheimer's

With A Christian Perspective

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Coping

With

Alzheimer's

Introduction

Alzheimer's disease, a condition that redefines boundaries, reshapes relationships, and reconstructs the very fabric of identity, affects millions worldwide, yet each journey is profoundly personal. This book is crafted with a Christian perspective to serve as a beacon of hope and give sound advice for those who find themselves on this challenging path, specifically as caregivers dedicating their lives to support loved ones. If you're reading this book, most likely someone in your life is facing Alzheimer's. Whether it is your brother, sister, mother, father, aunt, uncle or friend, it doesn't matter, it is a challenge that will affect your life. In this book, whomever this person is facing Alzheimer's, I will refer to them as your "loved one."

Alzheimer's is more than just a medical condition; it's a complex journey that challenges the human spirit, tests the bonds of love, and questions the essence of self. The disease's gradual onset often leaves families grappling with confusion, loss, and uncertainty. Yet, within this fog of Alzheimer's, there lies potential for growth, deepening connections, and discovering reservoirs of resilience previously untapped.

This book is born from a collective desire to provide solace, understanding, and practical advice. It draws upon personal stories, professional insights, factual information and heartfelt reflections to offer a comprehensive look into the Alzheimer's experience. From the subtle beginnings and the challenges of diagnosis to the evolution of care needs and the importance of legal and financial planning, each chapter delves into the crucial aspects of the Alzheimer's journey, offering clarity and guidance.

It seeks to validate the myriad emotions that accompany Alzheimer's - the grief, the frustration, the moments of unexpected joy, and the profound love that endures change. It emphasizes the importance of community, the value of sharing one's story, and the incredible strength found in vulnerability.

Furthermore, it is a testament to the human spirit's resilience. It acknowledges the hardships but also highlights the moments of grace and understanding that can emerge in the most challenging times. This book is an invitation to view Alzheimer's not just as a journey of loss but as an opportunity for growth and deepened human connection.

As you turn these pages, you may find reflections of your own experiences, insights to illuminate your path, and strategies to navigate the complexities of care. But most

importantly, it is hoped that you read valuable information that can help you.

Alzheimer's disease may be a journey through a fog, but no one needs to navigate it alone. This book aims to be a companion by condensing a lot of information into a short read so that you have a better understanding of this disease and what you might be potentially dealing with in your future. This book is meant to offer a light through the mist, and a reminder that even in the most challenging circumstances, there can be growth, love, and moments of God's clear, shining light. Welcome to a journey of understanding, resilience, and hope. This book is unique in that it is a mix of proven scientific data, information from current resources as well as personal advice from people who have gone through this same experience. All serve their purpose.

I understand how hard this is for you, because my mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's at the age of sixty-seven. I have been through the fire. I included a little bit of my personal story within the context of the reading to give you relevant support. Some of these things I wish I had known during my experience, and that is why I wrote this book.

Thank you for reading this, and at the end of the day, even if you have only learned one thing by reading this book, then I am grateful to have written this.

Chapter 1

The Beginning of Alzheimer's

In the Beginning: The Ever So Slight Changes

Is something different about your loved one? You notice something is different, but you're not sure what it may be? In the beginning, there are ever so slight changes in people that develop Alzheimer's disease.

As a matter of fact, they are so slight that you probably won't notice anything at all. It might not be years until you start to piece together this mysterious puzzle. What is happening to your loved one? In the beginning, those tiny seeds of forgetfulness hide underneath the many layers of their cognitive functions and it's very hard to notice and understand what has changed. They may act a little unusual or different, yet everything still seems normal. And because of this, it is very hard to detect exactly what's happening. You might even doubt yourself and think you are going crazy. While many of their cognitive abilities are working just fine, there are tiny little malfunctioning pieces that begin to rear

their ugly heads. Even more, they will be able to hide it very well.

My mom first developed Alzheimer's disease at the age of sixty-seven. My sister and I noticed this particular year that my mom didn't finish buying all her Christmas gifts like she usually did. She was a very big-hearted mother with such a giving spirit. Likewise, she was extremely organized and well prepared. Out of the blue, this particular Christmas day she showed up with hardly any gifts. She looked, acted, and spoke as her usual self, but oddly, she did not buy everyone a Christmas present, and everything was half undone. It was as if she was extremely unprepared. Why? We were so perplexed, confused and a little bit offended. We asked her "why?" but she had absolutely no explanation. We didn't know what to think of this new behavior.

Ironically, she happened to have one of the sharpest minds of anyone that I had ever known. But do not be mistaken; this disease does not discriminate between its victims. It doesn't matter how smart, well dressed, or friendly a person is; unfortunately, that does not matter. Another year went by, and everything seemed normal except that she continued to act as if to be crunched for time until we noticed a much more obvious sign – forgetting the date. Yes, that is one of the biggest signs, forgetting times and dates. My mom

kept thinking Thanksgiving was a month in advance. She couldn't reasonably discern that Thanksgiving was not until three more weeks. She bought the turkey and began to prep and bake the turkey as if we were celebrating it very the next day. That's when we drove to her house and started piecing the puzzle together.

Alzheimer's and Dementia have a very gradual onset in the beginning, and the disease is hardly noticeable. But eventually the memory and cognitive changes will possibly present themselves in the form of personality changes, forgetting daily tasks, not paying bills, mixing up the dates and times, and taking too much time to complete their normal routines. Most likely, this will continue for a period of time until the disease progresses to the next phase. These stages show more prominent signs such as confusion, agitation, loss of communication skills, and loss of personality traits. This may take years, or it may only take a matter of months. It all depends.

The timing of cognitive decline varies from person to person, which is why this journey is so difficult. Unfortunately, there are no decisive answers with 100% accuracy that you so desperately need. Dementia and Alzheimer's disease is so hard to wrap your mind around because the severity of symptoms varies from person to

person and the timeline of when these happen is also vastly different. So please keep this in mind when reading this book.

Here are some of the most likely beginning symptoms of Alzheimer's disease:

Memory Loss:

They may begin to appear more forgetful than usual. They might forget important dates or holidays or appointments. Their questions can become repetitive.

Difficulty solving problems:

They may have difficulty developing or following a plan of action. Working with numbers becomes more difficult and they might begin to have problems paying their own bills.

Difficulty Determining Time and Place:

They begin to misunderstand the passage of time. Planning for future events becomes increasingly difficult. As the disease progresses, they begin to forget where they are and how they got there.

Vision Loss:

This may or may not appear in the beginning, but some patients have increased difficulty in reading. They will sometimes have issues judging distances and determining contrast of color.

Speech Difficulties:

As the disease progresses, they begin to misplace and misuse words in the middle of their conversations. In the beginning, you might notice them switching topics in the middle of conversations.

Mood Changes:

Some people experience mood changes in the beginning. However, many will show signs of sadness, loneliness, or depression. They may even show signs of fear. Not trusting the people closest to them.

The beginning and middle stages can be the most difficult for the caregiver, and I will tell you why. It's a long road of acceptance and emotional upheaval for you, and it's a long road of decline for them. While you are struggling with how to care for them, they struggle to understand why you have to care for them. You might lose the ability to know and understand them, and vice versa; they will lose the capability to know and understand you. It is a tough battle. And I will not sugar coat this – It can be a very ugly battle. But you will get through this. Remember -This, too, shall pass.

So you suspect your spouse or family member has Alzheimer's or Dementia. What now?

So, if you are at the very beginning of this difficult situation and you think that your loved one may have this disease and you're asking yourself, what now? I will begin by saying, "God Bless you," and secondly, I will suggest reading the following steps below:

Take them to a Neurologist.

If you believe your loved one is experiencing signs of Alzheimer's disease or dementia, first and foremost, take them to see a neurologist. This is very important because they will be able to diagnose them, determine which stage, and help support you with their care. The other reason why this is so important is that a doctor will be able to prescribe them medications along the way that will be able to help them through this disease. This is very important. Please don't think that you can do this without the help of a doctor. They may not need any medications in the beginning, or ever for that matter, but the doctor will be able to determine this. As the disease progresses, people with Alzheimer's sometimes develop sleeplessness and they will wander at night. This coupled with extreme restlessness can lead to physical harm and that can be drastically reduced with the help of the right medications. Medications cannot cure the disease, but it can help reduce side effects. Do it for you, and most importantly do it for them.

What happens if they refuse to go to the doctor with you?

Yes, I hate to say it but many people with Alzheimer's will refuse to go to the doctor because they are angry that you are taking them. They do not believe that anything is wrong with them, and they are frustrated that you insist on infringing on their independence and free will. How do I know this? Because my mother refused to let us take her. So here is some advice. Imagine someone making YOU a doctor appointment and telling YOU when and what time you are going. Would you like this? Probably not. Because even though their cognitive abilities are declining, they can still understand many things to some degree. In the beginning, it's a mix. They will be able to understand some things and some things, not at all. And they might still be sensing that you are suddenly infringing on their decisions. This will anger and frustrate them. You might need to play along with their beliefs in that nothing is wrong with them. And you might need to delicately maneuver all your doctor appointments explaining that this is just a normal yearly physical or checkup. I advise you to come across to them very happy-go-lucky and compassionate. The more that they sense you are stubbornly forcing them into a corner, the more angry and stubborn they might become. My mother behaved this way, which was such a contrast to her usual demeanor. We had to

learn the hard way. At first, we were arguing with her about simple tasks that she would not comply with, but that did NOT work. Remember, your loved one is not the same person that they used to be. If you ask them to take a walk or brush their teeth, be prepared that they may simply just NOT do it. You will need to think more strategically in order to help them. For example, you might need to change your demeanor so that it eases their minds. Their minds are in a big ball of confusion. The last thing they need is more chaos. If your loved one refuses to go to the doctor, an idea that may help is to tell them the doctor called to request a yearly physical and you will take them to lunch after you go. Plan something after the appointment and keep discussing with them what you will both do together after the doctor's appointment. Keep the focus of conversation on the activity after the appointment. If they question it, keep telling them that you don't believe anything is wrong with them, but the doctor recommends a physical every year and they need to go. Whatever you have to do, do it, because it's very important that a doctor helps you along this journey. Keep the conversation extremely positive while trying to get them to go to the doctor and keep them in the most loving and healthy frame of mind possible.

Understanding the Situation

The second step in managing expectations is really understanding what you're dealing with. If you're caring for someone with Alzheimer's, this means learning as much as you can about the disease. Seeking detailed information about Alzheimer's is an intelligent step. Understanding the disease helps demystify the changes your loved one is going through. I cannot suggest this one word enough...Educate... Educate... Educate yourself! Educating yourself what Alzheimer's is and what it involves will help you tremendously every step of the way. Because without the proper knowledge, you MIGHT lose your own mind during this process! I will not lie, it's hard which is precisely why I wrote this book. My sister and I were the only two primary decision makers in her life. She did not have a living spouse during this time. We went through this journey alone and afraid. But we learned. We grew, and we survived and that is why I wanted to help others.

Setting Realistic Goals

Once you have a good grasp of the situation, you can start by setting realistic goals. These should be simple and achievable. For example, learn what stage they are in and what you can do each day to get ahead of the situation. What can you do now to help prepare for their future? Make a list

of things you can do to help them, even if it is for the worst-case scenarios that may not happen, at least you have a potential plan in place. Make an outline of solutions to help you navigate different decisions that you might have to make. Take one day at a time. Some days might be better than others, so being able to adjust your expectations is key. In the big picture, managing expectations and setting realistic goals help keep you grounded and focused. They remind you that you're doing your best in a challenging situation. By accepting the reality of the disease and working within its constraints, you can find more moments of peace and satisfaction for you and your loved one.

Caring for Loved Ones

This is the one the hardest decisions that you will have to make for someone with Alzheimer's. How will they receive care? This is not a simple decision and can only be decided by their closest family members. Some people can live independently up until a certain point. My mother lived independently for the first few years as we hired someone to come to her place certain times of the day and assist with her daily needs and medications. The way you will know when it's time for them to need more care is by the way they are able

to live and handle their daily lives. In the beginning, they may be able to take care of themselves fine with the exception that they are just repeating the same questions and forgetting the days and how to turn on and off the television. At this stage, either you or you can have someone come and check on them in their own homes or if you are already living with them then this stage will be relatively the same, but as time goes on, things change. The key word in all this is – safety. The further the disease progresses, the more dangers can arise. Don't ever compromise their safety or the safety of others. Your doctor will be able to tell when their cognitive reasoning skills have declined to the point that they will need additional help, however you are the one making the decisions that drive this.

Things that pose a danger:

1. Driving
2. Cooking
3. Candles or Fire hazards
4. Wandering

I am going to touch on the first point of “driving” a little bit more. If you have NOT taken the keys away from your loved one, please...please...please...consider if and when this should be done very closely. The reason I say this is because unfortunately we did not take the keys away from my mother soon enough. Her spatial skills seemed fine at the

time, however one day she got lost driving. She ended up on the highway and eventually ran out of gas, causing a terrible car crash with another person. We are very fortunate that no one was badly hurt, however, it could have easily been the opposite. And that simply would have been the biggest regret of my life. You can never reverse a deadly car crash. Never. Do not take a chance on this. I cannot say this enough. Driving can be one of the biggest dangers during Alzheimer's Disease because there is not a specified point in time when a person should not drive. This is a judgement call. Even though their spatial skills may seem intact, their reasoning skills may cause them to miss a stop light or run out of gas and not be able to move their car out of the road. I cannot say this enough – do not risk innocent lives on the road – ever. Period.

Trust your gut instincts. If you know that your loved one should not be driving and is angry and disputing that you are trying to take their keys away, this is where I am going to have to recommend playing hard ball. Disconnect their engine or misplace their keys on purpose until they can move past it and accept this phase. Trust me, as time goes on you will be dealing with a lot of other issues that will be coming down the pike and this will be a thing of the past. Driving is truly something that should cease when a person's reasoning skills are compromised. And remember that it is always better to be safe than to be sorry. You can never replace a life.

During the course of this disease, you will need to expect the unexpected. The brain is the core component that dictates everything we do. Everything is signaled from the brain. When a person's thought processes are off, so are their actions and so is their driving.

Assisted Living/Memory Care or In Home Care?

Which type of care is right for you and your family? Like I previously mentioned, there is not a single right or wrong answer for this question. It depends. It depends on the unique circumstances of each person. Some people might need part time care. Some people need full-time care and some might not need any yet.

But once the disease progresses beyond the point that they absolutely cannot live independently, you will need to plan out which type of care is best suited for them; in home care, assisted living or memory care.

Take note that Assisted Living communities require that they take a cognitive test before they accept your application so once someone is lower than the state limit they won't be allowed into assisted living. If the disease has progressed too far, they would only be allowed into a memory care unit. This situation happened to my mother, as she lived in a memory care unit for the past four years of her

life. In home care is also an option whether you or hired help will care for your loved one.

There is no right or wrong answer between any of these options, it all depends on your financial situation and most importantly, how you believe what will best work for you and your loved one.

Make a list of all the things that they *are* able to do and *not* do at this time and make these decisions based on them with safety at the forefront. Some of these include eating, getting dressed, driving, paying bills, taking medications, cooking, getting around the house safely.

I would suggest the following reference below to help make these decisions during your journey. It's not just a place for "mom" but they can help find the right place for any loved one (spouse, dad, someone else or yourself.)

-A Place for Mom

aplaceformom.com

Chapter 2

Understanding the Disease

In 2023, an estimated 6.7 million Americans aged 65 and older had Alzheimer's disease. Grasping the complex nature of Alzheimer's disease is crucial for anyone affected by this condition. This chapter aims to provide a clear understanding of Alzheimer's, empowering caregivers, and families with the knowledge they need to navigate the challenges ahead.

What is Alzheimer's disease?

Alzheimer's disease is a progressive neurological disorder that leads to the deterioration and eventual death of brain cells. It's the most common cause of dementia, leading to a continuous decline in thinking, behavioral, and social skills. This deterioration impedes a person's ability to function independently.

Alzheimer's Disease or Dementia?

“Many people wonder what the difference is between Alzheimer's disease and dementia. Dementia is an overall term for a particular group of symptoms. The characteristic symptoms of dementia are difficulties with memory,

language, problem-solving and other thinking skills that affect a person's ability to perform everyday activities. Changes to the brain cause dementia, and many different brain changes can lead to dementia. Alzheimer's disease is one cause of dementia. The brain changes of Alzheimer's disease include the excessive accumulation of the protein fragment beta-amyloid and an abnormal form of the protein tau, as well as damage to and destruction of neurons. The brain changes of Alzheimer's disease are the most common contributor to dementia. Dementia caused by Alzheimer's disease is called Alzheimer's dementia." (www.alz.org).

The Biology behind Alzheimer's

At the biological level, Alzheimer's disease is characterized by the development of amyloid plaques and neurofibrillary, or tau, tangles in the brain. These changes disrupt the normal functioning of brain cells and lead to their death. The brain also experiences shrinkage, particularly in the hippocampus, an area essential for memory and learning.

The brain has 100 billion nerve cells (neurons) which connect to form all the communication networks in the brain. These cells are separated into different compartments; learning, thinking, hearing, smelling, remembering, etc. Within each compartment, these cells are designed to communicate with each other using a complex

electrochemical process that involves electrical and chemical signals. Chemical signals are called neurotransmitters, and they are sent across synapses, which are tiny gaps between the dendrites and axons of nearby neurons. Dendrites receive messages from other nerve cells, and axons carry outgoing messages to other cells.

When Alzheimer's disease develops, abnormal chemical changes cause tau to detach from microtubules and stick to other tau molecules, forming threads that eventually join to form tangles inside neurons. These tangles block the neuron's transport system, which in turn, prohibits the synaptic communication between neurons.

Stages of Alzheimer's Disease

Understanding the stages of Alzheimer's can help families and caregivers prepare for the journey ahead:

Early Stage (Mild):

This stage is often marked by forgetfulness, losing track of time, and becoming lost in familiar settings. Despite these symptoms, individuals can still maintain independence and participate in social activities.

Middle Stage (Moderate):

This is typically the longest stage. Individuals may experience greater confusion, mood swings, increased

memory loss, and difficulty with language and thought processes. Assistance with daily activities becomes necessary.

Late Stage (Severe):

In this final stage, individuals may lose the ability to communicate coherently, recognize loved ones, or respond to their environment. Full-time care is usually required.

Symptoms and Signs

Symptoms of Alzheimer's will vary but generally include:

- Memory loss that affects daily activities.
- Challenges in planning or solving problems.
- Difficulty completing familiar tasks.
- Confusion with time or place.
- Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships.
- New problems with words in speaking or writing.
- Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps.
- Decreased or poor judgment.
- Withdrawal from work or social activities.
- Changes in mood and personality.

Causes and Risk Factors

While the exact cause of Alzheimer's is not fully understood, it is believed to be a combination of genetic,

lifestyle, and environmental factors. Age is the most significant known risk factor; most individuals with Alzheimer's are 65 and older. A family history of Alzheimer's increases the risk. Certain genetic mutations have been linked to the disease, though these are less common.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis involves a thorough medical assessment, including a review of medical history, physical and neurological exams, and tests to rule out other causes of dementia. Brain imaging, neurological exams, cognitive functional assessments and biomarkers, cerebrospinal fluid and blood tests can all provide further evidence of Alzheimer's.

Living with Alzheimer's

Living with Alzheimer's means adapting to a new way of life and finding strategies to cope with changes as they occur. It involves planning for the future, managing daily routines, and maintaining a supportive environment for the individual with Alzheimer's.

Support for Caregivers

Caregivers play a crucial role in the life of someone with Alzheimer's. It's essential for caregivers to seek support, manage their own health, and learn as much as they can about

the disease. Support groups, counseling, and respite care can provide necessary breaks and emotional support.

Medical overview: symptoms, treatments, and prognosis.

Understanding these aspects can empower caregivers and families, providing them with the knowledge to manage the disease more effectively. The progression of Alzheimer's disease varies significantly among individuals, influenced by factors such as age, overall health, and the severity of symptoms at diagnosis. Typically, Alzheimer's follows a gradual course, divided into early, middle, and late stages, each marked by a decline in cognitive functions and independence.

Symptoms of Alzheimer's disease

Alzheimer's disease manifests through a variety of symptoms, which typically develop slowly and worsen over time. These symptoms are broadly categorized into cognitive, functional, and behavioral symptoms.

Cognitive Symptoms:

The most well-known symptom is memory loss, particularly forgetting recently learned information or important dates. Other cognitive symptoms include

difficulties with language (finding the right words), problems with spatial and visual abilities (judging distance or color contrasts), and impaired reasoning or judgment.

Functional Symptoms:

As Alzheimer's progresses, individuals may face challenges in performing daily tasks, such as dressing, bathing, and eating. They might struggle with routine activities that were once familiar, such as driving, cooking, or managing finances.

Behavioral Symptoms:

Changes in personality and behavior are common. Individuals may exhibit mood swings, withdrawal from social activities, distrust in others, increased anxiety or aggression, and apathy.

Recognizing these symptoms early on is crucial for timely diagnosis and management, although it's important to note that experiencing one or more of these symptoms does not necessarily mean a person has Alzheimer's; other conditions can cause similar symptoms.

Treatments for Alzheimer's disease

While there is no cure for Alzheimer's disease, there are treatments available that can help manage symptoms and help stop the progression. Treatment plans typically involve

a combination of medication, lifestyle changes, and supportive care. Science is evolving at every corner, so hopefully in time they will have a solid cure.

Medications:

There are several types of medications approved to treat Alzheimer's symptoms. Cholinesterase inhibitors (such as Donepezil, Rivastigmine, and Galantamine) are commonly prescribed to treat mild to moderate Alzheimer's symptoms by improving neurological function. Memantine is used to treat moderate to severe Alzheimer's disease and works differently from cholinesterase inhibitors, regulating the activity of glutamate, a different brain chemical involved in learning and memory. Recently, medications aimed at slowing the progression of the disease have been under research and development, offering hope for future treatments.

Lifestyle Changes

It is proven that engaging in regular physical activity, maintaining a healthy diet, socializing, and participating in cognitive stimulation activities can help manage symptoms and can prevent the onset of Alzheimer's or Dementia.

Management of Coexisting Conditions:

It's important to manage other health conditions alongside Alzheimer's, as they can worsen its symptoms. Regular check-ups and treatments for conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and depression are crucial.

Recent research of Monoclonal Antibodies

Recent research has aimed strategies at targeting clumps of the protein beta-amyloids with medicines known as monoclonal antibodies for treatments to help Alzheimer's. The body naturally produces antibodies within our immune system to help fight foreign invaders. And science has studies showing that these antibodies can help prevent beta-amyloid from clumping into plaques.

In 2023, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved Lecanemab-irmb (Leqembi) which is a new monoclonal antibody medication used to treat Alzheimer's. It's given as IV infusion every two weeks. It's promising, however there are many side effects which they are in the process of studying right now.

Chapter 3

Preparing for the Future

Healthcare, Legal and Financial Planning Planning for the Future

Confronting the diagnosis also means thinking about the future. It's time to discuss and document your loved one's wishes regarding medical care, living arrangements, and financial matters. Though these conversations can be difficult, they are crucial in ensuring that your loved one's preferences are respected.

Navigating the healthcare system can be one of the most challenging aspects of dealing with Alzheimer's. From doctors' appointments to understanding insurance coverage, the complexity can be overwhelming. It's important to ask questions and seek clarification when needed. Keep organized records of all medical documents, appointments, and medications.

Don't hesitate to advocate for your loved one's needs. If you're not getting the answers or support you need, seek a second opinion or request a patient advocate. Remember, you

are the most significant advocate for your loved one's care and well-being.

The three most important aspects that caregivers will need to research are healthcare, legal matters and finances. These are all important with respect to this disease. If your loved one still has the capacity, make sure they have specified their “end of life” wishes. For example, who do they want to make their crucial life medical decisions when they are unable? This role is called the Medical POA form which gives a trusted person to act on one’s behalf using the Power of Attorney.

Navigating the Healthcare System

Navigating the healthcare system might be a daunting challenge for families. Here are some important reminders:

Medicare

Medicare is a federally funded health insurance. Most individuals 65 and older use Medicare as the primary source of Health Care Insurance. However, it’s still possible to use private insurance as well in addition to Medicare. Make note, assisted living communities and Memory care units are not covered by Medicare. Medicare does cover eligible short-term care in a skilled nursing facility. It can also cover certain costs including hospitalization, cognitive assessments, home health care, hospice care, medications, etc.

Medicaid

Medicaid is different than Medicare and is Federally and State funded by the government. Medicaid does not cover room and board for Assisted Living, however they can apply for (HCBS) Home and Community Based Service waivers to help cover the costs and these vary state to state. So, you need to verify the particular state you are living in. If your income and assets qualify for Medicaid, then this can be used to help fund care for your loved one. Their income must fall below the state's Medicaid limit. Certain facilities accept Medicaid, so it's important to research each community to learn what they do and do not accept. In some cases, you can use Medicaid when you are younger than 65 if you are disabled.

Veteran's Benefits

Eligible veterans may receive assisted living benefits through the Veterans Administration (VA). Some facilities are run by the VA and others are approved by them.

Visit the website (Va.gov)

Long Term Care Insurance

These types of policies do cover certain Assisted Living costs. But make note, once a person is diagnosed with Alzheimer's, they will not be able to apply for long term Care Insurance. This is a policy that has to have been already

applied for earlier in life. These are very smart and useful however they can be expensive, which is why the majority of people do not have these type of policies in place.

Questions to consider for long term care Insurance:

- *How long are benefits paid?*
- *Maximum lifetime payout?*
- *Daily Benefit?*
- *How long after diagnosis will policy begin?*
- *Taxes?*
- *What kinds of care does the policy cover?*

Legal and financial planning.

Financial Planning Options

IRA

A person with Dementia might also be able to withdraw money from an IRA before 59 ½ without penalties. What does Medicare cover? It covers medical items, inpatient hospital care, some doctor fees, and prescription drugs. It can also provide certain home health care, but it does not pay for personal care employees to assist with daily activities. Nor does it cover long term nursing home care.

Reverse Mortgages

You can use these funds from a reverse mortgage to pay for Assisted living. But if they reside at the facility for more than 12 months and the home remains vacant, the reverse mortgage must be paid (sell the house.) Consult with a financial advisor concerning this option.

Social Security SSDI

In order to qualify, one must meet the Social Security's definition of disability. This definition generally applies to proving that the person with dementia is unable to work in any job the condition will last at least a year or expected to result in death. Younger-onset Alzheimer's are considered eligible as long as they meet all criteria.

Life Insurance

If the loved one has life insurance, it's smart to investigate all avenues if it could possibly help their situation. For example, cash value policies can be borrowed from or could receive partial payment as a loan. In some cases, certain life insurance policies offer accelerated death benefits and be paid out if the person is not expected to live for next 6 to 12 months.

Legal and Financial Advisors

Consider consulting with legal and financial advisors to put the necessary plans in place. This can include establishing power of attorney, creating a living will, and planning for long-term care needs. Addressing the legal and financial aspects of Alzheimer's care is a critical component of ensuring that the rights and wishes of the person with Alzheimer's are fully respected, and that caregivers are adequately prepared to make informed decisions throughout the course of the disease. Initiating legal and financial planning early is advantageous, as it allows the person with Alzheimer's to be an active participant in decisions affecting their future care and estate.

This proactive approach helps in alleviating potential stress associated with making urgent decisions during crises and enables families to thoroughly explore all available care and financial management options.

Legal planning encompasses the preparation of essential documents that safeguard the individual's ability to have their wishes carried out when they are no longer able to articulate these preferences themselves. Key documents include a Power of Attorney (POA) for financial and legal decisions, a Healthcare Proxy or Medical Power of Attorney for healthcare decisions, and a Living Will that outlines the individual's desires concerning medical treatment and end-

of-life care. Additionally, preparing a will and engaging in estate planning are fundamental to ensuring that the individual's assets are distributed according to their wishes posthumously, with considerations for setting up trusts and other mechanisms for asset management and beneficiary care.

Financial planning is equally crucial, involving a detailed assessment of the individual's financial situation, including income, assets, debts, and expenses. Creating a budget for anticipated care costs and exploring diverse payment options, such as personal savings, long-term care insurance, Medicare, Medicaid, and veterans' benefits, are integral steps. Each funding source comes with specific rules and eligibility criteria, underscoring the importance of comprehensive planning that accounts for both immediate and future care needs.

Protecting assets and planning for future financial security are key concerns that necessitate careful strategizing around long-term care insurance policies, Medicaid planning, and estate conservation.

Consulting with professionals experienced in elder law and Alzheimer's care planning can offer guidance on asset protection strategies, ensuring eligibility for governmental assistance programs while safeguarding the individual's and their family's financial well-being.

Open and ongoing communication among family members regarding the established legal and financial plans prevents misunderstandings and ensures that everyone is aligned with the care and estate strategies set forth. Professional guidance from attorneys, financial advisors, and accountants specializing in elder law and Alzheimer's-related planning is invaluable, providing the expertise needed to navigate the complexities of legal and financial preparation effectively. This collaborative approach to planning empowers families to make decisions that honor the wishes of the person with Alzheimer's, providing peace of mind and a secure framework for managing the challenges ahead.

Legal and financial planning are integral components of comprehensive Alzheimer's care. By addressing these aspects early and thoroughly, families can ensure that their loved one's wishes are respected and that they are prepared to manage the challenges ahead. While the process may seem daunting, the peace of mind that comes from having a solid plan in place is invaluable. Planning for the future, though challenging, is an essential aspect of coping with Alzheimer's. This includes legal and financial planning to ensure the person's wishes are honored, care planning to document preferences for future care, and staying informed about the disease's progression to anticipate care needs.

Financial Matters that ripple into the Family Dynamic

Depending on your situation, you might have to literally take over all of your loved one's finances. This can be a slippery slope as you might have many family members involved trying to help make these crucial decisions. And the cost of taking care of the elderly is outrageous and scary in today's day and age.

If you have more than one family member making these types of decisions than I suggest reading the following advice below:

Be mindful and communicate expectations up front with your family. You will not always agree on what to do to take care of a loved one. You have to keep what is best for your loved one at the forefront of your financial decisions.

You might be in a situation where your loved one planned and communicated everything accordingly so that their care is simple and straightforward. However, most people find themselves in the opposite situation where end of life decisions are not planned or expected. So therefore, it is the closest family that usually takes on the burden of these decisions.

Sometimes family will disagree with you and that is where it can get ugly. Dealing with their finances can be a touchy subject, so my best advice is to meet in person. Have a family meeting once a month to discuss matters in person. Discuss solutions together. Listen to everyone. Respect everyone's ideas and meet in the middle. Why am I saying this? Because if you don't, this disease can end up causing rifts in the family at a time when you need to come together the most.

Chapter 4

Confronting the Diagnosis and Strategies for Coping

The journey through Alzheimer's is a winding path filled with uncertainty and emotional turmoil. As the caregiver, you're suddenly thrust into a role that no one can ever be fully prepared for. This chapter takes us into the emotional landscape of confronting the diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease, a moment that marks a turning point in the lives of both the patient and the caregiver.

My sister and I struggled very hard with the loss of our mother to this disease. She was such a fun, uplifting spirit to be around all throughout our lives. She was the life of the party at family events and her smile would light up the room. She had unconditional love for us so much that we never dreamed it could be any different. Until one day, it did. Everything changed. She could no longer speak coherently. She forgot our names. She forgot who she was at times. She needed our help. And we experienced every range of emotion from shock, to denial, to disbelief, to sadness, to shame, to

blame, to guilt, to anger, and even more. It took everything we had to figure this out.

The further that mom progressed in this disease, the crazier things became. Shocking things came out of her mouth. Nothing that she said or did made any logical sense. It took us a very long time for us to come to terms with this. As matter of fact, it took years. The things that Alzheimer's people can say are downright silly. Delusional. Crazy. And Weird. We just had to keep reminding ourselves that she not the same. We would say, "That is not mom anymore. Mom is gone."

All I am saying is, be prepared for acceptance.

This journey is one that demands resilience, patience, and a diverse set of coping strategies. It's a path that necessitates a deep understanding and acceptance of the diagnosis, which in turn, facilitates better planning and disease management. The more willing you are to accept these changes, be more susceptible you will be to educate yourself about Alzheimer's, which is essential to demystify the condition, alleviate fears, and adapt to the evolving realities of living with the disease. Acceptance fosters a mindset focused on maintaining the highest possible quality of life despite the diagnosis.

Addressing Shock and Disbelief

Shock and disbelief are common first reactions. You might find yourself thinking, “This can’t be happening.” During this time, it’s essential to give yourself space to process the news. Allow yourself time to absorb the information. Seek factual information about Alzheimer’s to better understand what the diagnosis means, but give yourself permission to take this in at your own pace because the initial diagnosis of Alzheimer's can feel like a heavy blow. Accepting the diagnosis is perhaps one of the most challenging steps. It's common to experience a range of emotions – shock, denial, sadness. These feelings are natural responses to a painful reality. However, acknowledging the diagnosis is the first step toward effective management. Sometimes denial can get in the way of taking care of your loved one. And if you wait too long, it could affect certain planning steps that are important. Acceptance allows families to seek the right help, support, and resources. It’s about recognizing the condition without letting it define your loved one. They are more than their Alzheimer’s diagnosis; they are individuals with stories, feelings, and needs.

Denial is a natural response to an unexpected life change. Understanding these emotions and accepting them as

part of the process is crucial. It's important to give yourself permission to feel whatever comes up. This is a time for introspection and coming to terms with the new reality.

For many, acceptance doesn't come easily or quickly. It's a gradual process, often filled with resistance. It's hard to accept the new norm. The key lies in understanding that acceptance is not about giving up hope but about facing the reality of the situation. It's about acknowledging the diagnosis while also recognizing that there are still moments of joy and love to be shared with your loved one.

Engaging with others who are going through similar experiences can be incredibly comforting. They can offer practical advice, emotional support, and a listening ear.

Coping with Emotional Impact

The emotional impact of Alzheimer's can be profound. Watching a loved one decline can bring about a sense of loss and grief. It's important to acknowledge these feelings and seek support when needed. This can come from friends, family, support groups, or professional counselors.

Fear, frustration, sadness, and loss are common feelings. It's important to face these emotions head-on rather than suppressing them. You might want to speak to a mental

health counselor to help you cope during this time. Everyone will handle this season in life differently, but make sure that you are expressing your feelings in a healthy way. Caregivers should seek support through counseling, support groups, or talking with trusted friends or family members. Remember, taking care of your emotional well-being enables you to be a better support to your loved one.

If you are on Facebook, I recommend joining a few Facebook groups. This helped me tremendously. There are other caregivers going through the same situations and there is no judgement or shame in any questions you might have. It's a great place to enlighten yourself by what others are going through. You're not alone.

Self-care is crucial during this time. Find activities that bring you peace and relaxation, whether it's reading, walking, meditation, or spending time with friends. Taking care of your emotional health is just as important as taking care of your physical health. Remember, taking care of yourself is not selfish; it's necessary. You cannot pour from an empty cup.

Dealing with Family Dynamics

The diagnosis can also affect family dynamics. Who is going to take care of them? Who is going to make the important decisions? Is someone not able to accept the new

reality and the diagnosis? Not only are you dealing with the chaos of your loved one, but the chaos can spread to the family or close people connected to the person. Every person may react differently, leading to conflicts or misunderstandings. As I mentioned before regarding financial decisions, it's vital to have open and honest conversations about the diagnosis and what it means for everyone involved. Encourage family members to express their feelings and concerns. This is not a journey to be taken alone; it's a time when the family needs to pull together, not apart.

Consider family counseling or mediation if conflicts arise. A neutral third party can help facilitate discussions and assist in finding common ground. Remember, the goal is to provide the best care possible for your loved one while also taking care of the family's well-being.

This disease can either bring family members together or rip them apart. Don't let it be the latter. When it comes to caretaking, it is not a journey for the weak. It is hard and demanding. If you are a caretaker and feel that you are the only one doing all the caretaking and your sibling isn't helping this can lead to bitterness. Just remember to do the best YOU can do and stay on course.

If a sibling or family member is not helping at all, and you are resentful, remember this one thing – at the end of the day, that is between them and God. Everyone is capable of different things, and we are not all in the same boat in life. He knows what *you* can do and can't. And he knows what *they* can do and can't. Judgement is his.

Adjusting to New Roles

As Alzheimer's progresses, the roles within the family will inevitably change. The person who was once the head of the family may now become dependent on others for basic needs. This role reversal can be challenging to accept for both the caregiver and the person with Alzheimer's.

It's essential to approach these changes with patience and empathy. Try to involve your loved one in decisions about their care as much as possible. This helps maintain their dignity and respect, even as their independence declines.

Adjusting Expectations

As Alzheimer's progresses, the abilities of the person affected will change. Tasks that were once easy may become challenging or impossible. This shift requires an adjustment

of expectations. It's about finding a balance between providing help and allowing your loved one to maintain as much independence as possible. Understanding that these changes are due to the disease, not the individual, can help mitigate frustration and disappointment. Managing expectations is not a one-time task. It requires adjustments as situations change. As Alzheimer's progresses, abilities can change, so goals and expectations might need to be updated. Maybe those walks become shorter or are replaced with sitting together outside. Continually adapting your goals can help prevent feelings of disappointment or frustration.

Communicating with Compassion

Communication becomes increasingly vital as this disease progresses. It's important to speak clearly, use simple sentences, and maintain eye contact. Patience is key. There will be good days and bad days. They will be able to sense when you are frustrated with them so remember this is a time to really soften your approach and try to remain patient with them. Adapt your communication style to meet your loved one where they are each day. Remember, nonverbal communication – such as touch, facial expressions, and tone

of voice — becomes even more important as the disease progresses.

Finding Joy in the Journey

Despite the challenges, it's important to find moments of joy and connection with your loved one. Alzheimer's can take away a lot, but it can't take away the love you share. Cherish the good days, the small victories, and the moments of clarity.

Try to find moments of joy and laughter. Alzheimer's doesn't diminish the capacity for love, joy, or connection. Celebrate small victories and cherish the good days. Finding light in the darkness can help combat feelings of despair and helplessness.

Focusing on the Present

While it's natural to worry about the future, or replay the past, try to focus on the present. Enjoy the time you have with your loved one now. The present moment is a state of being. It allows you to appreciate the "now." When you are with them, set the past and future aside and just focus on the present moment. Engage in activities that bring joy and

relaxation to both of you. Focusing on the present moment allows you to set aside worries and problems and enjoy the moment sitting right in front of you which will soon be gone. So might as well enjoy it.

Engage your loved one in activities they enjoy and can still participate in. This can include listening to music, looking through old photo albums, or simple crafts. These activities can provide comfort and a sense of normalcy for both of you. You might have to scale back all the normal things you used to do with them. Here is a list of activities/ideas that you might enjoy doing with someone with Alzheimer's:

1. Buy them a Fidget Blanket
2. Simple puzzles
3. Looking at photo albums
4. Walking around looking at flowers or nature
5. Music and singing
6. Make a busy box (bunch of safe items, sensory toys and fidget toys and place it on their coffee table.)
7. Drawing
8. Gardening
9. Setting a table
10. Watching their favorite movie
11. Painting
12. Feed birds

13. Rake leaves
14. Sweep the porch
15. Play with dog or cat
16. Play dough
17. Look at magazines
18. Watch favorite sports
19. Ask them about past childhood events (They typically remember significant past memories and hold on to some of these)
20. Brush their hair
21. Make a family tree with pictures

Confronting Anger and Frustration

Anger and frustration are also common, stemming from a sense of unfairness or helplessness. It's important to identify healthy outlets for these feelings, such as physical activity, journaling, or speaking with a trusted friend or therapist. Recognize that anger is often the emotion that is behind the ability to cope. You are angry that you don't have help, or that situation is happening. Addressing these underlying feelings can help alleviate anger. Acceptance is the key to tackling the situation and start planning for solutions.

Tackling Anger

Educate yourself about the disease to reduce some of the unknowns. Reach out for help. Plan. Ask for help with some of the resource websites that I provided in this book. Remember, it's okay to seek support from professionals, friends, family, or support groups to help manage these fears.

Anger Management Techniques:

1. Wait until you're calmed down to express concerns
2. Exercise
3. Take timeout
4. Think before you speak
5. Use "I" Statements instead of "You"
6. Use Humor to relieve tension

Communicating Openly

Open communication with family, friends, and healthcare providers is essential. Discuss your feelings, fears, and needs. Likewise, encourage your loved one with Alzheimer's to express their feelings, as they are likely experiencing a similar whirlwind of emotions. Honest communication can strengthen your relationships and provide mutual support.

Developing a Care Plan

Planning can help alleviate fear. Early planning can alleviate some of the fear associated with the future because you feel some type of control of the situation. Discuss care preferences with your loved one while they can still participate in decision-making. Knowing there's a plan in place can provide peace of mind for everyone involved.

Celebrating Small Wins

When caring for someone with Alzheimer's, every small victory counts. Did your loved one remember a part of their routine? Did they share a smile or enjoy a meal? Celebrating these moments can provide a sense of progress and joy for both of you. It helps to keep a positive focus and maintain motivation, even on tougher days.

Being Kind to Yourself

It's also important to manage your own expectations as a caregiver. Recognize that you're doing a tough job and it's okay to have difficult days. Setting realistic goals for yourself, like taking breaks, seeking support when you need it, and

acknowledging your efforts, can help you maintain your well-being. Take care of you!

Mental and emotional coping mechanisms.

You can write your own list of coping mechanisms that work for you, but here is a brief outline based on all the information discussed in this chapter with simple explanations that can serve as a foundation for you at this time:

Allow Yourself to Grieve:

Recognize that feelings of loss and sadness are natural. Give yourself permission to feel and express your emotions.

Emotional Expression and Support

Expressing emotions is vital in coping with the mental challenges of Alzheimer's. Bottling up emotions can lead to increased stress, anxiety, and depression.

Seek Support:

Connect with support groups, either in person or online. Sharing your experiences and hearing others can provide comfort and practical advice.

Professional Help:

Therapists, counselors, or clergy can provide a safe space to explore feelings and develop coping strategies. They can also offer techniques for managing stress, anxiety, and depression.

Stress Management Techniques

Stress can exacerbate the symptoms of Alzheimer's and affect caregivers' well-being. Implementing stress reduction techniques is crucial for maintaining mental and emotional health.

Mindfulness and Meditation:

Practices like mindfulness, meditation, and deep breathing can reduce stress levels and improve overall well-being.

Physical Activity:

Regular exercise can significantly reduce stress and improve mood. Activities like walking, yoga, or tai chi can be particularly beneficial.

Cognitive and Behavioral Strategies

Cognitive-behavioral strategies can help manage the negative thoughts and behaviors that arise in coping with Alzheimer's.

Challenge Negative Thoughts:

Learn to recognize and challenge pessimistic thoughts or assumptions. Replace them with more balanced and constructive thinking.

Behavioral Activation:

Engage in activities that bring joy and satisfaction. Maintaining hobbies and social connections can improve mood and quality of life.

Maintaining Social Connections

Isolation can be a significant issue for both those with Alzheimer's and their caregivers. Maintaining social connections is essential for mental and emotional health.

Stay Socially Active:

Continue to engage in social activities as much as possible. Join clubs, attend events, or participate in community activities tailored to individuals with Alzheimer's.

Leverage Technology:

Use technology to stay connected with friends and family, especially if physical visits are challenging.

Creating a Positive Environment

The environment plays a crucial role in the well-being of those with Alzheimer's. A positive, structured, and safe environment can reduce confusion and stress.

Routine and Structure:

Establish a daily routine to provide a sense of stability and security.

Adapt the Living Space:

Modify the living environment to make it safer and more comfortable, reducing sources of stress and confusion.

Finding Meaning and Joy

Despite the challenges of Alzheimer's, finding moments of joy and meaning is crucial for mental and emotional well-being.

Focus on the Present:

Instead of dwelling on what has been lost, try to find joy in the present moment. This can include small pleasures, like enjoying a favorite food or listening to beloved music.

Engage in Meaningful Activities:

Involve the person with Alzheimer's in activities that they enjoy and can still participate in, adapting as necessary to their abilities.

Self-Care for Caregivers

Caregivers must prioritize their own mental and emotional health to provide the best care for their loved one.

Take Breaks:

Regular respite care is essential. Take time for yourself to rest and engage in activities that rejuvenate you.

Set Realistic Expectations:

Acknowledge your limits. You cannot do everything alone. Seek help when needed and be kind to yourself.

Chapter 5

Strengthening Your Faith

In the journey of caring for someone with Alzheimer's, many find solace and strength in their faith. I did. Because I was grappled with the question of "Why?" Why was this happening to my mother? I understood scientifically what was happening to her brain, but that answer wasn't good enough for me. I wanted a deeper answer. Why would God allow this? Quite honestly, it did not make any logical sense as to why God would allow such a terrible disease to happen to someone. God seemed chillingly absent. But maybe, just maybe, the answer was not so obvious and while I slowly lost my mother, I slowly drew closer to God.

The role of faith

Look deeper than the norm and don't let your questions lie dormant. This is a time to ask God for his help during this journey. Seek him.

I remember one cold, dark February day driving home from visiting my mother, I looked up at the sky and asked God personally *why?* Why does he allow anyone to suffer? I was sad and lonely, but he did answer me. His answer is below:

Romans 5:3-5

“And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.”

Through suffering, God is sharpening us like a knife. All of us. He is preparing all of us for his Kingdom. Somehow, suffering pushes us to rely on him. If you rely on your money, your friends, your circumstances, they will all fail you eventually. He wants us to rely on him. And before we get to be with him, all you have is your faith. Faith is like the dress or suit that you put on before going to a wedding ceremony. Do you want to show up to the wedding with half your clothes on or an ugly outfit? No. Nobody does. My point is,

we can't please God without faith because we have to be prepared to meet him and God already knows this. Suffering can strengthen our faith. And faith strengthens our character like diamonds in the fire.

God also told me that everything here is temporary. Have you noticed that life just always seems to be fleeting? As soon as you get over there, after a certain period of time, you wish you were over here. And as soon as you build up something over here, after a certain period of time, something over there is falling apart. And after you finally achieve something, after time, it starts to get old. Well, we live in the land of times and seasons. What I am saying, is that nothing here is resolute until you are eternally with God.

There is a time and season for everything here. A time of happiness, and a time of sadness.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-4

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven; a time to be born, and time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted.”

I realized that day, that *this* was a time of suffering for me and for my mom, even though for two different reasons. For me, it was a time of many things. A time for sadness. A time that was hard. A time that I was giving instead of getting.

A time that I was helping her, instead of her helping me. A time when I had to be patient. A time when I had to be self-sacrificing. A time when I was growing. And a time when I was seeking God. It was a time when I had to lean on his ways and not my own understanding.

And quite honestly, during all this suffering, the absolute hardest thing for me as a Christian to understand and accept the most is that we are all going to die at some point. It's such a hard truth, a depressing truth, a cringing truth...most people can't stare "death" in the face. But with faith as a Christian you understand exactly what God said,

John 3:16

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Those in Christ, don't die. It bears repeating, we don't die. We live forever with him with the treasures he has in store for us. We might die to this temporal world, but our soul lives on forever in Heaven. So, as a Christian, I began to understand that death is not so final and scary after all. As a matter of fact, it will be beautiful. It will be beautiful because we die to this world of duality of "Good and Bad," but we enter the Kingdom of God where there is only "Good." We will cross over into eternity where suffering is no more.

Faith

In the complex journey of Alzheimer's, both for individuals diagnosed with the disease and their caregivers, faith frequently serves as a crucial element of support, offering not just comfort and healing but also a profound sense of connection. This extends far beyond traditional religious practices and can connect you individually with God. Yes, there are times in life to be happy and joyful and enjoy everything life has to offer, but there will also be times that are hard, and these are times when we can grow. Your faith can imbue life with purpose and comfort, serving as a cornerstone to find strength, hope, and a positive outlook amidst adversity.

Faith instills a peace, acceptance, and resilience that make navigating Alzheimer's more bearable, presenting a God as a companion in our solitude, a source of strength in vulnerability, and a confidant for deepest fears and aspirations.

Faith also illuminates the path through the ethical and moral complexities often encountered in Alzheimer's care, particularly concerning decisions around treatment and end-of-life care. Our beliefs offer a framework for navigating these challenges, ensuring decisions are reflective of the individual's values and beliefs.

Maybe you are already at a level where you are deep in your faith or perhaps maybe you aren't. But wherever you are, I challenge you to not let this situation defeat you. Moreover, let this Alzheimer's journey make you stronger. And when it does, one day you will look back at this terrible nightmare and realize that your spiritual development became the silver lining in the arduous journey with Alzheimer's.

Life is hard—and sometimes we get lost in the details of it. Faith centers you back to God. In most all cases, whatever we are facing, this is what we all need the most.

Here is a list of ways to help strengthen your faith during this difficult time:

Prayer and Meditation

Prayer and meditation are powerful tools for coping with the emotional and mental strain of caregiving. They offer a way to express your deepest fears, hopes, and gratitude, providing a release from the burden of your thoughts and emotions. Setting aside regular time for prayer or meditation can help maintain a sense of inner peace and perspective.

Simple acts of mindfulness or silent contemplation can also serve as profound spiritual practices. They can be moments to reconnect with your faith, asking for strength, patience, and guidance.

Scripture and Inspirational Readings

Read the bible. Share scripture readings with your loved one, even if they may not fully comprehend, this can be a soothing ritual, offering comfort and connection. It can be a moment of tranquility and togetherness, reinforcing your bond and shared faith. Take time to read scripture to them.

Community and Fellowship

Being part of a faith community can provide a vital source of support and comfort. Many communities offer specific support groups for caregivers and families dealing with Alzheimer's, which can be a space to share experiences, seek advice, and find understanding from those on a similar journey. The sense of community and belonging fostered by faith proves invaluable, especially for those grappling with Alzheimer's. Faith communities offer not only practical support and a shared understanding that mitigates feelings of isolation but also opportunities for engagement through rituals, traditions, and service that can bring comfort, a sense of normalcy, and moments of meaningful connection. These communities, and the activities within them, encourage a spirit of service and altruism that can alleviate feelings of helplessness and foster a sense of purpose and fulfillment.

Participating in community services and events can also offer a break from the routine of caregiving, allowing for spiritual nourishment and social interaction. Don't hesitate to reach out to your community leaders or fellow members for support; often, they can offer practical assistance, respite care, or simply a listening ear.

Rituals and Traditions

Maintaining religious rituals and traditions can bring comfort and a sense of normalcy to both the caregiver and the person with Alzheimer's. Whether it's attending services, praying before meals, lighting candles, or any other customary practice, these rituals can provide anchor points in the day and reinforce a sense of identity and belonging.

Adapting rituals to fit the current abilities of your loved one with Alzheimer's can also be a meaningful way to involve them in spiritual practices. It's a way to honor their faith and personhood despite the changes brought about by the disease.

Reflection and Gratitude

Taking time for reflection can help in finding meaning and gratitude amidst the challenges. Reflecting on your journey, recognizing the moments of joy and grace, and acknowledging the strength and lessons learned can foster a deeper sense of faith and purpose.

Keeping a journal of thoughts, prayers, and moments of gratitude can be a therapeutic practice, offering a space to connect with your inner self and your spiritual beliefs. It can also serve as a reminder of the support and strength you have through your faith.

Service and Acts of Kindness

Engaging in acts of kindness and service, guided by your faith, can provide a sense of fulfillment and connection. Helping others, whether within your faith community or the wider community, can offer a new perspective and remind you of the impact you can have beyond your caregiving responsibilities.

Acts of service can also be a way to honor your loved one with Alzheimer's, carrying forward their values and legacy even as the disease progresses.

Spirituality in the Face of Loss

Underneath the core of every human being is—Love. As you gradually lose your loved one, look for the small stillness of their character that remains. Love lies in its simplicity—it's a smile. A reaching out of their hand. And it can be seen in the innocence of their eyes.

John 4:8

“But anyone who does not love does not know God,
for God is Love.”

Chapter 6

Building a Support System

Finding Support and Resources

You don't have to navigate Alzheimer's alone. There are numerous resources available for both caregivers and those diagnosed with Alzheimer's. Local Alzheimer's associations, support groups, and online forums can provide guidance, support, and camaraderie. Leverage these resources to help manage the challenges and reduce the sense of isolation. Finding support is crucial during this time. Support groups, either in-person or online, can connect you with others who understand what you're going through. You would be amazed when you join online forums of people going through the exact same thing as you. I remember joining a Facebook group and it was refreshing to see all the same crazy stories that I was experiencing. I felt comfort knowing that I was not losing my mind, and that others are feeling the same thing and seeing the same shocking behaviors. Sharing your experiences and hearing others' can validate your feelings and bring relief. Additionally, consider

seeking individual therapy or counseling to help process your emotions in a safe environment. I would suggest the following references below to help during this journey.

Resources:

Alzheimer's Association Helpline 24/7

1-800-272-3900

A Place for Mom

aplaceformom.com

1-866-740-5687

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Alzheimer's Association

Alz.org

ALZ Connected

(free online community to ask questions and offer help)

ALZConnected.org

Building a strong support system is crucial for both the individual with Alzheimer's and their caregivers. This network can provide emotional, practical, and informational support, helping to navigate the complexities of the disease and reducing feelings of isolation and overwhelm.

A support system can include family members, friends, healthcare professionals, community resources, and online support groups and most importantly, Faith in God. Each member of this network plays a unique role in providing support, allowing for a more comprehensive approach to managing the day-to-day challenges of Alzheimer's.

Family and Friends

The first layer of support typically comes from family and friends. These individuals provide the emotional backbone, offering love, understanding, and practical help. However, it's essential to communicate clearly about your needs and the specific ways in which they can help. Whether it's assisting with daily tasks, providing respite care, or simply being there to listen, every little bit helps.

Open and honest communication can prevent misunderstandings and ensure that the needs of both the

caregiver and the person with Alzheimer's are met. It's also important to recognize the emotional toll the disease can take on family and friends and encourage them to seek support for themselves as well.

Healthcare Professionals

A team of healthcare professionals is vital in managing Alzheimer's disease. This team might include a primary care physician, a neurologist, nurses, social workers, and other specialists. They can provide medical treatment, advice on care strategies, and information on the progression of the disease.

Building a strong relationship with this team allows for better management of the disease and its symptoms. Don't hesitate to ask questions, seek clarification, and discuss any concerns you have about your loved one's care. Remember, you are an essential member of this team, and your insights and observations are invaluable.

Community Resources

Leveraging community resources and services can provide additional layers of support. Local Alzheimer's associations, senior centers, and aging services offer programs, services, and information that can assist caregivers in their roles.

These resources might include access to adult day care, respite services, meal delivery, and transportation services, which can alleviate some of the logistical burdens of caregiving. Being informed and taking advantage of these services can help caregivers manage their responsibilities more effectively, providing them with additional time and energy to care for their loved ones and themselves.

Many communities offer resources for individuals with Alzheimer's and their caregivers. These can include adult day care centers, respite care services, meal delivery services, and transportation assistance. Local Alzheimer's associations and aging services can provide information and referrals to these resources.

Engaging with community resources can significantly reduce the caregiving burden and provide social opportunities for the person with Alzheimer's. It can also connect you with other caregivers in similar situations, offering additional emotional support and shared experiences.

Online Support Groups and Forums

Online support groups and forums can be a lifeline, especially for caregivers who may find it difficult to leave the house or attend in-person meetings. These platforms offer a space to share experiences, seek advice, and connect with

others who understand the unique challenges of Alzheimer's caregiving.

These groups can provide 24/7 support, allowing caregivers to seek help and advice at any time of day or night. They can also be a source of comfort and understanding, reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Professional Support Services

Professional support services, such as counseling or therapy, can be beneficial for both caregivers and individuals with Alzheimer's. These services can help in managing the emotional and psychological challenges that come with the disease.

Caregivers, in particular, may find therapy helpful in coping with the stress, guilt, and grief that often accompany Alzheimer's caregiving. It can provide a space to express feelings, develop coping strategies, and maintain one's own mental and emotional health.

Regular Check-ins and Updates

Regular check-ins with family, friends, and healthcare professionals can keep everyone informed and engaged. Sharing updates about the person with Alzheimer's, as well as discussing your own well-being, can help ensure that support remains consistent and effective.

Consider setting up regular meetings or creating an email chain or social media group to share updates and coordinate care. This can help streamline communication and ensure that everyone involved is on the same page.

Importance of community and social support.

In the journey of Alzheimer's caregiving, the significance of community and social support cannot be overstated. This support network is vital, not just for the person with Alzheimer's, but also for the caregiver. It provides a sense of belonging, reduces the isolation often associated with long-term caregiving, and offers practical help and emotional sustenance.

Understanding the Impact of Community

Community support can take various forms, from formal support groups and services to informal assistance from friends and neighbors. This network is essential in providing a buffer against the stress, depression, and physical strain that can accompany caregiving. Community engagement offers emotional relief, practical assistance, and valuable information and resources.

For the individual with Alzheimer's, being part of a community can help maintain their social skills, provide a

sense of normalcy, and contribute to their overall well-being. Activities and programs tailored to their needs can enhance their quality of life and provide enjoyable, stimulating experiences.

Social Support as a Lifeline

Social support acts as a lifeline for caregivers, offering a space to share experiences, vent frustrations, and receive empathy and understanding from those in similar situations. It can come from various sources, including family, friends, support groups, and online communities.

This support is crucial in preventing caregiver burnout—a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion. It provides a reminder that caregivers are not alone, offering a sense of solidarity and shared experience. Through social support, caregivers can find relief, gain different perspectives, and learn new strategies for coping with daily challenges.

Benefits of Formal Support Groups

Formal support groups, whether in-person or online, offer structured opportunities for caregivers to connect with others facing similar challenges. These groups provide a safe environment to discuss problems, share solutions, and express emotions without judgment.

Participation in support groups can also lead to improved coping skills, decreased feelings of isolation, and increased knowledge about Alzheimer's care. The shared experiences within these groups can foster a sense of community and mutual support, empowering caregivers to navigate their roles with more confidence and less stress.

The Role of Informal Social Support

Informal social support from friends, neighbors, and extended family is equally important. This support can be as simple as a friend offering to spend time with the person with Alzheimer's, allowing the caregiver a few hours of respite, or a neighbor helping with household chores or errands.

These acts of kindness can significantly reduce the caregiving burden and promote a sense of community involvement and support. They also help maintain the social connections that are crucial for the mental and emotional well-being of both the caregiver and the person with Alzheimer's.

Cultivating a Supportive Environment

Creating a supportive environment involves both seeking support and being open to receiving it. It requires recognizing when help is needed and being willing to accept it. This can be challenging for caregivers who are used to

being independent or who feel obligated to manage everything on their own.

It's important for caregivers to understand that seeking and accepting help is a sign of strength, not weakness. By cultivating a network of support, caregivers can ensure they have the resources and emotional backing needed to provide the best care for their loved ones while also taking care of their own well-being.

Navigating Changes and Challenges Together

As Alzheimer's disease progresses, the needs of the individual and the caregiver will change. A robust community and social support network can adapt to these changing needs, providing continuous support throughout the journey of Alzheimer's.

This collective approach helps in navigating the various stages of the disease, addressing new challenges as they arise, and ensuring that both the individual with Alzheimer's and the caregiver have the support they need to face each day with strength and resilience.

How to seek and offer help.

When you or someone close is dealing with Alzheimer's, having a solid support system is not just helpful;

it's essential. This support can come from various places: family, friends, community resources, and professional caregivers. Here's how to build and maintain this crucial network:

Identifying Your Needs

First things first: understand what you need. The requirements can range from emotional support, like someone to talk to, to more tangible help, such as assistance with daily tasks or navigating medical care. Recognizing these needs allows you to communicate them clearly when seeking help.

Reaching Out

It might feel tough, but reaching out is critical. Start with family and close friends. Be clear and direct about what you're facing and how they can help. Remember, people often want to assist but might not know how. By being specific – asking for help with meals, transport, or just an afternoon off – you make it easier for them to provide meaningful support.

Utilizing Digital Platforms

The internet is a treasure trove of resources and communities. Online support groups offer a space to share experiences and advice. Websites dedicated to Alzheimer's care provide valuable information and can connect you to

local services. Social media can keep you connected to friends and family, even when physical visits aren't possible.

Joining Support Groups

There's immense value in shared experiences. Support groups, whether in person or online, provide a sense of community and understanding. They can be places to vent, share tips, and connect with others who truly understand what you're going through.

Leveraging Community Resources

Look into local Alzheimer's associations, community centers, and religious organizations. They often run programs or know of services that can assist. This might include respite care, counseling services, or activity groups for those with Alzheimer's.

Professional Help

Professionals like social workers, counselors, and home health aides can offer both practical and emotional support. Don't hesitate to seek their help, whether for managing Alzheimer's symptoms or coping with caregiver stress.

Building a Care Team

Consider assembling a team. This can include medical professionals, family members, friends, and community services. Regular meetings or updates can keep everyone

informed and engaged. Collaboration can lead to better care and less burnout for primary caregivers.

Accepting and Offering Help

Be open to accepting help, even if it's not exactly what you envisioned. Flexibility can lead to discovering new forms of support you hadn't considered. Conversely, if you're in a position to offer help, be proactive. A small gesture can mean a lot to a caregiver or someone with Alzheimer's.

Resource:

Visit [ALZConnected.org](https://www.alzconnected.org) which is a free online community where people living with Alzheimer's, caregivers, families and friends can ask questions, get advice and find support.

Chapter 7

Daily Living with the Disease

Living with Alzheimer's disease requires adjustments and adaptations to navigate the day-to-day challenges. It provides insights and strategies for managing daily life, aiming to maintain quality of life for both the individual with Alzheimer's and their caregivers.

Practical advice for day-to-day challenges.

You're dealing with high levels of stress from your own life while trying to take care of them at same time! Addressing the day-to-day challenges of Alzheimer's with patience and understanding can make a significant difference in the lives of both the individual and the caregiver. By focusing on structured routines, clear communication, safety, and well-being, caregivers can create a positive and supportive environment. Remember, seeking external

support and taking care of your own health are just as important in this journey.

I will list some key strategies within broader categories to help navigate these complexities with practicality and empathy.

Routine and Communication

Consistency and structure are beneficial for individuals with Alzheimer's, helping to reduce confusion and anxiety. Additionally, effective communication plays a pivotal role in the care process, requiring caregivers to adopt new strategies to connect and provide support. Again, the key is communicate effectively and simplify their routine. Maintaining a structured routine brings predictability and can alleviate confusion for those with Alzheimer's. People with this disease do better with routine. Regular wake-up times, meals, and bedtimes form a framework that can be soothing. It is not that routine resolves the underlying disease, but routine does actually help prevent further chaos than needed.

As cognitive abilities decline, everyday tasks can become overwhelming. Simplifying these tasks can help maintain independence and reduce frustration. This could involve breaking down tasks into smaller, manageable steps or using visual aids and reminders. It's also helpful to

establish a consistent daily routine that the person can become familiar with. You can use a whiteboard to list their daily tasks and place it in front of the room so they can view this clearly.

Within this structure, clear and simple communication is essential. Use straightforward language, maintain eye contact, and allow extra time for responses. Nonverbal cues like smiles and gentle touches can also be powerful.

Simplifying language, exercising patience, and utilizing non-verbal cues are all crucial for enhancing interaction with loved ones. Use gestures, facial expressions and other types of body language. Use simple sentences. Show as well as talk. Speak directly. Give them time to respond. Don't interrupt. Refrain from raising your voice. Repeat sentences.

Memory Support and Behavior Management

As memory fades, creating a supportive environment becomes crucial. Use memory aids like notes and labels to help your loved one navigate their day. When behavioral challenges arise, address the root cause—often discomfort or misunderstanding—rather than the behavior itself. Redirecting attention to a favorite activity or memory can diffuse stressful situations. These ideas may help:

- Place written instructions for using things around the house
- Use a white board in front of room to write out or explain important things for them to remember
- Simplify things around the house that may confuse them otherwise (downsize things around the house to simpler measures; tv remotes, dishes, towels, light switches, clothes, etc.)
- Place important things for them out in the open for them find
- Declutter things around their environment.

Safety and Personal Care

Personal safety and care are paramount. Adapt the home environment to reduce risks, such as installing grab bars and removing loose rugs. Encourage independence in personal care tasks, offering assistance only when necessary. Breaking down tasks into simpler steps can promote autonomy and reduce frustration. But make sure to modify the living environment to reduce risks removing trip hazards, and securing dangerous items. Use labels and signs to help

the individual navigate their space and remember the location of essential items.

Health and Well-being

Ensuring proper nutrition, hydration, and physical activity contributes significantly to overall well-being. Offer balanced meals, encourage regular fluid intake, and integrate gentle exercise into daily routines. Serve familiar foods in small, manageable portions. Use utensils that are easy to handle and plates with contrasting colors to help the individual distinguish the food. Ensure a calm, distraction-free environment during meals to help them focus on eating. Social interactions during meals, even in small doses, can boost mood and cognitive function.

Activity and Engagement

Engage the individual in activities that match their abilities and interests. Activities can range from simple tasks like folding laundry to more engaging ones like puzzles, music, or art. Encourage physical activity, such as short walks or gentle exercises, to promote overall well-being.

Handling Changes in Behavior

Alzheimer's can lead to changes in behavior and mood. Identify triggers that lead to agitation or anxiety and try to avoid or modify them. Use calming techniques, such as

reassurance, redirection, or music, to alleviate distress. Maintain a calm demeanor, as your mood can significantly impact the individual's emotional state.

Sleep and Nighttime Care

Sleep disturbances are common in Alzheimer's. Maintain a regular bedtime routine and ensure the sleeping environment is comfortable and secure. Limit naps and caffeine intake during the day to promote better sleep at night. If nighttime wandering occurs, ensure the home is safe and consider using motion sensors or door alarms for safety.

Maintaining Personal Hygiene

Personal hygiene can become a challenge, and caregivers may need to assist with bathing, dressing, and dental care. It's important to respect the individual's privacy and dignity while providing help. Establishing a routine for these activities can provide comfort and familiarity.

Medical Management

Stay on top of medical appointments, medications, and health monitoring. Use pill organizers and reminders to manage medications effectively. Keep a record of any changes in health, behavior, or mood to share with healthcare providers.

Cultivating Patience and Compassion

Patience and compassion are crucial in daily interactions. Recognize that the behaviors and challenges are symptoms of the disease, not personal choices. They are not the same person and try to avoid building a grudge against any offensive behavior. They do not realize how they come across any longer. Approach each day with empathy, understanding that both you and the individual with Alzheimer's are doing the best you can.

Navigating changes in the way they Speak and Act

Living with Alzheimer's disease necessitates adjustments in lifestyle and routine for both the diagnosed individuals and their caregivers. As the disease progresses, these changes become more pronounced, affecting daily activities, communication, and social interactions. Understanding and adapting to these changes can help manage the challenges and maintain quality of life.

The way they speak, and act now might become hard to understand. I remember my mom repeating words, telling us stories that never happened, skipping words in middle of sentences. Basically, they have their own language. To them, it makes sense. But to us, it sounds like a lunatic has taken

over their identity. My sister and I developed a way of communicating with her that helped the both of us. We pretended to understand her and looked for internal clues as to what she needed. We would redirect the conversation to other subjects if she was sad or confused. If they are happy communicating to you, even if it doesn't make a lick of sense, sometimes just playing along with them is the best solution. I remember one day sitting down beside my mother. I used to get so frustrated listening to her, and I would try to correct her. But after time, I realized this was a moot point. By listening to her, I one day just focused in on what she was saying and somehow unscrambled the words around in my brain and understood what she was saying. They are unable to coherently form grammatical syntax, so I tried to keep this in mind. She was saying it the way her brain would allow it to come out. But sure enough, I listened and figured out what she was saying. My mom was saying, "She was drinking a cup when she was in here." I had no idea who "she" was. And I didn't know what she meant by a "cup." But I looked across the room and saw a cup. I walked over to the cup, and I filled it up with fresh water. I asked my mom, "Do you want the cup of water to drink?" As it turned out that is exactly what she wanted. In this situation, "she" was actually "her" and she was speaking in past tense. But she was unable to form those words correctly. Also "cup" was the cup of water that she

usually would drink her water out of each day so that is how I understood that she wanted her cup of water.

Dealing with Behavioral Changes

Behavioral changes, such as agitation, aggression, or wandering, can be particularly challenging. It's important to identify triggers for these behaviors and find ways to address them. Creating a calm environment, using distraction techniques, and ensuring basic needs are met can help manage these behaviors. There is a term called "Sundowning" that occurs in the late afternoon or evening when the sun goes down. This is a common time of day where people with Alzheimer's experience confusion, anxiety, aggression or ignoring direction.

- Back off and ask for permission; use positive statements and offer guided choices to a solution.
- Use music or soft lighting to help alleviate aggressive behavior.
- Avoid yelling, moving too close and give the person plenty of space when they escalate any aggressive behavior.

Things that help Aggressive Behavior

- Dancing
- Walking
- Activities
- Positive reinforcement
- Routine and regular sleep patterns

Chapter 8

The Power of Prayer and Meditation

Living with Alzheimer's, for both the diagnosed and the caregiver, introduces a spectrum of unique challenges. In the midst of these difficulties, many turn to prayer and meditation, finding in these practices a serene refuge from the daily rigors and a wellspring of comfort and hope. Prayer, for numerous individuals navigating Alzheimer's, becomes a profound source of solace and strength. It offers a moment to forge a connection with God, to articulate inner fears, hopes, and gratitude, and to seek peace and direction. Here is a simple prayer to use when needed:

A Prayer for Peace:

"Make me, on my uncertain and unsteady course, a dispenser of kindness in the hope that others will grant me. Help me to sow

Love in the midst of this disease. Instill Peace in my being to counter flashes of irritability. Help me to reconcile to this reality and grow greater and stronger with you, God."

The act of engaging in prayer, be it through the utterance of traditional scripture or personal dialogues with God provides a sense of support and diminishes feelings of solitude. Establishing a routine for prayer, marking a regular time and place, injects stability and tranquility into the lives of both the Alzheimer's patient and their caregiver, turning these moments into cherished oases of peace and introspection.

Praying alongside others – family, friends, or within a community setting – enhances the sense of support and interconnectedness, particularly beneficial for someone with Alzheimer's, nurturing a feeling of inclusion and emotional solace. Maintaining a prayer journal, wherein prayers, thoughts, and feelings are documented, serves a therapeutic purpose; it facilitates a channel for expression and contemplation, offering a comforting resource to revisit during trying periods.

Meditation, too, carves a pathway to calmness and mental clarity amidst the often tumultuous Alzheimer's

journey. This practice, which can be as simple as quiet sitting, focusing on breath or a mantra, and allowing thoughts to pass unjudged, significantly mitigates stress, sharpens focus, and fosters well-being. Even brief daily sessions can yield considerable benefits. Mindfulness meditation, emphasizing present-moment awareness, helps both caregivers and those with Alzheimer's cherish the current moment, alleviating anxieties about what the future holds or past regrets. Integrating movement through walking meditation, tai chi, or gentle yoga, further unites the physical with the mental, promoting relaxation and mental acuity.

The power of prayer and meditation in the context of Alzheimer's cannot be underestimated. They offer a sanctuary from the storm, a place of peace and strength. By incorporating these practices into daily life, individuals and caregivers can find a greater sense of calm, clarity, and connection. Remember, the goal is not to escape reality but to find the strength to face it with grace and courage.

Story of Helen

I remember that day. It was a foggy, rainy Sunday morning. I drove over to visit my mother at her memory care unit. She was in the final stages of Alzheimer's. I slowly walked through the cold sterile hallways glancing

uncomfortably inside each of the rooms at all the other patients that lived there. I could hear their aimless words echo into the hall, their groans, their mumbling. Then I saw Helen. She always walked the hallways by herself. Her light gray hair fell just below her shoulders. Her walk was slow. In her eyes, was a lostness so deep that not even all the oceans combined would compare. In her right hand, she carried a baby doll that was with her wherever she went. She never spoke. Out of curiosity, I would ask various nurses working during their usual shifts about her, and they would share her story. She never spoke a single word and hadn't in years. She had lost all ability to communicate. And whenever we crossed paths, I never knew whether to say, "hello" or just look down at the ground and walk on past. Today I said "hello," but as usual she didn't respond.

I hurried on into my mother's room watching her sit on the edge of her perfectly made bed. She didn't acknowledge me, she just stared at the wall with those crystal blue eyes in complete silence. My heart sank to the floor.

"Mom lets go to church," I said. She grabbed my hand and we walked into the small chapel room at the end of her memory care unit. It sat about twenty people. We all sat down quietly as I began to watch this tall, cheery, thin lady start the sermon at the front of the room. I remember wondering how

her spirit remained so vibrant as she began to preach out to a room of blank bodies.

Hopelessness rose up through my chest as I stared out across the room. *Do they remember God?* I asked myself this question over and over.

Then, the tall, cheery thin lady stretched out her long fingers and sat down at the piano. She began to play various hymns praising God. Everyone's face lit up like a Christmas tree. Her singing was undeniably beautiful, and there was a small sense of peace in my heart that I hadn't felt in months. And nobody in the room was even singing along with the lady except one person. I looked over to the corner of the room to see who it was.

It was Helen. Helen did not have a song book or anything in her hands, but she somehow knew all the words. She didn't even have a babydoll in her right arm. I watched her as she recited every word of those hymns that day. Her face shined.

I looked over at my mom. Even though she wasn't singing, she was happy. I looked into those big crystal blue eyes, and I saw love.

It was a profound moment. Knowing that Helen somehow remembered the praises to God even though she did not have the ability to remember anything else.

Her story was significant to me because it demonstrated that life with Alzheimer's can still include moments of true love and meaning. Not only for me, but more importantly, for them as well.

That day, Helen showed me that way deep down inside, the human spirit is what we are truly made of, and it can shine through the darkest of hours.

Examples and guides for spiritual practices.

When facing the journey of Alzheimer's, incorporating spiritual practices into daily life can offer profound benefits. Here, we provide examples and guides for integrating these practices, tailored to meet the needs and abilities of those with Alzheimer's and their caregivers.

Simple Prayer Techniques

Prayer can be a source of comfort and strength. For those with Alzheimer's, keep prayers short and straightforward. Repeating familiar phrases or names can be soothing. Caregivers can lead prayer sessions, using gentle prompts if necessary. For example:

Morning Gratitude:

Start the day by listing things you're thankful for. This could be sunshine, a good meal, or a smile from a loved one.

Evening Reflection:

End the day by reflecting on moments of joy or kindness. A simple "Thank you for today" can be a powerful prayer.

Meditation for Calm and Focus

Meditation can range from guided sessions to silent reflection. For individuals with Alzheimer's, guided meditations with soft music or nature sounds may be most effective. Here's how to start:

Breathing Exercises:

Focus on taking slow, deep breaths. Counting breaths can help maintain focus and promote relaxation.

Sensory Focus:

Hold a familiar object, like a soft fabric or a smooth stone, and focus on its texture. This can help ground thoughts and reduce agitation.

Creating a Peaceful Environment

Designate a quiet space in the home for spiritual activities. This space should be free from distractions and

comfortable for both the caregiver and the person with Alzheimer's. A comfortable chair, a soft blanket, or a table with a few cherished items can make the space inviting.

Nature as a Spiritual Practice

Spending time in nature can be a spiritual experience. Simple activities like walking in a garden, listening to birds, or watching the clouds can provide peace and connection to the larger world. Ensure safety by providing guidance and supervision as needed.

Music and Spirituality

Music has a unique ability to soothe and uplift. Play familiar hymns, spiritual songs, or calming instrumentals to create a serene atmosphere. Singing along or simply listening can be a joyful, spiritual activity.

Art as Expression

Engaging in art can be a form of meditation and expression. Provide materials for drawing, coloring, or sculpting. Focus on the experience of creating rather than the final product. This can be a peaceful activity that allows for non-verbal expression of feelings and thoughts.

Reading and Reflection

Reading spiritual texts or inspirational stories can be comforting. Choose passages that are positive and affirming. For those with advanced Alzheimer's, reading aloud to them

can provide comfort and connection, even if they don't fully understand the words.

Gratitude Practices

Maintaining a sense of gratitude can lift spirits and shift focus from challenges to blessings. Encourage daily discussions about what each person is thankful for. Writing down these thoughts or sharing them at a specific time each day can turn this into a meaningful ritual.

Community Connection

Participating in religious services or community events can provide a sense of belonging and support. For those unable to attend in person, watching services online or participating in virtual events can also be beneficial.

Flexibility and Compassion

Remember, the goal of these practices is to provide comfort, not to adhere strictly to a set routine. Be flexible and responsive to the needs and responses of the person with Alzheimer's. What works one day may not work the next, and that's okay. The act of trying and the intention behind it are what truly matter.

Integrating spiritual practices into daily life can offer deep comfort and moments of joy for those with Alzheimer's and their caregivers. By adapting these practices to meet individual needs and maintaining a flexible approach,

spirituality can remain a vibrant and nurturing part of life despite the challenges of Alzheimer's.

Chapter 9

Finding Meaning and Purpose

Dealing with Alzheimer's disease, either as someone diagnosed or as a caregiver, can significantly alter one's sense of self and purpose. Yet, even in the midst of these changes, finding meaning and purpose is crucial for maintaining quality of life and well-being. You have a purpose!

2 Corinthians 9:7-9

“So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.”

When you are caring for someone with Alzheimer's it can become a one-sided relationship. It's no longer a balanced give and take dynamic. You have become the giver. And they will, by no fault of their own, become the taker. This will drain you mentally and physically, but do not forget that you have a purpose, and your role pleases God. Don't forget that you are helping your loved one when they are unable to do so.

This is a huge act of service to another human being and God is pleased when we help others.

Hebrews 13:16

“And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”

Your purpose might very well be to help your loved one in this season. Whether it's enjoying a meal, sharing a story, or sitting in the sun, these moments can provide a sense of purpose and connection.

The final stages of my mom's journey were dreadful. They were sad, depressing, and frustrating. Shamefully, I will admit that some days I didn't even want to go visit her. She would just sit on her couch—lifeless. expressionless. She had nothing to give. Nothing to say. But I forced myself to spark up and go visit her because I knew it was the right thing to do. Life had come full circle. The days when my mom would lavish us with her unselfish time and energy were over. It was now our time. My sister and I had to rise above *'ourselves'* each time, and unselfishly pull it together for *'her'*. It was all for her. We would fake smiles to make her happy. We would make up stories to make her laugh. We would paint, hold stuffed animals up in the air, feed her strawberries, walk outside and look at dead flowers, listen to her ask the same question over and over, brush her hair, look at the same photo album for the

thousandth time, you name it— we did it all. We would gather up all of our strength and do same activities over and over with her just to make her happy. Even though she would forget the activity very next moment, it didn't matter. We were just grateful for her happiness for that one small moment in time. It was all for her.

Whatever purpose you are to them, it will help you build meaning to it all. Here are some other simple ways to help fulfill a sense of purpose:

Maintaining Connections

Relationships often provide a sense of meaning. Maintaining social connections, even if they change form, can offer comfort and a sense of belonging. Regular visits, phone calls, or participation in group activities can strengthen these bonds.

Remember these important things which can deepen your purpose:

Engaging in Activities

Staying involved in activities that are enjoyable and doable can boost morale. This could include hobbies, light exercise, or community events. Activities should be tailored to current abilities to ensure a sense of achievement and inclusion.

Helping Others

Even with Alzheimer's, individuals can contribute to the well-being of others. This could be as simple as offering a smile, sharing a story, or helping around the house. Caregivers can also find purpose in their role, knowing they are providing love and support.

Reflecting on Life

Reminiscing about past experiences can be a source of joy and a way to reaffirm one's life significance. Sharing memories, looking at old photos, or recording stories can be meaningful activities for those with Alzheimer's and their families.

Adapting Roles

As Alzheimer's progresses, roles within families and friendships may change. Finding new ways to interact and support each other can help everyone involved find new purpose and meaning in their altered roles.

Contributing to the Community

Being part of a community, in any capacity, can enhance feelings of worth and belonging. This could involve participating in community services, attending events, or simply being a friendly presence in a social group.

Finding Personal Peace

In the journey with Alzheimer's, finding personal peace can be central to experiencing purpose. This means accepting the current situation, focusing on positive moments, and practicing gratitude for the present.

Finding meaning and purpose in the context of Alzheimer's is both a challenge and an opportunity. It involves recognizing the value in small moments, maintaining connections with others, and adapting to changes in a way that respects the individual's sense of self. By focusing on these aspects, individuals and caregivers can navigate the journey of Alzheimer's with a sense of dignity and fulfillment.

and her family discovered new ways to find joy and maintain her sense of self.

Inspirational stories of hope and perseverance.

Living with Alzheimer's or caring for someone who does can profoundly change one's perspective on life. Yet, within these challenges, there are countless stories of hope, perseverance, and rediscovered joy that inspire and offer comfort. Here, we share tales of individuals and families who have navigated their Alzheimer's journey with courage and

found new meaning in the face of adversity. Here are some short examples of these below:

John's Journey: Embracing Every Moment

John, a retired teacher diagnosed with early-stage Alzheimer's, initially sank into despair, believing his life had lost its purpose. However, his perspective began to shift when he joined a local art class for people with memory issues. Painting, something John had never tried before, became a new outlet for expression and brought him unexpected joy. He learned to live in the moment, cherishing each stroke of the brush and the new friends he made. John's story reminds us that even in loss, there can be gains; new hobbies and friendships can flourish, bringing light to the darkest times.

Maria's Mission: Transforming Caregiving into Advocacy

Maria cared for her mother with Alzheimer's, a journey that taught her patience, empathy, and resilience. After her mother passed, Maria channeled her grief into action, becoming an advocate for Alzheimer's awareness and support. She organized community events, shared her story publicly, and helped raise funds for Alzheimer's research. Maria's transformation from caregiver to advocate illustrates how experiences of love and loss can fuel a purposeful mission, impacting many beyond one's immediate circle.

Ethan's Epiphany: Finding Solitude in Nature

Ethan, who was always a businessman at heart, found his life turned upside down when diagnosed with Alzheimer's. The disease stripped away many things, but it also stripped away the noise of a busy life, leading him to discover a love for nature. Walks in the park became his sanctuary, a place where he found peace and clarity. Ethan's story teaches us that sometimes, in the stripping away, we find our true selves and the simple joys that we overlooked in our former busyness.

Samantha's Support Circle: Building Community Through Music

Samantha, a music therapist, saw her grandmother's mood lift whenever old songs were played. Inspired, she started a community choir for individuals with Alzheimer's and their families. The choir became more than a place to sing; it was a community of support, understanding, and shared experiences. Samantha's initiative shows how harnessing personal passions can create meaningful, supportive communities, bringing joy and a sense of belonging to those feeling isolated by the disease.

The Anderson Family: Turning Pain into Purpose

The Anderson family faced Alzheimer's when both parents were diagnosed within years of each other. The siblings, initially overwhelmed, found strength in unity. They started a blog documenting their parents' journey, sharing the highs and lows, the lessons learned, and the moments of unexpected humor and grace. Their honest and heartfelt stories became a source of inspiration and comfort to others facing similar paths. The Andersons' experience highlights how sharing one's journey can offer solace not only to oneself but also to others.

These stories of hope and perseverance show that while the disease may take away certain abilities, it cannot take away the capacity to love, to find new passions, and to connect with others.

Chapter 10

The Healing Power of Gratitude and Forgiveness

Sarah and Margaret's Journey of Gratitude and Forgiveness

Sarah's Struggle

Sarah felt overwhelmed as she watched her grandmother, Margaret, slowly succumb to Alzheimer's. Each day brought new challenges, from communication difficulties to emotional outbursts. Despite her love for Margaret, Sarah often found herself frustrated and resentful, wishing things could go back to how they used to be.

Discovering Gratitude

One evening, Sarah stumbled upon a gratitude journal while cleaning Margaret's room. Intrigued, she decided to give it a try. At the end of each day, Sarah wrote down three things she was grateful for—small moments of joy, like Margaret's laughter or a shared hug. Gradually, this practice shifted Sarah's perspective, helping her focus on the precious moments she still had with Margaret rather than dwelling on the losses.

Margaret's Moments of Joy

Margaret, despite her memory loss, found solace in simple pleasures. Sarah noticed how Margaret's face lit up when they listened to her favorite songs from her youth or when they spent time in the garden, feeling the warmth of the sun on their faces. These moments became anchors of gratitude for both of them, reminding Sarah of the beauty that still existed amidst the chaos of Alzheimer's.

Embracing Forgiveness

As Sarah delved deeper into her gratitude practice, she realized the importance of forgiveness in their journey. She forgave herself for moments of impatience and frustration, understanding that caregiving was a challenging role filled with ups and downs. Sarah also forgave Margaret for the changes Alzheimer's brought, accepting that her grandmother's actions were not deliberate but symptoms of the disease.

Strengthening Bonds

Through their shared practice of gratitude and forgiveness, Sarah and Margaret's bond grew stronger. They began to communicate more openly, expressing love and appreciation for each other every day. Sarah learned to let go of past grievances and focus on the present, cherishing the time she had with Margaret.

Sharing Their Story

Inspired by their journey, Sarah and Margaret started attending a support group for Alzheimer's caregivers. They shared their experiences of gratitude and forgiveness, offering hope and encouragement to others on similar paths. The act of sharing brought healing not only to Sarah and Margaret but also to those around them, creating a community centered on love and understanding.

Finding Peace

As Sarah and Margaret continued their journey, they embraced each day with gratitude and forgiveness in their hearts. Despite the challenges of Alzheimer's, they found moments of joy and connection that brought light into their lives. Through their unwavering love for each other and their commitment to gratitude and forgiveness, they discovered peace amidst the chaos, illuminating the path forward with hope and clarity.

Cultivating gratitude and learning to forgive.

In Alzheimer's, both for individuals diagnosed and their caregivers, the emotional journey is profound and complex. Yet, within this journey, cultivating gratitude and embracing forgiveness stand out as powerful tools for healing

and growth. Gratitude is more than expressing thanks; it's a deep acknowledgment of the good that persists even in hard times. It involves actively recognizing moments or aspects of life that bring any measure of joy or comfort, no matter how small. Starting or ending each day by reflecting on parts of the day you're grateful for can significantly shift one's focus from what's missing to the abundance that remains. Keeping a gratitude journal enhances this practice, making these positive aspects more tangible and serving as a reminder of the good that endures through adversity. Expressing appreciation to others not only strengthens bonds but also fosters a shared culture of gratitude.

The impact on mental and spiritual well-being.

Gratitude and forgiveness are like magic potions for our hearts and minds. They have a superpower that can make us feel better, even when life gets tough. Let's take a closer look at how these two special ingredients can change how we feel inside.

Imagine waking up each morning and saying "thank you" for all the good things in your life. Maybe it's the warm sunshine on your face, a delicious breakfast, or a smile from someone you love. These little moments of joy might seem

small, but they add up to something big. They remind us that even when things aren't perfect, there's still plenty to be thankful for.

When we practice gratitude, we're like detectives searching for clues of happiness. We look for the good stuff hiding in plain sight, waiting to be discovered. And when we find it, we hold onto it tight, savoring every moment. It's like finding a treasure map and following it to a chest full of joy.

But gratitude isn't just about saying "thank you." It's about feeling thankful deep down in our hearts. It's about noticing the little things that make life sweet and taking a moment to appreciate them. When we do that, it's like we're sprinkling magic dust on our souls, making them shine a little brighter.

Now, let's talk about forgiveness. Imagine carrying around a heavy backpack filled with anger, hurt, and resentment. It's like lugging around a ton of bricks everywhere you go. But when we forgive, it's like unzipping that backpack and letting all the heavy stuff fall away. Suddenly, we feel lighter, freer, and happier.

Forgiveness isn't always easy. It means letting go of grudges and letting bygones be bygones. It means choosing love and compassion instead of anger and bitterness. But when we do, it's like setting ourselves free from a prison of

our own making. We can breathe easier, smile brighter, and walk a little taller.

Gratitude and forgiveness aren't just good for our hearts; they're good for our minds too. When we practice gratitude, our brains release feel-good chemicals like dopamine and serotonin. These are like little happiness boosters that make us feel warm and fuzzy inside. And when we forgive, our minds become clearer, calmer, and more peaceful. We can think more clearly, focus better, and solve problems more easily.

But the magic of gratitude and forgiveness doesn't stop there. They're like seeds that grow into beautiful flowers, spreading joy wherever they go. When we practice gratitude and forgiveness, we create a ripple effect that touches everyone around us. We become beacons of light in a world that can sometimes feel dark and dreary.

So, if you ever find yourself feeling down or discouraged, remember the power of gratitude and forgiveness. Take a moment to count your blessings and let go of any hurt or anger you've been holding onto. You'll be amazed at how much lighter and brighter you'll feel inside. And who knows? You might just inspire someone else to do the same.

Chapter 11

Embracing Change and Growth

The Johnson Family's Path to Growth

A New Reality

When George Johnson was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, his family faced a wave of uncertainty. His wife, Mary, and their adult children, Alex and Lisa, initially struggled with the changes. George's forgetfulness started as missed appointments and lost keys but gradually became more pronounced.

Accepting the New Normal

The Johnsons realized that to support George effectively, they needed to embrace their new reality. They began by redefining what a 'good day' looked like—celebrating small moments like George remembering a grandchild's birthday or enjoying a family meal. This acceptance transformed their approach, focusing on quality of life over the impossibilities.

Finding Strength in Vulnerability

Mary, who took on the primary caregiving role, learned the power of vulnerability one evening at a support group meeting. She shared her fears and frustrations, finding solace in the community's empathy and advice. This experience deepened her relationships with fellow caregivers, providing a network of support and understanding.

Rediscovering Joy in Simplicity

Alex introduced Sunday walks in the park with George. These strolls, often silent, highlighted the beauty of nature and the simple joy of spending time together. The family began to cherish these peaceful moments, finding happiness in the calm rather than the chaos.

Building Resilience through Challenges

As George's condition progressed, each family member found inner strength. Lisa, once impatient, developed a resilience that allowed her to handle difficult situations with grace. She learned to adapt to George's changing needs, which in turn made her more flexible and stronger in her own life challenges.

Deepening Relationships

The journey with Alzheimer's reshaped the Johnson family's relationships. Mary and George, despite the disease, found new ways to connect, often through music and old

photo albums, which sparked fragments of memories and conversations. These activities didn't just pass the time – they enriched their bond, reaffirming their love daily.

Cultivating Patience and Compassion

Patience and compassion became cornerstones of the Johnsons' daily life. They understood that every forgetful moment was not a setback but part of their journey. This mindset helped them create a nurturing home environment, where George felt safe and loved, despite the confusion and changes.

Embracing New Roles and Identities

Mary discovered a passion for advocacy, joining efforts to raise Alzheimer's awareness. This new role gave her a sense of purpose beyond her immediate family responsibilities. Similarly, Alex found that helping others navigate caregiving challenges was a rewarding extension of his journey with his father.

Maintaining Hope and Finding Purpose

Despite the challenges, the Johnsons maintained a hopeful outlook. They organized local Alzheimer's awareness events and participated in memory walks. These activities provided a sense of community and purpose, highlighting their commitment to making a difference, not just for George, but for others facing similar paths.

Learning to Let Go

Over time, the Johnsons learned to let go of the past and embrace the present. They accepted that while Alzheimer's changed George, it didn't define their lives. They found peace by adjusting their expectations and focusing on the joys and love that remained.

Through their journey, the Johnsons discovered that while Alzheimer's could take away memories, it couldn't take away their ability to love, grow, and adapt. Each family member found personal growth and deeper connections, illustrating that in the face of adversity, embracing change can lead to profound transformations and enduring love.

Transformative effects of the journey.

When someone has Alzheimer's, their life and the lives of everyone around them transform significantly. This journey, though filled with challenges, also brings about remarkable changes and growth in individuals and families. Let's explore these transformative effects in simple terms.

Deepened Relationships

One of the most profound transformations is the deepening of relationships. As families navigate the complexities of Alzheimer's, they often come together in new

and unexpected ways. Bonds between spouses, parents, children, and friends can grow stronger as everyone adjusts to new roles in caregiving and support. This closeness develops from shared experiences, whether they're moments of difficulty or moments of joy.

Increased Empathy and Compassion

Dealing with Alzheimer's can significantly increase empathy and compassion. Caregivers and family members often develop a deeper understanding and sensitivity towards not only their loved one with the disease but also others who face similar challenges. This heightened empathy can extend beyond their immediate situations, influencing how they interact with others in their community and in broader society.

Personal Growth

Individuals often experience substantial personal growth during the journey with Alzheimer's. Facing daily challenges can build resilience, patience, and emotional strength. Caregivers may discover inner resources they didn't know they had, like the ability to manage stress better or communicate more effectively. This growth can apply to other areas of life, providing valuable skills and insights that enhance personal and professional relationships.

A New Appreciation for the Present

Alzheimer's has a way of shifting focus to the present moment. Families learn to cherish small, everyday joys – like a shared meal, a laugh, or a quiet afternoon stroll. This appreciation for the present can bring a richer, more contented quality of life, even amidst the disease's challenges. It teaches everyone involved to value what they have while they have it.

Sense of Purpose and Meaning

Many caregivers find a new sense of purpose and meaning through their caregiving role. This might manifest as advocacy work, volunteering, or simply being a stable and comforting presence for someone in need. Engaging in these activities can provide a powerful sense of fulfillment and identity that extends beyond the immediate demands of caregiving.

Enhanced Communication Skills

Communication often becomes more deliberate and thoughtful when caring for someone with Alzheimer's. Caregivers learn to speak more clearly and listen more intently to understand the needs of their loved one. These improved communication skills can enhance other relationships in their lives, making them better friends, partners, and colleagues.

Community Connection

Many families find themselves more connected to their communities as they seek out resources, support groups, and other services for Alzheimer's. This can lead to forming new friendships and discovering community assets that they might not have engaged with otherwise. This sense of community can provide significant support, reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Perhaps one of the most challenging transformations is learning to let go of past expectations and accepting things as they are. This process involves understanding that some things are out of one's control and focusing instead on what can be done. Learning to let go can bring peace and reduce anxiety, making it easier to deal with the day-to-day realities of Alzheimer's.

Personal growth and strengthened faith.

Personal growth and strengthened faith often emerge as powerful outcomes from challenging experiences, such as dealing with a loved one's illness like Alzheimer's.

Personal Growth Through Adversity

When you're faced with the daily realities of caring for someone with Alzheimer's, it can feel overwhelming. Yet,

over time, this challenging journey often leads to significant personal growth. Caregivers and family members may develop a deeper understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses, learning how to manage their emotions and reactions better.

Resilience:

Every day brings new challenges, and learning to navigate these helps build resilience. Resilience doesn't mean you won't feel the stress or sadness; it means you'll be better equipped to handle it. Over time, you learn that you can face tough times and keep moving forward.

Patience:

Alzheimer's can significantly change how someone behaves and interacts. This can test your patience in ways you never expected. However, this constant test can turn into a lesson in patience, teaching you to take a moment, breathe, and respond more thoughtfully rather than react impulsively.

Empathy:

Seeing a loved one struggle with Alzheimer's can open your eyes to the struggles of others, cultivating a deep sense of empathy. You might find yourself more understanding and compassionate not only towards your loved one but also towards others facing similar hardships.

Self-awareness: This journey can also lead to increased self-awareness. You might discover new limits to your patience and endurance but also find new depths to your capacity for love and compassion. Recognizing these aspects can be a profound step in personal development.

Strengthened Faith in Difficult Times

For many, faith—whether tied to religion or a more general sense of spirituality—becomes a cornerstone during the hardships of caring for someone with Alzheimer's. Faith can offer a comforting sense of structure and meaning when things seem chaotic.

Source of Comfort:

Faith can provide a significant source of comfort in times of uncertainty. Prayers, meditation, or other spiritual practices can offer solace, providing a quiet space amid the storm to gather your thoughts and find peace.

Renewed Purpose:

Engaging in faith-based activities, like attending church services, praying, or reading spiritual texts, can renew a sense of purpose. It can remind you that there is a bigger picture and a larger flow to life, helping to place the day-to-day challenges in a broader context.

Community Support:

Faith often involves a community with shared beliefs, which can be incredibly supportive. Being part of a faith community can mean access to emotional support and practical help, as well as a place to share your experiences and find understanding.

Hope:

Faith inherently breeds hope. It can encourage you to look forward to better days and find positivity even in small victories. This hope can be vital in continuing to provide care and support to your loved one.

Personal growth and strengthened faith are not just byproducts of navigating Alzheimer's; they are essential tools that can emerge to help cope with the journey. These elements foster resilience, patience, empathy, and hope, enriching your life in profound ways. As you grow personally and possibly in your faith, you not only become better equipped to handle the challenges of Alzheimer's but also find greater fulfillment and meaning in your role as a caregiver or supportive family member. Through this growth and deepened faith, what initially might feel like an overwhelming burden can transform into a journey of profound personal significance.

Sharing Your Journey

The journey through Alzheimer's is unique to each individual and their family, yet sharing these experiences can provide comfort, awareness, and connection. This chapter delves into the power of storytelling and the impact it can have on both the storyteller and the listener, using a personal story as a guiding example. Whatever you are going through now, can help others down the road so don't forget to share your story with others all the way from the early signs to the last stages.

The Early Signs

Reflecting on the early signs of Alzheimer's, as seen through a personal lens, can be enlightening. Sharing such experiences helps others recognize early signs they might otherwise dismiss. The change in behavior, such as not completing usual Christmas shopping, serves as a poignant reminder of how Alzheimer's can quietly begin its course.

Sharing the emotional turmoil of this realization—the mix of confusion, denial, and eventual acceptance—can resonate deeply with others. It highlights the importance of

recognizing and confronting the signs rather than dismissing them.

The Gradual Progression

Alzheimer's is often a slow journey, with changes that accumulate over time. Sharing the progression from minor forgetfulness to more significant cognitive declines can help others understand the nature of the disease. It's not just about the loss of memory but also about the impact on daily functioning and personality. This narrative can provide insight into the gradual nature of Alzheimer's, emphasizing the need for patience and understanding.

The shared experience of adapting to the new normal with a loved one can be both challenging and bonding. Discussing the strategies employed, the emotions faced, and the lessons learned can be invaluable to others in similar situations. Sharing how you navigated changes, maintained connections, and adapted to new roles within the family can offer practical advice and emotional support to others.

The Importance of Support

Highlighting the role of support from family, friends, and healthcare professionals emphasizes the need for a strong network. Sharing how you sought support, the challenges of accepting help, and the difference it made can encourage others to reach out and build their support systems.

Despite the hardships, there are lessons to be learned and growth to be experienced. Sharing the personal growth that comes from facing Alzheimer's – the increased empathy, strengthened relationships, and newfound resilience – can inspire others. It's about finding rays of light in the darkness, whether in moments of clarity, memories shared, or the simple act of holding hands.

Raising Awareness and Understanding

By sharing your journey, you contribute to a greater understanding of Alzheimer's, breaking down stigmas and fostering a community of support. Discuss how sharing your story has impacted others and yourself. Has it led to greater awareness, changed perceptions, or inspired others to share their own stories?

Finding Solace in Sharing

There is solace in knowing you are not alone. Sharing your journey can be therapeutic, providing a sense of purpose and connection. Reflect on how sharing has helped you cope, the responses you've received, and the connections you've made.

Encouraging Others to Share

Encourage others to share their stories, emphasizing that each person's journey with Alzheimer's is worth sharing. Highlight the power of storytelling in healing, connecting,

and educating. Offer advice on how others can start sharing their journeys, whether through writing, speaking, or art.

Sharing the journey through Alzheimer's can be a powerful tool for connection, awareness, and healing. By opening up about the challenges, changes, and moments of joy, you can impact the lives of others facing similar paths. Your story, like the story of a mother whose Christmas habits signaled the onset of Alzheimer's, can be a beacon for others navigating this complex landscape. In sharing, we find strength, community, and hope.

The importance of sharing your story.

Sharing your journey through Alzheimer's, whether as someone diagnosed or as a caregiver, is more than a personal narrative; it's a beacon for others navigating similar waters. The act of sharing can illuminate the path for others, provide solace, and foster a sense of community. This chapter explores the multifaceted benefits of sharing your Alzheimer's story.

Creating Connection

When you share your story, you reach out across the isolation that often accompanies Alzheimer's. Others, feeling recognized and understood, might see their experiences reflected in your words. This connection is vital—it can

transform a solitary journey into a shared one, offering comfort and solidarity to those who thought they were alone.

Educating and Raising Awareness

Educating Others

Part of accepting the reality of Alzheimer's involves educating others – family, friends, and sometimes strangers – about the disease. Misunderstandings and misconceptions about Alzheimer's are common. By educating others, you can foster a supportive community around your loved one, ensuring they are treated with respect and understanding.

Alzheimer's is a disease shrouded in misconceptions and stigma. By sharing your story, you contribute to a broader understanding of the disease. Real-life experiences can educate the public more effectively than statistics, shedding light on the daily realities of living with Alzheimer's and the nuances of providing care. This education is essential for fostering empathy, understanding, and support from the wider community.

Healing Through Expression

Writing or speaking about your experiences can be therapeutic. It allows you to process emotions, reflect on your journey, and find meaning in the challenges you've faced. This expression can be a form of healing, helping you

navigate your feelings of grief, loss, frustration, and love. For many, finding the words to articulate their journey is a step towards inner peace.

Empowering Yourself and Others

Sharing your story can be an empowering experience. It allows you to reclaim your narrative and be more than just an Alzheimer's patient or caregiver. For listeners or readers, your story can be a source of inspiration and courage. It can empower them to face their own challenges, seek help, and advocate for themselves and their loved ones.

Fostering Support Networks

Sharing encourages others to do the same, leading to the growth of support networks. These networks are invaluable resources for advice, empathy, and practical help. They provide a platform for exchanging tips, solutions, and resources, making the Alzheimer's journey more manageable for everyone involved.

Contributing to Research and Advocacy

Your story can contribute to a larger dialogue around Alzheimer's, influencing research, policies, and services. Personal narratives can highlight gaps in care, underserved communities, or unmet needs, driving change and improvement in Alzheimer's care and support. By sharing,

you become an advocate, not just for yourself or your loved one, but for the global Alzheimer's community.

Sharing allows others to see the emotional complexity of Alzheimer's. It's not just a story of loss and decline but also one of love, resilience, and moments of unexpected joy. By sharing these emotional landscapes, you help others feel seen and understood in their own complex feelings.

Leaving a Legacy

For those with Alzheimer's, sharing their story can be a way to leave a legacy. It's a record of their experiences, thoughts, feelings, and love—a way to be remembered beyond the disease. For caregivers, sharing honors the journey and the person they care for, preserving memories and highlighting the depth of their commitment and love.

How to Share Your Story

When you are ready, there are many ways to share your Alzheimer's journey. You might write a blog, speak at community events, participate in support groups, or simply have conversations with friends and family. Choose the medium that feels right for you and start when you're ready. Remember, your story is yours to tell, on your terms.

Encouraging Others to Share

Encourage others to share their stories too. Each story is a thread in a larger tapestry, creating a more complete

picture of Alzheimer's. By fostering an environment where sharing is valued, you help build a stronger, more connected community.

On March 15, 2023 my mom passed away peacefully at the age of seventy-three. She was in the advanced stages of Alzheimer's coupled with a heart condition called Aortic Valve Stenosis. One year later, looking back on it all now, it all seemed like a bad dream. I still can't believe it all happened.

I remember holding her hand the last night she was alive. She was very ill at this point, and she was struggling to breathe. Hospice had come in and told us that she was in the last stage before death. I hated to see her struggle and quite honestly, I could not bear another second to see her in that state. She was miserable. I said a prayer to God and told him it was okay to take her home. I held her hand and cried like a baby. She left that very same night in her sleep. But I know that she is at peace now, and I am at peace with her being free.

"Hark now, hear the sailors cry
Smell the sea and feel the sky

Let your soul and spirit fly
Into the Mystic"

-Van Morrison

Conclusion

As we draw this read to a close, we reflect on the shared experiences, insights, and heartfelt advice presented throughout these pages. "Coping with Alzheimer's: With A Christian Perspective" serves as just simple advice from one survivor to another.

Your specific journey through this may be all the bit the same but in a different landscape. Whatever you are going through, the bottom line is – it's difficult and I understand.

I wish you every bit of hope and clarity as you journey through the early signs, the emotional rollercoaster of diagnosis, the challenges of daily care, and the complexities of legal and financial planning, and arriving finally at a place of reflection and forward-looking.

Alzheimer's can reshape lives, test the bonds of love and challenge the essence of your identity. But remember, it presents the extraordinary capacity for growth, deepening relationships, and the discovery of inner strength that can emerge from adversity.

This book aims to provide practical advice, a sense of companionship, and a simple whisper of encouragement.

I hope that the conclusion of this book is not an end but a new beginning. It marks the start of your continued journey through the landscape of Alzheimer's, armed with a renewed sense of hope and purpose. The road ahead may still hold its share of challenges and moments of darkness but remember that you do not walk it alone.

Joshua 1:9

“Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

May you move forward with courage, with hope, and with the knowledge that your life, with all its challenges and triumphs, is a profound testament to the strength and resilience of the human heart. God Bless you!