



The Alchemy of Care Giving

11.30.03 by Terry Hargrave

Article:

Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. Exodus 20:12

My mother-in-law, Genevieve, grew weaker by the day, and the Alzheimer's was rapidly claiming her mind. My wife and I both took care of her. Bathing her was never my responsibility until one day when my wife was out of town, and I inherited the task. Genevieve hated the indignity of being bathed, but in the midst of my clumsily helping her into the shower, she said "You aren't doing it right, but I guess we will make it okay." With those words, my chore became our common task, and as we entered into the process, my discomfort also washed away. I tried to help her clean physically, and she helped clean me emotionally. I faced the measure of my willingness to serve, and she received an opportunity to be a gracious receiver. Giving to one another, Genevieve and I made it through.

People most often think of care giving as something to help parents or obey one of God's commands. But the charge to honor father and mother leads to a promise that our days will be long. I believe this is not a promise for long life so much as one that humility between the generations is what makes us a humble people of God. At the moment of care giving, both giver and receiver discover something intensely personal. The giver faces the purity of his love. The receiver must encounter her willingness to turn over control to someone else. In care giving, one's natural independence is laid aside for a symbiotic relationship—well-assured that both giver and receiver have much to learn from the other.

God doesn't instruct us to honor our parents for their sake, although it does contribute to their well-being. He gives us caring to lead us into the fundamental humility necessary in our relationships with others and with Him. The act of caring sharpens our need to love purely and unselfishly; at the same time it teaches us the necessity of one day graciously accepting honor and care from our own children. We may think that care giving is for the sake of our parents, but if we are willing, it is part of God's alchemy. He turns what we do to make another's life richer into an enriching, life-changing experience for ourselves.

Questions for discussion:

Is care giving drudgery or something God can use to teach you?

What needs to change in your life so that you can receive care in an honorable way?