

Perspectives on Caregiving: Allowing Yourself Grace

Excerpts from an essay by Tiffany Castignino

July, 2018

As a caregiver, you remember all too well that day the diagnosis came. You remember being with your loved one as they spoke about what the doctor said... You remember that moment you learned what a caregiver even was. Even if you as the caregiver were one of the blessed ones to be educated in the art of caregiving and felt completely prepared for the upcoming task, most likely no one ever gave you insight into the art of giving yourself grace.

Maybe you are the type of caregiver who finds great joy in caring for your loved one. Maybe you discovered your purpose and find a great sense of accomplishment in the work you are doing. Caregiving gives you a sense of confidence and even opens new doors for you, helps you meet new people. Or maybe you were like me, the type of caregiver that was sad for your loved one, but felt completely overwhelmed and inadequate, often frustrated and feeling alone...

No matter what your mindset as a caregiver or what resources (or lack thereof) you have access to, the art of giving yourself grace is for everyone!

grace noun \ 'grās \ a : approval, favor stayed in his good graces

b archaic : mercy, pardon

c : a special favor : privilege

d : disposition to or an act or instance of kindness, courtesy, or clemency

e : a temporary exemption : reprieve

I love this definition of grace. As a caregiver who feels overwhelmed, it's easy (and normal) to feel depressed and alone. This is where grace comes in. I would encourage you to print this definition and tape it somewhere you can see it regularly. Grace is allowing yourself to give you the stamp of approval, find favor on yourself, show yourself kindness, give yourself clemency, find reprieve and allow a temporary exemption.

How do you put this into action? Everyone's situation is different and everyone enjoys different things, so the key is to discover what grace looks like to you. Here are a few ideas:

Spend time talking with friends on the phone or computer

Watch a movie, take a walk.

Discover a new hobby

Take an online cooking or painting class

Find a good book and carve out time to curl up with it.

Keep your health in mind – taking steps to improve your diet and moving your body will help you feel your best, and when you feel your best, you can be a better friend, spouse, caregiver.

Ask for help!!! I can't stress this point enough. Those closest to you want to help, we just have to ask. Ask your closest friend or family member if they would be your "go-to" – the person you can call any time day or night and just talk when you need to. I guarantee you, they would LOVE to have the opportunity to do that for you!

I hope in some way I have been able to give you hope and you can give yourself some grace through this process. You'll find you'll make a better caregiver!