



Deborah Barr:

Grace for the Unexpected Journey

BY VONDA HENDERSON

The Alzheimer's Association estimates that 5.5 million Americans now have Alzheimer's disease. Every 66 seconds another person is diagnosed and 35% of caregivers report that their health has diminished due to their commitment to caring for someone with Alzheimer's or dementia. These are sobering statistics, indeed.

Deborah Barr has written a devotional, *Grace for the Unexpected Journey*, specifically for caregivers of Alzheimer's or other dementia conditions. The book, published by Moody Publishers and offered in hardback or e-version, is available January 2, 2018, and may be purchased wherever books are sold (Amazon.com; Barnes & Noble—in store or online; and Target, just to name a few).

This devotional actually serves multiple purposes. Each segment addresses a specific, common need or situation that caregivers encounter as they take this journey with their loved one. Within the segments, there are Scriptures to provide comfort, Biblical lessons, a summary statement for that situation, and several reflective questions that may be addressed as a learning exercise, plus space for journaling feelings at that particular moment. While the book cover indicates this is a 60-day devotional, it is truly a reference guide that can be used whenever needed for many of the stages/steps along this journey. For example:

Ask! (Day 16) Caregiving is not a solitary venture, especially as the disease progresses. "Every caregiver needs a team of people to help carry the load . . . you may be surprised to find many people who have always been willing to help, but just didn't know how—until you asked!" The summary statement is quite clear—"Solo caregiving is like trying to carry a sofa down a flight of stairs by yourself."

Live in Peace (Day 40) This day addresses how to deal with times when the patient is having delusions or hallucinations and how best to react. As Debbie shares, "It is easier to 'live in peace'. . . when you join them in their world and respond to their feelings rather than try to convince them of facts."

The Loss of "Us" (Day 45) A caregiver describes his emotional isolation as "the loss of 'us'." "It is impossible to describe this, because we are both here, more connected than ever, but our roles are completely different, and my loneliness is too profound even for me to understand." In summary, "It is imperative that you, the caregiver, do not become isolated."

Debbie explained that her inspiration for writing *Grace for the Unexpected Journey* resulted from her co-authoring experiences while writing *Keeping Love Alive as Memories Fade (The Five Love Languages® and the Alzheimer's Journey)* with Edward G. Shaw, MD, and Gary Chapman, Ph.D. "I felt such compassion for the caregivers who shared

their stories that I wanted to do something to help them. There is such a need for support that many sadly don't have it at a time they need it the most."

Check Debbie's website (debbiebarr.com) for more information about books (in print and future planned offerings), as well as book signings and speaking engagements. You can also order the devotional from her website via links to online bookstores.

Debbie will be speaking at the 2018 "Aging Well Conference," scheduled for Saturday, April 7th,

2018, at Clemmons Moravian Church in a session designed for caregivers. According to Ruth Burcaw, Executive Director of Moravian Cooperative Ministries, attendees will be able to select from a series of workshops designed to help older adults navigate today's changing world. Debbie will also have a book signing during conference hours. This conference is open to the public and is organized by the Aging Well Team of the Moravian Church, Southern Province. For information about registering for the Aging Well Conference, e-mail bcm@mcsp.org or visit moravianbcm.org.

"The average lifespan of a person with AD after diagnosis is 8 to 10 years. The long-term course of the disease confines the care partner to a highly stressful, often lonely role that lasts for years," declared Debbie. "Many feel they had no choice about stepping into the caregiving role. Elderly spouse care-partners, even when physically, emotionally, and/or spiritually depleted, may be reluctant to ask for help, believing it is their sole duty to take care of their mate. *Grace for the Unexpected Journey: A 60-Day Devotional for Alzheimer's and Other Dementia Caregivers* is written with the special challenges of Alzheimer's caregivers in mind."

