

Caregiver Devotions: Refreshing Your Soul with Lessons from Caregiving

Laura Vae Gatz

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Providing inspirational ideas for those assisting their aging family members, Caregiver Devotions is a thoughtful work.

Laura Vae Gatz's unpretentious Christian self-help book *Caregiver Devotions* charts a humble path through the difficulties of caring for someone with dementia.

The collection includes thirty-one brief reflections intended to help with finding God's love while facing the challenges of caring for an aging parent as their circumstances progress. They are organized around the process of coming to grips with difficult diagnoses. Earlier devotions describe how hard it can be to get out of bed, while later devotions begin to understand dementia specifically; the last entries speak to the need to let go and find unexpected blessings. This approach is accessible, likely to help those at various stages of caring for a loved one.

Reflections describe the importance of taking time for yourself, finding ways to show love, and reasons for hope. Each includes a familiar Bible passage to focus the reflection. There are often references to other biblical sources for inspiration, too. Entries end with a short prayer, written in a conservative Christian evangelical style and with that same theological understanding. Each devotion is about a page-and-a-half long, including both the opening biblical passage and the closing prayer.

The book mixes memoir elements in with its devotional techniques to good effect. The first entry, "Pay it Forward," describes how alone Gatz felt when she was first coming to grips with her mother's Alzheimer's disease, and how she found a fellow "sojourner" forced to make the same sorts of decisions. The book aims to serve as the same sort of fellow traveler, returning often to Gatz's struggles and her mother's decline. This approach transforms the stand-alone devotions into more of an extended memoir in which Gatz's story builds connections between her struggles and faith. This effort personalizes the material, but at the cost of narrowing its appeal. Further, didactic material regarding dementia clogs the text and will strike those already dealing with the same issues as repetitive.

The writing is unadorned, opting for information about aging over exploring the mystery of God. Devotions employ a range of styles, with some taking a more narrative approach and others functioning as faith-based pep-talks. The memoir-like narrative devotions are stronger in terms of their writing; they capture a nuanced experience of the challenges of caring for the aged. The best of the devotions take moments, such as helping a patient in a wheelchair reach a hanging cross or struggling to get of bed, and intentionally turn them into the work of God.

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