CAREGIVER CARDS



SIMPLE SELF-CARE TOOLS
FOR YOUR MIND, BODY & SPIRIT



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CAREGIVER CARDS

Caring for others is important work. So is caring for yourself.

It can be hard to juggle the needs of others as well as our own. When caring for others, it's important to care for ourselves, make sure our needs are met, and take time to restore the parts of us that are depleted. Caregivers often neglect their own needs or feel guilty for practicing self-care. These cards can help you care for yourself and experience God's love when the burden of caregiving feels overwhelming.

The suggestions, prompts, prayers and exercises in this card deck bring together proven mental health practices and the wisdom of the Bible in a simple, accessible way.

Here are some ways to use these cards:

- Choose a card at random whenever you're feeling overwhelmed
- Put cards that you find especially helpful in places where you'll see them often
- Send a card as a gift to a friend

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CHECK IN WITH YOURSELF

(START HERE!)

When you are caring for others, it's easy to become overwhelmed. Take time to ask yourself how you are doing, gently and without judgment. Do you notice any of these signs of being overwhelmed?

- ❑ Withdrawing from others
- ❑ Having trouble sleeping
- ❑ Changes in appetite
- ❑ Sensitivity to strong emotions of others
- ❑ Loss of focus or concentration
- ❑ Stomachaches, headaches, shakiness, fatigue, or increased illness
- ❑ Avoiding and numbing your feelings
- ❑ Questioning the goodness of God
- ❑ Engaging in risky behavior
- ❑ Resenting anyone who needs help
- ❑ Loss of interest in things you used to enjoy

If you are noticing some of these signs, you may be overwhelmed and need to do some things to care for yourself. **Here's one thing you can do right now: choose any card in this deck. Read it and follow the instructions, if there are any. Repeat as needed.**

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REMEMBER THAT YOUR NEEDS MATTER TO GOD

In the Bible, Elijah faithfully did God's work under great pressure. Along the way, Elijah saw, heard, and experienced many traumatic things. He had to run to escape grave danger, and after a while, he felt a deep sense of hopelessness. He finally stopped in the desert to rest under a tree. As he lay down, he asked God to let him die.

But God didn't do that. Instead, God cared for Elijah's needs by giving him food, drink, and deep sleep. Elijah asked for death; God provided nourishment and rest. After a period of rest, his body and spirit felt strong again, and he was ready to continue his journey for 40 more days and nights (1 Kings 19:3-8).

Elijah's needs mattered to God. God met his physical needs before meeting any of his other needs. It took time and space for Elijah to receive what was needed, and only when he was ready to continue the journey did he get up and keep going.

Which of your needs have gone unmet recently? Take a moment to remember them, and remember that they matter to God.

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MAKE A PLAN TO CARE FOR YOURSELF

Like everyone else, you have a body, a heart, a mind, and a soul. All these parts of you make up a whole. If one part suffers, the whole suffers. The more you care for your own needs, the more you will be able to offer comfort, aid, and hope to others. This exercise will help you figure out how to care for yourself. You will need paper, a pen, and about 10 minutes.

1. Sit quietly for a few minutes and consider the ways caring for others has caused harm or pain for you. If you are not sure, ask God to show you.
2. On the paper, make a list or draw a picture of the harms you have suffered from caring for others.
3. Flip the paper to the other side. Make a list or draw a picture of things you could do to care for the parts of you that hurt.

Ask God to care for you on your healing journey and give you the courage to do these things to care for yourself.

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RELAX YOUR BODY

One important part of well-being is being able to relax our bodies. This takes practice, and it is especially important for caregivers. Even though it seems simple, it can be very difficult — especially for people who care for others. Our bodies can carry habits of tension and stress, and often we are not even aware of them.

Wherever you are, take a moment to pay attention to your body. If it's safe to do so, close your eyes. Slowly breathe in, and slowly breathe out. Scan your body for tension, starting at the bottom of your feet and moving up all the way to the top of your head. Just notice where your body is tense. Then, repeat this scan from your feet to your head, focusing on relaxing each place in your body where you feel tension, one at a time.

Over time you'll become more aware of the places where your body tends to tense up, and you can choose to relax those parts whenever you feel tense.

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BREATHE

Practice this calming breathing exercise for 3-5 minutes. It may take effort at first, but with practice, this way of breathing will become easier.

- Get into a comfortable position, either on a chair or lying down. With your knees bent, focus on the feeling of your feet or body touching the ground. Release any tension you notice in your shoulders, head, and neck.
- Place one hand on your chest and the other on your belly, just below your rib cage.
- Breathe in slowly through your nose so your belly fills with air against your lower hand. The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible.

Breathe out slowly through your nose or pursed lips, and feel your lower hand move back toward your spine as the air is released. The hand on your upper chest should remain as still as possible. Imagine that each exhale takes with it any stress in your body.

The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life. — Job 33:4 (NIV)

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NAME YOUR LOSSES

Everyone experiences loss. In order to heal, we must name and grieve each loss. This process can take a long time, but it's very important. If we silence grief in ourselves, we tend to silence grief in others. For this exercise, you'll need paper, a pen, and 10 minutes in a quiet place.

1. Write, draw, or speak out the things you have lost that you still need time to heal from. *(Some examples: A person you have lost, the life you used to know, a dream for the future, a home, a community, something you loved or hoped for.)*
2. Pay attention to any tensions, sensations, or pain this causes in your body. Breathe.
3. Pray for God's help as you take this healing journey. Consider asking other people to help you, too.
4. Name one thing you can do to continue healing for each loss.

Losses tend to build up over time. It can be helpful to do this exercise regularly to clear that build-up, creating space to mourn and heal those losses.

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CHERISH FIVE SIMPLE GIFTS

When you are busy caring for others in the midst of chaos, you can help yourself by focusing on simple things that you enjoy. Right now, make a list of five simple things that bring you joy. Some ideas:

- Eat your favorite healthy foods
- Drink water
- Exercise in a way you enjoy
- Sing or listen to comforting music
- Allow yourself to cry
- Spend time with people who restore you
- Ask for help and accept help
- Breathe deeply
- Set a simple schedule
- Connect with people you love daily
- Make eye contact with other people
- Look for beauty wherever you are

Once you have your list, ask God to help you find opportunities to enjoy these five simple gifts.

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USE YOUR SENSES TO BE PRESENT

When you are overwhelmed, it is helpful to spend time simply being present in the here and now. In this exercise, you will take 3 – 5 minutes to become present using all five of your senses. You can do this using the fingers on one of your hands. Start with a fist, then extend each finger in turn. As you do, concentrate on your environment and ask these questions:

- Thumb: What is one thing I see right now?
- Pointer: What is one thing I hear right now?
- Middle: What is one thing I smell right now?
- Ring: What is one thing I can touch right now?
- Pinky: What is one thing I can taste right now?

No matter what else is happening around you, your senses connect you with the world God has made.

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TAKE ONE SIMPLE ACTION

Simple physical actions can help you release some of the stress of caregiving. Take a few minutes to take one or more of these simple physical actions:

- Change your position. If you have been standing a lot, sit or lie down. If you have been sitting a lot, stand up and move around.
- Take a short walk somewhere safe at a comfortable pace, noticing your surroundings.
- Step outside or look out a window. Take in the colors and textures you see, and notice the natural world around you (sky, clouds, trees, plants, grass).
- Eat something, taking time to enjoy it. Remember that God made it for you.
- Drink some water.

The simplest practices are often the most powerful.

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MAKE A SMALL CHANGE TO YOUR ENVIRONMENT

Caring for others can make you forget about having choices of your own. It is healing to remind yourself that you do have the power to change some things. Changing your environment even a little bit can go a long way toward reducing stress and promoting peace and joy. Take a few minutes to identify one small change you can make to your surroundings that will bring you peace or joy. Here are some ideas:

- Light a candle for 10 minutes
- Turn on music that you enjoy
- Add flowers or a plant to your room or living space
- Add something you find beautiful to your room or living space
- Display some of your favorite photographs

Your environment has a powerful influence on your daily happiness and health.

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PRAY FOR THE FUTURE OF THE HUMAN RACE

O God our heavenly Father, you have blessed us and given us dominion over all the earth: Increase our reverence before the mystery of life; and give us new insight into your purposes for the human race, and new wisdom and determination in making provision for its future in accordance with your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

— The Book of Common Prayer

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TRUST GOD'S POWER AND LOVE

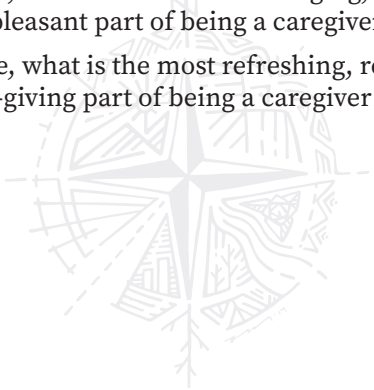
Dear God, when I am helping others carry their burdens, I am doing your work. Please help me to accept my human limits, secure in the knowledge of your limitless power and love. Amen.

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REFLECT ON YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE

When you are caring for others, it's easy to forget to pay attention to your own experiences. Right now, take 5 minutes to contemplate these questions:

- For me, what is the most challenging, painful, or unpleasant part of being a caregiver today?
- For me, what is the most refreshing, rewarding, or life-giving part of being a caregiver today?



Ask God to help you stay as present to the joys of your work as you are to its challenges.

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IMAGINE SAFETY AND COMFORT

When caring for others, it can sometimes feel like it's your job to be "on duty" all the time. Right now, take 5 minutes to imagine being "off duty" with the following exercise.

Close your eyes. Imagine a safe and beautiful place, real or imaginary. In this place, you have no one to take care of, and no work to do. Imagine every detail of this place, using all of your senses. What can you see there? What sounds do you hear? What plants, animals or things are there with you? What pleasant scents, textures or flavors are there for you to enjoy? As you contemplate this safe and completely peaceful place, you may want to imagine inviting God to join you there. In this place, God takes care of you, and you may rest.

Return to this imaginary place in your imagination any time you want. Remember that, no matter what is happening, God is always holding you with love and care.

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SING A SONG

Throughout the Bible, people use music to feel better and feel closer to God. Right now, think of a song that makes you feel more at peace. Then, if you can, take a few minutes to listen to that song or sing it yourself — out loud or silently.



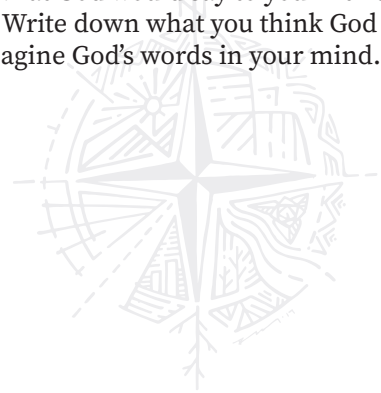
Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. — Psalm 96:1 (NIV)

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MEDITATE ON GOD'S CARE FOR YOU

The stress of caring for others can make you feel isolated from God's care for you. But God loves and cares for you deeply.

Imagine what God would say to you in this very moment. Write down what you think God would say, or just imagine God's words in your mind.



"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." — 2 Corinthians 12:9 (NIV)

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PRAISE THE FATHER OF COMPASSION

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

— 2 Corinthians 1:3–4 (NIV)

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WAIT FOR THE LORD WITH HOPE

I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits,
and in his word I put my hope.

I wait for the Lord
more than watchmen wait for the morning,
more than watchmen wait for the morning.

— Psalm 130:5-6 (NIV)

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FIND REST IN GOD

Yes, my soul, find rest in God;
my hope comes from him.
Truly he is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.

— Psalm 62:5–6 (NIV)

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HOPE IN THE LORD TO RENEW YOUR STRENGTH

Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.
He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.
Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;
but those who hope in the Lord
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.

— Isaiah 40:28–31 (NIV)

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REMAIN CONFIDENT

I remain confident of this:
I will see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.

Wait for the Lord;
be strong and take heart
and wait for the Lord.

— Psalm 27:13-14 (NIV)

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DO NOT FEAR

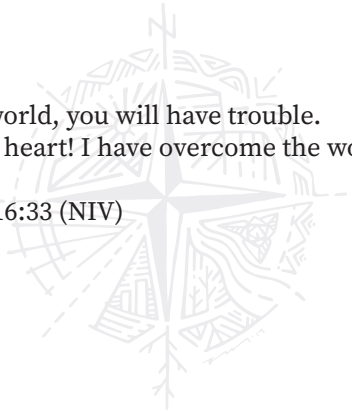
So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.

I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous
right hand.

— Isaiah 41:10 (NIV)

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TAKE HEART



In this world, you will have trouble.
But take heart! I have overcome the world.

— John 16:33 (NIV)

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REJOICE IN GOD'S LOVE

I will be glad and rejoice in your love,
for you saw my affliction
and knew the anguish of my soul.

— Psalm 31:7 (NIV)

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REMEMBER YOU ARE BLESSED

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

— Matthew 5:3–5 (NIV)

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ASK FOR HEALING

Heal me, Lord, and I will be healed;
save me and I will be saved,
for you are the one I praise.

— Jeremiah 17:14 (NIV)

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THINK OF ETERNAL GLORY

We never give up. Our bodies are gradually dying, but we ourselves are being made stronger each day. These little troubles are getting us ready for an eternal glory that will make all our troubles seem like nothing.

— 2 Corinthians 4:16 (CEV)

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RECEIVE A BLESSING

May the Lord bless you
and take care of you;

May the Lord be kind
and gracious to you;

May the Lord look on you with favor
and give you peace.

— Numbers 6:24–26 (GNT)

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FIND REST IN GOD

Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke and put it on you, and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit; and you will find rest. For the yoke I will give you is easy, and the load I will put on you is light.

— Matthew 11:28–30 (GNT)

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