

Quality Care



Caring for Your Elderly Parent

by Dixie Clark & Judy Bell

The following information was shared by Judy Bell and Dixie Clark during a seminar at Calvary on May 20, 2001.

Judy Bell:

Of the many needs the elderly have, one important need is for honor, or respect, which is something people don't often show them. Our country is also behind in improving services for the elderly. We need to think about things like this before we're there ourselves; we need to be advocates for the elderly and stand up for services that are needed in the community to help them carry out their every day activities.

We also need to do better with tapping into the elderly's great knowledge. Think about the things they've been through in their lifetimes. You and I may have had to adapt to voice mail, email, and computers, but many of the elderly went through the evolution of electricity, radio, television, airplanes, space age, and so on. Another need of the elderly is to be informed of decisions effecting them. I often hear people say, 'Don't tell mom and dad...they don't need that stress.' They keep family crises a secret, thinking they're

protecting their parents. Well, I have found in my own family that my grandparents were some of the strongest people in our family. You could lean on them. But, when my mother got sick a few years ago, some of the family members said, "Don't tell grandma how sick her daughter is." I told them "she needs to know...look at all the crises she has been through in her life...we're not going to keep anything from her."

Dixie Clark:

As my parents' health began to decline, I realized that something needed to be done for their safety. During one of my devotional times, as I was praying for guidance, I found Isaiah 46:3-4, which says, 'Listen to me, oh house of Jacob, all you who remain in the house of Israel, you whom I have upheld since you were conceived, and have carried since your birth. Even to your old age and gray hairs, I am He, I am He who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I have made you and I will sustain you.' Knowing how the Lord has provided for my parents through the years, I claimed this as a promise that He would direct me as I helped my parents decide on their future.

A new retirement community opened near my parents' home the summer I realized that something needed to be done regarding their care. After their 90th birthdays, I gave them a choice: we could hire a full-time sitter to stay at the house, or they could move to the assisted living facility. I urged them to go to the assisted living facility at least during the winter months for a trial stay, and if they didn't like it, they could move back to the house in the spring, and we would hire someone to stay with them. They agreed to move to The Neighborhood and by December, Mother told me I could sell the house. So, within a year I moved my parents to an assisted living facility; I cleaned out the house and sold it and the car; and then in August, my dad fell and died as a result of the injury. During these months, Mother saw the benefit of living at the assisted living facility, and she wanted to remain there.

Here is a quick list of resources and suggestions for assisting the elderly:

- Read "Fifty Plus" and "New Lifestyles" [free, community

publications found in the racks of grocery and drugstores].

- Read "A Guide to Social Security" [a free publication found at the local Social Security Office].
- Consider a long-term care policy.
- Make sure your parents have a durable or general power of attorney, healthcare power of attorney, and a living will.
- Visit and compare retirement communities, assisted living facilities, and nursing homes.
- Videos and books are available in Calvary's Media Center to help answer your questions.
- *The 36-hour Day* is a great book on dealing with Alzheimer's Disease.

Judy Bell:

The following hints can also improve your parents' homelife:

- Monitor their nutritional and medication needs.
- Go to the doctor with your parent when possible.
- Assess the home for what's not safe.
- Use brighter light bulbs to help with vision.
- Move furniture that might be in the way.

- Remove throw-rugs that might make floors more slippery.
 - Put up rails along steps.
- Consider the importance of canes or other walking aids.
- Consider getting your parents a pet for companionship.

Dixie Clark:

Caring for your elderly parents may at times feel like riding a 'roller coaster.' Sometimes you may feel confident with your decisions; other times, you may doubt yourself. But remember you are in a role reversal and needing to make decisions for your parents' safety and health.

Be careful how you state things. For example, avoid saying that you are going to "admit" or "place" your parents. Say instead, "We are going to move you. You have moved before in your life, and it is now time to make another move. You adjusted very well to the previous moves, and I know you will adjust very well to this move."

If you decide to move your parents, keep in mind that Jesus asked John to take care of His mother. If Jesus asked someone else to take care of his mother, then it is all right for

us, at certain times, to ask others to help take care of our family members. This helped me a great deal with the guilty feelings that came from time to time.

© 2001 **Judy Bell & Dixie Clark** are members of Calvary Baptist Church and professionals in the caregiving industry.