

Don't Let the Well Run Dry!

A collection of daily wisdom for those who serve others



“Self-care is so important! When you are always drawing from the well of your own heart, mind, and body, you have to find ways to refill that well so that it doesn’t go dry! You need to learn ways to take care of yourself. Because if you’re not taking care of yourself, you can’t take care of anyone else.”



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Caring for the Caregiver

Whether you're a family member caring for a loved one, a firefighter or police officer serving your community, or a professional caregiver working with a patient or family, you know how rewarding helping another person can be. You probably also know how heavy things can become. You are continually drawing comfort, compassion, energy, and wisdom from your well, your own inner wellbeing. If you never refill your well, it will run dry. You will no longer be able to draw from the depths of your care and compassion. Instead, you will find yourself on overload and burnout.

Whether you are a family member or a paid professional, the time, physical, and emotional energy you use caring for others takes its toll. No matter how indulgent or fancy "self-care" may sound, it is crucial for our physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental wellbeing. Don't neglect doing those things that renew you and fill your well back up!

My Gift to You

There is a story about a woman named Mary. She was a friend of Jesus who cared deeply. Unlike many who wanted to be served by this great prophet and miracle worker, Mary saw beyond that. She knew that Jesus needed compassionate care as well.

Before his death, Jesus was at Mary's home. Martha was in the kitchen preparing dinner. Lazarus and the disciples were relaxing and listening intently to Jesus. Instead of helping prepare dinner for all the guests, Mary sat at Jesus' feet, soaking in his wonder and wisdom. She sensed that something was different this time, that this may be the last time she would hear him teach.

Not only was Martha pretty dang angry that Mary wasn't doing her share of the work, I imagine the men in the room exchanged some questioning glances. "What is she doing? This isn't her place!"

Before the night was over, she did something even more outrageous! Mary took about a pint of pure nard, a costly perfume, "poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume."

Mary knew that the Caregiver himself needed to be cared for too!

So I, Lee **Mary** Atherton, offer these daily reflections as my gift of nard for all of you who give so much.

May peace and wellness always be your companion.

Day 1 – Be Ridiculously Happy!



“It is not how much we have, but how much we enjoy, that makes happiness.”

~Charles Spurgeon

Stop for a moment. Remember a time when you were completely lost in laughter. You know what I mean – a time you laughed so hard you almost peed your pants!

Get in touch with that moment. What did you hear around you? What were the quiet and the exuberant sounds?

What did you see? Right in front of you? In your periphery? What would you see behind you if you turned? Who else is with you?

What’s the environment like? Light or dark? Warm or chilly? Quiet air or windy? Indoors or out?

What were you smelling? Smell is a powerful memory trigger. Can you discover the subtle undertones that are present?

Stay there for just a few moments and relish the joy. Be aware of the smile growing on your face as you dive into that delightful memory. When you find your well a bit on the low side, come back to this memory.

Day 2 – Share Compassion!



“If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.” ~Dalai Lama

As caregivers, compassion is the essence of what we do. Compassion is as vital to life as the air we breathe. Caregivers find it as easy to be compassionate as it is to inhale and exhale. Is it just as easy for you to practice self-compassion? It should be. You deserve it.

Imagine. You come upon a scene of chaos, and tucked away in an almost out-of-site corner, you discover a young child. She is confused and afraid. Tears quietly overflow as her lip quivers. I bet you’d rush right over and scoop her up, whisper quietly that it’s ok. Maybe you would rock her, hum to her, stroke her hair.

Could you do the same for yourself when you feel overwhelmed and out of control? The more your well empties, the more overwhelmed and chaotic you will feel.

Try these simple practices:

- Instead of judging yourself, tell yourself three unique attributes about yourself. If you get stuck, ask someone who knows you well. You’d be surprised what you hear.
- Practice mindfulness. Listen to the chatter in your mind and ask it to quiet down. Your heart rate will slow, anxiety and stress will begin to fade.
- Give yourself permission to be imperfect. We all are. And that’s ok.
- Invite your gremlin (that devil on your shoulder that whispers criticism and self-doubt) to go on vacation!

Day 3 – Empty Your Backpack



“It is not the load that breaks you down. It’s the way you carry it.”

~Lena Horne, Singer

Rocks have lots of uses. You can pile them on top of each other to make a cairn, a Buddhist form of worship. You can set them just so and create a beautiful stone wall. You can toss little flat stones and make them skip across the water.

Rocks can also cause pain – like when you carry them all on your back as most of us in a helping profession do. A firefighter fights a small shed fire and adds a small pebble or two to the weight he carries. Another finds herself watching someone’s home burn down while one of her team is still inside. She’s probably going to add a massive rock to her load.

The adult caring for an elderly parent adds stones every day to their backpack – packing them in tightly until the day comes that the rock of the day makes the pack so heavy that she falls to the ground crushed and exhausted.

It is crucial that we find ways to ease our burden and empty the backpack regularly. If we don’t, we risk burnout. We risk the work we were once so passionate about becoming something we hate.

How will you empty your backpack today? Name 2 or 3 small things you can do each day to lighten the load.

Day 4 – Sing and Shout!



“Some days, there won’t be a song in your heart. Sing anyway.”
~Emory Austin

Do you know that singing releases the same feel-good chemicals as sex and chocolate! So sing out loud! Sing out strong!

The health benefits of singing are profound. Singing strengthens your immune system, releases endorphins that boost energy, gives your lungs a good workout, and even tones your abs. Who knew?

Research shows that singing exercises your vocal cords and keeps them youthful. Instead of an age-battered voice, you can still sound young as you get older. Your posture will improve. Your pain will subside, your circulation improves, and it even provides some aerobic exercise for older or disabled folks.

Singing the short-a sound (like ahh) for 2 or 3 minutes will help banish the blues. Want to be more alert? Sing the longer sound A. Stimulate your thyroid gland by singing short-e and help your digestion while you’re at it. You can regulate your blood sugar with the long-o, and sing oo (like moo) to strengthen immunity.

Sing for a confidence boost! Sing for fun! Sing for health!

What’s your favorite song? _____

When will be sure to sing it in the next few days? _____

Will you join a music group? _____ Which one? _____

Day 5 – Remember Why You Do What You Do



“Caregiving often calls us to lean into love we didn’t know possible.”

~Tia Walker, *The Inspired Caregiver: Finding Joy While Caring for Those You Love*

Whether you’re a clinician working with trauma victims, a police officer patrolling the streets to keep crime at bay, a firefighter ready to snuff out any flame large or small, or a human services professional advocating for those in need, chances are you entered your profession for reasons beyond a weekly paycheck.

Something or someone inspired you to join the helping world. A world where you give of yourselves without measure, often carrying the burden of others long after you’ve left the scene.

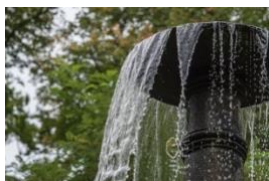
“I didn’t sign up for this!” recalls authors Peggi Speers and Tia Walker in “The Inspired Caregiver.” The passion and purpose that initially called us to our profession can easily be clouded over by the challenges, frustrations, and stresses that the work includes.

Stepping away from the work for even a short while and reminding ourselves why we do what we do can help us reconnect with those early-day feelings that so charged us up.

Why did you join your profession? What gets in the way of your passion?

Write these on a separate piece of paper. When you finish, crumple the paper up and toss those negativities to the wind or the fire! It won’t make them go away, but the process of doing this can make them easier to face.

Day 6 – Share Compassion



“Never give from the depths of your well, but from your overflow.” ~Rumi

How often do you say things like, “I’m so done! I’m overwhelmed. I’m exhausted. I don’t have one more ounce to give. I’m so drained!” Life feels grey and monotonous. You’re chronically tired and feeling down. Your life feels chaotic and out of control. You say you don’t have time or resources to devote to self-care.

How long can you keep on going like this? Not long, really, before you find yourself right on the edge of it all crashing down around you. Now more than ever, you need to refill that well! When we give from limited resources, we are cheating ourselves, but everyone around is.

Give again only when your well is overflowing. Make your self-care plan now.

Choose at least five actions from the list below that you will commit to trying:

Join a peer support group
Be strict with boundaries
Engage in continuing ed
Have a regular sleep routine
Aim for a healthy diet
Take breaks during the day
Take your dog for daily walks

Keep a journal
Make time to relax
Be with the people who make you laugh
Play a sport
Write three things to be thankful for each day

When will you do each activity?

Day 7 – Do The Hokey Pokey!



“Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.”

~Leo Buscaglia, Author

They say an apple a day keeps the doctor away, but I like to say it's a laugh each day that keeps the doc away!

Like singing (Day 4), laughter has many health benefits. I recently had to buy some flowers to be delivered to a friend whose mom had just died. I was devastated by her death, feeling pretty down, and lost in thoughts of how my friend was going to make it through. I walked into the flower shop and saw signs like, “If your child doesn't behave, I will gladly give them an espresso and chocolate before sending them home with you.” “Life is short. Smile while you still have teeth.” And “I wish I could sleep, but my ADD kicks in, and one sheep, two sheep, cow, turtle, duck, old McDonald had a farm... Hey Macarena!”

I left several minutes later with my bouquet in hand and a chuckle in my voice.

So maybe you're not up for doing the hokey pokey in a roomful of your closest friends and colleagues, but what does make you laugh?

Make a list and put it somewhere you can see it every day.

Day 8 – Yes, You Are A Hero!



The simple act of caring is heroic.”

~Edward Albert, Actor

A hero doesn't necessarily wear a cape. He or she might wear a fire hose and is often found running into a burning building while others are running out. A hero carries bandages, a blood pressure cuff, a stethoscope around his neck, and a bag full of gear. They can be seen running into the chaotic scene of a multi-car pile-up.

You've found a hero when you see the hospice volunteer taking time to find a special trinket or most loved candy for the patient she's going to visit. And you know you've met a hero when you see the funeral director sitting at the kitchen table with the suddenly new widow on New Year's Eve, giving her all the time and compassion when he could be hurrying on his way to get back to celebrating.

Yes. It may feel like just another day on the job to you, but to someone you encountered, you are their hero.

Remember – you matter. You count. Take care of yourself so you can be your best you!

How would you treat the hero who saved your life, or the life of someone you love? Jot down 5 or 6 things you would say or do to show your appreciation. _____

Now, choose the one you would give yourself and do it today!

Day 9 – Bathing Your Soul



“It’s more than a bath; it’s a transformative experience. You’re searching for buoyancy in the soul and spring in your step.”

— Amy Leigh Mercree, *The Mood Book*

I love taking a bath so much that my daughter, knowing our home only had a shower, gave me a blowup bathtub for Christmas!

A bath is about much more than hygiene. It is one of the most relaxing ways to soothe and care for our body, mind, and soul.

Just imagine slipping into the embrace of hot water after a long and stressful day. Feel the stress slip away and give yourself time to pause.

Climbing into the warm water of a bubble bath has a naturally soothing effect. Many scholars believe it gives us a sense of security, much like the one we felt in our mother’s womb or later as a child in our parent’s embrace.

Soaking in warm water will relieve muscle pain, the tension in your joints, and even improve your skin. It will help you slow down, to take time to pay attention to your inner voice and gain clarity of mind. Truly understanding our thoughts instead of letting our mind wander aimlessly can help keep stress and anxiety at bay.

Taking a long bath just before going to bed can help you fall asleep more quickly and stay asleep longer.

So go ahead – take that well-deserved bath and soak in all the gifts it has to share.

Day 10 – List 10. And do 'em!



“And those who were seen dancing were thought to be crazy, by those who could not hear the music.” — Friedrich Nietzsche

How many times has someone told you, “Man, I could *never* do what you do!”?

How do you respond? I answer, “I couldn’t NOT do it!” It’s not only the world of chaplaincy that speaks of “being called” to the work we do. I’ve heard firefighters and police say it. I listened to a Funeral Director this week (during the Covid19 Pandemic) say, “There are so many bodies we have no place to put the.! I’m stressed! I’m overwhelmed! I’m angry! I’m exhausted!” When asked if she was going to find another career when this was all over, she answered without a moment’s hesitation, “Absolutely not! This is my calling, and I’ll never do anything else!”

Sound familiar? Most of us who care for others would say a resounding “yes.” What is it, then, that keeps us keeping on even in the midst of the chaos and trauma?

Take a few minutes to list ten reasons why you do what you do.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.