

How This Spirit-Filled Caregiver Lives as a Prophetic Picture of Christ and the Church

In 1986, Peter Rosenberger married Gracie, the woman of his dreams. No marriage comes easily, but the Rosenbergers' marriage was harder than most. Just three years earlier, a horrific car accident had left Gracie disfigured. In 1991, doctors amputated one of her legs; her remaining leg was later amputated in 1995. Peter found himself shouldering the immense responsibility of caring for a double amputee.

He's not the only one. According to a 2015 study by the National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP, roughly one in six Americans—or 39.8 million—provide care to adults with a disability or illness. It's an often thankless and tiring job that, for many caretakers, can feel like too heavy a burden to bear.

The Rosenbergers want to help ease that burden. Their ministry, Standing With Hope, offers spiritual, emotional and practical support to both the disabled and their caregivers. Peter says his quest is to provide caregivers like him with a message of encouragement, and to tell them that longsuffering and perseverance are two biblical qualities that Jesus smiles upon.

"Through everything I've been through, I've discovered that people want somebody to speak life into them so they can better withstand what they have to deal with," he says. "There is nowhere in Scripture where there is a guy taking care of his wife through multiple amputations and 80 surgeries. But you know what? Jesus refers to Himself as the bridegroom, and

we are the bride of Christ. We're the wounded bride. My Savior is in love with a wounded bride just like I am. That's enough to get me through the toughest times."

The Rosenbergers started the ministry Standing with Hope out of Gracie's passion to help her fellow amputees through a prosthetic ministry where she could share the gospel. The couple traveled to Africa, and out of that trip, the prosthetic ministry was born in Ghana, thanks to mentoring help from the ministry of Joni Eareckson Tada.

Recruiting prosthetists from around the U.S., Standing with Hope teaches and equips local workers within Ghana's Ministry of Health to build and maintain prosthetic limbs for the people of Ghana as well as other neighboring countries. If a patient cannot afford the co-pay for the limb, Standing with Hope will sponsor that limb.

That ministry continues today, although Gracie's participation has waned due to her declining health. When it became apparent that Gracie could no longer be the face of the ministry, Standing with Hope's board of directors asked Peter to step up and showcase his communication skills to minister to other caregivers who needed encouragement and direction.

Peter remembers well the first time he was asked to speak about his life as a caregiver—there were four people in the audience. Today, he has the largest radio platform in the world for family caregivers. He broadcasts a weekly nationwide radio program on American Family Radio. He's written two books and even released a CD: *Songs for the Caregiver*.

Since its founding, the ministry of Standing with Hope has expanded. Today the organization ministers not only to caregivers, but to the families of addicts, special needs children and those beset by mental illness. All told, the Rosenbergers say their ministry now reaches about 65 million people.

"We are so blessed that God has given us this ministry," Peter says. "And the fact that it impacts so many people, we're so grateful for that."

Despite the ministry's success, Peter admits he constantly must remind himself of God's grace—for both Gracie and himself. There have been plenty of tough times for the Rosenbergers over the past three decades.

Doctors weren't always sure Gracie would survive, that her body could withstand the incredible amount of medical procedures necessary to keep her alive. At times, Peter says Gracie has been so medicated with opioids that he could hardly recognize her. Her condition has left the Rosenbergers with more than \$10 million in medical bills on top of the constant pain Gracie endures. Beyond the big procedures, there are a number of small daily tasks he's had to perform to keep his wife comfortable and to help her maintain a somewhat tolerable quality of life.

"There are days when you just hang your head in weariness, frustration, anger and despair," Peter says. "It's mind-numbing. Being responsible for the well-being of another human being who has serious disabilities and issues is a huge burden to shoulder. When you try to white-knuckle it on your own strength, you find out quickly that you're not up to the task, and that causes even more despair."

But with Jesus, Peter finds much to be encouraged about.

"A secular reporter once asked me what Jesus would do as a caregiver," he says. "I said, 'Let me tell you what He did. He took care of His mother from the cross; He delegated. If Jesus can delegate, so can I. I can enlist the help of other people. It's OK. I don't have to white-knuckle everything by myself.' That is the message I am communicating to my fellow caregivers: that you have a Savior who really understands this. He knows exactly what you are going through, and He is

equipping you.”

Through it all, Peter’s faith has been severely tested. He says he’s failed plenty of times—he refers to himself as the “crash-test dummy of all caregivers”—but he’s come out the other side with a stronger faith and marriage than ever. He hopes, through his work, he can help others reach that place too.

“There is nothing like caring for somebody with severe disabilities for a couple of decades to expose the gunk in your own heart,” Peter says. “The amazing thing is, God still loves me, and so does Gracie. And I’m more in love with Jesus now than I’ve ever been because of His unfailing love for me. And that’s what I try to impart to everybody I reach through the radio and the speaking and the books. His love never fails, and you can make it through anything when you have God on your side.” {eoa}

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