

Living *with* MOMMA

WORKBOOK

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Chapter 1

The Essence of a Caring Person

In our first set of exercises we will begin to practice a form of self-care by noticing our own moments of peace.

1. What is the best thing about living with your aging parent?

What is the best thing about living with your adult child? If you have more than one child in the home, provide a separate answer for each.

2. Which child or parent was the easiest to answer this question about? Which was the hardest? Be prayerful (in whatever form is most comfortable for you) about the hardest and easiest answers. We will seek understanding to your answers in the next chapter(s).

Chapter 2

Finding Meaning *in the* Experience of Caregiving

This exercise will help prepare you for learning to use reflective journaling as a compass in the coming chapters. Reflective journaling is where you can begin to see some of your own AHA! moments of connection between your spiritual and physical self. There are the moments of connection that will come from reflecting on open-ended questions and where you can find your own meaningful experiences simply because you are a caring person.

Before you begin: Pick (only) one person you wrote a “best thing about” story (see Chapter 1 exercises). Re-read that story. You are re-reading the story to allow a positive (or lighter) tone to be the frame from which you will explore needs. If you are not feeling close to (e.g., if you feel mad, sad, or hopeless) about this person after reading your “best thing” story, consider the following options:

- Re-read it again, but this time out loud.
- Re-write the story from a new perspective or write an entirely different “best thing” story.

Choose a different person you wrote a story about; this one may not be a safe space for your spirit to start practicing these exercises within.

Then we will begin to explore virtues from within the answers you will give in the following exercise. Often an identified need or virtue comes laden with heavy emotions in the beginning. That’s okay, you are the among friends who are sharing their own AHA! moments in this book. We are all using sacred texts as a safe space for spiritual awakening. We are all finding a higher meaning to caring than: “It’s just what family does.”

In the same notebook as before, please answer the following questions:

1. What is the one thing you wish you knew before _____ (your aging parent or adult child) moved in with you? Please only write one person's name in the space provided. If you find you are writing a lot of stuff instead of one thing, that is fine, too. Let it all out. Then go back and read what you wrote. Narrow it down to one sentence.

2. If you could choose any person in your family (living or not) to have a good meal with who would you choose and why?

3. Write out Galatians 5:22–23. Writing out sacred text can help us slow down our thoughts. This can help you prepare for reflective journaling we will begin to practice in the next chapter(s).

Chapter 3

Loving *your* Peace

If you are doing these exercises to bring peace, love and goodness into your caregiver spirit then please begin the following exercises.

1. Pick one person in your home about whom you have written a “best thing about” story and summarize that statement in one sentence.

Does that sentence make you smile and feel good inside, or does it bring up tension? How does your body react to this sentence? Are your shoulders tensed up around your neck? Do you feel sad? If you are feeling negative emotions, check your sentence and make sure you have summed up what you enjoy about the person and not something you are angry about.

2. Then, consider your answer to the second question, “What is the one thing you wish you knew before your aging parent or adult child moved in with you?” Write in one sentence what you need to see change. It looks like this:

I need to _____ more with _____ instead of
_____ for _____ .

(For example, Karen could write: “I need to laugh more with Joe instead of being so angry at him for making messes around the house.”)

3. Pick three (or more) key activities you can do that give you a sense of peace. Don’t sabotage this list with answers like “go to Hawaii” and “lay on the beach” unless you have a way of making those into real actions that you can do immediately or every day.

4. Rewrite a story for your caregiving self that includes one new way of living with an aging parent or an adult child in the above sentence. Ask yourself where you feel the lack of divine and human connection in your caregiver self and make a plan for loving your peace the next time you are faced with anger or sadness instead of peace.

5. Write out the actions of peace and love given in 1 Cor. and the definition we hold for Loving our Peace. Love is patient and kind, neither envious nor boastful, not proud, self-seeking, or easily angered. Peace is the wholeness of body and mind, the sense of being complete and unharmed.

6. Write out the definition we hold for Loving our Peace. Peace is the wholeness of body and mind, the sense of being complete and unharmed. Pick one thing you can do in concrete terms within your own “I wish I knew” stories for the peace to be around your spirit? If Blessed are the Peacemakers, then what does being called a children of the Creator mean in your life?

7. Consider writing yourself a pledge to be more conscious of life-giving vs. life-draining actions. An example you can use: “I will be more conscious of my life-giving actions as a way to apply a

healing salve to my wounded and tired spirit. I will not dishonor others by _____
(use a passive aggressive action on the line) any longer. I will live as though I am the only person I can change as a way to be patient with loved ones and for safe spaces to allow growth to occur with my caretaker and caregiver selves.”

Please note:

All suggested exercises are not intended to help people in abusive relationships. These exercises are not meant to allow or enable behaviors associated with abusive people in any way shape or form. Period. No one was holding abusive power over Martha, Karen, or me in the previous scenarios. If you are in an abusive situation, with a spouse or an adult child, please seek immediate help from a trained professional. Also consider using the web resources found at the end of this book if you are trapped in the whirlwinds of a relationship fueled by alcohol, drugs, physical, or mental abuse.

Chapter 4

Integrity of Goodness

The following exercises take a different form from those in the previous three chapters. Hopefully by now you are writing your answers in your notebook or journal in whatever form that takes in your own journey through this book.

Diane, whom we met in this chapter, was having a hard time translating what she wished she had known before she moved in with her parents, namely, how it would jeopardize her relationship with her sister, Jean. She sought counseling that addressed the specifics of her “what if” monsters. She gave herself a safe space to let go of the trauma of old personal wounds and the harmful patterns caused by years of fighting with her sister. Diane found those spaces with choosing to begin her own journey into integrity of kindness/goodness.

I suggested the following exercise to create a safe space for personal healing from the emotional trauma of fighting with a family member or a loved one in general.

I have done this exercise on many occasions myself. It has helped me regain a sense of seeing “the other” with eyes of kindness and goodness. It is a reset button for the heart for those times when we feel weakest and need help clearing our view—or harsh opinions—toward someone who has hurt us. I call this exercise “Let Me Count the Ways.”

You will actually be counting fifty ways (or reasons) you love someone. This directs your vision back to what the sacred teaches is divine kindness reflected in our human experience. Expressing kindness to our family can be a ritual to/with/for and in our Creator (Matt. 9:13, 12:7). Reflect on the character and virtues shown by the father of the prodigal son. His integrity showed kindness and goodness that never depended on the other person acting in “the right way.”

1. On a piece of paper write the numbers 1 through 50 near the left margin.
2. At the top of the paper write the name of a person you are having a really hard time showing loving feelings toward. Keep this simple and think about only one person at a time.
3. Think of things this person does or has a way of being that you enjoy, like, or admire. Fill out all 50 spaces on the list with the way you enjoy, celebrate, admire this person whose name you wrote at the top of the page. Be specific. Do not list superficial traits, e.g., “I like the dress Jenny has on today.” Instead, think of the fundamental reason behind the thing you enjoy, such as “Jenny has a wonderful sense of style.” It will not do you heart good to write things that are not in “Jenny’s” control (e.g., “Jenny is pretty.” That is something she inherited from DNA).

Chapter 5

Valuing Patience

1. Breathe deeply. Breathe in as you silently count to eight. Hold your breath for a heartbeat or a count of two. Then slowly exhale as you count to eight. Repeat three times.

2. Plan on doing this three times each day. Deep breathing like this reduces stress and can even improve your memory.

3. Reflect on Luke 8:1-13. What could happen if the seed of the fruit given by the Spirit falls on good soil?

4. Rethinking instant gratification. We have inherited a desire for instant gratification from a culture of constant choices, non-stop media, and unconscious input from living in a commercially driven society. Did you know that people actually pay money for silence? It is called a vacation.

5. In this exercise, you will take a free mini vacation into a world of media silence. Choose one day to turn off the TV, radio, cell phone, and computer. That also means ignoring newspapers and magazines too. Wait, what? Even magazines? Yep, consider this a break from being told everything you need to do to be happy, healthy, wealthy, and wise. For one whole day, take a vacation from the media that causes you (unconscious) stress by insisting on projects to be done and purchases to be made.

Journal what you do instead and how this vacation affects you. Decide if and how you can do this at least once a month. Work up to three vacation days a month, and journal about what you see and do without all the noise telling you what to think.

Now. Look at both sides of the paper. How are they different?

I suggest that the list of your weaknesses is longer than the list of your strengths. I also guess that on the strengths side, you started a sentence or two with “I am good at,” followed by a task that is all about serving other people or connecting with people by serving.

Knowing our weaknesses better than our strengths happens to many of the people I have asked to do this exercise.

1. Why do we have an easier time saying what we are weak in than admitting what we are strong in? Write this question in your journal and spend all the time you want discerning the answer.

2. Write one caretaker task you are doing for someone in your family.

Ask yourself why you are doing this task and then figure out whether you should continue doing it or replace it with something else, maybe something that better suits the purpose of why you do it. (Trust me on this one: I am not asking you to plan a house makeover. I am simply asking you to pick one small thing that you already do that others may be waiting to help you with. You might be surprised how good it will feel for them to have a place to show some love too.)

*** Remember: Sadly, there are studies showing family members are at the top of the list for abusing our aging population. If you see someone being struck, or starved, or laying in old feces, PLEASE don't wait. Call 911 immediately! Then call the family; many decisions need to be considered. Family will be needed to help on many levels.

Chapter 7

Non-judgmental Faith

The following exercises are two I have been using for years to help me remember to be living more faithfully, by remembering that others were also created in the image of our Loving Creator. They build on the previous exercises. First, we will remember what is good, or the best thing about someone, and then we will follow through with actions that can make the relationship better, stronger, and healthier. These actions will be based on reflection within any of the fruit we have been given: Peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control.

1. “If you can’t say something nice, don’t say nothin’ at all.”

Saying only nice or encouraging things about people sounds a bit too good to be true. What if I told you that medical science was telling us we are able to live longer, be happier, and feel more satisfied with our lives if we would change one small thing. Be compassionate.

As I have mentioned before, compassion is practicing empathy, but now we are going to begin thinking within a version of the golden rule. “Do unto others as you would want them to do unto you.” We are going to explore this golden rule further in the next chapter, but for now let’s do something measurable to get our heart, soul, and caring spirit facing in the right direction.

In your LIVING journal, start giving yourself a smiley face (a simple drawing or stickers if you want) in the upper right-hand corner each day you give anyone a sincere compliment. The goal here is to begin to think of others in a positive way. Give two people a compliment, give yourself two smiley faces. Sounds easy, right? When you are ready to do this, continue it for one week. If that sounds too easy, then take it to the next level.

2. Within one day, give everyone in your house a compliment. Just one, but everyone, no exceptions, no excuses. Then give yourself a smiley face (and a gold star).

When this becomes easy, think of five positive things about each person in your home, write them down on sticky notes, and attach them to the doors of their bedrooms. This is a very brave action, especially if you are still working through some hard feelings that are pushing you backward into childish behaviors, instead of forward into the adult actions. This public exposure of your renewed thoughts can be scary. What if you are rejected in some way? What if they never talk to you about the note you left on the door? What if they accuse you of something (in a passive aggressive reaction) in their own guilt about seeing your changing caregiver heart? Are those “what ifs” pushing to play a game based on worry instead of action? Can you say no to the monster and seek

out what is good for your caregiver spirit instead?

These suggestions are simply that, suggestions. If emotions around your home are too big for these small actions, please consider spending time with a trained professional. If you cannot afford one, seek out your pastor for direction and guidance in these matters. A worry monster is an evil master.

When all those previous choices become more of a habit, then take it to the next level and reflect on the following: Do I generally watch what I say to people? Do people generally see me as being an encouraging person? If so, why? If not, then why not? Most importantly, now what?

3. Choose to be in positive spaces. Psychologists are saying that they can predict if a marriage will last, or not, by counting how many positive interactions we have (with our spouse) verses how many negative interactions we have. They are also claiming it takes five encouraging statements to remove the damaging effects of one negative statement. In the spirit of having faith or a complete trust of confidence in someone regardless of whether they return the sentiment, try the following *three tasks for the next three days in a row*.

- a. Smile more.
- b. Start writing down one event that you are grateful for each day before you go to sleep. The thing you are grateful for does not have to be a big thing—like world peace being discovered (even though that would be really really nice). It can be even the smallest event which had a positive impact on your heart, or mind, or strength that day.
- c. Choose to be in only positive spaces for three days. You will talk to positive people, say positive things, and read, listen to, or enjoy positive items on your list of “things to do that make me feel at peace” list from the exercise in Chapter 3. If you have a hard time finding or being in those spaces for whatever reason, this is a great reason to reflect with writing in your LIVING journal. Why is this exercise difficult for you to try or to do? Figure it out, then do it; three days is long enough for a resurrection to occur in your faith, just saying.

Something to consider when you are choosing to be in positive spaces:

My dearest friend is a social worker. She is one of my heroes of the faith, as her chosen profession is to help juvenile boys attempt to deal with some of the issues that have brought them one step away from being sent to prison. You would think that her job would keep her from being in a positive space for three days straight. Well, that is where you'd be mistaken. These boys have such major issues that they have been institutionalized by the state at a "boys' home." Yet, that space is transformed because of who my friend IS. She has been able to surround her staff and her boys with giving and positive experiences. I have watched her boys when they see her. Many light up as they feel she both loves and likes them.

That said, I also have a new friend who, in the courtroom, defends women and children who have been abused. That type of court space is inherently sad and painful. She does not have the authority or the time for healing that is going to be needed to change the wounded hearts. Yet, she has the power to protect them from it happening again, which is a start on a long road to recovery. This friend knows that her professional calling is hard. I honor her courage to fight for the wounded among us. But she also knows *she must intentionally* use her weekends to be in positive spaces in order to keep up the good work she has been called for. She gives to herself on weekends.

Chapter 8

Guiding Joy

Try your own version of reflective journaling using Osmer's four questions within Psalm 139. This is one of the first ancient texts I used when learning to reflect in scriptures. Working in reflective in the psalms usually gives sweet soft cool reflections from the edge of living water.

What is going on here?

Why is this going on?

What might be going on (or what do I need)?

How might I respond?

If you want to ease into this idea a bit later try the next exercise instead.

1. This exercise is to help us remind our caring selves that we are all “beautifully and wonderfully made.” Read and then slowly write on a separate sheet of paper the Love is... scriptures given in 1st Corinthians 13:4–8. After you write it all, go back and ask yourself, how may I learn to accept my gifts within that scripture? For example, “Love is kind: I am kind when I play cards with my mother, even though I want to watch TV,” or “Love keeps no record of wrongs: My grandmother makes me feel like I can do no wrong and that is a special skill; I hope I will be able to imitate her with my own grandchildren.”

When you have listed all of them, put this in an envelope and write your address on it and mail it. You may find that you have more examples to add, after you receive this list back in the mail.

2. Write another letter to yourself using the following open-ended questions:
- a. What fruit do I hope to see growth in this year and why?
 - b. When I spend time thinking about the fruit of love, I believe...
 - c. When I reflect on what what joy looks, I wonder...

Chapter 9

Living *a* Good Life

All previous exercises in *Living with Momma* have been as an offer of safe spaces for our souls to emerge within the context of our family stories. I have seen the following exercise used by social workers, ministers, and healthcare workers as a way to introduce self-care through healing and acceptance. We will look at a larger view of our (family) history and ask how it has defined our own stories. This exercise will use a genogram as a way to help us learn from uncovering some of the history that creates healthy and not-so healthy patterns in our families.

Simply put, a genogram is a chart that allows us to see patterns within a family system. We will then use this personalized chart to help us (re)write our family stories; or as Kierkegaard said it best, “Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.” I gave you my own personal example of using a genogram to (re)write “being born into a family” in the closing paragraphs found in the introduction of this book. I took my genogram and reflected on the blessings and the wounds that needed to be seen through the eyes of an adult instead of my childhood. This is where I found my view of a good life.

1. Get a blank piece of paper (the next page is blank for you), a ruler, and a pencil (preferably not a pen). Set a timer for one hour. (I will explain why this is important later.) Begin the following:

- Draw a circle about the size of the palm of your hand right in the middle of the page.
- Write your full name, date of birth, present age, current or last occupation in that middle circle.
- On the right side of that (middle) circle draw another, smaller circle and then draw a line from that circle to your circle. Inside of that circle place the full name of your biological father. If you have a step-father or an adoptive father place another circle alongside of your biological father’s circle and another line to your circle. Inside of each father circle, also place (like your own) his date of birth, present age, occupation. If this person is deceased, then lovingly place an X across his circle after you fill it in. If you do not know the exact dates (or exact information) of anything we are doing, that is okay; estimates will do just fine.
- On the left side of your circle do the same thing as you did on the right side but for your mother’s information. Same as before, add any step- or adoptive mothers you have in your life and her birth date, present age, and occupation.
- In the space at the top of the page, do the same circle exercise with any children you have. Make sure you add those that are biological, adopted, and step-children.

In the space at the bottom of the page, do the same circle exercise with any siblings you have had.

- In the space at the bottom of the page, do the same circle exercise with any siblings you have had.
- Now it gets a bit wonky, but a lot more fun. Draw other circles that give the names and information of each of your parents' parents. Many of us in the sandwich generation are in our 50s and we knew our grandparents (so we might even have or at least been given firsthand knowledge of our great-grandparents). My own grandchildren are blessed to have two sets of great-grandparents (on my side of the family) to interact with.

If you really get into this kind of thing, add some aunts/uncles to this chart. You probably will not know their dates of birth, but may know approximately based on your parents' ages, and you may also know their professions. Add these, as they can show a few more patterns in your family (behavior) systems

Just remember you are not finished yet and you only have one hour. If you want to go further and do the whole Ancestry.com thing, good for you. I have fallen into that abyss myself at times. But researching your ancestry is not this exercise. When we get too far into other details we will never get to the real purpose of this exercise.

- Go back and add the following information (in capital letters) when you have finished adding all the people you can recall to your chart.
- Did any of them fight in a war? Mark with a F on the top of the circle with their name.
- Did any of them suffer the loss of a child? Put an S on the top of the circle with their name.
- Did any have a college degree? Mark with a C. (If a person is beginning to have more than one letter, then just start going around the outside of the circle with all the letters surrounding their names).
- Did anyone get fired or lose a business during economic downturns? Mark these with a B (as above).
- Did any live through the Great Depression or the Dust Bowl (as in, lived between 1929–1939)? Mark with a G.
- Are any of them first- or second-generation immigrants? Mark these with an I.
- Were any of them widowed or widowers? Mark these with a W.
- Were any of them divorced? Mark these with a D.

Hopefully you were able to finish your genogram within one hour.

If you are like me, at some point you will see many in your family will have several letters around their circles. As the lines connecting the circles will show you, every one of these people have or will have touched you, in one way or another. What I want you to consider is how most of them have survived (and even thrived) through some of the most hard- or grief-stricken times in life.

Take a minute and look at your genogram for patterns of survival.

- What comes to mind for you?
- Is this thought one of mindful character, heartfelt gratitude, and fruitful promises?
- What have you never considered before you saw this chart of your family in its entirety?
- How has being born into this family shaped your mindset to be responsible and motivated to make a difference in this world?
- What are you proud of?

I am not asking you to label any family member, mainly because it can lead to a judgmental spirit, and because as Kierkegaard also says, “Once you label me you negate me,” but attempt to look lovingly at yourself and ask, “What patterns do you want to consciously hope not to repeat in your own life story?”

Lastly, ask yourself, what does *LIVING* the good life mean to you? Can you (re)write your family stories from the view of virtues, positive character traits, or fruit of the Spirit as your guide?

Thank You

Thanks for reading!

I'd love to hear about your fruitful adventures in *Living with Momma: A Guide to Caring for Adult Children, Aging Parents, and Ourselves*. If you are interested in exploring further within your Caring Self, I'd be happy to keep you up-to-date on upcoming retreats, workshops, and video chats.

You can contact me or join my email newsletter at <http://www.livingwithmomma.com>

I'd also love to connect with you on my Facebook page at <http://fb.me/ElizabethBAdamsAuthor>

If you want to connect with other caregivers, I've created a Facebook Group at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/LivingWithMomma/>