**Unity in the Caregiving Family**

**(Post is 667 words)**

Like many siblings, my brother Gary and I fought a lot growing up. Nothing too serious, mostly squabbles over things like who crossed the imaginary line down the middle of the backseat of the car. Looking back, I realize most of the fighting may have been my fault. I was pretty bossy.

However, I do remember one time during our childhood that my brother and I were in complete unity. Instead of fighting, we chose to work together towards a common goal. The neighbors had a litter of puppies and we wanted a dog.

The mission was two-fold. First, we had to prove to Mom and Dad we were old enough to do the work a pet required. And second, we had to convince them that this dog was the dog for us. We experienced great success on our first joint mission. We named her Samantha. She was half Norwegian Elk Hound and half Poodle.

Now, more than four decades later, Gary and I work together on another joint mission – caring for our parents. When we began this journey several years ago, we talked about the challenges ahead. Due to the emotions involved, we knew disagreements could happen frequently and escalate quickly. But we work hard to keep our common goal in mind - the best care and the most-loving situation for our parents.

Caregiving decisions are never easy. Toss in different personalities, viewpoints, and distance and sometimes they can be almost impossible. There are no cut and paste answers, but there are some things we can do to foster unity with siblings and other family members. If we all have the same goal, then unity is possible.

In Ephesians, the apostle Paul cited four virtues necessary to build strong relationships (Ephesians 4:1-6). His short list includes humility, gentleness, patience, and loving forbearance. Humility tops the list because pride creates division. Pride always believes its way is the best way. If we allow pride to gain a foothold in our hearts then the other virtues won’t even have a chance to flourish.

Merriam-Wester’s online dictionary describes “gentle” as “free from harshness, sternness, or violence.” Gentleness is not weakness. Instead, to be gentle is to control our strength, to show restraint when interacting with others.

Patience and forbearance are close cousins. People who desire unity will be slow to become angry. We will be reluctant to return a wrong done. And we will be quick to put up with the faults and irritating quirks of others. After all, we have them too.

The specific application of these unifying virtues will look a little different in each unique family. Not long ago, I sat around a table at a restaurant with a dozen women about my age. Long after our plates were cleared, we stayed, talking. Eventually the conversation came around to caring for our parents. I asked how they all worked with their siblings to reach consensus on decisions.

Judy said they focus on prayer. “We pray independently and then together before making any big decisions.”

Someone else sighed then said, “That’s great if all your siblings are Christians.”

Donna added some words of experience. “My sister lives close to my dad and I’m a plane ride away. I feel her opinion should have more weight than mine. She has a better grasp of the situation.”

Another chimed in. “It’s vital we listen. I’ve learned to let my siblings share their thoughts and feelings before I speak. I need to really understand their point of view before I give mine. When they feel heard, they are more open to hearing me.”

You cannot control your family members’ thoughts and feelings, but you can foster an atmosphere of unity by choosing to practice humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearance. Unity begins with you.

***Personal Reflection***

*Think about the last time you had a disagreement with a family member. How did it begin? In what ways could you have been more humble, gentle, patient, or forbearing?*

*Kathy Howard calls herself a “confused southerner.” Raised in Louisiana, she moved with her engineer husband around the U.S. and Canada. She says “pop” instead of “Coke” and “you guys” as often as “y’all.” But she’s still a southern girl at heart! Kathy encourages women to live an unshakeable faith by standing firm on our rock-solid God no matter life’s circumstances. Kathy, the author of eight books, including the new daily devotional* [*“30 Days of Hope When Caring for Aging Parents,*](http://www.kathyhoward.org/books/30-days-of-hope-when-caring-for-aging-parents/)*” has a Master’s in Christian Education. She is passionate about Bible study and discipleship and loves sharing at women’s events and retreats. Kathy is also a regular contributor to Crosswalk.com, Hello Mornings, Arise Daily, and more. Kathy and her “mostly retired” husband live in the Dallas/Ft Worth area near family. They have three married children, four grandsons, and three dogs – one of them on purpose. She provides free discipleship resources and blogs regularly at* [*www.KathyHoward.org*](http://www.KathyHoward.org)*. Kathy also connects with women at* [*Facebook*](https://www.facebook.com/KathyHowardUnshakeableFaith/)*,* [*Pinterest*](https://www.pinterest.com/kathyhhoward/)*, and* [*Instagram*](https://www.instagram.com/mkathoward/)*.*

***30 Days of Hope When Caring for Aging Parents***

Struggling to navigate the parent/child role reversal? Kathy Howard’s new book, *30 Days of Hope When Caring for Aging Parents*,explores God’s Word to find hope and encouragement for the wide range of physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual challenges the adult child caregiver may experience. Each of the 30 devotions – which can also serve as a guide for a daily quiet time – includes a Scripture passage, a real-life illustration, biblical commentary/application, and questions for reflection.

**(Alternate bio)**

*A former “cultural Christian,” Bible teacher Kathy Howard now lives an unshakeable faith for life and encourages other women to embrace real, authentic faith. Kathy is the author of 8 books, including* [*“30 Days of Hope When Caring for Aging Parents”*](http://www.kathyhoward.org/books/30-days-of-hope-when-caring-for-aging-parents/)*. Find spiritual encouragement and free discipleship helps on* [*her website*](http://www.kathyhoward.org/)*.*