

THE POWER OF FAITHFUL GRANDPARENTS





“What children need most are the essentials that grandparents provide in abundance. They give unconditional love, kindness, patience, humour, comfort, lessons in life and most importantly cookies.” – Rudolph Giulliani

About the Author

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“It is my belief that grand parenting is the most important family role of the new century” (Roma Hanks, PhD)

INTRODUCTION

Grandparents have a huge role to play in passing on faith to their grandchildren.

Being a grandparent is a great time of life to be in. You can spoil the grandchildren and send them home. It is your divine right to do so. It can also be hard when the tyranny of distance or strained relationships with children complicates matters. Grandparents do however have an awesome responsibility to pass on a legacy and most importantly faith to the generations they are the matriarch or patriarch of. It is always worth fighting for the right relationship with your children and grandchildren.

I carry warm memories of grandma's kitchen. . . . The smells of home baked bread, preserves and interesting dishes made her home a welcoming place.



Grandma's house was a rock, a safe haven, a place where I could go and escape, be spoilt and spend time with someone I loved.

Grandma also had a huge impact on me spiritually, her spirituality, dedication, and involvement in church life was a shining example of what it means to be a God follower. Her matriarchal influence reminded me a little of what God was like.

IMPORTANT ROLES OF GRANDPARENTS

Grandparent as the holder-of-the-stories

A grandparent is the connection to the family's common history. As the teller of stories this helps the grandchild to find their place in the family and gives them a sense of belonging.

Grandparent as hero

Grandparents are real time heroes. Having lived in the "olden days", some have fought in wars or are connected to war time heroes. Grandparents are also good fixers of many things both practical and emotional and so in the grandchild's eyes are real live heroes.

Grandparent as mentor

Every child needs a mentor, someone who is in their picture and never gives up on them. A mentor is like a cheer leader believing in the child and cheering them on. They are also experts at picking them up when they fall, dusting them off and placing them back on the right path to try again. Because grandparents offer unconditional love, they are ideal mentors.

Grandparent as role model

Grandparents pave the way and live the life that their grandchildren can aspire to. They model how to behave in many different situations and how to live a good life. This modelling is far more powerful than anything the grandchildren watch or read.

Grandparent as a rock

The increasing busyness of parents, along with the stress that family breakdown can bring to the grandchildren, makes the role of grandparent even more important than ever before. Grandparents are often the one constant who is always there for their grandchildren.

Adapted from aha-now.com

Grandparent as friend

Grandparents are the ultimate playmate and are also great spectators encouraging their grandchildren as they say "watch me" at various performances and activities. They can also be the secret confidant and friend that every child needs.

Grandparent as faith transmitter

Grandparents can model what a faithful life looks like and focus on the moral and spiritual nurture of their grandchildren.

Grandparent as memory fun maker

A Grandparent's special role is to be fun, to make fun and to spoil their grandchildren. These special times of play and fun are formative in the lives of the grandchildren and form memories that will never be forgotten. A playful grandparent takes the child's focus off the stresses and gives them a brief break from the more formal aspects of life. Play prepares grandchildren for learning and life and has many emotional, social and spiritual benefits. Most of all, play models a playful fun loving God.



WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

Let's have a look at the research/literature and the Biblical mandate before we look at what this means for grandparents.

Grandparents are key faith influencers

Research from the National Study on Youth and Religion by Christian Smith (as reported in *Soul Searching*, 2010) clearly shows that the single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents. Grandparents and other relatives, mentors, and youth workers can be very influential as well, but normally, parents are most important in forming their children's religious and spiritual lives. The best social predictor, although not a guarantee, of what the religious and spiritual lives of youth will look like is what the religious and spiritual lives of their parents looks like: "We get what we are." By normal processes of socialization, and unless other significant forces intervene, more than what parents might say they want as religious outcomes of their children, most parents most likely will end up getting religiously of their children what they themselves are. The best way to get most youth involved in and serious about their faith communities is to get their parents more involved in and serious about their faith communities.

The top influencers are mum and dad but number three is grandparents. The significance of these findings is that grandparents are key faith influencers as they are still mum and dad, which mean they maintain their primary influencer role in the lives of their children even when they are adults. Then as grandparents they are the next most important influencers in the lives of their grandchildren. In reality then, grandparents are critical when it comes to passing on faith down through the generations.

The power of grandparents, religion and transmission of faith

Valarie King, an associate professor of sociology at Penn State University, found that religion is a factor that holds family together. She concludes that grandparents who were more involved with their religion were also more involved with their grandchildren.

"Children and grandchildren who end up coming back to faith are always because their parents/grandparents prayed and loved unconditionally."

Vern Bengston (2013) and his colleagues have conducted the largest study of religion and family across generations. They have followed more than 350 families composed of more than 3,500 individuals whose lives span more than a century — the oldest was born in 1881, the youngest in 1988 — to find out how religion is, or is not, passed down from one generation to the next. In *Families and Faith: How Religion is Passed Down Across Generations*, Bengston and colleagues report their findings.

What the study found, (when all the other factors were taken into consideration) was that children are more likely to be as faithful as their parents are faithful.

One of the four most significant conclusions in the study is that grandparents have an increasing influence on religious transmission, support and socialization in the 21st century.

Grandparents provide religious influence by modelling faith, teaching the tradition and faith practices and immersing their grandchildren in religious experiences, often at church. Grandparents can support and reinforce parents' religious socialization of children. In some cases they may substitute for parents' religious socialization, when parents feel that faith or church involvement is not a priority for them, but that it could be a value for their children.

A further significant result of the study is the increasing importance of grandparents and great grandparents in the transmission of faith. Because of their increased life expectancies and demographic changes in western society, Millennials and Generation Xers will have greater involvement with their grandparents, and for some, with their great grandparents, than any previous generation of grandchildren in recent history.



Grandparents provide a “God-like figure in their children’s lives. According to Kornhaber (2002), “Religion is passed more easily from grandparent to grandchild than from parent to child because of how a child views a grandparent” he says referring to the unconditional love more easily established between a grandparent and a grandchild than between two closer relatives.

Kornhaber says the unique nature of the grandchild grandparent relationship is extremely significant in relation to spirituality and relational knowledge. Grandchildren are arriving at the same time as grandparents are preparing to leave. He says there is something cosmic about the bond. You just have to be together.

Children describe their grandparents as being a bit like God. That is good news for grandparents who realise the importance of and establish this relationship with their grandchildren.

According to Kornhaber, what is most important is parental warmth. This is key to successful faith transmission. A high quality grandparent/grandchild relationship – close, warm and affirming - leads to higher religiosity.

Unconditional love and a non-judgemental attitude towards the parents and the grandchildren are also key. Children and grandchildren who end up coming back to faith is always because their parents/grandparents prayed and loved unconditionally.

Health benefits for both

Daniel Goleman, 2007 discovered that every person-to-person interaction literally shapes the human brain – and the more important the relationship, the more profound the effect of those interactions on brain development. Goleman credits his two-year-old grandchild in helping maintain his emotional health, likening time spent with her to “a vitamin” or “an elixir”. However this does not take into account the positive effects on the grandchild.

A recent study by Boston College (Sara M. Moorman, 2014) found that “an emotionally close relationship between grandparents and grandchildren is associated with fewer symptoms of depression for both generations.”

The Silverstein study 2006 found three elements to be crucial in the development of a strong grandparent – grandchild relationship.

1. The child feeling a sense of emotional closeness to their grandparent.
2. The child having regular contact with their grandparent.
3. The child viewing their grandparent as a source of social support.

Grandparents do make a difference to values and behaviours

Dr Karl Pillemer of Cornell University wrote, “Research shows that as many as 9 out of 10 adult grandchildren feel their grandparents influenced their values and behaviours. Grandparents transmit to their grandchildren the values and norms of social order.”

A recent AARP survey of grandparents confirms that grandparents are comfortable giving advice to their grandchildren. For example, 78% of grandparents say they have discussed values with their grandchildren. Grandparents can also have a special role teaching family history.

Grandparents pass on stories and much more

Robyn Fivush of Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, 2008 found that children who know more about the stories of their family and their family history have a higher self-esteem, a stronger sense of personal control, and a belief that their families function well. They also revealed greater resiliency, bouncing back more easily after stressful events. Adolescents who know more about their family history have a greater sense of self-worth, more self-confidence, and a stronger sense of identity!

“Hearing these stories gave the children a sense of their history and a strong ‘intergenerational self’. Even if they were only nine, their identity stretched back 100 years, giving them connection, strength and resilience,”

“An hour with your grandchildren can make you feel young again. Anything longer than that, and you start to age quickly.” (Gene Perret)

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

1

Grandparents are key faith influencers

5

Interactions between grandparent and grandchild shape the brain of both the young and old

2

Grandparents are a bit like God

6

Stories convey beliefs that are more likely to stick

3

The quality of the relationship with grandparents/ grandchild is crucial

7

A strong connection between grandparents and grandchildren reduces depression in both

4

Grandparents influence the values and behaviour of their grandchildren

8

Stories give our children an identity stretching back 100 years.



THE BIBLICAL MANDATE

Never forget Deuteronomy 6 is for grandparents too.

Love the Lord Your God

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

¹⁰ When the Lord your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, ¹¹ houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, ¹² be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. (New International Version)

God wants to make a difference in our 24/7 living. The question we need to be constantly asking ourselves is how can I make a difference in the mundane 24/7 rituals, routines and rhythms of my children and grandchildren and in so doing leave a legacy that will rebound down to eternity.

“Few things are more delightful than grandchildren fighting over your lap”. (Doug Larson)”

Some Biblical passages on the blessings of grand-parenting (English Standard version, 2011)

Proverbs 17:6

Grandchildren are the crown of the aged, and the glory of children is their fathers.

Psalms 145:4

One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.

Deuteronomy 4:9

Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children.

Isaiah 46:4

Even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.

Psalms 103:17

But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children.

2 Timothy 1:5

I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.

Isaiah 40:28-31

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

Proverbs 4:1-27

Hear, O sons, a father's instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight, for I give you good precepts; do not forsake my teaching. When I was a son with my father, tender, the only one in the sight of my mother, he taught me and said to me, "Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments, and live. Get wisdom; get insight; do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth. ...

Deuteronomy 5:16

Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

Proverbs 1:8-9

Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.

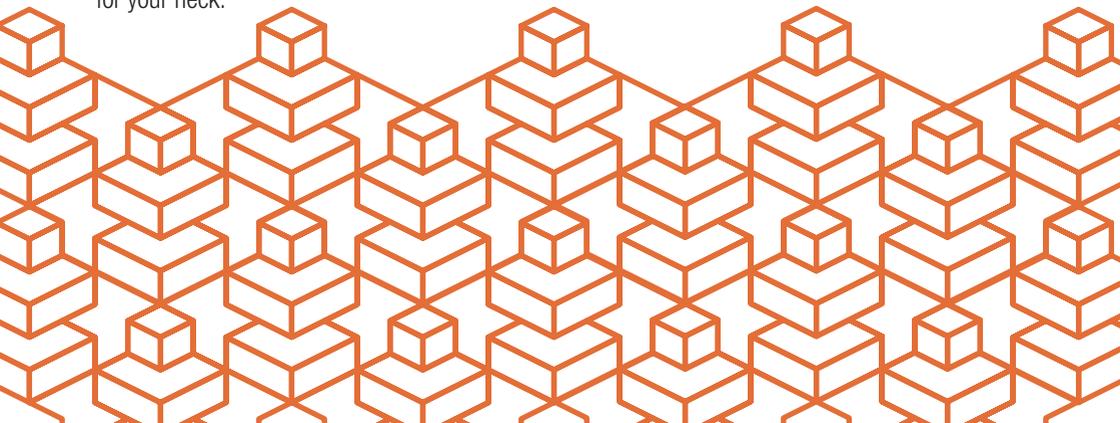
“Grandchildren are God’s way of compensating us for growing old.” (Mary H Waldrip)

Psalms 78:1-8

A Maskil of Asaph. Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth! I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children...

Deuteronomy 6:1-2

Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the rules that the Lord your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, that you may fear the Lord your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long.



MY STORY

I did not have the privilege in getting to know my paternal grandparents; the only grandparent in my life was my maternal grandmother. "Nana" was someone who I grew very close to. I would spend hours at her house, often alone with her, especially in the holidays. I enjoyed helping her in the garden, grinding wheat into flour in the wheat grinder and making bread, picking and preserving fruit, or just spending time talking to her. Nana would tell stories of her childhood and what life was like during the depression and war. Most of all Nana never missed church and would ring

our family if we were missing. She always sat in the same pew, wore the same dresses and always had a friendly greeting for her grandchildren. We would travel with her to nearby towns to collect for the Adventist Appeal for Missions. Nana gave me a sense of security and timelessness. I knew everything was OK because Nana was there living her life day in and day out and that I was special to her and that made everything OK. She was a constant in her routines and rhythms and this rubbed off and influenced me.



"I loved their home. Everything smelled older, worn but safe; the food aroma had baked itself into the furniture" (Susan Strasberg)



Nanny Tuesday
My mother-in-law and father-in-law have set up one afternoon each week where all the grandchildren are welcome at their house. Most of the grandchildren

live nearby and so this works very well. All the babies are baby sat during the day and the children at school arrive after school at nanny's house. Nanny does show and tell with them where each child brings something special to share. They play games and then she feeds them tea before their parents arrive to pick them up. This provides a great socialisation time for the grandchildren but also allows nanny and pa to speak into the children's lives in significant ways. This weekly get together is creating memories and markers to shape the grandchildren's lives and create a legacy long into the future.

40 WAYS TO CREATE A GRANDPARENT LEGACY THAT WILL REBOUND TO ETERNITY



Go ahead, be creative. How many can you do?

- 01** Time and connection is all that is often necessary. Create time where you and the grandchild are together and doing things together. Parental warmth is the key to successful faith transmission.
- 02** Hobbies and interests – create a hobby that you can involve your grandchildren in. Model trains, wood turning, cooking, sewing, fishing... the list is endless and so are the memories created.
- 03** Rituals, routines and rhythms. Let your grandchild in on these, going to church, morning/evening devotions, prayer and bible study etc. Let them see your habits but also involve them in these.
- 04** Pick up your grandchildren and take them to church with you. Especially if the parents don't attend regularly.
- 05** Read the Bible together even if it is just via Skype
- 06** Service activities – let your grandchild serve with you as you serve – soup kitchens, community centres, meals on wheels etc.
- 07** Special events and celebrations. Make the effort to show up for these or at least send something to make these events special, e.g. birthdays, holidays, school events etc.
- 08** Build something together. Go-carts, sheds, aviaries and dollhouses. Do them together with your grandchild.
- 09** Read stories – take time to read the stories of Kings and Queens, dungeons and dragons, paradise lost and regained. Children love stories and stories give our children the weapons they need to defeat the dragons. C.S Lewis is always a favourite.
- 10** Tell your story. Children love to hear the stories of your life and that of your ancestors. This passes on the family story but also creates identity, security and resilience.
- 11** Take your grandchildren on an excursion or a trip. These memory events provide solid anchor points for our grandchildren.

- 12** Make meal times special. Actually turning off technology and sharing a home cooked meal around the table is something that many children do not get enough of, yet the values passed on, stories told and the memories created are awesome.
- 13** Get out in nature. The protective factors of just being “lost in the bush together” is enormous and the sense of awe and wonder is a shared experience that will leave an indelible mark on your grandchild.
- 14** Show up regularly – sometimes family relationships can be strained. Keep showing up, contacting, sending gifts etc. to your grandchild.
- 15** Take some time to write your God story out so that your children and children’s children can know it and have a copy of it.
- 16** Set up grandparent/grandchild dates where it is just you and the child going out together to a café/restaurant or similar.
- 17** Go visit a museum together to help your grandchild get a sense of what it was like when you grew up.
- 18** Use school holidays to take the grandchildren “grey nomading” on short trips. Trains, planes and ferries are all awesome adventures for grandchildren.
- 19** Instant messaging and video conferencing is awesome for grandchildren who live a distance away. E.g. play online games, read stories, do hobbies together etc.
- 20** Snail mail – grand children love getting letters, cards and parcels sent to their mailbox. It is a rarity these days and is something they really appreciate.
- 21** Audio and video recordings of you reading a book or a few of your favourite children’s books and sending them with the books to your grandchildren is fun.
- 22** Grow a garden together (flowers or vegies) and enjoy the time spent as well as the produce.
- 23** Have an open door policy. Let your grandchildren know that they are welcome at your place any time.
- 24** Visit your grandchild’s school and church. They will enjoy showing you off.

- 25** Let your children know that you welcome pick up and drop offs and baby-sitting. This brings relief and security to most busy parents.
- 26** Send your child a box of chocolate kisses. Ask them to give your grandchild a “kiss” from you each day.
- 27** Once a year be sure to have a picture taken with each grandchild. Frame it and send it to them with a note expressing how much you appreciate them.
- 28** Set up a nannie and pa wall in your house and make sure that there is a picture of each child and grandchild on it.
- 29** Pray for and with your grandchildren. Being a prayer warrior is a privilege and the fact that the grandchild knows that you are in their ball court is awesome.
- 30** Send a jar with the exact number of M&M's until your next visit or when some special event is occurring. Have them eat one each day.
- 31** Get a copy of or research your family tree or fill it out together with your grandchild's help.
- 32** Begin a life's lesson book. Each week write down some of the lessons you learned. When it is full, send it to your grandchild.
- 33** Pick a day where you will both do random acts of kindness for the day. At the end of the day call each other and debrief.
- 34** Make your grandchildren a crocheted or patchwork quilt.
- 35** Write little notes on cards that you can leave all over your grandchild's place after you have gone.
- 36** Play board games together. Chess, draughts and checkers are classics.
- 37** Send your children gift cards to a bookstore to buy their favourite books.

38 Have a lolly jar at your house that the kids know they can raid when they visit.

39 Set up a secret bank account for your grandchildren so that you can create a nest egg for their first car purchase or something similar.

40 Go the extra mile to be in their picture. Children and grandchildren grow up so quickly. Go ahead, spoil them. It is your divine right.



“Nobody can do for little children what grandparents do. Grandparents sort of sprinkle stardust over the lives of little children.” (Alex Haley)

Grandparents who spend significant time with their grandchildren are making a significant investment in the future. This is an investment that will put your grandchildren in a good place for this life but is also an investment that will rebound down to eternity.

FINAL WORDS OF WISDOM

Remember no grandchild/grandparent is perfect. And no relationship will be perfect. There will always be in-law and out-law problems. What you as a grandparent need to do is to be the God-like figure to your family. Love greatly, forgive graciously, always maintain a non-judgemental attitude and always strive to go the extra mile to be in your family's picture. Never give up striving for the right relationship with your children and grandchildren. God is not calling for perfect grandparents, he is calling for grandparents who love God, who make mistakes and are forgiven, who model the Kingdom values of love, justice, grace, mercy and forgiveness. This modelling is far more powerful than any sermon, book or video. Go ahead be real, be you! Your family and grandchildren will thank you for it!



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We invest in others.