

How to be a Good Grandparent

Psalm 78 stresses the importance of transmitting Israel's experiences of the Exodus from Egypt and the conquest of Canaan on to the coming generations. Children can escape the judgment which fell on their forebears if they do not repeat their sins. They must not forget the works of God, and they must keep His commandments (Psalm 78:7).

The usual advice for us is to look forward. Let bygones be bygones. The past is water over the dam. Don't look back. Even Jesus cautioned against taking hold of the plow and looking back (Luke 9:62). But Psalm 78 says it's good to look back, that we might learn from the mistakes of past generations and not repeat those mistakes. We should tell our children and grandchildren about God's providential care, teaching each generation to obey the Lord and to set their hope in Him (Psalm 78:4-8).

The importance of mothers and fathers in training children cannot be overstated. But the contribution of grandparents is likewise of great value.

Grandparents are usually expected to be different from parents. In a survey taken several years ago, children were asked to respond to two questions:

1) How do grandmas differ from your mother? Grandmas (the children said):

- usually give you things
- they like for you to eat a lot
- they are harder to explain things to
- they hug too much

2) How do your grandpas differ from your dad? Grandpas (the children said):

- have better stories to tell than dads do
- they get sicker than fathers
- they need more naps
- they let you do things that fathers say you aren't old enough to do
- they think you are the greatest child in the world, when everybody knows that you aren't

The Bible speaks about grandparents and grandchildren, but the topic is not treated with as much detail as some subjects are. The only time the word "grandmother" is found in the King James Version of the Bible (KJV) is in 2 Timothy 1:5, where the Apostle Paul speaks to the younger preacher, Timothy. Paul said, "I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that (is) in thee also." (Paul was speaking to Timothy

about his sincere faith, and said that it was a faith that lived first in his grandmother Lois, and in the life of his mother Eunice—and now, Paul says, “that faith lives in you.”)

There are other Bible references to grandparents and grandchildren, mostly referred to as one’s “children’s children” in the KJV. That phrase occurs ten times in the KJV of the Bible. In the New International Version (NIV), the word “grandchildren” occurs seven times, and the words “grandmother” or “grandfather” occur six times. Proverbs 17:6 says, “Children’s children are the crown of old men.” (The more recent translations say that “grandchildren are the crown of old men.”)

We will look now at some of the characteristics of a good grandparent. There are no clear Bible passages that specifically describe the duties of a grandparent, but there are some qualities that should be marks of persons who are serious about being good grandparents. Most of this information is based on common sense and personal experience from making applications of Bible principles.

1. Good Grandparents Demonstrate a Spiritual Dimension

Grandmas and grandpas need to have a daily relationship with the Lord Jesus. Good grandparents glean wisdom from God’s Word daily. Their convictions are based on biblical principles. Their values are values in keeping with the Scriptures.

Every meal served in grandma’s home will begin with prayer. No one will make derogatory remarks about other people. Limits and boundaries will be repeatedly and clearly explained to the grandchildren. Wholesome books (rather than videos and television) will be available for the grandchildren. In fact, good grandparents will offer to read stories to the grandchildren over and over again.

Grandparents who hope to see their grandchildren grow up with a love for God and for holy things will read a variety of books to their grandchildren. These will include Bible stories, missionary stories, lessons from science and nature, biographies of famous Christians, and samples of good poetry.

All of the books written by Patricia St. John, the *Stories from Grandma’s Attic* series, the *Trailblazers* series, the *Little House* books by Laura Ingalls Wilder, the books by Christmas Carol Kauffman—all of these, along with readings from the Bible, should be part of the heritage passed along by grandparents to their grandchildren. Movies, videos, and television can never take the place of the intimate relationship that reading brings to a child. Surely all of us have heard a child say, “Grandma, will you read a story to me?”

Good grandparents demonstrate a spiritual dimension. They encourage grandchildren to memorize Bible verses. They read many wholesome books to them. They have mottoes with Bible verses in the rooms of their house. Going to grandma’s house is going to a place “where seldom is heard a discouraging word.” Grandpa and grandma have lived a long time. They have experienced good times and hard times. Grandparents who love the Lord have learned to trust Him to meet their needs **one day at a time.**

2. Good Grandparents Aim To Keep in Touch With Each Grandchild

Grandparents must try to understand their part in the grandchild's life. Grandparents are not to interfere with the parents' role, nor should they buy lots of expensive gifts that tend to spoil the grandchildren. But grandparents should have a list of all the grandchildren's birthdays, and should determine to keep in touch with each grandchild.

It is all right to give modest gifts at birthday time. Also, it is healthy to occasionally give gifts for no special reason at all. Just send a gift at a time other than their birthdays (or Christmas), and say, "We were thinking of you—a gift from grandpa and grandma." The giving of surprise gifts can be a strong way of saying to a grandchild, "We love you."

Perhaps a much more important activity for grandparents is to write a note to each of your grandchildren at birthday time. Every child likes to see his or her name printed on an envelope and is thrilled to know that there is a grandparent who cares.

Sometimes grandparents say, "But I just don't know what to write about; what shall I say to our grandchildren?" The following is a list of some ideas for writing letters to your grandchildren:

January: Tell them what your daily and weekly routine looks like. Tell them what time you normally get up in the morning, what you do after breakfast, how you generally spend your day, what time you go to bed, etc. It would be interesting to tell of a time when your routine was interrupted for some reason.

February: Give a running commentary on some of the latest news events. Tell about some of the deep snows that you can remember from your childhood days, and about traveling and sledding when the weather was snowy and cold.

March: Tell how the countryside looks in your area—melting snow, green grass, crocus peeping through. Or perhaps the magnolias are blooming beautifully where you live. Tell how it used to be when you were growing up.

April: Share what you are learning from the Bible, perhaps a new spiritual truth that you've discovered. Mention an answered prayer. Remind grandchildren that Easter means much more than chocolate bunnies and colored eggs.

May: Tell some of your best memories when you were their age. Some of us can mention the hard depression years. Other memories from long ago may include when you were first married, the cost of a stamp or a loaf of bread, or a month's rent. When you were a child, what was the church building like?

June: Ask your grandchildren to respond to a few survey questions which are designed for them:

- 1) Who is your very best friend in the whole world? Why do you like him or her best?
- 2) If you could pick any job in the world to have when you grow up, what would it be? Why do you think you would like that job?

- 3) Do you ever get afraid? What scares you the most? (The grandparent can tell about a time when he or she was afraid.)
- 4) Are you reading a portion of your Bible each day? What part of the Bible are you reading now? What is a favorite Bible verse that you have learned this year?
- 5) What one or two things would you like me to pray about in the next few weeks?

July: Tell about a vacation that you will never forget—a week with an uncle who lived on a farm, a train journey across the country, a trip to the ocean, a visit to the Holy Land, or the first time you flew on an airplane, etc.

August: Mention in review-form a good book that you have read, such as: *The Shaping of a Christian Family* by Elizabeth Elliot; *Our Saturday Night* by J. H. Moore; *Danny of Cedar Cliffs* by Christmas Carol Kauffman, or any of the *Trailblazer* books.

September: Tell about schools in your childhood. What was your school like? Tell what you had for lunch on school days. Tell what happened if you were late for school. Name the subjects you liked best.

October: Tell the grandchildren why you are looking forward to Heaven. Share some of the beautiful passages of Scripture about Heaven. While most of the society (in America) is focusing on Halloween, you can share some accounts of faithful Christian martyrs.

November: Name what you are especially thankful for this year. Tell what you plan to be doing on Thanksgiving Day. Describe a Thanksgiving Day you'll never forget.

December: Explain as best you can the glory and splendor of that first Christmas morning in Bethlehem. Tell about some memories you have of Christmas time in the past. (Don't take time to deride all the commercialization of Christmas.)

Remember, every child likes to see his or her own name printed on an envelope, and is thrilled to know that there is a grandparent who cares and is willing to write a note.

3. Good Grandparents Will Support the Grandchildren's Parents

Your married sons and daughters need to have your support in the difficult task of raising their children. Grandparents might disagree with the parents in some areas, such as the time when children should go to bed, the kinds of food and nutrition children should have, the kinds of books they read, and the best way to discipline for misbehavior.

Sometimes, after grandparents keep their grandchildren for a day (or a few days), they destroy many of the routines which the parents have tried to establish. When the children come back to the parents, one will complain because they don't buy him a donut every day like grandpa did, another will want to stay up until 10 o'clock because grandma said she is old enough to stay up later, and still another has a new t-shirt with some hideous picture on it and thinks that he must wear it because grandpa bought it for him.

Grandparents should be careful not to undermine the authority of the child's parents. And when your grandchildren are staying at your house, don't say, "Sorry children, but your mother won't let me do that"—which means *"Your mother is the bad guy, and I am the good guy, but for the moment we can't do anything about it."* When your grandchildren beg for a privilege, don't say, "Okay, go ahead, but promise you won't tell your daddy that I let you do it"—which means *"Your dad's rules are kind of peculiar, and it's all right to disobey them as long as you don't get caught."* And grandparents, don't say, "Frankly, that policy doesn't make any sense to me either, but this is your dad and mother's house, so we'll have to go along with it"—which means *"Grandchildren and grandparents know a lot more than parents about what is right and wrong, but we are held back because we don't have the final say in the home."*

At times, most grandparents will disagree with how the grandchildren are being raised, but we grandparents must realize that children have often been raised somewhat differently from the way we did it, and they turned out well too!

Maybe your son and daughter-in-law have decided to home-school your grandchildren—and you can't see why your grandchildren should be stuck in the house with their mother all day long; or you think that home-schooling robs the child of classroom experience and social activities with others. (That's a concern I had when some of our children began to home-school their children.) But news reports are showing that children who have been home-schooled are doing very well on college entrance exams as well as in other academic measures.

We grandparents are not the supreme court, with the final say on how everything should be done. We should be ready to give advice to our married children, but primarily our advice should be given only when asked for. The parents of your grandchildren are still the mother and the father, and thus they are responsible before God for the discipline and training of their children.

My point is this: You who are grandparents need to publicly support your grandchildren's parents. If you absolutely feel you must question something your children (the parents of your grandchildren) are doing, do it only in private, and only when you have good reasons for expressing concern. Unless your concern for the grandchildren is clearly a biblical one, and to compromise would be to disobey the Lord, then you (as grandparents) *have no choice but to support your grandchildren's parents.*

Grandchildren are very resilient (that is, they can recover rapidly from less than ideal circumstances). They survive even the mistakes of inexperienced parents, and come through struggles of various kinds, often better than expected. They have disappointments and temptations—but with lots of love, forgiveness, times of laughter, and supportive parents and grandparents—it's amazing how well they frequently turn out!

4. Good Grandparents Will Seriously Pray For Each Grandchild

In Romans 12:12 we are told to "continue instant in prayer"; that is, we are to persevere in prayer. We are not to grow weary in praying. We are to be diligent in prayer because prayer is our lifeline to God. The Apostle James was inspired to write, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all

men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (James 1:5). God never scolds us for coming to Him.

Grandparents should pray for their grandchildren on a regular basis:

a) Pray for their ordinary needs. Pray about their health and safety; pray that they might be preserved from giving in to the snares of the devil and the lure of the world and the pull of the flesh. If a grandchild sprained his wrist, or is feeling badly because she didn’t get all A’s on her report card, or if there are teeth that must be pulled, pray about these needs.

b) Pray for their salvation. Pray that God will bring people into their lives who will reinforce the Gospel before them. Pray that Satan will be kept from blinding their eyes to God’s wisdom. Pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal truth to them in such a way that they can hardly refuse to respond favorably to the invitation to receive Christ.

c) Pray for their future mate. Pray that the parents of your grandchildren’s mates will sow the seeds of strong character in their lives. Pray that the mates whom your grandchildren will choose for life partners will develop a healthy view toward the sexual relationship and the role of father and mother in the home.

d) Pray that your grandchildren will have wisdom to face life’s issues.

- that they will build a reputation for hard work and honesty
- that they will be quick to confess their sins
- that they will fight actively against the forces of darkness
- that they may turn tough times into sources of spiritual gain
- that they will know what to do about a job and/or further education

e) Pray for their spiritual growth.

- that they don’t lose heart in praying (Luke 18:1-8)
- that they won’t give in to temptations (Luke 22:40)
- that their love might grow from day to day (Philippians 1:9-10)
- that their faith might not fail (Luke 22:32)

Let your grandchildren know that you are praying for them if they go off into Volunteer Service, and the days sometimes get long and lonely, and when they are faced with new and difficult temptations. Pray that they might sense God’s presence through dangerous and scary times. Your grandchildren should be able to say to the enemy of their souls, “But I know that grandma is praying for me. She promised to

pray every day, and she's serious about it. She even gets down on her knees and appeals to God on my behalf!"

When Samuel, the aged spiritual leader of the Hebrew people, decided to retire, and the new king Saul began to rule, multitudes of Jewish people came to Samuel and begged him to keep on praying for them. And Samuel answered, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you" (1 Samuel 12:23). Grandparents can have a great prayer ministry in behalf of their offspring.

For those parents whose children are not blessed with godly grandparents, try to seek out some faithful older folks to help fill in the gap. To those whose children are grown and your life is less hectic than it used to be, you can serve as surrogate grandparents for the children in your local congregation who lack this vital influence.

May each grandparent aim to so live, that when we depart this life, the memories we have let behind will have helped (and not hindered) others on their journey of life.

-Harold S. Martin

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