

BIBLICAL GRANDPARENTING

**Exploring God's Design
for Disciple-Making and Passing
Faith to Future Generations**

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FOREWORD

The church has assimilated the world’s perspective on senior adulthood and grandparenting—a perspective that sees senior adulthood as a sort of second adolescence, filled with maximal freedom and minimal responsibility. Like the wealthy fool in one of the parables of Jesus, many senior adults have declared to themselves, “You have plenty of goods stored up for many years; relax, eat, drink, celebrate!” (Luke 12:19^{NET}). But Scripture calls older adults to something far more significant than sailing into the sunset on a ship that is free from responsibilities to the next generation. According to the apostle Paul, older believers are called to train and to encourage younger believers—a task that requires continuing growth and faithfulness in the local church (Titus 2:2–8).

This book is packed with solid biblical foundations and fresh empirical research. What Josh Mulvihill has provided here takes a significant step in the direction of developing a new vision for grandparents and senior adults in our churches. Read this work carefully, constantly seeking ways that your church might equip grandparents to be more effective as disciple-makers in the lives of their grandchildren and in the life of the local church.

—Timothy Paul Jones, PhD,
C. Edwin Gheens Professor of Christian Family Ministry,
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

INTRODUCTION

I began a PhD degree in family ministry with the intention of doing my dissertation on family worship. While progressing through my coursework, I noticed a large void in the field of family ministry and became convinced that families and the church would benefit from a clear explanation of God's design for grandparents. I spent four years studying grandparenthood in depth, and the results of my study are contained in the pages that follow.

This book is titled *Biblical Grandparenting* because our understanding of grandparenting needs to be based on the Bible. The Bible is sufficient for all matters of life, including grandparenting (2 Peter 1:3). Sadly, few grandparents know what the Bible says on the subject. Most look to other sources. In fact, most Christian grandparents have absorbed a philosophy of grandparenting that reflects secular culture rather than Scripture.

Two important truths are foundational to this book: *God designed grandparenting; therefore, God gets to define the role of grandparents.* God created grandparents because He has an important purpose for them and He clearly communicates it to us in the Bible.

I wrote this book to encourage grandparents to pass on faith in Christ to future generations and to help train pastors and seminary

Introduction

students to develop ministries that help grandparents in this pursuit. With that in mind, I have three goals for this book: (1) to explain what the Bible says about grandparenting, (2) to summarize what American culture says about grandparenting, and (3) to equip the church to develop disciple-making grandparents. I pray God uses this work for His glory and starts a movement of churches that take seriously God's role for grandparents as disciple-makers of the youngest generation.

—Josh Mulvihill

Executive Director of Church and Family Ministry, Renewanation
For family discipleship resources, visit GospelShapedFamily.com

WHY GRANDPARENTING?

Grandparenthood, in general, is misunderstood, unappreciated, and under-resourced. Grandparenting is not highly valued in America or in the church. Grandparents have an opportunity to make a significant spiritual impact but are settling for an independent existence that does not interfere with their adult children's decisions and places them at the periphery of family life. Grandparents need a multigenerational, Gospel-centered vision for their life. There are four reasons why a book on grandparenting is needed.

1. It's Biblical, Yet Misunderstood

There are hundreds of references to grandparents or grandparenting in the Bible. The central thrust of these Scripture passages is that God designed grandparents to be key disciple-making influences in the lives of children. God has a plan and a purpose for grandparents, which focuses on the transmission of faith in Christ to future generations. A grandparent, like a father and mother, is given a distinct role in the family that is different from all other adults in a child's life. Grandparents have a unique role that is irreplaceable and influential.

Grandparents are disciple-making partners with parents to pass faith to future generations. They are the adjunct servants of a godly parent and a spiritual surrogate for an ungodly parent. Grandparents are another voice meant to encourage children to embrace the Gospel. Grandparents provide the counsel of godly wisdom and the example of a godly life. Grandparents are a stabilizing force in the family. They are a last line of defense when crisis hits and are a built-in support system for the home. They offer affirmation and affection that is second only to parents in its impact on children. In short, the Bible presents grandparents as important and gives them an important role in the family.

2. Limited Resources

There are millions of Christian grandparents in America today with few resources to equip them to accomplish the role God has given them in Scripture. At the time of my study, there were fewer than a dozen books, one DVD series, and one ministry that existed to support all Christian grandparents. You might think this sounds like a lot of resources, but can you imagine having only a few books to address all the parenting needs for all Christian parents today? Christian grandparents are under-resourced from a Christian perspective on topics such as long-distance grandparenting, grandparents as parents, grandfatherhood, grandparenting a grandchild with a disability—and that is the tip of the iceberg. Like grandparents themselves, Christian grandparenting has been overlooked and undervalued, as reflected by the fact that pastors and publishers have almost completely ignored the subject.

Three resource providers are leading the way to encourage and equip grandparents to pass on faith in Christ to future generations:

- The Christian Grandparent Network led by Cavin Harper. Cavin is a pioneer in ministry to grandparents and has served this demographic for two decades. Cavin offers a number of

wonderful resources such as his book *Courageous Grandparenting*, GrandCamps, and a prayer focus in partnership with Lillian Penner, who wrote *Grandparenting with a Purpose: Effective Ways to Pray for Your Grandchildren*.

- The Legacy Coalition launched by Larry Fowler, Wayne Rice, John Coloumbe, Steve and Valerie Bell, and myself. The Legacy Coalition has a vision to start a national movement of intentional, Christ-centered grandparenting in America. I serve as the director of resources and encourage you to explore *Equipping Grandparents* and the GRANDPARENTING MATTERS series, which can be found at GospelShapedFamily.com.
- Renewanation, led by Jeff Keaton. Renewanation exists to provide millions of children with a biblical worldview. My role as the executive director of Church and Family Ministry exists to equip parents, grandparents, and church leaders to disciple future generations with the Bible. Renewanation offers family discipleship conferences, resources, and training events with biblical worldview at the center; visit us at renewanation.org.

3. Limited Research

The majority of research on grandparenting does not address the spiritual component of the role. Prior to this study, limited research had been done on the biblical-theological facet of the grandparent's role, and no research had been done on the role of grandparents in a Christian context. In the PhD world, it is frowned upon to state that no one has written on a topic or that a subject has been untouched. However, the more I explored the topic of Christian grandparenting, the more I noticed how little research has been done on the subject.

It is my hope that Christian scholars build upon my work and continue to study the topic of Christian grandparenting. Grandparents may be the most under-researched demographic in family

studies, providing ample research options as well as ensuring that research findings will be impactful, and in some cases even groundbreaking.

4. Grandparents Are Influential

Who are the most influential people in a young person's life? A George Barna study wanted to know the answer to a similar question and asked 602 teenagers, "Who, besides your parents, do you admire most as a role model?" According to Barna, the top five influences in the life of young people are: (1) parents, (2) other family members, typically grandparents, (3) teachers and coaches, (4) friends, and (5) pastors or religious leaders.¹

After parents, grandparents are the greatest potential influence in the life of a child—not a peer, not a pastor, and not a teacher. Grandparents, you should be encouraged. Young people admire you. They believe you are an important person in their life.

When teenagers were asked why they named a particular person as influential, teens provided the following reasons: They were worthy of imitation; they wanted to follow in the footsteps of the chosen person; they were always there for the teenager; and they were interested in the teenager's future.

The research report explains why grandparents have so much influence in a young person's life: "A majority of teens indicated the people they most admire and imitate are those with whom they maintain a personal connection, friendship, or interaction."² And David Kinnaman, who directed the study, concludes: "For better and worse, teens are emulating the people they know best."³ As basic as it sounds, grandchildren typically imitate the people who spend the most time with them.

1. Barna Group, "Teen Role Models: Who They Are, Why They Matter," January 31, 2011, www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/467-teen-role-models#.V6tVFjqdLzI.

2. Barna Group, "Teen Role Models."

3. Barna Group, "Teen Role Models."

Do you want your grandchildren to follow Christ? According to this research, the first step is to develop a strong relationship that maintains an active presence in a grandchild's life. Grandparents who are emotionally distant and physically disengaged limit the influence they will have on the faith of grandchildren. If churches want to impact the faith of young people, strategically, the greatest return on investment will come from equipping parents and grandparents to be disciple-makers within their own families.

Overview of the Book

Biblical Grandparenting is a readable academic work that explores culture's messages, God's design, and disciple-making methods to pass faith to future generations. This book began as a PhD dissertation and is the most comprehensive and exhaustive resource on Christian grandparenting to date.

Biblical Grandparenting will prove helpful for church leaders and grandparents. It can be used in Sunday school classes, small groups, and college classes. Every pastor should read this book. Every Christian grandparent would benefit from knowing the biblical principles of grandparenting presented in this book, and many will resonate with the grandparents I had the privilege of interviewing.

I want you to know what to expect from this book. It was written as an academic work, so the style and language of the book reflect that reality. The first section of the book is an easy-to-read overview of the entire book, where themes and concepts will be introduced. The other sections explore key findings from my study. I encourage you to read the book in its entirety, as you will benefit from a deep dive into culture's messages, an overview of the biblical themes of grandparenting, and the discipleship practices of Christian grandparents. Here are examples of key findings from my study:

- Three-quarters of the Christian grandparents I interviewed do not have a clear understanding of their role and operate closer to cultural norms than biblical imperatives. Grandparents are willing to invest spiritually in the lives of their grandchildren, but they are unsure what is expected of them. As a result, most Christian grandparents do not have an intentional plan to disciple future generations and lack a vision for how God can use them to impact their grandchildren with the Gospel.
- An expanded definition of “family” is needed. The family, according to cultural definitions, consists of parent(s) and children and is defined in nuclear terminology. The Bible defines family in extended family terminology, which includes grandparents. The Bible places expectations on how the generations are to interact and what responsibilities they have to one another. If a family consists only of parents and children, then grandparents are an extra, nonessential component of the family.
- I interviewed twenty-five grandparents from twenty-five different churches across the country and asked each one what their church has done to equip them in their role as a grandparent. One church offered a seminar on grandparenting. Not a single sermon, Sunday school class, small group series, or grandparent ministry was present at any of these churches. Imagine if a church never addressed parenting or marriage. This is the current reality for grandparents. Churches have completely ignored the subject, which means grandparents are left to figure things out on their own without the support or guidance of their pastors.
- Grandparents struggle with reading the Bible and verbally sharing the Gospel with grandchildren. About half of the grandparents read a children’s story Bible with their grandchildren, but once a grandchild grows out of this stage, the percentage of grandparents reading and discussing Scripture

with grandchildren plummets to extremely low levels. In addition, only one in four grandparents had verbally shared the Gospel with their grandchild, with most grandparents operating as if this were someone else's responsibility.

Part 1: Getting Started

Part one is an overview of the entire study. The high points are summarized and easy to read. This section provides a theology of grandparenting and a concise synthesis of what the Bible says about the subject. I believe the unifying concept from Old Testament to New Testament Scripture is the idea of grandparents building a godly heritage by being a disciple-maker who passes on faith in Christ to future generations. I break down the theology of grandparenting into ten biblical themes and refer to them as God's design for grandparents. The ten biblical themes of grandparenthood point back to the idea of building a godly heritage through the discipleship of grandchildren.

Part 2: God's Design

Part two lays the groundwork for the study by introducing the problem and explaining the research project. This section returns to Scripture to explore the biblical terms used to describe grandparenting and provides an academic perspective on six biblical themes of grandparenting.

Part 3: Culture's Messages

Part three explores what the literature says about the role of grandparents and provides a comprehensive summary of the past fifty years of research on the role of grandparents. If you want to know what the culture says about grandparenting, are interested in a brief history of grandparenting in America, or would like an

introduction to the major studies on the role of grandparents, this is the section to read.

Part 4: Discipleship Methods

Part four contains the summary of twenty-five interviews with evangelical grandparents from across the country. You will read about what grandparents believe their role to be and the spiritual practices they use to help grandchildren grow in their faith. This section provides practical ideas to disciple grandchildren, found in quotes from grandparents and in key findings of my analysis.

PART 1

GETTING STARTED

1

An Overview of Grandparenting

Ten Biblical Themes Every Grandparent Should Know

Every member of the family is given a clear, God-ordained role in Scripture that is not interchangeable with other members of the family. Husbands are referenced as the head of the home and are to lovingly lead their family (Ephesians 5:23). Wives are given the role of helpmate and are to willingly follow their husband's leadership (Genesis 2:18; Ephesians 5:22). Children are told to honor their parents through obedience (Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:1).

If the Bible clearly defines the role of family members, is it possible that it also defines the role of grandparents? This question has been one of the focal points of my PhD dissertation and multiple years of study. The Bible has hundreds of references that directly or indirectly speak to grandparenting. Phrases such as *children's children*, *son's son*, *father's father*, *old age*, and *forefathers* help us understand the place and purpose of grandparents in the home.

Although the Bible is clear about the role of grandparents, American culture is not, and many Christians have unintentionally adopted this unbiblical view of grandparenthood. Generally

speaking, in American culture there is confusion concerning the meaning and purpose of a grandparent's role. Gunhild Hagestad, contributor to *Grandparenthood*, says, "There is new uncertainty about what it means to be a grandparent and what grandparents are supposed to do."¹

Cultural Messages About Grandparenting

America has created its own role for grandparents, and it is known to scholars as "the new social contract." The core values of the social contract include non-interference by grandparents, emotional independence from children, and personal autonomy. Families unconsciously operate according to the agreement that children will grow up, move away, start their own family, and become independent from one another. Experts encourage families to aim for closeness at a distance, but what they gain is lonely, overburdened, and disconnected families. The social contract has amputated generations from one another and left countless grandchildren as grand-orphans who do not have the intimate influence of a grandparent in their life.

Because the role of grandparents is not clearly defined by American culture, it is viewed as an extra, nonessential role to the functioning of the family or the growth and development of grandchildren. Grandparents themselves fear meddling in their children's and grandchildren's lives. While relationships that do exist can be very positive, their limited and tenuous nature removes grandparents from the central hub of family life and places them on the periphery with a minimal impact.

Over the past one hundred years, society has redefined family with a focus on emotional-companionship. One manifestation of this change is found in children's literature about grandparenthood. A few notable titles of children's books include *Grandmas Are*

1. Gunhild O. Hagestad, "Continuity and Connectedness," in *Grandparenthood*, ed. V. Bengtson and J. Robertson (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1985), 33.

for *Giving Tickles* and *Grandpas Are for Finding Worms*. The children's book *What Grandpas and Grandmas Do Best* suggests that grandparents are for playing hide-and-seek, singing a lullaby, building a sandcastle, and playing games. In *Grandma, Grandpa, and Me*, grandparents are to play with, work alongside, and have fun with. Children's literature speaks of a grandparent's role as playmate and companion.

Grandparents adjusted their value system based on the place and purpose society gave to the elderly and defined their involvement with family around the two roles of independence and indulgence. Values shifted from leaving a family legacy and financial inheritance to pursuing a pleasant retirement experience. A bumper sticker occasionally seen on the car of elderly people captures this well: "We're spending our children's inheritance."

Society has lost its compass regarding why the generations should interact, how to do so, and what responsibilities they have to the other. My research revealed that two out of three Christian grandparents operate according to three cultural guidelines: (1) adult children expect non-interference, (2) the primary role for grandparents is emotional-supportive, and (3) a high value is placed on encouragement and companionship. The majority of Christian grandparents interviewed for my study did not know what the Bible says about grandparenting. In fact, low numbers of grandparents referenced the Bible as they talked about their role. Christian grandparents need a renewed biblical vision regarding their role in the family and purpose in society.

God's Design for Grandparents

The Bible has much to say about the role of grandparents. During my yearlong, cover-to-cover reading of the Bible, I cataloged every reference that applied to grandparents. At the end of that year, I had more than one hundred pages of single-spaced notes and summarized them as God's design for grandparents broken

down into ten biblical themes. An overview can be seen in Table 1. Each theme speaks to a different component of God's design for grandparents. Together, they present a rich picture of a disciplinarian role with a clear task of passing on faith in Jesus Christ to future generations.

Before exploring these ten biblical themes, it is worth noting what the Bible does not say about the role of grandparents. The Bible never portrays a godly grandparent as self-focused, emphasizing fun as the goal with grandchildren, disconnected from the younger generations of their faith community, or living a separate life from their adult children and grandchildren. The Bible never encourages a season of retirement to travel or play. The Bible never endorses self-indulgence due to a lifetime of hard work. The Bible never encourages individual, autonomous lives between family generations.

Grandparents of the Bible were not bleacher-sitting, pleasure-seeking, purposefully-sedentary, second-class citizens. They were warriors (Caleb and Joshua), kings (David), prophets (Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Anna), men or women of God (Noah, Lois), and apostles (John). They led churches and families. Grandparents of the Bible were active and impactful. Their lives were full and, God willing, long. In God's economy, grandparents were essential; they were not optional. Their lives were Jesus-oriented, not self-indulgent.

1. Heritage of Faith

The one word that summarizes a grandparent's role from a biblical standpoint is *heritage* (Psalm 78:1–8; 62–63). Grandparents have inherited a faith they are to pass on to their children *and* their grandchildren (Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:1–2). In modern terminology, the word *legacy* is more commonly used to communicate a similar idea of passing on faith or finances to future generations. In the narrative of Scripture, grandparents can be observed passing on faith through biblical teachings, traditions, and by living a godly life in obedience to the Lord.

Table 1: Ten biblical themes

Biblical Theme	Grandparent Responsibility
Grandparents have inherited a faith they are to pass on to their children and children's children (Deuteronomy 6:4–9, 12:28; Psalm 71:16–18).	Build a legacy of faith by passing on biblical teachings, traditions, and faithfulness.
Grandparents are to leave an inheritance to future generations (Proverbs 13:22; Ecclesiastes 7:1).	Provide children and grandchildren with a financial inheritance and a name that is worthy of honor.
Grandchildren are desirable and a crowning glory in life (Psalm 128:6; Proverbs 17:6).	Recognize the value of grandchildren. Grandchildren are a gift from God.
Grandparents are to be honored (Exodus 20:12; Proverbs 23:22; 1 Timothy 5:18).	Future generations have a responsibility to honor grandparents and care for them in their old age.
Grandparents who live in rebellion to God and do not walk in His ways may influence future generations to follow a similar path (2 Kings 17:41; Psalm 103:17; Deuteronomy 4:40; Exodus 34:6–7).	Live in obedience to God and exhort future generations to do the same while warning them of the consequences of sin. Be a living story worthy of imitation.
Grandparents are to have a multigenerational vision for the salvation and sanctification of the family (Psalm 78:1–8; 2 Timothy 1:5).	Proclaim the Gospel, point to Christ, and pray for future generations.
Grandparents are to utilize specific spiritual practices to pass on faith to future generations (Deuteronomy 4:9; Psalm 78:1–8).	Build a godly heritage by teaching the truths of God's Word and retelling the story of God's work.
Old age, the season of grandparenthood, increases one's potential contribution to God and others (Genesis 2:15; Psalm 92:14–15; Proverbs 6:6–11; Deuteronomy 6:1–2).	Reject the narrative that the purpose of old age is a life of leisure and self-indulgence but rather to serve God and bear fruit until one's dying day.
Grandparents have a responsibility to the church, which includes the discipleship of younger men and women (Titus 2:1–6).	Older generations are to train younger generations by providing biblical wisdom, guidance, and instruction.
Old age is a sign of God's favor and something to celebrate (Psalm 90:9–10; Proverbs 14:15).	Reject the cultural view of old age as undesirable, embrace old age, and live intentionally for Christ.

The grandparent's role is to leave a godly legacy and build a rich heritage in the Lord. To be clear, the grandparent is not building their own heritage; they are passing on the Lord's heritage. Psalm 127:3 says, "Children [and thus, grandchildren] are a heritage from the Lord." Just as a child does not truly belong to a parent, so a heritage does not truly belong to a grandparent (Psalm 24:1). The author of Proverbs 13:22 encourages grandparents to leave an inheritance for grandchildren, which has both financial and spiritual applications.

The Bible warns grandparents that disobedient and rebellious descendants are the result of spiritually neglecting the faith of children and grandchildren. God designed grandparents to be disciplinarians who treasure Christ, tell grandchildren the work of God, and teach grandchildren the truths of God's Word (Psalm 78:4–8). Biblical grandparenting centers on discipleship, is a crowning achievement of life, and focuses on the salvation and sanctification of future generations. Consistently throughout Scripture, older generations are investing in younger generations.

The most common passage of Scripture utilized for family discipleship is Deuteronomy 6:4–9. Currently, the Christian community limits the application of Deuteronomy 6 to parents, but based on the context of Deuteronomy 6:1–2, it has a broader application that includes grandparents.

In Deuteronomy 5 and 6, Moses summoned all Israel, including grandparents, and gave the community a charge to love God and diligently teach young people the commands of God (Deuteronomy 5:1; 6:1–2). As you read the following verse, notice *who* is to be a recipient of the commands of God. Moses states the commands of God are for "you and your son and your *son's son*" (Deuteronomy 6:1–2, emphasis added). The reference to "son's son" is one of the Bible's ways of saying "grandchildren" and suggests that Deuteronomy 6:4–9 is not only for children, but also for grandchildren.²

2. Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross agree with this assessment, stating, "Though these verses have often been assumed to be speaking exclusively

Grandparents as well as parents are given the responsibility by God: “You shall teach them diligently to your children” (Deuteronomy 6:7).³ Grandparents have been given a God-designed role that includes teaching grandchildren the commands of God. If God desires to see tri-generational faithfulness, it makes sense that God will employ a multigenerational strategy utilizing parents and grandparents to accomplish His desired outcomes.

2. Inheritance

Grandparents are to leave an inheritance to future generations. Proverbs 13:22 says, “A good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children.” According to the Bible, grandparents have something of value that God designed to be intentionally passed on to children and grandchildren. Grandparents are not to squander a family’s inheritance on themselves.

The Bible speaks of multiple ways grandparents leave an inheritance to future generations: financial, a good name, and salvation.

to parents, these words convey the communal sense that faith in God is to be modeled and taught in the home as well as among the faith community, across the generations. Parents, grandparents, and all extended family . . . are to participate in the telling of God’s faithfulness to those coming along behind them.” Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 80.

3. The Bible’s use of the words *son* and *children* in Deuteronomy 6:1–9 should be understood in a broader sense, allowing for grandchildren to be included in Moses’ command, rather than a narrow sense and an application only to children. According to Francis Brown, the Hebrew word for *son* (בֶּן *bēn*) is primarily used for a male heir, one generation removed from a parent, but is also used to refer to grandchildren (see Exodus 10:2; Judges 8:22; Jeremiah 27:7; Exodus 34:7; Deuteronomy 4:9, 25; Judges 12:14; 2 Kings 17:41; 1 Chronicles 8:40; Job 42:16; Proverbs 13:22; 17:6; Ezekiel 37:25). For example, Laban called his daughters’ children his own sons (Genesis 31:28, 43). Joseph called his grandchildren his sons (Genesis 50:23). When a grandchild was born to Naomi, “the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, ‘A son has been born to Naomi’” (Ruth 4:17). The Bible uses the word *son* to include grandson, and is additional evidence that grandparents can claim Deuteronomy 6:4–9 as applicable to them. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 2000), 119–120.

Proverbs 19:14 presents a norm in Scripture, “House and wealth are inherited from [grand]fathers.” My interviews with Christian grandparents around the country showed that grandparents do not have a clear understanding or application of Proverbs 13:22. Christian grandparents operate according to four different approaches to handling finances in later life: (1) spend now on family, (2) spend now on self, (3) provide a spiritual inheritance, and (4) save for family. The prudent grandparent gives forethought to what he or she would like to pass on and makes a financial plan toward that end.

Grandparents will also pass on a name, which will either be a blessing or a curse to future generations. Ecclesiastes 7:1 says, “A good name is better than precious ointment.” At the most basic level, grandparents pass on a reputation based on how they lived their life. Grandparents pass on a name of highest value when they walk with the Lord and live for God’s glory. Grandparents are reminded by Ecclesiastes 7:1 that there is little value in expensive outward enjoyments such as perfumes. Based on eternity, to be a child of God and to have one’s name confessed by Christ before the Father in heaven is better than all riches and is the greatest inheritance a grandparent can pass on to a grandchild. Grandparents who wish to spoil their grandchildren should give them an inheritance that cannot spoil: a rich heritage in Christ.

3. The Gift of Grandchildren

Every grandchild is created in the image of God and is therefore a blessing of great worth to grandparents (Genesis 1:28). Every grandchild, regardless of race, gender, health, disability, personality, or achievement is to be highly valued. Grandchildren are a blessing, not because of who they are or what they will do, but because they are created by God for His glory and as a good gift to grandparents. Every grandchild is to be received with open arms, even the most difficult or severely disabled grandchild.

The Bible tells us it is a blessing to know one's grandchildren. Psalm 128:6 says, "May you see your children's children!" Biblical grandparenting is embodied by enthusiasm, not ambivalence, about becoming a grandparent. Grandparents should treat the demands of being a grandparent not as a burden, but as a blessing. The grandparent who has a poor attitude toward grandparenthood in general or a grandchild specifically is at odds with God's sovereign plan. Grandparenting is to be embraced as God's good design for the later third of life, not avoided, abdicated, or considered a burden.

It is critical for grandparents to approach this season of life with an attitude toward grandchildren that reflects God's attitude. How does the Bible speak of grandchildren? Proverbs 17:6 says, "Grandchildren are the crown of the aged." God speaks about grandchildren as a crown, suggesting they are of high value and bestow upon grandparents an honor unmatched and unavailable through any other source. The attitudes and actions of Christian grandparents should reflect the value given to grandchildren by God in Scripture. Like any recipient of a gift, grandparents have the choice to receive or reject God's good gift of grandchildren. As we read through the narrative of Scripture, grandparents who receive grandchildren as a gift respond to them with warm affection.

Toward the end of his life, Jacob the patriarch called his grandsons to him to bless them; he "kissed them and embraced them" (Genesis 48:10). Another example is seen in the life of Laban: "Early the next morning Laban kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them" (Genesis 31:55 NIV). If Laban, an ungodly man, knew the importance of affection, then grandparents who have been transformed by Christ should demonstrate an even greater affection. Naomi displayed a loving affection for her grandson: "Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him" (Ruth 4:16 NIV1984). What a wonderful picture of grandparents at work! Every grandchild benefits from a grandparent who loves him or her outrageously. In an age when life is difficult, affection from a grandparent provides another source of safety and security for children. Even more important, strong

relationships become the foundation by which the Gospel can be transmitted and discipleship between generations can occur.

4. Honoring Grandparents

Numerous scholars speak of the centrality of the fifth commandment to the subject of grandparenting. A growing number of scholars believe that the command to honor one's parents was not directed only toward young children, but includes adult children for the purpose of caring for their aging family members.⁴ Ronald Clements holds this position and says, "The whole aim of this commandment is to secure positive support for ageing [sic] parents from their children, who are themselves assumed to be mature parents. . . . It is this care of the old that is demanded here."⁵ Douglas Knight has the following to say:

The commandment "Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12) is not directed so much at young children as it is at adults who are obligated to care for their elderly parents. Similarly, the harsh law in Deuteronomy 21:18–21 does not prescribe capital punishment for a minor who disobeys his or her parents, for drunkenness and gluttony are most offensive when they result in an adult's shirking the responsibility of providing for the needs of one's parents. The biblical text makes it a moral and social duty, the violation of which is punishable by the community.⁶

Gordon Harris has a helpful summary of the fifth command. He says the word *honor* "used here emphasizes the giving of 'weight' to prominent people. It commonly refers to glorifying God." Harris

4. See Rolf Knierim, "Age and Aging in the Old Testament," in *Ministry with the Aging: Designs, Challenges, Foundations*, ed. William Clements (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 29.

5. Ronald Clements, *Exodus*, The Cambridge Bible Commentary (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 125.

6. Douglas A. Knight, "Perspectives on Aging and the Elderly in the Hebrew Bible," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 68, no. 2 (2014): 148.

interprets this to mean that “children must grant full significance to parents,” which includes “making them feel important for what they have achieved as parents and for what they have accomplished as the instructors of younger generations (Deuteronomy 6:7, 20–21).”⁷

Honoring one’s parents includes applications for the aging, but should not be limited to this period of life.⁸ Honoring parents is a command that applies to adult children and grandchildren alike. It is not an attitude only, but includes the element of personal service.⁹ Honor is demonstrated by positive action on behalf of grandparents—meeting their needs, listening to their advice, recognizing their worth, and doing so in all sorts of ways large and small (1 Timothy 5:1; Leviticus 19:32; Proverbs 23:22).¹⁰ Dishonoring older family members through speech (Leviticus 20:9) or in deed (Exodus 21:15; Proverbs 28:24) was a serious offense, further establishing the importance that Scripture places on honoring elders.¹¹ The older generations in Scripture are given a place of honor that is often absent from modern society.¹² The attitude of the younger generations toward grandparents should reflect God’s attitude toward grandparents. In general, the Bible holds them in high esteem and suggests the later years of a person’s life are “a time of divine tribute.”¹³

7. J. Gordon Harris, *Biblical Perspectives on Aging: God and the Elderly* (New York: Haworth, 2008), 106.

8. Stephen Sapp points out that the use of the word *obey* gives the commandment a much broader meaning, which includes application for young children. Steven Sapp, *Full of Years: Aging and the Elderly in the Bible and Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 83.

9. Gerald Blidstein, *Honor Thy Father and Mother* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1975), 60–61.

10. Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, New American Commentary, vol. 2 (Nashville: B & H, 2006), 461.

11. Sapp, *Full of Years*, 88.

12. Georges Minois recognizes this reality when he states, “Old people seem to have been genuinely respected, cosseted and obeyed in a general way; they benefited from a semi-religious prestige. Their fate would be envied by future generations.” Georges Minois, *History of Old Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 30.

13. James Davies, “A Practical Theology of Aging: Biblical Perspectives for Individuals and the Church,” *Christian Education Journal* 5, no. 2 (2008): 277.

The Bible illustrates a number of ways in which grandparents can be honored: devotion (Ruth 1:16); financial support, especially for widows (Acts 6:1–4; 1 Timothy 5:3–8); providing a caring fellowship (Acts 2:42–26); and listening to their advice and wisdom (1 Timothy 5:17–18). In Matthew 15:1–6, Jesus interprets the commandment, “Honor your father and mother,” as referring to financial support. John MacArthur’s pastoral perspective further explains this passage’s meaning.

The Old Testament law of honoring one’s parents meant that as long as a person lived, he was to respect and support his parents. During the first half of a person’s life, the parents give everything they have to supply the needs of their children. When they get to the point in life where they’re no longer able to meet their own needs, it becomes the responsibility of their children to take care of them. That is God’s way of making families stick together. The parents raise the children, and when the children are grown, they take care of their parents while also raising their own children, who are going to take care of them while they are raising their children.¹⁴

It is noteworthy that as important as parenting is in the Bible, a high honor is also reserved for grandparents.¹⁵ God instructed those in the community of faith to “stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God” (Leviticus 19:32).¹⁶ In this passage, Moses links showing respect for the aged with having reverence for God.

14. John F. MacArthur, *The Fulfilled Family* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 4.

15. Peter Enns sees an application of the fifth command extending to others in authority in the community. He states: “Many have suggested over the long history of interpretation that honoring ‘your father and mother’ necessarily extends to other people of authority in the community. This seems somewhat justifiable in light of the fact that the titles ‘father’ and ‘mother’ were applied to individuals other than parents (e.g., Judg 5:7; 1 Sam 24:11; 2 Kgs 5:13).” Peter Enns, *Exodus*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 420.

16. R. Laird Harris notes that “Verse 32 seems to be unique in the Pentateuch, though it is implied in the fifth commandment that honor be given to parents. Proverbs 20:29 and 16:31 give similar thoughts.” R. Laird Harris, *Leviticus*, The

Grandparents are honored when young people listen to their wisdom. Elihu, one of Job’s friends, “had waited to speak to Job because they [three other friends] were older than he” (Job 32:4). Elihu purposefully acted with reverence toward those who were older. “I said, ‘Let days speak, and many years teach wisdom’” (Job 32:7). Rehoboam is not presented in Scripture as a model for young people to follow. He rejected the counsel of old men in place of advice from the young, and it cost him the majority of his kingdom (1 Kings 12:6–15). Job states, “Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding in length of days” (Job 12:12). Grandparents have accumulated wisdom, and wise grandchildren glean much from the aged.

Just as the older generation has a responsibility to spiritually nurture the younger generation, the younger generation has the responsibility to honor and care for the older generation. Honoring the older generation is the key responsibility of younger generations. It is the first command with a promise because it is the key to all human relationships and the passing on of a righteous heritage.

5. The Sin of Fathers

God never allows grandparents to sin successfully. The Bible says the sin of a father often becomes the sin of the family for multiple generations. One example is found in 2 Kings 17:41: “So these nations feared the Lord and also served their carved images. Their children did likewise, and their children’s children—as their [fore] fathers did, so they do to this day.” Grandparents who live in rebellion to God and do not walk in His ways may influence future generations to follow a similar path (Psalm 103:17; Deuteronomy 4:40; Exodus 34:6–7).

Grandchildren watch the lives of grandparents and regularly absorb a grandparent’s priorities, passions, and perspectives. The

Expositor’s Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 609.

multigenerational examples provided from Scripture are sobering. In Judges 2, Psalm 78, and the list of 2 Kings 17, each generation gave themselves over to a greater degree of depravity. In each of these examples, the move away from the Lord began slowly with a divided heart and ended with descendants who did not know the Lord or walk in His ways.

The first and most important command for all grandparents is to love the Lord with all their heart, soul, and might (Deuteronomy 6:5). A grandparent cannot properly disciple future generations if they have a competing love (known in Scripture as an idol). God's first concern is for a grandparent's heart, followed by daily discipleship practices with the family.

Grandparents, like every other member of the family, are called to love the Lord Jesus with their whole heart (Mark 12:30–31), deny themselves, follow Christ (Matthew 16:24), and forsake all that prevents them from taking hold of Christ (Matthew 13:44–46). The Scriptures sound a loud warning to grandparents when it states “their fathers forgot my name” and “have not obeyed my words” (Jeremiah 23:27; 25:8). To all Christians, grandparents included, are the words of Romans 6:12, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body,” and Colossians 1:10, “Walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him.”

Grandparents are called to model godliness before grandchildren. Older Christians can model how to live for Christ in a sinful world and how to respond to suffering. Numbering our days (Psalm 90:12) helps younger Christians determine to live out their days wisely. Grandparents can model a vibrant walk with the Lord before younger generations through prayer, praise, and lifelong service.

Grandparents who are serious about passing on faith to grandchildren must live in obedience to God and exhort future generations to do the same while warning them of the consequences of sin. Biblical grandparenting begins with a passionate love for God, which leads to obeying His commands, and powerfully impacts future generations to imitate the godly lifestyle of the grandparent.

Grandparents should live in such a way that they are able to say to a grandchild, “Imitate me as I imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1 GW).

6. A Multigenerational Vision

What is the biblical role of a grandparent? Psalm 78:4–8 answers this question as clearly and comprehensively as any passage in the Bible. In Psalm 78, Asaph combines a compelling vision with a somber warning to motivate the older generation to take seriously the role God has entrusted to them.

A critical element of a grandparent’s role is to adopt a biblical vision for their family. Psalm 78:6–7 provides that vision, “that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.” Grandparents are given a four-generation vision, which equates to 150 years, and are instructed to diligently work toward two goals: the salvation and sanctification of future generations.

This passage discredits the mindset that a parent’s job is complete when children grow up and leave the house. According to Psalm 78, a parent’s job is never finished. Rather, it expands to include future generations. In this passage, four generations are referenced: the reader, the next generation, children yet unborn, and their children. Parents are exhorted to care deeply for the future spiritual state of all these generations, not just their immediate family. Grandparents are given a four-generation vision for the salvation and sanctification of their family, and this reality should be reflected in a grandparent’s priorities and passions.

7. Tell of God’s Works and Teach God’s Words

At the center of Asaph’s vision for family discipleship in Psalm 78 are the two goals for every grandparent. Biblical grandparents are

to encourage future generations to place hope in God (salvation) and keep His commandments (sanctification). Faithful grandparenting consists of focusing one's energy and efforts on these two areas. Thus, it is insufficient for the goal of grandparenting to be happy or healthy grandchildren, grandchildren who are well behaved or well educated, a grandparenting role that affirms but does not exhort, or supports but does not instruct. Each of these outcomes falls short of God's vision if they are disconnected from the two goals of salvation and sanctification of grandchildren.

Psalm 78 not only presents the goal of grandparenting, but how to accomplish this God-sized vision. Grandparents are to busy themselves with two activities: telling and teaching. A key element of every grandparent's role is to tell grandchildren about the work of God and is found in Psalm 78:4, which says, "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 he has done." In Hebrew, "to tell" means to report, to count, to make known, to make a written record.

God is very specific about the content He wants grandparents to discuss with grandchildren. Telling recounts, as a testimony, one's experience with God, what God has done, and who God is. Grandparents can use life lessons and tell stories to intentionally magnify the nature and person of God in the hearts of grandchildren. Just as God has established a testimony in Jacob, He has also established a testimony in every grandparent (Psalm 78:5). God expects grandparents to share, in the form of testimony, the work of God in their lives, which could include times of God's provision, God's faithfulness, and their conversion.

Psalm 145:4–12 and Psalm 71:15–18 are two additional passages that provide a glimpse into the types of discussions every grandparent should have with their grandchildren. Psalm 145:4 says, "One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts." In short, grandparents are to remind the younger generation who God is and what He has done using their own life experience.

According to Psalm 78, the role of a grandparent centers on teaching grandchildren the commandments of God. In Psalm 78:5 we read, “He appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children.” Biblically, we are reminded that grandparents share in the faith training of future generations and should actively invest in a grandchild’s discipleship through teaching the Scriptures. It is important to note that God commands grandparents to teach grandchildren His commandments. Teaching is not optional. The grandparent who neglects this aspect of his or her role does so in disobedience to God.

In case you are unconvinced by Psalm 78, I will point you to Deuteronomy 4:9 (AMPC), which instructs grandparents to “teach [God’s commands] to your children and your children’s children.” Theologians such as Roy B. Zuck believe grandparents have a teaching responsibility with grandchildren: “Teaching the young God’s ways is a responsibility assigned not only to parents, but also to grandparents.”¹⁷

To teach (יָדָה yada) is to instruct or guide for the purpose of learning.¹⁸ What are grandparents to teach grandchildren? God has given grandparents the role of teaching core biblical truths, sound doctrine, and God’s commands to grandchildren. In addition, grandparents are to instruct their grandchildren to walk obediently before the Lord and fear Him all the days of their lives (Deuteronomy 4:10, 14). Grandparents teach for the purpose of seeing their grandchildren mature in Christ. The apostle Paul says, “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me” (Colossians 1:28–29).

One grandparent who is worthy of closer examination is Lois. Lois was the grandmother to Timothy and played an important

17. Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight: Childhood & Children in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 103.

18. Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries: Updated Edition* (Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc., 1998).

role in the development of his spiritual life (2 Timothy 1:5). The apostle Paul suggests that Lois taught Timothy the Scriptures from an early age, which became foundational in his following Christ (2 Timothy 3:14–15). Lois’s example, while not prescriptive for every grandparent, is worthy of imitation. Grandparents might consider three principles for teaching grandchildren from the life of Lois:

1. Early instruction (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15)
2. Frequent instruction (2 Timothy 3:14)
3. Jesus-centered instruction (2 Timothy 3:15)

In addition to the example of Lois, grandparents may glean from other biblical methods of teaching younger generations the truths of God’s Word. Throughout the narrative of Scripture we see older generations build traditions into their family life that remind younger generations of the salvation of the Lord.¹⁹ In addition, home décor, food, clothing, and stone pillars were all utilized to create discussion between young and old regarding the work and nature of God. Grandparents may choose to intentionally put items in their home that evoke curiosity, invite questions, and create the opportunity to teach the truths of Scripture to grandchildren.

In addition to the compelling vision of Psalm 78, grandparents are given a sober warning to avoid grandchildren becoming “like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God” (v. 8). Psalm 78:9–72 recounts the sad history of Israel’s failure to transfer faith from the older generations to the younger generations, resulting in rebellion and unbelief. Phrases such as “they sinned still more against him,” “they did not believe in God,” and “they tested God again and again” remind today’s grandparents

19. For a helpful book with many practical ideas see Noel Piper, *Treasuring God in Our Traditions* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007).

that history may repeat itself if they neglect to transfer faith to future generations.

Grandparents are given an important, God-ordained role that makes an eternal difference in the lives of grandchildren. Psalm 78 reminds grandparents that they have a strong influence on the faith of grandchildren, and provides grandparents with a God-centered picture regarding how they are to interact with grandchildren. It also provides the goal of grandparenthood and two tasks that are central to the role of grandparenting: telling the story of God's works and teaching the truths of God's Word.

8. Continued Fruitfulness in Old Age

The psalmist teaches that righteousness in old age results in the continued production of spiritual fruit. The psalmist uses the picture of a palm tree to make his point; "The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our Lord. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, 'The Lord is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him'" (Psalm 92:12–15 NIV).

Date palm trees bear hundreds of pounds of fruit well past 150 years of age and are a picture of what God expects from grandparents in the later third of their life. Whether referencing a palm tree or a grandparent, God expects continued fruitfulness for the purpose of declaring the nature of God to others.

Psalm 92 shouts a truth that all grandparents need to hear: Age does not impair fruit-bearing capabilities. It enhances them. Psalm 92 reminds grandparents of two important truths. First, the latter years of a person's life ought to be spiritually productive years. American culture attempts to convince grandparents that they have little to offer. Nothing is further from the truth. Second, this passage speaks against the American ethos of retirement and reminds grandparents to be fruitful disciple-makers to their dying

day. Ruth and Elmer Towns encourage retired individuals to have an eternal mindset when thinking about retirement. “What is retirement for . . . shuffleboard . . . fishing . . . puttering around the house? While all these things are enjoyable, nothing is more eternal than investing your time and wisdom in a grandchild.”²⁰

Grandparents need to reject the narrative that the purpose of old age is a life of leisure and self-indulgence. The example of the palm tree suggests that a fruitless existence is not a category the Bible recognizes. God’s expectation for palm trees is also true for grandparents: to live is to bear fruit, even in one’s old age. Let every grandparent remember that God does not give senior discounts, nor does He have retirement homes. One day, every grandparent will stand before Jesus Christ and will give an account for how they used the final third of their life. What kind of life lived would cause Jesus to say to a grandparent, “Well done, good and faithful servant”? According to Psalm 92, it is the fruitful grandparent.

9. Discipleship of Younger Christians

Grandparents have a responsibility to the church, which includes the discipleship of younger men and women. According to Titus 2, older men are to invest in younger men, and older women are to mentor younger women. The pattern Paul presents is one in which the older generations are to train younger generations by providing biblical wisdom, guidance, and instruction.

The pattern presented in Titus 2, older Christians discipling younger Christians, is not the pattern for the majority of Christian grandparents interviewed in my study. In contrast to Titus 2, the average Christian grandparent is not directly involved with

20. Ruth Towns and Elmer Towns, “Grandparents in the Bible: What They Can Teach Us about Influencing Children,” 42, accessed February 11, 2014, <http://elmertowns.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/GrandparentsoftheBible.pdf>. The book has been renamed *Great Lessons and Grand Blessings: Discover How Grandparents Can Inspire and Transform Their Grandchildren*.

the youngest generation of their church in any meaningful way. The majority of grandparents have limited interaction with the young people of their congregation that amounts to a passing greeting in the hall and results in limited spiritual investment in their lives.

Grandparents stated two reasons why they no longer disciple the younger generation of their church. First, some grandparents believe they are unwanted, unneeded, or no longer able to offer something of value to young people. Second, other Christian grandparents believe they served their time and now it is someone else's turn.

In Titus 2, Paul gives an important leadership responsibility to the older generation, which centers on the discipleship of younger Christians. Biblical grandparents are models of the Christian life and teachers of younger generations. The church is in need of godly, mature Christians who will pour themselves into the lives of younger Christians.

10. Celebrate Old Age

The Bible says old age is a sign of God's favor and something to celebrate. Taking their cue from Scripture, grandparents should reject the cultural view of old age as undesirable and embrace this season of life with intentionality for Christ.

It is good to recognize that the Bible does not hide the negative side of growing older (2 Samuel 19:34–35; 1 Kings 1:1; 14:4; 15:23).²¹ One of the most candid descriptions of what will happen to the grandparent's body in old age is provided in Ecclesiastes 12:1–7.²² The elderly, Solomon says, lose their eyesight (v. 2), are bent over and shake (v. 3), have few teeth and lose hearing (v. 3),

21. For a quick overview, see Harris, *Biblical Perspectives on Aging*, 84–90.

22. Scholars have suggested a variety of meanings for this passage ranging from literal, to allegorical, to symbolic. On this range of meanings, see Michael V. Fox, "Aging and Death in Qohelet 12," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 42 (1988): 55–77.

are fearful of others (v. 5), have limited sexual desire (v. 5), and are not far from death (vv. 6–7).²³ According to Solomon, this is not the ideal time to begin serving the Lord, due to the physical limitations of this time of life.²⁴ Grandparents are exhorted not to squander the evening of their life in self-indulgent pursuits, nor waste any of the precious days that the Lord has given them, but to live for God’s purposes rather than their own.

The Scriptures suggest that grandparents are not to spend their time thinking about their ailments or what they cannot do.²⁵ Even though the body weakens, God has promised, “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” (Isaiah 46:4). The psalmist wrote, “My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Psalm 73:26).²⁶ Instead, grandparents should focus their eyes on God and His strength.

Grandparents are told by American culture that old age lies in wait, ready to steal one’s youth.²⁷ Medications, creams, and

23. For a more thorough explanation, see Trevor H. Howell, “King Solomon’s Portrait of Old Age,” *Age and Aging* 16, no. 5 (1987): 331–333.

24. Paul Wegner, commenting on Ecclesiastes 12 states: “The preacher in the book of Ecclesiastes presents a graphic picture of the debilitating conditions common to ‘old age,’ but even he uses it to remind the reader to remember God before it is too late.” Paul D. Wegner, “Old Age,” in *New International Dictionary of Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1:1136.

25. For a theological perspective on what one can expect in aging, see Edward M. Andrews, “Finding Peace in Successful Aging,” *New Theological Review* 23, no. 4 (2010): 13–20.

26. In Romans, the apostle Paul says that our bodies groan due to sin. Paul, speaking of the wonderful glory of our eternal home, provides comfort for those whose bodies are wasting away and reminds the Corinthians that the body is a temporary home (2 Corinthians 4:16; 5:1).

27. Michael Harrington’s comments warrant hearing: “Perhaps the most important thing that must be done with regard to the aged is to change our operative philosophy about them. We have . . . a ‘storage bin’ philosophy about them. We ‘maintain’ the aged; we give them the gift of life, but we take away the possibility of dignity. Perhaps one of the most basic reasons why America has such problems with its elderly men and women is that America really doesn’t care about them.” Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1962), 118.

surgeries are encouraged as protection against the danger of old age. One author summarizes America's obsession with looking young when he says,

Every morning across America, people peer into bathroom mirrors, searching for signs of age. No line, no blemish is overlooked. We dread the appearance of those little lines at the corners of our mouths and eyes, and then we console ourselves with the thought that, really, they are hardly noticeable. Still we know the truth. We are getting older—every day one day older. Rarely do we set aside our insecurities long enough to ask, “What are wrinkles? Where do they come from and what do they really mean?” Perhaps if we understood them better, we might fear them less.²⁸

A society that panics people into painful Botox injections and disfiguring surgeries needs to be reminded that the Bible has a radically different view of old age. According to the Bible, gray hair and wrinkles are a crown and an honor.²⁹ The Bible welcomes old age; it does not try to protect against or reverse aging once it has begun. Gray hair is not to be despised, but appreciated as a sign of wisdom.³⁰ Wrinkles are not to be scorned, but valued as a sign of God's gift of long life. Proverbs 20:29 (RSV) reminds grandparents that “the beauty of old men is their gray hair.” Grandparents should embrace old age as a gift from God, as it allows the grandparent to be a continued blessing to others.

28. William H. Thomas, *What Are Old People For? How Elders Will Save the World* (Acton, MA: VanderWyk & Burnham, 2004), 4.

29. vanThanh Nguyen, “Biblical Perspectives on Caring for the Aged and the Sick,” *New Theology Review* 23, no. 4 (2010): 8.

30. Tremper Longman states: “Here modern Western society is out of odds with ancient Near Eastern and specifically biblical ideas. Today gray hair is something to be ashamed of. Youth now is venerated, but in antiquity gray hair, indicating advanced age, was a sign of distinction. The reason that age was respected was that, all things being equal, it meant that a person had matured and was wiser than a youth.” Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs*, The Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 386.

Conclusion

Grandparents have a multifaceted and important role in the transfer of faith from one generation to the next. God has given grandparents a ministry of first importance with grandchildren. Absent from Scripture is any form of self-indulgent lifestyle. Grandparents must see their role as much more than being a fill-in-the-gaps, last-line-of-defense, extra-special baby-sitter who dispenses large amounts of sugar. Rather, grandparents are essential components in God's plan to nurture the faith of future generations, and they need to embrace the biblical role that God has given them.

Grandparents have a God-ordained purpose clearly defined in Scripture. The great purpose God has set before a grandparent is clear: teach the things of God "to your children and grandchildren" (Deuteronomy 4:9 GW). Grandparents must live the Gospel and speak of it so that generations to come might know Jesus Christ (Psalm 78:1–8). Grandparents can encourage parents in their task, pray for the coming generations, pass on wisdom gleaned throughout life (Titus 2:1–5), stand in the gap when parents falter, and do so because their grand purpose is to pass on a heritage of faith and see grandchildren won to Christ.

When grandparents neglect to treasure Christ (Deuteronomy 6:1–2; 5) as well as teach the truth of God's words and tell wonders of God's work (Psalm 78:4–7), a critical voice is silenced, and grandchildren are more likely to struggle in their faith or walk away from the Lord.

I encourage you to take your cues regarding the role of grandparenthood from the Bible and not from culture. A grandparent's main role is not to spoil grandchildren or be their companion. A grandparent's purpose is not to indulge themselves during the last third of life. God has given grandparents the role of transferring faith to future generations. May you give yourself fully to this task so your grandchildren will be able to say with the psalmist, "We have heard with our ears, our [grand]fathers have told us, what deeds you performed in their days, in the days of old" (Psalm 44:1).