

GRANDPARENTS MAKE GRAND PARTNERS



How to Have an Eternal Impact
on Your Grandchild's Life

LORI WILDENBERG

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on Your Grandchild's Life**

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WHAT GRANDPARENTS AND MINISTRY LEADERS ARE SAYING ABOUT THIS BOOK

There are so many amazing adjectives that apply to Lori Wildenberg's book on grandparenting that it's difficult to choose only a few. Not only has Lori written a thoroughly biblical book, but it may be the most practical book on Christian grandparenting today. It will help you navigate the nitty-gritty reality of life with your family in a manner that balances grace and truth. I know Lori personally and she is a godly grandparent who loves Jesus and is actively helping her grandchildren love Jesus. She doesn't just talk the talk; she walks the walk. She is a faithful guide to help you do the same with your grandchildren! This book is fantastic, and I cannot recommend it highly enough.

Josh Mulvihill, PhD

Author of *The Grandparenting Matters* book series

My friend Lori Wildenberg has had a ton of experience encouraging and coaching families. That fact is so evident in her latest book, *Grandparents Make Grand Partners*. It is super-loaded with illustrations, scriptural principles, and practical advice; so much so that I found myself chuckling one minute and choking up the next but more importantly, learning from Lori's wisdom. There's something in this book for every grandparent: all who read it will find plenty of places where they will think, "That's me!" *Grandparents Make Grand Partners* is easy reading and fast-paced, plus, the reflection questions at the end of each chapter make it a great tool for learning for individuals, small groups, or classes in churches. I'm thrilled to see this book added to the growing library of resources for Christian grandparents. It has my full endorsement!

Larry Fowler

Founder, Legacy Coalition

Grandparents Make Grand Partners

Most grandparents begin this season of life with high expectations. Lori's ideas and instruction will help them come true. Understanding the grandparent personalities will help you see how you come across, why you may be struggling, and what to do. They're significant! The blessings, benedictions, beatitudes, and promises are game-changers. They will provide you and your grands with peace and hope. If you're confused, you'll find answers in these pages, if you're angry—peace, disappointed—comfort, abandoned—compassion, and alarmed—solutions. The suggested prayers will enhance your ability to be an intentional Christian grandparent and that changes everything. Read and use the ideas here!

Dr. Kathy Koch

Founder of Celebrate Kids, Inc., speaker, podcaster, and
author of eight parenting books including
Parent Differently and *8 Great Smarts*

In a world desperately in need of godly generational wisdom and stability, *Grandparents Make Grand Partners* is a timely and tender guide for grandparents who long to pass down more than just heirlooms to their children and grandchildren. Lori Wildenberg beautifully captures the sacred role of grandparents as spiritual anchors, weaving Scripture, personal stories, and practical insights into a powerful call to eternal impact. This book is a must-read for every grandparent who wants to leave footprints of faith for generations to follow.

Heidi St. John

Author of *Becoming MomStrong: How to Fight With All That's
In You for Your Family and Your Faith*, speaker,
and host of the *Heidi St. John Podcast*

In *Grandparents Make Grand Partners*, Lori Wildenberg celebrates our God-given role as grandparents with a road map to navigate every phase of a grandparenting journey. Her warmth and wisdom provide encouragement for understanding the differing needs of

Lori Wildenberg

each grandchild. With insightful information she covers everything from being intentional with daily and holiday rhythms to addressing complex family dynamics, from standing on biblical truths to using prayer to build bridges and strengthen bonds. This book is a treasure trove every grandparent needs.

Michelle Watson Canfield, Ph.D., LPC
Author of *Let's Talk: Conversation Starters for Dads and Daughters* and podcast host of *The Dad Whisperer*

Ken Canfield, Ph.D.
Author of *The H.E.A.R.T of Grandparenting*
and president of GrandkidsMatter.org

As a passionate advocate for the profound intergenerational influence of grandparents, I wholeheartedly embrace this ministry, especially with the joy of having 15 grandchildren. It is both an honor and a privilege to be invited into their lives, guiding and nurturing them with love. However, with this honor comes the important responsibility to respect the boundaries set by our adult children. You might wonder how to navigate this delicate balance. That's where Lori's invaluable insights come into play. *Grandparents Make Grand Partners* offers practical, actionable strategies that empower grandparents to make a positive impact in their grandchildren's lives. Lori emphasizes the importance of leading with love, respect, and humility. By adopting the principles in this book, you can become the welcoming influence your grandchildren need. Let's embrace this incredible opportunity to connect deeply with the younger generation while honoring the family dynamics in place.

Rhonda Stoppe
Grandmother of 15, podcast host of *Old Ladies Know Stuff*,
speaker, and author of seven bestselling books including,
*Moms of the Bible: Life Changing Lessons
From the Fearless, Flawed, and Faithful*

Grandparents Make Grand Partners

Lori is profoundly correct when she reminds us that if we only “want our grandkids to be happy,” we have set a pretty low bar for ourselves and our family. There is much more to grandparenting than making kids happy. Lori offers practical and biblical perspectives for being more than just “happy-centric” grandparents. You will find the tools in this book that are not only instructive but convicting. If you want to be a grand grandparent, this is a tool you will want in your grandparenting toolbox.

Cavin T. Harper

Founder/president emeritus of
Christian Grandparenting Network

Grandparents Make Grand Partners by Lori Wildenberg is such a thoughtful and timely read. It's rooted in Scripture, full of practical wisdom, and speaks right to the heart of what it means to be a grandparent with purpose. I especially appreciated the reflection questions. They gently invite you to pause, think, and grow. This book lays out clear roles and responsibilities in a way that's encouraging, not overwhelming. If you're longing to build a meaningful legacy with your grandchildren, this book will bless and guide you every step of the way.

Connie Albers

Author of *Parenting Beyond the Rules*, founder of the
Equipped To Be with Connie Albers podcast,
speaker, TV and media contributor

When you become a grandparent, it's like getting an encore season of nurturing, loving, leading, and influencing. Different from parenting, it's an opportunity to continue to build your legacy in a new way. This book is chock full of wisdom for grandparenting in today's complicated world. If you're a grandparent, you need this book.

Jill Savage

Author of *Empty Nest, Full Life* and
host of the *No More Perfect Podcast*

Lori Wildenberg

I am a new grandfather. Sadly, when I was growing up, I only knew one grandparent, my grandmother, who had issues with alcohol. Needless to say, I want my grandchildren to experience something far better than I received. Lori's important book gave me a biblical game plan for how to connect with my grandchildren and point them to Jesus!

Dr. Rob Rienow

Founder of Visionary Family Ministries,
www.VisionaryFam.com

Grandparenting is easier than parenting because you get to bring the grandkids back home after outings! Yet in this age of smartphones and strained relationships with adult kids, grandparenting can come with unexpected challenges. This book will help you navigate your family dynamics with wisdom and grace. Lori Wildenberg puts the "grand" back into grandparenting.

Arlene Pellicane

Host of *The Happy Home* podcast and
author of *Grandparenting Screen Kids*

Today's grandparents face unique challenges in passing down their faith in an increasingly secular society. Lori Wildenberg's book is an essential tool for those committed to becoming an intentional, loving grandparent. She blends scriptural foundations and practical real-life applications to empower grandparents to cultivate deep spiritual roots that will last a lifetime in their grandchildren's hearts.

Lee Ann Mancini

Author of *Raising Kids to Follow Christ*, founder of
Raising Christian Kids, adjunct professor at
South Florida Bible College & Theological Seminary,
and executive producer of *Sea Kids*

Grandparents Make Grand Partners

This book is a treasure trove for Christian grandparents who want to make an eternal impact. I wholeheartedly recommend this inspiring and timely resource.

Dr. Scott Turansky
National Center for Biblical Parenting

Grandparents Make Grand Partners is a spiritually rich guide for every grandparent who longs to leave a lasting legacy of faith in the hearts of their grandchildren. With heartfelt stories, biblical wisdom, and practical tools, Lori Wildenberg encourages and equips grandparents to step into their God-given role with confidence and grace.

Ginger Hubbard
Bestselling author of *Don't Make Me Count to Three*
and *I Can't Believe You Just Said That*, co-host of the
Parenting with Ginger Hubbard podcast

Grandparents Make Grand Partners is a gracious, hope-filled, and honest book about a grandparent's role in helping children thrive. While looking through the lens of grandparenting styles, Lori provides helpful tips without becoming prescriptive, recognizing grandparents as a supportive, but crucial role in a child's life. I'm not a grandparent (yet) but found this book fascinating, and know this book will become a great conversation starter within families.

Christie Thomas
Award-winning author of books for families,
including *Little Habits*, *Big Faith: How Simple Practices*
Help Your Family Grow in Jesus

This book will open your eyes to the incredible opportunity you have as a grandparent—helping your grandchildren grow into happy, well-rounded children with a heart for Jesus and their eyes fixed on eternity. You'll discover how to move beyond making memories, to making disciples, as you learn practical and meaningful ways to im-

Lori Wildenberg

pact generations to come by passing on a legacy of faith that will last into eternity.

Alyssa Seed

Founder and executive director of
Eternity Changers, eternitychangers.com

A thoughtful approach for grandparents, whether grands are being brought up with faith or not, with some ideas to help the parents of prodigals to pray and step gently. The book starts with encouraging grandparents to respect the parenting choices of their children. Practical tips and fun ideas to be intentional, weave in interaction with the three generations, and the prayers and role modeling of the grandparents provide opportunities to make a lasting impact on the grands.

Karen Whiting

Author, international speaker, creative, and grandma
who writes and lives to help families thrive

Lori Wildenberg knows how to knit hearts! I highly recommend *Grandparents Make Grand Partners* to draw relationships closer and imprint a lasting legacy for your family.

Pam Farrel

Author of over 60 books including bestselling *Men Are Like Waffles*,
Women Are Like Spaghetti, co-director of Love-Wise.com

Grandparents Make Grand Partners is designed to navigate the joys and unique challenges of grandparenting. Mimi, as Lori's grands affectionately call her, has woven her experience as a mom, grandma, educator, and parent coach into this book. If you desire to create lasting, Christ-centered relationships with your grandchildren, *Grandparents Make Grand Partner* is a must read.

Becky Danielson, M.Ed.

Parent & family educator, speaker, coauthor of *Faithful Grandparenting: Practical Ideas for Connecting the Generations*

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the Papa
who loves and lives with this Mimi.

I love doing life with you. Sharing our love for
our grands is one of my greatest joys.

I love you,

The Wife of Your Life

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book has been a joy to write. After being a guest on Legacy Coalition's Grand Monday Nights webinar, I have become passionate about being an intentional Christian grandparent. Many thanks to Larry Fowler and Barb Lorenz for lighting the fire!

Thank you to Ron Hunter, Danny Conn, and the team at D6 Family Ministry for believing in this project.

Dr. Kathy Koch, your belief in me and your gentle nudging continues to encourage me to step forward in faith. I am blessed to call you friend.

Robb Dunham, I am grateful for your wisdom and guidance.

Pastors James Hoxworth and Chuck Hess, you caught the vision for this project and provided the opportunity for my first grandparenting seminar at The Bridge Church. Thank you.

To my beta readers, fellow grandmoms, and friends: Maureen Behrens, Vicki Brock, Sandy Christianson, Mary Jacobs, and Lucille Zimmerman. Thank you for your prayers, time, talent, and love.

To my husband, Tom, thank you for your unwavering support and ever-present love. With an eye for detail, you read every word to make this book the best it can be. Also a big thanks for taking on dinner responsibilities so I could write.

With a full heart I want to thank my children along with their precious spouses. I am grateful to God that you share the desire to pass along faith to your children.

To my five grands, you are my inspiration. I am beyond blessed to be your Mimi.

Thank you, to my Heavenly Father, whose faithfulness and love endure through the generations.

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Introduction

The Grand Effect



**“SOME OF OUR GREATEST
BLESSINGS CALL US GRANDMA
AND GRANDPA.”**

One piece of paper remained. It was neatly folded into a small square. The text inside supplied the answer to the game’s question, “What do you look forward to as you get older?” The winner would be the one who came closest to my answer.

Game night at the cabin is a common occurrence. My kids, husband, mom, and additional family members were playing Best Guess at my mom’s cabin in northern Minnesota. Some solid guesses from the players included: More time with friends, time to start and finish a book, sleep in as long as you want, take more vacations, no cooking, and go on more date nights. All ideas I could get behind, with the no cooking answer being especially appealing. I unfolded the last piece of paper and read, “Having grandkids.” The no cooking answer moved to second place. Having grandkids was the best guess.

Grandparents Make Grand Partners

Even though I was certain I would love having grands, I couldn't picture being a grandmom. At the time, my kids were in fourth, seventh, eighth, and tenth grade. The grandparent role seemed a long way off. Having grandkids, well that was for older folks, that was for people my parents' age.

The wise and winning answer was supplied by my seventh-grade middle school daughter, Samantha. Fast forward to the present day, Samantha is now a mom and just had child number three. I have been a grandmom for six years. Samantha was right. Having grandchildren is something to look forward to, it is a blessing to embrace. What I did not realize, yet have come to understand, is that my Mimi role and my husband's role as Papa is a divine calling.

In Acts 16 we meet Lydia, a businesswoman, who had a divine calling. The Lord opened her heart to respond to the gospel message Paul preached. Not only was Lydia converted but God used her and her influence to impact her entire household. All those living under her roof were baptized along with Lydia. The Lord used her to reach the souls in her home. God can use us too, if we are willing.

Grand Stats

Before we get into our God-given calling, let's examine some statistics. It is interesting to note that most first time grandparents are not considered seniors but middle-aged, with middle age "generally defined as being between the ages of 40 and 60."¹ The average age of a first-time grandparent is fifty years for women and a couple years older for men.² In fact, one third

of the adult population are grandparents, who have an average of five to six grandchildren.³ Combine those statistics with the fact that grandparents are second only to parents in terms of a child's emotional and spiritual development, and we realize grandparents are a spiritual force.⁴ Fellow G-Mas and G-Pas, GiGis and Poppys, ViVis and Bumpas, Gammys and Gampys, Mimis and Pappas, we have a bigger purpose than spoiling our grands. We have influence, great influence. God calls us to step up. Our relationship with our grandkids matters eternally. The Lord wants us to partner with Him. He beckons us, He commands us, to be a part of our grandchildren's spiritual formation and pass the baton of family faith. Scripture confirms this in Deuteronomy 4:9, "Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them."

Grand Benefits

When our son and daughter-in-love were expecting their first child—the one who made Tom, Papa, and me, Mimi—Jaime dangled a carrot, "Watching grandchildren strengthens a grandparent's mental and physical health." I really did not need to be persuaded. Watching my little grand one day a week for the first eighteen months of his life was an easy sell.

Our daughter-in-love was correct. Watching grandchildren has a positive effect on the grandparent's brain and body.⁵ A study on aging done in 2016 showed that grandparents who babysat grandkids lived thirty-seven percent longer. Those who

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provided childcare were more physically fit and experienced less stress.⁶ Time grandparents spend with their grandchildren improves mental sharpness and overall health.

On the flip side, grandparents positively impact the mental and emotional health of their grandchildren. Studies show children need four to six adults in their life for stability and emotional and social development.⁷ An article in *Good Housekeeping*, points out the positive impact regular interaction between grandparents and grandkids has on the grandchildren's mental health.⁸

Culture Cues

Being an intentional Christian parent is countercultural. Throughout Scripture we see how God commands each generation to pass their faith and their faith experiences to the next generations. Our culture today does not value this. It speaks loudly about what this final third of our lives should look like.

We hear:

- You earned it.
- Buy it if you want it.
- Take a break.
- Take a cruise (Okay, I am all for this one if it is a River Cruise).
- Play pickleball.
- Move to a retirement community.

There is nothing wrong with any of these endeavors. But I have noticed a theme. As we move into retirement age, culture tells us, it is time to be a little selfish and receive our reward. But what if this time was more about being selfless? Being available and flexible? Again, none of these cultural experiences are wrong, but should they be our top pursuit? I wonder, is this a clever distraction by the enemy (the devil) so we do not live out our God-given calling to be the grandparents we are created to be?

Dr. Josh Mulvihill, in his book, *Discipling Your Grandchildren*, states, “Grandparents need to reject the narrative that the purpose of old age is a life of leisure and self-indulgence.”⁹ If our ultimate goal is to see our family in Heaven, we must make an effort to carve out time for our adult children and grandchildren to intentionally influence their faith.

Grand View

I like to think of our Mimi and Papa roles as a three-way partnership between us, with our grandkids’ moms and dads, and with God.

The grandparent’s hat is different from the parent’s. We no longer call the shots. Our involvement is largely determined by our adult children.

Between these pages you will find loving plus easily applicable and practical ideas for interaction with your grands, gain new respect for your adult children’s choices, and discover how to impact your grandkids’ faith. You will identify which one of

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the nine different grandparent personalities best describes you, recognize unhealthy family patterns, move toward healthy godly design, appreciate generational differences, and examine why adult children may implement boundaries. You will discover ways to avoid or address common relationship misunderstandings or problems that occur between parents and grandparents. The grandparent and parent roles will be defined so the grandparent is able to respectfully embrace the shift from parent to grandparent. We will unpack the critical life-giving messages our adult children, in-laws, and grandchildren need to combat the cultural influences of identity and sexuality.

Through present day grandparent stories and past biblical accounts, we will examine the grandparent role and influence in the family. Practical ways to navigate heart-wrenching issues like mental health, physical distance, spiritual differences, faith deconstruction, and complicated or estranged relationships will be provided. We will humbly look at what to do about grandparent competition or jealousy. Fun ways to weave faith into holiday celebrations will be provided. Many of those who shared their heart and experiences with me (and now you) prefer to remain anonymous. To honor their request, I have changed their names and altered some details.

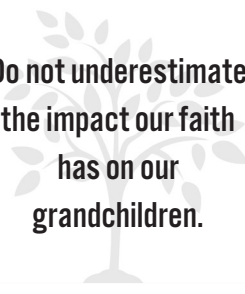
Your confidence in being a co-cultivator of your grandchild's faith will increase as you relate to the stories and implement the activities, conversations, prayers, and blessings. Partnering with our children, as they raise theirs, is good for all; good for our grandkids, good for our adult children, and good for us. It is an honor to be a participant with our Heavenly Father in our grandchildren's spiritual formation and unique calling.

Paul, in 1 Timothy 1:2, called Timothy his true son in faith. Timothy acted as Paul's representative in many churches and then pastored the church in Ephesus. In 2 Timothy 1:5, Paul mentioned Timothy's mother and grandmother. Both Eunice, Timothy's mom, and Lois, his grandmom, shaped Timothy's faith. "I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also."

These two Jewish women partnered to prepare Timothy, even as a baby, to recognize the Messiah, "and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). Because of the teaching of his mom and grandmom, he was ready and able to receive the good news of the gospel and then later to be used by God to bring the good news to others.

We can be like Lois. Do not underestimate the impact our faith has on our grandchildren. The faith that lives in us can live in our grandkids, too. Let's partner with our children and with the Lord to ready the hearts of our grands to receive Christ and fulfill their unique purpose in God's kingdom.

In this final third of my life, God has clarified what is most important. Time is fleeting. I want to invest my time in faith-building opportunities. Faith, my faith, my husband's faith, and my family's faith. Sure, having nice things is nice, taking exciting trips is exciting, and of course celebrating wins



**Do not underestimate
the impact our faith
has on our
grandchildren.**

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and accomplishments brings joy. But it all pales in comparison to my loved ones knowing, loving, and serving Jesus.

Most grandparents today consider themselves pretty good Grammys and Grampys. And they are most likely right. They are probably involved, loving, and caring. Yet as a Christian grandparent we realize there is more to it, isn't there? The stakes are high. The enemy is in a big battle for the souls of our grandkids. We must not get distracted or complacent.

I have heard the statement that comfort can be an idol. That's convicting. I like my comfort. I like a good night's sleep. I do not want to be too hot, too cold. There is even a name for this concept, The Goldilocks Principle where things are, "Just right."¹⁰

Let's not settle for just a Goldilocks comfortable and close relationship. Let's roll up our sleeves and co-cultivate faith in our grands with our Heavenly Father and our adult children. The grandparent bar must be raised from merely being a babysitter or fun playmate to a person who can impact our family member's eternity and kingdom calling.

Just think of it. We are one third of the population.¹¹ Grandparents have an average of five to six grandkids.¹² What a fierce faith-filled force we could be if we partnered with God to nurture faith in our grands. We have a God-given purpose, an eternal focus, to encourage our grands to embrace their faith in Jesus.

Cavin Harper states in his book, *Courageous Grandparenting: Unshakeable Faith in a Broken World*, "Successful grandparents know it is not just about the grandkids and them. I hope

you recognize that our top priority is to figure out how parents and grandparents work together as allies, not adversaries. Our goal is to work together toward the same objective—to help our grandchildren become all that God wants them to be. Our job is to find ways to foster an environment in which our adult children can become the greatest parents possible.”¹³

Being a good YaYa and PawPaw may encompass childcare, gift giving, fun times, laughter, and providing family history. These are all desirable things. Yet Scripture tells us our relationship with our grands has present impact and eternal implications. We can be a vital and integral source of support for our adult children’s role as parents and for our grandkids’ social and emotional development, mental health, and spiritual growth. Let’s be willing and available to partner with our great God to intentionally draw our grandkids toward a saving faith in Jesus Christ.

I am fired up about being intentional in passing the torch of faith to my grandkids, just as Lydia was when she passed along her faith to her entire household. Do you feel the same? Rise up with me as we learn together how to connect and protect our faith and family through the blessing of grandkids. Purpose built on God’s Word is the most powerful weapon against the enemy’s schemes.

Perhaps this comes as no surprise to you, but as I am walking this grandparent journey, I have learned having grandkids is far better than no cooking—which, I have realized, will never be realized.

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Since my youth, God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come.

Psalm 71:17–18

Grand Reflection

1. When you were parenting, what did you picture this stage of life would look like?
2. Which statistic or perspective in this introduction, “The Grand Effect,” impacted, encouraged, or surprised you?
3. How can you strengthen your own faith, so you are prepared to impact your grandchild’s faith?

Grand Verses

Read, reflect, and respond to these verses:

- Acts 16:11–15
- Psalm 71:17–18
- 2 Timothy 1:5
- Deuteronomy 4:9

What do you learn from these passages?

Grand Partner Tips

- Strengthen your faith by reading God's Word each day.
- Each day, spend time in prayer talking with God about your grands.
- Even if your spouse is not on the same page, you can still be like Eunice in 2 Timothy 1:5 and impact your grandchild's spiritual development.

Grand Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for the gift of grandkids. Help me not to be complacent and comfortable in my interactions. Move me to intentionally and lovingly share my faith in You so my grandkids' hearts, minds, and souls desire to follow You. Amen.

Chapter 1

Grand Personality



**“A GRANDPARENT IS A LITTLE
BIT PARENT, A LITTLE BIT
TEACHER, AND A LITTLE BIT
BEST FRIEND.”**

“You are right,” Amy, my sister-in-law exclaimed. “I think there are different grandparent personalities.” We had been chatting about my idea for writing this book and the inclusion of grandparent personalities. I appreciated her confirmation.

Just as I noticed other parents’ parenting styles before I became a parent, I have been paying attention to how grandparents, grandparent. I observed my neighbor who watched her eight-year-old grandson one day a week in the summer. I watched her interact with him and noticed the joy that exuded from both. Many days they would get on their bikes and go for an extended ride. I decided I wanted to be that type of grandmom, active and involved.

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“Mom, I think you will be like Nana when you have grand-kids,” my eldest child, Courtney, declared. My mom never missed a special date. I want to be that type of grandmom too. My mom’s philosophy is, “My job isn’t to parent. My job is to love my grandkids.” She has always been respectful of her kids’ parenting styles and has loved her nine grandkids well.

Time, fun, and respect are all critical components of a healthy relationship. But what about weaving faith into the equation? I asked my daughter, Kendra, how her grandparents may have impacted her faith. “I knew church and church activities were important to all my grandparents. Reading Pops’ poetry made me realize the depth of his faith. His poems made me want to feel the connection to God he felt. I could tell he knew God’s character and had a personal relationship with Him. Pops’ writings express that. It caused me to wonder what it would feel like to be able to write something like that. His poetry stirred curiosity in me and planted a seed, a ruminating thought.”

My maternal grandmother, Gram, played games, supplied us with Cracker Jacks, occasionally babysat, and talked about her church participation. This seemed good too. My paternal Grandma would belt out the hymn, “What a Friend We have in Jesus,” even when her body was weak and frail. Their approach was more indirect. Both of my grandmothers provided a subtle influence regarding faith.

The way in which we parented could affect the way in which we relate to our adult children and grandkids. This is something to be aware of. By reflecting on our past parenting style, “Was I more rules or relationship focused?” we will be cognizant of

past patterns. There are grandparent pluses and pitfalls to either approach. If rules were the focus, order and obedience are highly valued. If a relationship takes the top position, fun and connection take top priority.

As we examine the different grandparenting styles, we realize no approach is perfect. Some ways are more desirable than others if we hope to partner with our adult kids and God, in the quest for our grandkids to know the Lord and grow into their God-given purpose. We will make note of the positives and potential negatives of each style.

Personality Plus

It appears to me there are nine main grandparent personalities. Like me, you will most likely find you are a blend of a few types. Let's determine your dominant grandparent personality. We will do this by seeing how you respond to this fictitious question posed by your grandchild. Keep in mind, this is a fun exercise, meant to raise our awareness of how we interact with our grands and how that may affect our adult children.

Your grandchild asks, "Can I have a cookie?"

You respond:

Sure, anything you want.

Chum

After dinner.

Captain

Let's ask your parents.

Consultant

May I have a cookie?

Ceremonial

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If it's gluten, dairy, or sugar free. (Decision maker, functions as parent while watching kids)	Cool Surrogate
Let's ask your parents then let's say thank you to Jesus for the cookie. (Unavailable to ask, disengaged by choice)	Christian Coach Checked out
(Unavailable, blocked by parents)	Canceled
Which answer best describes your first response?	

Now let's look at the pluses, pitfalls, and perspective challenge of each personality.

Chum: The Fun and Perhaps Favorite Grandparent

Plus Side: Builds a strong relationship with the grandchild. Often considered the fun grandparent.

Possible Pitfall: May have difficulty following the parents' rules and requests if they conflict with the child's desires or fun. Avoids difficult conversations for the sake of the relationship.

Probable Proclamation: "What happens at Grandma's stays at Grandma's."

Positive Adjustment: To support the parents even if the grandchild is unhappy.

Tom as Papa embraces grandparent playfulness. As a dad he fell more into the authoritative personality. But as Papa he

is free from the day-to-day responsibility of raising a child and fully enjoys his time with the grands. The grandkids love it too. He's the guy who will laugh when he's soaked by the squirt gun or will stack the deck so he loses at a card game of War. Tom and I are learning not to laugh when the grands do something their parents are attempting to correct. It can be tough not to chuckle at some of the things the kids do. We see their behavior as delightful or perhaps a short-lived phase. Our adult kids feel undermined when we do this. They prefer we support their efforts to train their kiddos.

Captain: The Authoritarian Grandparent

Plus Side: Decisive. Orderly.

Possible Pitfall: Inflexible, stubborn.

Probable Proclamation: "My house, my rules."

Positive Adjustment: To increase connection and let go of control.

"My in-laws were very controlling and manipulative. They wanted my children to look and behave in a very specific way. They volunteered to watch my daughter while my husband and I went out on a date. I came back to my daughter sporting a new haircut. My first born got her first haircut without me, without my permission. My in-laws did not get to see me or my daughter for six months until they apologized. Their apology was more like a surrender. 'Fine. You win. We won't touch your kid again.' After that, our relationship was very tense."—Justine B.

Justine's story is a big warning for grandparents who are prone to call the shots. We must remember our grandkids are

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not our children. The more control we try to assert, the more boundaries their parents will likely impose. This will affect our relationship with our adult kids, their children, and our ability to be a faith-focused influencer.

Larry Fowler asserts that the more control grandparents attempt to exert the less influence they will have in their grandkids' lives.¹⁴

Consultant: The Grandparent Who Steps Back and Waits for the Parents to Weigh In

Plus Side: Supportive of the parents' rules and requests.

Possible Pitfall: Wishy-washy, maybe hesitant to act in matters that require immediate correction.

Probable Pondering: "Have I said too much, or too little?"

Positive Adjustment: To speak truth with grace if asked.

I recall a situation where one of my grands was a little disrespectful to another adult. I was surprised and even found the comment a tiny bit funny. I hesitated to address the disrespect. The parents were not around so I should have gently jumped in. I could have offered my grand an alternative respectful response. I asked my adult child if it would be okay in those situations for me to speak up. I was given the green light so going forward I will handle this type of situation differently.

Ceremonial: The Grandparent Who Values Good Manners and Family Traditions

Plus Side: Passes along traditions and family history.

Possible Pitfall: Difficult to see other's point of view.

Probable Proclamation: "We've always done it this way."

Positive Adjustment: To be flexible when it comes to holidays.

"My father-in-law valued tradition. Before we came to visit for an extended weekend, he declared, 'We are going to teach these kids some manners. Dinner is at 7:30 and everyone will sit at the table until we are all done.' In my opinion, my kids had decent manners for being so young. They were two, four, and five, 7:30 was way too late to feed them. I was offended at the implication that I had not taught my kids manners. To avoid conflict, we complied with the dinner time and sit-down rules but also gave our kids a hefty snack around 5:30. When my kids were little, visiting their home stressed me out. I wished my husband would have spoken up."—Laine A.

Laine's story shows how a ceremonial grandparent may miss the bigger picture. In this case the entire family came to visit. Making the visit pleasant is a higher priority than a late meal. Emphasizing ritual over connection gets in the way of faith building opportunities. Most grandparents don't share everyday meals with their grands. Prioritizing gratefulness for food and family, through prayer, would be a better tradition to zero in on. The parents can worry about manners.

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Cool: The Grandparent Who Highly Values Cultural Trends, Mores, and Embraces a World Rather Than a Biblical View

Plus Side: Understands today's culture, may be relatable, current with trends and technology.

Possible Pitfall: May choose cultural relevancy over biblical truth.

Probable Proclamation: "Follow your heart."

Positive Adjustment: To choose biblical truth over cultural trends.

My cousin Karen and I aspired to be like my maternal (her paternal) grandmother. We considered "Gramma Herbert" our mod grandmother. Her clothes were up to date, she was adventurous and traveled with friends, knew all the Minnesota Vikings and Minnesota Twins stats, and was up for family games at the cabin with her grandkids. Our mod Grandma was a person we could relate to and have fun with. My interaction was different with Gramma Herbert than it was with my paternal grandparents.

Here's what Susie W. has to say, "My children's dad and his entire family, go so far as to try and make my Christian lifestyle look cultish to my children. And they use this to seek custody. It's not easy being the only Christians in the family."

Surrogate: The Grandparent Who Provides Regular Childcare but Does Not Have Full-Time Custody

Plus Side: Meets child's needs while supporting her adult child and their spouse.

Possible Pitfall: May take over or interfere in parents' decisions or discipline.

Probable Proclamation: "I'll take care of it."

Positive Adjustment: To let go of the reigns when the parents are around.

I have had temporary and short stints with this role. When my daughter had her babies, she asked me to come and help. I jumped at the chance. Once babies two and three arrived, my main two jobs were to make meals and watch the older kids. It is difficult not to enter the fray after caring for the kids all day. Today there are many grandparents who function as surrogates and watch their grandkids regularly. (A grandparent with full-time custody fully functions as a parent.)

Statistics show over half of those who provide childcare watch their grandkids under twelve hours a week. About twenty-four percent watch their grands twelve to twenty-five hours per week. And one in four grandparents care for their grandkids twenty-five or more hours a week.¹⁵

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Christian Coach: The Grandparent Who Intentionally Encourages a Christian Worldview and Faith Development

Plus Side: Filters thoughts and feelings through intentional faith conversations and actions.

Possible Pitfall: May come across as pious, uses Christianese, and speaks in platitudes.

Probable Pondering: “How can I show Jesus in this moment?”

Positive Adjustment: To be ready to respond authentically with humility and grace.

Diane Fowler is a great example of an intentional Christian grandparent. Her middle school grandson asked her if she would participate as a leader with him in a church event.¹⁶ She could have said, “Been there, done that.” But instead, she set aside whatever she could have been doing during that time frame and jumped in with both feet. She wants to encourage her grandson, their relationship, and his participation in church activities while hoping to simultaneously grow his faith. This was a spiritual win-win!

This approach, when stretched to its extreme, and this grandparent could be viewed as hypocritical. Real conversations come as platitudes are regularly spoken.

Checked Out: The Grandparent Whose Interests and Schedule Trump Everything Else

Plus Side: Grandparent is meeting his or her personal needs or wants.

Possible Pitfall: Uninvolved.

Probable Proclamation: “I already raised my kids.”

Positive Adjustment: Get involved. Be a student of your grandkids. Get to know their likes and dislikes.

“My parents are uninvolved grandparents. No matter what we try, we can’t get them involved in their grandkids’ lives. They live 1,000 miles away. They see us once a year and it is like pulling teeth to get them to do much. They did come out for the girls’ graduations. Even with my dad battling cancer, they have little interest beyond a passing conversation. They don’t text, call, or engage on Facebook. Nothing. Christmas, they send money. My kids have always felt hurt that their grandparents aren’t involved. In all fairness though, that was their parenting style.”—Jenna B.

Reasons for lack of involvement may include grandparents who are still in the workforce, their energy level, medical issues, or just simply not wanting to babysit. An article in *Parents* magazine addresses the phenomenon of uninvolved grandparents. Part of what contributes to this is Boomers and Gen Xers are programmed to be busy. They work out, volunteer, are involved in various social clubs, and value going on trips. They are not interested in surrendering their time.¹⁷

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Grandparents, we know time is a precious commodity. The older we get, the more we value time and cherish time with loved ones. We have a window of opportunity to impact our grandkids' lives, their mental health, emotional well-being, and spiritual growth. We can still do fun things and be more care-free. However, we must be cognizant of how we spend our time and realign our priorities according to the charge our good God has given grandparents.

Canceled: The Grandparent Who Is Estranged From Their Adult Children and Grandchildren, Not by Choice


Plus Side: Could be moved to address past wounds in order to reconcile.

Potential Pitfall: Heartbroken. Separated.

Probable Proclamation: "I'm not allowed to see my grandkids."

Positive Adjustment: Be a bridge builder. First work on your relationship with your adult child. Admit, "I can do better."

This situation is heartbreaking. Many parents who told me their stories are baffled as to why their adult children are so angry and want to keep them out of their lives. Some of those stories are included in Chapter 4, "The Grand Gap."



We must be cognizant of how we spend our time and realign our priorities according to the charge our good God has given grandparents.

Which type or types best describe you? What are you doing well? Where could you improve?

We have tendencies toward certain styles. Each tendency has the power to positively or negatively impact our adult children and grandkids. If you have caught the vision of being used by God to impact your grandchild's faith, being a Christian Coach must land in the primary personality category. A grandparent who is a Christian Coach guides, prays for, prays with, and encourages family faith, and will eternally impact the grandchildren's faith.

When the Christian coach is combined with the Chum, Captain, Consultant, Cool, Surrogate, or Ceremonial personality your grandchild's faith will be positively impacted. Of course, be aware of the possible pitfalls and make the necessary positive adjustments. Each personality, stretched to its extreme, has negative implications.

If you find yourself in the Checked-Out category yet realize you have a desire to pass along your faith, it's not too late. God can make up time in the air. Hopefully this informal exercise will raise your awareness and encourage you to realign your priorities. If you fall into the Canceled group, and wholeheartedly desire to be a Christian Coach, I pray you humbly seek the Lord and pursue healing your relationship with your adult children (this is discussed more in the upcoming chapters).

Our Adult Child's Impact

"I've been surprised at how much my adult children's view of my role has impacted the way I grandparent. I wasn't expect-

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ing that.” Cindy P. expressed this frustration in a grandparenting class I was teaching after I posed the question, “What has surprised you the most about being a grandparent?”

The type of grandparent we are depends, to a large degree, on how our adult children see our role. Our adult children’s view and their expectation of the grandparent role impacts how and how often we relate to and interact with the grandchildren. This may be different among your adult children, and it will affect the way in which you interact with grands from different families. Are you seen more as a playmate, a free babysitter, a holiday host, a fan in the stands? Or do they recognize that you are a vital source of support for them and for their children?

I’ve noticed I’m a slightly different grandparent to our different families who have kids. One family lives out of state. Another a few miles away. One family loves to have Tom and me take their kids for short excursions, the other family likes their entire family to be a part of any fun-filled activity. One family is more concerned about germs and illness, the other less. One family is more comfortable with planned events; the other is open to spontaneity. No way is right or wrong. These are just personal preferences, which may be different from the way we would do things. It is important to remember, these choices are a parent’s call. As grandparents we need to keep in mind, it is more important to support our children’s parenting decisions and efforts than to force our personal preference.

It is good to have fun, watch the kids, host events, and be a fan. Yet as grandparents we can be so much more. We can be a source of spiritual support for the grands. We are an untapped faith resource. Let’s open that spiritual spigot.

*Children's children are a crown to the aged,
and parents are the pride of their children.*

Proverbs 17:6

Grand Reflection

1. Which three personalities do you display most often?
2. Which is your dominant personality?
3. What are some positives, negatives, and challenges you have seen or experienced? Where can you improve?

Grand Verses

Read, reflect, and respond to these verses:

- Proverbs 17:6
- Ephesians 6:1
- Ephesians 6:4
- Colossians 3:21

What do you learn from these passages?

Grand Partner Tips

- Be the Christian Coach who expresses and models faith in an authentic, relatable, and grace-filled way.
- Be the Chum and find engaging faith-filled ways to connect with your grands.

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- As the Surrogate or Consultant, support and respect your children in their quest to be the best parents they can be.

Grand Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for this opportunity to enjoy my grandchildren. Give me an awareness of the importance of time spent together and use me to support and respect my adult children so they can be the parents you have called them to be. Give me the words and creative ideas on how to encourage and cultivate faith in my grandchildren. Amen.

Chapter 2

Grand Family Dynamics



**“REMEMBER AS FAR AS
ANYONE KNOWS WE ARE
A NICE, NORMAL FAMILY.”**

“Remember as far as anyone knows we are a nice, normal family.” This statement is displayed on various types of home décor like decorative pillows, framed signs, and coffee mugs. Homer Simpson articulated this statement in the Simpson’s TV show.¹⁸ One of John Ortberg’s book titles dovetails Homer’s words perfectly, *Everybody’s Normal Till You Get to Know Them*.¹⁹

Homer and Ortberg are spot on. Each family has their own type of normal, with a little disfunction mixed in. Not one family, not one person, is perfect.

In my coaching practice, most of my current clients have concerns or difficulties with their adult children. They desire to improve or even to simply have a relationship. There are many reasons why parents and adult children struggle or are estranged.

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As we examine various ways family members relate, remember we can choose the best and most godly way to interact. We won't do life together perfectly and that is okay. As we read through Scripture, particularly the Old Testament, we see sinful people in imperfect families. In the middle of our mess, we find a God who restores and forgives even the most dysfunctional of families. In the process of our *unnormalness* we have an opportunity to grow. God teaches us humility, repentance, and unconditional love. These are three main ingredients to the connection concoction.

Levels of Connection

How connected are you to your adult child and their spouse? Your relationship, either healthy or unhealthy, with your adult children will impact your connection to your grandkids.

Toxic relationships have a high degree of negative connection. They are often characterized by negativity, criticism, control, selfishness, disrespect, competition, insecurity, blame, jealousy, or even abuse. The receiver of these poisonous patterns may display low self-esteem, anger, guilt, or shame. (In an upcoming chapter we will discuss messages our grandkids, adult kids, and spouses need.)

One type of toxic relationship is co-dependency, where one individual continues to give and the other continues to take. This type of relationship is unhealthy and unhelpful. The enabler is not helping a person change their circumstance but instead works to get the taker to rely on them even more. If this relationship is not adjusted, it can become enmeshed. An

enmeshed relationship is overly connected. The individual is so entangled in the relationship that they lose touch with their own needs and feelings. Healthy boundaries are blurred, and family members have difficulty expressing their own thoughts or preferences when they don't line up with the family narrative.

A second type is low connection. It may occur when a grandparent has chosen to get involved only when necessary. This will result in the adult child feeling a sense of resentment. Even if the grandparent changes their tune, the adult child may not be receptive. This dynamic often occurs due to selfishness, but it could be unintentionally spurred on by distraction, inattention, or a chaotic schedule.²⁰

"My daughter and her family lived in the same town as her in-laws. She had both her babies there. The in-laws would rarely visit their little grands. They maybe saw them once or twice a month. There was little effort made to check in on the family, see how they were doing, offer to babysit, etc. My daughter had each child via C-section. I came out before each child was born and stayed for three weeks after each birth. She really could have used some help after I left, and those grandparents did nothing. They didn't even ask my daughter how she was doing!"—Vanessa S.

"I'm estranged from my father. He abandoned us when I was about thirteen and my parents divorced. I tried to reconnect a couple times when I was in college, but he didn't have any desire to, so I let it go. Sometimes nothing can be done, and it is just better to move on. It wasn't my choice at first, but if he reached out to me, I would not want a relationship. No hate,

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no resentment, I have forgiven him but don't need him in my life."—Katie O.

Zero Connection

A third type of toxic relationship is zero connection. This is where we find the Checked Out and Canceled Grandparents. The Checked-Out personality chooses not to be involved as opposed to the Canceled grandparent who is prevented or blocked from being involved. In both cases, if the grandparent wants to reenter the family fold, that grandparent must seek relationship with the adult child and their spouse first. For a relationship to be rebuilt, apologies and forgiveness need to be part of the package. Own your part if you want a relationship, even if you think your behavior is not so bad or not such a big deal. Let go of pride or righteous indignation and begin to construct a relationship bridge.

When zero connection results from grandparents being canceled, it is most likely there is a wound that needs healing and trust that needs to be restored. Reconciliation, in my opinion, is better than a boundary of zero connection. That said, if physical or sexual abuse is the reason, the boundary will likely need to remain in place. Even if extensive therapy has been done, never leave the child alone with this person.

"I grew up with a father who had anger issues and a mother with a lot of passive aggressive tendencies. This made for a big dysfunctional family life. My parents separated when I was in college. At one point, my father said he had changed, but then he had a run in with my sister. I wrote a letter to him after that,

saying I forgave him, but I couldn't be around him. I told him, I wanted him to get therapy and until he did, I didn't want any contact with him. He sent back a letter saying he was sorry for 'whatever he did.' My mother has her own issues. She developed a lot of behaviors because of the marriage, but it has recently come to light that she also has a lot of her own unresolved issues from earlier in life. If we try to set a boundary with her, we get shut down, or the silent treatment. My own kids have asked why grandma is so angry all the time. We still see her, but the relationship has become more and more distant."—Linda H.

Conditional Connection

This is the quid pro quo in relationships, getting something for something. "What do I get for it?" "What have you done to earn my love?" "You don't deserve a hug." "Because you were so awful we are not going to ____."

This type of interaction may show itself in the personalities of the Captain or Chum.

"One of my kids was having a meltdown in the car. She was a toddler at the time. Her grandmother, my mother-law, said to her, 'If you don't stop crying, we are going to leave you here on the side of the road.'"—Lisa A.

Conditional connections expect conformity through control or threats. Our grandkids need to know we will never leave nor forsake them, no matter their behavior or attitude. They need to feel secure in the fact that our love, our relationship, is not conditional. Grandparents who lean toward the Captain or

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Chum personalities need to be careful to avoid the traps of a conditional connection relationship.

Surface Connection

Surface connection is most often displayed in the grandparent personalities of Ceremonial or Cool.

“My mother-in-law is a hard person to get along with. We have had falling outs more times than I can remember. I keep my distance. I will text her. She has a wonderful son. I keep her informed for moments like her grandson’s graduation. I wish her Happy Mother’s Day and text on holidays. I send pictures and gifts. But she is not my favorite person. I have a name for her, but I won’t share that here.”—Laurel E.

Manners and proper protocol, in some families, may trump connection. Yes, manners are important, but stretched to the extreme have the potential to stifle relationships. Placing the focus on respect and honor are deeper character traits to build upon as opposed to the surface display of proper manners. Consider the child’s age and stage. Our reaction to bad manners needs to be measured accordingly. If the parents are around, the manners instruction is best left to them. As grandparents we can model good manners and demonstrate how to respect and honor others.

Independent

“I want to raise my kids to be independent.” This is a statement uttered with confidence. I often hear this from young par-

ents in my coaching practice. I hear parents of adult children lament, “Well I raised my kids to be independent. I guess this is what that looks like.”

You may be among many Americans who have raised children to be independent. Independence, after all, runs through our western veins. It’s possible you fall into the grandparent personality of Captain; a person who highly values good behavior. What parents have come to understand is they really did not want the independent outcome. Complete independence results in separation from them. I want a relationship that lasts a lifetime. I want to be in my adult kids’ lives and I want to be in my grandkids’ lives. So rather than focus on the quality of independence, reinforce the characteristic of responsibility. Yes, responsibility is the quality I hope to reinforce in my grands.²¹

Jody M. describes her experience, “Before I had kids, I didn’t see my parents or any family for almost three years due to my dad telling me to go be homeless when I was in a rough situation. I was between jobs and apartments. I have never been close to anyone in my family. However, we did talk about three years ago and have had casual conversations, nothing deep. Once I became pregnant, we moved to be closer to family in hopes that we would get support. Honestly my parents are willing to help when asked but they do not seem interested in getting to know me or my husband as people. They refuse to have difficult conversations. I am not trying to keep my children away from my parents. It is a two-way street, if they don’t ask to come see their grandkids then I won’t make the effort to take them. I invite them to come to stuff, but they always say no. It makes it hard to want them involved. I want them to make an effort.”

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Interdependent Connection

This connection can be seen in all the grandparent personalities except for the Canceled or Checked out. Interdependence is God's healthy model for family relationships.

"Some people even get angry when I tell them my daughter, her husband, and their preschool son live with us. Many people have said cruel things. Some are even Christians. They will say things like, 'Jason needs to support his family.'" —Rosemary V.

Aren't families meant to support and help each other? God created us to be interdependent, to be each other's helper. Shouldn't we be able to be our adult children's helpers if they run into hard times? I know several people who feel embarrassment or even shame admitting they have their adult children and grandkids living with them. Families need to stand together. Why wouldn't we help our adult kids if they need assistance?

For those grandparents who have adult children plus grands in their home, this is a chaotic and blessed time; it's an opportunity to have a big impact on their grandkids' lives. This may be a gift from God.

Currently, our eldest daughter is living with us. She ran into some hard times and needed a helping hand. We were happy to offer it. Interdependence is a "one for all and all for one" type of attitude. I believe this is a biblical family relationship.

Grand Merge

I'm sure you noticed; we are not the only grandparents in our grands' lives. There is another set from the other side of the

family. The merging of different families and differences in the way they connect has the potential to create some unexpected issues. How families celebrate holidays, give gifts, express their faith, and interact will most likely be different. Those differences can create tension and must be respectfully and openly discussed. Our adult children may choose a way different from how they were raised. They can do this; we can accept this and learn another way.

In our home we chose to avoid recognizing Santa and the Easter Bunny, but we still had stocking gifts and Easter baskets. We chose a different way to celebrate those holidays from how we were raised. I think both sets of grandparents thought it was odd, but they respected our decision. Once we were asked, “If you don’t do Santa and the Bunny, why do you do the tooth fairy?” Fair question. “The tooth fairy does not distract from Christ’s birth or His resurrection. The tooth fairy is all about make believe.” Open dialogue is important. Respect, and maybe not agreement, for how the parents choose to raise their kids is critical.

Grandma Wars

Families do things differently and so do grandparents. Some grandparents would like their way to be seen as the favorite or best way.

Many grandparents confess they feel threatened, insecure, or jealous when it comes to their grandchildren and the other set of grandparents’ relationship with them. Rivalry for the grandkids’ time and affection begins to fester. One set of grand-

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parents notices the other has more access to or more privileges with the grandkids. Another notices that the other grandparents spend more on gifts. Some find it very tempting to make negative or disparaging comments about the other set of grandparents. Don't.

"My daughter's family lives five minutes from her in-laws and three hours from my husband and me. Our grandson sees his other grandparents almost daily. We see him as often as we can. From time to time a part of me gets to feeling sorry for myself. We are thankful for Facetime!"—Rebecca T.

Try to readjust your thought pattern to, "How nice my grand has so many people to love him." Speak well of the other set of grandparents. Do not put your adult children in a position to intercede or to carry the burden of grandparent competition. Each grandparent needs to find their relationship sweet spot with their grandkids and connect that way.

"It's the Grandma Wars," Kelly M. described the dynamic between her paternal and maternal grandmothers. "My grandmothers are in competition to be the favorite." Even though the two women were fast friends, each felt a little jealousy regarding the other's relationship with the grandkids. Things that typically stir jealousy among grandparents are noticeable differences in time spent with the grands, gifting, special grandchild knowledge, the number of pictures on display, and overt affection. Parents can help alleviate some of the comparison by spreading the love; even out those photos and access to the grands a little more evenly. It will never be exactly equal but work to close the gap as much as possible.

It helps to recall we have our own unique relationship with each grand. Find the connection that is uniquely yours, capitalize on that and weave the Christian Coach into that relationship.

“My daughter is close to her in-laws. Closer than she is to us. That hurts. Now my daughter has a baby, and I am wondering what that will look like going forward. I didn’t picture this stage of life to be like this.”—Brenda V.

Unmet expectations have the power to cause us deep pain. Speak your expectations, without involving the other grandparent. This is a more constructive way to go. Rather than, “You spend more time with ____.” Switch it up to, “I’d love to have more time with ____.” Keep the other set of grandparents out of the conversation.

“We are not the first ones they call. I sort of get it. It’s natural for my stepdaughter to call her mom first. But when she does call us to watch the girls, our answer is always, ‘Yes.’ Even if we must change our plans or adjust our schedule. We take what we can get.”—Valerie H.

Perspective in many cases can lead to peace. Perspective, love, and humility are qualities that have the power to improve relationships with the other set of grandparents. The better your relationship with the other grandparents, the more supportive each grandparent is of the other.

“My daughter’s mother-in-law, the other grandmother, has brain cancer. Her prognosis is not good. I’ve told Alyssa, my daughter, during these upcoming years to always put Debby, her mother-in-law, first when it comes to holidays, not knowing

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how much longer Debby will be around. I want Debby to have first dibs on everything while she's still able to enjoy the children and grandchildren."—Lisa W.

The Favorite

I do not like the idea of singling out a favorite grandkid. Each one is special, each connection is unique. The Lord warns us about favoritism. In Genesis with Joseph and his brothers or with Jacob and Esau, we can clearly see how choosing favorites creates jealousy, which brings out the worst in people. Jealousy moves us to sin.

I recall a time when my daughter was in fourth grade and her teacher told her, "You are my favorite." My daughter believed her and felt proud of the fact she had a special relationship with this teacher, until she realized she didn't. She overheard her teacher say, "You are my favorite," to another student. This is not the way to win anyone's heart. Love them all, love them big. Some families like to joke about who is the favorite. I dislike this type of banter. For some reason my adult kids like to joke around like that. Perhaps they get a kick out of it because I don't.

I have observed each one of my adult children think someone other than themselves is the favorite. After one of my girls announced she was pregnant with baby number three, one of my kids jokingly said, "Now she has moved into first place." (Oh brother.)

It is tough to keep things exactly equal, but it is important to be aware of places imbalance may occur. Here are some things that grandparents can do to eliminate the idea of favoritism: spend the same amount of money on gifts for all the grands, as much as possible try to spend an equal amount of time with each child, display pictures of each grandchild, focus on the grandkids you are with rather than talk about the others unless asked.

“My parents have passed. My husband’s mom is not that close to my son. She has chosen one of her ten grandkids that she likes.” —Ellen C.

The merging of two different families is complicated and has the potential to stir comparison and jealousy. The level of relational satisfaction is impacted by the idea of fairness or balance in time or gifting. Imbalance and favoritism breeds jealousy.

If we want to have satisfying, healthy, and interdependent relationships with our adult children and grands, cultivating God’s spiritual fruit in ourselves is a great place to begin. The apostle Paul defines healthy spiritual people and relationships in Galatians 5:22–23. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience (forbearance), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. I need to ask myself, “Is my fruit sweet or spoiled?” It is up to me, with God’s help, to bring sweet fruit to the family table.



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Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

1 Corinthians 13:4–7

Grand Reflection

1. As you review the different types of family dynamics, in what areas are you doing well? Where could you improve?
2. Have you experienced feelings of jealousy regarding the other grandparents? What can you do to strengthen your relationship with your grandkids and avoid having favorites?
3. In Galatians 5:22–23, Paul lists the nine ingredients of good fruit. How would you characterize your fruit? Where could you improve?

Grand Verses

Read, reflect, and respond to these verses:

- Genesis 25:27–28
- Genesis 37:3–4
- Proverbs 27:4

What do you learn from these passages?

Grand Partner Tips

- Give your love generously to all your grands.
- Apologize, ask for forgiveness, and repent for past mistakes.
- Be sure to be as equal as you can be when it comes to showing interest in your grandkids and gifting them.

Grand Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for Your example of how to love well. Grant me the courage and humility to address past mistakes. Give me Your wisdom and strength to repair relationships that are broken. Amen.

Suggested Grandparent Resources

Grand Monday Nights Weekly Webinar

A free weekly webinar about Intentional Christian Grandparenting with new and relevant topics and speakers each week hosted by Barb Lorenz with Patsy Glunt or Lori Wildenberg as guest hosts. This webinar is produced by Larry Fowler's Legacy Coalition. <https://legacycoalition.com/grand-monday-nights/>.

The Legacy Coalition

Provides help for grandparents to have a greater spiritual impact on their families through the weekly webinar (Grand Monday Nights), Grandparenting Matters Seminars, Grandparent Summit National Conferences. <https://legacycoalition.com/>.

Online Resources

Biblicalparenting.org

CelebrateKids.com

FamTime.com

GrandkidsMatter.org

LoriWildenberg.com

Moms Together Facebook group and community page

RaisingChristianKids.com/tips-from-the-experts/

Visionaryfam.com

Podcasts

D6 Family Ministry Podcast

*Moms Together, Moms Better Together, Raising Christian Kids—
MOMents with Lori and Lee Ann*

Lori's YouTube Channel <https://www.youtube.com/c/Lori-Wildenberg>

Eryn Lynam's *Rooted in Wonder* podcast

Print Resources

Becky Danielson and Carol Olsen, *Faithful Grandparenting: Practical Ideas for Connecting the Generations*

Ken Canfield, *The H.E.A.R.T of Grandparenting: 5 Keys to Being the Best Grandparent Possible*

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Lee Ann Mancini, *Raising Kids to Follow Christ: Instilling a Life-long Trust in God*

Larry E. McCall, *Grandparenting With Grace: Living the Gospel With the Next Generation*

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Christie Thomas, *Little Habits, Big Faith: How Simple Practices Help Your Family Grow in Jesus*

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Lori Wildenberg, *The Messy Life of Parenting: Powerful and Practical Ways to Strengthen Family Connections*

Lori Wildenberg, *Messy Hope: Help Your Child Overcome Anxiety, Depression, or Suicidal Ideation*

Lori Wildenberg, *Messy Journey: How Grace and Truth Offer the Prodigal a Way Home*

About the Author

Helping families build connections that last a lifetime is Lori Wildenberg's passion. She has over thirty years of experience working with families to help them be who God created them to be.

Professionally, Lori is a licensed parent and family educator, national speaker, co-founder of 1 Corinthians 13 Parenting Ministry, owner and lead mentor for the Moms Together Community and Group found on Facebook, and author or co-author of seven parenting or grandparenting books. Lori is a member of the Advanced Writers and Speakers Association. You can find articles by Lori at *Focus on the Family*, *Mom Life Today*, *Just Between Us*, *Crosswalk*, and other online Christian magazines.

Personally, Lori is wife to Tom, her college sweetheart, and mom of four. The Wildenberg family has experienced a growth spurt with a daughter-in-love, two sons-in-love, and five grands. A perfect day in Lori's world is a hike with any combination of family members and of course Toby the family goldendoodle. The Wildenberg home is nestled in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. For more information, to connect with, or to receive Lori's quarterly newsletter go to loriwildenberg.com.

Endnotes

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Did you know grandparents are second only to parents in shaping their grandchildren's faith and moral development? Grandparenting is a sacred role—a partnership with your adult children and God to nurture the next generation.

But stepping into this role often requires navigating challenges like strained relationships, spiritual differences, or even mental health struggles. *Grandparents Make Grand Partners: How to Have an Eternal Impact on Your Grandchild's Life* is your guide to thriving as a grandparent. This book equips you with helpful strategies to strengthen family relationships and share faith in meaningful ways.



It may be the most practical book on Christian grandparenting today. This book is fantastic, and I cannot recommend it highly enough.

Josh Mulvihill, Ph.D., author of *The Grandparenting Matters* book series

I found myself chuckling one minute and choking up the next but more importantly, *learning* from Lori's wisdom. There's something in this book for every grandparent. I'm thrilled to see this book added to the growing library of resources for Christian grandparents. It has my full endorsement!

Larry Fowler, founder, Legacy Coalition



LORI WILDENBERG, licensed parent and family educator, author, and national speaker, is passionate about helping families build connections that last a lifetime and beyond. Lori is the author or co-author of six additional books including the award-winning *Messy Hope: Help Your Child Overcome Anxiety Depression, or Suicidal Ideation*. Lori is married to her college sweetheart, Tom. They have four adult children, three in-laws, and five grands. A perfect day in Lori's world is a hike with Tom, any combination of family members, and Toby the family goldendoodle. The Wildenberg home is nestled in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. loriwildenberg.com

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