

LARRY E. McCALL

FOREWORD BY JOSH MULVIHILL, PHD

GRANDPARENTING

WITH

GRACE



LIVING THE GOSPEL WITH THE
NEXT GENERATION

“Don’t be mistaken. This book is not about how to give grace to your grandchildren. It’s about how to be full of grace as a grandparent, which is much better and far more powerful. It’s what makes this book so good.”

Jack Klumpenhower, Author of *Show Them Jesus*

“As of this writing, I’ve been on this journey as a grandparent for only a couple of years, but what a wonderful pilgrimage it is! Truly ‘Grandchildren are the crown of the aged’ (Prov. 17:6). I am grateful to have read *Grandparenting with Grace* so early in this journey. But by the time most Christians become grandparents, they have also started to give thought to finishing well as followers of Jesus. Larry McCall’s book has given me greater biblical clarity to the role godly grandparenting plays in that pursuit, and has provided many practical tools for the process.”

Donald S. Whitney, Professor of Biblical Spirituality and Associate Dean at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY; author of *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, *Praying the Bible*, and *Family Worship*

“Grandparents who care about both their grandkids and the gospel will find Larry McCall’s book full of biblical principles and practical advice. Larry gets it: the important role that grandparents can play in the spiritual development of their grandchildren, and the scriptural mandate to do so is a message every Christian grandparent needs to hear and act upon. I strongly recommend that grandparents not only read—but study—*Grandparenting with Grace*!”

Larry Fowler, Founder of The Legacy Coalition

“Our grandchildren are gifts from God. With that gift, there is an enormous responsibility for grandparents to help nurture their grandchildren’s love for the Lord and their spiritual growth. Larry shows us how a gospel-centered lifestyle combined with intentional prayer play a key role for grandparents. In this practical, Scripture-based book, you will gain tools to remember the great purpose God has given you in this role and bless the generations that come after you.”

Lillian Penner, Author of *Grandparenting with a Purpose: Effective Ways to Pray for Your Grandchildren*; co-director for the prayer ministry of Christian Grandparenting Network

“If you think being a ‘good’ grandparent is all there is to grandparenting, Larry McCall will challenge that thinking in a convincing way. Well-written and engaging, *Grandparenting with Grace* will forever change how you view your role as a biblical grandparent. Larry’s no-nonsense, biblical approach to grandparenting—centered in the gospel, not culture or traditions—will transform you and your impact as a parent and grandparent. Filled with practical action steps, *Grandparenting with Grace* ought to be in every grandparent’s toolbox for building a legacy worth outliving you generation to generation.”

Cavin T. Harper, Founder and President, The Christian Grandparenting Network

“I found out my daughter was pregnant with our first grandchild a week before reading *Grandparenting with Grace*. I thought I was excited before, but after reading Larry McCall’s book, my vision for grandparenting and excitement for my new role went off the charts. Larry has hit the sweet spot; he both inspires you in your role as a grandparent and gives you the practical steps you need to succeed. If you are a grandparent or soon will be, you should read this book.”

Marty Machowski, Pastor; author of *The Gospel Story Bible*, *The Ology* (a theology book for children), *Long Story Short: Ten-Minute Devotions to Draw Your Family to God*, *Parenting First Aid*, and other gospel-rich resources for families and churches

“Being a grandparent is a wonderful privilege. It includes most of the joys of parenthood without some of the difficult challenges. Though multiple resources are available for parents seeking wisdom for godly parenting, advice for grandparents is practically nonexistent. This is a book every grandparent should read. It is refreshingly grounded in the gospel, essential for guidance in our relationships with our grandchildren, and is also filled with practical tips. If you are a grandparent, do not wait to profit from this invaluable resource.”

Tom Julien, Former Executive Director of Encompass World Partners

“Our actions affect not only our personal lives but the lives of our children and grandchildren. It’s a joy to live in light of the gospel, but it’s an even greater joy to see the light of the gospel change those closest to you. Time and time again, Larry McCall writes and teaches with powerful and practical application. As a grandparent of thirteen, this is a book I have been waiting for!”

Byron Paulus, President, Life Action Ministries

“As an author and grandparent, Larry McCall has so many practical ideas and challenges for the parents of the parents. For all who get to love and provide fun and wisdom for their grandkids, *Grandparenting with Grace* offers insight ranging from the use of technology, ways to make memories together, and how to bless them in little but life-changing ways. Every mama and papa thinks about how their kids grow up so quickly. This manual of suggestions should be provided right away, every time a grandchild is born.”

Knute Larson, Grandparent; pastoral coach

“I thank God for Larry McCall and for this book which inspires, challenges, and equips us with biblical vision and practical guidance for making known to our children’s children ‘the glorious deeds of the Lord and his might and the wonders he has done.’”

David Michael, Cofounder of Truth78 (formerly Children Desiring God); pastor for the Next Generations, College Park Church, Indianapolis

“Who would’ve imagined that a sound, systematic, and practical theology of *Grandparenting with Grace* would ever be available in print? Well, thankfully, Larry McCall has now written such an important manual for us! And, in doing so, has literally left no stone unturned in addressing this vital, yet neglected, area of Christian living. His over four decades of solid marriage and parenting experience (he has many children and grandchildren), along with almost four decades of faithful pastoral ministry, make this book a veritable source of grandparenting wisdom. This is an important tool for discipling your family until you see Jesus!”

Jerry Marcellino, Preaching Pastor of Audubon Drive Bible Church in Laurel, Mississippi; cofounder of FIRE (The Fellowship of Independent Reformed Evangelicals)

“Biblically-grounded, gospel-centered, thoughtful, practical, reflective, and intentional are just a few descriptions that come to mind when thinking about this outstanding new resource designed for grandparents who desire to serve their families and make a difference in the lives of their grandchildren. This well-designed book, which includes helpful questions and action steps at the conclusion of each chapter, will be beneficial for many, whether read individually or studied in a small group setting. It provides a wonderful reminder of the special calling and responsibilities that come with grandparenting, including the relationships with grandchildren and their parents, in both good times and in moments of challenge. Larry McCall is to be commended for putting together this most applicable volume.”

David S. Dockery, President, Trinity International University/Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

“This book is a must-read for grandparents. Every season of life could use gospel-centered counsel. With the grace of a pastor, the insight of a theologian, and the love of a gospel-filled grandparent, Larry has given us just that. Make sure you get an extra copy for your friends; they will love you for it and so will their grandchildren.”

Louis C. Love, Jr., Pastor, New Life Fellowship Church, Waukegan, IL

Grandparenting with Grace

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Living the Gospel
with the Next Generation

Larry E. McCall



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DEDICATION



“Grandchildren are the crown of the aged,” Proverbs 17:6.

What a delight you are to your grandmother and me,
Jackson, Katy, Kamaile, Titus, Ellie, Anna, and Josiah!

You are God’s gift to us as your grandparents.

May we be instruments in the Redeemer’s gracious,
sovereign hand in coming alongside your parents
in pointing you to Christ and his amazing gospel of grace.

We love each of you immensely!



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Foreword

GRANDPARENTING WITH GRACE is a book about what matters most as grandparents—the salvation and spiritual growth of our children and grandchildren. Larry calls us, with a laser focus, to see and savor Christ and to allow the gospel to shape our grandparenting.

For many Christians, their understanding of the gospel is foggy and does not translate into everyday living. Christians understand that the gospel is important for salvation, but what about grandparenting? Everything in life, including grandparenting, should find its place in relation to the gospel.

God established the family as the primary means to evangelize and disciple the next generation. Parents and grandparents are gospel-partners, instructed by God to be disciple-makers of future generations. They share the same goal, but they have different roles. This book will help you rediscover the value of grandparenthood in the discipleship of grandchildren and ignite a passion to pass faith in Christ to future generations.

You will find that this is a Bible-saturated book. Larry McCall has written a book that is faithful to Scripture and grounded in the timeless truths of God's Word. That's why it's valuable. I'm delighted to see this book, because there are countless families, churches, and individuals who are in need of a renewed biblical understanding of grandparenting.

Grandparenting with Grace is an authentic book. Larry embodies what he writes about in this book. He walks the talk. Larry is a humble man, a faithful pastor, a husband worthy of imitation, and a loving father and grandfather. Larry seeks to live in a manner worthy of the gospel and can honestly say, “Imitate me as I imitate Christ” in this area of life. Larry would humbly admit he is not the perfect grandparent, but he is a seasoned guide and a godly teacher, and I can confidently commend this book to you.


Be careful with the book you hold in your hand. It may change your life and family forever. You will find that this book is a powerful call and a practical tool to help you take your responsibility as a grandparent seriously. Most importantly, this book reminds us that God designed grandparents to defend, display, and declare the gospel to future generations. May you be blessed by it and may the gospel shape your grandparenting.

Josh Mulvihill, PhD
Author, *Biblical Grandparenting*




Introduction:

What's So Great about Being a Grandparent?



SO, WHAT DO you think is the best part of being a grandparent? What's that well-worn quip? "The best thing about being a grandparent is that you can spoil the grandkids and then send them home to their parents!" Really? That's it? That's the *best* thing about being a grandparent? Hmmm . . . I hope not! Who wants spoiled children running around? There has got to be something better. So, what *is* the best part of being a grandparent?



I think for many of us grandparents, our enjoyment level is high. You know, "If I had realized having grandchildren would be this much fun, I would have had them first!" That's great. I'm glad you enjoy being a grandparent. My wife and I enjoy being grandparents too. Let's have fun with those grandkids. Let's keep our enjoyment level high.

But I wonder how high our understanding level is as grandparents. What I mean is, how much training have we received in seeking to understand God's calling on our lives as grandparents? How proactive have we been in exploring the Bible to find out what God calls us to do as Christian grandparents?

When my wife and I were asked to teach a class on gospel-centered grandparenting at our local church, we were taken a

bit by surprise. It's not that we were against the idea. We just hadn't given it much thought. And I'm a pastor! We had done a fair amount of teaching on marriage over the years, and on parenting issues, too. But, grandparenting? Who ever heard of a class on grandparenting? No one had ever given *us* any systematic teaching on grandparenting. Yet, here we were, the grandparents of six amazing grandchildren, doing the best we knew how, even though we had never been given any training in this awesome ministry of grandparenting.

How about for you? Have you ever received any training in how to be an intentional, Christ-focused grandparent? Perhaps you are part of that small group of grandparents who have benefitted from one of the few Christian grandparenting conferences that have sprung up in recent years. I'm confident you consider yourself blessed if you have had that privilege. But for the majority of Christian grandparents, the opportunity to receive biblical training on grandparenting has not yet entered their radar.

Well, my wife and I said "yes" to the invitation to teach the class at our church on "Gospel-Centered Grandparenting." We knew we had a lot to learn. So, we began to search God's Word in earnest to understand his calling on our lives as grandparents.

We were pleased, but not totally surprised, when the great majority of grandparents in our church accepted our invitation to join us for our class on biblical grandparenting. Clearly, my wife Gladine and I were not alone in our desire to increase our understanding about this crucially important ministry.

I would guess that many of us approach grandparenting in response—either positively or negatively—to how we watched our parents be grandparents to our kids, or maybe how our grandparents interacted with us. We like how those who preceded us did their grandparenting, so we try to do the same. Or maybe we *don't* like the way our predecessors did their

grandparenting, so we've determined to do it differently. And, to be frank, some of us haven't really given much thought at all to our grandparenting. Without thinking much about it, we've adopted the norms of our society, reinforced by the depictions we've seen of grandparents in the various media that flutter across our screens.

Maybe you are just now beginning this glorious journey of grandparenting, and the Lord has put in your heart a desire to know your destination before you set off. Or maybe you've been a grandparent for a while, and the Spirit is stirring within you a holy discontent. You no longer want to meekly go along with the flow of our culture's approach to grandparenting but, instead, to swim upstream in the direction laid out by our heavenly Father. You have a growing hunger to know more—to understand more fully God's calling in your life as a grandparent. You find yourself asking questions like, "Who are these grandchildren of mine?", "How does God want me to be intentionally involved in their lives for his glory?", and "Why does God want me to invest in my grandchildren's lives, anyway?" And in particular, "How does applying the gospel of Jesus Christ to the role of grandparenting actually work in real life—including some of those especially challenging situations today's families often face?"

Well, here you are, joining us on this quest to grow in our understanding of what God's Word says about our amazingly important ministry of grandparenting. Welcome! This is a book on grandparenting, but it's not primarily anecdotal. This is a guidebook—a book designed to serve grandparents by guiding them in how to apply the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ministry of grandparenting. My objective in writing this book is to take the glorious truths of the gospel and apply them very specifically and practically to the ministry of grandparenting. Paul wrote in Philippians 1:27, "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ." The gospel truth is that we

don't earn God's favor by our performance. Jesus Christ has already done that for us, on our behalf, through his life of perfect obedience, his death on the cross as our substitute, and his resurrection from the dead as living proof that everything he did sufficiently satisfied his Father's holy requirements. Standing on that gospel truth of all that Jesus is and has done for us, we can move forward in our Christian lives informed and empowered by God's grace. We have been called into God's family by his grace. Empowered by that grace, we can "walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which [we] have been called" (Ephesians 4:1).

So, how does that apply to the ministry of grandparenting? Well, that's what this book is about. As you read, my prayer for you is that you find greater clarity in God's call on your life as a grandparent and that you find hope and help by applying the gospel of Jesus Christ to those situations that arise in your quest to impact your grandchildren for the glory of our Lord.

At the end of each chapter I've included discussion questions and action steps to help you apply what you are learning, and deepen your understanding, so that the gospel can get greater traction in your daily life as a grandparent. Please don't skip these questions and action steps. In fact, maybe you would find it helpful to get together with some other grandparents in your church or circle of Christian friends. Going on this journey together would be a wonderful way to grow as grandparents who are centered on Christ and fueled by his gospel.

My prayer is that you will find the journey not only enjoyable, but truly helpful as you seek, by God's grace, to impact the next generation for life and eternity.

"Grandchildren are the crown of the aged"
(Proverbs 17:6).

Chapter 1

Learning about Grandchildren from God

The Blessing of Grandchildren

“HEY, BUDDY, COME on back in,” I called to our nine-year-old grandson. He had just left my home office quietly, crestfallen after I had told him, “I don’t have time right now.” As he shuffled back into the room, I slid back my desk chair and pulled him close. “Do you know what the word ‘irony’ means?” I asked.

To be honest, the question was for me as much as for him. Our grandson had been looking forward to some time with me. Finished with school for the day, he had come bounding into my office asking, “Papa, want to play air hockey?”

“I don’t have time right now,” was my quick reply.

Thankfully, I was quickly convicted of the irony of how thoughtlessly I had turned down my grandson’s request. The reason I felt I didn’t have time for air hockey with my grandson was that I was trying to finish writing an article entitled, “The Best Part of Grandparenting!” After thirty seconds or so of trying to explain to this nine-year-old boy what an “irony”

is and why I had asked, I abandoned the vocabulary lesson for some lightning-fast air hockey. He beat me, again.

That somewhat painful, somewhat amusing encounter with my grandson prompted some unanticipated self-evaluation. In what other situations had I communicated to him or to our other grandchildren that I was too busy to spend time with them? By my words, my demeanor, or my time commitments, had I given these young blessings the unintended message that they were, well, a bit of a burden?

The truth is, each of us struggles with self-absorption. That thoughtless “I’m too busy” response to my grandson led me to look, not only at my own life, but also at the lives of my grandparent peers. There has been a growing trend in American culture over the last couple of generations for the retired and semi-retired to devote the golden years largely to their own pursuits. The pull is strong in the hearts of many grandparents to move to “seniors only” retirement communities, perhaps in warmer climates, and to spend our time and money doing things we enjoy—golfing, shopping, cruising, eating out, whatever—with people in our own age group. The rationale is often, “Look, I’ve worked hard for a lot of years, spending my time and money on the family. Now it’s time to enjoy myself!”

Adding to the decision to withdraw from regular inter-generational family involvement is the assumption we grandparents can easily make: “Hey, we don’t want to interfere with how our kids are raising the grandchildren. So, we’re going to enjoy life and make occasional fun visits to the grand-kids, spoiling them for a little while, and then head back to our own lives. Anyway, being with the grandchildren can be pretty tiring! You don’t want too much of a good thing, you know!”

Might not this sentiment reveal that many of us view grandchildren, not merely as a blessing, but as a burden we’re

not terribly interested in carrying? Spending snippets of time here and there having fun with the grandkids, spoiling them for a while, is fun. But intentionally deciding to give up self-pleasing pursuits so that we can pour our time and resources into the coming generations seems like a bit too much to ask. We love our grandkids. They are a blessing. But there is a limit, right?

But how does God see our grandchildren? And what does God have to say about the lives we might very much like to call our own? Is it possible we have missed something, that we've settled for a way of life in our "golden years" that fails to imagine the lasting impact God might want to make through us?

Jesus valued children. When his disciples wanted to preserve Jesus's time for more mature activity, Jesus "was indignant and said to them, 'Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God'" (Mark 10:14).

And what do we read about the value of children in these passages?

- "Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate." (Psalm 127:3-5)
- "Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD." (Psalm 128:3-4)

God's Word clearly presents children as a blessing. Again and again, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, we read of God's people placing high value on children.

“Grandchildren are the crown of the aged” (Proverbs 17:6). Even if that crown can feel a little heavy sometimes, God *wants* us to see our grandchildren as a blessing and live as if we really believe that!

Grandchildren as God’s Special Creation

As grandparents, most of us feel that our grandchildren are “special.” But why are they special? Is it because of their cuteness? Their special abilities, intellectually or athletically? Or is it just because they’re “ours”? They may indeed be special in these ways. But as we think about who our grandchildren are in light of Scripture, we must acknowledge that their specialness comes ultimately from their relation to the Creator God. Like all human beings, our grandchildren are made in the image of God. The Lord clearly says in his Word, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27).

Knowing that God made our grandchildren in his image impacts how we think of them and how we seek to guide them in life. Intentionally recalling that human beings—including our grandchildren—are God’s special creations, God’s image-bearers, gives us, literally, something of a God’s-eye view as we go through life. Contrary to the dominant life perspective found in our culture, life is not to be lived from a merely human vantage point. Life is to be lived with the wisdom of God and from the perspective of eternity. And, by God’s grace, godly wisdom and perspective often grow with us, as grandparents, as we age. It may be that we, as grandparents, are uniquely given by God to our grandchildren to provide the perspective and wisdom they will need to understand and live life well with their heavenly Father.

Because our grandchildren are image-bearers, they were created to be dependent on God, not only for life itself, but for how they *see* life—how they see themselves and everything

around them. As God's image-bearers, our grandchildren should be guided to see that the answers to life's challenges are not found within themselves or within the consensus of the society around them. The answers to life's questions and challenges are found in God through his Word. Understanding this reality can have a direct impact on our grandparenting. Keeping this perspective will allow us to orient our grandchildren to a vertical perspective on themselves and their life by pointing them to God and his Word. "The fear of the LORD is the *beginning* of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7, emphasis added).

As God's image-bearers, our grandchildren do not only reflect him; they are also accountable to him. This may be hard for some of us grandparents to hear, but our grandchildren are not the center of the universe. God is, and our grandchildren are in the process, like all of us, of learning to orient themselves to put away selfishness and immaturity. But sometimes in our affection and desire to give them good things, we can inadvertently hinder their spiritual growth, feeding their natural, but wrong, bent toward assuming that life is all about them. But wouldn't it be more loving to patiently teach and graciously model the truth that our life is all about God?

The very reason for our grandchildren's existence is to bring God glory (Isaiah 43:7). We have the privilege of lovingly guiding our grandchildren into a deeper knowledge of their relationship to God and helping them to make God-honoring decisions about their relationships and responsibilities as they walk through life. As more experienced followers of Christ, we grandparents are uniquely placed to come alongside these young image-bearers and train them to reflect on their lives with godly wisdom. We can bring God and his Word into our conversations with our grandchildren, helping them see how our lives matter to God, and how life is not a string of random choices made on impulse but has a God-defined purpose. We were made to reflect God in all we say and do. We were made

to glorify God and enjoy him forever. That should be in the forefront of our minds as grandparents.

Yes, our grandchildren were made in God's image. But, there's something more we need to know about these young blessings in our lives. The reality is, our grandchildren were also made in our image. In the next chapter, we'll explore the Bible to see how it answers the question, "Do my grandchildren really need to be saved?"

Discussion Questions and Action Steps for Chapter 1

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you consider to be some of the blessings of being a grandparent?
2. What do you consider to be some of the challenges of being a grandparent?
3. How do you hope your grandparenting is different from your parenting?
4. What is one of your favorite memories of your own grandparents?
5. How do you hope to benefit from reading this book?

Action Steps:

1. Read Psalm 145 in a study Bible (The ESV Study Bible and NIV Study Bible are two of my favorites), reading the background notes, looking for truths about God that grandparents can pass along to their grandchildren.
2. Ask some of your friends who are also grandparents if they would join you in reading this book and discussing it together.

Chapter 2

My Grandchild Needs a Savior

YOU HAVE PROBABLY already noticed the sad reality that your grandchildren have minds of their own and want to go their own way, instead of God's way. Hopefully you and I have also recognized that tendency in ourselves. The prophet Isaiah put it this way, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6). That's a pretty good description of us all, grandparents, parents, and grandchildren: we all want our way and not God's way. That's what the Bible calls sin. And it's why all of us, grandchildren included, need a Savior.

Our grandchildren were born not only in *God's* image, but they were also born in *our* image. Genesis 5:3 teaches something about the human race in the wake of the sin of Adam. It says, "When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth." Did you catch that? "After *his* image." While Seth was born as God's image-bearer, he was also born in the image of his sinful human father. Seth was born a sinner and so were his kids, and their kids, and their kids—right down to you and me—right down to, yes, our grandchildren. King David's testimony is each of our testimonies: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5).

This is not an isolated verse. You can trace the biblical teaching of our need for salvation all the way through the Bible (Genesis 8:21; Psalm 58:3; Proverbs 22:15; Romans 3:23; 5:12; and Ephesians 2:1–3). Because our grandchildren are sinners like us, just like us they need Jesus to save them.

How does accepting the idea that our grandchildren need saving shape our grandparenting? Understanding our grandchildren's need for salvation can help us to point them to their need for Jesus every day—for forgiveness and the power to follow him. Realizing that our grandchildren are sinners means that we won't give them the impression that they can make life work if they just try hard enough to live good lives while staying away from bad influences. It's true that our grandchildren were born into a sinful, fallen world infected by the sins of others and the curse that sin brought into the world (Genesis 3:17–19). Sadly, our grandchildren are and will be the victims of the sins of others. They experience the painful consequences of the sinful words and actions of other people—even those of their grandparents. This is one reason why we want to make repentance and forgiveness a reality we model in our family relationships. We also want to support our grandchildren's parents in protecting these young ones from unnecessary exposure to people and influences that can harm them physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

But the sin problems our grandchildren face in life are not merely external. Let's not say, "I've got wonderful grandkids. They're good kids. As long as we can keep them away from drugs, premarital sex, and other bad influences, they'll be just fine." No, our grandchildren's problems are not merely external. They need more than protection from bad influences. They need rescue internally; they need new hearts! God wants us to know that. He put that truth in his Book so that we would not teach our grandchildren that they are simply "good at heart." Although they are God's image-bearers, and do reflect

his goodness, we want to teach them that they *really* do need new hearts. They, like us, *really* need Jesus. He said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17).

God wants us to know that our grandchildren need saving—they need Jesus. This can motivate us as grandparents to passionately, faithfully pray for God to pour out his saving grace on our grandchildren while they are still young. Acknowledging that our precious grandchildren are in need of God’s saving grace moves us to introduce our grandchildren to the gospel when we talk to them about the sin in their lives, when we read to them, when we pray with them, and when we encourage their families to be involved in a Christ-centered, Bible believing, grace-saturated church. Our heartfelt desire for our grandchildren is “that they should set their hope in God” (Psalm 78:7).

Isn't My Grandchild Already Good Enough for God?

Sometimes we grandparents struggle to embrace the thought that our grandchildren are in desperate need of the saving work of Christ in order to be accepted by God. It’s so easy for us to default to, “Look, my grandchild is a good little girl. Why, I even call her ‘my little angel!’” Of course, it’s true that they really can be cute. They really are sweet at times. But they were still born with a sinful nature that needs the radical intervention of God’s saving grace. The apostle John says it clearly: “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:12).

“But my grandchild is growing up in a Christian family and in the church,” our hearts might protest. “Doesn’t that count for *something* with God? Doesn’t that give my grandchild an ‘in’ with God?” While we can be thankful if our grandchildren are growing up in a Christian family and are part of the Christian community, that doesn’t guarantee their relationship with God.

Many of Jesus's contemporaries thought they had an automatic pass from God because of their parentage. They assumed that being born into the right family was their guaranteed ticket to heaven. But how did Jesus's forerunner, John the Baptist, respond to this prevalent assumption? "[D]o not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham" (Matthew 3:9). John the Baptist wasn't singing a solo on this issue. Jesus had a very similar response to people who presumed they automatically inherited a ticket to heaven due to their parentage (John 8:39–47), as did the apostle Paul (Romans 2:28–29).

If our grandchildren are going to be in a right relationship with God, being born physically into a Christian family isn't sufficient. They must be born spiritually into God's family. They must be "born again." The apostle John puts it this way, "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12–13). Our grandchildren need to be saved from their sin by God's grace through the work of Jesus Christ.

How Do We Teach and Model the Gospel to Our Grandchildren?

In our conversations with our grandchildren, why would we hesitate to bring up the topic of their need for Christ? Might it be a fear of jeopardizing our relationship with them by pointing out their need for God's forgiveness? How much better for them to grow up experiencing their grandparents regularly speaking about God and our need for his saving grace. If our lives are characterized by dependence on the Lord and a continual celebration of the good news of the gospel, our grandchildren will grow up seeing that conversation about Jesus is a central part of Christian life. What if our grandchildren reached adulthood with many recollections of their grandparents verbally

pointing out observations of God's astonishing kindness, listening to and singing songs about the glorious gospel, quoting or reading Bible verses about God's amazing grace, and thanking God in prayer for his undeserved mercy?

You know how strongly our memories are tied to certain aromas. Maybe you can recall a certain aroma when entering your own grandparent's home many years ago—possibly your grandma's cooking or baking. What aroma will your grandchildren recall years from now when reflecting on you? Wouldn't it be an inexpressible privilege if the "aroma" that came to their memory of us is that we "smelled like Jesus"? Oh, that we grandparents might be so saturated with Christ and his gospel that our grandchildren "smell" him when they are around us. "For we are the aroma of Christ" (2 Corinthians 2:15).

In addition to exposing our grandchildren to the aroma of Christ in how we live everyday life around them, we also want to be intentional in bringing to our grandchildren's minds and hearts their need of a relationship with God through his wonderful provision of salvation through his Son, Jesus Christ.

Look for age-appropriate books that are Christ exalting and gospel saturated that you can have in your home to read to the grandchildren or that you can give as gifts to your grandchildren who are old enough to read. Make sure that the books are not just telling children to "be a good little boy or girl," but are actually presenting the gospel. Before purchasing or borrowing a book to read to or give to your grandchildren, read it yourself. Is our need for God's gift of grace in Christ a focal point of the book? If you have skimmed through the book and have the distinct impression, "You know what? This book is presenting a Christ-less moralism," then it's probably best to keep looking for another option. It may be worth your time to read through some reviews of the book online or get input from a respected Christian friend or leader. Of course, having the books around your home unread has little value. So, if you

have young grandchildren, why not plan to spend some time snuggled on your couch with them reading books that point them to Jesus? That's good intentional grandparenting. And as you close the book, use that precious time with the grandchildren to talk about God's grace and our need of him. Ask the young ones what questions or thoughts they have after reading that book with you. Share with them your own thoughts about what you just read together.

Similar counsel can be given in selecting other media, such as music and videos, that you want your grandchildren to benefit from when you're together. While there is nothing wrong with planning to watch a wholesome non-Christian movie with your grandkids now and then, why not be intentional in processing the movie with your grandkids in age-appropriate ways? What commendable virtues did they notice in the movie? What wrong attitudes or actions did they see? Were there any redemptive themes that reminded them of what Jesus has done for us? Also, are there some Christian movies that might inspire your grandchildren to live for God's glory? Take the time to research options online, or check out your church's library or even your local public library. You might be surprised to find that there are some great options available now that weren't available when you were raising your own kids. We have enjoyed introducing our grandkids to some Christian movies specifically produced for children that focus on the lives of missionaries and key leaders in church history. Afterward, we have taken some time to process the movie with them, asking questions such as "What did you especially like about this movie? Why is that?" or "What do you think God may want us to learn (or how might he want us to change) from watching this movie?"

When you are with your grandchildren, or interacting with them via the phone or social media, why not intentionally interact with them about what they are learning in Sunday

school or in the worship service or in family devotions? With gentle enthusiasm, maybe ask something as simple as, “What was your Sunday school lesson about today?” then ask friendly follow-up questions, drawing out your grandchild’s heart.

When you need to address your grandchild’s sinful attitude, words, or actions, use your conversation to lovingly discuss the child’s need for God’s forgiveness. Don’t thoughtlessly settle for moralistic exhortations along the line of “You need to be a better boy or girl!” or try to minimize their sin by saying something like, “You’re usually such a good kid. I don’t know why you’re acting this way!” Instead of talking about your grandchild’s “goodness,” why not talk about the goodness and grace of Jesus Christ? We do take great delight in our grandchildren—and we tell them so. Let’s also take great delight in Christ—and tell our grandchildren so. Let’s intentionally give our grandchildren a gospel-saturated perspective. Let’s talk about God, his Word, sin (including our own), and our need for God’s forgiveness through Christ.

While we will discuss more fully later in the book the crucial subject of praying for our grandchildren, let’s acknowledge here that it greatly benefits our grandchildren to hear us pray for them and with them. When we are with our grandchildren around the table or at bedtime, imagine the impact on the little ones’ minds and hearts to hear Grandpa and Grandma praying for God to give them hearts that love and obey Jesus. If we’re talking with our grandchildren on the phone, or sending them an email or text message, we can let them know not only that we’re praying for them, but mention something specific that we’re asking God to do in them or for them. If we’re sending them a birthday card in the mail, why not add a sentence or two that mentions how we will be praying for them in this new year of life? Again, we want to intentionally seize opportunities to help our grandchildren think about God and our need for his grace in Jesus Christ.

And, most importantly, let's remember the power of reading God's Word with our grandchildren. Paul says in Romans 10:17, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." And he also reminded Timothy that, "[F]rom childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). When we are with our grandchildren, we can be intentional about reading the Bible with them. It might be just a verse or two that we read before bedtime or before a meal. At family holiday gatherings, we may want to plan ahead to read a holiday-specific passage. What a blessing for our grandchildren to grow up with the memory of Grandpa reading Luke 2 every Christmas or a resurrection passage at Easter or verses about giving thanks at the Thanksgiving family gathering. As grandchildren learn to read, enthusiastically involving them in the reading can keep them engaged. What an impression it can have on a child's heart to see Grandpa or Grandma reading the Bible in his or her devotional time, helping that grandchild see with his own eyes how much God's Word is treasured. Then, to watch his grandparent smile and hear him ask, "Want to hear what I've been reading this morning?" Memories can be made—possibly eternity-shaping memories.


What if a grandchild asks, "Grandpa (or Grandma), am I going to heaven?" Wouldn't that question make your grandparent heart skip a beat with joy? But how should we respond? What are some key issues to keep in mind in discussing salvation with our grandchildren?

First, it may be wise to gently clarify what prompted the question. Make eye contact and explore: "Why do you ask, sweetheart?" Does it seem like there has been a sincere stirring in his or her heart? Then, pray for God's guidance as you respond to your grandchild about this crucially important issue.


Second, use your Bible as you talk to your grandchild about how they can be sure they are going to heaven. Remember, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). Here are some key issues to draw from as you discuss salvation with your grandchild:

- God is holy. He made you and wants you to live your life for him, not just for yourself (Isaiah 43:7).
- But we *do* live for ourselves instead of for God, many times disobeying God just so we can get our own way. We often do what God says *not* to do, and we avoid doing what God says *to do* (Romans 3:10–12, 23). That’s called “sin.”
- Sin deserves punishment (Romans 6:23). The ultimate punishment is being sent away from the presence of God, into hell, forever.
- Jesus is the only person who never sinned (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15). He always did what his heavenly Father wanted him to do (John 8:29).
- Not only did Jesus live a life of perfectly obeying God, but then he died on the cross to pay the penalty that we sinners earned for our disobedience (Romans 5:6–11). Jesus could pay our penalty because he didn’t have to pay for his own sins.
- To be right with God, you must repent of your sin—you must turn away from it (Acts 2:38).
- You must put your trust in Jesus and what he did in his life and in his death on the cross as the only way you can ever be right with God (John 14:6; Acts 4:12)
- Ask him to forgive you and make you his child (Romans 10:9–13). Note: If the child wants to confess his or her sin and ask God to save him or her, I’d encourage the child to say that in his

own words. Sometimes well-meaning Christians assume that salvation is the direct result of praying “the sinner’s prayer” and seek to get a child to repeat the words being offered by the adult “evangelizer,” as if saying those words will somehow guarantee the child’s salvation. But, we need to remember that salvation is a miracle of God’s sovereign grace, not the mechanical result of saying certain words, even in a prayer. I wonder how many children have been given “assurance of salvation” by a well-meaning adult immediately after the child has prayed “the sinner’s prayer.” Is that really wise?



Sometimes grandparents ask me how they can know for sure if their grandchild is a Christian. And, of course, the answer is that only God knows another person’s heart. Remember that the regeneration of a soul dead in sin is a miracle of grace—the work of the sovereign Spirit of God. Second Corinthians 4:6, “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” John 6:44 says, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” Salvation is not the “magical” result of saying certain words or praying a certain prayer or “asking Jesus into your heart.” But you can always rejoice when you see the Spirit at work in their life. When your grandchild asks about salvation or heaven, rejoice that the Spirit is at work and point that out to them.



Remind your grandchild that becoming a Christian is as simple as turning to God and asking for forgiveness for Jesus’s sake. Share God’s promises, such as Romans 10:9, “[I]f you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved,” and John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his

only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

If your grandchild has, while talking to you, asked the Lord to forgive him of his sins and asked God to make him his child, make sure you have a conversation with your grandchild’s parents to tell them that wonderful news and discuss appropriate next steps in your grandchild’s spiritual development. And rejoice in the privilege of encouraging this young believer on his or her journey of following Jesus!

Discussion Questions and Action Steps for Chapter 2

Discussion Questions:

1. When did you come to faith in Christ? Who told you the gospel?
2. What is it that our grandchildren need more than anything else? See Romans 3:23 and 5:12.
3. How would you explain the gospel to a six-year-old? What would you want to include in your conversation with the child?

Action Steps:

1. If you do not do so already, begin today to pray daily for your grandchildren to come to embrace the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.
2. Check out these resources that can help us understand how to explain the gospel to children: *Show Them Jesus*, by Jack Klumpenhower or the booklet *Leading Your Child to Christ*, by Marty Machowski.