



“Great” GRANDPARENTS

BEING A GRANDPARENT is an amazing opportunity to pass on your love and spiritual heritage to the next generation, just as Lois in the Bible shared her faith with her daughter, Eunice, and grandson, Timothy. Today many grandparents also become step-grandparents when children remarry, or even surrogate parents when their grandchildren need another family for a while.

Whatever your family situation, you can have a significant role in your grandchildren’s spiritual development. You can pray, share your faith stories, open their eyes to God’s love, help them to discover the wonder in God’s creation, and nurture their character strengths.

Even if you don’t have grandchildren, you can be an “adoptive” grandparent for a family that doesn’t have nearby grandparents, for a single-parent family, or for an immigrant family. You can make a big difference by being a stable influence in the life of a child and by supporting their parents.

CONNECTED GRANDPARENTS

- Stay warmly connected to your grandchildren whenever possible. You’re a secure base when they face challenges during their teen years, or if their relationship with their parents becomes shaky for a while.
- Find out what makes your grandchildren feel especially loved, then do those things as often as you can.
- Look for creative ways to love and bless your grandchildren through appreciation, affirmation, support, and encouragement.
- Be good listeners when they chatter away. Take notes about their friends, their strengths, their interests, their struggles, and their dreams.

PRAYING GRANDPARENTS

- Prayer is an amazing gift that you can give your grandchildren every day.
- Pray that they will know Jesus, follow Him, and make good life choices.
- Pray that their parents will parent with wisdom and love and grow closer to God through the experience of parenting. If your own children are currently taking a break from church, the Holy Spirit can use your grandchildren to touch their hearts again.

- Write and illustrate prayers for your grandchildren and mail your prayers to them.
- Say a short blessing over them when you put them to bed or when saying goodbye on the phone.

SPIRITUALLY-NURTURING GRANDPARENTS

- Tell your grandchildren about your own spiritual journey, the difference your faith makes in your life, and how God has answered your prayers.
- Make worship kits for your grandchildren because ready-made worship kits are a blessing when you're busy. Visit *The Journal* website and search for the children's pages in the archives. Look for any ideas that your grandchild might enjoy, write out the instructions for the worship activity, gather together all the supplies needed, and put everything in a resealable bag.
- Make story bags. These are cloth drawstring bags containing a Bible storybook and all the materials needed to tell the story. For example: the Lost Sheep story bag could be in a green cotton bag (which doubles as a field). The bag could contain a piece of tan fabric (such as burlap) to represent a desert, gray foam shapes to represent rocks, several sheep, and a shepherd. Wooden popsicle sticks can be used to create a sheepfold or the shepherd's house.
- Come up with challenges that help children use their hobbies and interests to explore Bible topics.
- Help them memorize Bible verses by turning it into a fun game. Write each word of a verse on separate cards and ask them to arrange the cards in the right order.
- Write a Bible verse on an appropriate picture, cut the picture into pieces, and mail them all the pieces to arrange correctly.
- When you tell your grandchild a Bible story, use these open-ended questions:
 - What did you like best about the story?
 - What was the most important message in the story for you?
 - Which part of the story seemed most about you? Or where are you in this story?
 - What does this story show about how much God loves us?

CHARACTER-BUILDING GRANDPARENTS

- Make a list of positive character strengths that you would like your grandchildren to develop. Print off the "Periodic Table of Character Strengths" at www.letitripple.org.

- Spot your grandchildren demonstrating one of their character strengths, and let them know that you noticed: "When you did . . . you were being so kind/patient/brave/wise, etc. You made a great choice!"
- Explore the character strengths of Bible characters and talk about fun ways your grandchildren can develop their own character strengths.
- Plan activities that help children to be creative, work as a team, be hopeful and optimistic, and grow positive values.

SUPPORTIVE GRANDPARENTS

- Parents appreciate grandparents who support their style of parenting and their values. Ask how you can be most helpful, learn how they discipline their children, and find out how to support their routines for mealtime and bedtime.
- Fit around the family's routines and be respectful of their parenting choices. Many parenting practices that were popular when we parented young children have been replaced by new approaches. We may need to let go of our old ideas and embrace some new and better ones!

GIVING GRANDPARENTS

- Give your grandchildren inspiring books, perhaps the stories you enjoyed as a child. Ask a children's librarian for some good book recommendations, and read the stories before buying a copy for your grandchild.
- Other great gifts are Christian DVDs, books, and games; nature, science, and craft activities; good construction toys that develop fine motor skills, creativity, and imagination; outdoor toys that encourage healthy activity; and good quality wooden toys that have enduring and creative play value.
- Give experiences instead of toys, such as season tickets to the zoo; knitting or woodworking lessons; or a camping trip together. Or you might pay for music lessons, sports club fees, language classes, or whatever else they are keen to learn. ■

Karen Holford is a grandma to Zara, Leo, and Max. She loves watching their faith grow.