

BEING A GOOD GRANDPARENT

Proverbs 13.22

The familiar Church hymn, “Faith Of Our Fathers,” is a beautiful and encouraging song to sing. However, it is a hymn that brings sadness to the hearts of those of us raised by fathers without faith. May I tell you that it is a great tragedy when a child is raised apart from the Christian faith?

I have endured a great deal of heartache and agony in attempting to prepare this for Grandparents. I wrestled and fretted no end in an attempt to develop the sermon from God’s Word that led to the writing of this booklet that would be both meaningful and helpful to people of all ages, while also honoring grandparents. I always want to be respectful toward those who are aged, particularly to those of you who have the blessed experience of being grandparents. At the same time, I want to present the truth in love as a preacher of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. I also want to speak to matters that transcend a single generation, dealing with matters of eternal significance. For that reason, I would like you to take note from the Bible of Proverbs 13.22, where we find in the first half of the verse the words, “A good *man* leaveth an inheritance to his children’s children.”

I had a very good friend (now in heaven), a long-time preacher who was well known and greatly loved by the people here at Calvary Road Baptist Church. We were friends for approaching thirty years (he spoke here many times). We talked about important issues over that span of time, sharing in each other’s hopes and desires, each other’s concerns and great fears. Repeatedly, my friend voiced his concern for his grandchildren by saying, “I am not so much concerned about the world my children will have to live in, but I greatly fear for my grandchildren. The world they will have to live in will be far worse than anything I can imagine.” I agreed with him then. The world, especially our nation that has enjoyed many of God’s richest blessings, is not improving.

If I may set out on a path to bring this message from God’s Word around to a more personal basis, please take note that Solomon made the declaration that a good man leaves something for his grandchildren. Of course, the principle equally applies to grandmothers leaving something for their grandchildren. When this verse was inspired by the Holy Spirit of God to be written by the hand of King Solomon three thousand years ago, life was considerably simpler than it is today. Harder, but simpler. What good grandparents gave to their grandchildren were three basic items: First, grandparents gave to their grandchildren one of their two parents. Second, grandparents gave to their grandchildren inherited land that was passed down from generation to generation according to the Law of Moses. The grandparents were expected to hold on to the land and not lose it through mismanagement or irresponsibility of any kind. Third, grandparents were expected to handle their personal finances well enough so that they, their children, and their grandchildren did not end up slaves to pay off the debts they had incurred.

In our day, the prevailing cultural trends are quite different than were found in the Middle East long ago. Instead of grandparents sensing their duty and obligation to *give* something to their grandchildren, the trend these days is for most grandparents to *take from* their grandchildren. I am quite sure that no one I know who is a grandparent or a great-grandparent has intentionally thought this way, but consider what has happened in the United States and Western Europe over the last century. Government programs have been instituted to take care of people’s health and welfare that have been so poorly mismanaged, and so fraudulently financed,

that there is no disputing that the government debt that is currently being incurred will have to be paid for by your grandchildren.

To put it another way, our culture has drifted so far away from the Biblical pattern of the elder providing for the younger, that more and more we see young people placed into situations where they have to take care of their grandparents for the old folks to survive. The way the young people take care of their grandparents is not only by nursing them when they are in ill health, as has always and properly been the case with the aged but also by paying taxes throughout their lifetime to finance the care given to their grandparents long after their grandparents have passed on. It is an awful situation all the way around. I am not suggesting that you or I not make use of Medicare or Medi-Cal, or Social Security, but that those and other entitlement programs, along with a burdensome tax structure that penalizes those who receive inheritances, were set up by Congress in such a way that grandparents end up taking today from their grandchildren's future in the form of future taxes instead of giving to their grandchildren the inheritance God's Word indicates we should give them.

Do I have some suggestions for grandparents who are troubled about robbing Peter to pay Paul, or more specifically, taking from your grandchildren's future to pay for the government programs we presently use, which is how the government has things set up at present? The first thing I would suggest is that we decide to avoid the mindset reflected by that recreational vehicle bumper sticker that reads, "Spending Our Children's Inheritance." Those folks are spending their grandchildren's inheritance, and it is despicable. However, I am well known not to be a businessman by those who know me well. Therefore, I would hardly try to give anyone business advice beyond the wisdom declared in the Bible. Instead, I want to bring to your attention something far more important than money or property to leave behind as an inheritance for your grandchildren.

I want to address you grandparents, and the rest of us who are grandparents to be, about what kind of legacy you plan on leaving to your grandchildren:

First, TO BE A GOOD GRANDPARENT, LEAVE TO YOUR GRANDCHILDREN WELL-RAISED PARENTS

There used to exist this notion that all needed to raise properly kids was shelter over their heads and food for their bodies, and everything else would pretty much take care of itself. I know of no thinking person who accepts that notion any longer. The idea that children grow up spiritually neutral and that parents should allow them to make up their minds what kind of religious convictions to embrace, is based upon faulty reasoning. On one hand, nothing like that philosophy can be found anywhere in the Bible. In God's Word, you find commandments directed to parents about teaching spiritual truths to children with the following wording, Deuteronomy 6.7: "And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." This and other commands of this type leave no room for parents to govern their children so loosely that little ones, born without wisdom, should be left to themselves to decide between good and evil, right and wrong.

Why not? Let me illustrate a well-established Bible doctrine with a true account from the lives of two men, a godly father, and his son. I read the account of a Baptist historian:

The name of Rev. Isaac Case should not be omitted in this connection, for he has been justly styled the prince of pioneer missionaries in Maine. His labors were abundant, and his footprints are seen in all parts of the State. I saw him frequently in his old age and heard him preach, but never could discover the secret of his remarkable power. I once inquired of his son his estimate of his father's abilities. He replied, in substance, that his father had a remarkably quick mind, could easily solve the most difficult problems, and when discussing questions with other men would be the first to reach a conclusion, and without seeming to enter into an argument would invariably bring them to his way of thinking. Whereupon I asked him why his father had not convinced him that it was his duty to attend church, for, though living within my parish, he never appeared in church on the Sabbath, and he replied, "Grace is not hereditary, depravity is."¹

Isaac Case raised his son properly and did not leave him to himself. How, then, can you raise your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, only to see them turn out badly, or to turn out worldly? Keeping in mind that children, your children, and your grandchildren's parents, cannot turn out well unless they are raised well, keep also in mind that the tendency with children is to turn out badly. Thus, not only do you do yourself a great service in your old age by raising your children well, but you also do your future grandchildren a great service if you can give them Christian parents.

Make no mistake, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."² When death occurs, as it must occur, the godless and the Christless will suffer the torment of the damned.³ You do not want that fate awaiting your grandchildren when their time comes. When you give your grandchildren Christian parents, which is to say your sons and daughters who themselves are Christian people, they will be raised in the hearing and under the influence of the Gospel, which, if they obey, will result in their salvation. However, raise secular, profane, never-go-to-church-on-Sunday children. You will certainly have grandchildren who are a shame to their mothers and who will treat their grandparents disrespectfully. Who would want to give such grandchildren that type of inheritance?

You youngsters, and you young couples, and you who have children still living at home. Your most lasting gift to your grandchildren will be their parents, your children. Make sure you raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. If you do that, your grandchildren will love and thank God for you forever.

Next, TO BE A GOOD GRANDPARENT, LEAVE YOUR GRANDCHILDREN A WELL-WORN PATH

There are no guarantees in life, to be sure. It is possible to do your very best in rearing a child, only to be bitterly disappointed when that child goes badly. To raise up a child only to see that kid turn herself over to fornication or to turn himself over to drugs, booze, and thievery, is a heartbreaking disappointment. However, helplessly standing by while your child raises your grandchild in a godless and wicked environment, can be doubly discouraging. Do not think you are entirely without influence in your grandchildren's lives. Do not think the LORD's hand is not shortened that it cannot save.⁴ Not only is God able to reach into the heart of your wayward child in answer to your prayers to turn your grandchild's home environment entirely around, but God

is also able to reach across the span of a generation to use a grandfather or grandmother as a godly influence in a grandchild's life if that grandparent is godly.

I use myself as an example: For two weeks every summer growing up, our family would vacation in Albuquerque, New Mexico, with my paternal grandparents. Oh, how I loved them. They attended Church every Sunday, though I do not recall that we ever attended with them. We stayed at their house while they went to services since they would never think of staying home from Church just because the family was visiting. They also read their Bibles at the kitchen table every morning they were not in Church, though I have no recollection of ever accepting their invitations to sit down for a minute or two to join them. In short, I can remember no conscious influence on me from my grandparents, though I listened to them praying for me and my brother. Why, then, did I decide that I was to be identified as a Baptist on my dog tags when I was sworn into the military? Why did I accept that first invitation to Church after my conversion, and attend a Baptist Church? I had never thought about such questions, until this week while preparing this pamphlet. Then I realized the answer.

My grandparents left a well-worn path with their habits of life. Though I am sure I looked to them to be quite the hopeless case, raised in a completely non-Christian home by their son and daughter-in-law, they prayerfully, diligently, habitually, and in godly fashion, went about their business of worshiping, serving, and honoring God daily. Though I was not aware of their influence at the time, their influence was nevertheless authentic, and I am sure was helpful to God to set the course for my life without my awareness.

In Hebrews chapter 11, we see evidence of Abraham's influence on his grandson, Jacob. Read verses 9-10 with me:

- ⁹ By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling *in* tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:
¹⁰ For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.

You must read Hebrews 11 very carefully to notice that we are here told that Abraham lived with his son, Isaac, and his grandson, Jacob. This means that, though we are not specifically told this in the Genesis account of their lives, the godly influence of Abraham was not far away during Jacob's infancy and youth, was in Jacob's memory when he left to journey to the East to marry Rachel and Leah and sire twelve sons, and was once again in Jacob's life when he returned to live with his grandfather and father until they passed from this life. Thus, though we know that God dealt very powerfully in the life of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, what is implied but not explicitly stated is the well-worn path that Abraham marked for his grandson to see. It was the habits of his life, to worship and glorify Almighty God, habits and patterns of living that a grandchild could see and be influenced by.

One of our Church member's parents left well-worn paths for their grandchildren to follow. His wife's widowed mother also left a well-worn path for her grandchildren to follow. My dad's mom and dad left a well-worn path for me to follow, as Father Abraham did for his grandson, Jacob. Ordinarily, you cannot raise your grandchildren yourself. Typically, your children must perform that job. However, you can by the living of your own life, you do by the living of your own life, leave a well-worn path for your grandchildren to follow.

Grandparents, please ensure your well-worn path leads first to the cross of Calvary, and then onward to heaven. You never know when your grandchild will wander through the pastures of life and will need to come across his grandparent's path to straighten out the direction of his

own life. If your grandchildren follow your chosen path, where will it take them? I want my path to lead my grandchildren to Christ and to heaven.

Finally, TO BE A GOOD GRANDPARENT, GIVE YOUR GRANDCHILDREN WELL-REHEARSED PREACHMENTS

I have recently read two books about Associate Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas.⁵ In both the autobiography and the biography of his life, great prominence is given to his grandfather, whom he referred to as Daddy his whole life. Daddy was a remarkable man in the Jim Crow South in an age when the severest racial discrimination was practiced daily. Yet Clarence Thomas remembers two things about his grandfather: his manner of life and the things he said over and over again his preachments. How does Clarence Thomas describe his grandfather? As “The greatest man I have ever known.”

How does a man who never went past third grade and was described as a severe disciplinarian who never showed his grandchildren affection come to be described by one of the most prominent men in our country as the greatest man he had ever known? *First*, he left a well-worn path for his two grandsons to follow. I have already dealt with that topic. *Second*, he filled his grandchildren’s heads with sayings and truths, observations about life, and wisdom born of suffering and experience. I only wish Justice Thomas’ grandfather had been a Christian.

By the very nature of things related to aging and infirmity, grandchildren never see their grandparents in their prime of life and do not yet benefit from the experiences of life that only time provides, meaning that grandparents have their most significant impact on their grandchildren’s lives by what they say to them, the stories they tell them, the pronouncements they make to them, and the sermons in a sentence they repeat over and over and over again for young minds to remember for many years.

It is sad that so many grandparents these days give no thought to passing anything on to their grandchildren but want their grandchildren to give them attention and affection. Wise grandparents, on the other hand, know that you will never be as loved by the young as much as you love the young. Therefore, the time spent with grandchildren should be a time of storytelling, a time of reflecting, imparting wisdom, and giving to them the things you have prepared to say since the last time you saw them.

What should grandparents say to their grandchildren? Though I am not a grandfather yet, I have given prayerful thought to what I will say to my grandchildren if God gives me the opportunity: I will tell them that time is short and that I will no longer be around for them before long. However, it may well be that though we are separated for a time by death, we can be reunited once again, if both grandparents and grandchildren are Christians. Next, I will rehearse for them the experiences of my life, my successes, my failures, my delights, and my disappointments, so they will learn what life is really like. Life is hard, full of unexpected turns, and must be prepared for as best you can.

Of course, to help my grandchildren prepare for life, I will tell them of God’s dealings with me leading to Christ and God’s dealings with me since I met the Savior. How can I love my grandchildren without telling them of Jesus? By the time I am a grandfather, it will be too late to give my grandchildren a well-raised mother, since she will already be raised by then. I must prepare for that now before the grandchildren are born. However, even if the grandchildren are already born, a grandparent can begin establishing a well-worn path for them to follow and

provide well-rehearsed preachments for them to remember. Oh, the glory of someday hearing my grandchildren sing “Faith Of Our Fathers” from my place in heaven.

My friends, despite many notions to the contrary, there is no such thing as a fellow who is his own man, uninfluenced by those in his life as he grew up. Though God’s plan is most usually for our moms and dads to be the most significant influences in our lives, the influences of grandparents can be significant. For example, though it was not in any way intentional with me, it has turned out that my personality is far more like my two grandfathers than my own dad, and my religious convictions are pretty similar to both grandfathers, while not being in any way similar to my father’s beliefs.

I say that to say this: You grandparents are more influential than you think you are. You are so important, as I have consistently recognized how much I loved and wanted my grandparents. The critical consideration, however, is what kind of influence you decide to be in your grandchildren’s lives.

Your most outstanding contribution can be giving to your grandkids well-raised parents. This is accomplished when you do everything you can to see your own children converted to Jesus Christ and conscientiously prepared for a life of service to God. However, even if you did not raise your kids to be Christians, and even if they are not now believers in Jesus Christ, there is still time for you to set before your grandkids the well-worn path and well-rehearsed preachments. Distinguish yourself from the rest of your generation, who are focused only on what benefits they can obtain at the expense of your grandchildren’s generation, by dedicating yourself to giving of yourself to minister to the spiritual needs of your grandchildren, as my grandparents did for me.

Are you interested in being that kind of grandmother, that kind of grandfather? If you are, perhaps you and I (or the Gospel minister you know) should go to lunch someday and talk about how that can be achieved in your life for your grandchildren. I do not want my grandchildren to live godless lives and end up in Hell after all is said and done, nor do you.

Let us team up to become the spiritually helpful grandparents I had as a kid. Give me a call so we can discuss how you can invest your remaining time on earth in your grandchildren's lives.

¹ This account is quoted in David L. Cummins and W. Wayne Thompson, *This Day In Baptist History II*, (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2000), pages 498-499.

² Ezekiel 18.20

³ Matthew 25.46

⁴ Isaiah 59.1

⁵ Clarence Thomas, *My Grandfather’s Son*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007) and Andrew Peyton Thomas, *Clarence Thomas, A Biography*, (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2001).