ISSN 2207-4724

ISSUE 47 / **OCT 2025**

Equip.

ethos
ea Centre for Christianity and Society

Grandparenting

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Editorial

Gordon Preece,
Equip Editorial Committee

Since becoming a grandparent ten years ago today, I have been very aware, for all the greatness and joy of this divine calling, that it is often mixed with grief. And I have long wanted to write about it. Having had my only brother Guy die a year to the day before my birth, and knowing the profound effects of that death at six week's of age on my parents, particularly my mother's mental health, I was well aware then of how precious I was to my parents as their first-born living child, and later doubly aware of the mixed emotions involved – my father, Bill, died a year to the day *before* the day of our eldest grandson's birth. I didn't lie about it, but I covered up the fact by saying that Dad had died last night, which was technically true, at 3 a.m., though it was on the same calendar day of his great-grandchild's birth, October 6th, the day of my writing this reflection.

But having heard what grief people have felt when their birthday has been overshadowed by a loved one's death, or even birth, think of those born on the Messiah's birthday – a great privilege, but inevitably overshadowed by Jesus' birthday. So I kept my little secret. Grace and grief can often mix, and can't be unmixed, barring miracles, without damage.

So knowing today of our daughter's family returning from a long weekend's break, with a lot of driving, drove us to pray with a somewhat more serious edge than our normal prayers for our three children and six gloriously spirited grandchildren today.

Without wanting to be a party-pooper, similar emotions, and ups and downs may flow through many of these articles, largely by friends, parishioners and colleagues, whose wisdom and stories of grace and grief I'd wanted to see shared with a wider audience. You, brothers and sisters, are privileged to read and reflect upon them.

In Romans 12 the 'apostle of Tears' Paul, the passionate, emotional Paul tells us to 'rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.' Sadly, as the adage goes, 'laugh and the whole world laughs with you, cry, and your mascara runs'.

As hinted in my article on pages 15–16, my teary teen years were scarred by my mother's, my children's grandmother's shock-treatments having inseparably torn the tears and memories out of her. But what I've discovered

The Grace and Grief of Grandparenting

in later years is that my lived experience is a gift from and for Mum. And my tendency as a pastor to be often on the edge of tears is a calling by God to sometimes gently call such tears out of people. God counts our tears and puts them in a bottle, he tells his people in the Psalms of lament. But he gives us great joy and grace, not in their place, as Bonhoeffer notes, but in a bittersweet, muscular mixture.

Our six grandchildren have brought us and their terrific parents such joy, that we look in this late stage, 'seven score years and ten,' paradoxically forward to the time 'when every tear will be wiped away'.

But it is the only thing we can say, when we rush to turn the TV news off, when, for instance, children in Israel and Gaza continue to be taken so agonizingly abruptly from their parents and grandparents. The generational genocide on both sides of thousands of budding lives, can only be brought to God, as in a recent, rich service of Melbourne churches at Collins St. Baptist (which Ethos and the Anglican Social Responsibilities Committee supported). The mystical mixing of the daylight and night's dark, while the God-known names of all the dead children from both sides were read, and lamented, one by one, weighty with waiting, for the new heavens and new earth, when death and war and tears will be no more.

We have a rich trove of writers for this edition, to and for whom I give great thanks. Graham A. Cole, former principal of Ridley College and Dean of Trinity College, Chicago, shares some of the wisdom from which we have been privileged to learn in their raising of their children and grandchildren. He shared about surviving and thriving at an annual conference in 2024 at St Paul's Castle Hill about 'Grandparenting in an Age of Vertigo'.

Fellow former theological college principal, psychologist David Wilson speaks of 'What Happens When Grandparents Become Parents?' – the tragic but strangely triumphant story of their late son and the many grandchildren they raised with help from siblings and others who cared.

Baptist Pastor and author Alison Sampson always writes with great passion for the outcast. Her 'My Grandparents' Table' also adds a sacramental sense of God's joyful presence there.

Jill McGilvray's 'Books for Grandkids' reflects years as a children's bookseller and an even longer love of books like *Anne of Green Gables*. Jill writes with great joy of reading books, and not just the Bible, key as it is, with and to grandchildren.

Equally, Jill's husband Ian McGilvray, a former architect, who took early retirement in the Blue Mountains to paint, now shares that great gift in 'Grandparenting in the Studio'.

I share some more 'Grandparenting: Days of Grace and Grief' in my family's, especially my mother's, mental ups and downs.

Rev. Dave Fuller in 'The Local Church and Grandparents', while rejoicing greatly in many grandparents, provides a strong warning against exploiting grandparents in these times when harried parents and in turn grandparents are often exploited economically and time-wise. And many adult children, having lost faith for a variety of valid and invalid reasons, won't allow the children's grandparents to influence them godward at all.

Double doctor and master of hospitality, Denise Cooper-Clark, shares her hard-won wisdom and joy in 'On Being a Grandmother'.

Rev. Ian Barnett is founder of the National Grandparent Movement**,** a key, relatively new Australian ministry supporting local churches equip and encourage grandparents. Ian shows how in 'Be the Grandparent your Grandkids Will Never Forget'.

Gaye Bishop, my younger sister, writes from 20 years of experience in 'Missionary Grandparenting: The Hopes and Fears of All the Years'.

Patricia uses a pseudonym that enables her to bravely confront the issue of 'Single Grandparenting', which she has experienced for nearly ten years without her late husband, always wondering how he might have responded to grandparenthood, but still finding God's great joy in the midst of the bittersweet moments. May we support those like her, and be encouraged by her example.

Our Reviews include Graham Davison's ***Grandfather's Clock: Four Centuries of a British-Australian Family,*** Kayleen Manton's ***Godaku Tjukurpa (God's Story)***, and Ian Barnett's ***Footsteps for Future Generations***. ■

Gordon Preece is Director of Ethos: EA Centre for Christianity and Society, and is Commissioning Editor of Zadok Perspectives and Papers and Equip.

Grandparenting in an Age of Vertigo

Graham Cole

There are studies which show that having at least one caring adult in a child's life helps a child to be resilient and flourish. Just one. That one need not be a parent. It could be an uncle or an aunt or some other adult. Old Nan was that person for me. She was my paternal grandmother and the only grandparent I ever knew. As an only child from a broken home, she was my rock in my growing up. It seems to me we need rocks like her in what I describe as an age of vertigo.

AN AGE OF VERTIGO

What is vertigo? The tiny calcium crystals in the inner ear can move. The result is dizziness. For me it made it difficult to walk in a straight line. The room began to spin. I bumped into walls. Social change in our society can be like that. Our heads spin with its rapidity.

Eminent Polish sociologist, Zygmund Baumann has another way of putting it. He calls it liquid modernity. Everything is in flux: traditions, values, institutions. For example, according to the last census Christians are now a minority in modern Australia. Such change makes our heads spin. My question is, what kind of grandparents should we aspire to be in an age of vertigo or liquid modernity?

BE ILLUMINATORS, NOT DIMINISHERS

American journalist and cultural analyst David Brooks' *How to Know a Person: The Art of Seeing Others Deeply and Being Deeply Seen* offers this distinction. He distinguishes illuminators from diminishers. For him, illuminators 'shine the brightness of their care on people and make them feel bigger, deeper, respected, and lit up', while diminishers 'see people as objects to be used, not as persons to know and care for'.

Australian social scientist Hugh Mackay in his book, *What Makes Us Tick: Making Sense of Who We are and the Desires that Drive Us* adds another important consideration which complements Brooks' contribution. Being taken seriously is the number one driver in our culture, which for Mackay means being acknowledged, appreciated and remembered.

Putting the insights of Brooks and Mackay together, Illuminators take people seriously. Illuminators take their grandchildren seriously. Old Nan was an Illuminator, not a Diminisher, for me. She took me seriously, and so I felt cared for, valued, and that I had worth.

So how can we be Illuminators?

MODELLING

How Christians act can be usefully described as the body language of the invisible God. Take the Apostle Paul's experience. He wrote in 2 Corinthians 7:5–6: *'For when we came into Macedonia, we had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn – conflicts on the outside, fears within. But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus [an associate in ministry]'*. There was no burning bush, no voice from heaven, but God was at work none the less. Titus was, in effect, the body language of the invisible God. He brought comfort. He embodied the power of presence.

What about now? My wife Jules was very sick for a couple of years. It was a very dark period in our family's life. Celtic Christianity speaks of thin places where God's presence is more obvious. But we were in a thick place. Thick with fog. Questions tumbled out. Does God really care? Over time, I came to realise that God did care. He did so through the coming of Titus, as it were. By that I mean people, especially the wider family, who came to sit with Jules while I was lecturing at Moore College and the people from church and the college who provided meals. They were the body language of the God who cares. As grandparents we, too, can be models of loving care: that care seen in loving our spouses and in loving our adult children and in loving our grandchildren.

Grandparents can also be models of keeping faith. Promise keeping is an excellent way to do that. If we say that we will take them to a movie, we do it. If we say that we will take them out to breakfast, we do it. Faithfulness is a virtue. Faithfulness also mirrors the character of God.

And in an age of vertigo, we can be models of hope: Christian hope. Hope in a world of despairing young people who think that the planet is facing doom and

> *"By being models of faith, hope and especially love, we can be the body language of the invisible God in the lives of our grandchildren."*

understandably when the Secretary General of the UN says that 'the era of global boiling has arrived'. No wonder there is a mental health crisis among young people. Creation care matters. But believing that a new world is coming also matters. Being Christians who are 'joyful in hope' (Rom. 12:12) – hope that good will triumph over evil, that Christ will set the world to its rights. And who, like Martin Luther, so it is said, would plant an apple tree today even if he knew that the world was to end tomorrow.

Modelling love is especially important. Renowned psychotherapist Eric Fromm said that there are two kinds of people in the world: those who care and those who don't. But how do we show loving care? One way to do so is by listening to our grandkids whatever their age. So important. Nothing shows that you have taken another seriously that you care about them like listening. Listening so well that the other person feels understood. Nothing is more frustrating than thinking that the other person has not really listened.

Toppers do not listen. David Brooks describes a topper as the person you are talking with who uses what you say to launch into a more dramatic story of their own. Suppose your grandson or granddaughter says how hard it was to lose so badly at basketball on the weekend. And before they can elaborate, you say well you think that was a bad loss. When I was a boy, we had a game where we lost twice as badly, but I got over it and so will you. Instead, we could have asked, how does it make you feel? Do you feel that you let the team down? Questions can show that we are listening. However, statements can show that we have not really listened at all.

We can also show care by encouraging them in their interests. And how do you know their interests? By observation and by asking their parents and them. Our young granddaughter loves clothes, and my wife gives her sewing lessons. And as for myself, with one grandson I see a movie with him and then eat Mexican. My 23-year-old grandson is now into fitness, but the 9-year-old grandson is still into Lego.

We can also show loving care through treats, such as a walk or car ride to get a nice ice cream. With two of my grandkids, any flavour but mint. Old Nan who would cook me bacon on toast for breakfast when as a boy I stayed the weekend at her house. What a treat! I love bacon and the smell of bacon to this day. I have never forgotten the association with her.

By being models of faith, hope and especially love, we can be the body language of the invisible God in the lives of our grandchildren.

GRANDPARENTING THROUGH PRAYER

I like what Archbishop of Canterbury (1942–44) William Temple II said about prayer (perhaps with a twinkle in his eye): 'When I pray, coincidences happen, and when I don't, they don't'. That certainly has been my experience over many decades.

But what do we pray for? We can pray for opportunities with our grandchildren to show care and interest: a meal out or a movie or a concert or a sporting event or playing a video game with them. And I must say that nothing humbles you like playing a video game such as *Mortal Combat* with a fifteen-year-old. Their fingers move so fast. And pray for the right people to come into their lives as their friends. I can think of nothing more important to pray for, especially in teenage years when the wrong company can make a disastrous difference.

Praying for our children and their partners who parent our grandchildren is also so important. Praying also that they may be wise and patient and on the same page as each other and us as together we navigate an ever-changing social landscape. My wife and I never experienced a child coming home from their public primary school asking their parents, in the light of their class, whether they were a boy or a girl.

GRANDPARENTING AT A DISTANCE

For 20 years we lived in the US, mainly in Chicago but with a four-year stint in Alabama in the Deep South. We have been back in Australia four years. Chicago is more than 15,500km from Melbourne. So, the challenge for my wife and me was how to be Illuminators at such a distance.

Technology came to our aid. It can abolish distance. We used Facetime in Chicago to play *Pepper Pig* with grandchildren in Melbourne through the screen. We had Pepper Pig toys. They had *Pepper Pig* action figures, too. If it was today, we would most likely play with *Bluey* action figures. Remembering birthdays was key, also. We sent gifts aligned with their interests and, of course, some addressing their needs. Yes, socks. Visits also abolish the distance. Technology is great, but cannot replace actual face to face. We would bring the same toys on our annual visit and so Pepper Pig was in our luggage. The challenge of distance remains for us as one grandchild lives in Canberra.

SUMMING UP

The challenge is to be Illuminators for and not Diminishers of our grandchildren. Recall David Brooks' insight: '[Illuminators] shine the brightness of their care on people and make them feel bigger, deeper, respected, and lit up', while Diminishers 'see people as objects to be used, not as persons to know and care for'. In this age of vertigo Old Nan was an Illuminator for me: solid, consistent, reliable, stable and a promise-keeper. Grandparents have the privilege to model faith, hope and love and be grandparents who pray for their grandchildren and not preach at them. ■

This article is a shorter version of a talk at the National Grandparent Conference in Sydney on 31 August, 2024.

Graham Cole is a theologian, teacher and writer. He is married to Jules with three grown children and grandchildren ranging in age from nine to twenty-three.

Full-time Grandparenting

Some Reflections on Life as a Custodian Grandparent

David Wilson

I have been married to Debbie for 54 years. We have four children and 22 grandchildren (17 biologically related), one great grandchild and one more about to be born. We consider ourselves to be truly blessed.

Our second son, Bruce, was 21 when he first shot up heroin. He quickly became addicted and remained lost in the drug scene for over 17 years, including two stints in prison. He was married three times and did life hard, especially through years of addiction. We never lost contact with him and our love for him grew over those years. He told us frequently that he knew he was loved and that he felt supported by us.

Bruce tried dealing with his demons many times, but finally started on the long road out of addiction when around 38. It was a turbulent road, and he remained vulnerable to assorted drugs over years of recovery. The last seven years were generally good. He had started his own fencing business and settled down with a life partner, living mainly in Queensland. They had a vision to drive around Australia in their camper, stopping off at parks and setting up deck chairs, looking for a conversation with whoever passed by. Bruce loved a conversation, especially with those doing it tough. He was going so well.

But then, one fateful morning in January 2025 he said yes to one last hit and died of an overdose.

Bruce had nine children, four with his first wife and five with his second. In 2011 the Family Court granted full custody of the latter five to Debbie and me, which meant we were responsible for the youngest five children. This action came after many attempts to help the parents retain custody but in the best interests of the children, intervention was necessary. Although it was an extremely difficult decision to make, both parents agreed with the Court's ruling, and have maintained regular contact with the children for 14 years. The kids were 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7 years of age at the time of the Court hearing.

Someone once said that 'if I'd known how good grandparenting was going to be I would've had the grandkids first'. I have loved my role as a parent, even on the hardest days. It was really hard going at times…really hard going…but I feel so privileged to have been involved deeply with all my children and grandchildren.

It has also been said that it is great to have grandchildren because you can send them home at the end of the day. Not so with us! They just get put into bed and wake up a few hours later ready to go again. It has also been said that grandparents spoil their grandkids and don't have to suffer the consequences. Too much chocolate? Don't worry, their parents will sort that out. Not so with us. We can't even be the grandparents that are loved by the kids because they get spoiled rotten by them. Nope, we have to be the big, bad, mean parental figures.

There are many little things that we have experienced in our parental role with our grandkids that have made life different...But what about weightier matters?

THE PROBLEM OF AGING

We were in our late 50s when the kids moved in with us full time. We had raised four children, all of whom were married and living life as adults in the community. Debbie and I were enjoying the freedom of an empty nest, and then things changed. We questioned how we would handle full-time parenting again. We felt energetic then but wondered what we would be feeling like by the time the youngest turned 18. That event is just over 16 months away and we are still alive and firing on all three cylinders!

Over the years we have noticed how we have been slowly losing the energy the kids would love us to have. We have been very grateful to our daughter Dee Dee and her husband Glenn, who have been parents with the kids and have given so much time and energy, often at great expense to themselves, to help them have 'normal', flourishing lives. Soon after the Court hearing we all moved in together and have lived as a nine-person household ever since. It has been an exciting journey.

I have often felt for the kids, presenting to events with their old grandparents rather than young and energetic parents. Again, Dee Dee and Glenn have assisted in that area, as well as Debbie not looking like she is old enough to be a grandparent. As for me, well, that's another story!

THE CHALLENGE OF NURTURING A SECOND BATCH

Child raising can be really scary. We find it a deep joy, but we also find it a constant challenge of seeking wisdom and applying it fairly. We are both deeply into social justice and are fully aware that it starts at home.

We made some mistakes along the way with our own four kids and yet all of them developed through the ups and downs and are people of value in the world. Bruce had his struggles and yet there was a deep quality about his life that was well acknowledged at his funeral. He was a much-loved man with dreams and visions about helping to make the world a better place. Debbie and I are proud with how he dealt with his struggles. I often told him he was a hero of mine because he had been to hell and back; not many people achieve that outcome. Debbie and I are proud of the life choices our other three kids are making, and that their worlds are better places because of it. So we must have done some things right the first time around!

But here we are with a second chance. 'How's it going to go?' has been a legitimate question over the past 14 years. Bruce didn't get into the drug scene until he was 21. Three of the children are still under that age. We don't want to go through that agony again. We don't want any of them to make such bad choices, for their own sake, creating their own personal hell. And so we make choices, seek wisdom, help them become aware of problems bad life choices can bring about, including making sure we are honest about what happened with their parents.

So far, so good. The two girls have graduated from high school and have good jobs, while the two older boys are doing apprenticeships after finishing year 11. The youngest is coming to the close of year 11 and will do year 12 next year. They are all heavily involved in sports, including basketball, football, and cricket, and have healthy social lives.

And we keep on praying…

IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO RAISE A CHILD

An ancient proverb states that it takes a village to raise a child. In our culture it is often seen as a parental sole responsibility. Sometimes we realise the importance of the extended family, and that has certainly been the case for us. But we deeply appreciate the importance of a much wider community of people as significant others in raising and nurturing these five grandchildren, and supporting us physically, emotionally and spiritually. There have been a few naysayers across the years, but overall the village has been an important part on the pathway to wellbeing.

Top of the list, of course, are Dee Dee and Glenn. Remarkable. They have been strategic and essential. Then there are other members of our families, friends, people in church, teachers at their schools, child protection officers, and welfare workers. The whole village has come together, reaching out as part of the health equation.

The parents of the children have been a tricky part of the story. Their relationship had been irreparably damaged by drug abuse. Bruce left their mother and moved to Queensland just before the children moved in with us. A part of the Court orders was that the parents should have regular access to the children, an order with which we agreed. At first it was to be supervised and then increasingly open access. At times this was difficult, but we regarded it as very important that the children have a relationship with both Mum and Dad as much as possible. That was a success story with their Dad and an increasingly good story with their Mum.

One of the key things in relation to their parents was that we wanted the children to know they were deeply loved by them. They had made wrong and seriously damaging choices that led to a parenting crisis, but they loved their kids deeply. We wanted the kids to know that, and I think the message has been successfully conveyed.

In Conclusion…

Debbie and I are sad about the poor choices Bruce and his wife made that led to kinship care being needed. At the same time, we feel deeply privileged to have had an opportunity to nurture, along with Dee Dee and Glenn and the Village, five precious lives – to help them know they are loved and belong, and connecting well with God in all they are and do. ■

Need to talk?

If anyone would like to address any matters related to this story, I can be contacted at *davidroachwilson@gmail.com*.

***David Wilson** began work over 50 years ago in the inner suburbs of Melbourne working with people struggling with homelessness, drug addiction and mental health issues. He was also principal of Kingsley College, a Melbourne City Councillor, and CEO of Urban Seed.*

My Grandparents' Table

Alison Sampson

My grandparents' breakfast room opened off the kitchen. It had a brown sideboard, brown scratchy chairs, and a brown shag-pile carpet. Whenever my sister and I stayed with them, we participated in their morning ritual. First, we held hands and said grace. Then my sister and I would gobble up our breakfasts while our grandparents were still fussing around assembling theirs. Cornflakes. Sultanas. Bran. A bit of sugar. Milk. Yawn. My sister and I would sit swinging our legs, discreetly itching where the chairs scratched and waiting impatiently for our grandparents to finish eating. But even then, we could not get down from the table for, after breakfast was cleared away, it was time for morning devotions.

Out would come the thick little book stuffed with prayer cards and handwritten notes. Grandpa would painstakingly thumb through the pages to the right day. Once he had found it, he would adjust his glasses and harrumph, waiting until there was complete stillness before he read aloud a Bible passage, a commentary and a prayer. Then he and Grandma would pray freely for everything and everyone they knew: every child, every grandchild, and in time every great-grandchild. Every sick person; every person facing hardship; every person who had recently experienced loss. They prayed for missionaries and every project of the church. They prayed for the Baptist movement; they prayed for the government; they prayed for rain. 'Pray without ceasing', wrote the Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians, and it seemed to me that my grandparents did.

For a ratty little kid with no sense of the divine, it was excruciatingly boring. But now I am older, I look back on this time with gratitude for the discipline it taught me. For the orientation of their lives. And for the sure and certain knowledge that, until my grandparents died, I was prayed for every single day of my life.

We live in a world that venerates the appearance of youth, the technological knowledge of youth, the culture of youth. Sexy young things beam from every bus stop, every crease and wrinkle airbrushed away. Actors and billionaires fill our screens, hair artfully thickened and dyed, bodies reshaped by plastic surgery, lips and bosoms plumped and muscles pumped to evoke a youthful fertility. Even those who hold great wealth and power try desperately to appear young.

With the words 'Okay, boomer', anyone over the age of the speaker is instantly dismissed. Those of us who have been made redundant over the age of 50 have discovered just how hostile the job market is. As many of us have experienced, the way some health professionals speak with older people can be deeply infantilising and patronising. And the assumption that older people, particularly older women, automatically need pity is rife. The Western dis-ease with aging, our sense of its uselessness, is everywhere.

Sadly, we often hear this attitude echoed in the church. Perhaps you have heard a pastor refer dismissively to 'the little old ladies', seemingly oblivious that these women are frequently the powerhouse of the congregation, praying and serving and contributing in countless ways over many decades. More often, 'The church is dying', we hear. 'Half the church is over eighty', we hear. 'We have no children. Millennials don't come. We're about to fall off a cliff!' And indeed there are ways in which this fear is true. There have been enormous generational, cultural and economic shifts which mean the church as we know it does not have a future. We have not retained the young, and we will not have the bodies to sustain such a volunteer-heavy structure for much longer. There needs to be a reckoning and Spirit-led imaginings of a different way. But this is all greatly hampered when we adopt the values of the wider culture and dismiss the gifts of age.

Discipleship knows no age limits and, as long as there are disciples, there will be plenty of life in God's church. Indeed, the Bible frequently places those of advanced years front and centre in stories of faithfulness: 'Grey hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life' (Prov. 16:31). In biblical terms, children are incredibly precious, but old age is celebrated as a time of wisdom, fruitfulness, even adventure. To take one example, Luke's story of the birth and childhood of Jesus is almost entirely about older people. We meet Zechariah and Elizabeth, well past the

> *"I look around at congregations and see people in their seventies, eighties and nineties who are still active disciples, still bearing fruit."*

usual age of childbearing, then Simeon and Anna, who have spent many decades watching and waiting for the Messiah. Joseph's age is a mystery, and Mary is the only identifiably young person in the story.

Going back further, Moses was forty before he left Egypt and eighty when he died, still leading Israel; and we are told he remained vital until the end of his life. Abraham was 100 and Sarah 90 when Isaac was born, God's promise coming to fruition in their advanced old age. Meanwhile, Noah was a whopping 600 years old when he built the ark, and he never spent a cent on anti-aging serums.

Whether you understand these numbers as literal or figurative, they tell us something important: in God's story, those who live rooted in God's goodness bear fruit their whole lives long. Psalm 1 celebrates this. 'Happy are those who have not walked in the counsel of the wicked', it proclaims. 'Their delight is in God's law, and they meditate on God's law day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in due season, with leaves that do not wither'.

And what lies at the heart of the law? To love God with every fibre of our being, and to love our neighbour as ourselves. Happy are those, then, who delight in love, and who prayerfully meditate on God's law. Happy are those who reflect on God's word and let it shape their lives. Happy are those who in every possible way embody love and concern for their neighbour. Their roots will go deep; their lives will bear fruit; their leaves will not wither away.

I look around at congregations and see people in their seventies, eighties and nineties who are still active disciples, still bearing fruit. Some volunteer with Frontier Services, travelling long distances to erect fences, renovate houses, clean up farms, and build connections with people living in remote areas. Some make the Sunday service happen, week after week after week. Some facilitate playgroups, forming connections and bringing warmth to parents, grandparents and little children. Some are on committees, or run fundraisers, or attend to church governance, or work in the office, or visit people in aged care, or do any of a thousand other things which contribute to God's kingdom-culture in their little pocket of the world.

Their roots must have sunk deeply into streams of living water to show such blessed tree-time fruitfulness, for all these activities are the visible expression of a common life which runs below the surface. Because all these activities are rooted in faith. Faith in God's word, faith in the way of love, faith in the constant dialogue between people and the divine. Faith that faithful people are called to love and serve the world through activity but above all through prayer.

'Pray without ceasing', instructs Paul. And prayer knows no age limits. I think now of my grandparents in the last year of their lives. My grandfather had Parkinson's disease and had become very frail. My grandmother had Alzheimer's disease, and you all know what that means. And so, they went into care. They were assigned small rooms across the corridor from each other so that when my grandmother went wandering, she walked straight into her own husband's bedroom. In order to move from their four-bedroom house with the breakfast room, the dining room and the acres of shag pile carpet, they gave up nearly all their possessions. They retained just their clothes, a few trinkets and photographs, and their precious Bibles and devotionals. The books now had yellowing pages, flaking covers, cracked spines. Like my grandparents, the books had seen better days.

Yet even here, even now, they were well used as my grandparents continued their practice of devotions. They still read scripture aloud, meditated upon it, and prayed for a long list of people and places daily. As my grandmother lost first her memory, then reason, speech, movement and finally any alertness to the world at all, their practice continued. My grandfather would read aloud then pray freely, my grandmother bearing silent witness beside him. And I am confident that the practice which had so profoundly shaped their lives continued its subterranean work and expression even then, even in Grandma. For I trust that the Spirit helped her in her weakness when she no longer knew how to pray, or even that she was praying at all.

Like all the saints who have gone before us, let us sink our roots ever more deeply into streams of living water. Let us keep loving God, loving Christ, loving our neighbour, our enemy, our selves. And let us delight in God's word and above all pray without ceasing. For in prayer, we do not wither. With prayer, we have a future. And through prayer, the Holy Spirit will flow through our lives and bear an abundance of fruit. Thanks be to God. ■

This article comes from a sermon preached at Manningham Uniting Church (manninghamuc.org) on Sunday, 7 September, 2025.

***Alison Sampson** is the Supply Minister at Manningham Uniting Church. She lives, works and writes on Wurundjeri land. See more of her writing at https://alisonandthewhale.com/*

Books for Grandkids

Jill McGilvray

'Grandma, how many books can we have today? Could we have FIVE? Could we have SEVEN? Could we have a HUNDRED?'

These are my favourite words of greeting from my five-year-old grandson Hamish.

One of my friends, another book-reading grandma, told me this week that when she knocks on her daughter's door, the two elder grandchildren run to her with arms outstretched. Number three doesn't; he heads straight to the bookshelf and then greets her with an armload of books. What a joy.

Hamish and I love to read at different times and in lots of places, but our favourite is a crocheted cotton hammock swing (which looks a bit the worse for wear) on the corner of our front veranda. We call it The String Bag, and it is great for swinging, for spinning–'Look! I'm helicopter Hamish!'–for watching the birds in the bush next door, but best of all for snuggling in with books.

I am so aware of the privilege it is to read to Hamish. He won't always be five. He won't (here there is a catch in my throat) always want to listen to his grandma reading to him. Soon, in the next few years, maybe he will read to me! But for now, books are one of our favourite ways of connecting, along with baking, gardening and watching silly television together. We giggle and we sigh and sometimes we make VERY LOUD NOISES. It's love, right there.

Building a Love of Books

We love picture books and chapter story books right for his age. He is enjoying longer ones now, and ones with language tricks, like Craig Smith's *The Wonky Donkey*, illustrated by Katz Cowley, and Raymond Briggs' *The Elephant and the Bad Baby*. Hamish has always loved books about construction, building roads, big machines, and dinosaurs, of course. I now know much more about those things than I ever have before! He loves to teach me. But he also loves Arnold Lobel's *Frog and Toa*d, and a new favourite is the gentle beauty of *How to Make a Bird* by Meg Mackinlay, illustrated by Matt Ottley.

Hamish's little brother Fergus and cousin Ruby, both aged one and a bit, are also beginning to love the snuggle of book time, and the noise and bounce and rhyme of books just for them. Lift the flaps have never lost their appeal, either. They are both becoming more adept at turning cardboard pages with their tiny hands. Currently we love *Where is the Green Sheep* by Mem Fox, illustrated by Judy Horacek, and I especially love the chance to add a bit of drama with my voice, reading Swiiiiiing Sheep, and Sliiiiiiide Sheep, NEAR sheep and far sheep. What fun!

Journalist Richard Glover has written recently about reading to his grandchildren. He is very proud of the voice he does for the mouse in *The Gruffalo* by Julia Donaldson. For him, reading to his grandchildren feels like a time machine. 'You sit there with a child on your knee, reading Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*, or C. J. Dennis' *A Book for Kids*, or Margaret Wild's *Toby* – same copy, same knee, same time-tested accents. It may be life's only way to make 30 years disappear.'

The Importance of Reading with Children

It saddens me that reading books aloud to children is in decline, even though its importance is well known (theguardian.com/books/2024/nov/05/report-fall-in-children-reading-for-pleasure-national-literacy-trust). According to a 2024 study, less than half of children are regularly read to, and far fewer boys than girls. Busy parents report not enjoying reading to their children, so not making time for it.

Leila Berg, British author and passionate advocate of reading to children, wrote in her book *Reading and Loving* about the necessity for a child to have an 'Interested Other' who has or makes time to share books with them. Many a grandparent, regretting the busyness of life while raising their own children, finds that they can be that

"Very often children ask for the same book over and over. Wise grandparents know that this book must be meeting a need in this child at this time."

Interested Other With Time for the next generation. What a gift to give to them – as well as a gift to the reader.

I heard years ago a way of thinking about reading to children and it has never left me. A book, a lap and two arms make the perfect circle. A child in the middle of that circle is in one of the safest places they will ever be. Creating time and space for that is never wasted time. As time goes by, they say, my job as the reader is to move out of that circle gradually so that the circle of child and book becomes its own happy safe place. They will never remember the first time they engaged with a book, but it will always be just 'there.' Nearly all children who are read to often do not remember when they learnt to read; it 'just happens'.

My own mother was a wonderful reader of books to me and then to my children. Sadly she suffered from very severe rheumatoid arthritis, which stopped her from many activities, but never from reading. I remember wonderful times sharing books together and loved to see her reading to my own daughters. When I got a bit older and into longer books, she was also wonderful at reading just enough of a book to get me really enthralled, and then feign tiredness, leaving me to discover the rest of the story myself. One day when I was sick in bed, she read to me about Anne Shirley, until she was sitting in Marilla and Matthew's kitchen but they wanted to adopt a boy! Oh no! And that was what hooked me into the world of *Anne of Green Gables*, a love that has never left me and never will.

Sometimes a book can become a peacemaker in a conflict. I remember the (sadly not infrequent) times with my own children when I was about to explode about something, but if I had a shred of good sense left and thought to bring out either a noisy book or a funny book, the story itself could diffuse the tension. It is hard to stay angry when you're laughing together. Michael Rosen's *Little Rabbit Foo Foo* did it for us then. These days it is *The Book With No Pictures* by B. J. Novak that cracks us up the most.

How Do I Choose A Book?

Very often children ask for the same book over and over. Wise grandparents know that this book must be meeting a need in this child at this time, perhaps for security, and happily accommodate that desire – and woe betide the adult who tries to skip part of the story!

Keep a look out for well-written and illustrated books. Life is too short for badly written or illustrated ones, or ones that turn everything into a cartoon. As C. S. Lewis wrote: 'A book which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children's book. No book is really worth reading at the age of ten which is not equally worth reading at the age of fifty'.

Buying a book together can be a fraught experience. If the child is set free to 'choose a book' they can be overwhelmed, and in desperation grab an old friend, one they already have at home. 'No, not that one,' they're told, and tears can ensue, leading to leaving the shop with nothing at all. An expert bookseller who knows their stock is a huge help and a wise guide.

Giving books for birthdays and Christmas and sometimes for no reason at all is a great thing to do. They may not get the biggest shout of joy when they are unwrapped, but later they will come into their own. Remember that different people will choose different books, both to buy and to read. Grandfathers are sometimes left out of this, but bring their own perspective and a reminder that books are not only for girls! And girls often love the books their grandfather chooses as well.

A well-written Bible story for children is a wonderful thing, and my favourites tend to be those by Jesus Story-Book Bible author Sally Lloyd-Jones. I think that her Christmas book *Song of the Stars* is a pretty much perfect book, one I wish I had had the talent to write myself! Bible reading from the very earliest age is a wonderful way to form the life-long habit that is a pearl beyond price.

So, read lots. Read at all sorts of times and places, form your own favourites and if your little one is too bouncy for sitting on your lap, entertain them by reading to them as they ride around you on their bike. It's not the only thing to do with them, but it's a great one! ■

***Jill McGilvray** has always loved books and reading. Long ago, for over a decade she was a bookseller in a children's bookshop.*

Grandparenting in the Studio

Ian McGilvray

One of my fondest early memories is of times spent with my paternal grandfather, Pop. I am deeply thankful for his gift of being present and engaged with me in ways that would later feed into my lifelong love and practice of art.

Not that Pop was an artist himself. He did not teach me to draw or paint. But, more significantly, he sparked in me the world of the imagination and the power of art to enrich life.

This came about in an unusual way. At infant school age, I recall visits to my grandparents' home in Sydney. Grand Sunday roast lunches in a Californian bungalow that seemed very dour to me (remembered mainly for its dark brickwork and joinery, and curious prints on the walls depicting Hiawatha amid improbable moonlit scenery).

I could not wait to get out into the fresh air in the backyard with Pop. He would always have time for me. Long walks under his huge trellis structures supporting luxuriant grape vines and passionfruit. The giant T-arm clothesline with hoisting ropes. Proud displays of vegetables and flower beds.

But more was to come. When I was in primary school, I remember asking Pop one day to tell me what it was like to land on the beaches at Gallipoli as a soldier in World War 1.

His response caught me off-guard and went on to open a whole new world to me.

'No,' he replied, 'I really do not want to talk about Gallipoli; I want to tell you about our base camp at Cairo'. He then, and on subsequent visits, regaled the excitement felt by a young country lad from the bush of being in the land of the Pharaohs.

He introduced me to stories and books about the pyramids, Egyptian art, and wondrous lost civilisations. My mind exploded at the thought of this wider world, as did my imagination. His stories fell on the fertile soil of my already developing love for visual art and storytelling. This would stay with me in the years to come, playing a formative role not only in my love and practice of art, but in a growing awareness of the high calling of our humanity, and the power of creativity to deepen life and form meaning.

The spark for this was the kindness of a gentle man who still bore in his neck the shrapnel mark reminders of much that is broken in civilisation and in life. A man who had to walk off his upper Hunter Valley farm in the 1930s due to total crop failure and yet could still carry hope in his heart. A man who had endless time for grandchildren, always sharing wonders and delights in preference to complaints and regrets. It was if he was encouraging me to take joy in things present (like his enormous backyard grapevines) and to take joy in the enchantment of wider worlds: of art, imagination and beauty.

I still have regrets about not asking Pop more about his own post-Gallipoli life as I grew into adolescence. But for his gifts to me as a boy, I am eternally grateful.

My wife, Jill, and I are blessed to have two grandsons and a granddaughter.

Without always thinking about it, the example of Pop in my younger life tends to shape some of the ways that I approach the privilege of grandparenting these precious young people.

I am in a stage of life where I can devote a lot of time to painting and drawing. Art for me is a way to engage with the world around me. That engagement can be

> *"Like all proud grandparents, I rejoice in the beautiful left-of-field gems that come from Hamish's hands"*

immediate and intuitive (such as exploring the linework of tree branches or the nuance of how a person holds their head and hands) or it can plumb the deeper things of contemporary life and culture (such as our attitudes to refugees or wrestling with the implications of being made in God's image). Visual art is more than the making of things, important as this is. It is about ways of seeing – do we really look in wonder at what is in front of us day-to-day, and do we seek the deeper wells which transcend the merely visual?

I enjoy hanging out with my grandchildren in the act of drawing and painting (at this point of time, particularly with my five-year-old grandson Hamish). It is certainly not that I want to force them into becoming visual artists. But I am keen that they grow to become people of hope, wonder and passion. A bit like my Pop teaching me to love the here-and-now (as in the grapevines), and to love the yet-there's-more (as in the Valley of the Kings, the paintings of Pompeii, and so on). Visual art, like all of the arts, can be a window into experiencing both the prosaic and the profound.

So what does this look like?

In the case of Hamish, we go down to my studio and both get into drawing or painting. Hamish does whatever takes his fancy, and I work on my projects. We chat and sometimes joke around, but a lot of the time we work/play in comfortable silence. Sometimes we listen to some music in the background. I am not sure whether I am doing this the best way for Hamish, but it feels right to me.

Significantly, I do not 'teach' Hamish how to draw or paint. Sure, I am happy to help him if he has questions about how to hold a brush or pastel. I supply him with the pastels or pencils or paints that he needs, and the colours that he prefers. Hamish chooses what he wants to express in the painting or drawing, and how to do it. Of late, his pastel and painted works tend towards a type of Abstract Expressionism, sometimes with a surprising explanation from Hamish pointing out inner references to cloudscapes or forest trunks. He and I do not take it too seriously, but we have a lot of fun. Like all proud grandparents, I rejoice in the beautiful left-of-field gems that come from Hamish's hands. The gift of still being uninhibited at his age is a great thing. Children, when given the opportunity, will constantly surprise us with the freshness of an original idea.

The point of painting with Hamish is not 'realism'. I was once watching two young boys paint in my studio when their parents popped into the studio and said, 'Boys, why don't you draw a proper tree to show Ian?' I firmly but politely suggested that the parents go upstairs for a coffee break.

Selfishly, I genuinely learn a lot from watching children make art. I remember being asked by a 10-year-old friend who was drawing a large pastel flower with petals that were each colour of the rainbow, which colour should the stem be? I was at a complete loss, but in an instant she had the solution – silver grey. It was perfect. Me (the over-thinker) was stunned and proud. Picasso once quipped, 'It took me four years to paint like Raphael, but a lifetime to paint like a child'.

Children take in a lot more than we think. Hamish watches me at my easel, and only occasionally looks at what I am painting. It is comfortable. We are friends. But more than that, he forms a picture of his Pop as someone who loves the simple pleasures of colour and line and form, pattern and abstraction. As time goes on, he senses (I think) that art is both a fun and a serious business for adults as well as kids. It is my fervent hope that as he watches other adults who dance, make music, write books, perform plays, sing, write poems and so on, he will regard the arts as an important form of work and meaning-making alongside all other grown-up occupations such as shopkeeping, engineering, farming, carpentry or medical research.

From a Christian perspective, I think that the arts have the power to point us toward value and meaning far richer than the offerings of a screen-based culture and the blind pursuit of wealth or popularity. Art can sow the seed in a young person that can yield fruit in the form of an expansive curiosity, not only regarding the wonder of creation and the marvel and dignity of personhood, but in seeking the very Author of life.

So this is why I love to grandparent in the studio. My hope is that the simple act of being available and engaged with my grandchildren in that space will reinforce to them that they are loved and precious. That what they think and make of the world matters. That their imagination and sense of wonder matters. That the seed will be sewn in them to eventually seek out the deeper story of life and to find the joy of following Him who alone 'has life in himself' (Jn 5:26). ■

Ian McGilvray is a visual artist who lives in the Blue Mountains with his wife Jill. They have three grandchildren – Hamish, Fergus and Ruby.

Grandparenting
Days of Grace and Grief

Gordon Preece

You have likely heard the quip, 'If I'd known that grandparenting was so much fun I would have done it first'. Some of that has a sense of second chance about it, with more time, not constantly juggling jobs and kids. It can be space for grace, to make a positive, Christian mark on our grandchildren. But we need to be careful not to be romantic or Pollyanna-ish about grandparenting. It can come with considerable grief also – anxiety about the precarity of such vulnerable life – the sheer dangerousness and clumsiness of child-care, and particularly the threat of hereditary major mental health issues being passed on through generations along with generous inheritances. Fortunately no children or animals have been killed in the making of these grandchildren.

My wife and I having been grandparents for ten years certainly does not mean we are experts. But we hope we can share the joys and sorrows and some hard-won wisdom, often learnt largely from making mistakes. In this context I would like to share some of our days as grandparents, with a modicum of grace and grief.

Of our six grandchildren, only one, the second last, is a girl – a great answer to prayer. The rest are boys full of energy and exuberance. One anxiety we had, especially my wife (who may know too much as in her work she trains mental health carers), was if any of the grandchildren shared the family blight of mental health struggles – especially those of my mother, but also those of some of their parents, some of the time, especially in late adolescence.

Thankfully they all seem to have been born of 'sound mind'. We have often prayed **2 Timothy 1:7** for and over them:

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind [or self control].

We have also prayed at particular times of spiritual attack, sometimes seeming little different to mental health attacks, from the wall poster from Ephesians 6 about 'putting on the whole armour of God' both in their younger and older days.

Our eldest grandson, Caspian, named from C. S. Lewis's Prince Caspian, is about to turn ten. In the pre-school years we had him one delightful Friday every week. I would take him for morning swimming lessons, just as I had done for his Mum, who had severe asthma from about two. There is something about holding a young child just above the water, against your chest, that makes you feel a great responsibility and sense of nurture. Having inherited some severe asthma from his Mum, Caspian has nonetheless inherited her strength and courage too.

Once in Lakes Entrance near where they now live, we went to a giant water tube obstacle course one had to navigate. I remember being very conscious that if he fell off he would be in deep water, above his head. But he ploughed through the course, with me slipping and struggling behind. He was pretty proud of himself, especially in comparison to his Da's floundering, grasping for breath.

Shifting gear from no. 1 grandson to the last brought back many memories yesterday as we celebrated his second birthday. It was a very poignant moment. This rambunctious little boy, Theo, was nearly lost to us when he had four respiratory viruses at once, and about 70 seizures requiring emergency action on our son and his wife's flat floor, then nine days in an induced coma, fortunately at the world's sixth best Children's Hospital.

I prayed that God would bring him out in time to see the meerkats at the hospital for his first birthday. Sure enough, God gazumped me by a day. Next day there were many balloons and banners, much cake, and the family's ever-present pastor. I said on the Friday afternoon that it would be unlikely for him to be allowed home till Monday, but this wonderfully free and sensitive hospital decided that as Theo's family lived only 10 minutes from the hospital he could go home. Remembering all this yesterday brings tears of joy and gratitude. And who could correct Theo for confusing Jesus and Superman recently.

This Sunday afternoon we were babysitting our other daughter's two boys and girl when nearly every shop closed at 3 and no baby-cinos were to be found. Fortunately we found some Billy Buttons for our five-year-old budding gardener, and then ice-blocks, and then a

"All of these little God-incidences, both the griefs and the graces, are part of God's providential play in our and our grandkids' lives."

coincidental discovery of the Chocolate Snowballs of my youth gave me a chance to give the grandkids one of their great-grand father's Friday evening treats. It was a joyful generational moment.

After dinner and baths I read *The Garden, the Cross and Empty Tomb* to the middle child, a precocious gardener, thanks to his missionary grandmother and gardener. We came to John 20 where Mary Madeleine, (whose name his aunt shares) 'mistakenly' thinks Jesus is a gardener. But more deeply in Johannine thought, Jesus is the one who recreates Eden through his resurrection.

My wife, known as Nonny, and said budding gardener had a different mistaken identity issue at a Federation Square Gardening show. I called out that Costa, the ABC Gardening compere was there, but she thought he was a homeless guy. This petrified our ever-talking 5-year-old who froze before the camera and his hero's hapless questions. Fame awaits another day.

All of these little God-incidences, both the griefs and the graces, are part of God's providential play in our and our grandkids' lives. This is helped by the fact that five of the grandkids/cousins are within 15 minutes' drive of our house and two of our children's. This was enabled partly by the bank of mum and dad and passing on of our grandparents' generous inheritance. Otherwise they would be in the outer 'burbs or regions and we would have much less contact with each other.

The other, now blended family, in East Gippsland due to Covid after-effects virtually cancelling the whole events industry and their business, have made, with family cooperation, great efforts to enable contacts with grandparents and cousins in school holidays, long-weekends, city business pickups and so forth.

To return to some aspects of mental illness I hinted at, especially my mother Joan's, our kids' grandmother: upon our family's return from my PhD study in Pasadena, my parents' divorce came through three days before their fortieth anniversary. I took Mum's call and tried to minister to her as best I could at 12,000km distance and great expense. Then I went into the bedroom and wept and prayed. Then I heard conspiratorial whispering going on in the kitchen between the three kids led by our ten-year-old daughter (my wife was out).

This mini-trinity came into the bedroom bearing hot chocolate (my then best beverage) and Tim Tams (sent by their other Nana at some cost). I have often said it was like receiving communion, the very presence of Christ at the very lowest of times, from the hands of my children. Grace and grief are far from one way between parents, grandparents and children or grandchildren.

After two years at Fuller Seminary we headed home to Christmas reunion with one set of grandparents. We then had a tortuous seven-hour Boxing Day trip to Port Macquarie where my mother and the kids' grandmother had settled in the family holiday house, against my advice that it would make it very hard for us to see her. But many grandparents put a retirement of ticking off bucket lists, or licking major marital wounds, before mutually restorative work of families.

Mum was so looking forward to see us that her mania and paranoia was completely out of control. For the kids' sake we needed to leave. Pre-mobiles, I had to borrow her keys to make a public phone call, and get Xmas accommodation for ten. Upon my return Mum's paranoia had led her to believe I had copied her keys so people could break in. We left the next day in great grief and relief, but able to salvage something of Christmas for the six kids by a humble motel with a pool and a golf-course opposite that the kids enjoyed driving golf-carts around on.

Upon arrival a week later at Ridley in Melbourne we attended a lovely New Year's event at Graham and Julie Cole's. There was some time for sharing how Christmas and holidays had gone. When our turn came our precocious c. seven-year-old berated us with funny-cum-tragic stories about 'Crazy Nan' booting us out at Christmas. The faculty families seemed to cope with it fairly well.

Eight years later, our son's mania found refuge at Orygen - one of the world's best youth mental health facilities. His mother has become a virtual institution there, training mental health carers to become a profession. And our recovered son now works in mental health. Yes, there was much grief, but grace abounds even more, then and now, as parents and now grandparents of six spirited grandchildren. Sola Dei Gloria. ■

Gordon Preece is Director of Ethos: EA Centre for Christianity and Society.

The Local Church and Grandparents

Dave Fuller

The Melbourne-based Anglican parishes I have served – All Saints, Greensborough (2012-2021) and currently leading, St Mark's Spotswood (2021-current) – have both contained groups of Christians in the grandparent stage of life. Over the past 13 years I have observed this group closely, worked with many of them, shared in their celebrations, wept with them in their travails and, sadly, buried many. This article is an attempt to describe what I have witnessed of this quite special cohort.

GRANDPARENTS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

When school holidays came along in my home state of Victoria, there were three main groups of people you saw when you visited the local Greensborough Plaza Shopping Centre. While there were the usual array of teenagers hanging out together in the food court and some young children with their parents, the dominant demographic was school-aged children being supervised by grandparents. I think this image would have been repeated all over the shopping centres of our nation during such times. An experience so different from my own baby-boomer upbringing. School holidays meant going to the nearby local major shopping centre to see a movie and have lunch together as a special treat. The trip was done in the company of my siblings, perhaps some neighbour's kids, my mother and maybe her sister, my aunt.

Dad was at work, as were most of the men I knew in my neighbourhood. Once my mother started having children, she never worked in paid employment again. Her energies were spent raising four children, managing the inside demands of the house practically and emotionally, and being part of the glue that held our broader family and neighbourhood together. In later life she was busy with a range of volunteer activities in her neighbourhood and still caring for her adult children and eight grandchildren. Times have changed and now couples in a marriage or partnership with children generally means both parties are now in paid employment.

The rise of single-parent families generally means they need to be in paid work in some way to support their families. The need for grandparents to step into the breach and bring cheap childcare and broader support has followed. This increased engagement between grandparents and grandchildren has had consequences for both parties, which I'll now explore.

GRANDPARENTS AND CHILDCARE

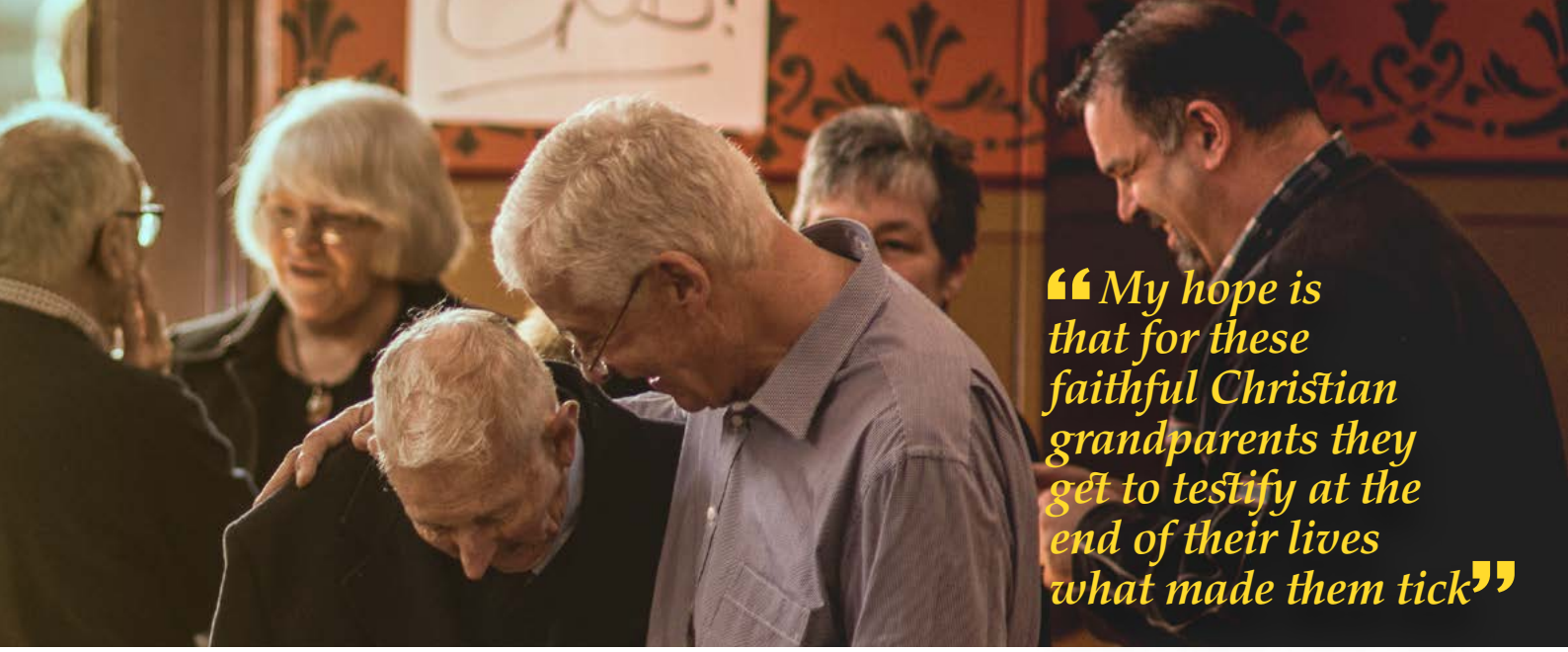
I noted earlier how the huge economic and social changes of recent decades have necessitated most parents with children, having both in the paid work force at some level. Sometimes both partners are full time, but many adopt one working full-time and perhaps the other working part-time to assist in managing the children and the practical work of running a household. While some families have been able to hire paid assistance such as childcare, house cleaning, gardening services and the like, many have called upon their aging parents for assistance in running the household.

Over all these arrangements are negotiated and appear from the outside as a win for all concerned. Parents get the practical assistance they need free of expensive childcare fees and grandparents cherish the additional time to interact and care for their grandchildren. I have seen multiple permutations and combinations of this type of arrangement. Often the grandparents come around to their adult children's homes for one or two days a week of childcare or vice versa with the grandchildren being dropped off at their grandparents' home.

I have, however, also observed arrangements between an adult child and their parent concerning childcare that troubled me. While not going into detail, it appeared to me that too much was being asked of the grandparent. This is terribly difficult territory. The grandparents in question never complained to me, which was often the case in general with that older stoic generation. I had never met the adult parents in question either, which made it difficult to even raise it. My experience as a church leader of raising difficult matters with people over the years has sometimes caused me much grief and being politely told where to go.

GRANDPARENTS AND FAITH TRANSMISSION

In both my congregations quite a few of the adult children of the grandparent cohort have followed in the faith commitments of their parents. This has been a gratifying outcome to all



concerned and, in some instances, a multi-generational faith ‘dynasty’ has been created. These grandparents act as Christian mentors, teachers and older role models to their grandchildren and play their part in supporting their children in their parenting roles at multiple practical levels, including childcare duties during school holidays and the like.

However, for many Christian grandparents the journey has not been as smooth. Many of their adult children rejected their faith upbringing and no longer participate in the church. A large number have seen their adult children separate and divorce from their partners, adding a complex layer for them. In some sad instances, being cut out of an ongoing relationship with their grandchildren by embittered and vengeful adult children or their former partners has occurred, creating a lot of distress and hurt.

What has been common, however, is adult children still allowing their children to engage relationally with their grandparents, whether their adult children’s family is intact or broken up by separation. With that has come permission for grandparents to share and teach the Christian faith to them during visits or stays with their grandparents. Grandparents bringing their grandchildren to church is also part of this permission-giving by adult children.

I have noted so many Christian grandparents taking up this opportunity with joy. The impact of this interaction is hard to judge long term, but I have noted people coming to faith later in life often have a similar story. In their background is a godly grandmother (usually) who prayed regularly for them, gifted them a cross or Bible, and read it or Christian books to them as kids.

GRANDPARENTS AND FUNERALS

When I started out in Christian ministry, it was eight weddings a year and the occasional funeral. Now its eight to ten funerals a year and the occasional wedding. I have conducted many beautiful funerals for Christian grandparents in my churches, accompanied by wonderful eulogies from their adult children and at times grown-up grandchildren. Jesus Christ and trust in him was a central feature of these wonderful occasions, and the celebration of a cross generational faith tradition. Funerals that were packed with people as up to four generations of family members, appreciative Christian peers and lifelong friends gathered.

But this was not always the case with some funerals. When you are organising a funeral for a widow or widower you generally deal directly with their adult children. You usually have not met them, or perhaps during a fleeting conversation at the annual Christmas family service. And if they don’t carry on the faith tradition of their parents, organising a Christian funeral is difficult. On two occasions the funeral was held at a local funeral parlour and their parent’s Christian story was written out of the script.

On one occasion I complained to the funeral director, who was Christian, and I had worked with closely over many years. I was able to get a role in the service and say the Lord’s Prayer while a civil celebrant led the service. Such a disappointing experience and more so for the person’s Christian peers and church friends who knew how important their Christian faith was. I have been saying for years now to older Christians that it is worth writing up their funerals while alive, with even some basic elements being outlined. I say this because one of the first questions I ask when sitting down with a family to plan a funeral, is, ‘did the deceased person leave some instructions for their funeral that we need to honour?’ My hope is that for these faithful Christian grandparents they get to testify at the end of their lives what made them tick as people before their children, grandchildren, peers and friends.

GRANDPARENTS AND LIFE EXPERIENCE

As a church leader I have benefitted enormously from the grandparents in my two Anglican parishes. Not surprisingly, they bring so much to the table of life. Maturity, experience, wisdom and a huge variety of skills that have been attained over a lifetime. They have been my Wardens (Elders in other church systems) and Parish Council representatives. They have been treasurers, small group leaders, practical repair workers, disputation negotiators, givers of hospitality and guest preachers. They brought all the sorts of character mix and skills required to help run a parish in an increasingly complex world. I am grateful for all of them and the ones I currently work with to this day! ■

Rev. Dave Fuller is Vicar, St Mark’s Anglican Church, Spotswood, Vice-President of God Squad International, and an Equip Editorial Member.

On Being a Grandmother

Denise Cooper-Clark

Looking back, I realise that I was not prepared to become a grandmother. I do not mean I was unwilling. I was thrilled when my daughter-in-law announced she was pregnant and overjoyed when each of my seven grandchildren was born. Nor was it that I dreaded being called 'grandma', with its implication that I was now officially old and had entered a new phase of life. When I say I was not prepared, I mean that I had not had adequate preparation for being a grandmother; I had no models of grandmothering in my family. Both my own grandmothers died before I was born and I have few memories of my only grandfather, who died when I was thirteen.

My own three children had only one living grandmother, as my husband's mother died in the same year we were married. My own mother seemed only a reluctant grandmother to my children. She only visited us on special occasions and when I was really desperate for help, such as when I was sick with three young children at home. She left my father and moved to Queensland when my youngest was three and had nothing to do with her grandchildren from then on, except when we visited her. When the children were older, my father enjoyed spending time with them, so they were much closer to their grandfather than to their grandmother.

In a way, the only preparation I had for being a grandmother myself was a resolution not to be a distant one as my mother had been, but to be available to help and to be present as much as my children wished me to and was possible for me. I was only working part-time in 2008 when my first grandchild was born, so I was almost always able to respond to the 'emergency' calls that were quite frequent when my grandchildren were very young and still occur occasionally even today.

My children did not go to child care (less common back then), and the grandmother 'gap' in terms of practical support was filled by my (single) paternal aunt and a dear older friend from church who lived nearby. My aunt caught public transport once a week to be with my children while I went to work, from the time my eldest was born to when the youngest started school. My friend, who did not yet have grandchildren of her own, looked after my children once a week so I could do the shopping, after which we enjoyed a chat over coffee and fruit cake. My children stayed for sleepovers from time to time with these surrogate grandmothers and were very fond of them.

BIBLICAL GRANDMOTHERS

If I had turned to the scriptures for particular wisdom about grandmothers, I would not have found much material. Grandmothers are not mentioned specifically in the Old Testament. There is not even a word for grandfathers, who are referred to as father's fathers, forefathers, fathers, or forebears or ancestors, the last two of which could also include grandmothers. But in the New Testament, we do meet someone designated as a grandmother (still no grandfathers!). In 2 Timothy 1:5, Paul refers to the sincere faith of Timothy's grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. The Greek word translated grandmother here, mamme, primarily has that meaning, although it could also be a familiar word for mother (like 'mama' or 'mummy'), especially by young children. It seems the word originally meant mother, but by New Testament times had come to mean grandmother. According to Strong's Greek Concordance, the word could also be used more broadly of an older woman who nurtures and instructs, like my aunt and dear church friend.

So what do we know about Lois? Not much. She is only mentioned once, although we learn a bit more about her family from Luke's account of Paul meeting Timothy during his second missionary journey (Acts 16:1). We're told Timothy's mother was Jewish and a Christian believer, but his father was Greek. They lived in Lystra, a Roman colony in the south of modern-day Turkiye. There are several puzzles here. Why would a pious Jewish woman marry a Gentile? The marriage was probably arranged by her father, but such marriages, while not unknown, were strongly discouraged in the Jewish community. Deuteronomy 7:3–4 specifically forbade such marriages. Perhaps Eunice's unnamed father was also a Greek (although that would leave the problem of why Lois married him) or, more likely, was not an observant Jew.

This would explain why Paul singles out Eunice and her mother Lois rather than Timothy's male relatives when highlighting the continuity of faith across the generations.

We have assumed that Timothy's parents were married, but the text does not say so. If they were not married, this could be another explanation for why Timothy's father is so briefly mentioned and unnamed. Marg Mowczko suggests another possibility: that he had divorced Eunice or had died while Timothy was young. It seems that, for whatever reason, he was an 'absent' father, and Paul became a father-figure to him, calling him 'my true son in the faith' (1 Tim 1:2) and 'my dear son' (2 Tim 1:2).

Whether Eunice was an unmarried mother, a divorcee or a widow, having partnered with a Gentile would have marginalised her and her son to a greater or lesser extent within the Jewish community at Lystra. Timothy would not have been regarded as Jewish because he was not circumcised. Perhaps his father did not allow it, or perhaps he was denied circumcision by the Jewish community because his father was a Gentile. Lois would have felt the pain of having her grandson excluded from her Jewish faith community. Yet it seems she continued to love and support her daughter and had a significant influence on the faith of her grandson Timothy.

But which faith – Jewish or Christian? Paul says that 'sincere faith' first lived in Lois and Eunice (2 Tim 1:5), which, if referring to Jewish faith, would be only natural as they had that faith before Timothy was born. And Paul refers to Timothy's grounding in the Jewish faith when he writes to him:

> But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 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 Tim 3:14–15).

As Paul refers to Timothy's infancy, he can only be speaking of what was learned from his mother and grandmother. And the Holy Scriptures at that time meant the Old Testament.

But we also know that Eunice (at least) had become a Christian – was that before Timothy did? Most commentators believe that is what 2 Timothy 1:5 means, and while some claim that Timothy was converted as a result of Paul's preaching in Lystra, probably during his first visit there, others believe Paul implies it was due to the influence of his mother and grandmother. If this was the case, Lois and Eunice were Christian believers. So it seems Timothy was nurtured in both his Jewish and Christian faith by his mother and his grandmother.

LEGACIES

It is strange then, that in an article based on 1 Timothy that focuses on 'the value of legacy, which includes instilling and transmitting inherited traditions', Lois and Eunice do not rate a single mention. Instead, the author cites the relationship between Paul and Timothy as an example of the 'importance of fictive kin, namely surrogate grandparents (and) parents'. (Mona LaFosse, 'Inspiring Interpersonal Relationships', Religions 13 (7), 2022, 628). No doubt Paul did function as surrogate father and spiritual mentor to Timothy, but why ignore the contribution of Timothy's actual biological kin? Could it be that the role of women in Timothy's faith is downplayed?

Some years ago, there was a big push in some quarters to get more fathers coming to church, with the claim that when a man goes to church his children are more likely to continue in the faith but when only the children's mother attends, they will likely give up their faith (*gcdiscipleship.com/article-feed/why-we-need-more-dads-in-church*). The statistics often cited were:

- When dad comes to Christ first, 93% of families will follow;
- When mom comes to Christ first, 17% of families will follow;
- When kids come to Christ first, 3.5% of families will follow.

However, there is no evidence for these statistics, or even of any study on which they could be based. So it seems that the claim that fathers have the most influence on their children's faith is a myth (*missioalliance.org/the-myth-of-the-93-fathers-and-mothers-are-not-a-competitive-hierarchy-in-the-home*).

There is some evidence for the opposite: a 2019 study of Christian households concluded that 'practicing

> *"We need to remember that Jesus' teaching shifts the emphasis for his followers from the biological family to the community of the church, the family of God"*

Christians in their teen years consistently identify mothers as the ones who provide spiritual guidance and instruction and instil the values and disciplines of their faith in the household' (Barna Group, 'The Powerful Influence of Moms in Christian Households' (*barna.com/research/moms-christians-households*).

Even if in Timothy's case it was Paul rather than his mother and grandmother who was most influential in his conversion, it seems clear that 'the real foundation that Timothy's faith was built on goes back into his childhood' (Simon Clay, 'Lois and Eunice: A Legacy of Faith' *simonpclay.wordpress.com/2015/03/15/lois-eunice-a-legacy-of-faith-2-timothy-15*). Lois, Eunice and then Timothy saw that the Old Testament scriptures pointed to Christ. And their experience of being ostracised by the Jewish community because of their association with Gentiles likely made Paul's message of reconciliation between Jew and Gentile through Christ particularly appealing. In their Christian community, this barrier was broken down, which would have been of particular significance for Timothy, with his mixed identity as both Jew and Gentile.

REFLECTING ON LOIS

Lois and Eunice are beautiful examples of taking to heart the instructions of Deuteronomy:

> 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 (Deut 4:9)

and

> Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up (Deut 6:5–7).

Like Lois, I have had some lovely opportunities to discuss faith with my grandchildren 'sitting at home and walking down the road'. A few instances come to mind. Discussing decision-making in Christian marriage with my 14-year-old granddaughter as we were having a manicure (she failed to convince me to have my nails painted green).

Sitting in Yo-Bar eating frozen yogurt with all the toppings when my 11-year-old grandson started a conversation about what happens when we die. Doing a 'diamond painting' with three of my grandchildren when one of them asked, 'How do you know that Jesus is real?'

Proverbs tells us that 'Children's children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children' (Prov 17:6). 'Crown' might be interpreted as 'glory' or 'honour', reflecting the Old Testament view that offspring are a sign of blessing from God, even a reward (Ps 127:3). But we need to remember that Jesus' teaching shifts the emphasis for his followers from the biological family to the community of the church, the family of God: 'Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?' Pointing to his disciples, (Jesus) said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother' (Matt 12:48–50).

I certainly see my grandchildren as an (undeserved) blessing; they are a joy and a delight, but a source of some anxiety as well. My grandchildren face so many challenges that my own children did not face, especially related to social media and secularism. The world in general seems more violent, more polarised and less secure. I pray regularly for each of them: for their safety, for their learning at school, for their relationships with their siblings and friends. But most of all that they will know the love of Christ and the hope they have in him.

I will let my grandchildren have the final word. I conducted my own brief and totally unscientific survey, having their parents ask them, 'What are grandmothers for?' Their answers included, 'They support you in life', 'they are positive role models', 'they cook good food', and 'they teach you interesting things'. One said, 'I don't know how to answer that question. That's not how I think about grandma. She's not a thing that is for something. She's a person'. Another one said, 'Grandparents help you and they help your parents. They bring families together'.

When asked what grandmothers are like, one said, 'They are smart. They teach you like parents, but they're not your parent, which can be helpful because parents can be difficult sometimes…I'm in favour of grandmothers. I think we should keep them'. I agree. ■

***Denise Cooper-Clarke** is part of the Equip editorial group, a double doctor and grandparent to seven.*

Be The Grandparent your Grandkids will Never Forget

The National Grandparent Movement (NGM)

Ian Barnett

The year is 2016. I am the Senior Minister of Figtree Anglican Church, a large Anglican Church in the Sydney Diocese, located in the Wollongong region. I am in my early sixties, a father of three and a grandfather of three. As I was reflecting and considering the future, (probably my future) I came across a particular comment, credited to Jay Kesler:

> *Everyone needs a connection to the past and a light for the future. Most of all they need what only Grandparents can give.*

Upon further checking I saw that this quote was probably an attempt to capture his thoughts about the role grandparents play and can play in the lives of their grandchildren.

Kesler's words caught my attention and would not leave me; and no, at the time I did not really consider the role of grandparents – their potential impact either personally or even in my own preaching. Even though I would come across verses like 'Children's children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children' (Prov. 17:6), I still did not, at that time, pay attention to the potential legacy that grandparents could leave, especially when it came to faith in Jesus.

Of course, as I look back, I realise this was the starting point of a whole new journey that I can now say, without fear or favour, that God would use for His purposes. The real turning point (possibly more of a tuning in point) came when all my children advised me that our grandchildren number would rise from three to six in the following year.

This began my interest in grandparenting, but more especially what resources were available for Christian grandparents to interact, engage with, and share with their faith journey in Jesus with their grandchildren.

To my surprise – more shock, actually – I found very little. Well, actually, I did not find anything that addressed the issue of faith in your later years, let alone what one should do with what one knows. Yes, there were lots of books on parenting, on raising kids, but nothing about the faith role of grandparents.

Thinking I was looking in all the wrong places, I kept going and discovered more literature and articles on being a grey nomad, on retirement, on hobbies, on superannuation, but nothing was available that would address my grandparent need.

Finally, I felt strongly that surely there must be others in this season of their life who would also be feeling that this was something that no one was addressing.

Added to that, with my concern as an evangelist, of bringing people to faith in Jesus, maybe something could be started that allowed older people, grandparents in particular, to pay attention not just to this season that they found themselves in, but what they were doing intentionally with their grandkids as they considered (I prayed) the legacy they would leave.

So, without any sense of what lay before me, I created and registered the National Grandparent Movement, a movement with the sole purpose of assisting grandparents to wrestle with the question, '*In a changing world, what is the faith legacy I and other grandparents are leaving behind?*' Without any resources available, I felt that we would start our journey with an annual conference in 2017 to determine, first, was God in such a thing and, second, were their other grandparents crying out for more?

A CONFERENCE FOR GRANDPARENTS – THE ONLY ONE IN AUSTRALIA

If the phrase 'grasp the nettle' had any real meaning for me, I was just about to put it to the test.

The National Grandparent Movement (NGM) was finally launched with its first conference to be held at Figtree Anglican Church in May 2017. I felt that the time was now and, as the saying goes, we were not getting any younger. We made it clear from the outset that the movement existed to support local churches to equip and encourage grandparents who were passionate about reaching and discipling the next generation, especially their grandkids.

This would be achieved through our annual conferences, small group ministries, seminars, and our hope to birth grandparenting ministries in every church, by equipping them in such a way that they would be able to help their grandchildren navigate their future with greater confidence as they fixed their eyes on Jesus (Heb. 12:1–3).

Let me pause as you read this and, just to make it clear, no, we had not written any courses for churches, we had not run any seminars about grandparenting, let alone have any resources that could answer the question, 'how do you birth a grandparenting ministry in your church?'

However, with the word of God as our guide, we used as our key verse the words from 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.

Even reading that now, I still get chills as I think about those words 'watch yourselves closely' and 'teach them to your children and to their children after them'.

"...grandparents not only provide a connection to the past but also a light for future generations. If anything, we are in a season of life where more and more young people and our grandchildren are craving both."

So the journey and the wrestle began. Questions like, who could I get to speak at such a conference, what topics would we address, what would the day look like, and much more. Of course, if God was in the movement and there was a need, what would I have to worry about, or to put it another way, you of little faith?

The two key elements of the NGM vision would be birthed and highlighted at every conference:

- Influence – To ensure that grandparents are encouraged and equipped to leave a living faith legacy for their grandchildren to follow.
- Impact – To see 30,000 grandparents having a greater spiritual impact on their families and especially their grandchildren by 2030.

The 2017 Conference was a surprising success, where 110 people gathered from as far as Canberra to the North Coast, and from Wollongong to Penrith. It was a wonderful day full of insight and authenticity. Our feedback for the first conference was incredibly encouraging. Without a doubt, the conference has filled a vacuum.

I anticipated that in 2018 we would continue to grow and we did. Our speakers for 2018 provided a variety of insights into the role of being a grandparent and the wonderful privilege it is to engage with our grandchildren. All speakers came from the perspective of being Christ followers. The talks were full of wit and wisdom. What stood out for me was the greater the authenticity, the greater the connection with those who attended. We were blessed to have about 180 in attendance. No consideration was given either to streaming the event or seeking host sites.

By 2019 the news of what we were doing had spread and we had to close registrations at 450. We had not expected such a response. By now it had become clear that God was doing a new thing through old people.

To jump ahead to 2025, we have just held our 8 conference where we had over 800 people engage from every state in Australia and overseas. Due to the challenges of Covid in 2020/21, our ministry and conference were stalled and relaunched as both an in person and on-line event. Because of the goodness of God, it has become a truly national movement.

The National Grandparent Conference, since its inception, has helped thousands of grandparents, who have felt the weight and pace of change, to better understand the influence they have in leaving a lasting faith legacy for their grandchildren.

THE GRANDPARENT LEGACY – IF NOT NOW…THEN WHEN?

Every statistic you read about grandparents or, as they are often called, seniors, from Census data to other research clearly shows that grandparents are living longer and have far more access with their grandkids than ever before.

The reasons for this are many, from cost of living, to broken marriages, to grandparents being required to step in and raise their grandkids.

However, I am not alone when I say that many grandparents want to ensure that our decisions about our future, what we do with our time and our influences, reflect our intention to leave a lasting faith legacy for all our grandchildren, a legacy that will assist them in navigating their future with greater confidence. A legacy where our grandkids will say that heaven was in grandad before grandad was in heaven.

Older Christians have to accept is that we are not done changing! Grandparents may be young(ish) or they may be old, but we are not finished changing and there is much we can pass on to those who come after us (Phil. 1:6).

In fact, I would go as far as to say that grandparents not only provide a connection to the past but also a light for future generations. If anything, we are in a season of life where more and more young people and our grandchildren are craving both. This is something I believe only grandparents can provide. Life is complex for our young ones and the issues they are facing require wisdom, love, grace and kindness – things that grandparents who have walked with Jesus should be showing as they still seek to be salt and light.

Our generation has learnt lessons of what it means to be faithful to our commitments and the joy of having an adventurous spirit. This is my hope for all grandparents (2 Tim. 1:3–5).

Since we started NGM, some of the things that we have developed include a website ngmlegacy.com.au that provides a variety of resources and conference talks; seminars; a podcast called Grandparenthood with Hope 103.2, which deals with many of the issues that grandparents face with their grandkids, plus our book titled *Footsteps for Future Generations*, and much more.

It is my hope that in starting such a movement, with an annual conference, that wisdom would be provided in the key areas of life that affects us all. This would include aspects of our spiritual, emotional, mental and physical growth of not only ourselves, but also our grandchildren.

Grandparents believe the time is now to chart a new course, to encourage and equip grandparents and ministry leaders, to grab hold of their potential influence and instil in them a fresh vision in helping them share their love and faith in Christ with their grandchildren so that they are able to leave a living faith legacy. Let me conclude with words from Psalm 78:

> My people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth…Things we have heard and known, things our ancestors have told us. We will not hide them from their descendants; we will tell the next generation, the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done…so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God, and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands (1-8).

■

***Ian Barnett** is the CEO and founder of the National Grandparent Movement.*

Missionary Grandparenting:
The Hopes and Fears of All the Years

Gaye Bishop

After a long, rewarding career in nursing education and research that allowed me the privilege of volunteering in India, Africa and Indonesia, I finally retired in 2020 and now have more time to be 'Nanny'. I am in my late 60s, married for 50 years, mother of three and grandmother to six wonderful grandchildren.

Growing up without available or involved grandparents influenced my desire to be present as a grandmother. Intentional grandparenting adds another dimension of unconditional love to the family overall. Ours was blessed with my mother's presence and, while she had complex battles with mental illness, she was a loving, affectionate and creative grandmother. Seeing her with my children was a gift. The insight, compassion, communication skills and wisdom they gained in this relationship equipped them with an immeasurable depth of understanding for people who are struggling.

My eldest daughter believes 'it takes a village to raise a child' and welcomes all possible support, especially with their beautiful daughter who struggles with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Because I am retired, I can be more available for school drop-offs and pickups, appointments and activities, and supporting my granddaughter with her special needs.

My three grandsons and three granddaughters are all unique and range from ages 19 down to four. Having a few years between the oldest and the youngest has helped me form a special relationship with each of them.

MISSING MISSIONARY CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN

My eldest daughter had a wonderful opportunity to live and work in Indonesia in 2015 for 12 months and this extended to 5 years. My other daughter and her husband were already living there where they met and were working in community development, tourism, teaching and Christian ministry. They had two children at this stage, one born in Sydney and one in Indonesia, so all my grandchildren were now living overseas. Knowing the sisters and their families were living close to each other was reassuring. There were teary farewells and at times it was difficult to adjust to life without them. I was working in palliative care education and research, which I was very passionate about, and this was a good distraction. I was also involved in children's ministry, which filled my heart with joy.

Another blessing was my son's daughter arriving not long after the others left so I was able to spend many hours with her, watching her grow, learn and engage with the world God gave her. My son and his partner sadly separated so this was grief in a different way. Being a paternal grandmother with separated parents has brought some challenges

"Feelings of helplessness and anxiety can dominate, and relinquishing my control to the only one who can get me through, Jesus, has been my only recourse."

so navigating a respectful, caring relationship has been essential. Fortunately, their co-parenting has been managed well, and they are both very intentional and loving parents.

I was present at the birth of five of my grandchildren, even in Indonesia for one, only missing the youngest one due to Covid. She was born in Indonesia, in August 2020 during lockdown. The feelings of disappointment and longing were overwhelming, but a new life was arriving via another c-section and Nanny was on call! At these times my background in nursing really helped as I learnt how to manage my emotions. We met when she was 15 months old and I adore her! Saying goodbye after 4 weeks was sad, but the next visit was already being planned.

Absence definitely makes the heart grow fonder and goodbyes overwhelmingly sad. I am so thankful for What's App and many video calls and funny emoji messages from her and family. I'm also profoundly aware of God's presence and grace during these times of sadness and anxiety.

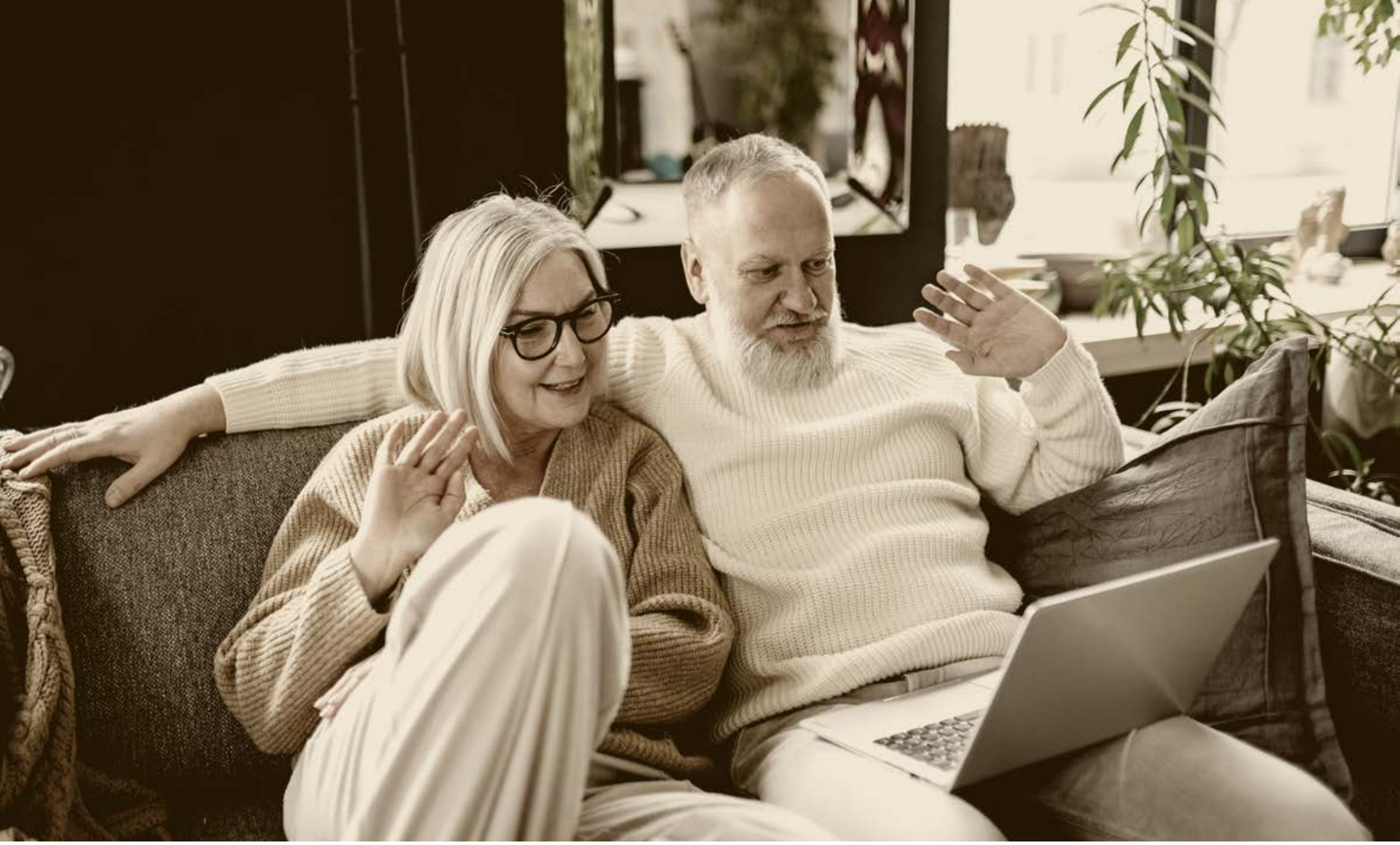
MANAGING THE GRIEF OF DISTANCE

Having family living in a developing country can be very challenging. My nursing career equipped me with expertise, but when I am so far away phone consultation for family members is tricky, especially when medicines and health infrastructure are not available. Even so, I am on call when illness or accidents occur through many calls asking about children's hospitalisations, various illnesses and dengue fever.

My daughter has become a very savvy proxy nurse practitioner. When she needs to see doctors she is well-equipped with information and wise questions. Once my 10-month-old grandson had gastroenteritis and pneumonia simultaneously and needed an urgent flight to Singapore. Nanny had to be there, too, of course. I have lost count of the many hospital visits there have been with chest infections, asthma and various accidents. Thankfully, he is now a strong healthy 10-year-old! My daughter also had two c-sections, and I was glad to support baby two's arrival in person. These were managed so differently from in Australia.

I have carried much grief with me during the years apart, at times very intense. Feelings of helplessness and anxiety can dominate, and relinquishing my control to the only one who can get me through, Jesus, has been my only recourse. Jesus does not promise a healthy and safe life; He promises Himself. He knows what we go through, and His life-giving words and presence comfort and restore me in sleepless nights.

My children and grandchildren living in a developing country changed their lives and ours in many ways. They experienced community so differently from the secular, individualised, western society of Sydney.



They learnt the effects of poverty and inequality on a society, witnessed many funerals due to inadequate health infrastructure, earthquakes, volcanos, floods and illness. This has impacted my oldest grandson and his decision to return, share his faith with others, and be baptised while there. My 12 and 10-year-old grandsons were also baptised in Indonesia a few years ago.

GOD'S FAITHFUL PREPARATION

God graciously prepared me for what was to come. When my youngest daughter was in kindergarten in a mainly Anglo area of Sydney, her two closest friends were Muslims. This was very unusual for that time, so I started wondering what God was planning for her future. I spent many hours in prayer when she moved to Indonesia after graduating. My husband and I missed her, yet we adjusted to this new normal. We spent holidays with her, and I visited yearly, exploring the country and learning about her world and home.

I have always felt welcomed, and the locals have encouraged me in learning Indonesian, eating with them (despite the chilli and occasional Bali belly), and embracing and investing in their way of life.

They recently returned to Australia due to visa complications impacting their ministry. This has been heartbreaking. The children and parents are missing their friends, home and community and, while I love them being so near, I also grieve with them. Knowing how they long to return home is a daily struggle. I am torn because I know they have made such a difference in the lives of so many, but I am so blessed to have them here with me for a now. It is the first time we have all been together in twenty years.

God's grace for them has been so visible and we feel very loved and supported knowing they are in God's hands. 'My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness' (2 Cor 12:9). God miraculously provided them with an affordable home in a great location in the middle of a housing crisis. My daughter is working with teenage girls from diverse backgrounds, which is her gifting, and they are connecting with church and schools, building new relationships. Only God knows when and if they will return.

Being a grandmother of six I am seeing God's love in so many ways. Seeing my own children become loving parents is a gift. When Jesus says 'be like little children' and 'the kingdom of God belongs to such as these', I know it is true. I have learnt to see God's glory through their eyes. Children see the wonder of God every day in so many moments. They see a blade of grass or a flower and are in awe. A bunch of dry sticks becomes a beautiful colourful bunch of flowers (given to me from my 4-year-old last week). They look in the faces of family and beam with joy. They have a real sense of belonging and 'home'. We all belong to God's family.

'It is well with my soul.' ■

***Gaye Bishop** is a former nurse and nurse educator, mother of three and blessed grandmother of six.*

The Joys and Sorrows of Single Grandparenting

Patricia

> *"When my first grandchild came into the world, it was both the happiest and the saddest day of my life"*

Playing a present and active Grandparent role to five delightful grandchildren is one of the greatest joys of my life. I love having them snuggle next to me as I read them stories, taking them to the beach to enjoy the sun, sand and sea, and yes, I even love answering their endless curious questions. However, along with joy comes a deep sorrow.

When my first grandchild came into the world, it was both the happiest and the saddest day of my life. I am pretty sure my daughter felt much the same. My husband, her father, had died suddenly three years before, from a massive heart attack. He was 59.

We cried tears of joy and sorrow as we welcomed Phoenix George into our lives. His Grandfather George, whom he would never meet in this world, felt very present amongst us. I was so thankful, at the time of his death, that he had been present to see each of our children married; however, the fact that we would never know him as a granddad was a loss we all felt strongly. There are now five grandchildren, and their parents and I spend a lot of time looking for signs of inherited traits from George as we're so keen to recapture reminders of their intelligent, energetic and enthusiastic dad and granddad.

So, my new season began…choosing your grandparent moniker is both fun and significant, like putting on a new layer of yourself. 'Dee Dee' was to be my new identity. When the kids were still living at home, they used to think up names that they would call us when we were grandparents and Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum was one of the favourites because we had dressed up as those characters for an *Alice in Wonderland* themed party. Of course, if George had lived we would never have been called Dee Dee and Dum Dum, but it was nice to have a name that included their Grandfather in its origins

Life as a new single grandma, as joyful as it was, was also a new season of missing George. He would have been the best Granddad, the fun and active one. He would have been the one to take them all to the park while the rest of us sat around after lunch relaxing and chatting. One of my fears when George died was 'Am I enough without him?', especially for my kids and future grandkids. It was a real fear, and it escalated when I became a grandparent for the first time.

The past eight years of single grandparenting has been one of continuous learning. I love spending time with my grandchildren, and babysitting is a joy, but it can be exhausting on my own at times, especially when they were little and it was hard even to go to the bathroom. I have needed to learn how to manage without George's emotional and practical support, having someone who cared as much as me about each of them, to share the ups and downs and marvel at new photos and videos, and exclaim over and over how 'exceptional' they all are!

Friends care, but not as much as George would have. Taking them for walks to parks and trips to the beach,

I feel the huge responsibility of trust given to me having solo care of these adventurous little ones. So often I wish George was there as my back up…or, more likely, I would be his back! Someone to climb to the top of the climbing frame, run after their bikes, or dash into the waves to rescue them! My brother was telling me the other day that even though his wife was not up to babysitting because of illness on their scheduled child-minding Friday, he was able to take them out for an adventure while she rested. It struck me that this is an option I do not have, an option that I would love our grandchildren to experience.

There are privileges in being a single grandparent. At least I have found that to be the case. It is hard to know how to put it, but you do not take up as much space, so you can slot into the family life easily without it making too much impact. You just become an easy extension of their family. My eldest son and daughter live a nine-hour drive away, and as often as I can, I fly up to visit them and their families. Iti's easy to babysit at their homes or just join in their everyday life without disrupting too much. Staying with them over that time is a privilege and means you have a unique opportunity to get to know the grandkids in every part of their daily lives. It also provides opportunity for intimacy and familiarity with them, their school and friends.

I am also thankful to have my youngest son's family living close by. Babysitting regularly and being included into their lives is an important family connection for me where I am needed and appreciated.

My children are all understanding and supportive for which I am so thankful, but it is different than it would have been if there were two of us. It is hard not to be envious of my friends who team babysit. I imagine the shared glances we would have had when the grandchildren said something clever or funny. It would not feel like boasting if I shared my proud observations with him.

I love telling stories of Grandfather George. My daughter-in-law wrote and illustrated a story book for our future grandchildren to read even before they were born. It is a favourite for all of them.

Looking back, I am very aware that God has been with me throughout this journey, every step of the way. He has nurtured me in discovering my new identity as a widow, a mother and grandmother doing it alone. My identity in Him has allowed me to recognise what my strengths and contributions can mean in the lives of these precious children, parts of George and me. He has shown me that I am enough. He has equipped me to be an integral part of each of their lives: a safe and trusted place. I can share my dependence on our God with them, the God who will be with me, and with them, every step of the way as they face the joys and sorrows of life.

One of my grandchildren was asked to draw a place where he felt safe and he drew 'Dee Dee's' house. My cup was full. I am trying to embrace Paul's words from Colossians 1:27 'my joy and my identity…have to be found in Christ alone'. I am thankful for my children and grandchildren and the privilege and joy of being part of their lives, while keeping alive the memory of the grandfather they never met. ■

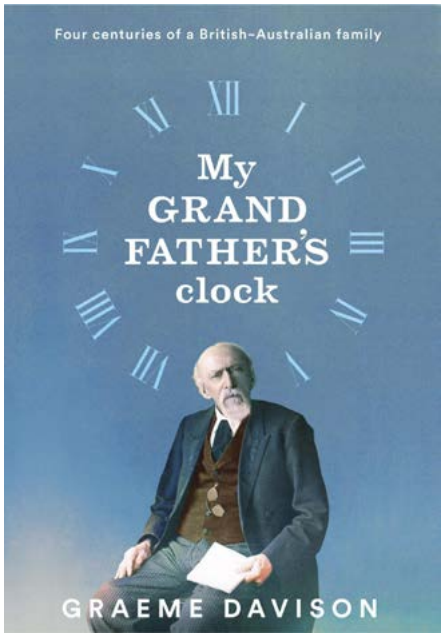
Patricia is a former teacher and learning support assistant.

Gordon with daughter and grandmother (see opp.)

My Grandfather's Clock

Four Centuries of a British-Australian Family

By Graeme Davison (Melbourne University Press, 2023)



REVIEWED BY GORDON PREECE

Monash University Emeritus Professor Graeme Davison is the unofficial historian of Melbourne and a major Australian historian. His books include *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne* and, pertinently, several on time: *The Unforgiving Minute: How Australia Learned to tell the time*, and an earlier award-winning family history, *Lost Relations: Fortunes of my Family in Australia's Golden Age*. Professor Davison is a Methodist by background and a member of the Uniting Church. I know his daughter Lucy and son-in-law Jonathan, an Anglican vicar.

This beautifully presented hardback is full of artistic maps centred around the borderland between England and Scotland where his family and, the star of the show, his Grandfather's Clock came from. It centres on Carlisle, where my own Scottish born grandmother grew up, and where in 2016 I found the small house where she had been a domestic servant-girl.

Davison describes himself as a material historian: not materialist, but one with a fascination with objects and how they change our lives, mainly concerning time, but also one book on Car Wars. Tom Griffiths describes Davison as

> *fascinated by family stories …, the vestiges of social and material culture that travel miraculously through the generations. My Grandfather's Clock (MGC) is an historical ethnography of family life, an exploration of heredity and nurture, memory and history. It is so captivating because the reader becomes engaged in the mysteries of genetic and social inheritance and the reading of clues - the same way aunts assign the facial features of newborns to long-lost relatives … and their part in national and global history.*

My late mother-in-law, the kids' grandmother, constantly saw ancestors' characteristics in her grandchildren, both physically and character-wise. And only today I found myself cheered by a photo of myself at about six and my mother in a kayak together, just two weeks after I was kayaking in Alaska. Another photo of my Scottish grandmother shows her with me aged two and a half at Avalon beach, Sydney. Nana, who I remember later as the long-suffering epitome of a dour Scot, is smiling with her arm around an exuberant me (see opposite).

Similarly, next to it, is one of my other grandmother, an alcoholic estranged from my Mum, meeting our ten-month first and oldest Madeleine in my arms, for probably the only time, but gripped and grinning at Madeleine's gaze.

These rare pictures in my study mean a lot to me. They mediate time, almost sacramentally, that despite the tragic drunkenness on both grandmother's sides, there were times of joy.

Davison's 'great-aunt's bequest – a 200-year-old grandfather clock' sends him on a journey deep into his father's family's past. From their tribal homeland in the Scottish borders he follows them to the garrison town of Carlisle, from industrial Birmingham [the second largest, now bankrupt city in England] to Edwardian Australia, and from the Great War [which so damaged my legless grandfather], to his own, [and not to be taken for granted] suburban childhood, relatively near to us in Essendon.

> *This is the story of an ordinary family's journey from frontier warfare and dispossession through economic turmoil and emigration to modest prosperity. At each step we are led to reflect on the puzzle of personal identity and the mystery of time … MGC is a moving testimony to the power of family history of family history to illuminate the present.*

As another blurb-writer and no-mean social historian Janet McCalman says, 'this is an enormously important book, in a lovely, understated, modest Methodist way that brings to life a neglected history. It is written with such love – and that is so rare in family histories', full of skeletons in the closets. 'It is a celebration of goodness, … good neighbourliness and loving kindness, the great virtues of the Common People of the United Kingdom' and, not to be forgotten, of the restored relationships of the Kingdom of God. ■

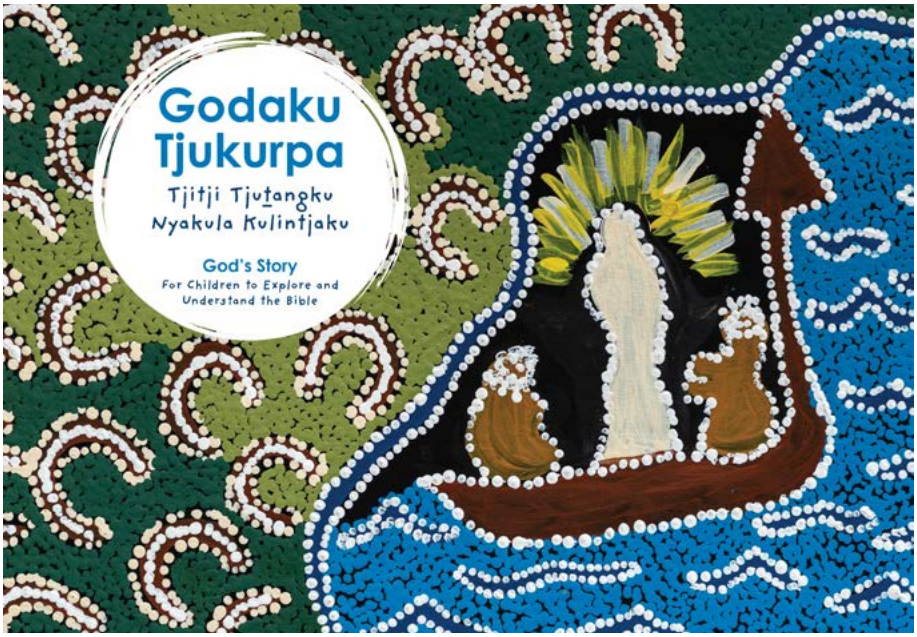
Gordon Preece is Director of Ethos: EA Centre for Christianity and Society

Gordon with Scottish Nana

Godaku Tjukurpa

God's Story

By Kayleen Manton (Nami Kulyuri, Bible Society of Australia, 2024)



REVIEWED BY KAYLEEN MANTON

This book is impressive to look at. Like most art, the first layer is put down first, before one paints the rest of the artwork. To appreciate this book, we need to look at the first layer. Author Nami Kulyuru had a vision of creating a book that painted God's Story specifically for the Pitjantjatjara children so they could learn about Jesus and trust in Him. She saw a gap in that there were no books for their children to learn about Jesus. This book, as I see it, is the Gospel message for the children from the Central Desert of Australia.

The book starts in Genesis and depicts parts of the Bible through to Revelation.

It paints God's stories, written in Kulyuru's language for the children in her family and community. The paintings of the stories were done by 28 Pitjantjatjara artists. They are eye-catching and it would be easy for the children to grasp and understand the Bible stories as it is art that is familiar to them.

The paintings also represent a community whose desire and goal is to come together to reach the children in their community with the Gospel. This team effort is in itself a witness to the children and their local community.

To have a book written in their own language further enables the children to hear the Bible stories, allowing them to capture the stories with a clearer understanding. To see and hear the Gospel in one's Mothers tongue can have a profound effect on them in following Jesus and living His way.

It is a breakthrough for any cultural group to have Bible stories expressed through paintings and languages. It enables them to present the Gospel message so one can learn to understand the Bible and learn about Jesus and to trust and believe in Him, that He truly is the Saviour.

What a blessing and a gift to give the children in your family and community.

I see a group of wonderful Christian brothers and sisters in Christ who care and have a desire to see their children in their community learn the stories of the Bible and to follow and trust in Jesus.

The Gospel will have a profound effect on these children through this book expressed through their own cultural art and language. They will, in turn, affect their community with the Gospel message: 'To learn and believe in Jesus'.

> *"There were no books for their children to learn about Jesus"*

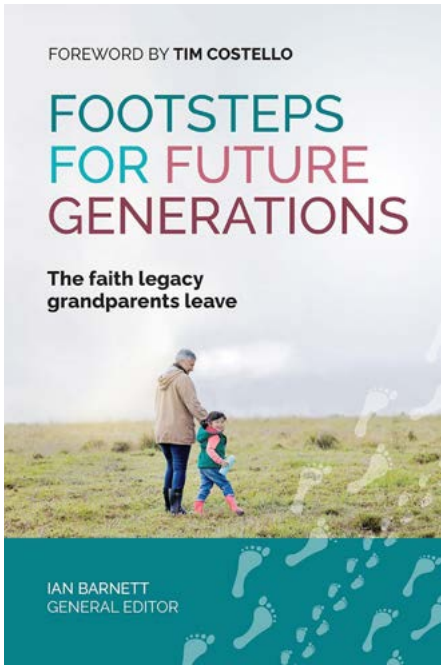
Nami Kulyuru and the artists have created a legacy through this book for the children of the Central Desert of Australia. ■

Kayleen Manton's people are Kuku Yalanji/ Ngunkal/Theypan from Wujal Wujal and Coen Area in the Cape York Region. She is married to Rick Manton, a missionary with the Australian Presbyterian World Mission. Together they founded the Mt Druitt Indigenous Church in Tregear, NSW.

Footsteps for Future Generations

The faith legacy grandparents leave

Ed. Ian Barnett (Anglican Press Australia, 2023)



REVIEWED BY PAUL R WHITING

For many people today, there is a lot of life left after retirement. Many years ago, when I began work, the union representative told me that our superannuation scheme for men was based on retirement at 65 and death at 67½! Now, the life expectancy for men is 81 and 85 for women. Being a grandparent can now last for 20 or 30 years and most of us who become grandparents will do so at a time of life when we are still very active.

In 2007, John Chapman published the book *Making the Most of the Rest of Your Life*, urging us all to prepare for an eternity beyond this short time on earth – the most important consideration as we grow older. But as life expectancy increases, how will I make the most of the remaining part of this life? And often that question is affected by the demands of modern life upon families. More and more, grandparents are called upon to have a role in the lives of their children's children. Every day in our suburb I see older adults pushing children in strollers who are obviously not theirs. My grandparents never pushed my stroller!

Grandparents are much more involved in the younger family than in previous years. So much has changed since I had grandparents that a book like Ian Barnett's *Footsteps for Future Generations* is welcome. To be grandparents who have not 'passed their use-by date', we need to understand what has changed and how it has changed the lives of our grandchildren.

Former Sydney rector the Reverend Ian Barnett is the founder and CEO of the National Grandparent Movement. In this book he brings together ten essays by nine grandparents who have the wisdom to be able to think theologically about being an intentional Christian grandparent. The theme is legacy: apart from material things, what will I leave to my grandchildren when I am gone from here – something that lasts beyond this life?

Then there is the biblical imperative. Some of us will not have registered the significant passages that emphasise our responsibility as grandparents. Mike Raiter develops this theme in his essay on how the Bible teaches us to live in retirement and old age. To start us thinking, Colin Bale provides an overview of grandparenting from 1900 to 2020. Some of us grandparents have lived through a good many of these changes. Yet the changes of the past 50 years – the changes in our society's worldview – are greater than the changes of the previous 100 years. These more recent changes have been more significant for our grandchildren than change was for us. Kel Richards' essay examines how those changes have affected our grandchildren's way of thinking and outlook on life, and to reflect on how little we really understand them. But his essay title tells us where he will end with all this: 'Prayer and your grandchildren in the light of culture'.

You probably already pray for your grandchildren. Richards invites us to

> *"What will I leave to my grandchildren when I am gone from here – something that lasts beyond this life?"*

consider what we should be praying for our grandchildren, how much we should be praying for them, and when and how we should be praying with them – the latter a new thought for some of us. Christine and Peter Jensen reflect together on what some of these things might look like in our family life, while Keith and Sarah Condie look at how we can equip ourselves for a long period of grandparenting.

Jonathan Harris tells the story of his parents and grandparents, concluding with a great anecdote from a tribal leader in Pakistan. Asked what it was about his father that had influenced him most, the leader answered, 'He told me about Jesus'. Wishing to probe more deeply, Harris rephrased the question. The answer: 'He taught me about Jesus Christ'.

The greatest legacy will be no surprise, but what is needed to leave this legacy? As a Christian since childhood and a grandparent of 23 years, this book left me thinking. It is worth reading, and the issues within it are worth praying for and about. It is also worth our determination to grow yet closer to our Lord Jesus so we will be able to represent Him for them. ■

***Paul Whiting** is the associate pastor for seniors at St Mark's, Pennant Hills, and has five grandchildren.*

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