

God Bless Grandparents



Reflections & Remembrances

Dr. Mary Manz Simon



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Introduction

We worship a God of surprises. Grandparenting is one of those surprises. Grandparenting changes our role as a parents, adds to the holiday shopping list and might even shift our life focus. Because, after all, grandparenting is special.

As grandparents, we catch a glimpse of the family we grew years ago and stride forward to our family of the future. What a surprise it is, then, that when our steps become a little slower and our hair a bit thin (or gone completely!), we become grandparents.

As we age, we may feel opportunities to leave financial wealth might have dwindled, time might be short and energy could be limited. But then God says, “Surprise! *You* can fill a child’s heart with love. *You* can teach a child what’s important. *You* can point another child to Jesus.”

A grandchild is a gift from our own child, for we see a reflection of one whom we nurtured. But the opportunity to grow a second level of generational faith is a gift directly from God.

Accept the challenge; receive the surprise; cherish this blessing.

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Part 1: Listen

Reflection

Digital technology has removed many of the barriers that separated previous generations. We can text, email and communicate directly using multiple formats. But I still tell my grandson, “I miss hearing your voice.”

The human voice gives clues to a person’s personality. Perhaps that’s the reason those who pay attention to what we say out loud can peek into our very souls.

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I feel loved when I hear two words: “Hi, Grandma.” Whether we answer to “Papa,” “Mimi” or something else, intergenerational affection comes shining through in such spoken words from our grandchildren.

The voice of God connects just as directly to his love. For we read in Isaiah 43:1, “I have called you by name; you are mine.” God says we are “precious” and “redeemed” (Isaiah 43:4, 1). The entire chapter of Isaiah 43 overflows with words we need to hear. I want to respond with, “Tell me that again, God. Let me hear your voice repeatedly.”

God speaks over and over to us. Are we ready to listen? How can we help our grandchildren to listen to God?

Prayers

O Lord, open my grandchild's mind so she has an eagerness to learn. May she listen attentively so she acquires and uses knowledge in meaningful ways. Unlock my grandchild's heart so she responds to her own needs. May observing others and understanding what they say uncover ways to serve. May she hear your biblical truths so she consciously chooses these principles to guide decisions and influence choices. Thank you, Lord. Amen.

Jesus, the world is so noisy that I'm afraid my grandchild might not pay attention to what matters. My grandchild often uses technology, so her attention is already divided. But from my own experiences and from the biblical story of Elijah, I know you sometimes speak in just a whisper (see 1 Kings 19:11-13). Nudge her to be quiet, so she can hear you without the interruption of beeps and pings. May those around her model a godly life consistent with Christian values so that even wordless messages inspire her above the noise. And if she struggles to hear your voice, use me to convey your promises. Amen.

Dear Jesus, so many pressures and temptations challenge my grandchild. Although I am here today to model for him, encourage him and equip him to cope, may he also be continually nourished by a Christian community. May he hear messages that line up with your Holy Word. May my grandchild hear your voice above the noise of inner voices that roar. And when distractions consume his attention, may he welcome your presence and value the peace you offer. As he listens, may this precious child fix his eyes upon you as his Savior. Amen.

Prayer Prompts

1. Children sometimes assume that because God is all-knowing and all-powerful that he only wants to hear about heavy or difficult topics. Help your grandchild share with God anything that is on her heart, questions she's thinking about or problems she needs to solve.
2. A child is sometimes puzzled by God's ability to hear our prayers. Remind your grandchild that God will listen, and he will answer. Honestly admit that God's responses might not always be what we want at the time. However, assure your grandchild that God will answer using his time clock, not ours. Pray about something that bothers your grandchild. Pray with him about something that bothers you.
3. Popcorn prayers are especially meaningful at the end of a family supper. After dinner, start by creating a prayer with the words, "Dear Jesus, today I want to thank you for..." Then each person adds one line when their turn comes around. Go around the family several times, each time speaking to Jesus about a different aspect of the day. For example: "Today I was especially grateful when..."; "Today I needed your help to..."; "Today I was disappointed with..."; "Today I was upset by..."; etc. Family members can say "pass" if they have nothing to add.
4. Children sometimes don't know that prayer is a conversation with God. Define conversation as what you are doing right now with her! Your pattern of talking honestly with your grandchild, whom you will love regardless of what she says, is good practice for talking with God. Thank God for the privilege of talking with her anytime, anywhere and about anything.

Remembrances

Our brain processes information using various pathways. This means that what we hear might be better remembered when those sounds are paired with a meaningful experience.

I remember that as a child, I would listen for the garage door closing. Without a single word, that “clunk” communicated “Dad is safely home. Time to sleep.” Today’s world is overloaded with sounds, yet we pray our grandchildren fall asleep away from the noisy clutter.

David, the future king of Israel, might have been a lowly shepherd boy when he wrote Psalm 4. However, the words we hear in verse 8 convey a timeless truth that we should pray for ourselves and teach those we love to pray: “I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me lie down in safety.” A quiet environment helps us to quiet our minds and focus on remembering the many goodnesses of God we associate with sounds and see in our mind’s eye.



Takeaways

1. Young children love to shake containers. Collect empty jewelry boxes, non-transparent pill containers or other small pouches. Insert a small item that will make a sound when the container is shaken. After inviting your grandchild to guess what is making the sound, your grandchild might delight in challenging her parents to guess what item is being heard in each container. This exercise helps with problem-solving.
2. Children often feel that although loved ones might listen, we don't hear what they say. Too often, we interrupt a child to give advice. However, that ruins true dialogue, which is defined as a back-and-forth conversation. Increase the caring factor in your grandparent-grandchild conversations by waiting to share your "pearls of wisdom" until your grandchild is finished talking.
3. Offer honest compliments to your grandchild in front of parents or friends or in any type of social situation (at a restaurant or in a park with people around, for instance). Your grandchild will not only hear but remember the key points of what you say about them.
4. We might be eager to talk, but a grandchild might prefer playing with a friend instead. So offer to cook together to get some dialogue going, and make your grandchild's favorite recipe. Take turns reading the recipe and stirring the pot while you talk and listen. Reading through the line-by-line recipe is a great way to practice active listening.
5. Make eye contact when listening to your grandchild. Eye contact helps all of us focus on what is being said.

God Bless Grandparents

God has truly blessed you as a grandparent with a unique role to play in this stage of your life. Let this booklet of prayers, reflections and remembrances designed just for you help you as you live out your faith with your grandchildren, other family members and friends. Author and educator Dr. Mary Manz Simon will guide you through these pages as she writes lovingly from her own experiences as a grandmother.

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