***Parenting Your Adult Children:***

***Un-emptied Nests • Becoming In-laws • Grandparenting***

David & Lucy Burggraff

Shepherds360 Conference • October 16-18, 2023

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Introduction**

Among the many changes during the last forty years, none has affected parents more than the not-so-empty nest. Adult children used to leave the home “nest” shortly after finishing high school. But by the early 1990s, 55 percent of young people ages eighteen to twenty-four were living with parents. Today, **one-in-three U.S. adults ages 18 to 34 live in their parents' home**, according to U.S. Census Bureau data from 2021. However, this was not in the script for many midlife parents who were looking forward to having more time for themselves and each other—hence, this presentation. Let’s begin with some “basics” before we address the “specifics” of this presentation.

**Family: It’s Importance to God**

The definition of a *family* that most of us have grown up with would read something like the following:

**fam-i-ly** \ ‘fam-(e-)le \ *n, pl* **-lies . . . 5:** the basic unit in society having as its nucleus two adults (husband & wife) living together and cooperating in the care and rearing of their own or adopted children.

But that definition is becoming obsolete. A significant shift has occurred in people’s thinking over the last twenty-five years. The family has given way to society’s moral innovations. Yet God’s purposes and guidelines for families are relevant for all times and cultures. Observe how central the role of “family” is in God’s program.

I. The physical family first appears in Scripture as God’s provision for human companionship and generation. From Gen 2 we learned that the family was designed by God, and initially consisted of man & wife.

II. But before the first family even had an opportunity to grow, before children were even born to the first family, the couple fell into sin: introduced death, disruption, discord (as a result, families would now experience widowhood, strife, conflict, difficulties) – the human saga.

III. Interesting, the rest of Genesis is about families. (Brothers Cain and Abel, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Lot and his family, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, etc.)

One cannot read the book of Genesis without a depressing awareness of what a deeply flawed institution the family is in a fallen world. The family stories in Genesis are stories of squabbling spouses, sibling rivals, and deceitful children who have a tendency to thwart their parent’s dreams for them. . . . Yet a final image of the family in Genesis provides a message of hope. . . . From the beginning, then, Scripture establishes the family as the social unit into which God put human beings and the channel through which He deals with them. The family is an inherently ambivalent image of disappointment and struggle on the one hand, and of hope on the blessing on the other. (P. 265, *Dict. of Biblical Imagery*)

IV. Family motif is carried through the OT and the entire NT: we are called “sons of God”, great theological truths such as “born again”, “adoption”, “bride of Christ”, etc. are all family terms; the writers of the epistles refer to their fellow believers as “brothers” and “sisters” in the Lord more than a hundred times.

V. This tells us that the Bible is the story about God’s family from beginning to end. God made families in the first place partly as a biological and social basis for the human race and partly as the channel of His grace and judgement.

**Marriage . . . through Four Stages of Life**

**Stage One: Inception –The Foundational Years (Psalm 127:1-2)**

The emphasis is on the importance of a proper foundation. A proper foundation, as intended by God, is given in Gen 2:24-25 (ref. also Eph 5:31).

1. A proper foundation involves *severance* (v. 24) –

• This does **not** mean: (1) that only a man is to do this (the man is mentioned as representative), but the woman as well; (2) to abandon, forsake (that you no longer talk to them, dishonor) parents; (3) a geographical location.

•This **does** mean: (1) My dependency on my parents has to cease, now we establish a “peer” relationship; (2) Dependency for my needs now shifts from parents to my mate, my spouse is where I turn to take care of my physical needs, my home needs, my security as a wife, my support financially, etc. (3) This new relationship is the priority relationship in my life (above parents, work, anyone else).

1. A proper foundation involves *permanence* (v. 24) –

Rf. Mark 10:7-10 = “cleave” term was used by Moses to speak of a disease ‘clinging’ to you. (Job said his skin ‘cleaves’ to him.)

• It involves duties; meeting a mate’s needs, affections, etc.

• Each assumes their own responsibilities; divorce is never an option, even to mention it. (“Till death do us part”, “not “Till debt do us part”; Also, not “Till interest fades . . . Till the excitement is gone.”)

1. A proper foundation involves *unity* (v. 24) – *“one flesh.”*

• Unity is a process – not instantaneous; it develops over a lifetime.

• Unity is not uniformity – It is not my right/goal to change her/him.

• Unity is two different people uniting so as to strengthen each other (complement [complete] each other).

• Unity touches all areas: (1) sexually, (2) spiritually, (3) socially

• Unity has hindrances.

1) Selfishness – “I want to do what’s important to me.”

2) Pride – lack of self-sacrifice

3) Lack of communication

4) Lack of concern for my mate’s needs.

IV. A proper foundation involves *intimacy* (v. 25) – *“naked . . . not ashamed”*

No barrier between them . . . no hindrances physically, emotionally; willing to open up completely.

**Stage Two: Increase – The Expansion (Child-rearing) Years**  **(Psalm 127:3-5)**

I. From God’s perspective: children are a *blessing*. (v. 3; “gift”, “fruit”, “reward”, “a heritage of the Lord”) The children in your home are (looking back, they were) God’s gifts to you. As such:

 A. They (each) are uniquely designed by God. (Ps 139:13-16).

B. There are/were no “accidents” with God. (No “unwanted” children with God.)

APPL: What kind of message are you sending to your children? If in fact they are gifts from God, do they know that? How do your children perceive themselves in the context of your life? Do they see themselves as burdens (money, time, etc.) or blessings? Do you remind them they were answers to your prayers? (Adoptive parents often do this).

II. From a parent’s perspective: children are a *stewardship*. As such:

A. God has placed them in our homes as a treasured trust.

B. Your child reflects your care for him or her, and indeed, of your own character.

(Ex: 2 Kings 17:41– “To this day, their children and grandchildren continue to do as their fathers did.”; Deut. 4:40 – “That it may go well with you and your children after you.”)

C. He intends for us to take care of them until they are mature and old enough to be directly responsible to Him. *Therefore, they are ours for only a little while; they are His forever!*

D. As parents, we are working in partnership with God to bring our children from a self-centered lifestyle to a God-centered (and others) basis for living. (Deut. 4:9-10; 6:4-7; Prov. 22:6)

III. From the child’s perspective: *a learner*; then an “*appreciator*.” (Eph 6:1, 2-3)

Notice: The child’s role is to carry out two all-encompassing commands from God.

A. *“Obey my parents!”* (Eph 6:1) [“listen to”, under the parent’s teaching/instruction]

B. *“Honor my parents!”* (Eph 6:2-3; i.e., obey my parents with an attitude of honor).

“Honor” = *timao*; means to reverence, hold in awe, to value at a high price. (Word is used to describe Jesus’ attitude toward the Father in John 5:23.) OUR ATTITUDE ALL LIFE LONG!

IV. From eternity’s perspective: children are *extensions of your life* (testimonial about you). (vs.4-5, “arrows”)

**Stage Three: Intimacy – The Relational Years (Psalm 128:1-3)**

It is during the years after our children arrive, while they are growing, ***even after they leave the nest***, that we begin to see why it is so important to build our homes upon the Lord. Emphasis is upon:

I. Proper relationships between mates (128:1-3a). [Ref. S. of Sol 2:14-16; Eph. 4:25-32; 5:21-31; 1 Pet 3:1-7]

II. Proper rearing of children (128:3b).

Parents are the primary molders of the values (and ethics) of their children. So, be a model of what you want your children to become. Express approval and demonstrate acceptance (i.e., unconditional love). Remember that character-building is “Job One” for parents. Therefore, teach children/teens about the “law of natural consequences” (i.e., that there are consequences for the words we speak, the friendships we cultivate, the lifestyles we adopt, and our faith-walk with God). And guide your children/teens/college-ager through the hard lessons of life. Pray for your children. And pray even harder as they leave the nest!

When it comes to parenting, we are being sold a bill of goods by our culture, and too many parents are buying into it: the idea that “everything will work out fine.” The result is that parents can grow apathetic to the needs of their children as they become preoccupied with their work, careers, and comforts. All the while, our children are crying out because they have needs . . . and only parents can meet those needs.

**Stage Four: Impact – The Twilight Years (Psalm 128:4-6)**

This is the stage of life where couples face the empty nest, aging, retirement, even death of a life-long mate. If you have been building on the Lord, you can face these difficult trials. Now, let’s get to the specifics:

I. How are you doing when it comes to parenting your adult children?

II. How are you doing as a grandparent?

III. What kind of legacy are you leaving?

**When the Nest Isn’t Emptying**

In our Western world, especially in America, the definitions of adulthood are often determined by federal and state laws (18-21 years old). In American society we used to have predictable times and means for marking the transition to adulthood, such as finishing high school, getting married, having children, owning a home, and settling into a career. Indeed, for many families, kids graduating from secondary education and leaving their parent’s homes to become college students, and their eventual strides toward financial independence equaled adulthood.

But times are changing, and the perception of adulthood is also changing. When college or other advanced education became the norm for a large share of American men and women, the deferral of adulthood began. Young people delayed marriage, had their children when they were older, and started careers later. The result: today, kids and parents are at a loss to define when kids officially become adults.

Today as Generation Xers, Gen Yers (now also Gen Zers) finish their schooling, they are not always ready to tackle the challenge of jobs and families. In their inability or reticence, they are creating a new phase of life between independent childhood and independent adulthood. And some see them as doing this on purpose. Career counselors summarize it this way: “Many of the students we work with are planning to return home after college. It’s not viewed as a last resort. It’s part of a plan.”

Without the former benchmarks to concretely mark the transition, it’s becoming more difficult for young people to think of themselves as adults, and it’s equally hard for their parents. The perception of early adulthood is often deeply entwined with a feeling of autonomy, which certainly seems to be on the decline over the last few decades. While many parents may want a clear definition for when their kids become adults or they long for the day that the proverbial flip switches, their parenting style could have a profound effect on how and when that happens.

In today’s society, overprotective parenting, helicopter parenting, drone parenting, strict parenting, or toxic parenting often present a direct challenge to that transition. If parents don’t give their children the opportunity to make their own decisions, the latitude to make and learn from their mistakes, and the space they need for proper development, it’ll be almost impossible for their children to understand what it truly means to be an adult. Warning: If a parent(s) fits the above categories during the child’s teen/college years, it’s likely to continue into adulthood.

As mentioned above, three to four decades ago, the usual rites of passage for adult children were financial independence, marriage, having children or buying a new home. But within the last few decades, these milestones are simply out of reach for many and being put off entirely for one reason or another. The reasons for staying with or boomeranging back home to live with parents often make sense, though they don’t lighten the parents’ duties. In a society of fewer shared values and greater ideological conflict, many young people feel anxious and pessimistic, and they want to extend the transition to adulthood and independence. For other young adults the high cost of higher education keeps them homebound. All the while they are making the home nest a very busy place.

These young people who move home can be divided into two groups: the ***planners*** and the ***strugglers***. The planners expect to return home and to live there until they are ready to marry and raise a family. The strugglers simply go home. They don’t want to struggle alone and need the security of home.

**It's a Question of Expectations . . . But Whose Expectations?**

What we have been talking about so far is the matter of expectations. We parents often have some expectations that are very different from those held by our adult children. What we consider to be failure or immaturity may be regarded in a completely different light by our adult children. They may see their actions as careful planning, as normal and necessary steps in achieving their goals. As a result, parents can find themselves in confrontations with their adult children over dashed expectations.

Perhaps your children have given you disappointment, frustration, and concern from one of the following situations: doing poorly in college, wasting time and money; Finishing college, but then wandering and/or moving back home for a while to “get their feet on the ground”; having a marriage end in divorce in a few years, perhaps moving back home with a child or two; spending far beyond their means; buying a home they cannot afford or making large, unwise purchases; or making lifestyle and employment choices that turn out disastrously.

**The Parental Quandary**

Now that those children are seemingly adults, they are not living in ways that you consider “adult.” When you find yourself in such a situation, you are having to deal not only with your child but also yourself. If you take time to look inside, you will find some conflicting emotions that affect your relationship with your child. All parents have these mixed feelings to an extent, but for you just now they are heightened by the behavior of your child. In addition to the love and hopefulness you feel for your adult child, you also are experiencing some level of guilt and anxiety about your own role as parents. You may be asking yourself, “Is it my fault? Where did I/we go wrong?” You may even be thinking of some specific incidents and wondering if they were the catalysts that derailed your child. This combination of guilt and anxiety can cause you to react inappropriately toward your adult child in one of two ways.

**Becoming Permissive**

This happens when parents feel so guilty about past mistakes that they allow the adult child to manipulate them and to give in to unreasonable demands.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Becoming Angry and Argumentative**

Fear and anxiety can cause feelings of anger. Guilt can easily affect the anger until it controls the parents’ reactions of disappointment toward the adult child. Wrongly handling your anger can harm, even be permanently destructive to the parent-child relationship.[[2]](#footnote-2) Also, keep in mind what was discussed above: most parents of adult children see the world through a traditional mindset; our children see the world in a vastly different manner. Hence, arguments.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**Helping Your Adult Child (and Yourself) Move Forward—Biblically!**

There are several ways we can deal with our own adult children and help them to maturity and biblical behavior.

**• Understand the Young Adult Child’s Point of View**

Have you noticed the tremendous gap between the mind-sets of contemporary parents and their young adult children? Parents see the world through a more traditional mindset; the young adult sees the world in a vastly different manner. The last couple of generations (Gen X, Y) have been influenced to believe that there are no cultural or moral (ethical) absolutes (i.e., post-modernism, and post-Christian). These generations believe to be rich is no more desirable than to be poor. Being married certainly does not bring more happiness than being single. They do not want to be connected to just one person; that is why hanging with friends is so important—they do not want the responsibility of being tied down to one person, at least not now.

So how does a parent relate to an adult child in a constructive manner and not fall into an argumentative pattern that can destroy the relationship? How can you deal with the tension that can alienate your adult children from you. The answer begins by seeking to understand their point of view (note: “understanding” is not the same as “agreeing with”). This requires a willingness to ask questions and then listen with a desire to understand rather than judge. You are not likely to agree with their philosophy of life, their viewpoint, but you can understand it. (Cf. Prov 22:6)

This is a bridge that many parents are unable to cross; they are so bound by their own outlook on life and what they believe to be best for their children that they find it almost impossible to see the world through the eyes of their children. Sometimes we parents must recognize the child’s perspective and admit that we (those of our generation) are at least partly responsible for the problem/confusion.

• **Be Willing to be Vulnerable and Real**

When you are open to discussion you will often receive the child’s respect and often the right to be a mentor. As you/we talk with them openly about their issues and choices, we need to honestly admit our own frustrations and disappointments with life and acknowledge that we have made some poor decisions. Being honest in our own struggles with life’s meaning is a prerequisite to effectively giving any insights we believe will help our children in their search for a meaningful life. Mark it down: Our children can and will dialogue with us as they do with their peers (who they “hang with” with and are comfortable talking with about choices) if we are willing to create the same nonthreatening and nonjudgmental atmosphere.

It is not that young adults are not looking for advice. They WANT advice, encouragement, and support, but from people they respect. If we parents are to serve as their mentors, we must remove the barriers that may have been built in the past and then learn to communicate, not as all-knowing parents but as brothers and sisters in Christ still in the process of learning, and struggling through life as we, too, trust in God for direction and discernment.

• **Recognize That Your Vision Differs from Your Child’s**

Recognize and respect the fact that your child is an individual accountable to God and give them the freedom to think thoughts, dream dreams, and view life differently than you do. According to our biblical worldview, this is what God does with each of us. He gives us freedom to think our own thoughts and make our own decisions, even when we are not in keeping with His. This does not mean our thoughts are as valid as God’s. It does mean that God values human freedom and does not desire to treat us as robots. Our children’s vision of their future and their choices in the future are theirs to make, and we must respect those choices, even if we would not make those same choices, and even if our children must suffer consequences of wrong decisions. (2 Cor 5:10; Eph 6:8; Col 3:24-25)

• **Begin an Honest Dialogue**

You have now opened the door for dialogue. Discuss with your child the implications of choices within that framework and talk about where certain courses of action may lead. At this point, share examples from your experiences—and don’t use them as a club but as a flashlight to identify the realities in the path ahead. Such a dialogue is usually effective. It communicates respect for your adult child’s opinion, helps you understand him/her better, and can help him/her sort through options. This dialogue is a whole lot better than a one-sided lecture!

• **Consider “Tough Love”**

Example: What if they aren’t motivated to find work; you observe no movement toward getting a job? You may have to say, “I’ve (we’ve) been thinking about our conversation some weeks ago. I’ve (we’ve) come to believe that I’m doing you a great disservice to let you continue to live here with me (us) without making any financial contribution. I/We think this is fostering your dependence on us and is hindering you from developing an independent lifestyle. Therefore, starting next month, if you want to continue to live here, you will need to pay $500 for housing and $200 for food. Of course, if you wish to make other arrangements, I/we understand. I/we just believe it is my/our responsibility to do what I/we can do to help you develop an independent lifestyle.”

Remember: tough love is still love!! But remember also, tough love is used only after more congenial approaches have failed. It is not the place to begin.

**Planners and Strugglers: Recognize the Differences and Treat Accordingly**

***Planners*** intend to spend the time at home in *preparation*. Their rationale usually includes saving money, paying school debts, and building a nest egg for the future. They see their parents’ home as a sheltered and inexpensive environment while they seek the perfect job and spouse. Yes, they may seem to be maturing slowly, but the planners are usually savvy in the way they use their resources to their advantage, often without being a burden to their families. Even if/when they don’t hit the right career track right away, they are still working and many of them contribute to household expenses. Evidence seems to indicate that planners generally do well in moving home and preparing themselves financially and socially for a secure future. They add vitality to their parents’ lives, and their relationships with family usually thrive and deepen with mutual respect and understanding.

***Strugglers*** tend to return home out of necessity. Their plans go no further than “living at home for a while.” They find the outside world threatening and don’t want to struggle on their own; afraid to leave the security of home. They simply are not ready for the intense competition and rapid change of today’s society. Young adults who are strugglers have many motivations. Most of them are normal adults who are slow in their maturational process and spiritual growth. If they are handled well by their parents, they will reach the level of maturity and trust in God that is necessary to go out on their own and lead productive and meaningful lives. Often, they simply need more time in the nest. Parents who can respond with understanding will later be delighted and overwhelmingly proud when their children become independent adults.

**Guidelines for the Unempty Nest**

1. *Maintain open communication*. You cannot clarify expectations without having open communication. If you have not, this is the time to begin. Listen carefully to the child’s thoughts, feelings, and desires.

2. *Balance freedom and responsibility*. Emerging adults should have more freedom than high schoolers, but freedom does not preclude responsibility. If they are to live at home, they must assume responsibilities for the welfare and peace of the family. These need to be made in the areas of finance, chores, and common courtesies.

3. *Honor your moral and ethical values*. The personal values of adult children may differ from yours, but it is appropriate to expect your adult child to respect the parents’ values in your house; tell them kindly but firmly.

4*. Consider your own physical, mental, and spiritual health*. Example: Most parents want to know when the adult child will return; otherwise, they worry for his/her safety. If that’s your approach, set an appropriate rule that everyone lets others know when they will be back at night. Know your limitations and take care of yourselves!

5*. Set time limits and goals*. While goals and time limits may need to be renegotiated along the way, it is important to have them in place from the beginning.

**Now Your Nest Is Empty – Hurray or Boo Hoo?**

I think it’s safe to say that the desire of each of us has been to see our children grow up to be confident spiritual adults. Now that we have launched them, our desire is to maintain a loving relationship with them through their adult years. A part of us is rejoicing to see them mature and move forward with their lives. Another part of us is trying to cope with the changes and sense of loss at realizing that that part of our lives is over, and we are moving on to the next set of chapters.

1. One Chapter may be **Living with the In-Laws**.

As a married couple we have had to deal with our in-laws. Now it’s our turn to be the in-laws.

1. Adopt your in-laws into the family.
2. Treat them as your own – address cards, phone calls, checks to both.
3. Make them feel part of the family – invite them to participate in family activities and family decisions.
4. Take an interest in them – celebrate them the same way you celebrate your children. Treat them with the same love and attention.
5. Help married children leave.
6. Stand beside them, not between them – help them see that pleasing their spouse is their priority. Don’t put your child in the middle.
7. Give them adult status – don’t order them around or expect them to help with family projects unless they offer.
8. Don’t monopolize their time (i.e., holidays, vacations) – invite them, but avoid the guilt-trip if they have other plans.
9. Untie the apron strings.
10. Give them to God and let them go. Avoid these controlling tactics:
11. Worry – don’t always check up on them. Let them worry about their children.
12. Second guessing and questioning their decisions – we so want them to succeed that we think we need to share what we have learned. Allow them to make their own mistakes. Allow them to make their own decisions (where to move, how to spend their money, how many and when to have children, etc.).
13. Judging – accept that there will be differences in the way they do things. Respect their family traditions. Accept them for who they are. Instead of criticizing their mistakes, complement their achievements.
14. Competition – avoid the temptation to out-do or out-give the other set of in-laws. Create your own traditions with the couple and their children.
15. Remember that roots are important, but so are wings. Someone said, “love them with open arms.”
16. Be an emotional and spiritual support.
17. Give them your approval.
18. Be yourself and allow them to be themselves.
19. If they’ve made a bad decision, remember it is their decision not yours. There’s a time to affirm love and support and a time to gently confront sin. Knowing the difference takes much prayer and wisdom.
20. Let them know that you pray for them – and then pray!

If we move away from parenting our married children to being friends with our married children, it will go a long way in building a wonderful relationship. They may *actually want to spend time with us*.

1. Another Chapter ~ **Those Not-so-Golden Years**

**Some notable quotes:**

* “Aging seems to be the only available way to live a long life.” Kitty O’Neill Collins
* “You know you’re getting old when you stop to tie your shoelaces and wonder what else you could do while you’re down there.” George Burns
* “I don’t feel old. I don’t feel anything until noon. Then it’s time for my nap.” Bob Hope
* “At age 20, we worry about what others think of us. At age 40, we don’t care what they think of us. Beyond age 60, we discover they haven’t been thinking of us at all.” Ann Landers
* “Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don’t mind, it doesn’t matter.” Mark Twain
* “Old age isn’t so bad if you consider the alternative.” Maurice Chevalier
* “Time may be a great healer, but it is a lousy beautician.” Anonymous
* “Life is like a roll of toilet paper. The closer you get to the end, the faster it goes.” Anonymous

By now we have experienced many changes in our lives. We’ve managed to survive each stage so far – childhood, those confusing teen years, early marriage, raising our children, launching our young adults. Our marriages have come full circle – we are back to where we started, just the two of us. This change has the potential to be the most difficult.

**Some common myths about aging:**

* Myth: Aging means declining health and/or disability.

Fact: There are some diseases that become more common as we age. However, getting older does not automatically mean poor health or that you will be confined to a walker or wheelchair.

* Myth: Memory loss is an inevitable part of aging.

Fact: As you age, you may eventually notice you don’t remember things as easily as in the past, or memories may start to take a little longer to retrieve. However, significant memory loss is not an inevitable result of aging. Brain training and learning new skills can be done at any age to keep our memories sharp.

* Myth: You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.

Fact: Middle-aged and older adults are just as capable of learning new things and thriving in new environments, plus they have the wisdom that comes with life experience.

**Some keys to healthy aging:**

1. Keep your walk with God the primary priority.
2. Spend time with God individually and together.
3. Be faithful to your local church.

3. Find a ministry you can do together.

1. Learn to cope with change. There will be periods of joy and stress.

1. Focus on the things you are thankful for.

2. Keep lines of communication open. Share your feelings.

3. Accept the things you can’t change.

4. Look for the silver lining.

5. Keep a sense of humor.

1. Find meaning and joy. Things have changed, but look forward and not back.

1. Pick up a long-neglected hobby.

2. Learn something new.

3. Volunteer.

4. Travel to new places. Maybe a short-term mission trip.

1. Stay connected.
2. Find a small group in your church.
3. Keep in touch with friends and family.
4. Make an effort to make new friends.
5. Find a support group if needed.
6. Get active and boost vitality.
7. Exercise under a doctor’s care.
8. Eat well.
9. Get plenty of sleep.
10. Keep your mind sharp.
11. Challenge your brain.
12. Vary your habits.
13. Take on a completely new subject.
14. Continue learning to be content. Resolve:

**I WON’T . . .**

~ Bore everybody about my pain, surgeries, medication, etc., etc., etc.

~ Give my children commandments.

~ Make my children feel guilty for not visiting or calling more often.

~ Talk about what foods disagree with me.

~ Let my hair or personal grooming deteriorate.

~ Be impatient with my hard-of-hearing mate.

~ Pick or bicker with my mate over little stuff.

**I WILL . . .**

~ Accept my wrinkles for what they are: God-given experiences.

~ Give my children suggestions.

~ Gladly welcome visits from my grandchildren.

~ Try to eat less and exercise more.

~ Continue to exercise.

~ Keep reading.

~ Keep a ready smile and quick laugh always close to the surface.

There will certainly be challenges as we grow older. Always remember, God knew all about your life before creation. He’s not going to forget about you now. Some verses that have been an encouragement to me through the years ~ Ps. 94:19; Isa. 41:10; Isa. 40:41; Deut. 31:8; Jn. 16:33.

**Grandparenting**

When God’s people were about to enter the Promised land, Moses gave them words of advice. He reminded them – *“Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the Lord our God whenever we call on Him?”* (Deut. 4:6b, 7). Then, this warning was given – *“Only take heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to* ***your sons and your grandsons****”* (Deut. 4:9). God wanted the *“sons”* (children) and the *“son’s sons”* (grandchildren) *“to keep all his statutes and his commandments”* which the Lord had commanded them to keep. (Deut. 6:1, 2)

In the NT we read of Timothy who had a godly mother as well as a godly grandmother Lois. They both made an impact on him according to 2 Timothy 1:5, where the apostle Paul states, “*For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelled in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and, I am persuaded, now is in you as well.*” **Grandparents make a difference . . . they can have a significant impact on their grandchildren!**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

When your children marry, you know you will likely become a grandparent someday. You may even yearn for it, to hold a grandchild in your arms, read to them, play games, spoil them silly—and then send them home and happily say good-bye to parenting at the end of the day.

Maybe you are a grandparent and love it—or maybe you don’t. Some grandparents take the attitude, “I raised my kids, they can raise theirs’ now.” Others think or say, “Don’t call me Grandma—I’m not that old.” Whatever the case, grandparents need to realize that the bond between a grandparent and a grandchild is very important, and **grandparents need to nurture that bond**. If we do not take this responsibility and privilege seriously, both we and our grandchildren are the losers.

There are more grandparents today than ever before, because people are living longer and generally have better health. Current statistics tell us that **there are about 70 million grandparents in the US today, and each month 75,000 Americans 45-69 years old join the club**. Their lifestyle has changed dramatically from that of fifty years ago. In the past, grandparents tended to be “stay at home” kind of people. Modern grandparents regularly travel abroad, can be found on cruise ships and on golf courses, and active in their communities and churches. Formerly, grandparents were considered free baby-sitters whenever and wherever. Today’s grandparents tend to set boundaries to protect their own way of life. Older grandparents were more easygoing and relaxed. Modern grandparents are often uptight and stressed out. Earlier grandparents retired and stayed that way. Modern grandparents tend to choose second and third careers. Grandma and Grandpa used to live in the same town, even on the same street, as their grandchildren. Today’s grandparents may be half a country away. Yet, for all the differences in style, some things remain the same – those roles that the grandparents have.

**The Roles of Grandparents**

● **We are family *historians***.

We are the ones who keep the family tied to its roots and to the past. It seems that as we get older, we become more interested in those who preceded us and we can then share this with the younger family members.

● **We provide *security* and *stability* to grandchildren.**

 • We represent unconditional love, kindness, and understanding. We are non-judgmental counselors.

• We are in the best position to be our grandchildren’s own cheerleaders, to get excited about each one and lift high their self-esteem.

● **We can become their trusted *mentors*.**

 • As grandparents, we can stand for spiritual guidance, wisdom, and strength.

 • Many grandparents choose to pray daily for each grandchild as well as their parents; they know we care.

• We can become role models of a deep spiritual faith that’s Bible-based, Christ-centered, genuine, practical.

Israel’s King Solomon wrote, “*Grandchildren are the crown of the aged*” (Prov. 17:6). Isn’t that the truth?!!

● **We have a different *role* than anyone else.**

• Because our role with them is different than with anyone else, our grandchildren regard us differently than they do anyone else.

• Because of this, we employ those bonds to give them courage, confidence, strength, and faith as they grow.

• This unique, powerful stewardship opportunity and responsibility is definitely our choice how we use our special powers to influence for good these precious, wonderful grandchildren who have come into our lives.

**Two Reminders for Grandparents**

1. They are ***not*** ***your*** children. Two considerations:

● Because you are not their parents, you should never overstep the rights and authority of the parents.

• This means that you need to consult the parents before you give or loan them money, take them to events, or make extravagant plans.

• Similarly, talk to the parents before you give the grandchildren major advice.

 ● A major difference in raising children today is in the means of disciplining children. Be wise and careful!

 • You may have used spanking when your children were young.

• Many parents do not want spanking as part of their disciplining method, and you may need to respect this decision.

• The reasons for this are not necessarily permissiveness; with heightened awareness of child abuse and increased government involvement with families, young parents are wary of how and when they correct their children, especially in public.

• It’s important you know their goals and guidelines; discuss with them discipline, but do not ignore their policies or try to change them.

1. They ***are*** your grandchildren.

● Whether they live close by or at some distance, always keep in mind they are changing and growing.

• Be sensitive to their needs; consult their parents for a better understanding of their abilities and interests, especially if you are not able to visit them regularly.

• This especially applies to gifts and activities. You may want give a gift you think is wonderful or plan a trip with your grandchildren, only to discover the gift is not age-appropriate or the trip is too challenging for their age (or, conversely, they are too old for the gift, or the trip or place they went to as little kids).

 ● Something all grandparents can share is time. Play, read, explore, and spend time listening to them. Find ways to stay in touch and express your love to them regularly (call, write, send texts, facetime, etc.). Do things that are special and fun. Stay connected, even as they grow older (to college). Then they will always be excited when they can be with you and love to go to Nana’s and Papa’s house . . . at any age in their lives.

 ● Treat all your grandchildren in an equitable manner. It is crucial that you show love and attention as equally as you can. Even into adulthood, people never forget when grandparents obviously favored one child in a family over the others, and this can cause conflict among siblings. What we have just said about favoritism applies to stepchildren as well (treat them just as your own flesh and blood).

1. I will use several excellent situations/examples of such behavior from Ross Campbell, M.D. & Gary Chapman, *Parenting Your Adult Child* (Chicago: Northfield Publ., 1999). Situation: Fred and Fran have one son, Tom. When he graduated from college, he took a job near the school, but didn’t enjoy and quit after 6 months. He returned home and has lived with his parents; Tom enjoys spending time with them. When they go our to eat, Fred, of course, picks up all the tabs. And when Tom asks for money, Fred can’t say no. Both guilt and fear control Fred; he thinks he wasn’t a good father to Tom, and he fears that Tom will somehow reject him. Fran strongly disagrees with Fred, she tries to convince him he has been a good father. She also feels he is not helping Tom’s self-esteem. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Situation: John and Pam are parents to 24-year-old Sandy, whose behavior is similar to Tom’s in the above situation. The difference in these families is the John becomes so upset with Sandy’s irresponsibility and credit-card spending since she moved home w/o a job that he occasionally loses his temper and shouts at her, criticizing her inability to “get herself together.” This, of course, hurts her and is breaking communication between them, for days at a time. Meanwhile, as John vents his anger, his wife sees the growing distance between two people she loves dearly. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Situation A great gap between a mother and adult son who often argue. Barbara is upset; her 22-year-old son finished college in May and spent the summer enjoying himself while living at home. It’s now October, he still isn’t looking for work. He spends evenings hanging out with friends, arrives home after midnight, sleeps most of the morning. When he is home, they talk for a while and then he is off to see friends again. Barbara accepted his inactivity for the summer, thinking he needed a break after college. She often wonders what he is going to do; but when she asks Phil about this, he answers, “I don’t know what I want to do.” She doesn’t understand why he won’t try to find a job so he can save some money, get his own place, and begin to “get his feet on the ground.” Any time she talks to Phil, they end up arguing, especially when his response is so unsettling to her: “Why? Why would I want to tie myself down to a regular job at this point in my life? Maybe someday, if I ever have a family, but certainly not now. This is the time to hang loose, experience life, read, think and meditate, and travel.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)