

The Role of Grandparents in Christian Education

from Dr. Paul A. Kienel, Founder & President Emeritus, ACSI

My wife, Annie, and I are the proud grandparents of four of the most remarkable grandchildren you have ever seen! We brag about our grandchildren just like most grandparents. I once asked a friend, "Have I told you about my grandchildren?" He replied, "No, and I appreciate it!" I deserved that!

The Bible says "*Grandchildren are the crown if the aged...*" (Proverbs 17:6). I feel that way about my grandchildren. I think J. Allan Peterson said it best, "Becoming a grandparent is probably the most welcomed sign of aging there is." It is true that grandchildren are a blessed gift to their grandparents. It is also true that grandparents are important to their grandchildren and their parents, and the schools the children attend.

In addition to being "back-up parents" who "babysit" or otherwise take care of the children when their parents are busy, grandparents can have a major spiritual influence in the lives of those children. I recall that it was an "adopted" grandmother, Rose Steudler, who led me to Christ during family devotions when I was seven years old. I remember every detail of that life-changing experience.

In his book, *Conquering Family Stress*, J. Allan Peterson wrote:

"The value of grandparents should not be underestimated. Grandparents frequently have more influence per time invested than do parents because of their unique relationship to their grandchildren. Grandparents are usually more relaxed than parents. This makes them approachable. They concentrate on giving love without the necessity of meting out discipline. Their time with their grandchildren is usually better planned and more intentional than parents' time. All of this adds up to what some social scientists have called 'grandparent phenomenon.' Children catch more of their grandparents' perspective on life than that of their parents. This can be a comfort if you are wondering about the effects of how your children are raising your grandchildren, and you may consider it a call to action to make the most of your time when you are with them." ¹

Permit me to list the ways I am attempting to influence my grandchildren:

1. Spiritually

My two oldest grandchildren received Christ as their Savior at their Christian school in Chino, California. I hope I had a part in preparing them for that most important milestone in their lives during our conversations about Jesus.

2. Joyful Living

Children and grandchildren learn to live by the way we live. If we are joyful, happy people who enjoy living, if we get excited about family adventures, if we get excited at the very sight of our grandchildren and our children when they visit us, our grandchildren will assimilate an attitude about life that is absolutely essential to their emotional stability. Far more than most of us realize, grandchildren are making up their minds about life by watching their grandparents.

3. Grandparental Love

Two summers ago, I was building an oak bookcase in my garage. My three-year-old grandson, Jason, was "helping" me. Quite frankly, he was irritating me more than he was helping me with his nonstop chatter and unanswerable questions. Finally I said, "Jason, I need you to be absolutely quiet for a few minutes while I figure the distance between the shelves of this bookcase." Jason stood there in silence. About half-way through my calculations, Jason broke the silence with these words, "Papa, I love you!" He knew he could get away with that.

I believe in family affection. Children and grandchildren need to be hugged and kissed and told often "I love you." Many emotional problems suffered by adults stem from a childhood where parents and grandparents failed to be generous with those all important words, "I love you."

4. Academic Help

Research from the U.S. Department of Education indicates that children to whom stories are read become better readers.

"The best way for parents (and grandparents) to help their children become better readers is to read to them -- even when they are very young. Children benefit most from reading aloud when they discuss stories, learn to identify letters and words, and talk about the meaning of words."²

Grandparents help their grandchildren academically by speaking positively about the value of learning, by building up the importance of their teachers and principals and speaking favorably about Christian education.

5. Financial Help

Christian schools are grateful for the many grandparents who assist their children in paying a portion or all of the tuition for their grandchildren. Many grandparents stretch to help and it is part of their powerful legacy.

Every Christian school needs a stronger financial base. Those of us who are grandparents often make very personal sacrifices to lighten the financial load of the Christian schools where our grandchildren attend. Christian school educators are also grateful for grandparents who give their time in the school helping in a wide variety of ways. Most important of all, they are thankful for their faithful prayer support without which the Christian school could not survive.

Grandparents are people of extraordinary importance. I think we underestimate how truly valuable they are to the present generation and to the generations to come.

¹ J.Allan Peterson, *Conquering Family Stress*, Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1978. Quoted in the *Encyclopedia of Christian Parenting*, Fleming H. Revell Co., Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1982, p.218.

² U.S. Department of Education. *What Works --Research About Teaching and Learning*, 1986, p.9.