

7 STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING YOUR GRANDPARENTING SKILLS PORTFOLIO

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If you're a grandparent who is invested in growing and enhancing your grandparenting skills portfolio, there are seven strategies worthy of your consideration. The questions below will support you in processing patterns in your life as you seek to be a godly role model to your children and grandchildren, followed with proactive steps to strengthen these relationships. Choose one area from the list below of challenges and one area from the list of callings, and then use the questions or action steps under each as prompts for further self-examination.

3 CHALLENGES that Weaken Your Grandparenting Skills Portfolio:

1 Criticism

Ask yourself:

- Where did I first experience being criticized (or hear others being criticized) in my family of origin and how is that pattern still impacting me today?
- Is it more important to be right about an issue or problem I have with my grandchild or child or to be in a relationship with them?
- Have I accepted that my authority within the family has changed and my role now centers on influence through relationship? If so, what changes am I willing to make?

Action Steps:

- Replace criticism with curiosity and seek to understand what's most important to the parents of your grandchildren.
- Only offer advice or support when asked. Practice listening, empathizing and validating.
- Be flexible and adaptable, practicing forgiveness in an ongoing way, especially when hurt, dismissed, unappreciated, disrespected etc. by your grandchildren or children.
- Pray Ephesians 4:29 daily until there's a breakthrough in your critical spirit: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." Commit this to memory.
- Practice holding your tongue despite seeing your children and/or grandchildren make choices you don't agree with or wouldn't make yourself.
- Turn critical thoughts and concerns into prayers (switching to a vertical focus). Write out and date each prayer. Then watch God work in miraculous ways!

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Competitive

Ask yourself:

- Where did I first experience being competitive in my family of origin and with whom was I compared (or who was competitive with me)?
- What did it feel like when competition was negative rather than positive, proactive and motivating? If there was jealousy driving the competition, what impact did that response have on me and my confidence, motivation, performance, etc?
- What insecurities do I have as a grandparent and how do those insecurities influence my actions and attitudes within the family?
- What boundary have I crossed that contradicts the parent/child relationship and causes tension and relational competition rather than support?
- Have I over-gifted or become over-involved to gain loyalty within the family?

Action Steps:

- Avoid the pitfall of treating your grandchildren equally rather than according to their individual needs.
- Look for opportunities to give your grandchildren experiences to discover and explore.
- Write out Scriptures that speak to your identity in Christ and read them prior to interacting with others in your family who may undermine your confidence and freedom. Claim the truth of Psalm 139:14, “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”

3

Cut Off

Ask yourself:

- Have I apologized or asked forgiveness for past hurts, attitudes, criticisms or wrongs I have brought into my family?
- Through prayer, ask Holy Spirit to reveal anything hidden regarding what I have done (or neglected to do) to create a cut off, even unintentionally. Then consider how this may be contributing to the breakdown in the family.

Action Steps:

- If you've been cut off from your children or grandchildren without a clear explanation, allow yourself to grieve while opening up to one or two confidants. Don't walk this journey alone.
- If you've done something to cause the breach, find a way to communicate with humility while asking (in person, text, letter, voicemail, etc.), “Tell me how I hurt you when I....” Then listen without defensiveness with a goal towards reconciliation.
- Repent and offer an apology for any pain you have caused.
- Avoid unsolicited advice and affirm the choices of the parents of your grandchildren where possible, and practice “zipping it.”
- Respect boundaries even if they seem unfair while remembering that trust is rebuilt over time and not through having your opinions validated or adopted.
- After prayer, respectfully request permission to reconnect with your estranged child or grandchild in a gradual way.
- Buy a journal and write in it things you wish you could tell them: memories, prayers, verses, dreams, etc. Date each entry, which will keep hope alive, as you pray for the day you can give the journal to your estranged or distanced family member.

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4 CALLINGS (ROLES) that Strengthen Your Grandparenting Skills Portfolio:

1 Cheerleader

Ask yourself:

- When was the last time I wrote an affirming message in my handwriting to each of my grandchildren (and/or children)? If it's been over six months, do it again.
- What areas of struggle or failure have my grandchildren (and/or children) experienced recently and how am I reassuring them that things will work out? (Romans 8:28).

Action Steps:

- Write about one area of growth you've seen in each of your grandchildren recently and communicate it to them in real time. [If they don't live nearby, record a video and send it!]
- Affirm their identity with a short video and remind them they're loved not for what they achieve or their performance, but for who they are.
- Use your unique perspective to share insights by sending a message that focuses on their unique gifts, contributions, and personality, not how they're performing in life.

2 Caretaker

Ask yourself:

- What is one conversation I need to have with one or two of my grandchildren that addresses an area in their lives where I can come alongside as support?
- What have I learned from listening to my grandchild's conversations that concerns me, and then make it a matter of daily prayer.

Action Steps:

- Make a list of one item of yours that you will give to each grandchild to remember you. Determine when and how you will give it to them.
- Welcome tears, confusion, angry outbursts, even failure--without judgment.
- Communicate words of support: "You don't have to be perfect. You can always tell me the truth, because I love you. I'm just glad you're here and we're talking."
- During times of disruption in your grandchild's life, ask questions before you give advice: "Would you like me to just listen or do you want some ideas?"

3 Coach

Ask yourself:

- What is one hobby or skill I can teach each of my grandchildren that will be helpful to them?
- What is one story I can share with each of my grandkids that I learned the hard way or failures I experienced, including lessons I gleaned as a result?

Action Steps:

- Name a book (other than the Bible) you can challenge each of your grandchildren to read.
- Think of three things that concern you the most that your grandchildren are currently facing or will face (dating, purity, substance use, friendships, technology, social media, etc.) and plan for how will wisely caution them.

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Chaplain

Ask yourself:

- What am I specifically doing to fulfill the exhortation in Deuteronomy 4:9, “Be diligent and do not forget the things your eyes have seen and do not let them depart from your heart all the days of your life, but make them known to your children and your grandchildren.”
- What generational patterns/curses, health issues, or other important information do my grandchildren need to know? When and how will I tell them about those things?
- What stories can I share with my grandchildren about significant spiritual experiences in my life and mentors who supported me in my spiritual growth along the way?

Action Steps:

- Share your favorite life verses with each grandchild, putting them in written form for them to keep.
- Name your favorite hymns and songs, and then play them for your grandchildren, explaining how they have specifically helped you. [Find the songs on YouTube and send the links so they can enjoy the songs in real time with you!]
- With your children’s permission, take your grandchild to a spiritually rich experience outside of your church or their local church, whether it be a concert, seminar, conference, etc. Then share stories of impact afterwards.
- Tell each of your grandchildren your path to knowing Jesus and Savior and Lord. Be specific about any struggles or difficulties you faced in the process of making Him first (in an age-appropriate way, of course).
- Take your grandchild on a missions experience where you serve together in reaching others in a sacrificial way.

As grandparents, we have a unique opportunity to positively shape our grandchildren’s lives.

By recognizing our challenges and embracing our callings, **we can nurture our family and find fulfillment in our role as grandparents.**

In doing so, **we leave a legacy of love, wisdom, and faith that will guide future generations.**