

THE AWESOME & INCREDIBLE PRIVILEGE OF GRANDPARENTING

By Ila McIlvain

He did not choose us to do small things. He chose us to touch people with His love (Lev. 19:34); to see lives changed (Luke 4:18,19); to raise the next generation of God's people (Deut. 6:7); to exhibit His life in all we do and say (Rom) 8:9,10)...

“So, Zeyna, tell me what happened at school this week” I asked our little 8-year old granddaughter who lives and goes to school in Muskat, Oman – nearly 7000 miles from Cheyenne, WY where her grandpa, Bill and I live. “Well, grandma” Zeyna responded after a long pause . . . ‘have you ever heard of the Romans?’ “Yes, I have heard of them.” “Well” . . . another long pause. . . “they have numbers and we had to do math with them!” Grandparenting often bring chuckles, rays of sunshine and sometimes a tear or two into our lives. We have four children and ten grandchildren ranging in ages from eight to twenty-one. Each one unique and each one loved unconditionally. Regardless of the uniqueness of each child, God has given grandparents a huge responsibility.

What is a grandparent? Well, Grandparents come in all sizes, shapes and temperaments. They are short and tall, thin and chubby, rich and poor, active and inactive, demonstrative and reserved. Grandparents are a big smile filled with love and eyes filled with hope and pride. They` are often known as ‘spoilers’, letting grandchildren eat more sweets, roast more marshmallows and stay up later than their parents permit. However, for the believer, being a grandparent is a huge responsibility. God does not suggest, He commands that we . . . “reveal these truths, things we have heard and known that our fathers taught us so we can describe these glorious deeds of God to our children . . . that they may teach their children; in order that each succeeding generation might know . . .” (Ps 78) and that we “Write these commandments that I’ve given you today upon your hearts. . . Teach them to your children diligently. Talk about them wherever you are, sitting in home or walking in the street, talk about them from the time you get up in the morning to when you fall into bed at nigh . . . “ Deut. 6 That pretty well dispels any passing thought that the empty nest means a relinquishment of responsibilities, doesn’t it?

When our first granddaughter was born in 1985 and ten days later we welcomed our first grandson, life changed. The McIlvain household has never been the same. First there were diapers, burp clothes, pacifiers; these were soon followed with stuffed animals, pull-toys, a high chair and crib. And all too soon – cell phones, ipods, e-mail and cars! An additional five granddaughters and three more grandsons have been welcomed into the family circle. Each grandchild was placed on earth, not just to warm our hearts, but we know God had a special plan for each life.

How can we as grandparents do our part to ‘teach them diligently’, ‘reveal these truths’, and ‘describe His might and wonders’ in order that ‘each succeeding generation may know’? This is a tremendous responsibility requiring, among other things, prayer, love, a worthy example, ample hugs and effective communication.

Each family develops its own uniqueness. Let me share a few thoughts and examples of how God has guided and helped us in our role as grandparents to develop our own McIlvain uniqueness:

PRAYER

- ✓ Specifically, individually, consistently. Our daughter-in-law, Dana, delights in sharing with her friends that even though she was born and raised in a non-Christian environment, she was delighted to learn that for many years she had been prayed for as we asked God to provide a Godly wife for our son and a Godly mother for our grandchildren. She found the Lord during her high school years and God answered our prayers. Now we are praying for Godly spouses for each of our ten grandchildren and Godly parents for any great-grandchildren God may send to bless and enrich our lives.
- ✓ We also pray for Godly friends. The world in which our grandchildren are growing up is so very different from the world we knew as children and teenagers. We ask God to send His special angels to build a wall of protection around each of them spiritually, physically and emotionally. We pray for their parents as they train them in the way they should go. Most of all we plead with God for their salvation and their walk with Him; we passionately desire that the family circle be complete throughout eternity.
- ✓ When a grandchild or grandchildren spend the night with us they delight in hearing stories from Grandma’s Gospel, a special devotional book with thought provoking questions at the end of each grandma/Gospel story. Followed by bedtime prayers; letting our grandchildren hear us pray for the specific needs of each grandchild. And even the youngest know that we are praying for Godly choices, friends and spouses in their lives.

HAVE FUN – BUILD MEMORIES

- ✓ When our family gathers, we have an abundance of fun. Our family is so blessed with a spirit of camaraderie, a wealth of creative minds and adventuresome spirits. Barbeques, hikes, McIlvain Olympics (with people and with stuffed animals), table games, yard games, water balloon fights and a myriad of innovative activities fill our days when we gather.
- ✓ The favorite of our 8-year old grandson is family baseball games – our own unique rules, special spots in our big backyard designated as bases and everyone cheering everyone.
- ✓ Our creative 11-year old grandson plans, writes, directs plays. Last summer it was a full fledged production of the Wizard of Oz – with neighbors and family gathered to enjoy the yellow brick (crepe paper) road, transformed refrigerator boxes and all that made for a fantastic

production. But the real value was listening and watching as grandchildren memorized, made costumes, decorated, advertised, practiced and performed.

- ✓ Most memories we build have little or no cost associated with them. However, once in awhile Grandpa (Bill) wanted a special day with our four youngest grandchildren and decided to take them to Estes Park, Colorado to fish at Trout Haven, a fully stocked pond with a 'no catch and release rule'. Well, the fishing went great; grandpa was busy untangling, helping with worms, teaching how to watch the bobber and reel in, noting which grandchildren love to put their own worms on and which ones refused to touch a worm or a fish. It was a great day filled with lasting memories. Oh, and the total bill at seventy-five cents an inch!-- \$176 . . . worth every penny.
- ✓ Last Christmas instead of a great deal of gift giving, each family member had one other family member's name and filled a stocking – can you imagine our surprise when a granddaughter said, "This was so much fun since we really don't NEED anything, so let's do this every year!"

SHARE GOD'S CREATION

- ✓ When I asked our granddaughters in Oman what they wanted to do in the summer when they came home, "Go to the greenway and watch the sunsets" was near the top of their list – a family favorite after dinner. We talk about all the colors God uses to paint His beautiful pictures for us to enjoy.
- ✓ In Children's Letter to God a little boy wrote: *Dear God, My grandpa says you were around when he was a little boy. How far back do you go? Love, Dennis.* On a daily basis when our grandchildren are near we pass on to them our thanksgiving for His creation – the stars, clouds, rainbows, mountains, flowers, rivers, animals --- just a word to remind them and us "God is so good. . . all the time". And a good reminder that God, indeed has been around a long, long time!

SET AN EXAMPLE

- ✓ Every grandchild knows that we, as their grandparents, love each other and we are committed "til death due us part". And we love each of them fully and unconditionally.
- ✓ Attending church is not an option; giving of our tithes and offerings is a joyful expression of our love for our Savior.
- ✓ Hospitality is a gift that anyone can practice. Our grandchildren and their friends are always welcome to our home, our refrigerator and our hot tub!
- ✓ One Christmas Day Bill was in the hospital, a granddaughter was working at the same hospital as a CNA and the family decided to spend the day bringing cheer into the lives of those confined – we all went up and down the halls singing Christmas carols and even added an enactment of "We Three Kings" . . . it brought smiles to many lonely faces, warmed hearts and set an example.

- ✓ Another Christmas we gave each grandchild a gift card – indicating funds had been sent in their name to buy school supplies for a needy child in another part of the world.
- ✓ Each grandchild was challenged to EARN ten dollars to provide lunches for a school in Kabul Afghanistan.
- ✓ From time to time we buy identical devotional books for our grandchildren. One set for the older ones and another set for the younger. Inside we put notes encouraging each one to have his or her daily devotions and to hold each other accountable as well discuss what they read and what God is teaching them.

So, Zeyna, yes grandpa and grandma have heard of the Romans, we've even seen, and on occasion had to memorize, their numbers. What fun you and your cousins bring into our lives. We earnestly seek, with God's help, to do our part to pass on to you grandchildren and to future generations the praiseworthy deeds of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Short or tall, rich or poor, thin or chubby---grandparenting is an awesome, incredible experience – may God grant us an abundance of His wisdom for the task.