



Our Lord Jesus Christ the King November 25, 2012 B

A grandfather shares six foundational gifts grandparents can give their grandchildren

The following article is by Tom McQueen, an award-winning author and the founder of LegacyNationUSA.com.

Plain and simple, my three-year-old grandson owns me. I was pulling Ethan in his favorite red wagon to the neighborhood park last week, and when we arrived, he hopped out of his seat, looked up at me, and slowly stretching his arms across his chest, smiled and said, “I love you, Grandpa ... not this big, and not this big, and not this big, but T-H-I-S — B-I-G.”

Grandchildren shower us with the riches of unconditional love and affection. Their words can heal a lifetime of suffering; their hugs can rejuvenate a broken spirit.

For those who consider grandparenthood and sacred vocation, that awareness prompts us to ask, *What can we share with our grandchildren today that will enrich their lives as they journey toward tomorrow?* After 25 years as a marriage and family therapist and now, as I embrace my new life as a grandfather, I believe that there are six foundational gifts that we can give our grandchildren as an ongoing legacy.

FAITH

Nothing matters more. In a world of instant gratification and a what’s-in-it-for-me? attitude, helping our grandkids to discover, accept, and share the love that God has for them creates a framework for healthy self-esteem and positive interpersonal relationships as they grow up.

The inquisitive mind of a young child is fascinating and miraculous. *Why?* is a question that gets asked repeatedly by the prekindergarten crowd. Having lunch in the food court at the mall recently, I was sitting at a table next to a grandmother with two young granddaughters. One of them inquired, “Grandma, why did God make me?” In a hurry to finish her meal and get to the next store, she replied, “Not now, honey. When you go to church, you can color in your Bible book.”

No matter the time or the place, never miss a faith opportunity with your grandchildren. A simple response

like, “God made you and your sister because he loves you so much,” would have answered the question at the moment, while encouraging more discussion at a later time.

CHARACTER

In my seminars throughout the country, I routinely question grandparents about what kind of legacy they want to leave for their grandchildren. Initially, they talk about family photographs, genealogies, and sentimental objects that are handed down through the generations. Eventually, though, the discussion focuses upon an assortment of intangibles like trust, respect, hope, and integrity.

A grandfather at a diocesan men’s conference in Lincoln, Nebraska, shared this wish: “After I die, I want my grandkids to remember me as a trustworthy man who always tried to do the right thing.” Very few grandparents truly grasp what a monumental impact they have as role models for their grandchildren.

As men and women of faith, the most powerful memories for our grandkids will be the ones defined by our character and commitment to live in the image and the likeness of God.

FUN

It isn’t easy being a kid. There’s parental pressure, peer pressure, school pressure, and it’s all terrible burdensome. Therapists treat children and adolescents for anxiety and eating disorders, drug addiction, major depressive episodes, and a host of other problems and concerns.

As crazy as it sounds, with all the demands that children and teenagers encounter in society today, there’s little time remaining to experience any genuine enjoyment in life. Having fun with our grandchildren can be the best investment we can make in their future. And fun does not have to be the expensive kind. A trip to a playground, collecting shells at the beach, tossing a football in the backyard, or making a beaded necklace in the kitchen are all opportunities to share good times with your grandkids.

As one grandmother confided, “I know that my grandchildren love the presents I bring to their home at Christmas, but the presence that I share with them on the weekends is the greatest gift I can give.”

So you're 2,000 miles apart. What then? My neighbor lives here in Florida while his teenage grandson is in Michigan. They both have computers and discovered a program that facilitates ongoing chess matches. One of the blessings of technology is that it enables us to stay connected with our families and friends despite the distance separating us.

WISDOM

My grandfather was one of my childhood heroes. Every Wednesday morning during summer vacations, we would walk about a half-mile to the local bus stop and ride downtown so he could run his errands.

Before we boarded the bus to go back home, we'd stop at the local five-and-dime, sit at the counter together, and enjoy a root-beer float. I remember being able to ask Grandpa about things that I didn't want to mention to my parents, teachers, or anyone else.

Not only did he give me his opinion and advice, he shared stories with me about people, places, and events that happened in his childhood. Of course, I didn't realize it at the time, but many of those conversations allowed me to acquire a perspective and a frame of reference for my own life as it evolved over the decades.

One of the potent treasures that we can give to our grandchildren is the wisdom we've acquired from navigating the obstacles and challenges that have shaped our lives.

So on your next trip for an ice cream with the grandkids, family visit, or shopping excursion to the mall, don't miss the chance to share with them the mistakes and miracles that you've encountered along the way—your wisdom will be a hope and a help to them for years to come.

ENGAGEMENT

Last fall, I was moderating a retreat for junior-high-school students. When we broke into small groups, I asked about a dozen sixth-graders what their grandparents could do for them that would make them happy.

One of the girls said, "I want Grandma and Grandpa to come to my piano recital next week." A young boy wanted a baseball glove for his birthday. Nothing was unusual about their requests until we reached the last girl in our group, Elizabeth. With tears in her eyes, she said, "My grandparents would make me happy if they would just talk to me."

Communication is to family dynamics what blood is to the body. Anybody can claim to be a grandparent, but that is a role, not a relationship. Genuine engagement with our grandkids is nurtured with an investment of time and conversation.

Considering that mothers and fathers average about nine minutes a day in meaningful dialogue with their children, grandparents become valuable resources in keeping their grandkids connected to real-life learning experiences, rather than allowing them to be held hostage in the solitary prison of television and Internet addiction.

IMAGINATION

According to Albert Einstein, "Imagination is more important than knowledge." creativity is becoming a lost art among children. With so much manufactured stimulation in their environments, God's precious gifts of intellect, emotions, and will become paralyzed, and kids lose their capacity to invent and innovate.

What grandparents can do is give their grandkids the tools they need to capitalize on the power of their imagination. For example, don't buy toys that just require children to push buttons or watch a DVD. Instead, encourage open-ended toys that they can decide how to use, like building blocks, animal figures, puppets, and dolls.

In addition, activities like coloring, cooking, and painting are all things that can be shared with grandkids. And, of course, storytelling is the cornerstone of imaginative development.

When Jesus traveled the countryside sharing stories with his followers, it was abundantly clear how he felt about children when he said, "Let the children come to me and do not hinder them ... whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it" (Luke 18:16).

For the grandchildren who color our world as blessings sent from God, it's our privilege and responsibility to endow them with a heritage of faith, character, wisdom, fun, engagement, and imagination.

Have a blessed week,

