

Years ago I dreaded any discussion with a grandmother and her photo album of her grandchildren. It would mean endless hours of listening about little ones that I had never met. Amazingly to my surprise, was my own reaction, when, just after the birth of my first grandchild, a boy, I produced three albums of one hundred and fifty photos each, one hour after the birth! As a photographer and then new grandma, I was asked to take a video and photos of the new baby.

I have had to repent my lack of grace and impatience over so many years with other grandparents. I fell in love with this boy, my grandchild, instantly. It felt like I had never loved like this before in my entire life. The possibility of how love can be expressed has been made wider and wider by the day as this boy has grown older and older. When the second baby was to be born, I wondered where I would find love again for this little one, a girl. I asked many grandmothers this question and their answer was, *"You don't have to look far, it will come."* Surely this has been true as she is so different to the older boy. She is so expressive and demanding of love that I have had no choice but to love her in a very deep way too. Now the third one is on its way and I am more convinced than ever that I will also have the right love for this child. But joy brings responsibility and we have to pass on a heritage to our grandchildren. Dietrich Bonhoeffer declared more than sixty years ago that *"A righteous man lives for the next generation."*

I soon realised that God has a specific plan with grand parenting. He has designed a way to accomplish a deeper dimension in a child's life for a specific outcome, a way to affect generations. Grandparenting is God's invention. The family is not the end in and of itself. It becomes the means to an end that is

greater than itself. It becomes the vehicle through which people can effectively contribute to the well-being of others.

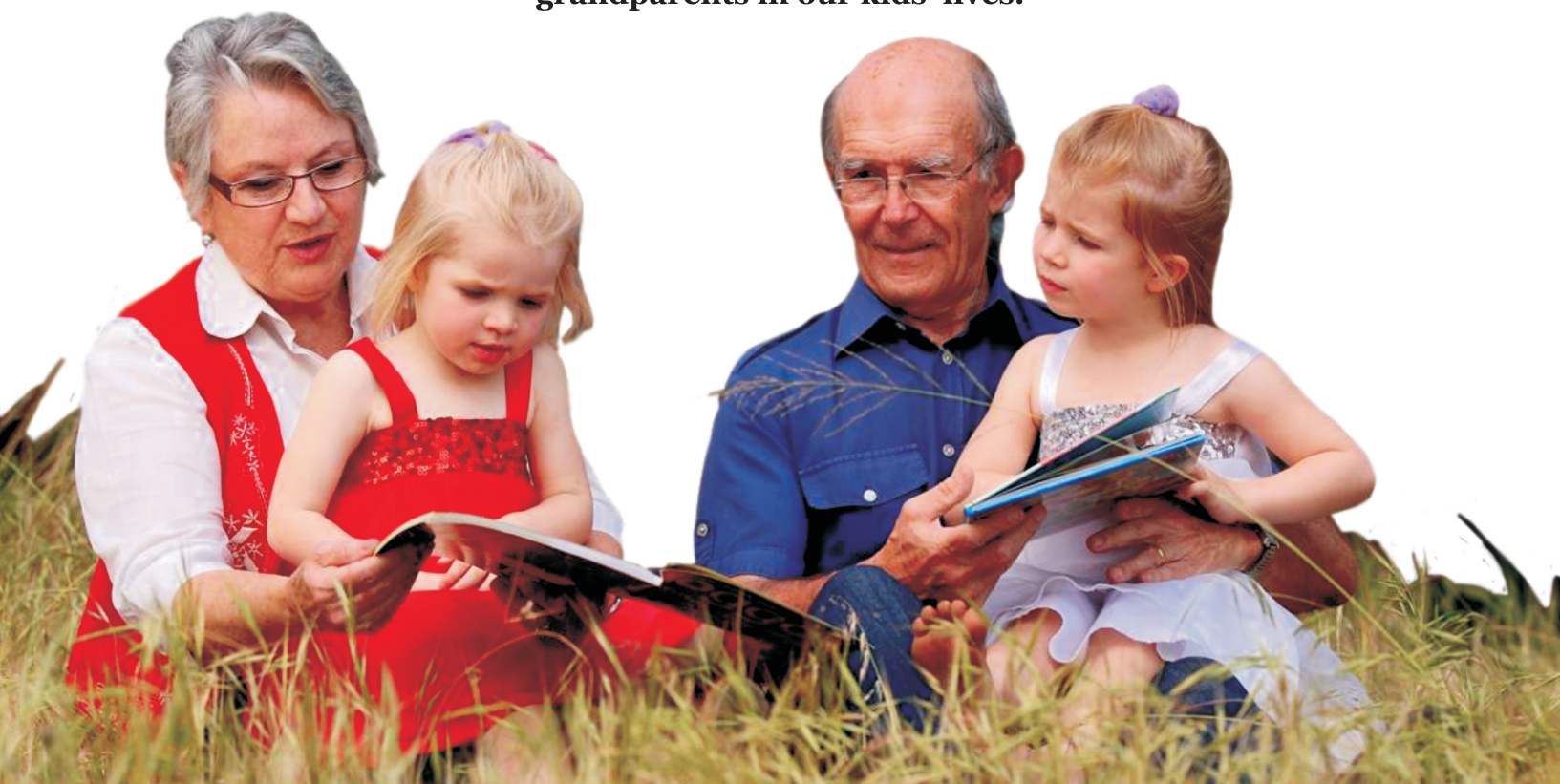
When we are raising our children we are so concerned with surviving and with everything they do. We wonder, *"what will they become, will they make their grades, will they be successful in life, will they find a life partner?"* Parents tend to be so focused on the problems to be solved rather than on being *"vision-minded"*, that they tend to miss the blessing of the parenting process. The difference between parenting and grandparenting for me is the moving on from problem-solving to future contribution and fulfilment, from survival to significance. When you have raised your own children, and you can see all their good qualities in your grandchildren, you know that they're going to be fine. It is like you suddenly understand what made a person... not education so much but a life filled with good values. We can co-partner with God in living values in the midst of an unstable world. We need to fight the opposition in our children and grandchildren's lives. (Nehemiah 4:14)

We need to live by good values now more than ever because the world is in such a state of moral and spiritual decline. As a result, there is an even greater battle for the hearts and the minds of our grandchildren than ever before. The enemy is trying to steal their lives and the plans God has for them. The attack is not just on our faith and their faith, but is also seeking to destroy the morals of the country and family unit. We need to pray for our grandchildren, *"The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results."* (James 5:16c). As in Ezekiel 22: 30 we need to rebuild the *"walls of righteousness that guard the land."*

History is full of evidence of where grandparents have helped discover the

God's best invention... ***Grandparents and Great Grandparents!***

MARTIE DU PLESSIS reminds us not to under-estimate the importance of grandparents in our kids' lives.



purpose in a grandchild and pursued it through dedicated prayer and service and resources. Lillian Ann Penner in her book *“Grandparenting for a Purpose”* encourages grandparents to have photo journals of their grandchildren with prayer requests. Her oldest granddaughter writes, *“Your phone calls, cards, and emails were encouraging and made a significant impact in my life, especially in my teenage and college years. Your prayers and encouragement have been rock-solid reminders of God’s truth in my incredible, crazy life-shaping years, and now in my married life. Your prayers help me surrender the craziness of my life to God”*.

This explains the crucial role grandparents can play in the lives of their adolescent grandchildren. A recent study in the *Journal of Family Psychology* showed that children aged nine to eighteen with a strong grandparent bond have fewer behavioural problems and better social skills than those who lack that relationship. *“Grandparents provide stability,”* says Shalhevet Attar-Schwartz, lead author on the *Family Psychology* article and a researcher at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. *“They take on multiple roles for their grandchildren: caregiver, playmate, adviser, mentor and friend.”* Perhaps at no time in recent history has this bond been more important.

The most powerful tool to influence the lives of our grandchildren is the way we live our lives. We can demonstrate the reality of our faith by walking with God and others and by setting an example. Our grandchildren will mirror our walk, whatever it is. God wants us to pass on a spiritual legacy to the next generation. Although I am not a camper, whenever I can, I make time and I go camping with my grandchildren. They live in a pretty setting next to a mountain near Golden Gate just outside Clarens, so even if I just camp next to their home, it gives me opportunities to build relationship so as to have influence when they are bigger and mature enough to receive greater input. Spending quality time with my grandchildren is a way to spend my time fruitfully. Our grandchildren will not have time for us when we get older if we do not have time for them when they are young.

We like to give gifts to our grandchildren, but the greatest gift we can pass on to them is the gift of prayer. Hear what this young man said about his ninety-eight year-old grandmother, *“My grandmother prays for me by name as well as for my wife, children, and grandson every day. She has prayed specifically for us and claimed God’s promises, seeing many of her prayers answered. She has a heart for prayer and has prayed for each of her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, great-great grandchildren, and her extended family members for as long as they can remember. She is the strength of our family and the example of God’s love as a Shepherd who will not rest until each sheep has returned to the flock.”*

When families come for family consultations I can many times sense when a grandparent has been involved in prayer. Such a life is marked with stability and direction. It is like this person has an extra investment to draw from—a spiritual trust fund. *“Our prayers are deposits in their spiritual trust fund and will be for withdrawals when needed.”* (From *The Legacy of Prayer*: Jennifer Kennedy Dean). Isaiah 55:11 says: *“God’s Word will not return empty.”*

There are certain fundamental principles (values) that govern all human interactions, and living in harmony with those values is absolutely essential for a quality family life. A grandparent can look from the outside and guide grandchildren by values, a compass (a sense of direction), rather than a clock (sense of urgency). The only way to influence a grandchild’s life is through modelling and mentoring. It has a profound effect on their sense of self-worth.

We do this by empathising, sharing, affirming, praying and sacrificing. All of the above must be grounded in a good relationship.

One such value to be modelled by grandparents, in an already selfish and loveless world, is the value of being significant in serving others. That is, to have a sense of stewardship and responsibility to the greater family of mankind, as well as a sense of accountability around that stewardship. I am determined to leave a legacy of reaching out to other families who may be at risk, of sharing together to make a real difference in the community or in society at large. This contribution brings a deeper and higher fulfilment—not just for individual family members but to the family as a whole.

Whenever I need to be truly effective in helping a needy person, I involve my own daughter with her strong gift of sensitivity for the person with special needs. She always adds a dimension that I cannot attend to. I am now starting to involve my grandchildren in this same pattern where healing is facilitated by the environment. Every member is a full participant in the functioning of the community with a common interest in the healing of the whole person. Steven Covey says that *“contributing together as family not only helps those who benefit from the contribution, but it also strengthens the contributing family.”* Albert Schweitzer says, *“I don’t know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will really be happy are those who have sought and found how to serve.”*

Jennifer Kennedy Dean says, *“As we seek the Lord ourselves, we are laying up treasures for future generations by the way God is reflected in our lives. As we invest in our own walk with the Lord and our prayers for our grandchildren, we are investing in eternity.”* Where our treasure is, our heart will be also (Matthews 6: 19-21). Psalm 103:17 states, *“But the love of the Lord remains forever with those who fear him. His salvation extends to the children’s children of those who are faithful to his covenant, to those who obey his commandments.”*

- **When your life has passed, what will the dash on your tombstone represent to your grandchildren?**

- **Will they remember that you walked with God through the valleys and over the mountains on your journey of life?**

Or

- **Will they remember the expensive gifts you gave to them or the trips you took them on?**

- **Will they remember that you did not have time for them?**

- **Will they say, “I don’t remember my grandparents ever telling me they were praying for me?”** 



Dynamis is a ministry to support and inform families and home educators. The goal is to serve and equip parents to make the most of their learning experiences by focussing on the uniqueness of their children. Email Martie du Plessis at martcham@vodamail.co.za or call 082 574 1433