

# Grandparenting for faith



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## You have a rich resource sitting in your pews: grandparents!

I remember my grandparents with great fondness. Cuddling up to my poppa as he listened to the football results on his little transistor radio; grandma producing new jumpers she'd knitted for us; our other grandma slipping a five-pound note into my hand as we waved goodbye after visiting her. All these memories, and more, still influence me over 50 years later. Poppa's love of Sheffield United means they are 'my' team; grandma's gentle chastisement whenever I bit my nails still rings in my head if I'm tempted to do the same now.

Grandparents are influential – and there's science to prove it!<sup>1</sup> God has designed grandparents and grandchildren to have a particular bond which means grandchildren are far more influenced by their grandparents than many of us realise. And it means Christian grandparents have a particular ability to help their grandchildren meet and know God.

But many Christian grandparents don't know that. Research undertaken in 2021 by Sarah Holmes of Liverpool Hope University confirmed that many are confused about their grandparenting role.<sup>2</sup> They're not sure if it's appropriate for them to talk about faith with their grandchildren, they're unsure about how to do this well, and they feel that the Church doesn't help them.

Working at Parenting for Faith, an organisation dedicated to helping parents, carers and the wider family disciple the next generations, we often hear from grandparents. In most cases, it's asking what discipleship looks like for them. How can they be an active part of their grandchildren's discipleship when they aren't always present, or close by, or when a parent has another faith or prohibits the grandparent to speak about faith with the child?

At a time when the Church is activated and distressed about the statistics about young people and faith, maybe it's time to turn to that hidden resource and mobilise them. The wonderful news is that it seems as if God is already doing something about this. There's a rumbling in the Church: grandparents are on the move!

If you want to change a culture, you need three things: envisioning, equipping and support. As churches, we are well-placed to offer all three to the grandparents in our congregation.

**Grandparents need hope** that they can share Jesus with the children they love so dearly. Even when grandparents aren't living close by, we know from secular and religious research that their influence is extraordinary. Cornell University reported that nine out of ten adults felt their grandparents 'influenced their values and behaviours'.<sup>3</sup> A famous study into how faith is transmitted across generations discovered that grandparents punched above their weight, affecting how grandchildren felt about God even when faith had skipped a generation.<sup>4</sup> And our research for the book *Grandparenting for Faith* discovered that many grandchildren reported it was the little and simple things that grandparents did that taught them about God. Grandparents can and do help their grandchildren meet and know God – and it's not hard to do.

As churches, let's start sharing this with grandparents: God's designed you to be really influential in your grandchildren's faith journeys! Share stories of grandparents and how they taught you about God. Share stories about the ups and downs of grandparenting for faith. Teach what God says about grandparents and their role and how you can connect well with your grandchildren. Give them hope.

**Grandparents need encouraging.** In many ways, grandparenting for faith is the same as any other sort of grandparenting: loving your grandchildren well and sharing as much good stuff with them as you can. Just as new mums pick up tips from each other at toddler groups, so grandparents will also be adept at sharing ideas with each other. But it can be handy to have a starting point to work from.



Parenting for Faith specialises in helping families use their normal parenting skills to share faith with children and young people. In the book *Grandparenting for Faith* we have a 'Grandparents' Toolkit', which outlines five tried-and-tested tools that give children and young people not only an understanding of faith but equips them to have a go themselves and opens their eyes to possibilities for them. The book also contains a small group guide to unpack these ideas in community that grandparents in your church might just find helpful.

**Grandparents need support** and church is the perfect place to get it. It can be surprisingly easy to mobilise grandparents. Katherine Bergin, Marriage and Family Life Advisor for the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton, has been encouraging churches to set up grandparenting groups in her parishes. Laughing, she explained how simple it is: Just get them together and ask about their grandchildren – and the conversation flows! From there, it's just a matter of keeping those conversations going.

So big-up their role, get them talking, pitch in with whatever they need and watch the grandparents in your congregation grow in confidence in their role and skills. And then be ready for wonderful stories of hope and transformation.

God is on the move! Let's make sure we are part of it.



Listen to an interview with Becky on the Roots for Churches podcast, <https://rootsforchurches.podbean.com>

You can get a copy of *Grandparenting for Faith* from BRF (see [WEB](#)).

<sup>1</sup> <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13644-022-00520-2>

<sup>2</sup> *ibid* <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13644-022-00520-2>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/the-age-overindulgence/202010/when-grandparents-undermine-parents-rules>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Families-Faith-Religion-Passed-Generations/dp/0190675152>