

BUILDING BLOCKS for IMPACTING YOUR GRANDCHILDREN

by Jane Haas

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The GRAND SCHEME of GRANDPARENTING

Envision a GRAND, colorful umbrella that has the Scripture verse, “We love because God first loved us” written on it. A Christian grandparent operates under that premise, as well as knowing that each one of us is God’s child, made in His image, a sinner/saint, forgiven by the blood of Jesus. We forgive because Jesus forgives us, and He always helps us to forgive others.

From the moment we find out the good news we’re going to be (first parents and then) grandparents, we start building relationships with many different building blocks, each a unique quality or action in our lives. (Hopefully we’ve already done this with our children or children-in-law!)

Here’s another word picture for you:

Maybe you’ve stacked wooden blocks with your child to see what you could create or how high you could build a tower. One by one, two by two, as the building blocks make a strong foundation and then are stacked and joined together, they continue to make and strengthen a solid connection. The important part of this word picture is that Jesus is the glue that keeps these blocks sturdy and solid – a family structure – and Jesus is always with us to be that glue, no matter what the challenges and hardships families have to endure. When it seems that our block towers or houses are falling, Jesus is with us to keep us strong, faithful, and courageous.

WHO AM I? (in the context of a Christian family)

The “Who I Am/ Whose I Am” Reminder Building Block -- We are God’s. God’s divine plan is ours. He has our names written in His book of Life. As a parent and grandparent, it’s best to remember that our children and grandchildren are loaned to us from our heavenly Father, and also that because of Jesus, our Father has promised us a heavenly home when we die—we can remind them each day that they are HIS.

Isaiah 43:1—I have called you by name, you are Mine (The Living Bible)

Jeremiah 29:11—I know the plans I have for you—plans to prosper you and not to harm you, to give you hope and a future ...(NIV)

Jeremiah 31:3 I have loved you with an everlasting love ... I have continued my faithfulness to you ... (English Standard Version)

God sets us in families – what does a family look like? Christian or non-Christian? Caring or non-caring? Each family looks and behaves differently. God LOVES each family! He wants each family to respond to His love with thanksgiving and love for Him.

Next to worshiping our Triune God, we keep family as a priority. We care for one another. We show love in action. We love because He first loved us. We forgive because Jesus forgives us.

HOW DOES GOD USE US? (as Christian grandparents)

Grandparents can help mold grandchildren for the future—to give them roots—so they aren't searching for the answer to "Who am I?" throughout their lives.

See the example of Timothy's grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (2 Tim. 1:5 and 3:14) --how he grew in God's Word through his mother and grandmother!

We grandparents can be children's teachers whether we're together often or not so often because of distance. Our words and actions, whether we're together in person or via technology, can greatly influence and mold our grandchildren.

We can tell Bible stories and our own personal life stories to point out God's activity in our lives. Tell about your Baptism; your education; your vocation; why you are and do what you are and do!

Examples:

My grandma read her devotion with me when I had a sleepover with her. She included me and my family in her short prayer that followed. I know she prayed for us often every day. She always asked me and my siblings about our Sunday school lesson, and always emphasized God's action in a story. She loved nature, gardening, and animals, and included me in choosing seeds and planting them. She always pointed out the beauty of God's creation and His care for us in His world. I learned to trust Jesus through her. She taught me to write creatively, to love poetry, and to sing praises.

My mom and dad always had evening devotions with us after dinner. We read *My Devotions* and prayed. Then because Dad's motto was, "No one leaves the kitchen until we all can leave the kitchen," we cleaned up together and sang hymns and songs. During bedtime prayers, Dad would remind us to put all our cares and concerns into

“the God bag” and “give it all to Him.” Our kids’ grandparents have taught them prayers and favorite songs, some even in German. I learned to trust Jesus through them.

Grandparents can decide what legacy they want to leave for their grandchildren. Some choose bank accounts, real estate holdings, stocks and bonds, antiques, or classic cars. Others choose collections of books, dolls, coins, stamps, and more. What do you hope that your grandchildren remember best about you? What do you you’re your legacy to be for them? Make a list of your priorities. What are the top two? Where does making sure your grandchildren know Jesus and have a personal relationship with Him rank on your list?

The clue is to remember to be INTENTIONAL in what we’re doing—and for the right reason: to praise and thank the Lord in all circumstances.

WHAT DO OUR RELATIONSHIPS LOOK LIKE (in a Christian family)?

Just as our heavenly Father wants us to have a personal relationship with Him—trusting Him for His love and care, forgiveness, and our daily needs—He also helps us build personal relationships with our family members.

The Prayer Block – Talk about how biblical people prayed for themselves and for family and friends (Abraham, Daniel, Paul and Silas, Mary, Jesus too! And so many more); remember that God wants us to talk with Him many times each day!

Pray for your grandchildren’s health, safety, learning, happiness each day many times, that the Lord would walk with them and keep them close to Him

Examples:

As I dust and vacuum around the house, or put groceries into the frig, I touch our grandchild’s photo and shoot up an arrow prayer for his or her wellness. You can pray for your grands when you’re folding clothes, packing lunches, shopping, or choosing books at the library.

We can model prayers and remind grands to pray every time we’re with them!

We sing the “BUCKLE UP” song that I made up one day long ago to remind children to pray for safety before traveling.

“Click, click, buckle up,

“Keep us safe today.

“God, You’re with us all the time.

“Protect us on our way.”

(Tune: “Row, Row, Row Your Boat”)

When we pray for our grands, we can begin by thanking and praising Him for their lives and all the blessings He gives them. If your grandchildren are baptized into God’s family, you can praise Him for that! If they aren’t, you can ask the Spirit to work to bring them to the water and Word in Baptism. We ask the Lord to touch their hearts with His love and forgiveness, and to bring people into their lives who point them to the Lord.

Paul prayed for the people in Colossae. You can read to grandchildren from the Bible, and with older grandchildren, pray Paul’s prayer: “[I] always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when I pray for you, because I have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints—the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the Gospel that has come to you...” (Col. 1:3-6)

Young children like the story about Daniel, how he prayed when he was put into the lions’ den, and how God answered his prayer and sent an angel to protect him through the night and to be rescued the next day. Jot down favorite Bible stories and their key God-action messages, and share them.

Remember to use your own words with younger grandchildren. Keep your prayers from your heart and age-appropriate.

The “Be Intentional” Building Block

Today, many grandparents are also full or part time caregivers for their grandchildren if they live close to them. I know some grandparents who fly across the country twice a year to spend a week or more visiting their grandchildren. *Make every moment count!*

Many more households are two-parents working families, or a single parent working family. They need much help skin to skin, with hearts that love and hands and feet that serve. The Spirit helps us through God’s Word to walk with Jesus, care and share from our hearts. He helps us through our words and actions to guide our grandchildren in distinguishing right from wrong, to make wise choices, and to learn self-discipline and self-control. When the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts, our grandchildren see the joy that Jesus brings to our lives, and they “catch” it by watching and listening to us. Much of what children learn is *“caught, not taught!”*

We build one another up. We encourage and support. We give advice when we’re asked for it. We have a “game plan” as we consider our own children and their lives, how to help them, and how to organize this plan together.

Grandparents can help grandchildren grow and develop empathy for others, throughout life, especially empathy for elderly persons. We help mold a child into a person who values life and treasures loved ones and new friends.

Examples:

Make the most of our time together, whether we live close or far away. Make the moments count! Rather than watch TV, walk on a beach, go fishing, ride bikes on a trail, bake muffins and visit someone, look at family photos, and during activities, talk!

Grandparents can influence a grandchild's choice of activities—a hobby (ham radio, sewing, gardening, fishing); a sports activity whether spectator or actively playing; a college choice; a vocation; a life passion.

We listen to one another. Use active listening: hear a grandchild's feelings, make eye contact, show welcoming body language, reflect on what you heard your grandchild tell you. Simply let them know that you care about them and their lives.

The Teaching Building Block

We watch for teachable times – we're alert for the opportunity to say or do the right thing. We can give our grands the words to say.

Children learn through hands-on experiences. Also remember from the beginning of life, so much of what we learn is "caught, not taught!"

Examples:

"Jared is saying bullying things to me at school." Again, demonstrate your active listening. You want your grandchild to trust you and tell you things. Do emphasize positive actions as options for your grandchild: "How can you show love to him? In what way can you include him in what you're playing?" Help your grandchildren *learn the words to say* for situations.

If your grandchild struggles with a life challenge, point him or her to the words of Ephesians 6:10ff. For a young child, make a drawing showing the full armor of God – the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. Explain these word ideas in words they can understand and relate to—a comic book story or a TV cartoon or action show in which someone is in full armor and in battle can give you a lead-in as you say, "Listen to how Jesus gives us the armor we need to go into battle against the devil!" Remind him or her to put God's armor on each day as they get out of bed! God helps us fight the evil one and send him to Jesus' cross. In doing

and saying these things, you can be a strong witness to your faith and how to replace fears with faith in the Lord, for He is and already has been victorious!

Perhaps a store clerk gives you too much change back from your purchase. Tell the clerk nicely and make the situation correct. Afterward, remind your grandchild that it's always God-pleasing and right to be honest! "You shall not steal" is one of God's commandments. Taking even pennies from someone is a sin just as stealing thousands of dollars is.

As parents and grandparents, we are children's FIRST teachers.

That's part of God's plan when He sets us in families! He expects us to take this job seriously, and He equips us with all that we need to do it! He helps us to share our faith in various ways. St. Augustine said, "When necessary, use words."

We share with one another our prayer needs, our daily concerns, and also how God answers our prayers – our praises and thanksgivings. "Guess what? Jesus helped my back feel much better and I thank Him! I can push you on the swing today!"

We guard our relationship with our children and value it. We support them in making their marriages and relationships strong with Christ as the third cord.

We accept our children—and our grandchildren—as unique individuals; where he/she is in her life; we remember God has a plan for each one. He wants us to know our grandchildren well, and to allow them and help them know us well too!

Example:

Ella phoned excitedly to tell us about her first day of school, and her new friends and new teacher. She was bubbling over! I call these air waves of joy!

Listen and affirm what your grandchildren tell you; sometimes it isn't happy or good—listen, comfort, pray together, and always give hope. Pray "on the spot." Pray via phone, Facetime, or Skype.

God has given us to each other as blessings, to make a difference, to be participants in this life, and to help prepare our grandchildren for eternal life – to help them to know Jesus as their Friend and Savior, someone who is always with them and someone they can talk to at any time; and to help them make Jesus known as a real person, our real loving God, to those around them.

What better way to share your faith than to remember and talk about Baptism through water and God's Word! We celebrate our children's and grandchildren's baptismal birthdays ("second birthdays") by lighting the candle he or she received at

Baptism. We sing a baptismal hymn such as “Baptized into Your Name Most Holy” (*Lutheran Worship 224*) or the children’s song, “I was baptized, happy day; all my sins are washed away. God looked down on me and smiled. I became His own dear child.” (*Little Ones Sing Praise*, Concordia Publishing House) Show the child his or her baptismal certificate, photos, and talk about how special it is to be a child in God’s family of believers. If your grandchild doesn’t have a baptismal banner to hang in his or her room, you might make one together, showing a sea shell, three water drops, a Bible, and his or her name and baptismal date.

God blesses us with His unconditional love and forgiveness because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross; He blesses us with love and care for our children and grandchildren; we want better for them than what we have in life; most of what our grandchildren need is free! Time together is a gift—the best gift we can give them. No one on his or her death bed would be likely to say, “I wish I had spent more time working in my office” ...” Rather, “I wish I had spent more time with my children/grandchildren.”

FAMILY IS NEAR and FAR

We have an impact whether we are living in close proximity and see each other often, or living far apart and see each other occasionally; time is a gift; we make memories together whether we are side by side or Skyping or phoning.

The Communication Building Block -- The key word is communicate. Speak in love. Discipline (teach) in love. Remind your grandchildren that LOVE is a verb. Teach grandchildren by using examples from your life.

Example:

Years ago, our dog ran into the street and was killed by a car. When our children, neighbor children, and most recently grandchildren needed to be reminded that drivers go too fast and don’t always watch for children playing, I filled a large paper bag with shredded newspaper, tied it closed, and placed it on the street on a day we were home. Not long after, I was able to use that smashed and broken paper bag as an example of what happens, as a visual warning. It may seem graphic, but it worked to help them understand that we don’t step into the street without holding a grownup’s hand and looking both ways first.

We communicate with the parents of our grandchildren, and try hard to not overstep in our roles.

Examples:

How many toys does a child need? Time is a more precious gift you can give! The over-buying of toys to gain a child's love doesn't work, isn't practical, may go against the parents' wishes, and only adds to the clutter at home

"If Mommy or Daddy says no, ask Grandma." It's a cute saying for a tee shirt. But it's not a positive grandparenting action, no matter how much you love that kiddo! Avoid giving permission to have the candy, to buy the new Barbie or action figure, or to stay up past bedtime when the parent says no.

On the other hand, if a parent says, "Sure, it's okay to wear that crop top to school" and you're thinking, "UH, OH, no, it isn't!", it's certainly right for you to suggest a different and more appropriate top for school. "Let's save that short top for when you come home and play in your yard." Gentle guidance is good. Parents can, will, and do learn from grandparents in subtle ways!

We keep in close contact to build relationships, to encourage (sports, academics, self-esteem, aka Christ-esteem to a Christian).

We pray together whether a child is afraid of going to school, has a difficult assignment or test, or is bullied, or has a reason to thank the Lord!

Example: God has helped us give Beatrice the words to say when she tells us that someone she loves doesn't believe in Jesus, and she cries about not seeing him in heaven someday. We pray for her listening ears before responding, we pray for the words from the Holy Spirit, and we pray for God to grow her child-like faith and trust. We want to always say positive words to build others up rather than tear them down. We model praying for those who hate us and are the enemy. It isn't easy. But God is always our Helper. Show your grandchildren your trust in the Lord, and let them hear your trust-words through prayers and life-statements. "God gave us a beautiful day to go to the park!" "Lord, hear our prayer and help Great-Grandpa feel better." "God, send Your Holy Spirit to take away the anger and to grow love in (person's name's) heart."

We praise him or her for a great piano or band concert, soccer game or ballet recital.

We thank them for a birthday or a hello card or letter.

We share favorite books and songs.

We ask open ended questions such as:

"Tell me about your most favorite activity at school today...Why was it your favorite?"

"What did you like best about our science center field trip today? Why?"

“What’s one truth that you remember from your Sunday school lesson today?”

WHAT WE CAN DO—WHAT WE CAN SAY – LOVE IS A VERB

The ACTIVITIES Building Block

We can bring our experiences into a grandchild’s life from our perspective of life and our world!

Intentionally we can teach grandchildren how to play (a child’s work) from birth forward – get off the couch, turn off the TV, play a board game from the shelf. Be active rather than passive.

Our children tell me that they enjoyed meeting their grandparents’ friends and hearing their stories about using an outhouse; being with one teacher for 8 grades in a one-room school house; riding a horse through the fields, and riding in a horse-drawn sleigh across the snowy fields in the winter.

Grandparents may be able to bring a more relaxed environment (depending on the situation), and help relieve the working parents who are tired and over-extended.

I challenge you to add activities that you think of to this starter list:

Take nature walks, bury treasures in a sand box, have a scavenger hunt (child helps plan it), make flower and vegetable gardens, harvest peas, beans, tomatoes, and enjoy flower bouquets (plant extras in your gardens to allow your grandchildren to cut the zinnias and marigolds and bring them in to put into glasses of water for the lunch table or shuck peas together and eat them raw!).

My parents took our kids on *Penny Walks*. As they came to the end of a block while walking in town, or a country road intersection, they flipped a penny. Heads meant they would turn right. Tails meant to turn left. Each walk resulted in a different destination! Along the way, they visited with neighbors. A variation of the walk had them dropping a penny occasionally along their walk and finding the pennies on the walk back home. They saved and counted their pennies, and sometimes got an ice cream cone before heading home. The bonus was that they talked as they walked! Use your creativity and make up games together.

Incorporate science activities. One of our favorites is to cut Queen Anne’s Lace with long stems, and place them into glasses of concentrated liquid food coloring. Watch the osmosis of the color turn the dainty white flowers into pastel flowers overnight!

Learn to polka or waltz or two-step

Make friendship bracelets with embroidery floss and add beads

Kids help make memory books, thankful journals and/or posters (For very young children, cut out pictures and use gluesticks to attach them to big posters titled “We Thank God”)

Write about memories—both good, fun, sad, and bad ones; how God brought us through these

Pray before meals and after meals, when someone gets hurt playing, for someone who is sick

Example: Our daughter was about three years old when she fell and scraped her knee while friends were playing together; one of the moms sat beside her on the grass and hugged her and prayed for her knee to heal—what a witness! This helped me to become more intentional with my words and actions.

Pray for health, for parents as they drive out of the driveway, for parents at work , for a friend’s situation, for their pastor/teachers, and more

Take area field trips—museums, science centers, appropriate movies, nature walks, library time, Home Depot or Lowe’s children’s activity (build a birdhouse)

Play Grampa and Gramma Games -- board games; chess; Hide and Seek; Which Hand?, I Spy, Finish My Sentence; My Car, Your Car; What Time Is It, Mr. Fox?, and more.

Do free things together! How much fun is baking, talking about family recipes, cooking, sewing, crafting, gardening, walking, sleepovers or grandparents’ “camp times”!

Fishing, camping, botanical garden classes, volunteering as Meals on Wheels deliveries

Make Healthy Meals Together – learn food groups and good meal choices

Physical activities: Jump rope jingles, ball playing, kite flying, nature walks in neighborhood or parks or zoo, bike riding, swimming, YMCA

Music and Art: sing together, dance, chalk drawings, watercolor or water paint with all sizes of brushes on a concrete driveway or sidewalk, modeling clay, “found objects” sculptures

Caring for Pets & Farm Animals— feeding and putting water out for birds, walking a dog, feeding the fish, watering and adding food scraps to the chickens’ compost pile, changing the kitty litter box, brushing a horse, helping to milk the cows or feed the pigs

Volunteer activities together—visit nursing homes, caroling in neighborhoods, VBS and SS events, parties for others, making cards for military persons, homebound people

We impact our grandchildren by sharing our family history and personal stories. (The WW1 and WW2 generations who shared their war stories, how God took care of them, how family members sacrificed the most; now the Korean, Vietnam, Desert Storm, and military veterans serving in the Middle East will be those you’ll want to ask questions and hear their stories unless you’re blessed to have a WW2 vet still living in your family.)

Sharing photo albums, memory books, videos (how God protected us on a vacation through a tornado, during a highway accident, during a sickness)

Sharing our hopes and dreams (our own, those for our children, for grandchildren, for the world, for those who don’t know Jesus yet)

Sharing our prayers and songs

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Age Specific Activities to Do Together

Early Childhood: (0-8 yrs)

These are “wonder years” – fill these with sensory activities—provide “ahha moments” for children to discover sights, sounds, smells, touches, and more.

Elementary Years (overlaps early childhood, ages 6-11)

Watch their sports activities; volunteer as a coach, teacher, scout leader, umpire at games if possible, or be a sidelines cheerleader

Share your loves of walking, cooking, painting, building with wood, photography, sewing, making or listening to music, singing and dancing, etc.

Point them to good chapter books that have Christian values and lessons; talk about what they are reading and learning, and how it can relate to their own life situations.

If your grandchild doesn’t have a Bible, get him or her one, and read Bible stories together. Always point out God’s action in the story, how He helped His people, how

Jesus saved us through His death and resurrection, how Jesus forgives and helps us to forgive!

Model and lead them—be there for them—verbalize when needed “Do you realize what you said?” “Let’s talk about what just happened.” “You’re out of bounds by saying that/doing that, and here’s why. Let’s decide on a better action.” Pray about it together.

Pre-teen and Teen Years (ages 11—up)

As a grandparent who is intentionally involved in a grand’s life, you might be teaching life skills—laundry, cooking, cleaning, caring for younger siblings in the home, grocery shopping, managing money and making a budget, teaching a new driver, helping fill out school forms, college applications and job applications, preparing for job interviews, and so much more.

Remember your grandchild’s ears and eyes are listening and seeing you. You are the model for their life – the Jesus “with skin on” in their world – providing them with the glimpses of their heavenly Father’s great love for them.

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A GRAND acronym for you with some key words:

G = God’s GRACE is ours; His grace is sufficient for us; GOD is #1; He GIVES us what we need.

R = God helps us build and strengthen RELATIONSHIPS through love, forgiveness, and acceptance.

A = God makes us AVAILABLE (whether close to our own grandchildren or to adopted ones in our church or our neighborhood). His Spirit guides our ACTIONS. Each day we can put on God’s ARMOR (Ephesians 6:16, the FSM verse) and teach our grands to do the same, as we ask God to walk with us.

N = God helps us supply the NEEDS of our grandchildren in a holistic way— for soul, mind, and body -- physically, emotionally, spiritually, educationally.

D = God gives us DIRECTION in grandparenting; with His guidance, He helps us stay intentional and DETERMINED to do a grand job!

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Our GRAND STAGE

Whatever we are called to do for our grandchildren, let's remember that God helps us to do it!

Father God, we thank you for giving us children and grandchildren!

We pray that you'll give us the strength, the courage, the resources we grandparents need. Give us the energy and intentions to be there for our children and grandchildren with a smile and welcoming attitude, with open arms and hugs, with the cheerful encouragement and nudges they need. Help us with the power of the Spirit to build their Christ-esteem.

Most of all, always help us to point them to you, to know you better each day, to put on the armor of God, and to tell others of your love for them.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

He is our helper to be the best we can be in this grand stage! Go and be GRAND! To God be the glory!

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I'm Jane Elling Haas—a redeemed child of God—a wife, mom, daughter, sister, aunt, and friend. My vocation for 40 years has been an early childhood teacher in LCMS inner city schools in Detroit and Cleveland, and a curriculum writer and editor of educational materials for all ages. For 24 years, I was leader of a “Parents and Twos” class and I still get glory bumps when I see some of “my kids” and their parents all grown up! Since retiring, I've made grandparenting a priority, to our own and to others' grandkids too. I love to get a “kid fix” whenever I can! And I enjoy telling kids and their families how much Jesus loves each one of them.

My immediate family includes my husband, Don, who is retired and active as a community volunteer; our two daughters, Emily and Bethany, who are balancing family life and careers; Emily's two daughters, Ella and Beatrice, ages 7 and almost 5, our precious granddaughters; and Bethany and Derek's first child is due in early November.

I've enjoyed the practice I've gotten so far as we grandparent ours and our friends' grandchildren! When I speak about the impact grandparents have on their grandchildren, I share from experience and from what I've learned from other grandparenting friends. My grandparents and my own parents, as well as Don's parents, have made an impact on our parenting and grandparenting, all for which we're so thankful!