

GRANDPARENTING
MATTERS



RAISING YOUR *Grandchildren*



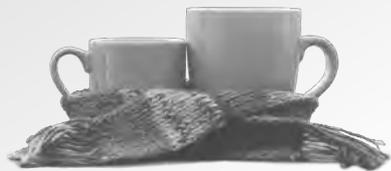
Encouragement and Guidance for Those
Parenting Their Children's Children

CAVIN HARPER

DR. JOSH MULVIHILL, GENERAL EDITOR

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SERIES PREFACE

GRANDPARENTING MATTERS is a series of short books that address common grandparenting problems with biblical solutions and practical ideas. I have had the joy of talking with grandparents all over the country about their God-designed role in the lives of children and grandchildren. Regularly, questions arise about how to do what the Bible says in the midst of barriers, problems, and challenges.

Grandparenting is filled with many joys, but it can also be filled with unexpected pain and problems. Relational tensions, grandparenting restrictions, adult prodigals, grandparents as parents, divorce, long-distance relationships, and blended families all can cause the heart to ache. When brokenness touches our families, we naturally ask questions about how to navigate the challenges.

There are a growing number of resources for Christian grandparents that address the purpose of grandparenting, but few deal with the problem-solving side of family life. We created this series because problems are common, hope is needed, and God's Word provides guidance that can be applied to our unique

situations. This series aims simultaneously to comfort and encourage, to equip and edify, and also to point the way ahead. If you are discouraged or hurting, then I trust you will be blessed by this series. If you are looking for biblical solutions and practical how-tos, you will find them in these pages.

We've titled the series *GRANDPARENTING MATTERS* because we believe the Bible teaches that the grandparent-grandchild relationship is important and worthy of our time and attention. Grandparents have a significant impact on the spiritual lives of grandchildren that is second only to parents. Our prayer is that the gospel is proclaimed, God is honored, your family experiences healing and health, and your children and children's children know, love, and serve Jesus.

Cavin Harper has been a friend and ministry partner for many years. I've had the joy of watching Cavin minister to grandparents nationally as well as faithfully serve his own family. He is a man of strong Christian character and great integrity. He practices what he preaches. He also is the founder and president of the Christian Grandparent Network that he has been leading for over two decades. Until recently, it was the only ministry in North America that was specifically focused on equipping Christian grandparents to reach and disciple their families. Before launching the Christian Grandparent Network, Cavin was a pastor for nearly two decades. Cavin has a lifetime of ministry experience. Cavin doesn't chase the latest ministry fads but is fully committed to the gospel of Christ, the authority of Scripture, and the power of prayer.

No one expects to be a grandparent raising a grandchild. Individuals who find themselves in this unexpected place of life arrive there not because of joyful circumstances but because of painful ones. Cavin has written a very practical book that is full of compassion and will help individuals find hope in Christ

and strength for the journey ahead. If you are a grandparent raising a grandchild, you should read this book.

If you are new to the GRANDPARENTING MATTERS series, I want to encourage you to check out some of the other books in the series, such as *Grandparenting*, *Biblical Grandparenting*, *Long-Distance Grandparenting*, and *Overcoming Grandparenting Barriers*. I'm delighted by the high caliber of authors in this series and the impact these books will have on families for their good and for the glory of God. I trust you will be blessed by Cavin's godly wisdom, gain a renewed hope in God, experience joy in Christ despite trying circumstances, and become better equipped to be a disciple-making grandparent who passes on a heritage of faith to future generations.

—Dr. Josh Mulvihill

Founding Member, the Legacy Coalition
Executive Director of Church and Family Ministry, Renewation
Connect with me at GospelShapedFamily.com

INTRODUCTION

When I began a ministry to grandparents in 1997, it never crossed my mind to address grandparents parenting their own grandchildren. I knew there were a fair number of grandparents in that situation, but I had no idea how significant this issue was until I recently began hearing many of your stories.

Your cries for help have not gone unnoticed, and the depth of your pain, physical exhaustion, and astounding circumstances are beginning to be recognized. I have been blessed by the inexpressible joy that I've observed by many grandparents raising grandchildren as you pour yourselves out for these young lives you love so deeply.

I am writing this book to encourage readers who find themselves in this difficult life situation. I'm also compelled to tell your stories because I realize that grandparents raising grandchildren are often ignored and unnoticed.

Grandparents who are raising their grandchildren is a growing demographic. Some studies, mostly from state and federal social service agencies, suggest 2.6 million grandchildren in the United States are being raised by grandparents, but that only

accounts for those who enter the foster care system.¹ I believe that number is low. The 2010 Census indicates approximately 8 percent of all grandchildren in the United States are being raised by grandparents. That number increased to 10 percent in 2012, which means that approximately eight to ten million kids in 2012 were being raised by grandparents. That number could be as high as twelve million today. Some grandparents do not have custody of their grandchildren but operate as a second parent by watching the grandchild for numerous days each week or providing significant emotional and financial support to a single-parent home.

Most states report drug and opioid addictions to be the number-one cause of child removals from parental care. Such addictions result in an estimated 40 percent of children who are removed from parental care and placed in the home of a grandparent.²

There is a lack of research to identify the critical needs of grandparents in this arena of grandparenting, but thankfully the Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act was signed into law in July 2018 to provide further research and recommendations for coordinating the support of grandparents raising their grandchildren, especially due to the opioid epidemic. This growing awareness may help give us a better picture of how large this demographic really is.

Whatever the actual numbers are, I hope you recognize you are not the only one living this story. That doesn't change the challenges you face or the exhaustion you feel, but I hope it encourages you to know that you are not alone. Hopefully churches will recognize this reality and the growing need in this area of family life and see it as a significant ministry opportunity.

I owe a major debt of gratitude to Rachel Mahnke, a grandmother raising two of her grandchildren, for her courage to

come forward, seek help, and teach me how significant this matter is today. I am humbled to have the privilege of working alongside Rachel and her husband, Lee, in this journey of understanding and engaging scores of grandparents like yourself.

Rachel's story will be woven throughout this book, along with the stories of others who are in the thick of this new and unexpected responsibility. I know her story will be a blessing to you. While this book may not include your specific story, I am confident one or more stories I've shared will resonate with you.

My prayer is to be a voice of encouragement to you as well as a spokesperson for those who are often invisible in churches and communities. I wrote this book to communicate God's love, grace, and hope to you when you find yourself feeling overwhelmed and wondering if you can get through it. I am aware of the voiceless anguish many of you experience and of your desire to be seen—to know someone wants to help bear your burden.

I say *burden* not because I believe that you view your decision to love and care for your grandchildren as a burden, but because of the weight of unimaginable challenges that accompany sacrificial love. Most grandparents raising grandchildren bear financial burdens, many bear guilt or shame, and almost all experience some measure of relational burden. Too often you bear these alone.

I want you to know you are not alone. My hope is that this book will be a source of hope and a means God uses to provide the strength to endure. For unknown reasons, God has providentially placed precious children in your hands to parent and love, and it is my desire that these pages encourage you to persevere and provide the confidence to make a difference in your grandchildren's lives for eternity.

Though a mystery to me, but not to God, I believe He has called me to bring this message of hope into your story. I believe God wants to give you reason to trust in His lavish grace and mercy, so that you will be strengthened with power through His Spirit for this grand calling that has been entrusted to you for such a time as this.

—Cavin T. Harper

Founder and President,
Christian Grandparenting Network

A WORD FROM RACHEL MAHNKE

Cavin mentioned that you will be reading portions of my story throughout this book. After working as a teacher for many years, I felt that God was showing me it was time to be a student and learn all I could about our new role in life. Yet, how was I to care for these traumatized, fragile babies? With a baby crying for hours every day, how was I going to find joy in my new circumstances? How was I going to maintain my relationship with my husband and with other family members and friends whom I desperately needed in my life?

I read every book I could get my hands on but discovered there was very little that addressed my new role. With two grandbabies under the age of two, you can probably imagine the challenge of finding time to do anything but care for them. But I persisted, in the strength of the Lord.

As you read through this book, you will encounter personal snapshots related to my journey, how I learned to cope with my new reality, what we did to regain connection to a life that was now dramatically changed, and how my husband and I began to thrive, not just survive. Perhaps my story will encourage you in yours.

We Didn't Sign Up for This

Darlene knew the call would be coming.

Her youngest daughter was addicted to heroin. Her drug habit had begun when she was introduced to opioids. Eventually, her addiction left her homeless with two children, ages one and two. Darlene made the call to the Department of Human Services for their protection, knowing something had to be done for the sake of those children. The authorities tracked down Darlene's daughter and brought the two children to Darlene and Ted, the nearest relatives. That was five years ago. Nothing much has changed for her daughter, but at least the grandchildren now have a stable home.

Ted and Darlene love their grandchildren and are doing their best to raise them, but it has not been easy. Born into drugs and domestic violence, the children have numerous behavioral issues. As they seek to cope with what it means to parent again, Ted and Darlene feel very isolated, if not abandoned, especially by family members. Despite all this, they are resolute. When I

spoke with Darlene, she told me, “Ted and I are committed to seeing this through together.”

Among millennials like their daughter, the opioid epidemic is impacting millions of young adults and taking its toll on their families. Sadly, it’s not only those who are caught in the grip of drug addiction who pay the price. Their children and the grandparents of those children also become victims.

For these grandparents, life has shifted from the role of cheerleader and coach for their adult children, to assuming the role of parent once again. No grandparent imagines that one day they will need to assume the role of parent to their grandchildren. Not in their wildest dreams would a grandparent expect this to happen to them.

Ted and Darlene’s story may not be your story. The opioid epidemic is only one of many reasons grandparents end up becoming parents for their grandchildren. The circumstances that lead to grandparents raising grandchildren are as varied as the people involved. The five most common reasons associated with this tragic event are

1. Drugs (including alcoholism)
2. Domestic violence
3. Detention (jail or prison)
4. Divorce
5. Death

Whatever the unfortunate cause, it ultimately comes down to young parents not being able to protect and provide for their own children.

If one of the first four situations describes your situation, you may be among those who still cling to the hope that your adult

child or their spouse will one day be in a position to properly care for and raise your grandchildren. You hope your parenting role will be temporary.

But many individuals have no such expectation. You may have full parental rights as a result of court-awarded adoption rights and are now the legal parents. Or you may have a range of roles, from full guardianship to temporary custody. You might even have no legal status at all, choosing to not involve the courts and social services. Yet the grandchildren are living with you because either the parents asked you to do it or because you took action to intervene for the protection of the child.

Grandparents raising grandchildren is nothing new. It has been going on for much of human history. In some cultures, grandparents are part of an extended family, either living together or in close proximity. They are a functional part of the entire family dynamic and a critical factor in the raising of the children in the family.

In many of our inner-city communities in the United States and Canada, a large number of children are raised by a grandparent (usually a grandmother), even if a biological parent is present (usually not a father). Many individuals do it with very limited resources to help them.

What has changed is the growing number of grandparents across all socioeconomic lines who are caught in the consequences of a growing opioid epidemic. Like Ted and Darlene, these families are forced to face the reality of being parents once again. Only this time the expectation of a joyous arrival is not part of the package. For many, life is suddenly and unexpectedly interrupted by a phone call or knock on the door in the middle of the night. There is no time to anticipate anything—only to react and try to understand the implications of this new way of life.

Yet this “unexpected interruption” is not the end of the story, is it? My goal for this book is to help you recognize the hand of our sovereign God in this “interruption” and seize upon it as an “unexpected opportunity,” even though, admittedly, it may be a hard one. I hope to encourage you in this journey to embrace the amazing opportunities you have been given to influence one or more children to know who they are, whose they are, and why they are so precious to you and their heavenly Father.

In the numerous encounters I have had with grandparents in a situation similar to yours, I have observed there are at least seven feelings that, in varying degrees, are common to most grandparents raising grandchildren. I have also observed that those unfamiliar with your reality are largely unaware of these feelings. Even if some of these are not relevant to you, they are still significant for many other grandparents raising grandchildren. See if you resonate with any of these feelings.

- Feeling emotionally and mentally overwhelmed
- Feeling physically exhausted
- Feeling hopeless (which may lead to depression)
- Feeling isolated from others (friends, family, church)
- Feeling guilt and shame (*Was I a failure as a parent, and will I only repeat those failures with my grandchild[ren]?*)
- Feeling judged and/or misunderstood by others (particularly from family members or church people)
- Feeling lost and helpless (*I don't know what to do or where to turn for help*)

My hope is to be an instrument of God in which He will heap a great measure of hope upon you. I believe the Bible is the

sufficient source of truth and hope that will help you navigate these feelings. Jesus came to testify to the truth and to remind us that He has already overcome all the troubles that life may dump on us. I believe the gospel of Christ is immensely valuable for your life situation. The gospel is not just some theological mumbo jumbo, but it is real-life practical truths that you can put into practice to strengthen you and lead you into the place of rest found in God's peace.

Before we jump into those practical truths, I want to remind you of something that is easily forgotten. As a grandparent suddenly thrust into this new role of parenting and providing a stable home for your children's children, I want you to know you are not the only parent with a wayward child. Remember that God, the perfect Father, has more than a few wayward children. Let that soak in for a moment.

God gave His children everything they could possibly need in the garden. They had everything a person could want or imagine. The Creator walked with them and talked with them. He laughed with them and gave them all the love and provision they needed. Yet, they chose to believe the lies of the serpent over all that God had given them. They chose the path of death and destruction.

Ultimately, our children and grandchildren make their own choices throughout their lives. Yet, when a child goes astray and makes really bad decisions, the questions persist. *Could I have been a better parent? Is all of this somehow my fault?* Feelings of guilt and shame are real, but are they justified? That's what we will examine next.