Bob: If you’re a parent / if you have children, you either are a grandparent or it’s very likely you will be at some point. Here’s Josh Mulvihill.

Josh: When we’re talking family, I think the statistics say about 94 percent of people who have kids are going to be grandparents; so you can pretty much count on it in the bank if you’ve got kids. Most people spend a third to half of their life as a grandparent. That’s a lot of time that you have to give and invest in these types of relationships

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Thursday, September 22nd. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I’m Bob Lepine. The question for parents is not: “Will I someday be a grandparent?”—the question is: “If I become a grandparent, how intentional will I be with that assignment?” We’ll talk more about that today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. I had somebody recently ask me, “Do you think Dennis is going to get into grand parenting as kind of the next phase of ministry?”

Dennis: Do you think? I am overrun with grandkids.

Bob: “He doesn’t have time to do grandparent ministry. He’s got more grandkids than he can shake a stick at—they’re taking up all of his time!” [Laughter]

Dennis: We have a young man with us who knows a little bit about that kind of ministry. Josh Mulvihill joins us on FamilyLife Today all the way from Minneapolis. Welcome to the broadcast.

Josh: It’s good to be here.

Dennis: Josh has been married to Jan since 2000. He has five children, ages one to ten. He serves as the pastor to children and families at Grace Church in Eden Prairie, which is just on the outskirts of Minneapolis.

Bob: Tell him how many grandkids you have.
**Dennis:** I was trying to avoid that. I’ve gotten some negative letters, Bob, from listeners because they think I’m boasting. Well, what is a grandparent supposed to do? [Laughter] I mean, give me a life!

**Bob:** How many grandkids do you have?

**Dennis:** We’re expecting our 23rd.

**Josh:** Wow! That’s awesome.

**Dennis:** There’s more than one way to take over the earth; huh? [Laughter] What do you think, Josh?

**Josh:** Crown of the aged.

**Dennis:** Isn’t that what the Bible’s talking about? I was thinking about you and what you’re doing in your church. I was thinking about this passage—Psalm 78—every parent and grandparent needs to know this passage. It says [verse 5]: “He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded to our fathers to teach to their children;”—that’s one generation—“that the next generation might know them,”—that’s the second generation—“The children yet unborn will arise and tell them to their children”—four generations in this passage—

**Josh:** Four generations.

**Dennis:** —“so that they would set their hope in God, and not forgot the works of God, but keep His commandments.”

A family is really where the soul is equipped—it’s where it gets ready for life; right, Josh?

**Josh:** Absolutely.

**Dennis:** And don’t you think grandparents have an assignment in that?

**Josh:** They absolutely do.

**Dennis:** Explain why you believe that.

**Josh:** Well, we see that in Scripture. It’s not something I think that’s been well recognized or appreciated, both in society and in the church today. When we look into Scripture, we see that grandparents are given that role in Psalm 78 of teaching and telling. They have a dual T role—double TNT—that’s part of our grandparent’s dynamite for the Lord.
Dennis: Yes.

Josh: But of course, the big picture we see in Scripture is that grandparents are to pass the faith on to their grandkids. When you pull that out of the equation, you are left with a weight on your shoulders, as parents, that I don't think God intended for you to carry alone. I think that grandparents are a big piece of that.

Bob: You differentiated there between teaching and telling. What's the difference?

Josh: Telling—I look at more as a testimony piece.

Dennis: That's the testimony of Jacob—that's telling the stories.

Josh: Tell the work of the Lord—the glory He has done in your life as a grandparent.

Dennis: Right; right.

Josh: Every grandparent has that—who is a follower of Jesus Christ. Teaching really looks at the words of the Lord / His commands—and this, obviously, you could run through to the New Testament—through the Great Commission and “Teach them to obey all that I have commanded you to do.”

But we see in Psalm78, here—this is a historical Psalm written by Asaph. Really it is a big warning on what will happen if grandparents and parents do not do that. If they don't do that, verses nine through the rest of the chapter, is the sad story from the time of Egyptian slavery up through the time of David, when this was written, of what happened if the older generations didn't tell the younger generations the commands of the Lord.

So we have a really good—we don't have formulas in Scripture—but if we could say: “Here is the closest thing that we can aim towards, as grandparents, to see that our adult children and grandchildren are walking with the Lord,”—I'd point to Psalm 78 as one of those key texts.

Dennis: Would you say then that a grandparent’s primary purpose, besides loving—obviously, they have to love their grandchildren.

Bob: Sugar—and providing sugar for the grandchild.

Dennis: Of course—gummy worms that suddenly show up in the lawn in the summer and all over rooms in the winter—that's the prerogative of a really good Papa / a grandfather.

But the purpose of a grandparent, you would say, then, is both the telling of God's works and the teaching of God's instruction to the next generation.
Josh: Absolutely— with the whole purpose of seeing children love Jesus Christ, grow in Jesus Christ, and walk with Him all of the days. Psalm 78 gets even further than that. Our concern, as grandparent, isn’t just with grandkids—it’s with great grandkids and great great grandkids as the Psalm says. I think a generation in the Bible is around 40 years. That means we’re supposed to have a 150-plus-year vision, as parents and grandparents, for our family. That’s a pretty big deal.

Dennis: It really is! Last night, I was having dinner with our daughter, Rebecca. She came to town for a special party they were having today, looking for our daughter’s wedding dress. Our youngest daughter is engaged. At the age of 31, she is going to get married.

We were talking, and I pulled out a devotional that Barbara and I wrote—the first one—it’s called Moments Together for Couples. We were talking about this generational relay, that you have been discussing here. I said, "Did you perceive the way our devotional ends on December 29, 30 and 31?" Our daughter, Rebecca, said, "No."

I pulled it out and I read an ancient letter by a great, great, great grandfather—I think it’s to the tenth great; okay? His name is Obadiah Holmes. He wrote a letter to his, then, children. I believe it was nine or ten children, and he wrote a letter addressing each of them around their names. Their names were Biblical names. He instructed them about how they were to live—and live up to their name and their spiritual heritage. He called succeeding generations to do the same.

When a man writes a letter, he doesn’t realize it may transcend hundreds of years. Someone may grab hold of that letter and pass it down to generations. It was Dave Jones who lives in Atlanta, Georgia, who gave that letter to me. It was his great, great, great—however many greats there are—grandfather who wrote that to his descendents. Here’s Dave Jones, today, representing Jesus Christ. That’s what it’s to look like; isn’t it?

Josh: Absolutely. None of us wants to raise kids and then see grandkids walk away from the Lord or say that about great grandkids. We need to expand our vision for what God has called us to as parents. That’s part of what we want to be praying for—is that our grandkids, great grandkids, and great great grandkids are walking with the Lord. I think we see that precedent set here in Scripture.

Bob: Josh, you’re a young man—you’re not a grandfather yet; right?

Josh: Right.

Bob: How old is your oldest child?

Josh: Ten
Bob: So you have a ways to go before you’re a grandparent.

Josh: I hope so! [Laughter]

Bob: You sat down to do your doctoral work at Southern Seminary. You could have gone in any direction you wanted to go. You picked grandparenting as the thing you wanted to explore and investigate. Why this subject?

Josh: There are approximately 30 million Christian grandparents in America. There’s virtually nothing to equip them to do their job to pass faith on to future generations.

Dennis: So about ten percent of our population is grandparents.

Bob: Christian grandparents.

Josh: Christian grandparents. There’s about 80 million in total.

Dennis: Okay; alright—but there’s not equipping occurring of grandparents. How do they feel about their assignment, Josh?

Josh: Grandparents?

Dennis: Yes.

Josh: I think they’re completely confused on one end of the spectrum. I think about a quarter of the Christian grandparents—at least that I’ve talked to—are hitting it out of the park, as far as—they understand what the Bible says and their trying to live up to that.

Dennis: Twenty-five percent? That’s a pretty big number.

Bob: That’s a better number than I would have imagined; because—when I stop and think about it—MaryAnn and I were talking recently about the fact that we are grandparents. In fact, we were talking about the event you are going to be speaking at in November at Stonebriar Church in Dallas. This is a national conference on grandparenting; right?

Josh: Absolutely—first one.

Bob: And I said to her: "When we raised our kids, we really operated more in the moment than we did with a road map. We parented for today and tried to deal with today’s dilemmas; because doesn't the Bible say, ‘Let tomorrow worry about itself’?" I mean, we were trying to apply that Scripture—no! We didn't have the intentionality—that I look back and wish we had had and implemented. MaryAnn said: "So we’ve got five grandkids. What are we doing in terms of being intentional with them?" And I thought, "Nothing."
Were you marked by your grandparents?

Josh: I love my grandparents very much. Their influence and impact was limited, spiritually. Part of what I have done—investing in this with my life—is because I don't want this to be the case with my grandkids. I'd like to see something different for them. In my own life, my mother died eight years ago from ALS. My mother-in-law / my wife's mother died two years ago from brain cancer.

Bob: So your kids are growing up without grandma.

Josh: Without grandma. By God's grace, my father remarried a wonderful godly woman. Her name's Pam, and my kids call her Grammy Pammy.

Dennis: So you have a blended—

Josh: We have a blended family. We love Pam to death, and Pam has done a phenomenal job trying to step into that.

That's one of the practical applications that I think a lot of families need today—in the sense that—because the subject matter in our society—there is really a lot of confusion about the role of grandparents. It's left it on a family-by-family basis to talk about “What does that role look like?” We need to get those expectations on the table. So if there is one of the takeaways you have from this discussion, practically, is: “Just sit down and have that discussion: ‘What does it look like to invest, as grandparents, to invest in grandkids?’”

The adult children are the gatekeepers in the relationship. This needs to be a subject that is understood, not just by those who are older, but also by those who are younger, raising their kids right now.

Dennis: I don't want to get too focused on the obstacles here, but there are a couple of obstacles I want you to speak into. One is—we're such a mobile society. When our six kids grew up, they all fled the penitentiary. I mean, they escaped and they decided they would move to other places. We love them / they love us, but none of them—none of our grandkids are local. They are in four different states. Fortunately, we live in one of them; but we are still 100 miles away from our grandkids. The others are Colorado, Indiana, and Tennessee. Speak to the mobility issue and how parents can tackle this and not be overcome by it or be discouraged by it.

Josh: Well, certainly, it is a limiting factor for some—grandparenting will have to take a different shape. Thankfully, due to technology, that is more doable today than it was in the past. A friend of mine, named Walt Pettigrew [spelling uncertain], has created an online resource called Love Your Reader. Resources like this allow grandparents to connect with their grandkids.
Say you want to do a devotion with your grandkid, but they live a thousand miles away. You can go and record that on a resource like Love You Reader and then email that digitally to your grandkid. They can open it up and hear you reading a passage of Scripture in your own voice to them as they follow along in the Bible. Things like that are wonderful for long distance grandparents.

They need to give intentionality to connecting regularly, whether that is for coming and traveling—and you’re going to spend a week or two together: “We’re going to come out to Grandma and Grandpa Camp and bring kids out to visit and spend some time with you.”

One of the pieces for those who are far apart from their grandkids and aren’t able to invest—the opportunity to be a spiritual grandparent for others exists and to adopt some in their church and neighborhood that they are living by. That has been a great blessing for many young people, and I would encourage some to consider that. That would be a great blessing for many.

**Dennis:** I’m sure there are listeners, right now, who are facing another obstacle. It’s not one in our family—our kids are kind of nibbling at our heels, saying: “Come on! Come on over here more often. Stay at our house more often. Spend more time with us.” But undoubtedly, there are grandparents who—and I know some—who say, "My kids really don't want my involvement in the grandkids’ lives."

**Dennis:** Yes; the gatekeepers have shut the gate—“We want to try to influence our grandkids, but we’ve been shut out.”

**Dennis:** They don’t want the spiritual influence—it may be as blunt as that. It could be the relational influence, but it could also be the spiritual teaching and telling that we’re talking about here.

**Josh:** Yes; it's heartbreaking when that happens. You know, I think that is where grandparents are always on their knees praying. For some, the reality is there may be a relational piece that needs attention. There may be some confession that needs to happen that they need to go to their adult child and own up to some things and restore relationships so that can change.

**Dennis:** Let me stop you there. You’re saying: “If you’re being shut out by your kids, maybe do a little holy introspection and evaluate—ask God—to say, “Have I done something to wound this child?” and to humble yourself and to go to your adult child and to open that door, at least, to the possibility of reconciliation.

**Josh:** Absolutely. And that’s obviously not the case for every single instance like this but it may be for some. And that may be the piece that the adult child needs to say, “I needed to hear that, and I embrace that.” They need to own their piece as well, which I
am sure there’s a component of. Through God’s grace, hopefully, there’s some reconciliation there and that changes.

In the event where the adult child has walked away from the Lord or is uninterested in anything spiritual, that’s a difficult situation. One of the areas that we found as a good entry piece, for those parents that aren’t interested in their kids going to church / bringing their kids—grandparents can say, “Can I bring them?”—many an adult child will say,” Yes.”

Another great entry point is through music. We find, where many adult children—that aren’t interested in anything biblical/spiritual—they won't be reading the Bible—they'll play a CD / they'll listen to music. If you are intentional about the music that is being listened to, God's Word can come in through another angle. So there are opportunities; and obviously, that doesn’t minimize the heart pain that is there or the challenges that are going to be present. I won't say that it’s an easy quick fix, but those are some ideas I have seen work.

Bob: If the gate’s been shut and the parent says, "We don't want you talking about Jesus and the Bible with our kids,"—as grandparents, do you respect that boundary or do you say, “Wait; I’ve got a Great Commission I'm supposed to follow; and I don't care what you want." What's your counsel to a grandparent at that point?

Josh: Navigate wisely. But yes; we obviously want to be obedient to the Lord. As I look in Scripture, I don't see any instance where, when somebody says, “Don't speak of the name of Christ,” that there’s agreement to not do that. But obviously, you need to have discernment in how you do that and when you do that.

Dennis: I'd just say there—I would encourage grandparents—and it may sound a little counter-intuitive at this point—but view it as a long haul. They may say to me, “Wait a second, Dennis; I don't look like I have that much of a long haul!” [Laughter] But I think they ought to think about “How can I win the trust of my adult children so that they will allow me to have, not only a relationship, but able to speak into the needs of that child's soul?”

Let me promise you something—life has a way of opening up some pretty hard slammed doors. Circumstances can cause those doors to be flung open, especially if the grandchildren start struggling with issues. Then it’s good to be there—it's good to have your relationship with your adult children intact so that you can offer a solution, or a word of encouragement, or even come be a part of the solution for that grandchild.

Bob: I think the theme we keep hitting on, as we talk about this, is the theme of being purposeful and being intentional. Many grandparents are casual about their role rather than being deliberate and intentional.
And of course, I’m thinking of you [Dennis]; because one of your kids named you “Mr. Intentional”; right?

**Dennis:** Yes; but I kind of share your dilemma, Bob, about what MaryAnn said to you: “We’ve got these grandkids. What are we going to do now?”

**Bob:** Yes.

**Dennis:** The whole intentionality is one thing if they are under your roof. When they are not under your roof, you really do have to take a step back. I think what Josh has written, in a book called *Equipping Grandparents*—which is really written for the church—helping your church reach and disciple the next generation—which, frankly, is a great idea. If the church began to equip grandparents to feel more comfortable and be intention, Bob, I think that would go a long way towards solving the issues.

**Bob:** Well, we haven’t talked about this, but you may not have grandchildren of your own; but if you are part of a church community, there are children in your church that you can be a grandparent to. Or you may be in a blended family and you may have stepchildren that you can pour yourself into. I think the point is that we have opportunity to invest, significantly, in the lives of the next generation to pass along a legacy of spiritual vitality to a coming generation. That’s a part of the assignment God has given to us, as grandparents.

You’re going to be talking about this, Josh, along with a whole group of speakers, at the Legacy Grandparenting Summit in Frisco, Texas, November 15-17. Chuck Swindoll’s going to be there, Crawford Loritts, Josh McDowell, Gary Chapman, John Trent, Tim and Darcy Kimmel—whole group of folks getting together to talk about, “What’s our assignment as grandparents?” If our listeners are interested in joining you, go to FamilyLifeToday.com to find out more about this upcoming event—the Legacy Grandparenting Summit taking place in the DFW Metroplex.

In addition, there is information about the book that Josh has written on this subject called *God’s Design for Grandparenting*. I don’t know if it’s in the warehouse or not, because this is something Josh just finished up; but you can go to FamilyLifeToday.com. There is information about how you can order a copy of the book, or you can call us at 1-800-FL-TODAY for more information as well—1-800-358-6329. Again, the book is called *God’s Design for Grandparenting*.

Now, we have to shout out today to Shreveport, Louisiana, where Najja and Morgan Thumbutu are celebrating their tenth wedding anniversary. “Congratulations!” to the Thumbutus on ten years of marriage together.

If today is your anniversary, “Happy anniversary!” to you as well. Anniversaries matter—they are milestones in a marriage. Here, at FamilyLife, we have been celebrating this year our 40th anniversary in ministry. It gives us an opportunity to look
back at all that God has done over the years. I hope the Thumbutus will take some time to do that today. I hope, on your anniversary, you’ll do it as well. If today is your anniversary, just take some time reflecting on God’s goodness to you, as a couple.

Here, at FamilyLife, one of our goals is to help you have more anniversaries and to go the distance in your marriage. We hope those of you who partner with us in the work of this ministry. We couldn’t do what we do without you.

In fact, if you can help with a donation today, we’d love to send you the FamilyLife 20017 calendar—it’s all about making your home an embassy of the kingdom of heaven. And the calendar actually starts with October—so when you order it now, you can put it to use right away. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com to make an online donation in support of our ministry. Or call 1-800-FL-TODAY to make a donation; or you can mail your donation to FamilyLifeToday at PO Box 7111, Little Rock, AR; our zip code is 72223.

Now, tomorrow, we’re going to spend more time exploring what it looks like to be purposeful and intentional as a grandparent. Josh Mulvihill will be back with us. Hope you can be back as well.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I'm Bob Lepine. We will see you tomorrow for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

FamilyLife Today is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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