

South Bay Community Church
Sermon Reflections
Shepherds of the Family
10 September 2023
Lead Pastor Tammy Long

Scripture Texts: Deuteronomy 4:9, 1st Peter 5:2

Sermon Preamble

We are celebrating Grandparents Day. In 1978, President Carter signed legislation proclaiming the first Sunday after Labor Day as National Grandparent's Day. It has never gotten the marketing fervor of Mother's Day, Father's Day, or Valentine's Day. The originator of the Mother's Day holiday, Anna Jarvis, became disgusted by its commercialism. Then by 1920, she launched a campaign against the rampant commercialism of Mother's Day. In the early 1970's Marian McQuade, a West Virginia house wife was disturbed by the number of elderly people lonely in nursing homes. She wanted a special day to highlight their worth to society and motivate grandchildren to connect with their grandparents, tapping into their wisdom and heritage. She started a statewide campaign for Grandparent's Day, which was signed into law in West Virginia in 1973. A national campaign followed over the next five years petitioning remaining 49 states to establish Grandparents Day in their states. By 1978, 43 states had established the celebration of Grandparents Day, when Grandparents Day became a national day of celebration.

Affirming the value, worth, wisdom, and contribution of our senior family members is a priority for God. One of the Ten Commandments is to honor your father and mother. There are no expiration dates, and the commandment crosses generations. So the commandment includes honoring fathers and mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers, great grandfathers and great grandmothers and so on. This directive and insight into God's values is made clear in Leviticus 19:32: "Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord." Not only does God affirm the aging and mature, but God has also given seniors a distinct role and calling that they are uniquely qualified to fulfill. God has designed us to live in social/family units. As we mature, we all can pour into those coming behind us. This message of shepherding those coming behind us applies to anyone who is growing older and wiser, even if that shepherd is not a grandparent.

The age of the grandparent has arrived in the entire world as a social revolution

According to an article earlier this year in The Economist, we are in the middle of a social revolution. Currently, there are 1.5 billion grandparents in the world, up from .5 billion in 1960. Grandparents have risen from 17% to 20% of the total world population. Projections of the year 2050, assert that there will be 2.1 billion grandparents in the world, making up 22% of humanity. Indeed, there will be slightly more grandparents than children under the age of 15.

Both grandmothers and grandfathers are pivotal to the family

There are common themes from around the world about grandparents in society. Grandparents pass on traditional beliefs, stories, songs, and a sense of history. Grandparents share an extra pair of hands that helps both parents and children. It may be true that challenges of generation gaps, as well as differing norms, values, and education can sometimes cause conflict within family units. However, studies show additional help and contributions grandparents provide often outweigh those challenges. A two decade study looking at the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren found the greater the emotional support grandparents and grandchildren receive from each other, the better their psychological and physiological health.

Grandmothers often get much of the attention. However, a survey in the US by AARP in 2018 found that grandmothers and grandfathers may have slightly different roles, but both are equally critical to the family. Grandmothers traditionally thrive in the roles of teaching culture, storytelling and imparting wisdom

to grandchildren. Grandfathers traditionally prefer family figurehead roles, such as mentor and valued elder.

The AARP study found that the contributions and what is deemed most important by grandparents can vary slightly in different cultures. For example, in Hispanic Latino families, the most important contributions from grandparents –in order- are deemed to be (1) roots from family heritage, culture, and history, (2) source of wisdom, (3) friend, (4) valued elder, and (5) storytelling. In Asian American Pacific Islander families, the most important contributions from grandparents –in order- are deemed to be (1) source of wisdom, (2) valued elder, (3) roots, (4) source of wisdom, (5) friend. In African American families, the most important contributions from grandparents –in order- are deemed to be (1) source of wisdom (2) roots, (3) valued elder, (4) mentor, (5) friend. In all three of these communities, as well as the general population, roots, valued elder, source of wisdom, and friend were among the top five, although not in the same order.

Here is the online link to this AARP study:

While priorities and nuances might differ slightly from culture to culture, grandparents, including mature aunts, uncles, godparents, and family friends, have a unique role and special gift to share with their families and the world.

Grandparents as the shepherds of the family

God's Word has grandparents as shepherds of the family. "Be careful never to forget what you yourself have seen. Do not let these memories escape from your mind as long as you live! Be sure to pass them on to your children and grandchildren" (Deuteronomy 4:9). "Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you" (1 Peter 5:2a). Since we are not a pastoral society, we don't talk much about shepherds today. Caring for the flock that God has entrusted to you is talking about church leaders and the flock of the family of God. This term for shepherding still applies when thinking about grandparents and senior members of the family. Let's think about what shepherds do.

Shepherds provide guidance and direction from learned experiences

Guidance and direction is a key attribute provided by grandparents. Across cultures, grandparents in the AARP study were regarded as sources of wisdom, mentors, teachers, and valued elders. Grandparents have experience and wisdom they have learned over the years. They can share advice, stories, and offer a perspective on life's challenges gained from lived experiences that they can pass on to the generations behind them.

Our core scripture text affirms this: "Be careful never to forget what you have seen...Be sure to pass them on to your children and grandchildren" (Deuteronomy 4:9). "What you have seen" speaks to lived experiences passing down lived stories and what was learned along the way. What we've learned along the way is wisdom. We all know people who are older, but don't appear to be wiser.

We are never to forget what we have seen and experienced, and what we learned from the experience. Learning from the experience means that we have to think about it, process it, understand it, and apply it to future possibilities. Lessons learned include growing from experiences when we learn from mistakes. Those lessons learned is what we pass down to our children and grandchildren.

The principle of passing down applies to anyone who is maturing, learning, and growing, not just grandparents. Our learned experiences are not just for us, but they are to be shared with the people God has placed in our lives. When the Holy Spirit prompts us to share, we are to share among our spheres of influence and our flocks.

Shepherds protect with love at the core

Protective instincts of grandparents come from a deep place of love and concern, even when it does not feel that way to the parents or grandchildren. If there is a threat, shepherds will place themselves between potential dangers and the flock. In the same way, grandparents also protect. They protect with advice,

physical efforts if necessary, and prayer. There is a quote that says, Grandma's prayers are the reason that a lot of us are still here. Let us never underestimate the truth that prayer is a powerful weapon of protection.

A grandparent's protective efforts may feel intrusive, outdated, or unwelcome. The protective efforts may be expressed in ways that aren't the most helpful and may even feel offensive. When you peel back to what is underneath, what may be fear, the concerns, and the intention behind the advice and comments, most often you will find love for the family and the flock at the core.

This over the top and protective vigilance of grandparents is often the source of grandparent jokes. An example is this t-shirt that says, "Five things you should know about my grandma. (1) She is a crazy grandma. (2) She loves me to the moon and back. (3) She can't control her mouth. (4) She has anger issues and a serious dislike for stupid people. (5) Mess with me, and they will never find your body." We laugh at jokes like these, but they speak to the profound love that grandparents have for their grandchildren.

That deep love of grandparents is only a micro dose of the love God has for God's children

The image of God is like a grandparent, holding the young lamb of the mother sheep, and providing a space of protection, safety, and love. "God will feed God's flock like a shepherd. God will carry the lambs in God's arms, holding them close to God's heart. God will gently lead the mother sheep with their young" (Isaiah 40:11). This text speaks of the gentle love of God for God's flock.

Shepherds nurture their flocks

Just as shepherds ensure the flock is well-fed, grandparents often nurture for the emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing of their grandchildren. The AARP study noted the important role of grandparents as friends and care providers. Grandparents have a unique way of nurturing that can offer support and uplift without the immediate pressures of parenting.

Their love can be a unique blend of gentleness, strength, and encouragement. They can express a love that sees beyond the here and now to what could be. Their love is always hoping and praying. They have lived long enough to know that time will tell, and today's challenges (like the teen years) shall pass. A grandparent's love sees what could be. In current challenges, the story is not over because God is always working.

The love of a grandparent is deep and wide, nurturing growth in both subtle and overt ways. They include a comforting lap, a nourishing meal, and a listening ear. Just like the Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, grandparents can create nurturing spaces of metaphorical green pastures, still waters, which can restore souls.

Applying shepherd principles for a grandparent, parent, aunt, uncle, godparent, teacher, mentor, or friend

Perhaps God brought people to your mind where these shepherd principles of providing direction and guidance, protection, and nurturing apply. Our God is so wonderful that it is never too late to begin what God has stirred in our hearts, to be doers of God's Word. All we have to do is say yes, take a step in that direction, and ask the Holy Spirit to help us fulfill where God is leading us.

As lovers of God and followers of Jesus, we are shepherds of the flocks God has entrusted to us. As we guide, direct, protect, and nurture, our intent is to be living testimonies for the glory of God.

Grandparents as living testimonies of the works of God learned from the covenant with God

Our scripture text in Deuteronomy 4:9 were spoken by Moses to God's children of Israel right before they entered the Promised Land, where God had promised they could live in peace, health, and fruitfulness. The biblical book of Exodus recorded a ten-plague battle from which God delivered the children of Israel from being enslaved hundreds of years in Egypt. Through miraculous events, God brought them to Mt. Sinai where God gave commandments through Moses. The commandments are not simply a list of rules to follow, but a covenant, meaning a mutual relationship of understanding and commitment that God offers the people

and the people agree to obey. Their promise to obey was short lived, and their disobedience led to the consequence of 40 years wandering in the wilderness, even though they were at the threshold of the Promised Land. For our Deuteronomy text, they are again at the threshold of the Promised Land.

When Moses said never to forget, he says that they were to remember the works of God, the things they had seen, the things they had been taught, and pass those memories on to their children and grandchildren. They were not only to pass down the memories from generation to generation, but also the teaching of God's ways.

Repeatedly teach and share ways of God and living testimonies with the next generation

A few chapters later in Deuteronomy 6, Moses still prepared the people to enter the Promised Land.

“¹These are the commands, decrees, and regulations that the Lord your God commanded me to teach you. You must obey them in the land you are about to enter and occupy,² and you and your children and grandchildren must fear the Lord your God as long as you live”.... ⁴“Israel listen: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. ⁵ And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. ⁶ And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. ⁷ Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up.” (Deuteronomy 6: 1-2, 4-7).

As lover of God and followers of Jesus, the ways of God are the foundation for the direction and guidance grandparents share. The ways of God are the bedrock for the protection and nurture grandparents offer. The ways of God are the memories and the testimonies of the goodness and faithfulness of God that grandparents are to hold and share with their grandchildren. Grandparents are to remember; we have a tendency to forget, so often in the Bible the children of Israel were told to remember. Similarly, grandparents are to remember for their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren as living testimonies the miracles and divine interventions. As grandparents share their lived experiences and stories, grandchildren of all ages gain a richer understanding of God, how God is at work in the world, how we fit into God's story, and how God continues to shape our lives. This text is not only a call to teach and share with the next generation, but it tells us what, how, and when to pass it down.

What we pass down - the truths of God's Word

We pass down the truth that the Lord alone is our God. There is only one God. Our grandchildren may explore other faiths, and they may have questions and doubts. We won't have all the answers, but we do know and can declare there is one God. We are to pass down God's command to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and strength. We are to pass down that we are to commit wholeheartedly to God and God's ways.

How we pass down - through repetition

We pass down through repetition. It is not a once and done conversation. It is like a life song that we just keep singing. They are watching, even if it appears that they are not listening. The next generation sees and hears more than we think they do. We are to repeat the truths of God's ways again and again.

When we pass down - in our daily living

We pass down the ways of God by what we do and what we say in our daily living. It is caught and taught from the rising of the sun to the setting of the sun, when we are at home and when we are on the road, from when we are going to bed to when we are getting up. Our journey walking in the ways of God will show naturally in the day to day life. It will show in our conversations, our choices, our behaviors, the stories we share, the advice we give, and the wisdom we impart. This principle is true for everyone, not just grandparents.

Why we pass it on - so next generations will know

Psalm 78 says it best: [“]⁴ we will not hide these truths from our children; we will tell the next generation about the glorious deeds of the Lord, about his power and his mighty wonders. ⁵ For he issued his laws to Jacob; he gave his instructions to Israel. He commanded our ancestors to teach them to their children, ⁶ so the next generation might know them— even the children not yet born— and they in turn will teach their own children. ⁷ So each generation should set its hope anew on God, not forgetting his glorious miracles and obeying his commands.” (Psalm 78: 4-7). Teach God’s truths to the next generations, so that they will teach children.

Application to our life journey

Marian McQuaid was right that grandparents have so much to offer, and Grandparents Day is a nice and a good reminder. God has already affirmed and given grandparents a unique and distinctive role to play in the family and society as shepherds of the flocks of God. They are keepers of the memories and teachers of God’s faithfulness. They offer guidance and direction because they know God is good. They offer spaces of protection because God guides them. They nurture with the unconditional love of God. Whether we are a grandparent or not, may we live into the call God has entrusted to us as shepherds of care for one another. We share the goodness of God as we mature as living testimonies to all generations for God’s glory.

Elder installation of Philip Thompson

In the same way that God has given shepherds to our families God has given shepherds to the church family. Elders care for the flock God has entrusted to us known as South Bay Community Church. In this worship service, we install our newest elder, Philip Thompson.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS INCLUDING FOR USE IN FAMILY GROUP

Sermon Preamble

-Why does one of the Ten Commandments to honor your father and your mother also apply to honoring your grandfather and grandmother? Is it limited to your immediate father and mother, or does it include other elders in your family that God calls to be shepherds of your family? Why?

The age of the grandparent has arrived in the entire world as a social revolution

-Why is it significant that the percentage of humanity worldwide that are grandparents is steadily increasing?

Both grandmothers and grandfathers are pivotal to the family

-What are the health benefits when grandparents and grandchildren receive greater emotional support from each other? What benefits have you experienced from increases in emotional support between grandparents or other elders and grandchildren in your family?

-Despite cultural nuances, what four values contributed by grandparents were in the top five in the 2018 AARP study, although not in the same order?

Grandparents as the shepherds of the family

-In what ways can grandparents shepherd in caring for the members of the family that is similar to the Good Shepherd Jesus Christ? In what ways have you experienced grandparents shepherding your family?

Shepherds provide guidance and direction from learned experiences

-What are you sharing from your experiences that would be helpful to the next generation? Why is memory and never forgetting critical in providing guidance and direction? Why is careful obedience to the covenant commandments of God important?

Shepherds protect with love at the core

-In what ways might grandparents provide protection from potential dangers to the flock they are called to shepherd?

That deep love of grandparents is only a micro dose of the love God has for God's children

-When grandparents shepherd out of their deep love for grandchildren, how might that deep love be an image for the grandchildren of the great love provided by God?

Shepherds nurture their flocks

-In what ways might grandparents nurture the grandchildren in unique ways that may be different than the nurturing love provided by parents?

Applying shepherd principles for a grandparent, parent, aunt, uncle, godparent, teacher, mentor, or friend

-Since it never too late to shepherd those whom God has entrusted to you, what steps will you take to begin what God has stirred in your heart?

Grandparents as living testimonies of the works of God learned from the covenant with God

-Why is it so important to remember and to pass on God's truth and ways from generation to generation?

Repeatedly teach and share ways of God and living testimonies with the next generation

-Why is it important to repeatedly teach God's truth, share the ways of God, and share your testimony of what God has done in your life with the next generation? Why is repetition important?

What we pass down - the truths of God's Word

-What do we pass down to the next generations? Why?

How we pass down - through repetition

-How do we pass down to the next generations? Why?

When we pass down - in our daily living

-When do we pass down to the next generations? Why?

Why we pass it on - so next generations will know

-How is passing it on an act of humility glorifying God?

Application to our life journey

-As a lover of God and follower of Jesus Christ, how is the Holy Spirit guiding you to shepherd those people God has placed in your sphere of influence?