

FAMILY MATTERS

Answers to your questions...

I love my grandchildren, but sometimes I worry that I'm not really connecting with them. Do you have any suggestions that can help me feel like I'm doing the right things?

ANSWER:

Relationship building is a process that happens slowly over time. It's the small, loving things that we do through the years that build the grandparent-grandchild connection: singing a lullaby and rocking them when they're babies; blowing bubbles to hear that belly laugh when they're toddlers; going to the zoo together; showing up at milestones like graduations; sending cards of encouragement; and giving all the hugs, smiles and phone

calls in between throughout elementary school, high school and college years.

The miles may separate us from our grandchildren, and certainly as they grow, the busyness of their lives will increase, but we can provide the unconditional love and acceptance they need in order to grow and face the challenges ahead. That's a gift that will last.

When divorce, death or a move brings change and uncertainty to our grandchildren's lives, we can give them the gift of a safe place and sense of security. The loving relationship we've built steadies them when the inevitable storms come. As grandparents, we're an important source of community, conveyed

through holiday traditions, customs, faith and family history, creating a chain of love linking the past with the future.

Most importantly, our prayers can surround our grandchildren all the way from the cradle to college and beyond, providing wind beneath their wings as they embark on their adult lives and build their own families. Our prayers are some of the greatest gifts because they don't fade, rust or go away. They continue showering our grandkids' lives with blessings even when we've graduated to heaven.

(Adapted from *Connect with Your Grandkids* by Cheri Fuller)

TOUGH QUESTIONS FROM KIDS

ANSWER:

God sees what we cannot and knows the needs of every person everywhere. Sometimes God gives us what we were really asking for rather than the specific thing we wanted. Maybe we asked for a toy but really we needed to be happy. If we trust God's perfect love, we will always be content with His answers to our prayers.

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A Season for Giving Thanks

THANKFUL IN THE HARD TIMES

BY JIM DALY

THANKSGIVING IS A CHERISHED TRADITION IN OUR NATION. Before America was founded, the Pilgrims expressed gratitude to God for His many blessings . . . even when life was hard.

And life *was* hard. The Pilgrims' voyage across the Atlantic Ocean took 65 days in miserable conditions. Many became ill, and one person died before the Mayflower reached Plymouth in November of 1620. Fewer than half of the Pilgrims survived that first winter. Despite adversity, their governor, William Bradford, proclaimed a day of thanksgiving for God's grace and provision.

In 1863, President Lincoln also called for thanksgiving in the midst of difficult times. He and his wife were mourning the recent death of their 11-year-old son, Willie. The country was embroiled in a bloody Civil War. Yet, Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday of November to be a day of thanksgiving and prayer.

Maybe you're going through a hard time this Thanksgiving. Sickness. Financial problems. An empty chair where a beloved family member used to sit. It's not easy to be thankful when life seems dark. But as Dr. Tim Keller says, "It's one thing to be grateful. It's another to give thanks. Gratitude is what you feel. Thanksgiving is what you do." It's in the midst of difficulty that thankfulness can be its most profound and most healing.

Tough
Questions
from Kids

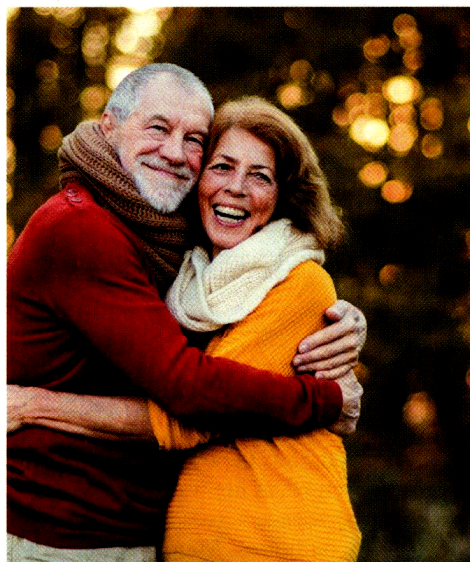
Why doesn't
God answer
our prayers
the way we
want?

NOVEMBER 20 Bulletin

EMPTY NESTERS

Our very first kitchen space featured a 100-year-old farm table my husband and I bought for \$20 the summer we got married. After stripping off layers of light-green milk paint, we sanded and conditioned the wood, restoring its luster. The table served us well until our third child was born and we needed to upgrade to a bigger table. We found an affordable new Amish-crafted table that did just the trick; the farm table found new purposes in the basement.

Our youngest child recently moved out of the house. When he did, my husband and I found ourselves sitting smack-dab in the middle of an empty nest. With



this transition also came a move to a smaller home. At that time, we decided to put our Amish dining set up for sale and keep our old farm table. That antique piece has once again become the centerpiece of our kitchen, with plenty of room for two.

While it felt familiar to once again be using it daily, it also had a strangeness about it, much like our new empty-nest stage of life. With no one needing help getting on the school bus or asking to be driven to sports practice, our days became eerily quiet.

After a few weeks of wallowing in my sadness, I decided I needed to make some changes and find ways to reconnect with my husband. I

knew that this new season of life did not come as a surprise to God. I would go to Him for direction as to what our new routine as a married couple should look like in this unfamiliar stage. I recalled Jeremiah 33:3, which urges, “Call to Me and I will answer you and tell you great and incomprehensible things you do not know.” Well, there were a lot of things I did not know. Things such as . . .

How am I going to adjust now that my children don't need me as much? How am I going to fill my extra time? What changes will the absence of kids in the house make in our marriage?

God was faithful and supplied the answers to all my questions. With His guidance, I've learned new routines and found fulfillment in my marriage during this season of life.

—Karen Ehman

SHARE YOUR DREAMS

I was at a women's Bible study group when the leader asked a fascinating question: “What were your dreams as a young girl?”

Over the next hour as the women disclosed their unique journeys, I learned more about the women in the group than I knew about some of my closest friends. My heart broke when I heard the regrets, frustrations and disappointments of unrealized dreams. But I found it uplifting to hear about God's faithfulness and how He had brought different opportunities and delivered unexpected blessings to each woman.

When you met your spouse, a new set of aspirations entered the picture. Your individual desires mingled, and you began to dream together. Dreaming has a powerful effect on a marriage. It brings a unique depth of closeness and connection.

The most powerful benefit of sharing a vision for your future is the synergy it creates. What you can do together is far greater than what you can do alone. Your combined abilities, experience, talents and passions create an incredible God-blessed synergy—the two become one. God wants you to use your oneness to bless others.

—Erin Smalley

GROWING IN STEADFAST LOVE

Life's tough situations are an opportunity to teach children how to demonstrate steadfast love to others. When these circumstances arise, kids should never be expected to shoulder part of the burden. But our sons and daughters can be encouraged to show compassion to a parent after the death of a grandparent, or to a sibling after the loss of a pet. Demonstrating compassionate acts, whether by sharing a hug or providing acts of service, is a great way to show steadfast love to the family.

The differences between boys and girls can have an impact on how they choose to demonstrate this love. Ask your son or daughter what they would like to do to show someone steadfast love in those situations. Support and encourage your kids while they are learning how to do this.

Our children are beautifully created to receive and show steadfast love in unique ways. Knowing the differences between boys and girls and how your son or daughter best gives and receives your love will help them be secure in the knowledge that they are precious in your eyes. Through your steadfast love, you are teaching your children that they are God's beloved.

—Carol Cuppy