



EncourAGING & Equipping Congregations for Older Adult Ministry

Lessons I Learned In Life, For My Grandchildren, by Robert Zimmer **Study Guide** by Mark Schoepp

Grandparenting: It is a special and unique relationship with the generations that follow. The role of grandparenting ranges widely:

- you might live far away and visit infrequently; or
- you might live close and visit often; or
- due to a variety of circumstances, you might even be among the growing

number of grandparents who are the de facto parent. This resource can provide help in all of those circumstances.

There are many other books around that tackle this subject. Bob's approach was to write broadly about things he thinks are important, and to keep the topics focused and short. He came up with 38 "Lessons". Be sure to check out his 'Preface' on page xii in the front of the book, and also check out the [YouTube video of Bob Zimmer](#) talking about this book in an interview.

Bob has a second practice as well with his extended family. He sends a weekly email about a wide variety of subjects to both children and grandchildren. He has done it for years. He says he hasn't gotten very much feedback from his family on the practice, but one of his grandsons recently commented: "Grandpa, I've saved all those emails you've sent me." Yes! His wisdom and faith conversations will live on!

"Lessons" - that is a good term to use. We are always in school, at every age. There is the formal kind which happens mostly when we are young, but which can continue for a long time. And then there is the 'school of hard knocks', the

school of life. That is where Bob's lessons come from. And it is one of the great reasons for grandparents to engage in intentional ways with their children and grandchildren in an ongoing way. I'm 64 as I write this, but my Mom still is 'Mom' and I'm her son, and she is happy to share her wisdom with me - and all her children and grandchildren. Thankfully she does it in a winsome way.

There are much better and much worse ways to share wisdom. I like Bob's approach, actually both approaches: his book and the weekly emails. First, compile the lessons. It doesn't hurt that, in order to do that, we have to reflect on our own life. Second, find a format that allows you to share them. Emails or a book allow the lessons to stick around and have a life beyond our own years.

Here are some suggestions for how to use this little book:

1. Use this book as a catalyst for you to make your own list with some explanations/stories from your own life. Your stories will be much more powerful to your children and grandchildren than Bob's stories - because they tell much more about you, and parts of you are in your kids and grandkids. Once you've compiled them, check out the next steps to see about how you might share them.
2. Get this book for you and a grandchild. Use it as a discussion starter with your children and grandchildren. I'm working on sharing it with my oldest granddaughter. She is now in the 7th grade - just about the right time to have some more serious discussions about life. You could tackle it in a variety of ways:
 1. Start at the beginning and take one "lesson" per week or month, whatever works for you.
 2. Take the "Lessons" in the order of interest. Take turns picking the next one you like until you are through the book.
 3. Make a special time of it, going out for 'coffee' or to a special place for you. You don't even have to be in the same city to make it work. Skype, FaceTime, Facebook, etc. all allow a video conference call for no charge. Perhaps you could share the leadership, taking turns as the 'discussion leader' for the topic of the week/month.
 4. Remember, not every session will be a 'home run'. They might even all be very 'normal' and ordinary and some of them even a bit uncomfortable -

especially at the start. Keep at it; you'll develop a rhythm over time. And also, remember to let the tangents in the conversation happen naturally. Sometimes the best discussion comes from the side topic that comes up rather than the planned 'lesson'.

5. It will be important to practice good listening. In my own experience (you can ask any member of my family) I can hog the conversation. The more you work on listening at the beginning, the more two-way conversations you will have throughout your time together. One suggestion is for the grandparent to count to 10 before saying anything. The space allows the other to get up the courage to share, and with sharing comes confidence to say more.
 6. You may not get through them all. 38 different lessons means that it takes more than six months to get through them on a weekly schedule. And once per month is more than three years! Be patient. If you are using your own lessons, be sure they are in a permanent format so they will always be there, even after you are gone.
 7. If you do this with your children and grandchildren, the odds go way up that your children will do it with their children and grandchildren. That pattern can mean your influence lasts for a long time! (Seriously, read Exodus 20:1-6. Parenting and grand parenting practices have consequences... for good, or... not so much! God promises that faithful parenting will have benefits that are really far reaching)
 8. If you try a format that works particularly well, please share it with us. We'd love to hear your ideas and pass them on to others.
aloa4u@gmail.com
3. Use this book in a group setting, grandparents and grandchildren together (or include the middle generation/parents too), perhaps for a short, one-time "Grandparent Night", or for a period of weeks, or as an option for Sunday morning Bible Study time. You could have books for everyone and then have a short input piece with everyone together that opens up the topic for that session - perhaps some of the short format videos from ALOA website or other stories - and then have families separate to talk about the subject.

List of Robert Zimmer's 38 lessons:

1. Life is not always fair (Fairness)
2. The sooner you get to know yourself, the better. (Identity)
3. People change as they go through life. (Growing)
4. Family is key to a well-adjusted, healthy and meaningful life. (Family)
5. Choosing friends is among the most important things you'll do. (Friends)
6. We are whole persons - body, mind and spirit. (Wholeness)
7. The Bible is the best source for instruction, inspiration and comfort. (The Bible)
8. Respect people of all faiths. (Understanding)
9. Personal integrity is a virtue set apart. (Integrity)
10. Do not mistake humility for low self-esteem. (Self-esteem)
11. Lifelong learning is key to personal satisfaction, meaning and reward. (Learning)
12. Choosing a spouse is bigger than you think. (Marriage)
13. The road to fulfilled dreams can be long, winding... and bumpy (Dreams)
14. There is a difference between a job, a career and a vocation. (Work)
15. Playtime is most satisfying when you feel you have earned it. (Play)
16. Who you are is more important than what you are. (Authenticity)
17. Planning your life is a good thing; trying to manipulate it is not. (Planning)
18. Falling down will happen. Getting up is a matter of choice. (Resilience)
19. The importance of self-discipline and routine. (Self-discipline)
20. Classy has nothing to do with class. (Classy)
21. It is necessary to prove yourself again and again. (Proving Yourself)
22. Strike a balance between work, service and play. (Balance)
23. It is better to give than to receive. (Generosity)
24. The best teaching is by example. (Modeling)
25. Keep the knives in your drawer sharpened. (Readiness)
26. Most problems can be solved within thirty feet. (Solving)
27. Things are never as simple as they originally sound. (Complexity)
28. Value people for who they are, not for what they can do for you. (Valuing)
29. Good results are usually the result of good work. (Results)
30. Never skimp on the quality of your footwear. (Quality)
31. Pick your battles carefully. (Choices)
32. Save for a rainy day. (Stewardship)

33. Constant criticism creates a culture of criticism. (Criticism)
34. Realizing the limits of parental influence. (Parenting)
35. Focus on the big picture. (Vision)
36. If you want to play in someone else's sandbox, play by their rules. (Propriety)
37. What you have done in the past is the best indicator of what you will do in the future. (Potential)
38. Whose you are is more important than who you are. (Belonging)