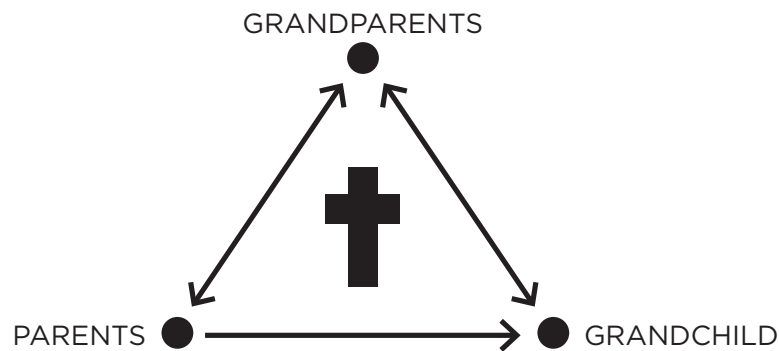


# A GUIDE TO GREAT GRANDPARENTING

The God-Given and God-Driven  
Family Trinity



*Paul and Diana Miller*



CHRISTIANGRANDPARENTING.NET

**A GUIDE TO GREAT GRANDPARENTING:**

***The God-Given and God-Driven Family Trinity***

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and Diana B. Miller

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# Who Should Read This Book?

## *Expectant grandparents-to-be*

People who are about to become new grandparents can learn from this book about the great changes that are coming to their lives and prepare them for new relationships, roles, and responsibilities. What lies ahead is not exactly what most people expect or are led to believe. In fact, grandparenting is as much about your relationship with your adult children as it is about your grandchildren. Those who focus only on the grandkids will miss out on the joy of helping and being with their adult children.

## *Grandparents who want to get better*

We think grandparenting is best done in the context of the “God-Given and God Driven Family Trinity” that consists of three generations (grandparents, parents, and grandchildren) and the unique relationships that exist among them. This book shows that grandparents can help most by coaching their adult children, which means replacing their old parent-child relationship with a new and improved version. Specifically, the adult children’s newly-experienced ability to love their child unconditionally triggers new-found respect and love for the grandparents that can change everything for the better!

## *Grandparents who aren’t sure what to do*

This book also guides grandparents who are uncertain about their roles and responsibilities. How much should they be involved? When should they stand back and watch? What’s the difference between helping and interfering? What should they do about babysitting, spoiling,

and gift-giving? The answers are different from what many think and what a lot of books say. We think this guidance will liberate and empower grandparents to build better relationships in their Family Trinity.

### *Grandparents in special situations*

Have you become a grandparent by adoption? Have your adult children decided to get involved in foster care? Does your growing family include new members who come from different cultures? This book will help you learn what these situations involve and get insight into how you can contribute as only grandparents can!

### *Grandparents in difficult situations*

Has your family felt the pain and difficulties that come from such things as death, divorce, disability, detachment, and deployment? These situations surely call on grandparents to step up to new roles and responsibilities. This book explains how to do your part to help sustain the family's stability and courageously get through these struggles.

# What Others Have Said

“Very few sources lay out the multi-generational responsibilities in a family structure, and even fewer that do it from a Christian perspective. Paul and Diana Miller have not only defined those responsibilities in this book, they have lived them out in their family. Grandparents will read this book and say, ‘I wish I had known this when I was younger,’ because it is just full of great stuff. It moves from a great visual structure for proper family relationships to wonderful, wise, practical advice for functioning well as a multi-generational family. I’m not aware of another book like this one; I promise you that following its principles will do wonders for your family’s relationships!”

**LARRY FOWLER**

Chief Executive Officer, The Legacy Coalition

“A second path to becoming great grandparents is by carrying out our grandparent role in such a way that brings the best out of our children and grandchildren. Paul and Diana Miller have turned this concept into a doable strategy, which is why we’re glad you picked up this book. When you’re done reading it, you’re going to be glad you did too . . . and your extended family is going to be much better off because you did.”

**DR. TIM & DARCY KIMMEL**

Co-authors of *Extreme Grandparenting: the Ride of Your Life*

For many years we have witnessed the way Paul and Diana Miller have modeled heroic self-sacrifice in parenthood. Now they do the same as grandparents and share insights for all of us called to the God-ordained honor of being someone’s Grandpa or Grandma. Read and glean!”

**KURT BRUNER**, author of *It Starts At Home*

**OLIVIA BRUNER**, author of *The Minivan Years*

“If you think grandparenting is just about the grandkids, think again. Paul and Diana’s carefully crafted concept of the Family Trinity birthed from their experiences as parents and grandparents will bring many “ah-ha” moments for grandparents. If you’re serious about being a truly “great” Christian grandparent—one whose legacy will outlive you generation after generation—you must read this book... and share it with your adult children.”

**CAVIN HARPER**

Author of *Courageous Grandparenting*

Founder and Executive Director, Christian Grandparenting Network

“Paul and Diana add a fresh and practical perspective for grandparenting. Their guidance has been timely for helping us learn to coach our adult children and understand more about our role in this journey of raising the next generation.”

**KEVIN AND KATIE DIFELICE**

Grandparents

“By clearly defining the role of grandparent coach, Paul and Diana have helped me stop trying to be a ‘father-corrector’ and given me deeper enjoyment in relating to my adult children and grandchildren. I am now learning better ways to observe character, listen, give value, and pray unceasingly in the midst of the fun and confusion. The Millers’ fresh-air insights have blown away pressure generated by the myth that I had to ensure my grandchildren grew up the ‘right’ way. Now I know that what I need to do most is bless my family, often by just being there cheering from the sidelines.”

**DR. GARY JEWELL**

Grandfather and Family Physician

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# Foreword

**Dr. Tim & Darcy Kimmel**

Co-authors of *Extreme Grandparenting: the Ride of Your Life*

There are two ways to become great grandparents. The first way is the one that's been around since Adam and Eve's grandchildren had kids of their own. It's one of those default titles we get to use if we happen to live long enough to watch our grandchildren become parents.

A second path to becoming great grandparents is by carrying out our grandparent role in such a way that brings the best out of our children and grandchildren. This is an *earned* title. Notice that we listed our *children* in the equation. Once they have children of their own, our role in their lives takes on a critical new dimension that calls for some deliberate dynamics on our part as their parents.

There's a grand myth out there that too many grandparents embrace. It's the myopic assumption that the role of grandparent is played out between two entities—the grandparent and the grandchild. This misses the point of grandparenting by light years. It's a toxic plan that not only does enormous harm to the parents involved, but also to the grandchildren we're called to love.

If we want to have this second version of the title “great grandparent” apply to us, we've got to be unselfishly deliberate when it comes to how we both view and interact with our grown children. We not only want to continue to be good parents to them, but also allies and assets to their ability to be good parents to our grandchildren.

Fortunately, we know two people who have turned this concept of “great” grandparenting into a doable strategy for you and me. Paul and Diana Miller unpack this triune relationship between grandparents,



their children (including in-law children) and their grandchildren in a way that goes to the core of what grace looks like handed down through three generations.

That's why we're glad you picked up this book. When you're done reading it, you're going to be glad you did too ... and your extended family picture is going to be much better off because you did.

# Authors' Preface

Because you're reading this page, you're probably asking: who are these people and why did they write this book? You're also wondering whether anything in these pages can be useful to you.

With regard to that second point, we're certain you'll benefit from what we have to say. We believe that's true because our firsthand experience helped us discover many ideas on how to improve our grandparenting skills. We've also been encouraged by positive comments from others who have studied these concepts. As a result, we're confident you'll have more than a few "Aha!" moments as you go through the book.

So, who are we? To start, we're grandparents of eight grandchildren, six in one family and two in the other. Further, we both knew our own grandparents very well and basked in their love. In addition, our parents were active grandparents to our children. We've also been involved in helping Cavin Harper, founder of the *Christian Grandparenting Network*, first by reviewing his manuscript that became *Courageous Grandparenting*, and then by participating in his GrandCamp® ministry.

As for our professional background, we're both educators. We like to call ourselves the "bookends" because Paul was university faculty for 43 years and Diana taught preschool for 26 years. In addition, Paul has taught Bible classes for older adults since 1989 in our Colorado Springs church, Woodmen Valley Chapel. This privilege has put both of us in the company of many experienced God-following grandparents.

The idea for this book materialized soon after we learned we would become grandparents. As we looked for guidance, we were surprised that virtually every author and advisor we consulted strongly focused on how we grandparents ought to relate to our grandchildren. It was as

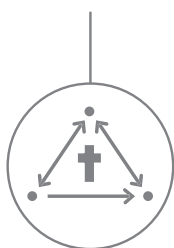
if our adult children didn't matter. However, we were hungry for help on our relationship with them as well as the grandkids.

If you share that same hunger, or if you, like many others, are eager to learn more about the benefits of supporting and coaching your grandchildren's parents, you'll find this book to be helpful.

Paul and Diana Miller  
Colorado Springs

# SECTION 1:

## Introduction



*This section describes the concept of the Family Trinity and its origins, its structure, and its members' responsibilities.*

*In particular, we explain that the three-generation Trinity offers great advantages for raising up productive and otherwise functional young people. This structure can be found in families in all cultures around the world, although it's not necessarily acknowledged or put into effect.*

*We're certain that those advantages are most likely to be harvested when this God-given Family Trinity is also God-driven.*





## CHAPTER 1

# Introducing the Family Trinity



**Psalms 1:1-3,6** *Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. ... For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous...*

*A few days before Thanksgiving, sometime ago, Diana's obstetrician assured her that our first child would not be born for at least another week. So, on Thursday, we enjoyed a traditional and large meal with Paul's sister and her family. That night, of course, labor started, just as we were both drifting off. Naturally, sleep wouldn't come. Around 6 AM, we headed to the hospital in an early-season snowfall. It was a long 12 hours before our son, David, was born.*

*His birth was a shock to him, of course, and a staggering event for us, despite much preparation and anticipation. All the reading and training had not*

*touched on a great surprise for us both. We knew we would be ready to love David with all our hearts. What we hadn't anticipated was that we suddenly loved our own Moms and Dads much more deeply than ever before.*

*God had blessed us far beyond anything we ever imagined.*

This chapter describes the *Family Trinity*, a multigenerational structure that helps stabilize and perpetuate families and communities.

Our path to discovering the Trinity was not complicated – as soon as we became grandparents, we realized we were right in the middle of one! It wasn't long before we recognized we had been in one a generation earlier and another one before that, although we didn't think of it as anything special at the time.

In retrospect after more than 12 years of grandparenting, and watching a great many others, we're certain that what we understand about this structure has made us more successful than we would have been without it. That's exactly why we want to help others learn what we've learned and go on to apply the Family Trinity to their own situations.

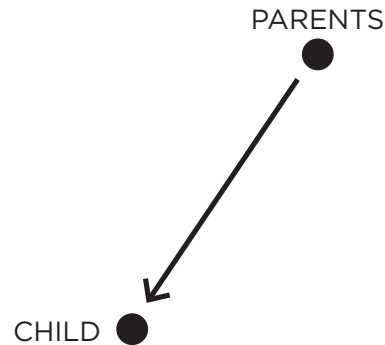
To explain those ideas, we've chosen the "God-Given and God-Driven Family Trinity" as the central theme for this book and others that may follow.

## BUILDING THE FAMILY TRINITY

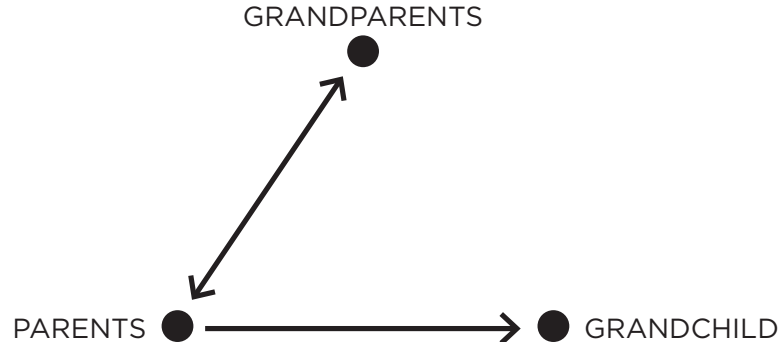
Specifically, the Family Trinity consists of a three-generation unit built around three different but very complementary relationships. This structure doesn't just pop up into existence but is built over decades, one generation at a time.

At the beginning of our life as a couple, we are the first generation, as represented here:

When our child arrives, we're given a new person to love and the second generation is created. The one-way arrow in this next diagram symbolizes the sacrificial and grace-based unconditional love for the child, through thick and thin, whatever happens.<sup>1</sup>



Even though our children love us in return, they're not yet able to return to us the same kind of love we feel toward them. However, that situation radically changes when our adult offspring has a child and gives us our grandchild:



The one-way arrow at the bottom represents the fact that the new parents love their child unconditionally, just as we sacrificially loved them when they were children.

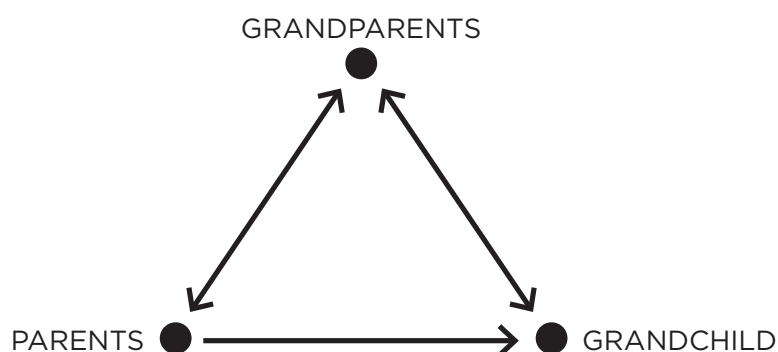
Perhaps you noticed the changed arrow between the new parents and the grandparents. It now goes *both* ways to represent the parents' new-found and compelling ability to return grace-filled love that flows back to the grandparents. Along with it, the adult children now have a deeper honor and appreciation for what their parents did for them. The end result is a greatly enhanced ability to communicate.



To explain more about this transformation, we know it happens because we personally experienced it. We've also had many others tell us they had the same thing happen to them. Even though we accurately expected our first child's birth to give us a new person to love, we didn't anticipate that it would enable us to love our parents more deeply. Thankfully, we gained a new understanding of how much they had been loving us!

Apparently, we just couldn't fully appreciate our parents' love until we started giving the same love to our newborn son. The exciting result was a new unconditional love for our moms and dads along with more respect and gratitude. In the same way, the birth of our adult children's own first child should allow them and us to enjoy a new relationship. Unlike our previous parent-child relationship, this one is more open because it's built on our shared adult-level experiences and fellowship.

Finally, the diagram of the Family Trinity is completed by adding a two-way arrow between the grandparents and the grandchild:



This arrow goes both ways because grandparents and grandchildren innately love each other unconditionally and graciously. That is, neither party has to do, buy, give, or achieve anything to earn that love. It's God's great gift to both generations, and what a blessing it is!

Now, come see what there is to becoming Great Grandparents!

---

1 We acknowledge that no earthly parents can achieve truly unconditional love equivalent to the *agape* love God lavishes on us, his children. However, compared to other relationships, we think it's appropriate to refer to parents' love for their children as unconditional.



## CHAPTER 2

# The Family Trinity and “Great Grandparenting”



**2 Timothy 1:5** *I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.*

*In the first century, a young man named Timothy grew up in what is now southern Turkey. From Paul’s words quoted above, it’s clear he had been raised in a Family Trinity that consisted of at least his mother and grandmother.*

*Although we know nothing of his grandfather or whether his Greek father was a Christ-follower, we can be certain that Timothy grew up in a multigenerational household where he was loved, nurtured, and otherwise prepared to be Paul’s companion and disciple as well as a significant leader in the early church.*

*The results of his family’s efforts are reflected throughout the New Testament in Paul’s descriptions of Timothy as his “fellow-worker” (Romans 16:21), his “brother” (1 Thessalonians 3:2), “my true son, in the faith” (1 Timothy 1:2) and, most affectionately, “my son, whom I love” (1 Corinthians 4:17).*

*Even though no one knows exactly what Lois did, Paul's praise shows that she must have been a "Great Grandparent"!*

Most everything in this book reflects the Family Trinity. That's true simply because what we call "Great Grandparenting" involves living and loving within two new multigenerational relationships with both our grandchildren and their parents. How wonderful it is to have the joy of receiving new, rich love from two directions, and giving it back!

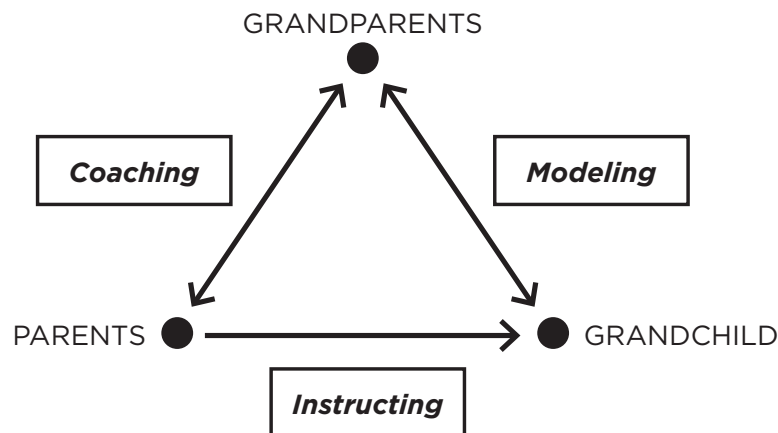
As a result, we've been first puzzled and then frustrated as our culture mistakenly focuses on grandparents' love for the grandchildren without describing this beautiful new relationship with the parents. For some reason, we find that most authors of grandparenting books prescribe how grandparents should relate to their grandchildren without describing this other new family bond.

As a result, we're happy to proclaim that *Great Grandparenting is not just about the grandchildren!*

## RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE FAMILY TRINITY

We find the Family Trinity concept to be especially useful because it helps us understand which responsibilities and roles go with each of the three relationships.

Of course, we fully realize that reality is more complex than any diagram can show. However, we suggest that this version can help everyone understand the different responsibilities for grandparents and parents:



To begin, our first responsible role as grandparents is to *coach our adult children* as they learn how to parent. We support this idea because coaches stay on the sidelines and encourage those who are playing the game. In addition, coaches can help rookies improve because they now know a lot more than they did when they were players themselves. We also note that good coaches only suggest what players can do without demanding or expecting perfect compliance. This behavior reflects the coach's respect for the player as a separate responsible individual with independent decision-making ability. Finally, we point out that coaches don't run out onto the field to push aside the players and take their place in the game!

With regard to the parents' first responsibility, we find that it is *instructing their children*. It's crucial that this role be respected by grandparents who want to create a healthy Family Trinity. It's also crucial that wise parents not abdicate their instructing responsibility to the grandparents. However, they may choose to welcome appropriate coaching and empower the grandparents to help them learn how to be good fathers and mothers.

Grandparents also have a special responsibility to help their grandchildren grow up well. As we see it, they are to *model appropriate behavior for the grandchildren*. This modeling teaches by demonstrating instead of lecturing or testing. Importantly, modeling means that grandparents have to be on their toes at all times because children learn just as much or more by watching as being taught directly.

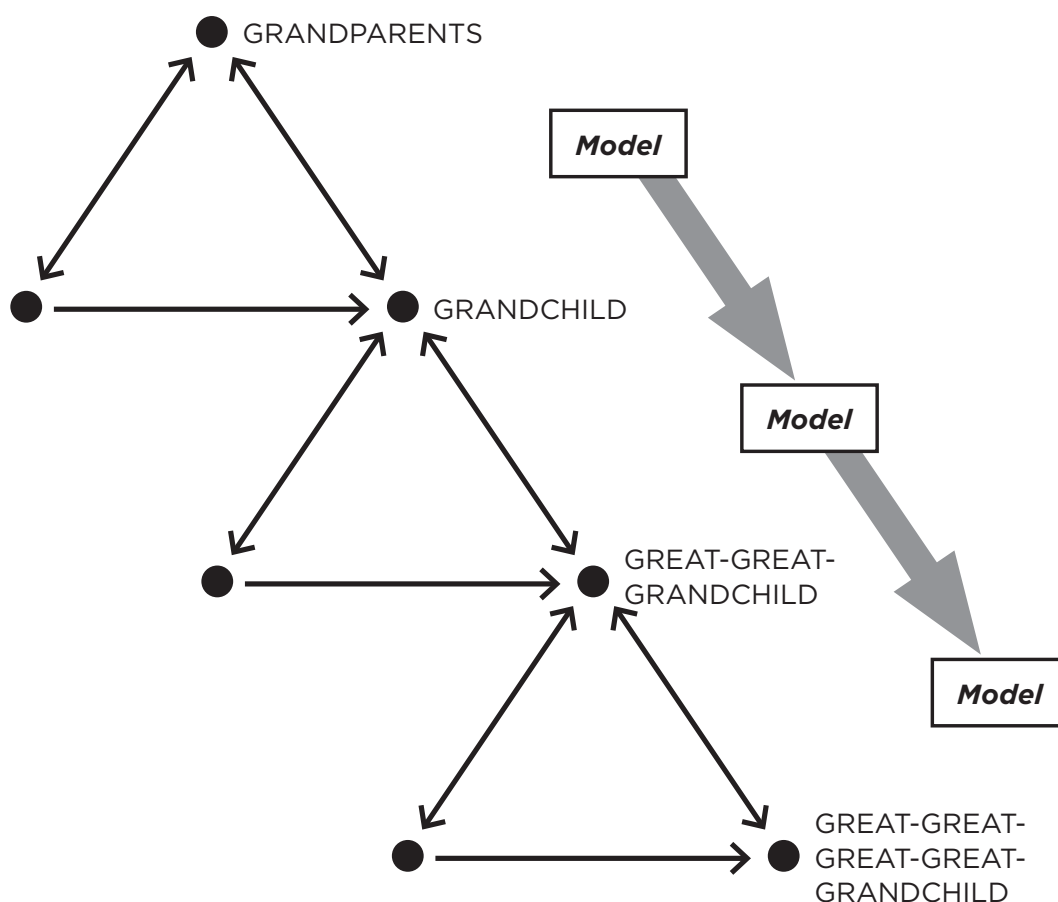
To be perfectly clear, we strongly believe that grandparents should not feel or behave as if they are instructors of the grandchildren on equal footing with the parents. The only exception is when they are compelled to take over because of difficult circumstances that take the parents out of the picture.

## HOW MANY GENERATIONS?

There's a big point that we think should motivate grandparents to be good models for their grandchildren. Specifically, we've observed that most people tend to mimic their parents when they're parenting but tend to mimic their grandparents when they're grandparenting.

Because that's so, the grandparenting behavior we model to our grandchildren is likely to be duplicated by them when they're grandparents to our great-great-grandchildren, some four generations after us. Further, our great-great-grandchildren's behavior can eventually affect the behavior and attitudes of *their* grandchildren, who will be our great-great-great-grandchildren!

This diagram shows how what grandparents do (or don't do) can impact four and even six generations of descendants.



### EVERY FAMILY TRINITY IS DIFFERENT

This multigenerational diagram suggests another valuable point. Specifically, early in our married life, the two of us were part of a Family Trinity involving our grandparents and parents. When we later began parenting our children and our parents became their grandparents, we helped create another Family Trinity. When our children had children, we then again assumed a different role in yet another Family Trinity.

Each one is similar but different. That outcome is only to be expected for a multitude of reasons, even though each one will be shaped by what went on before.

Therefore, grandparents must never doubt the power and ability of preceding generations to impact those that follow for many, many years. At issue for each generation is whether that impact will be *positive* or *negative*. It almost goes without saying that grandparents can have a powerful impact on which direction it goes.

### MAINTAINING STABILITY

One way that grandparents can help pass down positive values is to help maintain a stable Family Trinity. A key factor for stability is consistently honoring the three general responsibilities of coaching, instructing, and modeling. Each generation should carefully operate within those boundaries so that these two negative outcomes don't occur:

- When grandparents continue instructing their adult children instead of making the transition to coaching them, they're sending the signal that they've not yet relinquished their parents' role. For one thing, this failure to release the adult children can dysfunctionally prolong their maturing process. It can also cause friction after they become parents because they will surely resent any unwelcome meddling by the grandparents.
- When grandparents directly instruct their grandchildren instead of modeling suitable good behavior for them, friction and instability will surely follow. First, the youngsters will be easily confused when their grandparents and parents teach them different things. Second, it will cause the parents to resent the grandparents' encroachment on their responsibility.

To be clear, grandparents have many perfectly good ways to engage in teaching activities with their grandchildren that should not create issues. For example, they can occasionally tell family stories, explain traditions, do crafts to develop rapport, or just hang out together and enjoy each other's company. Special moments can emerge when they teach certain

skills to the grandkids, like cooking, sewing, fishing, gardening, playing golf, or the like without infringing on the parents' responsibilities.

### DEALING WITH INSTABILITY

Because of the world's broken nature, a Family Trinity may lack stability through tragic and unfortunate circumstances. However, even in bad situations, stability can be restored by shifting, sharing, and otherwise reassigning the key responsibilities.

In particular, grandparents may have to begin instructing the grandchildren if the parents are temporarily or permanently unable to do it. While this arrangement differs from the ideal, the grandparents' patience and love can produce spectacular results. (More guidance on these situations appears in the third and fourth sections of this book.)

### WHY THE FAMILY TRINITY MATTERS

So, there you have it: the Family Trinity is ideally a set of three healthy relationships that should create a stable three-generation family and set the stage for many more generations to come. However, life is seldom, if ever, ideal!

Instead, it's virtually certain that every family has some damage because of what we call the "D" factors: death, disability, deployment, detachment, dysfunction, and divorce. Even in these stressful situations, the grandparents' and parents' knowledge of the Family Trinity with its roles and responsibilities can help a family adapt and survive.

In fact, multigenerational stability makes it easier to get things back on track for the benefit of the present Family Trinity and later ones yet to come.

### THERE'S MORE TO IT

Now, as Christians, we're very willing to acknowledge that God is the architect of the Family Trinity. It's such a beautiful arrangement that it just has to be GOD-GIVEN! No one should be surprised that this structure can be found in all families in all cultures.

Beyond that point, we cannot conceive how it can ever work as well as it's designed to work unless the Holy Spirit is acting as the *powerful gravity* in the center, holding it all together while touching each member with God's grace just as they need to be touched. Thus, our aim for our family, and for yours, is that the Family Trinity will reach its full potential by being both GOD-GIVEN AND GOD-DRIVEN.

Further, we know that this outcome can be achieved by putting Christ in the center, touching everyone and shaping their actions and, indeed, their lives. This version of the diagram illustrates what we mean:

