

Reading this book by one of the denomination's most gifted pastors was a unique blessing—unique because of its many inspiring stories, its helpful intergenerational insights, its exegetical and homiletical gems, but especially its thought-provoking reflection questions. Altogether a very worthwhile and satisfying experience!

—Lawrence T. Geraty, Ph.D., president emeritus of La Sierra University

Pastor Orlich has created a much-needed resource to serve as a catalyst for intergenerational conversations in the church, bringing people together in a divided time. Add this to your must-read list. But you won't just want to read it, you'll want to invite others to come along for the journey.

—Tara VinCross, D.Min., senior pastor, Azure Hills Church in Grand Terrace, California, author of *Deep Calling: On Being and Growing Disciples*

Raewyn Orlich has written a fascinating book, which is a wonderfully inspiring mix of biography, autobiography, and spiritual encouragement. She skillfully intertwines Eric's life story with her own journey thus far and presents this, by means of discussion points at the end of each chapter, as the basis for intergenerational dialogue. Reading this exceptional book about these two marvelous people will be a blessing for readers of all ages.

—Reinder Bruinsma, Ph.D., retired pastor, teacher, church administrator, and author

In Grandpa's Shoes is Raewyn Orlich's love letter to her grandfather, Eric Webster. It is also a book full of hope for her beloved Adventist church and a calling toward more equality, kindness, community, and balance. Whether you read it with a friend or alone, you'll find yourself in conversation with Orlich's evocative stories.

—Sari Fordham, professor and author of *Wait for God to Notice*

Raewyn's recollections are captivating and very personal, while illustrating well her pastoral encouragement for the reader to forge relationships of their own. Ending each chapter, the reflection questions are poignant but not intrusive. *In Grandpa's Shoes* is a delight, not only to read but also to apply.

—A. Allan Martin, Ph.D., teaching pastor, YG Church in Arlington, Texas

Raewyn has a wonderfully unique gift in putting tennis shoes on the gospel and making it walk in real and tangible ways through her storytelling. This book will grow the reader both in their relationship with God and with those they encounter from day to day.

—Jon V. Ciccarelli, ministerial director, Southeastern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

This book will not only enrich the personal lives of the readers but will guide in the process of implementing intergenerational ministry.

—A. Barry Gane, Ph.D., adjunct professor, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Through vibrant narratives that span generations and continents and reflection questions that both challenge and move, Orlich sets a tone of gratitude, honest personal examination, and humor as she welcomes readers to make personal and communal connections of their own. Autobiographical as much as it is an affirming biographical homage, the book makes a thoroughly needed contribution to the first-person telling of the global story of women actively engaged in ministerial service and intellectual leadership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church of the 21st century. An enjoyable, multilayered, hopeful, and insightful read.

—Brishette Mendoza, Ph.D. student, Margo L. Goldsmith Fellowship in Women's Studies in Religion Awardee, Claremont Graduate University

As a 70-year-old, fellow long-distance runner, pastor, and one who often interacts with younger generations, I find this volume to be an extremely practical guide for sharing the joys and challenges of living the abundant life that Jesus offers to all. This resource will enhance the spiritual journey of all who are open to the delights of learning from each other.

—Ron du Preez, Ph.D., pastor and author

In Grandpa's Shoes affirms that a younger generation is ready to lead God's beloved church, while also appreciating the wisdom that can be drawn from those on whose shoulders we stand.

—Hendrik de Winnaar, Sabbath School and personal ministries director, Northern Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in South Africa

In Grandpa's Shoes

An Invitation to Intergenerational Connection

Raewyn Orlich

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OAK & ACORN
PUBLISHING

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For information contact:
Oak and Acorn Publishing
5120 Prescott Ave.
Lincoln, NE 68506

Cover design: Lauren Smith
Photos by Kristi Fontamillas

ISBN: 978-1-57756-281-8

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Acknowledgements	xi
Introduction – How to Use This Book	xv
Chapter 1	
The Comrades: Running the Race Together	1
Reflection Questions – Psalm 145	
Chapter 2	
A Cloud of Witnesses: Looking at Who Has Come Before	15
Reflection Questions – Hebrews 11:1-12:2	
Chapter 3	
More Abundantly: Living an Adventure	31
Reflection Questions – John 10:1-21	
Chapter 4	
Saying It Straight: Learning to Seek and Speak Truth	45
Reflection Questions – 2 Timothy 2:14-26	
Chapter 5	
If I Be Lifted Up: Keeping Jesus at the Center of It All	59
Reflection Questions – John 12:20-36	
Chapter 6	
Missing the Massacre:	
Dealing with God and Human Suffering	75
Reflection Questions – Romans 8:18-30	
Chapter 7	
The Signs: Stepping Out in Faith	89
Reflection Questions – Philippians 4:10-20	

Chapter 8

Reconciliation Day: Relating to Racial Injustice 103

Reflection Questions – 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Chapter 9

Your Daughters Shall Prophecy:

Facing Gender Discrimination 119

Reflection Questions – Galatians 3:26-29

Chapter 10

Priceless: Being Generous with What We're Given 135

Reflection Questions – 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Chapter 11

The Sabbath and Sardines: Choosing a Healthy Lifestyle 151

Reflection Questions – Mark 2:23-3:6

Chapter 12

Pressing On: Running with Perseverance 167

Reflection Questions – Philippians 3:12-16

Chapter 13

Finishing Strong: Approaching Death with Confidence 185

Reflection Questions – 2 Timothy 4:6-8

*To my Mom, Gillian Webster Howard.
Your bravery in the face of adversity, trust in God,
and ever-present, unconditional support
have made me who I am.*

Acknowledgements

It's been six years since the idea for this book was conceived in me. Back then, I ran the Comrades Marathon and started interviewing my Grandpa.

In the time since, I have birthed three children. Changed pastoral positions. Lived and led through a global pandemic. Become more aware of the depths of racial and gender-based injustice. Seen an extreme heightening of political divides across the globe.

Of course, the making of this book really began when I was a toddler living in my grandparents' home. Or, before that, it began as my grandfather learned from the teachers at his Adventist school, or as my grandmother listened to the songs and stories of her Welsh father. Before that, it began when my great-great-grandfather Hankins left Iowa to be a missionary in South Africa, or when my great-great-grandmother Staples decided to adopt the Advent message that Hankins preached, and to join a new movement.

It's impossible to personally thank all the people who have shaped us and the generations that have given so much to bring us into being. It will have to suffice to acknowledge them together. As Isaac Newton wrote to Robert Hooke in 1675, "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants."

I will limit myself to thanking by name the people and groups who have contributed to this project over the last six years. May they

share credit for anything praiseworthy and be absolved of blame for any errors.

To the Victorville Seventh-day Adventist Church board members who approved my 12-week sabbatical, even though it was a new concept to most, and have kept asking me when the book is coming out: Thank you for believing in the power of this story, being brave, and loving well.

To the members of our *In Grandpa's Shoes* Life Groups, hosted from the La Sierra University church: Thank you for signing up without really knowing what you were getting into, for diving deep on Zoom, and for truly investing in the conversations and your intergenerational small groups. You made it come alive.

To my aunt, Cheryl Webster: Thank you for your investment in me, from being in the room when I was born, to encouraging my calling to pastoral ministry, to forming our South Africa-based Life Group, to your last-minute edits.

To all my readers, but especially Larry Geraty, Brishette Mendoza, Ron du Preez, and Tara VinCross: Your creative feedback and enthusiastic support has been invaluable and has made this project so much richer.

To Ray Tetz, Alberto Valenzuela, and the team at Oak and Acorn: Thank you for investing in the voices of local church pastors that otherwise may not be heard.

To Brad Forbes and the team at *AdventSource*: Thank you for getting this book across the finish line and into the hands of readers. It's a joy to work with you.

To my Salt Sisters, Tara VinCross, Rochelle Webster, Emily Whitney: Your belief in me, and the importance of sharing this story, has spurred me along when it felt like the birth would never come.

To Granny and Grandpa: You have been both the inspiration and the impetus for me to bring this work to fruition. Without you, it wouldn't exist, nor would I.

To my physician-poet husband, Michael Orlich: Thank you for being my constant support and most constructive critic and co-creator. Sharing life with you is the greatest gift.

To the God of my grandfathers and grandmothers: You are my life, my breath, my all. I look forward to the time when "I will know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12, NRSV).

Introduction

How to Use This Book

To meet my maternal grandparents, Eric and Ruth Webster, is to fall in love with them. At least that's what people keep telling me. From church members who have talked to them during potluck or heard my Grandpa preach or my Granny play her jazzed-up hymns on the piano, to friends from school, to the neighbors, people young and old tell me how much they love them.

I've often wondered what it is that draws people. Is it the sweet companionship they have after 73 years of marriage? Is it my Granny's vibrant sparkle or my Grandpa's gentlemanly manner? Is it my Granny's propensity to tell stories or my Grandpa's depth of theological insight? All those characteristics are charming. But, in the end, I think it's their genuine interest in the lives and stories of the people they meet.

They taught me that there's no such thing as a boring person. Whatever our age, gender, cultural background, socioeconomic status, or cognitive abilities, each one of us is made in the image of God. Each one of us is a wellspring of creativity and life. Each one of us is worthy of biography. We all have stories to tell. We just need space to shine. Often this means experiencing someone who takes

the time to see us and invite us to share. It usually involves someone who asks meaningful open-ended questions, then listens and asks some more.

Both the young and those more advanced in years need this space. In each one of Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development, the attentive presence of other generations is crucial. Infants learn trust from caregivers who listen well. Toddlers learn autonomy from adults who create space for them to exert control. Preschoolers develop initiative as grownups follow their lead. Children develop confidence as teachers commend their competencies. Teenagers form a strong sense of self as adults encourage and reinforce their explorations. Young adults form intimate relationships as they find safe spaces to connect. Middle-aged adults need to sense that they're nurturing life that will outlast them. Older adults need to look back on their lives with the satisfaction gained through sharing their stories.

The benefits of intergenerational relationships are well documented. In 2019, the *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships* published a review of 16 studies that focused on programs connecting people over 50 and others under 30. "The younger participants showed greater self-esteem, improved academic performance, had higher motivation to learn, enhanced their social skills, and had more positive attitudes toward themselves and older adults. Older adults similarly showed improvements in their self-esteem, cognitive function and productivity, greater satisfaction with life, and additionally had improved outcomes in their mental and physical health."¹

Studies have shown that positive intergenerational relationships are an important factor for youth and young adults staying connected to the church. In 2019, Barna Group published *Faith for Exiles: 5*

¹T. Martins, L. Midão, S. M. Veiga, L. Dequech, G. Busse, M. Bertram, et al., "Intergenerational Programs Offer Benefits for Both Younger and Older Generations," *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships* (2019), pp. 93-109. <https://sdawest.pub/generations>

*Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon.*² In the book, they ask the question, “What practices distinguish resilient disciples among young Christians?”³ Practice three is: “When isolation and mistrust are the norms, forge meaningful, intergenerational relationships.” Seventy-seven percent of “resilient disciples” had close personal friends who were adults from their church growing up, compared to 53% of “habitual churchgoers,” 31% of “nomads,” and 27% of “prodigals.”

In 2011, Chap Clark and Kara E. Powell, from the Fuller Youth Institute, published a book called *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids*. Struck by the statistic that half of Christian high school seniors leave church post-graduation, they conducted the “College Transition Project,” to identify best practices that set young people up for lifelong faith and service. One of the four factors they discovered was the importance of intergenerational relationships. They found that “Each young person is greatly benefited when surrounded by a team of five adults.”⁴

In 2016, Fuller Youth Institute conducted research of over 250 congregations across the United States that were engaging young people aged 15-29, resulting in the book, *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church*. One

²David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock with Aly Hawkins, *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019). This followed up on *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church... And Rethinking Faith* (2011) and *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity...and Why It Matters* (2007).

³The research was done online in 2018 with 1,514 U.S. adults aged 18-29 who grew up Christian. Barna defines “resilient disciples” (10% of respondents) as those who have made a commitment to Jesus, are involved in a faith community, affirm the inspiration of the Bible, and agree with one or more of the following statements: “I want to find a way to follow Jesus that connects with the world I live in,” “God is more at work outside the Church than inside, and I want to be a part of that,” “I want to be a Christian without separating myself from the world around me.” “Prodigals” (22% of respondents) no longer identify as Christian. “Nomads” (30% of respondents) identify as Christian but haven’t attended church in the last month. “Habitual churchgoers” (38% of respondents) identify as Christian and have attended church in the last month but don’t have the core beliefs or behaviors of “resilient disciples.”

⁴Kara Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011). <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/stickyfaith>

of those six core commitments is, “Fuel a warm community: Instead of focusing on cool worship or programs, aim for warm peer and intergenerational friendships.”⁵

Most of us recognize the value of intergenerational relationships, but often our lives don’t reflect this value. It’s hard to know where to start. In May of 2017, Generations United and the Eisner Foundation published a report called “I Need You, You Need Me: The Young, the Old, and What We Can Achieve Together.”⁶ Fifty-three percent of adults say that it’s rare for them to spend time with people older or younger than they are, outside of family. Three in four adults wish their communities offered more opportunities to do so.

In 2018, the same two organizations published a second report, called “All in Together: Creating Places Where Young and Old Thrive.”⁷ It found that only 26% of adults are aware of places in their community that care for children/youth and older adults together. When it comes to which community institutions should be creating opportunities for young and old to interact, 58% of respondents highlight places of worship.

When it comes to the church, there are plenty of books written on the importance of intergenerational relationships, with suggestions on how to create a culture that values such connections. But there are few resources available when it comes to facilitating intergenerational conversations⁸ or hosting intergenerational small groups.⁹

⁵Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016). <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/growingyoung>

⁶<https://sdawest.pub/Summary>. The report shares the results of a poll conducted online by Harris Poll of 2,171 U.S. adults in 2017.

⁷<https://sdawest.pub/Report>. This report shares the results of a poll conducted online by Harris Poll in 2018 of 2,041 U.S. adults, as well as a study by Generations United and Ohio State University, supported by The Eisner Foundation, of 105 shared site programs in the United States (“one or more organizations delivering services to unrelated younger people, usually 24 and under and older adults, typically over 50, at the same location, such as a building, campus, or neighboring buildings”).

⁸Fuller Youth Institute has created an 18-page guide to one-on-one conversations called “How to Talk to Any Young Person: An Intergenerational Conversation Toolkit,” that includes conversation tips and over 30 sample questions. <https://shop.fulleryouthinstitute.org/products/conversation-toolkits>

⁹GenOn Ministries, based in Pennsylvania, has resources for seven-session intergenerational gatherings

You can use this book to create space for attentive listening between generations and the forming of new, life-giving, intergenerational friendships.

You can facilitate a group going through the questions at the end of each chapter together. From March through August 2021, my Grandpa and I hosted two groups through the 13-week sessions, via Zoom. Twenty-eight people were part of the first group, mostly based in Southern California, with 23 people part of the second, mostly based in South Africa. Our youngest participant was 13, while the oldest was 96.

It was beautiful to see youth and young adults connecting in meaningful ways with middle-aged adults and seniors, one-on-one and then in groups of four. We had four teenagers in our California-based group, and it was awesome to see them fully engaged in the conversations, offering suggestions for resources, and showing up every week or letting me know when they weren't able to make it. We had a granddaughter invite her grandfather to participate with her and a daughter join in with her father.

At least one of the sets of conversation partners, who had previously not known each other, was still meeting up for lunch a year later. Our South Africa group prayed together through a devastating COVID wave, chose to form a WhatsApp group to keep in touch outside of sessions, and continued meeting for another

called "God's World in Community," Sunday School options called "LIFT," two-hour gatherings around various seasons of the year called "All God's Children," and weekly church alternatives called "LOGOS." See <https://sdawest.pub/ministry-tools>. While many weekly discipleship resources offer one theme expressed across the generations (an Adventist option that does this is <https://growingtogetherchurch.org>, developed by the Southeastern California Conference), few have created intergenerational experiences. Gregory Rawn, with an M.A. from Luther Seminary, has developed the *Living the Word* series, which offers an intergenerational curriculum following the revised common lectionary. See <https://spiritandtruthpublishing.com/our-products/>. The Christian Reformed Church in America offers the *WE* series, including a 10-session series through the biblical narrative. See <https://sdawest.pub/faithalive>. The Mennonite Church offers intergenerational options for its new *Seeking God Together* and *Seeking Justice Together* 13-week curriculums. See <https://shinecurriculum.com>

series they called “Being God’s Body Together,” led by my aunt, Cheryl Webster, in which participants took turns leading sessions through a Scripture and creating discussion questions based on the model they had experienced.

You may wonder how we were able to facilitate meaningful intergenerational conversations in such relatively large groups. During our first session, as people were introducing themselves in the large group, I asked each one to privately send me two names of people in the group from different generations that they would like to get to know better. Then, before the second session, I spent a couple hours dividing people into intergenerational conversation partners (groups of two people from different generations), then small groups (two conversation partner groupings together, for a total of four people). Each participant was with at least one of the two people they had mentioned—as their conversation partner or, if not, at least as part of their small group. Some small groups were made up of two different generations, but most included three to four different generations. I first experienced this dividing into spiritual companions and then small groups as part of the excellent discipleship resource and curriculum by Pastor Tara VinCross called *Deep Calling: On Being and Growing Disciples*.¹⁰

At the end of each chapter is a discussion guide that includes six reflection questions and a portion of Scripture. Except for the first session, which is designed to take place in a larger group, each week includes questions for the larger group, the conversation partners, the small groups, and the individual post-session. If you’re utilizing Zoom, I’d recommend having participants put their group number and conversation partner letter in front of their name, making it easier

¹⁰ <https://taravincross.com/deepcalling>

for the host to break them up into breakout rooms (for example, 1A - Chris, 1A - Steve, 1B - Susie, 1B - Ruth, 2A – Matthew, etc.).

From the larger groups on down, we laughed together and cried together and prayed together. People felt safe to be real and vulnerable. Being on Zoom made it easy for people to use the chat feature, even if they were hesitant to jump into the larger group conversation. Chat comments included:

“Being a part of a younger generation makes it feel as if our opinion isn’t as valid as someone from an older generation. I think it’s easy to feel overlooked in conversations between generations.”

“I think when we make assumptions about someone based on their age, we miss out and misunderstand others. It’s an obstacle when you lump everyone into their ‘group’ and don’t get to know them as an individual.”

“Excited to spend more group time together! We will become good friends.”

“This was an amazing experience.”

“I loved this group experience.”

“What a wonderful time we’ve had.”

“These sessions have been so inspirational.”

“It was so lovely to meet everyone and listen to your stories.”

We did 60-minute sessions for 13 weeks, so this curriculum could be used for one quarter during a weekly discipleship time. But you could certainly have 90-minute sessions, as many times the participants expressed the desire for more time.

If you don't feel comfortable leading a larger group, consider leading a small group of four—or think of one person from a different generation that you would like to have as a conversation partner.

If you often find yourself being one of the most senior persons in the room, we need to hear your stories. Consider inviting a younger friend or family member to engage in the questions with you.

If you think you're closer to the start of your race than the finish, think of someone you'd like to learn more about. It could be a relative, an older member of your faith community, or even a co-worker. Consider sharing what you appreciate about them and asking if they would go through the questions with you. They are likely longing to share their stories and would be incredibly blessed by your perspective and shared experiences too.

Ask this person if they would set aside time each week, every other week, or once a month, to go through the questions with you.

Neither of you have to read the chapters. The questions were designed to be understood whether or not you have read the chapter itself. The chapters are also stand-alone, able to be understood out of order if needed, in case one has time one week to read and not a different week.

My deep desire is that this resource will be used to facilitate meaningful conversations and life-giving relationships between generations.

As you go through these pages, this is my prayer:

May you see God more clearly at work in your life and in your story.

May you create space for people of other generations to show up more fully.

May you be more completely surprised by the beauty of God's image in the people around you.

And may you fall in love again—with God, with those along your path, and with the amazing person you have been created to be.

Chapter One

The Comrades: Running the Race Together

“I better finish this race today, because I’m not coming back,” said the man jogging next to me.
I wasn’t coming back either. We were both in our first, and likely last, “Comrades,” the oldest ultra-marathon in the world.

Somehow, the marathon, that iconic race of 26.2 miles, hadn’t been enough. Never mind that the legendary Greek runner, who ran about that distance from Marathon to Athens in 490 B.C.E. to let his comrades know of victory, collapsed and died at the end. Never mind that there is something that happens to a lot of us called “hitting the wall” around miles 20 to 23, when your stored glycogen levels run out.

This race would be two marathons back-to-back, plus another mile and a half or so, for a total of about 55 miles (about 89 kilometers), and we had to be done within 12 hours.

It had taken a lot for me to get here: planning the trip to South Africa, buying the tickets, getting the time off from work. That's not to mention the training that was involved: running once, twice, then, finally, seven times at once around my 5-mile circuit at the San Timoteo Canyon Nature Reserve in Redlands, California.

We had lined up way before 5:30 that morning, 17,031 of us, from 73 different countries. We had sung South Africa's national anthem, with its beautiful blend of languages, and Shosholoz, a solidarity song born from migrant mine workers and adopted by freedom fighters, like former prisoner turned president Nelson Mandela. I wasn't the only one brushing away tears.

We had heard the *Chariots of Fire* theme song and Max Trimborn's recorded imitation of a cock's crow—a Comrades' tradition since he had first sounded it back in 1948—instead of the starter's gun.

The moment after the cock's crow was anti-climactic. Where I stood, in Section G at the back of the crowd, no one moved. The runner next to me said the race had started, so I hit my Garmin watch, then accidentally hit the lap button. I restarted. Two minutes later, we still hadn't moved. At 5:38 a.m., eight minutes later, I eventually crossed the start line.

I knew I needed to go slow for the first 25 kilometers (about 16 miles). I'd read that many lose the day by how they treat those first few hours. I was watching the pace and feeling pretty proud of just how slow I was going.

Relaxing into running down a hill, I heard a voice behind me saying, "Raewyn, slow down. It's a long day and you need to save

your energy.” The voice came from a random middle-aged man who was running past me, reading my name on my bib as he ran by.

I saw his bib too. He had a green number on his back, given to those who’ve finished the Comrades 10 times or more. I slowed down. (Although, I may have taken his well-intentioned advice a bit too far. Along the race, there are six cut-off points—if you don’t get there by a certain time, you’re blocked from continuing and put on a bus to the finish line. Later, I was shocked to find that if I had decreased my speed any further, the race would have ended for me at the first cut-off at 8:10 a.m. I had passed it at 8:06.)

When the sun came up behind us, we could see the countryside more clearly. Along the way, supporters cheered for strangers, as well as for their “special someone.” I kept hearing “Go U.S.A.,” and finally met the woman near me from South Carolina, wearing her nationality on her shirt. I heard others cheering, “Hi Minnie!” and wondered what the story was behind the woman running next to me, dressed up as Disney’s original female character. We were certainly a diverse group of people from around the world.

The Comrades Ultramarathon switches directions each year, affectionately called the “Up” run or the “Down” run, depending on if you’re starting in Durban or Pietermaritzburg. I was running the “Up” run, from Durban on the coast to Pietermaritzburg, northwest and inland. I was prepared to face five legendary hills—Cowie’s, Field’s, Botha’s, Inchanga, and Polly Shortts. These named hills encompass an elevation gain of about 2,200 feet, but there are plenty of ups besides the Big Five. I was surprised by how much we had climbed before even getting to Cowie’s. At the end of the race, Garmin reported I had run 5,600 feet up in elevation (more than a mile) and another 3,700 feet down.

Whenever I walked, I counted steps, willing myself to run once I had reached a certain number. First, I walked while I counted to 100, then to 200 or 300 later in the race. When I got to the predetermined number, I forced myself to run, looking down at my feet, counting again, first to 300, then to 200 or just 100 later in the race.

By hill number two, Field's, I still felt strong, but a runner I was passing said, "Someone told me that if you're passing people on Field's Hill, you're going too fast." So I slowed down again.

By the third hill, Botha's, I met Dave, a 73-year-old American. He had finished 43 Comrades! He lived near the start of the New York marathon and had run that race in 2 hours and 40 minutes in his younger years. I walked and ran with him for a while and considered sticking by him. But when he mentioned there were several Comrades he hadn't finished recently, I pulled ahead.

The crowd was amazing. Lots of people lined the road in certain spots along the way. I waved and gave the kids high fives. Later in the race, I was just putting my hand up and dragging it through a dense sea of hands. Eventually even that took too much energy. I kept my hands down, except for grabbing edible handouts.

The peeled and baked potatoes rolled in salt were delicious. After several experiences of having food slip out of my hand, I learned to be more decisive with the grab. I was hungry! Even with the four gel packages I had brought, and rejecting water in favor of energy drinks at most stations, I couldn't find enough calories to consume.

Another source of energy came not through the mouth but the ears. I usually wait until a certain point in a race to reward and distract myself with music. This time I started at about 11:30 a.m., just after the halfway point. "Happy," by Pharrell Williams, could make me feel like dancing even after 30 miles. After 42 miles of running, even the

Beach Boys' "California Girls" made me cry, never mind "Hero" by Mariah Carey.

I had just made it past the Umlaas Road intersection and to the highest point in the race (at 815 meters or 2,674 feet) when I saw someone in a referee shirt motioning at me angrily. A short while later, another referee gestured toward me. This time it was clear. I had to take out my headphones. The runner near me said I wasn't allowed to wear them, for safety, and I could be disqualified.

I couldn't believe it! I had carefully read all four pages of the provided *Final Race Instructions and Information*. I could have been disqualified for violating a norm so widely followed in South Africa that the race organizers hadn't even thought to mention it.

I took my headphones out reluctantly, knowing the race was about to get harder.

Going into this, I knew a race set up as a war memorial was not going to be easy. The Comrades, first run in 1921, is the brainchild of Vic Clapham, a World War I veteran who wanted to remember his fellow South Africans killed in the war with a race that aims to "celebrate mankind's spirit over adversity."¹

The word *Comrades* was increasing in its popularity in the early 1900s. An American poster from 1918 said, "I summon you to comradeship in the Red Cross," quoting President Woodrow Wilson. The word reached its pinnacle in the late 1930s, then usage plummeted as it became associated with the Soviet Union and spread of communism. *Comrades* literally means *roommate* (from Latin for *chamber*) but can refer to someone committed to the same space, group, or goal as you. In this case, we were all running the same race.

I looked down at my feet, willing them to keep going. I took

¹Stated purpose in the Comrades Marathon Association's Constitution.

turns focusing on my knees instead, moving them back and forth and back and forth. Everything else blurred into the background, and running felt easy and natural, almost trancelike. I was on a high. I could run forever.

Except for the fact that everything hurt. Surprisingly, running uphill was less painful than walking flat. To keep going on the flats after water stations, I had to tell myself that pain was good, that I enjoyed it, that nothing beautiful comes without suffering.

I had recently been listening to *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World*,² published from conversations between two Nobel Peace Prize recipients, the Dalai Lama (called His Holiness by the Tibetan people, living in exile in India) and Desmond³ Tutu (the first black Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town and a strong opponent of apartheid).⁴ I loved hearing these two senior spiritual leaders laugh together and share the insights they've gathered along the way.

I was running this race because of another man, an elder who stands with them in the same sage position in my life. He had encouraged me, celebrating my successes along the way, advising me to rest and make sure I took good care of my body, modeling the importance of a positive mindset.

My grandfather has been a runner for as long as I can remember. He first ran the Comrades in 1989 at the age of 61 when I was almost seven. He linked up with a man running his tenth race and, in his words, he put himself “into his hands.” The stranger turned comrade had knee problems, and they finished with just 30 seconds to spare.⁵

Two years later, Grandpa joined a “bus,” called a “pace group” in

²Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu, *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World* (New York: Penguin, 2016).

³We named our third child, Desmond, after three men, on three different continents, who we believe stayed true to their convictions, despite conflict, and worked for peace—between communities, for the wounded, and with God (Desmond Tutu, Desmond Doss, and Desmond Ford).

⁴South Africa's official policy of racial discrimination that ended in the early 1990s.

⁵The cutoff at that time was 11 hours.

the United States, with supportive leaders who are able to run faster but commit to helping their group finish within a set time. That year he came in with six minutes left on the clock. The next year, on an Up run, he started alone but ended with a friend, a well-known local journalist, finishing the race with just three minutes to spare.

I ran because I wanted to run the race Grandpa had run while he would still be there to cheer me on and greet me at the finish line.

I ran because I want to run, to press on in Grandpa's shoes.

Not his actual shoes, of course. I've actually had a terribly hard time finding running shoes that work. My first pair was an exception. With a bit of beginner's luck, I found them on the discount rack at a running store. They happened to be a men's size 8.5 wide.

In any narrower shoes, my left foot throbs with Morton's Neuroma (a swelling of the plantar nerve, usually between the second and third toes). This is common for women, due to the unfortunate prevalence of narrow shoes that squeeze our toes together, plus the heels that put pressure on the balls of our feet. I boycott those shoes. Mostly.

After that first pair, my luck ended. I could only tell whether shoes would work or not after the first few miles, when they had already become "used." I rejected three pairs as unworkable. From then on, I only bought from stores that had lenient return policies, mailing back three more pairs. Finally, a sports podiatrist compared the bottom of my shoes and suggested I needed ones with more traditional flex grooves, and I found a pair that worked.

I wouldn't run in Grandpa's actual shoes. No, the "shoes" I'm talking about here are what I've learned from my grandfather's ways of engaging with and being in the world. I want to follow him because I see him doing his best to "follow the example of Christ." (1 Corinthians 11:1, NIV).

We all carry certain biological traits from those who have come before us. These are with us, no matter what. But other traits, other characteristics, we pick up along the way. Once we're aware of them, like shoes, it's possible we can intentionally choose them, or choose to switch them out for a different pair. By God's grace, we can choose to live out the best of the legacies we've been given—and prayerfully leave certain aspects behind.

When I was born, we were living with my mother's parents in Cape Town, South Africa, where we stayed until I was almost four. Grandpa let me “help” him with the gardening and pushed me on the swings at the park just down the street. During family worship, I would lie on his chest and feel the warm words of Scripture rumbling within. I loved asking questions, like (as reported to me by my mother), “What does it mean to be born again?” I watched him kneeling by his bed in the mornings, talking to his best friend, Jesus, and said a happy “yes” whenever he invited me to pray with him.

And the prayers together continued. Grandpa dedicated me as a baby, baptized me when I was 11, prayed for me at my ordination-commissioning into pastoral ministry in 2011, gave the dedicatory prayer for Mike and me at our wedding in 2016, prayed over our firstborn, Eleanor, in 2018, our son, Eric, in 2020, and our son, Desmond in 2022. Along with the prayers, the questions and conversations continued too.

“Grandpa, do you think I need to be re-baptized?” He was visiting from South Africa, and we were walking down the street of my childhood in Berrien Springs, Michigan. I was 14, experiencing a spiritual revival, and sure that I knew Jesus so much better than I had at age 11. Plus, I felt guilty for not having had all the daily devotions I thought I ought to have had earlier.

Grandpa asked me one question, “When you got baptized, were you making the decision to give your life to Jesus?” “Yes,” I said. “Well,” he affirmed, “You will always get to know Him better.” That settled it for me.

“Grandpa, what do you think of my boyfriend, Mike, and our relationship?” We were walking together again, this time doing laps on the top deck of a small cruise ship, with miniature golf in the middle and the ocean on all sides. “He’s sincere, authentic, open. He cares deeply for you and would take good care of you. I’d say go for it.” I’m so grateful I did. His blessing mattered to me.

“Grandpa, what do you think I should do as I face this conflict in the church? How do I step back into the situation?” This time we were walking in Michigan again, on the long country roads surrounding Willo Drive, as I prepared to travel back home to California. “Listen carefully. Respond humbly. Then trust the Lord to give you all the wisdom and the courage that you need.” An elder and I were able to have a tearful heart-to-heart, and the conflict disintegrated. His counsel worked wonders for me.

My relationship with my grandfather has enabled and inspired me to run this race called life with more peace, grace, and courage. He has helped me better understand and experience the abundant goodness of God. Perhaps there is a person in your life who has done the same for you. If no one springs to mind, you may have an unmet longing for such a relationship. You wouldn’t be alone. So many are running without the benefit of such encouragers. I pray one will come your way. In the meantime, you can be that person for someone from a different generation.

In Psalm 145, David sings of the greatness and praiseworthy goodness of God. It’s a marathon song, not in terms of length but of

comprehensiveness. It's an acrostic. Each line starts with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This method symbolized the comprehensive nature of God's goodness, from A to Z as it were. It also made the song easier to memorize and pass along to the next generation.

Psalms 145:4 says, "One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts" (NRSV). The New International Reader's Version assumes one direction, "Parents praise your works to their children. They tell about your mighty acts." But I love the ambiguity in the Hebrew. It literally says one generation to another. Sharing God's goodness doesn't only go in one direction. Children can tell their parents about God's mighty acts. Younger generations can inspire older ones with their trust in God's abundant goodness.

Two conversations come to mind from my days as a youth pastor. A young girl had asked to be baptized and I was having Bible studies with her. I was stalling, a bit. She was nine and, in my mind, quite arbitrarily, I had decided the youngest I wanted to baptize was 10 years old. After several months of studies, one day she stopped and burst into tears. "But when am I going to get baptized?" I stopped, pulled out the calendar, and set a date. Who was I to hinder God with my random double-digit requirement? I learned to listen for how the Holy Spirit is speaking to or through someone, regardless of that person's age.

When I got a call to leave youth ministry for a lead pastor role, I was torn. A wise counselor asked me, "Have you completed your mission there?" As I reflected, it became clear to me that one of the young adults in the youth ministry had the necessary gifts and connections to lead the community in the next season. His dedication and fearlessness inspired me. I learned that we could trust next generations to hear and respond to God's relentless call. I passed on

the baton to the runner best suited for the next leg of that race and got ready for my next one.

One thing that has given me courage that God can work in the midst of our imperfections is the way the Scriptures themselves have come to us. Sometimes things get dropped along the way. There are 21 verses in Psalm 145, but 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Most manuscripts of the Masoretic text are missing the phrase that starts with the Hebrew letter nun. You'll notice that verse 13 is shorter in the King James Version, versus in the New International Version, which includes the nun phrase, based on one manuscript of the Masoretic Text, plus more recently unearthed Dead Sea Scrolls, the Syriac, and Septuagint. The missing phrase says, "The Lord is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does" (Psalm 145:13b, NIV). This is not earth-shattering. The thrust of the psalm continues unaltered with this omission. But, it gives me courage that God is still at work in the midst of our imperfections.

The summer my grandfather turned 90, I took a 12-week sabbatical from pastoral work to run the Comrades and have a series of intentional conversations with him about legacy.⁶ Granny and Grandpa were considering relocating to a different continent, moving to Michigan, in the United States, to be closer to family.

What would they choose to bring or leave behind? What about my Granny's mother's piano, or her father's paintings, or the stool from the 1820 settlers (passed down from the Staples or Webster families who had come from Britain to South Africa)? What would happen to all of Grandpa's books, photo albums, furniture, clothes, and papers? Not to mention the plates, the children's table and little chairs from my childhood? Beyond all the stuff, what would they

⁶Thank you, Southeastern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, for your exceptional, proactive sabbatical policy that encourages pastors to do this once every seven years.

hope to pass along to us? And what would I choose to hold onto or let go of?

My grandfather is not perfect. Making him out to be so would make this book a rather boring hagiography.⁷ But in the slip-ups I come across, I'd like to emulate the way he recovers after he falls. As Proverbs 24:16 says, he will "get up again" (NET).

I want to be a runner, a follower of Jesus, a pastor, a friend, and human being, like my Grandpa.

Growing up, whenever anything exceptionally exciting, unusual, hilarious, or downright challenging happened, someone would often say, "This is a story you will tell your grandchildren one day." Now, as a pastor, I often find solace in awkward or ridiculous moments by saying, to myself or out loud, "At least this will make a great sermon illustration."

So far, those theoretical grandchildren haven't materialized. Nor do those messy moments always make it into a message. But whether they do or not, saying, "I'll tell this to my grandchildren," changes my perspective. We look at life differently when we're thinking of the next generation, our future listeners and leaders. We make choices differently too.

Running the Comrades is definitely something I will tell my grandchildren about, and the experience has already made it into a sermon or two. Did I make it before the 12-hour cut-off? I'll leave you in suspense for now, because that's part of the point.

Your race isn't over. If you're reading or listening to these words, you're still running or walking, crawling or trying to catch your breath. The final chapters of your book are yet unwritten.

Today is not just yours or mine—it's ours. How we run our race impacts those running with us and after us. We're comrades. Like the

⁷A word used for writings that treat their saints or subjects as flawless.

one who smiled at me and suggested that we'd better finish this race, because we're only running it once. We're all in it together.

Reflection Questions

1. What would you hope to get out of conversations between people of different ages? (If you're facilitating a group, share your personal response first.)
2. Which generation do you identify with (for example, Gen Z, Y, X, Boomer One or Two, Silent Gen, G.I. Gen),⁸ and what is something you're devoted to or excited about, in three words or less (a hobby, cause, responsibility, etc.). (If you have a conversation partner or small group, share your name, generation, and three-word passion).
3. How can we create safe and meaningful space? Brainstorm rules of engagement all conversation partners could commit to (for instance, to seek understanding, stay confidential, show up or let us know, and share the time).
4. Read Psalm 145. What words or phrases stand out to you? What are generations called to share with each other (verse 4)?
5. What makes it hard to have healthy conversations between generations? Make a list (for example, assumptions about each other, using a different language, diverse life experiences). For each obstacle on the list, what can you and others do to connect?
6. For further reflection: Think of one person older than you and one person younger than you with whom you have a significant and positive relationship. For each of them, share with a partner, or write down, one thing they've taught you about who God is.

⁸Typical birth years for generations: Gen Z – 1997-2012; Gen Y – 1981-1996; Gen X – 1965-1980; Boomers II – 1955-1964; Boomers I – 1946-1954; Silent Gen – 1928-1945; G.I. Gen – 1912-1927.