

I AM MY GRANDPA'S ENKELIN

Walter Wangerin, Jr.

A Study Guide for Parents and Teachers

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A Word to Adults Who Read to the Children

Even as Enkelin's Grandpa—his actions, his word and his thoughts—arise from his strong faith, so does much of this story arise from the events and the powerful elements in the Bible.

I'm going to offer you several clear connections between My Grandpa's Enkelin and certain symbols and stories in the Bible.

I suggest that you don't turn the story in a Sunday school lesson, wherein you teach the children a number of doctrines. If you do this, children will lose the interest of genuine experience in the demands on their intellectual capacities.

Rather, you should make yourself aware of the Biblical references and truths which stand behind this story. Therefore you will be prepared to answer the questions which the children themselves will ask. If you know the theology, you will become the best presenter of the story for the sake of the children; but you need not become the theologian which no child can love in tenderness and trust.

-Walter Wangerin, Jr.

GRANDPA THE TEACHER

--When you think of Grandpa, think also of yourself. Both he and you are fulfilling the words of Moses to the children of Israel just before they enter the Promised Land.

Read Deuteronomy 6:1-9.

“So that you and your children and your children’s children may fear the Lord.”

Then comes the Great Commandment to love God above all things.

Finally, “recite these words to your children—at any time!”

THE SPRING

--Throughout the story, remember that the Lord’s Resurrection is celebrated in the spring, when the tender grasses and the blossoms and all this sprouting world symbolizes the new life of Christ for all those whose lives are hidden in him.

So there are two springs at the end of the story: The Last Spring is Grandpa’s death and departure (when he himself is the seed planted). And the First Spring of All embraces the resurrection which Grandpa and we all will experience after our earthly departure.

TO THE FARMER, “DRESS, TILL, AND KEEP THE EARTH”

--Grandpa is a farmer like the First Man, Adam.

Read Genesis chapter 1:26-31, chapter 2:7-9, 15-17.

See how Grandpa and Grandma are still doing what people have done from the beginning—the very thing God has asked us to do. To keep the earth. To praise God by growing things, by leading the cattle and taking care of animals. Grandpa the farmer and Grandma the gardener, and Enkelin the egg-gatherer are fine examples of humans who trust God, love God and are obedient to God.

GOOD GRANDPA, GOOD SHEPHERD

--When Enkelin gets lost among the corn rows, Grandpa comes and finds her exactly as Jesus comes and finds every lost sheep. For such a story, read Luke 15:3-7. For the most important thing the Good Shepherd does for the child, read John 10:1-5, 11-18, 27-30. “I lay down my life for the sheep!” And “No one will snatch them out of my hand.”

Connect these thoughts to Grandpa’s prayer on page 12. He won’t always be nearby; but Jesus will. Note, too, that the “hen” which Grandpa speaks about comes from Jesus’ words, Matthew 23:37-39—the way Jesus wants to gather us and to love us.

FOXES, TROUBLES IN THE WORLD

--The foxes seem to be everywhere, near the chicken coop, in our dreams. Little fears, are the foxes; little troubles, little enemies. (See Song of Solomon 2:15, and “that fox” is what Jesus calls Herod in Luke 13:32.)

Tornados (on p. 15) are the giant troubles nature can send upon us.

And death is always (first) an unhappy event.

The world is not free of troubles small and large. Even children know this. Things have made them cry, made them sad, things and people have hurt them. How do we help them understand such troubles? Several ways:

We protect them as Grandpa does (as the Good Shepard does).

For the natural troubles we can speak of how everything is here to serve other things (as Grandpa explains the life and the dying of alfalfa, wheat, hogs). Please read Psalm 104:10-30. Nothing is made for itself! (And from this psalm comes the prayer Grandpa prays on p. 19, right after his explanation of service.)

And finally (this is, of course, the most important theme of this story) we introduce the children to the larger circle of life in Jesus: that death, our death, which seems the hugest trouble in anyone’s life, *is really a resurrection.*

DUST

--Here is a picture of creation and death and re-creation—one of the strongest symbols in this story.

We are made out of dust, Genesis 2.

We will return to dust, Genesis 3:19; Job 10:9.

In the meantime we work “by the sweat of our face.” This, too, is the life of Grandpa the farmer.

Put the following pictures together in order to quietly show (by means of the story!) how Grandpa has prepared his dear grandchild for his own dying. On page 13 Grandpa does what any good farmer (in a good and blessed relationship with the earth) can do: He tests the ground to see if it is ready for planting.

Page 22, in the winter (when all the ground has gone into a sleep like death) Grandpa talks about a “sleep at the end,” calling it beautiful, taking the sting from it. Please note that for those who believe in Christ, Paul calls death no more than a sleep.

On the last page, p. 31, the illustration shows Grandpa allowing the dust to blow in the wind again—this time his own dust, with faith and contentment. And how do we know this? By the next symbol...

SEED

--Read John 12:23-26.

Watch how often Grandpa uses seed, talks about seed, involves the idea of seed in his discussions of dying and rising.

Apply that picture this way: The Seed whose planting, dying and rising which changed things for everyone is Jesus Christ, crucified, buried, and resurrected for the sake of the world.

By faith Grandpa can be planted (knows it is right and time for his planting) in peace and in hope. (This is the fun of the toothpick!)

And we, too, are a seed planted which, when it arises, has changed. Please read First Corinthians 15:35-49 for Paul’s wonderful, poetic explanation of death and the resurrection for the faithful. The corn seed is small and hard in the hand. But the full grown cornstalk, though it is of the seed, looks nothing like the seed.