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Grandma's Hands
Lyrics by Bill Withers

Grandma’s hands
Clapped in church on Sunday morning
Grandma’s hands
Played a tambourine so well
Grandma’s hands
Used to issue out a warning
She’d say, “Billy, don’t you run so fast”
“Might fall on a piece of glass”
“Might be snakes there in that grass”

Grandma’s hands
Soothed a local unwed mother
Grandma’s hands
Used to ache sometimes and swell
Grandma’s hands
Used to lift her face and tell her,
“Oh baby, Grandma understands
That you really love that man
Put yourself in Jesus’ hands"

Grandma’s hands
Used to hand me piece of candy
Grandma’s hands
Picked me up each time I fell
Grandma’s hands
Boy, they really came in handy
She’d say, “Matty don’ you whip that boy
What you want to spank him for?
He didn’ drop no apple core”
But I don’t have Grandma anymore
If I get to Heaven I’ll look for
Grandma’s hands
We all have trying times—times that seem impossible. There are some days when we wonder how we are going to make it to the next. But each of us has the power to get up in the morning and live our life.

Without determination and perseverance, we could never achieve our dreams. I went from a boy in a remedial reading class to a man with a degree in mathematics and three degrees in mechanical engineering, and eventually became a tenured engineering professor.

Without hope, acceptance, and optimism, even in the worst of times, we could not appreciate each day. Though the death of my mother was the darkest period of my life, I awakened each morning thereafter looking forward to the brighter days that were sure to come.

Without pride and confidence in ourselves and in God, we could never achieve the greatness within. I know that God has set me on this path in life because I am now capable of achieving more things than I ever imagined on my own accord.

All of us must have faith. We simply must rise to whatever challenge faces us with the knowledge that we have been impregnated with greatness and all that we need is within us. As the poet Maltbie D. Babcock says:

“Be strong! We are not here to play, to dream, to drift; We have hard work to do and loads to lift; Shun not the struggle—face it; ’tis God’s gift.”

How Do You View Life? What Will Make You Successful?

Attitude & Aspirations

When the occasion arises, the proverb arises.

West Africa
Everyone has storms that come into their lives. No one is immune to bad days, or months, or sometimes even years. The best thing we can remember about trouble is that the trouble didn't come to stay.

There were times when life was hard for me—financially, physically, and psychologically—but I took solace in the fact that these bad times were only temporary. I knew that if I could hold on and keep moving forward, better times would come. Bad times had come before, and they had passed, so the present challenges were soon to pass also.

If I didn't understand this proverb before, the events of Hurricane Katrina made it crystal clear. The people of New Orleans took one gut punch after another. First there was the hurricane, then the flood, the government's slow response, the loss of homes, lives, investments, and way of life; and yet, the people knew that all this would pass and life must go on. So years later, when everyone has moved on and the cameras have departed, the people of New Orleans are still rebuilding their lives and city, and eventually the impact of Katrina will pass.

We have a lot to learn from these brave people. I learned it first from Grandma.
Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.

Proverbs 31:25-26
We live in a world where people judge each other at every turn. Many times we look around at our present condition and make judgments on what we can accomplish. My father accomplished great things in his life with a limited eighth-grade education from state-approved segregated Negro schools—a feat which I will always be proud of, as will his other descendants. However, he frequently belabored the fact that he did not have the education that I was able to achieve. If he had instead focused on what he accomplished, given his challenging origins, he would have seen the victory that all of us see. Booker T. Washington said, “Success is not so much measured by the position one has reached in life, but by the obstacles which he has overcome.” We all can accomplish great things regardless of how humble our beginnings are. We cannot begin to dictate where we end up. The journey we have to travel to get to our goal is the most important part—not the actual destination.

Luke 14:28 NLT

Don’t begin until you count the cost... see if you have enough to finish.

When we make a mistake or someone wrongs us, we have to take the attitude that once it has passed, it is past. Why try to do anything about it if it’s over and done with and can’t be altered? Accept that the water is under the bridge and move on.

Now I’m not talking about things that you can go back and correct. By all means you should challenge wrongs committed against you and correct wrongs you have done. But many times we spend undue energy worrying about or considering things that simply happened, even when they have no feasible remedy. Let this reality go, plan around it if you must, but keep moving toward your dreams and goals. What has already happened is yesterday’s news; throw it away like yesterday’s paper!

Forget about what’s happened; don’t keep going over old history.

Isaiah 43:18 MSG

Don’t Cry Over Spilled Milk
...it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead…

Ephesians 5:14

Lazy hands make a man poor but diligent hands bring wealth.

Proverbs 10:4

The Early Bird Gets the Worm

Nothing comes to a sleeper but a dream.

The nationally-known Dr. Howard Adams wrote a book entitled Get Up with Something on Your Mind! It’s a collection of life’s lessons taught to him by his ancestors. I find the title very appealing and revealing because I was taught that, as a man, every day I had to get up and go get it.

My father was truly an entrepreneur and believed in the “cave man” theory of success: every day you have to get up and go kill or you do not eat. He taught me not to lie in bed in the morning because there was a world to conquer. The person who gets out often and early will win the battle and kill the most food. Nothing comes to a sleeper but a dream. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was not assassinated because he had a dream; he was assassinated because every day he awakened and tried to turn his dreams into reality. Wake up early with your future, dreams, family, and life on your mind and go forward about the business of achieving your goals and turning them into reality.
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.

Psalm 1:1

Do not ever just settle for what is available. As creations of God, all of us deserve the best in our lives and we should go for it. Do not settle for other people’s leftovers; go for style and class.

When you select a mate or partner, step up, reach up, and select someone who can make you better. Do not go backwards and find yourself rearing someone who may not ever mature. Many women believe that they can “fix” men or force them to grow up, and we all know the ending to that story. Like fruit, pick your mate from the batch that has matured at the proper time.

There’s a joke that an old lady told me one day that I have never forgotten: she asked, “What is the difference between men and government bonds?” I responded, “I don’t know.” She said, “Bonds eventually mature.” We see men who refuse to grow up and have fallen from the tree, from their parents’ home, and are waiting for someone to pick them up. Do not pick your fruit from the ground, that which has fallen from the tree and has lost all ability to grow and further develop. You deserve better.
No One Can Take Your Education Away From You

Put Something in Your Head and No One Can Take That From You

The material things that you acquire—cars, homes, and clothes—will never be more important than those non-material riches that cannot be perceived with the five senses. That’s what Grandma meant. She knew that true education imparts wisdom, and that the value of that wisdom was worth all the money in the world. In fact, she understood that this kind of wisdom could actually lead to the material things that we seem so bent on grasping. Your education is something you own, something you work for and earn. No one can go inside of your head and pull that knowledge back out—unless you let them.

After Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and I lost my job, I was able to care for my family because while I had lost many physical things—cars, house, clothes—I still had my education, which allowed me and others to bounce back quickly and take care of family. Your education and skills are yours forever.

Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold.

Proverbs 8:10
One of the most popular game shows in history is “Let’s Make a Deal,” in which contestants usually won one prize by playing a game and then had to decide whether to trade that prize in for something unknown behind a glittering curtain. Do I keep what I have or risk it on something I don’t even know about? Life often gives us the same decisions to make. I was often taught to go with the bird in the hand because you do not know what you might get by selecting the unknowns in the bush. They may fly away before you can catch them.

In other words, be prudent. When you look up the word prudent in the dictionary, the synonyms, or words with similar meanings, are careful and sensible. Be careful about throwing away something you already have for something of which you are not sure.

The wise in heart shall be called prudent…

Proverbs 16:21
... your Father in heaven... causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Matthew 5:45

God Watches Over Fools & Babies

Grandma's trying to tell us something here without being too harsh. She is giving some backhanded comfort as she assures you that, even though you may really be "messing up," God will have your back. He cares about you, and even when you act in ways contrary to His laws and principles, He will often step in and save you from yourself. Grandma, as has anyone who has lived long enough, has seen many situations in which a foolish action did not result in disastrous consequences.

Have you ever talked on your cell phone while driving on the freeway at 80 miles per hour? If you avoided an accident, you're a prime example of this proverb. Just look back and think about how many times you were spared from danger (despite your best efforts to step into it) and you will clearly understand the wisdom of this saying.

The subtle message, though, is this: even though God will watch over you, don't stay "out there" too long. There will be consequences.

In the Land of the Blind, a One-Eyed King is

Grandma understood this truth: everything is relative. If you go into a work or organizational situation with a knowledge level that is significantly higher than the other individuals in the room, you will often find yourself being catered to and rewarded according to your wisdom. While you don't always want to be in a situation where you outstrip your colleagues by a few orders of magnitude, it is occasionally good to be in that position. It certainly helps your ego, but most importantly, it allows you an opportunity to be compensated according to your knowledge level. The key is to be a leading expert in one important area. Your particular talent, if you are able to use it to improve lives or institutions, is the key to your prosperity.

I have been involved in many grassroots campaigns and activities. As I grew and matured as a person and leader, I realized how important it is to come from a point of knowledge. Over the years, I have watched community activists and politicians knowingly provide incorrect information and deceptive answers to very complex questions. The activists or politicians usually get away with such responses because they are convinced that the audience is ignorant about the matter. Not very often does the community or audience get to challenge or question such comments. If everyone in the room is ignorant and you are the speaker, then the situation makes you an expert. The nation has to begin to expect more out of our leaders at all levels. As we move deeper into the 21st century where technology is placing more and more information at people's fingertips instantly, the one-eyed man can't get away with taking advantage of the people's ignorance much longer.
A Dead Fish Can Go with the Flow, But it Takes a Mighty Strong One to Go Against It

John F. Kennedy stated that conformity is the death of freedom and the destroyer of creativity. America is a nation where its citizens are supposed to be free; but there are nonetheless strong competing forces enticing us to conform and be like others. We were born to be free, especially living in the most “liberated” nation on earth. Sadly, many people wake up every day in this free nation and decide to live in the cage that others have built for them. Why do they do it? They fail to develop the muscles needed to go against the prevailing wave of conformity. One can be literally near death and follow the crowd, but it takes intestinal fortitude to do your own thing and create what has never been created or achieve what has never been achieved. That’s the promise of humanity. I challenge you to be among the few who go against the flow.

All my life I have gone against the flow of prevailing attitudes in order to achieve the things that I have. Your family, friends, and society try to force you to conform to what they think or want for you.

Stand. Develop the strength. Follow your heart, even if it’s against the wishes of others. In the end, you’ll be happy, even if you miss the mark, because you will have tried to make your dreams come into reality, something most of the world will never be able to claim!

Matthew 7:14
Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

Daniel 3:16-18

If You Don’t Stand for Something, You’ll Fall for Anything

Character is what you would do when no one is looking. Your character defines who you are and what you are about. It doesn’t change with polls or fads, for it is constant, predictable, and unyielding. When your character is weak, you change with the wind. You are one place today and changing your religion the next. You stand for nothing, so anything will suffice for you. A leader, whether in the home or in business, must be clear about where he or she stands, especially on the most controversial issues of the time.

Sometimes you will find you have to take a stand even when it costs you something. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must do it because Conscience tells him it is right.”
Life has a funny way of bringing back to you that which you put into it. It is called the Law of Reciprocity. If you give the world love, compassion, support, and generosity, you will usually reap the same from the universe. However, if you give the world pain, envy, and destruction, you’ll probably get the same in return.

This is a good place to end. It really sums up everything Grandma teaches us. Your words and actions all have consequences. Your giving comes back to you in manifold ways. Likewise your words do too—we learned about their power earlier. When you understand this, you really understand the secret to life, and that is the principle of sowing and reaping.

So get out and sow something good! And have a good life...

Be not deceived; GOD is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.  

Galatians 6:7 KJV
Dr. Mackie’s book addresses a fundamental need—the virtues of personal responsibility, reliability, choice, trust, and strength of character are so old that they have become new again.

Bishop James N. Brown

“With eyes of faith, Dr. Mackie peers into the soul of the wise grandmother and cleverly extracts the most salient and timeless truths, which both affirm and challenge the content of one’s character. In doing so, he perpetually inspires generations to succeed against the odds with enduring images of hope.”

Rev. Kendrick E. Curry

Drawing inspiration from the women in the author’s family, this impassioned celebration of the enduring values of previous generations offers guidance and wisdom for the challenges of 21st-century life. Each thoughtful vignette is inspired by a well-known proverb Dr. Mackie learned from the courageous women who helped raise him. Each proverb is accompanied by a relevant scriptural reference and a collage of photographs of mothers and grandmothers expressing their unique cultural and maternal identity.

Dr. Mackie’s own deeply personal observations are presented in anecdotes from his life and his work. Harrowing global events like 2005’s Hurricane Katrina, generational hardships such as those African Americans endured in the racially-segregated South, and even his own personal struggle with the loss of his mother demonstrate universal truths about the world in which we live. Perspectives that might have fallen on deaf ears as "antiquated" or even “obsolete” are presented anew in a refreshingly relevant, thought-provoking, and genuinely useful light. Through an interweaving of personal and historical perspectives, Mackie’s stories and reflections offer the reader an intimate understanding of all that he has learned from the influential women in his life.