

KNOW THE AUTHORS AND CONTRIBUTORS

Ben Dickerson and Derrel Watkins have known each other for four decades. Ben and Derrel first met while representing two different educational institutions. They discovered they had a number of common interests. Both were people persons, both desired to make a difference with their lives, and both based their work on their Christian faith.

Ben has had the opportunity and benefited greatly from his involvement with youth groups such as Boy Scouts, FFA, and Christian camps. Additionally, he had what he calls a privilege to be a faculty member at several well-known universities throughout the country. Furthermore, his experience in the military provided exposure to some of the best leaders this country has, which taught him how to lead. Ben's undying interest has been dogs and their well-being. He is blessed by having a blended family that has provided him with many opportunities to expand his grandparenting career. Ben is known for his involvement with his students beyond the classroom. They felt welcome in his home and joined him in coauthoring articles for magazines and making presentations at national and regional meetings.

Derrel Watkins is a man with a multitude of interests from coffee beans to theology, psychology, ministry, and an incredible desire to learn more of just about everything. He has made significant contributions to higher education whether in colleges, universities, or seminaries. He is most known for his love for students and his willingness to help them in any way possible. Derrel, a Christian, relies heavily on his faith, especially the scriptures, to know how best to apply his life where it counts the most for his Lord and Savior. Derrel has been blessed with two wonderful children—a daughter and a son. His daughter made a granddaddy out of him in 1984 with the

birth of his number one grandson, Jason. His son added another grandson, Vincent, nine years later. In addition, his blessings include a favorite daughter-in-law (she is the only one) and a great son-in-law who contributed two “bonus granddaughters,” Sarah and Emily, to the family. Derrel loves most types of music and sings almost anything from classical to country western to hymns.

Both men feel a strong calling to utilize their God-given gifts to encourage others to maximize themselves for as long as possible. Likewise both men continue to be students of the scriptures, the family, and the life course as it continues to change through time. Ben and Derrel are avid readers. When they are at national meetings they utilize any spare time to visit the closest book displays to see what is new. Both these individuals make every effort to maintain a lifelong commitment to their students. Their desire is that their students will move beyond where they have been and create new pathways to the discovery of knowledge.

Ben and Derrel have been extremely fortunate in meeting some very talented people throughout their professional careers. Among that number are three that were asked to write chapters for this book. Kay Smith, lawyer turned social worker, is the author of Chapter 9, *Grandparenting and the Law*. Kay reflects so much in her life what we would like to see in our own. She is a servant of the people, devoted to helping them in whatever way possible. She often mentions how important her husband has been by encouraging her to make the transition from a prosperous career as an attorney to one that is seldom known for the income it generates. Ben first met Kay while she was a student in the Oklahoma Leadership Academy on Aging. It was easy to recognize quickly that Kay was both unique in her desire to serve and also a very bright woman able

to grasp problems and solve them quickly. She quickly responded to our request to write a chapter for this book, knowing that it could be used to help many.

Lance Robertson the author of Chapter 5, *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren*, is one of the best known individuals in the aging network throughout the state of Oklahoma. He has served at a university as codirector of a center for the study of aging, selected as executive director of a regional professional association, and known for his consulting and speaking gifts. Lance, reared by his grandparents, exemplifies how grandparents can make a difference in a grandchild's life. He gives his grandparents considerable credit for the man he has become.

Jim Hughes, author of Chapter 12, *Long Distance Grandparenting*, exemplifies what a strong faith can mean in a life filled with a number of unexpected challenges. His first wife died at an early age, leaving him the responsibility to raise three children. At the same time he had set a goal to pursue a college degree with a hope of advancing into graduate school. He often mentions how, during these times, God met all his needs and made the way for him to become what he believed God had called him to do. Jim not only finished a college degree but also complete a Ph.D. in Gerontology at the University of Nebraska. Since graduation, he has been an adjunct faculty member and a student minister, as well as authored numerous articles, notebooks, and other valuable publications. He also has served as a minister in several churches, helping him to gain a greater understanding of human behavior in difficult times. Jim has remarried and continues to devote himself to his family and his calling. One of his biggest challenges in the past few years has been how to be the grandfather he wants to be when his grandchildren live so far away. If anyone can meet this challenge with success it is Jim Hughes.