

Dear Boys

THE LETTER EVERY
SON NEEDS FROM
HIS FATHER

Dustin Kaehr

Copyright © 2018

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without prior permission of the author.

ISBN: 978-0-9973541-3-3 (sc)

ISBN: 978-0-9973541-2-6 (eb)

Edited by Susan Chilton (www.susanchilton.com)

Cover design by Katie Pearce (www.pearce.media)

Cover photo by John Tirotta (tirottaphoto.smugmug.com)

Author photo by Brooke Miller

Interior design by Kim Monteforte (WeMakeBooks.ca)

Bulk discounts are available for your company, church, or non-profit for reselling, gifts, or study groups. For information or to have Dustin speak to your conference, church or retreat, reach out to hello@dearboysbook.com or find Dustin on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, or Twitter (@dustinkaehr).

Printed in Canada

For My Dad, Scott Kaehr
(07.03.56 – 12.16.09)

In showing me how to die,
you showed me how to live.

Table of Contents

THE SET-UP

Start Here	3
The Gettysburg Address	9
Your Challenge	21

THE LETTER

Sentence One: Your Guide	43
Sentence Two: Your Mom	59
Sentence Three: Your Manhood	75
Sentence Four: Your Guides	103
Sentence Five: Your Job	117
Sentences Six & Seven: Your Wife	133
Sentences Eight & Nine: Your Savior	151
Sentence Ten: Your Reminder	167

YOUR TURN

Your Turn To Write	177
------------------------------	-----

*“When you teach your son,
you teach your son’s son.”*

THE TALMUD

The Set-Up

Start Here

I need to start here: I am a follower of Jesus Christ.

He has been my Savior since I was 14 years old. My faith journey has had many ups and downs. I do not claim to have it all together or to have all the answers. Nevertheless, this book is written through the filter of that worldview and my personal relationship with Jesus. I know that only through my choice to follow Him will I have any chance to raise my four boys into great men. I am much too flawed to do that on my own.

But whether you are a Christ-follower, a casual Christian, or of no faith at all, I believe this book will help you raise your sons. The strong desire to raise our boys into men who love their wives and who are themselves great dads is not unique to me because of my relationship with Jesus.

As a dad, the one thing we all should want for our sons is that they grow up knowing how much we love them, how proud of them we are, and that we have prepared them well to go into the world.

Some credit for this book must go to bestselling author, Mark Sanborn. Back in January 2011, I was listening to Mark share the importance of clear, concise, effective communication. Because my mind tends to wander (sometimes farther and faster than it should), I began to apply what Mark was sharing, but to something completely different.

That five-minute daydream prompted me to begin writing on the plane ride home. Those musings eventually ended up on a blog I had at the time. When I started writing this book, I once again found myself in a daydream, but this time of my own doing. I have always enjoyed writing and joked for several years

that I was going to write a book.¹ Well, in this second daydream, I became convinced that it was time to pick up a pen—or get behind a keyboard. As I began to ponder what subject I wanted to tackle, I was drawn back to that Mark Sanborn keynote about clear, concise, effective communication.

As a father to four boys, nothing could be more important than making sure that if something were to happen to me before my boys were raised, my message to them would be communicated in a way that would take root and be permanently entrenched in their hearts. For the sake of my wife, my boys, their future wives, my friends who are raising boys, and dads everywhere, nothing could be more important.

If you are a father, nothing is more important than the lasting messages we leave and model for our sons. I hope you read my story and apply it to your own journey.

Using This Book as Dad

I have designed this book so you can go through it with your son. There are some really simple questions at the end of each chapter for you two to answer together. My hope is you will read a chapter, have your son read it, and then go to breakfast and answer the questions. To work best, your son probably needs to be at least 13 to answer the questions in a meaningful way. As Dad, the best training he can get is to hear you share the answers to the questions and why those answers are important to you.

¹After I started writing this book, I did write and publish a business book so, technically, this is the first book I ever started to write and the second one I have published.

Through your answers, he will hear what being a man sounds like and, in your actions, he will see how a man acts.

As you answer the questions, I encourage you to be honest with him. If the answer to the question is going to make you look bad, so be it. He needs to see you vulnerable. He needs to see you admit it when you fall short. He needs to see you work to correct things that need correcting.

Raising boys into men does not just happen. It is a process and there has to be intentionality (more about that word later). My hope is that this book provides that for you.

When my sons turn 13, I take them out to breakfast and share my definition of Manhood with them. I tell them that over the next three years, I want them to watch me as I model that definition. I tell them they will hear me recite the definition a lot as I raise them and discipline them. The definition becomes foundational for them and me. Honestly, the definition is something all my boys hear me repeat regularly. I work it into as many conversations as possible.

I embarked on this book for selfish reasons. Even if I hadn't published it—and, now, if no one buys it—it does not matter. I plan to spend a year walking each of my sons through this book. They will get a copy when they turn 15 and by the time they turn 16, we will have been through all of the chapters.² Then, on their 16th birthdays, I will give them a handwritten letter from me asking them to join me in living as Godly men.

(At the back of the book, there is a guide to helping you write your own 10-sentence letter to your son. I hope that by the time you reach it, you not only understand why you need to do so, but

²Don't worry, I will probably sell them a copy at a discount.

also have the confidence to do so.)

If you have other men in your life, I encourage you to call on them as you go through the book. Have a brother, uncle, grandfather or friend help lead your son through a chapter. If you know a group of dads and sons, you can all go through it together. You will appreciate the support of other dads and the boys will learn the importance of openly exploring life together.

Use this book as much or as little as you want as you raise your boys. Use it just as I have laid it out. Change it to fit what you are doing. Use it only as a reference. The fact that you are willing to read this and do *something* with your boys means you are doing more than most fathers, so thank you!

However you proceed, share your journey with other dads who are doing the same thing! Let's use the power of social media to encourage and support each other. When you go to breakfast with your son, post a picture, and use #dearboysbook.³

Using This Book as Son

If your dad has given you a copy of this book, let me tell you what I already know about you: You are loved. The fact that your dad is making the effort to go through this with you tells me he cares very, very deeply for you. No, this book won't help him dress more fashionably or put an end to the dumb dad jokes, but what it will do is bring you and your dad closer together.

As you read, know I am writing to your dad. But I also want you to take the thoughts and ideas and do a few things. First, compare them to what you are seeing lived out in your dad's life.

³If you still think the “#” is the pound sign, ask your son to help you!

I promise I am going to challenge him and make him squirm a bit. Enjoy that. But also encourage him where you see him doing well.

Second, think of yourself as grown man who is married and has two kids (a son and a daughter). Take the thoughts in this book and remind your future self of the absolute importance of getting that right.

Finally, there will be questions at the end of every chapter for you to answer, too. Here is your chance to think deeply and respond. Do not just give one-word answers. Challenge your dad's answers; don't let him off the hook if you think he's going easy on himself.

Oh, and since he's buying, order the biggest breakfast you can.

One Final Thought

Some of you may read this book and think, "I wish I had read this earlier!" An old Chinese proverb says, "The best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago. The second best time is today."

I want you to know it is never too late. Whether your son is eight or 58, it is never too late to open up or express regrets or write him a letter such as the one we work toward.

I promise, regardless of his age, your son will appreciate it, cherish it and be changed because of it!

So will you.

The Gettysburg Address

*A righteous man who walks in
his integrity—how blessed are
his sons after him.*

PROVERBS 20:7
THE BIBLE, NEW AMERICAN
STANDARD BIBLE

*Sons are a heritage from the Lord,
children a reward from him.
Like arrows in the hands of a warrior
are the sons born in one's youth.
Blessed is the man whose
quiver is full of them.*

PSALMS 127:3-5
THE BIBLE,
NEW INTERNATIONAL
VERSION

Dad

The title “Dad” is one of the highest honors ever given to me. Next to serving my Savior and loving my wife, it is my highest calling. Knowing I am responsible to guide my sons as they become all that God has called them to be is exciting, humbling, overwhelming, and scary—all at the same time. It is something that, given too much time to think about it, seems to be a task for which I am ill-prepared, under-qualified, and destined to fail. There is no doubt that being Dad is a journey of walking (sometimes crawling), not running. Add to that the weight of being responsible to lead, protect, and care for the family and nothing short of panic can set in.

That is why this book is so important to me. It is my way of planning for the future. It is my way of guiding my boys into Manhood at all costs, above all else. It is setting a foundation and example for them that, by the grace of God, will impact my grandsons, great-grandsons, and beyond. This message, when communicated and executed correctly, is an absolute game-changer. It is a message that has been in my heart since the moment I held our first son in my arms, yet has taken over a decade to express.

Go back to the first time you held your child in your arms. Can you remember what you thought as you gazed down at that newly breathing, tiny, completely dependent human? It really is hard to put into words. But I believe that wrapped up in a jumble of thoughts and emotions is the idea of, “Oh man. Now what?”

We begin to process all the ways our lives just changed. In what should be the happiest of moments, we even allow ourselves to worry about how we will pay for college. We ask questions

like, “Just how much is car insurance for a 16-year old boy?”¹ We question every decision we have ever made and wonder if we have what it takes to raise this little person into a well-adjusted, “normal” adult. The responsibility of “Dad” presses in on us almost immediately and we pray for the strength and wisdom to live up to this daunting mission. Nevertheless, as our boys begin to grow, we settle into a routine with them and we simply resume life.

Then, as our boys get older, we begin to have this nagging question: “How am I going to help my son become a man?” I know it is my job to call my boys into Manhood. However, in order to do that, I have to know what I am even calling them *to*. I mean, “What does it *mean* to be a man?”

Without a clear understanding for myself, I have no chance of guiding them. This would be Exhibit A in the blind leading the blind.

For me, an answer was being formed before I even asked the question. My journey started with Pastor Robert Lewis’s *Men’s Fraternity*. *Men’s Fraternity* is a three-year program that leads men through a journey of understanding their past, defining Manhood, and helping call them to a God-sized future.

I had the opportunity to not only go through all three years, but to actually teach it to other men along the way. My soul drank up the knowledge the way flowers soak up a spring rain. I could not get enough. It helped me define Manhood. Those lessons made me understand the importance of *calling* my boys to Manhood. Those classes and being with those other men

¹Confession: Every time we had a son, I said a small prayer of thanks knowing I was not going to have to pay for a wedding. Don’t judge me.

changed my life, my marriage and, most importantly, helped me start to build the path I am guiding my sons down.

It was then I had a true definition of my calling as “Dad.”

Motivation

My genetic composition is not on my side.

It is too long a story to go into, but I have some certainty when it comes to my expected lifespan. A disease called Hereditary Amyloidosis Transthyretin (hATTR) runs in my family.² Sure, I understand that any of us could be with Jesus by morning and not even tomorrow is guaranteed, but short of succumbing to an unexpected tragedy of some kind, if I live to 65 I will feel like I have found favor with God. (In truth, I do not have a high degree of confidence I will live to see 60.) Please do not think I take that lightly or am being flippant about it. It is something that is always on my mind. Some days I dwell on it more than others. Some days it stirs emotions in me that are too many to list. But it is something I have known for a long time. My grandfather passed away at 61. One of his brothers died at 61, too, another at 54. My uncle was 57. My father was 53. As I said, my genetic composition is not on my side.

While there is no cure for FAP, recently there have been some medical breakthroughs providing a very small measure of hope. Regardless, the impact of FAP on my life cannot be understated.

Yes, God could perform a miracle in my life. Yes, God could use modern medicine to heal me. I pray for both of those more

²If you really want to know more, check out www.amyloidosis.org/facts/familial.

often than you can imagine. But even if that happens, I do not believe the motivation I have for writing this book would change. Honestly, I am thankful for this journey, because it has certainly channeled my energy.

I know what you are thinking: “Great, Dustin. Thanks for the depressing story.” But there is an important reason I shared it.

In my reality, there is a lesson for you.

Clarity and Focus

When you have clarity on any situation, it allows you to have amazing focus. You move with purpose. You become intentional more often and the “things that really matter” do not elude you. These stories are all around us.

The mother who is diagnosed with cancer who, to leave a legacy for her family, endeavors to start an orphanage in another country, and challenges her children to always think about those less fortunate.

The father whose daughter is killed by a texting driver, who turns grief into action, lobbying day and night to have texting-and-driving laws changed.

The child who, fighting for his life, speaks words of wisdom well beyond his years, gives more hope than anyone could ever give him, and teaches people about the power of friendship, community, and love.³

All because they were living their life with amazing clarity and focus.

³Issac Ray Steiner (01.23.06-03.06.13) you are missed, loved, and thought of often!

Hollywood recognizes the power of these stories. For example, in 1993, Michael Keaton and Nicole Kidman starred in a movie called *My Life*. Keaton plays a husband who has everything going for him. However, soon after finding out his wife is pregnant with their first child, he is diagnosed with cancer and given months to live. Knowing he will not live to see his child grow up, he begins to make a video of all the things he wants to teach his son. Everything from how to shave to how to enter a room and shake someone's hand. It is not necessarily the happiest of movies, but it tells a moving, inspirational story and is the perfect example of a man living with clarity and focus.

It certainly does not have to be (nor, ideally, will it be) something like a genetic defect or something more terrifying, like a terminal illness, that can give you the gift of clarity and focus.

Think about the soldier who knows he is leaving for his deployment. How much more valuable does his time become as his ship-out date looms? Do you think he is wasting a second doing things that have no lasting impact? What about the dad who travels for work? Doesn't he want to spend as much time with his wife and kids as he possibly can when he is home? Anytime you are faced with something that will remove you from those you love, regardless of duration or distance, you begin to cherish the precious commodity of time with them.

The problem arises when you do not have something giving you clarity and focus. You go through life on autopilot and then one day you find yourself saying, "I can't believe they are going into middle school," or, "Wow, high school already," or something scarier like, "I can't believe my boy is getting married."

When you lack clarity and focus, you look back on your life with regrets and find yourself saying, "I wish I had," "I should

have,” or “If I could do it over again, I would.”

Now here is the good news: You can live your life right now (starting this very moment) with clarity and focus. You just have to choose to do so.

My deepest hope for you is that after reading this book, you will want to do some very specific things for your son. To accomplish that, you know what you are going to need? You guessed it: clarity and focus.

Let me give you two quick suggestions about how to choose to have more clarity and focus.

Be Passive No More

“Passive” is defined by dictionary.com as *“Accepting or allowing what happens or what others do, without active response or resistance.”*

It is synonymous with words like submissive, compliant, docile, and unassertive.

Passivity is a virus that lies dormant in the soul of every man. For that virus to activate, all it needs a dash of indifference and a pinch of compliancy. Add to that the opportunity to be constantly distracted by society, technology, sports, and a hundred other things, and passivity becomes a silent killer of marriages, relationships, and the lives we were intended to live. We will talk much more about passivity in a later chapter.

Write and Share

You need to write down the things you want to accomplish. Write down your professional goals. Write down those things you want

to do with your spouse and kids. Decide what matters. Decide what matters now and, more importantly, decide what will matter in 10, 25 or 50 years. Then write those things down. There is real power in putting your goals on paper in a place where you can see them regularly. There is even more power in sharing them with someone. Give your spouse, your friends, and your discipleship group permission to ask you how you are doing in reaching your goals.

Dr. Gail Matthews, a psychology professor at Dominican University of California, conducted a study on goals. She found that people who write them down, share them with a friend, and provide weekly updates to that friend are 33 percent more successful in achieving them than are people who just wrote them down.

Write down your plan. Share your plan.

My Inspiration

I mentioned how the idea for this book started with author and speaker Mark Sanborn talking about the importance of clear, concise communication. His example, and the piece that really started my mind wandering and wondering, was the Gettysburg Address.

On November 19, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln traveled to the Pennsylvania battlefield for the dedication of the National Cemetery at Gettysburg and gave one the most famous speeches in American history. But here are some things you might not know:

- President Lincoln was not the main speaker for the day. A guy you have never heard of, who served as a U.S.

Representative, a U.S. Senator, and the Secretary of State, gave the Oration that day.⁴ It was two hours long and no one remembers it. By all accounts, it wasn't a bad speech, but when the President stepped up shortly after Everett for some "dedicatory remarks," history was made.

- While Everett rambled on and on, President Lincoln delivered his remarks in under two minutes.
- The Gettysburg Address has 246 words and is only 10 sentences long.

Ten sentences. It was that fact that stuck with me. I began to think about my life, my four boys, and ten sentences.

I am working to raise my boys into Godly men, but I realized that if something were to happen to me, the goals I have for them would be lost. I wanted something to leave behind for my boys to read. A message from me to them after I was gone, especially if I happen to not be here as they grow up (a la Michael Keaton in *My Life*). I wanted a letter to my boys read at my funeral. I wanted them to know what matters in this life and why. I wanted to make sure it was clear, concise, and encompassed everything I would want to share with them.

So, I set out to write them a 10-sentence letter that, for me, accomplished that.

Dear Boys,

My sons, my sons, my sons, I want you to read carefully, pay attention, and hold on to what I am about to share

⁴His name was Edward Everett. Ever hear of him?

with you. I want you to always honor, respect and love your mom (which means looking out for and protecting her when I am not around). Be a man of God that has Kingdom impact on your family, friends, and community by thinking differently, leading courageously, and living passionately. In case I did not have the chance to show you how to live like that, I have a group of men that will show you and they are men you can look to as Guides to follow. As you learn what it means to be a Godly man, I expect you to lead your brothers on this journey, as well as your sons, and grandsons. Even when you don't feel like it, love your wife and put her above everyone and everything by dying to self and leading as a servant because she is a Daughter of Christ. Remember you are called to honor and love her and will be held accountable to God for how well you do that. Most importantly, recognize your need for the Savior, Jesus Christ. Remember that His gift is about Grace (not about being perfect or trying to earn anything), about accepting the gift of Jesus, and then chasing him your entire life. It is the most important thing you can do. Know that I love you, am proud of you, and I always have been.

Love, Dad

Ten sentences. 258 words.

It is a letter I plan to give them as I guide them into Manhood. It is a letter that will be given to them if something happens to me before they reach that point.

As I said earlier, this is a message that is so important for them to hear. Over the course of this book, I am excited to take each of those 10 sentences and give them the depth of context and explanation needed.

It is my opportunity to pour my heart out to the four young men God has entrusted to my watch.

I invite you to read along.