

A Father's Guide to Raising Boys

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 New
Growth
Press
WWW.NEWGROWTHPRESS.COM

New Growth Press, Greensboro, NC 27404

www.newgrowthpress.com

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Cover Design: Faceout Books, faceoutstudio.com

Typesetting: Lisa Parnell, lparnell.com

ISBN: 978-1-942572-18-3 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-942572-19-0 (eBook)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Green, Rob (Robert Eric)

A father's guide to raising boys / Rob Green.

pages cm

ISBN 978-1-942572-18-3 (print) —

ISBN 978-1-942572-19-0 (ebook)

1. Fatherhood—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Fathers and sons—Religious aspects—Christianity. 3. Parenting—Religious aspects—Christianity. 4. Child rearing—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. Title.

BV4529.17.G73 2015

248.8'421—dc23

2015001454

Printed in Canada

22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15

1 2 3 4 5

Fatherhood is awesome. Raising boys is a privilege and a joy.¹

Perhaps, like me, before your first son was out of diapers you imagined the day when he would be signing a letter of intent to play college football at your alma mater. Or maybe you imagine something even better—your son making a difference in the world. And, also if you are like me, in the meantime, you have a blast pillow fighting, wrestling, having boys' nights, and generally going a bit crazy from time to time—just hanging out with the guys.

But raising boys is also worrisome. We wonder how our boys will turn out and exactly what we should do to make sure they learn to love God and others. This minibook won't give you "the answer." There is no fail-safe way to ensure that your son will live every day of his life for Jesus. That has far more to do with the Lord and his work in your son than it has to do with what you do or don't do. As a father I am wary of those who act as if perfect parenting (which doesn't exist) will result in awesome children. I make no such claims. To be honest, I struggle with every aspect of what I'm recommending in this minibook. Instead, this minibook represents who I want to be by God's grace, rather than who I am right now.

As I think about parenting my boys, I start with two basic, biblical truths: First, as fathers we are completely dependent on the work of God to draw our boys to Christ (Ephesians 2:8–10). We are not

able to make our children believe. We cannot save our children from their sin. We *can* be an important part of their life, but we can never be their hero because only Jesus can be that. Nor, much to our chagrin, are we able to make all other decisions for our children. God has designed each of them to be an individual, and unlike Star Trek's Borg, they are not assimilated!

Second, as fathers, regardless of how our boys ultimately live, we want to live thankful and pleasing lives to Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:9–10; 1 Peter 2:9–10). Thus, whether our sons believe and live for Christ or not, we want to be obedient to the Lord in our parenting. We find our joy first in the Lord and in honoring him. All other joys, including the joys of raising boys, are an added bonus from the Father who gives good gifts. With these two truths in mind, it is my prayer that this minibook will encourage you to strengthen your relationship with Jesus, help you live according to his Word, and give you practical advice on raising your boys in the teaching and admonition of the Lord.

Here are three basic biblical principles to guide us in being faithful fathers to our sons.

Love Completely

The Lord reminds us regularly of the importance of love. Loving God and others is in some sense a

summary of the entire Old Testament (Matthew 22:37–40). The New Testament picks up where the Old Testament leaves off. Christians are not only to love, but they are to love as Jesus loved (John 13, 1 John 2). This provides a helpful way to organize what it means to love our boys well.

Love the Lord.

Matthew 22:37–38 teaches that we must love God above all else. That's the way our heavenly Father has designed us. If we love something else more than God, including our boys, we function differently than God intended. The Lord, in his great wisdom, designed us in such a way that when we love him first, the best possible love will flow out of us to our boys.

You probably know firsthand just how difficult it is to love, give, and serve—especially after a long day (or week!) of work. When I walk in the door, my desire is to eat dinner, relax, and be free from the burden of serving anyone. Only as I know how much I am loved by Jesus and that my identity is in him, will I depend on him for the power to turn from my own comfort and instead love and serve my family.

The more we locate our identity in Christ—instead of ourselves as husbands, fathers, and workers—the more we live out of the truths Paul shares

in Romans 8:31–39: God is for us; there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus; and nothing can separate us from the love of God because of what Jesus has done for us. Because God's love for us in Christ can never be threatened, that allows us to love others, give to others, and serve others. Without the love of God in our hearts, we will demand love from others. As a father, one of the greatest gifts you can give your boys is a wholehearted love for God. It not only serves as an example to them, but it will also result in love for them that is real, meaningful, and faithful no matter what happens—just like God's love for you.

Matthew 22 does not end with loving God, but adds the command to love our neighbor. Jesus adds to that thought by saying “just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another” (John 13:34). Loving others as Jesus loves us involves self-sacrifice that often conflicts with our schedule, time, and desire to do our own thing. This sacrificial love for others begins inside the walls of our own homes.

Love their mother.

Loving your wife is not only consistent with the call for husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her (Ephesians 5:25–26), it is also consistent with what it means to be a biblical father. When you love your son's mother,

you love someone he loves. It gives him safety and security. If you treat his mother as an enemy, then it forces him to take sides. It's not likely that your son is mature enough to determine how he can love you and his mother if you don't love her. That is like asking your son to do a triple integral when he has not completed Algebra I.

When you love his mother, you lay the groundwork for a home where parents solve problems, encourage one another, pray for one another, and treat one another with kindness. This allows your son to live in a home where safety and security abound. He is safe to be what God has called him to be without feeling like he has to choose between his mom and his dad.

Additionally, your boys will be in many places that are far from safe, secure, or stable. Friends come and go faster than tater tots on Friday. Ten seconds can make the difference between whether your son is the hero of a game or the reason for the loss. Relationships with girls can foster roller-coaster emotions. Although the world may be full of chaos and uncertainty, what a gift to your son for him to know that inside the walls of his home are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and self-control—those essential elements of a safe, secure, and stable home.

It is important for the boys to know that you and your wife are the primary relationship in the

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