

JOEL FITZPATRICK



BETWEEN

US

GUYS

**Life-Changing
Conversations for
Dads & Sons**

“Joel Fitzpatrick wants to help boys grow up to be passionate spiritual men. But he knows that simply learning a list of godly character traits is not the key to manliness. *Between Us Guys* makes clear that what sons need most is to know and love the God who became a man to save them. I’m really excited to recommend this devotional for dads of boys in our church.”

Jared Kennedy, Pastor of Operations and Families at Sojourn Church Midtown, Louisville, KY; author of *The Beginner’s Gospel Story Bible*

“William Butler Yeats, in his 1929 poem *Coole Park*, used these words to describe a particular man: ‘There one that ruffled in a manly pose, For all his timid heart.’ Everywhere we turn today, the fallout of ‘ruffling men’ is hard to ignore. Men are ‘ruffling’ and ‘posing’ because, deep down, they have no clue who they are. Within the heart of every man is the question, ‘Do I have what it takes?’ and, for most men, this question has never come close to being answered. Ideally, fathers help sons answer this question, but the fathers of most men are still looking for the answer themselves. *Between Us Guys: Life-Changing Conversations for Dads and Sons* is a book that is transformative for fathers *and* sons because it helps both answer the ‘Do I have what it takes?’ question. This book calls dads and sons into the true fellowship of manhood where ruffling and posing are no longer necessary.”

Tray Lovvorn, Podcast host, speaker, and cofounder of Undone Redone, Inc.

“Life is hectic. Distractions abound. Meaningful conversations don’t just happen. Thankfully, Joel Fitzpatrick not only encourages fathers and father figures to cut through the clutter of daily life and engage their sons in real conversations, but he also equips them to do it. These fast-paced, engaging devotionals help dads point their sons to Jesus. As a pastor and father of three sons, I could not be more grateful.”

Kevin Labby, Senior Pastor, Willow Creek Presbyterian Church, Winter Springs, FL

“‘So be strong, act like a man’ (1 Kings 2:2). In our age the words of King David while on his deathbed to his son Solomon would be considered offensive. In this work, Joel realizes that sad reality and treats the subject of ‘what is a man’ with the utmost of care while never backing down on what a man really is. His little work teaches men to talk to their sons, telling them that a man is a broken person who looks to Christ as their only hope for salvation while trying to live their vocations by serving their neighbors in love, freely. If you are a father with sons, don’t miss out on this invaluable resource.”

Scott L. Keith, Executive Director, 1517 The Legacy Project;
author of *Being Dad: Father as a Picture of God’s Grace*

“Some of the most life-shaping moments of my life were spent one on one with my father. This wonderful book brought me right back to those conversations. It’s not just a book about ‘the sex talk’ that fathers dread. It’s a book about talking to your son as a fellow guy. It’s about having conversations that will never leave him. It’s about pointing boys to Christ in everything. I highly recommend it.”

Daniel Emery Price, Director of Christ Hold Fast; author of
Scandalous Stories: A Sort of Commentary on Parables

“Here’s a book for each of us dads who has found it hard to start those most important conversations we want to have with our boys. Joel not only knows how to get us talking, he reminds us what is most important—and that’s Jesus.”

Jack Klumpenhower, Author of *Show Them Jesus*

“When it comes to dads building a close relationship with their sons, sometimes the hardest part is knowing where to start. *Between Us Guys* is a valuable means for connecting fathers and sons. It provides both the substance and easy avenues for fathers and sons to have meaningful conversations. I believe that any father who reads through *Between Us Guys* with his sons will grow closer to them and their God.”

Cameron Cole, Director of Children, Youth, and Family, The Cathedral Church of the Advent; founding chairman of Rooted Ministry; coeditor of *Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry: A Practical Guide*; and author of *Therefore I Have Hope: 12 Truths That Comfort, Sustain, and Redeem in Tragedy*

“Attention Dads! In your hand is a tool that will guide you into a deeper relationship with your son and draw both of you into a deeper relationship with Jesus. *Between Us Guys* is filled with stimulating thoughts from Scripture on many rhythms of life (work, play, money, sex, . . . even failure!), which then tee up dads for great talks with their sons. If you’re looking for something fresh, practical and gospel-saturated, something that includes solid discussion questions and helpful activities—buy this book and start making memories with your boy!”

Dave Harvey, President, Sojourn Network; teaching pastor at Summit Church, Naples; founder of AmlCalled.com; author

“Since I’m neither a dad nor a son (obviously!), you might be wondering why I’d endorse a book like this. It’s because I know the author very well. In fact, I’ve known him well since the day he was born. I’ve watched him grow up, marry, have children, and become a pastor. And I’ve watched him parent his son and his daughter, and I love the way he loves them. He’s qualified to write this book for you because he lives this kind of life with his son every day. Moms, pick this up as a gift for your husbands. Dads, pick this up as a starting place for meaningful conversations with your sons. I know this author. He’s the real deal.”

Elyse Fitzpatrick, Author of *Give Them Grace*

“Honest. Insightful. Christ-centered. Those words sum up well this splendid gem of a book by Joel Fitzpatrick. Drawing on his own experience as a dad, he leads us into wise and critical conversations to have with our sons. My own son is now eighteen. I wish I’d had this book early in his life as a guide on our own journey together.”

Chad Bird, Author and speaker



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for Dads and Sons

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To my wife, Ruth:

I love you deeply and am so thankful for you.

To my son, Colin:

Thank you for loving me, even though I fail you
so often. You are my favorite son.

To my daughter, Eowyn:

Thank you for giving me the space
to write this book. You are courageous, creative,
and my favorite daughter.

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Introduction

Being a Man



Hi, Dad. I am happy that you have decided to pick up this book and join your son on a series of life-shaping discussions. This is a daunting task, I know. I have a son, and between his school, my work, and baseball practice, we are incredibly busy. Being a dad is not easy, and there are so many ways we are different from each other. But here are some things that I can guess about you:

- You love your son.
- You want to help him understand life.
- You live with low-level guilt, because you don't think you're doing enough to teach him about life.

I feel the exact same way. My son, Colin, is twelve years old now, and there are so many times I wish I could go back in time and have these formative conversations over again.

What you hold in your hands is my attempt at helping you have these conversations. Whether your son is older or younger, it is never too early or too late to start talking about what it means to be a man who loves God and his neighbor. If your son is older, tailor the questions and examples in this book so that they're more appropriate for his age.

WHAT IS A MAN? FOUR EXAMPLES

Read Matthew 19:13–15: “Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.’ And he laid his hands on them and went away.”

The subject of “being a man” is such a touchy one that it’s even hard to say. “Be a man” can cause so much hurt to those who don’t fit into the typical models of what a man is. What does it mean to be a man? We have all kinds of ways that we think about how to answer this question. The entertainment industry seems to highlight three models of a man in particular: the weakling, the loser, and the womanizer.

Men come in all shapes and sizes. Men may even struggle with their manhood. So, what does it mean to be a man, and does the Bible hold out a clear description of a man? I think the answer is yes.

My dad, Phil, is a man—a manly man. But he is not the kind of man you normally expect to see when someone says, “Phil is a man.” What makes him seem odd is that he loves children. For my entire life, my dad has been involved deeply in children’s ministry. When kids squeal in delight, my dad squeals (literally) alongside them. It is his greatest joy in life to bring kids to Jesus and show them Jesus’s love for them. When Dad walks into a room, his personality draws people to him in such a way that people walk away saying, “That is a man.”

My father-in-law, George, is a man, too. He is a wise man. He is a wise counselor whom I go to when I don’t know what to do next. He is a fierce teacher and counselor, incisive in his evaluation and biblical in his judgments. The thing that I love about him, too, is his



attention to kids. When he walks into the room, he finds the children and takes an interest in them. He desires to make them feel known and loved.

I have another friend, Rip Pratt. He loves kids fiercely. He loves broken people fiercely. He loves Jesus. He is a youth pastor and has been one for the past thirty years. He loves to see kids exercise their God-given talents and abilities to serve others. He moves toward kids who may not fit into other youth groups; he loves them and then brings them to see Jesus.

One last friend is Wayne Houk Duguid. He is a man. He is a friend. He is a musician. He laughs uproariously. He sings loudly. He loves kids. He talks to my son and daughter as if they were his peers, not people who are too immature to be taken seriously. He loves Jesus, even though at times he struggles. He is not afraid to love. He is gentle, humble, and is going to hate me for writing these words about him. He doesn't need attention because he is settled in God's love for him, and he gives that love to my children.

These are four very different sorts of men, but when they are around me I know that there is something in them that causes me to say they are men. So why do I look at them and say, "These are men"?

The biblical view of manhood doesn't have to do with how a man talks, dresses, or his affinity for facial hair. A man is a broken, sinful person who looks to Christ for salvation, points others to Christ, and lays down his life so that others can live. A man understands that he cannot be good enough to earn God's love, and because of that he doesn't expect others to earn his. This manliness is put on display so beautifully in the image of God the Father, and it is lived out in families as dads try to live this way, and look to their good Father



for acceptance and forgiveness. You get the opportunity to teach, train and instill this sort of lifestyle in your son. You get the cool responsibility of raising up your son to be a man who loves God and loves his neighbors—all through the vehicle of being a dad who has conversations about life with your son.

A DAD'S CALL

Dad, it can be really hard to know how to teach your son to be a man. But the Bible is clear on how you can teach your son: it says, *talk to him*. So, in our quest to learn how to speak to our sons, it will be helpful to look at three examples: Deuteronomy, Proverbs, and the apostle Paul.

- Deuteronomy 6:4–7 says, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”
- Proverbs 1:8–9 says, “Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and forsake not your mother’s teaching, for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.”
- Ephesians 6:4 says, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”



In all three of these verses, what do we read? As dads, we are given an amazing opportunity to be the primary influence for the gospel in our children's lives. But how do we do that? Look again at our three Scripture passages. We do it through conversations that happen in every area of our lives, encompassing every aspect of our lives.

This is not a book about how to make your son into a pious American Christian. This is a book about the only power in the universe who can cause us to love God and love our neighbor. If we fail to ground our sons in the finished work of Jesus for them, we will miss the point. The point of fatherhood is not just to make your kids obey. If that is the point, then you don't need a Christian book—you can go get a book written by anyone who'll give you practical advice. If our sons' hearts aren't changed by the gospel, then all we are doing is creating little Pharisees, whom Jesus called "whitewashed tombs" (Matthew 23:27).

We want our sons to know that God doesn't just save them and then expect them to earn their way into heaven. Yes, we will talk about what God calls us to do and who he calls us to be as followers of Christ, but that discussion will not take place outside of the context of the very thing that gives us the power to obey.

Hear this clearly. I know you may be tempted to ask, "Is Joel telling me that it doesn't matter if I sin or not? Is he telling me that it doesn't matter if my son is obedient?" (I know this because it is the temptation in my own heart.) So, here you go: Yes, you and your son need to obey. However, it is only Jesus's work for us that gives us the power to obey, and which brings meaning to our obedience.



A GUIDE AND A PERSONAL NOTE

What you have in your hands is a book full of conversations you can have with your sons. In fact, these chapters are written so that you can read them directly to your sons, if you choose. It includes conversations that cover so many different parts of life—money, friendship, sex, strength, defending others, and all sorts of other things. This list is by no means comprehensive, nor are these the only ways you can have these talks with your sons. What I hope to do is spark a lifetime of conversations that will build your relationship.

Take a second, pick up a highlighter, pen, or pencil, and look at the Table of Contents. Think and pray about your time with your sons, and then prioritize what topics you might want to cover first. You can go straight through the book or have the conversations piecemeal. The point of these conversations is that you have them, not the order in which you have them.

Each conversation has suggested questions that will help spur on conversation. If the question is directed toward your sons, it will say “Sons”; if it is for you to answer, it will say “Dads.” The questions marked “Both” are for each of you to answer. Answer these questions truthfully, but don’t feel the need to confess every sin you have ever committed. Use wisdom. Be transparent with your sons; show them you aren’t perfect. It will go a long way toward encouraging your sons to be open and honest with you.

I love to have these conversations when I walk with my son at night during the week, when we are out fishing, or just when I am putting him to bed and he’s had a tough day. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to try and make it natural. Yes, in the beginning it will feel forced; work through it. The rewards of being



able to have fun, natural, and serious conversations all outweigh the risks of looking like a dork. (By the way, your son won't notice that you look like a dork; he will be happy that you're spending time together.)

It is important to say, though, that I don't have it all together. That makes writing this book scary. I am a sinner saved purely by the grace of God, and any wisdom I have comes directly from God's hand. Don't miss this; we are the same in this way. We are utterly dependent on God to be with us and to make these conversations worthwhile. So, let's get started in our talk *Between Us Guys*. I feel like a dork—do you? Let's do this together.



