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STEPPING UP
A CALL TO COURAGEOUS MANHOOD

DENNIS RAINNEY
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DENNIS RAINEY
Dedicated to
Howard “Prof” Hendricks

*My teacher, mentor, and friend, whose steps I’ve followed.*

And to
Samuel Escue
James Escue
Peterson Rainey
Tyler Escue
Andrew Escue
Daniel Escue
Nathan Rainey

*My grandsons, who bring great delight to my heart.*

*May my steps guide you, and may yours lead others to Christ in your generation and beyond.*
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When I was twelve years old, I experienced a “defining moment.” Don’t get me wrong; it wasn’t some uncommon, extraordinary experience. It wasn’t a brush with death. I hadn’t contracted some debilitating disease. Neither had I been traumatized by some predator. It was what my father did and what my mother stopped doing that marked me deeply for the rest of my life. And it happened in less than five minutes.

It all had to do with painting. The family who rented a property my parents owned moved out, and there was some “fixing up” and painting that needed to be done before the new tenants moved in. My father thought this would be a great project for the entire family to tackle, so on a Saturday morning, my dad, my mother, my two older sisters, and yours truly re-reported for duty. Mom and my sisters were working on the first floor, and my job was to help Pop paint on the second floor. And that was the problem. I never did like to paint. I didn’t then, and I don’t now.

So I had to somehow figure out a way to be free of what I thought was an unnecessary burden. My “ace in the hole” was my mother. Mom was always more sympathetic to her precious little boy than Dad was, and I knew that if I pressed the right buttons, she would rescue her one and only son from spending his Saturday doing something he didn’t want to do. So under the guise of having to use the bathroom, I went downstairs and began to complain to Mom.

While I was in the middle of convincing my mother that I needed to take off and play with my friends, Pop showed up. As I write these words, I am vividly remembering and reliving that moment.

My mother said to my father, “Crawford, CW (my childhood nickname) is only twelve years old, and he doesn’t need to be here with us all day. He needs to be enjoying himself with his friends.”
Then my father said, “Sylvia, I got this. That boy one day is going to be somebody’s husband and somebody’s father. There are going to be people depending on him. He has got to learn how to do what he has to do and not what he wants to do.”

To my mother’s credit, she looked at me and then at my father, nodded in agreement, and turned away. Pop then turned to me and said, “You take yourself upstairs and paint until I tell you to stop.”

And I did.

Even at twelve years old, I knew that something important had just happened. It wasn’t that I had just lost a little skirmish, and this time I wasn’t going to get my way. The words “somebody’s husband . . . somebody’s father” and “He has got to learn how to do what he has to do and not what he wants to do” kept replaying in my mind. Of course, I wasn’t fully aware of the weight of what had happened. In fact, it would be years before I fully appreciated the significance of that Saturday morning. But I did have the sense that what just happened was a game changer.

My mother knew that in order for her boy to become a man, the most important man in his life needed to shape him. Pop knew that in order for his son to provide leadership and stability to those who would count on him one day, “CW” needed to embrace core lessons in manhood, obligation, and responsibility.

A transition took place that day, and I’m so glad it did. In a very real sense, it was what some would call a “rite of passage.” My dad knew that in order for me not to become a fifty-year-old adolescent, I needed to make some intentional steps toward manhood. I can’t tell you how grateful I am to God for the gift of Pop’s courage, and that he wasn’t passive when it came to my development.

Some years back when I heard my good friend Dennis Rainey give a talk that formed the outline of this book, not only did it bring to mind that Saturday morning almost fifty years ago, but it resonated deeply within me.
The message that Dennis unpacks in this compelling book is core and
critical to the direction of our families, our churches, and our nation. Per-
haps you think that statement is a bit overblown. I can assure you that it isn’t.
As a pastor, I witness daily the void and dysfunction caused by men who
don’t really know who and what a man is. They’re not to blame. When men
do not step up to and embrace the seasons of their lives, it damages hope for
those who are following and limits the impact these men will have during
their moment in history.

All of us need help in this journey toward authentic, intentional man-
hood. Thank you, Dennis, for giving us such a powerful, engaging resource
that helps us and inspires us to keep moving with courage toward being the
men that we can be and that indeed God has called us to be.

—Crawford Loritts
Atlanta, Georgia
How can I acknowledge all the people who assisted on a book that spanned more than a decade in being written? I may not name them all, but here goes.

I want to thank Tim Grissom and Dave Boehi for sticking with me and helping me step up. Big time! You two are awesome men.

Dave, you have been a great sounding board for years, and this was no exception. Your DNA is in the early manuscripts, dating back to the late nineties. Thanks for not giving up and for encouraging me to “slay the beast and sling it to the public,” as Churchill once said. You’ve been a great asset on this book and invaluable over the years in producing high-quality work that points people to Jesus Christ and changes lives. I do appreciate you!

Tim, you are the man! Thanks for your patience, counsel, coaching, encouragement, and professionalism as you worked with me. I don’t think this book would have occurred had it not been for you. Thanks for your heart for seeing men step up and have the opportunity of receiving the message of this book. You are a great editor. I also want to say thanks for being a teachable man in return and for graciously responding to my challenge for you to step up—go for it!

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And to the guys who read this book and gave some excellent feedback—thank you David Caranci, Fred Wood, Matt Hammitt, Matt Jenson, Michael Malloy, and Scott Hurley!

And finally to Barbara, my soul mate since 1972, the mother of our six children, and the one who shares the grandparenting load of numerous grandkids with me. You are THE BEST. I love you! Thanks for staying after me to finish the book.
WHAT DOES IT TAKE
TO BE A MAN?
I CALL IT COURAGE

Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important.
—Ambrose Redmoon

It lasted only twenty seconds, but in that short period of time, Gene “Red” Erwin embodied the courage of an ancient warrior.¹

Gene—called “Red” by his buddies because of his wavy auburn hair—was part of an eleven-man crew on board the City of Los Angeles, a B-29 Superfortress. On April 12, 1945, their plane was part of a bombing raid on a Japanese chemical plant in Koriyama. One of Red’s jobs was to launch white phosphorous smoke bombs to help the other planes on the raid draw a bead on and follow the City of Los Angeles, the lead bomber on the mission.

This was Red’s eighteenth mission, so he knew the drill: open the chute, pull the pin, and release the canister. Eight seconds later, the bomb would ignite when well clear of the aircraft.
But not this time.

For some unknown reason, the first smoke bomb exploded in the drop chute, caroming back into the hull . . . back into Red’s face. White-hot phosphorous, burning at 1,300 degrees, blasted smoke throughout the cabin and raised torturous havoc on Red’s eyes and skin.

Red was literally on fire, and the entire crew was in danger. The smoke bomb itself was eating through the metal of the bulkhead, where the real bombs were stored. There were two options: watch the fire spread to the other munitions in the bomb bay, or crash into the ocean before everything totally blew up.

Or maybe there was a third alternative, if a man had the courage.

Grabbing the white-hot canister in his right hand, Red Erwin stumbled to the front of the aircraft, weaving blindly by instinct toward the cockpit window. Suddenly, he collided with the navigator’s table that blocked his path to the cockpit. Still afire, he wedged the bomb between his forearm and rib cage, grappling with the spring latch on the table that required both hands to release and lift it. With a last surge of energy, Red scrambled into the cockpit and flung the glowing fireball through the open portal and out into the waiting waters of the Pacific. And then he collapsed in a sizzling heap.

Every man on board was saved, but Red Erwin’s life hung by a thread.

By the time the smoke subsided enough for the cockpit panel to become readable again, the instruments confirmed that the plane was a mere three hundred feet above the ocean’s surface. A few more seconds, and any attempt to pull out of the nosedive would have been too late.
Every man on board was saved, but Red Erwin’s life hung by a thread. A month after the accident, his body was still smoldering, the phosphorous reigniting from oxygen exposure each time doctors scraped another embedded fleck from his skin. He spent a solid year with his eyes sown shut and endured more than forty surgeries.

Even with a Congressional Medal of Honor hanging around his neck, he would always bear the limitations of a body seared by unimaginable heat. Yet Red Erwin would live to father four children and hold seven grandchildren in his lap. He would also coach Little League teams, follow Alabama Crimson Tide football, go to church on Sundays, and retire from a long career with the Veterans Administration.

DUTY UNDER FIRE

I’ve always loved stories about courage. My favorites are those about men who executed the impossible on a dangerous battlefield or accomplished great things despite obstacles and indescribable hardship—men who did their duty under fire.

I believe there’s something in the chest of a man that responds in a unique way to stories of courage. There’s a piece of every man’s heart that longs to be courageous, to be bold and gutsy and etch a masculine mark of bravery on the human landscape. In our hearts, we know that a part of the core of true manhood is courage.

But many men don’t realize that although most of us have not fought on a grisly, smoke-filled battlefield, all of us face battles in life that demand courage.

When you read books or watch documentaries about men who, like Red Erwin, were presented the highest award a soldier can receive—the Congressional Medal of Honor—you notice that the phrase most often repeated by these decorated warriors is “I was just doing my duty.”
For years, Dennis Rainey’s favorite question to men has been . . .

“What’s the Most Courageous Thing You’ve Ever Done?”

As men, all of us face decisions in life that demand courage. Big or little, complex or straightforward, these choices—let’s call them battles—matter a great deal. One courageous choice leads to another; tomorrow’s integrity depends on today’s bravery.

Renowned author, speaker, and radio host Dennis Rainey tackles head-on the call to living, breathing manhood, offering a powerful vision for what it means to be a man who truly conquers and wins. In ways both candid and inspiring, he beckons men in any field and any life stage with stirring conviction, practical insight and moving accounts of bold heroes.

Rainey identifies five stages of a man’s journey through life—boyhood, adolescence, manhood, mentor and patriarch—and examines a man’s responsibilities at each step. He calls all men to action, to duty, to courage.

Ultimately, you’ll be encouraged to be the man on your battlefield.

Dennis Rainey is the president and CEO of FamilyLife, a ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ, and a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary. For more than thirty-five years, he has been speaking and writing on marriage and family issues. He can be heard each weekday on the nationally syndicated radio program FamilyLife Today®. He and his wife, Barbara, have six adult children and numerous grandchildren.

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