



Letters to My Son: A Father's Wisdom on Manhood, Life, and Love

By Kent Nerburn

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Essential Wisdom for a Life Well Lived — with Three New Chapters Included

At once spiritual and practical, *Letters to My Son* has been beloved by readers from all walks of life, including single mothers seeking guidance in raising a son, fathers looking to share a voice of clarity about life's most important issues, and young men wanting an intelligent, sensitive, and streetwise companion on the journey toward a worthy manhood. In this twentieth anniversary edition, Kent Nerburn adds to his classic reflections on love, marriage, travel, money and wealth, tragedy and suffering, spirituality, sex, and the true meaning of strength, with new chapters on sexual identity and the difficulty of moving on (from relationships, homes, and stages of life). Unique in its profound simplicity and timeless insight, *Letters to My Son* is a book to savor and a gift to give to anyone looking for clear and gentle guidance on the big issues in life.

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Editorial Review

Review

“In these letters, Nerburn’s son has been given a gift that few people ever receive from anyone, let alone their fathers; we’re fortunate to be able to look over his son’s shoulder as he reads them.”

— *Yoga Journal*

“These thoughtful, serious essays are delightfully lyrical in tone....The results are always engaging.”

— *Library Journal*

“Nerburn delivers an eloquent spiritual philosophy to fathers in a way that men can easily hear.”

— *Utne Reader*

“Magic...Nerburn bequeaths his son a legacy of wisdom about marriage, fatherhood, infidelity, wanderlust, war, work, aging, and death.”

— *Publishers Weekly*

About the Author

A two-time winner of the Minnesota Book Award, **Kent Nerburn** is the author of thirteen books on spirituality and Native American themes, including *Simple Truths*, *Neither Wolf nor Dog*, and *Chief Joseph and the Flight of the Nez Perce* (featured on the History Channel). He lives in northern Minnesota.

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Introduction

This is not a book I intended to write. The world is full enough of grand moralizing and private visions. The last thing I ever intended was to risk adding my name to the long list of those involved in such endeavors.

Then, in midlife, everything changed. I was surprised with the birth of a son.

Suddenly, issues that I had wrestled with in the course of my life and questions that I had long since put to rest rose up again in the eyes of my child. I saw before me a person who would have to make his way through the tangle of life by such lights as he could find. It was, and is, incumbent upon me to guide him.

For now this is easy. His life does not extend much beyond his reach. I can take him by the hand and lead him. But before long he will have to set out on his own. Where, then, will he find the hands to guide him?

I look around and I am concerned. The world is a cacophony of contrary visions, viewpoints, and recriminations. Yeats’s ominous warning that the best lack all conviction while the worst are filled with passionate intensity seems to have come to pass. Good men everywhere realize that the world we have made is also the world we have failed, that our brightest dreams and our greatest fears lurk just over the horizon. Acutely aware of both, we stand mute, driven by our hopes, silenced by our doubts.

I can no longer afford this silence. I want my son to be a man of good heart who reaches out to the world around him with an open mind and a gentle touch. I want him to be a man of belief, but not a man of judgment. I want him to have explored his own moral landscape so that he will not unwittingly do harm to himself or others. To be such a man he needs to hear voices that speak with empathy, compassion, and realism about the issues of becoming a man.

And so I take my place among those attempting to provide such a voice.

I bring to the task such skills as I have: a love of the language; a belief in the higher visions of the human species; a complex mélange of anger, wonder, and despair at the world in which we live; years of learning, miles of travel, a love for the wisdom of all spiritual traditions, and a faith in the inexhaustible miracle of the experience of life all around us.

But above all, I bring this:

One day last week a former student of mine methodically drove his car to the end of a street, pushed the accelerator to the floor, and catapulted himself off a cliff into a lake far below. On the same day I listened to a man speaking about his journey to India to study with a woman who could read his spirit by laying her hands on the sides of his head and staring into his eyes. That evening I found myself sitting with an old drunken man on a bench outside a store talking about the pleasures of catfish.

It is my gift to be able to embrace all these people and all their truths without placing one above the other. I can enter into their beliefs and give assent to each of them and learn from each of them. And I can pass their truths along.

This may not seem like much. But I value it above all else. The lonely old neighbor with her thirty-six cats, the shining young man at the door with his handful of religious literature, the good teacher, the honest preacher, the junkie, the mother, the bum in the park who told me never to take a job where I had to wear the top button of my collar buttoned and not to mess up my life like he did — I can hear all their truths and I can celebrate them.

If I can take these simple truths and elevate them beyond the anecdotal, I can offer something of value to my son and to other fathers' sons. I can offer a vision of manhood that is both aware of our human condition and alive to our human potential. I can offer the distilled insights of the dreamers and the doubters, the common and the rare. And in the process, perhaps I can reveal something about manhood to those readers, both male and female, who seek a compassionate place from which to survey the vast and confusing landscape before us.

— Kent Nerburn
Bemidji, Minnesota 1999

Prologue

A Father's Wish

I write this book as a father — not just as your father but as any father. Until you have a son of your own, you will never know what that means. You will never know the joy beyond joy, the love beyond feeling that resonates in the heart of a father as he looks upon his son. You will never know the sense of honor that makes a man want to be more than he is and to pass something good and hopeful into the hands of his son.

And you will never know the heartbreak of the fathers who are haunted by the personal demons that keep them from being the men they want their sons to see.

You will see only the man that stands before you, or who has left your life, who exerts a power over you, for good or for ill, that will never let go.

It is a great privilege and a great burden to be that man. There is something that must be passed from father to son, or it is never passed as clearly. It is a sense of manhood, of self-worth, of responsibility to the world around us.

And yet, how to put it in words? We live in a time when it is hard to speak from the heart. Our lives are smothered by a thousand trivialities and the poetry of our spirits is silenced by the thoughts and cares of daily affairs. The song that lives in our hearts, the song that we have waited to share, the song of being a man, is silent. We find ourselves full of advice but devoid of belief.

And so, I want to speak to you honestly. I do not have answers. But I do understand the questions. I see you struggling and discovering and striving upward, and I see myself reflected in your eyes and in your days. In some deep and fundamental way, I have been there, and I want to share.

I, too, have learned to walk, to run, to fall. I have had a first love. I have known fear and anger and sadness. My heart has been broken and I have known moments when the hand of God seemed to be on my shoulder. I have wept tears of sorrow and tears of joy.

There have been times of darkness when I thought I would never again see light, and there have been times when I wanted to dance and sing and hug every person I met.

I have felt myself emptied into the mystery of the universe, and I have had moments when the smallest slight threw me into a rage.

I have carried others when I barely had the strength to walk myself, and I have left others standing by the side of the road with their hands outstretched for help.

Sometimes I feel I have done more than anyone can ask; other times I feel I am a charlatan and a failure. I carry within me the spark of greatness and the darkness of heartless crimes.

In short, I am a man, as are you.

Although you will walk your own earth and move through your own time, the same sun will rise on you that rose on me, and the same seasons will course across your life as moved across mine. We will always be different, but we will always be the same.

And that is what this book is about. It is my attempt to give you the lessons of my life, so that you can use them in yours. They are not meant to make you into me. It is my greatest joy to watch you become yourself. But time reveals truths, and these truths are greater than either of us. If I can give them voice in a way that allows me to walk beside you during your days, then I will have done well.

To be your father is the greatest honor I have ever received. It allowed me to touch mystery for a moment, and to see my love made flesh. If I could have but one wish, it would be for you to pass that love along. After all, there is not much more to life than that.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Helen Wright:

The guide with title Letters to My Son: A Father's Wisdom on Manhood, Life, and Love contains a lot of information that you can discover it. You can get a lot of profit after read this book. That book exist new expertise the information that exist in this guide represented the condition of the world at this point. That is important to you to learn how the improvement of the world. This specific book will bring you inside new era of the internationalization. You can read the e-book on your smart phone, so you can read the item anywhere you want.

Anthony Collins:

A lot of people always spent their very own free time to vacation or even go to the outside with them family or their friend. Do you realize? Many a lot of people spent their free time just watching TV, or maybe playing video games all day long. If you wish to try to find a new activity here is look different you can read a new book. It is really fun for you. If you enjoy the book that you simply read you can spent the whole day to reading a publication. The book Letters to My Son: A Father's Wisdom on Manhood, Life, and Love it is rather good to read. There are a lot of individuals who recommended this book. We were holding enjoying reading this book. When you did not have enough space to develop this book you can buy the e-book. You can more effortlessly to read this book from your smart phone. The price is not to fund but this book offers high quality.

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