

Four Gifts provides a compass for the next generation.

Four Gifts: A Parent's Prayer for the Next Generation

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*A Parent's Prayer
for the Next Generation*

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TWO

What Matters?

Matt and Luke come down to the beach with coffee in hand. I have been waiting and watching the morning sky as I sip a cup of my own. Four small gift boxes lie in the sand beside a book I've been reading. We enjoy the sounds and scents of the new morning without words. Matt and Luke occasionally sneak glances at the simply adorned boxes before they decide to lower themselves to the sand. Though they are decades older than when they first sat on this beach, they sit themselves down in such a familiar manner: Matt folds up and eases down with dynamic grace, and Luke engages the pull of gravity with athletic beauty.

“So...” Matt says and nods at the boxes. Luke, always of few words, intimates the same with a look and a nod.

“So,” I begin. “This idea hit me out of the blue one day. And I am old enough to know that’s just the way it is. I was thinking how little time I have left, and the time I have spent

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here has to mean something. I was thinking, as I often do, of what matters most. The greatest gifts I have received have been the relationships that have filled my life. First, your mother came into my life, and she helped me to uncover parts of myself I had never been aware of and taught me to listen to what the world was asking of me. I learned the gift of giving. Then you boys—you taught me what is limitless in this life. Matt, you taught me what it means to be a man in the fullest sense. And Luke, you taught me what it truly means to be a leader. My life changed each time someone special came to me—and I was so much the better for it.

For each of you, your life is about to change, and I will not try to tell you how. That's for you to learn and discover. There is no greater honor than to have a child depend on you and to then teach him to become independent. I wanted to give you some memento to mark this passage. We don't do that enough these days."

Matt and Luke both shift in the sand and we all intuitively know that Dad is about to give...

"A lecture," Matt says and smiles.

"Can't we open the boxes first?" Luke teases.

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I shake my head and offer, “It provides just the right tension.”

We laugh, and I go on, “We have to honor life’s stages. And the fact that we don’t do so appropriately is at the heart of so many of our problems as a nation. We don’t honor the stages of life, the passage of time and the newness of the challenges it brings. We’ve become a nation filled with wanderers and victims, because we refuse to learn from the lives of others. We’ve lost respect for the cycles of life. We chase things that don’t matter in the end. That’s when it hit me out of the blue. I couldn’t think of anything to give you, because I was looking in the wrong place. See how easy it is to get off track?”

“I know I am philosophizing, but that is the point. We want to know *what* to do, yet, we don’t consider the *why*. Few have a philosophy of living, and, therefore, they end up living other people’s lives. They chase what others chase and never define the means or the ends. It sounds old-fashioned, but living is living—you just have grown up with more distractions, more bells and whistles, than I did or my parents before me.

“Which got me thinking: what gifts were given to me by my mother and father that I could pass on to each of you? And their parents, and their ancestors? What did I learn along the

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way from others that made an impact on my life, how I see things, what matters? So...”

Now that they are older, Matt and Luke are listening. They listened when they were children, but it’s with a different intent now. They have heard me preach and teach so many times in my life, and it wasn’t until they were close to adolescence that I realized that’s the point. Keep saying what matters. Say it over and over, for all day long others are trying to tell them and sell them what *they* think matters.

We are given the gift of life, and it is a wonderful teacher. Despite what other philosophers have said, we are not born alone, and we do not die alone. We may leave in our own time, but we live and learn with others and what matters most is the relationship we have with God, our self, and those who we share our life with. We are not alone, for if we were we would not be graced with these four gifts...

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