

“I have been blessed mega-tons by the opportunity to deal with teens for over thirty years and I know of no other topic more pertinent in the life of a teenage boy than his relationship with his father. I believe an all-knowing God planned it this way and calls Himself our heavenly Father to give us a target for which to aim. I know of no other father/son team that is better equipped than Josh and Jim Weidmann to take God’s Word and provide a biblical road map to get us there...knowing that every road we travel must lead to the cross!

JOE WHITE
PRESIDENT, KANAKUK KAMPS

“Dads matter. How much thought and effort we intentionally invest in our strategic role as fathers will be reflected in the lives of our sons and daughters. YOU are what your child needs. I like what Josh wrote: ‘Your teens love you and want you in their lives.’ In this warm and personal book, Josh shows us dads how to listen and connect with our kids. I have known Josh for years. I know of his journey, and now you will too.”

TIMOTHY SMITH
AUTHOR, SPEAKER, FAMILY COACH, AND PRESIDENT,
LIFE SKILLS FOR AMERICAN FAMILIES

“Relationship! Relationship! Relationship! Dads connecting with their kids leads to kids connecting with their heavenly Father. When those relationships pulsate with life, then our children, families, churches, and our culture will do a 180-degree turn. And not be a minute too soon. My friends, Jim and

Josh, have demonstrated that father/son connection with God and each other. The lessons they learned in their relationship make getting this book into the hands of every dad a must!”

BARRY ST. CLAIR
PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER OF REACH OUT YOUTH SOLUTIONS

“For several decades, working directly with and indirectly for teenagers, I’ve become increasingly convinced that the role a father plays in the lives of his children is absolutely pivotal. But by stating the case through the eyes of teenagers (and Josh himself—not too far out of the teen years), the message comes across more powerfully. What would teenagers tell their dads if they felt they’d really listen? Before reading this book I thought, *Isn’t it nice that dads who really botch up this fatherhood thing now have something to help them?* But when I was just a few pages into it, I realized that this book is for all fathers—no matter how good or how bad they’re doing in this all-important job of raising godly sons and daughters. Personally, despite being a very hands-on father, I came away determined to do an even better job at raising my own teenagers.”

BOB WALISZEWSKI
TEEN, MEDIA, AND YOUTH CULTURE SPECIALIST

“At last, a book from a savvy, articulate youth about the longings and aspirations that teenagers have for a deepening relationship with their dads. I can’t think of anyone better to write this than Josh Weidmann and his dad, Jim. They have done us all a great favor!”

DR. JOSEPH M. STOWELL
FORMER PRESIDENT, MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE
TEACHING PASTOR, HARVEST BIBLE CHAPEL

DAD, IF YOU ONLY KNEW...

JOSH Weidmann
WITH JIM Weidmann

Multnomah[®] Publishers *Sisters, Oregon*

DAD, IF YOU ONLY KNEW...
published by Multnomah Publishers, Inc.

© 2005 by Josh Weidmann and James Weidmann
International Standard Book Number: 1-59052-486-1

Cover design by Studiogearbox.com
Cover image by Nick Daly/Getty Images

Scripture quotations are from:
The Holy Bible, New International Version
© 1973, 1984 by International Bible Society,
used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House

Multnomah is a trademark of Multnomah Publishers, Inc.,
and is registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.
The colophon is a trademark of Multnomah Publishers, Inc.

Printed in the United States of America

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system,
or transmitted, in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical,
photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission.

For information:
MULTNOMAH PUBLISHERS, INC.
601 N. LARCH ST.
SISTERS, OREGON 97759

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Weidmann, Josh.

Dad, if you only knew : eight things teens want to tell their
dads (but don't) / by Josh Weidmann, with Jim Weidmann.

p. cm.

ISBN 1-59052-486-1

1. Father and child. 2. Parent and teenager. I. Weidmann,
Jim. II. Title.

BV4529.17.W45 2005

248.8'421—dc22

2005008710

05 06 07 08 09 10—10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0

Dad, I dedicate this book to you. From my beginning days you have encouraged me in the way I should go—helping me to know Christ and Him crucified, keeping God’s Word on the forefront of my mind, and teaching me the eternal power of prayer. You are my dad, my coach, my hero, and my friend. Thank you for being a mighty man of God and molding me to be the same.

Mom, this book is for you, too. Thank you for helping Dad to be the father he is, for being our family’s steady heartbeat of Christ’s love, and for giving my passion an aim.

I love you Dad and Mom.

—*Josh Weidmann*

First, I want to dedicate this book to my father, Larry Weidmann. One of the most significant impacts on my life has been my dad. By making his children a priority in his life, he was able to model what godly fatherhood is really all about. This book is a tribute to the legacy he has passed. Second, I want to dedicate this to my loving wife. Her unconditional love and nurturing spirit for our children have helped instill their strong sense of worth and spiritual understanding. I thank God for how she completes me. Third, I want to dedicate this to Joshua. His passion for God is a blessing to my soul.

—*Jim Weidmann*

CONTENTS

Foreword by Josh McDowell	11
Preface	17
Introduction: Your Teens Are Talking	21
1 Three Words to Start It All “Dad, please tell me you love me.”	33
2 A Strange Sort of Love “Dad, love me with actions, not just words.”	47
3 My Father, My Friend “Dad, I need your friendship.”	63
4 No Longer Superman (But Still a Hero) “Dad, you’ve always been my hero.”	77
5 Anywhere a Green Chair “Dad, I need you to listen.”	93
6 The Power of Your Own Story “Dad, just be real with me.”	109
7 Getting Ready for the Game “Dad, please be my coach.”	123
8 Search for the Missing Me “Dad, please help me figure out who I am.”	139
Epilogue: A Father’s Greatest Gift	153
Thank You...	157

FOREWORD

BY JOSH MCDOWELL

ABOUT THE FIRST favor Josh Weidmann ever did for me was to turn me down.

It was right after the Columbine High School shootings in 1999. Josh was already neck-deep in a Christian student response to the tragedy, and even though I hadn't met him yet, I called to offer to come speak.

Josh said thanks, but no. The students didn't really want adults talking to them, he said. At least not yet. It was students who had died at the hands of their peers. It was the

blood of teenagers—their friends—spilled in school hallways. The only ones they were opening up to so far, Josh told me, were other teens.

Right there I got a full dose of Josh's special passion. He has a heart to reach his generation for Christ, but not without listening carefully first. That's what he does as well as any young man I've met. Wherever he speaks across the country—youth rallies, conferences, high school assemblies, music festivals, concerts—Josh shares the hope of the gospel for our times. He shares himself. And when he's done, teens line up to share their lives with *him*. What do they say? Things they wouldn't think of saying to *any* adult—father, teacher, pastor, you name it.

This book, *Dad, If You Only Knew*, is Josh's careful, passionate, and authentic report back to dads of what he's hearing from our kids. In these pages, you'll hear the truth. You'll hear the heart cry of a generation in crisis. And you'll understand right away where you can start to make a dynamic impact as their father.

I don't need to alarm you by quoting statistics that indicate what our teens are up against these days. They face unprecedented pressures and dangers. They're getting mowed down, chewed up, and spit out by the big, bad world. That, we know.

But do we really know what they're needing, asking for, *pleading* for from their parents? Have we listened—really? Do we know what they need *most* from a dad?

My friend, we can't afford not to listen and respond.

Adding special impact to this report to dads is the sea-

soned advice of Jim Weidmann, Josh's own dad, who is well known for his Heritage Builders seminars for parents, and his work with Shirley Dobson as co-chair of the National Day of Prayer. You'll find his perspective helpful, practical, and seasoned in Scripture. And as you'll find out, the relationship between Dad and Son Weidmann is genuinely respectful and affectionate—reality-tested enough from Josh's teen years to give them both plenty of great stories!

Since our first meeting, I've been privileged to share the stage with Josh at the one-year anniversary of the Columbine shooting, on Moody Bible Institute's *Open Line Radio*, in front of over sixty thousand youth at the "Acquire the Fire" event held at the Detroit Silver Dome, and at other youth events around the country. More importantly I have had the chance to spend time with Josh one-on-one over coffee or a meal. My conclusion: he's the real deal.

That's why I believe the Lord can use the Weidmanns' book to give Christian dads the tools they need to succeed, and the motivation to do so with all their hearts. I highly recommend it.

Josh McDowell

P.S. Actually, Josh didn't turn me down completely. He gave me seven minutes. Seven times sixty seconds. (Then he whisked me off to a side room where I spent time with area youth pastors.) You gotta love a kid like that!

DAD, IF YOU ONLY **KNEW...**

PREFACE

DAD, I WANT to show you something.

It's a line of teens waiting to talk. These kids look pretty much like any teen from anywhere in the country. They've been lining up like this in front of me night after night across North America for the past six years. The line forms every time I finish speaking at youth rallies, school assemblies, camps, and conferences. Trust me, they're not here because I'm so special, and it sure isn't because I have all the answers. The kids just want to talk. Because I've come to challenge them to know and follow Jesus Christ, they know I care. And

because I—like a lot of kids in my Colorado hometown—experienced the pain of the Columbine High School shootings firsthand, they know that I can relate to the fears of their generation. So they line up.

To talk about what? Well, the stuff they're doing and feeling and thinking about—the stuff they think no one else could ever dream up. Words tumble out. Sometimes the teens speak in whispers, sometimes they yell or sob. As they talk, I see one fact emerging over and over:

What they're sharing with me, they really wish they could tell you. Their dad.

Sure, it can be hard for a teen to talk to Dad. And often it's not Dad's fault at all. In fact, right now your teens may act or talk like they don't need you at all. Do any of the following describe your recent relationship with your teen?

- Your teen hasn't initiated a conversation with you for months.
- Your teen is embarrassed to be seen with you in public.
- Your teen thinks your taste in music, clothes, and friends is totally off.
- Your teen makes a point of letting you know how much she doesn't need your opinions, advice, time, questions, or maybe (on a really hostile day) even your money.

Take heart, dads. I hear it all the time: If a teen could say anything to you, he'd say, *Dad, I need you*.

Really.

If saying that—*Dad, I need you*—was cool, I think teens would say it all the time. They'd whisper it to you when they got up. They'd text message it to you on their cell phones. They'd shout it from the highest mountains. . . *Dad! I need you!*

But, well, I guess it's not cool. For whatever reason, most teens are reluctant or embarrassed to talk to you—their own father! Maybe they fear that you'll laugh at them or blow them off.

That's why I wrote this book. I'm a messenger, not an expert. But I love this generation of young people, and I feel called by God's grace to do my part. The lines of teens have convinced me—if we are going to call youth to a saving relationship with their heavenly Father, it helps for them to first have a vibrant relationship with their earthly dad.

My prayer is that the rest of the book you're holding will help you hear what your kids are really saying and respond with your whole heart.

—Josh

INTRODUCTION

YOUR TEENS ARE TALKING

NOT TOO LONG AGO I was speaking at a high school in the South. Right in the middle of my talk in the school's old theater auditorium, I heard a garbled yell from the balcony. It was a girl's voice and sounded something like: "*THEYWON'T DOIT!*"

I didn't understand her, so in front of everyone I stopped and asked her what she said. She ducked down and ignored my question, and not knowing what else to do, I decided to keep going with the rest of my speech. Afterward, the principal of the school pulled me aside and apologized for the girl's actions.

“She has a really bad home life,” he said. “I don’t think she’s got many friends here. Her teachers tell me she has a tough time in class...” Mid-sentence, his eyes looked away. I could tell by his look that someone was now standing behind me. I turned around to find *that* girl. She opened her mouth without saying anything, then darted off toward the bathroom. I called her back. The principal offered his office. Before we had even sat down, she began to cry.

“Nobody loves me,” she said between sobs. I was floored by how quickly she got to the core issue.

“What do you mean nobody loves you?” I asked. “Surely somebody loves you.”

“My dad hates me,” she said. “He’s hardly in my life at all. He doesn’t even acknowledge me when we’re in the same room. My dad tells me straight to my face that I’m the greatest mess-up of his life.”

The girl pulled up her sleeves to show me long red and black marks on her arms. The night before she had cut along the veins of her arms and jabbed herself with a hot metal rod. She was not kidding. I found it hard to keep breathing. She needed more help than I could provide in a short space of time, but I wanted to clarify something.

“What did you yell from the balcony?” I asked. Her shout had come right at the point when I was telling the student body to reach out to kids who aren’t accepted.

“I’m one of those kids you were talking about,” she whispered. “I’m one of the ones nobody accepts. I yelled, ‘They

won't do it!,' because I know they won't reach out. *No one has ever reached for me.*"

How I wish I could say this girl's story was uncommon.

About a month later I was speaking at a weekend youth conference. One night a junior high-aged boy told me about how his dad repeatedly told him he was just one big mistake. The boy lifted the front of his shirt to show me his chest. All across his skin were red streaks. I had never seen anything like it before.

"My dad told me I was just a huge mistake that just needed to be wiped away," he said. "So I took a pencil eraser and tried to erase myself."

This was a new one for me. I prayed that God would give me the right words to say next.

"Do you really think you can get rid of yourself with a pencil eraser?"

"Nah," he said. His voice fell. "I just hoped my dad would notice the marks and give me some attention."

We stood there a few minutes in silence. Finally I had the courage to ask, "Did it work? I mean, did your dad notice?"

"Nope."

Maybe these are extreme examples compared to what you're experiencing in your home, but the themes are more common than you might think. What I see across the country

**my dad told
me I was just
a huge MISTAKE
that just needed
to be WIPED
away**

is this: As teens seek approval and love, they'll go to extreme measures to get it from their parents—particularly their dads. If they don't get attention from their parents, they go elsewhere

**teens will
use whatever
they can to get
the ATTENTION
of their fathers**

to get their needs met, and along the way signs will appear. Your teen may not be cutting her wrists or taking a pencil eraser to himself. Maybe it's breaking curfew, getting a tongue piercing, or wearing a skimpy dress that you disapprove of. Teens will use whatever they can to get the attention of their fathers. Sometimes teens tell me their fathers simply write off this type of behavior as “going through a

rebellious stage.” But I don't think defiance is the core issue with most teens I talk to. I think the issue is a cry for attention.

Do you see the good news here? Hearing a cry from a teenager is an opportunity for a dad. Probably the most influential person in a teen's life, good or bad, is their father. That is why I'm writing this book! Teens want you to know: “Dad, I need you.” It's so simple, but so important.

COLUMBINE IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

In many ways my ministry right now is one of listening. But I didn't set out to make this happen. God used a horrible tragedy to bring me to this place.

April 20, 1999, was a warm spring day in Littleton, Colorado. I was a junior at Arapahoe High School, sitting in a life skills class where a guest speaker, a county sheriff, was talking to us about the dangers of drinking and driving. Our vice principal normally taught the class, but that day for some reason I could see him through the window pacing in the hallway.

It became a game to me—counting how many times the vice principal walked past the window. Five, six, seven... Boy, he must really be churning on something. Eight, nine, ten... He looked more worried than he usually did. Eleven, twelve, thirteen... I remember keeping track of his pacing with little ticks on my notebook.

Fourteen.

Fifteen.

And he stopped.

It was as if he finally found the words he was searching for. Suddenly, our vice principal burst into our classroom. I remember his statement exactly.

“There’s been a shooting at Columbine High School,” he said. He had tears and terror in his eyes. “They say the gunmen are coming here next.”

Columbine was four miles from my high school. The kids at Columbine were all our neighbors, kids we played with on our community sports teams, kids we went to elementary school with. Our schools had a huge, good-hearted soccer rivalry. Nearly everyone in my class knew someone at Columbine.

All around me in class kids started crying. We were on the second floor, and I remember wondering how we were going to make it outside. My school immediately went into lockdown, where no one could get in or out of the building. Our principal came on the loudspeaker and gave more details. Soon we all retreated downstairs, and all the students filed into the cafeteria, where teachers were setting up a row of TV monitors. Outside, I could see a long line of parents' cars beginning to rush to our school.

I remember being able to pick out individual faces on the TV screens—faces I knew. I saw my friend Craig Nason run out of Columbine along with other frantic students, hands behind their heads so they wouldn't get mistaken for gunmen. Craig was the leader of the Columbine High School prayer group and part of a movement I helped start a year earlier called Revival Generation, a handful of students who made it their aim to begin prayer groups in every high school campus in Littleton. By then we had established thirty-five groups all across Colorado, as well as in several other states. That day I remember praying for Craig like I had never prayed before.

It's strange, the words and actions that come to you in times of crisis. As we all watched the TV screens, I remember blurting out, "We have to pray—right now!" There in the cafeteria of a public high school, in the middle of all two thousand students, a few hundred students and staff alike put their arms around each other's shoulders and formed

the largest prayer circle I've ever seen within the walls of our school. Someone asked if what we were doing was legal. Someone else said, "Who cares—our friends are getting shot at."

That day was such a day of horror and confusion. Later we would learn that two teenagers, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, had gone on a shooting rampage inside the school. They killed twelve students and one teacher before committing suicide. Another twenty-four students and teachers were injured. Today, the Columbine massacre is considered the worst school shooting in U.S. history. For me, like so many others, that day is just one huge dark spot in my memory.

In the aftermath, so many questions were asked, including what provoked the killers and whether anything could have been done to prevent the crime. The morning after Columbine, the phone in my parents' house rang at 7 a.m. Somehow word had gotten out to the media about Revival Generation—about how a group of teenagers in the same city as the Columbine shootings had formed prayer groups. The phone rang all day long and for weeks afterward. Members of our group, including me, ended up talking to *Newsweek*, *Time*, *Oprah*, CBS, NBC, ABC, *Nightline*, a news show from Germany—all in all, forty news media appearances.

Topics of discussion ranged from social cliques in high school to feelings of helplessness, insecurity, and depression among teenagers. Anytime anyone from our group talked, we wanted people to know that whatever the reasons for this

horror, there is still hope in the world—and that this hope is found in Jesus Christ.

Those were days of huge sadness for my friends and me—in spite of all the hype. Everyone sort of walked around in a fog. Yet I also believe that the Lord spoke through a bunch of committed teenagers during that time. Two friends of mine since fourth grade, brothers Steve and Jon Cohen, together with their youth pastor Andy Millar, wrote and sang a song called “Friend of Mine Columbine” at a community-wide memorial service held several days after the shootings. (Vice president Al Gore, Franklin Graham, Michael W. Smith, and Amy Grant were in attendance.)

**they seemed
to have
unintentionally
sparked a
CHRISTIAN
revolution**

The Cohens’ song talked about how guns could end dreams, but how peace and hope could be found in Jesus Christ. Jon, Steve, myself, and our friends were all used by God in great and humbling ways. Reporter Jean Torkelson from the *Denver Rocky Mountain News* said it this way: “When the two killers opened their Pandora’s box of horrors, they seemed to have unintentionally sparked a Christian revolution.”

God is continually teaching me the importance of availability. As His Spirit moves within my generation, it has been neat to see how He can take an insignificant guy like me and use me in significant ways. Ever since the Columbine

tragedy, God has opened doors for me to speak to youth around the country an average of twice a month. Doors simply opened one by one, and I responded in faith. It's a bit crazy at times. Sometimes I'm overwhelmed. Since Columbine, I've spoken at DCLA 2000 and Creation Fest on both coasts, with the Billy Graham Association, Focus on the Family, Reach Out, First Priority, and Youth for Christ. I've been the main stage speaker at the Louisiana Baptist Youth Conference and the Wisconsin and Indiana United Methodist Youth Gatherings.

Everywhere I go, I speak with the sole purpose of helping students come to know God so that they can make Him known. Speaking at events is a God thing. It is not about me at all. I'm just a kid myself in many ways. As of the writing of this book, I'm a senior in college at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. I'm humbled by God's calling every time I get up on stage.

I want you to know up front that this isn't a book where I aim to give any advice on parenting. Right now I'm twenty-three years old, not a parent, and I have no intentions of writing a book on a subject I haven't experienced yet. This book is about *what teens tell me*. You'll hear from real teens. Sometimes their names have been changed if the subject matter is confidential, but each of the stories I tell is true. As I speak to teens, they speak to me. And what they have to say is so important that I want you to hear it too.

From time to time in the chapters that follow, I'm also

going to weave in some thoughts from my dad, Jim Weidmann. My dad is *The Family Night Guy*, a radio show on parenting featured on about three hundred stations across the country. He also serves as executive director of Heritage Builders Ministry, a health, education, and development service for parents from Focus on the Family. He and my mom, Janet, have four kids of their own—me, my brother Jake, and my sisters, Janae and Joy. I'm the oldest. I love and respect my dad so much and I truly believe that if anyone knows something about parenting, it's him.

DAD, YOUR TEEN NEEDS YOU

Think of me as a young reporter, telling you what I've seen and heard on the frontlines from the teens we both care about so deeply. In the chapters ahead, I'll tell you the good and bad of it—because I believe dads *do* want to hear what teens are saying. In fact, I believe dads must hear it, because what I'm hearing is absolutely vital to every father's success.

Dads, this is a book where you get to eavesdrop on the teen you love so much—or someone who probably thinks a lot like him or her. The bottom line from what I'm hearing is this: Dad, no matter how frustrated or limited you feel today, no one can replace you in your teen's life.

I know that meeting the needs of teens is not always easy. Often it involves *pain*, it requires *prayer*, it only comes

through *patience*, and it means that dads must be *persistent*. But the rewards in family relationships and your teen's future are great. Even eternal.

If that sounds worthwhile to you, I invite you to keep reading.