



Dr. Mark L. Bailey

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## Helping Our Boys Grow into Real Men

In the course of the academic year at Dallas Seminary, we have a number of speakers who bring us a very timely and challenging word. But I don't recall many messages that were more dynamic than the one we present in this issue of *Veritas*.

As he recounted the ways God has led him, Joe Ehrmann modeled the kind of masculinity that he works to instill in young men—a person who loves others and is committed to a life that is focused outwardly rather than being self-absorbed. He exemplified Paul's command in Philippians 2:3, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves."

His experiences and the call of God on his life have given Joe a great passion for the family and particularly for the challenges and struggles that boys face growing up in our culture.

Joe hits the bull's-eye with his analysis of the wrong messages that men and boys are receiving from the world today. And he understands the importance of capturing children for Christ while they are young, which is why he coaches in high school and ministers in an inner-city environment.

As a father of two grown boys, Joe's message really resonated with me. Our passion at Dallas Seminary is to help our students build strong families and equip them to teach the Bible's principles of family to others. And we are passionate about reaching our cities for Christ, which is so much a part of Joe's ministry.

We are also committed to minister to you through *Veritas* and other resources. This is our privilege, for it is your prayers and financial support that enable Dallas Seminary to prepare godly leaders who can help individuals and families live for the Lord. Thank you for partnering with us in this work.

Dr. Mark L. Bailey  
President  
Dallas Theological Seminary

# VERITAS

*Equipping Christians to live by truth—veritas—from God.*

## The Greatest Crisis in America Today

*The Loss of True Masculinity and Its  
Devastating Effects on Our Culture*

*by Rev. Joe Ehrmann*

*Unless we begin teaching our boys  
what it means to be a real man from God's perspective, we  
will not be able to solve many of the other very serious  
problems that are plaguing our country.*

DALLAS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY



*To help boys and men learn what it means to be a real man, we have to tackle three fundamental lies that I believe every male in America is being fed through this culture.*

**Joe Ehrmann** was an All-American football player at Syracuse University. He was named to the Syracuse All-Century team and received the university's most distinguished alumni honor. He also played professional football for 13 years.

Joe and his wife, Paula, a psychotherapist, are co-founders of Building Men and Women for Others (BMWOW), which holistically addresses issues of masculinity and femininity and seeks to reframe the social responsibility of sports, coaches, parents, and players. The Ehrmanns are also co-founders of The Door, an inner-city, community-based ministry that addresses issues of poverty, systemic racism, and social injustice.

Rev. Ehrmann was selected by the *Baltimore Business Journal* as the Renaissance Person of the Decade for his dedication and commitment to the city's betterment. He is also the co-founder of Baltimore's Ronald McDonald House, which has served more than 35,000 families from all over the world since its inception. For years, Joe has addressed the issues of child abuse and domestic violence, and he is the recipient of the National Fatherhood Initiative's Man of the Year Award.

Joe has been featured on the cover of *Parade* magazine, which called him "The Most Important Coach in America" because of his work to transform the culture of sports. During and following his football career, Joe matriculated at Dallas Theological Seminary and Westminster Theological Seminary and was ordained in 1985. Joe and Paula are the parents of four children.

This message is taken from an address Rev. Ehrmann delivered at the Dallas Seminary Golf Classic earlier this year.

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*Veritas* is a publication of Dallas Seminary for our valued friends and partners, designed to provide biblical encouragement and instruction in keeping with our strong commitment to minister to those who stand with us in prayer and financial support. We are pleased to present the messages of outstanding leaders and Bible teachers who speak during chapels and at other events, as a way of bringing you "on campus" with us and giving you the benefit of their insights. *Veritas* is also available online at our website, [www.dts.edu/veritas](http://www.dts.edu/veritas).



# The Greatest Crisis in America Today

## *The Loss of True Masculinity and Its Devastating Effects on Our Culture*

*by Rev. Joe Ehrmann*

I spent 13 years as a player in the National Football League (NFL). As I look back over my career, the most valuable thing I was able to take away from the game of football and incorporate into my life and ministry is the concept of a team, which is really the concept of community.

A professional football team is a group of men from different races and different areas of the country who come together each year to form a community. To be successful, these men have to transcend their racial, cultural, and social differences and work

together for a common goal. And in this community you learn very quickly that if you are going to be an asset to the

team, you have to set aside your personal goals and ambitions and work together for the greater good of the community.

## *Our Great Need for Community*

To me, developing this ability to build true community, to work together for a greater purpose, is a tremendous challenge facing us in America today. America is the richest, most powerful nation in the history of the world, yet there are 12 million children who live either at or below the poverty level in this country.

This year alone, 3 million

How do we demonstrate the reality of Christ's love in our communities in the midst of all these human problems?

I left football with the goal of trying to figure out how to create this sense of others-centered, others-focused community. After seminary, my wife and I started working on the streets of Baltimore. We moved into a very

needed to be addressed before real community could be built—problems such as systemic racism, poverty, domestic violence, child abuse, and economic development.

So I became deeply involved in addressing these and other needs. But after about 10 years of ministry in these areas, it dawned on me that there is an even greater crisis in our country than the problems of poverty, abuse, and other things, as serious as these are.

In fact, I became convinced that unless we deal with this crisis, we probably will not be able to deal successfully with the other psychosocial and spiritual problems that are devastating so many lives in America. The need to address this crisis is the

heart of what I want to share with you today.

To me, the single greatest crisis we face in America today—and that includes the church—is the issue of masculinity. That is, what does it mean to be a man? How should we define manhood and masculinity? How can we raise this next generation of boys to become men who love God and love others and who are willing to give their lives to a purpose greater than themselves?

To really answer these questions, we have to begin by tackling three fundamental lies that I believe every boy and every man in America is being fed through this culture, with the result that the truth of Christ is being both diminished and distorted in their lives.



*The need to build true community is a tremendous challenge facing us today.*

children in America—one every 10 seconds—will either be abused, abandoned, or neglected. In this context, it seems to me the question for the body of Christ is, how can we best expand the kingdom of God?

needy community and started developing ministries to provide things like food and shelter, after-school programs, and a number of other services.

It soon became obvious that there were bigger issues that

## *Three Lies That Boys Learn*

The first lie of our culture that young boys learn is that real masculinity is determined by athletic ability, which means that you have the size, strength, and ability to compete against other boys or men and win. This is something boys learn very early on the school playground, so that by the time

a boy is seven or eight he sees the athletic boys being held in higher esteem and concludes that they have more value and worth and are a little more masculine than the other boys.

A second lie about manhood in our culture is that being a man is all about sexual conquest. We could spend the

whole time on the damage this lie has done to men and boys in this country. Somehow we have associated manhood with the capacity to use girls and women for personal pleasure and to validate this twisted concept of masculinity.

The third lie usually comes along later in life as a man moves out into the marketplace. This is the message that being a man has to do with economic success—the size of your salary and the power associated with your job title. And of course, in this view it's important for a man to demonstrate his success and power by accumulating as many toys and other possessions as possible.

Think about a culture with these definitions of manhood

and the kinds of male role models it holds up for boys and men to imitate. The heroes of our culture are athletes and movie stars who can perform on the field or on the screen and attract a lot of women and the rich and powerful who seem to have it all.

Now imagine what happens in a culture when you raise a couple of generations of boys who think this is what it means to be a man. Because most men don't have the athletic ability or money to be what our culture says is a real man, many of them decide they are simply going to take what they want, even if it requires violence.

America represents just 4 percent of the world's population, but we have 25

percent of all the incarcerated people in the world. We have raised generations of men who think they can use size,

strength, a weapon, or some other kind of scheme to get what they want.

It's not just the boys and young men in the back alleys of the inner cities who are impacted by this crisis of masculinity. It affects every social and economic group. We have a country full of boys and men who have been deeply wounded by the culture and

deeply wounded in their families due in large part to the problem of fathers who are missing in action.

No wonder we have so many men walking around with deep wounds in their hearts and deep needs that could have been met in a healthy relationship with a father. This is the crisis of masculinity in America.

*We have a country full of boys and men who have been deeply wounded by the culture.*



## *A Painful “Lesson” in Manhood*

This issue is not just theory for me, but very personal and painful. My father was an ex-professional boxer who believed that real men don't cry, don't need, don't feel, don't want, and don't touch. He worked on drilling rigs on the Great Lakes and was gone most of the time.

I remember one time when my mother told me, “Your father is coming home.” I was filled with excitement. But when my father arrived, he took me down to the basement to teach me how to box. He put up his hands, and as a five-year-old I had to stand there and learn how to throw jabs and combinations. And I had to

get it right too.

I wanted to please my father so much, but I just couldn't throw a jab with the snap he wanted, and I remember being filled with anxiety. I think I knew even at that young age that his love was dependent on my performance, but I just couldn't get the jab right and suddenly tears started running down my face.

Those tears must have triggered some deep, ugly wound in my father that brought out his anger. He slapped me and told me I had better learn to control those emotions.

## Trying to Hide the Shame

What my father did was to give me a profound sense of shame about my masculinity. In my mind, real men didn't cry or need or want. But here I was crying, needing my father's love, and wanting so much to feel the strength of his arms around me. Therefore, I must not be a real man. And I felt a sense of shame.

I just assumed that when God put together the formula for my masculinity, He messed up the recipe somehow and brought in all of this feminine stuff because I cried and hurt and wanted my father's love. So I decided that there were entire parts of me that I had better hide from other people and especially from other men.

Like a lot of other boys, I figured the best place to hide my emotions and be a real man was in athletics. I have been in and around the National Football

League for 35 years now, and I would say that the number-one common denominator for professional football players is father-son dysfunction that gives these men a pathological drive to push and succeed. And I would suspect that this is true not only in the NFL, but in corporate boardrooms all across this country as well.

I went out for high school football as a big, tough, but very insecure kid. That's why, for me, football was never about sports or teamwork or camaraderie. It was a life-and-death struggle to validate my masculinity. I had the idea that every time I knocked the guy in front of me flat on his back, that made me a man. I went through high school and college believing this, and after seven years in the pros, I was still wondering where I came from and where I was going.

## The Turning Point

Looking back, I think the only thing I had in perspective in those days was the love I had for my mother, my grandmother, my two sisters, and my little brother, Billy.

Billy was 10 years younger than me, and because our father wasn't at home, I raised Billy not only as my little brother, but also as a son. Just as my father did with me, I took Billy down to the

basement and said, "Come on, Billy, let me teach you what it means to be a man. Don't cry, don't hurt, just suck it up."

So Billy went through high school playing football with the same kind of pathological drive I had. As he got ready to play college ball, just prior to his freshman year, I got permission for him to come and be with me at the Baltimore Colts training camp. I wanted Billy to learn the work ethic of a professional athlete and develop the skills and techniques of a defensive lineman.

But the very first week of training camp, I walked up to Billy and saw this massive black-and-blue mark on his chest. Our trainer saw it and sent him to the doctor for blood tests. That night I got a call from someone at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore who said, "Bring your brother here right away."

After admitting Billy to the hospital, the doctor told me, "Billy has a type of cancer for

which there is virtually no hope whatsoever." I was devastated by the thought of losing the person I probably loved the most in the entire world. I think

*I remember wanting to scream, "There has to be more to life than this!"*

I was equally devastated by the realization that everything I had built my life around offered Billy no hope. When an 18-year-old boy needed me to come and wipe away that last tear before death, all I had to offer were the old locker room speeches about sucking it up.

I spent five months on a pediatric oncology floor in a room with all these families trying to share each other's victories and dissipate the losses. On the third night of Billy's hospitalization, I put a pillow over my head and gave myself permission to cry. I found myself crying out to God for the first time in my adult life.

The turning point came as I

stood next to my brother's casket and open grave in a cemetery in Buffalo. It was the middle of December, the snow was blowing, and hundreds of people were there. I heard the priest say the last amen, and everybody turned and started to walk away.

I remember wanting to

scream, "There has to be more to life than this!" This is when I began asking questions like, "Do we just live and die, have some good times and some bad times, and then everybody walks away? What is the meaning and purpose of life?" I found my answers in Christ.

### *The Two Things That Really Matter*

So now here I am, coaching and mentoring and trying to teach boys what it means to be a man. Let me share the conclusion I have reached—the two things I tell my players, as well as boys and men all across this country, that matter most at the end of the day.

This is what I know to be true. At the end of your life, when you want to measure what kind of man you are—or what kind of woman, for that matter—it's all about relationships. The first thing it means to be a man is the capacity to love and to be loved. The important questions are not what kind of awards I won or what my achievements may be. The questions that matter are, "What kind of husband was I? What kind of father? What kind

of son, citizen, and member of the community was I? What kind of Christian was I?"

The second thing I know to be true is that the measure of a life well lived is a commitment to a transcendent purpose. What matters is that we go through life concerned about far more than just our own goals and wants and ambitions. We must understand that we have been put here for a purpose that is bigger than ourselves.

For us as Christians, this means that our relationship with Jesus Christ and our commitment to advance the kingdom of God are what matter the most. This is what will bring the healing and hope that boys and men in our culture need so desperately. †

IN APPRECIATION FOR YOUR  
SUPPORT OF DALLAS SEMINARY . . .

# An Inspiring Story of a Journey to Manhood That You Will Never Forget!

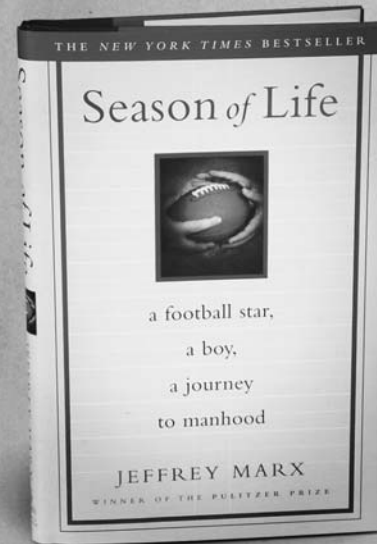
**S** *Season of Life* is the stirring story of Joe Ehrmann, a former pro football star and volunteer coach for the Gilman High School football team in Maryland.

The one-time captain of the Baltimore Colts and now an ordained minister, Ehrmann is serious about football—but even more serious about teaching the true purpose of life. Joe's story is told by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Jeffrey Marx, who was a ball boy for the Colts when he first met Ehrmann.

### **Empathy, Integrity, and Service**

Rev. Ehrmann now devotes his life to teaching young men a whole new meaning of masculinity through his Building Men for Others program: that being a man means emphasizing relationships and having a cause bigger than yourself. It means accepting responsibility and leading courageously. And it means that empathy, integrity, and living a life of service to others are more important than points on a scoreboard.

*Season of Life* will encourage and inspire you and also make a perfect gift for any man. It is a moving story that will resonate with athletes, coaches, parents—anyone struggling to make the right choices in life.



*Joe's story is told by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Jeffrey Marx, who was a ball boy for the Colts when he first met Ehrmann.*

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