ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

FAMILY & RELATIONSHIPS

Stepped Up: The Urgency for Fatherhood
Ralph Harper
CreateSpace
978-1-4903-2071-7
Three Stars (out of Five)

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Stepped Up melds Ralph Harper's memoir about life with his stepson, Cody, with a declaration of the importance of fatherhood. The book offers a firsthand account of common challenges like divorce, parenting in general, and struggles of the teen years. As a result, Harper's story, though it contains many details particular to his own life, is applicable to a wide range of readers. His voice and experience provide comfort and wisdom in the face of potentially frustrating challenges.

The book balances elements of memoir and exposition. The memoir takes precedence in volume and is the heart of the text, so readers looking for an in-depth discussion of fatherhood may be disappointed. Harper uses stories from his life with his stepson to illustrate broader ideas about fatherhood, such as discipline, respect, and consequences. The emphasis on memoir lends the volume a more heartfelt, personal feel.

When Harper and his wife (Cody's mother) divorce, the distance causes Harper great emotional pain, especially during the time when he and Cody are not able to communicate with each other. The silence between them brings up doubt and regret for Harper about conflicts he and Cody had in the past. Harper uses his deeply emotional reflections to discuss the pain of separation and the importance of showing affection. The raw emotion of his story speaks more effectively about these widely experienced emotions than a psychology text explaining the cause-and-effect relationship between separation and pain. Harper overcomes distance, conflict, and lack of shared DNA to become and remain a force for good in Cody's life.

The writing is clear and easy to read though at times becomes too formal for the intimacy of the relationships it's describing: "On our journey, our conversation quickly switched to one about my relationship with Cody. Ernest acknowledged that he could tell Cody and I had

a very sound chemistry."

The cover features a photo of Ralph and Cody wearing suits and standing against a blank white background. The image strikes a serious tone that fits well with the expository side of the book, but a warmer feel—perhaps even the same image zoomed in on the men's faces—would resonate with the tone of the memoir.

The subtitle—"The Urgency for Fatherhood"—also emphasizes the non-memoir content. The back-cover copy opens with a brief, balanced description of the two elements of the book. The rest of the copy, however, including a paraphrase of a Theodore Roosevelt quotation and the description of three types of fathers—"triumphant," "daring," and "timid"—shifts the focus even farther away from the more reflective elements.

Harper's account of overcoming obstacles in order to become a committed, faithful father is a touching read for fathers who take their role seriously despite the challenges they face.

Melissa Wuske