

The Ride OF Your Life



What I Learned about God,
Love, and Adventure by Teaching
My Son to Ride a Bike

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BakerBooks

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

© 2014 by Mike Howerton

Published by Baker Books
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakerbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

ISBN 978-0-8010-1392-8

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To protect the privacy of some individuals, some names and details have been changed.

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I dedicate this book to the fine people of Overlake Christian Church. You are truly the best church family I know at making the most radical difference in this world and building a beautiful culture of worship balanced by outlandish love. You make this a great place to be on the journey and an incredible place to raise my family, and I love you. Thank you for taking this ride with me.

Contents

Vignette	11
Introduction	13

Lesson One **No Fear**

1. Arguing with Fear 19
2. Risky Business 26
3. Bigger and Better 32
4. Off We Go 37

Lesson Two **Balance**

5. How It Is with Balance 45
6. Momentum 53
7. Balancing Act 60
8. Live Unbalanced 67

Lesson Three **Steering**

9. Steering 79
10. Turning in God's Direction 87

Contents

- 11. The Way You Look Matters 96
- 12. Avoiding Obstacles 103

Lesson Four Braking

- 13. How to Slow and When to Stop 115
- 14. Knowing When to Brake 122
- 15. Twenty Minutes, Then Lemonade 129
- 16. Slamming on the Brakes 137

Lesson Five Starting from a Standstill

- 17. Starting from a Standstill 151
- 18. Bounce 158
- 19. Get Back On and Get Moving 165
- 20. Starting Over 171

Conclusion 179

A Note to My Children 185

About the Author (in His Own Words) 187

Notes 189

Vignette

I have a five-year-old friend named Lola.

Last week she learned to ride her bike, mastering the principles found in this book.

Her dad, one of my best friends, showed me a picture he took of her after she learned to ride.

Her shock of red hair is a bit tangled, messy with summer sunshine and sweat. She is sitting so that both her knees and her elbows are visible, and all are sporting fresh battle wounds: raspberries and grass stains.

But her smile radiates. There is no hint of grief over her skinned knees hidden in her expression. Her eyes are steadfast with self-assurance. And I see joy. Not the shallow, flippant joy that comes from some passing novelty. She has put the training wheels away for good. Forevermore, she's a joyful rider of the bicycle.

Lola's is the hard-fought joy that comes from overcoming and expanding her world.

Maybe it's been a while. But it's high time for you to experience that joy again.

Introduction

When the spirits are low, when the day appears dark, when work becomes monotonous, when hope hardly seems worth having, just mount a bicycle and go out for a spin down the road, without thought on anything but the ride you are taking.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

It came to a boiling point one summer afternoon.

I pulled my car in the driveway after work, just in time to witness my son hurling his bike to the ground in frustration, his face red and tearful. If I couldn't already read it clearly in my wife's expression, she spelled it out for me: "He's *your* son," she said through clenched teeth. "*You* need to teach him to ride this bike." Then she turned and left, the bike jumbled at an odd angle but dominating the scene like a talisman of failure, a metal sculpture askew with defeat.

"Caleb, buddy, come over here." I knelt down to his level.

He picked up his bike and walked slowly over. My mind was racing. I shot up a silent prayer. And suddenly, miraculously, I knew how I needed to approach his instruction.

“Caleb,” I said, “I’ll teach you how to ride your bike. No problem at all.” (I was curious to hear where I was heading with this.)

“It will take five days.” (Five? Where in the world did I get five?)

“Each day I’ll teach you one lesson, and we’ll practice together. By the weekend, you’ll be the Jedi Master of the two-wheeled set.” (I was inspired from on high and the poetry was beginning to flow.)

“The neighbor kids will rise up and call you blessed. Does that sound good?”

He nodded his head, wiped the tears from his eyes. “Okay, Dad.” The boy was game.

Earnest but with compassion, I said, “Son, we will focus hard on each lesson for twenty minutes. But when Daddy says the lesson is over, it’s over. We give each other high fives, put the bike in the garage, and go inside to drink lemonade. Deal?” I extended my hand. With wide eyes he soulfully, sincerely shook my hand. He wanted this badly. He was ready to believe.

And so it began.

Each of the five days, we learned one lesson. We practiced, and we were done in twenty minutes as planned. The trainings were in a specific order, and each lesson provided the foundation for the next. Each day we reviewed the previous instructions. But, most important, we focused on one teaching at a time.

By the end of the five days, Caleb was in fact riding his bike around like a fury, a Yoda on wheels. He was having an absolute blast, going from frustration to freedom. He overcame. His universe expanded. His horizon lengthened. He was ready for all the adventure a master of the art of cycling could handle.

The lessons were simple and intuitive:

Lesson one: No fear

Lesson two: Balance

Lesson three: Steering

Lesson four: Braking

Lesson five: Starting from a standstill

The last lesson would display mastery of all of the previous lessons, because it would force Caleb to create his own momentum, often after a fall.

Since this experience I've realized that these five lessons aren't just for learning to ride a bike; they're for mastering any new challenge, for doing life well. They will help when facing the rigors of junior high or heading off to college; they're for starting a business, planting a church, beginning a marriage or prizing it for the long haul, playing an instrument, coaching a team, planning a road trip, or learning to surf. In other words, it turns out that these principles are virtually universal.

Childhood is quite often about embracing these five lessons in order to enjoy a new skill and the new paradigm that skill provides. Adulthood seems to force many of us into a mold where we just hunker down and hold on. We find ourselves not interested in learning any new skill, mastering any new concept, or tackling any new horizon. Our paradigm gets old and boring. We forget that life is for *living*. We forget we were made to live as overcomers.

So here is the challenge: What new bicycle do you need to learn how to ride?

What is the new paradigm that you wish you could break into but haven't been able to? Is there a language you need to learn? A service trip to a third-world country you've been dreaming about taking? A book within you that you need to write? A career shift you need to make? Art within you that needs to be created? A person you need to ask out for coffee?

Maybe you can articulate the desire, but you have no idea how to start.

Introduction

Start here. Start with these five lessons.

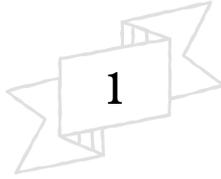
With these lessons I discovered a process, and the system bred success for Caleb. But there was something grander and more glorious going on. I believe that God revealed his invitation to abundant living. This is a process for sucking the marrow out of life, for enjoying the fullest amount of love and adventure. I've seen these principles bear much fruit in my own life and in the lives of those I've had the privilege of journeying with, and I offer them humbly now to you.

Remember the LORD your God. He is the one who gives you power to be successful. (Deut. 8:18)



Lesson One

No Fear



Arguing with Fear

When a resolute young fellow steps up to the great bully, the world, and takes him boldly by the beard, he is often surprised to find it comes off in his hand, and that it was only tied on to scare away the timid adventurers.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

I worked together with my wife, Jodie, to teach our oldest child, Alexandra, to ride her bike. We gave it our best, chaotic, scattershot teaching effort, and she caught on fairly quickly. There were a few spills and tears and some laughter, and then she was off and riding. She got it. She overcame. Her universe grew.

When Jodie began teaching our son, Caleb, he was overwhelmed by the sheer number of things to keep in mind. He was frustrated, and he vented his frustration at his mom. But I sensed this was because of an underlying tension: he was afraid.

Getting Going

The first lesson Caleb needed to learn was not to fear. He needed to have it branded on his little heart: *Do not be afraid*. Much of his frustration was simply the product of how unsettled he felt.

I had Caleb run inside and wash the tears off, grab a quick snack, and then meet me back on the yard next to our driveway.

“Buddy, are you ready?” I asked.

He nodded somberly; there was a steely glint in his eyes.

“The first lesson is no fear. Can you say, ‘no fear?’”

“No fear,” he repeated.

“Fear has no place in learning to ride. Together we are going to banish fear. We are going to stomp it out. There is no room in your courageous heart for even the tiniest bit of fear. Okay?”

“Okay, Dad,” he said, because he knew I wanted him to. “But what if I fall?”

“At some point, you might fall. So kneel down here.”

We both dropped down and felt the grass with our hands.

“Look, the grass on our lawn is soft. Even if you do fall, it’s not going to hurt.”

He didn’t look too sure.

“But Caleb, listen.” I gently placed my hands on his shoulders. “Today’s lesson is about having no fear. So today, I promise you, you have nothing to fear whatsoever. And the reason you don’t have anything to fear is because I’m going to be holding your seat the entire time. You don’t have anything to be afraid of, because I love you, I will be holding you, and I will not let you go. Okay?”

His face softened. “Okay,” he said, and this time he meant it.

We spent the next twenty minutes with Caleb riding his bike in the yard while I was running alongside him, holding his seat the whole time. He gained confidence, and he began to trust himself, even to trust that the yard was safe to fall on, but we didn’t focus

on any of those things. I only wanted him to be encouraged, to have energy to continue his training, and to have no fear.

“What’s lesson one?” I’d pant out, running beside him.

“No fear!”

“How come?”

“Because you’ve got me!”

“That’s right,” I’d say. “Your dad has you. Don’t forget it! And I love you, and I’m not going to let you fall.” And the whole time I was holding his seat, running and winded and thinking, *Gee, I’ve really got to get in shape.*

The Problem with Fear

We need to learn this lesson too. God has us. He loves us. And he’s not going to let us fall. One of the most important reasons we must learn the lesson is because of the damage fear does to us. It’s an assault against our identity as loved children of our heavenly Father. Wreaking havoc upon our potential, fear attacks the full life God has for us.

I have a friend who doesn’t believe in God, but I know she believes this truth. She tells me things like, “The universe is conspiring to help me.” She’ll tell me a story about how she was “thinking good thoughts” about a situation that she was nervous to confront, and then when she entered that situation, it was as if the solution presented itself. She wants to be grateful, but she doesn’t know who to thank. So she “gives it back out” to the universe.

When we talk, I affirm her journey and her fearless approach. I do believe that the universe operates by certain guidelines, I tell her, and I do believe there is a conspiracy in her favor. And I suggest to her, “Maybe behind the whole thing there is a Somebody. And just maybe, maybe that Somebody loves you.” For me, God’s love provides the reason to live fearlessly.

Fear erects a ceiling limiting our lives. Fear controls us by telling us what we can and cannot do. Fear chains us to the floor and prevents us from soaring. Fear prevents us from trying to master a new skill. It talks us out of taking the first step. Fear prevents us from loving, hoping, believing. Fear is an assault on our joy. It is what keeps us from allowing God to lead us into a new day, and it's what was keeping Caleb from learning to ride. That's why we had to start here.

Living in fear is a kind of death, which is why there is something so very powerful about stepping through fear. Stepping through our fear destroys it. On the other side of fear we experience life—heart-pounding, chills-inducing life. Besides, the alternative is a bummer.

Fear Begets Regrets

When I was in high school, I played football and drove a fire-engine red '66 Mustang with thick chrome rims. I kept this car clean—washed, toweled, waxed, and shining. I kept a full bottle of Armor All in the trunk. “You are *way* cool,” I would tell myself as I drove, to hide my insecurity about keeping a full bottle of Armor All in my trunk. Most days when I drove to school, I'd drive down the hill, out of my way, so I could drive past Sofia's house.

Sofia drove a red Pontiac Fiero. She was on the swim team. She was tan. She had a great smile. So I'd drive past her house day after day after day. I'd daydream that she would come outside to get in her car just as I was driving by, and I'd stop, and we'd chat.

Occasionally I actually would see her coming out to get into her car as I was driving by. It terrified me. I drove faster. I never stopped to talk with her. I desperately wanted to, but I didn't have a single conversation with her. Not one. I didn't even know

if she knew my name, and I imagined it'd be weird stopping and making up stuff to talk about. In my fear, I imagined it'd go something like, "Hi, Sofia. I'm Mike. How's it going? I'm on my way to school too. Yeah, I go this way." I'd squint like Eastwood and gaze significantly into the middle distance. "It takes longer, but I get there faster. You know what I mean? We both have red cars. I gotta go." And with images of crashing and burning in my mind, I'd just keep driving by, silently, day after day after day.

At my twenty-year high school reunion, I saw Sofia again and met her husband. Both were triathletes, successful, funny, and living on the East Coast. But when she saw me, she grabbed her husband and said to him (I'm embarrassed to write this), "Babe, this is that guy in high school I was telling you about! He's the one who drove that cool Mustang! Mike, you drove by my house all the time and I was always hoping you'd stop to talk!"

D'oh. True story. Cue the forehead slap.

Now I love my life. I'm head over heels about my godly, talented wife, and my kiddos are my favorite humans on the planet, so this tale isn't a gripe or a wistful I-want-to-do-my-life-over moment. It's simply a reminder that there are others who are wishing we'd step through fear as well. My dad has always told me that we regret the things we didn't try more than the things we were bold enough to attempt.

A Scary Encounter

By the way, my dad was in the US Marines. He's one of those barrel-chested, dismember-you-ten-ways-with-a-paper-clip kind of guys. When he wasn't shipped out on assignment, he'd get home in the late afternoon, and we'd often play catch or wrestle. So there were many days I'd be waiting excitedly for him at the end of the day. One evening I heard his car pull into

the driveway, and I made a quick plan to start a hide-and-seek game before he got in the door.

My plan was to hide in the garage and call my dad to come find me. Understand, our garage looked like an M. C. Escher painting of a junkyard inside an antique store inside a junkyard. I had found the perfect hiding spot, on the back side of the love seat, behind the stack of old John Denver vinyls, underneath some hanging tools, and inside an empty cupboard. Without some kind of magic wand, it'd take him forever to find me.

I had left the light on, and when I heard him come into the house, I called, "Dad, I'm in the garage, come and find me!" Then I scurried into my hiding place inside of the cabinet. I heard the door to the garage creak open, then shut, with the light turned off. My dad hadn't heard me! He'd just peeked in the garage, not seen anyone, switched off the light, and shut the door. I was left alone, in the pitch darkness, shut up inside a cupboard, in the far end of the junkyard that was my garage.

He'll come back. He's coming back. He's got to come back, I thought. I waited.

And waited.

And waited.

And waited.

For, like, thirty whole seconds.

Then I decided that I was going to have to handle this one. I could make it out of this black hole on my own. I slid open the cabinet door, cautiously. I leaned forward and sat still. I made no noise. I wasn't even breathing.

Someone else was.

As I froze in complete silence, I could hear a soft rustle. A muted breathing. Someone was in the garage with me! The horror of this thought made the hair on the back of my neck stand on end. These were the days when a man affectionately known as the "Night Stalker" was terrorizing Southern California,

causing my brother and sister and me to sleep in the same room. One night he had shown up in my town of Mission Viejo, and now it was obvious he was in my garage. Why oh why had I decided to hide in the bottomless pit of my dark garage with a serial killer? I'd never be seen again! If only my dad had come to find me, with the light on like it was supposed to be, this never would have happened.

I was still sitting in terrified silence, but I knew I had to make a run for it. I had to scramble for the slit of light that was barely showing under the garage door. That was my beacon of safety. With a deep breath, I plunged out from my hole, crashed into the stacks of vinyls, vaulted the love seat, barked my shin against a toolbox, and in a single bound made it across the floor littered with bikes, grabbed the doorknob of the garage door, and pulled it open, my shaking frame flooded with warm light. From this place of safety, I turned back toward the garage, when from the depths of blackness a figure jumped at me and shouted, "Boo!" It was my dad.

I wet myself.

You know that old saying, "You have nothing to fear but fear itself"? That guy didn't have a dad in the military who terrified him in a dark garage. Sometimes there is something to fear. Sometimes the thing you dread actually happens. Sometimes the worst thing possible is what impossibly happens. But even then you find that God has been holding you the whole time. In fact, the only purpose fear might serve is to cause us to cling to the Father. When we call to him, he takes our fear away.

The reason Caleb didn't need to be afraid when he was learning to ride is that I had him. I was holding him. The reason you don't need to be afraid is that God has you. The Lord is holding you. The Lord loves you.

The Somebody who crafted the universe will never let you go.
And he doesn't get winded.