

THANK YOU for downloading this sample of “Men Don't Run In the Rain,” a timeless reflection on the kind of man they simply don't make anymore.

“Men Don’t Run In the Rain: A Son’s Reflections on Life, Faith, and an Iconic Father” is the latest book by *New York Times* bestselling author and national radio personality Rick Burgess. Rick weaves the colorful and moving story of his larger-than-life father, William “Bill” Burgess, a man who was a football player at Auburn University and later a championship-winning coach at the high school and collegiate level. Rick had a front-row seat to this legendary man who had a way of living and speaking unlike any other.

In “Men Don’t Run In the Rain,” Rick captures his father’s many colorful sayings and stories, taking them a step further by communicating the spiritual truths behind each one. Coach Burgess’ coaching philosophy—shaped by integrity and toughness—is impactful for anyone wanting to live with purpose and faith.

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Men Don't Run In the Rain

*A Son's Reflections on Life, Faith,
and an Iconic Father*

By Rick Burgess

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Men Don't Run In the Rain: A Son's Reflections on Life,
Faith, and an Iconic Father

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This book is dedicated to the Lord Jesus Christ,
the only perfect man the world has ever known.

Contents

Introduction	xiii
Chapter 1: Nobody Cares About Last Year	1
Chapter 2: You Can't Worry About That	11
Chapter 3: Don't Be Stupid	21
Chapter 4: My Way or the Highway	31
Chapter 5: Get Out of the Stands	43
Chapter 6: No Excuses	53
Chapter 7: Confidence vs. Arrogance	61
Chapter 8: Be Perfect	71
Chapter 9: Fear	85
Chapter 10: Can You Go?	101
Chapter 11: Know Where You Are Going	113
Chapter 12: What Is a Man?	123
Chapter 13: A True Original	137
Epilogue	149
Chapter Questions	157
Acknowledgments	171
About the Author	175

Introduction

I don't remember the first time I noticed it, but I can see the image in my mind: my dad methodically walking in the rain as if nothing were happening. He is determined. He isn't picking up his pace. He isn't distracted. He isn't covering his head. He is walking as if no rain is falling on him at all.

William "Bill" Burgess was born on January 26, 1941 in Birmingham, Alabama. Like many babies born in the 40s, Dad was born at home and weighed around nine pounds. Even as a child, he was as thick and strong as the steel that made his hometown famous. He was the first son of William Calvin Burgess (whose friends called him "Shorty" even though he was over six feet tall) and Margaret Burgess. Shorty was blue-collar to the core, working the coal mines and the steel mills and eventually retiring from the pipe shop. He was a laid-back man who was often mistaken for the actor James Garner.

My grandparents were quite the pair. Shorty was one of twelve brothers and sisters who were all characters in their own rights. He loved to fish as much as any man alive and was a committed practical joker. Then there was Margaret Burgess, who, to put it mildly, was much more intense. She was the ultimate matriarch. She was very serious, loved Jesus, and was constantly present at

her local church. There wasn't a committee that did not feature Margaret Burgess, including the choir. My grandparents had an indelible hand in who my dad would become.

My dad was always around a football field. He played football at Jones Valley High School in Birmingham, graduating in 1958. He was a standout high school player, according to not only his family, who told tall tales of his prowess (including the story of Dad breaking another player's helmet) while playing both ways at fullback and linebacker but also to those he faced. A gentleman once told me that he faced Dad in high school and could still remember the intensity of my dad's eyes looking up at him from the fullback position, ready to destroy anyone who dared to stand in his path.

The stories must have had a kernel of truth because Dad would eventually draw the attention of college coaches such as the University of Alabama's legendary coach, Paul "Bear" Bryant, and Auburn University's revered coach, Ralph "Shug" Jordan. Dad chose to play his college football at Auburn, mainly because he loved the outdoors and the draw of a smaller, more rural college suited him. He would play fullback and linebacker for the Tigers from 1958 to 1963.

In August of 1963, my dad married his high school sweetheart and the love of his life, Geynell White. Mom and Dad honeymooned in beautiful Montgomery, Alabama for the weekend before Dad reported to his first-ever coaching job as an assistant to George "Shorty" White at Banks High School in Birmingham the following Monday. (Unlike my grandfather, George White was called "Shorty" because he was actually short.

Only in Alabama could two men have the same nickname for two completely different reasons.)

Dad would not be an assistant long. Banks High School's chief rival, Woodlawn High, came calling to make Dad their head coach at the ripe age of twenty-five. He would coach Woodlawn High School from 1966 to 1970. But in 1970, the Superintendent of Oxford High School in Oxford, Alabama, asked Shorty White who Alabama's best young football coach was. Coach White quickly replied, "Bill Burgess." Oxford High School offered my dad the head coach and athletic director job, and Dad gathered up his wife and two little boys and headed east to raise his family in Oxford. (Dad and Mom would add a daughter during their time in Oxford, rounding out the young family.)

Dad coached at Oxford High from 1971 to 1985 until Jacksonville State University offered him the head coach position, which he accepted. He would go on to coach the JSU Gamecocks from 1985 to 1997, reaching the postseason multiple times and winning Jacksonville's only national championship in 1992.

Bill Burgess has been inducted into the Division II College Football Hall of Fame, the Gulf South Conference Hall of Fame, the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame, the Jacksonville State Hall of Fame, the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame, and the Alabama High School Hall of Fame. He coached various conference championships both in college and high school. Over the years, I have only ever met two types of people: those influenced by Bill Burgess and those who never met him.

From my first memory of him to the day he died, my dad was a man of steel. Six feet of nothing but hard-nosed strength. My siblings and I were the only people that could say, “My dad can beat up your dad,” and it would almost be universally true. Dad coached football for thirty-five years at both the high school and college level. Dad was old school all the way. I have said this many times, but if my dad were coaching today, he would be in jail!

When you played for Coach Bill Burgess, you followed a set of expectations that might as well have been set in stone. You had a sensible haircut. You wore your helmet the entire game, whether on the field or on the sidelines. There were no piercings. You tucked your jersey into your pants and came onto the field in a straight line. There was no dancing in the end zone, and you must play physical football on the field. These rules, and others like them, set the tone for life on and off the field.

It wasn’t just the rules that made my dad the man he was. His appearance was straight out of central casting. What did Dad look like? Picture a football field in the heart of Alabama on a hot August day. The temperature is about ninety-nine degrees with what feels like 100% humidity. There, in the middle of the field, stands a coach. On his head is a ballcap with the team logo on the front. (Please never suggest he wear a visor.) He is wearing a collared coach’s shirt with the team logo embroidered on the left breast. (You will never see him in a suit and tie, a sweatshirt, or a T-shirt, and please never ever suggest a pullover.) He does not wear sweatpants but instead is perpetually decked out in the unforgettable (and unforgettably tight) coach’s shorts. No matter the temperature, even on those rare occasions, maybe twice a season, when the Alabama temperature would dip to the low forties,

the shorts remained. The brand of the shorts was “Bike,” and my dad may have been the sole reason they were in business. He is clad in black coach’s shoes and has white tube socks pulled up over his legendary massive calves. He will wear the same pair until the elastic inevitably gives out and they fall around his ankles.

Dad’s calves were the topic of many conversations. Players would marvel and ask, “How did Coach get such massive calves?” Were they merely genetic, or were they earned? Were they a product of the thousands of stadium steps he ran and made his teams run over the years? Were they a result of the many years of playing fullback and linebacker? The calves took on their own legendary status. Stories were told, including one where a snake bit Dad in the calf, only to be unable to penetrate the skin. One version of the story had the snake’s teeth breaking.

The outfit was finished off with the ultimate coaching accessory: the coach’s whistle. Dad would wear it on a string around his neck. The tip of the whistle would have a couple of bands of white athletic tape stained with tobacco juice. If there was one thing Dad was sure of, it was that white athletic tape could solve any problem. He carried a roll with him at all times. There wasn’t an injury or equipment malfunction that athletic tape couldn’t fix.

That is the picture of my dad doing what he did best: coaching.

My dad was old school in every way, especially his overall coaching philosophy. Dad loved defense. He truly believed that the best athletes should play defense and that each should be one of the eleven meanest people on the team. He believed that the offense should never consider running anything other than the

triple option; to suggest otherwise was to show your stupidity. (If you didn't like the triple option, you were likely one of those who thought the forward pass was a good idea.) Dad was a gifted leader and the type of man admired by other men. He was the type of man other men followed.

I don't recall Bill Burgess being afraid of anyone or anything. He always thought he could take anyone. One of my favorite stories about my dad happened when I called him on his seventy-seventh birthday. It went about like this:

ME: Hey, Pop! Happy Birthday!

DAD: Which one is this?

ME: It's Rick, Dad. I wanted to call and wish you a happy birthday—seventy-seven years old!

DAD: Is Muhammad Ali still alive?

ME: What?

DAD: Is Muhammad Ali still alive?

ME: No, Dad. Muhammad Ali passed away a couple of years ago.

DAD: OK, then, that settles it. There ain't a seventy-seven-year-old man alive who can whip me!

And there you have it. That's Bill Burgess in a nutshell. He played college football as linebacker/fullback at Auburn University for the legendary coach Ralph "Shug" Jordan. People still send me his SEC trading card from the 1950s. My favorite part is the back. Where other cards listed the player's stats, the only thing on the back of Dad's card is the phrase, "He loved contact." That is all you need to know about the intensity he brought to every day of his life. The only opponent that ever managed to slow him down was Alzheimer's. It proved to be his toughest challenge.

My dad taught me so much. To many, he was "Coach." But to my siblings and me, he was "Dad." I loved him dearly and am thankful for his influence on me. He gave me the gift of a work ethic. He taught me how to protect and love my wife by modeling a single-minded devotion to my mother. He taught me not to try to live vicariously through my children, as so many men are prone to do, and to let them find their own dreams and aspirations. He taught me to tell stories and enjoy a loud, hardy laugh. He gave me an appreciation for the outdoors and what a gift from God it was to just be in the woods, listening to the sounds of creation. He taught me that the people who think I am awful and those who think I am great are both wrong. Dad would tell me not to listen to either group. He said you are somewhere in the middle of the two opinions.

Dad won championships. But when Jacksonville State University decided to move up a division, the legendary coach with the ballcap and Bike shorts would eventually be patted on the back, thanked for the contribution, and let go. Like he always did, Dad once again kept everything in perspective. Years later, I remember we were back on the field, this time as a family, when

the school was naming the field after him. This was a huge honor, even though Dad always believed that head coaches usually got too much credit and too much blame. Dad was all about the proper balance.

Our family was on the field together as Dad received this wonderful honor. In front of a packed stadium, the announcer had begun the presentation. I was standing next to Dad, and as the announcer was drawing everyone's attention to the field, Dad leaned over to me and said, "Remember, Son, the people who will one day want to name the field after you are the same ones who fired you." And then he smiled at me and looked forward. Classic Bill Burgess.

He was like no other man I have ever known. Everywhere I go, I run into men who tell me Dad was the most influential man in their lives. His legacy lives on in the lives of so many men, but this book is about how he impacted *my* life. Far too many men have fathers who either weren't there at all or were passive or apathetic. I encounter men all the time in the course of my ministry whose fathers were either destructive forces or were completely absent. While I can imagine what their lives must have been like, I cannot relate. My father shaped my life and my faith.

This book is my attempt to share my father's lessons with the world, as a testimony to him and as a way of passing along his lessons to others. Along the way, I will weave in where I see Dad's character and his lessons rooted in the Bible. That is what made his lessons lasting. They were built on the sound principles of God's Word. That is what makes them timeless.

I have much to say, and I appreciate you joining me on this journey. But before we move on, let's return to my dad, walking through a parking lot in the rain. I am not sure how old I would have been, but my guess is that I was around thirteen years old. I found myself alongside my dad, keeping up with him as we walked through a downpour. Wanting to get out of the rain, I started to run for the truck until my dad's massive forearm stopped me dead in my tracks.

I looked up at the rain dripping off the bill of his ever-present cap, which featured the logo of the team he was coaching at the time. I looked into those eyes that never showed even a speck of fear and heard these words: "Son, men don't run in the rain." And there it was—another timeless lesson in a life full of them.

On page 157, you will find a list of optional application questions that allow an individual or a small group to process the truths covered in the chapters. To get more out of the spiritual concepts discussed in each chapter, turn to page 158 and work through the questions to consider how to apply the truths to your life.