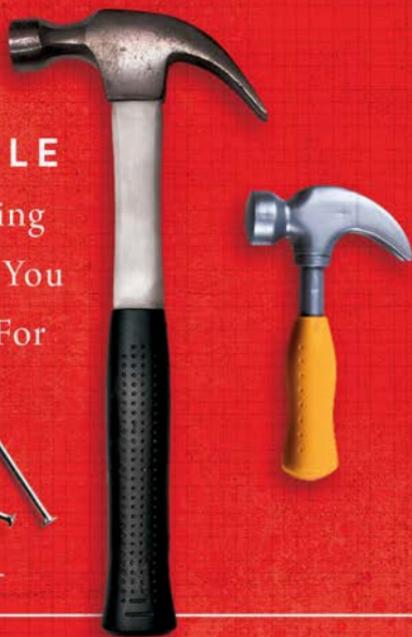

THE FAMILY

BUSINESS

—

A PARABLE
about Stepping
Into the Life You
Were Made For

—



GEOFF PETERS

A must-read for people deciding whether to step into the Father's business with their full lives, time, passions, and finances.

LAWRENCE TONG, international director, Operation Mobilisation

An enjoyable and discussable read; this book can help make Kingdom business *the* business of your home, group, church—and life.

EMILY SARMIENTO, president and CEO, Tearfund USA

This easy-to-read and engaging book acts as a great reminder of the invitation from Jesus to His followers to engage in the work of His father in every context we find ourselves in!

REVEREND NODDY SHARMA, head of church, schools and youth engagement, World Vision Australia

The Family Business invites readers into important questions and leads us to think about our lives—and our potential—with very readable and relatable insight.

REV. DR. PATRICK ODEN, director of academic integration and affiliate professor of theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

Get ready to be drawn in. This is a beautiful masterpiece you won't want to miss.

SHERRY SURRATT, geographical vice president of North America, OneHope

Mark Twain once said, “The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why.” A quick and inspiring read, *The Family Business* by Geoff Peters is the kind of resource that can help you find your *why*. I wish I had this book when my career and family were just starting.

BARRY LANDIS, chairman and cofounder, Ribbow Media Group, and executive director, The Briner Institute

Using a well-told, engaging story, Geoff paints a great picture of God’s intent for humanity—to join Him in His Kingdom work on earth.

ANDREW SCOTT, president and CEO, Operation Mobilization USA, and author of *Scatter: Go Therefore and Take Your Job with You*

The Family Business is a tale of spiritual legacy, personal volition, and future vision—timely for any believer who takes seriously the empowerment and equipping of the emerging generations.

REVEREND LISA PAK, global strategy director, Finishing the Task

Geoff Peters gives us a parable that helps us recognize how powerful and personal the reality of our Kingdom mission is.

REV. DR. GLENN PACKIAM, associate senior pastor, New Life Church, and author of *Blessed Broken Given*

Geoff Peters's parable of a family business is an apt metaphor. May we children of the good, good Father find ourselves in who He says we are and in the good works He prepared in advance for us to do.

TIM CROUCH, vice president for alliance missions, The Christian and Missionary Alliance

Geoff's story is a parable for our time, reminding us of the simplicity and power that come as we reflect on God's original design for His people.

JONATHAN THIESSEN, cofounder, Scatter Global

Geoff has written a modern-day parable that will make you sit down and rethink where you are as a person and where we are as a church toward God's family business.

EWOUT VAN OOSTEN, international director, TeenStreet

Geoff harnesses the power of fiction to help believers peel back the layers of their God-given purposes in this world.

LESA BROWN, founder and executive director, Awaken Creative Institute

We all know that we are called to be on mission with God, but most of the time we can't imagine what that looks like. If you need to be shown rather than told, then this story is for you!

JON HIRST, chief innovation officer at SIL and cofounder of Generous Mind

Parables are thought-provoking stories with intent, not just mindless entertainment. Sometimes they are life-changing. *The Family Business* is a well-written and engaging tale for a time such as this.

JAMES FERRIER, director of international operations, Community Bible Study

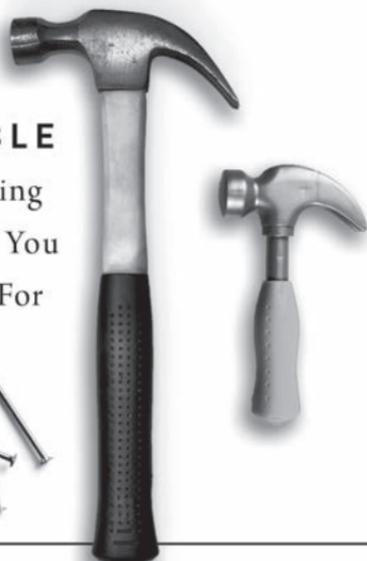
The Family Business offers a thought-provoking challenge to examine our lives to ensure we are directing our own strengths, gifts, and talents to do exactly what God made us to do.

GREG BAIRD, executive director, Outside the Bowl

The Family Business

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G E O F F P E T E R S



Tyndale House Publishers
Carol Stream, Illinois

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The Family Business: A Parable about Stepping Into the Life You Were Made For

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A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN 978-1-4964-6071-4

Printed in the United States of America

27 26 25 24 23 22 21
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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CHAPTER I

THE THREE OF US

JESSE LEANED ON THE CEDAR RAILING, gazing out over the rolling hills. Soft, glimmering rays of sunshine filtered through the early morning mist as a gray catbird swooped from the woodland beyond, its staccato whistles and squeaks forming a curious, melodious song. A smile formed on Jesse's face as he took in the wondrous beauty. He was so in the moment he hadn't noticed Holly was refilling his coffee cup.

"Glorious day, isn't it?" she asked softly.

"It is," Jesse agreed. "Is everything ready for the kids?"

"Yes." Holly nodded, her eyes brightening in excitement. "The beds are made and the bathrooms all have

clean towels. I will be cooking today. Roast pork with applesauce for dinner! Is there anything else you'd like me to do?"

"Good . . . that's good," said Jesse. "I'll be in my office today, getting the paperwork ready. I've got to admit," he shared, "I'm a little nervous, Holly. I really want the kids to join me."

"I know that would make you very proud," Holly said, folding a blanket and draping it over the Adirondack chair. "But Jesse, you know that ultimately it's their choice. You've raised five kids who are as unique as can be, and they all love you dearly. They've always known in their hearts that this time would come, and a decision would be theirs to make. Who knows?" she suggested with a smile. "Your children may surprise you this weekend."

Jesse chuckled softly and walked back toward the house. "At my age, the excitement might just kill me." Stepping inside, he grabbed the handle of the door to steady himself as he looked back, adding, "Hey, Holly, if you made more coffee, I'm sure I'd enjoy another cup in a while."

Jesse walked toward his office, his posture strong and upright, not the least bit hunched with age. He entered

his sun-filled study and took a deep breath. The scent of the floor-to-ceiling mahogany shelves and well-worn pages of his favorite books never ceased to please him.

Behind Jesse's commanding desk he stood for a moment, gazing at the room where he now spent so much of his time. He settled into his worn leather chair, the soft patina earned from years of faithful service. As he leaned back, he recalled the day he bought it. It was after his small hardware store in Ames had successfully turned a profit for one whole year. Jesse was young at the time, and the chair had been a big purchase for him. But in his mind, he figured he spent as much time sitting in his office with his ledger as he did stocking shelves and talking with customers, so he probably should have a proper chair to sit in while he did his bookkeeping.

In the beginning, Jesse created the hardware store so local farmers and families wouldn't have to make the trip from Ames to Des Moines when all they needed were a couple of bolts or blade-sharpening services. Jesse's farming family had raised him to work hard, and he didn't know any other way of life. He took that work ethic and poured it into Jesse's Hardware.

Over the decades, Jesse grew the small business into

a franchise that sprouted stores across the United States. He fondly touched the thick vellum map on his desk that marked all the locations of his stores. The edges of the map were slightly furled, and there were a few coffee stains in spots, but for the most part, the map was a clean representation of what Jesse had built. As he traced his fingers over each hardware store location, he thought about the owners who bought into the company, the employees who worked there, and the customers they served each day. Yes, each one of these stores and its people were a source of joy and pride for Jesse. His heart swelled as the names, faces, and stories of the Jesse's Hardware family rolled through his mind. Jesse was proud of what he had created, and he felt a deep love for everyone in the company.

Of course, he couldn't help but notice the empty spots on the map too. While his stores certainly spread across a great deal of land, there were gaps—in fact, more gaps than he had hoped to have at this stage. His fingertips wandered over the towns and cities that were not marked by a Jesse's Hardware hammer, and he couldn't help but feel sadness. These areas were holes in his master plan, and he needed help.

Jesse's vision for the future of his organization had

always been dependent on the participation of his children. His dream from the beginning, even before they were born, had been to involve his entire family in the business, full-time. Jesse was proud of each one of his children and could clearly see how their unique passions, skills, and personalities could be highly effective in his organization.

He also knew his vision would not be achieved at its current pace. Jesse needed to activate the next generation. The time had come for him to try to encourage his kids to join him.

It was Memorial Day weekend, and Jesse had invited all five of his children to come stay at the family estate for the three-day holiday. Jesse's housekeeper and faithful right hand, Holly, had been flitting around the house for weeks, making lists, shopping, baking cookies and muffins for the freezer, and doing everything she could to contain her building excitement.

"Time for a warm-up!" Holly sang out as she walked across Jesse's study with the coffee pot. "Would you like to go for a walk this morning? Beautiful day."

"Thank you, Holly, but I've got quite a bit to do here," said Jesse. "Maybe after lunch."

Holly refilled Jesse's coffee. "All right, but don't

forget to put your feet up if you're reading," she cautioned. "It helps the circulation in your legs."

As Holly returned to the kitchen with almost a skip in her step, Jesse chuckled, "Yes, yes, Miss H, I know."

Holly had been part of Jesse's family for about thirty years. In fact, she was in-residence, and had lived on the family estate for her entire adult working life. The love and admiration Jesse felt for Miss H—the name his children had coined for her when they were teenagers—ran deep. She was part of the fabric of his family.

As Jesse reclined in his chair, putting his feet up on the toadstool cushion under his desk, he recalled his first meeting with Holly at the Book Nook coffee shop back in 1990. Jesse had arrived in the late afternoon, and the coffee shop was nearly empty. The students from nearby Drake University were headed back to their dorms, backpacks in tow, and the professors were hours past their last cup of caffeine. As Jesse approached the front counter, he saw Holly sitting on the counter-top reading a yellowed copy of *Paradise Lost* by John Milton. Jesse's sudden presence jolted her. She jumped down, offered an apology, and asked Jesse what she could get him. Jesse asked about Milton, and conversation followed as she poured his black coffee. "The

story . . . it's everything!" gushed Holly. "There's good and evil, there's knowledge and power, there's rebellion and redemption. It's true to life." She continued, "Sure, it's hard to read, but it's so worth it."

Over the next hour, Jesse found out that Holly had been an English major at Drake. She knew she wanted to be a writer, but she also had to eat and make rent. So the job at the Book Nook was perfect. She could make enough to pay for a room near campus, and she had enough time to write. Plus, she had bottomless cups of free coffee and access to the bakery case.

When Jesse asked Holly what she liked to write, she blushed. "It's easy for me to wrap myself in other people's stories. I feel like that's my calling. It's not about me; it's about the beauty and pain that surrounds me . . . that surrounds us all."

As Jesse finished his coffee, he said to Holly, "My wife and I have five kids and could sure use some help around the house. We live just outside of Ames. I know you make good coffee, and I assume you know how to do laundry. If you're interested in housekeeping, we offer room and board, and I'll double what you make hourly here. I would just ask that you keep up your writing. You've got to pay attention to your gifts and use

them. Too many people today lose sight of what they've got, or they get too busy to care. I don't want that to happen to you."

The very next week, Holly turned up at Jesse's family estate with two small suitcases and a leather satchel slung over her shoulder. She was twenty-three. Days became weeks, which became years. Time carried on, and Holly earned a beloved place within Jesse's family. She became fast friends with his wife, Emma, and doted on the kids like they were her own. When she wasn't cooking or cleaning or playing quick games of Uno with whoever was begging for attention, Holly could be found in a small study Jesse created for her up in the attic. It was a warm, cozy spot with a picture window overlooking the sweeping grounds of the family home and the woodland forest beyond. Soft, moss-green carpet and walls painted in a buttery shade made the space a writing sanctuary, a soothing spot with just the right lighting for Holly to clear her mind and write.

Over the years, Holly was prolific at her writing desk. Each time she completed a manuscript, she tied it up carefully with a white grosgrain ribbon, making a neat bow on top. The shelves in Holly's attic were lined with these ornate paper stacks, representing a slow but steady

manifestation of her life's work. Of course, she would tell you it was not her writing that was important; it was the stories themselves that carried importance.

As a natural observer—a witness—of humanity, Holly would tell you it was Jesse and Emma who were doing the vital stuff of life. She wouldn't even be there without them! In her mind, she was just the housekeeper who cared for the children and worked to keep the family safe. Writing was her way of keeping everything straight.

Over the years, as it goes with families, the kids moved out one by one, on a quest to start their own lives. It started with Evie, Jesse and Emma's oldest child. Evie was a classic firstborn, headstrong and smart. After graduating at the top of her high school class, she headed for Drake University, Holly's alma mater, the month before her eighteenth birthday. Her debate skills were finely tuned at that point (a fact Jesse and Emma could attest to), and she thought perhaps a law degree would be in her future.

The following year Dave left. With just his guitar case, a canvas backpack, and a plaid bucket hat, Dave was off, headed to the University of Michigan in pursuit of a future in psychology.

Next Zach became an Iowa State Cyclone. Jesse and Emma's funny middle child was content to stay close, not straying beyond the perceived safety and comfort of Ames and the family home.

Becca followed her big brother to Iowa State, claiming their School of Education was the strongest in the Midwest. Of course, everyone in the family knew she just wanted to be close to Zach.

And finally, Mo—the baby of the family who had been just four years old when Holly moved in—packed his percussion instruments, skateboard, and oversize rucksack into his Camry in late August 2004, headed for Colorado State University. Mo's little blue Toyota sped down the tree-lined driveway, and Jesse, Emma, and Holly stared at the dust cloud long after the car was gone.

With each child's departure, those left behind responded a little differently. Jesse took each of his children into his arms, embracing them in a way that both protected them and gave them the confidence to know they were being released into the world. Emma, on the other hand, helped them pack their bags, talking with them about their hopes and fears, reassuring them in moments of confusion, and hiding little gifts in their

luggage to make sure they remembered just how loved they were. As for Holly, she stood at a distance, and through her tears and love and well wishes, sent a little bit of her heart with them for the journey.

The first few weeks after Mo left home, it was business as usual for Jesse. He was still serving as CEO of his company and had his sights set on ambitious growth. He had no plans to slow down. Emma continued with her charities and community outreach activities. She was the type of person who stowed bags in her car filled with cash and essentials for homeless people. Beyond handing out the bags, Emma would often buy people lunch so they could sit together, share a meal, and talk. Emma always made time for people—even when she didn't appear to have much time to give. She was a lover of everyone, and now, with the kids gone, she had more time than ever to reveal her true nature.

On the other hand, Holly wasn't feeling quite as confident with her new role. Over coffee one morning, Emma broached the tender subject. "Life isn't quite what it used to be, is it?" she asked with a wistful smile. "But Holly, my dear, this is a great gift. We've got to use the time we have, not focus on the past. The open road is ahead!" Emma's attempt to cheer her along wasn't lost

on Holly. She was grateful for Emma's loving spirit and encouragement.

The following weeks and months brought a new rhythm to the estate. Emma and Holly lived and worked more fluidly than ever before. When Holly was dusting the bookshelves in Jesse's office, Emma would jingle a bell playfully in the doorway, beckoning Holly to stop and sit with her for tea and cookies. And when Emma was packing canned goods for the local food pantry, Holly would turn on ABBA so she could tap and twirl with jars of sliced peaches in her hands.

The two women grew closer as time went on. Within months of Mo's departure, the energy and passion that once had been focused on the children was now directed outwardly, further than before. The women both glowed, each in her own way, as they collectively embraced this new chapter in their lives. Despite his relentless schedule running the business, even Jesse noticed the change in the household. "Whatever you two are cooking up all day long," Jesse would say, "keep doing it. Our home is alive!"

Emma's passion to love and serve others was not just swelling, it was spilling out over the edges of her life. She brought Holly along to help her love and care for

the elderly, the sick, and the poor. When Emma spoke to someone who was hurting, the connection was palpable. People felt loved and understood by Emma. And they felt at peace with Holly. Together, the two were a dynamic force for good in the community.

Their relationship grew sweeter over time too. A few times a week, Emma would leave handwritten notes under Holly's door, proclaiming, "Today is a writing day! Do what you were made to do!" So when Holly heard the rustle of paper sliding under her door as the sun peeked through the edges of her window shade, a smile would spread across her face.

The years went by, and while the big, bustling family gathered for all the major holidays, birthday celebrations, and college graduations dotted throughout the calendar, the days in between were fairly quiet for the trio—quiet yet purposeful.

In early January 2018, Emma and Holly sat down to plan a party. Jesse would be turning seventy in March, and they wanted to throw a huge celebration, inviting the whole family and all of their friends. Over the cold, dark weeks that followed, the spirits of the women were buoyed by the party. There were invitations and menus

to plan, decorations to design, and waitstaff to organize. It would be a huge gala for Jesse.

As February neared, Holly couldn't help but notice Emma was tired. Initially she chalked it up to Emma's faithful community work combined with preparations for Jesse's birthday party, but her exhaustion seemed to be progressing quite rapidly. Her rosy glow was fading, and as the three sat around the table for dinner, Emma appeared to be eating less and less. Holly saw her once energetic friend frequently drawn to her easy chair, gazing out the window with a painfully furrowed brow, a mohair blanket pulled up to her chin.

Holly tried to encourage Emma to visit a doctor. "Something's not right," Holly urged. "Please call and make an appointment?"

After weeks of prompts and nudges, Emma finally made an appointment. "I'll go with you," Holly said, touching her arm. Emma smiled appreciatively at her friend.

As they walked to the front door of the clinic, Holly reached for Emma's hand. "I'm here," she said. "I'm always here for you. You know that, don't you?"

Emma nodded.

Once inside, the nurse called Emma's name. The

two women walked together, hand in hand, toward the examination room. After a brief conversation with the doctor, a blood test, and an endoscopic ultrasound, the doctor told Emma she could go home. “We will call you when we have your results,” he assured her.

The drive home was quiet. As Holly gripped the wheel, Emma looked out the window at the passing cornfields, scattered with old stalks and mounds of melting snow. She knew in her heart this would be her last winter. She also knew she was at peace with it. She had lived a good life and tried to love everyone she could. This life was finite, and her time had come. Hopefully the seeds she had planted in those she loved would grow and flourish.

Days later, Emma received a call. The doctor said he was sad to report it was stage 4 pancreatic cancer. Emma hung up the phone and shared the news with Jesse and Holly. Jesse pulled Emma close, his rough weathered hands gently reassuring her without the need for words. Holly placed her hands on Emma’s small shoulders and rested her head on Emma’s back as they all wept. After a few moments, Emma gathered herself, brushed her hands down the front of her skirt, and wiped the tears from her face. “This is what’s

meant to be,” she said. “I know that. And before I die, I still have things to do.”

Emma didn't stop her community outreach activities in the coming weeks, and she proudly stood beside Jesse on the night of his seventieth birthday party. The whole family was there, along with many of their lifelong friends and some of Jesse's dearest employees. Emma beamed with pride as she looked out at everyone who had gathered there that evening. This collective group was so unique, so diverse, and yet in spite of their differences, they were united by a single thread that Jesse had started long, long ago. It was a thread of many strands that connected Emma and Holly, the children, and all of their friends and associates. Yes, they had all been carefully, artfully, lovingly woven together into this single grand tapestry.

That night, Emma could have gone on forever. She tried to cajole her friends and family to stay and have one more glass of champagne, dance to one more song, or eat one last shrimp toast, but by midnight the last coats had been taken from the closet, and the final car pulled away.

In mid-April, before the snowdrops poked their white heads through spring's final patches of snow,

Emma slipped away. Her final days had been filled with anguish as blood from her pancreas stained the corners of her mouth and marked her crisp, white sheets. The children took turns weeping mournfully as they sat with their mother for what would surely be the last time. Between visits, Holly read to Emma, whispering prayers of strength into her ear. Jesse stood in the doorway, his face wracked with pain.

After Emma took her last breath, Holly and Jesse looked at one another, flooded with a mix of grief and relief. Emma would no longer have to suffer. It was finished.