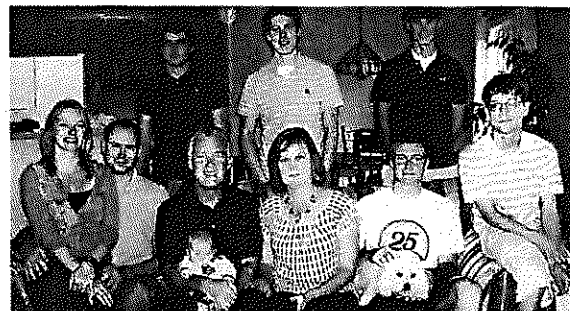


DEAR DEREK

A letter to my son as he goes off to college.

BY COACH JAY MILLS



The Mills Family - Back row (L to R): Chris, Josh, and Jared. Front Row (L to R): Stacey Jo and Ryan Tié, Jay (with granddaughter Evelyn), Kim, Derek (with dog Noah), and David.

Dear Derek,

Today is the day you leave for college. As I pen this letter, I am confident that you are still asleep. I'm up early again, as usual, but my thoughts are on you, and I felt led to write them down.

As you take this next step on your journey I wanted to share some insights that might assist you along the way. I've heard it said that life is to be learned backwards and lived forward. My goal is to be transparent and share what I've learned through both my successes and failures. It is the desire of my heart, son, that you realize all your dreams as you live life forward.

In no particular order...

1. Every mistake I've made has come when I departed from God's Word. Successes and failures will come and go; it's regrets you don't want to have. Regrets are when you could have done something differently and you didn't. Failures are when you did your best and came up short. Stay close to God—you'll never regret it.

2. Think positively (Philippians 4:8). This must be practiced daily. Don't dwell on the inevitable negatives. One technique is to shout it out. It's impossible to shout (speak) a word and think something else at the same time (Romans 12:2).

3. Mistakes: They only become failures if you repeat them. If you learn from them, they become experiences. Forgive yourself (God did) and move forward.

4. Choose your core values, and, once you do, choose your priorities. You have to know what you stand for and where the boundary line is before temptation comes—and it will come in many forms. You must also know your priorities so that when it comes time to make a decision, you have a basis for making a good one, or, if there are competing interests, you can choose the higher. A boat without a motor or rudder rarely drifts where you want it to go; you must guide and power it.

5. Collect experiences, not possessions. Possessions fade, break, get lost or go out of style. Experiences last forever. Similarly, pursue eternal rather than earthly rewards. The former is of infinite worth; the latter is short-lived.

6. Obey authority. The only exception is if the authority asks you to do something that conflicts with God's Word. God places us under earthly authority to train us to obey Him. The true test of obedience is when you do not agree with them or the authority is harsh. But it doesn't matter; you'll still be held accountable for your submission or lack thereof (1 Peter 2:18).

7. You never get a second chance to make a first impression. Don't underestimate eye contact and a firm handshake.

8. Happiness is different than joy. It is temporal and based on circumstances. If you focus on happiness, which is external, you'll be affected by everything and everyone. Instead, focus on joy, which comes from within. It is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), and it insulates you from the effects of the world.

9. Problems/Difficulties: When handled the correct way, these will develop your character, bring about maturity, and build

your self-esteem. One mistake your generation makes is always looking to be happy. It's a short-sighted outlook that causes them to avoid and quit rather than persevere. Nothing of value can be achieved unless someone is committed to seeing it through. Obstacles are inevitable; the alternative is boredom. No test = No testimony (James 1:2-4). Rarely will God remove you from a difficult circumstance. He will, however, equip you to persevere through it. Instead of asking Him to get you out of it, praise Him and ask Him to teach you while in the circumstance. He will exceed your expectations.

10. It's about Him, not you. You have passions (e.g. golf), and when you focus on Him, He promises to give you the desires of your heart (Psalm 37:4). If you make it about you, He will, in His mercy, do something to get your attention and remind you that He comes first. Remember, a passion does not define who you are. Whether you succeed or fail, it is only what you do. Who you are is the purpose.

Derek, these are just a few of my thoughts. They represent the old saying, "If I knew back then what I know now..." and they are part of a game plan for life. As I tell my team, most games are lost rather than won. I hope these thoughts will help guide you and that I'm around to serve as a dependable counselor a long time.

I love you. I'm proud of you. Now, go take on the day!

Dad

This letter is part of an original, which Mills wrote to his son Derek last fall. To read the full version of "Dear Derek," which includes six additional points, go to sharingthevictory.com.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Coach Jay Mills is entering his ninth season as the head football coach at Charleston Southern University. After taking over the program in 2003, Mills turned the 1-11 Buccaneers into Big South Conference champions in only three seasons.

Also the 2005 Conference Coach of the Year, Mills has a rich history with FCA. His involvement began in high school as the son of two Huddle Coaches. He and his three brothers all participated in Huddles and attended FCA Camps, and now, as a coach, Mills continues to engage in Huddles, events and studies. He cites the FCA ministry as the source of many lasting friendships and great spiritual encouragement.

Mills and his wife, Kimberly, have six children—Stacey Jo, Josh, Jared, Chris, Derek and David—and one son-in-law, Ryan Tié. They also recently welcomed their first granddaughter, Evelyn Tié.

