

[On Gender and Refusing to Disclose It](#)

There was a storm of controversy recently (June 7, 2011) over a Toronto couple's [announcement](#) that they were not disclosing the sex of their now 4-month-old baby. They "believe they are giving their children the freedom to choose who they want to be, unconstrained by social norms about males and females." Not only are they raising their child Storm to be genderless, but they decided not to tell the world—and the world did not like that one bit.

The mother, Kathy Witterick, writes, "When the baby comes out, even the people who love you the most and know you so intimately, the first question they ask is, 'Is it a girl or a boy?' If you really want to get to know someone, you don't ask what's between their legs." But genitals are only one indication of sex; gender-bound brain structures and chromosomes also delineate the fact that we live in a boy/girl world. And the way God set things up—to maintain the boy/girl distinction—you don't have to ask what's between someone's legs because there are plenty of other signs far less intimate.

Ms. Witterick and her husband, David Stocker, hold a loose ideology about gender, which they are encouraging in Storm's brothers, Jazz (five years old) and Kio (two). Jazz loves traditionally girly things like pink and purple, and chooses to wear his hair long in braids, which regularly invites people to assume he's a girl. His parents give him total freedom in how he presents himself.

"It is true that my oldest son Jazz does not have a traditional notion of what boys should wear, look like or do. It is also true that we believe our children should have the right to choose their clothes and hairstyle. Jazz has a strong sense of being a boy, and he understands that his choices to wear pink and have long hair are not always acceptable to his community. He chooses freely to do them anyway, because he also has been taught to respect difference, love himself and navigate the world in a way that is true to his own voice."

This is a five-year-old boy. How free is he, really, to make choices that he "understands" are "not always acceptable to his community"? How much understanding of the nature of the world does a five-year-old have?

Jazz's mom suppresses her natural instincts in order to parent ideologically:

"In my heart of hearts, I squirm when my son picks a dress from the rack (won't people tease him?), even though I know from experience and research that the argument that children need a binary gender orthodoxy taught to them in order to feel safe is simply incorrect."

I would suggest that teaching "a binary gender orthodoxy" is not incorrect; it is woven into the very nature of how things are because God made it that way: "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." (Genesis 1:27) When we depart from a biblical explanation and understanding of reality, and we start making it up as we go along, we invite chaos and confusion.

I think she's right to squirm when her son picks a dress from the rack, and not just because people will tease him. The binary nature of gender is part of God's plan for helping us maintain boundaries between things that need to be kept separate. The Old Testament includes a prohibition against cross-dressing (Deuteronomy 22:5) to support the natural distinction between the sexes. Creating confusion by dressing in the other gender's clothes is not consistent with God's intent to maintain separations between things that should not be confused or blurred. Genesis 1 tells us that He

separated the light from the darkness, the waters above from the waters below, the land from the sea. And when he created humans, He created them in two distinctly different types: male and female. Then, in Isaiah 5:20 He said, “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!”

I do understand the frustrations of Storm’s parents concerning society’s too-narrow definitions of boy and girl. (Please see my blog post “[The Gender Spectrum](#).”) Jazz is one of those [emotionally sensitive boys](#) who delight in color, texture, fabrics and vibrancy, and his parents apparently fully support the kind of gifted, creative boy he is, which is great. But when parents fully indulge a boy’s gravitation to pink, and dresses, and long hair, yet he wants other people to know he’s a boy (as Jazz does), there’s some needless confusion going on because of a lack of common-sense boundaries.

There’s another aspect of this philosophy of parenting that is disturbing: the desire for children to discover “their true gender self,” as psychologist Diane Ehrensaft puts it, and to choose what they want to be. Storm’s mama wrote,

“[I]n not telling the gender of my precious baby, I am saying to the world, ‘Please can you just let Storm discover for him/herself what s(he) wants to be?! . . . We’ve decided not to share Storm’s sex for now—a tribute to freedom and choice in place of limitation, a stand up to what the world could become in Storm’s lifetime (a more progressive place? ...)”

There are lots of legitimate choices that children can make for themselves, and exercising those “choosing muscles” develops self-confidence. But some choices are not legitimate: deciding whether or not to brush their teeth, refusing to eat anything but junk foods, discovering their own religious “truths”. . . and choosing their gender, regardless of what their body tells them. From a biblical perspective, God as creator is the one who gets to choose a child’s gender, and His choice is revealed in the first moment of birth: “It’s a boy!” or “It’s a girl!” It is our place as His creations to accept and embrace God’s choice for us, not insist on the personal freedom to define ourselves according to our own limited ways of understanding. That is anarchy. That kind of independence from God is the essence of sin.

I am reminded of the deep wisdom of Proverbs 14:12, “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” Just because something sounds good to us at the time doesn’t mean it will end up well. And this seems especially true of encouraging children to make their own paths without parental limitations.

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/on_gender_and_refusing_to_disclose_it
on June 7, 2011.

[The Gender Spectrum](#)



When I use the term “gender spectrum,” you might think in terms of masculinity on one end and femininity on the other. We hear men being prompted to “get in touch with your feminine side.” (For some reason, women never seem to be exhorted to “get in touch with your masculine side.” Huh.)

But I don’t think that’s the way it works.

In Genesis 1, we are told that “God created them male and female” (Genesis 1:27). I think, rather, that there is one spectrum of masculinity and another spectrum of femininity. I also think that God is the one who chooses where on the spectrum babies are born, according to His design and for His pleasure and glory.

The Femininity Spectrum

I suggest that little girls come into the world at some point on a femininity spectrum. On one end is the girly-girl who comes out of the womb asking for the little flower headband to wear in the hospital nursery, and she keeps on running toward all things frilly and girly. She loves pink, loves to wear dresses and twirl around to “be pretty,” wants to wear nail polish and makeup just like Mommy (or like the other ladies she sees on TV).



Femininity
Spectrum



Girly-girl.....Tomboy



On the other end of the spectrum is the tomboy jockette, who can’t stand wearing dresses, wants to climb trees and play tackle football with the boys. These girls are often gifted athletically and many are natural leaders. When these little girls’ type of femininity is supported and encouraged, they are comfortable in their skin just the way God made them. Wise parents also make sure they wear dresses and “act like a lady” when it’s time to do that—with the promise that when they get home, they can put their jeans or sweats back on and be comfortable.

Sometimes, though, girly-girl types can morph into “mean girls” and inform the jockettes that they’re not good enough as girls, and they can receive the message that it’s not okay to be the kind of girl they are, the kind of girl God chose for them to be because He has a good plan for them. They can grow up not feeling secure in their femininity.

The Masculinity Spectrum

On one end is the rough-and-tumble boy—athletic, noisy, enjoys getting dirty. He bonds to other boys shoulder-to-shoulder, engaging in common activities or tasks, and tends to find face-to-face interaction intimidating.



Masculinity
Spectrum



Rough-and-tumble. Sensitive/creative



On the other end of the spectrum from the *athletic* boy is the *aesthetic* boy: emotionally sensitive, gifted in art, music, theater, dance, or some other kind of art. He usually avoids athletics, getting dirty, and anything having to do with balls coming at him. He bonds eyeball-to-eyeball, connecting to others’ hearts through their eyes the way most girls do, but they are not girls. And then, of course, there is everything in between.

In our culture, we tend to define masculinity in terms of the rough-and-tumble type ONLY, but I don’t think God agrees, since He delights to create so many sensitive boys and those who are a balance between the two. In fact, even as toddlers, they can reveal themselves by responding to another child’s upset by dropping what they’re doing and going over to pat them, soothe them, and attempt to comfort them: “You okay? It’s okay.” This sensitivity is a beautiful thing to behold, but it can get a little boy in trouble. Since we define masculinity so narrowly, it is easy to marginalize and shame the masculinity of the sensitive boy. Especially if his daddy is a rough-and-tumble sort of man who is flummoxed by a little boy who would rather Daddy read to him than throw a football.

If the sensitive boy is affirmed in his type of masculinity, he can grow up to be a phenomenal husband, father, pastor, counselor, artist, musician, dancer—the list goes on. When tomboy girls are loved and accepted by their parents just the way they are, they can grow up to be great moms and teachers and scout leaders, especially of boys. If, however, they are ostracized for the way they are designed, they can burn with the indignity of being “other than.”

It's these sensitive, gifted boys that are most at risk for embracing a gay identity, especially when others wound them by slapping false labels on them, even from a young age: gay, queer, homo, fag. Tomboy girls, especially the ones gifted athletically, are quickly tagged with ugly false labels as well: lez, queer, gay. They can easily think, "What do others know that I don't know? If they say it, it must be true."

But it's *not* true. They're not gay, they're gifted. If only they could be helped to see themselves that way!

Our goal as adults should be to help all children grow into gender-secure, emotionally healthy kids who are glad God made them a boy or a girl, and are comfortable in their own skins just the way God made them. I think it starts with affirming the different kinds of masculinity and femininity. It's ALL good!

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/the_gender_spectrum
on January 4, 2011.

[Mothering Little Men from Mars](#)

One of the greatest privileges of my life—right after saying “yes” to Jesus and “I do” to my husband—has been mothering my two sons, now 20 and 22.

Several years ago, my husband Ray and I started researching gender differences and discovered the truths in John Gray's mega-bestseller, [Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus](#). It didn't take long for us to realize that we didn't have gender-free *children*; we had little men from Mars! And then I started realizing why I sometimes unnecessarily frustrated my kids and why we didn't connect all the time—because I'm from Venus and they're from Mars, and there is a HUGE gender gap between masculine and feminine! John Gray didn't discover it; God created it, with great delight and a big smile on His face.

For example, boys, being male, are wired to be **self-reliant**. They act like they get extra brownie points for doing something on their own. One of my son Curt's first whole sentences was, “**I** do it!” For boys, accepting help is perceived as weakness. For us relationally-oriented ladies, offering and accepting help is a way to make a heart-connection with another person. So when I would say, “Let Mommy help you,” they would be offended and I never knew why. If I could do it over again, I would tell them, “Let's see if you can do it on your own. If it doesn't work, I'll be glad to help.”

One of the most powerful lessons I've learned about mothering boys is that the male mind is linear, life is handled only one piece at a time. This impacts both their thinking and activity.

Males tend to think on one thing at a time. I now know that when my husband or sons are reading, it's not safe to start a conversation until I get their attention and they're looking at me. I used to frustrate the dickens out of my sons on soccer game days when they were dressed in their soccer uniforms, their soccer bags were packed, they had their game face on, and there were 15 minutes

left before we had to leave. And I, being the ever-efficient one, would try to get them to use that time wisely to clean up the living room or fold laundry. They never, ever, cooperated willingly! And now I know why. I'd love to go back and change that part of mothering.

This linear approach also has a major impact on their activity. They are created to **do one thing at a time** before moving on to the next event. If I wanted their attention while they were watching TV, I would have to physically stand in front of the screen to break their attention and have them look at me. I, on the other hand, am a natural multi-tasker, because if mothers couldn't do more than one thing at a time, humanity wouldn't last more than one generation. So I would have conversations with my boys or direct homework while doing the dishes or cooking or a multitude of other things. I finally realized that because my kids can't multi-task, they never believed that I was actually paying attention to them if my hands were busy.

Knowing this, I have learned that when they start to tell me something, I put down whatever I'm doing, turn my body to face them squarely, and give them my full physical attention. It's been wonderful to see the difference; they now *feel* I am truly listening. I've shared this insight with several of my friends, who report that it's made a major difference with the boys in their homes as well. Their girls never gave it a thought, because girls intuitively know you can wash dishes and talk at the same time!

Where girls are more verbal, boys are usually **more physical**. I have a friend who wanted her boys to always move quietly and slowly like girls, and had a "no rough-housing" rule in the house. This is the fast track to killing a boy's heart, because boys were made to wrestle and tumble and be loud. This isn't a design defect. It's the way God was pleased to make them. While it's not good to break lamps, of course, boys need to be able to MOVE while their moms smile and let them be who they were made to be.

Another thing I'd go back and change is trying to pry conversations out of my sons. I didn't understand that females naturally generate three times as many words as males, and we talk to build community and knit hearts together. Boys and **men talk for one reason: to convey facts and information**. If they don't have anything to convey, they don't talk. A wise counselor finally explained to me that if I waited for my sons to initiate conversations on their timetable, I would get what my heart longed for. I also learned that one of my son's love languages is physical touch, and if I would go in at the beginning or the end of the day and silently rub his back, he would often start talking. It's amazing what meaningful conversations can happen at bedtime when the kids are trying to forestall sleep!

John Gray says, and it's my experience as well, that a **man's primary need is to be respected**. It starts when they're very small boys. When a boy's mother shows him respect, especially when it's backed by a father's respect, that fills boys' "respect buckets." Because they are made in the image of God, that alone makes them infinitely valuable and precious and worthy of great respect and dignity. I showed them respect by giving them significant choices, and honoring those choices. It started with choosing their clothes and making various school-related choices, and grew into choices like room colors and what sports they would pursue. I showed them respect by listening to them and not interrupting, by not being sarcastic, and by not saying shaming and condemning things. My son has commented that it's important to remember that kids are "little MEN from Mars," and not talk down to them as inferior beings simply because they are not adults. He is glad we didn't do it, but it really bothers him when he sees grown-ups do it to kids.

One last thing I've learned lately is the importance of supporting and cherishing our children's gender to help them grow into healthy adults. Little **boys need to know that being a boy is a good thing**, and of course the same holds true for girls. After sharing this with a group of mothers

of preschoolers, one friend took her little boy for a walk down to the lake. Along the way she said, "Parker, let's look for frogs and toads. Mommy is so glad God made you a little boy so you could like yucky things like frogs and toads." When they got back to the house, his grandmother asked, "So how was your walk?" and Parker said, "Mommy's glad that I'm a boy because I like yucky things like frogs and toads."

When my first son was born, my mother told me that mothers and sons, and fathers and daughters, have a very special relationship. She was so very right, and I thank the Lord for His good, so very good, gift of my sons.

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This blog post was originally published on February 26, 2002.

[The Mother Heart of God](#)

Two days ago we observed Mother's Day in the US. I think Mother's Day matters to God because mothers matter to God. And I think mothers matter to God beyond their necessity for bringing new life into the world, but because women reflect an aspect of God's heart in ways men cannot.

Every aspect of our femininity, it seems to me, comes from God originally. He made females in His image with the feminine attributes and strengths that come straight from the Father heart of God.

The essence of our femininity is expressed in two main ways: responding and nurturing.

One of the most wonderful promises in God's word says, "Call to Me, and I will answer." He says this multiple times, and multiple ways! God is a responsive God. And it honors and glorifies Him when WE respond—to Him, and to others.

Nurture shares the same root word as nurse. I am fascinated by one of the Old Testament names for God, El Shaddai. El means "strong one," and Shaddai is a form of the word for the breast. El Shaddai means "The strong breasted one. "

El Shaddai is the mother heart . . . of God the Father. It's from the Father we receive a mother's heart.

I acknowledge that Mother's Day is painful for some women, especially those who long to be mothers and aren't. But the heart of a mother isn't about having given birth. It's an attitude of the heart, a desire and willingness to nurture others.

El Shaddai longs to nurture and nurse us, if we'll let Him, and He longs to draw us into an intimate embrace with Him.

I have seen Him bring healing to the hearts of many people as they pressed hard into His breast to receive nurture and comfort. . . and identity. His love is powerful enough to transform a heart that is so riddled with holes that it's like a spaghetti strainer, and when His love functions like Super Glue to plug up the holes, people's hearts are transformed into vessels that can hold His love—as well as people's—instead of draining out. As they receive nursing and nurturing from The Strong Breasted

One, He loves and provides for them. I've watched it happen multiple times.

I am so grateful for the responsive, nurturing "Mother heart of God"!

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/the_mother_heart_of_god

[Listen to Sue's message on this topic given at a Dallas-area church](#)

[The 3rd Grade Transgender Bus Driver](#)

It's back to school time, which usually means parents buy school supplies and start waking kids up earlier in the morning. But one elementary school just sent out a letter informing the parents that the school is welcoming a new family with a transgendered "3rd grade girl."

The letter urges the parents and students to welcome and accept her and treat her the same as any other girl. Not so subtly, the letter also informed parents that the school district does not tolerate discrimination in respect to gender identity and/or expression, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability or religion.

YIKES!!!

My heart absolutely breaks to learn of this. I'm sure the school administrators (and possibly, it's just one person) are patting themselves on the back for being so progressive and politically correct. I can't imagine that they are aware of the pressure this puts on this poor confused little boy, as well as an entire school, to engage in this social experiment.

If a third grader decided brushing his teeth is a stupid waste of time and he wasn't going to do it anymore, responsible parents would never give in to the little tyrant who is completely unable to see the long-term consequences of foolish choices.

If a third grader decided that school itself is a stupid waste of time and he wasn't going anymore, responsible parents wouldn't give in to that misguided tantrum, either.

But when a third grader is so consumed by confusion about being a boy, when his whole life is permeated with the hopeless despair of believing *It's not okay to be me*, and when his parents capitulate to his fantasy, something bigger than mere confusion is going on. This kid is driving the bus of not only his life, but his parents' as well. And just as we would never let third-graders drive a literal bus, it's equally nuts and scary to let them sit at the controls of anyone's life.

When my friend Ricky was four, he decided he wanted to be a horse. His mother wisely did not build a stable in their back yard and feed him hay just because her little boy wanted to be something other than who he was. She said, "No, you're not a horse, you're a human boy." And in time, he grew to accept who he was.

It's politically correct to affirm whatever feelings children have, such as "I'm a boy but I feel like a

girl,” as valid. When school administrators try to get a whole school to indulge the fantasy, it’s only a matter of time before things blow up in their faces, because their rhetoric isn’t powerful enough to disable kids’ baloney detectors. At least some kids’. Telling children to accept a boy as a girl and expecting them to swallow it without thinking is sheer hubris, I think.

“. . . male and female He created them.” Gen. 1:27

Children know that we live in a binary world: boys and girls, male and female. And it is not good, or loving, to indulge the fantasy that one can change the reality God created. Or that He made a mistake in choosing a baby’s gender.

I pray for this confused little boy, that his parents will get him the help for his gender identity disorder now while there’s still lots of hope for help. And I pray for the Christians in that school to be lovingly bold in proclaiming that it’s not in this student’s best interest, or the best interests of the rest of the students, to take make-believe to a scary new level.

And I pray that the Lord will gently pick up this precious, confused little boy from his bus driver’s seat and place him in His lap.

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/the_3rd_grade_transgender_bus_driver on August 18, 2009.

[India’s Missing Girls and the Right to Choose](#)

Rusty Wright and Meg Korpi reveal that female infanticide and feticide in India’s patriarchal culture stir passions for equality and fairness but raise troubling questions. Does favoring a woman’s right to choose logically imply that one supports her right to terminate a fetus simply because it is female?

Last summer, a farmer in southern India discovered a tiny human hand poking from the ground. A two-day-old baby girl had been buried alive. The reason? Much of Indian culture favors males over females, sometimes brutally so. The girl’s grandfather confessed to attempting murder because his family already had too many females; keeping this one would be too costly.

This wasn’t an isolated incident on the subcontinent according to award-winning filmmaker Ashok Prasad. Prasad spoke recently at Stanford University at the U.S. premiere of his BBC documentary “India’s Missing Girls.” Anti-female bias affects Indians rich and poor. Males can perpetuate the family name, bring wealth, and care for elderly parents. A female’s family typically must pay a huge dowry when she weds, often depleting family resources. A popular Hindi aphorism: “Having a girl is to plant a seed in someone else’s garden.”^{1}

Female Infanticide and Feticide

Against odds, this baby survived, but social and financial pressures bring alarming rates of female infanticide and feticide (termination of a fetus). UN figures estimate 750,000 Indian girls are aborted every year.^{2} Demographic studies reveal dramatically growing gender disparity since the 1980’s^{3}; in some regions only 80 baby girls survive for every 100 boys.^{4} Many men cannot find wives.

Financial repercussions are typically cited as the reason for discarding daughters, but the decision is often an economic choice rather than necessity. Greater gender disparity occurs in wealthier states.^{5} These families can better afford the sex determination tests and sex-selective abortions that, according to a report published by the UN Population Fund, are the main contributors to the decreasing proportion of female children.^{6}

Adding to the offensiveness of sex-selective abortion: the fetus must be well-formed (15-18 weeks) before the sex can be detected using ultrasound—the common sex-determination technology. “India’s Missing Girls” includes brief, grisly footage of terminated female fetuses being lifted from a well belonging to a clinic that performed sex-selective abortions. After the discovery, outraged women’s groups protested in the streets; several such clinics were closed down.

The heartening side of the documentary is Sandhya Reddy, who runs a children’s home, cares for abandoned kids, and tries to persuade mothers to keep their daughters or girl fetuses. This angel of mercy brings love, care and opportunity to society’s young rejects.

“India’s Missing Girl’s” poignantly depicts where devaluing women can lead. The Stanford screening’s sponsors included feminist and women’s organizations, but feminists and nonfeminists, liberals and conservatives alike will be moved. An [abbreviated 29-minute version](#) on [YouTube](#) is worth watching, even if only the first 10-minute segment.^{7}

Troubling Questions

To Western sensibilities, killing babies and terminating fetuses solely because of gender is abhorrent. Yet no Hitler masterminds this mass extermination of females. It results from hundreds of thousands of personal decisions.

As the U.S. recognizes 35 years of *Roe v. Wade*, feticide’s increasing contribution to India’s missing girls raises a disturbing dilemma: Doesn’t favoring a woman’s right to free reproductive choice logically require supporting her right to terminate a fetus simply because it is female?

Important worldview questions emerge. Opposing female feticide seems to ascribe some sort of value to the female fetus. Is this value inherent because the fetus is female? If so, wouldn’t equality require that we ascribe similar value to the male fetus because it is male?

Or is the fetus’s value utilitarian, e.g., to ensure female influence in society or sufficient brides? Or is it merely economic—negative for Indian females, positive for males?

An enduring view of the fetus’s value appears in Psalm 139. King David’s worldview recognizes awe-inspiring biological intricacy fashioned by the Divine: You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother’s womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!^{8}

Inherently valuable? Socially useful? Economically consequential? Wonderfully complex? The troubling quandary still haunts: Can opposing female feticide be reconciled with supporting reproductive choice? The question demands a logically consistent answer from every thinking person.

Notes

1. Raekha Prasad and Randeep Ramesh, “India’s missing girls,” *Guardian Unlimited*, February 28, 2007, guardian.co.uk/india/story/0,,2022983,00.html; accessed January 18, 2008
2. Ashok Prasad, “Harsh reality of India’s unwanted girls,” *BBC News*, 22 October 2007,

news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/this_world/7050657.stm; accessed January 18, 2008.

3. Christophe Z. Guilmoto, "Characteristics of sex-ratio imbalance in India, and future scenarios," Report presented at the 4th Asia Pacific Conference on Reproductive Health and Rights, Hyderabad, India, October 29-31, 2007. Published by the United Nations Population Fund

www.unfpa.org/gender/docs/studies/india.pdf; downloaded January 25, 2008.

4. Prasad and Ramesh, loc. cit.

5. Using India's 2001 census data for each state (www.censusindia.gov.in), we found strong negative correlations (-0.5 to -0.7) between various indicators of wealth and female-to-male sex ratios for children under 6.

6. Guilmoto, loc. cit.

7. www.youtube.com/watch?v=gf32d735VgE; accessed January 18, 2008.

8. [Psalm 139:13-14 NLT](#).

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[Christianity: The Best Thing That Ever Happened to Women](#)

Sue Bohlin examines the facts to show us that a Christian, biblical worldview of women lifted them from a status equivalent to dogs to a position a fellow heirs of the grace of God through Jesus Christ. Christianity, accurately applied, fundamentally changed the value and status of women.

The Low Status of Women in Jesus' Day

Some feminists charge that Christianity, the Bible, and the Church are anti-female and horribly oppressive to women. Does God really hate women? Did the apostle Paul disrespect them in his New Testament writings? In this article we'll be looking at why Christianity is the best thing that ever happened to women, with insights from Alvin Schmidt's book *How Christianity Changed the World*.^{1}



"What would be the status of women in the Western world today had Jesus Christ never entered the human arena? One way to answer this question," writes Dr. Schmidt, "is to look at the status of women in most present-day Islamic countries. Here women are still denied many rights that are available to men, and when they appear in public, they must be veiled. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, women are even barred from driving an automobile. Whether in Saudi Arabia or in many other Arab countries where the Islamic religion is adhered to strongly, a man has the right to beat and sexually desert his wife, all with the full support of the Koran. . . .^{2} This command is the polar opposite of what the New Testament says regarding a man's relationship with his wife. Paul told the Christians in Ephesus, 'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself

up for her.’ And he added, ‘He who loves his wife loves himself.’” {3}

Jesus loved women and treated them with great respect and dignity. The New Testament’s teaching on women developed His perspective even more. The value of women that permeates the New Testament isn’t found in the Greco-Roman culture or the cultures of other societies.

In ancient Greece, a respectable woman was not allowed to leave the house unless she was accompanied by a trustworthy male escort. A wife was not permitted to eat or interact with male guests in her husband’s home; she had to retire to her woman’s quarters. Men kept their wives under lock and key, and women had the social status of a slave. Girls were not allowed to go to school, and when they grew up they were not allowed to speak in public. Women were considered inferior to men. The Greek poets equated women with evil. Remember Pandora and her box? Woman was responsible for unleashing evil on the world. {4}

The status of Roman women was also very low. Roman law placed a wife under the absolute control of her husband, who had ownership of her and all her possessions. He could divorce her if she went out in public without a veil. A husband had the power of life and death over his wife, just as he did his children. As with the Greeks, women were not allowed to speak in public. {5}

Jewish women, as well, were barred from public speaking. The oral law prohibited women from reading the Torah out loud. Synagogue worship was segregated, with women never allowed to be heard.

Jesus and Women

Jesus’ treatment of women was very different:

The extremely low status that the Greek, Roman, and Jewish woman had for centuries was radically affected by the appearance of Jesus Christ. His actions and teachings raised the status of women to new heights, often to the consternation and dismay of his friends and enemies. By word and deed, he went against the ancient, taken-for-granted beliefs and practices that defined woman as socially, intellectually, and spiritually inferior.

The humane and respectful way Jesus treated and responded to the Samaritan woman [at the well] (recorded in John 4) may not appear unusual to readers in today’s Western culture. Yet what he did was extremely unusual, even radical. He ignored the Jewish anti-Samaritan prejudices along with prevailing view that saw women as inferior beings. {6}

He started a conversation with her—a Samaritan, a woman—in public. The rabbinic oral law was quite explicit: “He who talks with a woman [in public] brings evil upon himself.” Another rabbinic teaching prominent in Jesus’ day taught, “One is not so much as to greet a woman.” {7} So we can understand why his disciples were amazed to find him talking to a woman in public. Can we even imagine how it must have stunned this woman for the Messiah to reach out to her and offer her living water for her thirsty soul?

Among Jesus’ closest friends were Mary, Martha and Lazarus, who entertained him at their home. “Martha assumed the traditional female role of preparing a meal for Jesus, her guest, while her sister Mary did what only men would do, namely, learn from Jesus’ teachings. Mary was the cultural deviant, but so was Jesus, because he violated the rabbinic law of his day [about speaking to

women].”{8} By teaching Mary spiritual truths, he violated another rabbinic law, which said, “Let the words of the Law [Torah] be burned rather than taught to women. . . . If a man teaches his daughter the law, it is as though he taught her lechery.”{9}

When Lazarus died, Jesus comforted Martha with this promise containing the heart of the Christian gospel: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26) These remarkable words were spoken to a woman! “To teach a woman was bad enough, but Jesus did more than that. He called for a verbal response from Martha. Once more, he went against the socioreligious custom by teaching a woman and by having her publicly respond to him, a man.”{10}

“All three of the Synoptic Gospels note that women followed Jesus, a highly unusual phenomenon in first-century Palestine. . . . This behavior may not seem unusual today, but in Jesus’ day it was highly unusual. Scholars note that in the prevailing culture only prostitutes and women of very low repute would follow a man without a male escort.”{11} These women were not groupies; some of them provided financial support for Jesus and the apostles (Luke 8:3).

The first people Jesus chose to appear to after his resurrection were women; not only that, but he instructed them to tell his disciples that he was alive (Matt. 28, John 20). In a culture where a woman’s testimony was worthless because she was worthless, Jesus elevated the value of women beyond anything the world had seen.

Paul, Peter, and Women

Jesus gave women status and respect equal to men. Not only did he break with the anti-female culture of his era, but he set a standard for Christ-followers. Peter and Paul both rose to the challenge in what they wrote in the New Testament.

In a culture that feared the power of a woman’s external beauty and feminine influence, Peter encouraged women to see themselves as valuable because God saw them as valuable. His call to aspire to the inner beauty of a trusting and tranquil spirit is staggeringly counter-cultural. He writes, “Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful.”

Equally staggering is his call to men to elevate their wives with respect and understanding: “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.” Consideration, respect, fellow heirs; these concepts sound good to us, but they were unheard of in the first century!

The apostle Paul is often accused of being a misogynist, one who hates and fears women. But Paul’s teachings on women reflect the creation order and high value God places on women as creatures made in his image. Paul’s commands for husbands and wives in Ephesians 5 provided a completely new way to look at marriage: as an earthbound illustration of the spiritual mystery of the union of Christ and His bride, the church. He calls wives to not only submit to their husbands as to the Lord, but he calls husbands to submit to Christ (1 Cor. 11:3). He calls men to love their wives in the self-sacrificing way Christ loves the church. In a culture where a wife was property, and a disrespected piece of property at that, Paul elevates women to a position of honor previously unknown in the world.

Paul also provided highly countercultural direction for the New Testament church. In the Jewish synagogue, women had no place and no voice in worship. In the pagan temples, the place of women was to serve as prostitutes. The church, on the other hand, was a place for women to pray and prophecy out loud (1 Cor. 11:5). The spiritual gifts—supernatural enableings to build God’s church—are given to women as well as men. Older women are commanded to teach younger ones. The invitation to women to participate in worship of Jesus was unthinkable—but true.

Misogyny in the Church

Author Dorothy Sayers, a friend of C.S. Lewis, wrote:

Perhaps it is no wonder that the women were first at the Cradle and last at the Cross. They had never known a man like this Man—there had never been such another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, who never flattered or coaxed or patronized; who never made arch jokes about them, never treated them either as ‘The women, God help us!’ or ‘The ladies, God bless them!’; who rebuked without querulousness and praised without condescension; who took their questions and arguments seriously, who never mapped out their sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female; who had no ax to grind and no uneasy male dignity to defend; who took them as he found them and was completely unselfconscious.

She continues: “There is no act, no sermon, no parable in the whole Gospel that borrows its pungency from female perversity; nobody could possibly guess from the words of Jesus that there was anything ‘funny’ about woman’s nature.”[{12}](#) And this is one of the unfortunate truths about Christianity we have to acknowledge: over the centuries, many Christ-followers have fallen far short of the standard Jesus set in showing the worth and dignity of women.

In the second century Clement of Alexandria believed and taught that every woman should blush because she is a woman. Tertullian, who lived about the same time, said, “You [Eve] are the devil’s gateway. . . . You destroyed so easily God’s image, man. On account of your desert, that is death, even the Son of God had to die.” Augustine, in the fourth century, believed that a woman’s image of God was inferior to that of the man’s.[{13}](#) And unfortunately it gets even nastier than that.

Some people mistakenly believe these contemptuous beliefs of the church fathers are rooted in an anti-female Bible, but that couldn’t be farther from the truth. People held these misogynistic beliefs *in spite of*, not because of, the biblical teachings. Those who dishonor God by dishonoring His good creation of woman allow themselves to be shaped by the beliefs of the surrounding pagan, anti-female culture instead of following Paul’s exhortation to not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). The church in North America does the same thing today by allowing the secular culture to shape our thinking more than the Bible. Only nine percent of Americans claiming to be born-again have a biblical worldview.[{14}](#) The church in Africa and Asia does the same thing today by allowing animism, the traditional folk religion, to shape their thinking more than the Bible.

It’s unfortunate that some of the church fathers did not allow the woman-honoring principles found in Scripture to change their unbiblical beliefs. But that is the failing of imperfect followers of Jesus, not a failure of God nor of His Word. Jesus loves women.

Effects of Christianity on Culture

As Christianity spread throughout the world, its redemptive effects elevated women and set them free in many ways. The Christian ethic declared equal worth and value for both men and women. Husbands were commanded to love their wives and not exasperate their children. These principles were in direct conflict with the Roman institution of *patria potestas*, which gave absolute power of life and death over a man's family, including his wife. When *patria potestas* was finally repealed by an emperor who was moved by high biblical standards, what a tremendous effect that had on the culture! Women were also granted basically the same control over their property as men, and, for the first time, mothers were allowed to be guardians of their children.[{15}](#)

The biblical view of husbands and wives as equal partners caused a sea change in marriage as well. Christian women started marrying later, and they married men of their own choosing. This eroded the ancient practice of men marrying child brides against their will, often as young as eleven or twelve years old. The greater marital freedom that Christianity gave women eventually gained wide appeal. Today, a Western woman is not compelled to marry someone she does not want, nor can she legally be married as a child bride. But the practice continues in parts of the world where Christianity has little or no presence.[{16}](#)

Another effect of the salt and light of Christianity was its impact on the common practice of polygamy, which demeans women. Many men, including biblical heroes, have had multiple wives, but Jesus made clear this was never God's intention. Whenever he spoke about marriage, it was always in the context of monogamy. He said, "The two [not three or four] will become one flesh." As Christianity spread, God's intention of monogamous marriages became the norm.[{17}](#)

Two more cruel practices were abolished as Christianity gained influence. In some cultures, such as India, widows were burned alive on their husbands' funeral pyres. In China, the crippling practice of foot binding was intended to make women totter on their pointed, slender feet in a seductive manner. It was finally outlawed only about a hundred years ago.[{18}](#)

As a result of Jesus Christ and His teachings, women in much of the world today, especially in the West, enjoy more privileges and rights than at any other time in history. It takes only a cursory trip to an Arab nation or to a Third World country to see how little freedom women have in countries where Christianity has had little or no presence.[{19}](#) It's the best thing that ever happened to women.

Notes

1. Schmidt, Alvin. *How Christianity Changed the World*. Originally published under the title *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), which is the copy I reference in these notes.

2. "Men stand superior to women.... But those whose perverseness ye fear, admonish them and remove them into bedchambers and beat them; but if they submit to you then do not seek a way against them" Sura 4:34, as quoted in Schmidt, p. 97.

3. Schmidt, p. 97-98.

4. Ibid., p. 98-99.

5. Ibid., p. 101.

6. Ibid., p. 102-03.

7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., p. 103-104.
10. Ibid., p. 104.
11. Ibid., p. 104-105.
12. Dorothy L. Sayers, *Are Women Human?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 47.
13. Schmidt, p. 109.
14. "A Biblical Worldview Has a Radical Effect on a Person's Life," The Barna Research Group, Ltd. <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=154>.
15. Ibid., p. 111.
16. Ibid., pp. 111-112.
17. Ibid., p. 115.
18. Ibid., pp. 118-119.
19. Ibid., p. 115.

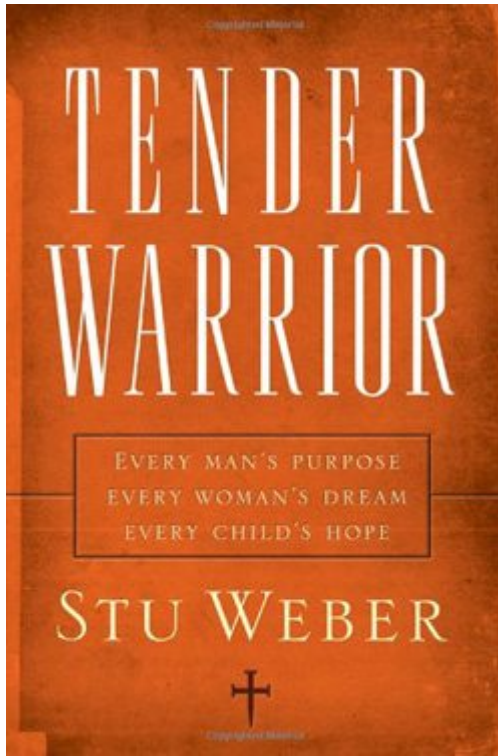
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Is the Tender Warrior Wild at Heart? - Characteristics of Christian Manhood

Dr. Bohlin looks at two attempts to define the characteristics of a godly man according to a Scriptural, biblical worldview perspective. These characteristics give a Christian man a way to evaluate his walk with God and how it communicates Christ to others.

The Four Pillars of a Man's Heart

Manhood continues to be in crisis. For many men today, their physical strength is rarely necessary. Technology and urban isolation have ripped up the landscape that men inhabit to such a degree that many men are wandering around wondering who they are and what they're here for. The extreme women's movement proclaims that a woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle.



Over the last fifteen years numerous books have been written from both secular and Christian authors to help men find their way. In this article we're going to spend some time with two of them. Stu Weber, a pastor in Oregon wrote the hugely influential *Tender Warrior* in 1993. *Tender Warrior* is full of stories and illustrations that irresistibly pull you along to Stu's appointed end: a vision of manhood mined from God's original intention for a man wrapped up in the New Testament vision of the Ultimate Tender Warrior, Jesus Christ.

At the core of Weber's vision is what he calls the four pillars of a man's heart: the Heart of a King, the Heart of a Warrior, the Heart of a Mentor, and the Heart of a Friend. I first read *Tender Warrior* in the mid 90s, and I was immediately caught up in his four-part description. I knew I didn't exemplify all of these characteristics as Weber describes them, but I knew I wanted to.

The Heart of the King reflects a man's visionary heart. The part of a man that wants to offer order, mercy and justice to the world he inhabits. Think of some of the Old Testament patriarchs, people like Abraham, Moses, and David. All of these men had a sense about them that drew others to them. They were leaders; they looked ahead and prepared those around them for what was coming.

The Heart of a Warrior portrays that part of a man that wants to shield, guard, defend and protect those around him. We intuitively understand this about men, but so many are inhibited from expressing this today. Movies and the entertainment industry often portray this aspect of manhood in its harsher tones. Consequently, this true aspect of manhood is more a target for suppression than for understanding.

The Heart of a Mentor reflects that part of a man that desires to model, train, and explain. Little boys particularly expect their dads to know everything. And a dad puffs up every time he can answer his son's questions. This aspect particularly is missing today in the church as young men from broken and dysfunctional families flounder, looking for an older man to help point the way.

The Heart of a Friend describes the part of a man that is truly compassionate, loving, and committed. The apostle Paul was a tough character as expressed in the list of hardships in 2 Cor. 11:23-28, yet he talked to the Thessalonians with gentle and tender words in 1 Thess. 2:7-8.

"Sourced in Scripture, observed in history, and experienced personally, these four pillars bear the

weight of authentic masculinity. They coexist. They overlap. And when they come together in a man, you will know it. You will feel it. You will be touched by it. Like four strands of a steel cable, they will hold you.” {1}

A Man and His Family

These four pillars encapsulate four essential qualities in a man of God: leadership, protectiveness, teaching, and compassion. A man with just three of the four is out of balance. A man who just emphasizes one of the four is a caricature of a real man. Nowhere is this more evident than in the biblical picture of headship and a man’s role in his family.

Our culture is horribly confused on this point. Weber sums it up neatly when he says, “Men, as husbands you have been given a trust, a stewardship, a responsibility, a duty, to husband, or manage, or care for the gifts of your wife.” {2} Part of my job as a husband is to create an environment in our home that allows my wife to be all God created her to be. She needs to be able to trust my leadership. She needs to know I will stand up for her and provide a secure environment. She needs to be comfortable in seeking my guidance and instruction. Finally, she needs to know that she is loved with a Christ-like self-sacrificing love. Weber adds, “A woman was made to be provided for, protected, and cared for. A man was made to be a provider, protector, and caregiver. Nothing is more pitiful than a man forfeiting his masculinity or a woman her femininity by transgressing the created order.” {3}

Weber’s discussion of a man and his lady provides numerous helpful insights, exercises, and illustrations on how a man is to love a woman. One commentator suggested that the chapter titled, “Does Anyone Here Speak Woman?” is worth the price of the book alone. Weber encourages men to realize that since men and women are inherently different, a man needs to learn a woman’s language, to live with her in an understanding way as Peter commands (1 Pet. 3:7). We need to put our analytical minds to work to understand how she is put together. We won’t ever get all the way there, but after all, a little mystery is what keeps marriage exciting, fresh, and interesting anyway.

Weber devotes three chapters to the incredible power of fathering. Our culture today is in dire need of real men willing to father their children. So many dads are absent either physically or emotionally. This alone accounts for so many wayward kids, both male and female alike. A father has a powerful multigenerational impact on his sons and daughters whether intentional or not. It’s the nature of God’s design.

Like arrows in a quiver, each child needs to be constructed, aimed, and released according to the bent God has given them. Skillful parenting does not come naturally, especially in our culture today that is so confused and off course. It will require biblical and rational thinking in advance.

A Man and His Friends

In his book, *Tender Warrior*, Stu Weber titles the first chapter about a man and his friends, “Real Men Stand Together.” In our increasingly mobile and fragmented society, it’s harder than ever for men to know each other well enough to be willing to stand together. Upon hearing that Jonathan was dead, the future King David commented that Jonathan’s love was wonderful, more wonderful than that of a woman (2 Sam. 1:26).

Men who have weathered tough times together, even fought together, develop a bond that can be stronger than that between a man and a woman. But how many men have such a friendship? There are numerous forces in our culture that leave most men isolated and cut-off. We see the lonely male model in the movies all the time. Characters played by John Wayne, Bruce Willis, Sylvester Stallone,

and Arnold Schwarzenegger tend to be the isolated lonely male types: able, or perhaps, forced to handle life's pressures on their own.

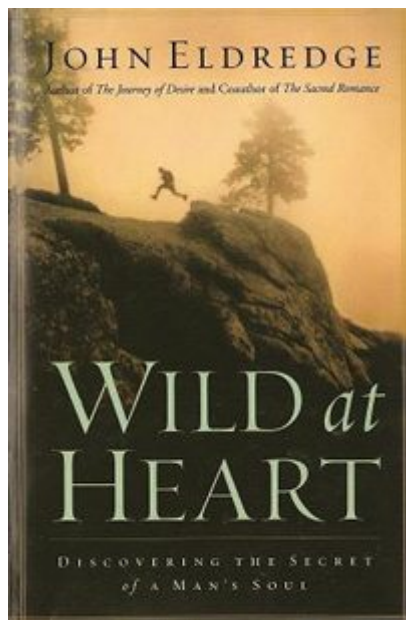
Neighborhoods rarely have block parties today. We live in our closed up homes (no open windows in summer or people out on the porch on summer evenings) with tall fences keeping things private. We drive our own cars to work, work long hours, and relax in front of the TV or a book isolated from those around us. A sense of community has been lost in our cities and even small towns. Men, therefore, have no one to connect with outside of office mates or sports teammates. We think we do just fine on our own, thank you.

However, as we grow older, we hunger for someone of the male species to truly share what we are experiencing. But there is no Jonathan or David, someone I fought with in the trenches, someone who really knows me and my successes and struggles.

Men long for someone to lock arms with in a struggle greater than themselves. Looking again at David and Jonathan, we learn in 1 Samuel 14 that Jonathan was a warrior just like David, and when David slew Goliath (1 Samuel 18), Jonathan immediately made a connection. They had shared values. They became one in spirit. Jonathan made a covenant with David that basically said what's mine is yours. They developed an unselfish love for each other. Jonathan exhibited a deep loyalty to David when he intervened on his behalf when his father, King Saul, sought David's life.

In 1 Samuel 20, David and Jonathan expect that they may never see each other again and weep in each other's embrace. They were transparent. They weren't afraid to be emotional in the other's presence. Do you have a friend like that? I encourage you to seek a friend who shares your values, and work to develop an unselfish, loyal, and transparent relationship that the Lord will use to guide you through today's muddy waters.

Battle to Fight, an Adventure to Live, and a Beauty to Rescue



In the continuing parade of books from Christian authors for men comes a book that has taken the evangelical community by storm. Counselor and writer John Eldredge claims that men are wild at heart and desperately need to recapture this essential part of maleness. In his book, *Wild at Heart*, Eldredge claims that every man needs a battle to fight, an adventure to live, and a beauty to rescue.

Eldredge's triumvirate lines up quite well with Weber's four pillars, the Heart of the King, Warrior, Mentor, and Friend. Both Weber and Eldredge assert that a man needs a cause outside himself to

fully live out the image of God in him. They just use different terminology.

However, *Wild at Heart* sometimes leaves you a little too wild. Yes, men need to be free to explore that wild side, but responsibility is not just a duty that shackles a man's God-given wildness. Eldredge can sometimes run roughshod over the state of men in the church and seems to encourage men to be little boys rather than grown men with both needs *and* responsibilities.

For instance, Eldredge uses many illustrations from physically demanding backcountry experiences to highlight his call to be wild at heart. Early in the book he retells how he and his sons faced the flooded, muddy, and debris-filled Snake River with nothing but a canoe. He says, "I have never floated the Snake in a canoe, nor any other river for that matter, but what the heck. We jumped in and headed off into the unknown, like Livingstone plunging into the interior of dark Africa." [\[4\]](#) Wild? Sure, but reckless and irresponsible, too!

But despite the occasional excess, Eldredge uncovers that same need for a cause outside himself, and identifies it as a battle to fight, an adventure to live, and a beauty to rescue.

Eldredge proclaims that there is something fierce inside every man, whether it is slaying the dragons of business or whacking a little white ball on a golf course. Men naturally compete. If there is no winner, we quickly get bored.

The adventurous spirit is not just about having fun. Adventure requires something of a man. Deep down inside we wonder if we have what it takes, whatever the task that presents itself. Most men watch war movies wondering how they would have responded if presented with the same situation.

But there's more. Men need someone to fight for and with. A companion. A beauty. A helpmate. Adam had a great and wonderful world to explore at his creation. But God recognized that he needed something else, a helpmate suitable for him.

In summary then, at the heart of every man there is something fierce, wild, and passionate. But all this can only be properly harnessed as we seek a relationship with the Ultimate Tender Warrior, Jesus Christ. But in a fallen world, we are all walking wounded. If that is the case, does Eldredge have a recipe for healing?

Healing the Wound

John Eldredge likens many men to a huge male lion in his local zoo. The lion, as powerful and ferocious as he is, is caged in a small cell where he lies around, bored except at feeding time, and is but a shadow of what he was created to be. In a fallen world, where our enemy prowls around looking for someone to devour, most if not all men have been wounded at the heart of their masculinity. It has sapped their strength and put them on the sidelines.

Most often this wound comes from someone close to us, either a parent (usually the father), sibling, relative or peer. Most of us can remember someone telling us, either by words or actions, that we don't have what it takes to be a man. This can often be due to a series of events over an extensive period of time rather than to a single event. As a result, we go through life wondering if we have what it takes.

In today's culture, this wound can come from a school system that is telling our boys that there is something wrong with them. Boys are far more likely to be medicated than girls, and often it is only for just being boys. And with so many fatherless homes due to either physical absence or an extremely passive father who never gets involved, nobody is showing boys and young men what it

means to be a man.

So men will often try to answer their question, to heal their wound, by going to some very unwise places. Some rebel, others try to earn their father's respect by becoming driven overachievers. Others retreat into passivity or are haunted by pornography or even drugs. Some search for their masculinity from women or maybe just one woman. But femininity can never bestow masculinity.

There ends up being a false self we create to distance ourselves from the question we fear, that gives others the impression we have it all figured out, when deep inside everything is mush. The answer lies in going to the One who created us for a very specific purpose and indeed knows who we are (Psalm 139). Jesus never shied away from acknowledging that He was totally dependent on the Father. Many times He said things like, "I and the Father are one." Or "I do nothing apart from the Father."

We have been created to be dependent on God, yet we as men continually try to convince ourselves we can do it on our own. In order to bring us to a point of recognizing our daily need to walk with Him, the Lord will bring us through trials that force us to depend on Him. The false self is stripped away until there is nothing left for us to do. Here and only here can the wound be healed. The Lord will walk us through an intensely personal awakening to reveal whom He created us to be if we will only trust Him.

So when troubles arise, instead of whining or complaining, we should ask, What is it the Lord wants me to see? What is He trying to teach me? What do I need to learn? Then we will be on the road to true masculinity. [5](#)

Notes

1. Stu Weber, *Tender Warrior* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah Books, 1993), p. 43.
2. Ibid., p. 92.
3. Ibid., p. 92.
4. John Eldredge, *Wild at Heart* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), p. 5.
5. This last section summarizes chapters 3-7, which are the heart of Eldredge's book, *Wild at Heart*. When reading *Wild at Heart*, one needs to be aware that Eldredge's language is sometimes imprecise and can leave the wrong impression. I'm convinced that Eldredge sees that the real battle we all must face is with spiritual forces, and that our physical tests of strength are only rehearsals for the real thing. But his book can be misinterpreted as an excuse for men to overindulge in risky behavior and some men to take dangerous risks they are not prepared for. For some, *Wild at Heart* can only serve as an appeal to the flesh. So, is the tender warrior wild at heart? Yes, but not to the degree some choose to believe. Eldredge uses a great illustration on page 83. "Yes, a man is a dangerous thing. So is a scalpel. It can wound or it can save your life. You don't make it safe by making it dull; you put it in the hands of someone who knows what he's doing." Only the Ultimate Tender Warrior, Jesus Christ qualifies.

Boys Are From Mars, Girls Are From Venus: Raising Gender-Healthy Children

Sue Bohlin begins with the concepts from John Gray's best-seller and applies them to understanding and supporting our child's gender to develop a healthy self understanding. Recognizing the wide variation among children, she is still able to apply biblical truth from a Christian perspective to give sound advice on this important topic.

Gender Differences

John Gray's best-seller *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*^{1} woke up millions of people to the truth that men and women are different, and different is good. The politically correct lie that gender is a culturally bound social construct was shown to be just that, a lie, because life doesn't work that way.

In this article I look at gender differences in boys and girls, examining the importance of supporting our children's gender to encourage a healthy self-concept as a possible means of preventing the development of homosexuality. (While I by no means wish to oversimplify this very complex subject, there are nonetheless patterns that show up in many people who experience same-sex attraction.^{2})

(Disclaimer: I do realize I am painting these gender differences in broad strokes. Not every boy and not every girl will follow along these lines. However, these generalizations are true for the vast majority of children, as well as adults.)

Boys get their sense of self from achievement. They're wired to be self-reliant. One of my son's first whole sentences was, "Me do it!" They think they get extra brownie points for doing things on their own. For boys, asking for help means admitting defeat, and being offering help means being disrespected. When I used to say, "Let Mommy help you" to my two sons, they would be offended and I never knew why. If I could do it over again, I would tell them, "Let's see if you can do it on your own. If it doesn't work, I'll be glad to help."

Girls, on the other hand, get their sense of self from relationships. Most everything is about people, and asking for help is a way to build a bridge to other people. When a girl is offered help, she often feels loved and valued. So when a Daddy from Mars lets his little girl struggle on her own, because that's what a boy would appreciate, she can feel hurt and abandoned.

Boys are very linear in their thinking; they focus on one thing at a time. Girls are usually multi-taskers, able to juggle several things at once. Both of these are strengths. I finally learned to show respect for my boys' one-thing-at-a-time kind of thinking by giving them my full attention when they were talking to me. Although I knew that I could focus on them even if my hands were busy, they didn't think I was really listening. It's also important for men to realize that girls can do more than one thing at a time without being disrespectful, like simultaneously embroider and truly listen to someone talk.

Boys, being linear, tend to focus on a goal, whereas girls can enjoy the process as well. I frustrated my kids so many times when they'd be dressed and ready for a soccer game and I'd think, "We've got 10 minutes before we have to leave! Let's get the living room vacuumed!" They would be focused on the goal of playing soccer and I'd drive them crazy with my emphasis on the process of running a

household.

Boys tend to be competitive and girls cooperative. That makes sense since boys get their sense of self from achieving, and girls get their sense of self from relationships. There has been a definite anti-male bias in many of our schools over the past several years where competition is seen as evil and hurtful, so it's been removed whenever possible. This means educational policy has been directed *against* boys' very nature.^{3} They often achieve more through competition, even friendly competition, and that includes building relationships. Boys (and men) bond best with other guys shoulder-to-shoulder, engaged in a competition or a common task. Girls (and women) bond best face-to-face. We need to support these differences for each gender to be who God made them to be.

Boys are action-oriented. Many little boys naturally throw themselves into a chair rather than sit in it. They are naturally active, which frustrates both parents and teachers, but the solution is not to drug them or try to turn them into girls. We need to change our expectations of what makes for acceptable levels of activity in boys, and provide safe channels for all that energy.

Where boys are primarily action-oriented, girls are primarily verbal. This verbal nature of females is not a design flaw; God, who defines Himself as "the Word" in the Bible, imparted that part of His own nature to girls and women. Girls' very wordiness is what allows them to connect with other people, to be the relational beings that God intended.

These differences really show up when kids get hostile. Boys will often get physical when they're mad or frustrated. The testosterone that flows through boys' bodies is part of their physical hostility, and it needs to be respected. This very same tendency to hit or kick when angered is usually channeled into the glory of adult masculinity where a man will fight to protect his family or his country.

When girls get hostile, they use their tongues. It's not true that "sticks and stones can hurt my bones but names will never hurt me." Unfortunately, more long-term damage can be inflicted with hurtful words than by hitting or kicking. That's why it's so important to teach girls what Proverbs teaches about the destructive power of the tongue,^{4} and to work at using their verbal skills to uplift and encourage and nurture.

Follow God's Rules for Marriage and Family

Although there is no one-size-fits-all explanation for why homosexuality develops, many who struggle with same-gender attraction can identify unhealthy patterns of relating in their families as they were growing up.

One of the ways that the development of a homosexual identity can be prevented is by following God's rules for marriage and the family.^{5}

First, Both husband and wife have clearly defined roles. Children need to see that mothers and fathers are not interchangeable, and there are distinct roles that men and women fulfill. They need to know that a man shows his masculinity by protecting and providing for his family, using his strength to serve them and not hurt them. They need to see the beauty of femininity expressed in their mother's nurturing and intuitive capabilities.

Second, The father is an involved leader, and is warm and affectionate toward his children. All children, but most especially boys, long for their dads' acceptance, praise and physical affection. When boys don't get it, it creates an emotional void of a sense of intimate connection with a man, and a boy can grow up not comfortable with being male.

Third, The mother loves and nurtures her family without being controlling. Girls need their mothers to show them that being a female is a good and lovely gift from God, and boys need their mothers to love and respect them without smothering.

Fourth, The father loves the mother. In showing love for his wife, the father creates the climate in which a little girl can believe it is safe and good to be a woman, and men can be trusted. When a boy sees his father loving his mother, cherishing and protecting her, he sees a man going beyond himself, the glory of masculine strength. He sees that being a man is a good and wonderful gift from God.

Fifth, The mother shows respect for the father. For the daughter, her mother's esteem for her father again shows that men are to be trusted, that women can enjoy and celebrate men. The mother's view of the father can become her view of him—and her view of men in general. Many lesbians deeply believe that men are idiots or brutes, worthless and repulsive, and something desperately sad shaped that belief.

If a boy's mother treats his father with love and respect, it says being a man is a good thing. But a weak father who accepts contempt, or a mean father who fights back, can both lead the boy to choose to identify with his mother and against his father. This just confuses his developing gender identity.

Following God's command to love wisely and well usually produces emotionally healthy kids.

Affirm Children's Gender

A wise person once said that it's easier to build a healthy child than repair an adult. The best way to build emotionally healthy children who accept and enjoy their gender is for us as parents (and grandparents and teachers) to affirm boys in their masculinity and girls in their femininity.

Boys and girls are definitely created differently from conception, and we should support those God-ordained differences. Boys who are typically active boy need to hear words of affirmation and acceptance for what makes them boys. A friend of mine recently took her little boy for a walk down to the lake. Along the way she said, "Parker, let's look for frogs and toads. Mommy is so glad God made you a little boy so you could like yucky things like frogs and toads." When they got back to the house, his grandmother asked, "So how was your walk?" and Parker said, "Mommy's glad that I'm a boy because I like yucky things like frogs and toads!"

Boys who are NOT typically boy, those who prefer quieter pursuits like reading and music and the performing arts, especially need to be supported in their masculinity. These boys can grow up to be the King Davids in our world, and we need them! I should also point out that these sensitive, quieter types, when cherished in their masculinity, grow up to be the best kind of husbands, and men with a shepherd's heart. All boys need to hear their parents affirm their existence with comments like "I'm so glad God made you a boy" and "You're going to make a fine man when you grow up." They need to hear that a boy can be a good strong male whether or not they play sports and like rough stuff.

Feminine little girls need to be admired and cherished for their girlishness. A little girl in a new dress can be praised by her mother and friends all day long, but she won't really believe she's beautiful until her daddy tells her she is. And girls need to hear the "b" word—they they are beautiful. It's a part of the feminine heart. Not every girl or woman is beauty-pageant material, but there are many kinds of beauty, and we all need to hear that we are beautiful. Girls who aren't typically girly, the tomboys and "jockettes," especially need to be appreciated for their particular expression of femininity by praising and encouraging them. They need to know that one can be a soft, feminine

lady AND a strong leader or a great athlete.

Every child's heart longs to hear "I'm so glad you're you, and I love you just the way you are."

Understanding Gender Differences

I think it's crucial for us as adults to understand gender differences in children and support them with a sense of humor, not condemnation.

One of my friends tells of an elaborate classroom Christmas craft where the kids were to fill socks with rice, tie them off and decorate them to be snowmen—a craft created by mothers of girls. The boys filled the socks with rice, tied them off and gleefully announced, "Look! A snow worm!"

I remember hearing another friend informing her young boys, "We don't roughhouse. We play quietly and gently." She didn't mean to, but she was trying to teach her boys to be girls. NOT a good plan!

Those who experience same-gender attraction, especially men, are usually uncomfortable and insecure in their masculinity or femininity. Homosexuality isn't primarily a sexual issue, but an emotional one, and it often starts with not being comfortable or confident in the gender God chose for us. So it's important to be on the lookout for signs that children might be struggling with their gender identity and may be vulnerable to developing a homosexual identity later:

- Kids who don't fit in.
- Kids who lack a close relationship with their father, especially boys.
- Kids who wear clothes and play with toys associated with the other gender.
- Boys who are TOO good, everyone seeing them as "the good little boy."
- Poor peer relationships, not bonding with other children their same sex, often lonely.
- Kids who are bullied and shamed by other kids.

In closing, let me give three suggestions for raising emotionally healthy children with a strong sense of gender:

- Cultivate warm, affectionate, respectful relationships—between husband and wife, and between parents and children. A hurtful relationship with the same-sex parent, whether real or just perceived, is the number one contributor to the later development of homosexuality.^{6} Both boys and girls, but especially boys, need a daddy's approval, acceptance and affection. Girls develop problems with gender identity from not being protected and cherished. They need to be encouraged toward feminine things with a close and loving relationship with Mom.

- Cherish and support your child's gender. Understand the God-designed differences and tell them how special it is to be a boy or a girl.

- When you see patterns of inappropriate gender behavior, lovingly correct it. For instance, boys don't wear girls' clothes or makeup or jewelry. And boys don't play with Barbies the way girls do. However, it's OK to play with Barbies the way BOYS would! That would include physical aggression and sound effects as well as nurturing behavior.

God knew what He was doing when he chose each child's gender, and we would be wise to support His choice.

Notes

Gray, John. *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992.

2. For example, see *Portraits of Freedom*, Bob Davies [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001], 9-10. Also, I highly recommend Don Schmierer's excellent book *An Ounce of Prevention: Preventing the Homosexual Condition in Today's Youth* [Word, 1998].

3. Please see my colleague Don Closson's article on the Probe Web site, "The Feminization of American Schools" at www.probe.org/the-feminization-of-american-schools/.

4. E.g., Prov. 18:21, 21:23, 25:23, 26:28.

5. I am indebted to Scott Lively's insight in his online book, *Seven Steps to Recruit-Proof Your Child* at www.defendthefamily.com/pfrc/books/sevensteps/Chapter5/index.html.

6. Lecture by Dr. Joseph Nicolosi, "Prevention of Male Homosexuality," Focus on the Family's *Love Won Out* conference, May 6, 2000, Dallas, Texas.

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The Wonderful Rise of Masculinity

October 2001

Recently, I was sitting at an airport terminal waiting to board a plane when a man dropped into the seat next to mine. He nodded to me and said, "How're you doing?" I looked at him and said, "Well, that depends on whether you're a bad guy or a hero. Those are your two choices." He smiled; he understood. As we boarded, everybody on that plane was looking at everybody else, scanning their faces, wondering the same thing—are you a bad guy or a hero?

One of the best things to come out of the Sept. 11 attack on America is that masculinity has been restored to its rightful place of honor. After a generation of merciless male-bashing in the wake of feminism's contempt of men, it's a good and fine thing to be a man again, and I for one love it. It seems that men are walking taller and more proudly, more confident in themselves. Young men flooded to the armed forces, ready to defend their country and grateful to be able to DO SOMETHING about such a heinous attack on America.

We have been reminded what true heroes look like: not sports figures, not entertainers, but the men of Flight 93 who controlled their fear to overtake terrorists and crash a plane into a field instead of a building. True heroes look like the firefighters who ran up the stairwells of doomed, burning buildings to rescue people going down. True heroes look like the police officers who helped people get away from the World Trade Center as they deliberately put themselves in harm's way. And now that we remember what a true hero is, we're seeing long overdue displays of gratitude for the public servants who risk their lives so the rest of us can be safe. Recently a local elementary school invited firemen to a school assembly where they had festooned the auditorium with banners, balloons and posters thanking them for their service. When the group of men entered the room, the kids went absolutely wild with cheers and applause. You'd have thought it was an N'Sync concert!

I'm thankful for the perspective my husband provided on this: he observed that men are able to be men because women are letting them. It seems that unless we women show men the respect and

honor due them in their masculinity, they won't fight for it and many will retreat into a most unmanly passivity. But in the attacks on our country, many women have lost our sense of security and we're more in touch with how much we need to be protected. Thank the Lord for His plan that men be strong and self-sacrificing as they rise to the occasion in protecting us! Masculinity is a beautiful strength. God knew what He was doing when He made men men. It's one more way He's bringing glory to Himself in the aftermath of 9/11.