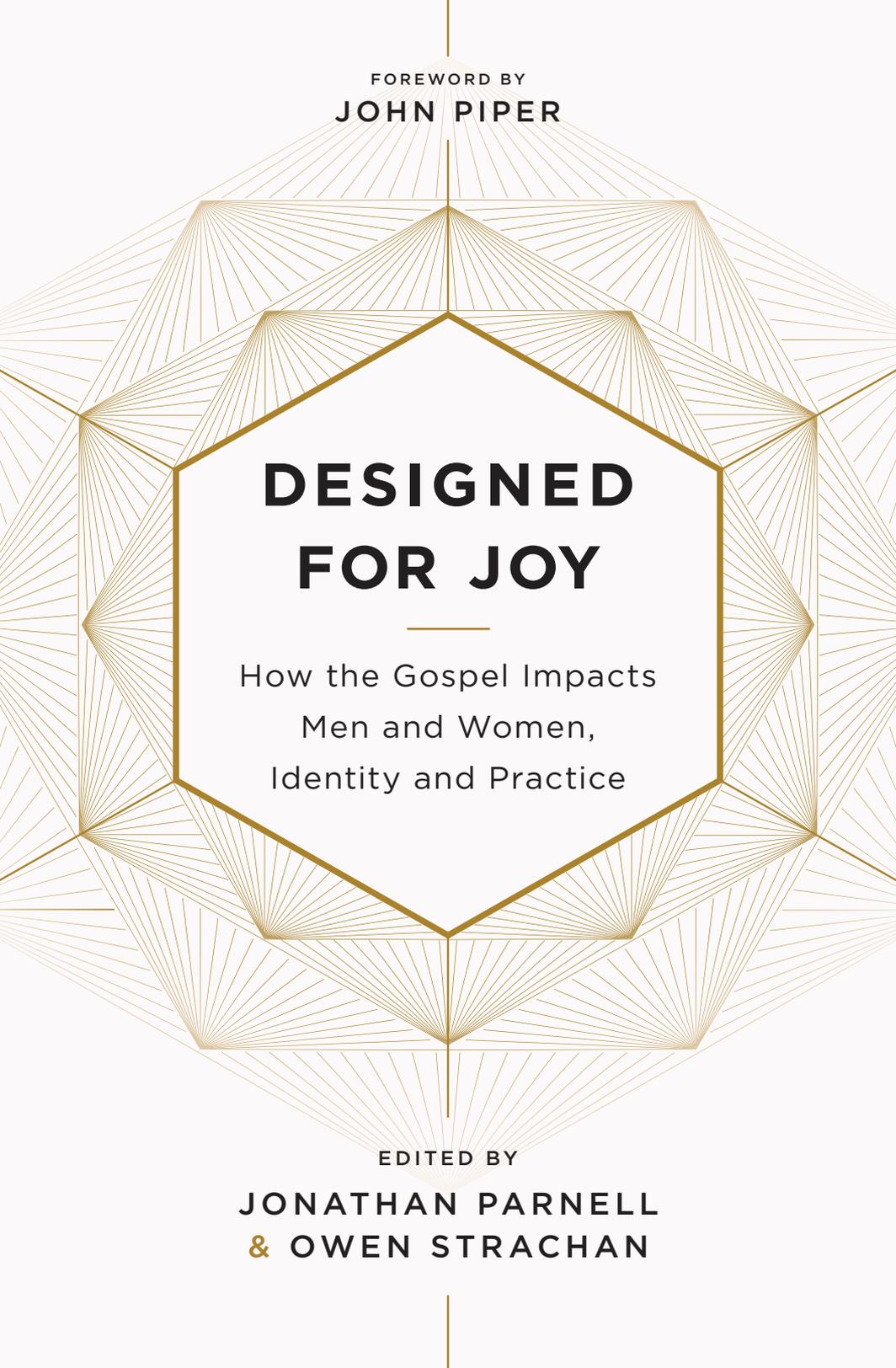


FOREWORD BY  
**JOHN PIPER**



**DESIGNED  
FOR JOY**

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How the Gospel Impacts  
Men and Women,  
Identity and Practice

EDITED BY  
**JONATHAN PARNELL  
& OWEN STRACHAN**

Designed for Joy



# DESIGNED FOR JOY

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*Designed for Joy: How the Gospel Impacts Men and Women, Identity and Practice*

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To John Piper and Wayne Grudem



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# Foreword

I asked to write this foreword. I had hoped to endorse this book and help spread the word through Twitter. But then I took a PDF on the plane to Brazil and could not put it down. So I told Marshall Segal, one of the authors, who told the editors, “If you’ll take me, I’d like to write the foreword.”

The reason for my eagerness is partly nostalgia, partly thankfulness, partly amazement, partly admiration, and partly hope.

The editors and most of the authors of this book were not yet teenagers when Wayne Grudem and I were editing “the big blue book” called *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* from 1988 to 1991. So to see this project emerge twenty-five years later with a shared and refined vision is like seeing our baby graduate from college. But of course, my nostalgia is no reason for you to read the book. So let’s turn to what matters more.

Rising in me, as I read, was a high sense of thankfulness to God for the insight, wisdom, giftedness, biblical faithfulness, and courage of these younger authors. The vision of manhood and womanhood they are trumpeting is biblical, beautiful, and sadly obnoxious to many in society. That is, it fits with faith in Christ and infuriates those who love the atmosphere of self-actualizing autonomy—what editor Owen Strachan calls “narcissistic optimistic deism.” So I am thankful for the valor of these men and women, who are willing to swim against unbiblical currents.

My amazement is that decades into this struggle, there is such a widespread and robust embrace of the beautiful biblical vision of

complementary manhood and womanhood. This may strike you as an evidence of small faith on my part. Perhaps it is. But if you had tasted the vitriol of our audiences in the 1970s and 1980s, you might understand.

In the late seventies, we were called “obscene” for suggesting that God’s Word taught distinct, complementary roles for men and women based on manhood and womanhood, not just competency. Therefore, the breadth and maturity and creativity and joyfulness of the complementarian crowd today triggers happy amazement in me.

Then, when I turned to these actual chapters, I read in admiration. These folks are not only good thinkers and faithful interpreters of the Bible; they are also gifted writers. The reading was not just informative and inspiring; it was a pleasure. I love to think of what these men and women will be writing in thirty years. If it’s this good now, what will it be then?

Finally, I come away with hope. I am pushing to the end of my seventh decade. So I think a lot these days about what is in place for the advance of God’s saving purposes on the earth in the decades to come. Reading these voices gives me hope that God is wonderfully at work to exalt his great name long after I am gone.

I commend this book to you and pray that the beauty of the vision, and the courage to speak it, will spread—for the supremacy of God in all things, for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ.

John Piper  
Founder and Teacher  
[desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org)

Introduction

# How Does the Gospel Shape Manhood and Womanhood?

Owen Strachan

The lips of the young woman quivered. Tears rolled down her face. Her angry father stared at her. “I thought you were the kind of girl who didn’t get into this sort of trouble,” he said. She looked back at him, confused and adrift: “I guess I don’t really know what kind of girl I am.”

This exchange came in *Juno*, a poignant film made a few years ago. It’s a quick scene, but it has stuck with me ever since. In this young woman’s reply, I heard the confusion of an entire generation. So many young men and young women don’t know who they are. They’ve never been taught what a man or a woman is. They may have seen terrible pain in their home, and they may have grown up without a father, or less commonly, without a mother. Or they might have had a father and a mother, but their home was compromised by sin in some way. The family didn’t eat together. The

parents weren't happy together. The children grew up without discipleship or investment.

This is 2015. Families are struggling. As one would expect, many young men and young women lack a road map—a script—for their lives. When you're in this confusing and confused state, you don't have answers to the most basic questions about your life. This is true of your fundamental identity, which includes your manhood or womanhood. What do I mean by this?

### **You Need to Know Who You Are**

Many high schoolers, college students, and twentysomethings know they have a body (this is kind of obvious); further, they know they're a boy or a girl, a man or a woman; and they know they want to follow Jesus. But they have little sense of how these realities intertwine. They don't know what their gender, their sexuality, is *for*. So they're tentative. They're confused. Quietly, perhaps with some shame, they ask these kinds of questions in their own minds:

- What is my purpose?
- Why do I have this body?
- What does it mean to be a man or a woman?

This book is intended to help you figure out who you were made to be. We want to give you an inspiring vision for your life as a young man or a young woman. We see that our society is training you to think wrongly about gender and sexuality. It's telling you things like: there are no essential differences between men and women; you can change your gender if you want, and that's totally fine; you can be attracted to whomever comes most naturally to you—boys can like boys, girls can like girls; and finally, there are no responsibilities or callings that come with being a man or a woman—you do whatever you like.

In this book, we're going to show that these ideas are false and harmful. We're going to offer true words and biblical counsel to you so you can know who you are and what you were created for.

We will see that we are designed by God, and that his design brings us joy.

We're not going to simply offer you "Ten Tips to Be the Manly Man's Man, the Manliest of Them All" or "Five Ways to Make Doilies and Sing Nineteenth-Century Hymns at the Same Time." We're coming at all this from a fresh perspective. You can almost hear the can cracking open as you read these words. We want you to see that the gospel, the good news of Jesus's saving death and life-giving resurrection, is the central fact, the most important part, of your life as a God-loving man or woman. The gospel saves us, remakes us, and helps us understand who we truly are and what we are called to be for God's glory and our joy.

The gospel is what frees us from our sin. The gospel is what allows us to live to the full, our hearts soaring, our pulses pounding, our lives stretching before us, full of hope, full of meaning. With this in our minds, let's now consider four ways that the gospel shapes us as men and women.

### **The Gospel Makes Sense of the Image of God**

One of the foundational realities of human beings, men and women alike, is that we are made in the image of God. See Genesis 1:26–27, which reads:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.

In other words, we're created in a special way to display the full-orbed grandeur of our Creator. We do this by creating, by thinking,

by taking dominion, and by enjoying relationships with one another.

But even this awe-inspiring theological truth can be a bit abstract, can't it? What role, we might wonder, do our bodies have to play in being the image of God?

Before we're converted, we understand that we are either male or female. That's well and good. But it's only when we're saved by the grace of almighty God that we truly begin to grasp the meaning of our bodies, our sexuality. We are created as men or as women to inhabit our manhood and womanhood to the glory of our Maker. He did not make us all the same. He loves diversity. He revels in it. He created a world that pulses with difference, that explodes with color, that includes roaring waterfalls and self-inflating lizards and rapt, at-attention meerkats. But humankind, man and woman, is the pinnacle of his creation.

In Christ, we understand that our manhood or womanhood is not incidental. It's not unimportant. It is the channel through which we will give God glory all our days. We have been put here to "image" God. After conversion, we understand that we're here to give evidence of his greatness. We do that in substantial part by receiving our God-given sexuality as a gift. God created us as "male and female," not as something else. The passage above states three separate times that God "created" the man and woman, stressing God's role in making the man and woman his image bearers. There is intentionality, wisdom, and purpose in the creation of Adam and Eve, as the gospel frees us to see.

Simply receiving and reveling in this reality is a matter of worship. It's not complicated, but it is profound. *I am a man or a woman designed in just this way by God*, we should think to ourselves as we consider the body given us from above. *In the same way that the Grand Canyon was created to show God's power, and the skies his handiwork, as a man or a woman I was formed to display the beauty of his brilliant design.* In our fallenness, we're tempted to think that we have no greater reason to live, and that

we're only "dust in the wind," as the famous song says. In truth, we are diamonds in the wilderness. We're no genetic accident, no freakish outcome of history. We're the special creation of God.

You could sum these thoughts up like this: as believers, we're not Christian Teletubbies. We're not gospel blobs. We're not the redeemed androgynous. We are gospel-captivated *men* and gospel-captivated *women*. When converted, we come to understand that our bodies are given us as vessels by which to put God's wisdom and intelligence and love on display.

Whether single or married, whether young or old, we have been given our manhood or womanhood as a blessing. Our bodies, with their distinctive designs, tell us that there is an exhilarating intelligence, and a grander story, behind our frame and form.

### **The Gospel Gives Us Power over Our Natural Weaknesses**

The gospel is our fundamental marker of identity. The work of Christ applied to our hearts is such an unstoppable, unopposable force that it refigures us entirely. It's as if our old boundary markers have completely fallen away, as Paul says: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:27–28). This text doesn't mean that the gospel wipes out manhood and womanhood. It *does* mean that our fundamental reality in life is our identity in Jesus Christ.

This has immense practical value for us. As men and women, we might be tempted toward certain stereotypes. Some young men might think that being a man means bench-pressing 250 pounds, dunking a basketball, or fighting off bears with their bare hands in their spare time. (Actually, if you do that, you are pretty manly.) Some young women might think that being a woman means being sexually desirable, a lover of literature, and having a certain image. Both groups can know that we are easily tempted to find our manly and womanly identity in stereotypes. The gospel is bad news for our

stereotypes. It tells us that men are self-sacrificial leaders, and that women are fearless followers of Christ.

We're going to be pulled as men and women toward certain ungodly behaviors. Men today are told that they are idiots, little boys who never grow up. We see such immaturity in Adam's initial failure to protect the woman God gave him. We also see his selfishness in his move to blame Eve for eating the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:1–7, 12). Men are tempted by an array of sins, but they must know that the gospel is the dread foe of their laziness, selfishness, irresponsibility, and immaturity. The leaders of Scripture do not look kindly on immaturity. "Show yourself a man," David says to Solomon (1 Kings 2:2). We men hear this call today. We recognize that Jesus has the same challenge for us—and has all the grace we need to meet it.

Women today are told that their value is in their looks, or their social skills, or their ability to dominate men. We see such a desire in Eve's being deceived by the serpent and her post-fall desire to "rule over" her husband (Gen. 3:16). This is an ancient problem with modern consequences. Women are told today that they will find fulfillment and lasting happiness in being strong. They are urged to use their sexuality as a tool of empowerment. They are challenged to disdain femininity. Christian women will feel these and other temptations pull at them, but they must know that the gospel shows us a better way. It opens a door to a happier world, a world of joy. In Christ, the power of sin is overcome and the distinct beauty of womanhood is celebrated.

The world gives us false visions of happy manhood and fulfilled womanhood. It's like the dinner plate that looked so good on your friend's Instagram but tastes so bad on your plate. Selfish manhood and "fierce" womanhood are not too big for us, though; these visions of our lives are too small. Sin always looks like a monster but ends up like a mouse. It has no power over us. It has no hold on us. We don't cower in the face of the world's temptations. We laugh at them.

We scorn the principalities and powers of this age. *You think lust and power are going to entice me?* we say. *Your vision of happiness is too small. Show me a picture of my life as a man or a woman that echoes into eternity and you'll have my attention.* In Christ, we have found something better than all the world throws at us. In him, we become the men or women we were designed to be.

### **The Gospel Shows Us the Goodness of Limits**

I remember going to basketball camp as a youngster. Part of the expectation of basketball camp is that you will hear at least one speech per week telling you that if you just practice enough, you can be the next LeBron.

You may never have dribbled a basketball, but chances are you have heard something similar. We've all been told this kind of message over and over and over again: "You are amazing. You are a star! You can be whatever you want! There are no limits in life for you." Many of us have heard of this formulation so many times that it's second nature to us. We naturally assume it's true.

This kind of thinking is embedded in modern culture. It's not just a cheesy mantra, though. It's a spiritual system in its own right. In my book *Risky Gospel*, I even give it a name: "narcissistic optimistic deism." I think this is the new "moralistic therapeutic deism." The basic view of narcissistic optimistic deism is this:

- Life is fundamentally about me.
- I deserve for life to get better and to allow me to achieve all my dreams.
- God exists to bless me and make my dreams come true.

If this sounds like a Disneyfied Christianity, that's because it is. All that's missing is a little flying insect with a magic wand. A major outcome of this way of thinking is this: you end up believing that you don't have any limits, and that if someone suggests that you do, that's a bad thing. People who might offer constructive criticism are

in reality “haters.” They’re in the wrong, and you’re in the right, because if your heart feels it and wants it, it must be good.

This perspective is disastrous for our spiritual health. It fails to account for our fallenness, our inherent sinfulness, which means that every part of us has been corrupted by the fall of Adam (see Isa. 64:6; Rom. 3:10–18). This perspective has influenced the way many people look at their bodies and lives. They say, “I can be whatever I want to be.” Being a man or a woman doesn’t end up meaning anything. There’s no structure or order to life.

There are many outworkings of this problem. If a couple is married and the man doesn’t feel like working, then he stays home. If the wife doesn’t really want to spend much time with her kids, she doesn’t. If a teenage boy feels like a woman, then he’s free to embrace womanliness. If a twentysomething woman is attracted to other women, then she should act on that instinct. Narcissistic optimistic deism tells us that whatever we want to do or be, that’s great. God is the great cheerleader in the sky. No matter what we do, he’s for us. He endorses all our appetites and commends all our instincts.

This view has as much to do with the biblical God as cronuts do with Genghis Khan. Too many people today tragically follow a fairy tale god. The God of Scripture is not our life coach. He is our *Lord*. We’re used to this word as Christians, and so it loses its edge. This divine title signifies that God is our master. He is our sovereign. He is our ruler. He sets the tone for right and wrong. He calls us to account for our sin.

His gospel brings both bad news and good news. It informs us that we are sinful and destined for eternal judgment (Rev. 20:14). It calls us to be re-created (Col. 3:1–10). Our chief need is not affirmation but Christ-powered transformation (Rom. 12:1–2). When it comes to our sexuality, we have God-appointed limits. These limits are not bad; they are good, and good for us. Men are called to be men. Women are called to be women. We are not free to choose our sexual predilections. We do not have the authority to remake our gender.

The gospel opens our eyes to the goodness of our manhood and womanhood, and the corresponding beauty of living according to God's design. We are not exhilarated by breaking free from God's wise and life-giving limits. When Adam and Eve failed to listen to God by disobeying his commands and ignoring their divinely mandated boundaries, they fell, and we all fell with them (Gen. 3:1–7). It was not life that came through their recklessness, but death.

Everywhere around us our culture celebrates rebellion and narcissistic willfulness. The Scripture calls us to something better, and this call envelops all our identity, including our manliness or womanliness. Don't try to become something you're not. Embrace who God made you to be, and what he calls you to be in his Word. That, and not the selfish creeds of a Disneyfied age, is where you will find true happiness and true liberation.

### **The Gospel Unlocks Joy for Men and Women**

Sometimes, when Christians talk about embracing biblical gender roles, we're heard as only wanting people to do what's right. Let us make this clear: above all, we complementarians want to be godly men and godly women who experience the joy that comes from knowing God and living under his Word.

When you're saved, you no longer see any area of life as a burden. You see all of it as a garden of delight. Everything before you presents an opportunity to give praise and honor to your Creator and Savior (1 Cor. 10:31). This extends, in fact, even to what you eat and drink—in other words, to the most basic parts of your daily existence! That's incredible.

This helps us make sense of how we are to live as men and women. We know now that as blood-bought believers, we have the opportunity to magnify God's greatness and goodness as men and women. Our sexuality, then, is not incidental. It's not unimportant. It's not a curse that we want to get rid of. It's not a burden that God has given us that we do everything we can to downplay. Our manhood and womanhood is a God-designed pathway to delight.

Our sexuality wasn't designed by a secular entrepreneur, a victimizing pornographer, or a Jason Bourne wannabe. Manhood was produced by the spectacular intelligence of the Father. Womanhood was created by the cosmic brilliance of the Father. Our culture tells us the opposite: "Sure, you may be born with a few certain parts, but that doesn't mean anything. Men and women are interchangeable. Gender is malleable, changeable, unfixed, unimportant." This is the opposite of the biblical witness. God made Adam as a man. Then God made Eve, an image bearer like Adam as a human being, but unlike him as a woman. She had a purpose in creation: to be his "helper," a noble title befitting a high calling (Gen. 2:18).

When Yahweh brought Eve to Adam, the man did not glumly nod his head in acknowledgment. He exploded with praise and delight:

Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
she shall be called Woman,  
because she was taken out of Man." (Gen. 2:23)

If this is read in church, it's probably read flatly, without a lot of emphasis. In reality, the whole section should be in ALL CAPS. The man "at last" has his covenantal partner. He is lonely no longer; he has a helpmate; he finds the woman unlike him, fearfully and wonderfully made, and this difference thrills him and causes him to shout praise to his Maker.

The body, we see, is good. Manhood is good. Womanhood is good. We don't all look the same according to our sex. Not every man has thick shoulders and a lantern jaw. Not every woman has a certain figure and lustrous locks. But whatever we look like, we all give immense glory to God simply by living joyfully as men or as women, savoring our divine design, seizing opportunities (as later chapters discuss) to live obediently as followers of Christ according to our sex and our foundational Christian calling.

This is why we're here. This is what the complementarian movement, bursting with life, is all about. This is our hope and prayer for you: that in owning your manhood and womanhood and viewing it through the clarifying lens of the gospel, you would give God much glory, and experience much joy.

## **Refigured Identity**

I want to leave you with a true story that pulls together much of what we've covered here. It's a story of a little boy whose body was weak. He couldn't walk, and he was carried everywhere he went. Over time, he became needy and weepy. If you saw him, you would have pitied him. He was not even ten years of age, and he was already way behind.

But then something happened. The little boy was adopted by a Christian family. This was no ordinary family, however. It was one led by a godly father, a man whose blend of kindness and authority drew respect from his wife and children. His wasn't the ultra-modern home you see on Hulu nowadays—teens eye-rolling, chaos reigning, Dad zoned out on his iPhone, Mom trying to tame the far-past-gone toddlers. This was a home where a father trained and pastored his children, and a mother devoted herself to her kids. This was a home where you were expected to pull your weight, pursue maturity, and sacrifice your interests to those of others.

This was the home the little boy entered. He couldn't have articulated his feelings, but he knew something was different. There was order. There was discipline. And there was love, abundant love, that spilled out into laughter and playing and real conversation. But the boy wasn't the only one watching. The father was watching, too. He thought to himself, *This boy isn't lame. He's not gonna be a track star. But I think he can walk.*

After a couple of days, he decided not to keep these thoughts to himself. He gently prodded the little boy, his new son, to try walking. So the boy did. At first it didn't go well. Walking wasn't supposed to happen. His self-identity was fixed. But then something

clicked. The boy took one step, then another. A lurch became a walk. Pretty soon he, too, was caught up in the whirl of the home. He wasn't the fastest, and the other kids had to help him at times. But the switch was back on. The boy had come alive. His strength was bigger than his weakness. His identity was refigured.

This true story elegantly illustrates what happens when the gospel speaks into our sexuality. We gain strength from the power of Christ's redemptive work to become who we were made by God to be. Once we were weak; now, in the Spirit, we are strong.

Once, like the young woman in *Juno*, we didn't know what kind of man or woman we are. We didn't know what our manhood or womanhood was *for*. Now, in Christ, we understand. Now, like a child taking his first faltering steps, we are free to walk. Now, in Christ, we are free to run.

# Being a Man and Acting Like One

Jonathan Parnell

Paul writes to the leaders in the church at Corinth, “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love” (1 Cor. 16:13–14). When Paul says to “act like men,” he means something different from “act like women.” There is actually a word for it in the original Greek—*andrizomai*—literally meaning “behave like a man.” The only place it shows up throughout the New Testament is here in 1 Corinthians 16.

As the context and classical use suggest, the idea has to do with courage and bravery. To “act like men”—or “be courageous,” as the NIV puts it—is to act in a way that is somehow different from a boy, in terms of maturity, and is somehow different from a woman, in terms of gender. As Paul shows us, masculinity—to act like men—is something that fits with standing firm and being strong. And standing firm and being strong fits with masculinity. The connection is apparently so natural that the words are synonyms. So what is that? What does it mean to act like men—to be masculine?

## Getting to the Who

Actually, before we get to the understanding of what it means to act like men, we need to know *who*, most generally, *should* act like men. The obvious answer here is that men should act like men, but the qualification “most generally” is important. There are instances when both men *and* women are called to exhibit masculine traits, just as there are instances when both men *and* women should exhibit feminine traits. In fact, the healthiest examples of humans are those who know how to employ either traits when different circumstances require them.

Paul models this for us in his letter to the churches in Thessalonica. He describes his ministry: “We were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children” (1 Thess. 2:7). And then, “Like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God” (1 Thess. 2:11–12). Nursing and exhorting, tenderness and toughness—the apostle Paul’s ministry featured two different characteristics commonly associated with two different genders. Sometimes men and women need to be strong and stand firm (i.e., act like men), and sometimes men and women need to be gentle and nurturing (i.e., act like a mother). Neither masculinity nor femininity is *exclusively* tied to maleness or femaleness, though masculine traits are most generally (and appropriately) associated with men, and feminine with women.

## Understanding True Manhood

With that said, it is this most general association of masculinity that is worth more thought. It is obvious to most of us that men are most naturally called to exhibit masculine traits. But *who* are men? What does it mean to *be* a man? Apart from what we do, what is a man in the most basic, God-given sense?

This is an important question because only the combination of *being* a man and *acting* like one constitutes *true* manhood. This is the equation at the heart of this chapter. There are two essential parts:

1. The divinely ordained fact of being a man (maleness)
2. The man's derivative behavior of acting like men (masculinity)

Both of these parts are necessary to realize true manhood: God gives maleness in his creative design for man; men cultivate masculinity as our behavior in response to that creative design. In other words, maleness + masculinity = true manhood.

If we skip immediately to behavior, to the characteristics of masculinity without some understanding of male identity, then we run the risk of truncating manhood as mainly about what we do, and therefore leave room for the misunderstanding that manhood is a lifestyle option rather than something built into our being by our Creator.

So first we ask, what is maleness? Because then, after considering what it means to be a man, can we most responsibly ask what it means to act like one and thus understand mature manhood. Or for starters, and more foundational to both questions, we need a real sense of why it even matters.

### **Why It Matters**

It matters what a man is and how he acts because that says something about the God who made him. This is key to any thinking about ourselves. Our existence is a lot bigger than the little you and me to whom we are most accustomed. If we fail to understand this, if we short-circuit our minds and move straight to the perfunctory details, we'll simply go on puzzling ourselves over hollow implications drawn from the wrong starting place. We shouldn't jump ahead to roles without knowing why. There is more for us to see.

God created us for himself—to behold, and be happy in, the manifold perfections of his character displayed in Jesus Christ, his perfect image. He spoke us into existence to join him in the gladness of his Son, the radiance of his glory (Heb. 1:3), and then reflect that same radiance with our lives. All the details of this universe are hardwired toward this end, including the corn and grits of manhood. What makes men *men*, or women *women*, is intrinsically

connected to the majesty of the God in our design. We each exist as we do in order to display that glory. Which means, when it comes to understanding “man,” how we *see* God is more important than knowing what we’re supposed to do.

And it’s actually here, in beholding the glory of God, in seeing Jesus, that we experience our deepest joy and learn how to live. We were made for this. In fact, because understanding what a man *is* and *does* is ultimately about God’s glory, it is simultaneously about human flourishing, because only God’s glory can truly satisfy the human heart. God’s goal in manhood and womanhood is that we would know him, and in knowing him, be forever glad in all that he is for us in Christ.

So now, upon this foundation, we step into what might be the densest part of this book. By way of disclaimer, in view of the shorter, more practical chapters to follow, this chapter might feel like a trip down to the boiler room—looking less pretty and requiring more work—but hopefully filling the rest of these pages with heat. Here goes.

### **What Does It Mean to Be a Man?**

God created humans in his image—“male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). The Genesis account says it straightforward. There is the human being, brought into existence by God as the pinnacle of his creation and bestowed with an unparalleled dignity. We have dominion over the rest of creation. We bear God’s image. And there are two kinds of us: male and female. That’s the way it is, and God said it was *good*.

So much of what it means to be one and not the other—to be male, not female; or female, not male—is left to natural theology. The Bible doesn’t tell us about chromosomes, and it doesn’t need to. In those instances when anatomy is the topic, Scripture doesn’t make the case for our differences but assumes that we already know them (as is so clear in Song of Solomon). Scripture’s virtual silence on these specifics suggests that we understand it naturally. And

therefore, because the mechanics of maleness are so generally intuitive, the brief explanation of maleness here will draw from the natural revelation common to us all, which the Bible implies and ultimately enlightens. This natural revelation can be considered in three aspects: *the observable world*, *human society*, and *human interaction with the world*.<sup>1</sup>

Using these three perspectives to view the reality of natural revelation, we can focus more closely on sexuality through a similar grid, examining sexuality from the three vantages of *sex*, *gender*, and *gender identity*. These categories provide a natural lens through which to understand what it means to be a man.<sup>2</sup> Sex is biological, recognized in the observable world; gender is sociological, recognized in the perceptions of masculinity and femininity in human society; and gender identity is psychological, recognized as an individual's personal interaction with the observable world within human society.<sup>3</sup>

### Biological Perspective

The first perspective is biological. It is something that we cannot choose, but rather is given us by God. Therefore, this perspective regulates the others. It refers to our chromosomal makeup expressed in the anatomy. Put in the simplest terms, the male anatomy is different from the female anatomy. I hope that doesn't shock you. Undeniably, this biological difference is part of the observable world.

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<sup>1</sup> Alister McGrath, *The Open Secret: A New Vision for Natural Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 126ff. By way of a distinctively Christian explanation of natural theology, McGrath writes, "A Christian natural theology rests on the premise that, although nature may be publicly observable, *the key to its proper interpretation is not given within the natural order itself*" (139, emphasis added). This is to say, though nature in these three aspects (observable world, society, reason) is helpful in regard to understanding maleness, the correct interpretation of the natural order requires that the human interpreter, within the confines of culture, has his or her intellect controlled by the miraculous, particular revelation of God. This means we try to see as much as we can in what's there, but Scripture is always the final authority.

<sup>2</sup> These categories are introduced by Kevin Vanhoozer as a case study on how to do theology in Walter C. Kaiser Jr. et al., *Four Views on Moving beyond the Bible to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009). He cites two resources on this topic: Justin Edward Tanis, *Trans-Gendered: Theology, Ministry, and Communities of Faith*, Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2003), and *Transsexuality: A Report by the Evangelical Alliance Policy Commission* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Vanhoozer calls these the "chromosomal marker," the "cultural marker," and the "consciousness marker" (*Four Views*, Kindle locations 3251–54).

By the simplest inspection, we can identify the differences between being a male and being a female, and we often operate based upon these observations.

In the early weeks of my wife's first pregnancy, we jumped headfirst into the exciting task of finding a name for our child. We scoured books and websites and even took a weekend trip with the sole purpose of landing on a name—*two* names, actually. See, we weren't sure yet if we were expecting a boy or a girl. Our plan was to choose two names, but let the twenty-week ultrasound "make" the final decision. What we were going to call this child was ultimately up to not what name we thought sounded best or had the most meaning, but what kind of child God had given us—which we could discern by looking at a certain spot of our baby's body with the help of medical technology. I remember well the nurse telling us, in a much less dramatic fashion than I had anticipated, "It's a little girl," to which I replied, "It's Elizabeth!" That was five names ago now, and each decision since has still come down to that same moment.

Males have male parts and females have female parts, and they always will, unless some unnatural inhibition occurs—in which case we are reminded that though this biological perspective is normative, the holistic picture of maleness is formed by two other perspectives.

### Sociological Perspective

Second, there is the societal witness. These are the culturally conditioned characteristics that we identify with the God-given realities of maleness or femaleness. In short, this perspective shows us that there is a male way to look, walk, and talk as perceived by societies of men and women, and that when men express themselves this way, they are identified as males. Additionally, when a male doesn't correspond to this societal expectation, it is considered unnatural or strange. Every human culture is ingrained, at some level, with this binary lens of understanding itself. And though these societal

markers vary among different places and times, Scripture suggests that it is right for us to abide by them as male and female, so long as they are not sinful.

Case in point, consider Paul's instructions to the first-century Corinthians when he says it is a disgrace for men to have long hair (1 Cor. 11:14). According to that culture, and our own in similar ways, there is a masculine way for men to wear their hair. Commenting on this passage, Kevin DeYoung says that Paul is making two universal statements about gender: (1) it isn't right for men to act like women; and (2) society influences the norms of masculine and feminine expression.<sup>4</sup>

At the most basic level, this societal witness points to the human consensus that certain actions correspond most appropriately to certain beings.

### Psychological Perspective

Third, there is a psychological aspect to being a man. According to one's personal interaction with the world, males will typically perceive themselves as such. They embrace the biological and societal witness to their gender identity. Males feel male. They sense maleness in their makeup and conform to the societal perception of how that should look. In most cases, males interpret the normative perspective of male anatomy and the situational perspective of gender labels to mean, existentially, in profoundly common terms, "I am a man."

There are situations, however, when the fallen nature of our world impairs this understanding. Sometimes men may not feel like men, even if they have male anatomy and look like men. For example, transgender individuals typically claim that something is missing in the existential correspondence to their given anatomy and societal appearance. They perceive themselves differently than who they are and how they look. Sadly, these individuals grant this

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<sup>4</sup>Kevin DeYoung, "Play the Man," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 16, no. 2 (2011): 13. DeYoung makes the case for the general principle "The Bible teaches that men can be effeminate but that they shouldn't be." Thanks to Tony Reinke for pointing me to this article.

personal perception the ultimate authority and attempt to manipulate the other perspectives through the use of hormones and surgical procedures. Ironically, the goal of becoming transgender is to have all three perspectives saying the same thing, even if by inauthentic, superficial means.

### **Parts, Traits, Sense**

To be sure, no one of these three perspectives testifies to our sexuality on its own, but they all work together—as three vantages on one whole—to form our identity as male or female. And that information is adequate in almost every case, even if one perspective is blurred by our sin-tainted world.

In general, to be male is to be created with male anatomy, to be considered male according to the societal perception, and to understand oneself as male in light of one’s personal interaction with biology and society. Or put even more plainly, being a male is to naturally have male parts, male traits, and a male sense.

This is what it means to be a man. This reality of maleness is the fundamental aspect of manhood exclusively given to the man by God and from which the man answers the masculine call.

### **Defining True Manhood**

The following two chapters of this book, by Joe Rigney and David Mathis, target the question of true manhood: What does it mean for *men to act like men*? But before we get there, I’d like to lead into that discussion by first anchoring masculinity in the most basic calling of every human: the calling to love.

Returning to 1 Corinthians 16, notice verse 14, following the string of imperatives that includes “act like men”: “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. *Let all that you do be done in love*” (vv. 13–14). “Let all that you do be done in love.” The call to love is certainly not exclusive to men. It is at the heart of the two greatest commandments, where Jesus said, in essence, love God and love people (Matt. 22:37–39)—which goes for everybody.

Men and women both should love, and the question of masculinity (and femininity as we'll see) gets at precisely how that looks, distinctive to gender.

Masculinity, then, is more than how a man should act; it's an expression of a man's love. And its distinguishing feature is self-sacrificing leadership. In a phrase, masculinity is gladly assuming sacrificial responsibility.<sup>5</sup> Given our understanding of maleness above, combined with this description of masculinity, our working definition of true manhood goes like this: *True manhood is man's response to God's calling for men to gladly assume sacrificial responsibility.* There are three key words here worth highlighting.

First, manhood is a *response*. This is central to masculinity, which is derivative from our God-given male identity. Manhood is not one option among others for whoever is interested. It is a reality that corresponds to God's creation. It is mainly the result of *who we are*, which gives rise to *what we do*. Therefore, we should be clear that manhood itself is never self-creative. We are not making ourselves to be anything. Rather, we are responding to what God has designed. In essence, manhood is our realization, through masculine action, of our God-designed male being as witnessed in the three perspectives.

Second, manhood is accepted *gladly*. This important qualifier connects back to the point of why this all matters. Manhood can be a great burden. It is a heavy responsibility to carry, as we'll soon see. But the Christian response to this weight is not grudging acceptance, because it is full of faith. We understand that God's design for manhood has our eternal joy in view. Our journey of maturing into the character God has intended for us means that we will encounter more of his sufficiency. He will prove himself, through the gospel of his Son, to be our all-satisfying anchor and hope. Just as Jesus, "for the joy that was set before him," endured the cross (Heb. 12:2), we can be sustained through the weightiest parts of the masculine call because we rest in the deeper pleasure on the other side.

Third, manhood is about taking *responsibility*. This is another

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<sup>5</sup>Douglas Wilson, *Father Hunger: Why God Calls Men to Love and Lead Their Families* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 51–52.

way to say that manhood is about leadership.<sup>6</sup> Men are given a charge to lead, provide for, and protect women and children. Within the home, and even society at large, men are designed to carry the mantle of seeing into tomorrow, plotting a course in that tomorrow, and guarding that course from inhibitions. In this sense, men are essentially leaders. This, of course, does not negate the leadership capacity of women or the innumerable everyday tasks of women that demand their leadership. It only suggests that men are uniquely called by God to be the ones who step out first. And this call to lead—this charge to take responsibility—is naturally accompanied by *sacrifice*. Typically, the action of stepping out, paving a course, and fending off assailants comes at some loss to the man himself. I say “loss” in the most temporal sense—loss in terms of the Christian man saying about love’s cost what missionary David Livingstone famously said: “I never made a sacrifice.”

In the hardest moment of leading, manhood “takes it on the chin” and exchanges the world’s lust after instant gratification for that deeper joy of finding our pleasure in the pleasure of the ones we love. It isn’t easy, and none of us will be perfect, but this is what it means to “play the man”—and the raw materials we need have already been provided. Given God’s grace in our Spirit-empowered practice, and learning from the godly examples around us, any man, regardless of his past failures, can grow more and more into this role. I mean that. The call to manhood is not last week, or next year, but today. And we answer the call not once upon a time, or later down the road, but here and now, by God’s grace.

### **More than a Profile**

The last thing to say about manhood before the next two chapters is perhaps the most important. We must remember that God has not

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<sup>6</sup>John Piper writes, “When the Bible teaches that men and women fulfill different roles in relation to each other, charging man with a unique leadership role, it bases the differentiation not on temporary cultural norms but on permanent facts of creation” (*What’s the Difference: Manhood and Womanhood Defined according to the Bible* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002], 21). Piper defines masculinity this way: “At the heart of mature masculinity is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for, and protect women in ways appropriate to a man’s differing relationships” (*ibid.*, 22).

left us with a mere profile of manhood, but he's given us an actual Person. We have a flawless example of what true manhood looks like in the life of Jesus Christ. This example, in particular, is seen in the way he loved his bride—a way that men are commanded to emulate (Eph. 5:25).

Again, as discussed above, both men and women are called to follow the example of loving like Jesus (Eph. 5:2). But this example presents a peculiar calling to men. Paul's instructions for the Christian household in Ephesians 5 singles out the love of Jesus as the normative characteristic of a husband's relationship to his wife. A husband's love for his wife—indicative of true manhood—involves great personal sacrifice. Jesus gave himself up for his bride, and so should we—for our wives, especially, and even for the others God brings into the sphere of our love.

In this way, Jesus embodied the masculine call and stands as the great example of true manhood. If anyone ever gladly assumed sacrificial responsibility, it was Jesus. Looking to the joy that was set before him, he walked headfirst into the pain and loss of the cross and drained the cup that only he could drink. He assumed the weight of our sins on his shoulders to pave the path for a new humanity and secure our everlasting good. Jesus is the man—the true and better man—who exemplifies and empowers us to walk in his steps as each of us embraces our God-given design to be a man, and act like one.





## ***“Male and female he created them.”***

Genesis 1:27

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It’s one of the most important—and controversial—topics of our time.

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*“Rising in me, as I read, was a high sense of thankfulness to God for the insight, wisdom, giftedness, biblical faithfulness, and courage of these younger authors.”*

**John Piper**, from the foreword

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**JONATHAN PARNELL** (MDiv, Bethlehem College and Seminary) is the lead pastor of Cities Church in Minneapolis-Saint Paul, Minnesota.

**OWEN STRACHAN** (PhD, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is assistant professor of Christian theology and church history at Boyce College and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and serves as president of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood.

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