



Vulnerability Makes the Man

A Review of *Man Enough: How Jesus Redefines Manhood* by Nate Pyle

reviewed by Tim Krueger

expectations. In doing so, men are freed to develop and share their unique gifts. When they do, they will find that they are already man enough.

Man Enough begins with a well-

argued and thoughtful critique of Western cultural ideals of masculinity, tracing their history and impact on boys, men, and those around them. Having established that these ideals do not align with Jesus' life and are unhealthy, Pyle looks to Scripture. He makes the case for a masculinity modeled on Jesus, who was meek but also bold, vocal but also silent. He was single, financially dependent, emotional, and vulnerable. He defied cultural categories in order to live out his full humanity and model the kingdom; Christian men should, too.

Though the book is well-written and compelling, a couple weaknesses stood out. First, in a book that challenges cultural gender norms, I was surprised to see a few stereotypes that are counter-intuitive to the direction of the book. One section casts various traits and desires as "masculine" or "feminine" (158–60), only to conclude that "Jesus showed us that to be fully

human is to embrace the masculine *and* feminine qualities that exist within *all of us*" (160, emphasis mine). Why, then, call them "masculine" or "feminine"? Challenging these categories would be in line with a major theme of the book, stated only a few pages earlier: "being a man isn't about being manlier; it is about being a man who is becoming more fully human" (151).

Second, at times, *Man Enough* may appear to stretch some biblical texts to make them about masculinity when that is not their focus (an analysis of the Last Supper, on pages 82–84, for instance). However, the intent is clearly not to stretch Scripture to support a point, but to glean lessons about Christian living and apply those standards to male behavior. Pyle even writes elsewhere that "nowhere in the Bible does it state that Jesus came to model masculinity" (90). Still, I think more care could have been taken with some of the biblical analysis. It would be a shame for one or two wrong impressions to cast doubt on *Man Enough's* fundamentally solid use of Scripture.

As I read, my concerns over these weaknesses were eased by the clear message of the book and by many specific statements that clarified the author's intent and values.

On the whole, I heartily recommend *Man Enough*. It is well-written, well-

They say clothes make the man. Translation: appearance counts for a lot, even everything. When image is paramount, vulnerability becomes the enemy. It threatens to shatter that image, exposing the person underneath. Nobody says "vulnerability makes the man." Until now.

Nate Pyle's new book, *Man Enough: How Jesus Redefines Manhood* calls Christian men to disregard elusive cultural ideals of masculinity in favor of Jesus-like vulnerability, love, and relationship.

Weaving his own story together with analysis of history, sociology, and Scripture, Pyle builds his case on two basic ideas:

1. Our definitions of masculinity are inadequate. They are inconsistent, unattainable, unhealthy, and often antithetical to the gospel.
2. Christian men should follow Jesus' example, regardless of cultural

argued, amply sourced, and engaging. But what impresses me more is that *Man Enough* embodies what it teaches. Pyle is vulnerable about some of his deepest struggles and insecurities, and we all benefit from his example. He models what it looks like to take the first step in building communities where men are freed to trade image and expectations for honesty and authenticity.

Pyle's openness and style give *Man Enough* broad appeal. The ideas will certainly appeal to egalitarians, but I think that the book will resonate with men of all perspectives, for the simple reason that Pyle taps into experiences and insecurities shared by so many men. And, while the book has strong egalitarian themes, they are not the primary focus, so will not turn off readers who disagree with them.

The fact that *Man Enough* is one of several new Christian books re-evaluating masculinity testifies to the evangelical world's appetite for this conversation. As the wider American culture dismantles long-held values surrounding gender identity, evangelical Christianity is searching for its moorings, sometimes discovering that we have been tethered more to a cultural patriarchy than to Jesus. Christians are recognizing that the patriarchal standards by which masculinity is measured are inadequate, if not actively harmful, and are looking for something different. *Man Enough* provides direction.

And that direction is beautifully ironic. Manhood, just like womanhood, finds its fulfillment in Jesus, who is fully God and fully human. In Pyle's words, "Jesus is the new model for both men and women, and in him, men and women are brought together as they seek to imitate Christ" (90). *Man Enough* calls us all to set aside shallow definitions of manhood or womanhood in favor of something greater—a humanity patterned after Jesus. That's an idea we should all get behind.



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R

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by H. Edgar Hix

What. Wait! Who Said "What"?

We all have our little pet peeves. As a writer, one of mine is using "what" wrongly. For example: "When I look in the mirror, what do I see?"

In my case, I see a 60ish, a-bit-past-pudgy male Caucasian with white hair, either a really big bald spot or a bit of hair left around the corners, and a huge Santa beard.

See the problem? When I ask "What do I see?" I answer by defining my body.

Don't get me wrong, my body and I are the same person. But, my body is only partially definitive of who I am.

If I look in my mirror and ask, "Who do I see?" I get a different picture. I see an evangelical Protestant Christian who loves his God, wife, seven cats, poetry and fiction, and theology; who suffers from (and takes medications for) depression and anxiety, is tempted by unnecessary food and sugar (read chocolate), knows he needs to exercise more...

The body is still in there. I cannot, and don't want to, escape my body. I use my eyes and mouth. I don't use my feet and arms enough. I keep my brain active.

When you look in the mirror, do you just see a what or do you see the who?

Do you see a female? Then yes, that's part of who you are. Do you see a Christian? Great! That's a very essential part of who you are. Do you see a mother, mathematician, married/single, mastermind, or muddled mind? Each, including your gender, is a part of who you are.

But, you and I must not let the parts be left apart, dissected with pins in them. The parts become the whole and the whole becomes a unique person who is beyond stereotypes and more than her parts. Each of us is a unique flicker in the overall flame that is the family of God. Each unique flicker is part of the brilliance that is God's creation, and God made each unique so he could love each uniquely.

You and I. We're each unique wavelengths of the light created by the Light. So, go ahead. Shine, you little who.



H. Edgar Hix is a Minneapolis, Minnesota, Christian poet and writer. He has a special interest in encouraging Christians to avoid unbiblical sexism, classism, and racism. His objective in writing is to express the humanness of being Christian and the tragedies and joys of this life as a human being.