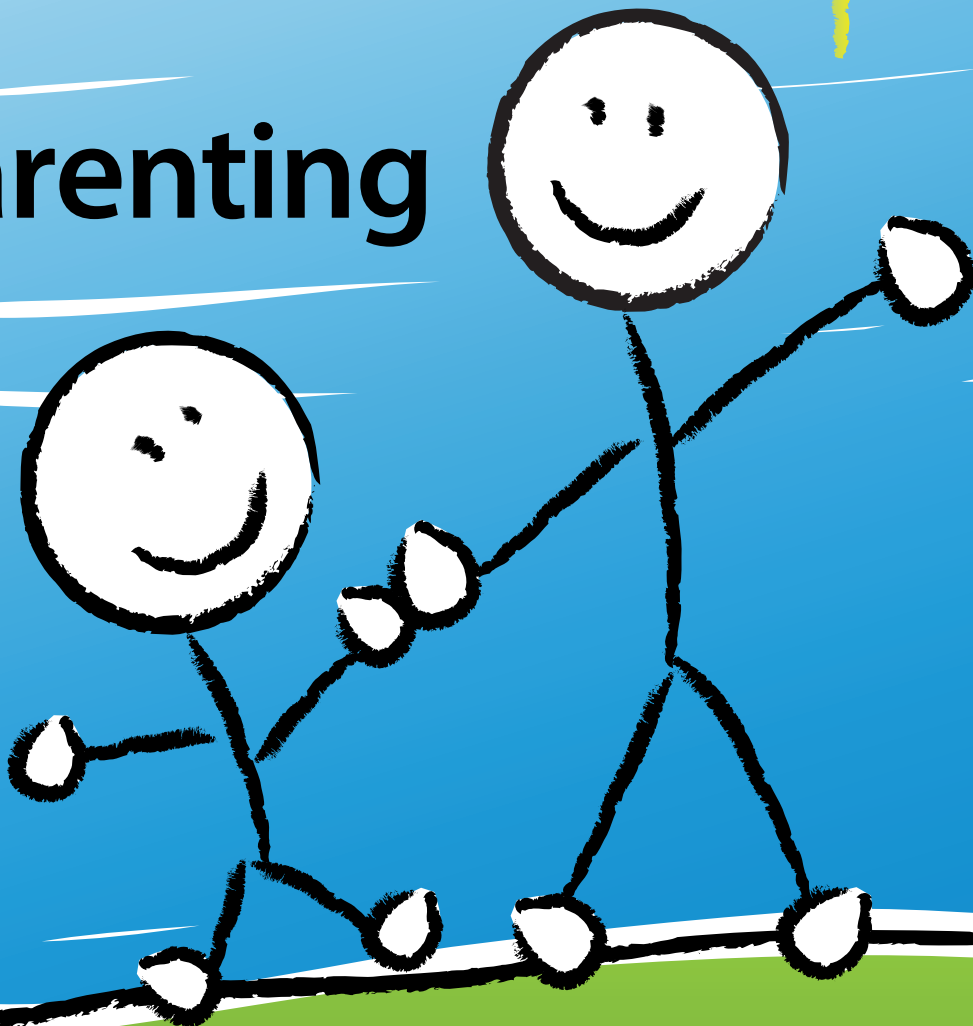


Autumn 2012 | Volume 19 | Issue 3

Mutuality

the voice of Christians for Biblical Equality

Parenting



Inside:

- ▶ Tips for co-parenting as equals
- ▶ Empowering your children without gender bias
- ▶ Raising boys to be egalitarian

and more...

Mutuality 19.3, Autumn 2012

"Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding" (Rom. 14:19, NRSV).

Mutuality (ISSN: 1533-2470) seeks to provide inspiration, encouragement, and information about equality within the Christian church around the world.

Editorial staff: Megan Greulich, editor; Image Spigot, graphic designer; Mimi Haddad, president/publisher.

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On the cover: Photo by pchristinaq, from istockphoto.com.



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“Resemble Me”

My friends Paula and Eric welcomed their first baby just three weeks ago. Visiting them a few days after they returned from the hospital, I held baby Avery tightly and stared at his tiny face and unusually thick white blond hair—for only ten minutes before I was overcome with anxiety that I would drop him. Struck by the enormous responsibility that my friends now face, I gratefully (and gently) transferred Avery back into his parents' arms.

Even with nine months to prepare for their new son, in an instant, Eric and Paula's lives were dramatically and irrevocably changed. All of my friends who have welcomed babies into their lives have embraced the responsibility with joy and patience. Observing them adjust to diaper changes, middle-of-the-night feedings, and crying fits has been a lesson to me about trusting God, and having grace for one another and ourselves as we navigate new challenges.

But beyond adjusting to a new sleep schedule, which seems daunting enough to me, my friends who are parenting will also face greater challenges in the years to come. I laughed at a story Eric relayed of finding Avery one evening, with his thick hair and strong cowlick, sporting a hairstyle that mimicked Eric's. With just a bit of hair-coaxing, Avery was a pint-sized version of his dad. The photo that resulted is sweet and funny. But it is also a reminder of the deeper concept of resemblance.

In a sense, a parent asks their children to resemble them. It is an incredibly tall order, in much more important ways than physical appearance. *With God's grace, a parent says to their children, I will be an example for you. I will demonstrate to you what it means to love and serve God and other people. I will encourage you to recognize and develop your gifts. And I will teach you to advocate for those the world ignores.* If I have anxiety while simply holding little Avery for a few minutes, my head spins with the responsibility of modeling and teaching a child these important lessons.

As egalitarians, we hold some core beliefs about God, women, and men that we hope to pass onto the next generation,

whether through parenting or mentoring. We want our children to be passionately dedicated to Jesus, to be good thinkers, and to be deeply committed to loving, serving, and respecting all people—regardless of their ethnicity, social status, or gender. But how do we fill this tall order? How do we live in a way that makes our request to “resemble us” a clear and worthy pursuit? We have dedicated this issue of *Mutuality* to these questions.

The feature articles, full of personal stories, helpful research, and biblical wisdom, are organized into three sections: how to share parenting responsibilities in an egalitarian way, how to empower children to recognize their worth and pursue their gifts, and how to teach children about biblical equality. We pray our authors' stories and insights will be an encouragement to you.

A note: I just have to point out the obvious but too often overlooked fact that not all Christians are called to be parents. As many of us have observed, this is a message that churches communicate poorly to women in particular. Yet, Scripture shows us that our worth rests solely

in the fact that we belong to Jesus, whether or not we birth and raise children (see Luke 11:27-28). To those readers who, like me, are not in the active stage of parenting, this issue of *Mutuality* is meant for you, too. As part of the body of Christ, we all have an important influence with children. Through mentoring youth, supporting those who are raising children, or serving our community in other ways, we too have the privilege and responsibility to live in a way that invites children to resemble us.

As always, we would love to hear from you about this issue of *Mutuality*! Send your comments, questions, and critiques to cbe@cbeinternational.org.

Blessings,
Megan Greulich

P.S. Our office is buzzing about the incredible ways God moved through our July conference in Kenya! Be sure to read some of the highlights on p. 18.



Eric and baby Avery resembling one another.



NOW PANIC AND FREAK OUT

REFLECTIONS ON ROLE-SWAPPING FOR PARENTS

by Jennifer and Luke Reynolds

Picture this: A young American couple arrives in York, England with their two-year-old son to start their new life—the mother to return to school and earn a PhD at the University of York, the father to become a stay-at-home-dad. Amidst a light drizzle, they walk the streets of York on their first day in the country, obtain library cards, relax at a café, and then saunter back to a quaint bed and breakfast. They fall peacefully into a deep and restful sleep, and visions of their delightful prospects dance through their dreams. They, indeed, are ready to live out England's World War II motto: *Keep calm and carry on*.

Now picture this: A young American couple arrives in York, England with their two-year-old son to start their new life—the mother to begin a demanding school schedule, the father to face a dramatic shift to full-time dad and homemaker. They haven't slept on the overnight flight from Boston. When they land in London, the rain comes down in microcosmic waterfalls. Everywhere. They use half their savings to take a taxi to the train station, then the other half of their savings to take a train into York—their new home for the next three years. Amidst an onslaught of torrential rain, they stagger into the

public library, track down library cards, stumble into a café, and finally collapse into an unfamiliar bed. None of them are able to fall asleep, and the father finally has a panic attack at three in the morning. They, indeed, are ready to live out the inverse of England's World War II motto: *Now panic and freak out.*

Both pictures were us. *Are* us. Now at the end of the second year of our role-swapping, living-abroad journey, the place we have arrived at is one of acceptance of the highs and lows involved with making big life changes. In a word, what our counter-cultural decisions have shown us more than anything else is the absolute power of God's grace. And this grace is teaching us how to live life in a more holistic way.

As parents, it is essential that we identify the needs of our family: physical, economical, emotional, and spiritual. What healthy meals will be prepared? Are there clean clothes to wear? Have we paid our bills? Are there opportunities to connect with a larger community? Does everyone feel listened to and understood? Is faith growing? Is trust in God deepening? Is there specific time devoted to prayer and studying Scripture? This list of needs, when written out in full, can become quite overwhelming, especially when facing such dramatic life changes. In our Christian culture, we frequently attempt to manage these challenges by focusing on *who* is fulfilling a need or *should be* fulfilling certain needs, based on assumptions about gender. But our life story to this point has shown us something different: Our family's needs are met best when we embrace a fluid approach to the roles we occupy as parents, rather than a fixed, unchangeable structure.

Each morning when we wake up in England, we find ourselves asking questions about who will do what. Our original role-swapping model has now transmogrified into a role-sharing parenting plan. Over the past two years, what God has been repeatedly showing us is that we must relinquish an all-or-nothing approach to parenting and living. Our culture likes to say, *Mothers will do this; fathers will do this.* Many of us at one point in our lives or another could probably make two columns on a sheet of paper and delineate the cooking, cleaning, and childcare to mothers, while placing economic responsibilities,

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the car, and the yard in the care of the father. But these kinds of differentiations fail to account for spiritual gifts, the needs of the family, and the time and resources available to meet those needs. It is almost as if a legalistic vision of parenting and marriage has come to replace the life-giving, emancipating, empowering, and sustainable vision that Jesus teaches and Paul endorses. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul writes a deeply impassioned account of what matters in our journey as Christians: it's

not the legalistic rites of passage on which the Galatians were placing so much importance—not circumcision, the law, and the carefully delineated roles for men and women, slaves and free, Greeks and Jews (Gal. 3:28)—but “what matters is faith that works through love” (5:6).

The challenging aspect of “faith that works through love” is that it looks different for everybody. And, the inertia of our Christian culture's assumptions that all parenting must look alike and be based on gender roles is hard to resist. Messages from the pulpit seldom seek to discuss fathers as nurturers or mothers as economic providers. Christians often frown upon fathers who stay home and mothers who work, and we have found few role models who are living outside of traditional expectations. Yet, as we continue on our journey—which will most

certainly cross confusing terrain—we must sit and discuss who will take care of what responsibilities, and how the needs of the family will be met. It isn't easy, to be sure, but our “faith that works through love” compels us forward. And the more we learn to parent based on need and gifting rather than cultural expectations,

**TITUS 3:9:
“BUT AVOID FOOLISH
CONTROVERSIES AND
GENEALOGIES AND
ARGUMENTS AND
QUARRELS ABOUT THE
LAW, BECAUSE THESE
ARE UNPROFITABLE
AND USELESS.”**

Sharing Parenting Responsibilities

the more we experience great empowerment and freedom.

Not so long ago, our son was scheduled to receive two vaccinations. Like his father, he is quite wary of sharp needles. Both of us brought him to the doctor's appointment, and thirty minutes of chaos ensued—complete refusal on our son's part to remove his shirt and let the doctor “poke” him with the “special” medicine. As parents, we wallowed in despair after his refusal turned to shrieks, and his shrieks, upon leaving the unsuccessful visit, turned to a complete emotional meltdown on the walk home. When we arrived home (trying to forget about all the judgmental looks we received from strangers for being “those” parents with “that” child), we tried to figure out why the appointment had been so terrible—what we could have done to have made it go more smoothly. But we were all exhausted, and after two years of living with no car, no dryer, no microwave, instant coffee (dreaming about the luxury of brewing a “proper” cuppa!), and fighting the cultural trends of parenting and family life, we were, quite simply, wiped out. We had little gas in our tanks, and we had no clue where to refuel. Even at this late stage of the journey, we asked that treacherous question: *What if we have made an awful mistake—about everything?*

The question sat with us like a grumpy army of curmudgeons the entire day, and we went to sleep that night confused and unsure about the path ahead. What is more, since our son hadn't actually received the necessary shots, we had to go back in a week. Was it now time to panic and freak out again, as we had when we first arrived? One week later—and after a series of days seeking Christ in prayer—we returned to

the doctor's office. Our son was no giddier than the previous attempt to have his arms assaulted by needles, but, as parents, we were armed with renewed faith. We questioned less, trusted more, and held on to the fact that Scripture never guarantees ease and prosperity, but it always guarantees that God's love “endures forever” (Ps. 136). God's promises to us, which we claimed on the second doctor's visit, were the same as God's promises to the Israelites as they sojourned in Egypt, to the disciples as they followed Jesus, to the early Christians in Acts—quite simply, *You'll never be alone*. It won't be easy, but God's love will provide a way for us to prevail.

In our one tiny moment, watching our son receive his shots became a metaphor for our whole experiment of parenting differently; there were cries and pain, yes, but the effect of the medicine was powerful, and it entered in and worked. Prevailing doesn't always look like ease and comfort. Prevailing by faith sometimes looks like loving when it's hard, keeping calm when you want to panic, and carrying on when you know that the confusions won't altogether disappear. But you take one step forward, then another, and another, because you believe that when God calls, God also equips—whether that takes the shape of an out-of-home vocation, an in-home-vocation, or a mixture in the middle.



Jennifer Reynolds is working on her PhD at the University of York, researching human trafficking. After her husband and her son, writing and social justice are her passions. Luke Reynolds' latest book is *Keep Calm and Query On: Notes on Writing (and Living) with Hope*. He loves his wife and son deeply, and is passionate about teaching, writing, and social justice.

ADVICE FOR PARENTS WHO ARE PRACTICING SHARED PARENTING

1. Try to avoid making other big changes, such as moving to a new house or a new country, at the same time as you change parenting responsibilities.
2. Talk frequently and in depth with your spouse. Share your emotions in honest ways, and listen to the difficulties each individual faces with the new situation.
3. Avoid blaming each other for the challenges you experience. For example, do not say, “I'm upset because the house is not meeting my standards of cleanliness” when you really mean, “I feel guilty that I'm away from home so much and am having a hard time at work.” And do not say, “I'm angry because you should get home earlier,” when you really mean, “I am still fried from the tantrum this morning and from having to nourish and entertain a moody child who would not nap. I am overwhelmed and exhausted.”
4. Expect confusion. Anything new, different, or counter-cultural elicits ambiguity as you proceed; be patient and make prayer a top priority.
5. Ask for dedicated prayer partners to support the life change your family has made.
6. Search out a community that will support and encourage your choices. This becomes incredibly helpful in the difficult, confusing moments—sometimes you need to cry on the shoulder of someone other than your spouse; likewise, it is uplifting and fun to share successes or insights with others who believe in what you are doing.
7. Expect some criticism and disillusionment from others. Learn to smile and nod, but seek the Lord's approval rather than the approval of others.
8. Laugh. Watch a clip on YouTube of a comedian you both enjoy, laugh about the mistakes you make in your new roles, laugh about the silly things your children do. If necessary, force the laughter until it becomes real.
9. At least once a week, sit down together for encouragement. Make time for each spouse to share compliments with the other regarding how they are handling their new responsibilities.
10. Try to refrain from critiquing your spouse; understand that they will perform their responsibilities differently than you would, and this is okay!
11. Even if you only have a few minutes: Pray together, every day.

Learning to Co-parent

by Kendall Potter

How a parenting model rooted in mutual submission and responsibility strengthens marriages and families.

One of the most powerful parenting lessons that I've had to learn, over and over again, is that 3:00 am, when your baby is screaming, is not the proper time for a conversation about navigating new parenthood as equals.

Even though my husband and I had exhausted (or so we thought) the topic of co-parenting our new son together, we kept finding the discussion needed some clarification. And we often found that the topic needed finessing during a diaper change or feeding session in the wee hours of the morning, when both the need for sleep and our emotions were running high.

Our marriage had been built on utilizing each other's areas of gifting, so it made perfect sense that our parenting would be similarly egalitarian. After much prayer and discussion, we had concluded that the biblical view of marriage is a marriage of equals, rooted in mutual submission. Our marriage had been strengthened by submitting our lives to one another. Parenting, then, was another opportunity to "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ," as commanded in Ephesians 5:21. Rather than just one parent shouldering all of the responsibility for the care of our newborn, we looked forward to both of us changing our lives for our baby. In the same way that we submit one to another, we would also have to submit our desires and schedules to the needs of our son.

Despite the reality that parenting roles are more equal than they might have been in the past, mothers still take on a greater share of multitasking than fathers. For example, a December 2011 study from the *American Sociological Review* found that, in dual-earner families, mothers spend an average of ten more hours a week multitasking than fathers, and enjoy the juggling less than men (Offera and Schneider). Setting up a system for equally sharing parenting tasks can guard against resentment that one parent might feel with an unevenly distributed workload.

Equally-shared parenting not only strengthens our marriage and guards against resentment, we also hope that in the future it will allow our son to see a picture of the dignity and equality that we all share in the image of Christ. In fact, this picture we present to him is likely to have a stronger effect on his own view of mutual relationships than many other images that he is presented. If my husband and I truly want him to believe that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus," it needs to be modeled at home.

Our son Hudson is now past infancy, and we are still learning how to share our parenting responsibilities. I'm sure that each new stage of his development, as well as the ebbs and flows of our work and ministry roles, will bring challenges in co-parenting. However, we've learned that a little preparation can make a difference in preparing to parent equally.

Challenge Your Assumptions

Even though I believe that my husband is perfectly capable of parenting our son as well as I am, I still find myself thinking that as the mother, I can do something better. Not only is this superior attitude wrong, it is also disrespectful and hurtful to my husband. I often find that I need to challenge my own assumptions, and recognize that even I—a passionate egalitarian—am capable of resorting to gender stereotypes rather than parenting based upon our gifts.

My husband grew up with a stay-at-home mother, while I grew up with a mother who worked outside of the home but still managed the bulk of the traditional female duties at home. Much like our families of origin shape our marriage relationship, the gender-specific roles we each saw modeled in

our homes has affected our parenting. One way to combat this has been to discuss our childhoods and who was responsible for the parenting. Did your father change diapers? Who was responsible for taking the kids to doctor appointments? Was something in your home considered "women's work"?

By challenging our underlying assumptions about parenthood, we open up the path to move past them into a mutually-satisfying parenting relationship based on gifting, rather than prescribed gender roles.

Plan Ahead for Nursing

There are some roles, of course, that a father cannot fill. If a mother is planning to breastfeed, have conversations before the child is born about dividing responsibilities equally. For my husband and me, this meant that he took a greater role in diaper duty. Breastfeeding (especially in the first month or two) takes a lot of time out of a mother's schedule. If this is something you feel strongly about, make sure that you will divide other tasks. My husband also chose to stay up with me for middle-of-the-night feedings during his paternity leave. That was very helpful for making sure that I didn't feel alone in feeding our son.

Reevaluate

Every few weeks, my husband and I have a conversation about how parenting is working out for the two of us. Sometimes this has meant that one of us has to bring up something that we feel the other could do better. Honesty is important and helps to keep a marriage strong and prevent against one parent resenting the other.

Remember to Show Appreciation

There was a period of time where it seemed like I was nursing Hudson all night long. Sensing how physically exhausted I was becoming, my husband chose to rock the baby back to sleep once he had been fed. After a week or two of this, I realized that he was staying up much more than I was. I made sure to thank him for taking on this role and allowing me to rest. Gratitude goes a long way in guarding against resentment.

In dual-earner families, mothers spend an average of ten more hours a week multitasking than fathers, and enjoy the juggling less than men. Setting up a system for equally sharing parenting tasks can guard against resentment that one parent might feel with an unevenly distributed workload.

Have Grace for One Another

New parenthood is stressful. If you are counting diaper changes, and who has rocked the baby the most, and who is more tired, you're probably not having grace with one another. It has been important for the two of us to realize that a grace-filled parenting relationship is often quite unequal, with good reason. As our schedules and the demands of our son shift, we find short seasons when one of us might be doing more than the other. For example, my husband is able to recognize when I might need more sleep, so he'll take an extra shift rocking our son back to sleep. Similarly, I can recognize when he needs a break, too. The Apostle Paul reminds us in Philippians 2:3-4, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." This is not only wonderful marital advice, but also great parenting advice.

New parenthood is a physically and emotionally exhausting time, but with a bit of preparation and communication, it can also be a time of mutual sacrifice and bonding for a husband and wife. As

we have prepared to parent equally, my husband and I have discovered that, amidst the dirty diapers and midnight feedings, we have found another way to honor Christ and model grace to one another and our family.



Kendall Rose Potter holds a degree in Christian thought from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. She lives in Pennsylvania with her husband and young son. You can read more from Kendall at kendallrosepotter.com.



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Campbellsville University



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Praising A⁺ Achievement

Strategies for Developing Your Children's Confidence *by Susan Howell*



Sometimes the way we communicate our approval of our children reflects the gender stereotypes of our culture.

"I made an A on my math exam!" your child exclaims.

"Great! You are so talented!" you respond. Or you might say, "That studying really paid off. You've worked hard!" On the surface, both sound like compliments. Both congratulate the child on a job well done. Both convey your pride. Yet, they are different in ways we often do not recognize.

The first response praises a quality that is inborn and not subject to change—something that is part of the essence of

who the child is. An inborn quality is likely to endure and be replicated the next time she or he takes an exam.

The second response praises something the child has done in a given situation—something requiring intentionality—rather than an inborn quality the child possesses. Putting forth effort is changeable depending on the situation, as well as the energy and time one has for any given endeavor.

The fact is, success most often hinges on both inborn talent and hard work, and neither response usually triggers an adverse reaction—unless the child consistently hears one message without enough of the other.

In their research on achievement motivation in boys and girls, Raty and colleagues (2002) found that parents are more likely to attribute their son's success in math to his talent or ability, and their daughter's success in math to hard work. This could communicate that his success is more likely to be repeated because it's a part of who he *is*, with hers being less certain since it's a part of what she *does*.

What's more, when a son does poorly in math, parents are more likely to blame lack of effort. But, with a daughter, mothers tend to blame both lack of effort and task difficulty (Raty, 2002). This again reflects less confidence in the daughters' chance for success, since lack of effort can be remedied by simply trying harder, but task difficulty is relatively unchangeable. After all, if you aren't good enough to master the task today, you probably won't be able to master it tomorrow either. Believing the task is simply too difficult might also contribute to passivity for these young females, letting others handle the difficult subjects, the hard questions, the tough issues.

Cultural stereotypes appear to weigh in, too, since research shows that parents believe their daughters have more talent in music (Fredricks, Simpkins, & Eccles, 2005) and reading ability (Tenenbaum & Leaper, 2003) than their sons. Parents' expectations seem to reflect the gender stereotypes of our culture, even when objective research shows no difference in skill level between the genders (Helgeson, 2012).

Do these biases influence the child's perceptions? Research says yes. Neuenschwander and colleagues (2007) found that adult perception seems to influence how children perceive themselves. Therefore, concern that girls and boys will learn to feel less certain of success when pursuing activities outside of gender stereotypes seems warranted.

In teaching a gender studies course at a Christian university, I have found that once my students learn of these biases, they begin noticing them among their friends and family members and are surprised they haven't noticed them before. They often report that they want to be more intentional about the way they communicate, so they will foster, rather than undermine, others' confidence and success.

I believe it's the same for most parents. We typically do not set out to make it difficult for our children to believe in their own success. We don't want our daughters to feel less confident in math and science or for our sons to believe they have less ability in reading. And to be fair, we probably shouldn't want our sons or daughters to focus exclusively on their abilities and talents, without due attention to hard work and effort. We want to help, not hinder, their confidence in themselves and their work ethic.

So, let's look at how we can praise and encourage our children in ways that will optimize their confidence in future success.

1 Know your child's talents and abilities. Notice when something seems to come easily for them, and encourage them to pursue activities where they show natural ability. Be careful, however, to note their actual abilities rather than assuming talents stereotypic to their gender. Don't assume your daughter will be good with children and your son will be able to fix any and all broken gadgets. They might have abilities that are in line with our culture's gender roles; they might not. Your daughter might be an exceptional athlete; your son might be the one to ask to make a special dessert for a family get-together.

2 Know where your child struggles. Notice the areas where your child seems to be challenged and wants to give up. In areas where greater effort is warranted (e.g., learning to read, being assertive with peers), encourage children to make the effort necessary to succeed. Provide direction and advice in areas where you can. Model strategies that work for you. Connect them with tutors or peers who can help when you don't feel capable yourself.

One word of caution, however: The way you help children can also communicate your confidence, or lack of confidence, in their abilities. One study found that parents were controlling when helping their daughters with homework, communicating the child's inability to do it on her own. Although parents used the same techniques with their sons, they also utilized autonomy-granting assistance which communicates his ability to do the work on his own (Pomerantz & Ruble, 1998).

When children are stressed and overwhelmed with homework, or confused about how to work the problem or write the essay, it's easy for us to want to fix the situation—just tell them the answer or give them a topic for the paper, etc. While this solves the immediate issue, it takes responsibility for learning away from the children, communicating their inability to “get it” themselves. The point isn't to simply finish the homework as much as it is to understand the underlying concept so it can be applied to the next homework assignment, the next exam, the next life situation.

A better approach might be to ask children to describe where they are struggling, talk through what they were told in class or read in the text, and help them to come to the answer themselves. When this works, they will be more confident tackling future challenges. When help is needed, it should build, not weaken, children's confidence.

3 Remember too that not every child needs to succeed in every area. In areas that are not crucial, accept your child's limitations. Your child simply may not have the ability to become a concert pianist, with or without all the effort he or she can muster. Respect that.

4 Pause to examine what you are already communicating to your children. The next time you comment on your son's or your daughter's success, take a moment and think what that comment will communicate. Would your comment be different if you were talking to a child of the other sex? Focus on tailoring your comments to the situation rather than the gender of the child. Sometimes the pause and thought are all that are needed to steer us in the right direction.

5 Learn about how you usually respond by simply asking your child. When your child gets the lead in the school play, ask them, "What do you think? Was it effort? Natural talent? Or some of both?" Listen to what they say. You can get a feel for what they think about themselves and an idea of what you, and others in their life, have communicated thus far.

6 Praise the gifts you see in your child. Specifically identify in them characteristics you admire that seem to be part of who they are naturally. "You are so observant." "I love listening to you sing." "Your sense of humor is wonderful!" These comments communicate appreciation for an ability that will likely surface again and again across a variety of contexts.

7 Praise the effort expended. Sometimes adults forget how overwhelming it is to tackle geometry for the first time or how pressure-filled it is to make friends in a new school. Children need to know that their efforts are noticed and appreciated, regardless of the level of success those efforts have produced.

8 Keep in mind that even tasks requiring effort might uncover hidden talents. Likewise, having talent rarely means preparation isn't necessary. Just because he

has to practice a lot doesn't mean your son has no natural athletic ability. She might be at the top of her class in algebra, but homework is still important. Praising talent while applauding commitment to practice is one way to communicate the importance of both.

9 Remember that while you are likely the most significant influence for your child's confidence, you are not the only influence. Your child's friends and teachers, television, movies, and books all communicate about gender and achievement in powerful ways. Monitor the media messages your child is exposed to, and, depending on the age, limit them and/or talk openly with your child about those messages and their dangers. Pay attention to what your child seems to be hearing at school. When appropriate, pass along information (like this article!) to your child's teachers to increase their awareness.

In conclusion, most parents want for their children to be successful and to believe in themselves. Yet research shows that the way we communicate with our children often discourages their confidence in future success when they venture outside of gender-stereotyped endeavors. Depending on whether we attribute their success to a stable ability or to the unstable expenditure of effort, we communicate our confidence in their future success. Since children often take cues from parents, we would do well to be intentional in moving beyond stereotyped expectations, appreciating the abilities our children possess as well as the work ethic we hope they develop.



Susan Howell, EdD, is professor of psychology at Campbellsville University, where she teaches classes in gender, development, and the integration of psychology with faith. Susan has written for CBE publications, professional journals, and several devotional magazines.

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Raising an Egalitarian Son

by Susan McLeod-Harrison



“God is a woman,” my son, Micah, announced one day last summer when he was still three. Then he added, *“You can see Mama, but you can’t see God.”* My husband had just explained that it was God who made the peas we were shelling in the shade of our tree. Intrigued by Micah’s response, I assumed he associated my love and closeness to the feelings of warmth and care he experiences from God.

How long will his reverence for me and my Super Powers last?

I ask myself sometimes, now that Micah is four and has had another year to glean information about God and gender from American culture. The other day Micah was stringing an old computer cable down the stairs. When he reached the kitchen, he said to me, “I’m glad a guy did that and not a woman!” Dismayed, I asked him to repeat what he had said. He looked

down, sensing he had said something I didn’t like, and replied, “I’m glad Mama cuddles me.” I saw a four-year-old boy again and not another sexist man. So I gently pointed out to him the woman who teaches plumbing and electricity on a few of his do-it-yourself videos. I reminded him that women can do all the jobs he admires.

Teaching Your Children About Gender

You have to understand that this is a feminist household. My husband teaches feminist philosophy at a Christian college, and I have written a book meant to bring healing to women hurt by the church. At barely three, Micah had heard enough of our discussions to shout, “No more feminism!” My husband asked, “Do you want to know what feminism is?” Micah said, “Micah doesn’t want to know!”

But, despite our quest to be egalitarian, we still let Micah watch DVDs of *Ask This Old House*, because he loves to learn about home repair. On these shows, he sees only men do the jobs that he wishes he could do too. (Approaching his fourth birthday, his big question was, “Am I a man yet?”). The guys on this show—his heroes—often address only other men, even though *both* husbands and wives work together renovating their homes. Though we will discuss such issues with Micah, I cannot undo all the messages conveyed to him in mediums that can dominate a child’s world. But I will not subscribe to cable until he is twenty-two. Super Mom won’t give up without a fight.

My husband and I have carefully selected the words we use with our son, understanding that his first notions about gender would be inherited from his parents. One day our little tyke said “he or she...” instead of “he” to represent a person, and we smiled

to fathom, four-year-olds included. The wonder to me is that, in a culture which so easily assumes otherwise, God is (or was, for one bright summer afternoon) a woman in his mind, and not the Man Upstairs.

With regard to other cultural values about gender, we take creative risks. We let him buy pink sweat pants and wear them when he wants to, ignoring stares from neighbors. His favorite toothbrushes feature the cartoon Hello Kitty—one pink, one blue. And we have bought him dolls and pink doll houses. He has always loved the houses, but, admittedly, not the dolls. He rearranges the furniture, and vacuums the houses with a miniature vacuum. His passion, in fact, is vacuums—of which he has nine, in various degrees of working order. His other loves are home repair and architecture, male-dominated arenas. But he also loves interior design and gardening, and can name many indoor plants and any number of herbs and vegetables at the

“My husband and I have carefully selected the words we use with our son, understanding that his first notions about gender would be inherited from his parents.”



at each other with parental pride. Yet, even the order, with “he” always coming first, and with our fading “...or she” too often tacked on at the last minute, tells him something about who comes first in our society. Other words, like “mankind” and “craftsman,” we change to “humankind” and “craftsperson.” We try to avoid giving God a gendered pronoun, although neither of us finds it easy. But how proud I was of our efforts on that summer day under our tree when Micah felt the freedom to give God a feminine gender. A year later, with visits to several traditional churches behind us, I wonder if Micah feels confused...is God a woman, or a man? Of course, God is neither, because God is spirit, but this is difficult for many of us

local garden center. He stands up on a stool to help Dad make breakfast most days, and of course, he vacuums the house.

So, we have done our best to give our son the freedom to develop into who he is, rather than pushing him to develop into a male or female gender role. Knowing this, you would think our family would look more interchangeable, less defined by traditional gender roles. But, no. Becoming less sexist in actual practice presents the biggest challenge to us in helping Micah learn egalitarian values. My husband and I both grew up with *Happy Days* messages and models of what moms do and what dads do, and how they do it. To our own embarrassment, we default

to these learned behaviors. One day last year as I was getting Micah settled in his car seat to go on a Home Depot trip, he said, “Mom will stay home, because *someone* has to clean the house!” For a moment, I saw our lives as Micah does. I wasn’t planning to clean the house, but, from his perspective, that’s my job. And it is partly true. I am a “Stay at Home Mom,” which does bring Marion Cunningham or June Cleaver to mind. I do clean the house more than my husband does, albeit not without periodic re-negotiations. I am not particularly handy with a drill or table saw (though I have used both), and all of this sends a message: moms nurture kids and clean the house; dads take you to the hardware store. And this from two Christian feminist parents.

But the fact is that Micah seems to need me intensely right now, and that is why I’m at home with him. I would like to have some non-sexist explanation for Micah’s strong mom-preference. But I guess I should just accept my Super Powers, knowing that someday they will wane and I will return to a humdrum Lois Lane status. I’ll rejoin the respectable “work force” when my son needs me less, and my husband and I will be able to model more equal co-parenting.

Meanwhile, we are working on less time with the *Ask This Old House* team. If we have made any other major mistakes with regard to passing on our egalitarian values, it would be allowing Micah to

watch too many DVDs that promote gender stereotypes. If we have made any real gains, it’s because we do not have access to television shows. And yet, I know that avoiding television won’t make sexism go away. I can steer him, at age four, away from the images that objectify women and are placed at a child’s eye level in the supermarket. But he will be fourteen in just a decade, and by then he will have been bathed in many sexist assumptions about girls and women. He will have observed them treated as objects, many times, on the cover of magazines, in advertising, on the internet, from his friends, and, of course, when he finds people who will let him watch their television. But I hope that a little boy, who intuitively understands the feminine aspects of an omnipotent God and understands the powerful nature of a mother, has the seed within him to become a man who respects women as human beings. With God’s grace, as the seed grows, I trust we too will grow into better models of what it means to be completely human.



Susan McLeod-Harrison is the author of *Saving Women from the Church: How Jesus Mends a Divide* (Barclay Press, 2008).

Reflect with us

“It Takes a Village to Raise a Child”

by Jo Ellen Heil and Susan McCoubrie

See Exodus 1:15-22; 2; 4:18-27; 6:20; 15:20-21; 17:11-12; 18.

“It takes a village to raise a child.” This traditional African proverb, made popular in the West by former first lady Hillary Clinton’s book by the same name, may be truer than we think.

Throughout Scripture we see numerous relationships which are as strong and loving as any biological bonds. In the Old Testament, Ruth’s loyalty to her mother-in-law Naomi and Jonathan’s friendship with David are well-known. The prophet Elijah mentored his successor Elisha so well that when he was carried to heaven in a whirlwind, Elisha cried out, “My father! My father!” (Years later, King Jehoash of Israel spoke these words on his deathbed to Elisha, no doubt evoking strong memories for the prophet). In the New Testament, a young couple from Nazareth was entrusted to create a healthy, loving home environment for their first born, so that during his earthly life, he could speak with authority about a loving Father, praise women outside of their childbearing roles, and declare that anyone who obeyed God’s words—regardless of their status—were his sisters and brothers.

Perhaps the best biblical example of “village parenting” was Moses. Born in secret as a Hebrew slave but raised publically as

an Egyptian, his early life was literally saved by a small host of women—the midwives Shiphrah and Puah, his birth mother Jochebed, his sister Miriam, and the daughter of the pharaoh. When he later made the shocking discovery of his real roots and fled to Midian, Moses was nurtured and mentored by his second family—his wife Zipporah, and her shepherding sisters and father Jethro.

A bi-cultural, multi-lingual man, Moses drew strength from those whom God placed in his life. His Egyptian grandfather had put a price on his head, but his father-in-law encouraged him with administrative advice and then left him alone to implement it. He was exiled from his royal mother but became part of a leadership team with his biological siblings Miriam and Aaron. As an urban Egyptian, he was educated in one of the most sophisticated nation states the world has ever seen; in the desert, he encountered God firsthand and passed on a spiritual legacy to the Jews which endures to this day.

Because he was raised by a village, Moses not only survived but grew to become a mighty witness of God’s mercy and power in the world. May God do the same in our own lives today.

Q: What does Paul mean when he writes that women will be saved through childbearing (1 Tim. 2:15)?

A: Paul's childbearing comment, infamously found in 1 Timothy 2:15, has long confounded interpreters. First, I will share my own view of this perplexing verse, but humility and honesty require me to give others' opinions as well, for the most certain thing that can be said is that interpreters disagree on its meaning. Though Paul knew what he meant when he said, "she will be saved through childbearing," his meaning has long eluded his readers.

The opening statement of 1 Timothy 2:15, "she will be saved," depends on the previous sentence for its subject: "the woman." From what "the woman" will be saved, however, is unstated. Several scholars believe Paul refers here not to eternal salvation but to physical safety through the travails of labor. The NASB, for example, suggests this interpretation: "But *women* shall be preserved through the bearing of children..." This view typically emphasizes the Greek goddess Artemis' pervasive influence in Ephesus. Frank Ames and I have argued that verse 15, rather than straying from the chapter's main thrust, continues the theme of prayer which is explicit in verses 1 and 8. The certainty that pregnant women in Ephesus prayed to Artemis—goddess of new life—raises the question whether some Christian women did the same. A pregnant Christian convert may have prayed to Artemis out of fear that she or her child would die in labor. She may have also prayed to Artemis for protection against child exposure leading to slavery or infanticide and against the social shame and economic vulnerability of being childless. Thus verse 15 is a warning against syncretism and an appeal to faith in the "one mediator...Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).¹

A second view is that, rather than being saved through the dangers of childbearing, women will be saved from false teaching. This view enjoys the strength that false teaching is indeed a prominent theme in 1 Timothy. Representative of this view is T. Scott Womble: "Paul is reminding the women to ... 'fix their hope' on Christ, their Savior. By turning their attention away from the false teachers to an admirable family life, he was helping them to do just that. Indeed, the troubled women at Ephesus who were captive to false teaching could be saved." Similarly, Alvera Mickelsen and others have argued that women will be saved from the effects of false teaching.²

A third and well-known understanding is that Paul speaks here of salvation from sin itself. That is, Eve and all her descendants

are offered salvation from the results of that ancient archetypal sin. Eugene Peterson's *The Message* makes plain this interpretation: "...her childbearing brought about salvation, reversing Eve." Many who accept this view understand "childbearing" as referring to the birth of Christ and rightly clarify that it is a Greek definite noun, hence "the birth of a child."³

Having demonstrated lack of consensus on what this verse means, I should emphasize the strong consensus on what it

does not mean: Commentators, regardless of their view of women in ministry, unanimously shun any suggestion that, while men are saved by grace through faith, women are saved by bearing children.

Finally, in this issue of *Mutuality* focused on parenting, one more point of consensus should be noted. Reading between the lines and even between the interpretations, Paul's words remind us that parenting is important. Indeed, with each birth of a child, new hope enters the world. May our souls magnify the Lord as we continue—with faith, love, and holiness—to nurture the fearfully and wonderfully made children whom God may grant us.

Pregnant Christian converts in Ephesus may have been praying to the goddess Artemis out of fear that they or their children would die in labor.

1. Frank Ritchel Ames and J. David Miller, "Prayer and Syncretism in 1 Timothy," *ResQ* 52/2 (2010), p. 65-80; reprinted as p. 94-111 in *Women in the Biblical World*, vol. 2.

2. T. Scott Womble, *Beyond Reasonable Doubt*, p. 208; Alvera Mickelsen, "An Egalitarian View: There is Neither Male nor Female in Christ," p. 173-206 in *Women in Ministry: Four Views*.

3. See Loren Cunningham, David Hamilton, with Janice Rogers, *Why Not Women?*, p. 223-224; Philip Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ*, p. 417-444.



Jeffrey D. Miller is a college professor, and his academic interests include textual criticism and biblical teaching about women. Miller and his wife Dana (who is a children's minister) live in Tennessee and have two adult daughters. Their main hobby is hiking in the Appalachian Mountains.

Find more short answers to tough questions at cbeinternational.org/SATQ.



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“The simple fact that [our] seminary is an institutional member of CBE sends a signal to our students and the larger community about how we view women, in particular, in the life of our family. For a faculty person to be able to say, ‘This is where we stand together as a community,’ helps to establish a culture of equality and mutuality in our common life.”

—Dr. Paul Chilcote, *Ashland Seminary* faculty member

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Conference Highlights

Equal to Serve: Gender and Authentic Biblical Leadership

Limuru, Kenya | July 20-22, 2012

Holding the fruit carried from his adventures, Caleb said, “We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit” (Num. 13:27). Like Caleb, we too celebrate the fruit carried home from our conference, “Equal to Serve,” a three day gathering for pastors, educators, lay leaders, counselors, and students. Over twenty lectures exposed how patriarchy undermines not only the gospel and the message of Scripture, but also the health of families, marriages, and communities. Because religion offers the most exalted and irreproachable authority shaping gender relations in cultures around the world, “Equal to Serve” took on the challenge to uproot patriarchy both as a biblical ideal and as a long standing practice among Christians.

Questions from the audience revealed how Scripture had been misinterpreted to further female subjugation. Comments were made like, “You mean Eve wasn’t cursed?” or “Adam was with Eve when she ate of the tree?” or “The ‘he will rule over you’ of Genesis 3 is a result of sin and is not God’s design?” As Scriptures were interpreted consistently and as caricatures were corrected, attendees jumped to their feet singing and dancing, declaring God’s healing power in action. The hunger and exuberance of attendees for God’s truth for women and men were uncontainable. Here are some of the highlights.

From left: Esther Mombo, Emily Onyango, and Richard Howell

Speakers



Speakers came from all over the world and addressed both practical and theological issues such as sexual harassment, HIV/AIDS, the Trinity, and Scriptures used to defend male hierarchy.

On the Web:

- More conference photos
- More reflections from attendees
- Recordings for preview and purchase

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Q&A with Rev. Domnic Misolo

Rev. Domnic Misolo is the founder and director of Ekklesia Community for Advocacy and Peace Initiative, a faith based nonprofit organization that was started in 2009 out of CBE’s academic journal Priscilla Papers. Upon this foundation, Ekklesia seeks to advance biblical truth about men and women both in Kenya and beyond. Domnic served as CBE’s Kenyan conference coordinator, and reflects here on what the event meant, and will mean, to his country.

Domnic Misolo and Mimi Haddad during the candle lighting ceremony.

What was so unique about the conference?

This conference was unique in several ways. It is the first conference Ekklesia organized. Also, the conference brought both church leaders and seminary/college/university professors together, which has never been witnessed in Kenya in the recent time. This encounter made the plenary sessions very lively, practical, and challenging. Another aspect about this conference is the number of students from universities and colleges across Kenya and Africa, including St. Paul’s University, Carlile College Nairobi, Nairobi International School of Theology, Nyang’ori Bible College, Great Lakes University of Kisumu, Egerton University where my wife Christine is currently studying, and many others schools. Books were given in plenty to all participants to carry back home. Some books remained that were given to other universities and bishops.

Again, the whole planning and organization of the conference was excellent. Just to mention a few highlights, the morning praise

and worship team provided great inspiration with unique African dances and sweet voices, with the cultural night on Saturday to mark the climax. The interdenominational Eucharist service with candles, presided over by Rev. Dr. Martha Giltinan of the USA, was also unique. The candles were like fire witnessed on Pentecost day. And finally, this was the first CBE International conference in Africa. The participation went beyond our expectation, and it was a big success.

What did you personally learn from the conference?

As the conference ground coordinator/planner and executive director of Ekklesia, I learned one striking lesson that the Bible truly and consistently teaches equality between men and women. From the first presentation by Dr. Mimi Haddad, it became very clear why we face many challenges in Africa such as extreme poverty, diseases and high death rate, sexual violence and rape, political instability, family and domestic violence, and many others. This is mainly due to society that has oppressed women

Worship

Worship during the conference was lively and full of joy. Mimi Haddad writes, “During our evening of cultural worship, choral groups from neighboring countries led worship through tribal dress, tongue, and dance. Rather than sitting as passive observers, we all joined in. We danced, and danced, and danced, just as we sang, and sang, and sang. Our tired bodies and weary minds were revived through an older tradition of worship—one that reaches back to Miriam and David when praise was unabashedly exuberant, bodies and voices were rarely still, and colorful clothing swirled around us all.”



African choral groups led worship during conference sessions and for an evening of special music and dance.

CBE's popular book, *Still Side by Side*, was translated into Swahili by Rev. Philip Owasi and given to every conference attendee.



Books

More than 4,000 donated books and journals were printed, shipped, and distributed. Each attendee received at least six books, including *Equal to Serve*, *God's Word to Women*, and Swahili translations of *Still Side by Side* and *12 Studies on Biblical Equality*. Each library represented also received up to twenty-five books.



Candle Lighting Ceremony



Communion

“With each session,” Mimi Haddad writes, “our oneness in Christ grew day by day and hour by hour, culminating in communion and a candle lighting service. One candle lit another, just as our unique gifts serve and empower one another. Our call from God was clear. Each member of Christ's body has gifts that the world and the church desperately need. We are fortified, by God's Spirit, to be new wine and to create new wine skins where the gifts of women are welcomed and celebrated.”

and put things off balance. From Prof. Esther Mombo, I also learned that the high HIV/AIDS prevalence in my country is due to gender inequality in that women have no voice to say no to polygamous marriages.

What encouraging encounters did you have with attendees?

One nice and encouraging story is that one attendee called for the church in Africa to start to transform the social institutions and structures in Africa that continue to oppress women. Religion has the power to shape and influence philosophy of life in many ways, both positive and negative. Another participant from Uganda said that churches in Africa have worsened gender inequality through biblical misinterpretation that promotes patriarchy and male dominance in society. To my expectation, all participants learned that God created man and woman with the same value, substance, and authority, and that we are equal. Again all participants carried home with them the correct approach to biblical interpretation.

What will be the lasting impact of the conference?

After the conference on Sunday, July 22nd, we had a meeting with African leaders from different countries who attended. It became clear to us that Africa needs CBE's ministry on a serious note to bring change of attitude toward gender equality. The lasting impact for Africa from this conference is to start CBE chapters within Africa to bring egalitarians together for fellowship, Bible study, dialogue, and conferences/trainings on biblical equality. This agenda was passed, and each country was given leaders to spearhead a chapter. I was elected as the CBE International Africa Coordinator, a post I took with great humility. I feel called to champion biblical equality in Africa by God's grace if given support to do so. Already I have an invitation with dates from three African countries that are ready to start their chapters in South Sudan, Uganda, and Nigeria. Ekklesia is developing a three year strategic plan that will define and help start these chapters in Africa. We will soon have a website with these plans.

“But Doesn't the Bible Say...”

CBE at the North American Christian Convention's 2012 Conference

On July 10-13, I enjoyed conversations with those who stopped by the CBE booth at the 2012 NACC conference (Orlando, Florida). Over the years, I have volunteered at many such conferences and have discovered that conversations vary as much as individuals I meet. Discussing biblical equality with people—of differing experiences, personalities, giftings, and circumstances—always challenges me.

Most people are curious about CBE's mission. One man at the NACC conference agreed as I explained the great need for the body of Christ to open spaces for men and women to exercise gifts of the Spirit without limitations due to gender roles. He commented that the mission organization he works for witnesses the most effective ministry when men and women work interdependently. One woman listened thoughtfully before questioning, “But doesn't the Bible say a woman cannot have authority over a man?” I appreciated her willingness to discuss that difficult question, and I shared my journey of squaring Paul's instruction with other passages that affirm public teaching of women within churches (Lydia, Priscilla, Junia, among others). She was interested in knowing that the plain meaning of the original Greek text, within first century Ephesus, differs from the plain meaning of 1 Timothy 2:12 in modern English. Paul does not prohibit a woman's authority (*exousia*) over a man since that word is absent from the passage. Rather, Paul prohibits a woman from dominating a man for selfish gain that may involve licentiousness (*authentein*). I explained that this makes sense given Ephesian cultic practices

that were creeping into the church. The woman looked excited, “I had no idea.”

Another question spurred a great discussion with a group of women: “But what about a woman submitting to her husband?” The ground beneath that question always feels shaky to me—I know that it has intimate ramifications and that responses may be emotionally charged. Pointing to Ephesians 4:15-16, I asked them to consider what Christ as Head (*kephale*) does—holding all things together and causing them to grow. Turning to 5:21,

I described what life in the Spirit entails—submitting to one another out of reverence to Christ (*hypotasso*). Framing instructions within this context, mutual submission between husbands and wives is in order as a husband—functioning as head (*kephale*)—empowers a wife toward fullness of life in Christ. The women were incredibly receptive.

Reflecting upon the conversations at our CBE booth, I appreciated that God's Word and Spirit powerfully transform lives and communities. I was reminded of the importance that CBE maintain its presence at

conferences like the NACC, so that we may continue to challenge and encourage one another to live more like the body of Christ.

Amy pursued an MDiv at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and George Fox Evangelical Seminary where she graduated in 2010. She has contributed to conferences and publications sponsored by Peace and Safety in the Christian Home (PASCH) and serves on the board of Life Together International. She lives in Palm Harbor, FL with her husband and two adopted daughters.



A view of CBE's booth at the recent conference of the North American Christian Convention.

Praise God with us for...

- A Holy Spirit-filled time of scholarship and fellowship at the Kenya conference in July. Praise God for the interest in new CBE chapters all over Africa! Read highlights from the conference on p. 18.
- \$50,000 a year, for three years, to complete eight major ministry projects! Learn more about the projects at cbeinternational.org/grantprojects.
- Our newest intern, Allison, who will be writing, editing, and researching for CBE over the next school year.

Pray to God with us for...

- CBE's 2013 conference, “Take Every Thought Captive to Christ: Ideas Have Consequences,” on July 26-28 in Pittsburgh, PA. Pray for direction about speakers and session topics, and pray that God would be preparing the hearts and minds of all who will attend.
- More churches to join our egalitarian church directory, and more organizations to partner with CBE through membership.
- More interns and volunteers to help CBE complete much-needed projects.

The Most Helpful Way

Want to know the most helpful way to support CBE financially?

Recurring monthly gifts allow us to plan for the future. CBE has 142 recurring donors who together give more than \$100,000 each year—about 20% of our annual budget! Some of these donors have been with CBE since it began, and we know that we can count on them month after month to sustain this ministry.

Here's what donors Ed and Coralee said about giving monthly to CBE:

Having been involved in charitable and mission work for over forty years, we understand the value of regular and recurring contributions to the ongoing work of faith-based organizations. Although one-time gifts are important, and we have given many of those to CBE, we understand that ultimately the work is carried on by a strong foundation of regular donors. The first CBE conference we attended was in 1999 just after we had embraced equality-based ministry and marriage. The event was so encouraging to us that we realized this was something we wanted to be a part of. We made a commitment at that time and began with a regular investment. We have attended conferences almost every two years and have continued to identify with the purpose and mission of CBE. We have increased our monthly contributions accordingly.

Investing in CBE and the mission it stands for is something we have never regretted, nor would we consider reducing our monthly gifts. On the contrary, the impact of CBE, the obvious integrity of its financial dealings, and the growing opportunities to spread the message of equality and its implications, demand that investors reach out by faith to say, "Yes, we will be a regular part of sharing in this work through our giving and our prayers."

Every month when we receive that special thank you from CBE for the contribution we have made, we feel just a bit more connected and strengthened in our sense of unity with this work. We know that what we are doing with our investment is making a difference in the lives of people, just as it has in our lives. We would not want to miss the joy it brings to us to know that we are a part of God's work of reconciliation



CBE monthly donors, Coralee and Ed

through CBE. As an added bonus, the excellent written materials we receive as members and the connections we have through the website and bookstore help us continue to grow in our understanding of God's message of equality and how he wants to use this message and CBE to make a difference in our world.

—Ed and Coralee

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Charity Kroeker is the development associate and international chapter liaison for CBE.



Is God Male?

For the first time in history, significantly fewer women in North America are serving or participating in the life of the church, according to the George Barna Group—considered the leading research organization studying faith and culture. Several weeks after Barna released their twenty-year study, two prominent pastors' conferences focused on the need for male-only authority. At one of these conferences, male leadership was viewed as inseparable from the God-given "masculine feel" of Christianity. After all, they said, Jesus was male, and Scripture reveals God as "king not queen, father not mother."

But, let's not allow these facts to blind us to the truth. Misconstrued facts take us not closer, but further from the truth. This risk is ever-present when focusing on one set of facts to the exclusion of all the others. And, facts as stated in the Bible require more than simply reading the words. To gain the fullest understanding of Scripture, facts should be read in light of the whole text as well as in their historic and cultural context. Does the gendered language of Scripture suggest that maleness is inseparable from God's being, and that males should be, therefore, in ultimate positions of leadership?

Though Jesus called God "Father," it was understood in Jesus' day that it was fathers who passed on inheritance, protection, and identity to children, as Marianne Meyers Thompson observes in *The Promise of the Father*. Christ also called God *Abba*, or "Daddy," as a way of expressing not only intimacy and trust, but also birthright. Like all language used for God, "Father" and *Abba* help us understand a spiritual or eternal principle: that just as Christ is God's child, in Christ, we too are heirs of God's kingdom, a point Paul emphasizes in Galatians 3:27-29.

Scripture speaks of God not only through father language, but also through a variety of metaphors, some masculine, some feminine, and some genderless. God is called a "rock, fortress, and shield" (Deut. 32:18, Ps. 18:2); "light" (Ps. 27:1); "moth" and "rot" (Hos. 5:12); "lion, leopard, and bear" (Hos. 13:6-8); "shade" (Ps. 121:5); and "shepherd" (Isa. 40:11). Each metaphor has distinct "is" and "is not" qualities. For example, God's love is fiercely protective like a mother bear (Hos. 13:8). Yet, God is not

like a mother bear in all ways. God is not a mammal. Similarly, Scripture describes God as a "mother bird" (Ruth 2:12, Ps. 17:8, Matt. 23:37), protecting and sheltering her young. Of course, God is not a mother bird. Rather, God's nature is motherly, nurturing, and fiercely protective. God is also imaged as a human mother (Job 38:29, Isa. 46:3-4, Hos. 11:3-4) and as a midwife (Ps. 22:9), because we, as Christians, are born of God, and God continues to love and instruct us with a motherly protection throughout our lives.

Jesus also described God in feminine images—as a woman baking bread (Luke 13:20-21) or as a woman sweeping the floor (Luke 15:8-9)—not to impart gender as an attribute of God's being or to suggest that females are more god-like than males. Rather, these metaphors illustrate the momentum of God's kingdom and also God's tenacity on our behalf. Each of these metaphors, too, has "is" and "is not" qualities.

Interestingly, however, in Hebrew, the Holy Spirit is a feminine noun and is frequently associated with the

birthing process (John 3:5; cf. John 1:13, 1 John 4:7, 5:1, 5:18). For this reason, the Syriac church refers to the Holy Spirit as "mother." What is more, the root of the name *El Shaddai* (Gen. 17:1, 28:3, 35:11, 43:14, 48:3, 49:25) can also mean "breast," which emphasizes God's nurturance and sustenance. Significantly, the self-naming of God in Scripture is "I AM WHO I AM" (Ex. 3:14)—a name without gender.

We cannot ascribe gender onto God because gender is part of the created world. While God is self-revealed in terms we can understand through our own experiences, we should not make these metaphors—these implicit comparisons—absolutes. When we do, we are making God in our image, whether male or female. Scripture warns against creating God in earthly images (Ex. 20:4). Hosea 11:9 reads, "I am God, and not a human being." "Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman, or like any animal on earth or any bird that flies in the air..." (Deut. 4:15-17). God is neither female nor male, and it is idolatry to suggest otherwise. *God is not limited by gender because God is spirit* (John 4:24).

All metaphors for God have limitations. God's love is fiercely protective like a mother bear (Hos. 13:8). Yet, God is not like a mother bear in all ways. God is not a mammal.

Christians for Biblical Equality

Christians for Biblical Equality is an organization of Christian men and women who believe that the Bible, properly interpreted, teaches the fundamental equality of believers of all ethnic groups, all economic classes, and all age groups, based on the teachings of Scripture as reflected in Galatians 3:28.

Mission Statement

CBE affirms and promotes the biblical truth that all believers — without regard to gender, ethnicity or class — must exercise their God-given gifts with equal authority and equal responsibility in church, home and world.

Core Values

We believe the Bible teaches...

- Believers are called to mutual submission, love and service.
- God distributes spiritual gifts without regard to gender, ethnicity or class.
- Believers must develop and exercise their God-given gifts in church, home and world.
- Believers have equal authority and equal responsibility to exercise their gifts without regard to gender, ethnicity or class and without the limits of culturally-defined roles.
- Restricting believers from exercising their gifts — on the basis of their gender, ethnicity or class — resists the work of the Spirit of God and is unjust.
- Believers must promote righteousness and oppose injustice in all its forms.

Opposing Injustice

CBE recognizes that injustice is an abuse of power, taking from others what God has given them: their dignity, their freedom, their resources, and even their very lives. CBE also recognizes that prohibiting individuals from exercising their God-given gifts to further his kingdom constitutes injustice in a form that impoverishes the body of Christ and its ministry in the world at large. CBE accepts the call to be part of God's mission in opposing injustice as required in Scriptures such as Micah 6:8.

Envisioned Future

Christians for Biblical Equality envisions a future where all believers are freed to exercise their gifts for God's glory and purposes, with the full support of their Christian communities.

Statement of Faith

- We believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God, is reliable, and is the final authority for faith and practice.
- We believe in the unity and trinity of God, eternally existing as three equal persons.
- We believe in the full deity and full humanity of Jesus Christ.
- We believe in the sinfulness of all persons. One result of sin is shattered relationships with God, others, and self.
- We believe that eternal salvation and restored relationships are possible through faith in Jesus Christ who died for us, rose from the dead, and is coming again. This salvation is offered to all people.
- We believe in the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation, and in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers.
- We believe in the equality and essential dignity of men and women of all ethnicities, ages, and classes. We recognize that all persons are made in the image of God and are to reflect that image in the community of believers, in the home, and in society.
- We believe that men and women are to diligently develop and use their God-given gifts for the good of the home, church, and society.
- We believe in the family, celibate singleness, and faithful heterosexual marriage as God's design.
- We believe that, as mandated by the Bible, men and women are to oppose injustice.

CBE Membership

CBE membership is available to those who support CBE's Statement of Faith. Members receive CBE's quarterly publications, *Mutuality* magazine and *Priscilla Papers* journal, as well as discounts to CBE Bookstore and CBE conferences. Learn more by following the "Membership" link on our homepage.

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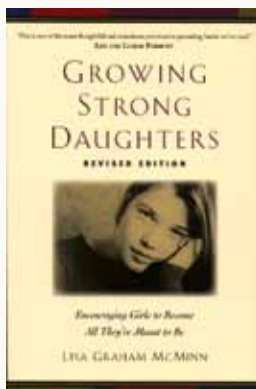
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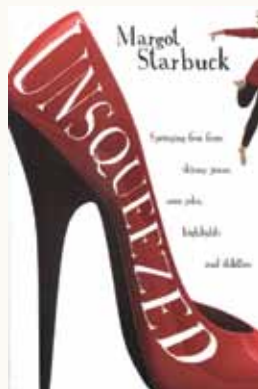
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