

Brothers & Sisters
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FAMILIES EXTEND.

Family *extends*. Children grow up into adults who may marry and have children. And, once you include cousins, aunts, uncles, etc., family offers a lot of interconnects. In mathematical terms, it's a triangular function. All of the people connected by familial vocation add up in a series of one-flesh unions. Exponentially.

Which means that a) everyone is connected in an expanding fashion, and b) no Christian is without a family vocation. Each person is a child, likely with blood or adoptive relationships, and every Christian is a beloved child of God and either a brother or sister in Christ.

Welcome to one of the biggest, most sprawling families that every will be within the human race!

In Scripture, we read about the development of the Tribes of Israel. What were they? Extended families descended from Jacob. Structurally, they went from tribe into smaller clans and smaller still into households. The head of the household might be a grandfather or, in a smaller household, a husband.

“House” can be a pretty big category. Jesus is of the tribe of Judah and the house of David.

For a biblical reference to that extended family system, we can turn to Genesis 12:1, the Call to Abram: leave your country, your kindred and your father's house.

Tribalism and Scripture don't always agree, of course. Scripture says that a wife's husband is her head, not a patriarch or grandfather, but we can probably imagine levels of headship without too much of a problem. Marriage brought women into a new house under a new head.

For a biblical reference for the smaller, nuclear family, the Levites were only allowed to attend to the dead of his closest relatives (Lev 21): “his mother, his father, his son, his daughter, his brother, ³ or his virgin sister (who is near to him because she has had no husband; for her he may make himself unclean).”

I'm presuming that since one lives with one's wife, one cannot help but become unclean if your wife dies? Any pastors want to add anything on that? I'm uncertain how that would work, though, with the command that the chief priest is not to become unclean with *any* dead bodies.

COMMUNITY & SOCIALIZATION

Community has its origins in family. Note that the term comes from *common*. Who has more in common than family?

Brothers and sisters, in particular, have a lot in common. Same parents, same rules, same resources shared for the sake of daily bread and growth. Same starting point. Same learning ground. You get the picture. The first community is family. The first socialization is family.

This socialization has different kinds. Spouses act differently toward one another than siblings do and rightly so! But both parenting and sibling-ship are non-sexual interactions. You get to know one another, male and female, through five senses, through learning together, playing together, and working together.

Brothers and sisters are GREAT! My speculation: brothers and sisters demonstrate that God can work all sorts of things out of all sorts of situations. The same parents, even in the same circumstances, will have *different children*. Every time!

Have societies often segregated work? To an extent. But at home, if a mother and daughter are gardening and the father and son are farming and tending animals, it's still a shared environment.

Both sexes are represented at home, and generally *all interact* with *both sexes*. Both sexes can gravitate toward a variety of services.

Both sexes are involved in 1) creating children and 2) raising and training children *of both sexes*. Both sexes are involved in work and rest. Scripture also supports that both sexes may have side-things they do, such as hobbies and arts they are gifted with.

Are you with me? Daughters need daddies, sons their mother, and every other relationship combination in the nuclear family. (Sometimes people say, "Aren't kids just in the mother's domain?" No. Scripturally, they are not. Fathers are reminded again and again of that fact with explicit commands.)

NON-SEXUAL SOCIALIZATION

Despite marriage being one of the very first institutions for humanity, marriage is *not* the first relationship experienced by infants. That is, infants experience it vicariously through parenting. Marriage affects parents. Marriage affects children. But children benefit from the *non-sexual* vocations: parenting, siblinghood, grandparenting, etc.

Non-sexual socialization is a fundamental form of socialization. Although marriage is presentational for the church, *brotherhood* is representational for society at large. Children first learn to interact to their parents, as people under authority, and to interact with *other children* as people under the same authority.

Emphasizing sexual socialization over non-sexual socialization is not a recent development. Suggesting that marriage is a threshold for entering adult society emphasizes sexual maturity over and against other forms of society. Fathers who are too nervous to hug daughters who have entered puberty? Can reinforce the idea that once a girl becomes physically sexually mature, she's too sexual to still be a daughter.

So what's the answer to an oversexualized community? It isn't entirely abstinence training. What could it be? A biblical concept, a definite presence within creation . . . a broad word with connotations of comradery and kinship? Brotherhood!

BROTHERHOOD

In the family, while headship exists vertically, the horizontal axis is brotherhood. Those who are one flesh together, in a non-sexual way, who share the same status as children within a family.

The parents are in charge. Not the kids. Sure, kids can try to get influence and power by fighting against one another, but they simply cannot get to be on the same level as their parents.

This isn't to say that siblings shouldn't struggle with each other. I actually think that's kind of great! LEARN how to get along with people who are different from you! Different ages, perspectives, concerns! See how one person excels in one way while another does in another! That's how you'll learn to befriend neighbors! Figure things out *as a team*. Figure out the things you can accomplish together! Practice such

weighty things as *mutual submission* and not to be bawdy but live out society that does not revolve around sex!

It is a bit ironic that many brothers have fought and struggled and killed for power, when, it seems to me, and maybe I'm wrong, but brotherhood has to do with equality. One Provider over all with enough gifts to go around. And, as Christians, one Brother who is not ashamed to call us brothers.

Ideally, children learn how live both under authority and in relationships not defined by authority. Brotherhood, therefore, is a natural place to look for equality. Are individuals different from one another? Sure. But there is an equality among those under the same authority.

This is *not* to say non-sexual relationships are ungendered. Every hand shaken or mouth fed is a physical entity, which has received gifts from God. Sex is *not only a part of our bodies*, but a part of *us*. We are embodied souls.

WHAT ABOUT SISTERS?

So what about sisters? I'll get to that, but, first, want to hear something beautiful? It struck me that Job was actually a really tremendous father. ☺

“His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, “It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed[a] God in their hearts.” Thus Job did continually.” (Job 1:4-5).

Job's children were close. No one was excluded. Not even the daughters/sisters. They all *wanted to be together*. And now they are together. Forever. 10 plus 10 more!

Toward the very end of the book of Job, who had been frankly abandoned by his family and abused by his friends, Job had his own family restored:

Then came to him all his brothers **and sisters** and all who had known him before, and ate bread with him in his house. And they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him. And each of them gave him a piece of money and a ring of gold. (Job 42:11)

They weren't ideal. But they repented. Relented. Returned to their brother.

Jacob's sons weren't always one for loving behavior, but they did care for their sister Dinah. They avenged her.

In Ezekiel, it is clear that saying “you are the sister of your sisters” is much like saying “you are your father's son”: entirely dependent upon the quality of those mentioned!

Jesus appears to be close with Lazarus's sisters, Mary and Martha. Linguistically it seems like sisters are often included in brothers, just as women are included in the term men. <shrug>

Brotherhood is a term you can find in Scripture. Sisterhood actually isn't. If any pastor would like to comment on that, I can open the floor to that.

The point that strikes me is that sisters, since they join a new household through marriage, are more mobile than brothers. This does *not* mean they are any less a part of things while part of a particular household. Consider Ruth and Naomi! Rebekah still turned to her brother Laban when Jacob was in danger! And Laban still welcomed kin from Abram's line.

What other brother/sister combinations do we know from Scripture?

Abraham/Sarah, Moses/Miriam, Jonathan/ Michal, Tamar/Absalom

SISTERS ARE PART OF THE BROTHERHOOD

Matthew 12:50: "whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." Yes, we have gender, but gender does not define every aspect of our vocations. In Christ, we are family.

Insofar as we are joined to Christ—and we are joined to Christ--we are also joined to His masculinity. Although I am a girl, in Christ, I am also your brother. This is how Scripture speaks of it. I don't see why we need to be offended by it.

Also, we all have an old Adam, as referenced in Romans 12, and a new Adam in Jesus. There isn't a new Eve. We needn't talk about an old Eve, although the symbolism . . . is understandable.

Eve came from Adam's side. As a Christian woman, I come from the side of Christ. From the water and blood that flowed. But so are all Christians, male and female.

In my flesh, I am a girl. In Christ, I share in His Sonship. In your flesh, some of you are men. Yet you are incorporated into both Christ (male) and the Bride (female). It doesn't change your flesh, but it does pertain to how we understand the value, the roles, and the connections between the sexes. There are more connections than we sometimes remember.

In Scriptural narratives, sometimes an emphasis can be placed on sex. Other times emphasis is on the one-flesh union. This isn't contradictory. It is, in its ways, inclusive.

All of that is to say that sisters of Christ are within His brotherhood. And I don't think we need to be surprised by that.

In the beginning, Eve was called woman for she was taken out of man. And ever since, every man has been taken out of woman. And every woman has been fathered by a man. The sexes are interconnected, *even in unsexual ways* through relationships like siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, etc.

Still, people can have concerns about relationships between the two sexes. People continue to ask, "Is it ok to be friends with someone of the opposite sex?" Some will be friends but only interact when their spouse can be involved, in a text group, email group, etc.

My plan is to be brother/sister. And if my husband were to become concerned in some way, or if I became concerned in some way, steps could be taken. Additional distance or protection introduced. But my approach—you do as your conscious leads—is that most of my relationships are non-sexual and utterly unrelated to marriage or the marriage bed.

The presumption between sexes needn't be that relationships all have sexual elements. They don't! Can't we aim toward increasing brotherhood? At the same time, we live in an oversexualized world, where precautions and clear communication are warranted.

CAIN & JOSEPH

Now, should Cain have killed Abel? No. Does Scripture make it sound like Cain got pouty about being Abel's babysitter? Yes.

Sometimes there are levels of authority introduced, even among children. Often to stand in temporarily as a parent. In other words, babysitting. And you know what? Children generally are either greedy, manipulative tyrants about it or resentful.

I heard a great argument recently that the coat of many colors given to Joseph was actually a vibrantly shiny one. Like an ephod. Like Israel had set Joseph apart as a priest over his brothers. It's a fascinating idea, hinging on the Hebrew text rather than the Greek Septuagint.

But what makes Joseph's dreams so remarkable—and so absolutely irritating, no matter what culture hears it—is the inequality of it! Daring to rise above brothers and parents in order to rule!

That Jacob had a favorite—*that* is what sparked their hatred (Gen 37:4). The dreams that followed only made them hate him more.

The temptation between siblings is jealousy. Or lack of faith that there is enough to go around, whether love or material goods.

Eventually Joseph shared his good fortune with his brothers, including a portion of land in Egypt that was among the very best. “Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their dependents.” (Genesis 47:12). That's brotherly.

Am I squeamish about the requirement for a brother to produce an heir if his brother dies before doing so? Yes! But it is a strict application of one-flesh union with an aim of keeping inheritance within the line of descent.

The conquest of Canaan, brutal as it was, was supposed to continue until every *brother* had his portioned inheritance.

LEVELS OF AUTHORITY

Anyway. Favoritism breeds disunity, dissension, etc. Inequality causes serious reactions. But sometimes there are levels of authority.

If you let kids babysit, it's helpful to be sure they understand what they are doing. Authorities are not more valuable than the governed, and babysitting doesn't create bosses. Babysitting just helps parents and aims to protect children. Not manipulate, control, etc.

If we go back to Cain and Abel, Cain asked, “Am I my brother's keeper?” And most of us would frankly respond with a wholehearted, “Yes!” But it is a different, broader kind of keeping.

Cain was not the child promised in Genesis 3, and as that became evident, either through his jealousy over his brother or by God's rejection of his sacrifice, sin crouched and sprang up to catch him.

But all of us know Cain didn't need to be the Savior in order to keep his brother! The proper work of a sibling is to co-exist. Share. Yes, even bearing each other's burdens. For the sake of neighbor, family, and community at large.

Neighbor: Brother

Unique role: Non-sexual cohort

Proper work: co-exist & share

Duties: Help, Support, Keep

Perks: Equality

Temptations: Tyranny & laziness

Crosses: Bear one another's burdens

Status: Comrade

KEEPER

When God commands us to keep all that He has commanded, He doesn't mean keep as in tuck away inside a box. The Hebrew *shamar* offers a richer concept of cherish, watch, protect, and treasure.

We don't have to treat our siblings as though we are babysitters lording it over them. In fact, that tends to be a recipe for disaster. Distorting not only how they see us, but also how they view authority, family, and interactions with others in general.

Do you want to spread manipulation throughout the world? Then practice it with your brothers, sisters, friends, and cousins. If you don't, then . . . let's have a better understanding of the family vocations and an articulate way to say it.

But keep a helpful eye out. Appreciate. Continue to get to know the people in your lives because they're still growing and gaining in nuance. Protect as you can. And consider both big and small picture. God does not give you neighbors in a haphazard, arbitrary way. Rather, God is working His Will.

Every time God commands us to be good to our neighbors, that includes our nearest neighbors. And whether we are loving neighbors in our home or halfway around the world, we can do so by better understanding who they are as individuals 1) bought by Christ—believers or otherwise, 2) a gift and opportunity from God for loving service, and 3) part of our extended family.

EVERYONE NEEDS HELP

As pastors, teachers, and parents, we can be clear that *everyone* needs help. And everyone has something they can offer. At every age and stage. Sometimes matching needs with assets can take a while, but we can all try to help one another in all sorts of ways.

And we can help without jumping to conclusions. We learn what we do not know. Therefore helping someone to learn says *nothing* about whether a person is smart or not. Only whether that person has finished learning the specific thing. We can say that to children.

Taller people aren't better than shorter people. Though tall folks may reach high while shorter may reach lower. Heavens. When I was pregnant with twins, I couldn't touch the floor for anything. It was *very clear* to my children that I needed their help to pick up *anything!*

Now. If we want, we could probably go through all the negative examples of brothers in Scripture to see where things went terribly wrong. But I don't think we need to take that time.

I think brotherhood is partially a matter of natural law. Most have instincts about what brotherhood should be like. Brotherhood comes to represent society at its best. Yes, there have been terrible incidents between brothers. Yet, as Proverbs 17:17 says, “a brother is born for a difficult time.” Maybe you’ve heard the term resilience? Once upon a time it wasn’t just about personal resilience but *family resilience*.

Family, and not just marriage, exists for good times and for bad, health and sickness, wealth and poverty.

Even so, let’s turn to Psalm 133 for another layer of understanding.

PSALM 133

Psalm 133:

Behold, how good and pleasant it is
when brothers dwell in unity!^[a]
2 It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down on the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down on the collar of his robes!
3 It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion!
For there the Lord has commanded the blessing,
life forevermore.

It is an empirically wonderful thing that God puts different people together, settling the solitary into a home, often before realizing solitude is even an option! Differences between equals lets us learn and grow in different ways. Differences become learning experiences and resources, different moving parts coming together into a productive, cohesive whole!

But Psalm 133 connects ordination with the unity of brothers. You can certainly read Luther’s take on this psalm, which is a more Christological approach than the simple view I will share from my husband, but *forgiveness* is what allows for true brotherhood. True unity.

The priesthood was to keep the 12 brotherly tribes united *under the mercy of God*. And all its physicality was an asset!

I think, too often, modern brotherhood lacks physicality. Men may not hug, for example. But while effusion can’t replace sincerity, it may do us good to remember, again, the physicality that can exist within a relationship. Work alongside someone. Drop a note in the mail that a person can hold in his hand. Shake a hand. Share some time with coffee.

Not because activities create or sustain brotherhood—they don’t. But forgiveness and life go together, unless we unnaturally separate them. “For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.”

CHURCHLY BROTHERHOOD

The church is a brotherhood. As Malachi 2:10 asks, “Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?” Or as St. Peter says in 1 Peter 2:17: “Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.”

As the passage goes on, it is clear some are still servants subject to additional masters, but Christianity is familial. A brotherhood.

Ephesians 5:21 is part of a much longer sentence so bear with me as I read 15-21.

15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

As part of the brotherhood, we submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. This is a submission *in addition* to submission to family members, laws and government contracts, etc.

We do so trusting that God will take care of *all* of us, even if we aren't the one's making all the decisions. Now, if God's teaching is up for debate, we speak up. Who ever heard of brothers and sisters keeping silent with one another?

The unity of a brotherhood is not in silence or superficial appearances. Each child can—and should—be free to speak with his parents *and* with his siblings.

But, again, just because there is a brotherhood doesn't mean there aren't other structures, too. Some brothers are preachers, other hearers. This is not in conflict with brotherhood. It's explicitly how God resets and affirms brotherhood in Ps. 133.

AUTHORITY

Now, Christ is explicit regarding authority in the church:

You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for mother (Matthew 20:25-28).

Authority does not mean someone can be a selfish jerk. Not authority to govern. Not authority to teach. Not authority to forgive sins. Not authority as found in headship.

Although . . . we do well to remember a very human thing: awkwardness can be found *anywhere*. *Equal opportunity!*

Authority is a very real thing. But the world has turned it upside down. All real authority comes from God. Rather, it is a false, striving for authority that seeks absolute control and manipulation.

In fact, when we were researching for *Family Vocation*, one of us stumbled on something of a gem of a concept. John Kleinig, Australian professor and pastor emeritus, wrote this in the article "Ordered Community: Order and Subordination in the New Testament" in *Lutheran Theological Journal* 39:2/3 (2005):

In sum: the apostolic teaching on subordination does not establish a chain of command for the exercise of power by those who sit at the top; it promotes a chain of transmission from the triune God for the delivery of blessings through his appointed agents in the church and in the world.

Submission. Transmission. You can *hear the connection* and easily say that God's mission toward us is giving us Jesus and all that we need.

Which is to say, on Jacob's ladder, angels ascended and descended—not pious folks struggling to climb high. Likewise, authority is a matter of steps downward in care for God's people on various levels. Not levels of *worth* but levels of need. Governors for government. Heads for household unity.

And what do brothers share, O gathered Lutherans who have subscribed to the Book of Concord, as equals called and gathered by the Holy Ghost Himself? Consolation of the brethren!

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God”(2 Corinthians 1:3-4 ESV).

In the Smalcald Articles, Luther includes this:

“[The Gospel] gives guidance and help against sin in more than one way, because God is extravagantly rich in his grace: first, through the spoken word, in which the forgiveness of sins is preached to the whole world (which is the proper function of the gospel); second, through baptism; third, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar; fourth, through the power of the keys and also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters [in Christ]. Matthew 18[:20], ‘Where two or three are gathered...’” (SA III:4, Kolb-Wengert edition of The Book of Concord).

A TREASURE-TROVE OF RESOURCES

Brotherhood is a unity that can recognize differences as something to be treasured. Whereas rivalry treats family like a business for profit. Brotherhood sees that gifts can be different and distinct yet still be included, whether as assets and resources or not. An infant brother is no less a brother. Nor a comatose one.

Unity between brothers, in this fallen world, can only happen because of forgiveness, mercy, and unconditional love. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, there is such joy over the son who returned! What could possibly mar it? A hardened brother. Unmoved by pity toward his brother or compassion toward his father. Who seeks his friends' companionship rather than his family.

Let me quickly add, if your family doesn't *get* vocation, they might do all sorts of unloving things. And my heart goes out to you. Responding to your neighbor, regardless of vocation, when he's set himself up as a rival, is a totally different ballgame and conversation. I knew a girl, who considered herself a Christian though not a Lutheran, and she didn't believe in forgiveness. At all. Maybe people could try to make things up to her, but she literally despised the word and concept of forgiveness as a weakness. So how could she be unified with *anybody*?

Rivals are one thing and controllers are another. We'll have to see how much time we have, but we may come back to controllers and how we can try to coexist without harm.

ETERNAL BROTHERHOOD

Our brotherhood with Christ will last forever. And we will not be bossing one another around during that time! We will not be babysitting one another. Age will not particularly be a factor, nor as far as we know levels of authority.

Age is not what grants authority. It's not an education, intellect, or prowess either. God's Word and vocation grants authority. A king gains authority because of his office. Likewise, a husband, a parent, a pastor, a teacher. Our authority isn't over all people, but according to vocation. Right?

I am a sister trying to stimulate thought & discussion. I'm not your wife or your mother. I'm not even your children's teacher, etc. But brothers and sisters do get to help fill in all the nooks and crannies of life. Exploring creation! Digging deeply into topics. Having common concerns, but facing things *together*. In a blessedly non-sexual way!

There are so many things that brothers and sisters can do for each other! And, of course, brothers and sisters are where you get nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles, etc. *Brotherhood extends family even as marriage does*. It's just more of an indirect addition. Another angle. Another branch on the family tree.

Thanks be to God that, even if you—or your children—lack a role model in your dad, just because he happens to be different, maybe there's a grandfather, cousin, uncle, or someone else to help him grow into the adult he can be.

BROKEN FAMILIES/HOUSEHOLDS/ BROTHERLY ADOPTION

Those with broken families? Who have suffered neglect or abuse? These precious souls may desire family more than anything else. The young, of course, may be adopted. Christianity is *pro-adoption* without question. There are entire books dedicated to that.

But young kids aren't the only ones needing family, right? In Luther's day, sometimes people came into the household, to be protected and taken care of, without being formally adopted. People of any age.

Know what happens around me? Homeless teenagers. Sometimes even kids kicked out of the house because they got pregnant and won't have an abortion.

We may be tempted to think we can parent the world, but things just aren't set up that way. However, we can have flexible, helpful households. We can extend something of an adoption into brotherhood.

It isn't easy. It isn't necessarily clear what one ought to do or not do in such situations. But it's an option an increasing number of Christians are taking.

The term *household* shows up 124 times in the ESV and seems to include anyone in the home into the *oikonomia*. The nuclear family is a gift. The extended family is a gift. But sometimes there are other people included, too, and that is *also* a gift, well within the prescriptive word of Scripture.

DOORKEEPER

“I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Ps 84:10). Doorkeeping may not be family as we think of it, but it pertains to *belonging, identity*, and associating with those who benefit from your services.

“Let brotherly love continue” (Hebrews 13:1). “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor” (Romans 12:10). “Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart” (1 Peter 1:22), and “Finally, all of you must live in harmony, be sympathetic, love as brothers, and be compassionate and humble” (1 Peter 3:8).

Brotherly love is a big deal. An opening. An opportunity. A welcome and sometimes a rescue: “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a difficult time” (Proverbs 17:17). Thanks be to God that Christ has made Himself our brother, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh. He even shares His inheritance (Romans 8:15-17).

It was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin. That is why he (Jesus Christ!) is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.” And again, “I will put my trust in him.” And again, “Behold, I and the children God has given me.” (Hebrews 2:10-13, ESV)

(If Time Allows) MASCULINITY & FEMININITY

Manliness & femininity are being attacked from just about every angle possible. So let's look at a few comparisons in Scripture.

Two women commonly contrasted are Mary and Martha. One quietly listens. One's a hard worker. One's inward, one perhaps more outward. Both need Jesus. Both are blessed by God's Word. Both we'll meet at the resurrection of the dead, I am sure! Does Scripture say one is more feminine than the other? Nope!

So let's turn to the masculine pair Jacob and Esau. One is quiet, plain, indoorsy. The other is clever and outdoorsy. One is a momma's boy. The other the father's favored, a man's man. Sure different folks gravitated toward them, but both were beloved! Married with children! Productive members of society! Blessed by God, admittedly in different ways.

Since Esau isn't known for his faithfulness, let's list some additional men and think about how similar and dissimilar they may be. We're bound to find a diverse bunch of role models:

- Moses: Educated. Adopted. Felt a bit insecure, especially at the beginning of his career, but an excellent leader. Excelled at prayer and preaching.
- David: Musical guy. Folks loved or hated him. Strategic. A bit wobbly on his dealings with his kids.
- Job: Great guy! Knows what's he's talking about! But he's had a hard time.
- Daniel: Periodic vegetarian. Diplomatic. Surprisingly good with animals. :D
- Elijah: Talk about outdoor time! Brave.
- Elisha? Called bears out against what I have to presume were teenagers. But otherwise he was pretty peaceful. Solid guy.

I'm being a little silly, but you see where I'm going with this. In a time of existential crises about “Am I man enough? Am I woman enough?” Scripture reminds us that God works through all sorts. Outdoorsy? Great. Indoorsy? God can bless that, too.

Although, you know, fishing trips & mountain getaways can be good on all sorts of levels. ☺

More seriously, Scripture does not give us narrow definitions for gender goals. It doesn't need to. Because God works through both genders in all the variety of their expressions.

A primary question that the church needs to answer is this: can God provide for the man or woman you are? And the answer is a resounding YES! Even if it's complicated!

VIRTUES

Masculinity and femininity have never been, in themselves, considered virtues. Or Goals. They weren't really stand-alone concepts until recently! Men were men. Women were women. Things worked out.

At the same time, if you've studied another language, you've probably learned that *words* can have gender. God works through gender. He can work through the gender of words, too. So here are, for your somewhat random consideration masculine and feminine virtues.

Masculine virtues include: ambition, diligence, persistence, endurance, accountability, bravery, confidence, commitment, assertiveness, defiance, punctuality, discipline, focus, determination, fortitude, loyalty, honesty, dependability, justice, honor, majesty, orderliness, restraint, steadfastness, chastity and wisdom.

Examples of feminine virtues include: cleanliness, compassion, mercy, thoughtfulness, kindness, cooperation, discretion, flexibility, gracefulness, peacefulness, sensitivity, unity, tranquility, tolerance, innocence, hopefulness, consideration, helpfulness, care and prudence.¹

In the words of St. Peter:

make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue,[e] and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. 8 For if these qualities[f] are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:5-8)

And, to widen perspective back out,

For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 1 Cor. 12:14-18

Session 4 I hope to cover a few more scandalous things in case you'd like to rake me over the coals on them during the Q&A. Anything you'd like to discuss further from this session? Anything you'd like me to be sure to hit on in those to come?

¹ <http://silasreinagel.blogspot.com/2010/05/on-masculine-and-feminine-virtues.html#:~:text=Examples%20of%20feminine%20virtues%20include,%2C%20helpfulness%2C%20care%20and%20prudence.>