Biblical Manhood and Womanhood in the World[[1]](#footnote-1)

**CHANGES FOR NEXT TIME**

* **Add that it is appropriate for biblical women to stand up against discrimination in the workplace – whether salary issues, not getting a seat at the table, etc. Do that confident in your value as a woman created in the image of God.**
* **Consider, if you’re working outside the home, the opportunities you *miss out* on (time with kids, etc.)**
* **If you’re considering grad school, don’t only talk to those who you think will give you the answer you want to hear – talk to women who are using their degree AND women who aren’t.**
* **Both men and women work; the home isn’t only a place of rest, but also of work, care, service/hospitality. Question of paycheck isn’t only one to ask.**
* **JAMIE’s feedback: be “stronger” on the titles of points II, III, IV. Instead of “Consider,” something like “Embrace Your Created Disposition in the World…” etc**
* **Deal with the question of a job that would require a woman to engage in violence, such as police officer or active duty military? Answer: for almost everyone, it is best to be in a job that’s congruent with the dispositions and roles we see in scripture; an unusual person may be able to stretch and thrive in this setting, but that will probably be the exception not the norm. May be permissible (Judges 4, Deborah and Jael?) but not usually beneficial.**

**I. Introduction: Masculinity and Femininity in a Feminist World**

“We are talking about a society in which there will be no roles other than those chosen or those earned.”[[2]](#footnote-2) With those words, in 1971 Gloria Steinem issued a rallying cry for what is now known as second-wave feminism. Steinem envisioned a new world order, a society in which the only distinction between men and women is biological. Other than bodily differences, Steinem said, the two sexes are exactly the same and thus can do exactly the same things. Each person should play whatever role he or she desires. Over forty years later, the world we inhabit is several steps closer to the world Steinem envisioned. And we should be clear: the various waves of feminism have yielded some wonderful results. From the right to vote, to property ownership, the principle of equal pay for equal work, and many careers have opened up to women that weren’t available generations ago. But here’s the problem. As we’ve seen over the last 10 weeks, feminism’s view of gender is worlds apart from God’s design. God created male and female totally equal in value, yes, yet beautifully distinct.

So, today we address the question, “What does it look like to express our God-given gender in the world at large?” I’m using that term “gender” as a catch-all to refer **both** to our physical sex and the psychological, social aspects of our identity and how we behave. In the last few weeks we looked at what the Bible has to say about men and women in the home and the church. In both those contexts, Scripture lays down clearly prescribed roles – for husbands and wives, and for how leadership is expressed in the church. But what about when we think of other spheres – the workplace, the military, our neighborhoods, our responsibilities as citizens?

This is a challenging question, because the Bible doesn’t give us clear prescriptions or restrictions for gender roles in these settings. So what do we do? Should we just close our Bibles and assume that anything goes? No – we do whatever we do when we face an issue that scripture doesn’t address directly, whether it’s artificial reproductive technologies or nuclear warfare. We prayerfully turn to scriptural principles, priorities and patterns, and apply them to the topic at hand in the context in which we live. In other words, this is a question of *wisdom, not law.* Wisdom is figuring out how to live in God’s created world according to God’s design and for godly purposes. So we’re going to consider several areas this morning in a search for wisdom, and I’ll conclude by interviewing Joan Dunlop about her life and career so we can hear how she’s thought through some of these questions.

Let’s start with: **II. Consider Our Created Dispositions**

This been the backbone of this core seminar. We’ve seen in Genesis 1, 2 and 3 that the distinctions between men and women reach all the way back to creation itself. Thus, they will have implications for all of life.

Genesis 1: Men and women are, without doubt, equal in terms of dignity and honor, equal in that they are both created in the image of God. Yet, Genesis 2-3: God created them to be *different* from one another. Genesis 2:15, God calls the man to work and protect the Garden and by extension to provide for his family; Genesis 2:18, God creates his wife to be his helper. Genesis 3:9, Adam is held responsible for the spiritual failure of the family. Genesis 3:20, Eve is the mother of all the living, and we talked about how femininity doesn’t require having biological children but often is seen more broadly in cultivating life in others for their spiritual good as we see women called to do in Titus 2. So, there may be considerable overlap sometimes in how these dispositions express themselves, but generally speaking, even if it’s subconscious, we should expect to see men and women expressing them. Men will tend to work in God’s creation and to provide for and protect others. Women will tend to cultivate life in others and help others flourish. These qualities may look different in different cultures, and I do recognize they’re quite broad. And because of the fall, some men or women may live out these inclinations more or less easily, or may even struggle to feel them as natural. But these broad differences simply flow from the reality that God didn’t make two identical sexes. He chose to display his image in distinct, complementary genders. Embracing this reality is foundational to human flourishing. God’s plan is for our good!

And on that point, it’s worth acknowledging the general physical differences between men and women as well. This too is part of God’s wonderful and wise design. Women and men have different anatomy, different hormones, different roles in conceiving and delivering children, and, statistically speaking, different average size and physical strength. It’s not wrong if, on the macro level, these differences lead to certain trends in how men and women behave, the sorts of jobs they take. Yes, there will be exceptions, and yes, we should avoid stereotypes and caricatures that are unhelpful. A soft-spoken senior citizen teaching toddlers how to finger-paint can be fully masculine. He *doesn’t* need to become “wild at heart,” buy a pick-up truck and kill a deer to be a man. A muscular woman who builds airplanes can be fully feminine even if she doesn’t have a Martha Stewart cookbook on her shelf. But there *are* macro-level trends in how men and women behave, and that’s OK too. It’s not wrong, for example, for a woman to work construction; but it’s also OK if more men *tend* to work construction due to their body type.

So, when it comes to how you live as a man or woman in the world, this point is simply calling us to consider – and celebrate! – that God has made men and women different. He calls us to live within the grain of the gendered dispositions he has given you. Joy comes not from ignoring his design, but from acknowledging it as a gift.

Next, **III. Consider Our Prescribed Roles in the Home & the Church**

We must be careful here. God calls wives to submit to their husbands. He *doesn’t* call all women to submit to all men. God calls only men to lead the church through formal teaching and holding the office of elder, but he doesn’t forbid women from engaging in other public speaking in the community or holding governmental office. Scripture simply doesn’t lay down rules or boundaries about such things.

Still, we should be mindful of the roles that God prescribes in the home and the church *insofar as these roles represent a formalizing of men’s and women’s distinct created dispositions* that we discussed just a moment ago*.* What I mean is that the roles to which God calls men and women in marriage or in the family of God aren’t arbitrary. They’re not random. They are consistent with how he has created men and women. It seems unlikely that God would intend for his people to pursue the biblical vision of masculinity and femininity in the family and church but then completely abandon those patterns and dispositions whenever they’re outside of those specific contexts.

So, for example, we talked at length about the general trait of godly femininity known as a “gentle and quiet spirit” from 1 Peter 3. He’s talking not about a woman’s personality but her spirit, her heart – how she rests content in God. Even though the context of the 1 Peter 3 is marriage, we agreed that that passage and others commend the inner beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit to all Christian women, whether married or not. Wisdom would say to find a way to express that spirit in all your various endeavors.

The same is true of men. A man who isn’t married shouldn’t read the Bible’s instruction for husbands to lay down their lives for their families and then think, *Great, I’m off the hook, I don’t need to live sacrificially in providing for others spiritually, protecting them, and taking leader-like initiative to do them good.* Precisely the opposite. He should see the biblical vision of a husband as *something* of a blueprint for his own masculinity, but with the obvious caveat that husbandly authority and wifely submission don’t apply in his relationships.

So hear me clearly. The clear biblical roles we see in the family and the church do not apply formally in the world and workplace. But they can still teach us something about masculinity and femininity. When it comes to the question of whether a woman can be CEO of Apple or President of the United States, there is no law in scripture but rather freedom. But at the same time, remember that so often when it comes to living out our gender, the question isn’t one of law, of “can” a man or woman do a particular thing. Rather the question is, “what is most wise?” And to help us consider that, we need to turn to our next point:

**IV. Consider Your Particular Stewardships and Responsibilities**

When any believer deliberates on how to express his manhood or womanhood in the world, he or she must consider: what are those non-negotiable duties that God has called me to? Often the answer will help give some shape to what life should look like in this particular season. God calls us to provide for our families – 1 Timothy 5:8. He calls us to commit to a local church and love others sacrificially. He calls us to give to our congregation and to pay our taxes. He calls us to any number of duties in caring for family members.

So let’s take the example of trying to choose a job, and how your gender, plus your responsibilities, might play into that. I do think a woman is free to take any job she wants. But also: a mother of young children is not free to neglect the role of nurturer in her children’s lives, a role that’s distinct from a father’s role and that, yes, requires more time in the kids’ younger years. Titus 2 encourages women to be busy at home, not meaning primarily decorating her physical house, but caring for the people who live there. What an opportunity we have to rejoice in the beauty and goodness of motherhood in a culture that so often undervalues it! And a father isn’t free to neglect his family duties for the sake of job either. He is called to provide financially, but he is also called to bring up his children in the admonition of the Lord. Maybe in order to do that he actually says no to a promotion, to get more time at home.

How do you figure out what to do? You need wisdom! Seek counsel from others. Be ready to make sacrifices. Other factors will affect any individual’s decision-making process, such as financial hardship, the precise nature of the jobs they’re considering, maybe the availability of other family members to help care for kids, who knows.

Where can we go for a good example of the interplay between family responsibilities and work activities? Again, we can look at Proverbs 31. I’m not going to take the time to read the whole passage, because we’ve already done that in prior weeks. I just want us to notice a few things about this idealized woman that Proverbs presents for us.

* Verse 15: “She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household.” This is a woman whose main burden is to provide for those under her care.
* Verse 16: “She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.” So, this isn’t a woman who literally stays within the 4 walls of her home. She’s involved, essentially, in real estate development!
* Verse 18: “She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.” Verse 24: “She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers sashes to the merchant.” So she is making goods and selling them and running a successful business. She even seems to have some sort of distributor or middle man!
* Verse 27: “She looks well to the ways of her household.” Verse 28: “Her children rise up and call her blessed, her husband also, and he praises her.”

So the summary is of a woman who is – speaking somewhat anachronistically – quite ambitious with her professional endeavors! Yet not primarily for her own self-fulfillment or reputation, but in order to serve others, starting with her own family. In all of that, she’s a good example not just to women but to men as well. This woman’s work with the vineyard and the garment business isn’t in conflict with her family responsibilities. It’s in harmony with them and enables her to nurture her children and help her husband. What should this look like for you? Again, I don’t know – this is only one example, and a particularly idealized one at that. In other words, it’s a poetic picture of a woman who’s almost too good to be true. We shouldn’t be overwhelmed by her example. This isn’t a full picture of all her sins and struggles. but instead learn whatever we can from her about how we can attempt to live out our gendered dispositions and honor the various responsibilities God gives us.

**QUESTIONS?**

**V. Applying These Considerations**

So let’s try to put the pieces together. How do we wisely apply what we’ve been talking about so far? I have one broad encouragement for us. And let me say that since there’s great freedom and flexibility in this realm, we have an opportunity to show each other charity as believers if we disagree on how to apply these things.

So here’s my encouragement: *Pursue endeavors that seem consistent with your identity and responsibilities as a man or woman, rather than endeavors than might undermine or suppress them. And in whatever position or endeavor you find yourself, do your best to express it in a way that embraces and upholds your God-given masculinity or femininity.*

For example, one common question is if women should take secular jobs that place them in leadership and authority over men. Is it inherently wrong or unbiblical for women to hold such positions? No, not at all. But it would be wise to think about the type of authority that job involves, and whether it’s authority that can be expressed in feminine ways. Will she be comfortable living out this role *as a woman*, or is it the type of post where she will feel pressured to adopt our culture’s stereotype of a macho or manly attitude?

A Northwestern University “meta-analysis” of men’s and women’s leadership styles found, not surprisingly, that when women adopt “culturally masculine behaviors,” they are less efficient in their leadership.[[3]](#footnote-3) Other studies have shown that women naturally exhibit several feminine features when they exercise authority on the job. One article summed it up this way: “Women employ a more participative leadership style, are more likely to share information and power, and have strong relational skills that make them seem empathic to their staffs.”[[4]](#footnote-4) In other words, to use biblical language, women are created to cultivate life and help others flourish, and they are actually better leaders on the job when they lean into these proclivities.

I can think of examples of Christian women who have been worked for the military and have had authority over men, yet they’ve used it in a way that honors those men and their sense of masculinity. Such women have generally embraced a distinctly feminine, “mama bear” style of leadership – under which their employees have thrived.

Similarly, when a man finds himself under a woman’s direction and authority, he should fulfill that role as a Christian *man*. He asks, “what are appropriate ways that I can take initiative to provide for and protect others, including my supervisor?” Above all, he should do his work with graciousness and a good spirit, serving his employer, as Paul says, “with a sincere heart . . . rendering service with a good will as to the Lord.” (Ephesians 6:7) He should try as much as possible to show his employer the honor and care that men should show to women generally.

[[*Optional:* In all this, we must remember that our world either over-emphasizes gender or makes it meaningless. On the one hand, we see slogans like “women run the world” and “girls do it better” celebrating femininity as an end in itself. On the other hand, we hear that gender is merely a construct used to express power over others and that we are entering a post-gender world where gender is more of a continuum than a binary reality. But God’s Word shows us a better way. A way where we appreciate the dignity and beauty of both femininity and masculinity, and seek to live every moment of our lives to express the womanhood or manhood that God has graciously given us. And yet a way where our hope is never in ourselves or our gender or but in the perfect man who gave up his life to set us free.]]

**Questions?**

**VI. Interview**

To close our time, we thought it would be helpful for you all to hear from a woman in the church and how she has thought about these issues in her life and at her job. Joan has been a member here for many years. She’s married to Jamie, they have 3 kids. She’s graciously agreed to answer a few questions about how she applies these principles.

* Joan, what you do for work?
* How have you thought about your job in conjunction with the other responsibilities God has given you as a wife, mother, church member, etc.?
* How has embracing God’s vision for femininity brought you joy and blessing?
* What challenges have you faced with expressing your femininity as a doctor? Are there any responsibilities or expectations you have had to fulfill that seem less "feminine" than you might desire?
* Do you supervise any men? How do you do so in a way that takes their masculinity into account, while exercising your authority in a distinctively feminine manner?
1. “Anything you can do, I can do better.” When it comes to manhood and womanhood in the world, and the jobs we have and roles we play, that’s often how the debate is framed – as an issue of competence and strength. But the Bible addresses the subject differently, and that’s what we want to think about today… [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Cited by Andreas J. Köstenberger and Margaret E. Köstenberger, *God’s Design for Man and Woman: A Biblical-Theological Survey* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 305. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://www.northwestern.edu/newscenter/stories/2011/07/women-leadership-eagly.html [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/on-leadership/what-men-can-learn-from-women-about-leadership/2011/08/10/gIQA4J9n6I\_story.html?utm\_term=.f6e3c606dfd7 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)