

## **Boys, Masculinity, and the Church: Why Boys Need a Strong Men's Ministry**

"Jesus was a wimp," said my 11 year old son, Josh. I literally almost fell out of my chair.

"What?"

"Well didn't he say we were supposed to turn the other cheek and back down from a fight, and all that?" To Josh, who started for his football team at middle linebacker, anyone who backed down from a challenge, wasn't tough enough to deserve his respect.

"Josh, didn't you ever read the story of Jesus making a whip and clearing out the temple?"

"Jesus never did that," Josh argued. I had to open the Bible and show the story to him. The sad truth is that Josh's mental picture of an effeminate Jesus is more the rule than the exception in today's world. Researcher Woody Davis, asked one hundred men why they didn't go to church. Their most common answer was "church is for women, children, and wimps."<sup>i</sup>

Consider the message the world is sending our sons about church-going men:

<b>Real Men...</b>	<b>Church Men...</b>
<b>Live a wild life</b>	<b>Live a restrained life</b>
<b>Enjoy sexual conquest and sexual variety</b>	<b>Experience sexual deprivation or monotony</b>
<b>Look at women</b>	<b>Look at their Bibles</b>
<b>Drink beer</b>	<b>Drink grape juice</b>
<b>Go to parties</b>	<b>Go to potlucks</b>
<b>Drive cool cars</b>	<b>Drive the church van</b>
<b>Light cigars</b>	<b>Light candles</b>
<b>Hang out with babes in bars</b>	<b>Hang out with babies in the nursery</b>

We might be tempted to say, "Who cares what the world thinks about the church?" But consider the hardwiring of a boy's heart. Researchers tell us that in every culture there is a code which defines what it is to be a man, a code which boys learn very quickly. This code helps a man overcome his natural instinct of self-preservation to do what is best to protect the women and children of the tribe. He fears harm less than he fears the shame from the rest of the males if he fails the test of manhood.

Masculinity is conferred on a male by the other males of the tribe. It is something he earns. If a man fails to be brave, stoic, and self-sacrificing, he is branded a sissy and becomes an unmanly outcast of the men of the tribe. If a man succeeds in his manly endeavors he adds coins to his masculinity bank. Males avoid anything that might drain their banks. That is why womanly behavior is so damaging to a male, especially a boy.

Interestingly if a woman engages in male behavior, she is often seen in a positive light, as a tomboy, or deliciously rebellious. Not so with a man who engages in womanly behavior. He will be branded a sissy at best, and often much worse. Men are embarrassed to appear feminine in public. Ask any man how he feels when he is asked to hold his wife's purse even for a moment. Nearly every instinct

in our son's heart is to resist appearing to be feminine. **So, if our boys see Christianity as feminine, what should we expect their attitude towards it to be?**

Our churches need to appeal to our boy's God-designed masculine heart. John Eldredge writes, "When all is said and done, I think most men in the church believe that God put them on the earth to be a good boy...If they try real hard, they can reach the lofty summit of becoming a *nice guy*. Now let me ask my male readers: In all your boyhood dreams growing up, did you ever dream about becoming a *Nice Guy*?"<sup>ii</sup>

Men and boys dream about saving the world against impossible odds (and winning the heart of the beautiful princess in the process.) They are created for challenge, risk and reward, adventure, action, heroic sacrifice. Those motivations were precisely the masculine drives that Jesus appealed to when calling the twelve. Jesus had no problem attracting men. Fisherman dropped nets full of fish to follow him. Hardened soldiers were awestruck by the power of his presence. Our sons need to hear the message, "Christ's call to follow him never denies your masculinity. Rather it fulfills it, especially when you understand that to follow Jesus is to enlist in a war between two kingdoms."

Our sons need to grow up in church where men have an identifiable presence as a band of brothers committed to being warriors in the spiritual battle together. They need to see in the men's ministry that the church is a place for men and see that their masculine longings to compete, to be a warrior, to win, to take the hill for their commanding officer are fulfilled in their calling to follow Christ. They need to be around men in the church who remind them that we are called by God to participate in nothing less than his grand plan of redemption for the universe, following King Jesus in the conquest of this entire world, spreading his kingdom geographically to the ends of the earth, and spiritually to the very gates of hell itself. Our passion, as his followers, is to see all of life redeemed, across the globe, for his honor and glory. Our calling is to something a little bigger than being a *Nice Guy*.

**(Note:** Gary serves as the PCA's Men's Ministry Coach, is the director of Forging Bonds of Brotherhood, The above article contains excerpts from Gary's men's devotional, [Allegiance: Building a Foundation of Loyalty to God](#), which is also being used by fathers to disciple their teenage sons. It is available at <http://www.forgingbonds.org>.)

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<sup>i</sup> **Woody Davis, "Evangelizing the Pre-Christian Male" Net Results**

<sup>ii</sup> **John Eldredge, Wild At Heart**