

Biblical Parenting – 13 Bringing Up Girls

I. Biblical footing

A. Big Picture on Gender

We start by quickly reminding ourselves of God's big picture on gender. We say that God intends to project his image differently through men and women, who are created *equally* in His image. *At the same time*, men and women are not *interchangeable*. Instead, the biblical idea is that men and women *complement* one another—as in *completing* one another, or serving as another's *counterpart*. God gave us these complementary roles so that we would represent Christ's relationship with His bride, the church—who are not *interchangeable*. This is one way our lives display the Gospel.

Often this complementary design is discussed in terms of headship and submission; but in the Bible, it is also fleshed out in their *activities* or *roles*. And as we have seen, these roles are part of God's original design. Differentiated roles for men and women are not the result of the fall. The *abuse* of those roles certainly is. But our unique roles – and our design to fit those roles – is God's perfect plan in creation.

But this idea is *despised* in our culture.

Elizabeth Elliot puts the point beautifully:

We must and do deplore the stereotypes that caricature the divine distinctions [between men and women]. We deplore the abuses perpetrated by men against women . . . but have we forgotten the archetypes? Stereotype is a word generally used disparagingly to denote a fixed or conventional notion or pattern. An archetype is the original pattern or model . . . I am not here to defend stereotypes of femininity, but to try to focus on the Original Pattern.

The first woman was made specifically for the first man, a helper, to meet, respond to, surrender to, and complement him. . . . But Eve, in her refusal to accept the will of God, refused her femininity. Adam, in his capitulation to her suggestion, abdicated his masculine responsibility for her. It was the first instance of what we would recognize now as "role reversal." This definite disobedience ruined the original pattern and things have been in an awful mess ever since. BMW, p. 397.

The world looks for happiness through self-assertion. The Christian knows that joy is found in self-abandonment. [and of course, Jesus said: "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." ~ Mt 10:39]

B. Sufficiency of Scripture.

II. What is biblical womanhood, and how do we teach it?

A. Definition:

So, what does this female reflection of the image of God and the Gospel look like? While any definition inevitably will be incomplete, John Piper usefully puts it this way:

“At the heart of mature femininity is a freeing disposition to affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in ways appropriate to women’s differing relationships.” BMW, 46.

Like the definition of masculinity, it starts with the word **“mature.”**

But Titus 2 pictures a mature *Christian* woman. “Older women,” Paul writes Timothy, “are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.” Titus 2:3-5.

B. Modeling... PLUS

Then, as you understand and embrace these traits, *model* them. Let her see you serving your home and others. Let her see you trust your husband’s leadership (doesn’t mean mindlessly agree – you’re a helper, after all. But model respect and trust during and after the decision).

Fathers, you, too, must understand the cultural onslaught your wives and daughters are facing. Study this issue, read these books, and determine to adopt these biblical priorities for the women in your family – and to provide the kind of strong leadership under which they can thrive.

But modeling is insufficient. The cultural opposition is too strong. Our daughters also need: instruction, prayers, practical training, and love.

1. Instruction. And let’s start by making clear that we do not consider our girls interchangeable with boys, and our goals for them are different. Encourage your daughters that God made them wonderfully female. Help them understand that there is more to being female than having long hair and wearing dresses; they are female on the inside.

Teach them that being female and living out God’s design for women is a high calling—every bit as lofty as his design for boys. Teach what we talked about earlier – how they show the character of Christ; that you’re not a slave to tradition, but to living freely in God’s image under the authority of

His Word. Consider especially how you're training their hearts' loves, longings, and ambitions. What goals and hopes do you hold out before them? Are they found anywhere in God's word?

2. Prayers. In our very *prayers* for them, we want to make clear that we don't just want a child that loves Christ, but we want a *woman* who loves Christ. And then we pray using these biblical terms: "Father, make [Susie] into a godly young woman. Help her to grow up to be self-controlled. Make her pure – make her gentle just like Jesus our Good Shepherd is gentle... Prepare her to be a strong and beautiful helper. Give her the beauty of a quiet & gentle spirit..." And so forth. Pray the Bible – and ask God to make these things the longing of her heart.

3. Training. Remember, too, that your daughters need *practical training*. Show and teach them how to keep a home. Point out specific things you do to show love to their father. Don't overlook the practical! Many women arrive at marriage only to realize they received training for many things, but not to be a wife and mother – to be biblically feminine

Practical training also extends to spiritual things. For instance:

- Purity. You can teach modest from a very young age. Explain that our bodies are not for attracting attention and are not an object to perfect.
- Kindness. Cultivate kindness by encouraging her to use her speech to edify, not to gossip or be bossy. Talk with your daughters about the beauty of the heart, the beauty of a "gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight."

4. Love. Finally, they need *love*.).

Let's look now at a few aspects of the definition of femininity we gave earlier:

C. Biblical femininity is a "*freeing disposition*."

Remember what Elizabeth Elliott said:

The world looks for happiness through self-assertion. The Christian knows that joy is found in self-abandonment

Mothers / ladies: Are you convinced that this is liberation for you?

For your Daughters: Teach them that they will be happiest doing what God has made them to do. (...and *show* them!)

D. Biblical Femininity *affirms and receives*... ..strength and leadership from worthy men.

Women actively affirm the leadership of men when they live cheerfully under the authority of their husbands, fathers, or elders in their church. In fact, John Piper writes, "*a mature woman is glad when a respectful, caring, upright man offers sensitive strength and provides a pattern of appropriate initiatives in their relationship. She does not want to reverse these roles. She is glad when he is not passive. She feels herself enhanced and honored and freed by his caring strength and servant-leadership.*" BMW, 48.

Mothers: Aspire to be the opposite of the quarrelsome wife! Do you undercut his leadership by complaining about him with others? Or to his face, about being late from work or a decision he made for the family

For your Daughters: Encourage them to affirm, not buck, their fathers' leadership. Though it's not an exact parallel, this will be good practice for life in the church and, if the Lord wills, for marriage. Help her understand that this is how she lives under God's authority.

Teach your daughter to relish going to her father for counsel and help. For example, consider having her show her dad her new clothing purchases for a modesty and appropriateness check.

Fathers, are you cultivating your relationship with your daughters so that your daughter feels the blessing of living under the leadership of a benevolent, Godly man?

E. Biblical Femininity *Nurtures*.

It is a freeing disposition **to nurture** strength and leadership from worthy men. Here we're drawing on the woman's core calling described in Genesis: she was to be "a helper suitable" for the man. Gen. 2:18.

What does "helper" mean? In Hebrew, it means "helper." ! But "helper" in Scripture is a strong word. The vast majority of times it's used of God Himself: God is the "helper" of Israel. In the NT, Christ calls the Holy Spirit "the Helper." Women do not help from a point of weakness; the help because they have tremendous God-ordained strength to do so!

Proverbs 31 is a wonderful picture of this industrious, skilled, savvy woman using her abilities and intelligence to serve her family, household, and community. She embodies the traits in Titus 2. Taking these passages together, we get a composite picture of biblical womanhood from three angles. Women are helpers to their husbands, their churches, and the world.

1. Women are helpers to their husbands. This starts with women's very orientation: they help their husbands by being oriented to them, and not primarily to themselves.

One basic way women help their husbands is by *having and raising children*. As we saw in the early lectures, we see right from Genesis 1 that God wanted to spread his image throughout the world in part by procreation. Psalm 127 teaches us that children are a blessing and like "arrows in the hands of a warrior."

Women also fulfill their childrearing job and help their husbands by being, as Paul puts it, "busy at home" (Titus 2:5; see also I Tim. 5:14).

Brothers and sisters, do you want to set high goals for your daughters? Teach them the joy of using their time and home and creativity to "make God's business prosper." Teach them not to follow secular trends or lifestyle expectations, but what will strengthen their families and advance the cause of Christ. Single women, catch this vision for your home. Of course, you have your job. Serve

there with all your heart, as if you were serving Christ! But how can you also use your home to build God's kingdom? To take a couple examples, ask Jessica Sandal, or Margaret Bradley, or Sabrina Smith.

2. Women are helpers to their churches. Mothers, prepare your daughters for a life of service not just in their own household, but in "God's household," the church. Let them see the importance of the church in your family's life, and help them see that biblical femininity adorns not just her, not just her family, but the body of Christ.

3. Women are helpers to the world Proverbs 31 speaks of this wise woman as opening her hands to the poor. We see her using her home to serve those outside her home. Biblically feminine women are not insular. No, their homes are Gospel outposts! Their love is always reaching out to do good to others in the church and the world.

Mothers: Consider the weight, the magnitude, the impact, of what God is calling you to do. Your helping may often feel mundane

For your Daughters: As you think about her education and goals, what are you encouraging her to do? Are you encouraging her to be a career woman for her own self-fulfillment, or to use her helper design – in whatever season or situation she finds herself in? Teach her Who it is she's really serving – and the mighty hands in which her work is an instrument!