

Shalom!

A JOURNAL FOR THE PRACTICE OF RECONCILIATION

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Real Men

Okay, so I'm not sure I'm the right person to be compiling an edition of *Shalom!* focusing on men's issues. I confess that this edition has been a bit of a struggle for me, certainly not because I don't believe that men face challenging and unique issues, but more because I wasn't sure how to develop it. With that confession out of the way, here's where my mind went as I tried to decide how to set the context...

What woman hasn't spent time with her female friends joking and commiserating about the odd ways of the opposite gender? What wife can't tell a story of how her husband is absolutely sure there is no more cheese in the refrigerator only to come herself and pick it right off the front shelf in two seconds? Or how many husbands seem incapable of multi-tasking, thinking of or doing more than one thing at a time, while their wives care for their children and cook dinner simultaneously every day? What child ever wonders whether his or her dad has eyes in the back of his head, while it's a known fact that mothers know pretty much everything that goes on behind their backs?!

In our house, my husband and I have had these conversations many times over more than 37 years of marriage. We've frequently discussed the differences between the genders, and how women have been discriminated against and denied equal opportunity. We've also discussed how stereotypical male characteristics—like logical analysis, lack of emotion, assertiveness/aggressiveness—have been more highly valued in our culture, thus perpetuating inequalities because women's stereotypical characteristics have been thought not to be as effective in “running the

world.” Sometimes our conversations have been heated. While my husband has some of the stereotypical male qualities, I do too. For example, his tendency to be logical about pretty much everything sometimes drives me to distraction, but I also value my own ability to think carefully and logically. The reverse is true as well—we both have qualities that would stereotypically be called “feminine.” He agrees that women have been oppressed, but he doesn't think it's particularly helpful to talk in terms of the differences between men and women as having anything to do with it.

Our congregation has had various ministries designed and planned especially for women, such as women's Bible studies, “moms' mornings out” and salad suppers, but we've struggled with creating successful men's ministries. Over the years, I have heard one man on more than one occasion criticize the women's groups, partly because they are limited to women, but also because there have not always been parallel groups scheduled for men. According to this man's reasoning, if there is equality between the sexes, there should be equality in programming. I think he might say that there shouldn't even be separate ministries or events for each gender. He might agree with Bruxy Cavey, teaching pastor at The Meeting House, whose recent sermon series on gender is reviewed in the lead article in this edition. Bruxy contends that having separate groups perpetuates barriers between the genders.

However, as a woman I know how valuable and helpful conversations and activities with other women can be; I thor-

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Learning from the Gender You're Not

A sermon series review by Rachel Petersen

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oughly enjoy spending time with my female friends, who often understand me in ways even my husband doesn't. If that's true for me and other women I know, I suspect it is true for men as well. I also suspect that men have their own conversations among themselves about the odd ways of women.

There have been two or three editions of *Shalom!* on gender issues and women in ministry and leadership in the past, but never one exclusively on men's issues. In the interests of equality, and recognizing that in our culture men are confronting significant and perhaps unique challenges to their roles as Christian spouses, parents and workers, it's probably long overdue. I invite your response.

Harriet S. Bicksler, editor



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In a recent sermon series entitled "His and Hers: Learning from the Gender You're Not," Bruxy Cavey, teaching pastor at The Meeting House in Toronto, Ontario, dove into a topic that few preachers (especially male pastors) care to tackle: the countless differences between the sexes, and how the body of Christ might lovingly respond to this diversity. His insights seem especially relevant to this issue of *Shalom!* so we'd like to highlight some of the main points of his series here.

Cavey begins his series with a thorough (and highly entertaining) exploration of the biological, emotional, and relational differences between men and women. He incorporates many recent scientific findings that have confirmed what common sense has long taught: in many ways, men and women couldn't be more different. Of course, there are exceptions. Cavey is careful to note that the scientific community, in addition to confirming the overwhelmingly prevalent differences between the sexes, also identifies significant exceptions to every generalization. In fact, researchers have concluded that nearly 20% of men have "feminized" brains, and 10% of women have "masculinized" brains. For Cavey, these statistics add to the wonderful diversity represented in God's creation. He says, "our attitude toward the exceptions should be the same as our attitude towards the differences to begin with: and that is to say, 'This is part of the riotous creativity [...] and] diversity of what it means to be human, and so we are going to appreciate these exceptions as well.'"

Examining the evidence that has led to the popular adage, "men are from Mars, women are from Venus," Cavey acknowledges that we are "different by design." But as he identifies the myriad differences that seem to be hard-wired into our nature, he often points out that being born a certain way "doesn't make it right – it just is." For example, the left side of the brain tends to be more developed among females, which is why little girls tend to develop verbal skills more quickly than boys their age. On

the other hand, males tend to have a stronger spatial awareness than females; a result of the right half of the brain being stronger among men. For this reason, it comes as little surprise that while many architectural schools have 50/50 enrollment, close to 97% of architects turn out to be men.

When it comes to emotional intelligence, women tend to have a much stronger capacity for empathy than their male counterparts. The relational nature of females manifests itself as early as one week of age, when baby girls can distinguish their mother's voice or the cry of another baby from other sounds in a room. According to Barbara Pease, who Cavey often quotes in this series, "Male awareness is concerned with getting results, achieving goals, status, and power, beating the competition, and getting efficiently to the bottom line. Female awareness is focused on communication, cooperation, harmony, love, sharing, and our relationship to one another. This contrast is so great that it's amazing men and women can even consider living together in the first place."

Of course, not all differences exist because of nature. Many result from (or are accentuated by) nurture—the cultural and familial context in which we are raised. But, as Cavey continually reminds his listeners, even those differences that can be attributed to nature aren't necessarily part of God's design. "As Christians," he says, "we acknowledge that just because we're born a certain way doesn't mean we should be victims of our biology. And this is very important. We see our identity at birth as a mix of two things; one to be celebrated, one to be pushed back against. One is the glory of God's image in us, male and female, but the other is the corruption of that image by sin, which is now part of creation and becomes influential even in our wiring from birth."

Even so, Cavey points out, it is important to recognize that at least some element of our diversity exists by God's design. Looking at the opening passages of Genesis, Cavey offers a fascinating exposition on the creation of humankind in God's image. He notes that some biblical scholars debate the sexual

identity of “Adam,” questioning whether this original human contained the qualities of both maleness and femaleness until God separated out the latter into an “other,” or whether “Adam” was biologically male prior to Eve’s creation. Either way, it is important to note that God did not pronounce humankind to be good until Adam and Eve existed in community as two separate (but complementary) others. Significantly, the meanings of the Hebrew words for “helper” and “suitable” in Genesis 2:18 shed some light on this complementary relationship. First of all, Cavey notes, the word “helper” doesn’t in any way imply a subservient role for Eve. On the contrary, the word used in this passage is the same word used regularly throughout the Hebrew scriptures to describe God’s relationship to Israel. The “helper” of Genesis 2:18 might then be better understood as “rescuer,” according to Cavey. Furthermore, the word “suitable” in this passage means “one who corresponds to the Other as in a mirror image; exactly the same and yet completely opposite.” Therefore, it would be a misreading of Genesis to assume that all the diversity between men and women came into being after the fall in chapter 3.

Cavey suggests that though each difference between the genders may be an inextricable reflection of our simultaneous goodness and corruption, our overall response to these differences should not be to accept them as barriers, but to view them as opportunities for learning and growth. “God has designed men and women to reflect his image in mutually enriching ways,” says Cavey. Because of this, we are called “to learn from and celebrate our differences for the good of our families, our churches, and our society.” Citing 1 Corinthians 12:14-27, Cavey observes that “scripture invites us to move toward those who are different from us, believing that God desires diversity in unity. This has implications for our relationships in church, marriage, family, careers, and everywhere else. Men and women need to learn from the gender we’re not in order to learn more about God’s heart.”

In the final sermon of this series, Cavey addresses the implications for the church. Since Christ’s followers are called into a familial experience with other believers as genuine brothers and sisters (1 Timothy 5:1-2),

Cavey suggests that we work to change our attitudes and approaches toward the gender we’re not in order to better align with scripture. In terms of church structure, this means organizing ourselves to “reflect the reality of spiritual family, where brothers and sisters, wealthy and poor, Jew and Gentile, young and old, single and married, the hurting and the happy, all experience home life together.”

In practical terms, this means (for Cavey’s church), prioritizing mixed gender opportunities for fellowship and partnership (i.e., home church groups), over gender-restricted groups. Citing Galatians 3, Cavey notes that, in a church setting, we would not tolerate the perpetuation of barriers between any other people group. For example, we wouldn’t have different small groups for people of different racial or economic backgrounds within the same congregation. Yet within church culture, we have grown accustomed to taking our cues from the wider culture, which separates out genders. Though this may be simple, it is not scriptural. Likewise, in the area of church leadership, we should be intentional about having both genders—just as we strive to have people representing various backgrounds and stages of life—work together at all levels of leadership.

God created us to function in community not because of our essential sameness, but because of our diversity. To fully realize the image of God in humankind, we must embrace this diversity and be willing to learn from those who think and act differently. What better place to begin, therefore, than with those whose “otherness” aggravates us the most? If we can learn to truly appreciate and respect the gender we’re not, we will have made a great deal of progress towards the community Christ has called us to become.

Bruxy Cavey is the teaching pastor at The Meeting House in the Greater Toronto Area, Ontario. Rachel Petersen is the assistant editor of Shalom! and housekeeping manager at Paxton Ministries in Harrisburg, PA.

Fifth Biennial Retreat of the Brethren in Christ Council for Women in Ministry and Leadership

Women at the Well: Choosing What is Better

March 16-18, 2009

Kenbrook Bible Camp,
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You are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen what is better, which shall not be taken away from her. (Luke 10:42, NRSV)

Women in all areas and at all levels of ministry are invited to attend the fifth biennial retreat of the BIC Council for Women in Ministry and Leadership. We will gather March 16-18, 2009 at Kenbrook Bible Camp in Lebanon, PA for a time of workshops, worship, fellowship, and quiet spiritual reflection. Registration deadline is February 20, 2009. For full details see our brochure and registration form on our web site at BIC-CHURCH.ORG/WOMEN/NEWS.ASP.

For more information, you can also contact Lois Saylor at LAWSAYLOR@COMCAST.NET.

Real Dads Ask For Directions

By Dale Shaw

A few years ago I went hunting with a friend and our two sons. We drove to a lake about 200 miles north of Toronto and put our boat in the water and crossed the lake to a small camp. The next morning we boarded the boat and beached in an inlet where each of us went our separate ways.

I went deep into the woods walking quietly and looking for deer as I walked. About three hours later I realized I had no idea where I was. I knew that the cabin we stayed in was no more than four or five miles away but I also knew that there were continuous woods for 40-50 miles to the north and 15-20 miles to the east. By now the sky was overcast and I hadn't taken note of what direction I had walked into the woods that morning. I prayed very sincerely and began to walk in a direction that seemed right. After awhile I heard sounds and hid behind a tree hoping a big buck was coming my way, but what should walk out from behind a tree but my son Darren. He too was lost.

Together we decided on a direction to walk and finally came to a cliff and saw a birdhouse high on a pole. We realized we were within walking distance of the lake and thought that the birdhouse was probably near another camp. We found the cottage on the lake but still had no idea where our camp was. We decided it might be just around the next inlet. We looked around and found a small paddle wheeler boat. We pulled it out and launched it, put our guns in the back, climbed in and started to paddle. As soon as we got out of the calm side of the inlet we experienced a fairly strong wind that was stronger than our paddling and we found ourselves being blown in the opposite direction. With a little careful maneuvering we steered the paddle wheeler toward a small island. Darren thought there might be a phone in one of the cottages so he found an unlocked window, crawled through and called our camp. Our friends got in their boat and came for us.

I learned something that day. Real dads should ask for directions, even if it's a GPS or a compass.

Not that it's natural to do that. When God made men he created them to be hunters. We hunt for things. We don't need to hunt for food anymore because we have jobs that allow us to buy the stuff we need to keep our families and us alive but that innate desire to hunt is still there. So forget the map, we hunt for houses deep within subdivisions. We hunt for obscure roads without the aid of a map. We hunt for the ketchup at the Supermarket or the hinges at Lowes or the oil at Advance Auto Parts. We hunt for more powerful cars and bikes and chain saws. Why would you ask when you can hunt?

I am not going to try to change the natural instincts of every man. But I am going to assume that there is enough male intelligence to get us to ask for direction on the crucial areas of life where we have little experience or understanding. I'm not talking about directions to Harrisburg or Los Angeles or Toronto but direction for the crucial things of life.

In the Old Testament, Isaiah wrote, "This is what the Lord says, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: 'I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea'" (Isaiah 48:17-18). God says we will have peace and integrity if we let him direct our lives. If we follow his direction we will live a life of risk but we will discover purpose and adventure.

Consider the following ten true or false statements that outline areas in our lives where we should ask for directions.

1. Fathering skills come naturally.

Just make a few babies, follow your intuition, and all will be well. **False.** Fathering skills do not come naturally to every father, and sometimes following your fatherly intuition can be downright disastrous. Sometimes your fatherly intuition has been skewed by an unwise father or grandfather. The best fathers I know are the dads who

admit what they don't know right from the get-go. They read books about parenting, they go wherever parent training is being offered, they talk to other dads whenever they can, and they try to gain new insights.

2. Fathers play a more important role in the lives of their sons than they do in the lives of their daughters.

False. Fathers raise confidence levels in their daughters. Fathers convince daughters that they can overcome the gender limits that still exist in our society today. Fathers teach daughters how men treat women. Fathers demonstrate to daughters how life can be lived with God at the center whether you're male or female. Fathers play an extremely important role in the lives of their girls. Of course, the same could be said for fathers and sons. Dads teach boys that there's more to masculinity than bravado and drinking beer. Dads teach sons that respecting women and protecting the defenseless is just standard operating procedure for men.

3. Stepfathers have significantly less impact on children than their biological fathers.

False. The male in the family that has the greatest impact on the children in the growing up years is the male who is there, whether stepfather or biological father. The male who engages with the children has the impact on the children. He's the one who listens carefully and loves deeply. It could be a stepfather, biological father, or grandfather. It could be a Sunday school teacher or a youth advisor, or a Boy Scout troop leader. You'd be surprised how often it's not a parent. The point is that no adults get impact points without significant engagement in the lives of kids. Your genes buy you very little when all is said and done. The key to having impact on a young person is engagement.

4. A father's attitudes toward morality, work, play, money, and racial diversity have a lifelong effect on a child.

True. It's not just the conversations but fathers' general attitudes or their behaviors—what they do and how they do it. Their

choices, their methods, have an effect on us for longer than we would imagine. Stephan Poulter, in *The Father Factor*, shares his research regarding how a person's relationship with his or her father affects performance. He says that if a father is a super-achiever type, it will have an effect on how a son or daughter approaches their vocation.

If a father is a ticking time-bomb who explodes and rages all over others when they least expect it, that affects the children's relationship with their adult bosses when they're in the marketplace many years later. If a father is a compassionate mentor type, his children will model that. Almost every person who has racial prejudice and mistrust issues says it was their parents' attitudes about race that set in motion their own attitude. Maybe words were never even said, but the attitude just got caught.

So when a dad displays constructive attitudes about work and play and race and money, that's going to get caught. That sets up a kid to win. And it goes the other way as well. When a father's attitude about these things is not constructive, sometimes it takes a lifetime for a kid to readjust and get over it.

5. If a father raises children consistent with the teachings of Scripture, all will be well.

Here's the deal on this one. The Bible teaches that if a father raises children according to the Scriptures and if the father models the character of Christ, the likelihood of kids turning out well goes up significantly. But it's never a 100 percent sure thing. Why? Because sons and daughters are autonomous beings with the freedom to make terrible choices. They're capable of what the Bible refers to as "folly"—brain-freezes and moments of utter stupidity.

Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Well, the children are likely to do a little zigzagging here and there, and it's not necessarily the parents' fault. Parents should do everything in their power to give them a strong spiritual heritage. It's important to pray for your kids every day, for their safety and protection, because you know they can commit folly.

6. Fathers who make major investments in their marriage are simultane-

ously making a positive investment in their children.

True. When young children see the playful, romantic side of their parents, that kind of interaction makes them feel more secure. Every time a father makes an investment in a marriage, it pays dividends in the lives of children. They see up close and personal what a loving relationship can look like. Their discernment tools are sharpened for what they should be looking for in a relationship with a member of the opposite sex if God leads them down that path someday.

7. A father's provision for his children is significantly more important than a father's affection.

False. Provision is pretty important, but ask any kid what he or she would rather have. The Bible teaches very clearly it's the responsibility of fathers to work hard and make provision for the family. But the Bible also urges fathers to pour out love and affection on their sons and daughters. I'd put affection over provision all day long. The power of a father's affection is almost immeasurable. The lack of it does soul damage that is very hard to repair. Every kid's heart is starved for a father's affection. A dad doesn't have to get it all right; the kid just has to see that you're trying. It is never too late to improve your ability or to take a risk to try to convey your love and affection to your kids or grandkids.

8. Verbal abuse from a father is far less serious than physical abuse.

False. It's as bad to consistently verbally abuse a child as it is for a father to strike a child in a fit of anger. Consistent verbal abuse causes nearly the same level of soul damage in the life of a child as physical abuse. Physical abuse is always awful and should never happen. Sometimes I'll hear dads say, "Well, I never laid a finger on my kid." And the kid will tell, "Yeah, but you often berated me; you belittled me every day." You don't have to hit a kid to hurt a kid. If you use words carelessly, you can do a lot of damage.

If you have memories you'd rather not dwell on, you need to insist that you're not going to pass on to your kids that broken baton you received from your dad. The

Bible is very clear about the power of the tongue, how it can bless and how it can set spirits soaring, and how it can do great damage. A word that's spoken to cut, to hurt, can leave a wound for a long, long time.

9. Wounds from a father can never be overcome.

False. The apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old is gone. The new has come." The healing power of our heavenly Father is greater than the wounding power of our earthly father. Sometimes that healing comes through the help of Christian counselors or grace-giving people in small groups.

10. As children reach adulthood, the father's affection and approval are no longer critical.

False. Maybe you think there is some magical age—18 or 21 or college graduation or wedding day—when there would be a finish line for fathers. Here's what I'm finding: my involvement in the lives of our adult boys, now 36 and 30, is still pretty important and still wanted by them. Your kids are never too old to hear you say, "I love you." I never end a phone conversation or a visit with Darren and David without saying, "I love you." They often beat me to the punch.

Finally, a prayer for dads:

Father in heaven, we are so grateful that we all can call you Father: our great, loving, faithful, expressive, grace-giving, long-suffering Father. We accept your love and feel your gracious spirit toward us. We want to take that great, heavenly father love and we want to spill it out to our spouses and sons and daughters and grandkids. We want to be loving men. We want to be men who lift the spirits and set soaring the hearts of those people that you put in and around our lives. I ask that each one of us will keep asking you for direction for their lives. I pray this in Jesus name, Amen.

Dale Shaw is senior pastor of the Pequea Brethren in Christ Church, Lancaster County, PA. This article is condensed by permission from a sermon he preached on Father's Day, June 17, 2007. You can listen to the entire sermon online at BIC-CHURCH.ORG/RESOURCES/MENSMINISTRY/

Reinventing Fatherhood

by Brian McCann

When I was a kid, Father's Day cards always confused me, but now they simply sadden me. I remember being 12 years old and going to the Hallmark aisle in the grocery store to pick out a Father's Day card for my dad. All the cards seemed to be about either cars or fishing or golf. My dad was too busy to do car repairs anymore. We had gone fishing together exactly two times in my life, but he had recently taken up golf for some reason that adults have that children don't understand. So, I chose a golf card.

We have somehow allowed ourselves as a people to create a label out of the word "father." This father is a generally clueless though often well-intentioned man who works when he has to and is lazy the rest of the time. When he is engaged in family life at all, it is to make crass jokes or insensitive statements.

This father stereotype grates against every sensibility I have for two reasons. First, I don't fit the stereotype at all, and neither do many other dads. Secondly, and more importantly, this twisted version of fathering skews our perspective on the Real Father, the one who created us all. By endorsing the "greeting card dad," we subtly reinforce the idea that God the Father is also largely absent and unknown and interested in only a few things (none of which are us).

Sometimes I get angry with the media for creating this image, but I wonder how much of it is our own fault. I've often heard older women tell girls to anticipate being a mother some day. "You'll understand when you're a mother," they say. But I've never heard it said to a boy, "You'll understand when you're a father." We give our young men no ability to prepare for future fatherhood, no understanding that it is a natural and probable aspect of their future lives. Girls are often raised with the knowledge that they will one day be mothers and grandmothers. We do nothing to prepare boys to become fathers and grandfathers. With no preparation for a moving shadowy target, is it any wonder that we don't know what fathers are supposed to be like?

Thankfully, there is a reason that God is also called the Father. He has given us various

templates in the Bible of what it looks like to display true fatherhood, and by examining the Scriptures, we can find out what it truly means to be a father. Godly fathers (and I mean Godly with a capital G) are:

Creative

- The primary characteristic of God the Father is his innate capacity and joy in creating things, whether it be the universe or human beings or plant life or simple gnats.
- Make sure that your kids see you create things. Carve something from wood, build a go-cart, write a novel or a poem, fold a paper airplane—just make something.

Verbal

- Creating is an act of expression, but so is speaking. Many of God's speeches in the Bible are in the form of poetry, indicating that he not only wanted to say something meaningful and important, but he wanted to say it in an intrinsically beautiful way.
- Don't expect people to read your mind. Try keeping a journal to practice using words to convey your thoughts to people, especially your children.

Willing to listen to their children

- God always listens to human prayers, and he always hears when his people cry out to him. He even lets some of them (namely Abraham) change his mind.
- When did you last let a child change your mind or convince you of something?

Forgiving

- God forgives. He is the father lifting his robes to run to his returning scoundrel son. He is the vineyard owner who keeps sending messengers to his vineyard in a desperate hope that the workers will do the honorable thing. He is the One who has been injured by every wrong ever committed—and yet he still forgives.
- The brooding solitary male is just that—solitary. If we want to be any kind of decent father we must expect wrongs to be

done to us (by our children and by others), and we must grow the courage and love to forgive.

One of the largest issues facing Christian men in the 21st century is the need to reinvent the image of "fathering." We need to explore again the images that Scriptures and the long tradition of Jesus followers have used to explore God's paternal character and, consequently, our imitation of true fatherhood.

Brian McCann is a youth minister in Kansas City, Missouri. A graduate of Messiah College, Brian served for a time as a pastoral resident at the Grantham Brethren in Christ Church. He and his wife are expecting their second child in December.

A Father's Wrath

by John P. Walker

There are many positive things a father can pass on to his children. Mine passed on a healthy work ethic, a strong sense of loyalty and fairness, an interest in news and politics and a strong social nature—too strong according to most of my grade school teachers. The cross-country camping trips every summer when I was growing up stuck with me. I still sneak away at least once a year to camp, often on my own, usually in a tent. The funny little songs I would make up to amuse my young children had their origin in my father's own songs, sung loudly in the kitchen of our family restaurant. I also inherited my father's silly British sense of humor, his joy of reading, especially action-suspense novels, and his love of cars, though, sadly, not his talent with fixing them. One not-so-positive thing I seem to have inherited from my father is his anger.

Though he has mellowed with age, my father had an explosive temper when I was a young boy. His anger was unpredictable. One could expect a cuff behind the ear or to be the target of yelling for such offenses as making noise during his favorite television program, running in the house, getting poor grades or simply for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Things were especially tense during his years of third-shift work at the auto plant when we crept about on tiptoes during the day for fear of "waking the bear."

As a young teenager working in the family business, I learned that I was expected to do the job of a man. If I messed up, my father's wrath was often expressed in cutting remarks and sarcasm, sometimes peppered with expletives. On occasion, my mother had to remind him that he was no longer a foreman on the assembly line and I was not one of his line workers. Both parents could be hurtful at times and I grew to fear the berating and damaging words. Those nasty tapes played in my head for years during times of poor self-esteem: "You stupid fool." "Let me do that. I'll do it right." "What's wrong with you?" "What good are you?" "You're useless." I vowed that I'd never say such things to my own children.

About four years ago, my life was a mess. We'd been through some difficult experienc-

es in pastoral leadership and had been the target of some ugly behavior. I wasn't handling it well. I became cold and angry and bitter. "Surly" was the word my wife used to describe me. Our marriage was falling apart as the result of years of this behavior. It wasn't until a forced confrontation and I submitted to going to counseling that I came to an unsettling conclusion: in many ways, I had become my father.

I didn't use putdowns or name-calling and I didn't hit them or threaten them, but I was hurting my wife and children just the same. My angry outbursts were, like my father's, unpredictable and sudden, without warning. I have a powerful voice and a counselor helped me to see that I didn't have to shout to use it to intimidate, and often did. I made my own children skittish and fearful and my wife felt she had to be a buffer between me and them, to protect them from my anger. My anger wasn't a recent phenomenon either. It had been there just below the surface from the beginning.

Nobody likes to hear bad news about himself, but I finally had to admit that what my wife was saying must be true. When I realized the full extent of my sinful behavior, I was crushed. How could I have become what I vowed I would not? How could I have grown to the point where my own children were afraid of triggering my next outburst?

In my reading I have learned that anger often arises from a sense of being oppressed, even victimized. The problem is that when you feel victimized, it's easy to project the cause for your behavior on someone else. For example, I remember one particularly embarrassing scene I caused in a store. I distinctly remember feeling like I was being denied what I deserved and was being taken advantage of. I went off on the clerk, arguing, threatening, and almost shouting. My poor wife looked as if she wanted to crawl under the counter. After a lengthy tirade in which I gave the clerk a piece of my mind that I could ill afford to lose, she gave me a simple answer to my problem that I didn't expect. Angrily, I said, "Why didn't

Editor's Notes

Proposed topics for 2009:

Winter: Waging war on poverty

Spring: Responding to evil (war on terror, relating to enemies, forgiveness)

Summer: Creation care and environmental stewardship

Fall: Money matters

If you or someone you know would like to write on any of these topics, please contact the editor. Each issue is generally published near the end of the season of its date (despite our best efforts to speed things up!), and deadlines are generally at least 6-8 weeks ahead of publication (for example, the preferred deadline for the winter edition is January 25, 2009).

Request for end-of-year contributions:

As you know, *Shalom!* is self-supporting and depends entirely on subscriptions and the generous contributions of our readers. As we approach the end of another fiscal year, we are running short of funds. We'll be sending out the 2009 subscription letter relatively early in the new year, but in the meantime, we would really appreciate your considering an extra contribution to help tide us over until then. Make your check payable to the Brethren in Christ Church and mail it to me at the address on page 2. Alternatively, you can contribute online through the denomination's secure service for online contributions. You can choose *Shalom!* as the recipient of your contribution and indicate in the comments line that this is an extra contribution. Simply go to BIC-CHURCH.ORG, then click the "Donate" link at the bottom of the page. Thanks so much!

(continued from page 7)

you tell me this when I first came in?” Her reply was, “Sir, I tried, but you wouldn’t give me the chance to tell you.”

The real chill hit me during an uncomfortable confrontation with my oldest daughter. She was very angry and yelled in my face with very little provocation. It’s as if God spoke to me in that moment saying, “You did this.” I had passed on that anger to my own child and it wasn’t serving her well. That moment was a turning point for me. It was a part of a much larger turning point that involved lots of prayer, asking for forgiveness and the decision just to love my daughter through the anger. Things got better and the anger has lessened.

I like to think that I have grown, but I know I have a long way to go to resolve the deeper issues that underlie the anger and bitterness. It is not without reason that the Bible warns us about the “bitter root” (Hebrews 12:15). When bitterness is allowed to grow in one person it can defile him and make him unfit to stand before God. But bitterness can’t remain localized. It easily spreads to others with far reaching effect, defiling “many.” For the same reason, we are advised to “not let the sun go down while you are still angry” (Ephesians 4:26). I am learning that dealing with the need for forgiveness should not be left to fester and become worse, but should be

dealt with immediately where possible.

As I said in the beginning, my father has mellowed with age and, prayerfully, I will too. With God’s help, I can stop passing the anger and not “exasperate (my) children” (Ephesians 6:4). I can love my wife and daughters with God’s love, becoming a better husband and father. My wife says that I am “a changed man.” I hope so. I need to be “a new creation” in Christ.

John Walker serves as director of development for Paxton Ministries. He lives in New Cumberland, PA, with his wife, Bonnie, a fourth-grade teacher at Hershey Christian School.

Divine Nobodies: A Book about You and Me

a book review by Lois Saylor

Jim Palmer, author of *Divine Nobodies*, grew up in a troubled home with an alcoholic mother. He became a Christian as a high school senior and life began to open up for him. He completed college, went on to seminary, and found himself as one of the pastors at a large church and traveling for speaking engagements. He was climbing the ladder of Christian success. Then a personal loss triggered a series of events and the up-and-coming young pastor was divorced and unemployed. *Divine Nobodies* is both the telling of Palmer’s own story and the strong affirmation that God works outside religious structures in the work-a-day world through regular folks. Palmer writes about these experiences with both humor and poignancy.

As Palmer finds himself on the outside of the organized church, he began to seek God in new ways and discovered that God had many ministers in many unexpected places. These people he calls divine nobodies. He writes, “I never knew ‘called’ people worked as cooks, cashiers or carpet installers and reckon it would have remained lost on me if it weren’t for becoming one.” Palmer’s experience outside the organized church helped him to understand the breath of the spiritual church, the body of Christ.

Palmer’s nobodies include the jazz drummer who ran a retreat where listening to

God in quiet took precedence over talking out troubles; the unchurched waitress who had a few things to teach him and the church; and the friend who “knows Jesus and believes Eminem is a musical genius with something to say worth listening to.” There is also the story of the struggles of a gay friend and the auto mechanic who “sees his shop as a spiritual post on the potholed journey of life.”

As Palmer reveals the ways these divine nobodies serve God and help people, he also reveals the hurts and wounds of his own life, as his “nobodies” become his ministers and teachers. One insight he gains concerns living as a Christian outside professional ministry. He writes, “I was finding Christianity in the real world had all sorts of challenges I never experienced in my vocational ministry world.”

There are times that Palmer seems to have started his journey with a rather naïve view of the world and the lessons he learns, though correct, are hardly a revelation. It also seems that he has just started his journey and will continue to learn and develop and that where he is is not where he will end even if the book is coming to a conclusion. Yet, he tells his stories well and there is certainly something for everyone to ponder. The collection of stories is worth

reading for those in ministry who might be experiencing some of the same isolation and insulation that Palmer did as a young pastor. For the many of us who see ourselves in these everyday missionaries, it is a reminder that everything we do, we should be doing as for Christ. Sometimes we can forget this focus in the midst of life’s to-do list.

Most of us will live our lives under the radar of fame or renown. We may not rise to the pinnacles in our chosen fields. We won’t become the next Billy Graham. We may live rather anonymously in our communities, but we live. We build homes and families. We influence friends, co-workers, neighbors, our sisters and brothers in the church, and hopefully along the way those who are lost. We are salt and light for the kingdom and that is our holy calling. *Divine Nobodies* is a chronicling of God’s unusual sources of that salt and light in the life of its author who finds out the unusual was his notion and not God’s. For God uses ordinary people with extraordinary results every day.

Lois Saylor writes from her home in Elizabethtown, PA, and attends the Harrisburg Brethren in Christ Church.

Reaching Men

By Nicholas Hankins

One of the main focuses in the church is reaching out to men and young men. The church puts on Bible studies and men's small groups, hoping that this will spur participation by men. The problem is that men are not getting the memo. No, I am not saying that we just need to publicize these events more; instead we need a revolution in how we approach reaching men. Traditional Bible studies and small groups where feelings are shared openly work well for women, but often this does little to change the lives of men. The solution revolves around understanding men in general.

Before we can touch men's lives we first must engage them. Men, especially those who grew up in our Rambo/Terminator culture, typically (consciously or unconsciously) find sharing their emotions and problems a sign of weakness. For men to share their feelings they must become vulnerable and hope they will not be ridiculed by the others around them, which culture and society have taught them through hard lessons will not be the case. Thus men's small groups become a place where "everything is fine, things are good." How many men's groups across the country cringe when an individual says things are just "okay," because of the necessary follow-up questions that must happen? Or feel awkward about the one individual who is considerably more open than the others?

All things considered, this does not mean men don't want to share; they just feel uncomfortable, or they are unable to discuss these topics in a group of men that they hardly know. The ultimate question is: how do we get men to be open, to allow themselves to be vulnerable? One of the traditional responses has been to give an opening statement—that this is an open group and we do not judge, but are here to support each other. Most men in small groups have heard some form of this statement and while it is a fine statement to make, it is not an adequate reassurance to men that it is okay to become vulnerable. To bridge the gap of awkwardness we must figure out what drives men and makes them close.

We know men are capable of being vulnerable; we see it in movies, men experience it all the time, but it happens outside of the church. Men typically open up to other men with whom they are close—their best friend, their buddies, "the boys." Men share of themselves with the other men they have come to respect and have grown close to over time. These relationships were not started by coffee and conversations about feelings, but by hanging out as "guys." By hanging out with each other, men come to respect each other. And as they do this, they become open to each other, open to discussing their emotions and problems and allowing other men to help them.

This was the approach of Jesus. He did not just sit down the twelve and give them a Bible study. Instead he lived with them, experienced life with them, and taught them along the way. Jesus knew that the disciples needed time; his message would not have an impact on them until he walked with them and became their friend and mentor. For the disciples, it took three years for them to start to understand; it took three years of miracles and experiences for them to finally start growing in their relationship with God.

A more modern example is the conversion of C. S. Lewis. Lewis, a staunch atheist, came slowly to Christ by the advice and support of his friends. The catalyst for his conversion was his experiences in a writing group called the Inklings. The group was filled with both Christians and non-Christians who informally discussed their writings together. In this group, Lewis made life-long friends who helped lead him to Christ.

The church needs to realize that men are primarily creatures of experience, not emotion. We need to connect with them first on an experiential level and once we do that we will be able to connect with them emotionally. To do this, we need to sponsor events that help men bond with each other. This can take multiple forms: camping trips, football games, playing sports, etc. Through these events, men will connect and allow themselves to be open to growing together and

being vulnerable together. Additionally, these events allow new men to find a less awkward way to join the fellowship of men already established in the congregation. As newer men join, the already established members can bring them into their groups and help them avoid the awkwardness of being the "new guy" or the discomfort in being vulnerable in front of men they do not know.

Until we realize that men are differently tuned than women and allow that to affect the way we do ministry, we are going to lose a lot of men. We as the church must meet men where they are and help them grow in ways that are suited to their needs. We cannot accomplish this by merely telling them that it's safe to share. Instead, we must foster an environment that will naturally encourage trust and vulnerability within the context of authentic male relationships. This will only be done when we transform our understanding of men and see them as primarily experiential rather than emotional beings.

Nick Hankins is youth pastor at Valley Christian Church (BIC) in Moreno Valley, California. He is currently working on a Ph.D. in church history.

From the Eyes of a Male Victim of Domestic Violence

After 27 years of marriage, I left my wife, not because I didn't love her, but because I was unable to handle the abuse any longer. I don't know when it started nor at what point it escalated to life threatening physical attacks.

As is the case with many couples, we were very different; she was a true server and I did not see the things that needed to be done. I, on the other hand, enjoyed spending time preparing to lead a Bible study and she resented that this took up so much of my time. Lack of respect led to a lot of criticism and demeaning comments that made me feel worthless as a man; it became very clear to me that in her eyes I was a poor husband who didn't exercise his responsibilities as a father to our children. I couldn't do anything right. There seemed to be all those expectations that I could never live up to, and over time I felt like I was not much more than the gardener of our yard. She made major decisions without even discussing them with me, even though it affected others in the family.

How did our marriage end in such an abusive situation? The earliest signs were control issues; these were often over little things that may not seem to be that important, but as time progressed, my opinions mattered less all the time. There was a withholding of affection and affirmation towards everyone in our family, and when I saw how that was affecting our children I found myself 'crawling into a shell'. I dared not confront the situation for fear of an angry outburst, and so we, the children and I, 'walked on eggshells'. The verbal abuse that our children endured was incredibly painful to see. There was rarely a day where our teenage daughter was not in tears as she went to school. Our oldest son, who had just started his own business and still lived at home, had failed to live up to his mother's expectations one Mother's Day. She cried for hours that night and then wrote a six page letter and put it on his door; he moved out the next day. Not long after that our daughter also moved out, and we saw little of her over the next few years.

Throughout this time there had been physical attacks, both on the children and on me. After a physical altercation with our youngest son when he was in grade 7, he told her never to touch him again or he would mash her within an inch of her life. From that point on he had a hunting knife beside his bed at all times. Having been punched in the head on numerous occasions and smashed across the face with a telephone, I feared not only for what might happen to our children but I feared for my own safety and always ensured that there were no objects, like knives or rolling pins on the counter, that could be used as weapons by her. I feared for my life and realized that we could not carry on with this downward spiral, but suggestions that we go for counseling were belittled and I saw no way out; in my hopelessness I just wanted to die.

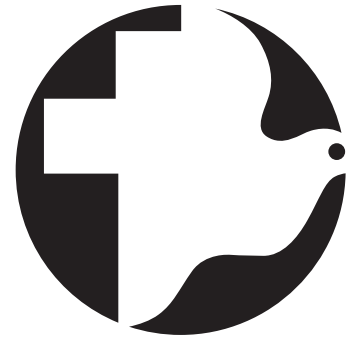
Our pastor and two couples that were close to both of us advised me that I had to leave, but how could I abandon the person I loved, and how would that help? Then, one day when I questioned a decision she had made, she flew into a rage, attacking my face with her fingernails, punching me, cracking one of my ribs, and then choking me to the point where I could not breathe. I had to fight hard to get her hands off me and I felt like I was going crazy. The day after this attack I received a phone call from a counselor with Focus on The Family, asking me what was going on at our home. "Something in your recent letter makes me ask" he said. When I told him what had happened just the day before, he advised me to leave "before one of you does something you will regret for the rest of your lives." I

realized at that point that I was as capable of killing my wife as I was afraid of what she would do to me and so I, together with my youngest son, moved out to temporarily stay with friends who had advised me that we needed to leave my wife. Two months later we rented a house and the older two children came to live with us as well. Confirmation for this action came when our youngest son said, "Do you know what I love about this place? We can laugh again!"

Our leaving was never meant to be permanent. We now went for counseling, but none of those sessions lasted very long since she did not find them helpful. After twelve years of separation, I finally filed for divorce. The abuse has ended and all three children are doing well in their work and in their relationships. I have the privilege of spending a lot of time with my children and grandchildren and we often invite my former wife to be part of the celebrations in our family. I am very grateful for this degree of reconciliation that we have been able to achieve.

The author prefers to remain anonymous. This article was reprinted by permission from Mennonite Central Committee's web site at MCC.ORG/ABUSE. Also available from MCC is a new resource, "Abuse: Response and Prevention," a guide for church leaders. The 32-page booklet can be downloaded from the web site as a PDF file or ordered from MCC.

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Real Men Love Jesus

By Jeremy Ritch

Most men in our culture are raised to fit the stereotypical American male role: they are expected to work hard, not show emotion, be patriotic, be tough, eat red meat, hunt and fish, go camping and like guns. While these characteristics are not necessarily bad, they are the attributes our society expects of men. In many ways I was raised according to these male stereotypes, though they didn't all appeal to my personality. For instance, I do not enjoy camping, fishing or most outdoor activities. I was into sports but I have no competitive edge. Guns are not something I am comfortable around and I have never been accused of working myself to death or holding back how I feel. To be honest I am not much of a patriotic person either. I was a typical boy, however. I fought, played in the dirt, pretended to be an army man and even hoped one day to drive trucks. All these things faded overtime as I grew into the man I am today. Despite this growth, I am still seeking to find out what a man truly is. Even more so, what is a Christian man?

The point I am trying to make is that being a man is not easy, especially when trying to also follow the examples of Jesus. When we compare typical male attitudes and roles with those of Christ there are many blatant differences. First of all, Jesus was not tough in the traditional sense. He did not walk around with his chest out and a wall up. He spoke truth bluntly but from a place of love and compassion. Though many have painted Christ as a "man's man," I just don't see it. Nor do I see an example of him telling us Christian men to be that either. I have heard sermons about Jesus where he is described as a sword-wielding avenger. That is not the Jesus I know. The Jesus I know broke me of that thinking and showed me how to open myself to others. Becoming transparent and loving our enemies is not something John Wayne or The Marlboro Man would do. They would teach us to bottle up those feelings, eat a steak and hit something when we are upset. We live in a culture where being tough as nails and paying back enemies is noble. The problem is, Jesus clearly taught

us to forgive one another and to love our neighbors and enemies.

So where does this leave us Christian guys? We are taught one thing by society and another by our Lord and Savior. The answer should be easy but it is not. There are things that men do that make us who we are. Just ask my wife and she can tell you that. We are complex beings. That said, there is a lot we can change about the way we perceive manliness. First, look at what Jesus taught us in Matthew 5:3-12. He said blessed are the poor, meek, merciful, and the peacemakers. Nowhere does it say blessed are the prideful, strong, macho or muscular. Our call as Christians is to become more and more like Christ, not like the worldly model of a man. Does this mean we should give up hunting, sports or red meat? No, but we should look at our lives and see if we are following the right image. Is our mission peace and compassion or is it being a tough guy and emotionally disconnected? As members of the Brethren in Christ denomination we should examine whether our theology (which is certainly not a very manly one, according to cultural definitions of manliness) informs our values. The images we have grown up with of men might have been positive for some of us but that doesn't make them Christ-like. In fact, we often end up losing sight of Jesus all together because of our quest to conform to cultural understandings of masculinity.

Being Christian is about being broken, stripped of our defenses and transparent before God. It also means that sharing our lives, stories and struggles with others is how we become good men of God. This means allowing people to see past our walls of pride into our hearts. It is not a bad thing to cry or let some emotion out from time to time. It is not a feminine or masculine issue either because as Paul writes in Galatians



3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female: for you all are one in Christ Jesus" (NLT). Therefore, we must not define ourselves any longer solely by these cultural stereotypes. We are not only men but men of God who serve a greater purpose than "out-tuff guying" each other. In reality we know that we are not that tough anyway, and if we don't, our moms and spouses certainly do. Most of us are teddy bears in grizzly bear clothing. Fortunately, this is not a bad thing. Some of the greatest men of God were compassionate, loving, and very open men. Jesus Christ was a man and I believe he is the example for what a true man is. We may be fond of the John Wayne types but we should be in love with the man who sacrificed himself for a bunch of people just because he loved us.

Just to be clear, I am a 6'3", 230-pound guy who is heavily tattooed. I love Ultimate Fighting Championships and football. God is molding me into a peaceful, simple man. It is not an easy road but that is why we dudes need to stick together and cowboy up. Real men love Jesus.

Jeremy Ritch is pastor of Hold Fast Ministries and attends the Harrisburg Brethren in Christ Church with his wife, Hannah. Welcome to Jeremy as the new writer for the "Midnight Musings" column.

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Meeting the Needs of Men in the Church

by Harriet S. Bicksler

EDITOR'S NOTE: I sent several questions about congregational men's ministries to several pastors across the denomination. Below are the two responses I received.

What are the major issues facing men in contemporary culture (both Christian men and non-Christian men)?

For both Christian men and non-Christian men there is a deep need for connection. While being as relational as women, men don't relate to one another as women do. Most women can jump into a deep conversation much easier than most men yet men need this type of connection just as much. For men, this usually works by investing time and warming up to one another through shared interests such as work and sports.

The major issues facing men in our contemporary culture is self. We seem to seek to meet our own needs first, instead of say, the kingdom. Both Christian and non-Christian men succumb to sin which includes everything from Internet pornography to failing to meet our obligations as husbands and fathers. We give our job/ministry first place and neglect nurturing and leading our families. We set goals for the work place and our career path but set no goals for providing a biblical worldview to our children in order to successfully repel ungodly thoughts and actions. We don't show Christ-like sacrifi-

cial love to our children's mother, our wife, that would demonstrate how it's possible for marriage to be a God-designed blessing and why making a covenant is important. We invest in things not people, we sacrifice our families rather than our time, some of us use God or church as an excuse, and some of us just don't care anymore because we don't really believe it matters.

What male-only ministries are needed?

I think men need ministries for them just as women do; it's just that these ministries look completely different than a women's ministry. Our women's ministry meets for an hour and a half and is an intense book study. Our men's ministry meets for breakfast for one hour, during which time we discuss sports, our families, current news and share in discussion of the book that we are reading.

Successful male only ministries would include some of the following:

- One-on-one mentoring (including topics like spiritual servant-style leadership, finances, fathering, anger management, accountability, parenting, sacrificial giving, and the workplace).
- Group accountability for overcoming vices and addictions. A man I know from a local church had a small group

of men meet to discuss sexual addictions. He prescreened interested individuals and determined if the group, whose attendees and meeting location were kept extremely confidential, could benefit a particular addict.

- Helps ministries for assistance with the elderly and poor, and a prison ministry.

What is your congregation doing specifically to meet these issues and needs?

We have a solid core of men that meet for the Wednesday morning breakfast; however, we could probably do a better job inviting other men to join us. Another need is for reaching out to women whose husbands don't attend the church and finding creative ways to connect with the husbands.

I don't have a congregation but we host a few men's retreats annually at our camp. When possible we also host the Pacific Conference Men's Retreat. (However, this will be the third year in a row that there hasn't been enough interest for this event).

Thanks to **Timothy Fisher**, lead pastor at the Walkersville (MD) Brethren in Christ Church, and Gabe Valencia, director of Mile High Pines Camp in California, for responding to my questions.