

Developing Godly Manhood Through Recreation

by David Gundlach

“And the LORD God said, [It is] not good that the man should be alone, I will make him an help meet for him” (Gen. 2:18). Both the testimony of Holy Scripture and that of God’s revelation in the world about us demonstrate that males and females are each incomplete without the other. “Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman [is] of the man, even so [is] the man also by the woman; but all things of God” (1 Cor. 11:11-12). This is so obvious that you would think it silly for me to actually write these words for publication and have to cite Scripture to support them. Yet, at this point in history, the concepts they express need to be unequivocally affirmed.

Men are commonly discriminated against in the employment arena and are seen as the cause of many of today’s problems. Age and wisdom are rejected in favor of youth and frivolity. There is little incentive to be a man when there is widespread favoritism toward women. Again, what impetus is there to act like an adult when the inexperience and recklessness of youth are preferred by an immature society? Before we can hope for our nation to function properly, we will have to offer solutions to the problem rather than blindly ignoring it or even contributing to it. Unisex clothing and hairstyles are merely the shark’s fin above the water. Confusion over this issue predominates in our society-even among some Christians.

This article is aimed at taking at least one small step out of this dilemma (by offering some direction for fostering characteristics through our boys’ recreation that will equip them to fulfill their position as godly men when they reach adulthood). How will men be leaders if they have been taught to be followers? How will they make decisions if decision-making has been devalued by claiming that “there are only shades of gray” and “there is no right or wrong”? How will they think logically if logic is considered “masculine” and, therefore, detrimental to society?

God has made us as men and women to provide us with illustrations in our lives that assist us in knowing and serving Him more fully. Christ refers to His church as the “bride” and to the first Person of the Trinity as His “Father.” The Bible tells us that we become the “children” of God through the atonement of His only begotten “Son.” I need not continue. The family symbols run throughout the length of God’s word. Our mission on this earth is easier and more fulfilling for us when we are guided by the examples God has placed before us and the methods He has told us to follow. A driver who failed to heed the signs along the road would soon wind up in a wreck. Perhaps this explains why so many people’s lives are in such a shambles.

I am convinced that many (most? all?) of the problems we face from women

who reject their role stem from the more fundamental malady of men who refuse theirs. If we can get men to fulfill their calling as men, I believe it would be easier for women to fulfill their calling as women. “For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man” (1 Cor. 11:8-9). “For Adam was first formed, then Eve” (1 Cor. 11:13).

To correct this problem, we must start at the beginning. As parents, we need to recognize the differing roles of men and women and prepare our children as well as humanly possible to fulfill those roles (with prayer to ask God to make up the shortage). We should assemble definitions that conform to God’s word, not our society’s distorted expectations. I admit that we will have to build “from the ground up” because we have “botched the job” in the past. So be it.

If we are going to execute this duty properly, we can’t let our relatives, our neighbors, or our own past practices determine our proposed course of action. I have heard Christian adults declare, “Boys will be boys!” as their ill-mannered brood abused others whose parents had conscientiously heeded the word of God and replaced with Christian character the manifestations of innate sin of which we are all heirs. This has to stop! We cannot afford to permit a heathen society’s definitions to establish the rules by which we, as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, conduct our lives. Let’s let the Bible do the defining. Here’s a non-exhaustive start for letting God’s word tell us what Christian manhood should look like:

Men are to be the spiritual leaders (1 Cor. 14:34-35) and are to make certain that their families are well instructed in God’s law (Deut. 6:7).

Men are to protect the women and children and provide for them (2 Cor. 12:14 & 1 Tim. 5:8). (Although having women involved in the family business—even making major decisions—is fully acceptable under the right circumstances [Proverbs 31:10-31].)

Men are to apply the characteristics God has given them to take dominion of the earth (Gen. 1:28 & 9:1). (I didn’t say ‘self-willed domination.’ The Hebrew word means to “rule” or “reign over”. It implies doing so on God’s terms as His subordinate. “Taking dominion,” therefore, suggests bringing godly order to God’s good creation. It means systematic stewardship, rather than destructive abuse. We need never feel mortified about claiming that our Lord expects us to “take dominion” of the earth. God wants His “garden” tended. The heathen want freedom (physically, mentally, and spiritually) from God and His requirements. They prefer untouched “Nature” in the use of land and in the indoctrination of children. This is just the blatant defiance of God’s mandates. It brings no blessing. It simply keeps us under the immediate manifestations of His Edenic curse. He wants godly order brought to every area of existence. To oppose this is to defy God. It is sin.)

Men are responsible for ruling their households well and are expected to lead their families in being serious about their Lord’s business (1 Tim. 3:4). (The Greek word that we translate as “rule” means: “to be over, to

superintend, to be a protector or guardian, to give aid to, to care for, or to give attention to." The aspect of responsibility and care is at least as great as the aspect of authority. Ruling is a form of benevolence when performed according to God's word.)

Men, especially, are accountable for chastening their children when necessary (Prov. 13:24).

Men are to love their wives (Eph. 5:25).

Men are to recognize the value God places on the children and be sympathetic to their needs (Mark 10:13-16; Col. 3:21; Eph. 6:4).

Some Guidelines for Boys' Recreation

From the preceding discussion, we can discern some of the characteristics that we would like to see encouraged in boys by their recreational activities. No single game is going to nurture every trait we would like to see developed in our boys. Perhaps no hobby will aid in fostering all attributes. Nevertheless, we can at least begin by defining what some of these qualities are and consciously seeking activities that will cultivate them. God willing, some of the random element will be gone from our children's development. Once again, the following is a non-exhaustive list intended to stimulate your thinking.

There should be unchanging rules. These rules should be the same for all players and require careful attention to them if one is to be successful in the game. This reinforces the children's understanding of one aspect of God's character. It also offers an example of God's laws and our need to abide by them if we are to please Him. (No, I did not say we are saved by obedience to the Law. I am well aware of Eph. 2:8,9. Please read Eph. 2:10 at the same time, though.)

The children should be taught that how we react to winning and losing is more important than whether we win or lose. Our lives should exhibit grace. Our testimony before the world matters. If they lose every game they ever play, but their wonderful attitude and Christian witness are used by God to lead one lost soul to Christ, the effort that seemed wasted at the time will have been well spent.

The boys should be active (no, not hyperactive) rather than passive. Their hobbies should require their participation. We do not want to create passive men who would make good serfs but poor leaders.

The boys should try to do well at whatever they do, without squandering their time to gain unnecessary (even wasteful) competence in a mere avocation. (Ecc. 9:10). A lazy, half-hearted approach will never serve them well in life (Prov. 13:4; 20:4).

Skills should be fostered that will enhance the children's ability to take dominion as God has instructed that we do. Logic and problem-solving are particularly important. Unfortunately, these faculties are considered masculine and are, therefore, loathed in relation to "feelings" and "guessing" at this depraved time in history. We parents should make a special effort to see that these essential qualities are inculcated in our boys. We have to

provide the proper tools if our children are to be able to fulfill God's assignment for them on this earth. We wouldn't expect them to work on our car's engine without the right tools. We, too, need to use logic as we approach this matter.

Skills should be fostered that will prepare boys to defend their families and nation, as well as to act cooperatively with others. (Deut. 31:6; Josh. 1:6, 10:23; 2 Sam. 10:12). With today's feminizing influences, manly courage is despised, and groveling servility is praised (at least for men). While we should be sufficiently discerning to avoid confusing heathen machismo with Christian valor, we must also avoid equating cowardice with virtue. Therefore, it is wise to have some of the boy's games be of a competitive nature. A few may even simulate combat. (This is not to glamorize war. However, there are conditions in this life that are worse than defending your family or nation. There are situations worse than even the horrors of war. This has already been fully discussed in these pages.)

One Proposal for Boys' Recreation

While there are a number of recreational activities that I believe are acceptable in God's sight and that would advance those talents in our boys that will help prepare them for their role as godly men, I will offer just one as an example that I believe fills the bill reasonably well by strengthening qualities that are minimized today but that are supportive of Christian manhood: the game of chess.

Chess is not something to be done to the exclusion of more productive activities. Neither is it inherently better than some other hobbies that might come to mind. Yet it does involve interaction with another human. It is active rather than passive. It builds logic and problem-solving capabilities. There is loss (chastening?) for failing to follow the truth of the position and reward for following it. Many of the lessons it contains, such as patience, carry over to real-life situations. It provides an opportunity for witness and godly acceptance of setbacks (since life, too, is full of these). It is structured according to one set of unchanging rules. There is no danger of injury even though it involves a competitive element. It helps one to see that stricture and organization aid in bringing about desirable results. Finally, like our Lord, chess is no respecter of persons. The results are absolutely not based on whether you are black or white, young or old, short or tall, slender or portly, or man or woman. In chess, competence is rewarded. This is an especially vital lesson in an era in which mandated hiring quotas and other distortions of the economic fabric of the nation have hidden the crucial relationship that exists between proficiency and productivity.

Chess, like other diversions from directly productive activities, can be a senseless waste of time and energy. I used to be a tournament chess player who once won six U. S. Chess Federation-rated tournaments in a row. Twenty years ago, I came to the place in my life where I realized I needed to be more productive, so I gave it up. It is only within the last year that I have

recognized that chess is a beautiful form of art (like painting or music) that, kept within godly boundaries, is well within the limits of "Christian liberty" and can actually be an asset to our lives as Christians.

It has given me a field for witnessing (even though I still do not participate in tournaments because of other responsibilities). When my son and a couple of Christian friends of ours would not play in the round that was held on Sunday morning at the state championship, there was a definite, beneficial impression made on some of those who did play. Their Christian witness was clearly noticed. Even our play contains a search for chessic truth that the play of others usually fails to exhibit. This results from a worldview that believes there is such a thing as "truth". Our unusual attitude toward the game is noticed and respected even by those who do not serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

Am I claiming anyone in your family should take up chess? No. Am I claiming that chess is necessarily a better form of recreation than some other? No. I am just trying to offer one helpful example. I simply hope to stimulate your thinking about an issue in regard to which you might have been operating in the "default mode" previously. If I have stirred your mind and heart to godly consideration of this matter, then I have done my job whether we agree entirely or not. May God bless your efforts to esteem Him by building God-honoring character in your children and grandchildren.
