



# Auburn Presbyterian Church

*Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to every individual*

13025 Bell Air Drive, Auburn, CA 95603 (530) 823-3916 auburnpres@gmail.com

## **“Growing Up Male” Genesis 1:24-31, 2:15-24; 3:1-19**

Today we begin a new series of sermons about “men”—today is, “Growing Up Male”; next week we’ll ask, “Do Fathers Rule?”; and following that we’ll learn about “Men and Women and Marriage”. This series is designed for men, and for the women who love them.

Since the beginning of what we call “the women’s movement”, women have been re-defining what it means to be a woman. And in many places there’s been an accompanying confusion about what it means to be a man. Robert Orben noted, "In 1492 Columbus set out for the Orient and ended up in the Caribbean, and thus set a pattern that has continued for over 500 years. Men still won't ask for directions."

The vicar of one parish in England was awarding prizes at the local dog show, and was scandalized by the dress of some younger members of the fair sex. "Look at that youngster," said he; "the one with the cropped hair, the cigarette and breeches, holding two pops. Is it a boy or girl?" "A girl." said his companion. "She's my daughter." "My dear sir!" The vicar was flustered. "Do forgive me. I would never have been so outspoken had I known you were her father." "I'm not," said the other. "I'm her mother." Confusing days!

So in this first message of this series, I thought we’d go back to the blueprint, and see if our Maker has any ideas about growing up male. Let’s begin at the beginning, with God’s Word in Genesis, the first book of the Hebrew Bible. Please open your Bibles to Genesis chapter 1. I’m going to read verses 24 – 31. Listen for the Word of God TO US TODAY—men and women—as I read these words aloud from Today’s New International Version regarding the “sixth day of creation”. *[text]*

Human beings come in two types—male, and female, and they are related; they are both required to make up what it is to be human. Someone in the Friday Men’s Breakfast Bible Study brought up that one definition of life is “the ability to reproduce”. You don’t have “life” if you don’t have the ability to reproduce. Apparently, that’s God’s plan—both in providing male and female humans, and in his command to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth—one of the few commands of God that we have carried out really well!

But there’s much more for us in this text than just reproduction. God created. God did it. God created humankind, and the first thing to notice about that is that God creates people “in his own image”. So there must be qualities in people that are analogous to qualities of God.

Humankind is the first order of creation that can communicate with God. This is a big point being made here--the personal connection between God and humankind. As God completes His work on this sixth day, he stands back and says of it, “It was very good.” For the

earlier creation works, God said, “It was good.” This, is very good. “Nice work,” God says, “even if I do say so Myself.” The creation is complete, a work of art. Every month we discover something new about creation—or a medical discovery about human life—that ought to put us in awe every time, at God’s artistry. And humans have a special place in it, with God, with its creator.

Now let’s listen again to part of the Bible that focuses on God’s creation of the earth, in Genesis, chapter 2, verses 15-24, again from Today’s New International Version. Listen again for the Voice of God in these words. *[text]*

God takes the earthling, made of earth, and puts it into a special part of His creation, a Garden in the East. Right away, the human is given a job to do—take care of the garden. This is different than the commands God issues in Genesis 1, where the emphasis is on ruling over creation. Here, the human is to tend and till creation, to work with it so that it bears fruit. Wouldn’t you say this is a significantly different command? It seems to me the ecological movement of the last 40 years has been an attempt to re-balance our skewed emphasis, bringing God’s order on “ruling” creation back into balance with His command on “tending”.

Then God provides for the human, and sets limits. Professor Laurel Mellin of the USF School of Medicine has done some good practical research to identify how to live a great life. She says we must learn two skills—how to nurture ourselves, and how to set limits for ourselves. We must teach these skills to our children, as well. Hmm! Maybe she got her idea from God, here in Genesis 2!

Then God says that a human is not complete without a partner. First, God calls all His creatures to come by, and gives the human the privilege of naming the creatures. For the Hebrew mind, this is a huge thing; for to give something a name is to set in place an identity, and to claim power over the thing or person named. God shares His power with the human.

This is fine, but this naming does not solve the problem of incompleteness. So God goes to work, and makes a woman to complete the man. Now they can be fruitful and multiply humans, too. Of course, this is a statement about men and women and marriage, which we’ll focus on in a couple of weeks. But for our topic today, we learn that men are to connect with women, who are like them and yet also different. Life is to be a partnership. “Connection-in-Relationship” is part of our nature, which Christians also understand to be part of God’s Nature. That’s what our concept of the Trinity is trying to say, that God’s very nature is relationship. We read this back into the Genesis 1 story, when God says, “Let US make humans in our own image.” Who is the Creator talking to? Christians think it’s God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, all involved in creation.

Where are we so far? God created humans. We are God’s best work. As men, we are to work and produce fruit. God provides. God sets limits. Part of God’s plan is relationship, another way we (men and women) are created in God’s image.

Now, watch what happens in this next reading, from Genesis, chapter 3. The beautiful plan of God gets twisted. I’m reading verses 1-19, again from Today’s New International Version. Listen again for God’s Word to us today. *[text]*

In the order of things here, Eve enters into a conversation with a lawyer—sorry, a serpent—and she buys into the suspicion about God’s motives behind His limits for humanity: “God wants to keep you down.” She buys it, and she bites it.

Now, where is Adam while this is going on? He’s right there, isn’t he! After taking that juicy bite, Eve hands the fruit to Adam, and he buys it and bites it, too. Did you ever notice how passive Adam is here? He says nothing. He does not object. He goes along. This was not good then, and it’s not good now. But isn’t that so often the way we men are—passive, harmless, maybe helpful once in a while to lift heavy things?

In my thinking about “men”, I’ve been helped by Christian author John Eldredge, and his book, *Wild at Heart*. He mines this “treasury” (Scripture) for “the gold” about men. Eldredge looks at Scripture, and every adventure story you’ve ever read, and notes that the man who is “fully a man” has a battle to fight against a real enemy, a battle that requires craft and strategy and courage and strength. A man who is fully a man also has “a beauty to win”. Men are to have a great capacity to love, as well as to fight. And men are to live an adventure. Life can be full of adventure. On the other hand, Eldredge points to Adam’s passivity here with “the test in Eden” as the male’s original sin, a colossal failure to be fully a man. Eve is active, Adam is passive, and both of them (in their own ways) violate their most important relationship by excluding--breaking trust with--their Creator and Father.

What is the vision of “manhood” you see in the church at large, and OUR church? Ronald Meredith, in his book "Hurryin' Big for Little Reasons" describes one quiet night in early spring: Suddenly out of the night came the sound of wild geese flying. He ran to the house to tell everyone about it. What compares with wild geese flying across the moon? That might have been the end of the event, except that he caught sight of his family’s tame mallard ducks out on the pond. As the geese passed over, the mallards heard the wild call they had once known. The honking out of the night sent little arrows of prompting deep into their wild yesterdays. It stirred them; they sat up; their wings fluttered just a little. The urge to fly - to take their place in the sky for which God made them - was sounding in their feathered breasts, but they never raised from the water or the land. The matter had been settled long ago. The corn of the barnyard was too tempting! Now their desire to fly only made them uncomfortable.

A lot of churches are full of domesticated men. We’ve been tamed and trained. Only at times like when we serve in the military are we allowed to be “dangerous”. We come home from combat, and we’re supposed to put that away, and resume “normal life”. When was the last time you heard a man in the church called, “wild”, or “dangerous”?

The Celts of Northwest Europe, like the Hebrews of the Bible, are earthy people, valuing creation, looking for the Lord of Creation in all things. They think of the Holy Spirit of God as a “wild goose”—uncontrolled, in the air, on the ground, calling to us. Women are to tend to children most of all. It’s men who are especially to respond to God’s call of adventure, of a greater love.

When we say men are to be “dangerous”, we don’t mean “violent”, but boundary-crossing, adventuresome explorers, trailblazers, innovators. To me, the popularity of what we call “extreme sports” like BMX racing or Olympic trick snowboarding—or look at the popularity of NASCAR!—is an attempt to reclaim the limit-pushing maleness that we have let modern life drain from us.

And can we talk about Jesus for a minute? How do you see Jesus—as meek and mild? Or do you see him as a boundary-crossing rebel who was so dangerous that First Century Israelites and Romans became friends for a moment, to cooperate in taking Jesus out. . . ? Is he the quiet saint, or the Lion of Judah?

Radical love let loose in the world is dangerous. Radical love works for justice, comes alongside the poor and oppressed, and the powers that be will not ignore such a challenge. Willingness to suffer pain for a great gain—that's dangerous. Do we teach this Jesus to our kids? Do our boys get a grasp on a God who will take huge risks to win the prize He's after—US? Would our kids grow up to love Jesus, not just believe in him, if we leveled with them that Jesus even makes us nervous, when he calls US to follow him? But when we do—when WE take huge risks to win people with God—we are the most fulfilled we can be?

Men are created with huge potential, as are women. But as males, we too often go passive. Jesus shows us a non-violent, radical, boundary-crossing manhood that feeds off his relationship with God. Cutting ourselves off from the God who made us, we lose our center, we become eccentric, we become ego-centric, we get lost.

Jesus said he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is the Way to God, he tells the truth about life, and with him is Life the way God created it to be, the way God created us to be. “Real men love Jesus” alright—real men love him enough to follow him.

Ah, Men! Loved by God, lost without God, called again to Life in Jesus.

Ah-MEN!

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on June 10, 2007, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]