



SESSION 1 — The Nature of a Man: Genesis 1-2 **- Pastor Keith -**

This session will lay an important doctrinal foundation, a theology of manhood, that will be absolutely vital for us to understand in order to be the kind of men that we need to be to honor God. Our theology will be built upon three biblically-revealed assumptions that we'll explore together.

- 1. We are created by God.**
- 2. We have a particular design from God.**
- 3. We will flourish and be fruitful only in accordance with that design.**

Samsung recently issued a full recall on their Note 7, due to a design flaw that led to devices overheating and in some cases catching fire. After initially hoping to stop the bleeding, the company finally had to amputate—poor design was not only jeopardizing each device, but also harming several users. Similarly, when we fail to adhere to our design in our manhood, it is disastrous not only for us, but for those around us! Our friends, our family members, our churches, and our communities suffer because we have thrown out the blueprint and abandoned our design.

Unfortunately, many forces have colluded together against us to erode a biblical concept of manhood and trash its divine design.

- 1. Contemporary homes** — Today's families are marked by absent or uninvolved dads. Single-parent homes have become normal. Distant fathers are too common.

2. Secular media — wrong stereotypes, models, and ideas

- **Wrong stereotypes** — This cuts two ways.
 - *Traditional stereotypes* — The long-standing description of gender was that men were from Mars and women were from Venus. This humorous illustration was actually rooted in a biblical and binary view of the sexes. However, even when it was the normal perspective on manhood and womanhood, it often produced false or inadequate stereotypes. So, a “real man” was equated with John Wayne, while true feminism was characterized by Lucille Ball and other television housewives.

In many Christian subcultures, these stereotypes are maintained and exalted as the standard, resulting in the alienation of those who don't fit. For example, some young men who don't have the rough and raw disposition of a Jack Bauer may find themselves questioning their manhood and embracing sexual deviance. Likewise, some intelligent and independent women, finding little freedom within overly-strict stereotypical teaching, have abandoned faith altogether in pursuit of their own individual expression.

So, the church needs to be careful in teaching a traditional or biblically-faithful understanding of gender identity and gender roles, that it avoids wrongly equating certain culturally-conditioned stereotypes with biblical truth. When the church fails to practice such discernment, it is as guilty as the secular media in popularizing wrong and destructive stereotypes of the genders

- *Modern stereotypes* — The moral or sexual revolution has infiltrated and transformed anything that smacks of traditional religion. As a

result, manhood and womanhood have also been redefined and recast. Hollywood, for example, regularly depicts men as being idiots and immature, needing to be rescued by the enlightened and discerning mother, wife, or girlfriend.

- **Wrong models** — Donald Trump is, in microcosm, what we've tolerated in cultural masculinity: narcissism, vulgarity, bullying, dishonesty, misogyny, racism, abuse, rivalry, etc.
 - **Wrong ideas** — Our society questions everything and accepts everything (except the idea of absolute truth). Consequently, we are encouraged toward "self-discovery" since there are no standard, absolute ideas that ought to shape each one of us.
3. **Feminized spirituality** — Culture encourages men to embrace their "feminine side" (mine is named, Dawn), and churches have become dominated by apathetic men and ruling women.
 4. **Cultural dynamics** — In our industrialized, technologized, postmodern Western society, there is no longer the colonial struggle for survival that used to turn boys into men. One satirical video advertises "Millennial International," a made-up ministry through which you can sponsor millennials who cannot support themselves, or as their tagline puts it, "enabling millennials so they don't have to get jobs" (<https://youtu.be/RGvrmItfMrA>). Indeed, culture has changed so much over the last several decades so that there is no longer a real struggle for survival that used to turn boys into men. Subsequently, there is hardly even the expectation of such growth.

How we need to return to God's blueprints for manhood! God's design for men was inherent in creation, was broken at the fall, is trampled on in our contemporary culture, but is being redeemed through Christ in Christian men today. We want to recover an awareness of God's design for us as men and recommit ourselves to pursuing that in our own lives.

Now, as we work through this, we'll discover that God's design is indeed an ideal standard, but we should not want to lower it in order to placate

our own laziness and apathy. No! Instead, by insistently and dependently striving to attain His design for us, we bring glory to God and good to those around us! So, brothers, let us "act like men" (1 Corinthians 16:13)!

What does that mean? Well, when we go back to the beginning and consider God's blueprint for manhood in Genesis 1-2, we discover four essential truths about our design.

ESSENCE: MAN IS A CREATED BEING (GENESIS 1:26-27; 2:7; 3:8).

Many of us men like to appear impenetrable, but we recognize that the mask only hides a fair amount of insecurity. This first feature of manhood offers inherent value and subsequent confidence to each one of us.

Genesis 1:26-27 records, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

The multiple fractures and breakdowns in society today can be traced back, in large part, to the embracing of naturalism as an explanation of origin. What I believe was ultimately an attempt to release ourselves from divine accountability (Romans 1:18ff), the denial of creation absolutely produces the unintended consequences of robbing life of any meaning. Since our human existence is no more than the product of a long series of lucky mutations, then human worth and dignity, concepts of morality, distinctions of gender, concerns about death, confusion in suffering, and a whole host of issues becomes meaningless—it is what it is. Now, inescapable questions about these and other matters still universally exist, of course, because as Ecclesiastes 3:11 states it, God "has put eternity into man's heart"—this is not all there is. Nonetheless, in willful ignorance, we have rewritten our own story, in in such self-deception, only darkness is found. When humans denied their Creator, they also devalued their own creation.

In contrast, the creation narrative infuses value and dignity into humanity, and consequently into manhood. We were made by God in His image!

What does that mean? (1) Some hold to a *structural view*, suggesting that “the image of God” are those personhood traits that distinguish us from animals. (2) Others hold a *relational view* that interprets it in light of our ability to enjoy meaningful relationship with God and other humans. (3) Another group suggests a *functional view* that emphasizes the representative responsibility God gave us.

Which one is right? I think they are all correct, each one being suggested in the Genesis account and collectively providing us with a full understanding of what it means to have been made in the image of God (i.e., image of God in man = structural view + relational view + functional view). Actually, the very term “image” gives us some simple understanding of this concept, for it indicates that we are images of God, imaging God. This is why God prohibits us from making images of Him, for we are the image of God—in other words, we are not to make images; we are to be images.

Bruce Ware offers this very helpful explanation of the image of God in man—“the image of God is, at heart, God’s making us His representations (images of God) in order that we might represent Him (imaging God) in carrying out His will.”¹ Ware offers a longer explanation in which he essentially isolates the idea into three aspects:²

1. **We reflect God. We are the representation of God.**

In our very makeup, we reflect the nature of God. No, not in His divine attributes, but in His personhood—Intellect, will, emotion, morality, spirit. These faculties certainly separate us from created animals and reflect the image of God. Furthermore, unlike the rest of creation, God formed us and breathed life into us (Genesis 2:7).

2. **We relate to God. We have a relationship with God.**

In a mystery, Scripture teaches that God is three in one—of one divine essence, existing in three distinct persons. This is the Trinity or the triune nature of God. Similarly then, He created us in His image, as plurality in singularity—one humanity (Heb. *adam*, “man”), two genders (“male and female”) (cf. Genesis 5:2). In this unique parallel relationship, we have the capacity to seek God, know God, love God, and fellowship with God. This is what is referenced in Genesis 3:8.

3. **We represent God. We have responsibility from God.**

The most immediate explanation of the image of God in man is found in Genesis 1:26, where God says, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion.” God connects image with responsibility. Because they were His representation (reflection/image), they would also be His representatives. To mankind, God would grant vice-regency over this planet, in which they would exercise stewardship and dominion in service to their Creator.

Application: Why is this first point so foundational?

- *First*, it restores to men the sense of God-invested value and dignity that society and our own corrupt flesh robs from us.
- *Second*, by emphasizing the nobility of representing God, it invests life with meaning and motivates us to throw ourselves into responsibilities.
- *Third*, whereas naturalism determines that it really doesn’t matter what kind of man you are, or friend, or husband, or father, our created status instead affirms that this is extremely important, for in our character and relationships we do nothing less than reflect God, relate to Him, and represent Him.
- *Fourth*, Christian men realize that while “all men carry [God’s] image in some measure,” we “carry it in greater measure and are called to spend [our] lives increasing that measure” (cf. Romans 8:28-30; Colossians 3:10).

What an honorable design indeed, that we have been created in the image of God! Bruce Ware summarizes these practical applications this way: “To be what (by God’s grace) we should *be* in order to do what (by God’s grace) we should *do* is God’s task for all of us, married and single, and this reflects our being made in the image of God.”³

DISTINCTION: MAN IS A GENDERED BEING (GEN. 1:26-27; 2:15, 18-24).

Back in Genesis 1:26-27, we discover a second detail to God’s blueprint for manhood—that is, that we are a gendered being. In other words, we are men, not women. The creation account reads, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. ... So God created man in

his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” In the one humanity, God created two genders. Beginning as early as Genesis 1 and consistently taught throughout the Scriptures are two truths about this gendered dualism.

1. Man is equal in value with woman (Genesis 1:27; 1 Peter 3:7).

Both male and female share the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27), are given responsibility from God (Genesis 1:28), and have equal standing in the redemption of Christ (Galatians 3:26-29). As 1 Peter 3:7 puts it, we “are heirs with you of the grace of life.”

2. Man is complementary in role to woman.

Ware writes, “While male is fully human, male is also *male*, not female; and while female is fully human, female is also *female*, not male. That is, while God did intend to create male and female as *equal* in their essential nature as human, He also intended to make them *different expressions* of that essential nature, as male and female reflect different ways, as it were, of being human.”⁴

While the illustration breaks down if pushed too far, we could equate women with China dishes and men with standard dishware. Are they of equal value? I think we must answer “yes,” for although China may cost more and have increased economic value, the standard dishware is used more and has practical value—and therein we see their complementary roles, too.

In their created gender distinction, men and women have complementary roles in three areas.

a. In society (2:15, 18-22)

While both were commanded to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28), man was uniquely and solitary placed in the Garden “to work it and keep it” (Genesis 2:15). Scripture indicates that man was to lead in this role, representing the Lord his God as lord of the garden. Unto him was given the important task of naming and thus having dominion over the animals (Genesis 2:19-20a). In complementary fashion, the woman was created to be Adam’s helper in the divinely assigned “dominion mandate” (Genesis 2:18, 20b-22).

b. In the home (Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18-19; 1 Peter 3:1-7)

In their equal value and marital unity (cf. Genesis 2:24), the husband and wife should be in essential partnership with each other. And yet, in spite of the cultural rebellion against it, Scripture fleshes out that partnership by demonstrating that God has given to each gender specific roles in the home—to the husband He has given the role of headship, and for the wife He has ordained the role of submission.⁵ Now these roles can be terribly distorted, and their very abuse has often contributed to reactions against them. Husbands can become wimps or tyrants; wives can become doormats or usurpers. The seemingly elusive balance is somewhere in the middle, but we can be sure that it is there.

At the end of the creation week, after the formation of a gendered humanity—male and female—including their equal value and complementary roles in society and marriage, “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). Rather than questioning, we should seek to understand and practice the goodness of these roles. In the New Testament especially, men are taught to be humble and loving leaders, and wives are encouraged to be intelligent and joyful helpers. Thus, in this gendered duality, men (and women) are given a clear blueprint for their home.

c. In the church (1 Timothy 2:11-15)

In the corporate assembly, the New Testament restricts some governing and teaching roles to men, while affirming the mutually beneficial ministry and practice of gifts of both genders.

Application: Now, applying all this just to men tonight, we are able to clearly discern that, in regards to our blueprint, both the feminist left and the masculine right are equally egregious! The feminine left emasculates men; the masculine right produces violent and abusive men. As we already suggested, the beauty of God’s blueprint lies in the middle balance, and when we bow to God’s Word, we can both learn it and practice it. And that is important, because man is a gendered being with specific and unique God-ordained roles and responsibilities.

PURPOSE: MAN IS A REPRESENTATIVE BEING (GENESIS 1:28; 2:15).

Remember the third component of the image of God in man? It was that we represent God, we have responsibility from God. Having created man in His image, God appointed him as vice-regent over creation, commanding him to be a fruitful Lord. We see this clearly in Genesis 1:28.

- Fruitful — “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth...”
- Lord — “...and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

That responsibility is then given a specific and universal job description in Genesis 2:15—“The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.” Phillips observes, “It seems that God was using these two complementary terms to indicate the package of attitudes and behaviors that would constitute manhood as He intends it to function.”⁶ Let’s analyze these two parts of the job description.

1. “To work” — to cultivate as a servant (spade)

Phillips explains this task this way, “To work is to labor to make things grow.”⁷ He uses these synonyms to flesh it out a bit: “nurturing, cultivating, tending, building up, guiding, and ruling.”

In the immediate context, such “work” was agricultural and would have involved planting, digging, watering, pruning, and harvesting. His goal is to accomplish something good and growing. While not all men are called to “work” as gardeners, we are all “called to ‘work’ whatever ‘field’ God has given to us. Men are to be planters, builders, and growers. A man’s working life is to be spent accomplishing things. ... Men should be using their gifts, talents, and experiences to succeed in worthwhile causes.”⁸

This calling may be accomplished through a vast array of occupations and endeavors, but we must also remember that “our ‘garden’ includes not merely things but people.”⁹ Our work of building, cultivating, and nurturing should be applied to the hearts of people placed in our sphere. Phillips writes, “A man’s fingers should be accustomed to working in the soil of the human hearts—the hearts of those he serves and loves—that he might accomplish some of the most valuable and important work of his life.”¹⁰

And it is at this point of application that we discover another way in which this blueprint of biblical manhood is so contrary to our contemporary culture. Society tells us that women are to be main nurturers, and yet God’s job description puts the primary calling of building and nurturing lives upon men. That is why the “absent father” epidemic is so tragic and damaging today.

Application: A helpful biblical metaphor for this responsibility is a “shepherd.” Seeing God’s shepherding care for us as exemplary, we learn from Psalm 23, for example, that we should be caring for the physical (v. 2), spiritual (v. 3), and emotional needs (vv. 4-5) of those in our charge. Can those in your care say Psalm 23 about you (i.e., “Keith is my shepherd; I shall not want”), that you are serving and nurturing and shepherding them? Phillips notes, “It is the male arm around the shoulder or pat on the back that God allows to have the quickest access to the heart of a child or employee. Men who are seeking to live out the Masculine Mandate will be nurturers.”¹¹

2. “To keep” — to protect as a leader (sword)

This is the second and related responsibility in God’s job description for us men. As the prototype, God put the first man in the Garden “to work it and keep it.” Again, Phillips offers a definition, “To keep is to protect and to sustain progress already achieved....guarding, keeping safe, watching over, caring for, maintaining.”¹²

If the tool of the first task is a spade, the instrument for this task is a sword. We are to defend, protect, and guard both things and people. God repeatedly uses this same word to describe His role toward us, and in so doing He again becomes our model. Listen to Psalm 121, for example.

I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade on your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.

Application: Are you “keeping” those around you so that they could express these sentiments about you? No one is suggesting that we’re supposed to usurp God’s authority here, but we are supposed to be one of the instruments through which He “works” and “keeps” those in our sphere. So, could your children, your wife, your coworkers, your siblings, your friends, your church family affirm your commitment to this “keeping” role? Could they say Psalm 121 of you?

May I go a step further and suggest one very specific application? Brother, if your life is consumed by self-indulgence in pornography, video games, and other distractions, then you are not even “keeping” your own soul, let alone those around you, and especially your sisters. Instead, you are wielding a sword that is harming them. Phillips asserts, “To be a man is to stand up and be counted when there is danger or other evil. God does not desire for men to stand by idly and allow harm, or permit wickedness to exert itself. Rather, we are called upon to keep others safe.”¹³ Do you take that calling seriously? Or, like Cain in Genesis 4:9, have you forgotten that you have been designed to be your “brother’s [and sister’s] keeper”?

CONTEXT: MAN IS A RELATIONAL BEING (GENESIS 2:8, 15).

In contrast with John Eldredge’s popular book *Wild at Heart*, God did not design man to find his identity in exciting and uncharted wilderness quests and adventures.¹⁴ Instead, God put man into the Garden (Genesis 2:8, 15), into a place of covenantal relationships and obligations. The Garden was not a place of wild self-discovery; instead, it provided a context of duties and relationships in which man was to act out His God-given purpose. While not every man will experience the same relationships, God’s Word normalizes at least four that provide a context for his dignified, distinct purpose of “working” and “keeping.”

1. Godly man

In regards to being a godly man, each man is confronted with his need to be cultivating and guarding his relationship with the Lord. We will address this specifically in our second session, but suffice it to say that if this relationship is decaying, then the others will be damaged, too.

2. Loving husband

Genesis 1:27-28 and 2:18-24 suggest that, generally-speaking, this is God’s will for man. Phillips suggests, “By God’s design, as seen in Genesis 2, a man is completed by a woman, and not just any woman, but by a wife.”

In light of this, let me address the single guys for a minute. While 1 Corinthians 7 affirms that the state of singleness may be God’s gift to you, Genesis 2 provides the normative truth—“It is not good that the man should be alone” (v. 18). Guys, don’t fear marriage or despise it or unnecessarily delay it. And certainly do not replace it with the “unfit helpers” of pornography, video games, sports obsessions, and the like—you know that “there [is] not found a helper fit for [you]” there (Genesis 2:20). Instead, in direct contrast with such self-indulgent “unfit helpers” is God’s blueprint. Especially if you are embattled by lust, God counsels, “Because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. ... For it is better to marry than to burn with passion” (1 Corinthians 7:2, 9). So, single guys, consider God’s design, His blueprint for biblical manhood, and prayerfully talk with Him about its implications for your own life. I don’t know what His tailored plans are for you, but I do know that following His customized blueprint for you will be better than determining your own.

Married men need to recognize that your marriage is the first and foremost relational context in which you should be “working” and “keeping.” You must cleave to your spouse as her nurturer and defender, serving and leading her as God has designed you to do.

3. Good/caring father

Ephesians 6:4 speaks plainly and pointedly to this matter, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” Men, our children are a fertile and raw garden, entrusted to us by God for us to “work” and “keep.” Against the current of our culture, may we be known as family men.

4. Faithful friend

Proverbs 20:6 says, “Many a man proclaims his own steadfast love, but a faithful man who can find?” Prove to be the exception. Be a faithful friend to those in your sphere, especially in your church. In Christ, whether married or single, you belong to a family, a body. Be a “worker” and “keeper” in the lives of those around you.

We have studied God’s blueprint for biblical manhood from Genesis 1-2 and discovered four essential truths about our design.

- Essence: Man is a created being who reflects, relates to, and represents God.
- Distinction: Man is a gendered being, equal in value with woman, but distinct in our role.
- Purpose: Man is a representative being, commissioned to “work” and to “keep.”
- Context: Man is a relational being, applying our shepherding calling first and foremost to the people in our sphere.

May God help us to “act like men,” fulfilling this design and being conformed into the image of the perfect Man, Jesus Christ, so that we and those around us may flourish and be fruitful by the grace of God.

RECOMMENDED READING

Richard D. Phillips, *The Masculine Mandate: God’s Calling to Men* (Orlando: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2010).

Wayne Grudem, ed., *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002).

ENDNOTES

¹ Bruce A. Ware, “Male and Female Complementarity and the Image of God,” in *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. Wayne Grudem, Foundations for the Family Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 90.

² “The image of God in man as functional holism means that God made human beings, both male and female, to be created and finite representations (images of God) of God’s own nature, that in relationship with Him and each other they might be His representatives (imagining God) in carrying out the responsibilities He has given to them. In this sense, we are images of God in order to image God and His purposes in the ordering of our lives and the carrying out of our God-given responsibilities” (Ibid., 79).

³ Ibid., 90.

⁴ Ibid., 81.

⁵ “Biblical support for the husband having the primary responsibility to provide for his family and the wife having primary responsibility to care for the household and children is found in Genesis 2:15 with 2:18–23; 3:16–17 (Eve is assumed to have the primary responsibility for childbearing, but Adam got the ground to raise food, and pain is introduced into both of their areas of responsibility); Proverbs 31:10–31, especially vv. 13, 15, 21, 27; Isaiah 4:1 (shame at the tragic undoing of the normal order); 1 Timothy 5:8 (the Greek text does not specify ‘any man,’ but in the historical context that would have been the assumed referent except for unusual situations like a household with no father); 1 Timothy 5:10; 1 Timothy 5:3–16 (widows, not widowers, are to be supported by the church); Titus 2:5. I believe that a wife’s created role as a ‘helper fit for him’ (Gen. 2:18) also supports this distinction of roles. I do not think a wife would be fulfilling her role as ‘helper’ if she became the permanent primary breadwinner, for then the husband would be the primary ‘helper’” (Wayne Grudem, “The Key Issues in the Manhood-Womanhood Controversy, and the Way Forward,” in *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. Wayne A. Grudem, Foundations for the Family Series [Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002], 40). In this same chapter, Grudem offers ten reasons for believing in male headship.

⁶ Richard D. Phillips, *The Masculine Mandate: God’s Calling to Men* (Orlando: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2010), 10

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 17-18.

⁹ Ibid., 18.

¹⁰ Ibid., 18-19.

¹¹ Ibid., 19.

¹² Ibid., 10.

¹³ Ibid., 21.

¹⁴ Ibid., 6-9, 11-12.