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DISCIPLING

MEN *and* WOMEN


IN
OUR MODERN
AGE




From the President's Desk


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MISSION

Harvest USA brings the truth and mercy of Jesus Christ by:

- Helping individuals and families affected by sexual struggles
- Providing resources that address biblical sexuality to individuals and churches

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It can be tempting to look at our modern age and question whether the Bible ever could have anticipated our concerns, questions, and dilemmas. You won't find words like *transgender*, *AI*, *trad wives*, *mano-sphere*, or *LGBTQ+* in your concordances. Is the Bible too antiquated to be of any value to our modern problems?

To put a modern twist on a familiar passage, we could say, "Viral memes wither, and social media trends fade, but the Word of the Lord remains forever." From the beginning, our enemy has been attacking God's image-bearers, specifically calling into question their value, identity, and purposes as male and female. So, too, it would seem that many pressing issues facing the church today are questions of how we live as men and women in a modern age that has sought to deconstruct our every foundation.


This Harvest USA magazine seeks to answer age-old questions about discipling men and women within our modern context. We examine a surprising shift in Gen Z men—they are growing more conservative. The church has an incredible opportunity to strengthen the next generation of men and instill in them godly ambitions of virtue and greatness, but this will require the older men to invest in the next generation.

We also consider the opposite cultural phenomenon—Gen Z women are growing more liberal. We explore helpful ways the church can re-evaluate our commitment to teaching a robustly biblical, counter-cultural worldview to the next generation of young women who are increasingly finding the secular world a more enticing, liberating environment.

While the church faces many new ideologies and worldviews contradicting Scripture, we also continue to face older unbiblical ways of thinking aligned with the flesh, not the Spirit—including the expression "men will be men." Ellen Mary Dykas presents a gospel lens that calls men to the standard Christ sets before us. Anything less demeans the dignity of men and harms the hearts and lives of women.

You'll hear from a local pastor who bravely shares his testimony of repenting of ways he overlooked and undervalued the pain and trauma of the wives in his church whose husbands had been unfaithful. Pastor Mike beautifully testifies to the work God did in his heart through interactions with the staff of Harvest USA and how that has transformed his care for hurting wives in his congregation.

Lastly, we explore a method of defending our faith that is grounded in the biblical truth that God is the Creator, and we are the creature. We'll apply this apologetics method to two modern issues every Christian must engage with: transgenderism and artificial intelligence. The world is bent on elevating ourselves above the Creator, beyond our need for God and his Lordship over all things. But, for Christians, our lives are not evaluated through the lens of our private beliefs or agendas; God calls us to face every new issue by seeking to think his thoughts after him.

With affection in Christ,

Mark Sanders
President of Harvest USA



MY EYES WERE OPENED:

One Pastor's Story on Care for Wives

Caitlin McCaffrey

Pastor Mike (a pseudonym for this interview) is a man I've ministered alongside as he cares for hurting wives in his local church. Mike has undergone a transformation in how he views pastoral care for women, and I am deeply encouraged by his humility, transparency, and wisdom. I had the opportunity to interview Mike to learn more about his journey of growth as a pastor, shepherd, and man of God.

CAITLIN: Tell us a little bit about your role in your church and how God led you into this type of ministry leadership position.

PASTOR MIKE: I am the pastor of care in a non-denominational church in the eastern United States. God used an uncommon route to get me into my current role, and I thank him for it. I was fired from two pastoral roles, and by God's gracious providence, ended up working in corporate America. To put it bluntly, I was a corporate drone for two decades! In retrospect, I see how the Lord put me in a wilderness to humble me and deal with my arrogance. I believed I was 'the man,' but Jesus has shown

me that the role of the pastor is not to be 'the man' but to commend Jesus to those under your care. It was only after decades of painful humbling that I was ready to be in my current role as pastor of care.

CAITLIN: How did God equip you, both formally and informally, to become a pastor?

PASTOR MIKE: I committed my life to Christ at age 15 after experiencing a 60-foot fall over a waterfall, resulting in numerous bodily injuries and being in a coma for three weeks. That trial resulted in a commitment to follow Jesus, and I soon developed a heart for ministry. Another formational event was a career-ending knee injury in college that ended my sports journey. I found much of my identity in sports, and the Lord abruptly opened my eyes to what had become an idol.

After college, I continued in youth ministry, seminary, ordination, and finally earned my Doctor of Ministry degree. God provided a few churches in the Midwest where I could serve him and serve others. But he was not done

fashioning me for this day—this opportunity to reflect on his majesty and his transforming work in my life with you and your Harvest USA readership. My last pastoral stop was a church plant in northwestern Pennsylvania. People were coming from wounded church situations and finding hope. They were coming to know Jesus better. Then the day came in 1999 when I was told by our overseeing church that they were moving in a new direction, and I was not invited.

This is when I asked the Lord for permission to leave the ministry. I entered the corporate world with very limited corporate skills or savvy; it was deeply humbling. I started taking some of the younger guys, especially new hires, out to lunch and showing an interest in them. In the background of my corporate job and outside the ministry spotlight, God was growing my heart as a shepherd. The Lord used those formative years to teach me about his greatness rather than my giftedness. I worked hard in corporate America for 21 years, until my Fortune 100 company terminated 5,000 positions in one day—I had one of those positions. Because of COVID, my wife and I ended up at my current church, and soon this pastoral opportunity became available. By God's grace, I'm here, and it's a great fit!

CAITLIN: What are some of the assumptions and convictions that God has reshaped in you, as a male elder, regarding counseling cases that include sexual sin in marriage and caring for women?

PASTOR MIKE: I'm ashamed to say it, but here are a few wrong assumptions and methods that I carried with me for almost 25 years of ministry:

- As is the tendency with many men, I tried to fix instead of listen.
- When a wife expressed concerns over her husband, in my mind, the husband was innocent until proven guilty.
- I believed women were "too emotional" and usually blew things out of proportion.
- I held a strict category for what I considered biblical divorce. For example, only sexual intercourse outside of marriage was adultery, and I considered desertion to be physically leaving one's wife. There was no other nuance or application to those sins in my mind.
- I was chauvinistic in my view toward women in the church and ministry, whereby the only places for women to serve in the church were the nursery or the kitchen.
- I took an "it takes two to tango" approach to marital conflict—I was quick to try to identify what the wife was doing wrong in cases of sexual sin on the husband's part. I would try, mistakenly, to get her to own her wrongs at the same level as his sexual sin.
- I would move, in my mind, to the need for forgiveness, marital reconciliation, and marriage counseling at our

first meeting in a marriage crisis. In reality, this is often not the right first move at all.

CAITLIN: What have been some of the growth points for you as you've specifically learned to care well for wives whose husbands have pursued sexual sin?

PASTOR MIKE: I began to look at the life and ministry of Jesus and realized that being on mission with him means a mission of servanthood. With wise ministry consultation and resources from Harvest USA, I began to be equipped to care well for hurting wives. I learned that empathy is so much more significant than I ever realized! I learned that I need to feel pain with a sufferer, not just seek to fix the problem. I learned that safety and trust are the initial priorities for pastoral care to a hurting wife, not jumping to forgiveness and restoration of the marriage in the very first meeting after the revelation of sexual sin. Forgiveness and restoration are my aims, but not in the very first meeting with a wife who has just had her world turned upside down. I've learned from the women's ministry at Harvest USA to consider communicating with words like this:

I am grieved by this with you. I want to understand your pain; your heart matters to me. What has happened here is egregious; I wish we didn't have to be here discussing it right now. Our church is committed to walking with you in your pain.

I've learned to put my "detective mode" and doubts to the side and be in the moment sympathizing with a hurting wife. Recently, a man burst into my office in tears telling me that his wife had been unfaithful to him. I immediately felt his pain and did not question his story for a moment. What stood out to me was that, if a woman came into my office with that story, it would not be so intuitive for me to empathize with her. I would wonder if she was telling the whole story or blowing things out of proportion. I am

"I was wrong in my approach to counseling women, especially those who were **betrayed by their husbands**"

still learning about my biases and how to be consistently faithful to hurting spouses.

CAITLIN: Considering these growth points, could you share a few thoughts for other male church leaders who may have similar assumptions?

PASTOR MIKE: To my fellow pastors, I would say: Look, you guys don't know me, but I've been around for six and a half decades; I've seen and experienced my share of pain and heartache. I am pleading with you to trust me that I was wrong in my approach to counseling women, especially those who were betrayed by their husbands. I've made serious pastoral missteps and have missed understanding and addressing the hearts of hurting wives. Because of Harvest USA's equipping ministry, books I've read, and listening to experts, I would advise you to check your heart and take a solid inventory of how you really feel about women. Seek to honestly assess what you understand about trauma and abuse dynamics, as well.

As pastors, our position is not primarily one where we need to display power. We need to display Jesus. If you are not equipped for a particular area of counseling or shepherding, don't be afraid to admit it. Develop a reservoir of healthy Christian counselors with varied specialties and refer to them! Find the very best care for your people.

Also, brothers: part of our call is to equip the saints for ministry, and this includes equipping our women to disciple and train each other. We must not only train elders, but women who can comfort, counsel, and disciple each other. This year, we will launch an elite team of women expertly gifted in understanding the needs of women—particularly those who have experienced trauma and abuse—to come alongside those who are experiencing that pain.

CAITLIN: What would you say to a wife if her pastor is dismissive and blaming, yet she still desires the support of her local church?

PASTOR MIKE: To a woman who has felt hurt or harmed by pastoral care, I want to say that I am so very, very sorry. My heart hurts for you. What grieves me is that some elders have a good ol' boys mentality and, as a result, from the get-go women aren't heard. I would then listen, provide an environment of trust, and seek to understand more about what she experienced pastorally before taking further action. It's important not to dismiss her out of hand. I would remind this woman that Jesus sees and feels her pain, and cares for her even when she feels forgotten. Pastors, find a counselor specializing in trauma and abuse who can provide counseling support in conjunction with your pastoral support. This is vitally important.

Reflections

Pastor Mike took the posture of a learner and sought to listen well to the women under his care—and this is his ongoing attitude. I am convinced that the pastoral role is so highly regarded in Scripture, in part, because of its capacity for both good and harm. Heartbreakingly, the platform can be used for great evil, but it also can and should be a beautiful instrument of Jesus's care.

Brothers, pastors, and men who serve God's people: look to Jesus for your example of a strong defender, gentle shepherd, and wise teacher. Seek wisdom and counsel from other leaders, both men and women, to help shape and enhance your imitation of Christ. Your faithful Shepherd is watching and ready to help, equip, forgive, and enable you to serve his church. 🙏

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People often say Harvest USA is the best-kept 'secret' around. If you live in the greater Philadelphia area (including NJ and DE), consider hosting a small dessert in your home to introduce your friends and church leadership to the ministry. One or two of our staff can be available to attend and share about what God is doing here daily. But if you live near *another* major city in the US, still consider hosting; we travel widely around the country.

Contact Jim Barr for more details.
jimb@harvestusa.org

DID YOU KNOW?

Harvest USA's very own Ellen Mary Dykas is one of three keynote speakers at "Made for More," the national PCA Women's Ministry conference for women and girls that will be held all around the USA! Join her at one of the following locations:

- ❖ October 18–19: Village Seven Presbyterian / Colorado Springs, CO
- ❖ November 8–9: Covenant Church / Naples, FL
- ❖ November 15–16: Evangelical Presbyterian Church / Annapolis, MD
- ❖ January 31–February 1: Christ Covenant / Matthews, NC
- ❖ April 4–5: Park Cities Presbyterian / Dallas, TX
- ❖ May 2–3: Naperville Presbyterian / Naperville, IL

Ellen will also lead a special pre-conference seminar, "Navigating Sexuality and Gender: Biblical Truth and God's Compassionate Wisdom." If you'll be there, don't miss this extra seminar—and be sure to say hello to Ellen!



Scan the QR code to find out more and register:





What Can We
Learn
from the
Growing Conservatism of
**GENZ
MEN?**

Mark Sanders

It's a story from time immemorial: Older generations worried and confused about the trajectory of their successors. In 2023, only 2.3% of baby boomers and 4.5% of Gen Xers identified as LGBTQ+. Contrast this with the 22.3% of Gen Z identifying as LGBTQ+,¹ and it's understandable why our seasoned saints in the church are expressing great concern.

But, with Gen Z (born between 1997 and 2013), more than any preceding generation, a clear fault line has emerged between men and women on many issues. While 28.5% of Gen Z women identify as LGBTQ+, only 10.6% of men do.² Among white Americans, 46% of Gen Z women identify as liberal, compared to 28% of their male counterparts.³ Gen Z men are more conservative than their millennial older brothers, while Gen Z women are more liberal than their older sisters.

This helps explain the shocking drop in Gen Z's support of same-sex marriage. In 2021, 80% of Gen Z supported same-sex marriage in America. But in 2023, that number drastically fell to 69%, well below the 73% support of millennials.⁴ There is no doubt that Gen Z men were the driving factor in this seismic shift.

What should the church do with this data regarding Gen Z men? Is this cause for celebration that the tide is shifting back to a biblically informed worldview about sex and gender? Or are other messages and voices capturing their hearts, potentially leaving them just as far from Christ and his redemptive work?

The State of Young Men in America Today

It's hard to be a Gen Z man. In America, there are over nine million prime-age men who are unemployed, not looking for work, and not in school.⁵ Only 42% of all bachelor's degrees go to men.⁶ Richard Reeves notes that "deaths of despair" (suicide, overdose, alcohol) are three times higher for men than for women. He says that the two words that capture the reason for their despair are feeling *worthless and useless*.⁷

The overarching narrative in our culture today does not help men in their despair. Dr. Anthony Bradley sums up our culture's message to men as, "We don't want you, we don't need you, and when you engage, you cause problems."⁸ This can be seen in the increasing number of women pursuing financial independence apart from men. Today, 40% of women earn more than the average man in America.⁹ The #MeToo movement, the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, and the increased awareness of sexual assault on college campuses all add to the narrative that *men are dangerous to women and society*.¹⁰

Sadly, more young men than ever before have imbibed this message. Bradley has seen an increasing number of men “self-resign.” Their message to society is, “Leave me alone!” They don’t look for work, they don’t seek marriage, they’re done running the proverbial rat race. One study showed that 45% of 18- to 25-year-old men have never approached a woman in person. Instead, they’ve settled for a life of isolation with social media, pornography, recreational drugs, and video games.

While more widely recognized today, many conservative voices have been concerned about this trend in young men for the past four decades. Sociologists like Jonathan Haidt have noticed that the American school system inherently favors girls more than boys, not only due to brain development timing, but also “shorter recess, bans on rough and tumble play, and ever more emphasis on sitting still and listening.”¹² Boys also have a decreasing number of male teachers in elementary education, and the epidemic of father absence in America disproportionately affects boys more than girls.

Jordan Peterson to the Rescue?

There has been a vacuum of prominent men speaking a message of hope that resonates with young men. Even in the church, there can be the danger of focusing only on the sins men should avoid without giving them a vision of true greatness.

But with any vacuum, it’s only a matter of time before something or someone fills the void. Enter the podcasters and YouTubers! If you look at the demographics of those listening to Joe Rogan, Jordan Peterson, Andrew Tate, David Goggins, and Andrew Huberman, you’ll see that the vast majority are high school boys and young men.

These personalities are encouraging millions to put down video games and pornography, “make their bed,” and make something of themselves.

One prominent camp of male influencers, represented by men like Andrew Tate and SNEAKO, are previously self-professed Christians who have converted to Islam. In their “manosphere” and “red pill community,” Christianity was deemed too weak, so they opted for the masculine “strength” that Islam offers. Male influencers like these are tapping into some of the worst ambitions of young men. They teach men to be “alpha males” whose goals in life are money, flashy cars, getting shredded, and anonymous sex—all while somehow trying to call men back to traditional values.

In another camp is the reaction to everything labeled “woke.” Even though Joe Rogan and Tucker Carlson may have very different political ideologies, they stand shoulder to shoulder in giving men a voice against the tyranny of “the left.” That tyranny may come in the forms of gender ideology, mandated COVID protocols, or suppression of free speech. Their appeal is not to a party line, but a rebellion against the elites who have ushered in an age Rod Dreher calls “soft totalitarianism.”

Because the elites have gone all-in on progressive ideologies, the most natural form of rebellion for young men is to adopt an increasingly conservative position on social issues. This may be one reason why Gen Z support for same-sex marriage has dropped so dramatically—because LGBTQ+ advocates have utilized cancel culture as their primary means of gaining support. Young men notice individuals who stand up for what they believe. They find it empowering to see examples of men who don’t back down from their principles in the face of intense political and social pressure.

Jordan Peterson epitomizes this heroism for young men. He’s developed a platform championing free speech. But he’s much more than a political reactionary, he’s a father figure to millions of dejected and hopeless young men. More than any other influencer, you’ll hear countless young men say, “Jordan Peterson saved my life.” How did he do this? Anthony Bradley notes that Jordan Peterson knows how to speak to men stuck in shame. In a culture plagued by perfectionism, Peterson offers young men a way to grow that is filled with compassion.¹³

3 Lessons the Church Can Learn from Gen Z Men

Young men in our churches today are flocking to these influencers. Many would say these voices have a greater impact on their daily life than their local pastor. And yet, none of these influencers proclaim the true gospel. They are devoid of Christ, and they also don’t have real, genuine relationships with these young men. In essence, they are the celebrity pastors of Gen Z. What can we learn from this trend?

Lesson 1:

Not All “Conservative” Movements Are Good

In our ever-polarizing age, it’s easy to adopt the mantra that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” But true biblical wisdom calls the church to a higher standard. We must always remember that our true enemy, Satan himself, knows how to appeal to our weaknesses. So, for Christians who are chiefly concerned with culturally conservative

values being labeled hate speech, the temptation for the church is to see influential men spouting vile and destructive commentary as cobelligerents—because at least we have a common enemy. Sinful ideologies about women, sex, physical strength, and financial success are rampant within culturally conservative circles and many male influencers know how to appeal to the carnal desires of young men. We must not be complacent with swapping one bad idea for another.

Lesson 2:

Young Men Need Compassionate, Relational Investments from Older Men

Despite what you may be tempted to believe, young men need and *desire* life advice. There is a massive market for advice to young men; they’re starving for it, and they’re willing to consume hours of online content every day to find it.

While online influencers may have some helpful information about nutrition, exercise routines, and ways to get promoted at work, what young men truly need is relationships with older men in their local church. Primarily, young men need their fathers. The Lord provides everything we need for life and godliness in Christ (2 Pet. 1:3), but without the intentional, loving involvement of his father, a young man will struggle as he learns how to care for others in a Christlike way. God has given fathers the unique position of greatest influence over their sons. Fathers, your sons need you. An essential concern for every church should be building up good fathers.



“Even in the church, there can be the danger of focusing only on the sins men should avoid without giving them a **vision of true greatness.**”



But even more powerful is when a group of godly, older men heed the call to build up the next generation. Young men need multiple role models—ideally, friends of their father—who make time for them, believe God will use them, and are safety nets when life takes terrible turns. My story, as well as that of many of my friends, is of God placing important older mentors on our paths. These men delighted in us, invested in our future, and were available to hear about our fears, shame, and failures. The older men of your church have the opportunity to point young men to the character, strength, and kindness of their older brother, Jesus Christ.

Lesson 3:
Young Men Need a Vision of Greatness

So much of the pornography scourge in the church is an epidemic of purposelessness. The church is typically good at pouring into young men who display potential for future pastoral ministry. But what about the 17-year-old who has the potential to be a successful plumber with a lovely wife, four children, and a thriving ministry of hospitality and care for widows? Or the 25-year-old single man with gifts for writing and the culinary arts? Do they realize the eternal potential for Kingdom impact that their unique gifts, abilities, and opportunities afford them?

Anthony Bradley helpfully encourages the church to instill in men a sense of “virtuous ambition” that could be applied to any problem they see in the world. The ambition¹⁴ of many online influencers is no greater than money, sex, power, and fame. But virtuous ambition recognizes that the cross of Jesus Christ has conquered Satan, sin, and death; part of our calling as believers is to make that message known by being part of the solution to the real problems in the world. Every time a young Christian man pursues a career as a doctor, lawyer, carpenter, or police officer, he is proclaiming Christ as Lord of all. He’s declaring that Jesus has fundamentally dealt with the problem of sin in the world and will one day consummate his work of making all things new.

Are we teaching young men that whatever they do in life, they are ambassadors proclaiming that Jesus Christ has conquered, and all his enemies will be made his footstool? This kind of virtuous ambition will “count others more significant than yourselves” (Phil. 2:3). This ambition is willing to lay down your life in love for your friends (John 15:13). This ambition awakens a checked-out man to envision a life that is full of purpose, meaning, value, and worth in the Kingdom of our Lord and Savior. 🙌



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A GOSPEL LENS:

WHY “MEN WILL BE MEN” HURTS WOMEN

ELLEN MARY DYKAS

DIRECTOR OF EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY TO WOMEN

In my writing for Harvest USA over the past 17 years, I've steered clear of ranting or raging. To be sure, plenty of situations and stories have prompted heartfelt tears—and sometimes anger—on behalf of hundreds of women. But there's one sentiment, held and communicated in a variety of ways, that particularly sparks my charged emotions: the idea that “*men will be men.*” I've seen this tragically used to excuse, minimize, or outright approve of sexual sin and selfishness.

Please hear my broken, yet hopeful (if occasionally riled) heart on this issue. I have many godly, kind, humble men in my life: brothers in Christ who not only preach against such unbiblical sentiments and actions but defend and advocate for women in vulnerable circumstances. I know pastors and ministry leaders who equip their people to live with sexual integrity and include women in the conversation about sexual struggles and Christ's grace. They know that we, too, need the gospel for our sexual and romantic temptations and sins.

Yet stories keep emerging about high-profile ministry leaders abusing their authority for selfish sexual gain. Pastors and leaders admonish wives along the lines of, “Well—he's a man, after all, and *all* men have problems with lust.”

Is It Really That Bad?

Hearing real-life testimonies like the following has left me feeling disheartened and angry.

- A woman is dressed immodestly, and a man moves toward her with ungodly, lustful, threatening words—and maybe actions. *What did you expect? Men are visually aroused; of course he couldn't restrain himself.*
- A wife is disinterested in sex. Though she engages in it to please or appease her husband, he's consistently angry with her apathy and lack of desire for him. He looks at porn to have an audience that seems to want him. I mean, can you blame him? *A guy has needs, and if his wife doesn't satisfy him, what's he supposed to do?*
- An engaged woman is receiving advice about her wedding night. *Women get all the attention leading up to the wedding; husbands should get all the attention on the wedding night. A bride should focus only on pleasing her husband. She should be willing to do whatever he wants. After all, wives' bodies belong to their husbands, right?*

Friends, this is not an exaggeration. These vignettes are based on real experiences women have shared with me.

“Men Will Be Men” — But What Kind of Man?

God created men and women for himself—with purpose and power supplied by him alone. We are to reflect him in all we do and say through holy lives of sacrificial love, kindness, and utter dependence upon Christ as we “work out our salvation” in this life (Phil. 2:12–13). Our Father in heaven created men to be *his* men and women to be *his* women as sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, united in Christ for his glory to spread his fame throughout the world.

How, then, has it become common (even among professing believers!) that we expect men's sexual desires to rule them? Why do we neglect God's command in 2 Corinthians when it comes to sexual temptation and desire?

From now on, therefore, *we regard no one according to the flesh.* Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, *if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.* The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Cor. 5:16–17, my emphasis.)

When women are taught “*men will be men*” to excuse selfish behavior and attitudes, it communicates an anti-biblical message to hurting wives, vulnerable teen girls, and single women who didn't expect a Christian man to demand sexual ‘favors’ on the second or third date.

Men (and Women) Need Higher Expectations

Consider another look at the above ideas—this time, through a gospel lens that recalibrates us according to God's truth.

- “*Yes, he's a Christian brother. But he is a man, after all. ALL men struggle with lust.*” It's not true that all men struggle with sexual lust—at least not in the same way, consistently, or in a way that demands the lust of his flesh be gratified sinfully. No! It is demeaning to our brothers in Christ to see them with such a worldly point of view. Just as it's wrong to see women as objects of lust, it's wrong to objectify men as animals with no ability to exercise self-control—both attitudes are worldly rather than biblical.

Yes, men have sexual desires; women do, too. But the power that raised Christ from the dead abides within the believer to slay sin, flee from temptation, and love others as Christ does. What stunning transformation could happen if Christians would begin to rally around a statement like this: *Christ's men (and women!) will*

be Christlike through the very real and present power of the Spirit.

Instead of a generalized, worldly view that assumes men must be flesh-satisfiers, let's proclaim God's powerful work to change believers: “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it!” (1 Thess. 5:23–24).

- “*He's your husband so you must submit to him sexually, whenever and however he demands.*” Really?! This is not the message of the gospel, nor was this Paul's intent when he taught about marriage and the vital role of mutual submission to Christ and the call of wives to submit to their husbands' mantle of servant-hearted, sacrificial leadership and love. To demand that a wife please her husband sexually no matter what—even if she is uncomfortable or in pain—is to disregard her as an image-bearer of Christ. It dehumanizes her as merely a means of providing sexual pleasure to her husband. Full stop.

Wives can acquiesce to engage sexually with their husbands in these circumstances while feeling used, broken-hearted, and utterly ‘missed.’ This is not living out the “profound mystery” that sex

was created to highlight (Eph. 5:32). God designed sexual intimacy to point to the tender, selfless, safe, joyful love of Jesus for his bride!

Imagine the impact it would have on marriages if believers were to rally around this truth: Brother and sister, your call is to love Jesus together—*submitting to him and one another, serving the other as more important than yourself.* This is, in fact, a core aspect of being a disciple of Jesus (see Luke 9:23; Phil. 2:1–11).

The Beauty of Christlike, Kingdom-Minded Men

Over 32 years of vocational ministry, I've known some of the best men in the world. The brothers I've served with—and many who came to us for ministry—have modeled Christlike and God-honoring male image-bearing.

What makes a godly man or woman? They yield to the Lord through loving and obeying him, they desire to love others with humility, and they prioritize the supremacy of Christ in all things (see Col. 1:9–21). To confront sin and selfishness, this is the gospel lens we must apply when someone misuses a phrase like “men will be men.”

I've seen godly character and stunning transformation in the lives of single and married men who, in practical,



“Let's **commit** to being men and women who see each other through Christ, not through the **lens of worldly opinions or culturally informed values.**”

humble repentance, allowed Christ to grow them into his men. They moved away from saying, believing, or teaching the kinds of things mentioned earlier. With transformed thinking, they began to express gospel love with words and actions reflecting Paul's prayer for the Colossians—they grew in a walk of faith “in a manner worthy of the Lord,” sought to please Christ and not themselves, and began to bear fruit more and more which was in keeping with repentance (Col. 1:10). Practically, this looks and sounds like:

... seeking Christ with devotion and faithfulness as a lifestyle.

... patient forbearing with wives who need time, gentleness, and intentionality to rebuild trust in their husbands.

... refusing to coerce, pout, or shame girlfriends and wives into sexual activity.

... honoring unmarried women as sisters in Christ and daughters of our Father in heaven who is very committed to protecting, honoring, and cherishing them.

...marriages and churches that hold to a complementarian¹ understanding of the different roles for women and men growing into the safest, most nurturing and women-honoring places of all! This includes discipling women about godly sexuality, repentance from sexual sin, and relational holiness.

Honor Christ: The Man Who Is Savior and Lord!

Brothers and sisters, isn't it humbling and faith-invigorating to know that Christ, our Lord, became a man? He was the Man of all men and lived joyfully yielded to his Father's will. He courageously initiated healing, acted with honoring love toward the women he met, and disciplined and sent men and *women* in his name to spread the gospel to the world. Women must surrender to Christ in essentially the same ways that men are called to surrender: from the heart, as an active step of daily obedience.

Let's commit to being men and women who see each other through Christ, not through the lens of worldly opinions or culturally informed values. He is the “right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing!”² 📖



WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM

**TRAD WIVES,
FEMINISM,
AND**

“EX-VANGELICALS”?

Caitlin McCaffrey

There is nothing new under the sun. Still, a lot of what we are seeing with women in the church today certainly *feels* new. According to Pew Research Center, women now make up 55% of evangelical congregations.¹ They outnumber men in church attendance, practice of daily prayer, and spending time reading or learning about God.

However, when we look at overall trends from generation to generation, younger women (Gen Z and millennials) are trending away from church while younger men are gravitating *toward* church affiliation. So, while more women attend church than men, that number is expected to shift if current trends continue with women more rapidly leaving church each year.

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Statistically, women are also leading in abandonment of biblical teaching on sexuality more rapidly than men. For example, women are the fastest growing demographic in mobile device pornography use since 2016. Overall, the trend appears to support lower adherence to Christian teaching on sexuality the younger the demographic of women surveyed.² Culture operates in two predictable ways: a pendulum and a continuum. The pendulum is a repeating of history, swinging between extremes, while a continuum is how culture moves further and further away from God’s original intent and so declares independence from its Maker. The modern woman is facing both the pendulum and the continuum. How can we chart a path of faithfulness amid many competing voices?

Seeking the “Good Old Days”

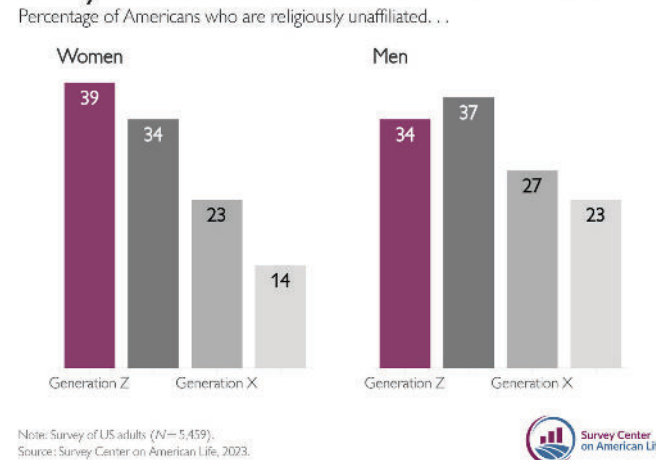
“If you put me in a time machine back to the fifties, I’d have it made . . . everyone wouldn’t be asking me when I’m going back to work.’ Her point ran a little deeper: that era, she believed, was the last time the housewife was celebrated.”³

This is a quote from a New Yorker piece on the trad wives movement. Short for “traditional wives,” the trad wives movement seeks to find utopia in the relic of a lost age when women were exclusively homemakers and wives. Social media has several prominent trad wife influencers who bake sourdough bread, give tutorials on folding towels, and march their children through sunlit creek beds for their homeschool curriculum. Ultimately, trad wives are aiming to restore the “good old days.” But is this the best aim for Christians? Is urging women back to 1950s-style tradition and propriety the answer to the modern cultural trend of women exiting churches? Is it enough to long for a past time when things felt simple?

Seeking Progress

What about feminism? If tradition for tradition’s sake is not the aim, perhaps progress is. Feminism is a loaded word that draws both derision and affirmation from across the Christian landscape. I will not attempt to define or defend it here, except to say that where trad wives are on one end of the pendulum swing, feminists may be the opposite equal of that movement. While feminism once accomplished distinctly Christian aims in the early 19th century with things like women’s suffrage and fighting for access to education and vocation, its fourth wave (modern feminism) has ushered in a harrowing set of ideas that are incompatible with a Christian worldview. One of the most notable qualities of modern, fourth wave feminism is an

Nearly Four in Ten Gen Z Women Are Unaffiliated



obliteration of gender distinctions across dimensions of disposition, physicality, vocation, and sexuality.

The “Ex-vangelical” Phenomenon

Bethany Dufilho, a Texas woman who calls herself “ex-vangelical” (someone who no longer identifies as evangelical), says that deconstruction is freedom from certainty, “. . . freedom from others telling you, ‘This is how you have to interpret the Bible; this is how you have to express your faith.’” Bethany represents a growing number of women who describe themselves as deconstructing their faith in Jesus.⁴ Deconstruction implicitly shirks definition, but, generally, it is a process by which a Christian breaks down the things she has been taught about her faith and, through examination and exploration, decides what—if anything—she will continue to believe and live by.

As women increasingly distance themselves from the Christian faith, it’s right to ask why this is happening. It’s right to seek to understand and remedy it. But ultimately, this is not a sociological phenomenon; we’re talking about the church of Jesus Christ. It’s important to have clarity on where this exodus is to be understood and addressed: in the care and community of local churches. Paul gives instructions on how local churches are to operate and disciple members into Christlikeness in Ephesians 4:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood [and womanhood!], to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather,

speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:11–16)

For pastors and ministry leaders, how can faithfulness, love, and obedience to Jesus forge a path forward within a set of options that are so fraught? If women are departing the church in unprecedented numbers, how can church leaders faithfully shepherd and equip the next generation of women?

Have Women Lost Their Vision for Godly Womanhood?

Here are four factors to consider when shepherding young women in your church:

1. Recognize the extent to which worldly thinking has infiltrated the church.

Many younger congregants are spending upwards of eight hours per day online. They’re ingesting content that they may or may not be discussing with others in their church community or evaluating according to God’s Word to weigh its veracity. The world is preaching to them far more continuously than any pastor could. It’s key for church leaders to honestly assess the reality of what young women are facing.

Women are also hurting and responding to real wrongs. Amid the pornification of our culture and moral failure of many public leaders, some women feel disillusioned and undervalued at church more than at any other time in their week. Yet some of this is not because they are undervalued, but because they’re believing lies to which we are all vulnerable. It’s easy to believe that life can be found in power, independence, leadership roles, and status—many women hear this refrain all day long at their jobs, in their homes, or on social media. Yet the way of the cross opposes those lies. Jesus calls all his disciples to weakness, dependence, humility and poverty of spirit.

2. Pursue fearless countercultural living.

Pastors must have courage amid the fear of being canceled for teaching what the Bible says about sexuality, gender, and what it means to be a man or a woman. Seek to shepherd with clarity, boldness, gentleness, and truth. Local churches should stand apart as outposts of God’s kingdom among a crooked and depraved generation. This



will bring persecution and embarrassment. But pastors and church leaders can model humble courage and disciple the women in their care about the matchless worth of Christ which motivates such countercultural living and sacrifice in this life.

3. Invest in women from the top down.

A 2023 survey from Lifeway research found that 83% of women’s ministry leaders were unpaid volunteers, and 86% lacked formal theological training of any kind. Only 5% of women’s ministry leaders are given the opportunity to participate in planning alongside paid church staff.⁵ Something is wrong here. Churches invest their money in the things that are important to them. Consider how your church is seeking to invest in women leaders across several domains:

THEOLOGICAL: How are you seeking to promote biblical literacy and theological precision among the women at your church?

WORLDVIEW: Teach the whole church (including women) how to engage with every lofty opinion that is raised against the knowledge of God, as 2 Corinthians 10:3–5 says:

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

This exodus of young women from the church is, in part, because of a failure to robustly teach women how to engage with the world's modern messages with a more compelling biblical vision for womanhood. Women need to be taught how to apply the gospel to the myriad modern messages and lies that can be compelling and enticing.

DISCIPLESHIP: Women need women leaders who can invest in them (Titus 2:3–4). It's also important to have male elders and pastors who don't approach equipping and shepherding women from a place of fear, avoidance, or suspicion. How are pastors and women leaders intentionally investing in the next generation of women? If this is not on your radar as a church, I'd exhort you to prayerfully seek to be faithful to women as not only a vital part of your congregation, but, for most churches, the majority of membership! My pastors did an excellent job

of this by spending several months teaching the women of the church how to read the Bible with and disciple others. This has multiplied their efforts because the women of my church are implementing that investment the pastors made in them in their homes, jobs, and communities.

4. Don't conflate culture with biblical commands.

Have we defined "godly womanhood" too narrowly? It can be easy to become prescriptive and go beyond what the Bible teaches about what it means to be a godly woman. I see this often in my ministry to women struggling with sexual sin. They feel different from other women, and, upon further questioning, I usually uncover that what they're believing about what it means to be a godly woman is not from the Bible at all. To be sure, God gives commands and emphases that are unique to men and specific to women throughout his Word—don't shy away from teaching these! However, churches must remain committed to preaching and teaching Jesus Christ as *the* example for the whole household of God.

The church is destined for a loftier goal than mere progress or restoring tradition; we are called to something that is not attainable apart from the Holy Spirit's work among his covenant people. Our goal as women is not to get free, or get traditional, or even get our way—our goal is Christlikeness. There is freedom in this for many expressions of womanhood and many types of women under the Lordship of King Jesus. 🙌



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TRANSGENDERISM, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, and DEFENDING THE FAITH

Yohan Huh Prudente

When you hear the words "gender and sexuality," what comes to mind? Today, these words are loaded with meaning that they did not have even twenty years ago. Our culture now sees things we once defined clearly and simply through a spectrum in which one's choices and feelings determine ultimate good and evil. We have distorted reality to fit idolatrous agendas, and this self-determination redefines human identity.

Christians are under relentless pressure and attack from Christ's enemies. How can we stand firm when those who reject Christ suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18)? We are called to honor God and always be prepared to answer anyone who asks why we have hope (1 Pet. 3:15a). Amid so many offensives against the Christian faith, how can followers of Christ answer the world "with gentleness and respect" (1 Pet. 3:15b)?

Thinking God's Thoughts After Him

Cornelius Van Til (1895–1987), a late professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, helps us think effectively about answering unbelievers. The word "apologetics" comes from the Greek *apologiā*, a speech made in defense of something.

Van Til taught that "the Reformed apologist will point out again and again that the only method that will lead to the truth in any field is that method which recognizes the fact that man is a creature of God, that he must therefore seek to think God's thoughts after him."¹

Our goal is not to assert our own thoughts, beliefs, or agendas but to rightly reflect God's truth. Therefore, Van Til suggests two foundations for Christian apologetics: God's sovereign, covenant faithfulness and his eternal self-sufficiency. Because God is the Creator, the world works as he designed it to work. God is the starting point for all human thought, reasoning, morality, and meaning.² Without God and his revealed Word, there is no reference point to make sense of the world or any human experience.

Believers can learn how to defend the Christian faith through this framework of theology where God and his revealed Word stand supreme for determining truth. Our foundation is the Lord. Any time we evaluate arguments and philosophies, our ground for truth can be nothing other than our unchanging, covenant-keeping Creator as revealed in his Word.

Van Til recommended two practical steps as we speak about Christ:

1. Move to the unbeliever's position to show that it cannot be lived or thought consistently.
2. Ask the unbeliever to move to the Christian position to show how it alone can answer those inconsistencies.³

The goal is to reveal the inconsistencies in worldviews that disregard the Creator, and to demonstrate how Christianity resolves those problems. But how can we apply this apologetic framework?

Transgenderism: Only the Gospel Grants Status and Belonging

Transgender ideology rejects the biological gender binary of male and female. It states that gender is a fluid spectrum, and individuals can discover their gender through a journey combining personal choices and internal feelings. Gender is understood as separate from an individual's physical body.

Transgenderism goes against God's Word and his created order, placing ultimate importance on people choosing their own gender instead of accepting God's design. The transgender narrative creates many inconsistencies. Attempting to match one's inward perception of gender to an artificial construction of the external self through surgeries leaves many physically impaired, sick, and with limited life opportunities. Transgenderism offers false promises of status and belonging; it can't deliver real peace or relief from internal discord. This has, indeed, led to many stories of detransitioners attempting to restore the way they used to be and look.

Though the negatives are clear, transgenderism does seek to protect each person's distinctiveness. It acknowledges the suffering of those who struggle with their gender and seeks to create a space where all are enabled to grow through loving support and care. This is not foreign to Christians. We, too, seek to honor the dignity and value of each person, knowing we are created in the image of God (see Gen. 1:27; 1 Pet. 4:19). Human flourishing is based upon God's love, and the Christian response to the gospel is selflessly serving those who are in pain with compassion and care.

Transgenderism and Christianity see gender dysphoria from different perspectives. Transgenderism seeks to remedy what is perceived as a disconnect between the physical body and gender identity through medical intervention, personal feelings, and individual choice. But Christians see that this division is essentially spiritual. The final solution, therefore, is not found in surgeries but only through repentance and faith in the saving power of Jesus Christ.

Transgenderism calls gender identity a journey of self-discovery and reconstruction, but humanity's purpose can only be found in Christ. In Christ, there is true freedom and the deepest level of knowing God and being known and loved by him. In Christ, we receive a renewed heavenly identity that is forever fulfilled and secured in his eternal promises (Phil. 3:20–21; 1 Pet. 1:3–9). In Christ, we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). In him, our final status and belonging shall never perish but be fulfilled.

“May we, too, suffer well as we face the questions of our era—faithfully loving, faithfully seeking, and faithfully defending the faith.”

Stepping toward the transgender position, we see its failure to satisfy because it is based on a wrong understanding of the Creator and his creatures. From this perspective, we can then ask unbelievers to step toward us and examine the holistic, soul-satisfying promises of Christ.

Artificial Intelligence: Only the Gospel Fulfills Our Longing for Connection

Time magazine notes that artificial intelligence (AI) “has already had a pervasive impact on our lives. AIs are used to price medicine and houses, assemble cars, determine what ads we see on social media. But generative AI, a category of system that can be prompted to create wholly novel content, is much newer.”⁴

Since the advent of social media, generative AI has been introduced and used for programs like ChatGPT, which can respond to almost any question, and DALL-E, which is capable of creating any image people desire. Companies have also integrated bots for casual chatting, romantic relationships, pornography, and others that mimic human interaction and responses. Such AI responses include, but are not limited to, showing compassion, joyful and sorrowful emotions, sarcasm, affection, and more. AI's bounding progress is difficult to comprehend, especially as companies make these programs available without charge to further test and improve them.

Many people are facing unpredictable consequences as companies capitalize on loneliness, depression, and lust to justify the creation and use of artificial companions meant to meet those in desperate search for social and emotional connection. “A relationship with an AI,” writes Andrew R. Chow, “could offer nearly all of the emotional support that a human partner does without any of the messy, complicated expectations of reciprocation.”⁵

Relating to and conversing with an artificial intelligence can only foster an artificial bond that hijacks the “messy” reality of what makes humans *human*.

1. AI-generated relationships do not create person-to-person relationships. They are synthetic in nature and not able to bear the weight of genuine relationships between people.
2. We can only question the ethical standards concerning privacy, reliability, and morality once AI has harmed the welfare of its users. A clear example is AI-generated pornography, where “deep fakes” of real people distorted reality and negatively impacted the lives of those involved.
3. Only the Lord creates perfectly. All human creation is finite and bound to termination. Generative AI is limited and imperfect.

To take a step toward the world's position, we can acknowledge that AI technology has indeed helped people in many segments of life. From school classrooms to making automobiles, from smartphone apps to grammar corrections, AI technology has created new ways to tackle life's challenges.

However, what began as synthetic will always be synthetic. A machine may mimic human responses, but it cannot capture the essence inherently belonging to humans. AI will never be able to take the place of a mother for an orphan, or a husband for a grieving wife. AI can never express how Christians have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16b). Relationships among humans entail a depth of

spirituality that an inhuman, artificial intelligence cannot comprehend nor represent.

Thus, Christians need to exercise wisdom in their use of AI technology, remembering that we are called to relationships that will bring both joys and sorrows, goodness and suffering. And we encourage unbelievers to step toward a Christian view by helping them see the depth and necessity of the real, human fellowship we have in Christ with our brothers and sisters.

The only righteous path for believers is to proclaim God's sovereignty over our human relationships, calling every person to bow down and worship his holy name. AI-generated relationships cannot do that. Indeed, how can they lead people to worship God when companies are exploiting human brokenness and sin to generate profit and stir up our quest for finite satisfactions incapable of lasting until eternity? God's relationship with his people, however, will last eternally (see Ex. 25:8–22; Ps. 16:11; John 1:14, 13:1; Rev. 21:3–7).

Loving, Seeking, Defending

I pray that this method of apologetics will help you to know the Lord and make him known. Though we may fade away, the Word of the Lord remains forever (Isa. 40:6–8; 1 Pet. 1:25). Beloved brothers and sisters, may we run with endurance this race set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. He saw the cross as the joy set before him (Heb. 12:1–2)! May we, too, suffer well as we face the questions of our era—faithfully loving, faithfully seeking, and faithfully defending the faith as we think God's thoughts after him. 🙏



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