

# **The Meaning of Masculinity and Femininity**

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Rich Nathan

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Roots: A Study of the Book of Genesis 1-11

Genesis 2:18-23

This morning I am going to talk about one of the most controversial subjects in society today, and also in the church. That is the meaning of masculinity and femininity. Are there any differences between God creating some of us as men and God creating some of us as women? Any differences that go just beyond our bodies and the fact that at this present stage of scientific knowledge, we men still can't bear babies or nurse them?

The differences between men and women are an endless source of humor for comedians. Dave Berry had, in one of his books, some questions to determine if you are a real guy. Here are some questions to consider:

1. When is it OK to kiss another male?
  - A. When you wish to display simple and pure affection without regard for narrow minded social conventions.
  - B. When he is the Pope.
  - C. When he is your brother and you are Al Pacino and this is the only really sportsman like way to let him know that for business reasons you have to have him killed.
2. When it is OK to hug another male?
  - A. If he is your father and, at least, one of you has a fatal disease.

- B. If you are performing the Heimlich Maneuver and even in this case you should repeatedly shout, "I am merely dislodging food trapped in this male's trachea."
  - C. If you are a professional baseball player and your teammate hits a homerun to win the World Series, you may hug him provided that:
    - i. He is legally within the base path.
    - ii. Both of you are wearing protective cups.
    - iii. You also pound him fraternally with your fists hard enough to cause fractures.
3. In your opinion, the ideal pet is:
- A. A Cat
  - B. A Dog
  - C. A dog that eats cats
4. You have been seeing a woman for several years. She is attractive and intelligent and you always enjoy being with her. One leisurely Sunday afternoon the two of you are taking it easy. You are watching a football game; she is reading the paper, when suddenly out of the clear blue sky she tells you that she thinks she really loves you, but she can no longer bear the uncertainty of not knowing where your relationship is going. She says she is not asking whether you want to get married, only whether you believe you have some kind of future together and you could imagine yourself being married to her. What do you say?
- A. That you sincerely believe the two of you do have a future, but you don't want to rush it.

- B. That although you have strong feelings for her, you cannot honestly say that you are ready to make a lasting commitment and you don't want to hurt her by holding out false hope.
- C. That you cannot believe that the Rams called a draw-play on 3/17.

If you want to throw a bomb in a college classroom or in a church, just start laying out what comes to your mind when you think of masculinity or femininity. This is a huge issue for the church today.

The Southern Baptists recently came out in their convention with a whole new set of positions regarding the proper role of men and women in the church. At the Southern Baptist Convention women were not allowed to speak from the stage. When women speakers gave talks, they had to do it from the floor, I am told.

Churches for the last 30 years have been divided regarding what are proper, God-given roles for men and women. In some Christian seminars and in Christian books you will have very rigid roles laid out for men and women. What it means to be masculine in your home is to do all of the home repairs, change the oil in the car, chop the firewood. If you are a woman, you are called upon to cook, clean, sew and bake. Many women and men find the rigidity of roles offensive and they say there are no differences whatsoever between men and women other than the fact that we, obviously, have very different body parts.

Today I want to discuss the meaning of masculinity and femininity. We are going to take a look at the issue of masculinity and femininity from the first book of the Bible, from Genesis 2, as we read about the first human couple, Adam and Eve. Let's pray.

Genesis 2:18-23: *The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."*

Part of the reason I decided to do this series I am calling "Roots: A Study in the Book of Genesis 1-11" is because these eleven chapters deal with many of the fundamental questions of our lives: Who are we? Where did we come from? What is our essential problem? Why is the world so screwed up? What does it mean to be made male and female?

Genesis 1-11 deals with almost all of the basic fundamental questions of life. What do we need? What were we made for? What is our purpose? It is all there.

So here in Genesis 2, we have an exploration of one of the fundamental issues. What does it mean to be male and female? And we read in Genesis 2, beginning in v. 18: *The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."* This is the first time we read in the Bible, "It is not good."

Now, when we went through Genesis 1 we read the words over and over again, “God saw that it was good.” Seven times in Genesis 1 God saw that it was good. Genesis 1:4 God saw that the light was good. In v. 10 as an example, God called the dry ground “land” and the gathered waters he called “seas” and God saw that it was good. In v. 12, the land produced vegetation, plants bearing seed according to their kind and trees bearing fruit with their seeds in it according to their kinds and God saw that it was good. The same refrain is repeated in v. 18, 21, 25 and finally it culminates in v. 31, God saw all that he had made and it was very good.

Genesis 1 seven times communicates to us about the essential goodness of creation. That the fundamental nature and structure of reality is goodness. Badness is not part of the fundamental structure of this world. Evil and sin are not part of the intrinsic nature and structure of this universe. They are deviations from the creation. Creation was made good. Evil is a perversion and distortion of creation. Goodness is at the foundation of all that we do and of all that we see.

And then we have these shocking words in Genesis 2:18. The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone.” I like the fact that it is the Lord God who speaks these words first. It is not good for man to be alone. Adam does not complain to God saying to God, “Hey, God, I have a problem here. God, pay attention to me. God, do you see me? That I am alone? Do you care? Does my problem matter to you?” It is God who on his own initiative looks at the man he created and God said, “It is not good.”

What this tells us, friends, is that God sees the problems in our lives before we do, or even before we pray. We so often feel like we have to send up a flare to heaven to get God’s attention. Are

you aware, Lord, of what is happening in my family? I am going through such great difficulty at my job. Lord, are you aware that my mother has cancer? Of my dad's heart problems? Of my unhappiness in my marriage? Do I need to scream my problems out to God in order for him to be aware of them?

No, this text says that God is the initiator of all acts of mercy and grace toward us. It is not our prayers that cause God to be gracious. God is gracious and the movement of grace and mercy to us take place even before we are aware of our how unhappy we are. Grace is coming the way of a cancer victim even before that person knows they have cancer in their body. Before you know that something is wrong in your life or in the life of a loved one, God knows and God is initiating a response. Before you discover the affair, before the accident, before you lose your job or the break up with your boyfriend or girlfriend. Do you get it? That's the meaning of grace—favor that comes initiated solely at the instigation of God.

So God says, "It is not good." What's not good? It is not good that man should be alone. Aloneness, isolation, loneliness, having no deep relationships, going through life with no one to love and no one who loves you – it is not good to live outside of deep, loving relationship with others. We were created for relationships. We were not – listen to me – created for marriage. This passage doesn't turn us all into Mormons who put marriage at the top of the human hierarchy. Jesus lived a perfect human life and was single. The Apostle Paul was also single. We are not made for marriage necessarily, but we are all made for relationship.

We are living at a time right now when our natural communities have broken down. Millions of children in America grow up with the experience of either their mother, or father, or both leaving

them, sometimes for years, sometimes forever. I remember the startling experience I had several years ago in a small group for teens that my wife and I were leading in our home. This was a group of juniors and seniors in high school. Marlene and I have been leading a group for juniors and seniors for the last five years. By the way, if you are a junior or senior in high school, you are invited to come to our group. But one of the kids was talking about something going on in his home and it was obvious that he was not living with either his mother or his father. And I just said to the group (there were about maybe 35-40 kids sitting around shoved into our family room), "How many of you don't live with either your father or your mother? That you are living in a situation apart from both of your parents?"

Six kids raised their hands. One teen was living with their grandparents. Another teen was living with a step-mom. Another was living with an aunt and uncle. Six kids raised their hands. Another seven or eight kids were living with only one of their parents. And we were talking about mainly Christian kids.

We are living in a time where natural community has broken down. Many of us live hundreds or even thousands of miles, as I do, from my parents, siblings, aunts and uncles. Some of us like it that way. We like the distance. Maybe a few weddings and holidays are about all you can handle. But this past half century has resulted in the most massive breakdown in natural community in human history that wasn't the result of a war or plague or slavery or natural disaster. This last half century of human history has resulted in the greatest breakdown in natural community, which wasn't the result of some disaster, that the world has ever seen.

Americans right now are a profoundly lonely people. Sociologists, a few years ago, published a study called “Bowling Alone,” in which an investigation was made of various kinds of volunteer organizations, voluntary groupings like PTA, bowling leagues, rotary clubs. Essentially, the finding was that participation in almost any kind of grouping was at historic lows. So this sociologist coined the title, “Bowling Alone” because he found more and more people going to bowling alleys by themselves, and participating in recreational activities alone. We Americans are a profoundly lonely people. More of our elderly are dying alone in the company of strangers, attended by non-family members.

Folks make fun of the TV show “Friends.” And there is a lot of silliness and vulgarity in it. But the reason why the show “Friends” is so popular, especially among young adults and has so many rip-offs and spin-offs, is because it strikes a resounding cord in the hearts of many. It is the story, if you haven’t seen it, of six young adults. The theme song summarizes the show. The theme song is one of the group member’s promise to always be there for the others. “I’ll Be There for You.” Why? The last line of the song says, “Because you’re there for me, too.”

This idea of being there for someone – it echoes the show that was popular in the 80’s – Cheers! In their theme song, “Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name. And they are always glad you came.” We are looking, as a result of the breakdown of the natural community, we are looking for people to be there for us. Isn’t that what you want? Don’t you want a few people who will just be there for you, no matter what happens? That you won’t be alone? Don’t you need that?



The saddest thing in the world is when a person comes to the place of believing that they don't need relationship with anyone else. It is very healthy to come to a place of saying, "I don't need to be married to be a whole, well-functioning human being. I don't need to be married to feel OK about myself, to be happy, to have a useful existence." But I think it is the saddest thing in the world when someone comes to a place of believing that they don't need relationships with anyone else. I find it so profoundly tragic when a person because of repeated disappointments says, "Oh, it doesn't matter. God has misdiagnosed the problem in my case. God, what you said to the first man, Adam, doesn't apply to me. It is good for me to be alone."

Friend, we were made for relationships as much as we were made to breathe air in our lungs. A few weeks ago when I talked about what it meant for men and women to be made in the image of God, I said we human beings are made in the image of the Triune God. And part of what that means is that we were made for relationship, for community, just as the Trinity exists in the eternal community of love as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so for we human beings, part of our essential nature is to yearn for and need relationships with other people.

Well, the text goes on and says, *"Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field, and all of the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them. And whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all of the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field, but for Adam no suitable helper was found."*

I picture Adam in the garden and God brings in this one great parade, like the circus train going by, he brings all these animals by for Adam to name. Adam is there thoughtfully, deliberately

considering the name that would be appropriate to the nature of each of the animals. And as he is considering the nature of each of the animals, it just increases Adam's sense of aloneness. It is interesting to meet you, Mr. Boa Constrictor. I am glad you dropped by Rocky Raccoon. He watches all of the animals pair up. They all have partners. All of them have counterparts, companions. The longer Adam is involved in this naming process, the more acutely he is aware of the problem that God saw ahead of time. I am alone. I have no companion, no friend.

Have you ever done anything, which was designed to relieve your feelings of loneliness which only served to increase them? Maybe you have gone out on a date, almost from the opening shot, the moment your date begins to speak, you realize you have made a horrible mistake. And the rest of the date you are just counting the moments until this pain of being with this other person will be over. "My goodness, I have to spend three full hours with this other person incessantly talking at me." Or bragging about their medical practice or complaining about all the losers they've met.

Have you ever done anything which was supposed to relieve your feelings of loneliness and only increased them? Some of you have engaged in sex outside of marriage only to find that instead of establishing a connection, it made you feel more isolated and disconnected. Some of you may have had affairs because, perhaps, at a certain time in your life, you felt so utterly isolated and alone and you were reaching out for what you thought would be a life line, only to discover that you had grabbed on to an anchor that was pulling you to the bottom of the ocean.

There are lots of things that increase our feelings of loneliness. Sometimes just watching other couples, if you are single or if you are married, but unhappily so. And you watch other couples who

seem to be enjoying themselves. You go jogging along the street and you watch mothers pushing their babies or families walking together.

I think that's what Adam felt like – everybody but me.

I want to speak frankly to you right now and tell you that I know that going to church for some individuals and for some couples can increase your sense of loneliness. The reason why we talk so much around here about joining a small group, again, to be frank – I hope you are getting something from the messages I deliver each week. I hope they make a difference in your life. And I hope being involved in worship here is making a difference in your life. But I know in my heart that the magic comes for a man and a woman when you come here and somebody is waiting for you in the lobby, they call your name and put their arms around you and say, "Let's grab a cup of coffee together before the service." The magic is in looking for your friends and finding them sitting with a group, after church occasionally going out for lunch or doing something together.

If you are sitting alone today, you are a guest here and you don't know anyone here, you have been coming for a little while, but you really haven't connected. You are just sitting alone or sitting with your spouse, I want you to hear my heart. It doesn't have to be that way for many more weeks. You can change your aloneness in this church, if you want to change it. This place called Vineyard could be for you a place of relationship and community. But you are going to have to initiate. You are going to have to take some responsibility. Those of you who are sitting alone are going to have to take some responsibility.

It is painful to initiate change, isn't it? When we're babies, someone else changes our diapers. It is like finding a new job. Unless you are the rarest person in the world, you have to go and initiate a job search. I don't think there are very many of you sitting out there that just hung out by your phone and had employers hunt you down and offer you a job. You had to get off your duff and apply. It is the same thing with forming relationships here. You can end your aloneness if you want to. But I doubt that there is going to be many of you who just have someone walk up to you and say, "Hi, my name is Marvin. Let's be best friends."

So if you aren't connected and you are sitting alone, you don't have those magic moments week by week in church where you see someone familiar and you both move toward each other, then go the lobby today and go up to one of the tables – men's groups, women's groups, home fellowships – we have groups of people who meet around common ages and interests. We have teen groups that meet together. We have groups for you if you are a young adult, you are in your 20's. We have about 30 groups just for young adults in their 20's. We have women's groups, men's groups, home fellowship groups that would mix up men, women and couples and singles. But don't sit here alone forever.

Well, how does God answer Adam's need for a companion? It says, "For Adam, no suitable helper was found. Those are the key words – no suitable helper was found. "So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man."

For Adam, [v. 20] no suitable helper was found. There have probably been tens of thousands of sermons preached on women being created to be helpers for men based on this phrase “a suitable helper.” And then it is interpreted this way: what it means to be a helper is to be a kind of junior assistant, someone to help Little Lord Fauntleroy achieve his goals in life. To make it easier for him to be the king of the castle and the master of the house. To iron his shirts and fold his socks. To make his food, to be his cheerleader and his enthusiastic supporter. And at the end of the day to look great and to smell good and to always be ready for romance. You know, to be a helper to your man’s desires, needs and ambitions. Some of the men are saying, “Amen. Preach it, brother. This is really good. Where do we get the cape?”

Usually, in traditionalist circles, helper implies some sort of subordination. After all, you have a master electrician and his helper. You have the plumber and his helper. The dentist and the dental assistant. So, a wife is there to be sort of a junior partner in the relationship.

Well, that’s not at all what this phrase “suitable helper” was designed to communicate. The Hebrew words are “ezer kenegdo”. The word ezer, meaning helper, is found 20 times in the Old Testament. Far from being a junior assistant, 17 of the 20 usages refers to God. God is our helper in times of trouble. To say that a woman helps a man is not to imply weakness in the woman, but strength. A doctor is a helper to a patient. A social worker, nurse, pastor are part of the helping professions. The one who helps is someone who offers help to someone who is helpless or needs help. Adam needed help. So God created a helper.

What was the help that Adam needed? Did he need someone to find his favorite socks? Did he need a person to tell him that his fig leaf didn't match his shoes? "Honey, that just doesn't go together. I have told you that over and over again."

Adam needed help to overcome his aloneness. His need was not clean socks or fashion counsel. He needed a companion. He needed a counterpart. He needed a partner in life. He needed someone to relieve his aloneness. The word "suitable" literally means a companion like opposite him. Like opposite him. Not identical to him. Like him, but opposite. Unlike him.

Have you noticed that men and women are different? Two year olds notice that there is something different about Mommy and Daddy. And little girls notice that they are different than little boys. And little boys are different than little girls. And the differences are not just physical – that women can get pregnant and nurse babies and men can't.

Here is where we find the Christian community going in two very opposite directions; two very different extremes. The traditionalist position would be that yes, we are different and here is what the differences mean in terms of our different roles. And then we come up with a prescribed list of what men are allowed to do and what women are allowed to do. From a traditionalist perspective, if you deviate from these roles, you're under suspicion as some sort of radical feminist or liberal.

The problem with every list that you can come up with about men's and women's roles, is that they are all so culture bound. The Bible does not lay a list out for us of approved roles for men and women that apply for all time everywhere in all cultures.

Let me move this from the theoretical realm to this world, our lives. Is it masculine or feminine to lift heavy loads? When I was down in Haiti, I noticed that almost all of the heavy lifting was done by women and not by men. I remember one day watching these women walking down a hill with what must have been a hundred pounds of wood on their heads. They were carrying these long boards, these 14-16' pieces of lumber, several large boards bending on either end. And they had them on their heads, walking down a hill, talking with each other. There is this 14 year old boy walking with his mother and he is not carrying anything other than a little stick and he is hitting the stick with a rock.

Now as an American, I just wanted to hit this kid up the side of the head and say, "Help your mother out. What's the matter with you? You can't carry anything?" But it was unthinkable in that culture for a young man to do woman's work. And what woman's work meant was to carry loads like a beast of burden.

A year and a half ago, when I went to India, I watched women carrying buckets of cement on their heads up these planks onto high scaffolding where the men were doing the finish work on a wall. The women were carrying the cement in buckets on their heads. And the men were pouring it out and smoothing it out on the wall.

Is it masculine or feminine to carry heavy loads? Well, it depends on where you live, friend. Is it masculine or feminine to sew curtains or to make dresses? I have a male friend that sews curtains and makes dresses for his wife. Historically, most of the tailors have been men, not women. As historically have been most of the cooks and chefs. Who's supposed to cook the dinner – the

husband or the wife? In the home that I grew up in, 99% of the dinners were cooked by my dad. When I got married, my wife wasn't competing with my mother's cooking, she was competing with my dad's cooking.

Two young adults that I know were planning to get married and they got into an argument about who was going to pay the bills once they got married. And in the young man's home, the bills were always paid by his mother. She sat down at a low table and popped in a video and spread the bills out in front of her and this bill paying job was always Mom's job. In the young woman's home, her father went into another room with a pot of coffee and spread the bills out on a table and he always balanced the budget and paid the bills. These two got into this argument. They were telling me about it, laughing. The young woman said, "Well, I am not paying the bills. That's what a daddy does. That is what a husband does. You are supposed to do it." The young man said, "I am not paying the bills. That's what moms do."

When anyone says, "Doesn't it seem obvious to you, or normal or natural, doesn't your intuition tell you that such and such role is the only possible one for a man or a woman," you can say, "Well, a century ago many people thought it was absolutely obvious that women weren't suited for the intellectual challenge of college. It was obvious that women couldn't go to college. And if they did go to college, they would major in Home Economics, or teaching or perhaps nursing. They certainly wouldn't take up law. The thought that you could have a woman lawyer was laughable. No way could a woman competently engage in science or medicine."



30 years ago the notion of a woman lifting weights was laughable. Now, go to the gym and it is filled with women lifting weights and doctors are prescribing weight lifting for many middle aged women who might have the propensity to suffer from osteoporosis in later life.

I believe that the rigid list of roles and also our stereotypes of what a man is supposed to be like and what a woman is supposed to be like – a man is not supposed to cry. Really? Well, we find men in the Bible often crying. We find Jacob crying when he meets his future mate, Rachel. We find Abraham crying by the tomb of his beloved wife, Sarah. We find Jesus weeping by his friend Lazarus. It is not unmanly to cry. It is not unwomanly to be physically strong.

One extreme position – the traditionalist position that says for masculinity and femininity, let me lay out a list of roles - I believe there is no warrant for that type of thing in the Bible. God does not define for us in this text, “and these are the things I am going to allow your wife to do, Adam, and these are the things that you must do.”

Rich, are you saying that there are no differences between men and women? That we are all just people with no differentiation at all, other than perhaps a bit of physical differentiation?

Remember that word suitable. Suitable. For Adam no suitable helper was found. The word suitable means like opposite him; like unlike him. We are told right off the bat that God is going to create for Adam a companion who is like him in some ways, but opposite him, unlike him in other ways.

The 70's radical feminist perspective that the only difference between a man and a woman has to do with our genitals, a woman's ability to bear and nurse children, has been entirely rejected by the sociological studies of the last 25 years. It is quite apparent that what the Bible is teaching here about our gender differentiation goes way beyond our bodies down to the depths of our souls. We are eternally female and eternally male. So that if a man has a so-called sex change operation, they are never, ever changed into a woman. A so-called sex change operation just turns a man into a defaced and tragically deformed man. As Larry Crabb, the psychologist, put it, our sexuality doesn't merely adorn our person. Our sexuality defines our person. We are not just people. We are men and women.

And study after study shows the difference between men and women. For example, women's senses are finer tuned than men's. So a woman will generally smell something before a man will. Something will smell sour or smell bad. A woman's sense of sight is generally finer tuned so that she can pick out smaller items in a box compared to a man. That's why a man could open up his sock drawer and look in it and say, "I can't find my brown socks." She walks over and in one second says, "They are right there" and picks them out. He has been going through the drawer for ten minutes. A woman's senses are generally finer tuned according to the studies.

The part of the brain that controls aggressiveness and assertiveness, the amygdale, is much larger in a man than in a woman. So men tend to be more aggressive and assertive in general than women.

Studies indicate that men are generally far more compartmentalized in their thinking than women are. Women's brains are much better lateralized. So in many marriages, men tend to

compartmentalize their lives. They may not think of their wives at all when they are at work. They get home and may not think or talk very much over the course of the evening. And then desire to be romantic at the end of the evening, because that is the compartment that a man may put his wife in. On the other hand, a woman's life tends to be far more integrated. The studies use word pictures regarding women. Women are more like a flowing river. Who she is flows into who her husband is, and how her children are doing, and how the house looks, and how her friends are relating to her. It all flows together.

In the compartmentalization/integration divide, women tend to attach feelings to facts. I am not talking about an emotional/rational divide, women and men are all over the map regarding the testing on how rational or how thinking you are or how feeling you are – I am talking about the tendency to compartmentalize versus integrate. Women tend to integrate, they are more lateralized. So facts are attached to feelings. That's why when women watch sports, they tend to enjoy it more when they know more about the players. They want to know something personal about the athlete they are watching, not just watch the action. For me, the players in the field could be androids, they could be cyborgs, they could be robots. I don't care, just make the tackle.

At least this is the Olympic sponsor's theory. So instead of showing hour after hour of sports, in order to attract a female audience, we have a little bit of sports interspersed with all of these personal vignettes about the home the swimmer grew up in; about the problem she overcame; about the farm the weight lifter or wrestler grew up on. And this enables women to feel more connected with the action.

There are so many studies put out about the differences between men and women. And these are not just written by traditionalist authors. Many of the studies are put out by feminist authors. There are also dozens of popular books, which offer helpful snapshots for women and men about the general styles of relating, of our two different sexes, at this particular moment in history. So you have books like “Men are From Mars and Women are From Venus.” Or Deborah Tannen’s book, “You Just Don’t Understand.”

And I think these books are helpful. I just don’t want to exalt all of these studies and all of these various books to the level of scripture and then to enforce these differences upon people. I think it is helpful for men and women to read books that suggest the different ways that men and women in our culture relate. My wife and I, frankly, because we tend to fall into fairly traditional male and female patterns, find a lot to laugh about in the various marriage books on differences. We fit certain classic patterns. I have a problem, I tend to withdraw. I go back into my cave to solve it. My wife in order to be empathetic wants to try to draw me out. Let’s talk about it. Let me help you feel better. And for me, talking about my problems makes me feel like I am crawling over broken glass on my stomach. The last thing I want to do is rehearse and rehash some emotional pain. I want to solve it. I want to fix it. My wife wants to talk about it. Let’s expose it. Let’s expand upon it. Let’s analyze it. Let’s turn it over. Let’s look at it from the top. Let’s look at it from the bottom. Let’s look at it from the sides. Let’s talk about it at night. Let’s talk about it first thing in the morning. And every time we talk about it, I just want to die.

Now the reason I find these books and studies helpful is not because we want to lock someone in and say this is the only way a man can relate and the only way a woman can relate. But they do assist us in fulfilling the scriptural requirement, at least that husbands have in 1 Peter 3:7 [men, you

can write this text down]: “You husbands likewise live with your wives in an understanding way.” Many men have never taken the time to really try to understand their wives or the differences between men and women. Many women have never taken the time to really try to understand the different communication patterns or needs of their husbands. Living with each other in an understanding way can be assisted and helped by reading some of the popular literature.

But some of the literature, frankly, doesn’t relate to my marriage or to who I am. And it won’t relate to your marriage or to who you are because it is not scripture. So when I read that in general women are more affectionate or like to be romantic more or are more touchy and huggy, that’s certainly not true in my home. I tend to put a lot more emphasis on special days and occasions like anniversaries and Valentine’s Day than my wife does. I will strategize for months about something special I can buy her or a special romantic place where we can go.

How do you, apart from all the literature and all the writing and studies, find your uniqueness as a man or a woman? If you aren’t going to be locked into roles or lists, but you do believe that God has done something in you to make you uniquely a woman or a man, how do you discover that?

Well, I believe we discover our unique maleness or femaleness as we relate in love to other people. V. 22, “Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, ‘this now is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.’”

As we encounter and relate in love to other people, we find ourselves. As you love and serve another person, and you listen to them, really listen, they will share with you the impact your life

has on them. I learn about who I am as a man as people give me feedback, as I humbly receive it. Rich, here is where you messed up. Here is where you hurt me. Here is where your approach was really bad. Here is where you helped me, Rich. Here is where you blessed me. Trust me – as a pastor I receive a lot of feedback. And I regularly have to learn to see myself through the eyes of other people. Where as we love and serve and listen, really listen, to others we discover our unique selves.

You don't discover your masculinity and femininity by reading down a list. No book can tell you who you are. But as you love and serve someone else, you find yourself. Mature people have an amazing amount of self awareness. A key gift that God has given for us to discover our masculine selves and our feminine selves is the gift of marriage. As we husbands commit ourselves to be a blessing to our wives, and you wives commit yourselves to be a blessing to your husband; as you relate to your mates or you relate to friends as single males and females, listening and serving them, you find yourself.

I can't say it enough times. You don't find yourself by sitting alone. You find yourself in relationships of love.

Secondly, you don't discover masculinity or femininity by simply reading a book that may or may not talk about you or by consulting a list. But we do find our masculine and feminine selves as we relate in love to God. As we relate in love to others and we relate in love to God. By opening our hearts to God, we discover who we are.

How exactly would relating in love to God help us to discover our masculine or feminine selves? You go before God and you say, "Heavenly Father, here's the place in my heart or life where frankly I have been neutered because of a very bad experience that I had or some sin that I committed. A part of my feminine soul, a part of my masculine soul has been cut off. I have been neutered."

What does that mean, Rich? Well, there are many men who have been neutered by being raised in homes with very domineering, very controlling, very manipulative mothers. There are men and women who have been neutered by being raised in homes by absent or aloof or utterly controlling fathers. You may find, as you come before God and open up your hearts to him to love him and receive his love, that a part of you has died through some trauma or molestation. A part of you has died. If you can't come before God and with your whole heart say, "God, I love being a woman. I love being a man. And I love it down to the very depths of my soul, with every fiber of my being, I love what you have made me and I feel it. And I can enter strongly into this place of masculinity or femininity." then you need to say to the Lord, "Lord, heal whatever got broken in me."

I believe ultimately that masculinity and femininity remains a mystery for us as human beings. I believe most of the definitions we attempt to attach to it are artificial, culture bound, helpful at certain times and seasons. They may help us to live in understanding ways with our mates. But ultimately, masculinity and femininity are discovered in relationships of love. As I give myself unreservedly to love and serve and listen to another, and as I give myself unreservedly to love and serve and receive from God, I find myself – being made in God's image, male or female. Let's pray.

# **The Meaning of Masculinity and Femininity**

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Rich Nathan

October 7-8, 2000

Roots: A Study of the Book of Genesis 1-11

Genesis 2:18-23

- I. The Problem: Aloneness
  
- II. The Solution: A Suitable Helper
  
- III. The Problem: Two Extreme Positions
  - A. Traditionalist
  
  - B. No Differences
  
- IV. The Solution: Relationships of Love