

Where Are the Christian Men?

She was a single Christian friend (totally just friends), venting her frustration about immature men. It was casual, because that kind of venting is common. It was over coffee. It cut deep.

“Christian men ... ugh.”

As a male Christian college student with no wife, no steady job, and no financial independence, I squirmed with unease and insecurity. She wasn't attacking me; just issuing a general complaint to the universe. The words effortlessly flowed out of her mouth like she had said them a million times before, and I wasn't prepared for the adjectives that would be slung in the conversation: “Immature.” “Childish.” “Lazy.” “Weak.” “Pathetic.” Wait for it ... “Man-Boys.”

At a level, the tone we use to speak about young Christian men today would be self-evidently disrespectful in another context. And to state the obvious, it cuts the deepest when coming from our single female counterparts. There are a slew of legitimate reasons a single Christian woman would be tempted to rag on immature men. (1) Secular women offer a pre-packaged and intuitive man-boy bashing liturgy. (2) She (or a friend) dated a guy, got burned, and reinterpreted him through the lens of hurt as a “man-boy.” (3) Taking jabs at immature men is a fun and easy way to sequester the chilling reality of singleness.

It's understandable, but can I please say this? It's not OK. The term “man-boy” (sometimes “man-child,” “baby-man,” etc.) is a slur. It is used to personally demean and debase a class of Christians. It is a put-down. It expresses contempt and exhibits haughtiness. And, worst of all, it defines the value of humans in God's image according to their gender performance.

The Problem Is Not Laziness

“But,” you say, “there are a lot of Christian men who exhibit disappointing behaviors.” This is true, but I’m not convinced categories like sinfulness or laziness, common explanations, properly capture the issue. Perhaps laziness points beyond itself—maybe it is symptomatic of a more systemic problem. Let’s interpret the classic “man-boy” behaviors through a lens other than laziness:

Delaying marriage can help: avoid shared physical, emotional and spiritual space, and retreat into personal space.

Neglecting the Bible and church can help: avoid divine intimacy, and retreat into personal life.

Floating without ambition can help: avoid work hours, and retreat into personal time.

Playing video games chronically can help: avoid external reality, and retreat into virtual reality.

Living at home can help: avoid external pressures, and retreat into internal comforts.

Modern-Day Fig Leaves

“Lazy” is a surface-level description. “Avoid” moves us toward an explanation of the heart. Scripture tells us that the heart is always active (Gen. 6:5; Deut. 10:6; Jer. 17:5, 9; 1 Pet. 1:22), so our description of the heart should always be in the active voice (I’m not saying avoidance is *the* problem, but it helps us get a bit deeper than the laziness concept).

“Avoid” is a door to a slew of other active words and a host of other realities of the heart: fear (“What if I fail?”), anxiety (“I can’t handle this!”), depression (“I hate

myself/life”), feelings of insufficiency (“I am not enough”), self-deprecation (“I am stupid/dirty/undesirable”), shame (“God and neighbor are disgusted with me”), and a thousand more. “I would rather escape than publicly be put to shame” (cf. Rev. 6:16).

These categories give us a new perspective. “Man-boys” aren’t first and foremost struggling with being men, but with being human. Singleness, solitude, laziness, video games and Mom’s house are modern-day fig leaves—self-made coverings for men who are stripped of competence and deeply ashamed of their inability to engage with the realities of life because of their experience with the Oppressor (Is. 14:4), who seeks to spread confusion and chaos among God’s people (John 8:44; 2 John 7; Rev. 12:10).

The Solution Is Not ‘Try Harder’

The need of the day is not for the church of Jesus Christ to rip away the leaves but to start clothing them with the God-made garment of the gospel (Gen. 3:21). The solution to immaturity among young Christian guys is not remembering truths or tightening regulations, but a Person who did not avoid our realities but rushed into them for our sake: Jesus (Luke 2:52; Phil. 2:6-9)—Jesus, with his intercession, charity and grace.

Surely women aren’t to blame for male immaturity or responsible for changing men. But what can single Christian women do about this phenomenon of immaturity—for their brothers in Christ—besides vent and name-call (Matt. 18:15; 1 John 3:14)? Here are some ways that they can help:

1. Intercessory Prayer

Pray for more fathers to take seriously their role to teach their children how to engage the world and not avoid it. Pray for men in general to do the same for guys without fathers.

Pray for men to change, not merely at a behavioral level, but at a heart level—to move toward God and neighbor in the midst of indwelling sin and external oppression (Luke 10:27).

2. Charity

Speak well of others (Eph. 4:31). Treat the immaturity of young men the same way you would treat any other issue in the church: with diligence, faithfulness and love—the very same traits Paul includes in his imperative to “be men” (1 Cor. 16:13-14). This means that women are not reacting with cynicism or using the term “man-boy” (Eph. 4:29).

3. Faith

God is disciplining immature men to grow them up (). He doesn't need your snide comments to help (Prov. 11:12). Trust that God has not abandoned men to immaturity, but is finishing the work that he began (Phil. 1:6).

4. Grace

All temptation is common to humankind (1 Cor. 10:13). The fear that exists in a man's heart may manifest itself in different (gender-specific) ways in your life. No matter whom you date, he will be a sinful man (Rom. 3:23) who is immature and afraid, and if he is a Christian, God is overcoming evil that is against him and in him (Phil. 2:13; Rom. 16:20). I'm not saying Jesus wants you to date a loser. He doesn't. All I'm saying is this: Don't just date a gospel-centered Christian; date *like* a gospel-centered Christian (1 Pet. 4:8).

Philosopher Søren Kierkegaard said that nature has affectionately equipped women “with an instinct so sensitive that by comparison the most superior masculine reflection is as nothing” (*Sickness Unto Death*, XI, 162). Sisters, prove Kierkegaard right. Outdo us in prayer, charity, faith and grace, and we men will try to outdo you in godly discipline and ambition. Then, perhaps mutual awe of the One “who helps

us in our weakness" will bloom in due course (Rom. 8:26).

*This article was originally published on , and is used with permission. You can read the original article here: -
blog/posts/talking-about-man-boys*