

RAISING BOYS BY DESIGN

WHAT THE BIBLE AND BRAIN SCIENCE REVEAL
ABOUT WHAT YOUR SON NEEDS TO THRIVE

GREGORY L. JANTZ, PhD
AND MICHAEL GURIAN
WITH ANN McMURRAY

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BOYS
BY DESIGN**

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P R E S S

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*For the Jantz, Gurian, and McMurray families,
with love and thanks.*

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Joining Together to Raise Strong, Loving Christian Sons

Thank you for bringing this book into your family. As we join together to explore with you the best parenting practices based on biblical insights and scientific research, the two of us—one a Bible-based psychologist and the other a science-based marriage and family counselor—draw not only on our more than fifty years of collective research and experience but also on the shared belief that faith and science can and must serve one another, especially where the development of children is concerned.

A Note from Dr. Gregg Jantz

Welcome to this book! I'm so glad to be working with Michael and with you on this very important subject. I had been asked for a number of years if I would consider providing a book for parents who are raising Christian sons. As the father of two sons and a professional who has worked with young males for decades, I wanted to write that book. My research and clinical practice has constantly brought me into the lives of boys and their families, and the wisdom I've gained from these young people and families has inspired me to look deeply into the available research on male development in both religious and secular contexts.

As part of that journey, I met Michael—initially through his book *The Wonder of Boys* and then personally when I attended the Gurian Institute Summer Training Program at the University of Colorado—Colorado Springs. As he presented his findings, I was immediately moved by the fact that his science-based theory coincided in many ways with my own theoretical and clinical work in helping the families of

boys and girls. Not too long after our meeting, the two of us became friends and started sharing our perspectives. I soon began considering how I might partner with him to bring our intersecting theories, research, and practical strategies front and center into the Christian world. That Michael is a practicing Jew and a man of deep spiritual commitment helped me to immediately feel comfortable with him.

As the two of us compared notes, I learned that Michael, too, had been asked to write a purposeful resource for Christian parents.

Michael's Story

I join Gregg in welcoming you into this book and its passionate journey! It is an honor to walk with Gregg and Ann in helping you raise your sons.

Much of my career has been devoted to working with parents, teachers, and organizations to integrate science-based research into their lives. As a clinician and counselor, I've also worked hard to help bridge gaps between religion and science. Part of this intention grows from my Christian clients and readers. In my office, in e-mails, or after lectures, they have asked things like, "Can you put together your science-based research with the Bible?" "Would you consider writing a Bible-oriented book for Christian parents?" "Is there a God-given design to males and females?"

The questions I've received that relate to Bible-based parenting were not questions I had the expertise to answer, but the concept of "God-given design" is, I believe, a profoundly important concept to consider. In the early 1990s, from a secular perspective, I coined the phrase "nature-based theory" to reflect the fact that gender, personality, talent sets, and many other aspects of human development do indeed possess a "nature" component (we will look in detail at the scientific studies behind this assertion in chapter 2).

Male and female natures (gender) begin in our genetics, before birth, and we carry those natural gender proclivities (what are called, in developmental science, "biological tendencies") with us throughout our lives. So while each boy and each girl, each woman and each man is influenced significantly by nurture and culture, each gender comes into the world with some profound gender differences in tow.

As I met with Gregg, I heard him using the terms "God-given design" and "parenting with God's design." His theories provided a meeting point with nature-

based theory and science-based parenting. We realized that the phrase “design-based parenting” integrated our common themes. As we developed this book, we found significant intersections between the Bible and brain science.

Our bridge building between the Bible and science feels to me like not only a powerful and positive resource for parents and others caring for children but also a way for faith-based and secular worlds to work together to deepen our human conversation regarding the lives of our precious children.

Our Team and Your Team

Together, as experts from two different worlds, we are excited to provide this leading-edge resource for Christian parents. Our work is elevated by the behind-the-scenes efforts of our respective teams. We want to thank Ann McMurray, Gregg’s partner at the Center for Counseling and Health Resources, for bringing her gender perspective and expertise to this project, and we want to thank the staff of the Center. We also want to thank the Gurian Institute team in Colorado and elsewhere in the country and give special thanks to Rev. Tim Wright in Peoria, Arizona, for his expertise in matters regarding boys and church life.

Our two teams join us in hoping that the practices in this book will help you gift your son and family with an approach to parenting that brings together the best of the contemporary scientific world with the abiding truths of ancient wisdom.

Part I

THE INSIDE **STORY**

UNDERSTANDING THE
DIVINE DESIGN AT WORK
IN YOUR BOY'S LIFE

1

Our Sons Need a New Approach to Boyhood

We live in a culture that has forgotten many crucial aspects of the divine design at work in the body and soul of boyhood.

They come into the world red-faced, sometimes screaming at the top of their lungs. With the joyous pronouncement, “It’s a boy!” our sons are celebrated. Into their tiny bodies we stuff our hopes and dreams as parents. As we gaze at their faces, we see our fathers and mothers, our grandmothers and grandfathers gazing back at us. Though our new son is barely a part of our present, we look at his squirming, warm bundle of future potential and say to ourselves, “Hello, little man.” Little do we know the adventure we are beginning! Our sons grow and change, sometimes before our eyes, and we can barely keep up with their active, inquisitive natures. We seek to mold their wills to our own without breaking that spirit we know they will need in order to become a man.

And we worry what sort of men they will become. Will they be strong enough to shoulder an adult load? Will they be humble enough to learn the lessons we yearn to teach? In a culture where the rules for manhood don’t always align with our values, whose wisdom will they listen to and follow? We watch our sons change and mature. We watch them succeed, and we watch them fail. Knowing they must someday take over their own lives, we wonder how much to intervene. The line between too little help and too much help isn’t always clear to parents of boys today. Our sons must learn to bear the weight of their thoughts and actions, but how much is too much and how soon is too soon?

It’s difficult enough to deal with these questions and doubts when our sons are

small and relatively contained under our roofs. When our sons enter preschool and then school, the circle of adults with input and opinions and responsibility over our sons expands. Our choices and decisions and the conduct of our sons come under review. The schoolhouse is just one place where our parenting and the character of our sons can come into question. As you notice your son measuring the world and being measured by it, you may feel that now is the time to fully embrace the complexity of raising boys in this busy, challenging world. Now is the time to take a journey into the divine design of your son.

Boys Need to Know They're Made in God's Image

For me (Gregg), schooling is what challenged my family and me to look at the divine design of boys. In grade school and even through middle school, I often found myself bored and unmotivated, trapped in a curricular purgatory of meaningless worksheets and monotone lectures. I (and therefore my parents) would get comments from teachers such as “Gregg is disruptive in class” and “Gregg is not working up to his potential.” After many discipline referrals to the principal, I finally learned to play the game. I was mentored in how to power through the tedium of what I was expected to do so I could finally get to what I wanted to do. And contrary to some of the dire predictions prophesied to my parents and teachers over those early years, I actually did graduate high school and even went on to earn my doctorate.

As I established my career, I thought I had put all of that early anxiety and struggle behind me. Imagine my surprise when many of those feelings came flooding back as my sons began their schooling. Through my sons' eyes, I realized that not much had changed since I'd been in school. The tipping point toward looking at the design of boys for the sake of my sons came soon after my oldest—my namesake, Gregg—started sixth grade at a new school. One day he reported a weird thing that had caught his attention. At the start of each day, a line of boys paraded up to the teacher's desk and took some sort of pill. When he relayed this oddity, my heart sank. The only conclusion I could draw was these boys were being medicated, probably with Ritalin or a similar drug, probably for ADD or ADHD.

Not long after we learned this disturbing news, my wife and I were advised by school administrators to consider putting our son on medication as well. Hearing a

recitation of what he was like to “deal with” in class was like reading over the comments on my own childhood report cards. Please hear me: As a seasoned counselor, I know that some children absolutely need medication to cope with very real issues. But I also know that medication is being overprescribed; far too many social systems today, while being truly devoted to helping children succeed, simply do not understand the way boys are designed.

In our case, I knew my son did not need a prescription; he needed an environment that valued his male learning style, his male brain and biochemistry, his male culture. As I became even more intentional and involved in my sons’ academics, I came to realize it wasn’t just my boys who needed this shift in perspective from the adults in their lives and it wasn’t just about school. Boys as a group need us today as never before. They need to know that they are made in God’s image; they need to know they are not inherently flawed or inherently defective simply by being born male.

As Michael has said to me, “Boys are struggling to learn, mature, love, and succeed in a culture that values a few males very much—the ultra-rich, and the males who get to the top—but devalues or simply does not understand a lot of males to a dangerous degree.” I see evidence of this every day. Perhaps you, too, have noticed that most of the systems set up to help them spend little time actually studying their design as males. As a result, millions of boys are left struggling to understand how they are needed, and many will disappear into prisons, drugs, bad behavior, anxiety, and depression.

Raising Boys by Design begins from the perspective that God has designed boys to value and strive toward the mantle of maleness and that our culture is very hard on that maleness. Often a boy’s natural energy is seen as disruptive. A boy’s inquisitiveness is seen as disrespect for authority. A boy’s competitiveness and his fits and starts at leadership are seen as presumptive or flawed. A boy’s resilience is seen as uncaring and even too harsh. A boy’s tenacity is seen as arrogance. Many of the strengths designed into a particular boy become suspect or devalued. Gradually, the boy either instinctively rebels against this harsh interpretation of his inner self or withdraws into a deep loneliness.

I love my sons and their friends, and I know you love your sons and their friends. Whatever challenges you are facing, whatever joys you are experiencing, your boys are filled with the wonder and design God intended for them. Protecting

that design is our sacred work as parents of faith. Our choices in parenting will impact our child's present and future and also potentially hold eternal consequences. As parents of faith, we recognize that our children belong not only to us but first and foremost to God.

Design-Based Parenting

Michael and I come to this book with the belief that our children are designed for great things. Though he is Jewish and I am a Christian, we share a belief in a loving and omniscient God who created both male and female in the divine image. God designed intricate and elegant differences into the two genders. As neurobiology delves more deeply into the intricacies of creation, an increasingly clear picture emerges of the vital reality that boys and girls learn and grow differently.

This book represents a meeting of the Bible and brain science in *design-based parenting*, equipping you to integrate biblical truths with scientific outcomes in an intentional, thoughtful approach to helping your son thrive in every area of his life. We will help you aid your infant and toddler's development; get your son ready for school; infuse your son with discipline and follow through; guide your son in homework, academics, and cognitive growth; prepare your son for puberty and adolescence; communicate with your son about your own and his development, needs, and issues; assist him in becoming a hero in his world; and discover with him his God-given purpose in life.

The State of Boyhood in America

We also want to inspire you to become an advocate for boys in a complex world. There is a crisis facing boys and their families today. Let's begin by exploring it together so that we have an understanding of the challenges and opportunities we face.

I (Michael) first began to study male development in the late 1980s. As a young man I saw that gender conversations in universities and the media did not integrate biology and biochemistry (nature) into education or parenting. As I studied male and female neurobiology, I drew on my own complex boyhood for some of my inspiration.

Like Gregg, I had difficulty in school. At ten years old, I was put on Ritalin because of my hyperactivity. As a teen boy, I was somewhat lost. As a young man in college and graduate school, I felt a deep need to figure out how to help boys thrive. I married Gail in 1986, and we moved to Turkey, where I taught and completed multicultural research in gender. When we returned, Gail became pregnant with our first daughter, Gabrielle. My need to help children thrive became even more visceral. Then, in the early nineties, I saw in my counseling practice a number of families that were having trouble with their boys in school, at home, and in life. I also saw how much help the families experienced when they learned what made boys and men tick, how boys and girls learn differently, and the genetic nature of boys' and girls' brains and life development.

In 1996 *The Wonder of Boys* was published. By then, it was clear that both girls and boys were in crisis, though not in the same ways. Thankfully, the crises facing girls were being well expressed in our culture, but boys' issues were not. Thankfully, too, families had many resources to choose from in order to help them develop, grow, nurture, and protect their girls. But I did not see such resources for the families of boys.

Because I was seeing boys in my practice who were in significant distress and also a culture around me of families who were not in distress but just felt confused about how to raise sons in the postmodern world, I kept researching and publishing books on boys. In each of them—just as Gregg and I are doing in this book—I hoped to gather from my colleagues in the field the latest data and research on the state of boyhood in America.

Through presenting this data to you, Gregg and I hope to inspire both personal and social action on behalf of males—social action that does not harm females but in fact empowers them—so that whether or not your own son is facing issues at home, at school, or in life, you will feel emboldened to advocate for boys as a group as well as for one boy at a time.

Some Startling Statistics About Our Sons

Tom Mortenson, senior scholar and policy analyst at the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, has been tracking the state of boyhood in America for nearly four decades. He is the author of “The State of American Manhood,” published in *Postsecondary Education Opportunity*, March 2011. What

follows are just a few of his findings as well as findings from the federal government and from academic studies, all of which provide a distressing glimpse into the state of boyhood in America.

- Males are diagnosed with learning disabilities at almost triple the rate of females. For emotional disturbance diagnoses, that rate increases to more than triple.
- One and a half times as many preschool boys as girls are identified as developmentally delayed.
- Almost twice as many boys as girls struggle with completing regular schoolwork and behaving in the way school systems want them to behave. Boys make up between 80 and 90 percent of discipline referrals to the principal.
- Twice as many boys have speech difficulties, and three times as many boys are considered mentally disabled.
- Boys are almost twice as likely to repeat kindergarten as girls and over twice as likely to be suspended.
- Boys are expelled from public school at almost three times the rate of girls.
- For every girl who kills herself, 4 or more boys kill themselves.
- For every girl in a correctional facility, more than 8 boys are incarcerated.
- Among eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds, 14 males are incarcerated for every female incarcerated.
- For every 100 women who enter college, 78 men do.
- For every 100 women who earn a bachelor's degree, 75 men do.
- For every 100 women who earn a master's degree, 66 men do.
- For every 100 women who earn a doctorate, 80 men do.

These statistics are only the tip of the iceberg. At the heart of each statistic are a boy and his family struggling to cope with the weight of his situation. My (Gregg's) son could easily have become just another statistic, another boy medicated as a way to adjust to an academic environment not suited to addressing his maleness. In my practice, I've met boys and their families devastated by the realities of these statistics, attempting to come to terms with a diagnosis. These diagnoses, though well intended, can be accompanied by a label that creates its own set of harmful effects

as boys interpret themselves as being defective. This devalued self-image undermines a boy's sense of who he is—a young male who very much wants to prove himself and succeed in the challenges he is given.

Many of these challenges are growing and expanding statistically in negative ways. For more statistics regarding boys and men, please see my (Michael's) books *The Minds of Boys* and *A Fine Young Man*, which reveal, among other things:

- Around one million boys are being medicated for brain disorders earlier than there can be certainty of diagnosis. Some of these are as young as four or five years old.
- Boys get two-thirds of the Ds and Fs in our schools but less than half the As.
- Boys are behind girls in standardized test scores in all fifty states and in all fifty-two industrialized countries. (Only in math and science in some countries do boys outperform girls.)
- The majority of school dropouts are boys.

Our nation does not fully understand what boys need to thrive. As just one example of the depth of our cultural confusion about males, I (Michael) have never forgotten a meeting I had with a Department of Justice executive. When I asked him why hundreds of millions of dollars were being spent on positive and preventative girls' and women's programming but little money was earmarked to helping boys and men, he responded sheepishly, "Well, from the government's point of view, we already budget for boys and men—in our prison budgets." The irony and tragedy of that response continues to haunt me.

Nurturing a Cultural Shift on Behalf of Boys

As the father of two grown daughters and the author of *The Wonder of Girls*, I (Michael) am a strong advocate for girls and women. Certainly, studies on male distress don't negate issues girls and women face in our culture. But we must now band together, socially and publicly, to nurture our sons as we have done to change the world for our daughters.

As a society we need to figure out why we are seeing disturbing statistics that paint a picture of an increasingly steep climb toward manhood for boys today. Gregg and I hope to inspire you to talk with others in your community about what you believe are the causes of boys' distress today. In fact, throughout this book, we

will provide insights, ideas, and strategies with the constant encouragement that you use this book as a dialogue starter and a tool kit by which to accomplish your own personal study of boyhood as it is being lived around you.

To start things off, we'll pose one theory we think helps explain the challenges boys face.

One Possible Social Theory for Boys' Distress Today

In the sixties and seventies the cultural conversation about gender shifted as part of the movement to improve academic and social outcomes for females. In an effort to enhance equality, our culture bought into the idea that the design of boys and girls was inherently the same, that any suggestion of gender differences might be misused by men to catapult themselves over and beyond women.

Without a doubt, some cultural institutions were biased against girls and women, resulting in unfair treatment that needed to be addressed. But amid the well-intended efforts to level the playing field, we began condemning the very maleness of men—their nature element or their God-given design. Men and boys were (and to a great extent still are) seen as constantly victimizing girls and women with their inherent violence, anger, competitiveness, and search for power. As social movements empowered female nature and female God-given design, these movements broadened the possible expressions of womanhood and emphasized the assets of female design. Meanwhile, male distress went unnoticed. And the idea that males might be in distress because their maleness was not understood or valued in the culture was seen as anti-female, dangerous, or just plain wrong.

Now we are faced with boys falling further and further behind in school, emotional maturity, family life, and workplace success. We have just under two million males in our criminal justice and correction systems every year. While some prevailing social theories might use this statistic to say, “Those males are defective” or “The systems males create are defective,” the two of us join many others in the field of gender development to posit a deeper issue: our culture does not understand the nature and design of boys, and it enforces social systems that do not fully serve that nature and design.

This book works from the theory that, although both boys and girls reflect the image of God and share many characteristics, the inherent differences between male and female are vitally important. Michael's research in brain science shows

this (as you will see in chapter 2). I (Gregg) believe that Christians and readers of the Bible already intuit what science is showing. In Genesis 1:27 we read, “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Girls and boys, like women and men, are equal in God’s eyes, but they are different. Those differences are inherent within the construct of creation, designed into us by the will of God.

We encourage you to push beyond some present social theories of males and join us in considering that male-female differences are not inherently destructive but, instead, inherently constructive. We need to understand boys and men and thus create social systems that serve them as well as the systems now serving girls and women. In doing so, we will serve all of us: girls, boys, women, and men.

Ultimately, at least from the biblical perspective, it seems clear that God does not pit girls against boys, males against females; people do. In the biased social systems of the past, boys and girls and women and men were positioned as rivals in deeply damaging ways, including males taking far too much power from females. Where this kind of injustice against girls and women still lingers, all of us must continue to fight against it. But in the last fifty years, many social systems have become biased against boys. Let us now fight against this anti-male bias with as much fervor as we fight against anti-female attitudes.

When we contemplate, study, and nurture male design—not settling for a stereotype but taking a look at the wide spectrum of boys and men in the world—we get amazing results: boys of all kinds thrive, from the most Type A, high-energy, can’t-sit-still guy to the most sensitive, quiet, shy guy. Throughout this book we will share examples of this positive success from homes, schools, and communities much like your own.

■ Next Steps

Note: At the end of each chapter, you’ll find a section like this, intended to help you identify practical ways to act on what you’ve just learned, taking deliberate steps to help your son thrive and grow right now.

Each one of us is a product of our experiences, assumptions, and viewpoints. As we prepare to explore the nature and needs of your son, take a

moment to examine the perspectives that are currently shaping—perhaps unconsciously—your own parenting choices or the choices of others who care about your son.

Start a journal, whether in a notebook or on your computer, and note your initial responses to the following statements. Keep this journal close at hand as you read this book so you can add new notes and insights regarding your ongoing study of the boys and men around you.

- What gender biases against boys and men am I seeing in my family?
- What biases am I seeing in my son's school?
- What biases am I seeing in our church?
- What biases am I seeing among other families and people around me?
- Do I (or others) stereotype boys as disruptive, messy, inattentive?
- Do I (or others) stereotype boys as too insensitive, naturally disrespectful, unable to follow directions?
- Do I (or others) stereotype certain boys as tough, unfeeling, and bullies?
- Do I (or others) stereotype certain boys as weak, too sensitive, too soft?

As we examine our own and others' stereotypes regarding males, we take a powerful step in understanding the biases undermining the growth and development of our sons: how we were raised, how we related to our father and mother and to the males and females in our world, what we were told about gender similarities and differences, what we observed and what we concluded. All of this matters.

As you read this book and for the next several weeks, we hope you will pay attention to thoughts about gender that skitter across your mind as you interact with the world around you. Notice the generalizations you casually make. Turn up the volume of your truisms. Extract presuppositions from your subconscious and hold them up to the light to see if they reflect reality.

All parents are doing incredible work already to nurture, protect, and love their sons. Still, we can challenge ourselves and those around us to go even deeper into understanding the need for a clear, design-based approach to nurturing the blessed boys in our care.



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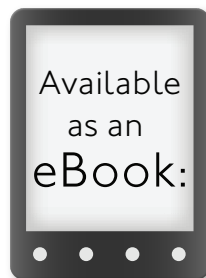
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