



Secure Daughters Confident Sons

How Parents GUIDE THEIR CHILDREN *into*
AUTHENTIC MASCULINITY *and* FEMININITY

Glenn T. Stanton

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Praise for
Secure Daughters, Confident Sons

“Excellent! Timeless wisdom is dispensed with clarity and refreshing lightness. If you are serious about raising great kids, you must read this book.”

—MEG MEEKER, MD, pediatrician and author of the best-selling
Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters

“*Secure Daughters, Confident Sons* provides a powerful vision of raising girls and boys in an ever-changing world. Combining brain science with a Christian perspective, Glenn Stanton inspires parents and teachers to be at once visionary and practical. This book is inspiring and far reaching.”

—MICHAEL GURIAN, author of *The Wonder of Boys* and
The Wonder of Girls

“In this delightful book, Glenn Stanton lovingly reveals the secrets of raising healthy sons and daughters.”

—LOUANN BRIZENDINE, MD, author of *The Female Brain*
and *The Male Brain*

“*Secure Daughters, Confident Sons* will help you become a secure, confident parent in raising gender-healthy children. It offers rich insight and highly practical applications for empowering your children to be all God intended when He made them male or female.”

—ROBERT LEWIS, founder of Men’s Fraternity and author
of *Raising a Modern-Day Knight*

“The culture tells us that the lines separating male and female are meaningless, but Glenn Stanton has tapped into the critical importance of recognizing and cultivating the distinct qualities of boys and girls. His book gives parents practical tools to help them appreciate and develop the femininity of their daughters and the masculinity of their sons. Glenn’s work

demonstrates that each gender is uniquely gifted by God for a purpose, and by celebrating these gender-specific behaviors and attitudes, we strengthen families and help men and women find purpose and fulfillment.”

—JIM DALY, president and CEO of Focus on the Family

“Every parent is raising a boy or girl into manhood or womanhood. There is no third option. Glenn Stanton has done parents and grandparents a noble service in helping us understand—based on insights of emerging science and the ancient wisdom of Christianity—how mothers and fathers both guide their children into healthy, balanced, and authentic masculinity and femininity. I know moms and dads—as well as those who want to understand how and why gender matters—will be helped by this important book.”

—JOHN ROSEMOND, family psychologist and author of
The Well-Behaved Child: Discipline That Really Works!

“Glenn Stanton has courageously addressed one of the most challenging yet rarely discussed aspects of parenting: what is the essence of your child’s gender? His observations are not only insightful, but also practical. In a world steeped in gender confusion, this resource is invaluable.”

—DR. JULI SLATTERY, author and psychologist, Focus on the Family

“We live in a time of almost breathtaking confusion over things that should be basic, like the difference between boys and girls. Parents need good guidance in the midst of such confusion, and Glenn Stanton offers this kind of advice in *Secure Daughters, Confident Sons*. The secular world tells us that masculinity and femininity are merely social constructs that we must learn to leave behind, but Stanton believes that a proper understanding of manhood and womanhood is essential to Christian faithfulness and human happiness. I am thankful for his conviction and his courage.”

—DR. R. ALBERT MOHLER JR., president of the Southern Baptist
Theological Seminary

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Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

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Affectionately dedicated to five amazing gifts:

Olivia Glenn
Reed Schaeffer
Sophia Grace
Tess Elizabeth
Isabel Lee

You each have taught me profoundly about the beauty,
mystery, and wonder of humanity
found in what it means to be male and female
without even being aware of it.

One of the greatest joys of my life has been watching you grow
and become God's women and man.

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Acknowledgments | xi |
| Introduction: The Importance of Difference | 1 |

PART I

A CLEAR VISION FOR AUTHENTIC MANHOOD AND WOMANHOOD—AND HOW TO HELP YOUR KIDS GET THERE

| | |
|--|-----|
| 1 What Makes a Good Man? | 19 |
| 2 What Makes a Good Woman? | 35 |
| 3 What a Boy Needs Most | 57 |
| 4 What a Girl Needs Most | 81 |
| 5 The Journey to Manhood: Making Healthy Men out of Healthy Boys | 109 |
| 6 Metamorphosis to Womanhood: Making Healthy Women out of Healthy Girls | 131 |

PART II

WHY BOYS AND GIRLS NEED MOTHERS AND FATHERS

| | |
|---|-----|
| 7 Why It's Good When Mom and Dad Disagree | 151 |
| 8 The Serious Business of Play | 165 |

| | | |
|---|--|-----|
| 9 | How Moms and Dads Together Influence Language Development | 183 |
| 10 | Balancing Grace and Discipline | 193 |
| 11 | Preparation Versus Protection: Why Both Dad and Mom Are Right | 201 |
| 12 | Your Child Is a Sexual Being | 211 |
| 13 | How Mom and Dad Raise Kids Who Care | 229 |
| 14 | Gender Differences: The Basis for a Healthy Family | 237 |
| Appendix: Are Men and Women Really Different? | | |
| | Consulting the Sciences | 247 |
| | Notes | 265 |

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Some authors write books to fulfill a contract. Others write books because they feel a particular volume just has to be written and they cannot rest until it is completed. My reason for writing this book falls into the latter category. It addresses a vital issue of our age.

Three folks had a very direct role in the formation of this book. First is my literary agent, Blythe Daniel, who helped me find a good publisher to work with. She helped usher the book through from early idea stage to final product. And to make the whole feat a bit more interesting, she had twins while caring for her sweet toddler in the midst of it all. That's awesome, folks. Laura Barker, the gifted editorial director at WaterBrook Multnomah, maintained a smart vision for the project from the start and helped with wise and patient guidance. Brad Lewis, whom I had the fortune of working on each of my other books with, was a masterful final editor who made my words, ideas, and research sound better than they originally were. I was blessed to have this mighty team of three to work so closely with.

My wife, Jackie, and four of my kids gave me up for long hours to read countless journal articles and books on the subjects covered in these pages, as well as the extensive process of writing, editing, and rewriting. I did a great deal of this work during my oldest daughter's drama practices as I waited around, hunched over journal articles, books, and laptop, in the quiet recesses of her school's hallways while she was practicing with her cast in *Annie Get Your Gun*. A husband and father of five with a full-time job and travel schedule must multitask deftly.

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I hope that you, the reader, feel as I do, that this is a book that needed to be written. I pray it guides you in the vital and necessary task of raising boys and girls to be great men and women.

INTRODUCTION

The Importance of Difference

Scott is all boy. At age six, he's the apple of his dad's eye. He learned quickly how to catch a football, kick a soccer ball, and swing a bat. Dad is itching to help him become a pro. The little bruiser loves to be with dad and soaks up every drop of his attention. But he also seems to have a great interest in caring for small animals, nurturing them as if he were their mom. When he and dad are playing in the front yard and a dog comes by, little Scott forgets all about the game and runs straight for the animal. This concerns dad...and mom too, but for different reasons. Dad wonders what normal boy allows anything to distract him from playing ball, other than perhaps a pretty girl. But certainly not this uncontrollable attraction to hugging dogs. Why can't his boy be a little more *boy*? Shouldn't he be caring more about "big boy" things by now? Has mom's concern for his safety—what if the dog bites?—encouraged Scott to be a little too soft? Should dad get him a dog—or take him hunting instead?

Alisa is a princess. Not specifically one princess, but several in any given day. Sometimes she's Cinderella, sometimes Snow White, other times Jasmine or Ariel. Most often, she's any kind of princess she can cobble together out of her available dress-up resources and from the creativity of her imagination. For Alisa, the frillier and shinier the better. Her mom is uncomfortable with Alisa being so stereotypical. She doesn't like the unrealistic role models of the Disneybots so prevalent among girls today. But what should Alisa's mom do? She always intended for her daughter to be a strong and independent woman, and this road lined with glitter and satin isn't the one she feels will ultimately take Alisa there.

Every one of us spends every day being either a man or a woman. But what does that really mean? What do male qualities really look like? What are essentially female characteristics? Do these qualities even exist? How do we *be* male or female—and how do we know when we aren't?

At its core, this book is simply about what everyone is. And that's either male or female. For all the diversity we see in the world, the different sorts of human beings who have populated our world throughout history have been made up of only two major kinds. And all the infinite human variety around us stems from these essential two types. There are a zillion and three ways to be a healthy, well-rounded man or woman. But at the same time, there are behaviors, attitudes, and perspectives that we universally and specifically understand as masculine or feminine. Unmistakably.

That brings us to the primary purpose of this book.

With human sex differences, most often the discussion these days unfortunately runs to one extreme or the other. In one corner, we have the “nothing to see here” folks who believe that sex differences are minor, biological “plumbing” issues and that gender is a concept created largely by cultural assumptions, prejudices, and sexism intended to keep people in their places.¹

In the other corner, we have the vigorous Macho Joes and the Pretty-in-Pinks. Pure and simple, neat and easy: a boy is wild, only interested in contact sports, hunting, and getting dirty. A girl is only a girl if she is captivated by makeup, clothes, babies, gentleness, and sweetness. They would have us believe that any boy or girl who doesn’t fit neatly into one of these two boxes isn’t healthy or well adjusted.

Is there any territory between these two extremes? a space where we can talk truly and universally about male and female differences? I know there is, and it’s why I wrote this book. As parents raising little people whom nature signed up to represent one of these two types, shouldn’t we be more interested in helping them navigate the vast terrain in the middle than shoving them into either of the corners?

This is the space we’ll be exploring together to gain a clearer understanding of what’s truly and authentically male or female and how this translates into parenting children who are distinctly unique from us, in partnership with a spouse whose essential makeup is fundamentally different from our own. I believe this task—raising daughters secure in their femininity and sons confident in their masculinity—is an important one for parents, and it just so happens that the natural and social sciences agree. This is the first book that addresses this important topic altogether, much less in this depth, drawing from the breadth of established and emerging scientific discovery and examining this research in the light of the Christian story. We explore this question by asking not just what

masculinity or femininity looks like in your nation or part of the world but across human experience, because this is where we understand it best and most authentically.

If each of us is male or female, then every day of our lives and every interaction is colored, indeed *determined*, by this first fundamental difference. No person is exempt or ever will be. And it has been this way since the first two humans arrived on the scene.

The two underlying questions we need to explore that stem from this fact are these:

1. How do we develop from childhood to healthy adulthood along one of these two lines?
2. What role does the gender or sex of parents play in guiding children in this process?

Our singular goal is nothing other than a healthy family of well-adjusted, happy human beings, because to be human is to be gendered.

So let's start at square one.

ARE THERE REALLY ESSENTIAL GENDER DIFFERENCES?

Maybe your interest in this subject goes back to your own childhood. How did you develop? Your kids have a vested interest in this question. Before we get into this fascinating discovery, let me invite you to pause for a moment to think about your own gender and its virtue. No deep or heavy stuff. Just sit back, clear your mind, and think with me for a moment.

For all of our differences and our unique stories about growing up in different places of the world—perhaps in strange and wonderful families—maturing into adults, we all started the same way: in the dark, warm security of our mother's womb. I know this about you.

You grew day by day with all the potential and promise you'd even-

tually realize. Within weeks, the news of your existence changed a number of people's lives forever in important ways. Great *consequence* and *significance* came from your existence. Your mother's first two thoughts of you were likely this, and in this order, probably not too far apart:

I'm pregnant!

Wow, I wonder what it is?

She wasn't the only one who wondered about your gender. It was the first question people wondered or asked about you! Which would you be: a rascally little boy or a precious little girl? In fact, at the news of a baby's birth, people will typically ask, "What is it?" before they ask, "Is the baby healthy?"

What's more, everyone who meets you every day of your life following your birth will note immediately whether you are male or female. Every one of us immediately begins to form opinions, questions, and thoughts based upon gender. You do the same with everyone you meet, most likely without even being aware of it. No one has ever said, "You know, I didn't even notice if that person was a man or a woman." When you tell about hearing the most captivating speaker the other day or meeting the nicest person on a trip, you genderize the details without even noticing. It's no small part of the story you are telling.

What I want us to consider is *why*.

We do this because knowing a person's sex is our first effort to *understand* and *identify*, to *connect*. As humans, we are made to ask, *What is it?* We intuitively organize everything into appropriate categories. With children, we can't initially know whether he will be more analytical or creative, what sort of humor she will have, what his personality will be, or what career she might pursue. But we can know what gender a child is, and most parents would agree it's a pretty important fact to know at the start. Knowing if we are having a little boy or a little girl means so much more than what color we will paint the nursery. Regardless of our views

on gender, our children's sex determines how we'll interact with them, what we'll do or not do with them, and how they will understand and identify us.

Recently, our oldest daughter, Olivia, had her first crush over to our house. The two of them made pizza for the family, and it was a milestone event for all of us. Our youngest daughter, Isabel, is a second grader. She excitedly asked if Michael was staying for a sleepover. For Isabel, that's what good friends do on special evenings—they stay up late watching movies and then they sleep over. Why would this be any different?

Well, because of gender. Gender matters, and in countless different ways.

Think about how this works itself out in adulthood. At a final job interview, this time with the CEO, an interviewee has made a good impression. After offering the position to the candidate, the CEO extends this invitation: "Listen, I've got a beautiful new Catalina 470 and my family doesn't like sailing. How'd you like to join me next weekend out at the Cape?"

A nice invitation and great opportunity. But what if the CEO is a woman and the new employee a married man, or vice versa? Sex differences would completely change the nature of the invitation from friendly to awkward or even a bit creepy. Imagine a woman coming home to tell her husband about the new job and the sailing invitation. No doubt, he will care quite deeply about the male-female question, and he'd be legitimately concerned if his wife wasn't. This is universally true.

In my day job at Focus on the Family, I handle a good share of calls from media on various issues relating to gender identity and the family. More than one reporter has asked if gender is really that important in parenting. Many believe the popular but false line that children just need loving and caring parents.

"I hear your busy newsroom in the background," I respond. "Say it

was staffed exclusively by men. How different do you think the environment and your publication would be if that were the case? Doesn't a great publication like yours simply need smart and talented journalists, regardless of sex difference?"

Usually I hear a nervous chuckle, followed by a sheepish, "I get your point." If a newspaper, magazine, or television news program needs distinctive gender-specific input and influence, how much more does the family that is generated by these differences? In most given human situations, it's silly to believe gender makes no meaningful difference.

Male and female matter! The argument that says otherwise is merely a cultural construction of the past few decades.

DIFFERENCE MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE

Let's now consider the importance of differences. Difference is what makes the world work. Consider the book you're holding. The contrast of the black ink on the white page makes it work. It's simple, but profound. The cooperative contrast of these two different elements creates something useful. No one asks, "Why can't we work for more similarity between the print and the page?" The power and effectiveness of the print and page is in their complete contrast and difference and in the way they work together—the same kind of dissimilarity that makes electricity work, cars run, airplanes fly, bicycles go, doors lock, knives cut, atoms spin, and electrons fire. This sophisticated computer I'm writing on—and those that now run the world—works by the simple distinction of ones and zeros.

Difference makes the world work.

Think of how God explains His account of creation. He does so by distinction—light and darkness, water and sky, and so on. The first thing we learn in the Bible is that God is distinct from creation; in the

beginning God *was* and creation *was not*. Then God created, and it was. *Distinct!*

God's first creative act is really separation and distinction: light from darkness (see Genesis 1:3–5). Next, water from sky, then sea from land. God continues this dividing and contrasting in the creatures of the sea and the air, the animals of the land, and finally, man, different and distinct from the animals (see verses 24–30). This is how God explains the world to us, with whom He shares it.

Then humanity is given a profound distinction. The first chapter of Scripture tells us that after five days of creating, God declares He would make something with a grand uniqueness: it will bear His image, giving the created world a tangible and experiential picture of the invisible and immeasurable God. He says, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (verse 26).

As splendid as all of creation was—the clown fish, the gazelle, the panda, the millipede, the peregrine falcon, the sunflower, the coral reefs—how could God best represent His own splendor in a created being?

God tells us plainly: “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (verse 27).

Male and female! Are you one of these? If so, you just learned the most profound truth about yourself—and your gender—that you could know. It describes you and all those around you, forever shaping how you receive and treat them.

Both man and woman *are* uniquely the earthly image of the invisible God. The distinguished scholar Leon Kass, from the University of Chicago, illuminates the importance of this word *image* in his careful study of Genesis, where he notes the Hebrew word translated “image” is *tselem*, from a root meaning “to cut off,” “to chisel”; literally, something cut or chiseled out. This word brings to mind a sculpture representing some-

thing greater. The artist of the sculpture is saying to us, “Look at this that I am creating and be reminded of something larger, the bigger *something* it stands for. Something worth knowing about.” Kass says,

Any image, insofar as it is an image, has a most peculiar manner of being: it both *is* and *is not* what it resembles. The image of my granddaughter that smiles at me out of the picture frame on my desk *is* my granddaughter—not yours. But it is *not* really she—just a *mere* image. Although being merely a likeness, an image not only resembles but also points to, and is dependent for its very being on, that of which it is an image. Man, like any other creature, is simply what he is. But according to the text [of Genesis], he is—in addition—also something more insofar as he resembles the divine.² (emphasis in the original)

We are all image bearers of the Divine. And don’t miss this point: It is our *gendered* humanity that images God. God was certain to make that clear on the first page of His Word to us, and it can’t be missed: “In the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

Any observer can tell that man and woman are different without even trying because of this deeply divine distinction—a distinction that shows us something important about the nature of God. We can’t fully understand *how* this is, but we know *that* it is.

Understanding how we grow children into healthy men and women is certainly about healthy human development, but it’s about *so* much more. Because God is imaged in male and female, raising boys and girls is a deeply divine task. This first human truth that we are either male or female is a central part of the divine story.

The beautiful, passionate, and intimate contrast and cooperation of male and female is the door we all pass through to get to where we are

today. Humanity is like an elite country club: you have to know someone on the inside to get in. We call these special connections *parents*. Both must be involved in your entrance, because the hard-and-fast, nonnegotiable rule of the club is clear: no mom, no dad, no entrance. Every one of us is a living testimony to the importance and beauty of the essential cooperation between male and female.

THE END GAME OF PARENTING

My desire is to help you teach your child to navigate between the two extreme views of gender identity that are present in our culture today. One group firmly believes that the way you nurture or socialize a child trumps the work of nature; the other demands that no amount of nurture should change the inborn wild-at-heart or captivating nature of boys and girls.

Our definition of gender has to involve both nature and nurture to truly explain the essential difference and how we authentically live in our humanity throughout distinct cultures of the world. Our natures are real, but so are our nurturing environments. If not, parenting would simply be about providing food, clothing, and shelter.

I love what Dorothy Boyd (played by Renée Zellweger) in the movie *Jerry Maguire* says about raising her little boy without a father. She says all her girlfriends are out “trying to get a man. Trying to keep a man. Not me, I’m trying to raise a man!”

Here’s a mom who knows what her end game is. Just how do we take these new members of this prestigious humanity club who come to us as boys or girls and turn them into happy, well-adjusted men and women?

Proverbs 22:6 exhorts parents to “train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” (NIV). Solomon tells us two things here:

1. How we train a child will affect the kind of adult he or she grows into.
2. There is a way *each* child should go.

It's not just that there is one path that's right for all children. This is certainly true when we think of qualities like truthfulness, compassion, and diligence—these apply to everyone. But it also means there's a way that *each* child should go! God makes every one of us distinct individuals. He doesn't use a mold. And He delights in this individuality. Our job as parents is to honor that uniqueness and nurture it. Parent, raise your child in the way *he* or *she* should go, not the way they do it next door or like some group at church or those impressive camps or schools. They are not raising *your* child. Your job is to pay attention to the way this unique little person should be going. For God has a unique and important life for your child to live.

How can you possibly raise a gender-secure son or daughter if you don't know what the end game looks like? Who starts out on a journey simply hoping and trusting they'll arrive without considering the destination and how to get there? I'm convinced parents today are worse off than at any other time in human history because of the doubts the world has placed in our minds about the importance and even the existence of sex distinction.

I write this book as a much-needed and realistic guide, out of my fifteen years of experience as a full-time researcher in family-strengthening work, where I have carefully examined the social and psychological sciences on how mothers and fathers contribute to healthy child development. But I also write it out of my practical experience of more than twenty-seven years of marriage and raising five children with my wife. I have a deep and personal interest in this topic for myself, for our children, and for my friends and family members who are parents as well.

Our gender distinction carries profound meaning in God's story. So

I share from both a personal and professional perspective, informed by both science and theology, which really do affirm each other.

Unfortunately, the issue of gender distinction has become a politically loaded topic. Too many people have bought into the notion that *different* means *unequal* and that the only way to increase the standing of women in society is to downplay the differences between male and female. However, I don't understand how it elevates women to make them more like men and to make men more like women. The fact is, women have great power, influence, and intuition that men don't have, while men have powers, influences, and ways of looking at life that women don't have. This truth is beneficial to both and empowers both.

Which is better? Are fruits more important than vegetables? Is sunshine more important than rain? Both are most important, just like male and female. We can't sustain a civil and productive culture without both.

My intention is not to upset people. If the rhetoric of political correctness keeps us from exploring the issue of gender differences, we lose something valuable to our humanity. Amazing scientific evidences of essential sex difference in the fields of anthropology, psychology, endocrinology, and neurology in the last few decades strongly disprove nearly all the thinking that drove the misunderstandings about gender in the first place. In fact, the more sophisticated this scientific research gets, the more it deepens our insight into the importance of male and female differences and how profoundly they exist within us.

AREN'T BOYS AND GIRLS MORE SIMILAR THAN DIFFERENT?

I often hear that while all this "difference stuff" might be true, men and women are more similar than different. I readily agree. They are both human, no small fact. Each is a thinking and feeling being with two arms

and two legs who walks upright. They both show emotion and speak to communicate ideas and desires. Both will laugh, cry, and experience sadness. They both find enjoyment in working and relaxing. There are hundreds of ways men and women are similar.

But many things are more similar than different, yet their variations and distinctions carry significance. Consider salt and sugar, a horse and a zebra. Imagine giving Johnny Cash a ukulele just before he goes on stage at Folsom Prison and telling him everything's cool because it's more similar to a guitar than it is different.

Small differences can indeed make all the difference! Dr. Louann Brizendine, a neuropsychiatrist at the University of California in San Francisco, explains this similarity-difference issue nicely in her excellent book *The Female Brain*:

More than 99 percent of male and female genetic coding is exactly the same. Out of the thirty thousand genes in the human genome, the less than one percent variation between the sexes is small. But that percentage difference influences *every single cell in our bodies*—from the nerves that register pleasure and pain to the neurons that transmit perception, thoughts, feelings, and emotions.³ (emphasis added)

WHAT IS ESSENTIALLY MALE OR FEMALE?

So what are the distinctive qualities of the human male and female? This monumental question is one well worth considering, and I hope to help us understand the answers. However, to keep us from being disappointed in any collection of qualities, we need to recognize that answering this question demands a very big view. No list or description could pretend to capture *every* aspect of masculinity or femininity. Others could come up

with genuine qualities that I leave out. But a substantive, respectable, and descriptive collection of genuine and largely universal man and woman qualities can be assembled, and I try to do that in this book.

So I invite you to read on with an open mind. Briefly, here's what lies ahead:

- Chapters 1 and 2 describe the distinctly and largely cross-cultural male and female qualities boys and girls possess.
- Chapters 3 and 4 explore how parents reinforce masculine and feminine qualities in their sons and daughters.
- Chapters 5 and 6 look at these gender-distinct qualities, exploring how we want our sons and daughters to turn out as men and women and what we can do to help them get there.
- Chapters 7–13 examine how the same male-female qualities in us as moms and dads contribute a broad array of necessary things in the healthy development of our children's well-being, security, compassion, confidence, intellect, and maturity.
- Chapter 14 explores how gender differences affect your marriage and how you can use that wonderful difference to raise amazing children.
- Finally, for those who want to dig a little deeper, the appendix provides additional and fascinating scientific data that point to the important gender differences in men and women across diverse human cultures.

As you take in and weigh all of this information, my prayer for you is twofold: first, that you will gain a deeper understanding of the God-given differences between male and female that exist in wonderful and mysterious ways in your children; and second, that you will gain an appreciation for how gender distinctions between you and your spouse

provide essential contributions to the growth and maturity of your developing boys and girls.

Raising secure daughters and confident sons is, by definition, gender-distinct work. It's the most important work going on in the world, and the next generation and those following are counting on us to get it right.

Learn more about
Glenn Stanton at
Glennstanton.wordpress.com/