

# Masculine vs. Feminine – A New Church Perspective

By David Murrow

## Are we creating a feminized worship climate?

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Pete's a worship leader at a thriving church -- but he's noticed a disturbing trend. "The guys just aren't into worship like the women are," he says. "There's always a handful of guys who really get it, but most men stand there with their hands in their pockets." Pete continues: "Every Sunday we see women slain in the Spirit, weeping, utterly broken before God. But most of the men seem cool, detached and passive."

The reality of the gender divide came home to Pete during a recent trip to the Holy Land. One Friday morning he was enjoying breakfast on a balcony overlooking an open-air mosque. He looked down and saw dozens of Muslim men worshipping there. He was struck by their enthusiasm. "They were not hesitant at all. They knew their role and engaged themselves with gusto. I wish Christian men knew how to express themselves in worship."

So what's the difference? Why are Muslim men such enthusiastic worshippers, when Christian men are not? And what of our own faith heritage? Why were the men of the Bible such fervent worshippers, while today's churchgoing men seem so hesitant? So bored?

The evidence points to a startling conclusion: mosques provide an ideal worship environment for men. So did the early church. But too often, our modern churches do not.

Many of today's common worship practices foster a feminine spirit in the church. Without even realizing it, we've created the perfect environment for sensitive women and soft-hearted men to meet with Jesus. But masculine men stay away. Your average construction worker may feel like he has to check his testosterone at the sanctuary door. What's worse, the men who do show up for church often feel hesitant and restrained.

You may be thinking: *a feminine spirit in church? What are you talking about?* Those of us who've grown up in church don't notice anything out of balance. We can't imagine church any other way. But unchurched men notice – and vote with their feet. This is a major reason 61 percent of the adult worshippers in our churches are female. Why up to 90 percent of the boys who are raised in church will abandon it by their 20<sup>th</sup> birthday, many never to return.

Here are some of the specific ways we're creating a feminized worship climate:

**CORNY, SENTIMENTAL ELEMENTS.** Men respect excellence. If your worship service feels like amateur hour, men will recoil. What a woman may see as heartfelt and homespun, her husband often sees as hokey and half-baked. Prayer-and-share, tear-jerking sentimental stories, and 7-year-olds playing the offertory warm the hearts of women, but leave most men cold.

**EMOTIVE DISPLAYS.** Charismatic churches often encourage their members to express strong emotion during worship. While there's nothing wrong with this, our society looks down on men who lose control emotionally (women face no similar censure). Men need a good cry now and then, but if we judge a man's faith by how many tears he sheds, we've set him up for failure.

**DÉCOR.** Believe it or not, décor makes a difference. Many sanctuaries are painted a soft pink, eggshell white or lavender with cushiony pews and neutral carpet. The altar features fresh flowers while the walls are adorned with quilts or felt banners. Honestly, how do we expect men to connect with a masculine God, in a space that feels so feminine?

**FEMININE TERMINOLOGY.** Christian men talk different. We never use words like precious, tender and sharing – words you'd never hear on the lips of your average guy. We talk about the saved and the lost; men don't want to be either. And here's the biggie: a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. That term never appears in Scripture, yet it's become the number one way we describe the Christian walk. Why? It frames the gospel in terms of a woman's deepest desire – a personal relationship with a man who loves her unconditionally. Even men's ministries are encouraging guys to "have a passionate, intimate relationship with Christ" and to "fall deeply in love with Jesus." How would you react if one of your male friends asked to have a passionate, intimate relationship with you? Doesn't this feel a little creepy?

**MUSIC FITS WOMEN'S TASTES.** Reformation hymns spoke of battle, blood and victory. But today's praise songs are mainly love songs to Jesus. The lyrics grow more romantic by the day, and they have the same breathless feel as the top 40 love songs.

*Hold me close, let your love surround me. Bring me near; draw me to your side.*

*I'm desperate for you, I'm lost without you.*

*Let my words be few. Jesus, I am so in love with you.*

Think of the mental gymnastics that must take place inside a man's subconscious mind as he sings lyrics like these. He's trying to express his love to Jesus, a man who lives today, using words no man would dare say to another, set to music that sounds like the love songs his wife listens to in the car.

It's not just the lyrics: the music itself is getting slower and dreamier. Market research shows that men like robust, fast-paced music with a driving beat. For example, album-oriented rock, known for its blaring guitars and bone-rushing percussion, draws an audience that's 69 percent male. Soft adult contemporary, known for its tender love songs, attracts 67 percent female ears. Our current obsession with slow, romantic, repetitive choruses is creating frustration among men.

So how can we make our worship services a place where anyone, masculine or feminine, can encounter the living God? Here are some practical steps:

**EMPHASIZE THE CHALLENGE AND RISK OF FOLLOWING JESUS.** Pastor Doug Giles laments today's "I'm in therapy forever" church. Yes, we need to comfort the hurting, but at some point we've got to issue a stern challenge to followers of Jesus. Christ promised the disciples arrest, floggings, betrayal, persecution and death (Matt 10). Men have to sense they are in a huge battle, rather than a huge support group.

**MUSIC FOR MEN.** I could write a book on this topic. Play songs in men's vocal range. We need at least a couple of songs that portray Jesus as leader instead of lover. And don't assume that singing is the only way to lift up Christ. Instead...

**EXPLORE OTHER WAYS TO GIVE PRAISE TO GOD.** Today, worship and singing are synonymous. Worship includes singing, but there's so much more to it! Discover the many ways to give praise and adoration to God. You might even skip the singing at the next men's gathering.

Take men outside. How many times have you heard this from a man: *I feel closer to God when I'm out in the woods than when I'm sitting in a church.* This isn't an excuse, it's the truth! John Eldredge advises, "If you want men to learn how to worship, take them outside. Take them into contexts where their heart is alive and it will come naturally." Yet 99 percent of Christian worship takes place indoors. What a tragedy!

**FEATURE MEN UP FRONT DURING WORSHIP.** If men see other men leading worship (especially masculine men), they will be more inclined to worship themselves.

**LITTLE THINGS MATTER.** Please, no holding hands. **Go light on the sentiment.** Drop the prayer-and-share time. These strategies will probably get more men in church. **But if we want more men *in Christ*, we must rediscover personal discipleship.** Jesus took a small group of 12 men and showed them what a life pleasing to God looks like. **If we want men to come alive in faith,** we must do the same. **Men learn by example.** A good sermon might give men knowledge, and a good worship set might give them a release, but **they will never mature in Christ without personal, intentional discipleship from another man they know and trust.**

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