



LET BOYS BE NON-MEDICATED BOYS

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We've all heard it before—stories, that is, from people reminiscing about the “good ol’ days” when they were kids.

“When I was a boy,” they say with an antiquated shimmer in their eye, “we could roam the streets, climb the tallest of trees, and discover adventure with an undaunted courage that would rival the expeditions of Lewis and Clark.” As a confession, I love it when I get a chance to talk with folks about “the good ol’ days,” and I have heard this type of reflection many times when talking to older men about their childhood. In fact, I remember feeling this way at times when I was a child. There seemed to be no limits to what we could do in our neighborhood—our arena. The only “rules” my parents gave us were to not leave the neighborhood and to not go into anyone’s home. Other than that, there were no rules... so it seemed. The neighborhood was ours for the taking. It was our own Appalachian Trail to explore; our own urban landscape to inspect—every nook and cranny.

I remember feeling at home when I was exploring the neighborhood, being outside, and unleashing my Mt. Everest amount of energy onto beaten-up driveway basketball courts and cul-de-sacs that were scarred with bicycle tire marks. It was home. It was familiar. It was a place I didn’t get into trouble for my energy levels. Yes, it was kid world—as my mother-in-law calls it—but I could breathe, because there were no walls, no desks, and no quiet times where I had to sit still and conform to an expectation of a modern learning style.

However, when the time came to sit at that desk during school hours, I felt far from home. Early on in my schooling, I learned quickly that I abhorred school. I earned heaps of trouble; I couldn’t ever sit still; and I had atrocious grades. Like many boys with mountains of energy about them, it was considered a problem. Because of this, the answer for my learning disabilities and bad behavior

was Ritalin. I was on Ritalin for two full school years. I don't fault my parents, but it was terrible; it completely changed my personality. I went from vibrant and full of life to shy and awkward. I didn't talk to anyone while I was medicated. When the Ritalin eventually wore off, I found myself returning to my normal personality—after school—when it was time to return to the comfort zone of wandering my neighborhood.

My story is a common story for many boys. I talk with parents often about their intentions in medicating with Ritalin. I get it. They want their boys to succeed, have good grades, and not get in trouble, but there is a considerable complication with this manner of thinking. Sometimes, though, it might be needed. For instance, there are times when this sort of medication is medically necessary. I'm not a doctor, and I'll be the first to admit that I don't know all the ins and outs, but I do think that because we live in a fallen world, there are cases where it might be needed. Even the goodness of boyhood energy is broken by the fall. But in most cases, I think we are getting the diagnosis wrong. When we see problems with our boys like...

- Doesn't play well by themselves
- Doesn't sit still
- Fidgety
- Easily distracted
- Loud and talkative

...we often diagnosis those symptoms as a problem. As Albert Mohler has said, "We want to find a diagnosis in a problem, and we want to find a savior in a pill." To me, these problems seem more like God-given characteristics of what it means to actually be a boy—a non-medicated boy. I would suggest to you that the diagnosis of boyhood is not a problem to solve, but a tension to love, channel, and celebrate, as we teach boys how to take dominion over their energy.

Instead of medicating, here's what I would recommend instead:

LOVE IT

Love the energy in your child. God has uniquely created your child and gifted them in great ways (Ps. 139:13; Rom. 12:3-8; Eph. 2:10). Don't become adverse towards them for their God-given nature of desiring to climb stuff and punch each other. Boys don't often want to sit Indian style in a circle and play quietly and relationally.

Buy dangerous trampolines for your backyard. Wrestle with your boys in the living room floor. Let them climb all over your back like Mt. Kilimanjaro. Use your conscience here, but give them permission to run around and explore the neighborhood—and kid world. Have dance parties in your kitchen. Buy them dirt bikes, not just normal bikes. Put them in Little League, Pee Wee Football, and put a basketball in their hands. And when you do this, you'll learn to love how God shaped them, instead of perceiving their energy as a problem to solve.

CHANNEL IT

Furthermore, teach boys to channel their energy. This will take time, yes, but when you give them a legion of outlets at their disposal, they will eventually begin to find a favorite one. When they do, channel them to their favorite outlet.

My outlet-of-choice as a child was the sport of basketball. I loved the game at an early age, and I learned quickly that I was okay at it. I spent hours and hours in my driveway playing basketball. So much, in fact, that my neighbors would come out at midnight and finally ask me to go inside. I played on the Varsity team as a freshman, and I played AAU with a traveling team sponsored by Nike. Several of my past high school and college teammates play in the NBA, or professionally overseas. I even coached high school basketball for a few years after seminary. Basketball allowed me to channel the mountains of energy I had through middle school and high school. Today, I have learned to channel this energy in different ways, and over the years, God has taught me that this is a gift to be used for his glory, not a curse to medicate.

CELEBRATE IT

And, finally, I would encourage you to celebrate the energy in boys. As we learn to love it ourselves, and then channel it in them, we also need to celebrate their energy with them. Boys do not need to feel like they are a disappointment or a problem because of their energy. I know that's easier said than done; there will be times when they need to actually sit still (e.g., the dinner table, Sunday morning worship, family devotions, etc.). In the event they do these sometimes-impossible acts, celebrate that with them, and discipline them when they don't. When boys are learning quietude, they are learning to exercise dominion over their life. It's not all outlets of energy and no self-control. We want them to learn self-control and times of stillness. The conquering spirit of young boys can be extended to learning to take dominion over their energy. This is a Genesis 1-2 concept. We, like Adam, are dominion-takers, and we should teach boys to take dominion over their quietude, and not just the playground.

As you do this, help them see that God created them to grow up to be men—leaders, providers, and protectors. When you celebrate with them what God is doing in them, you are having teachable moments about the God who created them. In turn, you are teaching them to celebrate the only One worth celebrating.

DON'T EVER STOP PARENTING THEM

I am not saying in this article that ADD or ADHD don't exist. I am saying we too often diagnose the awesome characteristics of boyhood as a problem, and then we medicate them as our solution—our functional savior. I want you to see that they aren't a problem to fear, or medicate. They are far from it. Boys are filled with testosterone. When God created Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden, the first thing Adam did was go out into the Garden, full of testosterone, and began to explore and name stuff. As parents, we shouldn't be afraid of this exploratory essence and energy in our boys. We should love it, channel it, parent it, and celebrate it.

I think we should let boys be boys, and non-medicated ones at that. Therefore, parents, if at all possible, don't medicate your boys. Help them thrive in a culture of lectures, walls, circles, niceness, and quiet rooms. Give them permission to be boys. Constantly pray for their salvation. Give them grace when

they fail. Discipline them, too. But, most importantly, don't ever stop parenting them. Don't give up. Don't give into a culture that so easily defines a solution in a pill. It will be hard. You will be tempted to go that route. Teachers and counselors might even suggest it. But trust, and lean into, the promises of God in Christ alone—who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in *the likeness of men*. And being found in *human form*, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

When we stay close to that truth, we can channel everything... and help our boys—in Christ—conquer just about anything.