

Growing Up: How to Listen Like a Man

Scripture: Proverbs 1:8–15

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Before we put up John MacArthur's second post in the series—what amounts to some fatherly advice to the Young, Restless, and Reformed folks—I'd like to interject a few thoughts for your consideration.

I've been watching the comments here and there in the blogosphere, and I'm mostly encouraged. Most people have been saying, "I appreciate John MacArthur. I don't always agree with him, but I realize I need to set my disagreements aside to hear what the man has to say." Bravo. I totally applaud that attitude, and I appreciate Tim Challies for [encouraging us in that direction](#).

But I've also read posts that represent the sentiment Tim cautioned against. I appreciate the concerns some have raised, and I'd like to speak to some of that now. In fact, to keep you from having to wade through it all, here are a few of the criticisms (in my own words):

- Why does MacArthur always sound like he's scolding everyone, like he's everybody's critic? Who appointed him the evangelical pope?
- MacArthur puts his own preferences on clothing, culture, and worship styles on par with Scripture. Who says you've got to dress like him and love organ music to do church right?
- Sure, MacArthur emphasizes personal holiness, but he really has no appreciation for reaching the lost. He has his emphases, and we have ours. Can't he appreciate what we're doing well?
- MacArthur's dispensational and cessationist commitments are quaint but crippling aspects of his ministry.
- Why does MacArthur always have to pick on Mark Driscoll? Driscoll is *obviously* the target of this whole series.
- MacArthur *clearly* doesn't get the YRR movement. If he wants the YRR crowd to listen to him, he needs to take time to understand them first.

While I could take the time to answer each of those concerns point-by-point, I don't think that'll be as profitable as the direction I'd like to take for this post. But what those criticisms show me, beyond the shadow of a doubt, is that *the YRR crowd doesn't get John MacArthur*. He's quite a bit different than the caricature created in the comment threads.

But here's an observation I'd like to make at the outset: Of all the comments I've read about this series, in several different blog forums, the criticisms have largely come from young men. I admit, I'm probably missing an exception or two, but the women and the older men who comment seem to be in strong agreement with John. It's the young men who take issue with John's tone, question his motives, or complain he hasn't taken the time to understand them.

Why is that? What do young men have against John MacArthur? In light of all who have appreciated

John for his biblical *manliness*, what gives?

I can think of a few factors that contribute to the gap between men of John's generation, and the men of younger generations. To begin with, today's culture favors the young, and young people are used to having older people cater to them. The rapid development and continual marketing of new technology reinforces the idea that what's new is awesome and what's old is useless. Who has any use for a cassette tape, a video tape, or even a first-generation iPhone?

Digital natives are fast adapters to the newest digital gadgets, and are quick to abandon any technology that is out of date. It's relatively easy for twenty-somethings—always helping their parents and grandparents program their new cell phones—to get the idea that the older generation doesn't have a clue. Oh, maybe some wise advice here and there, but relevant instruction and exhortation about living in a modern world? Not a chance.

Those who create the technology also market the technology; and they aren't dummies either. Marketers know full well what demographic has the most disposable income, and they need that money to fund their salaries and their continuing development of new technologies, which funds tomorrow's salaries and tomorrow's development, and so on.

Biblically speaking, marketers are flatterers; they spread nets to ensnare young people and take their money (Proverbs 29:5). Read the ad copy, listen to the sales pitches—"It's all about you, and don't let anyone tell you differently!" To write persuasive, flattering ad copy, marketing teams need to understand their target audience, so they are constantly surveying them, soliciting their opinions, and learning what makes them tick. And after spending precious time and money to understand young people, they'd be mortified if the surveys came back with this message: "You don't get me!"

So, I guess it's understandable that many today would be uncomfortable when John MacArthur *doesn't* cater to them, when he shoots straight, when he tells them what they *need* to hear, not what they want to hear. It's understandable, even if it isn't right.

There is much in this culture that contributes to the tremendous gap between the young and the aged, the simple and the wise, the YRR crowd and the men of John MacArthur's generation. There has always been the seepage of that aspect of our culture into the church, but it was church growth philosophy that turned the spigot on full blast.

Now, combine the liabilities of being young with the difficulty of learning how to be a biblical man, and we begin to get a clearer picture of the challenge facing John MacArthur as he reaches out to the YRR generation.

The cumulative effect of decades of *unbiblical* manhood and womanhood in this country has been devastating. Roles are reversed and divorce is epidemic, so it's hardly surprising when young men have no idea what it means to be a man. From their vantage-point, the YRR feel like the older generation is a bunch of grumpy old men, always critical and scolding; from the perspective of the older generation, the YRR can come across as thin-skinned and narcissistic.

How do we break the impasse? What will bring the two generations together?

If we return to Scripture, the biblical pattern—which is the assumption throughout most of human history—is that it's incumbent on the young to understand the old. Young people should make every effort to understand the aged, not the other way around. That's the message of the Proverbs:

- Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching (Proverbs 1:8)
- My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent... my son, do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their paths (1:10, 15)
- My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments (3:1)
- Hear, my son, and accept my words, that the years of your life may be many (4:10)
- My son, be attentive to my wisdom; incline your ear to my understanding (5:1)
- My son, keep my words and treasure up my commandments with you (7:1)
- My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways (23:26)

Older people, by virtue of God's predetermined birth order, have the right of priority over us younger people. If you don't think that's fair, you'll have to take that up with God; He's the one who chose to put them on the planet ahead of us.

But some will say, "We have no problem with *age*. After all, we're the Young, Restless, and *Reformed*. We *do* listen to Luther and Calvin, Owen and Spurgeon. Those guys are our homeboys, our spiritual heritage!"

Yes, well, those guys are dead. They have gone to heaven. But if they were walking the earth today, what do you think they'd tell you?

Rather than debate that point, how about listening, *like men*, to those who have gone before you? How about trying to understand and learn from the men who are still living, men who have studied the Reformers and the Puritans in more depth and detail than you have? Men like John MacArthur have been drinking deeply from the fathers of our spiritual heritage, learning from them through big, thick books, not blog articles. (That's a joke. Just chuckle as if I'm not talking about you.)

This little summary has already become longer than I intended, so let me leave you with a quote from one of our favorite homeboys, Charles Spurgeon:

It is very pretty, is it not, to read of Luther and his brave deeds? Of course, everybody admires Luther! Yes, yes. But you do not want anyone else to do the same today.

When you go to the Zoological Gardens you all admire the bear. But how would you like a bear at home, or a bear wandering loose about the street? You tell me that it would be unbearable and no doubt you are right.

So, we admire a man who was firm in the faith, say four hundred years ago. The past ages are a sort of bear-pit or iron cage for him. But such a man today is a nuisance and must be put down. Call him a narrow-minded bigot, or give him a worse name if you can think of one.

Yet imagine that in those ages past, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and their compeers had said, "The world is out of order. But if we try to set it right we shall only make a great row and get ourselves into disgrace. Let us go to our chambers, put on our night-caps and sleep over the bad times and

perhaps when we wake up things will have grown better.” Such conduct on their part would have entailed upon us a heritage of error.

Age after age would have gone down into the infernal deeps and the infectious bogs of error would have swallowed all. These men loved the faith and the name of Jesus too well to see them trampled on. Note what we owe them and let us pay to our sons the debt we owe our fathers. It is today as it was in the Reformers’ days. Decision is needed. Here is the day for the man—where is the man for the day? We who have had the Gospel passed to us by martyr’s hands dare not trifle with it—nor sit by and hear it denied by traitors who pretend to love it but inwardly abhor every line of it.

I don’t know about you, but I’m looking forward to listening, *like a man*, to John’s next installment.

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