

Chapter One New Eyes

*You're my brother, you're my sister,
So take me by the hand
Together we will work until He comes.
There's no foe that can defeat us
When we're walking side by side.
So long as there is love,
We will stand.*

("We Will Stand" lyrics by Russ Taff, 1983 Word Music)

Billy Crystal and Meg Ryan immortalized the popular (mis)understanding of male/female relationships in the hit movie "When Harry Met Sally." When Harry makes a pass at Sally, his fellow co-ed, she turns him down with the familiar words, "No, Harry...we are just going to be friends, OK?" Harry responds: "Friends? You realize, of course, that we could never be friends."

Why not?

What I'm saying, and this is not a come-on in any way, shape, or form, is that men and women can't be friends because the sex part always gets in the way.

That's not true. I have a number of men friends and there is no sex involved.

No, you don't.

Yes, I do.

No, you don't.

Yes, I do.

You only think you do.

Are you saying that I'm having sex with these men without my knowledge?

No, I'm saying they all want to have sex with you.

No, they don't.

Yes, they do...

How do you know?

Because no man can be friends with a woman he finds attractive. He always wants to have sex with her.

So you are saying a man can be friends with a woman he finds unattractive?

No, you pretty much want to nail them too.

What if they don't want to have sex with you?

Doesn't matter because the sex thing is already out there so their friendship is ultimately doomed and that's the end of the story.

I guess we are not going to be friends then.

Guess not.

That's too bad because you are the only person I know in New York.

Poor Sally! What a choice when it comes to men—romance or nothing. Why not “just” friends? Is a pure, non-romantic relationship really impossible between a man and a woman, or is Harry right? More specifically, how does Harry's theory relate to men and women who follow Christ? We believe that Christians, indwelt by the Spirit, will prove Harry to be wrong. Men and women really can be friends. In Christ, they can be more than friends—they can be spiritual siblings, and the implications for ministry are enormous!

Steve and Sue

“Our women need relevant, in-depth Bible study and I'm willing to do whatever it takes to make that happen.” Steve's eyes burned with brotherly passion as he offered me the position of minister-to-women in his church. For seven years, I had led the women's ministry in another mega-church where I was never paid a penny even though I sometimes clocked sixty hour work weeks. Although I was grateful for the opportunity to learn and serve there, I grieved that I had almost no access to the senior pastor, never attended a staff meeting, and felt marginalized in church-wide decisions that affected my ministry.

Steve's offer included everything I needed to create a dynamic, relevant women's ministry including his full support, my own administrative assistant, a large budget, the chance to join the lead team, a generous salary, and flexible hours. Even more inviting was Steve's brotherly demeanor, his authentic desire to see women of the church mature.

Over the years, I served alongside Steve. The women's Bible study grew from under a hundred to over eight hundred. Diverse women, single, married, widowed, from all ages and walks of life, stay-at-home moms and professional women, met weekly in small groups to study, pray, and

process life together. Women in the church implemented evangelistic dinners, retreats, and special interest seminars and ministries, including post-abortion and infertility. Bible teachers and small group leaders were trained. Women fed families in crisis and reached out to the incarcerated and the poor.

During those years, the church grew, in spiritual maturity and numerically, requiring new facilities. As Steve and I toured our new 12 million dollar building, he commented, “You know, Sue, we could not have done this without your ministry.” My heart swelled with gratitude. I thanked God for the opportunity to serve in a place where men and women worked together as brothers and sisters, knowing that this partnership contributed to the success of the whole church and to God’s glory.

Kristen and Jason

Kristen was born into a family of speed skaters. She learned to skate at the age of 2 and competed at 4. Her grandfather flooded his back yard for a skating rink for her to learn to skate and later took her skating at local rinks. At 23, Kristen’s medals and accolades crowded the family mantel. Now—to top off a stellar career—Olympic gold was in her sights. Then her 19-year-old brother Jason was diagnosed with aplastic anemia, a rare and potentially fatal condition that impedes the body’s ability to produce blood cells. His only hope was a bone marrow transplant and Kristen was the match. Dr. Jones candidly informed her that the procedure might weaken her and probably end any hope of winning a medal. It did.

In an interview at John Hopkins Hospital, Kristen told reporters, “Skating is just skating. It’s important, but nothing is more important than life. After all, he’s my brother. Kristen had a shot at

glory and a 1994 Olympic medal but chose to give her brother life instead.” By the way, Kristen was elected to the Speed Skaters Hall of Fame in 2004.¹

Paul and Lynda

Paul and Lynda’s friendship grew out of his respect for her professional abilities. “She was disciplined, serious, and capable in managing document control, which is a key role in an engineering company. The value of everything you design is in the documentation and Lynda did a wonderful job of keeping that all straight,” says Paul. But what began as a friendship based in work-related issues deepened because of Lynda’s personal need for Jesus.

They were friends, so Lynda naturally looked to Paul for spiritual answers. “I started questioning him about Christ and his beliefs. I wasn’t a Christian at the time and Paul became like a mentor to me. Raili (Paul’s wife) and Paul invited me to friendship day at their church and it went from there.” When asked to describe their relationship, Paul says, “We have such easy communication. It was exciting to watch as God grew Lynda, and I could see those changes. I saw the hardness melting away.”

Paul knows the importance of personal relationships, even with women in the workplace. “I fundamentally believe that the reason God has put us on this planet is to relate...a fundamental part of God’s nature is relating, and we need to reflect that...it starts with respect and trust...that is the foundation of our friendship.”

Steve for Sue, Kristen for Jason, and Paul for Lynda—the former paved the way for the latter, living out sibling love. Only Kristen and Jason are biological sister and brother, but the others

are not related by blood. Nevertheless, the others are equally brothers and sisters in the eyes of God the Father.

In the family of God, they are spiritual brothers and sisters. This is a book about family—not biological family—but what it means to *see* one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, the way God intended. This has ramifications. With new eyes, we can work together as men and women in a spiritual family, blessing each other rather than setting one another aside because of gender. This book will challenge all of us to examine our gender biases and perceptions. This book is for men and women who want to make an impact for Christ—both those who earn their living in ministry and those who volunteer a few hours a week.

(drop quote)

Of course men and women can work together as brothers and sisters in Christ. This is the Biblical perspective and failure to acknowledge this is a denial of the redemptive power of Christ's work in our lives. However, this is a fallen world and there is such a thing as sibling rivalry. Male-female relationships are caught in the "already-not yet" —already redeemed, but not yet fully sanctified.

Frank James
President
Reformed Theological

Seminary

One Hyper-charged Factor

What blinds us from seeing one another as siblings? The answer is different for each of us. We will wrestle with these complexities. Sexual temptation is one hyper-charged factor we cannot ignore—for both men and women, especially in our over-sexed culture. It's almost impossible not to be influenced by women with bare bellies and breasts, and muscular men sporting steely pecs and abs. God asks each of us to take charge of our hearts and hormones and submit them to Christ for the glory of God and building up of His Kingdom.

What Does the Bible Say?

The Bible tells us straight up.

Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.

1 Timothy 5:1, 2

Paul indicates that in the community of faith we are called to honor older, mature men and women as if they were godly parents and male and female peers as if they were our brothers and sisters. Paul insists that we see the opposite sex as family members first, not as sexual objects. God considers lust between a biological brother and sister to be abhorrent.² Just as sinful is lust between any man and woman, according to Jesus (Matt. 5:28). Shouldn't it be unthinkable to lust after a spiritual brother or sister? Followers of Jesus are to consider one another as family. Is this mission impossible? Are we able to see one another this way in the family of faith? Yes, he enables us through the power of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts and minds to love one another as siblings. How might our churches be changed if men and women caught this vision and lived it out?

Jesus too supports our premise—that with new eyes, Christian men and women can thrive as brothers and sisters in a spiritual family, leading to powerful partnerships in ministry. Yes, Jesus was a family man! Not in the sense that he was married and fathered biological children, but in the sense that he inaugurated the spiritual family we call the Church. Consider his response to his mother, Mary, and his biological brothers in this interchange:

While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.” He replied, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” Pointing to his disciples, he said, “For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

Matthew 12:46-50

Undoubtedly Jesus' biological family felt that, as blood kin, they deserved his attention. He should stop what he was doing and come out to see them. Although he loved his mother and brothers, Jesus used this occasion to teach an important truth. He had come to create a new kind of family. Not a family related by genes, common heritage, or shared genealogy. It is a faith family, and in this passage, Jesus reveals that this new spiritual family trumps blood kin.

The Problem

Do Christian men and women see one another as brothers and sisters in a spiritual family? Are they working together in powerful partnerships? Is this an accurate picture of how most men and women relate to one another in the church today? Our interview responses from men and women across the country were mixed. We sought out men and women known for healthy working partnerships as positive examples, to draw from their expertise and experiences. Most saw themselves as pioneers and grieved that their healthy experience of sibling friendship are so rare. Their stories pepper the pages ahead.

Sadly, many we interviewed or have counseled through the years reflect the findings in a research project conducted by Dr. Joye Baker at Dallas Theological Seminary in 2004. She surveyed three hundred and seventy seven female seminary graduates to identify their most difficult leadership challenges. Their answers to the question, "How can the seminary best prepare women students to meet these challenges?"

- Prepare men and women to more successfully minister together (24%)
- Help men value and respect women in ministry (18%)³

Granted, this is a limited sampling and reflects just one seminary, but their responses echo what we hear over and over, from both men and women who believe we are missing critical opportunities to work together. It begins with the way we *see* one another.

Few of us see and treat the opposite sex with sibling love. When was the last time you evaluated your relationships with the opposite sex in this light? When was the last time you heard a message on this topic? We have not been taught to see one another through Christ-like sibling eyes. Current problems between men and women in ministry cause us sometimes to resemble a dysfunctional family. This perspective is especially difficult in a culture where sexual images and messages constantly bombard us.

(drop quote)

I think too often churches either: 1. avoid the topic or 2. settle for an unbiblical "strategy of isolation" where men deliberately separate themselves from women as a means of temptation-avoidance. (e.g. - "I never meet with a woman. have lunch with a woman, ride in a car with a woman," etc.) This leads to a loss of biblical community, lost opportunities for the development of leadership gifts, and doesn't even help in avoiding sin. For God's intent is that we aim at becoming *the kind of persons* who treat one another as brother and sister.

Pastor

Presbyterian Church

John Ortberg
Author and Teaching

Menlo Park

Menlo Park, California

Paying a high price

Consider the state of the American church. Since 1950, membership in all American denominations, except Southern Baptists, has declined.⁴ In the United States, there are 40 million unchurched, men and women who call themselves Christians but do not belong to a community of believers.⁵ Women comprise sixty percent of American churches, yet there has been a 22% slip in women's church attendance since 1991. Women are leaving Christianity for alternative spiritualities by the millions.⁶ These statistics indicate that the American Church may be headed for serious

trouble in the coming decades unless we tackle issues that hinder us. We believe resolution of gender conflict could make a real difference. How might healthy, dynamic teams of brothers and sisters impact the future Church in America?

Healthy faith families, just like biological families, need both men's and women's ideas, gifts, and perspectives in order to thrive. Single parents will testify that it's tough being both mom and dad. Children need a mother's tender touch and a father's guidance and protection. But many ministries today are like single parent families. The male presence is strong but the mother's touch is missing, or, in other ministries, the female influence is so dominant that the father's guidance is absent, and that lack skews ministry decisions and effectiveness. Neither is healthy. We will show how the combination makes ministries more effective, strengthening the future church in America.

The Role of Women in the Church

The hot debate over the role of women in ministry also affects the manner in which godly men and women treat one another. We will not address the issue of the role of women in this book. Whatever your view on women's roles, it does not negate God's command in 1 Timothy 5:1 and 2 to treat one another as brothers and sisters. Theological matters are sometimes used as smoke screens to hide the real issues that lie within our hearts and minds. Let's look deep into ourselves and be honest. If we refuse to face these issues directly, the cost may be high for ourselves and for God's work. But if we learn to see one another as siblings and work together, we believe much of the wrangling over roles will subside.

Protection from Sexual Temptation

We realize that bringing men and women together in ministry frightens many Christians. They fear that God will be dishonored. We have all seen too many pastors succumb to sexual temptation and destroy their families and ministries in the process.⁷ We share this concern. The traditional strategy has been to isolate men and women from one another, but this tactic has not worked. We will argue that healthy sibling love actually *protects* pastors from immorality. We will show you how.

This is my partner in ministry. She just happens to be a woman.
Jay Quine
President, College of
Biblical Studies
Houston, Texas

Our Game Plan

We believe that with new eyes, Christian men and women can create healthy working partnerships. In the pages that follow, we will show that Jesus treated women with compassion—even women with questionable reputations. We will also explore the brotherly love Paul exhibited toward women ministry partners.

We offer practical suggestions on how men and women can develop “new eyes” and how we can work together. What does sibling love look like outside a biological family? How do we relate to spiritual siblings in personal conversations, staff meetings, and professional development outings.

How much intimacy is wise between spiritual siblings? How do we deal with what goes on in our heads if we find ourselves sexually attracted to a co-worker or friend of the opposite sex? Do we handle all attractions the same? How can we learn to be “safe” siblings with our dress, actions, and communication? What are appropriate bridges and fences? How do we decrease the risk to our marriages while serving alongside a brother or sister in ministry? We must not ignore safeguards to

protect ourselves from sexual misconduct and infidelity—but what are those safeguards? Our interviews with mature men and women leaders may surprise you.

What role do modesty and pornography play? What about spouses? How do we include and communicate with them so they are not uncomfortable with our sibling relationships?

Is it worth the work to change?

The Bible shows us sibling love—we will see how Jesus and Paul model it. But is it that simple? No. We realize this is a complex and thorny subject. We will explore these issues together as male and female authors and pepper our work with the thoughts, wisdom, and experience of respected male and female scholars, pastors, and theologians. We need both perspectives in writing, life, and ministry.

(drop quote)

Speaking to the category of advantage, I can never see well without the other. To be a like-minded team, is a deficient basis, because literally you have excluded the perspective of one gender.

Dan Allender
Author and
President, Mars Hill

Graduate School

Is it worth the effort to change? Change requires hard work. Rethinking the way we relate to the opposite sex is challenging and requires introspection and effort. But we believe the rewards will be worth the effort. We believe that churches will grow both spiritually and numerically when men and women serve together as brothers and sisters. Hear out our arguments in the subsequent pages.

The questions we have raised deserve answers. Until we wrestle with these issues, most of us won't be persuaded that healthy sibling love in ministry will work, regardless of what the Bible says or how Jesus and Paul acted. So wrestle with us, but remember that the Bible speaks clearly, admonishing us to treat one another as brothers and sisters "with absolute purity."⁸ If we can figure this out, it might just change ministry ethos, attract unbelievers, and glorify God in the process.

Let's begin by watching Jesus, our brother.

Don't assume women can't contribute. Don't assume they want some kind of relationship with you. But remember that people will first think the worst so try not to give them a chance. Be careful!

Dean
Seminary

Jim Thames
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Discussion Questions

1. Do you agree or disagree with Harry's statement to Sally, "Friends? You realize, of course, that we could never be friends." Explain your answer.
2. Have you ever observed a healthy, non-sexual friendship between a man and a woman? If so, describe the relationship.
3. Have you experienced this kind of friendship? If so, what were the benefits? the challenges?
4. In your opinion, how does our hyper-charged sexual culture impact potential mixed-gender friendships?
5. Jesus describes Christian relationships in family terms in 1 Timothy 5:1 and 2 and Matthew 12:46-50. Do men and women see one another as family in your church? What are the ramifications?
6. Do you view the opposite sex through sibling eyes? If not, what attitude changes and action steps might correct your eye sight?

Chapter One

¹ Kristin Talbot. See her story at www.nationalspeedskatingmuseum.org

² Leviticus 20:17

³ Baker, Joye, D.Min. Dissertation, *An Analysis of the Leadership Challenges Facing the Dallas Theological Seminary Women Alumnae*, 2004.

⁴ Benton Johnson, Dean Hoge, Donald Luidens, *Mainline Churches: The Real Reason for Decline*, First Things, Volume 31, March 1993, pages 13-18.

⁵ George Barna, *One in Three Adults is Unchurched*, The Barna Update, Barna, org, March 28, 2005, page 1.

⁶ George Barna, *Women Are the Backbone of the Christian Congregations in America*, The Barna Update, Barna org, March 6, 2000, page 4.

⁷ Wayde Goodall, *Why Great Men Fall: 15 Winning Strategies to Rise above It All* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Publishing Group, 2005), 56-60; John W. Thoburn and Jack O. Balswick, "Demographic Data on Extra-Marital Sexual Behavior in the Ministry," *Pastoral Psychology* 46, no. 6 (1998).

⁸ 1 Timothy 5:2