

62: A Withdrawn Boy

Q: I have a 9 year old son Tom and an 8 year old daughter, Lona. Their father walked out on us when they were 3 and 4. I am now married to a wonderful man whom they love. The problem I face is with Tom. He is an absolute introvert and never speaks of himself, his feelings, and his hurts. He loves computer games, which we monitor so as not to take over his life, because if left alone that is all he'll do all day. He has no self esteem where his sister is always the center of attention because of her strong personality. How do I get my son to share with me? He has no friends and at school he plays with his sister and her friends. I feel that if I don't get him to open up I will lose him as a man. My brother and father suffer from this characteristic where they seem so emotionless and nothing seems to get to them, even though it must. I have prayed to break this blood line curse but it seems to have a hold on my son. Please any advice will be appreciated. I love my son dearly but I do not know him no matter how hard I try.

A: As always, I'd recommend that you talk to your pastor or a Christian friend who can observe the situation and help you get an outside perspective. It is hard for me to know if you are right on target or if you are overreacting or under reacting. Ask someone close to you what they think, because sometimes our own perspectives can get skewed.

Here are a few thoughts:

I wouldn't expect Tom to talk a lot about his feelings and his hurts. He may be very different from his sister in this. He is a different person. Plus, boys don't tend to talk a lot about emotional stuff. Maybe he has dealt with his hurts, handles them differently, or just doesn't like to talk about them. I wouldn't assume that means that something is wrong with him.

For Tom, and all kids, I'd greatly limit the amount of time he gets to play computer games. 20 minutes a day should be plenty. It's not that there is anything wrong with it, but it just doesn't add to his life in any significant way. Reading an exciting book appropriate for his age, playing with Legos, or learning to play the drums would all be fun AND productive activities. You may want to buy him a really cool video game, and on that game tell him he can only play it with his dad. That would help add some relational time to something that he loves.

When you say you are afraid that you will "lose him as a man" I'm not sure if you mean that you may lose his heart when he becomes a man, or that he will be effeminate (girly). I'll assume the latter, since I think a lot of parents have that fear. I do think it is important for kids to learn how to relate to their own sex. Your son is probably just shy and since he is comfortable around his sister, it makes it easy for him to get included in her circle of friends. That is fine, but he also needs to learn to relate to boys. Figure out who his potential friends are at church or at school, and then invite one of them over to play. You may want to suspend the video game restrictions the first time and let them go at it. After he has a friend over 2 or 3 times it will be far easier for Tom to relate to him.

You may want to repeat this with another boy or two so he can have several peers that he is comfortable around.

In any case, I'd focus more on his relationship with your husband than his relationship with you. This is my strongest piece of advice. You know what it takes to be a woman, but your husband knows what it takes to be a man. He can help your son by building a strong relationship with him. He should DO stuff with him. Most boys don't want to sit and share feelings. They want to hunt and explore and torture bugs (trust me on this). These would be good things for your husband to pursue with him (other than the bug part). He may share some feelings while doing these things, but he is not likely to just sit and share his deepest emotional feelings. Whether he does have a problem being open, or if he is just being a boy, I think reinforcing this relationship is key to Tom's wellbeing.

I would not be concerned about a blood line curse. Your boy is just a boy, and he needs some help learning how to become a man and how to relate to boys and girls and the world around him. The following passage should help calm your fears about a blood line curse. Perhaps a tendency toward shyness has been passed on, but I don't think a curse has.

Ezekiel 18:14-20 "But suppose this son has a son who sees all the sins his father commits, and though he sees them, he does not do such things:

"He does not eat at the mountain shrines or look to the idols of the house of Israel. He does not defile his neighbor's wife. He does not oppress anyone or require a pledge for a loan. He does not commit robbery but gives his food to the hungry and provides clothing for the naked. He withholds his hand from sin and takes no usury or excessive interest. He keeps my laws and follows my decrees.

He will not die for his father's sin; he will surely live. But his father will die for his own sin, because he practiced extortion, robbed his brother and did what was wrong among his people.

"Yet you ask, 'Why does the son not share the guilt of his father?' Since the son has done what is just and right and has been careful to keep all my decrees, he will surely live. The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him."

Keep seeking God on this. He can give you and your husband the wisdom you need.