

Jasper



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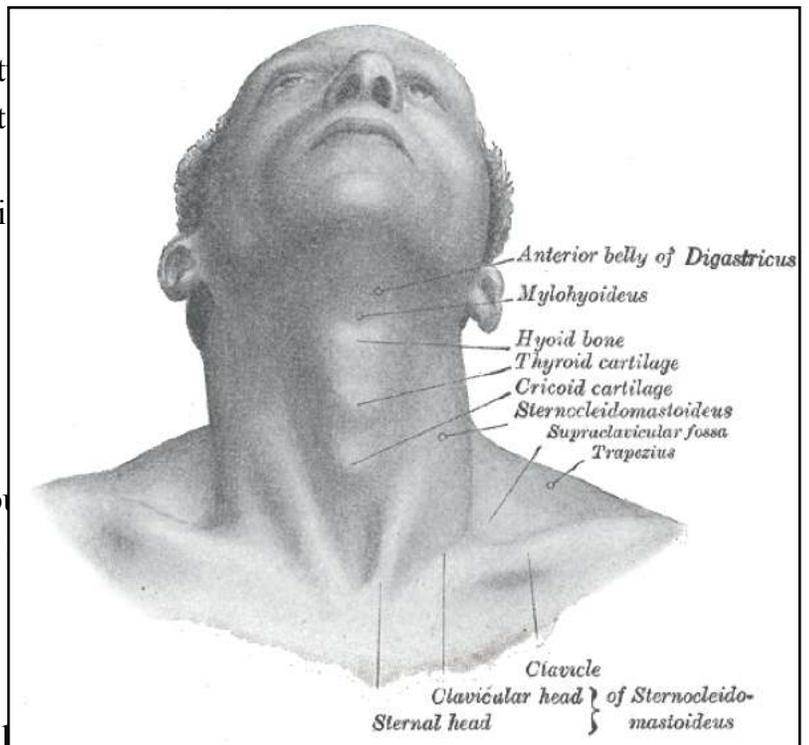
Curiosity of the day:

The Boy's Voice

A long time ago I read some pages in a book by a woman who didn't like men and boys very much. She said there was reason to believe that boys are *taught* to make their voices deep when they are around thirteen years old. If only people would teach girls to do that too, then the world would be a Bet Place. But I thought that was just donwright silly.

Have you ever wondered what the voice is? Put your fingers on your Adam's apple. Girls have those too, but they are smaller and not usually visible from the outside, while a man's is sometimes like a big lump that we can watch going up and down when he talks or swallows. That is your *larynx* – your voice box. It isn't an apple or box, though. It's a muscle. It has two strings in the middle of it, and we make these vibrate when we utter certain sounds. Keep those fingertips there, and make the sound for the letter F, and hold it – FFFFFFFF. No vibration. Now make the sound for the letter V, and hold it – VVVVVV. Vibration! Your teeth and tongue and lips were in exactly the same place, but for one sound you made the cords vibrate. That's your voice box in action.

As I said, it's a muscle, and boys have bigger muscles than girls do, if they are healthy. Why should that matter? Compare two musical instruments, say, a tuba and a flute. Can you imagine OOM PAH PAH OOM PAH PAH coming out of a flute?



Can you imagine *tweedly tweedly tweedle twee* coming out of a tuba? No, you can't, because you are an ordinary person and want tubas to be tubas and flutes to be flutes. It won't happen, because the tuba makes vibrations that are different from the ones the flute makes. It's the same with the musical instrument that boys and

girls have in their throats. They are of different sizes and shapes, so they make different sounds.

You can usually tell the difference between a boy's voice and a girl's voice even when they are little, and the boy has a flute and the girl has a piccolo, but things really change when the boy starts to become a man. Then he grows tall, his bones thicken and harden, hair starts to show up on his chin, and his muscles become bigger and stronger, especially if he is outdoors a lot and gives them a good natural working out. But the voice box is a muscle too. It grows, and it does something else. It tilts and it *drops*. That is, it really is lower in the man than in the woman: a little closer to his chest and a little farther from his mouth. You can hear it when a man gives a command at the top of his voice. It sounds not like a crackle, but a boom.

The funny thing is, this happens to a boy pretty quickly, and then it's as if he's got a new musical instrument that he isn't used to playing. Take a clarinet or a recorder or a bugle, and play a note on it. If you know how to do it, you'll get the right sound, but if you don't – maybe you are blowing air into it too fast, or

not steadily enough, or too hard – you might get a creak or a squeak, much higher than you want, or you might get the low note and then the creak. It's because your voice box hasn't dropped all the way down yet, and because you aren't used to the new thing. After a year or so, you'll have had a lot of practice without even noticing it, and you don't embarrass yourself anymore. But you will still sound like a boy and

not a man, because you have a long way to go yet, growing bigger and more muscular. You will just not sound like a little boy, or like your older sister or

your mother.

I like to think of this as one of the small miracles of a boy's life. It happened to Jesus, too. One day, I can imagine, he was working on a two-man saw with his father Joseph, sawing away at the trunk of a cedar, and when Joseph asked him whether he needed a break, Jesus might have replied, "No, Father, I'm all right!" – and the voice came from deep in the chest. And Joseph smiled, because he loved his son and was glad to see him growing tall and strong.



Anthony Esolen is a lecturer, translator, and writer. Among his books are *Out of the Ashes: Rebuilding American Culture*, and *Nostalgia: Going Home in a Homeless World*, and most recently *The Hundredfold: Songs for the Lord*. He is a professor and writer in residence at Magdalen College of the Liberal Arts, in Warner, New Hampshire.

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