

The Bible and the Headlines: News You Can Use David Bachelor, PhD

People sometimes suffer from an illness for a long time, but no one believes they are sick, until science creates a name for their malady. Such is the case for an affliction that recently has been getting noticed by the media. Now that this debility has a name, we can see that it was hiding in plain sight all along.

On May 13th the mommy blogsite Scary Mommy asked, “Does Bluey Have Eldest Daughter Syndrome?” The author (herself a self-identified eldest daughter) borrowed from TikTok to define Elder Daughter Syndrome (EDS) as “a term coined to describe the unique pressures and responsibilities placed on the oldest daughter in the family.” The article shows how Bluey, the namesake for an animated TV series about an anthropomorphic Blue Heeler puppy, meets all eight diagnosis criteria for this evolving affliction.

Across the pond, the Telegraph on May 15th provided, “Eight Signs You Have ‘Eldest Daughter Syndrome’ and What To Do About It.” Structuring her article along the eight points from the viral TikTok video, the author personalized a recurring experience of eldest daughters when she said, “I was like a third, responsible parent from a young age, always reminding my siblings to clear up or lecturing them about revision.” The unilateral burden causes many eldest daughters to resent both their parents and their siblings.

The relationship website Your Tango.com featured, “The Immense Impact of Eldest Daughter Feminism” on May 16th. The author notes, “Although ‘eldest daughter syndrome’ may seem new, we have seen stereotypical depictions of eldest daughters in media for decades.” Seventy years of Disney animations came under the author’s scrutiny, with ‘Cinderella,’ ‘Mulan,’ ‘Lilo and Stitch’ and the recently released ‘Encanto,’ being identified as featuring main characters who all suffer as eldest daughters taking care of their wards at great personal expense. In the author’s opinion these fictional characters have the benefit of redemption for their suffering that is not usually experienced by flesh-and-blood elder daughters.

EDS appeared to be present, but unnamed, in a well-known New Testament narrative. This is the case of Martha and Mary whose story is told in John 11 and Luke 10. John 11 reveals Martha as the sibling of Mary and Lazarus. However, it is in Luke 10 that Martha’s EDS manifested itself. While Mary felt free to focus her attention on their guest Jesus (Luk 10:39), Martha resented her sister not sharing in household responsibilities. Martha protested to Jesus, “Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself?” (Luk 10:40). Jesus diagnosed Martha’s malady and provided the cure for EDS when he said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one” (Luk 10:41-42). The “One” essential thing was Jesus.

Jesus says to everyone, “Come unto me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28). His call is particularly applicable to Martha and all the eldest daughters of the world.