

WHAT IS TRUE MASCULINITY?

What comes to your mind when you think of a masculine man? Who do you naturally think of? For most people in the world they would probably think of heroes from big screen movies like James Bond, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Clint Eastwood, the Fonz or Rambo. Sylvester Stallone, now there's a man, a man that can do anything...except speak.

If we were to think about the way that Hollywood portrays masculine men many of these characteristics are typical in the men that Hollywood portrays as masculine men. Hollywood would say that such men are tough and brutal, good fighters, heavy drinkers and smokers, reckless drivers who drive hard and fast, someone who's the strong and silent type, someone who swears and tells crude humour and most common, along with their fighting skills, is that they are sexual conquerors who sleep with lots of women.

Do such traits of Hollywood's heroes match up with the values of God in the Bible? I think we can see in those characteristics I just mentioned that the way that Hollywood portrays masculinity is a perversion of the sort of masculinity that God wants to develop in godly men. The world's masculinity focuses on physical prowess and how to best take advantage of others and dominate - the way of get. Godly masculinity is the opposite of that.

Today I'd like to answer the question "What is true godly masculinity?" There's a great ambiguity of the roles of the sexes in our society today. Society is trying to blur the sex roles. Effeminism, where men are too soft and act and look more like women (1 Corinthians 6:9) is just as abominable in God's eyes. Men are getting softer and being dominated by women. Many men are weak and skinny and unathletic. Homosexuality and effeminism are drastically rising.

So what is true masculinity? To understand true masculinity we need to recognise that there are three aspects of what true masculinity looks like in action. There are physical qualities, emotional qualities and there are spiritual qualities that make up the whole picture of what true masculinity is.

First, let's look at the physical side of masculinity. Men should be physically strong and fit. David was no weakling. He battled wild animals and a bear (1 Samuel 17:36). Now we don't have to do bold things like that or be an Arnold Schwarzenegger but should we have a reasonable amount of physical strength.

While I am more inclined to believe that Jesus wasn't in Judea during his 20's and was preaching where the lost tribes of Israel were in that time, no doubt during his teens Jesus learned his human father's trade. Most think he was a carpenter but the Greek word "tekton" means a tradesman and he was more likely a stone mason as stone was used far more than wood for building in Israel. Jesus himself would have been a strong man and physically fit. He must have had some physical prowess to be able to drive out the money changers from the Temple the way that he did on two separate occasions at both the beginning and end of his ministry.

Some, of course, overdo this physical development and get out of balance with it. Such physical development is good in balance. It's only a problem if it starts getting obsessive or its done for image and show or it's done to the exclusion of other, more important things.

In 1 Timothy 4:8 we read: "**For bodily exercise profits a little**, but godliness is profitable to all things, having promise of the present life, and of that which is to come." Outside of physical occupations such as labouring, there isn't a great need for such strength to serve and defend others in this day and age compared to Bible times. Godliness, the spiritual side of masculinity, is much more important.

One last point on the physical side of masculinity is that it must be only used to defend and serve, not to be brutal or bully others such as women or children.

The next aspect of true masculinity is the emotional side of masculinity. A key part of true masculinity is having courage.

Revelation 21:8 warns us against being cowards. Everyone has fears. A coward is one who gives in to his fears. A brave man is the one who cuts through it and does the tough and the right things even when he's fearful. 1 John 4:18 says that "Perfect love casts out fear". A rock solid love for others and for God and His way of life will give us the courage to do great and tough things compared to someone who is only half hearted in his love for God and others. It will give us faith to believe that God will back us up just like the incredible faith David had to trust God would back him up when he took on Goliath.

A courageous, masculine man has a strong, deep conviction of what's right and he'll do what's right even against ridicule and persecution from family, friends and people at work, school or wherever. One book that I've read on this subject that I strongly recommend is "Hero...Becoming the Man She Desires" by Fred and Jasen Stoeker. It primarily covers the battle for sexual purity against pornography and sexual promiscuity, though its principles are much broader. Fred, who authored "Every Young Man's Battle", did it the hard way after being addicted in his younger years and early into his marriage. His son, Jasen, willingly took up the cross of ridicule from friends in school and college and courageously fought to never let it get a foothold in his life. As his father commented, "He left every girl better off for knowing him rather than using them and leaving them worse off for knowing him."

Men should be able to endure hardship, both physical and emotional. That kind of toughness, physical and emotional, in particular, takes time to develop. Often that mental toughness comes about sticking with things that are important to do though they are not pleasant at the time. A friend mentioned to me that one thing he is seeing more of, that appears to be a Generation Y thing, is that vocationally they have less perseverance where they never stick around long in any job. They go at those times when it is better that they stay.

Though emotionally we shouldn't be oversensitive to hurt and criticism, on the other hand we should be expressive of our feelings and occasionally not be afraid to cry when it's appropriate such as for repentance or times of great stress or great joy and emotion like the Broncos winning the premiership for example. Many women are drawn to the strong, silent type like we see in Westerns only to chew them out after they get married because they never talk much or share their life with them. As godly men, we should be expressive and share our life with the women in our lives.

Men should be capable of enduring physical and emotional hardship in taking the lead to help and support ladies through the trials of life. We should be a strong shoulder to lean on but that doesn't mean we don't need bolstering from time to time. That's where a truly feminine woman stands out. True femininity includes bolstering, supporting and encouraging us males. In that way a truly feminine woman makes a man more masculine and brings out his masculinity.

In his book "Wild at Heart", John Eldridge says that there are three basic drives that God has put into the hearts of men - A battle to fight, an adventure to live and a beauty to save. Vicariously many of us fight most of our battles through video games and sports but there are real life battles of character against Satan's devices that we all have to face. The calling that God has given us to overcome our human nature and Satan and the world's influence represents the greatest battle and the future God has to change this whole world with Him after Christ's return is the greatest adventure that anyone could be offered. Our life should be an adventure where we have plenty of goals and plans even after we have got the girl, goals that become an adventure to share with that special someone.

Men should have drive and motivation to be successful and achieve and get things done in life. That should be the direction of that natural manly aggression and we shouldn't be egotistically "macho". Education and knowledge are vital tools for a masculine young man with real goals and purpose. Both Solomon and Jesus (1 Chronicles.1:7-10, Luke 2:46-47) had a desire for knowledge and understanding.

The third part of true masculinity is the spiritual side of masculinity. God has called us men to be leaders and servants. Are we that or is our focus just on ourselves?

Do we lead our families, if we are married, providing direction in all aspects of family life in a gentle and firm way including leading study of God's word together? Ephesians 6:4 says that we should be diligent in bringing up our children in the training and admonition of the Lord.

Do we do our part in providing for them physically, financially and emotionally? Or do we neglect or have abdicated some of those areas? 1 Timothy 5:8 says: "But if anyone does not provide for *his* own, and especially *his* family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel."

If we are single do we show leadership by organising activities and group dates that would benefit others? Are we givers and show hospitality where we can? Are we inclusive with the activities we organise or do we just include our own circle of friends? A true leader is inclusive and does his best to ensure everyone is looked after and doesn't miss out.

Are we so selfish that our conversation is all about us and we never let anyone else get a word in and we tune out when others talk about what's on their minds?

A truly masculine man who steps up to the plate and takes the lead in showing kindness and service to others including women. He is someone who keeps himself pure for his wife (1 Thessalonians 4:3) and who'll stand up for godly integrity (Titus 2:7).

A truly masculine man is thoughtful, courteous, self-controlled and takes a genuine personal interest in the life of others. He gives a lot in hospitality including dating and has a wide range of talents and skills.

He strives to be wise and make sensible decisions. He can be clear and decisive when decisions need to be made but doesn't ride roughshod over the concerns of others. He seeks the input of others and considers them before making such decisions.

He gives his all to help, provide, encourage and support his family seeking God's help diligently in his life to truly lead others in a godly way.

We have looked at some of the key qualities physically, emotionally and spiritually that a truly masculine man has.

In summary, the world's masculinity focuses on physical prowess and how to best take advantage of others and dominate. Godly masculinity, on the other hand, focuses on developing and using one's physical, emotional and spiritual strengths to defend, serve, encourage, develop, support and lead others, including leading them into a deeper relationship with God and others.

The world's masculinity focuses on using those male strengths to get while godly masculinity focuses on developing and using our male strengths to give to others and lead in a positive way.