

What Masculinity Is (& Isn't)

Good morning everyone! So great to see all of you. My name is Eric and I'm a pastor in training here. If I haven't had the chance to meet you, I'd love to after we're done this morning. If you've recently started coming around, you might have noticed that I'm not Kent. But I do get the opportunity to get up here and talk with all of you every six weeks or so, give or take. So we are in the middle of our series talking about God's *design* for us and our gender. And as weighty as this series might feel to some people, I'm actually really excited to be a part of teaching a couple of the weeks. It's a really important conversation people are having, and we as followers of Jesus need to know how to have these conversations in ways that are both informed and helpful. It's vital for both our conversations and our own discipleship.

We often try to quickly catch everyone up to where we are each Sunday just in case you missed or forgot last week's teaching, but I think for this series specifically, it is *particularly* important to make sure we are all on the same page. The first week, we talked about how our basis for this whole series really rests on our understanding that God is who he says he is, and he can be trusted. That's ultimately at the core of everything else we're talking about. If we *trust* God, then the logical flow would be that we *trust* what he has to say about *all* of our lives, including our understanding of gender and our innermost selves.

The most important takeaways are that men and women are both *equal* to one another in value, and also *distinct* from one another. We talked about how if we don't understand the shared value between men and women, we've actually missed a lot of what the Bible says about us as human beings. We are co-laborers, co-image bearers, co-representatives of God, and we are therefore equal in worth and status in God's kingdom.

So we spent a chunk of our time last week talking about incredibly important similarities between men and women according to God's design. And today and next week, we're going to try to unpack a little more of what it means to be distinct and some of the differences that do exist. So *today*, we're going to talk about what it does and doesn't mean to be masculine, and next week we're going to talk about what it does and doesn't mean to be feminine.

Really quickly: I recognize there are quite a few people in this room who are not men. I'm keenly observant like that. So if that's you, I want to formally invite you to please not tune out. Yes, a lot of what I'm going to talk about is specifically for the lives of men. But I

would also argue if you are not a man, odds are very high that you know some. So, women in the room who are followers of Jesus, *all* followers of Jesus have a responsibility to help *all* followers of Jesus grow into who God made us to be. If you're a married woman in the room, a lot of what we're talking about will hopefully be helpful for you in walking alongside your husband as he seeks to pursue biblical masculinity. And this will hopefully give you some ideas and tools to help encourage him *and also* call him to repentance where he needs to repent. And if you're a single woman, if you want to be married one day, what we're talking about will help give you some lenses to see what a potential spouse should look like and be doing in their masculinity. And if marriage isn't going to be part of your story, there will be many fellow believers in your life who are men. And remember, as followers of Jesus, we are *all* a part of each other's walk and journey with Jesus. So for the rest of our time today, I want to walk through three components to expressing and living in biblical masculinity. Are we ready? First and foremost, **let's pray.**

Here we go! The first component is...

Questioning Masculine Stereotypes

Far too often, our beliefs about masculinity come from cultural stereotypes rather than the Bible. And oftentimes, people will try to endorse some of those stereotypes as biblical concepts without actually doing much work to figure out if they are. Remember, for something to be biblical, it needs to come from the Bible. It's important to remember that sometimes stereotypes are based on trends or majorities, but that does not make them biblical prescriptions.

Let's take a little Bible journey together and talk about some masculine stereotypes along the way and see what we can find. I think one significant stereotype throughout history is that **men aren't emotionally sensitive.** "Men don't cry." Men *certainly* don't weep. Men are supposed to suck it up and project *strength*. But here's the problem with that: all throughout the Old Testament there are accounts of men crying¹, and there's too many to mention so I'll skip those references and go to one that's more brief. In **John 11:35**, "**Jesus wept.**" That one is pretty direct.

In our culture we hear a lot about how **men are assertive.** Or men should be outspoken or should be visionary leaders. Let's talk about Moses for a second. The man tasked by God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. **As soon as God spoke to him and told him what his task was, he told God he has "never been eloquent...[and is] slow of speech and**

¹ Genesis 33:4, Genesis 45:15, 1 Samuel 20:41, 2 Samuel 15:30, 2 Kings 8:11, Ezra, 10:1, Nehemiah 1:4, Psalm 6:6

tongue.”² Moses said he couldn’t do it. A point he continues to make throughout the beginning of Exodus. He said he could only do it if God sent Aaron with him to speak because he was so bad at it. Or how about when Paul said he was untrained as a speaker and not very good at it?³ Or what about when Isaiah was describing Jesus, the Messiah, and said, “as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”⁴ There were at least a few key moments in his life where Jesus himself wasn’t very assertive.

Or maybe you’ve heard or you feel like *real men become husbands and fathers*. Or that you’ll finally move from a boy to a man if that happens. *Being a husband and a father are both great things, however Jesus was neither*. And as best we can tell neither was Paul. Two relatively significant male figures in Scripture. And the idea of picking one aspect of a man’s life in Scripture and calling it a command for men also falls apart pretty quickly if you think about it much at all. “David was a strong warrior!” Yep. And that attribute in particular was the *reason* God said he wasn’t allowed to build the temple.⁵ He was also an adulterer and a murderer. How do you decide where to draw the line? “Samson was a big strong man who helped God’s people.” He also killed a *ton* of people, and he eventually got himself killed because of a woman he didn’t want to stop sleeping with.

Or maybe you’ve heard some people in our culture on the other side of things because we’ve seen a pendulum swing. You may have heard that *real men aren’t aggressive, but are sensitive and in touch with their emotions*. Or maybe that *real men should be highly refined. The sharp dressed, well-groomed, very stylish guy. Or someone who’s highly intellectual, that’s a real man*. Look at David! He was a king who was a poet and a songwriter. He was wise and refined. Yeah, and he was also a strong fighter and military leader, and he killed a giant warrior on his own when everyone else was too afraid to even try.

Listen, maybe you're a man and you like sports, or cars, or woodworking, or fixing things—or any number of stereotypically "masculine" things. If that's you—great. Good for you. But biblically, those would be considered "interests." Hobbies. They aren't defining measures of masculinity. Maybe you pride yourself on your emotional intelligence or your style or your intellect. Those are all great things too, but they’re just *attributes*. Just pieces of your personality, not benchmarks of what it means to be a man.

² Exodus 4:10

³ 2 Corinthians 11:5-6

⁴ Isaiah 43:7

⁵ 1 Chronicles 22:8

So does all that mean we are supposed to say every stereotype about men and masculinity is invalid and has to be thrown out? Not necessarily. It means that we need to think critically so we can distinguish between stereotypes or tendencies and biblical guidance. And once we are able to discern some of those things and figure out where we may be elevating some stereotypes and tendencies, we can start to look at the next component of biblical masculinity:

Recognizing Sinful Masculine Tendencies

Every person has natural tendencies and inclinations, but what's even more important to recognize is that each and every person is impacted by sin. We live in a broken world, and none of us are exempt from those effects. And a huge part of living in biblical masculinity is recognizing your sinful tendencies as a man and repenting of them.

And there's 2 key passages from Scripture that people tend to reference when talking about masculinity. *And both* of these passages, I would argue, are speaking directly to this idea. The bible specifically mentions men and says they are prone to anger, quarrelsomeness and disputing, they have issues with self-control, among other things. I'll put them on the screen, look with me at 1 Timothy 2:8:

“Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing.”

And now Titus 2:6-8:

“Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.”

So in this passage, Paul is looking at men in general and noticing some tendencies that *many* (not all, but many) of them have. Notice, though, that these aren't *exclusive* to men. Does the author also say, “women should not pray. Women should angrily dispute. Women should not be self-controlled or have integrity”? That's a tough argument to make if we consider most of anything else Jesus taught. Just take a glance at the Fruit of the Spirit. But he's listing some sinful tendencies men are *especially prone* to. If you're a man and you don't struggle with these, that's great! Less sin is what we're going for. You might struggle with *other* things, but I do think a lot of men struggle with this in particular. At a biological level, men have higher levels of testosterone. And studies have shown

that higher testosterone can lead to higher levels of aggression⁶ or anger.⁷ Again, not every man is prone to this, stereotypes are not automatically true across the board, but they're based on tendencies and majorities over time.

So Paul here is directly addressing some tendencies in these men. He's saying, "hey, instead of being quick to anger and arguing with each other, you should pray. Instead of being impulsive, you should practice self-control." He's telling them instead of just automatically following their inclinations and tendencies, they should repent of those things, and instead look to God. And we should be doing this in every aspect of life! We have to look at our own personal inclinations *and* whatever society tells us is "masculine" and ask the question, "is this portraying Christlikeness?" There are so many cultural stereotypes about men that are harmful, but, because they are so common, are still widely accepted. "Boys will be boys" doesn't hold much weight in the eyes of God.

Here's a modern example of what I think Paul was talking about in 1 Timothy, but it is more observational: in 21st century America, a belligerent and overbearing male boss might be annoying, but in many fields it is entirely accepted, if not outright *expected*. Men tend to be more aggressive and display "anger and disputing" in the workplace. A man using a position of authority to make another person feel small or insignificant or afraid and manipulated might be an "industry standard," but it is by no means a biblical expression of masculinity. And if you are a follower of Jesus and you feel social pressures to behave that way as a man, or you feel a pull within yourself towards those kinds of actions, you are called to *reject* those ideas, repent of that behavior, and instead look for ways to love and serve like Christ in those contexts.

Another observation from our culture today: it is *assumed* that men will sexually objectify other people. That's the baseline. It's just what men *do*. Why repress what you're inclined to do? Why bother trying to exercise self-control when you could just run with what your mind and body crave? But participating in that behavior is an outright rebellion against what men are called to in Scripture. So while it may be a cultural norm or expectation, a biblical expression of masculinity would be to *reject* that tendency in yourself. There is no situation in which objectifying another person will point people back to God, and we are instead invited to practice self-control, and see others as fellow human beings, worthy of dignity and respect. And we are invited to not only change our internal dialogue, but to speak out *against* the objectification of others, regardless of cultural normativity.

⁶ <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=b3i4qFWgNy8C&lpg=PA134&ots=QBCM09KD1k&pg=PA134#v=onepage&q&f=false>

⁷ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26671006/>

We should constantly be scrutinizing our own inclinations and looking at ourselves, not through the lens of social or cultural acceptability, but through the lens of Scripture. And an opportunity for repentance often follows by turning away from those tendencies. However, sometimes that's not the only option. And that leads us to...

Curbing Every Interest and Inclination Towards Christlikeness

I mentioned it earlier, but all of us are created uniquely with interests and inclinations and desires. Now, a lot of those things often become corrupted in some way because we live in a broken world, but many of those inclinations and desires are instilled in us by our creator. So when those inclinations are expressed in a way that elevates selfishness or arrogance or hostility or any other sinful desire, we as men are called to reconsider. And when men take those aspects of themselves and instead use them as a means of reflecting attributes of God and pointing people to him, they can be absolutely beautiful expressions of masculinity.

Let's say, for example, you are very interested in sports. You love reading about sports, you love watching sports, you love talking about sports. That is completely morally neutral. The bible says absolutely nothing about whether men should or shouldn't like sports. Now imagine that your love of sports also turns to a desire to coach sports. Maybe you have a child who is starting to play on a sports team and you step into that role and start coaching a little league baseball team.

Scenario one: you think the current coach of your son's team, the Tigers, is about as effective as hot garbage. He's just not pushing these 6 year olds enough to reach their extremely limited, yet invaluable, potential. Contrary to their Sandlot namesake, the Tigers keep losing and your frustration continues to grow. So you valiantly offer to step in, offering your expertise and ousting that sorry excuse of a coach. And you start *working*. Spring training doesn't hold a candle to your regimen. And you get results. The Tigers get better and better as you mercilessly grind them into a highly refined machine and they soar to the top. You go out for drinks after the championship game with your assistant coaches and proceed to roast the old coach and his ineffectiveness, gloat about how much better your gang of 6 year olds is than the other teams, and go home to rest easy knowing you've proven once and for all that you are indeed the greatest coach to ever live.

Scenario two: your kid is on the Tigers, and one of the coaches mentions they could use some help with the team. You step in because you see an incredible opportunity to spend more time with your child, as well as an immediate opportunity to connect with some other parents. And you know for a fact some of those kids on the team probably

don't get much positive attention from male adults in their life. So you make a point to get to know some of the other parents and offer encouragement and praise for every single kid on that team. By the end of the season, you've won a couple games, but everyone on that team feels loved, cared about, and invested in. And both kids and some parents have developed some friendships they'll never forget. And it is so much more valuable to you than any championship.

One of those is an example of building your own kingdom, pride and ego, and the other is an example of building God's kingdom. Both of them are examples of a man who loves sports stepping in to coach a little league baseball team. But one of them is an example of cultural masculinity, and one of them is an example of biblical masculinity.

Maybe you are a man who does or wants to own a truck. That's a morally neutral decision. At least I hope so considering my vehicle choice. Now, do you want to own a truck because "it's what real men do"? Or because you feel like it's a status symbol for you, or you feel an internal need to feel bigger or stronger than other people? I don't think intimidation is a biblical value we should be striving for. If you decide you absolutely *have* to have a brand new \$70,000 V8 supercharged HEMI, and put your family in a really bad financial position due to purchasing said truck, is that a good way to love your family like Ephesians 5 says, as "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her"? Or can you make a reasonable financial decision because the desire can be used in a Christlike way? Because you see times in life when people may be able to benefit from someone freely offering help where they would otherwise have to pay ridiculous amounts of money or go through logistical nightmares for someone to do the work for them. And you know if you have a truck, you can be the person to offer that assistance. One of those is a selfish, unbiblical motivation for owning a truck. The other could be a *very* biblical motivation for owning a truck.

Maybe you have a desire to work out consistently and build a stronger body. Is it because you primarily want to attract as many people as possible or get more attention? Do you feel a need to convince yourself you're better than other people around you? *Or* do you have a desire to be physically healthy and to be a good steward of the body you've been given? Maybe, despite it being difficult, you know that it benefits your mental health and well-being to consistently exercise, so you prioritize it, despite it being hard for you, because you are trying to care for yourself well?

And even with interests that are less stereotypically "masculine," it's the same thought process. Do you have a strong desire to create art, whether it's visual or musical or any other form of expression? Is it because you want to feel validated by people's praise or recognition? Or because you feel like you'll attract certain kinds of people that you want

attention from? Or can you use it to healthily express the depth of your thoughts and emotions? Can it be a medium where you are able to put to page or put to words things that other people have difficulty articulating, and you want to use your unique gifts to help them process the difficulties of the world around them? Can you create something beautiful as a reflection of the beautifully artistic nature of our creator and put some of his attributes on display for people to enjoy?

Do you love to cook? Or meticulously design the space in which you live? Is it so you can feel impressive to others who enter your space? So you can invite people over to ooh and ah over your talents and taste? Or can you use that to create a space to be hospitable and for people to feel loved and cared for and seen and heard? Can you make delicious food and a beautiful home so that when people enter your space they feel like they belong? They feel like they can rest and receive love and service with no strings attached in the same way Jesus welcomes us in.

Are you or do you have a desire to be a stay-at-home dad? Is it because participating in the workforce just doesn't sound all that fun? Or having a professional career just sounds hard and you'd much prefer to feel like you can just hang out at home instead? Or is it because your wife really values her career and she's worked really hard and put in tons of effort and she wants to continue pursuing it, so you decide to lay aside your desires and your preferences for *your* job and *your* career so she has the freedom and opportunity to pursue hers?

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And this list can go on, but here's my point: **the biblical instruction to men is not to be more masculine. The biblical command is for you to become more Christlike as a man in the areas of your life where you are especially prone to not be Christlike. Christlikeness is our goal.** And I have three primary hopes this morning in sharing all of this with you. I mentioned the first at the beginning, but one hope is that all the women in this room would be able to hear and understand more of what it means for men to be biblically masculine. And the hope is that you would be able to use it to encourage where men in your life may need encouragement, and also to call men to repentance when they choose to reject Christlikeness in favor of some other ideal they've constructed for themselves.

My second hope is that this offers some men in this room encouragement and freedom in your life to express yourself as a man created in God's image. **And just because there may be aspects of your life that don't align with certain cultural stereotypes of masculinity, that doesn't make you less of a man.** Certainly, if there are areas of your life that don't reflect Christlikeness, you're invited to repent just like everyone else. But just

because you don't fit perfectly within some arbitrary borders someone drew up along the way, you are still an image-bearer of God.

I hope it's helpful for you to hear, because I have personally had to deal with this in my life. For most of my teenage years, I had an incredibly unhealthy view of relationships, especially with girls in my life. And I made plenty of bad decisions when it came to dating because of my unhealthy views. And towards the end of my time in high school, I decided I needed to stop. And dating needed to be held at a higher standard because as a Christian, the goal of dating is to determine if that's a person you can marry. And I wasn't ready for that. So I said no more until that time. But the people at my school didn't see it that way. They saw me say that I didn't want to try to date everyone like they were doing, and to them it made no sense. To them, every guy should want to date anyone they could. So my decision in their eyes could only be explained by the fact that I wasn't a "real man." And they picked apart other aspects of my life that weren't "manly" in their eyes and mocked me for it. "You don't like watching sports? You're not a man. You drive a VW bug (which I did)? That's not a man's car. You don't want to join us in mocking other people and being incredibly derogatory to the girls in our class? You like music made for girls, you're weak, you're not manly, you're...whatever else. And over time it weighed heavier and heavier on me. Their comments combined with the things I saw around me added fuel to my insecurities about myself. I couldn't help but think that they were probably right. I was the outlier, so there had to be something wrong with me. But there's so much freedom and hope that is found in a *better* identity. I was eventually able to see that I wasn't less of man than other guys just because I didn't fit their mold. I was created with the inclinations and interests that I have. And I am tasked with using those things to bring God glory in light of my identity that's found in Jesus. And there is hope for *you* in Christ. The things you like, and the things you don't like, do not determine your masculinity.

And my third hope this morning is for anyone who's ever been a part of subjecting someone else to your personal assumptions about what masculinity should be. And it's that you would see there's freedom in Christ through repentance of that too. Jesus is good news to both sides of that conversation. It is not just the people in my story that made me feel terrible for the things I did or didn't like that are called to repentance, but also the way I've responded in return. Years of my life have been spent mocking and tearing down people with different interests and tendencies than me in an attempt to make me feel better about myself. I'm an emotional and sensitive person, so I've mocked men that seem calloused or emotionally distant. I've made fun of guys who like watching sports saying things like, "it's just a stupid game for mindless oafs." And the list could go on. And in those moments, I am equally as guilty. I am equally as wrong as others have been because all I'm doing is elevating my own personal convictions or

tendencies over someone else's and saying they're less-than because of it. When in reality, we should all be looking to Jesus as our example *and* as our hope.

Our identity can never be, and was never meant to be, found in our masculinity. Our identity is meant to be found in Jesus. He gives us purpose and hope, and he gives us an example of what it means to live a life for God. Our identity is completely secure in Jesus, and that security gives us freedom to live our lives as the men we were created to be, reshaping and remolding every aspect of ourselves that has been damaged by the effects of sin to be aligned with Him and His goals.

So I want to end today by taking some time to reflect and ask the Spirit to move in our hearts. The band can come on up and I want everyone to do whatever you need to do to really focus and think clearly. I'll give some time for you to process each one, but I want to end with three questions. First: **in what ways have I let culture define masculinity for me more than the bible?** Second: **in what ways have I held men in my life (friends, coworkers, brothers, sons) to cultural stereotypes rather than the Scriptures?** Third: sometimes our tendency as humans is to have a rebellious nature. And what can sometimes happen is in response to ways we feel like someone is telling us to be or act, we instead rebel and go the opposite way. Now, sometimes going against what culture says is motivated by Scripture, but we need to try to identify where we may *actually* be more motivated by rebellion than by Scripture. **In what ways have I been more motivated by rebellion against masculine stereotypes than I have the Scriptures?**

Let's pray.