

This is Who I Am: Masculine

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I once felt masculinity was barbaric, saturated in stupidity, and weak. So I separated myself from it. When I entered the darkened hallways of middle school I realized I didn't like, or do, most things other boys did. I was different. The masculinity I had rejected once before, I now wanted. But it was so unreachable as if an impassable canyon valley separated me from manhood. There was no way I could be masculine. I didn't like to play sports (nor was I good at it), I wasn't aggressive, and I couldn't care less about the score last night. But I loved singing (and I was good at it), I was sensitive, and I cared abundantly about the clothes I wore to school. As you can see, I would have been like a square being forced unsuccessfully into the circular shape for masculinity. It wasn't happening.

It took me years to realize I was comparing myself to a mold of masculinity that a broken world created. Every man on Earth struggles with what it means to be a man. Even friends I thought for sure would be secure have battled with measuring up to the "masculine standard". Many men do "well enough" fitting into the manly archetype, but some don't. I've heard many stories from guys who battle with same-sex attraction of feeling separated and even unworthy of masculinity. Their interests, passions, and mannerisms just don't measure up. But by whose standards are we measuring ourselves?

Are we looking to our master Creator and perfect Designer for proper gender perspective, or to social norms of a society functioning out of a worldly, broken perspective? Is God informing whom we are as created men and women, or are other *created people*?

It is hard living in a society that pressures us to fit into the prototypical man or woman. If we don't we are cast aside, rejected, and labeled an identity that appeases culture. If you aren't what the world thinks is masculine, you must be a sissy or gay. I was given that label that completely cut me off from grasping the masculine God designed me for. I lived close to 15 years of my life – from a child to early college – believing I was just like girls. I could completely understand and relate to them. The masculine was mysterious. Alien.

What changed was my perception. I moved into a house with five other guys during my junior year of college. That year turned out to be the most insightful, impactful, and growth-filled period of my life. I was accepted into the circle of men. I was affirmed as a man, and they had my back. The world that once seemed so foreign to me, I finally stepped into with trepidation. As I spent time with them, doing things guys do, I began to realize I was a lot more like them than I

thought. The many years of pre-programming fought the ludicrous idea that I could actually be like them. Eventually truth won, and I embraced masculinity and saw it as a good thing.

Coming to the realization that women were complicated and confusing (no offense) was an admission I never thought I'd give. But it finally clicked in my mind that I wasn't like girls, and I couldn't understand them as well as I thought, and that was okay. I was free to embrace the masculine that was always there. I still enjoyed the arts, dressing well, and still got bored at basketball games. But I was finally free to be me and know that I was still masculine.

As I finally denied the lie and ripped off the straight jacket the world clamped down on me, I could see how masculine I was. I didn't go onto a potter's wheel and evolve into a masculinity that fit the world. I realized the Lord had already molded me into the man He wanted me to be long before the world gave me a counterfeit name. I'm still the tender, sensitive, and artistic guy, but the more I embraced my masculinity the more strength I exuded, the more protective I became, and the more leadership developed.

A friend recently told me that a girl he introduced me to said I had a very calming presence and any girl would really want that in a man. It's interesting that one of my personality traits I once carried with embarrassment was something a girl saw as good and desirable in a man. I am secure in my masculinity today, and not because I've finally found the "key" to open the door to worldly masculinity. Part of my security came from acceptance and affirmation from other guys. But most of it came from acknowledging my Creator knows His design best. He showed me my masculinity and affirmed it in me. My security came when I embraced myself, and was willing to get to know me better and allow all of who I am out.

If you're like me – creative, sensitive, and artistically inclined – that's a good thing. Don't embrace the masculine mold of this world, but embrace God's masculinity within you. Unsurprisingly, it looks a lot different from the world's perspective.

Embracing my Creator's craftsmanship, I'm no longer inadequate. This is who I am: masculine.