

Tim Clinton: What True Masculinity Looks Like

At a time in culture when men are put down and their masculinity is debased, they can either live a life of defeat or stand in their God-given inheritance. As an observer of culture, a student of the Word and a highly trained professional counselor, Dr. Tim Clinton has much to say in addressing biblical masculinity, what it is and how to walk in it. Charisma asked Dr. Clinton, president of the American Association of Christian Counselors, to share his Scripture-based views on this topic as it affects men, the family and culture.

You have long been a proponent for strong families. What led you to write a book that shows the importance of biblical masculinity?

It's no secret that there has been a real beatdown on men in the media and our culture. If you are a male, you are pretty much labeled as bad and in need of serious help. I don't know about you, but I'm tired of hearing that men are nothing more than deadbeat dads, porn addicts, terrible lovers, abusers and disengaged buffoons who only care about themselves and what they can get out of life. I'm also tired of the radical push to feminize men. Sure, we have seen this toxic behavior in men, but that doesn't mean masculinity is toxic. Why? Because research shows that men matter, that dads matter. The statistics don't lie. You take fathers out of the picture, and things go haywire. The research on fatherlessness is stunning. Now more than ever, what we really need are godly men: men who know and harness their role, gifts and influence for good. Bottom line is that a lot of men have let down their guard, given up ground to the evil one and/or stepped out of the fight. What they need is to first understand their role and significance in this journey called life and to step up and

get back into the fight. Strong men are the walls and gatekeepers for the family. Take them out, and the enemy has a clear shot at the family structure, which is the foundation of our Christian culture. The progressive culture is trying to tear down the family unit, and that starts with men and masculinity. Why? Because progressives know men are the key. In Take It Back, we wanted to create a word of help, hope and encouragement to embrace biblical masculinity. Take It Back is anchored in the belief that God made men unique for a purpose and reason.

Please give an example of how you've seen male leadership impact you and your family.

My dad was a part of what Tom Brokaw called the "Greatest Generation," World War II veterans. He faithfully served in the U.S. Navy and spent time on the USS Pennsylvania in the South Pacific. He loved God and took seriously Nehemiah 4:14 (NKJV), "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and fearsome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses." I still remember some of the war stories he would tell and loved the part how when he got home he saw our mother walking down the streets of DuBois, Pennsylvania, and won her heart once again. I never heard my dad ever raise his voice to her. I still remember being by her bedside when he said his last words of goodbye to her. He taught us to love and be loved, to stand strong in what we believe and to let our lives reflect our beliefs. Even though he served three churches as a pastor, he always made our family a priority. He and I would hunt and fish together, throw a ball, go swimming and kneel together. I often describe him as the kindest man I have ever met. As I look at my everyday life, I have learned there are so many things that compete for our attention and affection, distractions that get in the way of what and who really matter. As a man, it's easy to let your guard down and fail to love well or be present for your spouse—or for those little noses pressed up against the

windowpane waiting for you to get home. It's also easy to get discouraged in what you do and fail to provide and protect those you love. Research is clear that the consequences for this are horrible. When you think about it, if men/dads didn't matter, this discussion wouldn't matter all that much either, would it?

You talk a lot about the need for men to reclaim "true masculinity." How do you define it?

David's words to his son Solomon to "be strong, and show yourself a man" (1 Kings 2:2b, ESV) were carefully chosen to help him stay anchored on what he would need to be and do to lead the children of Israel in the days ahead. I believe David wasn't focused on talent, skill or determination but rather on being a man after God's own heart—to do His will. The focus is more on character. To me, there is no room for a culture of sexism or toxic behavior in true biblical masculinity. Jesus, for example, was a carpenter who knew how to work. He had calloused hands. He stood alone in the face of opposition, even threats and crowds. He knew how to wield a whip. Make no mistake, Jesus was masculine in the traditional sense. Yet He was compassionate and sensitive to the pains of those around Him. He wept and honored women in a culture that didn't. Jesus is the ultimate example of biblical masculinity.

As a father, how do you approach this topic with your son?

We are admonished to love both in word and deed. I believe that a lot of what is imparted to our children is both taught and caught, that they listen to our words and watch our lives closely. As a dad, I have wanted my children to know how much of a priority they are to me by being present physically and emotionally. As a result, I didn't just go to games; I coached my children until I couldn't be their coach anymore. That meant I passed on a lot of speaking and traveling opportunities. I keep learning every day that the power of showing up is half the battle. I also believe "being present"

opens the door for meaningful conversations about life and roles at those critical teachable moments, especially when life is being unkind and brutal. Busy, preoccupied dads miss those moments. I also believe as dads, we have to model what it means to love God, their mother and their siblings. It also involves talking about spiritual things, praying for and with your kids and family matters. Our children see and know our hearts. I have tried to live out gentleness and kindness toward them and to own responsibility for my actions. We all (dads included) need heavy doses of grace and forgiveness. I have also wanted him/them to know that being a man means being someone who is fun to be with. Life is an adventure, and we all need encouragement and courage to face and embrace this life.

Emotion regulation is important too, such as being slow to anger, to listen first and then respond. Kids also need to know that you will show up and fight for them when they have been wronged. That is so important. That's what dads do. I've also wanted to let them know that God loves them more deeply than I do. I am reminded here of William Wallace's words in the movie Braveheart: "'Every man dies. Not every man really lives.'" To me, that is about standing for something, having fun, enjoying your moments and remembering what Josh McDowell once said, "You don't make memories with your children, but rather, you are the memory."

How can a local church best help men reclaim biblical masculinity?

Create a culture that honors, encourages and engages men to know, serve and live out their everyday passions in alignment with the Word of God. Teach them how to be godly, good fathers, to enjoy and celebrate their gifts and abilities in and through ministry outlets, whether building engines, fishing, teaching music, sports or mentoring. Have older leaders mentor and reach out to younger men. Involve youth with activities and Bible studies that include men of all

ages. Don't always separate the youth from the older. They feed off each other.

What should parents keep in mind as they discuss gender and masculinity with their children?

Don't excuse or confuse toxic behavior with masculinity. Be sure to teach skills that endear the heart of the fathers to their children and the children to their fathers. Be careful not to beat men up. They get enough of that. But rather challenge and encourage them to do good works. Teach them how to love and be loved. Do you know why? Because deep down inside, most men do care how they are doing as a son, dad, husband, as a servant of the most high God.

What closing thoughts would you like to add?

Something is happening. I believe there is a stirring in the hearts of men. There is fire burning in their souls to step up and into the moment. I see it in the next generation of fathers. I believe it is the work of God. Can you imagine what could happen to families, churches, communities, nations if men would take their rightful place? Heaven and earth are on tiptoes waiting. It's go time!

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