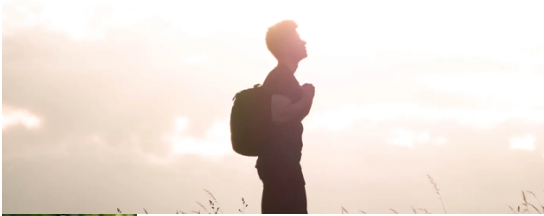


The Man of God You Could Become

Six Steps Toward Spiritual Maturity



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Do you want to grow as a man of God?

Maybe you're a new believer. Your character drastically differs from just a couple years ago, but you know you have a long way to go. Or maybe you've been a believer for a long time, but you've sensed yourself spiritually stagnating. You'd be hard pressed to point out a way you've made evident spiritual progress in the last year.

If either of those profiles fit you, this article, and its two goals, are for you. The first is to give you a new ambition, namely, becoming a man of God. The second is to give you some directions for the journey.

The "man" in "man of God" is deliberate; I'm speaking particularly to men. Much of what I'll say also applies to women, but the next-to-last section zeroes in on a uniquely male calling.

First, here's the new ambition. I want you, from now till the day you die, to make it your ambition to become a man of God. And I want that for you because God does. As Paul writes to Timothy, "Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come" (1 Timothy 4:7-8).

Godliness is "of value in every way." It is more valuable than physical strength or financial success. It is worth more than the thickest resume or the most coveted property. Godliness will, in the long run, make you happier than the satisfaction of any earthly desire.

So how can you get it? Here are six pieces of counsel.

Mind the Gap

First, mind the gap — that is, the gap between your character and God's. And "gap" doesn't even begin to cover it. More like "infinite chasm." But God commands you to cross it: "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" ([Leviticus 19:2](#); cf. [1 Peter 1:15–16](#)).

Learn to see and evaluate your character in light of God's. Hold Scripture before your eyes as a mirror to reveal what's lacking in you but present in him, and what's present in you but lacking in him. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" ([1 John 1:5](#)). What darkness is present in you? What light is missing? If you want specific benchmarks to measure yourself against, study the Sermon on the Mount ([Matthew 5–7](#)), the fruit of the Spirit ([Galatians 5:22–23](#)), and the qualifications for elders ([1 Timothy 3:1–7](#); [Titus 1:5–9](#)).

One good way to become more mindful of this gap is to seek out and study godly men. Who do you know who radiates more of God's holiness and joy and love than you do? Get to know him. Get close to him. Find out how he has made the progress he has, and do what he does (more on models below). The gap between your character and his can help you see the infinitely greater gap between your character and God's. But not only that: learning how a more godly man got more godly can power-assist your progress in godliness.

Mine New Motives

Real change comes from the heart. This requires (though is by no means limited to) a new set of motives for you to mine. In order to make any lasting progress in godliness, your chief motive must be to glorify God: "whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" ([1 Corinthians 10:31](#)). Train your heart to love God's glory more than your own, to love praising God more than receiving praise. Make it your ambition to please God in all you do ([2 Corinthians 5:9](#)).

In our theme verse, Paul promises that godliness is of value in every way. What is the value-added of godliness? What should motivate you to pursue it? Godliness gives you power greater than any physical prowess, technological reach, or military strength: "Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city" ([Proverbs 16:32](#)). Godliness gives you a freedom that runs deeper than any other: freedom from tyranny of self and slavery to sin. As Jesus promises, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" ([John 8:31–32](#)). Godliness gives you contentment, which is greater gain than any stockpile of earthly treasure. "Godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world" ([1 Timothy 6:6–7](#)).

Do you want power or freedom or lasting, secure gain? You'll find the best, and the only reliable, form of all of those goods in godliness. So, work to continually recalibrate your motives.

Form Transforming Habits

In order to do this, you need to form transforming habits, especially Scripture study, meditation, and prayer in private and with others. Donald Whitney's book [Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life](#) is a practical, challenging guide to these, as is David Mathis's [Habits of Grace](#).

If you're not in the habit of regularly communing with Jesus through time in his word and prayer, here's how I'd encourage you to start. Whatever your morning schedule looks like, get up a little earlier, even just twenty or thirty minutes. Read something in Scripture — could be a Psalm or a chapter of Proverbs, could be the passage your pastor is going to preach the next Sunday — and find something to turn into prayer.

What in the passage can you praise God for? What sins in your life does the passage reveal? What reason does the passage give you to thank God? What does it teach you to ask God for? Turn Scripture reading into prayer and even a short time with Christ can become a regularly refueling engine of daily transformation into his character.

Get New Models

Everyone has models. Even if you don't consciously admit it, styling yourself as an intrepid individualist, chances are there are men you strive to be like.

Whether in matters personal or professional, superficial or substantive, there are men you know, or at least know of, that you want to be like. And if you haven't been self-consciously striving for godliness for the past several years, then chances are, you need new models.

“Find the godliest men you can, get as close to them as you can, and learn as much from them as you can.”

So find the godliest men you can, get as close to them as you can, and learn as much from them as you can. That's what the apostle Paul told the whole Philippian church to do: “Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us” ([Philippians 3:17](#)). And again, “What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you” ([Philippians 4:9](#)).

Find Ways to Father

One nearly universal definition of manhood is to produce more than you consume (see, for instance Roy Baumeister, *Is There Anything Good About Men?*, 195). It's easy to see how that works in an economic, material sense: to provide for a family, you need to earn more than you use. You must be a generator of surpluses. And working hard so as to provide for others is a basic biblical imperative that especially lands on men's shoulders ([1 Timothy 5:8](#)). But this shorthand definition of manhood — that you produce more than you consume — doesn't just apply to bringing home bacon. It has deep spiritual relevance as well. We all have burdens, and we need help bearing them ([Galatians 6:2](#)). We all have limited wisdom, and so we all need counselors ([Proverbs 24:6](#)). But a spiritually productive man is one who is a net burden-bearer, and a net wisdom-dispenser, a net exporter to others of spiritual good and gain. So strive to be a spiritual producer. Strive to have your desires so under control, your heart so aligned with God's will, and your mind so transformed by his word, that you store up a surplus of spiritual help that you can regularly share out with others.

“Fatherhood, both natural and spiritual, is the distinctive shape of masculine maturity.”

Another way to say this is, find ways to father. If you're the father of children, train them in all God's ways ([Ephesians 6:4](#)). If you're unmarried and desire to be married, pursue the kind of holiness, competence, leadership ability, and maturity that will make you not only attractive husband material but ready and eager to be a father. Fatherhood, both natural and spiritual, is the distinctive shape of masculine maturity. A father provides and protects. What kind of man do you need to become in order to faithfully provide for and protect others in both material and spiritual ways?

Make Membership Matter

Finally, make membership matter — meaning church membership. The New Testament assumes that all Christians will belong to local gatherings of Christians that assemble regularly and are mutually, self-consciously committed to each other (for example, [1 Corinthians 5:1–13](#)). I'm putting this last, but in some ways it really goes first.

Church membership is the crucial, formative context for these other five items that have come before. Finding, committing to, and throwing yourself into a gospel-preaching church is the best way to regularly expose yourself to the

character of God, reminders of gospel motives for godliness, help in forming spiritually fruitful habits, godly models to follow, and opportunities to bear others' burdens and build them up in love.

These six points are just a start, hopefully a jump-start, for the long, often difficult journey of growing more godly. But the good news about church membership is that, when you regularly gather with a body of believers who are committed to Christ and each other, every single Sunday is a fresh start. And fellowship with other godly men who are striving in the same direction can continually refresh your heart in your quest to be more like Christ.