



The Masculinist #12: How to Improve Your Posture

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Welcome back to the Masculinist, the monthly newsletter on the intersection of Christianity and masculinity.

Is this newsletter resonating with you or stimulating your thinking? Then I need your help. The percentage of people who read these emails is off the charts compared to most email newsletters. I've gotten positive feedback. And very few people have unsubscribed. But to justify the investment of time in this, and the risk I'm taking on by writing some of this stuff, I need to see my subscriber base growing. So although some of this might be too hot to handle for some, please step out yourself and pass it along to those you think could benefit, especially Christian pastors and lay leaders, because I need your help to make this a success.

New readers can subscribe here: <http://www.urbanophile.com/masculinist/>

Big personal news for Yours Truly this month. I am a first time father. Katy gave birth to our son Alex on July 19th – exactly nine months and one day after we were married. It's definitely turning my life upside down. So we'll see how it goes and how it affects what I write here.

You are no doubt aware of the events in Charlottesville. I have been following these groups for some time. In Masc #5 (available on request) I wrote, "I started this project about Christian masculinity because I saw so many young men being drawn into pagan alt-right masculinity." While the church is responsible for the harms done by its teachings and actions such as purity culture and Mark Driscoll (Masc #7), the responsibility for people deciding to become neo-Nazis lies with them alone. But don't we want to see fewer people make that choice? As the residual Christian culture of society finishes corroding away, [previous constraints are being released](#). I for one would like to see people attracted instead into an authentic Christian masculinity instead of other directions they could go, which is a big reason I've been fighting here to reform the church's deeply flawed thinking on the topic.

Just because Charlottesville was a debacle for these groups, don't think that this trend is somehow going away. Identity politics and nationalism are on the rise because of global forces. Similar movements are happening across the western world and are in some ways more advanced in several European countries. I don't want to live in a world of identity politics, but reality doesn't care what I think. You might not be interested in identity politics, but identity politics are interested in you. Just look at what happened to Tim Keller at Princeton. The church is going to be challenged in ways few if any of us has ever experienced. Difficult times like these particularly call for the masculine virtues. We must have the courage to seek the truth, not our own comfort, and align our lives with the truth. That moral courage itself will be part of the package that helps to attract people to the faith, as it has attracted people to folks like Jordan Peterson (Masc #11 and below).

In the Masculinist I alternate issue between hard-hitting cultural commentary and practical news you can use for being a better man. Today another installment of the latter with a focus on posture.

Posture – The Key to Improving Masculine Presence

Do you want to have strong masculine presence when you walk down the street or into a room or stand at the podium? Almost nothing is more important to that than having good posture.

Americans today have terrible posture. You can attribute this to all sorts of things, such as people hunched over computers in the office or bending their neck down to look at their phone. But it's pretty obvious when you look around. It's been widely made fun of, such as in those [parody "evolution of man" graphics](#) that show man evolving from a bent over monkey to an upright human to a bent over man typing away at his computer.

I long had absolutely horrible posture. I always walked along almost staring at the sidewalk, as if afraid of stepping into a hole or something. As far as I know I was always like this. I speculate it was because I grew up next to a cow

pasture where you really did need to watch where you stepped. But who knows why really.

It took a long time before I even became aware my posture was bad. After I did I tried to fix it. But I just couldn't do it. I could keep my head up when I was consciously thinking about it, but if I stopped concentrating, I'd immediately revert to craning over and staring at the ground.

About three years ago I stumbled on some techniques that really helped me to fix my problems. I'm by no means perfect and probably never will be. After a lifetime of poor posture, I'll probably have something of a [kyphotic posture](#) forever. But I'm much, much improved.

Good and Bad Posture

Bad posture comes in a variety of forms. There is a graphic at this link:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/537b0649e4b0f6c6b6877a35/t/53a03919e4b00a948fdecaab/1403009306165/?format=1000w>

that compares good posture with various forms of poor posture. (I am not embedding it because of copyright. The image is from [The Physio Company](#)).

Proper posture is your entire body in vertical alignment, like someone is pulling you up by a string attached to the top of your head, with your shoulders open and back, head up, and eyes forward.

By contrast, I have traditionally looked like the guy on the right in that image. Note the rounded, slumped shoulders, curved upper back, head forward and looking down. But also note the tilted hips. Everybody knows that you are supposed to keep your head up, and looks for posture problems in the head and shoulders. But posture problems often start at the hips with a forward or backward tilt.

I believe this kind of poor posture results from two things: habituation, and a weak posterior chain and core. Many of us have had bad posture for so long it's stamped itself on our body. That habit has to be broken, and the body reshaped to a proper contour. And most men are very weak. Standing up straight requires a strong posterior chain (the muscles on the rear side of your body, such as your back muscles) and core. But most men can't even do one unassisted pull-up, an exercise heavily reliant on your back muscles.

I have good news and bad news. The good news is that even if your posture will never be perfect, you can make massive improvements that will give you a much greater sense of masculine presence and bearing. The bad news is that it takes a while. This is journey that will take months and, like lifting weights or any other physical fitness activity, be something you need to integrate into your lifestyle forever.

I made good progress in about a year. So that should give you an idea of what's possible.

Posture is absolutely critical to how you are perceived by others, so this is one you don't want to overlook or wait to get started on. If your posture is terrible, it will undermine everything else you do when it comes to how other perceive you.

The route to better posture is two fold. If the key problem is a weak posterior chain and core, you need to strengthen those. You can do them through either a dumbbell/bodyweight program or barbell training. And then you need to focus on consciously reshaping your posture through things like posture stretches, eye contract drills, and making sure to keep checking in on the state of your posture until good posture is second nature.

As you'll see, the strengthening exercises are ones you should already be doing as part of your fitness routine. There's really nothing extra you need to do for posture other than being sure to focus on your posterior chain. So really better posture is just extra motivation for doing something you ought to already be doing. Get the right workout program going, and the actual number of posture specific activities is low and take very little time.

Strengthening – Bodyweight/Dumbbell Version

This is what I started with. The most critical part of it is strengthening your back, which for most guys is extremely weak. Again, most dudes can't even do a single pull-up. I know I couldn't when I started out. It was hugely embarrassing.

The first exercise you want to do is the pull-up or chin-up. You can do them at home on an [inexpensive doorframe pull up bar](#). Can't do any pull-ups? Use a chair for some assistance. But be super careful with that. Always position one leg to come down on if you fall. When I did these I would do as many as I could unassisted (which at first was zero), then use chair assist for as many more reps as I could, being careful to stop before true failure.

The other key exercises are dumbbell rows – lots and lots of rows. Here's a video of the [two-arm version](#). And here's one of a [one-armed version](#). If you don't have a bench, you can bend over and put your forearm on your knee.

To make this really easy, just do [P90X](#). If you do two or three cycles of this, you'll be well on your way – and be much more overall physically fit than today. I personally did it. The full P90X routine is too time consuming to do more than once. For future go rounds, I just used the three day a week weight sessions combined with my own cardio. P90X does a ton of work on your back, core, and rest of your body. It's not the kind of program you'd do forever, but a couple rounds of it is a good boot camp.

The beauty of this approach is that you can do it at home, with limited equipment and no formal training.

Strengthening – Barbell Version

A second approach is to use barbell training, specifically the deadlift, squat, and overhead press, along with pull-ups. Nothing strengthens you or adds muscle faster. The deadlift especially is the single best exercise you can do for your posterior chain and posture in my view. The very act of deadlifting is the same muscle pattern you use to snap yourself into erect posture. Here's a video capture of me near the top of the deadlift.



The other thing about these lifts is that you need to move in perfect alignment with your center of gravity to avoid tipping over. This helps orient you towards good posture and movement too. Here's a video capture of me in the overhead press. It's not perfect, but illustrates how this lift facilitates good posture.



The core of my workout today is barbell. With it you get much, much stronger. The great news is that this is a maintenance workout you can do for a lifetime, and unlike P90X you can keep getting better indefinitely. The downside is that you need either a gym membership or expensive equipment. You also need initial training from [someone qualified](#) in order to avoid serious injury. And you have to accept that you'll gain some fat as you build up during the beginning phases. For that reason, I think what I did works best. Start on P90X to get good baseline fitness and do some weight cutting, then move to barbell.

Posture Reshaping

Here are some things you can do help get your posture right. Again, I do these and they have helped a lot.

First, try the Mike Cernovich [posture stretches](#). (I addressed Cernovich in detail in Masc #7). Here's a video of them. They are simple and effective. I do them every morning as part of my routine.

Here's [another version](#) of the Cernovich posture stretch. These are basically a combination weighted shoulder shrug/chest expansion. I don't do them now but did do them with dumbbells at home in the past while I was focusing on posture improvement.

Secondly, do my eye contract drills, as mentioned in Masc #4. That is, attempt to establish eye contact with everyone you pass and hold it for 2-3 seconds. Why does this help with posture? You need to have your head up and be looking straight ahead at eye level to do it. Are you noticing how the things I am telling you are synergistic? They support and reinforce one another.

Thirdly, check in with yourself periodically to sense what your posture is. Correct if off. Here's one quick tip to sense if your hips are wrong. When they are in the right position, you should feel as though you're walking forward leading with your belt buckle, as if a string were tied around it pulling you forward.

Do this and over time you'll see results. Again, nothing will improve your masculine presence and confidence more than walking into a room with excellent upright posture and being able to make strong, unapologetic eye contact.

Additional Resources

There's a book called [Posture Alignment](#) that's all about this topic. I think it's excellent at helping you understand good posture and diagnosing what's wrong with yours. The author's solutions are based in a light yoga approach that I really haven't tried so can't endorse. (By the skin in the game principle, I only endorse things I personally do or have done successfully). But you can try if you'd like. Or integrate some of his positions and moves into the program I outlined above.

In the Culture

A Millennial focused web site called [Fatherly](#) just raised \$4 million in funding. It's apparently designed to get Millennial men more into fatherhood. Apparently fans of the site are getting its logo tattooed on them (standard marketing claim

discount applies). I checked the share count on some of the articles, and its traffic is pretty modest at this point.



What Can Millennial Parents Predict About Their Children's Generation?

Joshua A. Krisch | August 9, 2017 5:35 pm



The Five Stages Of Self-Awareness Explain What Kids See In The Mirror

Joshua A. Krisch | August 9, 2017 3:00 pm



Music Therapy May Not Help Treat Autism

Lauren Vinopal | August 9, 2017 11:51 am

<https://www.fatherly.com/health-science/music-therapy-autism/>

The Millennial mommy blogger sites were huge moneymakers for a while. People with kids buy a lot of product. We'll see if these guys are able to tap into the dad market.

Noteworthy

In the last issue I mentioned You Tube celebrity Dr. Jordan Peterson, and said it was only a matter of time before there was an attempt made to get him kicked off Patreon. Less than a month later, Google suspended his account, causing him to lose access to both his email and You Tube. He appealed and was told his account would not be reinstated because he had committed unspecified violations of Google's terms of service. Because he's a high profile person, media blowback got his account restored. Don't count on this happening forever, however.

The irony is that Google and the rest of Silicon Valley are now in the process of being devoured themselves by the very demon they summoned.

Leila Miller wrote up some [highlights from her recent book *Primal Loss: The Now-Adult Children of Divorce Speak*](#). It's a write-up of 70 people who reflect back on the divorce of their parents. They still have negative feelings about it and have experienced significant impacts into their adult life as a result. I was particularly struck by how multiple of them talked about having to be, in effect, therapists to their parents, attempting to validate their parents' feelings and avoid making them feel bad about divorcing. Here are some excerpts:

I believe [the divorce] instilled a fear of abandonment in me with regard to all of my relationships. I developed problems trusting people to be there for me, believing that when the going got rough, people would leave me. I never learned any skills for solving conflict in relationships. As much as I desperately craved intimacy and love, the closer someone came to me, the more terrified I was of getting hurt, or worse—abandoned. I unconsciously sabotaged relationships, as I didn't know how to receive and accept real love...

I'd want people to know and understand that people with divorced parents see the world differently. It's just how it is. Even with the 'best' divorces like mine, a seven-year-old should never be in a position to somehow take the responsibility of her parents' emotions. She should never have to think about which parent gets to hear or see something from her first, for fear of hurting the other parent's feelings. She should never have to feel like she doesn't belong in the home of her parents. None of these things were done on purpose. My parents did the best they could to keep me at the center, to keep me as the focus, so that my life could have minimal turbulence.

A parent might be able to totally start over with a new spouse, experiencing freedom from the first marriage and only minimal contact with the first spouse. For the child, however, their worlds will forever be fundamentally split. Forever. There is no starting over with a clean slate; things are now complicated and fractured. Divorce starts a family onto two different paths that, as the years unfold, grow further and further apart. It's not a one-time event, but rather an ever-changing and ever-widening gap that only the children are really tasked with

straddling and reconciling, season after season, change after change.

These results are consistent with the longitudinal study by Judith Wallerstein, et. al. published in book form as [The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: A 25 Year Landmark Study](#). Bottom line: even the best divorces have profound, apparently life-long negative effects on the children. Parents who rationalize their divorce as somehow better for the children are engaging in casuistry, plain and simple.

The wife of my former pastor, who divorced him after he was permanently disabled in an accident, may have found freedom for herself, but the ultimate price will be paid by her five children.

NYT: [Jay-Z and the politics of rapping in middle age](#)

Jay-Z's old creative and sexual promiscuity have been replaced by an act of commitment. No more women, just his wife. No more gluts of great producers, just this one. These are the new risks for him: monogamy, focus, trust. There are new existential concerns, too. The ambition here extends from his own plight to the straits of black people all over America. Nothing like a coherent thesis emerges, but he's feeling his way toward if not a moral capitalism then the idea of who capitalism is for. Jay-Z began his career talking about all the money he had and how he made it. Now, he's aged into a man with time to think about what the money means, what else it can do. He has become wealthy, and wealth is money with dimension, vision and heirs.

City Journal: [Parents, Plural](#)

BBC: [Sperm count drop could make humans extinct](#)

Jeanette Kupferman: [Will my granddaughter pay the price for my fight for equality?](#)

Marie Claire: [Dear Parents-to-be: Stop celebrating your baby's gender](#)

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