



---

## The Masculinist #27: Habits of the Home

---

Aaron M. Renn <arenn@urbanophile.com>  
To: arenn@urbanophile.com

Wed, Nov 14, 2018 at 8:13 AM

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

You can read all of the back issues and subscribe at <https://www.urbanophile.com/masculinist/the-masculinist-archives/>

Last month's issue was about the fall of the household. Interestingly, First Things magazine's new issue also has an [article](#) on the decline of the household. I'm very glad to see this topic getting more attention. You can judge for yourself who did it better, but I'm glad I hit the Publish button before they did...

Thanks also to Rod Dreher, who included a link to my last issue in [a post](#) of his on the challenges facing the family.

I was also recently privileged to be on the Wesley Seminary [podcast](#) talking about Christianity and Masculinity, so check it out.

### Support the Masculinist

I have a job and don't need your money to publish this newsletter, which I write on evenings and weekends. It's free and I plan to keep it that way. But I am spending cash money out of my own pocket to do this. For example, I spend over \$50 a month on mailing list software alone. That's not all for the Masculinist, but most of it is.

So I'd like to ask for those of you who are up for it to support the Masculinist on Patreon at [www.patreon.com/masculinist](http://www.patreon.com/masculinist). If you don't know Patreon, it's a platform that lets you make monthly contributions to people you want to support. I use it to support other people whose work I like, and it's very easy to use.

The Masculinist is getting a lot of uptake. I'm continually adding new subscribers. The percentage of subscribers who actually open the email each month is higher than any other mailing list I know anywhere – it's off the charts. My Masculinist work has been featured in Christianity Today, the Institute for Family Studies, Mere Orthodoxy, by Rod Dreher, and others.

The feedback people send me has been incredible. Here is some of it:

- "I cannot begin to tell you how much I appreciate what you are doing with The Masculinist, and I am so glad I found my way into your subscription list."
- "Subscribing to your newsletter was one of the better decisions I've made in some time...I don't encounter anyone else who connects the dots in the manner you do."
- "Every month when one of these shows up I stop what I am doing and read to completion instantly."
- "This is just what the doctor ordered for me personally"
- "I LOVE LOVE LOVE your emails!"

Is the content in the Masculinist resonating with you? Have you forwarded any issues to others? Then please consider [becoming a supporter](#). Because it would be nice to at least not lose money on this.

As a thank you, anyone who signs up during November will receive a special issue of the Masculinist that will be exclusive to my supporters.

To be clear, I'm going to keep publishing even if none of you gives me a dime. My intent is to keep this going at least another year regardless. There's no obligation at all. And if you're a new subscriber, this is not for you. First read for a while and then decide if it's something you want to support.

For those of you who want to support the Masculinist in a bigger way, Patreon is set up to have tiers of supporters with

rewards, so I created some. If you give \$10/month, you'll get early access to every issue of the Masculinist. At \$25/month I will from time to time (probably once or twice a month), send out special updates with exclusive links and commentary that won't make it into the main issue. And if anyone wants to give \$100/month, I'd actually do quarterly conference calls/live streams/or some other kind of interactive live discussion.

If I raise more than needed to cover all of my current costs, I've got a number of ideas for Masculinist extensions I can use it to help with.

Thank you. Again the link to support is [www.patreon.com/masculinist](http://www.patreon.com/masculinist).

## More Free Online Resources From Me

I also have some additional free resources to give you. The Masculinist archives are online, but some old issues had attachments of supplemental materials I'd distributed. I have now put some of these online, which you can download at your convenience.

- [Notes on Charles Taylor's A Secular Age](#). This book is extremely important but also very dense. I've read it twice and took extensive notes, which are in a zip file organized by chapter. This material makes for good review or discussion document for a reading group.
- [Notes on Nassim Taleb's Incerto](#). As I noted in [Masc #14](#), Nassim Taleb is a very important thinker whose conclusions are counter-intuitive, profound, and very favorable to Christianity. I have summarized some of the key points from *Fooled by Randomness*, *The Black Swan*, *Antifragile*, and *Skin in the Game* (new) for your convenience.
- [Proverbs on Women and Marriage](#). Last year I read through the book of Proverbs and extracted every verse on women and marriage, now conveniently compiled into a single document.

## Habits of the Home

A number of you signed up because of my issue on the fall of the household. I try to alternate issues like that which feature cultural analysis and critique with more practically focused issues designed to help build men up. This month is one of the second type, focused on habits of the home.

I tend to be skeptical of "life hacks." It's rare that we can use simple tricks make a major life change. But there's nothing wrong with small life improvements. And using the Ratchet Principle I outlined in [Masc #6](#), if you are continuously making small, incremental improvements over time, it will ultimately turn into real change.

So today I want to share some small things I do in my home in case you find them useful for yourself. In return I'm asking you to [email me](#) any similar kinds of household habits you have. I might want to use them myself. Also, if people send them to me, I will edit, anonymize, and compile them and send them out to everybody in a future issue so we can all benefit from each other's discoveries.

To start off, here are some of my household habits.

1. [Family Verse](#). I took this idea from my friend Dwight. Every week his family recites their family verse at Sunday dinner. Not only did I take his idea, I took his verse. It's Proverbs 3:5-6: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight." My in-laws also have a framed picture of this verse at their bedside. I haven't done something like that yet, but might well in the future.

2. [Fishbowl Prayers](#). I have tried to make a point of adding some type of intercessory prayer at meals to make sure we make a habit of focusing outwardly as a family towards other people's needs. I don't do it 100% of the time because a) I'm generally ravenously hungry and b) I can't often think of things to pray for on the spot. I read a story about a pastor – I think it was Russell Moore – who figured out an easy way to handle this by keeping a fishbowl of business cards of other pastors in the kitchen. At meals they pull one out at random and pray for that guy. I don't personally have a fishbowl yet, but I can see the value in it to help further institutionalize our intercessory prayer habit.

3. [Friday Fasting](#). My family fasts from meat on Fridays. No, I'm not Catholic. But it's a practice I think makes a lot of sense for Protestants too, which is why I'm including it here. Why? First, it established a corporate family fast. It's something we can all do together, even our 1yo, any of us who are sick, etc. Second, many Christians around the world do still fast from meat on Friday, so there's also a greater sense of corporate fasting as the body of Christ. Third,

the practice of fasting on Fridays is ancient. Why reinvent the wheel when there's something we can do that Christians have always done? We've been very good at keeping this fast, though it isn't fully meeting my expectations yet in terms of focusing our minds on the things of God. So I plan to make some tweaks - remember the ratchet. Note: we don't refuse offers of hospitality in order to keep this fast. So if a family invites us over to their home on a Friday for a cookout or something, we are happy to accept.

4. Honor Thy Father. I'm especially interested in ways that families can show honor to fathers. There are obvious ones like having Dad sit at the head of the table, or say grace at meals. But my wife's family had a rule when she was growing up that nobody could read the newspaper until Dad had read the paper. I'm still a newspaper addict, so I thought this was a great rule and have instituted it for our home.

5. Thanks Log. I started keeping a "thanks log" in 2014. Whenever something good happens in my life, I try to just append a dated bullet point about it in an MS-Word document. I don't have to do everything as I don't want to make this a huge chore or burden, but I end up including a substantial amount of stuff - maybe 3-5 things per week. It's amazing the sheer number of things that go right in our lives on a daily basis that we don't really remember or take stock of. Re-reading some of these periodically always helps keep me in a thankful and humble frame of mind.

None of these is earth shattering or totally unique I know. That's the point. They are just simple, small habits. But there's no reason not to do small things as well as large ones.

What about you? Have any good habits from your home you'd like to share? Email them to [arenn@urbanophile.com](mailto:arenn@urbanophile.com) because we need to be sharing what we've learned and what works with other people. Again, I'm especially interested in things targeting the honoring of husbands and fathers (i.e., you).

## Setting a Stop Loss

In investing there's something called a "[stop-loss order](#)." This is an order to automatically sell a stock when it drops to a certain value. For example, someone buying stock XYZ at \$100 might set a stop loss order for \$80, so that if the stock drops more than 20%, it's automatically sold to avoid the risk of further losses. A stop-loss order sets in advance the biggest decline in the stock price that you are willing to tolerate.

The stop-loss as a concept is applicable to many other endeavors in life and I try to consciously consider it in many of my undertakings these days.

It wasn't always like that. At the end of 2006, I started a pseudonymous blog about urban policy called "The Urbanophile." I was working at the entry-level partner level in a big consulting company, so this was a creative outlet for me. I thought I had something to say about cities that other people weren't saying.

I was right about that. The site took off and attracted a lot of readership. I won a global innovation competition for public transit in Chicago. I got my picture on the cover of the Chicago Tribune and started getting quoted by many other media outlets. Senior public officials started reaching out to ask me for input on their situations. I was interviewed for a cabinet level position in a state government.

It occurred to me that I might be able to professionalize this. So I took a negotiated departure from my consulting company in order to take an entrepreneurial leap into the unknown.

Professionalizing my work turned out to be far harder than I'd anticipated. And I ran into many other challenges, including the complete collapse of my personal life. This was without a doubt the bleakest period of my life, and it went on for an extended period of time.

On the other side of it, I did manage to successfully professionalize this, but it frankly could just as easily have ended as a total failure. Failure isn't bad, but failing after massively over-investing something is not a good outcome. As they say in Silicon Valley, you want to fail fast.

I went into my urban policy professionalization quest without any clear sense of what success would look like, and without any "stop loss" order to cut off further pursuit of it if it reached a certain point without success. I don't think having an undefined idea of success is necessarily a bad thing. Over-defined ideas about success can in fact be bad in a lot of ways. But I decided that I'd never go into something again without having a sense of some limit to how much I was willing to invest before pulling the plug.

Given my previous success with urban policy, I was not afraid of attempting to intellectually disrupt another space when I started the Masculinist. But I did incorporate a stop loss up front. I said that if I didn't get 500 subscribers after one year through word of mouth (that is, with no direct marketing on my part), then I would shut this down.

How would I have felt if I'd had to shut this down after that year? Actually, I know exactly how I would have felt, because I did fall short of my mark. I felt great. I didn't have any sense of loss or bitterness at all and was very thankful to God. I emailed my charter subscribers to tell them I was shutting down and thanked them for reading. Then a few days later Rod Dreher linked to me and sent a large number of subscribers overnight. I was back in business. But I got to experience what it was like to walk away, and it was a good feeling.

I said above that I was planning to keep this going at least another year. That's because I've decided to set another performance gate next fall. I'm not sure what it will be yet, but it will be a serious threshold to cross (though probably look unconventional). There's no way I'm going to let getting in the media, etc. lure me into some interminable project the way Urbanophile did. I've already produced over a book's worth of work in this newsletter. If I end it after essentially writing a high value book or two then close up shop, I'll feel great about that. If I keep moving forward, even better.

The stop loss idea seems applicable to many endeavors. I've heard that there's a rule of thumb that a church plant that doesn't become financially self-sustaining within three years never will. The limited time financial support provided to church plants is a kind of stop loss.

The church plant is a good example to bring up because it's very different from my personal writing projects. For those, I can close up shop whenever I want no problem. But once you take on investors, donors, employees, church members, etc., then you have an obligation to them. You can't just quit. But maybe in some of these cases you do need to look for new leadership to replace yourself. Or take some sort of other hard decision. And of course there are some things such as our marriages where we don't get the option to exit, regardless of what is happening.

Regardless, thinking explicitly about setting some sort of maximum time or monetary investment in advance of taking on some project is a good practice to consider. By anchoring yourself into that commitment, even provisionally, you can help avoid the dreaded [sunk-cost fallacy](#). We have a psychological tendency to say to ourselves, "I've invested so much time and money already, I have to keep pressing on or that's all wasted." Actually, it's already wasted in the sense that you cannot recover any time, money, etc. that you've already invested at more than the salvage value of what you've built. Those are sunk costs. There's an old expression about "throwing good money after bad" that gets at this. You don't want to be in that situation. All you can do is judge whether on a go forward whether further investment is worth the return on its own merits. Personally, I think we have a great tendency to delude ourselves in thinking about things like that. So having some kind of preset stop loss position can help avoid that trap.

## Noteworthy

Joshua Harris, who wrote the famous purity culture book *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*, has [issued an apology](#) for the harm it caused and withdrawn the book from publication. I wrote about the failures of purity culture in [Masc #7](#). IKDG sold over one million copies and was very influential. However, Harris was only 21 when he wrote it. The church should not be able to transfer the sins of purity culture onto Harris as scapegoat, even if he is willing to fall on his sword over it. There should be a much broader accounting for what happened with purity culture, because a twenty-something year old Harris was not responsible for institutionalizing this.

The Atlantic: [Fewer Sex Partners Means a Happier Marriage](#) – No surprise here. It's long been known that female sex partner count is highly correlated with risk of divorce.

NYT: [A "sugar date" gone wrong](#)

Bloomberg: [Almost Half of U.S. Births Happen Outside Marriage, Signaling Cultural Shift](#)

Axios: [The great family exodus](#) – the rise of urban post-familialism, as I described in [Masc #26](#).

ACTS Apologist Blog: [My "Five Rules", a Guide to Navigating Dating Waters](#) – I don't know this site, but a reader sent me this link, which is interesting

Finally, for those who are interested, don't forget to support the Masculinist at [www.patreon.com/masculinist](http://www.patreon.com/masculinist).

## Coda

A friend recently mailed me to say:

I saw [big name pastor redacted] on some panel recently. What struck me is how irrelevant just about everything he said was. He shares that with [big name Christian organization redacted] in general. However, I can also see why he was regarded as being so important say, 10 years ago. I'm re-reading *The Magic Mountain*, Thomas Mann's work about pre-1914 Europe, and one of the points he makes is that life can go on for years, decades even, with little change, and then one day something happens, so that last week seems like 50 years in the past. At some point in the last few years, that happened here. Suddenly everything was different and the old ways no longer suffice. Trump is an obvious clue, but it is far deeper than that. The old ways don't work and American Christianity hasn't adjusted, partly because the irrevocable change is so recent and the future seemed predictable. You talk about this but it really stared me in the face listening to [redacted]. He doesn't know his ideas no longer matter--he's an old man so that's fine. But the younger generation following is going to be a problem.

PO Box 231028  
New York NY 10023  
USA

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Change Subscriber Options](#)