

Are You a Self-Made Man or Father-Forged?

Self-made men inevitably self-destruct.

This is my deep conviction after a lifetime of personal experience with my own attempts at growth as well as from thousands of interactions with guys as a pastor and speaker. Life is so broken and challenging that it takes its toll on all of us.

Where does this drive to become self-made men come from? The motivational coding which prompts this nearly inevitable masculine tendency rests far below our consciousness, barely discernible to us. Its narrative goes something like this:

"Today I have to make it happen. Again. I have to deliver, I have to succeed, I have to prove my worth and thus prove I'm a man. It's up to me. Get up, man, and get going!"

Unlike women, most men believe they have to prove their manhood every day. This view of what drives us as men is the conviction of sociologist Michael Kimmel in his well-researched volume, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. Every day is a "relentless test" to prove I'm really a man and worthy of being called a man. Yesterday's worth is gone; it's history. Each day we start with a *tabula rasa* of value, a blank slate of worth.

This attitude creates a great deal of "chronic anxiety and insecurity," and for us, this "relentless retesting of an unprovable ambition." It's with us from the earliest days. Ultimately, this male self-made-man force within us comes from our fallen nature and dysfunctional world.

But in the gospel, we find the really Good News that because of what Jesus accomplished for us, we can become *Father-forged*

men instead of self-made men. Grace scripts for us a different narrative of life. At the beginning of each day we can say:

"It's good to be alive! I am the redeemed and deeply loved son of the Most High God, and I can't wait to spend time with my Father in His Word. It doesn't get any better than being who I am. The best part of my day is meeting Abba and my Lord Jesus Christ. It gets me filled up for the adventure ahead of me today!"

The grace of God in Christ enables us to truly face our sins and deficiencies as men without despairing or groveling endlessly over our unworthiness and inability to be good men. Time no longer wasted in stressing over our failings or trying to "be the man" can now be spent in resting in His great love for us and in our high identity as the Father's sons. We can allow our privileged position to leverage us in interacting with the Father on the very areas where we need to grow.

God forges His sons into great men through the fire of our failings with the quiet but transformative Spirit-shaping and sometimes hammering of His Word, reshaping our masculine souls—always under-girded by His deep and abiding love.

Grace enables us to see with extreme clarity the areas we need to change without the accompanying clouding of shame. We can discern the character that needs to be added, as well as the different behavior we may need to implement in a particular situation. The Father-forged man is fueled by grace and love, and connects that love and grace to concrete areas of growth.

How does this work? Let's say I have to lead and make a decision for my work team or family that I am insecure or fearful about. First, I make an appointment with the Father. I start that time out by focusing on what Christ has done for me out of love. Reading the Word with the Spirit's power helps here! Resting in and ruminating on the Father's great, steadfast love and Christ's accomplishments through His life,

death and resurrection, my thinking begins to change. "I'm not a nobody. I'm the Father's son."

It's easy when I'm freed up emotionally in the context of God's unconditional commitment to confess and repent of my fear, insecurity and failings from the past. I can look my Father full in the face and ask for boldness and wisdom in leading well.

The reality is that during the process I've just described, specific wisdom and new strength is already beginning to flow even before I ask for specifics. What I've found is that subtle but unbelievable power flows when we first engage God as Father. Self-made manhood becomes a thing of the past, because it is a relic of an identity that is being replaced by my true identity as a beloved son.

Pick any subject where we need and want to grow as men—lust, addiction, fear, anxiety, inferiority or leadership. Where grace is mediated from Father to son, sons grow and are forged into the greatness for which they were designed, and for which they long.

But there's more! This new way of life and manhood is transferable! With the grace of God in Christ we become more relaxed, authentic and open to other people. No longer needing to play the "I have it all together" game, we move into the lives of other men, helping them to see that they too can abandon the self-made-man strategy. They realize the self-made mindset will inevitably cause them to self-destruct, and move into the more exhilarating and motivating life of a Father-forged son. Imagine how simple and powerful it would be to leave no man left behind on the battlefield of life.

So abandon the ultimately self-destructive mindset of self-made manhood. Lean into the grace and honor of being a Father-forged man. When we do, common men like us can help other men become Father-forged men living uncommon lives, promoting the

flourishing of men, women, children, churches and culture, for the glory of God. {eo}

For the original article, visit .

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