

“Some more skilled future self”

By [Ryan Dueck](#)

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*Unlike animals that live in the moment and merely cope with the world (however smoothly), we are...drawn out of our present selves toward some more skilled future self that we emulate....[W]e are never fully at home in the world. We are always “on our way.” Or perhaps we should say that this state of being on our way to somewhere else is our peculiar human way of being here in the world. — Matthew Crawford, [The World Beyond Your Head](#)*

Most therapists will say that a key to finding any kind of viable and lasting happiness in the world requires coming to peace with who you are. Not some future self that you wish you could be, not the person that you imagine yourself to be in your best moments, not the person that you will undoubtedly be two, five, ten years from now. No, the person staring back at you in the mirror. Unless you can believe that you are *enough* as you are—that you matter and have value even *prior* to all of the well-intentioned character modifications that inevitably loom over the next ridge of your life—you will never be at peace. Your striving will always be borne out of restlessness and dissatisfaction, rather than a desire for goodness.

And yet. So many of us live lives where from the moment we wake up until our heads hit the pillow at night, we are mocked and goaded by the “more skilled future self” that we have yet to become.

The self that has shed all of its toxic habits and unhealthy behaviors.

The self that gets up and goes for a run instead of tramping bleary-eyed to the digital trough first thing in the morning.

The self that eats (and inexplicably takes pleasure in) virtuous green stuff and passes on the 11 p.m. trip to the fridge or the wine rack.

The self that exhibits inexhaustible patience with their children, rather than snapping at the slightest provocation and marching around in a cloud of righteous indignation.

The self that forgives easily and often.

The self that refuses to cling to fabricated grudges as an illusory defense against the inevitable pains that come with relating to others on meaningful levels.

The self that reads deeply and with understanding, rather than grazing listlessly on the information morsels served up by the online bazaar.

The self that prays.

The self that acts purposively rather than constantly reacting to the demands (real or imagined) of others.

The self that makes wiser consumer choices and embraces simpler things.

The self that sees opportunities rather than burdens.

The self that moves through their days guided by love and not fear.

Our more skilled future selves call out to us in countless ways, and how we pant after them. Sometimes we do this for long, fruitless decades. And all the while we miss the most basic and liberating of truths. We are loved by God as we are. We have value, even as—*precisely* as, in fact!—our unskilled present selves.

This is not to say that we are not called to pursue better selves. I am convinced that Matthew Crawford is absolutely right—that the ability to imagine and pursue better versions of ourselves is a uniquely, gloriously human trait, and that God has made it to be so. But it seems to me that unless we can accept that our unskilled present selves are deeply loved and cherished by God, the future selves that we are always stretching toward will remain a torment rather than an invitation and an embrace.

In 1 Timothy 6:6, Paul writes, “But godliness with contentment is great gain.” How desperately we need both. And how crucial the latter is to a healthy pursuit of the former.

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