

Week 10

The Crucible of Self-Control

Last but not least we consider the final component of this wonderful fruit the Spirit develops in the lives of His children. The final characteristic is self-control. Any woman or man is a mighty warrior if he or she has self-control. Any person without self-control is either an accident looking for a place to happen or a slave in chains. Only through the self-control developed by the Spirit can we ever fulfill the promise of Jesus: *Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free* (John 8:32).

In this final week together we will examine self-control. We will see examples of men who had it and men who did not. We will discover principles for growing in self-control, and we will end our time with a look at a day lived in the self-control of the Spirit.

Principal Questions

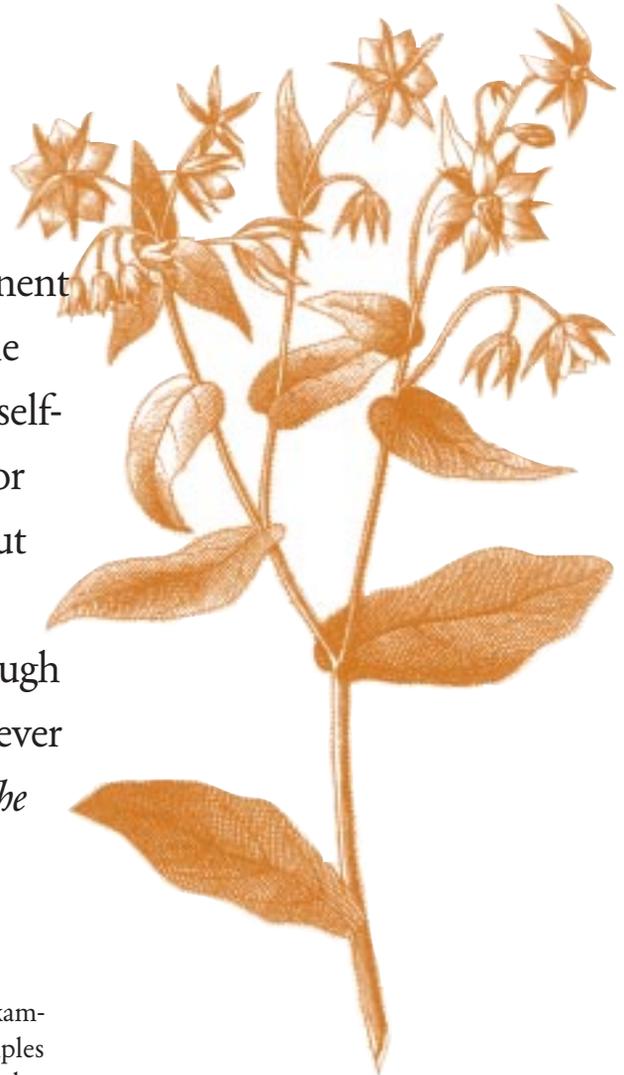
Day 1: Why do we need self-control?

Day 2: What was the difference between Daniel's attitude toward the king's food and Samson's attitude toward the honey?

Day 3: What happens when we attempt to serve both God and money?

Day 4: What type of person is never at fault in what he says?

Day 5: What does God do for the "blessed" person?



Day 1

That's Enough

🦋 Today's Treasure:

“Like a city whose walls
are broken down is a man
who lacks self-control”

(Prov. 25:28).

The headline on the front page of the *Houston Post* read: “Violent youths would as soon kill you as look at you.” Newspapers and tabloids overflow with headlines and articles about the drug-related deaths of popular young actors and rock stars. From the abuse of power to the abuse of substance, one theme is crystal clear: our society is in a corporate crisis caused by individual indulgence. Lack of self-control kills self respect, friendships, marriages, careers, and ministries. Not one of us can boast that we’ve always avoided its clutches.

How wonderful it would be if salvation and self-control were simultaneous, but they are not. The believer’s struggle for self-control is ongoing, but, praise God’s powerful name, He makes it available and attainable!

Today we begin our study of the ninth and final quality of the fruit of the Spirit. How appropriate that the list of qualities began with love and ends with self-control. Love keeps us afloat, and self-control keeps us anchored. Love lends us liberality, and self-control provides the boundaries within which love can be unleashed.

The Greek word for *self-control* is *egkrateia* which means “continence, temperance, self-control.”¹ It means “restraining passions and appetites.”² The antonym or opposite of *egkrateia* is *akrasia*. It means “excess, self-indulgence.”³ Today we consider just how important self-control is to the believer in Christ.

How do you feel about this topic of self-control? (Check one or more.)

- Dread—I don’t even want to think about it.
- Excited—I want to learn more about living a self-controlled life.
- Confused—I thought we were supposed to be Spirit-controlled.
- Condemned—I feel guilty every time I even think about the topic of self-control.
- Other _____

Perhaps your thoughts are like those of someone else in God’s Word. Read Acts 24:22-27. Notice that the subject matter of Paul’s sermon to Felix and Drusilla was “faith in Christ Jesus” (v. 24), but it was expressed in a three-part outline.

Record each “part” of the outline below.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Mark each of the following descriptions of Felix' reactions to Paul's sermon either true or false.

- Felix feared because of Paul's words.
- Felix sent Paul away.
- Felix tried to have Paul executed.
- Felix said he'd see Paul at a more convenient time.

The ancient historian, Josephus, described Felix as a man of lust, pride, greed, and selfish ambition. If the sermon topic had been announced in advance, he would have "conveniently" missed this service! There is never a "convenient" or comfortable time to consider the issue of self-control. No doubt each and every one of your toes will feel stepped on before this week is complete. I suspect you'll have moments when you may want to shelve it like Felix and say, "That's enough for now," but now is exactly the time God has chosen for you and for me.

We're going to learn to turn those four negative words from the mouth of Felix into four positive words from the mouth of God, because self-control is knowing when to say, "that's enough for now." Beloved, we are desperate for self-control, and in its absence, we are drowning in self-defeat.

Which of the following most clearly states the key to self-control found in 1 Corinthians 6:12?

- I will choose to be free in Christ rather than to be captured by my desires.
- I have freedom in Christ, so I do not have to live by rules.
- Since I am free in Christ, I can do what I want.

Look back over those last few words carefully: "I will not be mastered by anything." The Greek word for *mastered* is *exousiazo*. It means "to be ruled by or be under the power of, to be in bondage to." Its root word is *exousia* which means "authority, right and power."⁴

The key to self-control is the refusal to allow our enemies (the flesh, the world, or Satan) to rule or hold us captive in any way. What does "self" have to do with the issue of "control"? Christ has given us the victory over our flesh, our world, and our accuser. Only self can re-extend authority to one of these three enemies. They cannot presume authority over us. In the life of a believer, they can rule only where they are invited.

Self makes the choice over the issue of control. The Spirit-led self holds the power of five key words: "no," "yes," and "not right now." Self-control is as much about saying "yes" and "not right now" as it is about saying "no." Sometimes self-control is not about "what?" but "how much?" and not "when?" but "why?" Self-control is an issue of mastery, of authority, of boundaries.

☞ Why do we need self-control? Today's Treasure explains it perfectly. Paraphrase Proverbs 25:28 in the space below:

Without self-control, we are like a city with broken-down walls! To understand the significance of such a terrible dilemma we must remember a crucial characteristic of ancient architecture: a city was only as secure as the walls which surrounded it. A city's walls were its fortification. Archeologists estimate that three chariots could ride side by side on the wall of Nineveh. The walls of Babylon were so wide that six chariots could ride abreast on them!⁵ Their walls lent the reputation that they were practically impenetrable.

Read Deuteronomy 1:22-28. How did the “spies” describe the cities in the promised land? (Check one or more.)

- The armies are huge and the walls are impenetrable.
- The cities are large with walls that reach up to the sky.
- We can conquer the cities with the Lord's help.

The Hebrew word for *walls* in Proverbs 25:28 says it all. The word *chowmah* simply means “a wall of protection.”⁶ Anything of value had to be protected.

What were the first structures Solomon built after He was crowned king? (1 Kings 3:1).

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

God demanded walls in every dwelling place He chose to grace. Even the tabernacle in the wilderness had a portable wall to provide security.

Where does the Holy Spirit dwell today? (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

It is no accident that these verses reside in the very same chapter as our definitive phrase for self-control: “I will not be mastered by anything” (v. 12). We are the temple of God...and self-control is our wall of protection! It fortifies all that is within. The quality of self-control is that which secures our freedom to love, to experience joy, to know peace, to respond with patience, to have a kind disposition, to act out of goodness, to step out in faithfulness, and to agree with gentleness. How? Because self-control is the ability to make choices which invite and enhance the authority and filling of the Holy Spirit. Self-control is the decision to remain within the boundaries of victory!

According to the following Scriptures, what happens when the walls of fortification are broken down?

Ezekiel 26:7-14 _____

Ezekiel 38:11

☞ Can you think of a way in which the enemy has stolen victory from you through a broken-down wall in your life?

Any out-of-control area in our lives, no matter how big or how small, is an open invitation to the enemy. Believe me, he has memorized every strength and every weakness in our lives. He is always on the lookout for that one crumbling section of your protective wall—that one out-of-control area—where he will enter and play havoc in your life. His weapons are your greatest temptations. Your wounds are guilt, shame, frustration, and failure; his goal is to hold you captive for as long as possible. I know. I’ve been there. Are you a prisoner of war? Have you been in captivity? Do you deeply desire an end to your defeat? Do you want to know the protection and daily victory of self-control?

Read Nehemiah 2:1-20. God’s Word will tell you how to begin. Check off the steps you have already taken. Pray about the steps you need to take.

- “I set out ... with a few men” (v. 12). Enlist a few accountability partners!
- “I went out ... examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down” (v. 13). Perform an honest self-examination. In what areas do you lack self-control?
- “Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace” (v. 17). Admit that you have experienced internal or external disgrace in your areas of self-indulgence.
- “They replied, ‘Let us start rebuilding.’ So they began this good work” (v. 18). Don’t put it off any longer. Begin immediately to cooperate with God’s diligent work with you in your areas of captivity. God may work through a structured process such as a support group or counselor.
- “The God of heaven will give us success” (v. 20). Give it to God, then keep giving it to God over and over until you have overcome.

You can succeed! “After 20 years of battling this addiction?” Yes! “After 50 years of living out of control?” Yes! Read 2 Corinthians 2:14. If you follow Christ, you’ll have to march to success. It’s the only direction He’s going! Does it seem like too huge a task? Have you tried too many times before? Have those old habits been around a lifetime? Then you need to read Isaiah 58:12.

Write Isaiah 58:12 on a note card and begin to memorize it. God always has the bases covered, doesn’t He?

How does God want you to respond to what He showed you today?
