



Family Values

Virtue Realities

Self-Control

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The writer of Proverbs describes someone who lacks self-control to be *“like a city breached, without walls.”* (25:28) In other words, that person is compromised and vulnerable. Someone without self-control has inadequate boundaries and is open to criticism and temptation, even though that person might come across as tough and intimidating. Proverbs describes the opposite characteristic in the following: *“One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and one whose temper is controlled than one who captures a city.”* (16:32) Lack of self-control is considered a weakness, whereas exercise of restraint is definitely heralded as a strength.

In the New Testament words translated into English as self-control can refer either to soundness of mind, such as good judgment, or moderation of desires and emotions. In Romans 12:3, Paul cautions the reader *“not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment.”* In other words, keep your perspective and exercise restraint. Paul also encourages Titus to teach what is *“consistent with sound doctrine,”* which includes urging young men and women to be *“self-controlled,”* keeping desires in check. (Titus 2:3-8)

Self-control by definition involves control of self. It includes the ability to regulate feelings, impulses and behavior. Ironically people who we may experience as out of control are frequently busy trying to control the external environment or people around them. When they lose control, they are quick to blame external factors. As a result, the person who cuts you off on the freeway, borrows something of yours without asking first, or fails to have the meal on the table when you get home from work, each are responsible for your outburst of anger. If the other person had done what he or she was supposed to do, then the show of anger, abuse or violence would never have happened. As long as it is the other person’s fault, then I don’t have to take responsibility for

it. Yet self-control means that each person is responsible and accountable for his or her own behavior. There is no excuse for lack of control or abuse.

Actually control starts when someone admits that he or she is out of control or is unable to control. In the case of addictions, the first step of recovery begins when the person turns to a higher power, when he or she lets go and lets God be in charge. Self-control is one of the fruits of the Spirit. Paul elaborates on this process when he writes to the Galatians: *“And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.”* (5:24,25) Through the spirit we can regain control and temper our lives with love, gentleness, joy, patience, etc. In addition, anyone who has difficulty controlling anger, sexual desires, use of alcohol or drugs is strongly encouraged to seek treatment as part of a plan successfully to regain control.

The following are ways to practice self-control:

1. **Let go and let God.** Daily ask God to send you the gifts of the Spirit, in particular self-control. *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”* (Phil. 4:13)
2. **Think before you act.** Give yourself options. Take a time out. Use good judgment. Do not simply react.
3. **Own your behavior.** When you have an outburst, respond to someone inappropriately, or act abusively, make amends. This involves a change in behavior.
4. **Set limits.** Do not let others intimidate you or treat you in an abusive manner. Ensure your own safety and hold others accountable for their behavior.
5. **Get help, if needed.** Do not hesitate to seek treatment or to request the support of others.

Affirmation: Today with God’s help I will exercise self-control.

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