

Cultivating Self-Control: (Proverbs 25:28)

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Dominant Thought: Our self-control is a glimpse of Jesus' sacrifice.

Objectives:

I want my listeners to understand how to practice self-control.

I want my listeners to experience a sense of freedom through sacrifice.

I want my listeners to follow Jesus' teachings.

FOCUSING QUESTION: How do I practice self-control?

What is your name and what is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think of self-control or lack of self-control?

I'm Nic Babbs, and the first thing that comes to mind with self-control looks like a big red button that says, "Do not push". There is a specific story that gets told in our family a lot, but it was a time when my papa set a lawn mower on fire because it would not start. That was not good self-control.

I'm Benjamin Small, and I think about my first year of college. I walked into Walmart and headed straight for the Lego section. The next thing I know I'm walking out with my third box of Legos that week.

I'm Walker Brosi, and when I think about self-control I think about a specific moment in NBA history called Malice at the Palace. It was when a NBA player started fighting and punching a fan because a fan threw a beer at him and he got mad. This player who gets paid so much money is fighting a fan watching the game.

The character of self-control: Walker

Ben asks: What does the character of self-control look like?

Walker: The dictionary definition is "the ability to control oneself", that's not very helpful. I think a better definition can be said like this, having authority over the passions that wage war within us (sin, anger, lust, etc.) (James 4:1; Galatians

5:24). To show self-control we need to crucify our fleshly passions and desires that keep us from God. In Genesis 39, we see a man, Joseph, who has self-control with Potiphar's wife. Verses 6-8 and 12 say this.

'So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. 'She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house. ' Genesis 39:6-8, 12 NIV

Joseph has a chance to sleep with Potiphar's wife but says no. Joseph has a chance again but has so much self-control that he runs out of the house naked so he doesn't sin. Self-control is obedience.

Nic asks: How does God display self-control?

Walker: In Galatians 5:22-23 it says that self-control is fruit OF the spirit, so self-control is a part of God. In Exodus 32:9-10, and verses 13-14, we see God's self-control in action when He is on Mt. Sinai. God shows self-control by the patience that He has with His children. Exodus 32:9-10, and 13-14 says,

"I have seen these people," the Lord said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation." Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.' " Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened. ' Exodus 32:9-10,13-14 NIV

God is patient with us, even in 2 Peter 3:9 it says,

'The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. '

2 Peter 3:9 NIV

God is patient with us, so we should be obedient to Him.

Obstacles to self-control: Ben

Nic asks: Walker said that self-control is probably one of the hardest fruits of the spirit to follow. Why do you think self-control is such an obstacle?

Ben: It's so hard because it's like trying to drive on the wrong side of the road. In a world that promotes self-indulgence and instant gratification, it doesn't simply feel unnatural, it feels impossible. Self-control is countercultural. Culture says to follow our dreams, trust our hearts, to live our hearts, which sounds okay, but they all put your will at the center. All while scripture says the opposite: "Deny yourself. Take up your cross. Walk by the Spirit." Culture says you're the main character, do what you wish. While Scripture tells us it's not about us at all. It begs us to struggle with the question, Are you going to follow your own desires, or surrender to God's?

It's not just hard because the world encourages this path, it's the path we want to take ourselves. Paul writes this in Galatians 5:16-17,

"So I say, walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law." Galatians 5:16-18 NIV

There's a huge conflict. The hardest part about self-control isn't just turning down the wrong things, but yourself. Not just once, but constantly. It's not always a big decision. It sneaks up in the small ones, too. Not always dramatic. We're constantly scrolling, tapping, buying, watching, indulging. But how often are we surrendering? It's subtle. One of the lyrics I keep hearing lately goes like, "We've got dust on our bibles, brand new iPhones." The dust didn't accumulate in one night, it took time. And the irony is that these desires don't lead us to the freedom we're seeking. They trap us. Anxiety. Addiction. Regret. The more we chase them, the emptier we feel. Paul says this in Galatians 5:13-15,

"You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other." Galatians 5:13-15 NIV

Self-control is hard because we believe that freedom is about being able to do whatever we want. We don't stumble because we don't know better, it's because we're actively seeking the wrong things. A friend likes to say something

like, “I was too busy thinking about how I can get a little more happiness right now.” A good mentor once told me that sin is simply a shortcut on a gift God wants to give you. We want peace but seek out distractions. We desire purpose, and chase validation. We want comfort, not discipline. It’s hard because it doesn’t just go against culture, but against ourselves. We don’t want surrender, but rather control. We want the reward without the trial. It’s a battle we must fight, a spirit-led choice to trust in His plan, His will. How hard is that?

Walker: In our Proverbs text it sounds like an obstacle - “those who lack self-control are like a house with no walls.” What do you think that means?

Ben: Back then, those words held a lot of weight. Being without walls meant vulnerability. They’re not simply a nice look; they meant survival and protection. Without them it was like inviting them to come and take over. We get that same picture with self-control. No walls, no resistance. Whatever comes knocking, be it temptation, distraction, or compromise, is easily let in. It’s like I was saying before, sneaks up on you. We need self-control to act as a guard, not every desire deserves an open door. How can we love when your default is irritation? How do we practice patience when we give into every impulse? How do we hold onto peace when every notification steals our focus?

Philip D. Kenneson wrote this in a section of his book on self-control, “By wrongly believing **that we** are individually equipped to deal with these problems **by ourselves, we** have unwittingly cut ourselves off from the **very** resources God has entrusted to us for our common benefit.” This stuck with me. It shows what when we believe we don’t need that wall, we both expose ourselves to danger and reject the help God has provided. In a world like ours, with distractions and excess at every turn, we can’t afford to live without self-control.

Cultivating self-control: Nic

Walker asks: What does it look like to cultivate self-control?

Nic: Self-control is sacrifice. I’m going to focus on two ways to cultivate self-control. Fasting is a part of self-control and prayer. First, we see fasting is a resistance from something you desire, and replacing that time with quality time with God, which self-control would be needed for that. Isaiah says this about fasting.

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from

your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.”

Isaiah 58:6-8 NIV

Isaiah is saying that this is how we should fast, giving food to the hungry, providing shelter to those who are wandering, and clothe those that are naked. I was wondering why these specific tasks. I noticed that all of these tasks are part of our basic needs. There is a psychologist that made this pyramid of needs, Maslow's pyramid of needs. From the picture you would start at the bottom and make sure those needs are in place before you would climb to the next section. Start at the bottom and go up. Physiological needs, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization, this is the list from bottom to top, or most important to least important. All three of the examples that were given in Isaiah were physiological needs, food, shelter, and clothing. You are to turn away from yourself and bless others around you that are in need and provide them with basic needs.

The other way we can cultivate self-control is through prayer. We even see it with Moses. In Walker's answer Moses got mad and broke the ten commandments in Exodus 32, and then later in the same chapter you see him in prayer when he goes back up to Mount Sinai. During prayer that is our spirit working within us. Self-control is one of the fruits of the Spirit. So, fasting and prayer are good exercises for us to cultivate self-control.

Ben: Where can Jesus be seen when looking at self-control?

Nic: Jesus preached about fasting during the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 6:16-18, is when He preached about it and this is what He says about fasting.

' “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ' Matthew 6:16-18 NIV

Jesus says to not make it obvious to others that we are fasting. Jesus also didn't only preach about fasting, He did fast. Jesus wasn't someone to say, “do as I say not as I do.” No, Jesus preached about fasting. Jesus fasted 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness while being tempted. Just back a couple chapters

from that Matthew verse. In Matthew chapter 4, Jesus had fasted 40 days and 40 nights and is now being tempted. I think this story is important to acknowledge, because Jesus is fasting, which is how we will cultivate self-control, and then Jesus was able to have self-control while the devil was tempting Him. Just by this alone it shows how great Jesus is. His self-control shows a lot especially when He willingly died for us, came down from His heavenly throne, to be lowly like us, and willingly died for us. That takes a lot of self-control. I believe that our self-control is a glimpse of Jesus' sacrifice.