

# Self-control

By Peggy Lively

**Core Verse:** For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. **Titus 2:11-12**

**Creed:** I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

## Part One: What does it mean?

Self-control is defined as “restraint exercised over one’s own impulses, emotions, or desires” (Merriam-Webster’s). Because we are born into sin, our natural human impulses and desires are selfish and sinful. That is why when we accept Christ into our lives, we must learn how to restrain these impulses through His power and the help of the Holy Spirit.

Paul says, “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games *exercises self-control in all things ... I discipline my body and make it my slave*, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified” **I Corinthians 9:24-27**.

*“The Greek word translated ‘discipline’ here literally means ‘to strike under the eye.’ It is the word for beating the face black and blue. But that’s not to say we’re to abuse our bodies for the sake of discipline ... Even in Paul’s day the word was a figure of speech. It was one of those humorous, extreme word pictures we sometimes use to describe our actions ... The purpose of this discipline over the body is, as the literal Greek would put it, ‘to enslave it.’ Like an athlete, we have to show our bodies who’s boss ... The point of disciplined self-control is to make the body serve us rather than the other way around. That makes all the sense in the world if you’ve ever encountered an addict ... Those who run to win exercise restraint over their impulses and emotions and desires.”*

- Charles Swindoll, So, You Want to be Like Christ?, pages 158-161

1. According to our core verse (**Titus 2:11-12**), what teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions?

Not only does God’s grace bring us salvation, but by his spirit it also convicts us and teaches us to live “self-controlled, upright, and godly lives.”

“You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.” **Romans 8:9**

## Part Two: Why be self-controlled?

### A. We are not our own.

“‘Everything is permissible for me’ – but not everything is beneficial. ‘Everything is permissible for me’ – but I will not be mastered by anything ... Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? *You are not your own; you were bought at a price.* Therefore honor God with your body.” **1 Corinthians 6:12, 19-20**

Read **1 Corinthians 6:12-20**.

2. According to these verses, why is it important that we take care of our physical body?

3. What was the price paid to buy us? (See also **1 Thessalonians 5:9-10** and **Acts 20:28**.)

Read **Romans 6:14-23**:

4. According to this passage, who are we slaves to? (**verse 16**)

5. Look at verse 16 again. Paul tells us that we are slaves to one of two things. List these two things and what each one of them leads to. (See also **verses 20-23**)

The truth is we will all be mastered or controlled by someone or something. The question is, who or what will it be?

6. What hope do we have, according to **verses 17-18**?

“For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.”

**Romans 6:14**

### Bring it Home:

\*Is there something or someone, other than Jesus, that is master in my life? Explain.

Take some time to confess this area of sin to the Lord, and ask Him to free you from this worldly master. Then acknowledge Him as your one true Master.

## **B. We are entrusted with God's work.**

“I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.” **1 Corinthians 9:27**

Unfortunately, I have heard way too many stories about ministers of the Gospel falling prey to the temptations of sin. One faithful pastor of a large thriving church had ministered so well to so many people. He confessed one Sunday to his congregation that he was struggling with an addiction to pornography. He said to them, “I have been disqualified; I must sit out of the race.” None of us are exempt from the temptations this world offers. That is why we must protect ourselves and rely on God's Spirit to help us be self-controlled for the sake of the Gospel.

Read **Titus 1:7-8**.

7. List the qualities of one who is entrusted with God's work.

8. What does it mean to be entrusted with God's work?

“We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.” **2 Corinthians 5:20**

An ambassador is one that is sent on a mission. As followers of Christ, our mission is the Great Com-mission.

9. What does this mission require of us? (**Matthew 28:19-20**)

**Bring it Home:**

\*How am I helping to fulfill the Great Commission?

## **C. So that we can pray.**

“The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear-minded and self-controlled *so that you can pray.*” **1 Peter 4:7**

This verse implies that somehow the practice of self-control affects our ability to pray. Maybe it's the simple fact that it takes discipline and self-control to set aside a daily time

of uninterrupted prayer. Or maybe, as a result of our self-control, we have a clear conscience toward God and therefore, it is easier for us to come to Him in prayer.

### **Bring it Home:**

\*Is there a lack of self-control in my life that is affecting my ability or desire to pray?

Explain.

Pray that God would help you gain self-control in this area through the power of his Holy Spirit. That's why he sent him: "the Spirit helps us in our weakness." **Romans 8:26**

"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." **Hebrews 4:16**

### **D. We are an example.**

"... set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity."

**1 Timothy 4:12**

Read **Titus 2:1-10**.

10. How does this passage apply to you in being a living example for others?

11. In **Titus 2:9-10**, what does Paul say is the purpose for slaves obeying and respecting their masters?

We must realize that even in our menial everyday tasks, we are setting some kind of example for the people around us. Furthermore, as believers in Christ, we must never forget that *whatever* kind of example we are setting is a reflection on His holy name.

### **Bring it Home:**

\*Who in my life is looking to me as an example?

\*Read **Titus 2:1-10** again. What type of example am I setting for this person(s)?

### **E. Temptations will come.**

"Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control."

**Proverbs 25:28**

Every day we are faced with temptations to sin. In order to resist giving in to these temptations of our flesh, we must be self-controlled. Joseph is a great example in the Bible of self-control.

Read **Genesis 39:3-12**.

12. How was Joseph tempted “day after day”?

13. How did he respond to the temptation? (verses 8,10,12)

14. Joseph proclaims, “How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against \_\_\_\_\_?” (verse 9)

Not only does our sin affect us personally, it also affects those against whom we have sinned. But most importantly, it affects our relationship with God. It is *His* commands that we are breaking when we sin. In the midst of our temptations we need to remind ourselves, as Joseph did, *Who* it is that we are sinning against.

### Bring it Home:

\*In what area of my life am I tempted day after day? How can I, like Joseph, resist the temptation when it comes?

Even in our moments of defeat (sometimes day after day) we need to keep coming to Jesus and asking him for forgiveness and strength to have self-control. Don't let guilt or shame keep you from coming to him. His mercies never fail; they are new *every* morning (**Lamentations 3:22-23**). He longs for us to live in victory over self, and not dwell on our defeat and sin.

“But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

**1 Corinthians 15:57**

*Dear God, so often my spirit is willing but my flesh is so weak. Please forgive me when I lack the self-control that I need in order to resist temptation. I thank you and praise you that your power is made perfect in my weakness. Thank you for your Holy Spirit who fills me and transforms me into your likeness with ever-increasing glory. I pray that I would not quench your Holy Spirit in my life, but that I would be sensitive to his conviction and then choose the way of escape that you have provided. I long for my life not only to be self-controlled, but to be God-controlled. Have your way in me. In Jesus' name, Amen*