

INTRODUCTION

Love is the first flavor of the fruit of the Spirit and today we come to the last, self-control. I think these two virtues are placed first and last because love is the primary fruit and drives the rest, and self-control is the virtue that holds them all together.

Our scripture says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-23)

The fruit of the Spirit is so important that when we were building this Worship Center about twelve years ago, I suggested to the Building Committee that we name each of the doors entering the worship area after a fruit of the Spirit. So, if you've ever taken the time to glance up at the lintel of the door you just walked in, one of the fruit of Spirit was listed there.

So I hope every time you walk in one of these doors you'll think about how Jesus wants to display that fruit in you. Maybe you should choose which door you walk in based upon where you need the most help. And as you walk out, glance behind to remind yourself that Jesus can empower you to live with that virtue in your life. And if you have trouble with the traffic in our parking lots, why don't you make sure you walk in the door labeled patience, and then walk out the door labeled self-control?

Some people have a reputation of being control-freaks. They want to control everything in life except themselves. But there are many things in life you can't control. For instance, you can't control the weather. When someone says, "Pastor we're having an outside event will you ask the Lord for good weather that day?" I always say, "Sorry, but I'm in sales, not management!"

And even though you may try, you can't control other people. A bride-to-be was so nervous; she didn't think she could make it down the aisle. Her maid of honor said, "Just look down at the aisle and walk. Then look up at the altar where the preacher is standing, and then look at your groom." So she decided to remember those three things. As she walked down the aisle she was even saying those words in a quiet voice. Those close enough could hear her saying, "Aisle, altar, him. Aisle, altar, him." As much as we try to alter and control our spouses and our children, we can't. But with the power of the Holy Spirit you can exercise control over the person who gives you the most trouble: You. I saw a sign recently with quote from Teddy Roosevelt that made me laugh. It said: "If you could kick the person in the pants responsible for most of your trouble, you wouldn't sit for a month."

So before we go any further, please raise your right hand and repeat after me. "With God's help ...I will stop trying...to control other people...and control things...over which I have no control." Good. Now you're ready to learn about the most important kind of control: Self-control. Let's start by answering an important question:

I. IS ANY AREA OF MY LIFE OUT OF CONTROL?

Everybody struggles with self-control. We all wish we had more of it. Dawn Bridges told me a true story about a 1st grader at Grace who was taken out in the hall by his teacher because he had been disrupting the class. Since they are a Christian school, the teacher spoke to him about the importance of the fruit of the Spirit. She began to name them all, and when she got to self-control the little boy held up his little hand and said, "Hold it right there. That's the one I have trouble with." Well, join the rest of us because all of us struggle with self-control. We all wish we had more of it.

To see if there are areas where you might need more self-control let me ask you three questions about things that can get out of control.

A. Do you have any uncontrolled appetites?

God has given us appetites for food, drink, pleasure, love, acceptance...and many other things that we crave. But God has also given us normal, healthy ways to satisfy these appetites. The world, our flesh, and the devil want you to overindulge your appetites.

The Bible says, "When you sit down to eat with a ruler, consider carefully what is before you; And put a knife to your throat if you are a man given to great appetite." (Proverbs 23:1-2 NASB)

A lack of control means that you want something and you've got to have it NOW! How much self-control do you have? Can you practice delayed gratification, or do you have to have it all right now? In 1972 social experiments on self-control were conducted at Stanford University. Researchers selected 600 4-year-olds. They put each child in a room with a single marshmallow in front of them. The children were told that if they could wait for 15 minutes and not eat the marshmallow, then they would be rewarded with another marshmallow. So, the dilemma each child faced is the same thing we face every day. "Do I eat the one marshmallow NOW, or do I wait and get twice as many?" Of the 600 children, only 30% of them were able to wait. But that wasn't the point of the experiment. Then, the researchers followed the developmental progress of the children into adolescence and young adulthood. The 30% who practiced self-control were better adjusted socially, more dependable, and in high school, scored significantly higher on their SAT tests. What's the point of the marshmallow test? Self-control impacts every area of your life.

B. Do you have any uncontrolled ambition?

Sometimes we try to bite off more than we can eat. There's nothing wrong with ambition. We should all be ambitious to please God and serve God. But ambition has a dark side when it becomes selfish. Galatians 5:20 contains the opposite of the fruit of the Spirit—I call it the weeds of the devil. One of the sins of the flesh listed is "selfish ambition." The Bible says, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." (Philippians 2:3-4)

Can you think of a Bible character who had uncontrolled ambition? How about King David's son, Absalom? He was a piece of work. The Bible says he was extremely handsome and vain. He

had such thick hair that when he cut it each year, he would weigh it. Who does that except a vain person? He would have become king when his father died, but that wasn’t soon enough for him. So Absalom hatched a sinister plot to steal the throne. He enlisted fifty soldiers to go before him and applaud him everywhere he went—sound like a rock star’s entourage? And Absalom would station himself at the gates of the city and kiss babies and talk about what a terrible king David was. In other words, he was a born politician.

After a few months of this crusade of criticism, most of the people decided they wanted Absalom as king so he attempted a hostile takeover. But instead of fighting his son, David was heartbroken and vacated Jerusalem. He left town barefoot and weeping with a few of his faithful men. Absalom and his soldiers pursued them. And in the heat of the battle Absalom was riding a mule. He rode under the thick branches of an oak tree and his pride became his downfall. His thick hair got caught in the limbs and the mule kept going and left Absalom hanging there. Talk about a bad hair day! David didn’t want to harm his son, but his general, Joab, didn’t feel the same way. When he found Absalom just hanging around, he threw three spears into Absalom’s heart. When David heard about it, his heart was broken and he cried, “Oh my son Absalom, if only I had died instead of you!” (2 Samuel 18:33) It’s tough for parents to bury children, even rebellious ones.

We live in a nation where most people only want one thing: MORE. They want more food, more drink, more money, more toys, more cars, more channels, more pornography, more thrills, more perks, and more success. A few years ago a survey was given to ask Americans across all economic levels were asked how much money it would take to make them happy. Not a single person responded that they were happy with what they had. Instead everyone answered an amount that is more than what they were currently making.

C. Do you have uncontrolled anger?

Anger is not a sin, but uncontrolled, raging anger is a sin. The Bible says in Ephesians 4:26, “In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.”

In 1978 the Ohio State Buckeyes, coached by Woody Hayes, were playing Clemson in the Gator Bowl. At that time, Woody Hayes was one of the most respected football coaches in the nation. He had led the Buckeyes to five national championships. But today, he isn’t remembered for all the wins he coached, instead he is remembered for a moment in which he didn’t control his anger. In the fourth quarter of the Gator Bowl, Charlie Bauman, the Clemson nose guard intercepted a pass from the Ohio State quarterback. As he was returning the interception he ran out of bounds on the Ohio State sidelines. In front of a national television audience, Woody Hayes lost his temper and grabbed Bauman by the helmet and started punching him in the throat. That led to a bench-clearing brawl. The next day Woody Hayes was fired. He died nine years later, but never apologized to Bauman.

The Bible says, “A quick-tempered man does foolish things, and a crafty man is hated.” (Proverbs 14:17) When you lose your temper, you lose more than your temper. You could lose your job, lose your family, and lose the respect of other people.

II. LACK OF SELF-CONTROL LEADS TO RUIN

What's so great about self-control? Well, if you don't ever practice self-control, your life may spin out of control.

The Bible says, "Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control."
(Proverbs 25:28)

In ancient times, cities had walls around them to protect them from attackers. When the walls are broken down, there was no way to protect the city, and it would usually end up in ruins. Do you have some strong walls in your life? Do you have solid boundaries? Have you built margin into your personal life, or are you living on the edge?

Can you think of another Bible character who had no self-control? Absalom wasn't the only one who had a bad hair day. Samson had a bad hair day, too. God gave Samson supernatural strength. He was born to godly parents, and he took a Nazarite vow not to cut his hair and to live a pure life. His strength wasn't in his hair; it was in his commitment to God. But Samson forgot about his vow and lived a reckless life with no boundaries. He was a he-man with a she-problem.

Delilah pretended to love him but she was a secret agent for the Philistines. She begged Samson to reveal the source of his strength. He tricked her several times by giving her false information. First he said, "Tie me up with strings from a bow and I'll be as weak as a puppy." While he was sleeping, she did just that. When the Philistine soldiers came in she said, "Samson, the Philistines are here!" Samson jumped up and broke those strings like they were spider webs, and killed all the Philistines. She kept pouting and pleading and he said, "Take new ropes and bind me and I'll be as weak as a puppy." While he's snoring, she does just that. Same song second stanza. The Philistines come in and he breaks the ropes and kills them. After another lie, finally Samson says that a razor has never touched his hair, and if he was shaved, he would be as weak as a puppy. Once again, while he's asleep, she shaves his head. His strength really wasn't in his long hair; it was in his commitment to God. But when the final symbol of his commitment was cut off, his supernatural strength left as well. Let's read what happened this time. Delilah said, "'Samson, the Philistines are upon you!' He awoke from his sleep, and thought, 'I will go out as before and shake myself free.' But he did not know that the Lord had left him. Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding in the prison." (Judges 16:20-21) The saddest part of that story for me is that Samson really expected the power of God to be there, but it was gone. He traveled down the long slippery slope of losing his self-control, and suddenly woke up and found himself without the power of God. Sadly, that's what people find at the end of a slippery slope of forgetting their commitment to God.

III. SELF-CONTROL MEANS GIVING CONTROL OF MY SELF TO JESUS

In regard to self-control, let me go to the bottom line immediately. You and I can never control self in our own strength. So my only hope is to surrender my self to Jesus who lives in me. In Luke 9:23 Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." That doesn't mean that you deny yourself something like chocolate,

it means that you deny SELF. And self is your sinful nature. It's the part of your personality that always says, "Gimme, gimme, gimme."

It all boils down to this: Who's in charge in your life? You or Jesus? The title of this message about self-control is "Who's in Charge Around Here?" I was in a store not long ago and watched as an obviously spoiled little boy saw something he wanted and he yelled, "Mommy, Mommy, I want that!" His mother said, "No, you don't need that." When he heard that he started screaming and stomping his little feet. He screamed, "I want it and I want it NOW!" Then I watched as the harried mother quickly grabbed the object and said, "Here, now please stop crying." I wanted to say, "Excuse me, but who's in charge around here?"

Each of us has that little boy inside of us—it's called SELF. Who's in charge around here?"

I wonder if the Lord doesn't look at us with frustration sometimes when we neglect His word and go off and do our own thing. Can you hear Him asking, "Who's in charge around here?" Self-control simply means saying, "Lord, You're in charge of my life."

That's what it means to daily deny self and take up your cross.

A. Jesus in me will say no to the wrong things!

When Ronald Reagan was our President, his wife Nancy took a leading role in the war against drugs. She was at an elementary school in San Diego, when a schoolgirl asked her what she should do if someone offered her drugs. Without really thinking, Nancy Reagan said, "Why, you just say 'no.'" That statement launched a campaign called "Just say 'no' to drugs." As a result, thousands of schools established "Just Say No" clubs where students made a pledge not to experiment with drugs.

That's a wonderful idea, but the problem with just saying no to drugs is that most people don't have the willpower to just say no to a Krispy Kreme donut. It's not as easy as JUST saying no. Saying "no" is hard. Our willpower isn't strong enough for that. Basically that's what God told Adam and Eve. He said, "Just say NO to the forbidden fruit." And you see how that worked out for all of us!

No, each of us needs a supernatural power within us giving us the strength to say no. And that's what Jesus does when you surrender control of your life to Him. The Bible says, "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." (Titus 2:11-12) But self-control isn't just about saying, "No" to the wrong things.

B. Jesus in me will say yes to the right things!

We all love to hear the word, "yes!" When you're applying for a job, or a scholarship, or propose to someone you want to marry, you want to hear, "yes!" I've often said God's favorite word is, "yes." Most people think of God as a mean cosmic schoolteacher who's ready to slap your wrist with a ruler and say, "No, no, no!"

But the Bible says, "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ." (2 Corinthians 1:20)

The struggle with your sinful nature isn't a matter of listening to a bad angel on one shoulder and a good angel on the other. As followers of Jesus Christ, we have another option. Jesus lives in you, and He always says, "Yes" to the right things and "No" to the wrong things. So the only thing we need to say, "Yes" to is this: "YES, Jesus, I surrender my self to your control!"

The choice we have isn't about doing wrong or right, it's the choice about whether or not we will allow Jesus to make that choice for us.

When I was in college, someone explained it to me by sharing a little tract by Campus Crusade for Christ with me. It was entitled, "Have you made the Wonderful Discovery of the Spirit-filled life?" He showed me a circle that represented my life, and in the picture, a big "S," representing self was on a throne. Then there was another circle with self off the throne and a cross, representing Jesus, on the throne. My friend asked me, "Which circle represents your life right now?" I pointed to the one with the big S on the throne. He asked, "Which circle represents how you'd like to live?" And I pointed to the one with the cross on the throne. Then I prayed a simple prayer where I asked Jesus to be enthroned in my life. It was a turning point in my life, because for the first time I understood what it meant to let Jesus be the king of my life. The prayer I prayed that night wasn't a once-for-all prayer. Jesus said we must DAILY deny self and take up the cross.

Until that time, it was like my life was a car and Jesus was a passenger. He was in my life, but I had the steering wheel. I'd sometimes see a detour and flip on the blinker and Jesus would say, "Don't go down that road!" I'd say, "Who's driving? Me or you?" Then I'd always end up lost and stuck in the mud of my poor decisions. I'd say, "Jesus please give me directions to get back on the main road." My life was a continual series of bad detours. But on that night I truly surrendered to Jesus as Lord, I said, "Jesus, let's swap places. I want You to have the steering wheel." At that moment I became the passenger and He became the driver. Through the years I've seen plenty of flashing billboards directing me to go down the wrong road, and I've said, "Hey, what about that? Let's try that road!" And Jesus simply says in reply, "Who's driving? Me or You?"

CONCLUSION

The first President I can personally remember was President Dwight David Eisenhower. He was a great leader and I like Ike. Before he was elected President, he was the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in WWII and he planned and carried out the invasion of Northern Africa in 1942 and then the Normandy Invasion in 1945.

He was a great leader who captured enemy cities, but he never would have been able to lead men into battle if he hadn't learned an important lesson about self-control early in his life.

Ike was born in Denton, Texas, but he grew up on a farm in Kansas where his parents prayed and read the Bible at breakfast and at dinner. Ike had five brothers and no sisters, and they were always fighting. Young Ike had a terrible temper and he would often be blinded by his rage. One Halloween he wasn't allowed to go trick-or-treating with his older brothers and he flew out his house in a rage. He was so mad, he went outside and started pounding his fists into the bark of a tree. He kept hitting until his hands were bleeding. His father found him and pulled him back into the house and spanked him. Later his mother came to his room to take care of him. After she finished bandaging his bleeding hands she took her Bible and read a verse of scripture to Ike he said he never forgot. It was Proverbs 16:32 which says, "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city." (Proverbs 16:32)

Dwight Eisenhower said from that point in his life he made a settled decision that with God's strength, he would control his anger, rather than letting his anger control him. It turned out to be a turning point in his life. Who knows where he would have ended up without self-control? Who knows where our nation might be now if he hadn't been a man who demonstrated the spiritual fruit of self-control?

So, let me ask you, when it comes to your life, "Who's in Charge Around Here?" If you answered, "Jesus is!" Then you're on the blessed road of self-control.

OUTLINE

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- C. Uncontrolled anger?

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes