

One of the great ironies in life is that we have more freedom than ever, but less self-control. We can *eat* what we want, *buy* what we want, *watch* what we want, *say* what we want, *post* what we want, and *access* almost anything we want w/ a tap on a screen.

And yet – for all this freedom, more people feel more trapped than ever enslaved by our *appetites*, *anger*, *anxiety*, *impulses*, and *patterns* that we once thought we could control but can't.

This week I received a letter from a friend sharing her struggle w/ something as ordinary as sugar – and her inability to overcome it – always sneaking around to indulge her fix. Truth is, whether it's sugar, drugs, social media, porn, or some other vice, we're all suspect when our WANT overwhelms our control.

SEE – long before sin becomes a prison, it's often an innocent snack – a small indulgence repeated until it develops into a habit, a pattern, and finally a prison.

This is why self-control matters. Self-control isn't about **denying** joy – it's about **protecting** it. It's about learning to live under God's rule so our *ambitions*, *attitudes*, *appetites*, and *actions* don't rule/wreck us.

But what is Biblical self-control?

Our culture defines self-control as internal willpower to regulate behavior, manage emotions, delay gratification, and resist temptation to achieve a goal. While true – this definition doesn't go far enough.

In the N.T. – **self-control** is *enkrateia* – it carries the idea of God giving us what we can't have on our own – true mastery/power over our desires/impulses.

Meaning – self-control isn't just being strong enough to control yourself – *it's the Spirit-enabled ability to bring our ambitions, attitudes, appetites, and actions under His lordship so we can say NO to what dishonors Him and YES to what pleases Him.*

*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, meekness and **self-control**. Ga. 5*

That is – self-control is more than discipline – it's a **fruit**. And fruit can't be manufactured or stapled to a tree; only grown. It's produced only thru the life of the vine flowing into the branches. So, self-control isn't just personal *discipline*, *determination*, and *willpower* – it's God's guiding influence flowing in/thru us when we abide in Christ and yield to the leading of the H.S.

Discipline is what we practice. Self-control is what the H.S. produces as our discipline is surrendered to God.

WTM – let me introduce you to the RECHABITES and offer (3) essential truths about self-control.

I Self-Control Requires Settled **CONVICTIONS**

In **Jeremiah 35**, we meet the Rechabites, a nomadic clan descended from the Kenites of which Moses' father-in-law, Jethro was from. In their ancestry, Jonadab commanded them not to ¹drink wine, ²plant vineyards, ³build permanent homes, or ⁴own land.

Fast forward 200 yrs – and we find they’re still around holding to the values Jonadab instilled in them when God told Jeremiah to bring them into the temple, place wine before them, and invite them to drink.

Imagine the pressure. They were in the temple w/ God’s prophet offering them wine while everyone was watching. Yet their response was immediate:

We don’t drink wine, b/c our ancestor Jonadab son of Rekab gave us this command. Jeremiah 35:6

Jeremiah 35 isn’t about wine, tents, and nomadic living, but **disciplined obedience**. The contrast is the Rechabites faithfully obeyed the instruction of an earthly ancestor, while Judah repeatedly rejected the commands of their heavenly Father. God was using their convictions/control to expose Judah’s lack of it.

So, when faced w/ this situation, they didn’t have to debate, call a meeting, or take a poll b/c their restraint was rooted not reactive. Their self-control wasn’t situational; it was generational. The matter was settled.

This is one of the great secrets of self-control: ***don’t wait until temptation arrives to decide where you stand and don’t base your convictions on popular vote – make the decision in advance prior to testing.***

I think of Daniel. He didn’t wait until the king’s food was served to determine his convictions. Daniel 1:8 says he had already – *resolved not to defile himself.*

Point – pressure doesn’t create our convictions; it reveals whether they already have roots.

II Self-Control Requires Surrendered **CONTROL**

The world says – *take control of your life*; **Scripture says** – *surrender control of your life to God b/c when God governs you, He enables you to govern yourself.*

The Bible calls this **struggle** the **flesh** – it’s the inner desire to live ¹*independently of God*, ²*satisfy our appetites*, ³*avoid discomfort*, ⁴*defend our pride*, and ⁵*put ourselves first*. **And the battle is real!**

For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. Galatians 5:17

SEE – there’s a battle raging w/in us. The flesh says – *I want it now. I deserve this. Nobody will know. Just this once. Do what makes you happy.* While the Spirit says – *Wait. Listen. Trust. Obey. Please God.*

Samson is the posterchild for the tragedy of strength w/out surrendered control. He could tear a lion apart, carry away the city gates, and defeat an army w/ a jawbone, but he couldn’t control his own appetite for Delilah. He repeatedly chose impulse over conviction b/c he was more committed to his desires than to God.

SEE – his betrayal by Delilah wasn’t the beginning of his collapse; it was the culmination of many smaller compromises. So, when Samson finally awoke: *He did not know that the Lord had left him.* Judges 16:20

Think – the strongest man in Israel became a blind prisoner, grinding grain for his enemies b/c his appetites had become stronger than his convictions.

Esau offers us another warning. He returned from the field hungry/exhausted – and in one impulsive moment, traded his birthright for a bowl of beans b/c his hunger became his urgency – his urgency became justification – and his justification became his loss.

SEE – the problem wasn’t that Esau was hungry. The problem was he couldn’t wait. Satisfying his hunger was more valuable than his future inheritance.

The tragedy of these (2) lives remind me of Paul's words in Galatians 2:20-21: *I've been crucified w/ Christ and I no longer live b/c Christ lives in me. And the life I live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loves me and gave His life for me.*

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh w/ its passions and desires. Galatians 5:24

Self-control begins when Christ is on the throne as our Savior/Lord and self is on the cross. B/c the Christian life isn't about self-improvement; it's about surrender.

III Self-Control Builds Protective **BOUNDARIES**

Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control. Proverbs 25:28

In the ancient world, walls weren't ornamental – they were critical as they protected what mattered. A city w/out walls was exposed, vulnerable, defenseless, and open to invasion. The same is true of a life w/out self-control. When desires go unchecked, the soul is open territory w/ no resistance to temptation/fleshly desires.

Self-control isn't only about restricting behavior; it's about protecting what God has entrusted to us – our walk w/ Him, life, family, body, testimony, and future.

So – we don't build walls to keep life/blessing out. We build them to keep destruction out.

Think about a river. A river w/out banks isn't more free – it's a flood. After all, the banks don't steal the river's power; they channel it. ***Godly boundaries don't rob us of life – they channel our desires to keep us from destroying the very life God has given us.***

Yet our culture treats boundaries as oppressive. We're told that freedom means following ¹every desire, ²expressing every emotion, ³satisfying every appetite, and ⁴refusing every limitation – and yet we have more access than any previous generation and less peace.

Food is engineered to keep us eating. Technology is designed to keep us scrolling. Entertainment is available every hour of the day so every inclination we have is available at our fingertips w/ no accountability.

To have self-control, the Rechabites built walls around their lives long before Jeremiah placed wine before them so their boundaries protected their convictions.

Our problem is that we often ask – *how close can I get w/out crossing the line?* But wisdom asks – *how can I honor God and protect what He has entrusted to me?*

Truth – most of our failures aren't failures of information but failures of restraint. We know what's wise, but do what's easy. And while we know what's God-honoring, we choose what satisfies the moment.

We need to see that self-control isn't deprivation; it's devotion. It's not legalism; it's loyalty.

LBH – affairs, addictions, and financial collapse rarely begin w/ a plan to destroy ourselves. They begin b/c we haven't set boundaries/limitations to guard our decisions before they can become a repeated pattern.

Perhaps you already know where the wall has fallen. You don't need anyone to identify it for you. The H.S. has been placing His finger on it thru-out this message – not to condemn you, but to call you into freedom.

So- how do we practice self-control?

1 **RECOGNIZE** the Real Enemy

Stop blaming everyone else. Just b/c your conditions may be difficult and Satan may place temptation in your path, you're still responsible for how your actions

Self-control begins when we admit: ***My greatest struggle isn't only around me – it's also w/in me.*** So, stop excusing the flesh and begin exposing it by taking responsibility for your *ambitions, attitudes, appetites, and actions.*

2 **WALK** in Step w/ the Holy Spirit

Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Galatians 5:25

This is the big kahuna. To **keep in step** is to march in alignment in cadence w/ a leader. IOW – we're to discipline ourselves to pursue and follow after God.

Self-control grows thru daily surrender as we pray, read Scripture, worship, and obey – b/c our frequency w/ God gets us on the correct frequency to HEAR God.

3 **PRACTICE** the Intentional Pause

As James tells us – we're to *be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.*

Many failures of self-control occur b/c we react too quickly w/out considering the consequences. So, before sending that text, or posting that comment, or making that purchase, or clicking that link – **PAUSE.**

Instead **ASK** – *Is this Spirit-led or self-driven?* Truth is that most of life's greatest regrets could've been prevented by a Spirit-directed pause.

I thought about this on the golf cart yesterday when a few carts zoomed by me around corners. Here's what I've learned in my 1,000's of miles of carting around PTC. You always have to be looking at least 50 ft ahead of you for pending danger so that you can avoid unsuspecting trouble b/c if you don't... you can pay dearly. The same is true w/ self-control – always be looking ahead for the potential consequences.

4 **BEGIN** w/ One Specific Area

Don't pray – *Lord help me have more self-control.* Get specific. *Where are your walls broken?* Is it your tongue? Taste bud? Temper? Thought life? Or something else? **NAME IT!** And deal w/ it!

Think of the **debt snowball**: you pay off one debt, then roll that payment into the next. Deal first w/ one specific struggle – identify it, establish boundaries, and pursue victory. Then carry the discipline and momentum you gain into the next area until, one by one, the habits that controlled you lose their grip.

So, where has the wall fallen? Name (1) area then surrender it to Jesus. Establish (1) boundary then tell (1) trusted person. Finally, begin walking in step w/ the Spirit instead of in shame over yesterday's failure.

Ultimately – the key to self-control is surrendering your struggles to Jesus, b/c the gospel offers more than behavior management – it offers freedom.

SEE – thru His death/resurrection, Jesus not only forgives our sin, He breaks its ruling power. He succeeded where Adam, Samson, Esau, Judah, and all of us have failed; and b/c He remained faithful, He forgives our failures, gives us His Spirit, and produces in us what we could never manufacture on our own.

Self-control isn't about denying joy. It's about protecting it. It's about living freely under His rule. B/c when God governs the heart, He enables us to govern our desires, decisions, and actions.

Self-Control – IT Matters