

Self-Control

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Preacher: Jesse Kincer

[0 : 0 0] All right. Good morning, everybody. All right. So, we are in our second-to-last installment. Doesn't sound like the right word to use here, but the Fruit of the Spirit series that we are in. And man, it's been absolutely wonderful getting a lot of feedback from you guys of just how helpful and also unhelpful in a way that these things are, the challenging and how God's been working with us and challenging us as we seek to become more like Him, which is actually what the fruits of the Spirit are all about, is these characteristics of God that grow in us and begin to manifest in our lives in the way we live, in the way we act, the way we behave, the way we even think and process things. It even affects our desires as we live this with God life, abiding with Him in His Spirit and in His truth. And so, today's Fruit of the Spirit is self-control. And I like how Jerry Bridges defines self-control.

He says this, the exercise, it's the exercise of inner strength under the direction of sound judgment that enables us to do, think, and say the things that are pleasing to God. So, that's a great starting point for us. And we'll kind of launch out from there to unpack all that that means, because there is, as good as that is, and it's very succinct, but there's a lot more to this than meets the eye. And so, to help us, we're going to consider one of the great moments of self-control found in the Bible, and that is Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

And those of you that are maybe new to the Bible, maybe new to the Bible story and the Jesus story, let me just say this. Jesus came and He lived for 33 years on earth, and He came, like we sang about today, He came to live and die, and His purpose of coming was to die on a cross for our sins. And this Garden of Gethsemane is the beginning of what is called the Passion of the Christ. Just before He's arrested, just before He's put on trial, just before He's tortured and then crucified. And so, in this moment, it's the final hours of Jesus being a free man, being able to come and go as He pleases, and yet He knows what is coming. And so, we find Him here in this garden with His disciples. Matthew 26, verses 36 to 42 says this, Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and He said to His disciples, Sit here while I go over there and pray. And taking with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, He began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then He said to them, My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.

Remain here and watch with Me. And going a little further, He fell on His face and prayed, saying, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will. And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And He said to Peter, So could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The Spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. Again, for the second time, He went and waited and prayed. And my Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, Your will be done. Here we see the fullness of our Savior's humanity in this vulnerable moment. What He is doing, He is acknowledging that His soul is sorrowful. He says, It's sorrowful unto death. He goes, then He goes to God the Father and pleads for this cup. What He is facing, this moment, this moment of facing divine judgment from the wrath of God on Him for the sins of the world, and also because of Roman execution. He's saying, Lord, may this cup pass from Me. But He lands with, nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done. And so here we see, in the most intense circumstance, the divine fruit of self-control. And there's many lessons that this story of Jesus can teach us about self-control, but a good place to start is that self-control requires the recognition and testing of our desires. See, desires aren't a bad thing to have. God made us to be creatures of desire. Jesus on earth experienced desires. He experienced all the same desires we experience, because He was like us in every way. But He was also the God-man, the perfectly spiritual man, full of the Holy Spirit and fully God as well. And this brings us into the reality that we all face as human beings. Our desires are not always aligned with God's will. Also, our desires are many, and sometimes they compete against one another, right?

One can think of like we're heading into

[4 : 57] Thanksgiving. Man, we may want one more slice of pumpkin pie, and that's a desire we may have. But we also might have a desire of wanting to avoid acid reflux, right? And so those are competing desires. Now, what we have from our Savior in this case study on dealing with desires is that He acknowledges His desire to not want to face divine judgment and Roman execution, and that is a good desire. And it expressed in His naming His emotional reality, I am so sad that I could die, is kind of what He's saying in that moment, which sounds more like someone in the throes of radical hormone swings than what we would come to expect of Jesus in this moment. And yet, He says that.

I am so sad. I am so sorrowful. It's like coming to the point of death for me. And so He names what He's feeling. He names what He desires. He goes on to say, man, Lord, can this cup pass from me?

And we should be thankful that we have a Savior in that moment that validates the emotions and desires that any of us may feel. But He also shows us how the wise and the righteous govern these things.

Our emotions and our desires, they need to be tested as much as recognized. And here's why. Desires become dangerous when they become dysregulated. That's a fancy word, right? Dysregulation is the modern psychology word that we use today when somebody lacks self-control. And a little aside here, it's important that we realize when modern terms align with biblical truths because we can see that they are, in fact, redemptive and helpful, and we can accept them and learn from them.

[6 : 35] God really doesn't mind if we don't use Bible words for Bible truths. He's okay with that because any truth is God's truth. But back to desires becoming dangerous when they aren't regulated. And what happens is we become dysregulated as people.

Dysregulated desires are an intense, often overwhelming craving or urge that is poorly controlled and can lead to negative consequences. Essentially meaning a desire that is not managed or balanced in a healthy way often causes impulsive behaviors or actions to fulfill them.

It can be related to various aspects of life like eating or sex or substance abuse or even certain or other certain behaviors depending on the individual. The point is hopefully we can all agree that we don't want to be that way.

We don't want to be those kind of persons. But then what does it mean to regulate your desires? Well, let me say it's not suppression of desire.

It is not denial of desire. It is just engaging them wisely, which requires discernment from you and me to know when to say no. Or when to say not yet.

[7 : 50] Which brings us to an important characteristic of self-control. Self-control is the practice of temperance. Now temperance simply means you know when to say no to things or not yet to things.

It's the essence of regulation. It's the opposite of how Roald Dahl characterized the children in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, right? We look at all those kids and each of them lacked personal temperance and they kind of lacked parental temperance as well, right?

See, one of the distortions of our sinful nature is that we take good things that are good to desire, food and rest and wealth and pleasure and sex and chocolate, and we indulge in them past the point where the wise would say no.

And when we lack internal temperance, we manifest dysregulation. To put it another way, when we don't know when to tell our desires no or not right now, they become disordered desires.

Which, to be more clear, means that our competing desires aren't prioritized correctly. And our greatest desire must be toward what we were created for.

[9 : 04] What do you mean, Jesse? What does that mean? Well, some of the oldest extra-biblical and yet universally trusted documents of our faith put it this way. When you look over the whole of the Bible, it's, guys have created this thing, the chief end of man.

What we are created for is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. And in glorifying Him, that means we put Him first.

We put His kingdom first. And we're going to get into that in a moment. But first, let me make an important point. This doesn't suddenly mean that everything enjoyable, everything fun and good, has to go flying out the window of our lives.

It's just that every desire must be tempted against this priority of putting God and His kingdom first. That has to be the priority, which every desire gets tested against.

Too often, Christians are only known for what they don't do. But here's the thing. In God's kingdom, there is freedom and there is liberty to enjoy so many good things.

[10:10] But we have to realize that in God's kingdom, His freedoms have boundaries. He has guardrails around these things. And I would argue that freedom without boundaries isn't very freeing.

It isn't very life-giving. Anyway, a river without boundaries is a swamp. Land without water means you're in a desert or in Kansas, and nobody wants that, right?

There was a social experiment done with kids, and they put a bunch of kids in a playground. And first, they put them in a playground without a fence, and then they took them and then put them in a playground that did have a fence.

So what was more interesting is that the kids felt more freedom to wonder further away when there was a fence than when there wasn't. You would think it would be the opposite, right? See, it's easy to believe that any boundary limits or prohibits one's ability to really enjoy life.

But actually, the opposite proves to be true. Boundaries are good. Think about it. Sexual intimacy without boundaries, that sounds like a lot of freedom.

[11:16] I get to be with whoever I want, whenever I want, and it's no big deal. But kept within the boundaries of the marriage covenant, man, it is actually better for us.

Let me argue the point. Take away that boundary, and there is no standard of consistency or stability connected with what is arguably one of the most impactful things to bear upon our mind, soul, and body.

And the research, especially in the world of psychology, is proving this more and more and more. What is reported by most who break that boundary, he choose not to live within that good God boundary, is that their emotional state is one of being unsettled, of feeling anxious, of feeling even times of depression and being unwanted or unworthy.

Here's another example. Eating and drinking. Oh, it's a great gift, right? And it can bring us such good enjoyment and pleasure.

Think about this. There is going to be feasting in heaven. Amen? Oh, that's just worthy of like, man, yeah, let's put our faith in Jesus then, right? If that's what that's going to be like, that's awesome.

[12:31] But here's the thing. Excessive eating and drinking here on earth, it damages our body. We got to have good boundaries around those things. The point is our minds and souls and bodies thrive under self-control.

They thrive under temperance. They thrive under the ability to discern and know when to say no or not yet to things. In sin, what it does, it drives us to hedonistic indulgence of things, of these good gifts that God can give us.

But the Spirit of God guides us towards this temperance, this self-control. And while a part of that self-control is avoiding excess, another important aspect of self-control is in that ordering of priorities that we mentioned earlier.

Self-control places God and His kingdom first. Disregulated desires might lead to excess, but disordered desires are caused by not having God as your reference point.

Think about this. What was Jesus' reference point in the garden? It was God's will. Jesus had temperance.

[13:38] Jesus was expressing temperance in that moment, but it was temperance with a point of reference. Jesus saying no doesn't go far enough.

The other side of that coin is saying yes to something. What is it you're saying yes to? In your temperance where you're saying no to something, what are you saying yes to?

For the Christian, the guiding principle of our self-control, of why we say no or not yet to anything, is to say yes to God's will. It's to yield to His will and be submitted and surrendered to it.

Now, here's another wrinkle with self-control. It's one thing to acknowledge that God's will needs to win. It's another thing to know what it is in any particular moment, right?

That's always a thing I think most of us would acknowledge and wrestle with. And that opens us up to another important aspect of self-control. Knowing God's will is important because of where the regulation of our desires and emotions happen, which is in our minds.

[14 : 41] Self-control takes place in the battleground of the mind. Think about a young child's lack of self-control. Or a baby.

They say babies cry, and actually they're expressing anger, not fear. They are mad. They are communicating that I am hungry. Why are you not feeding me? My diaper is filled with things that I don't like.

Please get it off of me. Fix this problem, right? If no one was to teach two-year-olds what is appropriate or inappropriate to do when they are together, let's say, in a kids' ministry classroom, we would have classrooms of bruised and bloody messes in no time, wouldn't we?

Kids tend to bite and kick and punch and throw things to get their way. Why? Well, they have well-developed desiring mechanisms, but they have very little mind regulation.

They have to be taught. Their mind has to be engaged more and more with how to properly regulate their desires. Here's an interesting fact. The Bible references our relationship with Jesus in terms of maturity, right?

[15 : 56] So we are saved, and we could be baby Christians or infants or children, or the desires that we grow up to matureness in Christ, reaching full manhood, full maturity. And that Christian maturity, in large part, is becoming aware of what our desires are, but also knowing how to regulate them well.

Self-control. So what are we to regulate towards? Romans 12, 2 says, Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Our default setting is to be conformed to the pattern of this world. Like, your will setting is like to the pattern of this world, which is the antithesis of the will of God. And what is that pattern of the world? We have this knowledge of what the world values, what the world prioritizes, the knowledge of what the world says your purpose should be, and what you should be living towards, and what you should be achieving in life.

And your mind, as regulatory agency, is set on those patterns and priorities and purposes defined by the world. But here's the problem. That is introduced to the Christian.

[17 : 11] We are called to set our mind on the will of God. And the Bible says that takes mind transformation. That takes mind renewal. Our minds need to know the will of God in order to discern the will of God, in order to regulate ourselves toward the will of God.

And I wish it were easier than that. I wish it were as simple as saying a prayer and everything suddenly, just for us, comes under alignment with God's will. We're just perfectly set in that way. Unfortunately, it requires some effort from you and me. Well, what kind of effort? Well, Paul gets at this in Ephesians 4, verse 17. He says, Now this I say, and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.

They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

But that is not the way that you learned Christ. Assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus.

[18 : 18] To put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through the deceitful desires. And to be renewed in the spirit of your minds.

And to put on the new self created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. There's much to say here and much that follows after those verses about the new self and the old self.

But to kind of summarize it for the sake of time, self-control requires a daily renewal of putting on our new self. The thing that we are saved, the new creation that comes to us through faith in Jesus Christ that God has worked on our behalf.

And this new self comes with a new mindset, a new set of desires. And it stands against, in opposition to our old self, the things that we once were.

All the stuff that's described in verses 17 to 19. Not knowing God. Ignorant. Darkened in our understanding. Our minds once being futile. Our souls being callous.

[19 : 20] Our hearts being callous and full of sensuality and greed and all of the like things. We don't do that anymore. We don't desire things. We don't desire those things anymore. We're not supposed to walk in that way anymore.

We're meant to walk in the new way of Jesus. As verse 21 puts it, the truth that we heard about. About Jesus. The truth that we are to be trained in.

We're supposed to walk in that way. Which means that we put off our old self. That's something we do. Our old habits. Our former manner of life.

That those deceitful desires. That futility of our mind. We put those things off. Which means this. This renewal of our mind. This renewal. This reconforming to the ways of Christ.

And to the knowledge of Christ. And to living for him. Which is going to result in more self-control. In our lives. That renewal process is a progression. To say it another way.

[20 : 17] We are to be being renewed. In this. The renewal of our minds. In the spirit of our mind. Which is a daily practice. This new self. This new creation of who you are in God.

That we are made in the likeness of him. And in his righteousness and holiness. Now. That is a lot of spiritual talk to wade through. And parse out. But let me make it clear.

In the new self. Our minds can regulate our desires. And emotion towards God's righteousness. And God's holiness. And the more that happens. The more our thoughts. Desires and emotions. Follow the good and perfect will of God. And that is self-control. Now. Let me help us with some very practical ways.

How do we. How do we regulate? What are some of the regulating principles. For our minds to know. To help us out here. In this battlefield of the mind. Well. First. Self-control principle.

[21 : 11] Is whenever you're facing. Something. Ask this question. Will this glorify God or not? That is a good. Self-regulating principle. Meaning.

Will this bear witness. To who God is. If I behave this way. If I act this way. If I make this choice. Is it going to bear witness. To who God is. And who he's made me to be.

Does it align with how. Jesus bore witness. To God's nature. It's a good. Guiding principle. Here's another one. Will this further God's kingdom.

Or will it further mine. Will this desire. That I'm feeling. If acted upon. Bring about. God's redemptive purpose. For myself and others.

Will it be truthful. Will it be merciful. Will it be good. Will it be just. Will it be kind. Will it be loving. Will it be patient. Will it be gentle. See what I'm saying. Will it promote.

[22 : 08] God's righteousness. And holiness. In myself. And in others. And finally. Guiding principle. Number three. Will this increase. Intimacy. And integrity.

With God and others. See God's ways. Are always connection driven. They're always looking. To close. The relational gaps.

To bring about. Restoration. And reconciliation. In our lives. To promote nearness. And closeness. With one another. But in an honest. And truthful way. And as we.

Live by these principles. What they do. Is they draw us together. They draw us closer. Now I'm sure. There's probably more principles. To add to that list. But guys. This is all you get. This is all I can think of.

Sorry. So three good principles. To help guide us. Into. Man. How do we. How do we engage. In any specific moment. To exercise some. Self-control. That would align us. With God's will.

[23 : 03] And lead us. Into the will of God. And in the final analysis. Let me say this. Self-control. It is the regulation. Of our desires.

And emotion. Aligned to God's good. And perfect will. We. And here's the thing. If that is true. Then we. You and I. Cannot do it. Without his help. This isn't something.

That we go to God. And say. I got this. It's all about me. No no no. We need. We need him. You can't get the fruit of the spirit. Without the spirit. You need his divine power.

At work. In you. You need his divine power. Leading and guiding you. And to give you the strength. To do these things. It's only by that. We can make. We could even hope.

To be self-controlled people. So. My invitation. Actually. God's invitation. To you. Is to come to him. So that he can lead you.

[23 : 59] And guide you. Submit. And surrender to him. Live the with God life. That says. Nevertheless. Not my will. But yours be done. As the band comes up. And we seek to respond.

We're going to take communion. In a moment. And I want to say. To those of us in the room. Maybe you're here. You would consider yourself. Not yet a follower of Jesus. Man we are so glad you're here. I am so glad you're here.

And that you got to listen. To this. Sermon about self-control. And how important it is. And life giving. It can be for our lives. But also to remind you. That this self-controlled. Kind of life. It requires beginning. With a surrender. To. To God himself. To the person of God. And to his good. And perfect will. And his good.

And perfect will for you. That first step. Is believing that Jesus. Died to save you. And he died. To save you from your sin. And from eternal judgment.

[24 : 53] In a moment. There's going to be an opportunity. For you to respond. And there'll be a prayer. Up on the screen. For you to pray. I want to encourage you. To pray that. And if you're here. And you're already. A follower of Jesus. We're going to take a moment. To prepare for communion. I want to ask you. How is God calling you. To respond. Where is he calling you. To say. No we're not yet. To things in your life. Where is he calling you. To surrender to his will. Or to repent. And turn back to his will. I want to give us time.

To come to him. He invites you. To come to him right now. He is so good and gracious. Man he says. Like come to me. In your time of need. And you will find help. So come to him right now. Before we come. To the communion table. And just take. As much time as you need. A few. 30 seconds. A minute. Whenever. And when you're ready. Come but. Just to lead us into this moment.

[25 : 47] Let me just pray. Over this time. Heavenly father. We come to you today. And I just ask. That you would come. Very near to us. Right now. That we would feel you.

As we sit in these seats. We would feel your presence. We would feel you. Speaking to us. Meeting with us. In profound ways. Lord.

We want to open our hearts. To you. We want to know. What your good and perfect will is. For us. And to be guided. In that way. Lord.

I pray. For those that are going to come. To the communion table. In a few moments. That they would be reminded. That you are the one.

Who showed us. What the greatest. Of self-controls is. Lord. We are coming to this communion table. Because. Your desire.

[26 : 44] That this cup. Would pass from you. Was. Submitted. And yielded to. The good and perfect will. Of the father. And so we get to drink.

Of the cup. Of Christ's suffering. In Christ's death. In our place for us. And we thank you for that. Lord. Amen. Amen. Amen.