



1362 US Highway 395 N Ste 102-200  
Gardnerville, NV 89410  
E-mail: [bill@liferesource.org](mailto:bill@liferesource.org)  
Website: [www.liferesource.org](http://www.liferesource.org)

**Presentation Transcript**  
**Fruits of the Spirit – Part 10 – Self-Control**  
**May 6, 2022**

We're completing, with this presentation, the series on the *Fruits of the Spirit* detailed in Galatians 5 by the apostle Paul. This is the tenth in the series and it's about *Self-Control*.

As we do with all of our presentations in this series, let's look at definition of the term. In the *King James*, the Greek word is translated *temperance*. More modern translations translate it *self-control*. Since both English terms mean essentially the same thing, that's how we'll talk about it today.

Let's read what the Louw & Nida lexicon says. This is a part of the definition – we've already accepted self-control as the definition. And they say: "An adequate rendering of the expression *to exercise self-control* may require an idiomatic equivalent. For example: to hold oneself in; to command oneself; to be a chief of oneself; make one's heart be obedient; command one's own desires; to be the master of what one wants; or to say no one's body." Pretty much what one could expect, I think. I hope we're all on the same page of what the term means.

Let's think about some areas of application. Anything that has to do with being human could be considered, but let's look in James 3:3. James says:

**James 3:3-5** – *If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. Look at ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!*

It could seem to some that James is implying that the body part is at fault – you know, the tongue is the problem – same kind of analogy that Jesus might have used when He said, "If your eye offends you, gouge it out." Jesus didn't really mean that. He was trying to make a point. And James doesn't either. He's drawing our attention to a part of our body that we use to do good or bad, but the use is determined by something in the frontal lobes of our minds, called the

executive functioning part of the brain. The idea is to use the tongue for good. Keep an eye on it. Avoid problems by keeping it buttoned up and under control.

Last summer in our area of Nevada, close to the California border, we had a forest fire start from a single tree set ablaze by a lightning strike. One of our relatives knows the helicopter pilot who found the source of the smoke on his way back from dumping water on another fire. He radioed in and reported what he saw and asked permission to load up with water at a small lake nearby and douse this tree before it got out of hand. But he was told to skip that, because the lake had too many fish in it. And that fire eventually burned thousands of acres before it was put out – all because of one tree on fire and the foolishness of politicians who approve of the ridiculous laws and policies put forth by various bureaucrats.

So, when it comes to saying foolish things, we're like that. Once the fire gets started, it can't be put out. Better not to say something that would cause a problem. Another metaphor – I know I shouldn't mix them – but I've heard it said that you can't un-ring a bell. We can't reel back in what we've said.

James continues in verse 9:

**V-9-10** – *With it – that's the tongue – we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not be so.*

So, we claim to love God, yet we say things that show we haven't fully grasped what God is all about and that we're not close to Him. Now, does that seem like an overstatement? Well, look in James 1:26.

**James 1:26** – *If anyone thinks he is religious – or spiritual – and does not bridle his tongue, but deceives his heart, the person's religion is worthless.*

Instead, as Paul says in Colossians 4:6:

**Colossians 4:6** – *Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*

There's a way to use the tongue for goodness and a way not to. He says, "Let your speech...." That's biblical for *make* – *make* your speech be gracious. It's a choice we get to use.

Okay, so that's enough on the tongue. Besides speech and how we misuse our tongues, where else do we need self-control? In our society, sex has taken on a way too important role. Let me give you an example.

I was talking to a sixteen-year-old – maybe she was fifteen at that time – very abused girl, very low sense of self at that time. She was telling me that she had sex with her boyfriend, even though she felt guilty about it. I said, “Well, if you feel guilty about it, why do it?” She said, “You know how guys always need sex?” It’s as though every sexual urge has to be fulfilled or he’s going to turn into a pumpkin. I told her, “I think that you are laboring under something that’s not true. To me, a *need* is something like air, or water, or food. Those are physical needs that keep us alive. Sex is a physical *desire*, but it’s not a need. Do you know what happens when your boyfriend doesn’t get sex? Nothing. But in our society, it’s almost like not possible to deny ourselves that. We just *have* to do it.”

Here’s what Jesus said about it...so this attitude is not just for our day. Listen to this – Matthew 19:3. I’ve got to do a little setup by giving you some background here.

**Matthew 19:3-9** – *The Pharisees came to Him and tested Him – they were trying to trick Him into saying something that would get Him in trouble – by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” He answered, “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” And they said to Him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?” And He said to them, “Because of the hardness of your hearts, Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning, it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”*

Okay, that’s the background for what’s coming next.

**V-10-12** – *The disciples* – who were there listening when Jesus explained this to the Pharisees, and when they got Him alone later, here’s what happened: *The disciples said to Him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.”* They were saying, “If you can’t get married again, that would mean that we can’t have sex ever again.” Oh no! So, it may not be just a modern thing. *But He said to them* – listen carefully to this. It sounds like He’s changing the subject, but He’s not. *He said to them, “Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth – people can be born with birth deformities and so they can’t have sex – and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.”* He’s saying that people should emasculate themselves if they can’t be married – the same way as “gouge out your eye.” That’s not really what He meant. He was just talking about, if something is offensive to look at – might cause you to sin – don’t look at it! Or, if your hand is going to cause you to do something wrong – not cut it off – it’s just, *withdraw* your hand! And His point here is that there are lots of people who can’t have sex for lots of different reasons and they can still live their lives.

Do you know what happens to a person when a person does not have sex as a part of their life? Well, the same thing as that girlfriend's boyfriend – nothing! There are some who can have sex, but choose not to, because it would hinder their effort to get into the Kingdom. So, who would that apply to? Well, in context, divorcees, if it wasn't for sexual misconduct. The apostle Paul would be another example. He was too busy traveling in God's service and being persecuted, so that he didn't get married. Jesus, the same. He would be an example too. Christians who would consider themselves homosexuals. When I was pastoring churches, I met a number of people who turned away from the gay life, giving up same-sex relationships to be Christian. And then there are the people with birth defects – the eunuchs Jesus mentioned – and other types of defects, and probably more. And all that is not to say that those who abstain do not have sexual desire. That's where self-control comes in. So, self-control has a large part in being a Christian. It keeps us from doing things that are contrary to God's law – things that we might want to do.

What other areas can we look at? Well, food and drink. We were told that gluttons and drunkards won't be in the Kingdom. That implies the need for self-control. The opposite of a drunkard can be someone who drinks, but doesn't get drunk. That takes self-control and habit-building. And a glutton doesn't necessarily have to be overweight. I've dealt with quite a few binge-eaters, who are not overweight, who would eat for days until they got sick, and then tell me that they couldn't control it. Well, I think common sense would tell you, that's just not true. One just has to stop opening the mouth while the elbow is bending. I mean, it's that simple, in one way. If you're lifting food to your mouth and you don't let it in, you're not going to gain weight, or you're not going to binge-eat. I also know some people who are overweight because of their genetics. Some people don't want to admit that that's a problem. But you may know people who are very thin, yet can eat anything they want and never become, as we say, fat. It's possible for people who are very thin to be gluttons. And it's possible to be thin because of genetics. So then, if that's the case, it's also to be overweight because of genetics as well.

I was talking to a flight attendant – a woman – who was gaining weight even though she was only eating 1,400 calories a day and exercising – extremely frustrating for her – self-controlled, but still getting heavy – overweight and not a glutton. That said, it's never helpful to be morbidly obese. It's hard on the joints, the heart, the lungs, the pancreas.

And we could also include all kinds of addictions here. Once a person detoxes, nothing bad happens if they no longer do the drugs. I've talked to more people who have quit heroin on their own than I have those who went to rehab on various programs. And think about all those guys who came back from Viet Nam addicted to heroin and quit without any outside help. They said they just didn't need it anymore, so I guess a lot of them just gradually went off of it – or, maybe just went cold turkey and suffered the detox process.

Are there any other areas where self-control would help us? Well, here's one that we might not think about too much: personal organization. Perhaps not a sin, but personal organization is an example showing how things that God tells us are good things and helpful to live a better life and

less stressful come from self-control. A lot of the people that come to counsel with me suffer anxiety because they say they have more to do and they can't get control of it.

When I was in high school, all I needed was a notebook with a single sheet of paper in it to keep track of homework due dates. Everything else just happened on its own. We ate dinner at the same time and breakfast at the same time, and we didn't have many appointments to keep – or we had few enough of them that I could remember them. But when I went to college, I began to forget things, because I had too many things to remember. I was dropping appointments, assignments, work periods. So, I added a small pocket calendar to my list that I carried in my notebook. That seemed to take care of it for quite a few years – as long as I wrote everything down.

Then I read the book of *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, and that convinced me that I needed to add goals I wanted to achieve and roles I found myself playing – like husband, father, minister, etcetera. So, I got a day-planner and a half-sized 3-ring binder. And that did okay for a while.

But years later, after I started doing a masters' degree and all the practicums that came along with them, and not long after that, I decided to start LifeResource Ministries and a private counseling practice – at approximately the same time – my day-planner was completely inadequate for those tasks. So, I came under a lot of stress, created not only by all the work, but my inability to manage all of it. I couldn't find the time to do the things I needed to do, and I forgot a lot of things I should have done. So, I dropped the day-planner, found a computerized system that would help me focus on only the things I needed to do at the moment, so that my mind was freed up from all the mountain of stuff that was there that needed to be done eventually. What a big relief that was! It was amazing! But until I found an implement – a better system – I was unnecessarily stressed.

So, why am I telling you this? Because it takes self-control to use any organizational system. It has to be used consistently and faithfully to be helpful. So, that's why the self-control. We could just as much talk about budgeting. If a person budgets their money, they will end up with a lot more than if they didn't budget, because it's a way to focus their income on the things that they really need and want, instead of on impulse-buying, or living out of balance – driving a Cadillac while living in an efficiency apartment, or living in a big house and not having a car to drive. That's an area where self-control...it might not be a sin to forget appointments, but it frustrates us and makes us unhappy if we can't manage our time.

So, let's move on to talk about some modern thinking that needs to be jettisoned. Like I said, we could cover many more areas of life where we could apply self-control, but there seems to be an idea that people who are born with certain genetic propensities can't help the way they are. It's true that, if you're disabled, you might not be able to do much with a disability other than physical therapy, for example. But let's take the example of the flight attendant who gained

weight at 1,400 calories a day. This lady was six feet tall and all her sisters had the same issue. If you're that tall, and you're still gaining weight at 1,400 calories, it's not what you're eating. It's about your genetics. Well, does that mean that she's doomed to be obese? Well, no. It just means that she's going to have to work harder and sacrifice more than other people to be thin. It's the same thing for the people who are born without the ability to walk. It's always going to be harder for them to get around, but they can get around if it's important to them.

I had a client once, who had a fifteen-year-old son, and he was starting to show signs of sociopathy. He'd never been abused or mistreated, but when he was an infant, he suffered a blocked ureter that caused him an incredible amount of pain until the doctors discovered what was causing it. Now studies show that some people who suffered that kind of pain can become sociopaths. And that can lead to a terrible life of anger, isolation, even jail time. While it's harder, if he works on the issue, and has the right help, he can probably overcome that. He's only fifteen. But that would take self-control – our topic today. Just as people who get in a car accident and lose the ability to use their legs, if they do enough physical therapy, some of them can recover from that to a degree or, maybe, completely. But it's hard work and it takes self-control to make oneself do that.

The key to understand all this is to understand the biblical position. Even though an issue may be more difficult for some than others, if we work at it, we will get better and we will be better off than if we gave in to it. Remember what Jesus said about the eunuch who became so for the sake of the Kingdom of God. If we want, pretty much, anything, we can attain it if we control ourselves, marshal the resources, use creativity and ingenuity to accomplish our goals.

I learned something really interesting these past couple of weeks. I was doing some CEUs and one of the courses I borrowed – or took, sorry – was a survey of all the studies that had been done on teenagers with suicidal thinking and suicide attempts. In their conclusion, they mention that one of the most helpful things that a practitioner can do to help a teen with those problems is to teach them problem-solving skills. So, what's causing the problem and how do we fix it? Well, it's going to take self-will, and self-determination, and resourcefulness to overcome it. But if people start thinking about that, then they have hope to go forward.

What the Bible tells us is that God knows all our weaknesses and all our disabilities. And He knows all the sins we've committed and He knows *why* we've committed them. So, all His knowledge of such weaknesses and all such misbehavior goes into His thinking when it comes time to judge us. And God is merciful and gracious toward His children. It doesn't do any good to blame it on genetics, for example, and then just go ahead and do what we want.

Now, let's talk about staying in control of self. The school of psychology has done a lot of work on this really fascinating subject. What is it that causes us to rise above difficulty. Well, here are some the things that have been discovered about self-control:

Number one: Self-control is *not* constant. It waxes and wanes based on our internal resources, like energy, and stress, and stress fatigue – just tired of dealing with something. So, why does knowing this help us? There's the joke about the guy who said, "I can stand anything but temptation." But, if we're worn down and tired, we are more likely to give in to it. If you know that, what is it that you think you should do? Stay away from things that are going to tempt you. Right?

How do we deal with temptation? Well, I've already alluded to it. Here the Bible and psychology agree. The best way to deal with temptation is to avoid it. Here's a direct quote out of the Bible: "Flee fornication." Get away from it. If there's somebody that you're tempted by, or some place where you're tempted, get away! If you like donuts too much, don't buy any. If you like alcohol too much, don't keep it around. If you find yourself triggered by certain people, stay away from them.

Another thing to think about is how to build will power. Well, psychologists have figured out a lot about that too. The number one thing to do is to exercise it. If you've pulled a piece of pie out of the refrigerator and you're getting ready to eat it, put it back in. Or, stop going to the refrigerator after dinner. Avoid hanging around your former heroin dealer. One of the biggest reasons people fail after a rehab is going back into the same location – place – where they lived before – where they're around the same people that they did heroin with or bought heroin from. So, a lot of people think that self-control has a lot to do with will power. And that certainly is a factor, but there's something that has been proven to be better than will power, and that's good habits. Once dinner is over, let it be over for the rest of the night. Go to the gym *x* number of times a week. Make it a habit. Say something kind instead of something demeaning, sarcastic, etcetera. Get over being snarky. Develop a habit of saying something pleasant to people. Instead, be concerned about how people are feeling – instead of putting everyone down.

Another thing is: in the psychological literature they say, "Feel good about yourself." But I would say, for Christians, knowing that we are loved by God is very important. That us important and valuable and worthwhile to God, doesn't it? And that's true. You can read that in the Bible. So, if you want more help with that than just reading the Bible, go back and see where He has intervened to move you in a good direction from the time He began working with you. So, people who feel good about who they are, are more likely to take care of themselves. And that usually involves self-control. There's a motive to take care of oneself when one believes oneself is worthwhile.

So, God's solution to many aspects of life that cause us trouble is self-control. People who have self-control, for the right reasons, are much happier than those that don't – much less stressed and unhappy. And also – and this is something that psychology can't talk about – according to your Bible, self-control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit in a person. I mean, that's what this whole series is about. Right? The fruits of the Holy Spirit at work in us when we have God's Spirit in us. So, if God is *in* us, that means we have power to control ourselves for Godly reasons – not

just about being good for us. Temperate persons are easier and more helpful to be around. And that makes us better tools to build unity in our congregation and also with potential new people. Remember that the context of Paul's comment was about fruit of the Spirit. And the reason he was offering it to the Galatians was to combat a relational problem that they were having in their congregation. That is one of the reasons God offers us these fruits of the Spirit. Of course, we need it to become more like God, but if we *do* that, then we're going to be better tools to work in a congregation and make it a healthy place.

You can go to our Website, [liferesource.org](http://liferesource.org), to see the previous presentations of this series, and also, a link that I mentioned about psychological research about self-control. So, just click on the "Presentations" link, then go to the series, and you'll find it there.

Until next time, this is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.