

Fruits of the Holy Spirit – Session 10

Self-Control

Galatians 5

Timing: 30-45 minutes, then leading into ministry

Buzz groups: Suggestions are boxed, pairs or groups of 3-4 will work best

Illustrations: Suggestions are noted, but your own ideas and stories are preferable

Focus: Major on the one or two points most relevant to your group

Icebreaker: Which Christian known personally to you exhibits self-control?

Introduction

Introduce this week on *self-control*.

Key Point: God grows self-control in us

Key Verse: “*But the fruit of the Spirit is...self-control*” (Galatians 5:23)

Oscar Wilde’s autobiographical character *Dorian Gray*, says “the only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it”. But in the process he destroys himself.

Mick Jagger once said “it’s alright letting yourself go, as long as you can get yourself back”. The trouble is, often we can’t. And often we let ourselves go, but still can’t “get no satisfaction”.

Group brainstorm: Ask, “What other words do people associate with ‘self-control’”? Draw out both +ve and -ve associations, (e.g. boring, restraint, lack of passion, suppressed emotions).

Jesus’ ‘cleansing’ of the Temple (see John 2:13-16) was not Jesus “losing it”, but a premeditated, daring prophetic act. Jesus saw what was happening, made a whip, and then used it!

The fruit of self-control is not just about containing negative behaviours, it’s about unleashing courageously-holy ones. Unfortunately, we tend to contain the courageously-holy behaviours and unleash the negative ones! Share a personal example, light and humorous, to illustrate this.

Self-control is the ability to choose how we respond to situations, which in turn relies on reading them correctly, so that we can choose courageously God’s way forward.

Most of us possess limited choice. We often react to things according to flawed perceptions. We are often instinctively driven by our natured/nurtured inherited worldview and attitudes.

The key to developing self-control – the full ability to choose behaviour/attitude responses – is to perceive situations correctly. We perceive things according to what we believe about the world. For example, if we believe the world is unsafe, we will perceive things as threats and dangers.

Illustrate: share a personal story about when you perceived threat/danger/humiliation and reacted without thinking. Looking back, you misread the situation. What would you do differently now?

How can we allow the Holy Spirit to grow this vital fruit in us? 4 P’s!

1. Be Persuaded (work on our beliefs)

The Point: Our beliefs matter. God is in control. Judgment is real (our actions have consequences). We live in a now-and-not-yet world where Christ’s victory is won, but not yet fully seen on earth.

→ 1 Peter 1:13 “prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled”

- Philippians 3:21 “everything under his control”; Job 37:15 “Do you know how God controls..?”
- John 5:19. The devil is not in ultimate control, but resists those seeking the Kingdom of God
- Acts 24:25 / Romans 8:8 sinful behavior (lack of self-control) results in judgment
- Romans 7:5 Actually, lack of self-control makes us miserable (a la *Dorian Gray*)

Illustration: Share which of these you struggle to believe, but choose to simply trust God about

Application: “I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24) Share how you work on your beliefs, e.g. listening to talks, reading books, journaling, chatting to friends...

2. Be Proactive (engage and anticipate challenges)

The Point: Gain self-control by understanding yourself (Psalm 32:9; Proverbs 16:32; 25:28; 29:11)

- Parents use other positive activities to distract children away from tantrums
- Anger-management trainers ask patients to imagine “Stop+Think” road-signs when angry
- We can deliberately enact opposite responses, Jesus said “Love your enemies”
- Self-reinforcement – not shielding ourselves from negative consequences of our actions, and fully enjoying positive ones – is much more effective than self-punishment in learning self-control.

Illustration: Tell a personal story about how you have received inner healing over anger or unforgiveness stemming from past hurts or sins, that previously were causing you to simply react. But having received forgiveness and healing you are much freer to choose your responses.

Buzzgroups: How do you learn and monitor your self-control over e.g. anger, lust, alcohol, time?

3. Be Personal (stay alert to temptation)

The Point: “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy prowls...to devour” (1 Peter 5:8)

- Get a friend to use the parental control function to code-lock unhelpful TV channels
- Use internet buddy-systems to stay accountable about what you’re looking at online
- Reduced glucose levels has been shown to have a big impact on self-control – so keep fuelled!

Illustration: Tell a story not about not doing something negative, but about when you had to use self-control to do something positive. Perhaps you were fearful and had to have courage. Perhaps you had to confront someone when it was socially awkward. Perhaps you had to manage your time better in order to volunteer in something God was asking you to get involved with.

4. Be Prayerful (receive the Holy Spirit)

The Point: “Be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray” (1 Peter 4:7). “You however, are controlled...by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you” (Romans 8:9)

- We learn self-control by first ceding it to God (see Matthew 10:38-39)
- Our degree of self-control is linked – by design – to the quality of our prayer life
- Self-control is not a fruit we grow apart from God, but in partnership with him

Application: So let’s pray! Move in to a time of ministry.

Ideas for Ministry

- All stand and ask the Holy Spirit to come and help cultivate the fruit of self-control. Ask him to inspire the group with helpful scriptures, words or pictures. Wait. Ask people to share any. Then pray in to them all together.
- Break in to 3’s and briefly share with one another in what areas we need God’s help to develop self-control. This may involve an element of confession at shortcomings. Encourage everyone to assure each other of God’s forgiveness, and to build one another up in prayer.