

## The fruit of the Spirit, part 9: Self-control

The keys to healthy friendships, businesses,  
and marriages

Message for Sunday, March 13, 2016  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** Galatians 5:16-25, and various  
Proverbs

**Children's Message:** Use a large “10” as the  
symbol for self-control (as in “count to 10”).

Have a sugar bowl and a bowl of cereal. Sprinkle a  
spoonful of sugar on the cereal, then start to eat it  
(explain that I slept in this morning, and didn't have  
time for breakfast). But the first taste is *eewyuck* —  
I put salt on it by mistake. It looked like sugar, I  
thought it was sugar, but it wasn't right.

Now choosing between salt and sugar can be tricky  
at times, especially on April Fool's Day, when  
someone in your family switches them (hey, there's  
an idea for you!☺)

Most of the time, however, it's easier to know the  
right thing to do. Let's say it's lunchtime at school.  
Someone had a chocolate bar in their lunch, but  
weren't hungry and left it in their desk and then  
went outside. You can hear it calling to you,  
“Bruce, oh Bruce, come and get me.” But God says,  
“That's stealing, and that's wrong.”

But it's pretty easy to know which way is God's  
way, and which was isn't. The only hard part is in  
making the right choice. God wants to help you  
with that.

One of the fruit of the Spirit is self-control. That  
means God's Spirit in you will help you want to do  
the right thing. The next time you're tempted to do  
something you know is wrong, you can pray, “Lord  
Jesus, this is hard for me. I need your help. Please  
help me to follow you. Amen.”

### Message

## The fruit of the Spirit, part 9: Self-control

This is the ninth in a series of messages about the  
fruit of the Spirit:

Galatians 5:22-23, New International Version:  
The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience,  
kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and  
self-control.

## 1) If you don't control yourself, you're out of control

Today we're looking at self-control. Any area of  
your life which is out of control will hurt you and  
your relationships. Probably the top four areas  
where people have difficulty with self-control are  
sex, money, booze and food. Here are some Biblical  
examples.

- Uncontrolled lust: just think — a few moments  
of pleasure can bring a lifetime of regret.

Proverbs 6:26, Today's English Version:

A man can hire a prostitute for the price of a loaf of  
bread, but adultery will cost him all he has.

- Uncontrolled spending: “I love credit cards.  
They go so much further than cash.”

Proverbs 21:20, Today's English Version:

Wise people live in wealth and luxury, but stupid  
people spend their money as fast as they get it.

- Uncontrolled drinking

Proverbs 23:29-35, New Century Version:

Who has trouble? Who has pain? Who fights? Who  
complains? Who has unnecessary bruises? Who has  
bloodshot eyes? It is people who drink too much  
wine, who try out all different kinds of strong drinks.

Don't stare at the wine when it is red, when it  
sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly.  
Later it bites like a snake with poison in its fangs.  
Your eyes will see strange sights, and your mind will  
be confused. You will feel dizzy as if you're in a storm  
on the ocean, as if you're on top of a ship's sails.

Other places in the Bible talk about uncontrolled  
eating, the tongue which is out of control, pride, and  
so on. It's all there!

Wow! That's bad news! (As if you needed anyone  
to tell you that.) Being out of control is a horrible  
feeling. I've sometimes felt that way when I have  
responsibilities piling up on me, and I don't know  
where to begin.

What the Bible is talking about here is slightly  
different, though: you may not be able to control the  
situation you're in. But when you don't control  
*yourself*, that's serious bad news!

## 2) God's plan to help you gain control over your life

The Bible has Good News for us. God wants to help us regain control of our lives.

Those verses about the fruit of the Spirit are part of a larger passage on the whole topic of controlling our passions and desires.

**Galatians 5:16-17, 22-25, New Living Translation:**  
So I advise you to live according to your new life in the Holy Spirit. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The old sinful nature loves to do evil, which is just opposite from what the Holy Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are opposite from what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, and your choices are never free from this conflict.

But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Here there is no conflict with the law.

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. If we are living now by the Holy Spirit, let us follow the Holy Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.

### Next Steps:

Every message, I give some "next steps" of how we can live out the principles we find in the Bible. Here are some for self-control.

#### a) Pray for self-control

People in Alcoholics Anonymous have known this truth for years: addiction is bigger than they are; they can't control it by themselves. That passage above describes the fierce battle which goes on inside us. We need to turn to God for help.

This Scripture promises us this fruit, as we ask and allow Jesus to fill us with the Holy Spirit. That means, of course, making a commitment to Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

Ironic isn't it? In the very act of turning our lives over to someone else, we find the control we were missing.

#### b) Practise self-control

"Anything worth doing," so the saying goes, "is worth doing well." And the way to become good at something is to work on it. Galatians 5:25 (the last

line from what we read above) says, "If we are living now by the Holy Spirit, let us follow the Holy Spirit's leading in every part of our lives." That means putting it into practice.

G. K. Chesterton wrote, "Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried." Jesus never said that following him would be easy; in fact, he compared it to carrying a cross. To practice self-control means dedication. But it's worth it.

#### c) Make self-control a habit

How many of you are sitting in the same seat you sat in last week? When you came to church this morning, you likely didn't worry about where to sit. Chances are you didn't even think about it. You just did it by habit.

Some psychologists say that 90% of our actions are done purely out of habit. So the way to change yourself is to change your habits. A few weeks ago in a message, I mentioned that I would make a practice of leaving five minutes early when I'm going somewhere. Afterwards I read an article which said I should have promised to do it for thirty days. It said if you do something every day for thirty days, it becomes a habit. It becomes part of you.

Here's an idea that some people have found useful: put a rubber band on your hand. Throughout the day, whenever you see it or think of it, pause for a moment and pray, "Lord Jesus, am I following your will right now?" Practice that, so that obedience and self-control become a spiritual habit, a normal part of your life.

#### d) Help one another

One of the key principles why Alcoholics Anonymous is so successful isn't even listed in its Twelve Steps. It's the tradition of helping one another. If we're A.A. members, and I'm fighting a losing battle with the temptation to take a drink, I can phone you for support. Chances are you'll drop whatever you're doing and come to be with me.

That kind of mutual support is what we need in the church. It means being honest with one another. It means being committed to one another.

Here's an example. Let's say a man here has been spending a lot of time looking at pornography on the internet. I know how easy it is to do; I've done it myself. It's not like buying a magazine in the store and hoping no one spots you; you do this when no one is watching, so the temptation is all the greater.

Suppose that's you. You can use a program to block pornography. The one I use is a free program [www.K9WebProtection.com](http://www.K9WebProtection.com) (I use it more to block games, but it's also good for pornography). But those programs let a lot through, and they block a lot of good things. So here's an alternative: go to [www.X3Watch.com](http://www.X3Watch.com). This doesn't block anything; you are free to look at anything you want. What it does is it keeps a list of all the websites you visit, and emails that list to one or two people whom you have asked to be your accountability partner.

#### **e) When you fall, get up**

I'll guarantee you one thing. You will fail. You and I are, and will always remain, sinners. The struggle is never over.

**Galatians 5:17, New Living Translation:**

**These two forces are constantly fighting each other, and your choices are never free from this conflict.**

But this is an important part of self-control. When—not if, but when—you fail, you don't throw up your hands and say, "It'll never work. I'm hopeless." You don't give up in disgust with yourself. You are a child of God! God believes in you even when you don't.

So you go back to Step 1: Prayer. Pray and ask forgiveness. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to fill you, to give you power for self-control. Keep on praying; make that a habit as well.

In fact, let's do that right now...