

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

STUDY NINE

When Tapping the Brakes Is Crucial

Galatians 5:22–25

The Holy Spirit lives inside you with His divine foot on the brake pedal, ready to apply it, saying, “Don’t go there. Don’t say that. Don’t think that.”

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THINK back to when you were a child, and your mother just pulled a batch of delicious cookies out of the oven. As she slid them onto a plate to cool, she told you, “No cookies until after supper.”

You wanted to reach for a cookie, but you didn’t. Why not? Your desire to obey your mother outweighed your desire for the sweet treat—and you exercised self-control. Your hand stayed away from the cookies. But, oh, they smelled delicious!

As an adult, you experience different temptations, but the need for self-control is just as strong. Because you want to obey God, self-control keeps you from putting personal purchases on your company’s expense account. It applies the brakes when fleshly desires drive you to the wrong places. Bites your tongue when you’re just about to make a sarcastic comment. Gets you out of bed on time in the morning. Prods you to press on when hardships pressure you to quit.

All the fruits of the Spirit need self-control to function (*Galatians 5:22–23*). Perhaps that’s the reason self-control is the final virtue—it fortifies the rest. *Love may be the heart of the virtues, but self-control is the muscle.* Let’s take a closer look at this action-oriented fruit of the Spirit that helps you obey God . . . and keeps your hand out of the cookie jar.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Whet your appetite for God’s Word by asking the Spirit for spiritual insight. Use the following space to write your prayer.



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TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Living in the power of the Holy Spirit is not passive. We must exert our will to trust God and decide to obey Him. And then, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we must exercise our self-control to take action.

In *Galatians 5:25*, how did Paul balance what the Spirit does for us with what we do? Notice how the New International Version Bible highlights the meaning of Paul’s metaphor in the second part of the verse.

How is self-control essential if we want to “follow the Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives” (5:25)?



Observation: Areas in Which Self-Control Is Essential

The Bible highlights key people who walked in step with God. Their faithful obedience required self-control to say yes to God’s will and no to their own desires. Joseph modeled this virtue superbly. Use your skills of *observation* to see how, even as a young man, he exercised self-control.¹

Self-Control in Our Morals—Genesis 39:1–12

Sold into slavery by his jealous brothers, Joseph was “purchased by Potiphar, an Egyptian officer” (Genesis 39:1). What was the reason for Joseph’s success in this role, according to *Genesis 39:2–5*? What were Joseph’s responsibilities?

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What kept Joseph from sinning when Potiphar’s wife tempted him in [Genesis 39:6–12](#)? In what ways do you observe the virtue of self-control in Joseph’s words and actions?

We must train ourselves as people of self-control to say no. And then to say, “never.” Do that, and you won’t fall. You will pass the test morally, and you won’t have to live in regret. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Self-Control in Our Motives—Matthew 6:1–18

Jesus modeled self-control in all aspects of life, and He taught others how to follow His example, specifically, in our motives. Proud motives twist even our religious works into opportunities for self-glory.

In the following passages, Jesus taught His followers to control the hidden chambers within us that direct the reasons we do what we do. *Why* do we do good deeds? *Why* do we pray? *Why* do we fast? Read [Matthew 6:1–18](#). What motives did the hypocrites have in their religious actions?

What self-control methods did Jesus offer to guard against impure motives in our spiritual life?

What principle did Jesus teach to help us keep our motives pure? Look closely at [Matthew 6:4, 8, 18](#).

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When you live your life before the Lord Jesus, you care less about what other people think. Your desire will be to please Him. Your audience should never be the public. You have an audience of one—the One who saved you.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Self-Control of Our Mouths—James 3:2–10

From Joseph to Jesus and now to James we turn to see the need for self-control regarding the words that come out of our mouths. What metaphors did James use to describe the power of the tongue—for good or bad, according to [James 3:2–6](#)?

“No one can tame the tongue,” James admitted (3:8). What point about the crucial need for self-control did James make in [3:9–10](#)?

The problem is the heart. If the heart is cold, your tongue will be uncaring. If your heart is nasty, your tongue will be vulgar. If your heart is harsh, your tongue will be abusive. So how's your heart? —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Self-Control and the Heart

Without the Holy Spirit at work in us, our efforts at self-control would be hit-and-miss. As James lamented, one moment the tongue issues “praises” and the next, “curses” (James 3:9). We need a spiritual “heart” transplant to help us control our mouths, along with our morals and our motives.

Ezekiel looked forward to the day when God would cleanse His people from their sins, and then what would God do, according to [Ezekiel 36:25–27](#)?

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Jesus described heart change as new birth in [John 3:5–8](#). What is necessary to enter the kingdom of God? Why is *physical* birth insufficient?

How do you understand the role of the Holy Spirit in your ability to exercise self-control?

*“Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life”
(Proverbs 4:23). You hold the key to your heart, and the door opens on the
inside. Open your heart and tell the Lord your need for self-control.*

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Self-Control and Godliness

In Greek, the word that Paul used for “self-control” is *enkrateia*. Peter used the same word in the context of godly living.

According to Peter, we have “everything we need for living a godly life” (2 Peter 1:3), because we have a “share [in Christ’s] divine nature” (1:4). How should we respond to this wonderful blessing, according to [2 Peter 1:5–7](#)? List the virtues that Peter names.

What central role does self-control play in this list? What is the ultimate expression of godliness in [2 Peter 1:6–7](#)?

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In a beautiful circle of virtues, the final fruit of “self-control” takes you back to the first fruit, “love” (Galatians 5:22–23). Only through self-control can you demonstrate love for others as well as your love for God. Self-control helps you operate at your best to give others your best. Self-control lives with an eye on God because all we do is seen by Him and meant to reflect Him.



Application: Elements of Self-Control

The first step toward self-control is to decide to obey God’s will *before* the temptation comes along. Use the following space to record your decision to obey God in the areas of your morals, motives, and mouth.

A second step is to set boundaries—guardrails to help you maintain self-control. For example, a boundary regarding morality might be restricting your internet browsing, making personal policies against being alone with members of the opposite sex, or budgeting how much you’ll spend before you shop.

What boundaries have you set regarding your morality, motives, and mouth? Are there any additional boundaries you’d like to establish based on your time in God’s Word?

Another step is accountability. Sharing your decisions and boundaries with another person strengthens your self-control. Would you like to include accountability in your walk with God? If so, how might you take this step?

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The final step concerns our hearts. Joseph’s love for God kept him pure. Remember how he responded to Potiphar’s wife? “How could I do this great evil, and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9 NASB). His relationship with God was more precious to him than the passing pleasures of sin.

Use the following space in this final *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study to open your heart toward the Lord and share your love for Him. Invite His Spirit to fill any gaps in your self-control and keep you faithful to your Lord in every area of life.

The fruits of the Spirit are beautiful expressions of your changed heart that is only possible through Christ who “lives in all of us” (Colossians 3:11). His life flows through us to produce love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—fruits that give us a taste of God’s kingdom on earth.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, through Your Holy Spirit, enable me to produce all the wonderful fruits in Galatians 5:22–23. May my heart always be Yours and my life display these fruits of Your marvelous kingdom where Your will is done now and always. In Jesus’ name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, “[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)”

For the 2024 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll’s messages. Copyright © 2023, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

