For your well-being, God has placed adults in your life to help you set limits on your pleasures and freedoms. Having parents and teachers who help you learn how to act responsibly is a privilege. As you become an adult, you will have to make more decisions yourself. Begin now to learn what honors the Lord. Daniel set limits in his youth: he “purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself . . .” (Daniel 1:8). Setting limits now can guide you to success in the future. For example, finish your schoolwork before you play. Follow your parents’ guidelines for electronic devices. Decide to eat only one piece of dessert. Respecting those boundaries for yourself now will build discipline to resist self-indulgence in the future. Know why you set boundaries and keep those reasons in mind.
Self-Control Overview

What Is Self-Control?

Read aloud, study, and discuss what self-control means and how it applies to life.

The operational definition of self-control is “instant obedience to the initial promptings of God’s Spirit.” At salvation, a person is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit within him reminds the Christian of God’s Word, convicts him of sin, and comforts him in trials. The Spirit’s direction will always be in accordance with God’s Word and His ways. Many people in the Bible learned to recognize God’s voice. The Spirit’s promptings are not audible but can be perceived within a believer’s spirit. A Christian develops sensitivity to the Holy Spirit by spending regular time with God and responding immediately when He speaks. The Holy Spirit may prompt a believer to arise right away when his alarm rings, to give a Gospel tract to a stranger, or to respond graciously in a frustrating situation. Although anyone can seemingly control himself for a time, only the person yielded to God’s Spirit can experience freedom from sin. (See Romans 6:22–23.) The indwelling Holy Spirit has the power to transform a Christian’s desires as well as his actions.

The opposite of self-control is self-indulgence. Self-indulgence is a lack of restraint, evidenced by a misuse of the good things God created. For example, God gave us taste buds so that we can enjoy eating our food. However, this pleasure is misused when a person overeats. God designed rest to rejuvenate the body, but this necessity is abused when a person is slothful. A self-indulgent person does whatever he feels like doing, even if it goes against God’s Word. He lacks the self-discipline to limit and deny himself. Proverbs 25:28 warns: “He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.” Yielding to one’s natural desires leaves a person vulnerable to spiritual attacks and painful consequences. If children do not learn self-control when young, as adult citizens they will not govern themselves responsibly. Consequently, they will require more oversight by authorities, who will govern with excessive laws and regulations. Self-control safeguards society from corruption, because human desires become harmful when they are indulged, abused, or fulfilled outside of God’s boundaries.

The word self-control might seem to imply that “self” is in “control,” and that one can do what is right in his own strength. Although a person can learn to outwardly submit to moral rules and regulate his behavior, changed affections and a desire to obey God come only from the Holy Spirit. A Christian cultivates self-control by denying himself and heeding the Holy Spirit. May we pray as Jesus prayed, “Nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt” (Mark 14:36).
Self-Control in Scripture

The Character of God

We see examples of God constraining Himself in the following ways:

- God set a limit for Himself when He promised to never again destroy the earth with a flood. (See Genesis 9:15.)
- Jesus exercised self-discipline to rise early and pray. (See Mark 1:35.)
- Jesus followed the leading of the Holy Spirit and fasted. (See Luke 4:1–2.)
- Jesus quoted Scripture to reject Satan’s temptation to unrighteously satisfy His hunger. (See Luke 4:2–4.)
- Jesus chose His words wisely and carefully when speaking with His enemies. (See Luke 11:53–54.)
- The Holy Spirit does not speak His Own words but speaks only what God the Father directs Him to say. (See John 16:13.)
- The Spirit bears the fruit of self-control. (See Galatians 5:22–23.)

Self-Control in My Life

Now let’s examine some ways God wants us to live out self-control daily.

- How can I display self-control when someone bothers me? (See Proverbs 14:29.)
- What may result from failure to control my thoughts and actions? (See Proverbs 25:28.)
- What has God provided to replace the inclinations of my flesh? (See Ephesians 4:22–24.)
- How will self-indulgence be manifested in the last days, and how am I to respond? (See II Timothy 3:1–5.)
- What are the consequences of speaking whatever comes into my mind? (See James 1:26.)
- What qualities, along with self-control (temperance), will produce spiritual fruitfulness in my life? (See II Peter 1:5–8.)
- How can I find power over my selfishness? (See Romans 13:14, Galatians 5:24–25.)
Because of King Saul’s disobedience, God directed the prophet Samuel to anoint young David as the future king of Israel. Furious and jealous, King Saul determined to kill David. For years, King Saul pursued David. On one occasion, King Saul entered a large cave, unaware that it was the same cave where David and his men were hiding. What a perfect opportunity for David to kill his attacker and secure the kingdom! Yet, because of his deep reverence for God, David refused to harm the king whom God had appointed. Instead, David quietly cut off a small piece of King Saul’s robe and remained hidden until Saul left the cave. When David called out and showed the king the cloth, Saul wept, realizing David had spared his life. David and King Saul then went their separate ways. Shortly afterward, some people told Saul where David was hiding. With this information, the king rallied a trained army of three thousand soldiers to hunt down David. If David had another chance to kill King Saul, would he take it? Would David change his mind since King Saul had failed to keep his word? Or would David trust God and honor his resolve to respect the Lord’s anointed?

Let’s read the Bible story in I Samuel 26:3–12 and then discuss the following questions.

1. Who bravely accompanied David into King Saul’s camp? (See I Samuel 26:6.)
   What gives me courage and the ability to control my fears? (See Psalm 27:1–3.)

2. What did David and Abishai see that they easily could have used to kill King Saul? (See I Samuel 26:7.)
   Although a computer, phone, or other items may be readily accessible, why is it important you use them with self-control?

3. What did Abishai encourage David to do? Why? (See I Samuel 26:8.)
   When should you not follow your friend’s suggestion but instead respect the limits God has given you? (See Proverbs 1:10.)

4. What was David’s reply to Abishai? (See I Samuel 26:9.)
   What boundaries do you have? Why is it vital to set limits? (See Proverbs 22:24–25, Romans 14:14–15.)

5. Whom did David trust to take care of the situation? (See I Samuel 26:10.)
   Why is it better to trust God to act on your behalf rather than sin to get what you want? (See Proverbs 10:2, Romans 12:19–21.)

6. What did David and Abishai do next? (See I Samuel 26:11–12.)
   Why is it important to flee from sin instead of remaining near a temptation? (See Psalm 1:1, 6; Proverbs 4:14–15, 19.)

7. When calling out to the king, what reason did David give for his self-restraint? (See I Samuel 26:22–23.)
   What motivations for your actions and limits please the Lord? (See Romans 14:17–19, Hebrews 11:6.)

8. Who praised David for handling the situation wisely? (See I Samuel 26:25.)
   What will happen when you handle a matter wisely? (See Proverbs 16:20.)
Play the game together to help the children commit Galatians 5:24–25 to memory. In the section “Doers of the Word,” have the children record how they will apply the verse to their lives.

“And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”

GALATIANS 5:24–25

MEMORY VERSE GAME

Volume Control
Say the verse together several times. The teacher is the first “volume controller.” As the children say the verse, the volume controller stretches his arms forward and moves them to adjust the volume. When he wants the children to say the verse loudly, he lifts his arms above his head. When the children are to say the verse softly, he lowers his arms down toward the floor. The children watch closely and adjust the volume level at which they are saying the verse to match the motions of the volume controller. Play until a child thinks he can quote the verse from memory by himself. If successful, he becomes the volume controller for another round of quoting the verse. After everyone has had a turn to say the verse alone and be the volume controller, end the game with the group saying the verse together from memory.

DOERS OF THE WORD

In the blank below, write how this verse could be applied in your life, e.g., “deny wrong desires,” “abide in You daily and look to You to direct my steps,” or “quickly obey the promptings of the Holy Spirit.”

“Dear Lord, I yield to You and am willing to apply this verse. Help me to ________________
_________________________________________
____________________________________________.
I ask that You would develop self-control in my life. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

When the Lord gives you an opportunity to apply this verse, write it in your journal to later recall God’s working in your life.
Instructions
Enjoy meditating on and thinking about the words of the self-control key verse and definition as you find them in the word search below. The underlined words are hidden horizontally, vertically, diagonally, or backwards. (Answers can be found on page 13.)

Galatians 5:24–25
“And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”

Self-Control
Instant obedience to the initial promptings of God’s Spirit

If finding the underlined words is too difficult or frustrating for your child, assign only a few words to find, such as “God” and “walk.” Younger children could point to the ABCs. Older children may enjoy the extra challenge of finding all the words of the verse and definition instead of only the underlined words.
Activity

TAMING THE TONGUE

Supplies:
- Scissors
- Markers
- Glue gun and glue sticks
- 8” x 3” piece of white card stock
- 2” x 1.5” red construction paper
- A bag of miniature marshmallows

Instructions

To make the mouth, fold your cardstock in half. Then fold both edges back halfway to the first fold. Tape the top two layers together at the side edges, and tape the bottom two layers together at the side edges to form pockets. Now, when you put your fingers in the two pockets, you can open and close the mouth! Use scissors to round the front of the mouth.

On the roof of the mouth write: “A heart for Jesus =.” Round the corners of the red construction paper to shape a tongue. On the tongue write: “A tongue for Jesus.” Tape the tongue inside the mouth so that inside the mouth you read from top to bottom: “A heart for Jesus = A tongue for Jesus.”

Now glue miniature marshmallows around the tongue for teeth! Let’s practice self-control by setting a limit on how many marshmallows you may eat during this project. How many do you think would be a good limit? Why? The limit I will set for you is ___________. (Depending on the age of the children, you may want to explain why you chose a particular number. This may help the children know what to consider when setting their own limits.) Now let’s practice self-control by not surpassing that limit.

What limits will you set for the words you speak? You may decide, “I will not yell at my brother or lie about what I’ve done.” However, no one on earth can tame his own tongue. (See James 3:8.) Have you acknowledged your need for God’s power in order to tame your tongue? (See Psalm 141:3.) Instead of repeatedly trying to hold back unkind and hurtful words, focus on your relationship with God. As He purifies your heart, your words will also be refined.

Choose a “tongue tamer” verse from the list below to memorize and think about as you ask God to transform your heart and your words:

- “He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.” PROVERBS 18:13
- “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.” MATTHEW 12:36
- “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.” EPHESIANS 4:29
- “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger. . . . A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit.” PROVERBS 15:1, 4
- “Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.” PROVERBS 17:28
- “For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile.” 1 PETER 3:10
- “If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.” JAMES 1:26

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In a Nutshell

2. Our sin separates us from God (Romans 3:23).
3. God sent His Son, Jesus, to provide the way for our sins to be forgiven and for fellowship with Him to be restored (Ephesians 1:6–7).
4. We can do nothing to earn salvation. It is a free gift from God that we receive by faith (Ephesians 2:8–9).
5. We receive that gift of salvation by confessing with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and believing in our heart that God has raised Him from the dead (Romans 10:9–10).

Christ Our Righteousness

You will need the following items: sticky notes, pen, and a white bed sheet.

The Bible tells us about God. He is the Creator of the universe and He is holy. God loves us and created us to have fellowship with Him. (See Revelation 4:11.) Select a volunteer who would not mind standing to represent the sin of all people. Romans 3:23 says, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” Sin is anything we think, say, or do that breaks God’s Law. Can you name some examples of sin? As the children answer, write their examples on sticky notes and place them onto the volunteer’s clothing (e.g., speaking unkind words, stealing, disobeying, doing good with wrong motives).

Because we have all sinned, and God is holy, we are eternally separated from Him. However, because God loves us so much, He sent His Son, Jesus, Who died on the cross to pay for our sin and Who rose again to conquer death! Now we can have fellowship with God forever through Christ. (See John 17:3.) If we accept God’s gift of salvation, Christ’s blood cleanses us from sin, and His righteousness is put upon us! (See II Corinthians 5:21.) Remove the sticky notes and wrap the white sheet around the volunteer to represent Jesus’ robe of righteousness. Isaiah 31:10 describes what has happened this way: “My soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness...” In Romans 10:9–10, we are told how we can accept this gift: “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

Are you trusting in Jesus Christ for your salvation? If so, your sins are forgiven and Christ is living in you! Your new, inward identity is one of righteousness in God’s eyes. The more you realize that you are a new creature in Christ and walk in the Spirit, the more your outward actions will demonstrate Christ living in you. Just as the Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 2:20, you can also say, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” God gives us eternal life—sweet constant fellowship in the Spirit with our Savior—and then His righteousness is seen in us for His glory. (See John 15:4–10.)
Hymn History

“Yield Not to Temptation”

Sing “Yield Not to Temptation” and read about the self-control demonstrated by the hymn writer, Horatio R. Palmer.

One Sunday afternoon, a woman walked into New York state’s Sing Sing prison. Her purpose was to lead a religious service for the imprisoned women. Sing Sing was a high-security prison that reputedly held the worst criminals. As she entered, the visitor heard the loud clunk of the heavy steel door lock securely behind her. Before her, the female inmates gathered in the hallway to attend the religious service.

Hateful tension existed between the guards and the incarcerated women. On this particular afternoon, a guard gave a harsh order which sparked the prisoners’ anger. Instantly, they reacted! Long-standing bitterness and fury flamed to the surface, and within moments a riot broke out!

Hastily, the desperate guard called for reinforcements. The revolting prisoners proved difficult to subdue. Quickly the uprising escalated!

Suddenly, over the noisy cursing and shouting, a voice clearly sang out these words:

Yield not to temptation For yielding is sin,
Each vict’ry will help you Some other to win;
Fight manfully onward, Dark passions subdue,
Look ever to Jesus—He will carry you through.

The rioters paused to hear the words. Other voices joined in. The singing grew louder and stronger. Shouting ceased as more prisoners began to sing.

Shun evil companions, Bad language disdain,
God’s name hold in rev’rence, Nor take it in vain;
Be thoughtful and earnest, Kindhearted and true,
Look ever to Jesus—He will carry you through.

Soon repentant sobs filled the hallway. Amazed guards escorted the now-compliant inmates back to their cells. The report spread: a prison riot had been quelled by a simple hymn!

What if the lone person had not obeyed the Spirit’s prompting to sing? What if the prisoners had not heeded the hymn’s message? What if the hymn writer had not composed this song?

Horatio Palmer wrote the words to “Yield Not to Temptation.” How he came to write the words is a powerful illustration of self-control, which is “instant obedience to the initial promptings of God’s Spirit.” Mr. Palmer recorded in his journal the following words:

This song is an inspiration. I was at work on the dry subject of “Theory” when the complete idea flashed upon me, and I laid aside the theoretical work and hurriedly penned both words and music as fast as I could write them. . . . I am reverently thankful that it [the hymn] has been a power for good.

Because Mr. Palmer set aside his own priorities to respond immediately to the Holy Spirit’s prompting, the Church has enjoyed this hymn for decades. Just as Mr. Palmer and the courageous woman at the prison obeyed the Holy Spirit, may we also follow His leading. Like Jesus, may we not yield to temptation!

Photo courtesy of www.hymntime.com/tch

Horatio R. Palmer (1834–1907)
Yield Not to Temptation

1. Yield not to temptation, For yielding is sin,
2. Shun evil companions, Bad language disdain,
3. To him that o'ercometh God giveth a crown,

Each God's victory will help you Some other to win;
God's name hold in reverence, Nor take it in vain;
Thru faith we shall conquer Tho oft'en cast down;

Fight manfully onward, Dark passions subdue,
Be thoughtful and earnest, Kind hearted and true,
He Who is our Savior Our strength will renew,

Look ever to Jesus— He will carry you through.
Look ever to Jesus— He will carry you through.
Look ever to Jesus— He will carry you through.

Horatio R. Palmer (1834–1907)
Ask the Savior to help you, comfort, strengthen and keep you;

He is willing to aid you—He will carry you through.
“Then said Abishai to David, God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day: now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear even to the earth at once, and I will not smite him the second time. And David said to Abishai, Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the LORD’s anointed, and be guiltless?” (I Samuel 26:8–9).
Word Search Answer Key

N S C F Y E W A E B E B M
O S T S I R H C R V V W W
X I N S T A N T A L I A H
P Q D O U E C H I O S L A
T R T S I L R E W R P K Q
H H O D N T U Y Z T I S N
E F E M I A C W H N R P N
I B H M P H I E I O I I S
O U V K F T F T F C T R X
L N O T H A I L A F O I O
I F U D N A E N L L L A T I
H D W I L S D O G E A N D
J I F I H Y C H U S T G X

Hymn History Bibliography


Recommended Resources

- 2020 Biblical Character Illustrated Calendar
- *Hymns for the Family* CDs
  (“Yield Not to Temptation” is sung to piano accompaniment on Volume 1.)
- *The Power for True Success*
- *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*
- Character Cards
- Character Cards Memory Game
- *Character Sketches*, Volumes I–III
- *Achieving True Success*
- *Instructions for Our Most Important Battle*
- *Absolute Surrender* by Andrew Murray
- *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald Whitney
- “Keep Thyself Pure”
  (message by Scott Pauley, available at embassymedia.com)
- “The Power of the Tongue”
  (message by Gabriel Cleator, available at embassymedia.com)
- “The Way of Escape”
  (message by John Van Gelderen, available at embassymedia.com)
- “True and False Grace”
  (message by Tom Harmon, available at embassymedia.com)

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