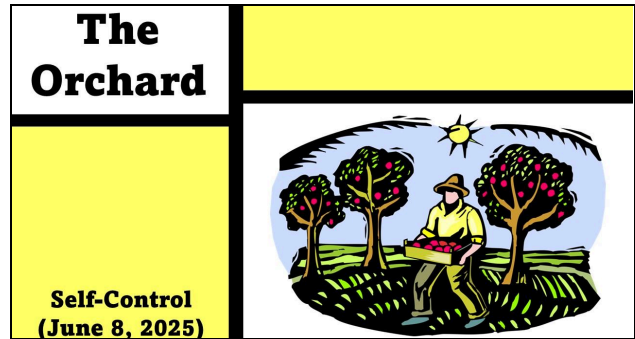


The Orchard (Week 6) - Self-Control  
Yesterday's Sermon Summary

1. Last up in our study of the "fruit of the Spirit" is self-control, that fruit of the Spirit you want everyone else to have but yourself...not so much. The term in [Galatians 5.22-23](#) is the combination of two Greek words: "in/within" and "power." So to have self-control is to be under, and not fighting against, your own power. The apostle Paul compares self-control in our lives to how an athlete trains and lives, always with their eye on the prize ([1 Corinthians 9.25](#)).



2. We know because of comparisons with other similar Greco-Roman lists that by putting self-control last in the sequence Paul means to underscore its importance. Why? Because it's hard to imagine being able to be patient, gentle, or kind without first being at least a little self-controlled.

3. Self-control is central to Christianity: when Paul explains Christianity to the Roman emperor of Judea, Felix, self-control is one of his key talking points ([The Acts of the Apostles 24.24-25](#)). And the pastor Titus is told to make sure that all ages in his church are aspiring to self-control, meaning that a lack of control isn't only a problem for the young but is both a struggle and worthy goal in every life stage ([Titus 2.1-8](#)).

4. In order to really understand "self-control" in Gal. 5.23, we need to connect it to its context, namely what's already been said in [Gal. 5.16-21](#). Namely, to be out of control is typically and normally human - be it aggressiveness, anger, envy, argumentativeness, etc. - and from the Christian point of view our self in at least some regard needs to be reined in or controlled so that we can be free.

5. [Proverbs 25.28](#) paints a vivid word picture about the cost of this characteristically-human lack of self-control: "Like a city breached without walls is one who lacks self-control." A city in the ancient world without walls was vulnerable and defenseless, able to be overrun or conquered at any time by anybody. That's our lives without self-control...we end up being captive to our own out of control impulses, instincts, and unchecked predilections.

6. This tendency to live untethered, unrestrained, and uncontrolled is so innately human that it cannot be curbed or resolved by humans alone. It is God's Spirit and God's Spirit alone, we're told in [Gal. 5.17](#), that opposes these desires that so ravage and ensnare us. Father Richard Rohr, in his book *Breathing Underwater*, says that each of us needs at some point to come to the end of our own ability to manage and direct our own lives; it is then that we don't give up, but give in, give to, and give toward...and in giving our lives to God we find that they can finally be controlled and guided well.

7. Self-control is not an end to itself. It is the gateway into a far greater, far bigger life, the kind of life for which we all yearn deep down. This is how retired PCUSA pastor Eugenia Anne Gamble describes that, "Self-control is not simply mastery of the body, its impulses, or even the ego. It is more than just momentary...It is not the self-righteous feeling of power that comes from choosing not to have a second scoop of ice cream...It is not the teeth-gritted determination to give up doughnuts for Lent only to find yourself on Easter morning in the Krispy Kreme line. Spiritual self-control is the capacity to regularly choose actions that are consistent with one's truest values and are consistent with who God is and what God wants...Self-control is not about self-denial, it is about freedom." So, whatever else it is, self-control is the best form of self-care.

8. So how do we grow in self-control? We need to remember that self-control is like a muscle. First, it's like a muscle because it's like a limited resource. Just as every muscle can't exert itself indefinitely, your self-control works the same way: the most self-disciplined will run out eventually. Dr. Jim Coan, a neurologist and clinical psychologist from the University of Virginia, describes that this way: "Humans are the cheetahs of self-control. Just as cheetahs can run faster than any other creature, upwards of 50 to 80 miles per hour, no animal on earth can control its own emotional and thought life the way a human being can. And just as cheetahs can only maintain their top speed for a little less than 500 yards before reaching exhaustion, humans can only exercise their self-control for so long before they start to lose it."

9. So each of us needs purposeful time outs, places and times when we don't have to exercise self-control and can recuperate.

10. Also like a muscle, self-control can get stronger over time - slowly. The resources below from the world of psychology will flesh that out, but here are a few concrete tips: a) don't start trying to exercise self-control where it's hardest, start instead where it's easier and you have a good chance for some success, b) slow down and visualize the cost of not exercising self-control and/or the bigger purpose you hope you to serve via self-control, and c) resolve stresses as quickly as you can so that they don't sap your finite energy, thus shortening how long you can exercise self-control.

## **A Week Focused on Self-Control and God's Spirit**

- This week following Pentecost Sunday, maybe you'd like to spend each day considering what it means to be filled by God's Spirit. That's how D365 - a great online devotional - spent last week, and you make your way day by day through its entries, starting on June 2: [Devotions Archive - d365 Daily Devotionals](#)

- If you'd like to weave a written prayer into your week, try this one that we used to end the service yesterday - from Common Worship (The Church of England):

"Lord God, may Your Spirit who hovered over the waters when the world was created, breathe into me new creation. May Your Spirit that propelled the prophets and apostles propel me out into the world to speak up, love, and serve. May Your Spirit, who at Pentecost set the church on fire, refine, purify, and illuminate me. And may Your blessing – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – be with and through me for the sake of the world, now and forevermore, amen."

- Build purposeful time outs into your week, and make sure those breaks require you to exercise very little self-control. In that respite, find ways to replenish and refuel yourself.

- Begin every day this week with a simple prayer in which you let God know that you cannot manage your own life or exercise self-control without the Spirit being front and center in your life.

- Here's some great insight from modern psychology on self-control...

- First, a TED talk on cutting-edge research into self-control: [The secret to self control Jonathan Bricker](#)
- Second, two articles that get very concrete about how to build your self-control muscle: [Does Self-Control Have a Limit?](#) and [10 Strategies for Developing Self-Control](#)
- Last, here's a free self-control assessment: [Self-Control and Self-Monitoring Test](#)

- And for your kids (or the young at heart), here's Cookie Monster and NPR on self-control (5 min. video): [Cookie Monster Practices Self-Regulation | Life Kit Parenting](#)