



SELF-CONTROL: CHANGING FROM THE INSIDE OUT

So often, our good intentions don't work out.

Maybe we planned to eat healthier, but finished the cookies anyway. Or we wanted to exercise, but turned off the early alarm and went back to sleep. Maybe we planned to read the Bible, spend time with our spouse, or visit someone who needed encouragement. But the Bible study was left unfinished, the time with our spouse was never planned, and the visit never happened.

Or maybe it is sin we are trying to overcome. We want to stop gossiping, but the words come out anyway. We want to be more patient, but we react in anger.

Why is it so hard to stop doing what is wrong and to start doing what is right?

Another follower of Jesus asked this same question:

*I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it.
Instead, I do what I hate...*

I want to do what is right, but I can't.

I want to do what is good, but I don't.

I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. (Romans 7:15, 18-19)

Thankfully, in verses 24-25, Paul gives us the answer to this struggle:

Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God!

The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul's solution to his struggle was not a better habit tracker, waking up earlier, or removing all junk food from his house. Trying harder was not enough.

He needed Jesus.

We also cannot turn away from sin or make lasting change by our own willpower.

Self-control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Fruit does not grow because a branch tries harder. It grows because the branch stays connected to the tree.

In the same way, self-control grows as we stay close to Jesus. As we do that, God gives us the desire and power to do what pleases Him (Philippians 2:12-13).

This does not mean we do nothing. We still choose to obey. We make wise plans. We turn away from temptation. We practice good habits. Below is a list of practical ways to grow in self-control. But these tips will only work as we stay connected to Jesus and allow Him to work in our hearts and minds.

Practical Steps for Self-Control and Lasting Change

1. Start with God

Before you try to change, ask God what He wants to change in your life. Ask Him for wisdom as you make a plan.

More than seeking behavior change, we want to seek Jesus. Spend time in worship, prayer, and reading the Bible. Continue to surrender your life to Him.

When you fail, return to God. Confess, receive forgiveness, and ask for His help.



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2. Make the Right Choice Easier

Put things you need where you can see them. If you want to read the Bible in the morning, place your Bible where you will see it. If you want to exercise, lay out your shoes and clothes the night before.

Remove things that lead to temptation. If your phone causes you to waste time, put it in another room. If certain people, places, or activities lead to sin, make a plan to avoid them.

Small changes in your home, schedule, and friendships can make a big difference.

3. Start Small and Be Faithful

Do not try to change everything in one day. Choose one small action you can do every day.

Instead of saying, "I will read the whole Bible," begin by reading a few verses each day.

Instead of saying, "I will never lose my temper," begin by praying and taking deep breaths when you feel angry.

Instead of saying, "I will exercise every day for one hour," begin with a short walk.

A short walk done daily is better for us than an intense workout we planned and never executed.

4. Make a Clear Plan

Decide what you will do, when you will do it, and where you will do it.

For example:

- I will read my Bible for ten minutes after I wake up.
- I will pray with my spouse after dinner.
- I will put my phone away when I am with my children.
- I will take a short walk every morning before work.

A clear plan helps us act when we do not feel motivated.

5. Remember Who You Are

Linking desired behavior change to your identity can help.

Say: With God's help, I am becoming:

- a person who speaks with kindness.
- a faithful husband, wife, parent, or leader.
- someone who uses my time wisely.

6. Ask for Help or Do it with a Friend

Do not try to grow alone. Tell a trusted person how you are seeking to grow. Ask them to pray for you and check on you. Be honest when you struggle.

Consider inviting a friend to make changes with you.



Reflect and Apply

AUGUST

Self-Control: Changing from the Inside Out

1. How can we rely on God's strength as we try to change or grow in self-control?

Do you have a testimony of how God has strengthened you or helped you grow?

2. Think about some of the action steps you chose during the week of prayer. How are you doing with them?

What has helped you make changes? What has made change difficult?

What is one thing you could implement from the list above to help you move forward in the areas you are hoping to change?

3. Read Titus 2:11-12. What does this passage teach about growing in self-control?

How does this compare to how people typically view self-control?

4. How does self-control help us serve our families and communities, and be good stewards of our health, time, talents, money, and creation?

5. Read 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:7–9.

Why do you think God requires leaders to be self-controlled?

What happens when a leader's desires, anger, words, money, or time are not under God's control?

6. Read Hebrews 4:14-16; 1 Corinthians 10:13, Philippians 2:12-13.

What do these verses teach us about God's help when we are tempted or struggling?

What do they teach us about our responsibility?