



TIME OF GRACE®

How Can I Resist Temptation

Study Notes

Summary

So much of life hinges on this single thing we call self-control—because there are so many temptations that can overcome us. So how do we get more self-control? Pastor Mike zeroes in on two big ways that God helps us have more self-control.

- **Proverbs 25:28** — Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control.
- God produces self-control through _____.
- **1 Corinthians 6:18** — ¹⁸Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body.
- **2 Peter 1:5-6** — ⁵For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control.
- God produces self-control through the _____.
- **Titus 2:11-12** — ¹¹For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹²It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.

Points to Ponder

1. Numerous research studies show a connection between church attendance and recovery from an addiction. While many churchgoers still battle addiction, why do you think worshipping together would increase our self-control?
2. Talk with a Christian friend (or your Life Group) about an area of your life where you need guardrails. Be honest. "Make every effort" to keep yourself from the sins that know your name.
3. Read Luke 23:32-43. In which verses do you see the perfect self-control of Jesus?
4. Evaluate: You will never become a generous person without the fruit of self-control.

Homework for Next Week

Read Psalm 139:14; Ephesians 2:8-9

Time of Grace Ministry
How Can I Resist Temptation?
Proverbs 25:28; I Corinthians 6:18; 2 Peter 1:5-6; Titus 2:11-12
November 6, 2022

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About every month or so, I buzz in at the back door of our local jail. I click that little buzzer, I wait for the intercom, I introduce myself, the door clicks, I walk through the sterile hallway, I fish up to the left, I wait for the doors to open. No buttons necessary. I look at the cameras that are looking back at me, I step inside the elevator, and it takes me to the proper floor. The doors open into a concrete cold room, the officer takes me right or left, either to that row of stools in front of the row of glass where I fidget in my uncomfortable seat and wait, or to the two bucket plastic seats with the table in between and the big red button behind my head that I can push if things happen to go south with an inmate. And I sit there with my little blue Bible and I wait for the officer to come, the jangle of the keys, my friend dressed in all orange, slippers on his or her feet, but I already know what we're going to talk about.

I've been a pastor for 14 years, I've sat in situations like that, dozens, if not hundreds of times, and I can almost guarantee that the topic of conversation for the day will be "self-control." And when you stop and think about it, it's not just the message for our friends who are watching right now from a cell. Isn't it true that so much of the quality of your life, your financial life, your physical life, your relational life, even your spiritual life comes down to that thing we call self-control? Not to freak you out in church, but any of you, any of us, could completely train wreck our life in less than an hour, right? It would take one choice that could ruin a family, that could mess up a marriage, that could land us in prison, that could get us addicted. When it comes to living in this world, you don't always get three strikes or five chances, sometimes it just takes one decision where everything takes a hard turn and changes.

And so, the topic I want to talk to you about today, when you slow down and think about it, is of infinite importance. Do you have and do I have, do we have self-control? You know, some of you here today are a lot like my friends who are sitting in a cell. The things that draw your heart are very, very explosive and dangerous. I'm going to call them bad boy kind of sins. Drinking, to be honest, you like it, you've done it, you've done it often, and you're very tempted by it. Using partying, escaping, spending money you don't have, clicking on websites that you shouldn't, flirting with people that you shouldn't, these things are very, very interesting to you. And so, the anger, the abuse, the addiction kind of things, that's where you need self-control before things blow up really big.

Others of you have never been tempted by getting high or getting wasted or clicking on inappropriate websites. For you, the self-control is what I'll call the good girl kind of behavior. Did you know you can blow up your life with fairly socially acceptable behavior? Like if you're a Christian but you're super controlling, you just need to be right in every argument in a

relationship or you need things to go your way at work or you just melt apart and panic and get all tense. Like, that can mess you up. If you're highly organized, but you're highly overwhelmed and over committed, and exhausting to the people around you, that can mess up your life. If the Bible says that we should rejoice, but you don't have time for that; and we should live at peace, because God is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, but you're too busy being productive for that. If you would be patient and kind and loving with people but you don't have time to slow down, because there's so many things on your to do list. If you don't control that part of you that needs to be amazing and excellent and exceptional, and have control of everything, like, that, that can mess up a life today, too.

And so, today is an important topic, and it's an essentially serious topic, that there is something within me and within you that is so tempting. And there's something in the world that we are about to walk back into that is so tempting. And if you and I allow those two to tango, lives quickly, implode. But, if with the help of God, we can say no to that, like, "Yeah, that's interesting, but I'm not interested, not today." If we can resist temptation and we can live a self-controlled life, there are so many good things that come out of it. There's this amazing Bible passage in Proverbs 25 where God says this. He says, "Like, a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control."

So, I'm not sure of your struggle, I don't know your pet sins or your vices. We all got something. But today I want to open a Bible and ask, how does God help us control ourselves? Whether it's anger or anxiety, whether it's pornography or impatience, what does God do to slowly and steadily produce in us the fruit of more self-control? Now, to be candid, there's a ton of answers to that question. There are rewards that God promises, there are threats that you find in the Bible, there's the blessing of community, but today I actually want to zero in to the two things that I have seen personally in my life produce the most self-control.

So, we're going to open our Bibles, we're going to cover two big ideas as we pursue the fruit of self-control together. So, grab a pen if you're taking notes, because here's the first and I think one of the best ways to control yourself. It's what I'm going to call Guardrails. Guardrails. God produces self-control through guardrails. Now, I'm borrowing that phrase from a pastor who gave a sermon, actually a whole sermon series called "Guardrails" years ago. Here was his point, he said, "On the highway, when there's ever, like, a really dangerous cliff your car could just drive right off of it, driving over that would kill you, maim you, ruin everything in a minute. What the government often does is not allow you to drive right here, close to the edge. Instead, way over here, they set up a guardrail. It's like this thing that you hit and it's a little bit painful, but it prevents you from doing something that's much, much more painful, it's a guardrail."

And this pastor had a brilliant analogy. He said really smart Christians, really wise people, when they know the thing that will totally ruin their life, they don't try to walk as close to the edge as they can. Instead, what they do is they make a personal rule that keeps them right here. It's like here won't be sinful, and here wouldn't be technically wrong, and here there's no command from God that says, "You shall not." But if I know that I'm very tempted and very easily persuaded to do this, then maybe one of the smartest things I can do is, to do that.

I think about what the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 6. It's a city filled with sexual immorality, prostitution, Greek culture. Here's what Paul told the Corinthian Christians in chapter 6, "Flee from sexual immorality." That's good advice, isn't it? He could have said, "Just resist it." He could have said, "Hey, you really shouldn't." He said, "No, flee." Like, you guys just became Christians, you got a lot of experience walking past the brothel, the temple, you know that once you see her, you know that once she gives you her business plan and pitch, you know once she smiles subtly and winks, you're done for. So, what do you Corinthians do? Paul said, "Flee. Run away. Take a step back, take the long way around town. Whatever you have to do to stay as far away from temptation," Paul said, "do it." And if you're wise and I'm wise, one of the wisest things we can figure out today is figuring out what's the cliff for us and what would it look like to stand far from it?

Let me describe it this way, I have here in front of me, two little magnets. Let's imagine that this is the sin that could really mess up your life. Like, if you go back to this, you're going to end up an addict, you're going to lose her trust, you're going to lose your job, you're going to disconnect from Jesus, from God. And let's imagine that this magnet is you. Now, what would the smart thing be if you knew that these two magnets coming together would really jack up your life? Would it be to say, "Not technically wrong. Officially, I can do this. There's no Bible passage against it. I'm not touching this." Boom. Right, it's like there's something powerful and you say, "How did that happen? How did I -- I didn't plan on doing that, I hated it -- I prayed last Sunday that I wasn't going to do that and -- And God said, "Listen, know thyself."

Maybe for some people that's not the temptation, maybe they can do this, maybe they can go there, maybe they can hang out with those people. But if you've seen it in your own life that there is a pattern of behavior where whenever you get this close, bad things happen, then the smart thing you could do today is not get that close. So, here's my tough question for you today, what would that look like for you? If you thought really deeply about the sin that just instantly comes to mind, when you have that moment in church to just talk between you and God. If you know what that sin is, what would it look like to make a personal rule to flee from that temptation?

Jesus close friend, Peter, said this in 2 Peter 1, he wrote, "Make every effort to add to your faith, goodness and to goodness, knowledge and to knowledge, self-control." Like, God is speaking that word of law in great love. He's a father, he doesn't want you or me to live with the consequences, he doesn't want to see another family blown up, another life ruined, another year of freedom lost. And he says, "Now, before it's too late, before you drive off the cliff, before the sin touches your life, make every effort, you will not regret it."

It makes me think of a drug court judge. About a year ago, I was with a friend who had to go to court. She's battled addiction for a long time, just messed a lot of things up in life. But here she was, begging the judge for another chance and it turned out that day that the judge in the courtroom was actually the head of the county drug court. So, this judge had heard, what, dozens, probably hundreds of people who said, "I know what I did. I know what I used to do, but I'm making a promise to you today, Judge, that it's going to be different, give me chance, show mercy on me, let me walk away free."

And so, my friend gave her speech, and the judge responded and what the judge said was so brilliant, that as soon as she said it I knew I'm going to steal this. The judge listened with empathy and patience and love and then she looked at my friend and she said, "Young lady, what you need are new people, new places, and new things." Right? "You want a new life, you're making all these promises to me, but I tell you what, if you go back to the same old people you used with, the same old places where you used to get high, the same old habits, your life is going to turn out the same." And I thought, Judge, that'll preach. Right? New nouns. And I speak to you in love and earnestness, if you want to make a change in your life, if you want to say no to an old habit or sin, what you need are new people, new places, new things. Make every effort to add to your knowledge of yourself the gift of self-control. So, where does self-control come from? Point number one: Guardrails.

Alright, deep breath. If you're ready for part two give me thumbs up. Alright, here's the second key to self-control. First is guardrails, second thing I want to share with you today is the gospel. The gospel. Now, the gospel, if you're new to Christian lingo, is just the good news of what Jesus has done for us. Right, the law or the things you do or don't do. Be self-controlled, make every effort, that's the law. What I just shared with you, the gospel, isn't something that you do, it's something that Jesus did for you. He lived, he died, he rose on the third day, he forgives you, he cleanses you, he saves you, he gives you a place in heaven, he makes you good enough for God. According to the Bible itself, the second key, maybe the most powerful key to producing self-control, is focusing on the gospel. It's actually what the Apostle Paul said to his friend Titus.

I had a chance this past week to read all of the Bible passages in this whole book that talk about control or self-control. They're about 30 or 40 of them. And what I found kind of interesting is that the hotspot for self-control in this entire book was this tiny little letter in the New Testament called "Titus". Have you read it before? It's pretty interesting. Titus was a pastor on the Greek island of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea. And if you read just the first few verses of the book of Titus, you would find out that Cretans, Cretans were not famous for self-control, Crete was like the Vegas of the ancient world. People lied, they swindled, it was Greek culture. So, sexual immorality, prostitution, plenty of adultery, drunkenness was a form of worship. There's this one line where they said, "Cretans -- Where is it? Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy, gluttons.' This saying is true." But then the message of Jesus comes to the island of Crete. The apostle Paul is leaving his friend, a pastor named Titus there, and what is Titus going to do as he runs points and tries to make this very sinful island less sinful?

How will they control themselves? You could say have a guardrail run, but when you're on an island, it's hard to run away. So, what would they do? And as you start to read, Paul's answer is, "You need to preach about self-control." He says, "Titus, the first thing you need to do is find pastors who are not just biblical and theological, but they're self-controlled." If the pastors and leaders of the church are falling off cliffs, things are going to blow up. And then in chapter two, he says, "You need to make sure you tell all the people in the church the importance of self-control." You can read this for yourself later, but he says, "Teach the older men to be self-controlled." You ever seen any grouchy older guys before? Or slowing down like Uncle Rico from Napoleon Dynamite, you know living in the past and are just angry. "Kids these days! In

my day, remember I walked up hill both ways." Like, no, "Tell the old guys to take a deep breath to be self-controlled."

And Paul said, "Tell the women to do the same thing." Women on Crete, much like many women in America today, are a little bit too attracted to wine and when the bottles start flowing, the words start flowing too and gossip happens and slander happens, and being disrespectful of husbands and fathers happens. "So, you need to tell them, Titus, that the women need to be self-controlled with their wine and their words." And then, this is my favorite part, he says in verse 6, "Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled," period. Like, that's all you have to tell the young guys. Like, "These buck wild bachelors, tell them, 'I know you want to, just don't.'" He's like, "This is what you need to preach: self-controlled pastors, self-controlled older men, self-controlled women, self-controlled younger men." And you want to ask the apostle Paul, "Well, how?" Yeah, everyone just don't sin, okay, amen. "But Paul, how?" And I have to tell you what Paul says in this chapter is so, it is so fundamental for the way that we do church here at The Core and what we preach at Time of Grace. Do you know what he says next after all this 'have self-control, have self-control, be self-controlled'? Let me read you Titus 2:11 and 12. He says, "For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It (grace) teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age."

What will inspire me to stand back here when all my friends are having fun here, here and here? How can you face that same old temptation, but have a whole new reaction to it? Paul's answer is, grace. When you think about the grace that appeared on earth 2,000 years ago, when you slow down and meditate on the crazy, undeserved love that Jesus gave when he gave his life for you. When you stop just thinking about dos and don'ts and start meditating on the done that happened at the cross, something happens. It's actually logically very difficult to explain, but something happens in your heart where without a carrot or a stick, you just want to. Some people call this Gospel motivation. What motivates me is not the law and its demands, it's not the fact that I might end up in hell or train wreck my life. The greatest thing that drives my heart is the love of God that captured my heart.

Other Bible passages say it like this, "Christ love compels us." Or, "We love because he first loved us." It's kind of like when you're in an amazing relationship, you're out grabbing a drink with a friend, you've fallen for this guy, you're married to this woman that you love, and someone flirts with you and your friend says, "Whoo." And you say, "I don't want to." Like, why would I choose the lesser of two sources of joy? I found something better. And, I have no doubt there would be short-term pleasure if I cross that line but I don't want to. It's like love captures your heart.

Why do some of you parents sit on an uncomfortable grade school bleacher on your free Saturday to watch, you know, B-team volleyball? The answer is because of love, because when something stirs your heart so deeply, you want to, and you choose to. There are other options that might be more fun in the moment, but you choose the thing that grabs your heart. And this is the power of being connected to the Gospel. His love for you and for me, for people who struggle insanely with self-control. It was so deep, it was so profound, and it was so perfect. He was like

a lamb to the slaughter, and he didn't even open his mouth. And because he was so self-controlled, you and I today say, that through faith in him we're saved, we're good. In the middle of our Romans 7 prayers, "God, why do I keep doing this stupid stuff that I hate?" Like, in our next breath, we can say, "But thanks be to God, I'm forgiven. I'm cleansed. I'm loved. I'm good. I deserve nothing, he gave me everything. I deserve the back of his hand, instead, he gave me his shining face. Jesus is so with me, and he is so for me." You think about that self-control, and something happens in here, where that sin is tempting, but now there's something else inside of you, that just doesn't want to. Brothers and sisters, yes, make every effort, but even more, fix your eyes on the grace of God, the grace that saves us and then teaches us to be self-controlled. Let's pray,

Dear God, thank you so much for working in our hearts today, for all of us. God, life could be a thousand times worse if you hadn't answered that prayer to lead us not into temptation. We thank you, as imperfect as it was, for the self-control of our past. And I pray now, God, for a mighty move of your spirit to produce just an abundant harvest of self-control in our hearts. Oh God, you can really change the trajectory of lives of people who are sitting in a cell right now. You've done it before and you can do it again and we pray this prayer for them.

We pray for all of us who are here today live, God, that you would help our families and our faith, our connection to you. The devil is a liar, but unfortunately, he's a good one. So, help us to believe that the best blessings don't come from flirting with sin or seeing how close to the line we can get, but instead making every effort to honor you with our bodies, our words, our lives and our everything.

God, change our habits today, give us courage to make bold choices today. But more than anything, God, help us not to just think of ourselves and our steps, but to lift up our eyes and think of your Son. He is the source of our salvation. He is the reason that this struggle with self-control is temporary. He is the sole source of all forgiveness and love.

So, we thank you, God, for the gift of Jesus, for your grace that brings salvation to all people, we pray that you'd bless us today, personally, as a congregation and as your big Christian family. Bless us all in the holy, sacred, beautiful name of Jesus and all God's people said, amen.