



# Pause With Purpose

...to refresh

...to grow

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## Self-Control

The story is told of a Stoic (an early European sect known for showing no emotion) who stole a neighbor's fox. While carrying away the fox, he encountered the local constable and quickly hid the live fox under his heavy coat. While the constable engaged him in conversation, the fox began to bite and chew on the thief under his coat. Through it all, the stoic maintained control and gave no indication of the trauma he was enduring. Shortly after the two men parted ways, the Stoic collapsed and died from his wounds.

A tall tale? Possibly. Yet, as a story, it represents what we often think of when we consider "self-control" - pain, sacrifice, and super-human effort. But is this view as distorted as the story itself may be?

Let's explore a basic assumption underlying the concept of self-control, namely that our "self" needs to be controlled, either personally or by others. It raises the question, "Who's in charge?" Who determines what we think, how we act, and what choices we make? Comedian Flip Wilson used to get big laughs by claiming, "The devil made me do it!" Perhaps he was on to something.

Ever since the fall of mankind and

the new awareness of evil as well as good, we have struggled with all sorts of personal inclinations and attractions that are unhealthy, hurtful, and destructive. When no one is "in control", we are naturally inclined toward all sorts of selfishness, greed, gluttony, hatred, envy, lust, pride and disrespect. So we speak of the need to control this "self", to harness the potential damage that could be done if our self was given free reign. And where we fail to adequately control our own self, society steps in to exert its influence and control.

What then is involved in our personal efforts at self-control? Let's consider six elements.

### 1. Self awareness:

- of our strengths, our needs, our vulnerabilities, and our values.

- of our triggers, those things that lead us away from contentment and wisdom, and into a sense of lacking, fear, discouragement, and pain.

- of how we respond to this discontent and attempt to find soothing and relief.

### 2. Self appreciation:

- accepting, respecting, and valuing ourselves enough as we are now, so we are motivated to grow and improve as a gift to ourselves.

### 3. Commitment:

- to ourself - to respect our values and mature in character

- to God - to live honoring Him

### 4. Willingness to exert effort:

- to exercise self-denial and endure discomfort for the sake of achieving our goals

- to seek healthy alternative fulfillment of our needs which also honors our values

### 5. Confidence:

- in our ability to change and grow

- in the value of our goals

- in our ability to "do without"

(deny our "fallen" self) and still be okay

- in God's desire to see us grow into greater health and maturity

- in the power of God to produce change through us and within us

### 6. Perseverance:

- Recognizing that change happens gradually, we must be prepared for the marathon, not the short sprint.

Temporary failure and discouragement are inevitable, but **BEWARE** of the **big lie** that says, "It's no use. You can't do it. Why even try? You've failed again, so just give up!"

We have an enemy that gets in our head and wants us to fail and give up. We also have a strong spiritual ally working for us. Let's explore this more on the next page.



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## CONTACT INFORMATION

Your thoughts and comments are warmly welcomed. I would also be happy to share with you more about life coaching and how it can assist you to be your best, personally and relationally, at home and at work.

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## Spirituality and Self-Control

Often, when we think of self-control in spiritual terms, we think of "spiritual disciplines", those spiritual/religious practices designed to increase our awareness of God and deepen our relationship with Him. These disciplines include such things as prayer, fasting, Scripture reading, and meditation.

Yet, spirituality's connection to self-control goes even deeper than that. According to Scripture, self-control is a "fruit of the Spirit" (Galations 5:22-23), evidence of God's Spirit working within us. We are not, however, simply passive pawns waiting for the Spirit to show up and create self-control for us. We must have the desire to make better choices and to engage in healthier behavior. We also need to take active steps to support those desires and humbly request that the Spirit bless our efforts with power and success.

Ultimately, the Spirit not only increases our ability to control and manage our unhealthy inclinations, but also changes our heart and desires so we more and more reflect the character of Christ Himself. The weaknesses that made us vulnerable in the past are strengthened as we grow and mature in the Spirit's care.

Less struggle ... more peace within. That's both a goal to be achieved and a gift to be recieved.



"Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.

- Proverbs 25:28

"Create in me a pure heart, O God; and renew a steadfast spirit within me."

- Psalm 51:10