

II. Group Discussion *Each number below includes a set of questions that relate to the scripture text. We offer a few answers, but your perspective may be better. The point is to discuss, not to get 100% agreement on an answer. Rule of thumb: the fewer questions you ask, the better.*

1. Read Proverbs 25:28 aloud.

What role did city wall serve in ancient times?

Served to protect a city from invasion. Served as a boundary to protect the identity of the city.

According to this saying, what is the purpose of self-control?
What happens when we do not have it?

Read Tit. 3:3-5; Rom. 6:6-14; Eph. 4:22-24 aloud and in succession.

2. In these texts, how does Paul describe the former life before conversion to Christ?
3. What role do we ourselves play in cultivating self-control? What role does the Holy Spirit play?
4. In *Life on the Vine*, Kenneson notes the difficulties in translating the word Paul uses for self-control. Not to be confused with self-mastery, Kenneson describes this final fruit as “Control of the self by the Spirit for the sake of the Gospel”

Do you think it is the goal of a Christian to have *self*-mastery?
Why or why not?

What is the difference between self-mastery and what Paul is talking about in these texts?

Read Isaiah 58:1-7

5. What was the prophet saying about the relationship between fasting and how we treat others?

What is the danger of seeking to be self-controlled *without* seeking the other fruits of the Spirit?

6. If being set free from the passions is the Spirit’s work in us, what is the purpose of prayer and fasting?

Why did Jesus practice prayer and fasting so often?

7. What new insight(s) has God revealed to you from this discussion? From this series?

III. Cultivating self-control *Practical suggestions and reflections to help participants connect the discussion to their daily lives. Challenge each person to try at least one of these each week.*

To what extent do you plan your day around serving yourself, rather than serving the needs of others? If you keep a “to do” list, take a look at how much you plan around your own desires, compared with the needs of others.

Consider fasting one day a week for a couple of months. Make sure you plan spiritual activities, like prayer or Scripture reading, in place of the time you would spend eating (don’t skip lunch to get more work done, in other words). After experimenting with this discipline, share what you learned about yourself with someone you trust.

Do you think you might be addicted? Is there something destructive in your life that you can’t stop doing, no matter how hard you try? If you do, know that you are not alone. The first step toward healing is to admit your powerlessness. Seek spiritual and perhaps professional guidance from someone experienced in working with people with addictions.

IV. Other resources

The point – We cannot really pursue self-control in the sense that we master ourselves. If we have died to sin (Rom. 6), then we are living a new life in Christ. It is *His Spirit* which is the new power in our lives. But we can't just sit back and let the Spirit work without our cooperation! Through practicing spiritual disciplines such as prayer and fasting, we can carve out space in our lives for the Spirit to work His transformation in us.

Prayer. *Creative suggestions for group prayer.*

- ✓ Pray Psalm 51 aloud.
- ✓ Offer a time of silent prayer for group members to confess their sin to God. If your group knows the song set to this Scripture, sing it together.

Fasting

“When we as Christians find ourselves trapped by our self-inflicted addictions, we might consider the benefits of fasting, not as an exercise in self-mastery but as an attempt to carve out space for God and neighbor.” Kenneson, *Life on the Vine*, p. 237.

Kid-friendly activity

An activity designed to help kids and adults connect the scripture to their lives. Works best when adults participate in the activity with the kids.

Read Proverbs 25:28 aloud

Object Lesson:

You will need a deck of cards, some blocks, and a ball (about the size of a baseball). Build a simple card house and place some blocks around it to protect it. Then roll a ball toward the card-house. Then, remove the blocks and roll the ball again. Smash!

Explain that this is what happens to us when we can't control ourselves.

Read the last part of Matthew 28:20.

How does God protect us in our times of need?

Thank God for protecting us and being with us.

Life on the vine: Self-control

Small group guide based on

Life on the Vine, by Philip Kenneson (IVP, 1999. ISBN 0830822194)

www.saltandlightresources.com

By John Grant, Jon Camp, Trey Finley, and Ben Siburt

Theme: What does it mean to exhibit the fruit of “self-control”? What are some practical ways Christians can cultivate this fruit?

The last fruit in Paul's list in Gal. 5:22-23 is self-control. This virtue contrasts sharply with our contemporary culture which, in Kenneson's words, is “characterized by excess, addition and attempts at self-mastery” (*Life of the Vine*, p. 228). He continues: “Although we may joke about being ‘addicted’ to such things as chocolate or romance novels, beneath our jokes an uneasiness often lurks.”

This discussion guide will invite participants to reflect on what Paul means by this fruit, how it contrasts with our culture's version of “self-control,” and why the distinction is so important.

Leadership tip: Discuss with your group your next plan of study. Ask them to evaluate this series. Hopefully, this series created an appetite for Bible study that connects with everyday life. Look for curriculum that will provide further opportunities for spiritual growth. We would love to hear your comments – send them to jgrant@collegehills.org.

I. Relate *Use a few of these to introduce the theme and “break the ice.” No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage individuals through these questions.*

- ❖ Describe a time in your life when you had to discipline yourself to accomplish some task or achieve some goal. How did you go about this self-discipline?
- ❖ What are some common addictions in our culture? How would you define an addiction?
- ❖ Why would you say most people discipline themselves? For their own benefit, or for the benefit of others?