

Laurentian Wesleyan Church
Sunday, February 7, 2016
Series: Take What You Need
Sermon: Self-Control

Opening Question: What would life be like if you could master _____ area of your life?

We're continuing our series called "Take What You Need", based on Galatians 5:22 & 23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness gentleness and self-control..."

Today we're going to talk about having self-control. Would you say that there are areas of your life that you need more self-control? Let me ask it another way. Are there any areas of your life that are out of control?

Perhaps it is food, or an addiction, lust. It could be negativity. Gossip...that's a tough one. Perhaps binge watching Netflix, or all night playing that video game. Maybe it's spending money. Self control is the power to say "no" to the things that will or could lead to harm of yourself or others.

Fern read our scripture for today a few moments ago. Titus, chapter 2. In this short chapter, we're told to be self-controlled four times. Why is this emphasized?

1. Self Control Helps You Grow.

Think about these first two verses of Titus 2, "You [speaking to Titus, a pastor] must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine. Teach the older men to be temperate [which means to show self-restraint], worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and endurance" (Titus 2:1-2) Why does he have to tell older men this? If we read further, why does he need to address the older women? Wouldn't older men & women already have learned these lessons? As you know, growing older isn't optional, but maturing is. Any kind of growth in our lives doesn't happen by accident. We don't build muscle by sitting on the couch. We don't learn how to handle our emotions by being sheltered by our parents. And we don't grow spiritually by osmosis. A sure sign that someone is not growing or maturing is a lack of self control. Titus 2 begins by talking about older men, but of course, men and women of all ages need to hear this message. If you're going to grow you need to learn self-control.

2. Self Control Helps Your Witness.

The scripture encourages us to not be slanderers, be sound in faith and love, to not be addicted to wine, to show integrity...so, verse 5, "no one will malign the word of God." That's why these life issues are important. Malign means to speak about something in a spitefully, critical manner. Does that not describe many people's attitude towards Christianity today? They're quick to criticism, often with disdain. Does the way we live our lives affect how other people see God's Word? You better believe it does. "That's not fair". No it's not fair. As Christians, we're not claiming to have it all together. But we do need to recognize that my lack of self-control in a particular area can hurt my witness, our witness. This isn't about living a perfect life, but it is about striving to live a holy life with God's help.

3. Self Control Helps You Live Free.

A life lived with no self-control is a life lived under control of other things. If you can't control the things you say, you are controlled by your tongue. If you can't control the rage inside you when someone cuts you off on the highway, you are controlled by the rage. Jesus came to set us free from being controlled by these things. "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free" (Galatians 5:1a).

Ok, I'm going to assume you see it. There are areas in our lives that we perhaps feel we have mastered, and there are areas we need to work on in this area of self control.

So, how do we do it? It's easy to say we need to do it, sometimes harder to put intention into action. How do we live a life of self control?

I think it's found in Titus 2:11-12, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age..."

Grace Is Our Teacher.

I love this. The first word I think of when I say "self-control" is not grace. But there it is. I wonder if God put this word in this place to remind us to be humble. To remind us that it is through Grace we have been saved, not by works so that no one can boast. Because, you see, we like to boast. We like people to know about my accomplishments. To be honest, we sometimes look down on people. But that kind of attitude can't live in the grace world. You see, if I have strong self-control in an area, it's easy to start passing judgment on others, thinking, "why can't they get their act together."

Could it not be that the people that Titus had in his church that he was supposed to teach self control to, did not have it in their lives yet. They weren't full of love, but hate, that's why they needed to be taught. They were slanderers. Their speech was foul. They were not worthy of respect. They were judgmental and lacked self control. Success in this area should never lead to pride or self-righteousness because we all would have nothing without the undeserved, unmerited, free grace of God. Available for the most upstanding citizen and the worst criminal, in equal supply.

How does grace teach us?

A. Grace Teaches Us Where to Start

Do you remember the image we have of the prodigal son returning to his father, ashamed and defeated. And the father embraces him and is overcome with joy. His son who was dead is now alive.

Well, it does actually start with dying. Dying to self. This might sound strange. I mean we've been saying "self" control. And you want me to die to self? You see, what we're talking about it not "just trying harder" or "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can." It's not buying the latest self help book. It's about saying, "I know I can't". Is that not what receiving salvation through Jesus is all about. "For the grace of God that brings salvation". Our journey of spiritual growth and spiritual self-control begins with saying to God, "I'm tired of trying myself. Can you take over".

What's a big reason we don't try to have self-control in areas of our lives that are out of control? Because we tried and failed. "I can't", we say. Maybe you need a real fresh start.

B. Grace Teaches Us to Connect with Others.

Parts of this passage are a beautiful picture of Christian community. "Older man, I want you to grow in your faith, but don't keep it to yourself. You know the struggles a man faces. Make sure and pass on what you've learned to the young men. Live your life in a way that helps them on life's journey. Grace hopes and prays for others, even in the midst of the teaching and learning. Are you struggling in a certain area? Ask for help? Ask someone to keep you accountable?

C. Grace Teaches Us that the Impossible is Possible with God.

In verse 14 it says that Jesus will "redeem us from all wickedness and...purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good". When you give your heart to God, He wants to change it. In the natural, we want to say "yes" to ungodliness and worldly passions. We have a bent towards those things. But God wants to bend our heart towards him, so that we desire to live the kind of life that is described in this passage.

This is an unpopular message today. Just this week, Pastor Mark from Lakeshore was saying how the message of holiness, of our lives and conduct being pleasing to God, is unpopular. And it is. We'd rather just receive God's love and grace, and go home. But God wants to change your life, not just your heart.

Some Believe Self Control is Impossible.

I'm going to give you an example. In the area of sex, the world would say you can't control it. "It's not possible to follow God's instructions about sexuality. I mean, this idea that sex is only between one man and one woman in the context of marriage is very outdated and pushes against human nature. Teens are going to have sex. Men and women are going to cheat, if not literally, at least in their minds". Is that not a common attitude today. I know you've heard it. There is a growing philosophy of "I must follow my sexual urges wherever they take me"...and we're going down all sorts of paths that are contrary to the teaching of scripture. And they're becoming normalized. Is this true? Is self-control just not practically impossible?

I believe God would say "it is possible". I can give you the power to say "no", in this present age...". It is possible.

"Is it sometimes hard?" Yes.

"Are there perhaps uncomfortable issues I've got to work through?" Yes.

"I might fail?" Join the club. Just get back up.

"But all my friends and even my family don't believe I can succeed." All I can say is "self control" is a fruit of the Holy Spirit living in you. Keep seeking Him and He will show you that what He calls us to is not impossible with Him.

So are you lacking self-control today? Come, take what you need.