

3 Qualities of a Self-Controlled Leader

Every time I see a homemade chocolate chip cookie fresh out of the oven my self-control is pushed to its limits.

What's your temptation?

What about the more serious kinds of temptations leaders face when it comes to self-control?

Under pressure it's easy to be swayed by your own emotions, make reactionary decisions, or be tempted to trade long term success for more immediate rewards.

Self-control is the ninth and last in the list of fruit of the Holy Spirit. It has always appeared to me like an out of place add-on at the end of a list of positive attributes.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and **self-control**.

Galatians 5:22-23

It appears like it's the only fruit that is defense and the other eight are offense.

But I've learned to see self-control not as the caboose at the end of a powerful train, but the backstop. Without it, the others may easily be lost.

Love may be the engine that pulls the locomotive, but self-control is what keeps it on the tracks.

Without self-control, a leader will be sidelined, derailed, or perhaps taken out of ministry.

You may need self-control to win over anger, discouragement or speaking too quickly. Another leader may need self-control for their thought life, managing money or how they use their authority.

None of us escape the great need for consistent self-control.

What is the area you have greatest need to exercise self-control?

Developing self-control:

1) Embrace the significance of life's daily trades.

All of life consists of daily trades, and over your lifetime the wisdom of your trades becomes very evident.

I've made some poor trades along the way. Like trading my potential safety and the well-being of others in order to arrive somewhere faster. Yup. Speeding. Not cool, but I've done it.

That may seem like a relatively minor "poor" trade, but not really. I'm just banking on not getting caught. That's the dark side of making bad trades. Hoping you won't get caught, or at least no consequence or penalty.

There are more serious trades, but in the moment we can rationalize that they are minor. Like making an optional big purchase when you should be saving money.

It's always about the bigger picture, and self-control or lack thereof is always involved.

In leadership it might be trading frustration for patience toward an employee, or trading lazy for study in developing a sermon. It might be trading a hurtful word for an encouraging word, or trading compassion instead of comfort.

Most of life is won or lost in these daily trades. These decisions develop patterns that determine the course and outcomes of your life and leadership.

2) Engage the wisdom of pay now and play later.

If you play now you will pay later. It's not possible to alter the reality of that life principle. This is true in all areas of life, especially leadership.

The wisdom of delayed gratification (pay now play later) is a significant part of making smart daily trades. Self-control and smart daily trades go hand and hand to help you exercise discipline now and enjoy more freedoms later.

Think long-term, values-driven and character-based to build the right foundation to support self-control. This kind of "pay now" character yields the life and leadership you desire.

Discipline now rewards you with the freedom and options that allow you to live well and lead well.

Resist the desire to play now, and lean into the exponential dividends of discipline today. This paves the way for greater rewards in the future.

3) Ask God to help you do what you can't do.

When it comes to self-control I think God wants to see some effort on my part. If I ask God to remove the need for any work, or even struggle on my part, there is no process that leads to maturity.

The process toward spiritual maturity requires that I face and handle real life tensions that don't have easy solutions. That's when God steps in.

As we pray and ask for help, God is eager to grant the power of the Holy Spirit that helps provide the self-control we need. Ultimately, this strengthens the first eight in the list of the fruit of the spirit.

It's always been about a divine partnership. You do your part, God does His. It's not works, it's grace.

The quest is not for perfect leadership or discipline for the sake of discipline. Leaders with great self-control are still human beings who make mistakes, and fall short on occasion.

The point is that the seldom spoken of # 9 in the list of the fruits of the spirit, may just be a quiet key to much of your long term health and success as a leader.

> [Read more from Dan.](#)
