



Are We There Yet: Self-Control

OPENING PRAYER

Invite a member of the group to lead prayer.

Read Judges 15:1-8.

“After a while, at the time of the wheat harvest, Samson went to visit his wife, bringing along a kid. He said, ‘I want to go into my wife’s room.’ But her father would not allow him to go in. Her father said, ‘I was sure that you had rejected her; so I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister prettier than she? Why not take her instead?’ Samson said to them, ‘This time, when I do mischief to the Philistines, I will be without blame.’ So Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took some torches; and he turned the foxes tail to tail, and put a torch between each pair of tails. When he had set fire to the torches, he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines, and burned up the shocks and the standing grain, as well as the vineyards and olive groves. Then the Philistines asked, ‘Who has done this?’ And they said, ‘Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he has taken Samson’s wife and given her to his companion.’ So the Philistines came up, and burned her and her father. Samson said to them, ‘If this is what you do, I swear I will not stop until I have taken revenge on you.’ He struck them down hip and thigh with great slaughter; and he went down and stayed in the cleft of the rock of Etam.”

WEEK TWO: SELF-CONTROL

It appears our news cycle is filled with stories about incredible athletes who have been blessed by God with record-breaking strength and speed. However, these celebrated athletes become infamous for their off-the-field, off-the-course or off-court antics, and in some cases, illegal activities. These activities may cut their careers, lives, or the lives of others short. The star that once shone so brightly, fizzles out before it reaches its true potential. The hopes of the team are dampened, and lives of those affected by the irresponsible behavior are damaged or destroyed. Perhaps, these once celebrated athletes have something in common with Samson, and his lack of self-control.

Samson was chosen by God from birth to be a judge of Israel, a charismatic leader whose purpose was to deliver the people of Israel from the oppressive Philistines. However, Samson did not live up to his calling. Instead, Samson does the very thing that Joshua warned the people of Israel against: do not enter into a covenant with the people living in the land of Canaan. Samson takes one as a wife and participates in wild parties with the enemies of the Israel. Unlike leaders before him, Samson does not lead people into battle, instead he carries out personal vendettas. God had given Samson the gift of supernatural strength. In our text today, Samson becomes angry and uses his strength to destroy farmland and slaughter people. Imagine if Samson could have controlled his anger and his hedonistic desires; picture what good he could have achieved for others, rather than personal glory from himself. The problem with Samson was that he started to read and believe his own press clippings, or whatever the ancient version of tweets were at the time. He had forgotten about the true source of his strength: God. My friends, the enemy will try to twist the very gifts that God has given us - to corrupt us. This happens whenever we take what God has given us and use it for our own glory, or to achieve our own selfish desires. The Bible teaches that God has given us the power of the Holy Spirit, and like Samson, we are chosen people and we have a purpose in this world. Are we practicing self-control, using restraint when necessary, and using our gifts for the glory of God in our own lives?

So how do we practice self-control, even when we have been hurt by others? First, we should remember that God has given us access to self-control through the power of His Spirit. Self-control is not simply will power or a mental activity, it's a spiritual activity. It is the activity of the grace of God at work in our lives.

No matter what happens to us in life, God has given us enough grace to overcome it. God has given us access to self-control, but it is up to us to put it to use. Therefore, we have the power to walk in love rather than revenge. We have the power to turn the other cheek rather than strike back. We have the power to remain silent or speak the truth in love, rather than saying words we will regret later. Finally, we have the power to use the gifts that God has given us as holy people to make our homes, our neighborhoods, our country, and our world a better place. We simply need to lay claim to this truth and put it to use.

GROUP REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Share where you've seen God at work in your life this week.

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Define self-control in your own words.

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Share a time when you chose self-control - even when revenge would have been understandable. What did you learn about yourself? About God? About others?

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Reflect on your life. Would you say that you are maximizing God's gifts to you for His glory and the deliverance of others?

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What was the most impactful think you learned from the sermon, podcast or sermon series curriculum?

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PRAISE AND PRAYER REQUESTS

Please go around the group and have each person share a praise for this week and a prayer request/concern.

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CLOSING PRAYER

Have a volunteer lead closing prayer: asking for prayer concerns and lifting up the needs of the group.

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WC ENCOUNTER GROUPS CURRICULUM

WEEK TWO: SELF-CONTROL

FAMILY ENCOUNTER

WEEK TWO

Supplies:

- Bible
- Sacred Candle & Matches/Lighter
- A clear drinking glass
- Baking soda
- 2 tbsp. vinegar
- Liquid dishwasher detergent
- Baking pan & food coloring

WELCOMING GOD:

Gather together, and welcome God into this time and space through the lighting of a candle. Take this moment to pause briefly and sit quietly in this light for a few moments, allowing time for everyone to relax their body, mind, and spirit for this time. In these moments, the invitation is to become aware of God's presence with and amongst you as a family.

SHARING WITH GOD AND ONE ANOTHER:

Say: "If anything is on our minds that makes it difficult for us to focus, let's share it now and then let it go."

- Whoever leads this portion might share what is on his or her mind to model this. Give time for each person to respond. When everyone has responded that would like to, invite everyone to place their hands out and lift them up as we give these distractions to God.

OR you can invite the family to pray together as one person leads, saying the following:

"Dear Loving God, The One who knows our hearts, celebrates our victories, grieves with us during our losses, and gives us the strength to overcome our challenges. Please help us to let go of the distractions we name now, so that we can openly share with our family and may encounter you in a special way today. Our distractions are... (let there be silence here, so everyone has an opportunity to name aloud what is distracting them). In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen."

ENCOUNTERING GOD:

Say: "This week in church, we talked about self-control. Try to remember what we heard last Sunday as we read today's Bible verses..."

- Take turns reading the Scripture or have a different family member read the Scripture each week.
- Read James 3:2-8:

"For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison."

ENCOUNTERING EACH OTHER:

Say: “The Bible reminds us of many things that humans can tame. And we have tamed many - like cats, dogs, lions, elephants, etc. Yet, it says we have a hard time taming our tongue. Knowing how to speak to others is a part of self-control. One of the easiest ways to give up our self-control is to say something we regret. Most of the time we do that when we are angry.”

Activity: Place the baking pan in the center of everyone on the table. Place the glass in the center of the pan and fill it nearly full with warm/hot water. If you like, add two drops of food coloring in the water. Now, add three to four drops of liquid detergent. Sprinkle in 2 tablespoons of baking soda. Pour in the vinegar, and watch it bubble up!

Say: “We are like the water. The baking soda is like our anger; and the vinegar is like our self-control. If we don’t have self-control, we can make a wrong decision and bubble over - saying things we might regret later.”

Discussion Questions

- Can you describe what happened when the experiment bubbled over?
- What does it feel like when you’re angry? Does it ever feel messy?
- How can we keep from bubbling over and losing our temper when we get angry? (Reader may suggest some calming exercises such as breathing deep, calling time-out, etc.)

ENCOUNTERING GOD TOGETHER:

Say: “May we pray together as a family...”

Let us share our prayers for the world: for our country and leaders, for other countries and their leaders...

Let us share our prayers for the church, ministers, and spiritual leaders...

Let us share our prayers for our teachers, first responders, friends, and others in the community...

Let us share our prayers for our family and our own specific needs...”

If you would like to record the people for whom you pray, use the next few lines to do so:

*You can also record these requests in a family prayer journal if you are using one.

ENCOUNTERING TRANSFORMATION TOGETHER:

Pray aloud together:

God, we welcomed you here and read Your Word,
we prayed and we spent time with you,
we rested in your love for us,
and we did this all together.

Now, we promise to love one another and others as you love us.
In the name of Christ. Amen.

BLESSING ONE ANOTHER FOR OUR ENCOUNTERS WITH THE WORLD:

Invite family members to bless one another using any of the examples below or their own blessings.

Examples:

- "I love you. God loves you. I pray God blesses you."
- "God loves you exactly like you are—and so do I."
- "I love the gifts God has given you and how you bless the world with them."

DAILY REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Please answer these during your personal devotional time at the end of the day or do it as a couple or family.

Where have you seen God today? For the children, we say, "what made you happy today?"

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What broke your heart or made you sad today?

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What good thing did you do for someone else today?

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What are you thankful for today?

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