

Impulse Control

On Sunday we concluded our study of “life in the Spirit” by focusing on the 9th and last core characteristic of a Spirit-filled life – captured in the Greek word *egkrateia* [In-KRAT-ee-uh].

1. Warm-up Question: Before jumping into our sermon conversation, last week Jeff posted a Facebook video challenging us each to take 30 minutes to send a message to our elected officials expressing our angst about racial injustice and demanding systemic police and criminal justice reform. He shared a link that identifies our elected officials and how to email them. Have you had a chance to do that? If so, how did it make you feel? If you haven't yet, is it something you feel you should?

<https://www.facebook.com/LifeJourneyChurch/> (posted June 12).

2. Now let's dig into Sunday's sermon and Scripture. In Galatians 5:22, the Apostle Paul says, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generous goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and *egkrateia*.” *Egkrateia* means “the virtue of one who masters his desires and passions, especially his physical and emotional impulses.” The word is often translated into English as “self-control.” Jeff shared a story about a time, as a kid, he blew up and chewed out his basketball coach, only to realize he'd made a complete fool of himself. Jeff found himself thinking, “Wow, I really need to get myself under control.” We all have areas where we struggle with self-control. In your present or past, where have you most struggled with self-control? Why do you think that particular area of struggle is so challenging for you?
3. At first blush, self-control can strike us as a killjoy concept that's all about deprivation. It may even call up bad memories of past preachers railing *ad infinitum* against sin. Jeff suggested that, properly understood, self-control is actually a life affirming concept. Without a heavy dose of self-control, he said, none of the other positive fruit of the Spirit are possible. Let's test that proposition.
 - a. Expressing gentleness requires us to exercise firm control over what contrary emotions? Is it possible to be gentle without self-control?
 - b. Expressing generosity requires us to exercise firm control over what contrary emotions? Is it possible to be generous without self-control?
 - c. Expressing *agape* love requires us to exercise firm control over what contrary emotions? Is it possible to show *agape* love without self-control?
4. A wise person once said, “What you say ‘No’ to is more important than what you say ‘Yes’ to, because what you say ‘No’ to creates the space in your life for what you say ‘Yes’ to.”
 - a. What thoughts, feelings, or insights arise within you when you hear that quote?
 - b. Give us an example of something you've said ‘No’ to that's created space for you to say ‘Yes’ to something much more life-giving.
 - c. Give us an example of something you've said ‘Yes’ to (past or present) that

c. Give us an example of something you've said 'Yes' to (past or present) that prevented you from being able to say 'Yes' to something much more life-giving.

5. The story of Samson is a powerful reminder of what can happen when we don't manage our passions. Before Samson's birth, God told his parents that their son would have the potential to deliver his people Israel from the oppression of the Philistines. To prepare himself, Samson was commanded to practice great restraint by never drinking alcohol, never cutting his hair, and never eating or touching unclean things. And in return, he would have superhuman strength. But Samson couldn't curb his passions. He had an explosive anger that led to violent acts. He fell for a Philistine woman, Delilah, and stuck with her even after it became apparent she was prepared to betray him. Ultimately, he ended up captive to the very people he was supposed to deliver Israel from – the Philistines. Read Judges 16:23-31.

a. Have you ever allowed sexual or romantic passion to trap you in an unhealthy relationship? How did that affect you? How did you ultimately break away?

b. Verse 30 says, "Those he killed at his death were more than those he had killed during his life." Imagine having that epitaph on your tombstone. What do you think God is trying to say to us through those words about Samson?

c. As his final act, Samson pulled on the pillars of the Philistine temple and brought the stone ceiling down on himself and everyone else. What's the most self-destructive act you've ever witnessed or experienced?

6. Jeff offered two suggestions for how we can work with God to grow our self-control:

(1) Self-control grows with practice and repetition. Every time I say 'No' to an impulse, so I can say 'Yes' to something better, it makes it easier to say 'No' the next time.

(2) Self-control requires me to set healthy boundaries for myself in advance, so that in moments of temptation, it's already "a thing decided," i.e., *stare decisis*.

a. Critique those two suggestions. Do you buy 'em? Why or why not? Have you found these principles to work for you?

b. Is there an area in your life where you feel called to practice the foregoing two principles? What healthy boundary do you feel you need to set for yourself?

7. Jeff closed by reminding us that self-control is not just about the things we don't do because we shouldn't. It's also about the things we make ourselves do that stretch us beyond our comfort zone because we know they'll be good for us. What's something positive you feel called to do that will take you out of your comfort zone, but you know it would be good for you? Are you ready to make yourself do it?