

Last week I talked with the wife of a man with kidney failure. She said he just wouldn't go on the diet. "He just has no self-control – he just keeps eating whatever he wants."

That's a self-control problem that most people in the US have. But there are greater self-control problems than diet for a person facing dialysis. They're also going to face God – and shortly.

Act 24:25 And as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, "Go away for the present, and when I find time, I will summon you."

What is self control and how do we achieve it?

(ἐγκράτεια, *egkrátēia*): Rendered in the King James Version “temperance”, but more accurately “self-control”

the reflexive meaning of “self-mastery,” “self-restraint,” is equally well established in the classics and Septuagint. Thus, in the verbal form, it is found in Gen 43:31, for the self-restraint exercised by Joseph in the presence of his brethren

Walter Mischel (the “marshmallow psychologist) – “It's a widespread perception that the world is more and more one in which people are orientated to immediate gratification and don't know how to delay it. But when you look closely, I think that's probably not the case. If anything, there has been improvement in overall self-control.”

Mishchel says children are developing
“the skills to delay gratification very well.

That ability – psychologists call it
executive control – shows whether they
can keep a goal in mind, suppress
impulses that interfere with reaching
that goal, and use attention control
abilities in the brain's prefrontal cortex
to keep marching on until they reach
that goal.”

“In the 1960s at Stanford University, we set up a study using pre-school children and gave them a choice between one reward, say a marshmallow ..., that they could have immediately, or they could get two if they waited up to 20 minutes. There was a bell to ring to call the researcher back into the room if they wanted to eat the first reward. We observed the behavior of kids who managed to wait, and the first thing they did was transform the situation from an effortful one to a much easier one.”

How did they cope? “They try to turn around in their chairs so they don't face the goodies, they look away, or invent interesting things to do to. For example, they begin to sing little songs, or explore their nasal and ear canals and toy with what they discover. We see a steady progression over the early years, from self-distraction to the use of abstraction, that is, they build pretend brick walls between themselves and the marshmallow or goodies. They use imagination to cool the situation.”

“With one little girl who rang the bell in less than a minute, we ran a test to see if she could change how long she waited by changing how she thought about the cookies. If we suggested, for example, she should make believe that they're not real, that they're just a picture, she could wait 15 minutes.”

“We learned that the way the object of desire is appraised makes a huge difference. If I know I can't resist chocolate mousse on the dessert tray in the restaurant, I can devise a plan beforehand in which I imagine a cockroach nibbled on it before it was served to me. Then I've lost my desire for it instantly.”

“By the age of 25 to 30, we found the "delayers" were more able to reach long-term goals, used risky drugs less, achieved higher educational levels and had a significantly lower body mass index. In 2009, we scanned delayers' brains and found more activity in the prefrontal cortex, used for problem-solving, creative thinking and control of impulsive behavior. So learning to delay gratification early correlates with success as an adult, and the techniques can be applied to everything from coping with heartbreak to weight control, retirement planning and smoking.”

The question for each of us is can we resist the temptation for the greater reward.

1Ti 4:8 for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and *also* for the *life* to come.

In this life, self control has unquestionable rewards – coping with heartbreak, weight control, retirement planning and smoking as Mischel says.

What does self-control hold for us in God's kingdom?

The fundamental principle is to take the heat out of what is in front of me and focus on the consequences of a delay.

Have you counted the cost?

Jesus talked about the required self control to be His disciple.

Luk 14:26 "If anyone comes to Me,
and does not hate his own father and
mother and wife and children and
brothers and sisters, yes, and even
his own life, he cannot be My
disciple. (27) "Whoever does not
carry his own cross and come after
Me cannot be My disciple

Lk 14.28 "For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? (29)

"Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, (30) saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'

Luk 14:31-33 "Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand *men* to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? (32) "Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. (33) "So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.

Paul speaks of his own self-control

1Co 9:25 And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; (27) but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

Consider how many hours a runner has to compete to enter a marathon with hopes of winning.

Running 26.2 miles in 3 hours 30 minutes requires tremendous sacrifice, discipline – self-control.

Running 3-5 miles 5 days a week for 3-4 months and then step it up to 2 days of 8-10 miles for 1-2 months prior to the race day.

When you think of the Christian race, do you think of it in terms of training?

Do you have a plan for daily Bible reading?

Reading and study are two different things.

2Ti 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

God says that if you walk in His way, He will give you self-control.

Gal 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, (23) gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

At the same time, each of us has to grow
in our self-control

2Pe 1:5 Now for this very reason also,
applying all diligence, in your faith supply
moral excellence, and in *your* moral
excellence, knowledge; (6) and in *your*
knowledge, self-control, and in *your* self-
control, perseverance, and in *your*
perseverance, godliness;

Self-control comes after diligence, faith, moral excellence and knowledge.

Surely there is a reason the Holy Spirit arranged these things in this order.

Our effort – diligence – allows us to study the word to grow in faith, leading us to desire moral excellence through the knowledge of Him who called us.

Knowledge gives us the consequences of having, losing and keeping control of our lives in all things.

1Co 7:9 But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn *with passion*.

If there is anything that consumes our society, it is sexuality – both homosexual and heterosexual!

If there is anything that causes divorce more frequently, sexuality and self-control are the root cause.

1Co 7:5 Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

We see less self-control each day – and
encouragement in this by our government

the approval of polygamous marriages in
Utah

the Supreme Court approving of homosexual
marriages in 30 states

The Pope of Rome saying he will not judge
homosexuals

2Ti 3:1 But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. 2 For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good

Truly these are difficult times.

We must teach our children self-control.

Our children learn best by following our
example.

We serve God when we exhibit self-
control

We must walk with God and to do so, we must control ourselves.

1Jn 1:6-7 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; (7) but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Will you determine this day to
control your life by trusting in God?

Mar 16:15-16 And He said to them,
"Go into all the world and preach the
gospel to all creation. (16) "He who
has believed and has been baptized
shall be saved; but he who has
disbelieved shall be condemned.