*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

November 15 - 20

“Fruit of the Spirit: Self-Control”

**Monday, November 15 2 Timothy 3:1-5**

*“They have no self-control”*

The expression “last days” is found in both the Old and New Testament, and calls attention to major events that characterize different phases of history. In this passage, Paul uses the expression to denote the time between the first and the second coming of Christ. Thus, as did Paul and Timothy, you and I are living in the “last days” which are characterized by humanity’s active opposition to God. Paul gives a representative list in these verses of the types of behavior that are typical of such lives. Among them is the lack of self-control.

All this anti-social behavior inevitably leads to the harm of others. God’s order is that we love him first (with all our heart, soul, mind and strength), our neighbor next and our self last. If we reverse the order of the first and third, putting self first and God last, our neighbor in the middle is bound to suffer. The Christian is to exercise self-control, that is, intentionally control the sinful impulse to place the self ahead of God so that both God and the neighbor will be loved.

*Dear God. We live in a world in which the self is proclaimed to be most important. Help me to stand firm on the belief that you are most important. I will control my self from taking over the direction of my life. Amen.*

**Tuesday, November 16 Proverbs 5:15-23**

*“An evil man . . . will die from lack of self-control”*

Sexual faithfulness in marriage is used by the Proverbs “teacher” to illustrate the importance of self-control. While the sinful self is tempted to go outside the marriage to explore the potential of sexual partners other than one’s spouse, the person who practices sexual self-control understands that God’s law concerning marriage is meant to keep and preserve the relationship that God has blessed. Lack of self-control leads to the death of the marriage, with the accompanying emotions of loss and regret.

In the end, those who have no self-control will be trapped by their own evil, like an animal caught in a snare and held fast until the hunter comes and kills it. Their foolishness at thinking that they can elevate their own self above the commands of God will be revealed in the futility of their lives.

*Heavenly Father. To exercise self-control over sinful urges is to choose the way of wisdom. That is my choice today! Amen.*

**Wednesday, November 17 Titus 2:11-15**

*“Live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age”*

This passage deals with two “appearings” or “revelations.” The first is the appearing of God’s grace, an allusion to the first coming of Christ (v. 11). The second is the return of Christ in all his glory (v. 13).

God’s grace does not end at the crucial point of salvation, but accompanies us on the further journey of our new life, providing the wisdom and direction needed to remake our now-redeemed lives. This includes saying “No” to godless living and sinful pleasures, and “Yes” to self-control, right conduct, and devotion to God. The present age is a time of opportunity for Christians to live a life of high moral quality. This kind of life is both possible and required because we have been “redeemed” (or “liberated”) from wickedness and “purified” for doing good (v. 14). Self-control allows us to live God’s way.

*Lord Jesus Christ. You came the first time to save me and you will come again to judge all people, including me. My desire is to be found to be your worthy servant, having said “Yes” to self-control and “No” to self-indulgence. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

November 15 - 20

“Fruit of the Spirit: Self-Control”

**Thursday, November 18 1 Corinthians 9:24-27**

*“All athletes practice strict self-control“*

The city of Corinth hosted one of the most famous of the Greek athletic events, second only to the Olympic Games. Everyone in the city knew of the strenuous training and purposeful discipline required of the participants.

The Christian race is different in at least two ways. The crown the runners received was a wreath which soon wilted, while the reward of the faithful Christian will last forever. Also, in the Greek races only one person can win, while in the Kingdom of God, every child of God has the potential for success.

Spiritual growth involves consciously cutting out of our lives everything that does not aid in reaching the goal of becoming like Christ. It involves patiently building Christ-like skills and habits of thought and action, and cultivating all the fruit of the Holy Spirit in the garden of our life, including the fruit of self-control.

*It is my desire, Lord, to run well the race that you have placed before me. I am aware that this will require self-control and I commit myself to it. Amen.*

**Friday, November 19 1 Timothy 3:1-7**

*“He must exhibit self-control”*

Paul is listing the qualities essential in a Christian who is in a leadership position in the church. He presents high standards (his list contains sixteen qualities in all) which are not only applicable to leaders, but should also be the ideal for every believer. Among these is the quality of self-control.

An individual may be encouraged to accept a leadership position in the church, but he or she is not required to accept it. Therefore, in order to ensure that leaders are qualified for the positions they are offered, Paul says that their lives need to be exemplary according to God’s standards. Otherwise, how can they lead God’s people with integrity?

Self-control in this context means that a Christian is aware of the danger of spiritual pride. Whether because of a particular leadership position held in the church or a more general view of oneself as a Christian, we are prone to think of ourselves as better than others. Self-control counters this tendency with Christ-like humility. In Christ, we are what we are by God’s grace and mercy, and pride has no place.

*Regardless, Lord, of my responsibilities in the church, I know that you call me to humility. Help me, I pray, to cultivate self-control as the antidote for my pride. Amen.*

**Saturday, November 20 1 Peter 1:13-16**

*“Think clearly and exercise self-control”*

Holiness is a subject often avoided by Christians. It is uncomfortable for us to talk about being holy because we imagine the caricature of what none of us wants to be - someone who acts as if he or she is “holier-than-thou.” Jesus refuted that kind of behavior whenever it was demonstrated by the scribes and the Pharisees.

Instead, God calls us to the life of authentic holiness, and Peter points out that in order to live holy lives we need to “think clearly and exercise self-control.” Holiness begins with the proper preparation of our minds. Just as “garbage in, garbage out” applies to computer programming, so the term applies to our spiritual lives. With all the “garbage” the world makes available to us, we need self-control to fill our minds only with God’s truth.

*You, God, call me to be holy. I know there is much in me that is not holy because I have allowed the world to influence what I think about. I commit myself to exercising self-control, refusing the garbage, so I can think clearly. Amen.*