

Equipped to exercise self-control

We have a very good friend who is a self-confessed 'control freak'. She just loves to be in charge of other people and situations. On a recent ministry trip overseas, one of her co-workers had to back out at the last minute. Rather than responding in panic to this turn of events, she gleefully exclaimed, "This means I'll be in control - and I love control!" Our friend has a tendency to think that she can do things better than others and, to a very large extent, she's right. She likes a job to be well done and she invariably rises successfully to the challenge.

But, the downside is that control freaks can often be manipulative and are not content unless *everything* is done their way. They can make life difficult for others and it's not easy being around them for too long. But, wanting to control other people isn't always translated into a desire to control themselves. As such, they may know little of *self-control* - the ability to exercise restraint in their own behaviour.

One part of the bible that speaks of self-control is the Old Testament book of Proverbs. It is packed full of wisdom and insight, and so relevant to our everyday lives. For example, it compares a person with no self-control to a city with broken-down walls¹. Both are defenceless and vulnerable to attack. A person with no self-control lacks the ability to resist temptation which can come in all sorts of guises.

Some people find it particularly difficult to exercise self-control over their *spending*. They see something they want to buy and, before they know it, they've handed over their credit card - even though, in some instances, there's little or no money to back it up...

Others have a problem with being self-controlled when it comes to their *emotions*. Perhaps anger, jealousy, or bitterness threatens to swamp them - and often does - because they haven't yet learned how to deal effectively with their feelings.

Then there are those who struggle to maintain self-control in their *eating habits*. Yes, we know, we can relate to this one very well! Our 'flesh' hates to be denied anything it craves and that chocolate cream cake would hit the spot very nicely...

The Lord Jesus Christ must have been amazingly self-controlled. He needed it to rise up early in the morning after an exhausting time of ministry the night before. He showed it when he was tempted by the devil and never sinned. His self-control was probably at its highest on the cross at Calvary, as he gave himself freely to unimaginable suffering.

There are many other examples of self-control in the life of Jesus, but one episode that stands out in my mind is the account of the illness, death and resurrection of his friend, Lazarus. Why not take a few minutes now to read the complete story?² In verses 5 and 6 we read that Jesus loved this family from Bethany, but when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he deliberately stayed away for a further two days. By doing this he exercised great self-control, as he could have gone immediately to the family and prevented their sorrow by healing his friend. He had the power to do this, but he kept it under control until the time was right. Jesus' self-control at this point in time brought glory to his Father when he later raised Lazarus from the dead. Many people also benefited as a result.

I wonder how many people would benefit if we all exercised self-control more than we do. Let's consider the areas where we need to do this and, with God's help, let's go for it! Perhaps then we'll be less inclined to be 'control freaks' in relating to other people...

¹ Proverbs 25:28

² John 11:1-45