



## Self-Control

Life Group Leader Guide

### What can we do when our willpower isn't enough?

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Whether we have been Christians for a long time or are just beginning to explore what being a follower of Jesus is all about, there are moments in our lives when we find ourselves drawn to things that you'd rather not indulge in – eating another sweet treat, hitting the snooze instead of getting a jump-start on the day, losing our cool when we'd like to remain calm under pressure ...

We can all relate to moments when we could use a little self-control. Over the coming weeks we are going to explore what our life can look like when we build disciplines that allow us to live in an intentional way.

Together, we will look at the following themes and Scripture passages:

1. "What is Self-control?" Proverbs 25:28
2. "Competitive Self-control" 1 Corinthians 9:24-27
3. "The Gift of Self-control" 2 Timothy 1:6-7
4. "Temptation and Self-control" 1 Corinthians 7:3-5
5. "The Holy Spirit and Self-control" Galatians 5:22-25
6. "Self-control—a Process" 2 Peter 1:5-8

In this packet, you will find sample discussion questions for our study and several helpful tools and handouts you can use in leading your group meetings.

In addition to these materials, watch for our regular leadership emails and other helpful resources as you lead your group. Feel free to contact our team with any questions or concerns that come up during this series.

## Discussion Questions

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At each group meeting you will have the opportunity to discuss a series of topics and explore the passages we are studying in worship each week. Our sessions are aligning with the sermon series beginning the weekend of August 11-12 and will give your group a chance to dig a little deeper into our weekly theme.

Each session's discussion includes three groups of questions:

1. **Get to know me:** Questions written to help your group open up to one another and begin sharing life experiences related to the topic. If your group is meeting for the first time, consider using all (or most) questions included here. If your group knows one another fairly well, you might consider skipping the first few questions in this section and starting your discussion with question three, etc.
2. **Into the Bible:** Questions designed to draw you into the text from the most recent week's sermon. These questions include Scripture passages to study as a group. This might be the first time some of your group members have explored the Bible. Don't miss an opportunity to let them really read the Word of God. These questions are written with the most direct questions appearing first, and the more complex ones last. Feel free to select questions that best fit your group and generate ideas that will be most valuable to members.
3. **Application:** No lesson is complete without the opportunity to apply the learning to our lives. The questions and discussion prompts in this section do just that. Complete as many as your group has time for, and/or focus on questions that stimulate the greatest interest in your group.

## **Session One: “What is Self-control?” Proverbs 25:28**

### ***Get to know me***

- If your group is meeting for the first time, be sure to introduce yourselves and welcome any newcomers. As you begin this series, discuss who you might like to invite to join in the coming weeks. Complete the group roster in the appendix of this packet, and use the “Circles of Life” handout to brainstorm who would benefit from joining your group.
- As we begin our look at self-control, kick off this week’s discussion by sharing about a time when you had to employ an extra measure of willpower. How did it go? What struggles did you experience as you mustered up a little extra self-control?
- Think of someone you know who seems to display high levels of self-control. What do you admire about them? From where do you think they get their strength?

### ***Into the Bible***

- What stood out to you most from this week’s sermon?
- This week’s text says, “A man without self-control is like a city broken into, and left without walls.” Based on this week’s study, how would you define self-control?
- In your own words, what are the consequences of living without self-control? How does the image of this proverb help describe what a lack of self-control looks like in someone’s life?
- In Bible times, the walls of a city were critical. How does that compare to the boundaries you establish in your own life today?
- ALTERNATE SCRIPTURE: In each session of this study, we will have an additional scripture designed to give your group another discussion option. Feel free to look at these suggested verses as time permits, and consider similarities or differences you find. This week, consider Peter’s instruction in **1 Peter 1:13-16**. How does he describe the impact of a focused/self-controlled mind?

### ***Application***

- Think of an area in your life where the walls (boundaries) are getting a little shaky. In what ways are you feeling the consequences of a lack of self-control?
- What can your group do to help you deepen your self-control in a particular area – personal, professional, spiritual? Is there something you would like to focus on?
- DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS: In each session of this study we will have an application designed to help your group focus on a personal discipline. This week, consider the value of disciplined Bible reading. If you haven’t already, consider starting a reading plan using the YouVersion Bible App. The Bible App has hundreds of very good reading plans and it would be great for your group to choose one together.

## **Session Two: “Competitive Self-control” 1 Corinthians 9:24-27**

### ***Get to know me***

- If anyone is new to your group this week, be sure to give them a chance to introduce themselves and meet the other group members.

- As we open this week’s discussion, what are some of the dangers of not exhibiting self-control?
- In our culture, too often we see people get “disqualified” because of a lack of self-control. Can you think of an accomplished leader or celebrity who should have exercised more self-control?

### ***Into the Bible***

- What stood out to you most from this week’s sermon?
- In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul compared self-control to athletic practice and competition. Read verses 24-27 together and discuss what you observe about self-control in these sentences.
- Athletes work hard to get better. What do we learn about discipline in these verses that would help us develop our self-control?
- In a race, the other competitors are threatening to beat us to the finish line. What are we competing against when we don’t display sufficient self-control in our lives?
- ALTERNATE SCRIPTURE: In addition to this verse, Paul uses athletic language in other portions of his writing. Consider looking at **Philippians 3:14-16** as a group this week. How does the discipline of an athlete describe spiritual maturity?

### ***Application***

- Name some consequences that naturally arise through a lack of self-control. How does identifying these potential threats motivate you to change and grow?
- What can you do to develop your self-control this week?
- DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS: Sacrificing builds self-control and helps us identify with the suffering of Christ. What can we do in our lives to identify with Christ’s sacrifice? Is there something that you will go without for a period of time as a way to sacrifice as Christ did, to develop greater self-control?

## **Session Three: “The Gift of Self-control” 2 Timothy 1:6-7**

### ***Get to know me***

- What is something you enjoy doing? What sacrifices might you be willing to make to be able to participate more fully in that activity?
- Tell about a time when you were afraid you were going to miss out on something. What did that tension feel like?
- In what ways can fear drive people to make certain decisions?
- Do you believe self-control is a gift – or a weight? Why or why not?

### ***Into the Bible***

- What stood out to you most from this week’s sermon?
- Read 2 Timothy 1:6-7 together as a group. What does Paul want Timothy to do with the gifts God has given him as a response to this passage?
- What do we learn about God’s gifting of Timothy in this verse? What three qualities do we receive as follower of Christ?

- How do these three gifts work in unison with one another? And how does fear derail the effectiveness of God’s gifting in our lives?
- In what ways can Timothy develop the gifts God has given him?
- ALTERNATE SCRIPTURE: In addition to 2 Timothy 1, consider looking at **Romans 8:15** as a group this week. How do we see Paul’s message confirmed here, and what influence does our adoption into God’s family have on our ability to live self-controlled lives?

#### ***Application***

- A highlight of this week’s passage is Paul’s affirmation of Timothy’s gifts. As you are able, share some of the gifts you see in the members of your group.
- How can you leverage the gifts God has given you to build your self-control?
- DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS: In this week’s teaching we emphasized the development of our spiritual gifts. As a group, commit to using your gifts to serve others in some way. Tackle a project together, meet a need in your group, pursue a community partnership, or consider participating in an upcoming SERVE Day. (For more information on recommended community projects and SERVE partners, visit the life group leader’s page at [www.christchurchohio.org](http://www.christchurchohio.org) or call the church office).

### **Session Four: “Temptation and Self-control” 1 Corinthians 7:3-5**

#### ***Get to know me***

- On a scale of one to ten, describe your level of willpower. Do you think of yourself as someone who can – or cannot – gut out a tough situation?
- Is self-control easier in some areas of your life, and less so in other areas?
- When people are tempted in our culture today, do you think there is a shared value around trying to avoid the temptation and doing the right thing?

#### ***Into the Bible***

- What stood out to you most from this week’s sermon?
- In 1 Corinthians 7:3-5, Paul’s uses sexual abstinence as an example of temptation that many struggle with. What do we learn about the nature of temptation and self-control from this passage?
- How does our awareness of certain situations increase the possibilities of self-control failures?
- How does the unholy one use specific conditions and situations to tempt?
- ALTERNATE SCRIPTURE: In addition to this passage, consider looking at **1 Thessalonians 3:5** as a group this week. What consequence did Paul fear could result from temptation?

#### ***Application***

- How can you apply this week’s lesson and prepare yourself for potential temptations?

- With whom in your group might you share a relationship that is safe enough to candidly discuss areas of temptation? How can the support of a trusted friend be helpful in navigating the pitfalls of self-control failures?
- DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS: What can you do to avoid temptations? Spend some time in prayer this week asking God to show you how you might be more aware of areas of temptation and what you can do to avoid those specific situations.

## **Session Five: “The Holy Spirit and Self-control” Galatians 5:22-25**

### ***Get to know me***

- How do you fare when it comes to gardening? Does your effort in the garden bear fruit, or are you the kind of person who struggles to get anything to grow?
- In what ways do you think your spiritual life is like a garden? What analogies can you draw from the image of a garden bearing fruit to your own spiritual health?

### ***Into the Bible***

- What stood out to you most from this week’s sermon?
- In Galatians 5:22-25, we see the importance of a healthy connection to the Holy Spirit. What do you learn about your spiritual development through this verse?
- What results in our character because of the Holy Spirit’s role in our lives? How can we foster the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives?
- One of the results of the Holy Spirit’s work is self-control; oddly, it is the last “fruit” mentioned on the list. Why do you think Paul listed it last? What conclusions can you draw about your own self-control through this list of the fruit of the Spirit?
- ALTERNATE SCRIPTURE: In addition to the fruit of the Spirit, consider looking at **Romans 8:5** as a group this week and discuss what competes with the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

### ***Application***

- How can the Holy Spirit be more influential in your life and yield more fruit?
- In what ways can we “cultivate” a healthier connection with the Holy Spirit?
- DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS: In addition to self-control, we want to foster all of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Spend time this week reflecting on Galatians 5:22-25 and taking an inventory of these characteristics in your life. Ask God to help you grow in one specific area this week.

## **Session Six: “Self-control—a Process” 2 Peter 1:5-8**

### ***Get to know me***

- As we begin our last session of this series, be sure to confirm plans for the launch of your group’s next study. Consider where and when are you going to meet; who you might like to invite; and what, if any, changes you are planning to make in your group meeting format.

- Think of a skill or talent you have developed over your lifetime. What process did you activate and practice to build and develop that skill?
- Can you think of a shortcut you tried to take that didn't go well? Why do some things require us to take all of the steps, even when we're tempted to cut corners?

#### ***Into the Bible***

- What stood out to you most from this week's sermon?
- In 2 Peter 1:5-8 we see a series of characteristics that build upon one another. In your own words, describe how this process is built.
- What is the assumed result of this process in the life of a Christian?
- Can you think of ways you have seen these characteristics build in your own life?
- How is self-control specifically developed in these verses?
- ALTERNATE SCRIPTURE: In addition to this verse, consider **John 15:2** as a group this week. What is the outcome of building your spiritual character through the process outlined in 2 Peter 1:5-8?

#### ***Application***

- What are you doing to develop these characteristics in your life? Are there areas you believe you could apply more intentional effort in this season of your life?
- What could the members of your group do to help you grow in one or more of these areas specifically?
- As we have focused on self-control for the past several weeks, share with your group a way that you believe you have grown or become better prepared to avoid self-control failures.
- DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS: Set aside some time this week and record some of the lessons you have learned from this series. Additionally, make plans to meet together as a group to participate in our fall week of prayer, September 24-29.

# Group Agreement

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## **Our Group's Purpose:**

To transform our spiritual lives by cultivating our spiritual health in a healthy small group community.

## **We do this through:**

### **Group Attendance**

To give priority to the group meeting. We will call or email if we will be late or absent. (Completing the Group Calendar will minimize this issue.)

### **Safe Environment**

To help create a safe place where people can be heard and feel loved. (Please, no quick answers, snap judgments or simple fixes.)

### **Respect Differences**

To be gentle and gracious to people with different spiritual maturity, personal opinions, temperaments or imperfections. We are all works in progress.

### **Confidentiality**

To keep anything that is shared strictly confidential and within the group, and to avoid sharing improper information about those outside the group.

### **Encouragement for Growth**

To be not just takers but givers of life. We want to spiritually multiply our lives by serving others with our God-given gifts.

### **Welcoming Newcomers**

To keep an open chair and share Jesus' dream of finding a shepherd for every sheep.

### **Shared Ownership**

To remember that every member is a minister and to ensure that each attender will share a small team role or responsibility over time.

### **Rotating Hosts/Leaders and Homes**

To encourage different people to host the group in their homes and to rotate the responsibility of facilitating each meeting. (See the Group Calendar.)

- Refreshments/meal times \_\_\_\_\_
- Child care \_\_\_\_\_
- When we will meet (day of week) \_\_\_\_\_
- Where we will meet (place) \_\_\_\_\_
- We will begin at (time) \_\_\_\_\_ and end at \_\_\_\_\_
- We will do our best to have some or all of us attend a worship service together. Our primary worship service time will be \_\_\_\_\_
- Date of this agreement \_\_\_\_\_



# Group Calendar

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Planning and calendaring can help ensure the greatest participation at every meeting. At the end of each meeting, review this calendar. Be sure to include a regular rotation of host homes and leaders, and don't forget birthdays, socials, church events, holidays, and mission/ministry projects.

DATE	LESSON	LOCATION	DESSERT/ MEAL	FACILITATOR



# CIRCLES OF LIFE

DISCOVER WHO YOU CAN CONNECT IN COMMUNITY

The diagram consists of five overlapping circles arranged in a pentagonal pattern. Each circle contains a title and a brief description, followed by three horizontal lines for writing.

- Family**  
(immediate or extended)
- Familiar**  
(neighbors, kids' sports teams, school, and so forth)
- Friends**
- Fun**  
(gym, hobbies, hangouts)
- Firm**  
(work)

Follow this simple four-step process:

1. **Prayerfully** list 1-2 people in each circle.
2. **Prepare** the group for them. Share a few names with your group and update your progress.
3. **Place** a call to them.
4. **Pick** them up and bring them to your next meeting.

*"Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." Matthew 4:19*

## Leading for the First Time

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Sweaty palms are a healthy sign. The Bible says God is gracious to the humble. Remember who is in control; the time to worry is when you're not worried.

Those who are soft in heart (and sweaty palmed) are those whom God is sure to speak through.

Seek support. Ask your leader, coleader, or close friend to pray for you and prepare with you before the session. Walking through the study will help you anticipate potentially difficult questions and discussion topics.

Bring your uniqueness to the study. Lean into who you are and how God wants you to uniquely lead the study.

Prepare. Prepare. Prepare. Go through the session several times before your group meets. Set aside time to discuss the material with your coach and bring up any questions or ideas that you are unclear about. Consider writing in a journal or fasting for a day to prepare yourself for what God wants to do.

Don't wait until the last minute to prepare.

Ask for feedback so you can grow. Perhaps in an email or on cards handed out at the study, have everyone write down three things you did well and one thing you could improve on. Don't get defensive, but show an openness to learn and grow.

Prayerfully consider launching a new group. This doesn't need to happen overnight, but God's heart is for this to happen over time. Not all Christians are called to be leaders or teachers, but we are all called to be "shepherds" of a few someday.

Share with your group what God is doing in your heart. God is searching for those whose hearts are fully His. Share your trials and victories. We promise that people will relate.

Prayerfully consider whom you would like to pass the baton to next week. It's only fair. God is ready for the next member of your group to go on the faith journey you just traveled. Make it fun, and expect God to do the rest.

# Leadership Training

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Congratulations! You've responded to the call to lead a group.

There are few other tasks in the family of God that surpass the contribution you will be making. As you prepare to lead, whether it is one session or the entire series, here are a few thoughts to keep in mind. We encourage you to read these and review them with each new discussion leader before he or she leads.

1. Remember that you are not alone. God knows everything about you, and He knew that you would be asked to lead your group. Remember that it is common for all good leaders to feel that they are not ready to lead. Moses, Solomon, Jeremiah and Timothy—they all were reluctant to lead. God promises, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). Whether you are leading for one evening, for several weeks, or for a lifetime, you will be blessed as you serve.
2. Don't try to do it alone. Pray right now for God to help you build a healthy leadership team. If you can enlist a co-leader to help you lead the group, you will find your experience to be much richer. This is your chance to involve as many people as you can in building a healthy group. All you have to do is call and ask people to help, you'll be surprised at the response.
3. Just be yourself. If you won't be you, who will? God wants you to use your unique gifts and temperament. Don't try to do things exactly like another leader; do them in a way that fits you! Just admit it when you don't have an answer, and apologize when you make a mistake. Your group will love you for it and you'll sleep better at night!
4. Prepare for your meeting ahead of time. Review the session and the leader's notes, and write down your responses to each question. Pay special attention to questions that ask group members to do something other than engage in discussion. These exercises will help your group live what the Bible teaches, not just talk about it. Be sure you understand how a question is designed, and bring any necessary supplies (such as paper and pens) to your meeting. If the exercise employs one of the items in the appendix, be sure to look over that item so you'll know how it works.
5. Pray for your group members by name. Before you begin your session, go around the room in your mind and pray for each member by name. You may want to review the prayer list at least once a week. Ask God to use your time together to touch the heart of every person uniquely. Expect God to lead you to whomever he wants you to encourage or challenge in a special way. If you listen, God will surely lead!
6. When you ask a question, be patient. Someone will eventually respond. Sometimes people need a moment or two of silence to think about the question, and if silence doesn't bother you, it won't bother anyone else. After someone responds, affirm the response with a simple "thanks" or "good job." Then ask, "How about somebody else?" or "Would someone who hasn't shared like to add anything?" Be sensitive to new people or reluctant members who

aren't ready to say, pray or do anything. If you give them a safe setting, they will blossom over time.

7. Provide transitions between questions. When guiding the discussion, always read aloud the transitional paragraphs and the questions. Ask the group if anyone would like to read the paragraph or Bible passage. Don't call on anyone, but ask for a volunteer, and then be patient until someone begins. Be sure to thank the person who reads aloud.

8. Break up into smaller groups each week. If your group has more than ten people, we strongly encourage you to have the group gather in discussion circles of three or four people. With a greater opportunity to talk in a small circle, people will connect more with the study, apply more quickly what they're learning and ultimately get more out of it. A small circle also encourages a quiet person to participate and tends to minimize the effects of a more vocal or dominant member. It can also help people feel more loved in your group. When you gather again at the end of the section, you can have one person summarize the highlights from each circle. Small circles are also helpful during prayer time. People who are unaccustomed to praying aloud will feel more comfortable trying it with just two or three others. Also, prayer requests won't take as much time, so circles will have more time to actually pray. When you gather back with the whole group, you can have one person from each circle briefly update everyone on the prayer requests. People are more willing to pray in small circles if they know that the whole group will hear all the prayer requests.

9. Rotate facilitators weekly. At the end of each meeting, ask the group who should lead the following week. Let the group help select your weekly facilitator. You may be perfectly capable of leading each time, but you will help others grow in their faith and gifts if you give them opportunities to lead. You can use the Small Group Calendar to fill in the names of all meeting leaders at once if you prefer.

10. One final challenge (for new or first time leaders): Before your first opportunity to lead, look up each of the five passages listed below. Read each one as a devotional exercise to help equip yourself with a shepherd's heart. Trust us on this one. If you do this, you will be more than ready for your first meeting.

- Matthew 9:36
- 1 Peter 5:2-4
- Psalm 23
- Ezekiel 34:11-16
- 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, 11-12

## How to lead in Prayer

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One of the most powerful aspects of small groups is the opportunity to offer prayer requests, to pray together, and then to see how God follows through on those prayers. It's amazing to see how God works over three months or six months or a year. Prayers gets answered, situations change, hearts change—your group sees God work in mighty ways.

Just as powerful as the group dynamic of prayer is the impact that a praying leader can have on his or her group. A praying leader ministers to the group not only by showing how much he or she cares about their needs but also by modeling a life of prayer.

As with most things, becoming a small group centered on prayer doesn't just happen. Here are seven tips on how you can minister to your small group through prayer:

- Dedicate the last half hour of each bible study to “personal prayer needs” time.
- Write each member's prayer requests down on 3x5 cards or the prayer sheets provided. Bring the cards/sheets to every study so you can check back on their requests.
- After the requests are given, pray immediately with your group.
- Set up a prayer-partner system where each member has another member praying for him or her, and vice versa.
- As a leader, continue to pray for each specific prayer request of each of your members (use your cards as reminders) daily.
- Call mid-week (or mid-session) to see how things are going.
- Call or email whenever the Holy Spirit prompts you. God may use you to help answer a member's prayer. If you feel the Holy Spirit giving you wisdom that could help a member in a quandary, let that person know.

# Prayer and Praise Reports

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Prayer is essential to group life, use this chart as a place to record prayer requests that are shared in your group each week.

<b>PRAYER REQUEST</b>	<b>PRAISE REPORT</b>