

Lesson Plan - "Keep It Under Control"

Key Passage: 2 Corinthians 8-9; Matthew 6:16-18

Central Truth: I discipline my body and keep it under control by sacrificing my money and my regular eating pattern so that I might share in His holiness.

Relate

Option #1: Strike a Pose

Have all of the students in your group stand in a circle facing each other. Demonstrate a pose that you'll expect all of them to "strike" when you say go. (Pose Ideas: Karate Kid pose, Heisman Trophy pose, or sumo wrestler stance) When you say go, students are not allowed to move at all or they are out of the game. Even the slightest movement of the face or hands eliminates them from the game. The game is over when only one student remains.

Say: It's very difficult to have self control when doing something your body is not used to doing.

Ask: How long do you think you'd be able to hold that pose this time next year if you practiced it every day for 15 minutes a day?

Say: During this session we're going to look at how we can discipline our spiritual bodies by practicing self control and sacrifice.

Option #2: Group Discussion About Self Control

Ask the following questions and allow time for your group to discuss.

What do you think of when you hear the words "self control"?

Often, teenagers are accused of having really poor self control. Why do you think this is and do you agree or disagree with this accusation?

Option #3: Group Discussion About Sacrifice

Ask the following questions and allow time for your group to discuss.

What do you think of when you hear the word "sacrifice"?

Often, teenagers are accused of being very self centered. Why do you think this is and do you agree or disagree with this accusation?

Realize

Bible Teaching Plan:

Introduction to the Passage

Teach: Because of the prolific number of 5K races and because most Americans are less familiar with distance involved, many of these events attract a noticeable number of contestants who are significantly hindered by coming to the race without keeping it under control. One runner comes dressed in a heavy thermal gear because she left for the event on a cool morning – but then feels so hot that she is ready to pass out after she has covered the first mile of the race. Another runner stops for a heavy, greasy breakfast buffet on the way to the event – and his stomach is cramping and heaving before he knows what hit him.

When these runners turn their attention to the race at hand, they would have been much happier to have gone through their morning routines differently. The first runner would gladly sacrifice her temporary warmth on the way to the event. The second would love to go back in order to practice self-control as he satisfied his hunger at the breakfast table. Their pursuit of instant gratification had a significantly negative impact on the rest of their race!

READ 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Teach: In contrast to the culture of instant gratification in which our teenagers live, the Christian running as described in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 can experience tremendous benefit from exercising spiritual disciplines associated with self-control and sacrifice. Giving money to the Kingdom of Christ and abstaining from food by fasting are practical ways that the believer can encourage these desired character traits as we run. These two disciplines are essential to our mandate to “keep it under control” as we “do not run aimlessly” in our pursuit to obtain “the imperishable prize.”

Why Should I Give Away My Money?

Teach: In the world today, giving away money is widely celebrated, praised, and rewarded. We are encouraged to give money to the less fortunate – whether they are the needy in our own community, orphans on the other side of the world, or puppies in need of a permanent home. Meanwhile, in the wake of every natural disaster, celebrities flock together to create special events to help mobilize people from across the nation to give resources in order to help people and communities rebuild.

While giving money to assist human need or support a cherished cause are great things to do, when the Bible talks about giving money, it has something a little bigger as its focus. In the letter of 2 Corinthians, Paul spends chapters 8 and 9 in a discussion about taking up a collection to support the impoverished and embattled church in Jerusalem. Instead of asking for a specific dollar amount or percentage of income, however, Paul targets the heart motivations of his audience. As his encouragement to give money unfolds over multiple chapters, he primarily wants his audience to look at their giving from the perspective of their own attitudes and motivations.

READ 2 Corinthians 8-9

Teacher's Note: It may be a good idea to have different students read different sections of these 2 chapters since the text is so long.

A. Giving Is Primarily to God

Teach: The primary focus of our giving is God Himself. 2 Corinthians 8:5 says that believers "first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God." God comes first, and others (the "us" of the verse) benefit from the money because God wills it to be so.

While God instructs us to give to Him, He is not in need of our money. Psalm 50:9-12 says, "9I will not accept a bull from your house or goats from your folds. 10For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. 11I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. 12If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine." What He wants is the heart attitude described in 2 Corinthians 9:7-8, which says, "7Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work."

Why is it so important to give money to God then? Jesus makes it clear in His teaching that is recorded both in Matthew 6:21 and Luke 12:34 when He says, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Where you spend and/or give away your money is an astonishingly accurate indication of your highest values and deepest allegiances. Romantic interests, friends, family, video games, cell phones, international missions, weekly giving to your church – your actual spending will provide a trail of crumbs to what the actual desires of your heart are.

Realize Discussion Question #1: How is how we spend our money (or give our money) a reflection of what's important to us?

B. Giving Is Not About a Specific Amount of Money

Teach: In talking about giving, Paul begins the entire conversation by highlighting the churches of Macedonia, who gave even though they lived in poverty. 2 Corinthians 8:1-4 says, “1We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, 2for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. 3For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, 4begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints.” Because they understood the race and the prize at the end, these believers literally begged for the opportunity to give beyond what they could “afford” to give for the sake of other believers and the Kingdom. They were in a temporary season of great difficulty and they had extremely limited personal money – the very excuses for not giving that most American teenagers use – but they found a way to give anyway! As 2 Corinthians 8:12 says, “For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.”

READ Mark 12:41-44

Realize Discussion Question #2: Why was the widow’s gift more significant than the gifts of the many rich people?

Teach: Biblical giving cannot fit into the teaching that you give to God with the expectation that God will increase your earthly prosperity in a tit for tat arrangement. If you are able to give money to the Kingdom and still afford to do everything else that you could possibly want to do in life (even if you are giving ten or even fifty percent of your income), are you creating a lifestyle and character of self-control and sacrifice that are helping you to “keep it under control”? There are no cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all answers to giving. It takes reflection and thoughtfulness in our giving when our goal is a mindset of sacrifice and not just hitting a mathematical calculation or an expected return on investment. This type of giving is an active statement in trusting God to provide for your own needs, as He promises in 2 Corinthians 9:10, saying, “He who supplies the seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.”

Realize Discussion Question #3: Are you willing to give to God even though no material blessings may return your way?

What Good Does It Do For Me To Go Without Food?

Teach: On the rare occasion that the topic of fasting does come to the forefront for evangelical Christians, it is usually not in connection to food. Over the past few years, it has become increasingly popular to see well-meaning Christians announce their upcoming absence (especially around the season of Lent) on a particular website as a fast from social media. In the name of fasting, you will also see people giving up soft drinks, meat, chocolate, computer usage, phones, television, and more experiences of everyday life. The ideal that should underlie any of these expressions is that we are giving up something important and enjoyable for the sake of focusing on God, who is even more important. In the strict biblical sense, though, fasting primarily refers to going without food. Even more than being important and enjoyable, food is essential to life itself – thus the implication of this fasting is that God is more important to life than food.

Quote: “Self-indulgence is the enemy of gratitude, and self-discipline is usually its friend and generator. That is why gluttony is a deadly sin. The early desert fathers believed that a person’s appetites are linked: full stomachs and jaded palates take the edge from our hunger and thirst for righteousness. They spoil the appetite for God” -Cornelius Plantinga

Realize Discussion Question #4: Why is fasting from a “need” like food better than fasting from a “want” like the internet, phone, or chocolate?

READ Matthew 6:16-18

Teach: Notice that Jesus talks about “when you fast” and not “if you fast.” In addition to showing us the necessity of fasting, these verses speak to two basic truths about the discipline.

A. Fasting Should Not Be Seen By Others

Teach: Fasting is something specifically designed to be left between you and God and no one else. Do not gloss over the irony of the status update posted online for the whole world to see which politely tells your friends that you will be “fasting” from social media and unable to respond to their messages. Instead, the verses of Matthew 6 tell us to go out of our way not to act like we are doing anything out of the ordinary. When it comes to running late for a meal (much less skipping one or more), most of us get grouchy and start telling everyone within a fifty foot radius that we need food NOW. It takes intentional effort to “not look gloomy” so that your fasting will not be seen by the people around you.

In fact, these verses go so far as to say that the person who makes fasting public is a “hypocrite” who has “received their reward” already in the form of the praise and flattery of other

people. When we “fast” with the motivation of looking holy or spiritual for others, we are actually not doing the spiritual discipline of fasting at all. In Jesus’ extensive interactions in the Gospels with the Pharisees, we see that this truth equally applies to Bible study, prayer, giving, and the other spiritual disciplines. We so easily seek to obtain the perishable prize of the praise of other people in the place of the imperishable prize of God. It is mutually exclusive. According to Matthew 6:24, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” You cannot both serve God and pursue the praise and popularity from the masses.

Realize Discussion Question #5: Why does Jesus instruct His disciples to fast in secret?

B. Fasting Will Be Seen By God

Quote: “The most important aspect of this Discipline is its influence on prayer. You’ll notice that in one way or another, all the other biblical purposes of fasting relate to prayer” -Donald Whitney

Teach: Just like we discussed in our conversation about prayer from Lesson 2, we cannot think about fasting as a mechanical, automatic practice that gets God to give us what we want – as if we were rubbing the magical bottle to call forth our own personal genie to grant a wish. Fasting does not obligate God to answer our prayers, but he chooses to gladly hear and respond to our fasting like a dad who rewards the obedience of his young children.

READ Mark 2:18-20

Teach: When Jesus’ followers were with Him face to face in the joy of his presence, there was no need for fasting. However, Jesus specifically says that when the bridegroom (Jesus) would depart, then His disciples would fast. Our fasting therefore shows our longing to interact and talk with Jesus directly, as His disciples did when He walked among us.

Why is our fasting especially seen by God? When we replace our time spent eating with time spent with God through prayer or Bible study, we affirm His value in our lives. It is a display of our absolute dependence, faith, and trust. At the same time, there are also notes of longing and melancholy. We are saying that we want more of God and that we are not satisfied with where we are! Fasting adds a bent of urgency and fervency to our prayers. While a lack of food normally makes us feel drained and lethargic, skipping food for the sake of a fasting is a shot of pure adrenaline into our prayer life.

Realize Discussion Question #6: How would fasting from food, even from just one meal, contribute to your prayer life?

Renovate

Option #1: A Commitment to Giving and Fasting

Say: Now that we've talked about self control and sacrifice through the disciplines of giving and fasting, you may be thinking "this seems really hard, where do I begin?" The answer: you begin small! Here's an exercise that can get you started.

Have your students spend a few moments alone to pray through and answer the following questions in their work books.

What amount of money do I have that I could give away (either as a one time gift or, for those with part time jobs, on a regular basis) that would be sacrificial like the widow in Mark 12:41-44?

Is there one meal a week that I could give up to spend that time in prayer and fellowship with God? If so, am I willing to do that beginning next week?

Teachers Note: If your group is doing this session before the Saturday night service of 180 Weekend, remind them that they will have the opportunity to give sacrificially towards the 180 Mission Offering in tonights service.

Option #2: Being Self Controlled and Sacrificial In Every Area of Our Lives

Say: Self Control and Sacrifice go beyond the two spiritual disciplines that we discussed today and should reach in to every aspect of our lives.

Have your students spend a few moments alone to pray through and answer the following questions in their work books.

In what areas of my life am I currently struggling to keep under control?

What steps am I willing to take to bring these areas of my life back under control?

Living sacrificially goes way beyond the money we give the church, the poor, or to missions. What possessions or practices do you have that God may be calling you to limit or completely give away in an act of sacrifice.

Option #3: Prayer Exercise

Bring your group back together after doing the previous Renovate option(s) and read the following passage to them.

READ Romans 5:3-5

Pray over your group for the following things:

That their suffering in this world will draw them closer to Christ and will develop endurance within them...

That as they endure in this world that God would continue to strengthen them and that Christlike character would be evident to others...

That as they are continuing to be made into the image and likeness of Christ and take on more of His character that they would be reminded of the hope we share in the Gospel...

That as we rejoice together in the hope we share in the Gospel that we would daily dedicate ourselves to self control and sacrifice for the sake of Christ.