EVALUATING AND IMPROVING SELF-CONTROL

THROUGH THE RENEWAL MINISTRY AT

WEST PARK BAPTIST CHURCH IN

KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE

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by

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APPROVAL SHEET

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PREFACE

Because of their efforts I am inspired to continue to work to improve and refine this project for future use among God's people.

Finally, to my supervisor, Dr. Stuart Scott, and the faculty of SBTS, I would like to express my deepest appreciation. Your demand for excellence is the essence that permeates throughout everything this project represents. Along with the countless scores of resources provided by gifted believers that have lighted my path with insight and knowledge, you have affirmed that God has indeed provided for his people all that is sufficient to address the struggles we face as the redeemed of the Lord living in a fallen world.

Al Cage

Knoxville, Tennessee

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In a fallen world, many believers are challenged to resist the lure of enslaving sin. The potential for successfully overcoming this challenge is within the reach of any believer willing to embrace the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Instead of walking in the paths of a fallen world, the alternative is for the believer to walk with the Spirit. In doing so, Jesus declared that spiritual fruitfulness—the defining mark of spiritual conversion (see Matt 7:15-20; John 15:1-11)—will become the defining characteristic of their walk.

The apostle Paul outlined the characteristic of spiritual fruitfulness by providing a list of nine defining attributes; one of which is self-control. Self-control is a major enabler in the believer's battle to overcome enslaving sin. Conversely, a lack of self-control is a serious deficiency to any believer's efforts against succumbing to the devastating impact of enslaving sins. Assessing and addressing self-control represents a specific area of opportunity for believers to deal with enslaving sins in a manner acceptable to God (Heb 12:1).

Context

West Park Baptist Church is as an independent Baptist church, located in the northwestern portion of Knox County in eastern Tennessee. A specific area of focus for the West Park Baptist Church has been to help believers who are struggling with habitual sins through the Renewal Ministry at the church. The Renewal Ministry began with an emphasis on targeting believers struggling with enslaving sins of various kinds, including drugs, alcohol, gambling, pornography, etc. The ministry meets weekly for a time of

fellowship, sharing a nutritional meal, a time of group worship, and break-out into small groups for a time of specific teaching. Since its inception in 2015, the Renewal Ministry has maintained focus on being heavily relational, with an emphasis placed on continuous accountability.

Renewal is anchored by a fundamental commitment to the sufficiency of God's Word to provide all that is required for life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3). Many Renewal participants have previously had some level of interaction with secular-based approaches that have failed to lead to sustained success in addressing life-dominating sins. Spiritual formation involving practicing spiritual disciplines that originate from biblical truths is also central to the Renewal approach to addressing enslaving sins. An additional core of the approach deployed in Renewal is to establish a robust accountability network so that each participant may build solid biblical relationships with one another. Building a biblical accountability flows out of the realization that believers working together is required to carry the load of providing continuous, on-going support, which is key to long-term change.

One of the most heart-breaking patterns common to almost all of the participants in the Renewal Ministry has been the tendency to lapse back into bondage in relationship to the presence of enslaving sins. It is common that even after experiencing extended periods of freedom, the participants for various reasons slip back into sinful habits. Discussing this pattern has revealed a lack of understanding that the root cause of their bondage is sin. God has provided a solution for this dilemma, but for those who seem to struggle the most, there is little confidence that it will work in their situation. Many turn to non-biblical approaches to help break the bondage but are driven into further despair when those attempts fail as well.

Although all believers struggle with sin, participants in the Renewal Ministry seem especially weak in the practice of spiritual disciplines, especially in trusting the power of the Holy Spirit to guide them into heart transformation through the application of the

truth in God's Word. There appears to be a superficial understanding and embracing of the authority of God's Word, but it is quickly discarded when challenged to follow God or to yield to the influence of sin instead. There is a strong desire to find freedom in Christ, but despair rules in their hearts when yielding to the false belief that the power of sin is overwhelming.

Fundamentally, this mindset represents the disbelief that God is able to deliver "them" from their situation. Even after hearing testimonies from ministry leaders concerning their personal deliverance from similar types of bondage by placing their trust in God, many Renewal Ministry participants remain convinced their situation is different. Teaching and equipping them to rely upon the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, is a major element to effect ongoing change. Transferring "head knowledge," coupled with the fellowship of Christian community to provide admonishment and encouragement, is critical for true lifestyle change. Exercising strong self-control is essential for God-honoring change to both occur and establish the path to experience long-term freedom.

Participants in the Renewal Ministry struggle in some, if not all, of these points. Repeatedly, stories are shared by individuals who have experienced relapse into the enslaving habits destroying their lives and witness for Christ. When confronted, many attempt to justify their actions or assert they are victims instead of willful participants in their sin. Often there is a plea for understanding based on the premise that a door of escape to deal biblically with the temptation, as promised in Scripture, was not made available for them.

It is not uncommon for Renewal participants to fail to sustain the effort to embrace genuine repentance and restoration. For instance, one ministry participant was sponsored through a lengthy process to facilitate addressing his enslaving sins. The process involved completing of several steps, including a detox intervention as well as participating in a ninety-day short treatment intervention ministry (STI) that is Bible-based and is consistent with the Renewal Ministry principles. Upon completion of the

STI and returning to Knoxville, a mature believer was assigned to walk with him through the difficult transition of returning home. For a relatively short period of time, there was great rejoicing as the participant seemed to have finally achieved victory—however, the celebration was premature. The participant once again became mired in the darkness of his enslaving sin and slipped back into a state of hopelessness. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated example, but represents a common reality for many Renewal participants.

Rationale

The Bible clearly establishes the expectation that, regardless of the situation confronting a believer that may result in sin, believers have the ability to resist temptation (1 Cor 10:13). However, that is not to say that instantaneous sanctification will occur, because even healthy believers struggle with sin (Rom 7:15-20). Another clear expectation from Scripture is that every believer must continually work to put aside sinful habits (Heb 12:1). That is the nature of progress sanctification. Growing in Christ is hard work that requires the discipline of knowing and doing what God has commanded. Believers who fail to do so not only hurt themselves but damage their witness to others (1 Cor 9:27).

Bridging the gap between cognitive understanding and practice is a daunting challenge for the Renewal Ministry participants who repeatedly return to sin to satisfy their lusts. It is a disheartening experience exacerbated when the actions of participants seem to convey a complete lack of understanding that God has provided everything needed to live in a manner that is pleasing to Him is true (2 Pet 1:3). God has provided the means of escape, but participants in the Renewal Ministry truly struggle with accepting a high level of personal accountability to walk with the Spirit to address their challenges. The default position is to try something other than placing their total trust in God. Walking closely with participants is needed, both to instruct and admonish them appropriately, to embrace the solutions God has provided. Isolation is a deadly enemy to securing the

freedom the participants desperately want and need. Sharing life together in community will help address this issue (see Heb 3:13).

Missing the mark is not completely due to a lack of self-control, but a deficiency in this area is a major contributor to the other negative factors leading to sinful bondage. It is important to thoroughly address non-spiritual issues that may be contributing to the bondage. For instance, after addressing any apparent biological issues through appropriate measures, affecting a change in the area of self-control is considered a significant step toward change. Despite the high level of frustration, disappointment, and pain associated with seeing believers struggle with enslaving sin, the biblical charge is to press on. It is unfortunate that only believers who have fallen into the darkest pits of enslavement look to ministries like Renewal as the last bastion of hope to address their desperate situation.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to help participants in West Park Baptist Church Renewal Ministry evaluate their current state of self-control and identify steps to strengthen this vital attribute as an essential element of long-term spiritual fruitfulness and health.

Goals

The goals for the project were as follows:

1. The first goal was to evaluate the practice of self-control of participants in West Park Baptist Church's Renewal Ministry.

2. The second goal was to develop and implement a curriculum to equip participants in West Park Baptist Church's Renewal Ministry of self-control based on biblical principles.

3. The third goal was to guide the participants in the West Park Baptist Church's Renewal Ministry to re-assess their practice of self-control and develop an on-going strategy to continue improving self-control.

Research Methodology

The first goal was to evaluate the level of self-control of participants in West Park Baptist Church's Renewal Ministry.[1] This evaluation provided a baseline to assess the level of self-control in the participants. The evaluation phase comprised the first module of the overall process and was composed of three sessions. This goal was measured by administering a Self-Assessment Inventory Survey (SAIS) to participants in the Renewal Ministry.[2] Each participant was required to select three associates—who are believers and have a close relationship with the participant—to complete the Self-Assessment Inventory Survey on the participant. Along with the survey completed by the participant, a total of four surveys were used to create a composite report for each participant.[3] The initial composite report was used primarily to establish a baseline for the participant to utilize the information presented in two ways. First, participants' responses were used to capture their individual assessment of how self-control is displayed through their thoughts and actions. The scores were averaged together to provide an overall assessment of their level of self-control.

Second, the responses from the associates selected by the participants were used to provide insight into areas of diversion from the responses provided by participants. In particular, the participants reviewed the composite report to identify up to three specific questions to investigate the obvious disconnect. These areas of disconnect became an integral component of assessing ways to impact self-control during the education phase of the project. This goal was considered successfully met when 75 percent of the individual surveys from the Renewal participants beginning in the project were collected and analyzed to ensure the surveys has been adequately completed.

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[1] On average, Renewal ministers to twenty participants weekly.

[2] See appendix 1, "Self-Assessment Inventory Survey."

[3] See appendix 2, "Self-Assessment Inventory Survey—Composite Report."

The second goal was to develop and implement a curriculum to equip participants in West Park Baptist Church's Renewal Ministry of self-control based on biblical principles. The equipping phase would become a critical component to facilitate a re-assessment of the participants' practice of self-control in the final phase of the project. The development component of the second goal was to construct a curriculum based on biblical principles and have it reviewed and approved by an expert panel. The measurement for the second goal utilized the Self-Assessment Inventory Survey Curriculum Evaluation Rubric.[4] Each member of the panel received a copy of all of the course materials, including the books. A session was held with the panel members to present the course objectives, the structure utilized for the lessons contained in each of the three modules, and how the supporting information (including the books used in the course) were used to facilitate the information and principles being presented. Independently, the panel members evaluated the curriculum and provided written feedback containing their comments, corrections, and suggestions. The success of this goal was determined by retaining a minimum of 90 percent the original curriculum following the expert panel members' review.

The final component of the second goal was to implement the self-control equipping curriculum during the second module of the project. The implementation component of the second goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 50 percent of the participants that completed goal 1 also completed the seven-week self-control equipping process. During the seven-week equipping segment, the Renewal Ministry leader shepherded the participants by meeting with them weekly to provide review, clarify any misunderstanding, reinforce the lessons taught in the instructional phase, and provide encouragement to complete the process. A key expectation was for each participant to journal their thoughts, desires, and behaviors in various situations,

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[4] See appendix 3, "Self-Assessment Inventory Curriculum Evaluation Rubric."

including gathering external feedback from others who are impacted by their choices. The journals were reviewed weekly by the Renewal Ministry leader and collected at the end of the equipment segment.

The third goal was to guide the participants in West Park Baptist Church's Renewal Ministry to re-assess their practice of self-control and facilitate development of an on-going strategy to continue improving self-control. During the third, and final, module of the project, each participant completed a re-assessment of their practice of self-control using the Self-Assessment Inventory Survey. The results from the re-assessment were used to compile a final composite report for each participant, which included participants' initial self-control assessment, the assessment from the participants' associates, and the re-assessment. In the final module of the project, participants were guided through the change(s) in the level of self-control by reviewing the final composite report.[5] This goal was considered successfully met when two objectives were accomplished. First, each of the participants attending the third module also completed a personal self-control improvement strategy based on the knowledge gained in the course. The participant's feedback captured on the final composite report and the blind-spot form. Finally, the second objective was for the Renewal Ministry leaders to share with participants their observations and review of the participants' strategy to address self-control.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms will be used in this ministry project:

Counseling. Counseling, defined by Heath Lambert, is "a conversation where one party with questions, problems, and trouble seeks assistance from someone they believe has answers, solutions, and help."[6]

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[5] See appendix 2, "Self-Assessment Inventory Survey—Final Composite Report."

[6] Heath Lambert, *Theology of Biblical Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 14.

Biblical counseling practice. Biblical counseling practice, as deployed by

believers, separates itself from other forms of counseling in how it is taught and practiced.

The practice is clearly articulated by John MacArthur:

> By definition, the biblical counselor is one who is persuaded of and allegiant to a Christian worldview, that is, one who functions within a frame of reference that consciously sees all of the realities and relationships of life from a perspective that is biblically coherent and consistent, and thus honors the God of Scriptures. The one element of such a worldview that most dramatically distinguishes it from all pretenders is the commitment to a theocentric perspective on all of life and thought. Thus, any model of counseling that is authentically biblical will be framed, designed, and executed in happy submission to the biblical demand that our lives be lived out entirely for the glory of God.[7]

Twelve-step program. According to the American Psychological Association,

twelve step programs are defined as

> a distinctive approach to overcoming addictive, compulsive, or behavioral problems that was developed initially in ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS (AA) to guide recovery from alcoholism and is now used, often in an adapted form, by a number of other SELF-HELP GROUPS. The twelve-step program in AA asks each member to (a) admit that he or she cannot control his or her drinking; (b) recognize a supreme spiritual power, which can give the member strength; (c) examine past errors, a process that is carried out with another member who serves as sponsor; (d) make amends for these errors; (e) develop a new code and style of life; and (f) help other alcoholics who are in need of support. Variations of this model also exist for drug abuse and addiction, gambling addiction, and other problems.[8]

Integrationist counseling. Integrationist counseling may broadly be understood

as the incorporation of both theology and secular psychology into one's principles and

practice of soul care. Stanton Jones provides a helpful working definition:

> Integration of Christianity and psychology (or any area of "secular thought") is our living out—in this particular area—of the lordship of Christ over all of existence by

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[7] John MacArthur, *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 51. MacArthur further elaborates concerning the practice of biblical counseling:

> In short, biblical counseling is animated by a Godward focus. The temptation today, even within the Christian community, is to do otherwise, to conduct counseling with a primary focus on someone or something other than God. But the biblical counselor must be committed to a preeminently Godward focus in counseling. Why? There are three basic reasons: (1) because God demands it; (2) because the natural exaltation of self is destructive; and (3) because the soul-satisfying life God intends for His children can only be found through Jesus' spiritual paradox deny self and focus on God. (MacArthur, *Counseling*, 51)

[8] American Psychological Association, *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2015), 951.

our giving his special attention—God's true Word—its appropriate place of authority in determining our fundamental beliefs about and practices toward all of reality and toward our academic subject matter in particular.[9]

Two delimitations will be imposed on the project. First, participants are required to be active in the West Park Baptist Church Renewal Ministry. Second, individuals chosen by the participants as associates must also complete the Self-Assessment Inventory Survey. The associates must be professing believers in Jesus Christ and active members of a local church. The limitation of this project includes the issue that the observation phase of the Renewal Ministry Leader will not be continuous but was limited to a weekly review session due to schedule restraints. Another similar limitation is that, other than holding participants to a code of honesty, there was no way to ensure that they record completely their thoughts and actions. Finally, the observation segment of the project was limited to a total of seven consecutive weeks, but it was difficult to ensure that the participants will adhere to this schedule. If there are any unexcused breaks in the schedule, then the participant was not allowed to continue in the project as a subject of the study.

Conclusion

Self-control is a powerful witness to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer, but it requires a clear understanding of this attribute and the personal resolve to act upon this understanding. The following chapters detail the steps required to evaluate and improve self-control. Chapter 2 will present the truth contained in God's Word that overcoming habitual sin is an expectation and is achievable. Chapter 3 will outline that true change is only achievable through spiritual renewal found in Christ.

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[9] Stanton L. Jones, "An Integration View," in *Psychology & Christianity: Five Views*, ed. Eric L. Johnson, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2010), 102.

CHAPTER 2

A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON
LIFE-DOMINATING SINS

All believers struggle to resist the power of sin. The struggle is compounded when sins become entrenched and deeply rooted through the practice of enslaving behavior and thoughts. However, enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit, every believer can achieve victory over sin—even enslaving sin. Concerning this reality, the apostle Paul declares, "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col 1:13).[1] As a result of this glorious union with Christ, the once defeated sinner is now equipped to faithfully strive for righteousness and resist the on-going influence of sin and darkness. Three key passages, one from the book of Hebrews and two from Paul's writings to the Corinthian church, will be examined to frame this reality and point to the essential need for self-control. By exercising the virtue of self-control—a key aspect of spiritual fruitfulness—believers are empowered to escape the joy-robbing influence of sin; in particular, any sin(s) that may potentially become habitually enslaving.

The Reality of Enslaving Sins (Heb 12:1-2)

The book of Hebrews was originally written to Christians who were on the verge of returning to ineffective traditions that could never please God. An on-going theme in the letter are warnings concerning the consequences of resuming these failed man-centered solutions that ran counter the Christian faith (see Heb 2:1-4; 3:12-15; 4:11-13; 5:11-6:6; 10:26-39; 12:25-29). From laying a theologically rich foundation of the Christian faith,

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[1] All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

the inspired writer pivots in chapter 11 to address what is required to faithfully live out the spiritual truths presented. After presenting specific examples of those who have faithfully walked in faith, the chapter 12 opens with an emphatic exhortation to "let us run with endurance" (vv. 1-2) the race that lies before every believer. The exhortation begins with instructions to lay aside the weight that interferes with the successful running of the race. These enslaving sins will be addressed in this section of the chapter. Sin is complex and, as Jeremy Pierre notes, it is not simplistic. Pierre explains,

> The biblical writers were never simplistic about sin. Sin is not just doing something, but a comprehensive corruption of being. Out of that corrupt nature flow all kinds of sinful dynamics. As John Frame describes, "The Fall was not essentially a derangement of faculties within man. It was rebellion of the whole person—intellect as much as emotions, perception, and will—against God. My problem is not something within me; it is me.[2]

One of the two direct objects of this passage deals with the subject of habitual sin that ensnares a believer (the other is the weight that impedes the running of the race). The writer uses the Greek adjective εὐπερίστατον, which basically means "be-setting, which points specifically to the nature of the sin in question. This unusual word, used only here in the New Testament, is a compound word that takes its meaning from the context of the sentence in which it is used. The constituents that make-up εὐπερίστατον are widely used in the New Testament with its cognates used over forty times.[3] For instance, the apostle Paul in his second letter to his protegee Timothy, challenging him to serve as a good soldier, warns him to not become entangled in pursuits that would detract him from accomplishing his goal (2 Tim 2:4).

Frank Beare, writing in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, writes that εὐπερίστατον portrays vividly the concept of avoiding distraction when participating in a race:

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[2] Jeremy Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2016), 57.

[3] B. M. Metzer, *The Letter to The Hebrews A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/German Bible Society, 1994), 178.

Taken actively, it would have the sense of "easily distracting, or diverting from the course," and would thus maintain with the greatest vividness the figure of the race. Sin is described as "easily distracting us," drawing us aside from the course that is set for our feet, as Atalante was distracted by the golden apples; causing us to look away, when we should be "looking unto Jesus".[4]

William Lane, noted author and theologian, references Beare's understanding of the singular use as possibly a scribal error, which does not detract from the exhortation to avoid becoming "distracted or diverted from the course, which is entirely appropriate to the metaphor of the race."[5] In Frederick Danker's lexicon for the New Testament, he includes the meaning of "easily ensnaring" for εὐπερίστατον.[6]

Adam Clarke provides additional context for understanding the meaning of εὐπερίστατον:

> [D]erived from ευ, "well," περι, "about", and ἱστημι, "I stand"; the sin that stands well, or is favorably situated, ever surrounding the person and soliciting his acquiescence. What we term the easily besetting sin is the sin of our constitution, the sin of our trade, that in which our worldly honor, secular profit, and sensual gratification are most frequently felt and consulted. Some understand it of original sin, as that by which we are enveloped in body, soul, and spirit.[7]

There exists the need to challenge the runner specifically to identify and strip away any incumbrance that clings closely or envelopes the total person. This illustration points to the effort required to strip away these types of sin. It is wise to recognize that enslaving sins begin simply as "sin." In that regard, stripping away all sin is a worthwhile objective for any believer. God abhors sin, and as noted Pastor and Theologian John MacArthur describes in detail, sin is a significant barrier to effectively running the race of holiness:

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[4] Frank W. Beare, "The Text of the Epistle to the Hebrew in P46," *The Journal of Biblical Literature* 63, no. 4 (1944): 390-91.

[5] William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9 -13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47B (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 398.

[6] Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 410.

[7] Adam Clarke, *Clarke on Hebrews: Adam Clarke's Bible Commentary* (Laughlin, NV: GraceWorks, 2015), 219.

An even more significant hindrance to Christian living is sin. Obviously, all sin is a hindrance to Christian living, and the reference here may be to sin in general. But use of the definite article (the sin) seems to indicate a particular sin. And if there is one particular sin that hinders the race of faith it is unbelief, doubting God. Doubting and living in faith contradict each other. Unbelief entangles the Christian's feet so that he cannot run.[8]

Also in this passage is the use of the hortatory subjunction τρέχωμεν, translated "let us run," which is significant.[9] It is not a given that believers will successfully run the race to lay aside any sin, or group of sin(s) that may cause them to stumble—the implication is that they very well may not. The exhortation employed in this verse falls short of a disqualification from the faith, although there is no indication that the failure to run well has no impact on the believer's witness. It does. In addition, there is a clear expectation that believers are capable of addressing enslaving sins successfully.[10] Although there is no guarantee that the goal will be achieved, there is certainly a clear expectation that the required effort will be exerted to achieve the desired results.

Scripture clearly supports the premise that God expects his people to recognize that the practice of self-control is required to successfully battle enslaving, or habitual, sins. By definition, these sins severely inhibit a believer's ability to walk faithfully with Christ. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, believers must work with renewed eyes to see their responsibility to recognize areas that are especially detrimental to their walk in Christ. All sins impact believers, but the damage conveyed through habitual, enslaving sin, is particularly severe. Believers are admonished to deal directly with habitual sins as evidence of their submission to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Of all the things that sin is, it is infidelity against God, and it arises from within the person.

The nature of sin fuels disloyalty, and habitual enslaving sin in particular highlights the degree to which people, including believers, will steal the worship that God

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[8] John MacArthur, *Hebrews*, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1998), 377.

[9] A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), 931.

[10] See Heb 11 for a list of believers, who in spite of severe trails, ran faithfully.

alone deserves and give it to another. The inspired writer of Hebrews employs several analogies and metaphors to convey the nature of these habitual sins. A key analogy is drawn from the prominence that athletic competition held across the ancient world, just as it continues to hold in contemporary culture. In particular, the concept of running a race with the specific objective of running in such a way as to ensure success, is a well-used analogy among New Testament writers. The apostle Paul also uses the model of an athletic race to establish the objective of obtaining the prize as the object of entering the event (1 Cor 9:24). The key issue is that to run a successful, competitive race, any article of incumbrance that would weigh the competitor down must be stripped away.

The action that establishes the tone for the phrase is ἀποθέμενοι, another compound word that means to "lay aside."[11] The implication is obvious: only that which is negative should be laid aside. The structure of Hebrews 12:1-2 has one main point (the imperative clause) followed by three sub-points explaining how to fulfill the exhortation to run the race with the objective to win the reward. Obstacles, or weights, impede the path to victor. Paul Ellingworth cites that the scope of ὄγκον includes anything that would impede the performance of the race runner. Expanding the analogy of an athlete stripping himself of clothing that would prevent running the race well, Ellingworth expounds that the scope of the weights includes "every burden, that is, essentially, sin."[12]

The writer of Hebrews also indicates that it is easy for the athlete to become entangled with the sin. Ellington notes that this is the essence of the meaning of the phrase "καὶ τὴν εὐπερίστατον ἁμαρτίαν," that is, the sin that easily entangles or clings so closely.[13] Likewise, Arthur Pink, noted biblical theologian, addresses the nature of these

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[11] Dennis E. Johnson, *Hebrews*, in vol. 12 of *ESV Expository Commentary*, ed. Iain Duguid, James Hamilton, and Jay Sklar (Wheaton IL: Crossway, 2018), 184.

[12] Paul Ellington, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 638.

[13] Ellington, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 638.

obstacles and offers the following observation concerning the enticement of these sins that pervert God's intended purpose:

> By "weights," then, may be understood every form of intemperance or the immoderate and hurtful use made of any of those things which God has given us "richly to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17). Yes, to "enjoy" be it noted, and not only to use. The Creator has placed many things in this world—like the beautiful flowers and the singing birds—for our pleasure, as well as for the bare supply of our bodily needs.[14]

The response to stand firm in Christ is precipitated by the exhortation to diligently press on to spiritual maturity, even to the point of the shedding of blood (Heb 12:3-6). The epistle closes with a clear outline of what maturity entails, highlighted by the call to understand sin and the many areas it impacts. John MacArthur provides clarity by pointing to the nature of a race as "not a thing of passive luxury, but is demanding, something grueling and agonizing, and requires our utmost in self-disciple, determination, and perseverance."[15] Jesus Christ, as the greatest example of one who exhibited the greatest level of self-control in the face of overwhelming difficulty, establishes the standard for all believers to aspire to achieve in resisting temptation. Dennis Johnson notes that the author is "about to urge his hearers to endure painful suffering in anticipation of its future fruit (12:11). Jesus shows them how and why."[16] Indeed, as Jesus joyfully endured the shame of dying on the cross, believers are admonished to endure the suffering of resisting enslaving sin to accomplish the goal of serving Christ.

Returning to the athletic analogy, creating habit is one of the defining goals for those aspiring to ingrain deeply into their routine, automatic, repetitive practices, that are critical in achieving the objective to claim the ultimate prize of their sport—to win the game. Repetition of basic skills on a daily basis is the foundation of the training regimen to transform performance from the obvious to the ingrained. These habitual practices

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[14] Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of Hebrews* (New York: Prisbrary, 2012), 1031.

[15] MacArthur, *Hebrews,* 372-73.

[16] Johnson, *Hebrews*, 185.

become second nature. When enslaving sins take on this characteristic, the results are devastating.

At a certain level all sin is dysfunctional, and habitual sin in particular is dysfunction that rises to the level of enslavement. This is to say that not every sin has the same degree of impact as all other sins. The entanglement of sin and habit is complex and difficult to dissect. This may be related to the fact that sin produces enslaving habits and enslaving habits promote sin.

The issue of habitual sin would naturally open up a discussion of whether the Bible addresses different degrees, or types, of sin. Wayne Grudem adeptly decries, "Sin is directly opposite to all that is good in the character of God, and just as God necessarily and eternally delights in himself and in all that he is, so God necessarily and eternally hates sin."[17] It is readily acknowledged that any sin, regardless of impact, is deserving of eternal punishment from God if not dealt with according to Scripture (Jas 2:10). All sin is first of all against God and must be properly adjudicated (Ps 51:4). Before Holy God, the nature of sin, no matter how "large" or "small," will be addressed with the supreme justice that is a defining attribute of the Almighty.

It is important to consider not just the sin itself, but also the degree to which the sin controls the sinner. Two sinners may fall to the sin of drunkenness, requiring confession and repentance from both. However, for one of the two, drunkenness may result from a singular event that may never occur again. While for the other, drunkenness may represent a constant source of repeated sin that has taken residence deep in their idolatrous heart. This level of sin would fall into the category of habitual sin that represents an on-going obstacle to spiritual freedom for the individual.

Scripture also speaks of degrees of sin, depending upon various factors such as context, intention, the person committing the sin, and the sin's overall effects. Consider

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[17] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 492.

Jesus' scathing words of condemnation before Pontius Pilate concerning the Pharisees having committed the "greater sin" (John 19:11). The underlying issue in this case was their rejection of God's truth even though they were completely aware of it (see Luke 12). God's divine justice demands that if a person commits twice as many sins as another person, the punishment is meted out accordingly (it is noted that this same logic applies to rewards as well). Noted theologian R. C. Sproul emphatically presents this implication:

> Why is it important for us to emphasize this point? Many times I've talked to men who struggle with lust and they say to themselves or to me, "I might as well go ahead and commit adultery because I'm already guilty of lust. I can't be in any worse shape in the sight of God, so I might as well finish the deed." I always answer, "Oh yes, you can be in much worse shape." The judgment of actual adultery will be much more severe than the judgment upon lust. God will deal with us at that level, and it's a foolish thing for a person who has committed a misdemeanor, to therefore say, "I'm already guilty; I might as well make it a felony." God forbid that we should think like that.[18]

Sproul's helpful illustration highlights a critical aspect of the nature of sin, which is the unwarranted attraction it has for humanity. From the very beginning God warned that the penalty for sin would be death (Gen 2:17). Throughout human history, this truth has led to the complete disruption of all that God has intended for good. Grudem sums it up by indicating that "all sin is ultimately irrational."[19] The irrationality of sin is truly an insightful characterization. All sin, regardless of its degree, shares this underlying characteristic.

Briefly, it is also helpful to consider the idea of the unpardonable sin addressed in the New Testament (Matt 12:24-32; Luke 12:10; Heb 6:4-6; 10:26-31; 1 John 5:16). What appears to link these passages together is the denial of the work of Christ in a complete and total way—given there is no way of salvation outside of him—resulting in a final judgement of eternal condemnation due to rejecting grace. Clinging to habitual

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[18] R. C. Sproul, *How Can I Develop a Christian Conscience* (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust, 2013), 56-57.

[19] Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 493.

sins is a devastating reality that should not be regarded lightly; however, it is not the unpardonable sin.

However, the on-going presence of a habitual sin may indicate a level of deprivation that points to evidence that a person has indeed rejected Christ. Clinging to habitual sin is clear evidence that a serious disconnect is rooted in a person's heart. Scripture is clear that the on-going practice of fleshly desires is a stern warning that the people who habitually do these things will not inherit the kingdom of God. These habitual sins evolve into an enslaving reality that is an expression of ungodly worship. Pierre writes concerning the state of an addict's enslavement to sin:

> This is true of the nakedly apparent forms of addiction, like alcohol and drugs, which involve certain chemical dependencies that are physically observable. But this process of habituation occurs in all sorts of pursuits, whether they would graduate to the level of addiction or not. The habits people form in their self-worship make them less aware of the beliefs, values, and commitments that lead them in the direction of a particular idol. Just like alcoholics are often unaware of why they desire alcohol so much, so are people obsessed with checking social media or eating late at night or playing video games for hours a day. The idol has become a fixation, and people become less aware of what they think the idol is doing for them.[20]

In place of genuine God worship, addicts serve themselves by sinning. It is a disturbing but very real indication of how enslaving sins cause a person's life to spiral further and further into darkness. To effectively address enslaving sin, believers must develop appropriate strategies—both offensively and defensively—to overcome the struggles these sins present. One of the most amazing changes resulting from salvation is the on-going work of the Holy Spirit to transform the character of a believer to become more Christ-like (2 Cor 3:18). The process of progressive sanctification is fueled by the reality that God has made available to the believer everything required to achieve this new reality regardless of the lingering effects of sin that is a persistent barrier to accomplishing the goal. The process of transformation results in real, evidential, signs of

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[20] Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life*, 62.

change that flow out of the internal heart change superintended by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the heart of every believer.

It is important to interject that a genuine believer may indeed struggle with habitual sin that may result in a failure to resist the temptation. However, due to the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit, a believer is motivated by godly sorrow to offer genuine repentance and forgiveness, which ultimately leads to reconciliation (see 2 Cor 7:9, 10; Heb 12:15-17). Conversely, worldly sorrow may represent a real sense of regret but falls short of the motivation required for lasting change. The desire to flee from sin because it is an affront to God is a defining difference between a believer and unbeliever. Falling to sin is common to all humanity. Hating sin because it displeases God is unique only to sinners who have been born again.

King Solomon provides the wisdom that declares there is a way which may seem right to a man, but it ends in destruction and death (Prov 14:12). The way Solomon describes is a path that ignores the faithful testimony of God and instead replaces it with wisdom from within. Earlier in the wisdom literature, the folly of the unwise nature of trusting in human wisdom rather than the knowledge provided by the hand of God is clearly described (Prov 3:5-6). God, who provides wisdom freely to any of his followers who ask (Jas 1:3), has provided a pathway toward developing and exercising self-control. Key steps that fall within this understanding include practice of self-control; accepting the personal accountability for the lack of self-control; and exercising self-control through self-discipline and self-denial.

Practicing Self-Control (1 Cor 9:24-27)

The New Testament places a high premium on the virtue of self-control that flows out of a heart rightly motivated to please God. For as God shared with the Prophet Samuel, the intent of the heart is what he sees (1 Sam 16:78). Although the objective of biblical self-control is manifested through thoughts and deeds, the practice begins with the inward condition of the heart. The Greek word group for self-control, "egkatés"

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(ἐγκρατής), hinges on the concept of literally being able to master from within (Titus 1:8).[21] In its multiple usages found throughout the New Testament, this admonition is used in various situations that demand personal accountability, empowered through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, to master sin and its evil manifestations. Anthony Thiselton expounds on the importance of exercising the highest level of control over oneself, regardless of struggle facing a follower of Christ. Thiselton writes,

> Paul explicates why he treats his day-to-day life as a whole roughly in terms of rendering it a slave (δουλαγωγῶ), i.e., to make it strictly serve my purposes, bring it under strict control, NJB, RED; enslave it, NRSV. The whole of life is at issue, including not simply the body's desire to eat meat or to enjoy feasts but wholesale attitudes towards other which determine day-to-day practical stances and conduct which affects others as well as the Christian believer who needs to exercise self-control for their sake. The whole of everyday life must be held captive to the purposes of the gospel.[22]

Thiselton's treatment of the concept of self-control is broad, extending well beyond the impact of life-dominating sins to control every aspect of life. Certainly, mastery over a specific sin is enhanced if mastery over sin in general becomes the object of running the race well. It is helpful for Thiselton to close out his treatment of 1 Corinthians 9:27 by indicating that failure in this regard does not imply disqualification from salvation: "The test reveals failure of an unspecified nature, not utter rejection."[23] Spiritual self-control is a virtue to be cultivated, not a requirement for salvation.

The apostle Peter, in his listing of virtues of victorious Christian living, includes self-control as a necessary spiritual attribute that must be a part of the maturation process of every believer. The apostle Paul uses *egkatés* to frame his discussion on the importance of self-control in 1 Corinthians 9. As noted by David Garland concerning the apostle's emphasis on the issue, "the key is self-control (ἐγκρατεύεται, *enkrateuetai*).

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[21] Gerhard Kittle, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 2:339.

[22] Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 716.

[23] Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 717.

Every reader knew that winning a race or a boxing match required of the athlete hard training."[24]

The essence of mastering self-control, though rooted deeply in the heart, is not achievable without the aid of the Holy Spirit. For the believer, this mystery flows out of the power of Holy Spirit; hence, it is attributed as an aspect of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:23). The combination of internal resolve, fueled by the power of the Holy Spirit, enables the believer to achieve the defining attribute of the Greek word *egkatés*, which is defined as the "power or lordship which one has either over oneself or over something."[25] Personal intentions and choices are volitional, which result in accountability that flows out of the proper motivation to please the Lord. The importance of self-control cannot be understated. Behavior ultimately reveals the essence of who a person is, what they value, how they think, and finally, what they do. Driving this truth home for the believer struggling with enslaving sin is an essential pursuit for the biblical counselor.

Even in exercising personal emotions, there is no option for the believer in regard to choosing to do what honors the Lord, because human emotions have been inexorably damaged by the effect of sin. When these desires and values lead to behavior that dishonors God, genuine believers must address what is ruling in their hearts. The desires must be mastered and controlled, ruled over, so that the outward behavior is lorded over, because at their roots, emotions are the expressions of desires. The contest to overcome these struggles seems rigged against the person struggling with sin, and giving up seems the best and only option for many.

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[24] David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 611.

[25] Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), s.v. "egkatés."

Self-Control via Self-Discipline

The nature of self-control rests upon the combined effort of the individual and the Holy Spirit. The space that operates between obedience and individual accountability is that of self-discipline. Millard Erickson notes,

> It is the Spirit who is at work in the believer, bringing about likeness to Christ. One might conclude from the preceding that sanctification is completely a passive matter on the believer's part. This is not so, however. While sanctification is exclusively of God, that is, its power rests entirely on his holiness, the believer is constantly exhorted to work and to grow in the matters pertaining to salvation. For example, Paul writes to the Philippians: "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil. 2:12, 13).[26]

Self-discipline takes what has been enabled by faith and translates it into works that reflect obedience to the Holy Spirit. Believers are exhorted to walk according to the Spirit and to live by the Spirit so that the sinful nature is not gratified (Gal 5:16). It is clear in Scripture that the ability to progress in holiness is intrinsically linked to the empowerment that only comes from the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:4, 9, 13, 14). However, as Erickson has noted, there is a critical role that the believer does, and must, play in the practice of self-control. He sums this imperative up well: "So while sanctification is God's work, the believer has a role as well, entailing both removal of sinfulness and development of holiness."[27]

Greg Gifford, in his book on how change occurs, insightfully writes, "Only by the work of the Holy Spirit can the Christian work. Yet the Christian still works."[28] By living in the Spirit, as Gifford writes, Christians have available to them all the resources required to resist the desires of the flesh and achieve on-going change. The struggle to live self-disciplined lives is not overcome through a passive attitude that denies the reality that genuine effort is required of the believer. Gifford is very clear in this regard:

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[26] Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 983.

[27] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 983.

[28] Greg Gifford, *Heart & Habits: How We Change for Good* (Monee, India: Kress Biblical Resources, 2021), 42.

"The Holy Spirit doesn't use your non-effort to transform you—he uses your effort. He works through your effort."[29]

The apostle Paul has this struggle in view as he reflected upon what Bromiley describes as "the physical mistreatment he has received, the scars this has left on his body, the hardships to which his body is constantly exposed, and the results of these."[30] Paul employs the word ὑπωπιάζω—the denominative verb of *upopion*—which means the "part of the face under the eyes" (see 1 Cor 9:27; also used by Jesus in Luke 18:5 to describe the parable of the persistent widow).[31] Paul is speaking to the degree by which one is willing to disfigure one's own body to stay in the battle with the intent of emerging victorious. Knowing that one is to remain under control, actually be in "control" is an expression of self-control translated into self-discipline.

In reality, the practice of self-discipline is complex. For instance, I intended to work to complete my paper and have cleared my schedule to accomplish that goal. However, as I sit down to write, I fall asleep in an almost uncontrollable fashion. I waken from my unplanned slumber, frustrated and disappointed that I could not stay awake even one hour. I grapple with understanding why this occurs. It has been a pattern that I have noticed in the past, but this time I have taken all the pre-cautions to avoid what has contributed to my falling short of achieving my desired goal in the past. Yet, once again, I find myself victim to my physical desire. Unfortunately, at times even a punch under the eye is often not enough to avoid the lure of the flesh.

The key solution is the mortification of the flesh through the power of the Spirit and the "power which vanquishes the body is thus the Spirit. This and the passages cited makes it plain that the reference is not so much to an 'ὑπωπιάζω' practiced by the

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[29] Gifford, *Heart & Habits*, 42.

[30] Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "ἀποκαλύπτω."

[31] Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "ἀποκαλύπτω."

Apostle as to chastisements which God lays upon him and their willing acceptance."[32] If an athlete is so dedicated to go to whatever extremes are required to procure a temporal prize esteemed by mere mortals, then how much more should a believer, whose focus is on an eternal reward, strive to overcome the desires of the flesh that seek to hinder their progress. B. J. Oropeza captures this sentiment exactly: "The boxer's training is described by Seneca as torture—as athletes punish their bodies to win a garland, so one should do the same to gain virtue, peace, and steadfastness of soul."[33] John MacArthur frames the issue in this light:

> A considerable part of that fight was against Paul's own body. I buffet my body and make it my slave. Buffet (*hupopiazo*) literally means to hit under the eye. He figuratively would give his body a black eye, knock it out if necessary. Make it my slave (*doulagogeo*) is from the same root as "made . . . a slave" in verse 19. Paul put his body into subjection, into slavery to his mission of winning souls for Christ.[34]

Enslaving sins must be controlled through the practice of self-discipline. The writer of Hebrews certainly has this intense struggle in mind when writing the command to lay aside the weight that prevents one's obtainment of the prize. Inherent to the exhortation is also the means. When considering the background of this prescription, A. W. Pink elaborates that a progression of effort is worthy of consideration. Specifically, he writes,

> But let us now consider, secondly, the means prescribed: "let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us." That might be tersely expressed in several different forms: let us relinquish those things which would impede our spiritual progress; let us endeavor with might and main to overcome every hindering obstacle; let us attend diligently unto the way or method which will enable us to make the best speed.[35]

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[32] Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "ὑπωπιάζω."

[33] B. J. Oropeza, *1 Corinthians*, New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 124.

[34] John MacArthur, *I Corinthians*, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 215.

[35] Pink, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 1029.

If the mastery of self-control was easy, then the subject would not occupy such a prominent position in the text of Scripture. At some level, every believer is taxed to master the desires of the flesh that impede achieving the goal of mastering self-control.

Self-Control via Self-Denial

Self-discipline may be considered the positive exertion of self-control; the idea of doing what is required to master the desires of the flesh. Conversely, self-denial is the mastering of denying the flesh what it desires. Again, the apostle Paul is the vessel the Holy Spirit uses to provide insight into the requirement to deny the lure of the flesh. Referencing his writing in the 1 Corinthians 7, Paul used ἐγκρατεύομαι to address athletes preparing themselves for games by abstaining from unwholesome food, wine, and sexual indulgence; and οὐκ ἐγκρατεύεσθαι, said of those who cannot curb sexual desire (1 Cor 7:9). In addition, the depth of the meaning of ἐγκρατεύομαι includes keeping one's emotions, impulses, or desires under control, control oneself, abstain.[36] Oropeza illustrates this self-denial well in writing that Paul instructs that to win a believer must "train by punishing his body with blows of self-imposed discipline in order to subjugate it into obedience that it might be fit for the contest. In essence, he enslaves his own body so that his bodily appetites and sinful nature do not enslave him."[37] Pink expands this explanation and includes the key linkage back to the idea of weights that encumber the one running the race:

> In other words, this exhortation is a calling upon the Christian to "mortify the deeds of the body" (Rom. 8:13), to "abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul" (1 Pet. 2:11). There are two things which racers discard: all unnecessary burdens, and long flowing garments which would entangle them. Probably there is a reference to both of these in our text: the former being considered under "weights," or those things we voluntarily encumber ourselves with, but which should be dropped; the latter, "the sin which doth so easily beset us" referring to inward depravity.[38]

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[36] Pink, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 274.

[37] Oropeza, *1 Corinthians*, 125.

[38] Pink, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 1030.

It is important to appreciate the general understanding of this concept in the ancient world; its impact remains even in contemporary culture. Mark Taylor writes, "The athletic metaphor was widespread among philosophers in the ancient world and would have been especially relevant to Paul's audience since Corinth hosted the biennial Isthmian games, which was second only to the famed Olympic games."[39]

The path forward to overcoming enslaving sins lies within the maturation of the virtue of self-control. To foster this growth, the exercise of self-discipline and self-denial is required. The discipline to do what is demanded, and then to deny the lure of vice, are the twin towers that anchor the resolve to lay aside the sin and run with endurance the race. Again, it is prudent to recognize the relatability of the athletic analogy to highlight this struggle and the process necessary to overcome sin's lure. MacArthur uses the athletic parallel well to describe the struggle that plagues so many:

> Most people, including many Christians, are instead slaves to their bodies. Their bodies tell their minds what to do. Their bodies decide when to eat, what to eat, how much to eat, when to sleep and get up, and so on. An athlete cannot allow that. He follows the training rules, not his body. He runs when he would rather be resting, he eats a balanced meal when he would rather have a chocolate sundae, he goes to bed when he would rather stay up, and he gets up early to train when he would rather stay in bed. An athlete leads his body he does not follow it. It is his slave, not the other way around.[40]

Yet, even the commitment of a trained athlete pales in comparison to the empowerment even the youngest believer inherently has due to the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is a failing of contemporary Christianity to neglect the power of teaching this truth to all believers, regardless of their level of spiritual maturity.

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[39] Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, The New American Commentary, vol. 28 (Nashville: B & H, 2014), 222.

[40] MacArthur, *I Corinthians*, 215.

Escaping the Temptation of Enslaving Sins
(1 Cor 10:13-14)

Through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and the promise from God that a means of escape is available to the believer in every circumstance, shedding enslaving sins is not a fleeting fancy, but a present reality (1 Cor 10:14). Overcoming enslaving sins is ultimately not the goal for the believer. The overarching objective is Christlikeness. With perfect self-discipline and self-denial, Jesus modeled once and for all the resolve required to resist temptation any and all temptations common to humanity.

The apostle lays out the promise from God that clearly removes any and all reasons that would provide a defensible position for a believer to remain enslaved to sin in 1 Corinthians 10:13. First is the declaration that no temptation is so unique that some other believer has not addressed it in a God pleasing manner. As the writer of Hebrews declares, we are surrounded by faithful witnesses who have gained victory over all manner of sin (12:1). Continuing with the argument concerning God's provision, no believer is ever tempted beyond what the Lord knows is beyond his ability to bare (1 Cor 10:13).

Finally, the argument reaches its zenith with the promise from God that he will provide the means of escape so that the believer is able to stand up under sin's onslaught. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* notes that in regard to any temptation the believer faces, "God is right there with us to keep us from being overwhelmed by the temptation. He will provide a way out, not in order to avoid the temptation, but to meet it successfully and to stand firm under it."[41] This biblical principle removes all excuses to falling short of resisting the temptation posed by enslaving sin. God has provided the means of endurance that is binding for the believer.

Paul uses the word "ὑποφέρω," which means to endure. The word originates from a rich word group based on the verb "φέρω" (*pheró*). Among its various meanings, *pheró* conveys the idea of being able to endure and is defined as the "power with which,

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[41] W. Harold Mare, *1 Corinthians*, in vol. 2 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: New Testament*, ed Kenneth Barker and John Kohenberger, abridged ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 635.

in defiance of all resistance, the rule of God achieves fulfilment."[42] Jesus uses this word

to describe the work of a vine dresser to prune the branch that it may bare much fruit. God

does not promise the believer a life of freedom from sin. However, the clear expectation

is that the believer is equipped with the ability to emerge victorious from the battle with

sin.

Again, self-denial is a critical aspect of achieving victory over sin. Denying the

flesh is an elusive struggle that claims those even with the strongest of resolve. Though,

the solution is common to all, and as the Bible presents throughout, it begins in the inner

man. It is a battle for the mind. This observation is even held in high esteem in the self-

help movement. A pioneer in those circles, James Allen, assents that the "body is the

servant of the mind. It obeys the operations of the mind, whether they be deliberately

chosen or automatically expressed."[43] Enslaving behavior becomes habitual, which further

adds to the resilience of sin to labor against righteousness. The Bible requires both a

habitual commitment to "putting off" sin and to the steadfast commitment of "putting on"

righteousness (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:5-15). The exhortation is to allow the Word of God to

richly have its affect upon the mind which results in renewal (Col 3:6; Rom 12:1-2; Eph

4:23).

Jay Adams, an influential leader in the establishment of biblical counseling as

an esteemed practice, is noted for his work on the formation of *habit*. Adams defines habit

as "the capacity to learn to respond unconsciously, automatically and comfortability" in

regard to understanding human behavior.[44] Adams' foundational work has undergone

considerable revision to further define the topic of habit and indeed many have benefited

from his early work in this regard. The additional work concentrated on the rehabilitation

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[42] Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "φέρω."

[43] James Allen, *As a Man Thinketh* (Shippensburg, PA: Sound Wisdom, 2019), 11.

[44] Jay Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 161.

of habit through a focus on motivation. Biblical counselors such as George Schwab, Brian Mesimer and Ed Welch have provided great insight into this area, thereby improving upon Adams' founding work and replacing it where needed. Concerning reforming habituation, Mesimer writes, "Habituation is an acceptable practice when joined with proper motivation and God-glorifying goals."[45] Mesimer presents the benefits of a two-prong attack in the battle against enslaving sin that focuses on "both the spiritual motivations and habitual processes of human life. This process focuses simultaneously on repeated practices and heart conditions."[46] Incorporating the important factor of motivation, with the cultivation of self-discipline, is best accomplished in the environment of the renewed mind of the believer.

Freeing the body begins with renewing the mind through the truth of Scripture (Rom 12:2). Unbelievers are handicapped due to not having the ability to tap into the power of the Holy Spirit. Even when change is achieved by an unbeliever it only partially effective—at best a 90-degree turn—which falls short of true freedom that is available only in Christ. However, as devastating as it is to witness the destructive impact addiction and other enslaving behaviors have on the unredeemed, it is an even more tragic occurrence when spiritually empowered believers are unable to master enslaving sin. Beyond even the personal destruction experienced by the fall into enslaving sin, is the multiplied negative impact experienced by family, community, and society at large. If there is validity to the concept that we are what we do, then the inability of believers to master enslaving sins undermines the testimony that being in Christ enables one to do all things because of the strength that this relationship provides.

Returning to the insight of James Allen,

> In the light of this truth, what, then, is the meaning of "fighting against circumstances?" It means that a man is continually revolting against an effect without,

[45] Brian Mesimer, "Rehabilitating Habituation," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 34, no. 2 (2020): 63.

[46] Mesimer, "Rehabilitating Habituation," 73.

while all the time he is nourishing and preserving its cause in his heart. That cause may take the form of a conscious vice or an unconscious weakness; but whatever it is, it stubbornly retards the efforts of its possessor, and thus calls aloud for remedy. Men are anxious to improve their circumstances, but are unwilling to improve themselves; they therefore remain bound. The man who does not shrink from self-crucifixion can never fail to accomplish the object upon which his heart is set. This is as true of earthly as of heavenly things. Even the man whose sole object is to acquire wealth must be prepared to make great personal sacrifices before he can accomplish his object; and how much more so he who would realize a strong and well-poised life?[47]

Desiring Self-Control

Through the inspired scripture presented in the Bible, God has made known to his people all that is right and pleasing to him. This revelation has been given to redeemed humanity to guide them in all things that represent godliness (2 Pet 1:3). Therefore, biblical truth must anchor any effort to address what deviates from acceptable actions, and concurrently, provide the foundation to establish the basis required to grow in holiness. The practice of biblical self-control finds its root in this understanding. The goal of the redeemed heart is to desire to do what is pleasing to God (2 Cor 5:9; Col 1:9-10). It is not a simple task. The apostle Paul laments greatly his personal failings of choosing to pursue unrighteousness instead of doing what was right. The foundation of this struggle is a break-down in self-control. Paul's reality is just one of many examples throughout the biblical record that demonstrates the importance of self-control.

Without a solid anchor in the virtue of self-control, the consistent practice of every other aspect of spiritual fruitfulness is potentially placed in jeopardy. Desiring self-control must be viewed as a premium by all believers. John Calvin declared, "We are not our own; therefore, let us not make it our end to seek what may be agreeable to our carnal nature."[48] The lingering impact of sin in the heart of a believer remains capable of inciting the flesh to embrace the lure of carnality over the virtue of obedience to Christ. Embracing sin's lure is the defining fruit of a breakdown in self-control. Calvin understood clearly

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[47] Allen, *As a Man Thinketh*, 5-6.

[48] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 449.

that the motivation for this choice results from the conscious decision that reflects desire. The great Reformer would further expound on this truth, declaring that the believer has been provided with the wisdom needed to live and die for Christ through the provision of God—contrary to the inherent pull of self-centered desires that erode the believer's energy to serve God.

The war against sin is the battle for the soul. The war finds its locus first in the heart, or soul, which represents the immaterial aspect of what makes human beings living and breathing creatures. Driven by desires, thoughts, and the will, each of which is birthed in the heart, the war is quickly transported to the body—the material aspect of who we are—where heart motivations lead to desires and desires are translated into concrete actions that impact the total person. If left unchecked, the cycle once initiated intensifies into an on-going struggle for dominance that at times seems to be a type of musical chairs where whatever is closest to the "chair of the heart" gets to sit in it. At that point it becomes almost irrelevant what is leading, because the result that ensues is an ever-increasing obedience to enslaving sin that drives the person into an out-of-control spiral leading to further darkness and despair. The only remedy for this lack of self-control is the freeing power of "control over self" that comes through re-establishing Jesus' rightful place on the throne of the heart. Strong scriptural support exists to demonstrate that followers of Christ are able to deal effectively with the consequences of enslaving sin through spirit empowered self-control.

Exercising self-control reflects the capacity to actively choose to think and act in a manner that pleases God and conforms to his will. Conversely, an inability to consistently resist sin demonstrates a lack of self-control. The desire to sin is anchored deep in the being of fallen humanity. Theologians have developed a helpful concept to speak of the damaging impact of sin on humanity under the rubric of the "noetic effect of sin." Simply put, the damaging effect of sin is seen in everything a person does, including how they think. "Sin impacts how our minds work," is how noted biblical counselor Heath

Lambert succinctly describes the scope of the noetic effect. Lambert goes on to explain, "Because of our sinfulness, we do not think as we should."[49] This explanation adds to the understanding that sin's effect on humanity results in the fundamental incapacity to reason in a manner acceptable to God. Lambert is correct in concluding that the noetic effect has a devastating impact that fosters a lifetime struggle to stand against sin. Likewise, Alvin Plantinga captures the struggle broadly with the following insight:

> First, it adds that we human beings have fallen into sin, a calamitous condition from which we require salvation—a salvation we are unable to accomplish by our own efforts. This sin alienates us from God and makes us unfit for communion with him. Our fall into sin has had cataclysmic consequences, both affective and cognitive. As to affective consequences, our affections—our loves and hates—are skewed, and our hearts now harbor deep and radical evil: we don't love God above all; instead, we love ourselves above all.[50]

The ability to desire what God esteems is the dynamic which strikes at the heart of the struggle for self-control. It is a personal battle that is a central focus of what it means to grow in Christlikeness. Inevitably, Almighty God, who is able to accomplish all things according to his will, permits people to make decisions that reflect genuine choices. David Powlison highlights this reality by declaring, "God does not anesthetize us; he redirects our desires."[51] God is sovereign over desires, however, rather than mandating change at times, God sometimes chooses to facilitate change that aligns with godly motivation. As Powlison notes, God is at work to help us change what we desire so that we delight in what he has decreed to be godly.

The goal of self-control is to accept or act upon whatever pleases God and to reject or defeat whatever does not. This struggle boils down to a matter of desire. In the universe of fallen humanity, desire is the common enabler for all sin. The ultimate

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[49] Heath Lambert, *A Biblical Theology of Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 222.

[50] Alvin Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 47.

[51] David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 159.

objective of self-control is to increase the ability to rule over desire. Desiring self-control must become the focus of a believer's mindset over the empty promise that sin offers.

Recognizing the struggle to control desire is a matter of spiritual maturity that only comes through hard synergistic work. If this work is not pursued successfully, then desire will flourish and become a dominating force that will consume a person. Unchecked, simple desire morphs into out-of-control inordinate affection. This affection leads to an ever-increasing level of bondage, and it is this bondage that separates habitual sin from other sins that do not cling as closely.

The transition from desiring sin to exhibiting self-control is difficult and challenging. Sin is a fierce competitor that is reluctant to give up the entrenched territory claimed in the heart of all humanity, including redeemed believers. One of the ways sin becomes so entrenched is because it is born and nurtured from within. These internal inordinate affections become the catalyst of self-love, which is readily encouraged by the forces of evil. The alignment of external behavior with internal desires combine to facilitate a spiral into darkness that instigates a shift further into the bondage of darkness and away from the freedom found in Christ. James Smith describes, "There is a resonance between the telos to which we are oriented and the longings and desires that propel us in that direction—like the magnetic power of the pole working on the existential needle of our hearts. You are what you love because you live toward what you want."[52] This assessment is helpful because of the emphasis it places on the nature of the desire that pulls the heart away from God. Smith looks to Church Father Augustine, who provided poignant insight into the directional pull of desire: "My weight is my love," he says. 'Wherever I am carried, my love is carrying me.' Our orienting loves are like a kind of gravity—carrying us in the direction to which they are weighted."[53]

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[52] James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 12-13.

[53] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 14.

As previously stated, the fight for self-control over desire is no small task. The struggle harkens back to the broader topic of humanity's fundamental inability to resolve sin's curse in a manner acceptable to God. Recognizing the futility of man's effort in this regard underscores the steps God himself must first take to fundamentally change the trajectory of the struggle. Man is not able to exercise the will needed to walk the path of sanctification. To reason otherwise is to fall into the trap of Pelagianism—the erroneous belief that mankind innately possesses the ability to please God.

Pelagianism was named for the fourth century British ascetic Pelagius (AD 354–420), who taught the fatal error that man has the inherent ability to both save and sanctify himself. By a person's sheer force of will, he claimed, he is able to accomplish the divine will. By this, Pelagius denied original sin and the total depravity of mankind. The mere knowledge of the divine law, he insisted, is all that is needed. By his own free will, man may discipline himself by self-determination. Pelagius was denounced as a heretic by the Council of Carthage in AD 418 for this fatal teaching. Tragically, however, Pelagianism remains today. Many today falsely assume that they can simply will themselves to be whatever they want to be. This mindless mantra is found in the self-help movement and prosperity gospel, which follows the concept that what the mind can conceive, the human will is able to accomplish, based on the motivational teaching of Napoleon Hill.[54]

Individually, followers of Christ are charged with the responsibility to pursue holiness; however, God must work in the hearts of each one to produce personal godliness (1 Pet 1:13-16). That is not to downplay the responsibility a believer does have to strive for holiness. Once again, Smith's words are helpful in understanding this balance:

> Every Christian is responsible to pursue holiness, yet God must work within us to produce personal godliness (Phil. 2:13, 14). Augustinian teaching rightly understands that only God can produce authentic self-discipline in the believer. So it is in the Christian life. Paul urges, "Train yourself for godliness" (1 Tim. 4:7). This kind of

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[54] Napoleon Hill, *Think & Grow Rich* (Mumbai, India: Sanage Publishing, 2020), 295.

self-discipline is a rebuke to half-hearted Christians who do little to train for spiritual victory. They are out-of-shape believers with flabby faith. They are spiritual couch potatoes with bulging spiritual waistlines. Their lifestyle is self-indulgent due to their lack of self-control.[55]

Accepting Personal Accountability
for the Lack of Self-Control

Personal accountability for sin is a historic tenant of the Christian faith. Linked together by the fall of Adam into sin, nevertheless, each person stands accountable to understand, acknowledge, and address sin as a personal issue. Historically, the debate has raged intently over how to address sin, but there has never been a sustained debate concerning individual accountability for sin. Though, the tide is beginning to shift in contemporary culture from individual accountability to, at the very least, a social component that alleviates full acceptance of one's personal responsibility regarding sin and its penalty. Gregg Allison highlights this shift in his analysis of the views of sin in the modern area:

> Of particular note was the modern propensity to address sin more as a social phenomenon than as an individual problem. Walter Rauschenbusch, the father of the social gospel, articulated the view of sin from the standpoint of that gospel: "The social gospel seeks to bring men under repentance for their collective sins and to create a more sensitive and more modern conscience."[56]

Allison goes on to point out specifically the danger that results from the "socialization" of sin: "The Bible declares that every soul is guilty before God because of the individual's personal sin."[57] Denial of personal accountability for sin dilutes the effort required to turn from sin in general and the "sin that clings so closely" in particular. It is worthy to note that emphasizing the nature of sin as primarily personal does not detract from the fact that corporate sin exists. Millard Erickson skillfully balances this interaction:

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[55] Smith, *You Are What You Love,* 15.

[56] Gregg Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 360.

[57] Allison, *Historical Theology*, 361.

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There also is an emphasis on the individual. Each person is an isolated, self-contained entity capable of making free choices, relatively unaffected by conditions within society. The unit of morality is the individual person. The group is not an organic entity with characteristics of its own, but merely a collection or assemblage of individuals.[58]

The influence of the individual on society, and conversely the impact of society on the individual, is a reality that further aggravates the impact of habitual, enslaving sins. Society is a function of the individuals who compose it. The reason society is what it is, is because of what its individuals are. Yet, paradoxically, society often receives the blame for choices individuals make. The Bible is clear that when God metes out eternal judgment in the life to come, it will always be at the individual level. Individually or collectively, the issues that drive sin share a common ethos. Human beings are exceptionally skilled at creating facades that hide the darkness that resides in their hearts. Seeing through this self-defeating mirage is critical to begin restoring self-control.

Conclusion

The apostle Paul uses the idea of running a race as a fitting illustration of the need to exercise self-control as a key means of overcoming a lifestyle of becoming enslaved by sin. Sadly, many believers have succumbed in this struggle. It seems as if their own bodies and minds have become an inescapable prison. However, freedom is indeed within their grasp. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, believers are compelled to develop the biblical virtue of self-control. It is a characteristic that is both expected and possible. The clear testimony from Scripture is that many faithful saints have escaped the lure of sin by walking through the door of freedom provided by God. These testimonies, along with the supreme example of Jesus Christ, serve as a reminder for all struggling believers to "run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Heb 12:1).

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[58] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 672.

CHAPTER 3

ENGAGING THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE
ON SELF-CONTROL

The American Psychological Association defines *self-control* as "the ability to be in command of one's behavior (overt, covert, emotional, or physical) and to restrain or inhibit one's impulses. In circumstances in which short-term gain is pitted against long-term greater gain, self-control is the ability to opt for the long-term outcome."[1] Examining this definition reveals that secular culture views self-control as a virtue worthy of pursuit—which is true from a biblical perspective as well. Indeed, the considerable on-going pursuit from both a secular and Christian perspective provides evidence that the desire to understand self-control is not losing any momentum and is leading to devising schemes to both measure and improve this uniquely human capacity. From a biblical lens, within the chronicles of both the Old and New Testament, the uses of self-control and its cognates number well over 174, making it a focus of intense theological emphasis and practice in Scripture. The secular community has produced an unending volume of books, articles, and research papers espousing a humanistic understanding of self-control that is flawed due to the noetic effect of sin.

Historical evidence abounds in both the secular and religious records that supports the pursuit of self-control. This chapter will present an overview of how self-control has been addressed throughout the history of the church; how secular thinking has approached the subject; and finally, by example, will show how the contemporary church

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[1] American Psychological Association, *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2015), 4535.

is pushing back against the secular strategy of reclassifying addiction as a disease rather than a devastating personal choice rooted in the heart.

Self-Control Under the Light of
Church History (Heb 12:1-2)

An examination of the history of the Christian church reveals that the issue of self-control has been effectively addressed by believers through a reliance on biblical truth. From the opening chapters of the Bible and continuing throughout recorded history, human beings' inability to exercise the virtue of self-control has resulted in devastating results. In the Garden of Eden, Satan, the enemy of God, initiates a strategy to malign God's character by asserting, "did God actually say" as a means to introduce doubt in the minds of Adam and Eve (Gen 3:1). In this bold and pernicious move, Satan sets into motion a relentless battle to undermine God's authority and incite rebellion in the idolatrous heart of human beings.

With the establishment of the New Testament church, and the empowering of the believer to escape the enslavement of sin through the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit, leaders throughout church history have utilized biblical truth to equip believers to effectively resist sin. An ongoing aspect of this resistance is through the development of biblical self-control. As directed by the truth contained in the biblical canon, church leaders began to deploy systematic teachings to exhort believers to develop the fruit of biblical self-control. It is also noted that incorporating non-biblical approaches to addressing life dominating sins is represented in church history,

Self-control, one of the aspects of the fruit of the Spirit that reflects a strong walk with the Lord, has been promoted throughout the history of the church. Primarily through the lens of self-denial, believers were led by the Church Fathers to understand the factors leading to a lack of control and to institute practices required to reign against the indulgences of sinful flesh. The sin of self-indulgence was, and remains, a formidable adversary in the fight to subjugate fleshly desire and maintain self-control. One of the

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early Church Fathers, Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430), wrote extensively on the topic of self-control. Augustine did not hesitate to share his personal challenges as a means of instructing the flock on the difficulty of the battle for self-control. Framing the issue as an ongoing battle of two wills—one carnal and the other spiritual—that fought to undo his soul, Augustine declared, "But I wretched, most wretched, in the very commencement of my early youth, had begged chastity of Thee, and said, 'Give me chastity and continency, only not yet.' For I feared lest Thou shouldest hear me soon, and soon cure me of the disease of concupiscence, which I wished to have satisfied, rather than extinguished."[2] Augustine's use of "continency" is rich in meaning. Richard Muller translates continency from the Augustine's use of the Latin *continentia*, into the English word *temperance*.[3] The *Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary* gives additional insight by noting that continence incorporates the "control of your feelings, especially your desire to have sex; the ability to control the bladder and bowels."[4]

Augustine framed the battle for control as a battle waged between the lines of desiring to please the flesh against remaining resolute to remain chaste. He understood that success was only found by turning to God for help, for he alone is the source of all that is good and perfect. Yet, almost paradoxically, Augustine's fear was that God would swiftly provide the answer to his prayer, thereby denying him the opportunity to indulge in the enslaving pleasure of sin. That sentiment demonstrates vividly the alluring power

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[2] Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, unexpurgated ed., Halcyon Classics (Herford, UK: Halcyon Press, 2019), 83

[3] Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 393. Muller notes that there are three principal moral virtues: justice or righteousness (iustitia, q.v.), courage or fortitude (fortitudo), and temperance (temperantia, continentia). Justice is the disposition that aims at perfecting the will in terms of right relationships, including religion, piety, and gratitude. Courage and temperance moderate or regulate passions, desires, and appetites to bring them into accord with right reason (recta ratio, q.v.). Subsumed under courage and temperance are such virtues as modesty, honesty, patience, and perseverance.

[4] S. A. Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 8th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7219.

of sin. Yet, Augustine realized that to truly turn to God would not simply result in an abatement of the fleshly desires, but the denial would also provide the means to diminish the influence of sin. It is with little wonder that, upon reflecting upon the choices available to him, Augustine would declare with great assurance that it was much better for "me to give myself up to Thy charity, than to give myself over to mine own cupidity; but though the former course satisfied me and gained the mastery, the latter pleased me and held me mastered."[5]

As an essential Christian virtue, self-control was seen as necessary to promote other godly virtues and has been an object of serious pursuit throughout church history. Both in attitude and practice, self-control begins with the mortification of the flesh. The apostle Paul's admonition to "buffet" the flesh (1 Cor 9:27), as many would refer to it historically, was based on the active practice of denying the self in pursuit of holy living. Practice of biblical self-control would lead to incorporating habitual practices needed to fortify the soul against indulging in fleshly desire.

Church history also provides a picture of the extremes many people practiced in the effort to mortify the flesh in pursuit of self-denial. Often this effort was out of a wrong motivation that reflected a drive of self-righteousness instead of being driven by genuine heart change. The monasticism movement, for instance, included the establishment of monastic communities that grew out of efforts to address the need for self-control. The Roman Catholic community in general approach self-control through the pursuit of a works-based, self-righteous pursuit of holiness focused on unbiblical self-mortification. As the great Reformer Martin Luther wrote concerning the flaws of the Catholic motivation, "For we should so far bridle and check the body, that we may be sober, vigorous, and fitted for good works; not that we should torture and mortify ourselves as

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[5] Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, 80.

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some famous saints have done."[6] Luther expounded on this theme by instructing that God's opposition to sin did not provide license for undue destruction of the body, establishing the principle that there is no obligation to ruin or injure the body needlessly, but rather "give it its food and refreshment that it may remain sound and in living vigor."[7]

Luther's admonition was largely ignored by those in the monastic movement to the detriment of its practitioners. A noted member of the movement was a monk named Antony the Great. The writings of these men have been collected into various works to preserve their understanding of biblical truth in regard to subduing the indulgences of the flesh. The call to personal mortification, regardless of the strength of the passions to succumb, was a prime objective of the community. The following interaction between an apprentice and older monk highlights this instruction:

> A brother came to Abba Poemen and said to him, "I have very many thoughts, O father, whereby I am vexed; and the old man took him out into the air, and said to him, Spread out your skirt, and catch the winds," and the brother said to him, "I cannot do this." The old man said to him, "You cannot do this, neither can you prevent your thoughts from coming, but it belongs to you to stand up against them."[8]

The focus of the monasticism movement effort to achieve self-control by focusing on personal self-righteousness stands in sharp contrast the emphasis placed on righteousness imputed from the work of Christ that began to surface during the Protestant Reformation. The great Reformer John Calvin writes clearly concerning the issue of self-control through the lens of self-denial:

> The sum of the Christian life is denial of ourselves. . . . The ends of this self-denial are four: 1. That we may devote ourselves to God as a living sacrifice; 2. That we may not seek our own things, but those which belong to God and to our neighbor; 3. That we may patiently bear the cross, the fruits of which are—acknowledgment of our weakness, the trial of our patience, correction of faults, more earnest prayer,

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[6] Martin Luther, *The Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude Preached and Explained* (New York: Anson Randolph, 1859), 10.

[7] Luther, *The Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, 160.

[8] Willis Budge, *The Sayings of the Holy Desert Fathers* (Notre Dame, IN: Classic Christian Works, 1907), 14, Kindle.

more cheerful meditation on eternal life; 4. That we may know in what manner we ought to use the present life and its aids, for necessity and delight.[9]

Calvin, clearly in this statement, begins to delineate the practices he believes are required to internalize the discipline needed for the exercise of self-control. Calvin's thoughts help to affirm practicing self-control is not simply reserved for any specific tradition or practice but is for all believers. His teaching will become instrumental in establishing self-denial as a core component of the virtuous Christian life. Calvin's teaching exemplified the practice of the spiritual disciplines as a means to cultivate self-control. This practice is clearly taught in Scripture. It is also significant to note that Calvin highlighted the connection between the believer's desire for self-denial and the fruitfulness that results from walking with the Holy Spirit. While the biblical premise is that self-control is an attribute of the spiritual fruit that comes only from the Holy Spirit, there is however an expectation that human effort is also required to develop this virtue.

Perhaps the most ardent command to practice self-control across the totality of the body of Christ historically comes from the Puritan tradition. This tradition of understanding both the principles and practices of self-control is ideally captured in John Owen's *The Mortification of Sin*. With extensive effort, Owen endeavors to describe in detail the link between the believer's walk and the indwelling working of the Holy Spirit. First, Owen begins by establishing the principle of fleshly fruit naturally produced by sinners as opposed to spiritual fruit that comes only through a growing vibrant relationship with the Holy Spirit:

> The first is, How does the Spirit mortify sin? I answer, in general, three ways:—[1.] By causing our hearts to abound in grace and the fruits that are contrary to the flesh, and the fruits thereof and principles of them. So the apostle opposes the fruits of the flesh and of the Spirit: "The fruits of the flesh," says he, "are so and so," Gal. v. 19-21; "but," says he, "the fruits of the Spirit are quite contrary, quite of another sort," verses 22, 23.[10]

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[9] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 130.

[10] John Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor (Wheaton IL: Crossway, 2006), 61.

From this starting point, Owen moves on to present the biblical solution of how the fruit produced by the Spirit is translated into the life of the believer. The prescription is preceded first by identification, that is, they that are Christ's, and then is brought into full bloom by the command to walk in a manner empowered by the Spirit:

> Yea; but what if these are in us and do abound, may not the other abound also? No, says he, verse 24, "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." But how? Why, verse 25, "By living in the Spirit and walking after the Spirit;"—that is, by the abounding of these graces of the Spirit in us, and walking according to them. For, saith the apostle, "These are contrary one to another," verse 17; so that they cannot both be in the same subject, in any intense or high degree. This "renewing of us by the Holy Ghost," as it is called, Tit. iii. 5, is one great way of mortification; he causes us to grow, thrive, flourish, and abound in those graces which are contrary, opposite, and destructive to all the fruits of the flesh, and to the quiet or thriving of indwelling sin itself.[11]

Self-control is not simply a matter of exercising one's will over the lure of the flesh; rather, it is the identification of who a believer is at their core—a Christ-follower who actively practices putting on the Lord Jesus through personal vivification. Out of this identity the Holy Spirit provides the means of transformation that results in the production of spiritual self-control. Calvin, who emphasized both a positive and negative side of a believer's growth in holiness, stressed the awareness that sin produced a contrite and anguish of the soul.[12] Accordingly, these emotions would drive a person to hate sin and seek restitution with God (2 Cor 7:10). Unlike the Roman Catholic pursuit of self-righteous asceticism, Calvin placed the focus on "the putting to death of old, sinful desires."[13] This is the proper sequence of actions motivated through the prompting of the Holy Spirit compelling the believer to strive for purity, which leads to the actions of mortifying the flesh (Rom 6:2-10; Col 3:5; 1 Cor 6:11; Eph 3:16). Calvin would rigorously teach that the battle against sin would be a constant engagement throughout the life of a Christian that reflects the command to take up one's cross daily (Luke 9:23).

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[11] Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, 61.

[12] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 130.

[13] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 130.

Returning to the Puritan tradition, Owen is not alone in providing insight into the area of self-control. Thomas Manton, in his writings, has also labored fruitfully in the rich area of self-control. Manton's *A Treatise of Self-Denial* provides a thorough exposition of Jesus' command of self-denial for his followers (Matt 16:24). Manton also labors greatly to clearly demonstrate that self-denial is not limited to a select few but is intended to be a badge of identification for all believers. This expectation is clearly on his mind as he succinctly writes, "Christ says, 'If any man,' to show that the duty is not limited in application. It involves all; whosoever will enter themselves in Christ's school, or enlist themselves in His flock or company."[14] Additionally, using the backdrop of the martyrs who willingly gave their lives for Christ, Manton exhorts every believer to understand that the demanding act of self-denial "does not concern only a few, but all who are called out to be champions for His cause, and to expose their bodies to the cruel flames," but that the call to become willing sacrifices for the sake of Christ extends to any who "will come after me."[15]

Perhaps the most daring aspect of Manton's exhortation is the manner in which he demands that the self becomes subjugated to the will of God. Life dominating enslaving sins would not escape the scorn of Manton's disdain. Concerning the sinful disposition of personal self-centeredness, Manton poignantly writes,

> The Greek eauton, which means "himself." This is a word with a large scope; it not only involves our persons, but whatever is ours, so far as it stands in opposition to God or comes into competition with Him. A man and all his lusts; a man and all his relations; a man and all his interests; life and all the appendages of life are one aggregate thing that in Scripture is called "self." In short, whatsoever is of himself, in himself, belonging to himself, as a corrupt or carnal man—all that is to be denied. And indeed, every man has many a "self" within him: his lusts are himself; his life is himself; his name is himself; his wealth, liberty, ease, favour, lands, father, mother, and all relations—they are all comprised within the term "self."[16]

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[14] Thomas Manton, *A Treatise of Self-Denial*, Chapel Library (Pensacola, FL: Chapel Library, 2014), 6.

[15] Manton, *A Treatise of Self-Denial*, 7.

[16] Manton, *A Treatise of Self-Denial*, 8.

Manton's solution is to implement a regimented, denial of anything that interferes with whole-hearted devotion to Christ. His formula to progress in the area of self-control centers upon the core principle of self-denial. The pursuit of selfish desire would serve as a drain of "vigour and strength" from the soul in its effort to achieve communion with God. Interestingly, Manton also wrestles with limiting the pursuit of those things that may not even inherently detract from holiness but might potentially shield a person from truly understanding their basic motivation for obtaining these things. He declares, "Riches are to be denied not only when they choke conscience, but also when they choke the Word. So I am to deny honours; that is, not only the ambitious seeking of them, but also when they will make me to lose the pleasant opportunity of quiet devotion and religious privacy with God."[17] This insight is worthy of consideration by any believer to ensure that no pursuit goes forward without a thorough and discerning evaluation of its potential to compete with one's total affection toward God.

There is great wisdom in maintaining this distinction, which is constantly under attack in the secular world. A good example of this dysfunction is the sin of drunkenness. Linda Mercadante, a noted social scientist, provides a helpful critique of recovery movements such as Alcoholic Anonymous (AA), and provides needed insight into this dynamic of the relationship between sin and addiction: "The current tendency is to redefine sin in terms of addictions."[18] AA is complicit in this effort. In its defining testament, the Big Book, AA hinges its entire program on the premise that alcoholism is a "disease of a two-fold nature, an allergy of the body and an obsession of the mind."[19] The AA strategy, employing this understanding, is a weakly veiled attempt to break the link between addiction and personal choice. In contrast, using the related objects of guilt and shame,

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[17] Manton, *A Treatise of Self-Denial*, 42.

[18] Linda Mercadante, *Victims and Sinners* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 28.

[19] Alcoholics Anonymous World Service, *The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2008), 15.

Mercadante notes that although the two issues have distinct ontologies, both are inextricably linked by sin.

A Clash of Authority

An examination of the drift away from the Bible as the believer's source of authority reveals that the Christian church embracing humanistic thought has hindered its ability to address habitual sin fueled by the lack of self-control. To highlight the drift specifically, the subject of addictions as a category of habitual, life-dominating, sins will be used to illustrate the impact of the lack of self-control. This leads to a corresponding tragedy of accepting a humanistic cause—as well as proposed solutions—to resolve this issue for believers.

The clash of beliefs begins with understanding the root issue associated with the nature of why addictions develop in the first place. The issue revolves around the biblical proposition that the lack of self-control results from sin, which is opposed by the secular view that the cause lies elsewhere. It is in this debate specifically that the gulf widens over the nature and cause of addictions. The Bible declares that the cause of addictions is a worship disorder that resides in the heart of fallen humanity—it is not the result of a disease (Eph 5:18).

The narrative to establish the disease model for addiction has remained fairly consistent throughout most of contemporary history up to the present day. For instance, the debate is evident as early as the 1700s, when Benjamin Rush, a physician and signer of the Declaration of Independence as well as an advisor to Thomas Jefferson, began to refer to alcohol addiction as a disease.[20] Interestingly, Rush's proposition did not go unopposed within society at large. However, there was also little opposition to viewing the issue primarily as a breaking of a social norm rather than as sinful behavior that had

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[20] Gene Heyman, *Addiction A Disorder of Choice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 7.

the potential of becoming life-dominating. The same sentiment continued to unfold into the nineteenth century, as opiates, in spite of the known scientifically validated addictive nature of the substance, were viewed as a socially acceptable alternative to what was seen as the immoral nature of alcohol. In 1889, publications began to widely report that opiates were a healthier life choice than alcohol. This is an example of the confusion concerning the nature of addictions.[21]

In the early twentieth century, the disease model concept as an explanation for addictions began to establish itself as the prevalent means of labeling this behavior. The emergence of programs such as AA lead to leveraging false promises of twelve step programs as the most effective means of addressing alcoholism, would ignite similar efforts to address other addictions as well. The disease model continues to evolve and is undergoing a growth in sophistication as well, buoyed by celebrated results from secular initiatives. Yet, it is difficult for the movement to shake its subjective roots. Again, referring to the AA rationale for classifying alcoholism as a disease, it is interesting to note the heavy reliance upon a subjective definition of the cause of alcoholism. The guiding resource for the organization, the Big Book, notes that alcoholism is a "disease of a two-fold nature, an allergy of the body and an obsession of the mind."[22] This statement reflects the grammatical maneuvering used by secular organizations to deny the biblical truth that addiction is rooted in the sinful heart of the person.

Rigorous debate around the causes of addictions rage in the secular world. The various causes receiving consideration in the debate include the focus on both biological causation and psychological factors. Within the biological camp, the current thinking about alcoholism—which again serves as a proxy for addictions in general—is that a

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[21] Edward Breacher, *The Consumer Union Report: Licit & Illicit Drugs* (Boston: Brown, 1972), 8.

[22] Alcoholics Anonymous World Service, *The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous*, 15.

breakdown in the brain function or genetics play the determinative role in causing the problem.

On the other hand, many psychologists argue that the root of addiction lies within an individual's response to an intense mental trauma, such as displacement,[23] as the underlying culprit. Both of these attempts at defining the causation of addition ultimately fall short of providing effective solutions for those struggling with addictions. It is important for those countering with a biblical solution to effect change in believers trapped in the practice of life-dominating sins such as addictions to have a working-level understanding of the nature of these debates.

A leading platform advocating to promote addiction as a disease is *The New England Journal of Medicine* (*NEJM*). Dan Longo, featured by the *NEJM*, captures this sentiment by writing, "In the past two decades, research has increasingly supported the view that addiction is a disease of the brain."[24] To make the case clear, *NEJM* expounds that the brain disease model

> is the most prevalent model of addiction in the western world. Particularly in the United States, it dominates professional and public discourse on prevention, treatment, research agendas, and policy issues. Because the disease model focuses on brain change, it has helped explain why persons with addictions find it difficult to change their thoughts and behaviors quickly or easily. . . . The brain disease model has also legitimized the role of doctors and other medical professionals in addiction treatment and driven research on new drugs to combat addiction, and it has been used to advocate for access to treatment and care rather than segregation and punishment.[25]

[23] As defined in the *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, displacement is the "the transfer of feelings or behavior from their original object to another person or thing. In psychoanalytic theory, displacement is considered to be a DEFENSE MECHANISM in which the individual discharges tensions associated with, for example, hostility and fear by taking them out on a less threatening target." American Psychological Association, *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, 1555.

[24] Nora D. Volkow, George F. Koob, and A. Thomas McLellan, "Neurobiological Advances from the Brain Disease Model of Addiction, *The New England Journal of Medicine Review* 374, no.4 (January 2016): 363.

[25] Marc Lewis, "Brain Change in Addiction as Learning, Not Disease," *The New England Journal of Medicine Review* 379 no. 16 (October 2018): 1551.

Similarly, researchers from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) have published opinions that align with the assertion that addictions are diseases. For example, NIH contributors Edenberg and Foroud comment, "Alcohol dependence (alcoholism), the most severe alcohol use disorder, is a complex genetic disease."[26] The position that addiction is a disease is a clear challenge to the authority of biblical truth and the solutions Scripture brings forward to remedy these issues.

Likewise, on the psychological side of the debate, Lance Dodes, a Clinical Psychologist and co-author of *The Sober-Truth*, while debunking the credibility of AA's Twelve Step program as a viable method of addressing alcoholism, presents the case that "addiction is a problem of the mind and not of the spiritual soul."[27] Clearly, Dodes is not an advocate of the addiction as disease model. In *The Sober-Truth*, Dodes presents a robust defense against the disease model in what he perceives as confusion between causation and correlation. Throughout the book he deploys a clear, data driven position, that not only exposes the poor overall effectiveness of AA but also highlights the futility of searching for a biological basis for addiction—including the search for a gene that is responsible for alcoholism. Dodes writes, "Statistically, it is likely that many genes, possibly hundreds of thousands of them, may play some role in increasing the susceptibility to addiction. This has led some researchers to refer to susceptibility genes. But nobody has ever discovered any of these genes."[28] Indeed, Dodes's position seems to align well with the research flowing out of many laboratories and research studies that negate the belief that a direct link exists between genes and alcoholism.

Although Dodes's position concerning the psychological premise for addiction is off base, it is noteworthy that he presents a thorough analysis outlying the ineffectiveness

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[26] Howard J. Edenberg and Tatiana Foroud, "Genetics and Alcoholism," *The National Institutes of Health* 10, no. 8 (August 2013): 487-94.

[27] Lance Dodes and Zachary Dodes, *The Sober Truth* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014), 136.

[28] Dodes and Dodes, *The Sober Truth*, 88.

of AA. Dodes points out that the "success" rate for AA is closer to the single digits compared to the lofty numbers posted by the organization.[29] Although he presents an effective position against addictions as a disease, as well as discrediting AA's failed approach, his psychlogical solution is antagonistic to a faith-based solution as well. Dodes declares, "Since addiction is a psychological phemomenon, it stands to reason that the best person to treat an addict would be someone who has been trained in psychology." This is both a bold and pernicious statement. It is bold because Dobes is declaring that he knows the creation better than the Creator. It is no wonder that Scripture declares that the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of man (1 Cor 1:25). On the other hand, Dobbs' position is pernicious because Satan is skilled in the art of deluding people to accept falshood disguised in a pleasing package (Prov 23:31,32).

It is not suprising to understand why Dodes is suceptable to these types of fatal errors—he does not have the Holy Spirit to guide him. To ensure that there is no misunderstaning his belief, he declares, "I will simply say that addiction can be understood, managed, and ended through learning about oneself. People can do a lot on their own, but is often faster and more helpful to explore these kinds of underlying issues with a professional."[30] Dodes rethorically ends the debate by asserting, "For working out these issues permanently, a good psychotherapy is the best approach."[31] Jesus is clear in his warning concerning the perils of rejecting biblical truth in favor of human wisdom. To follow this foolish path in addressing addiction is an example of the blind leading the blind and both ending up in the ditch (Matt 15:14).

Despite his antagonism against any faith-based solution to addressing addictions, it is commendable that Dodes presents a solid case against both the disease model and the

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[29] Dodes and Dodes note that peer review studies of AA effectiveness is in the 5 and 10 percent which he asserts is remarkably synonymous with no treatment at all. Dodes and Dodes, *The Sober Truth*, 44.

[30] Dodes and Dodes, *The Sober Truth*, 95.

[31] Dodes and Dodes, *The Sober Truth*, 95.

AA approach. It is ironic that in debunking the AA model, Dodes's solution has many components that seemingly rightly reflect upon what indeed is taking place in the idolatrous heart of the addict. Concering the issue of compulsions, Dodes defines these choices as being "driven behaviors that people cannot stop themsleves from doing, even when they want to."[32] The phsycological category of complusive behaviors, along with dissplacement theory, leads Dodes to adopt the position that, "no longer is it necessary to adopt special spiritual beliefs or join a cohort of people who all suffer with the same problem. The problem becomes ordinary, no more or less manageble than any psychlogical challenge; it needs no special category; it is a psychological problem and can be mannaged as such."[33]

The root of the psychotherapist approach according to Dodes is talk therapy. Those who are qualified to conduct such therapy are only qualified to do so after many years of training and instruction. Dodes views faith-based approaches as overly-simplistic at best and ultimately destructive to the well-being of the addict.[34] It is obvious that his unbelief has darkened his mind to the power of the gospel to address all that is broken in the heart of man.

Indeed, the New Testament especially provides considerable insight into the debilitating nature of disease and furthermore presents the ultimate solution—Jesus Christ. The earthly ministry of Jesus abounds with demonstrations of his power over previously uncurable physical disease (see Matt 14:14; Luke 4:40; 8:43-48). Demonstratively, Jesus attended to the broad spectrum of illnesses and diseases that affected the entire unity of the person. In doing so, he addressed the "fundamental unity of the individual personality"[35]

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[32] Dodes and Dodes, *The Sober Truth*, 83.

[33] Dodes and Dodes, *The Sober Truth*, 94.

[34] Dodes and Dodes, *The Sober Truth*, 98-99.

[35] Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 1:958.

while not assigning total blame of physical weakness solely on the basis of punishment for sin (John 9:1- 41).

While acknowledging the physical implications of diseases, there is also a clear understanding that the consequences of addictions are borne by the total person and the personal choices made. For instance, New Testament writers often used the Greek word *astheneia* (Gk: ἀσθένεια) to cover a broad range of physical and mental diseases, yet by definition the word indicates the comprehensive wholeness of man (see Luke 5:15).[36] Beyond the practice of supernatural healing of diseases, the New Testament also promotes the practice of applying medicinal steps to address disease. The apostle Paul further expanded the meaning of *astheneia* when he instructed his young protegee, Timothy, to augment the drink of water with wine to address the frequent sicknesses he was experiencing in his body (1 Tim 5:23; also see James' instructions to anoint the sick with oil as well as prayer in Jas 5:13-16).

The Greek word also used to address diseases in the New Testament is *kakós* (Gk: κακῶς). Again, the word clearly represents a defect that has both moral and physical components (see Matt 4:24). The common understanding in the early church was that the "real suffering of the inward man is ignorance. Hence it is equally necessary to heal both the outward and inward sickness."[37] The presence of sin, which results from the reality of personal choice, is inexorably woven into the biblical understanding of human sickness. Ultimately, complete healing is predicated upon the treatment of sin in a person's life.

There is a biblical basis that includes the nuanced understanding of how the choices of people impact the lives of others; however, that does not remove personal accountability for one's actions. When standing before the judgement of God, no one will have the luxury of passing on the consequences of their sin to someone else or even to

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[36] Gerhard Kittle, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 1:491.

[37] Kittle, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 1:1093.

society. Interestingly, supporting this position from a genetic research position is Howard Edenbery, a researcher and professor in the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at the Indiana University School of Medicine. Edenbery's position is that "alcoholism has long been noted to run in families, but that alone is not sufficient to demonstrate that genetic factors contribute to risk."[38] He would emphatically point out that in addition to a lack of research data that points to a specific gene for alcoholism, there is ample support for the position that both environmental and social factors contribute to the debate. This position is collaborated by Jackie Scully, a Senior Research Fellow at the Unit of Ethics in the Biosciences at the University of Basel, Switzerland. Scully states, "The social model's fundamental criticism of the medical model is that it wrongly locates 'the problem' of disability in biological constraints, considering it only from the point of view of the individual and neglecting the social and systemic frameworks that contribute to it."[39] Although Scully moves away somewhat from the error of completely supporting the biological position as the cause of addiction, by not looking beyond the failed social and systemic framework, she remains no closer to resolving the issue of addiction. In this regard, both Edenbery and Scully fail to steer the addict to the true root of their struggles with addiction.

The Bible presents the truth about addictive behavior—it is a personal choice that leads to life dominating sin. In response to the theories put forth from secular communities, it is important that biblical theologians directly confront these falsehoods. For instance, Millard Erickson, writing concerning the familial transmission of sin, states anecdotally that "alcoholism frequently recurs in one's children."[40] Modern science as

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[38] Howard J. Edenbery, "Genetics and Alcoholism," National Institute of Health, August 2013, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4056340/.

[39] Jackie Leach Scully, "What Is a Disease?," *European Molecular Biology Organization, Reports* 5, no. 7 (2004), https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1299105/.

[40] Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 670.

well has validated the potential for addictions to be passed on from one person to another, i.e., drug addicted babies. This is not an issue to be treated lightly, especially when attempting to assign causation or to determine an appropriate treatment plan. However, to ignore the reality of individual responsibility and choice results in jeopardizing the ability of those at risk to experience true freedom.

The American Psychological Association defines "self" as the "totality of the individual, consisting of all characteristic attributes, conscious and unconscious, mental and physical."[41] Although conceptually the definition as stated parallels biblical teaching regarding personhood—especially the concept of the "heart" as the seat of what distinguishes personhood—the understanding of what it means to be a person differs dramatically between a biblical and secular worldview.

All believers struggling with overcoming habitual sin are exhorted to resist turning to non-biblical solutions to address habitual sin and instead to embrace the transforming power of applying God's Word both in belief and practice. Again, it is of no minor significance that secular thinkers, including those in the psychological sphere, have noted the impact of the uniqueness of humanity, even while avoiding the impact of God's design as his image bearers. One key social psychologist leading the effort to understand the world of self-control is Roy Baumeister, the Francis Eppes Eminent Scholar and Professor of Psychology at Florida State University and Professor of Psychology at the University of Queensland. Concerning the critical role self-controls plays in establishing and maintaining human culture, Baumeister with great clarity and resolve states,

> The central idea is that all the distinctively human traits—the ones that set us apart from all other animals and explain, essentially, what makes us human—are the result of biological adaptations to make culture possible. Creating complex societies with culture is how humans solve the fundamental biological problems of survival and reproduction. It is a highly effective strategy, but it requires much greater psychological capabilities than other, simpler forms of social life. Regardless of

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[41] American Psychological Association, *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, 4525.

what one thinks about free will, it is fairly clear that self-control is vitally important for culture . . . but culture requires self-control.[42]

Baumeister is tantalizingly close to one of the most vital revelations that is only gained from biblical truth: humanity in its pre-fall state was free to image the character of God in how they related to each other, to the rest of creation, and more fundamentally, to truly being at peace within oneself—living in harmony with their Creator. Sin marred this entire design. Therefore, it is not surprising that psychologists like Baumeister truly miss the mark by ascribing the increasing level of human sophistication to evolution instead of recognizing the devolution of the perfect into the dysfunction that marks human society today. Despite this blindness, through God's common grace, psychologists have correctly ascertained the importance of the role self-control plays in its impact on humanity.

Reclaiming the Battleground

Effective faith-based practices are emerging that have yielded tremendous results in the effort to demonstrate the effectiveness of applying biblical principles to enable believers to experience freedom from habitual sin. The scope of life-dominating sins is broad, ranging from physical to mental issues. Again, the issue of chemical and mental addiction is a pressing concern for the Christian community and will be used to highlight both the struggle and the God honoring solutions to this issue. The ground that has been ceded over to secular/humanistic based solutions by the church may be adequately reclaimed by returning to biblical solutions to recover the truth that God has provided for his followers to carry out all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3).

Reclaiming the battlefield begins with an understanding of biblical anthropology. In the beginning, God created human beings as embodied spirits to reflect the image of the triune Godhead (see Gen 1:26,27; 2:7). Foundational to this premise is

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[42] Roy Baumeister, *Self-Regulation and Self-Control*, *World Library of Psychologists* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2018), 18.

the reality that human beings are composed of both a physical and non-physical aspect. Within the biblical counseling community this concept is generally labeled as the "dichotomist" view of humanity. Heath Lambert provides a useful discussion on the makeup of human beings through the following insight that addresses the two-fold nature of human beings and underscores the need to retain the overall unity of the person:

> The word dichotomy comes from Greek and means, literally, to cut in two. This literal meaning is not ideal, since human beings are not designed to have the two aspects of their nature be cut at all. Rather, they were designed to stay together. Still, insofar as the language points to the two-sided nature of a human person, it is useful. Theologians have used other language, including dualism, duality, duplex, holistic dualism, and psychosomatic unity. Many of these terms have their own baggage. My personal preference is to use the language of holistic dualism or psychosomatic unity since I think those terms are the most theologically precise in showing that human beings are a united whole of two aspects. I have chosen to use dichotomy, however, since that seems to be the most common term.[43]

As Lambert notes, the dichotomous view, though flawed, is helpful as a means of utilizing a simple term to capture a biblical concept; but it is not ideal, and adherents must consider the unintended consequences of utilizing this reductionist, non-biblical term. Stepping into this debate, Anthony Hoekema provides tremendous help for the Christian community. Hoekema notes that as the image bearers of God, mankind is "a psychosomatic unity. . . . The advantage of this expression is that it does full justice to the two sides of man, while stressing man's unity."[44]

It is an understatement to say that the interaction of the two aspects that together constitute the "person" is an intricate and deeply mysterious subject. Although there is a strong urge to separate the two, to pursue this avenue is to attempt to divide what God has uniquely woven together. The material impacts the immaterial, and the converse is also true. The relationship of the two aspects is no doubt individualistic, but it is profoundly social as well.

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[43] Heath Lambert, *A Biblical Theology of Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 192.

[44] Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 217.

Hooked on Truth

The unresolved tension between both science and faith at its core deals with the issue of how both relate to "truth." To cling to any position that runs contrary to truth is detrimental to the erring party's ability to maintain a grasp of genuine integrity for its counter belief. To cling forcefully to truth is to speak the language of God because God is truth. Ultimately, since God has conveyed truth in Scripture concerning the human dilemma (Ps 119:160), to deny this truth is to choose to flee into the darkness of ignorance. Sadly, this darkness is held together by thinking that is more closely aligned with subjective superstition than objective thought and investigation.

Robert Thomas, while serving as Professor of New Testament at the Master's Seminary, published a clear overview of general revelation that brings great clarity to the subject of all truth is God's truth, with a major objective being to differentiate the general from the special. Thomas instructs, "Though all truth is God's truth, all truth does not rest on the same authority."[45] Additionally, he forcefully presents the case that not only is there a difference in authority with respect to truth, but that God has also made truth available to humanity in different ways for various purposes. The truth concerning Himself, his nature, character, and purpose, comes through general revelation, that is, it is available to every person that has lived, is living now, or will ever live (Ps 19:1-6; Rom 1:19); and special revelation, i.e., it is only available to his redeemed people (John 10:27; 14:6). Furthermore, the truth discoverable through common grace is made available to both the believer and non-believer.

Regardless of how he has chosen to reveal what is true, God has made the total scope of what truth is available to humanity (Deut 29:29). Though, the "unknown" should motivate both science and faith to energetically investigate the vast realm of beneficial truth God has made available to humanity through common grace—unless he

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[45] Robert Thomas, "General Revelation and Biblical Hermeneutics," *The Masters Seminary Journal* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 16.

chooses to bar entry according to his own divine prerogative. If indeed that is the case, then humanity must gracefully accept the reality that not knowing is the only reasonable path forward. There is no shame for neither science nor faith in taking this position.

Regarding the issue of God's common grace, humanity has gained wonderful insight into how God has designed the universe and everything it contains. The advances the world continues to witness are truly remarkable. There is every expectation, and justifiably so, that the pace of discovery will continue. However, when human efforts begin to cast dispersion upon biblical truth, there is reason for concern. As has been already presented, the human community has invested heavily in research to classify addiction as disease. These efforts have generated a plethora of publications, forums, and discussions on this topic, proclaiming the good news that addictions are allegedly diseases. Regardless of how beneficial the insights gained through investigative sciences have been, the corrupting nature of sin inexorably twists the thing that was created into an idol of worship. The insight by Patricia Smith Churchland, quoted by Joel Green, is helpful in this regard: "Bit by experimental bit, neuroscience is morphing our conception of what we are."[46] Churchland's quote supports the worldview of secular theorist and practitioners that addicts are not fallen humans who make bad choices, but rather are victims of a disease that relieves them of all personal accountability for their harmful choices that hurt themselves and others.

The final arbitrage of human choice cannot be properly adjudicated without concluding that personal choice is the responsible culprit that leads to addictive behaviors—including, sadly, the crippling consequences that an addictive mother may transfer to her unborn baby. It all begins with the first decision to expose oneself to the influence of addiction that the potential of spiraling out of control is initiated. These

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[46] Patricia Smith Churchland, quoted in Joel Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 17.

personal choices, regardless of the reason why or the justification to do so, must be done with the understanding that negative, life-altering, consequences may occur.[47]

A Balanced Approach

Indeed, ample evidence supports the position that addiction is a complex issue. That comes as no surprise, because, clearly, God's design of the human being is complex. The impact of sin's destructive demise upon the goodness of God's creation further complicates the situation. The contrast between pursuing God honoring biblical self-control and practicing a destructive lack of self-control is vivid. The issue is sin, which was introduced to the human being through a volitional act of rebellion against the goodness of God. Furthermore, the solution to this treasonous act by human beings resides outside of humanity—and that solution is the gospel of Jesus Christ. This solution, which resides outside of oneself, must be received into the heart of fallen man to counteract the corruption brought about by personal sin.

Addictions are enslaving behaviors that represent powerful forces that destroy lives. The addictions become all-controlling forces that take on the role of idols. As John Street laments, "Idol's demand worship," which is an accurate description of what occurs in a person's life, believer or non-believer, when addictions become deeply rooted in their hearts.[48] Addicts quickly move from being in "control" of their addiction of choice, to being controlled by it. Secular thinkers build systems that attempt to find freedom but only lead to further bondage.

Again, this becomes evident when examining the efforts to skirt around the truth of God, and even at times attempting to avoid or disavow the truth God has placed in every person's heart. Along with Dodes scathing indictment of the failures of AA,

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[47] It is well noted that in the case of drug therapy in particular, medicinal use of drugs is warranted, but only under the direct oversight of a qualified medical professional.

[48] John D. Street, *Passions of the Heart: Biblical Counsel for Stubborn Sexual Sins* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007), 35.

others have provided valuable insight into the organization's shortcomings. For instance, in discussing how AA works, David Berenson, an expert on alcoholism and recovering alcoholic, remarks,

> "AA is designed so that a person can stop drinking by either education, therapeutic change, or transformation." Those who belong to the first group only need to be given information in order to quit—the sort of information they can pick up easily by attending a few AA meetings. In contrast, members of the second group must undergo a "second order change similar to changes brought about in therapy" in order to stop drinking. Finally, those who belong to the third group are men and women brought to abandon drinking through "a full-fledged transformative shift or real religious insight."[49]

Berenson presents a veiled illusion of the fact that, without the transformative shift in the way a person thinks, AA is incapable of reliably freeing anyone struggling with addictions from its enslaving grip.

Kent Dunnington, utilizing the expertise he has gained through advanced degrees in philosophy and theology, has produced a rich assessment of the factors that result in addictions in his book *Addiction and Virtue: Beyond the Models of Disease and Choice*. Using the best of interdisciplinary rigor, he addresses the dueling extremes of classifying addiction as either a disease and choice—or, in philosophical terms, determinism and voluntarism—while also introducing the biblical nuanced concept of habit and virtue as the most robust platform to address solutions to this struggle. He provocatively asserts and defends the position that attempts "to describe addiction exclusively in the language of science-as 'disease'-are bound to fail."[50]

Dunnington devotes a significant portion of his work addressing the failed disease model of addiction. He bases his assessment heavily on the inconsistencies taken directly from structured observation and data involving addicts that challenge the scientific framework used to establish what is, or is not, a disease. Dunnington's fundamental

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49 Francis Seeburger, *Addiction and Responsibility: An Inquiry into the Addictive Mind* (New York: Create Space Independent, 2013), 159.

50 Kent Dunnington, *Addiction and Virtue: Beyond the Models of Disease and Choice* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), 100-101.

argument stems directly from the basis of analyzing what the scientific community has established as the backbone of determining the nature of a disease—the factors that are both necessary and sufficient to reliability predict the conditions which will lead to a person becoming addicted. The factors of tolerance and withdrawal have been formulated as the conditions required to determine addiction. However, as Dunnington skillfully demonstrates, many individuals on a large-scale experience tolerance and withdrawal, but are not considered addicts.

Against this backdrop Dunnington closes his work by pivoting to the issue that although tolerance and withdrawal are important considerations, they are insufficient in determining the causal relationship between addicts and addictive behavior. The element that is neglected by the scientific community is the understanding of willful choices as being fundamental to becoming an addict. The key to addressing addiction, as Dunnington frames it, is replacing old habits with new ones: "Sinful acts lead to sinful habits, and these habits orient us away from God." Conversely, replacing sinful habits with patterns of virtue reverses the lingering impact of sin. Certainly, this is consistent with a biblical worldview that stresses putting off the old man and putting on the new (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:5-14).

In addition to Dunnington, Harvard Medical School research psychologist Gene Heyman also has applied his considerable skills to expose the deficiencies of the disease model. Heyman's book, *Addition: A Disorder of Choice*, compiles real-world observations with a wealth of research sponsored by many leading psychological and pharmacological laboratories operating in this space to debunk the theory of addiction as a disease. Heyman, in a familiar challenge, joins with Dunnington to ask the most pertinent of all questions: "What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for addictions?"[51] Addressing the valid evidential assessments that changes to the brain are evident in

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[51] Heyman, *Addiction*, 20.

addicted individuals, Heyman pushes back by declaring, "If OCD patients can learn to ignore obsessional thought, then it seems reasonable that similar processes are taking place when addicts learn to ignore drug cravings."[52] That position, if true, prompts Heyman to continue and declare, "Thus, drug-induced brain change is not sufficient evidence that addiction is an involuntary disease state. Drugs change the brain, but this does not make addiction a disease."[53]

Unlike Dunnington, Heyman does not take up the mantel that a biblical worldview is the best means of orienting the addictive man away from the destructive consequences of drug use. For instance, he touts the virtues of AA and its emphasis on turning to a "higher power"[54]—a power that is defined by the individual. Unfortunately, without directing a person toward the true and living God, as Dunnington would declare, turning to a self-proclaimed higher power is simply a counterfeit form of worship. The point is that to effectively combat addictions of any type, acknowledging the medical implications of this behavior is appropriate, but only as a factor that is first dominated by individual choice (Titus 3:3). Acclaimed biblical counselor Stuart Scott wisely counsels, "When sin is not dealt with God's way, it is easy to fall into counterfeits for grace-based and love-based mortification."[55] Scott is correct in shining the light of caution in this area. If ignored, achieving enduring, lasting self-control is questionable.

Conclusion

Running a race is a fitting backdrop to consider the importance of self-control as an example of the biblically prescribe method to address life-dominating, enslaving sin.

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[52] Heyman, *Addiction*, 20.

[53] Heyman, *Addiction*, 97.

[54] Heyman, *Addiction*, 170.

[55] Stuart Scott, *Killing Sin Habits: Conquering Sin with Radical Faith* (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2013), 51.

Captured through the annals of recorded history from both a spiritual and secular perspective, this review presents evidence that the issue of self-control, expressed as either self-denial or self-discipline, has served an important role in both historical and contemporary thinking on how to run the race well. Church history in particular demonstrates that considerable effort has been exerted to instill a God honoring approach to self-control. Conversely, the secular approach has been hijacked by the corrupted loyalties of the fallen human heart to influence humanity's desire to serve self rather than God. These contrasting views highlight the tension that generates solutions, which deviate in both attitude and practice.

This tension is resolved for the believer by turning to biblical truth. Jesus declared that it is not what goes into a person that is defiling, but rather that which comes out of the person (Matt 15:11). Humanity's fundamental flaw is not addressing the condition of the heart—the inner essence of every person—by pointing to external sources to explain and justify what has gone wrong in the battle for self-control. On the other hand, biblical truth proclaims that the struggle for self-control is an internal matter. This claim leads to understanding that a lack of self-control holds open wide the door of the heart that allows self-worship to dominate the tendency to revere the creation rather than the Creator. This form of worship becomes entrenched and is manifested by enslavement to life-dominating sin. True freedom is only found when a person understands, and embraces, personal accountability for one's actions. The person then realizes the need to embrace Christ, his gospel, and his church. Only then is biblical self-control an obtainable goal.

CHAPTER 4

REVIEW OF BIBLICAL SELF-CONTROL PROJECT

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to help believers evaluate their current state of self-control and identify steps to grow in this area of spiritual maturity. The objective of the goals of this project was to equip believers to practice greater biblical self-control through the practice of scriptural truth in this area. To accomplish this objective, a discipleship process was initiated that began with an assessment of the participants' current level of self-control. This information was used to establish a baseline in the participants' practice of self-control. The assessment phase was followed by a Bible study that presented a biblical framework for addressing self-control. Following the Bible study, participants completed a second assessment to determine if there was any change in their baseline obtained at the start of the process. Finally, each participant developed a personal plan to continue the process of growing in biblical self-control.

Description of Project Design

The self-control project was conducted over a thirteen-week span covering twelve teaching sessions and a review session following lesson 3. The teaching sessions were grouped into three modules, each of which had objectives to meet the goals identified. The modules were (1) Examine Yourself; (2) Renew Your Mind; and (3) Re-examine Yourself. Each participant was supplied with a binder containing the course material and copies of the reference books that supported the lesson series.

The sessions were held weekly on Mondays beginning September 20, 2021. The concluding session was held on December 13, 2021. Each session lasted approximately

ninety minutes, beginning at 6:30 p.m. and ending at 8:00 p.m. However, it was noted that many break-out sessions lasted well past the scheduled end time. This was a healthy indication that significant engagement with the process was taking place.

Each session followed a common format which included a brief period of worship, an introductory lecture, and a group breakout session that closed in prayer. The worship period was led by the Renewal Ministry Leader (RML). The lecture segment was led by the Project Leader (PL). The breakout session was led by a Breakout Session Leader (BSL) who had been specifically equipped to oversee this portion of the session. These individuals comprised the Self-Control Leadership Team (SCLT). The breakout groups were divided by gender. Based on the number of participants, the breakout groups were composed of two female groups and four male groups. Throughout the project, the average attendance was twenty, while the total registered number of participants was thirty.

The worship period included prayer and congregational music. The worship period was instrumental in establishing an environment of Christ-centered focus throughout the session. The worship time was fairly unstructured and included open participation from those in attendance. The worship time was led by the RML and lasted for approximately fifteen minutes.

The worship period transitioned into the lecture period, led by the PL. The lecture was used to briefly review the previous week's objective and highlight the primary objective for the current session. The teaching portion of the session began with an exposition of a key scriptural text to establish the biblical framework for the lesson. Next, a discussion of specific application, and any additional supplemental information, was presented. The lecture period was closed with a discussion of the goals of the group discussion time which followed the lecture period. The lecture period length varied from module to module; however, the lecture time was fairly consistent for each of the lessons within a module. The maximum time allocated was twenty minutes.

The final segment of the session was the break-out period, led by the BSL. The primary goal of the breakout sessions was to provide an intimate, open environment for participants to discuss their understanding of the biblical truth presented during the lecture and specific application of that truth. The number of participants in each breakout group was intentionally kept small, with a target of no more than four individuals, including the BSL. The size of the group promoted building relationships both during the session and during extracurricular interactions. This level of contact facilitated re-enforcement of biblical truth and provided a real-time platform of check-in and accountability for participants. Each breakout session closed with prayer within the group. The breakout sessions lasted an average of forty-five minutes.

Course Development and Introduction

Prior to the beginning of the course, the SCLT met to develop the breakout groupings. Each participant was informed of their breakout group number and location when they picked up their course material packet. Participants remained in their assigned groups throughout the entire study. The course material packet included a binder with all the lesson materials, a copy of the required reading for the course, a personal self-control assessment inventory; and three copies of the self-control feedback inventory.

The required reading was composed of two books selected because of their emphasis on personal holiness achieved by addressing life-dominating sins. Module 1 and module 3 used Stuart Scott's *Killing Sin Habits: Conquering Sin with Radical Faith*. Module 2 used Rush Witt's *Diehard Sins: How to Fight Wisely against Destructive Daily Habits*. Participants were required to read both books to facilitate discussion during the breakout sessions. Additional supplemental materials were presented throughout the course to facilitate the participants' introduction to a wide range of teaching concerning self-control. The material was provided at no cost to participants.

During the first session, a brief overview of the entire course was presented, and the course materials reviewed. Included in the overview was general information

which laid out the course objectives and the required reading.[1] The course syllabus was presented which contained a high-level overview of the topics of each of the twelve lessons in the three modules.[2] A glossary of terms was also included in the course introduction material as a reference for participants if they were not familiar with special terms or concepts used in the course.[3] A listing of key biblical self-control verses was also included for reference and independent study by the participants.[4]

The Agreement to Participate release form was also reviewed and discussed during the course introduction. Although participants had the option to sign the release form, because of the sensitivity to the level of personal disclosure shared during the Renewal Ministry, it was recommended that each participant use a personal pin, known only to them, to complete the release form. It was stressed that if the personal pin option was selected, the only way to connect feedback from the process would require the participant to remember their code. This helped maintain the level of confidentiality that was the norm for the Renewal Ministry.

Module 1: Examine Yourself

The first module of the study was comprised of three lessons. Each lesson was designed to establish a baseline of self-control for each participant. Lesson 1 introduced the concept of biblical self-control. A key verse was reviewed, along with an excerpt from the required reading. The lesson concluded with an overview of three key questions that would be addressed in the breakout session and provided instructions for the assessment phase.

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[1] See appendix 4.

[2] See appendix 5.

[3] See appendix 6.

[4] See appendix 7.

Prior to beginning the breakout session, the PL introduced and reviewed the Self-Assessment Inventory Survey (SAIS). The SAIS was composed of forty-five questions arranged into three groupings: (1) Q1-Q20, personal background questions; (2) Q21-Q40, personal reflection questions; and (3) Q41-45, personal reaction questions. The SCI was designed to help each participant assess their current level of self-control. Following the general overview presented by the PL during the lesson introduction, the BSL reviewed the inventory in detail during the breakout session.

Each participant was encouraged to identify up to three individuals to participate in the assessment process on their behalf, i.e., their associates. Instructions were provided to the participants regarding how to obtain their associates' perception of the participants' practice of self-control. This feedback, called the Associate Self-Control Survey (ASCS), was a subset of the SAIS, containing only questions Q21-Q45, which totaled twenty-four questions. Course participants were instructed to identify three individuals who knew them extremely well. It was strongly recommended that the participants would select associates who were professing Christians, but it was not mandated.

Participants completed the SAIS of themselves during the breakout session of lesson 1. The BSL addressed any points of clarification from participants concerning the survey questions. If needed, the PL was also available to provide insight concerning the survey tool. Participants were given the ASCS to take with them with instructions to have the assessment completed by their chosen associates and returned to the participant as soon as possible but no later than two weeks from receipt.

Prior to completing the SAIS, each participant was asked to sign the Agreement to Participate by creating a personal pin. Participants were to write in the personal pin code on each ASCS form. The associates' ASCS form was returned to the participant in a sealed envelope that was provided with the form. The ASCS was also made available electronically, if requested, to transmit to their associates. If this option

was selected, then the participant provided their personal pin as part of the transmission of the form.

After completing the ASCS, associates were instructed to email the completed form to the PL. The intent was to prevent the participant from identifying their associate's feedback. In addition to the three individuals selected by participants, an ASCS was also provided if there was a desire to request feedback from one of the regular RMLs.

Lesson 2 of module 1 addressed the need for transparency and accountability that is uniquely found in Christian community. Lesson 2 was initially scheduled to be conducted two weeks after lesson 1. The week in between the two lessons was used as an informal time to review lesson 1 and any lingering questions associated with the survey (this activity will be formalized in future courses, expanding the total lessons from twelve to thirteen).

The key emphasis of lesson 2 was the presentation of the Composite Report that compiled the responses from the SCI completed by the participant, and the input from the associates selected to provide feedback. Both the SAIS and the ASCS utilized a modified Likert Scale, i.e., six-points in place of the traditional five-point scale. The options ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The PL compiled the results for each participant and placed them in a sealed envelope marked with the personal pin code. The report provided a visual tool to help participants identify areas of opportunity to address self-control issues.[5]

Another key deliverable from this lesson was the introduction of the Blind Spot Form.[6] Each participant reviewed their composite report to identify questions where feedback from their associates deviated from their response by two or more points on the scale. The key was to find three areas of differences, regardless of whether the score was

[5] See appendix 8.

[6] See appendix 9. A completed sample blind spot form is presented in appendix 10.

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considered more positive or negative, to log on the blind spot form. If there were more than three questions that met the criteria, then the participant was instructed to select the three they considered to be the most impactful.

The Blind Spot Form contained six columns that aligned with lesson 5–10 of the module 2 lessons. The Blind Spot Form became an integral component of the lessons to help participants address self-control areas that were challenging for them. A complete review of the Blind Spot Form was conducted as part of the re-examining process in module 3. Throughout the course, the BSL directed participants to review the Blind Spot Form to continually reflect upon areas of concern.

Module 2: Renew Your Mind

Module 2 is composed of seven lessons. Each lesson examines an aspect of self-control from a biblical perspective. The expectation was communicated that participants should come to the session having spent time reading through the lesson material. Following the opening worship time, the PL led a discussion for the entire group on the topic presented in the lesson. The first lesson of module 2, lesson 4, dealt with laying aside life-dominating sins as a fruit of progressive sanctification.

During the lesson, the PL focused on key aspects of the material presented, including highlighting a key supporting point from the required reading book. A specific point of application was also reviewed in each lesson. The lesson closed with an overview of the discussion that would ensue in the breakout session. Lesson 4 closed each breakout group with a brief review of the upcoming lesson, group prayer, and a request to stay in touch with each other during the week ahead. This pattern was followed for each of the module 2 lessons.

Lesson 5 presented the objective of practicing self-denial as a key enabler of self-control. The lesson dealt with mortification of the flesh through the prism of putting-off life dominating, enslaving sin. A key concept of identifying and destroying idols of

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the heart was presented in the lesson. Lesson 6 was the corollary session for lesson 5 by presenting self-discipline as the second key enabler of self-control.

The focus of lesson 6 was the concept of putting-on areas of spiritual discipline to replace the idols previously identified. Two enablers, self-denial and self-discipline, were identified as the believer's responsibility to join with the Holy Spirit's work to develop the virtue of self-control that makes up the fruit of the Spirit. The challenge was clearly presented in both lesson 4 and 5 that growing in self-control is not optional for a genuine disciple of Jesus Christ. A lack of self-control is an indication that something is broken in the relationship.

Lesson 7 was designed to build from the discussion initiated in lesson 6 concerning the importance of daily practice of the spiritual disciplines. As directed by the apostle James, the emphasis of this lesson was putting into action what was being taught and discussed. One of the spiritual disciplines, a time of personal worship with the Lord, was the key point of application in this lesson. A considerable amount of the teaching time was spent diving deeply into this requirement. The objective of addressing enslaving sins is not to only experience a change in behavior, but more importantly to experience the joy of walking obediently with the Lord.

Lesson 8 focused on identifying the true motivation for desiring to practice biblical self-control. As self-control increases, the focus for change becomes less about the believer and more about Christ. As the self-centeredness of the believer decreases, Christlikeness becomes an ever-increasing reality. True freedom is not in having the difficulties disappear in life, but rather in gaining the strength to endure difficulties as they occur. In many ways, lesson 8 is the highlight of the entire course.

Lesson 9 directly addresses the frailty of the human resolve, which wilts easily under the struggles of sin. Forthrightly, the biblical truth clearly declares that giving up and looking for excuses to fail is not an option. The apostle Paul declared that not only will the Lord never put anything on a believer without also providing a door of escape,

but he will also provide the strength needed to endure the trial; strength made available by the graciousness of God (1 Cor 10:7). If a believer is not growing in this area, then he is nearsighted and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from the enslaving power of sins (2 Pet 1:9). Lesson 9 drives home the point that no excuses are acceptable in the struggle against sin.

The final lesson of module 2, lesson 10, is designed to leave participants with a renewed sense of hope that in Christ they will ultimately experience growth in their ability to overcome enslaving sin. Review of the blind spot form is a key component of this lesson. The expectation is that, by this point, participants have begun to implement steps required to embrace biblical self-control. Again, the emphasis throughout the study is to build relationships that have touchpoints between the lessons. If the only contact between participants is during the session, then the effort has fallen short of expectations.

Module 3: Re-Examine Yourself

The final module is designed to determine if growth in biblical self-control has taken place in the heart of the participants. There are two lessons in module 3, lessons 11 and 12. The primary activity of lesson 11 is for participants to fill out the SCI again. A request was not made to have the participants' associates re-submit the survey. However, for the purposes of assessing if a change in self-control had indeed occurred, the BGL completed a survey on each participant in their breakout group. This information was not shared with the participant but was used by the PL to assess if any change in self-control had occurred (see chap. 5 for a discussion on this point).

The final lesson, lesson 12, is designed to help participants develop a specific strategy to continue their growth in self-control. A strategy template is presented to build the plan.[7] The plan includes an update to the Blind Spot Form to identify specific areas of opportunity requiring the participants' attention. The participants are also requested to

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[7] See appendix 11.

complete the Biblical Self-Control Promise Pledge as a sign of their commitment to growing in self-control and to validating their ownership of the plan.[8]

The final lesson was also used to request feedback from participants concerning the course. Each participant was requested to share one area of growth they experienced while participating in the study and one area of change that would improve the study. The lesson closed with prayer for each of the leaders, participants, and for the on-going success of the course.

Supporting Structure

Ultimately, the success of this effort resides within the participants' commitment to remain engaged in the process. However, the very nature of the issue being addressed, a lack of self-control, is a primary obstacle to accomplishing the goal. In addition to the session gatherings and creating a sense of Christian community that exists before, during, and after each session, other items must be in place to support the process, including building a leadership team, conducting regular leader review meetings, targeting a diverse group of participants, and building a prayer team.

Leadership Team

The execution of the project requires building a team of individuals to assist the PL in leading the effort. This team carried out several roles during the project. The first is to lead the breakout sessions that occur with each gathering. Each team member must be a seasoned believer who has a solid grasp on biblical truth. Strong interpersonal skills are required as well, along with solid listening skills, especially when sensitive information is being disclosed.

The ability to navigate difficult issues while maintaining focus on accomplishing the lesson goals is critical. The inability of people struggling with self-control to remain

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[8] See appendix 12.

engaged with the process is constantly a concern. Not only is this non-productive for the person drifting from the lesson focus, but it also hurts the overall group. If possible, having two BSL in each group is a means of maintaining focus in the group. If this is the case however, one of the leaders must assume the lead role to ensure the group is not pulled in different directions.

Another critical role played by the team members is to build relationships with participants and among participants. The need for genuine Christian relationship is not unique to this setting. However, it is difficult to challenge a person struggling with a lack of self-control to understand the struggle and to then take appropriate steps to change destructive habits without genuine relationships. Building relationships requires time, but the goal is that by the end of the sessions, a trusting relationship will have been established to help facilitate growth in self-control.

Review Meetings

Prior to beginning the course, and throughout the thirteen weeks, the leadership team met to discuss the session activities and plan for the week ahead. The team critiqued previous sessions to identify opportunities to improve the study. Each component of the gathering, worship, lecture, and breakout sessions were reviewed to capture what was working well, but also to recommend changes when needed.

During one of the review sessions, the team members shared that too much detail was being presented during the lecture time, which adversely impacted discussion during the break-out session. The PL received this feedback and with team input adjusted the lecture time to maintain focus on the key lesson points. Likewise, the PL exhorted the team members to adopt best practices developed by the team during their breakout sessions. It is the PL responsibility to ensure that this level of give and take exists in the team meetings.

Finally, feedback from the team helped facilitate changes to the course in real-time, including changes to the curriculum. When a point was not clear, both in lessons

already covered but more importantly in future lessons, the team was instrumental in helping the PL deliver a quality session. There was discussion concerning increasing the frequency of the team meetings, but this was not deemed necessary. The team meetings were conducted bi-weekly via Zoom.

Project Participants

The original project design was targeted at members of the Renewal Ministry. Renewal focuses on assisting believers struggling with enslaving sins, such as addictions. Indeed, many of the participants fit this profile. However, many participants also did not. As a result, there was an excellent cross-section of the body of Christ engaged in the course. This added a level of diversity that contributed to the overall strength of the project. It further demonstrated that building biblical self-control is applicable to all believers because in varying degrees all believers struggle with self-control.

The project remained open throughout its duration for new participants to join. When possible, either the PL or a leadership team member would attempt to work off-line with these individuals to allow them to join a breakout group and not feel out of place. This worked well up to about lesson 6 of module 2. After that point it was difficult to get a late comer up to speed with the group. However, allowing a person to sit in and learn from a specific lesson was permitted.

There was also a great mix of participants from a wide range of church affiliations. The maturity level of participants was mixed as well, from fairly new believers to many who have walked with the Lord for years. The majority of participants were male, but there was a good number of females as well. There were singles, married couples, single moms, parent/adult child, and a good generational mix. There was ethnic diversity and one international participant. Babysitting was provided to assist families who required that level of support, and a light meal was also provided before the session began (which is a normal component of the Renewal Ministry).

Conclusion

Overall, the execution of the project proceeded as envisioned. The level of engagement from participants was outstanding. The willingness to incorporate changes real-time not only improved the study but created a strong sense of ownership across the team. The self-assessment process, especially incorporating the associated feedback component, surpassed my expectations. Without a doubt improvement is needed, but overall the assessment process has great potential to both assess current levels of self-control and provide feedback to identify specific points of growth in this area.

Executing this project successfully would not have been possible without the involvement of the leadership team. The team provided encouragement at critical times in the project, but also implemented very important improvements. The excellent leadership of the breakout leaders allowed the PL the flexibility and freedom to serve as a resource across each of the groups. Also, this degree of freedom allowed the PL to interact one-on-one with participants as needed, especially those who joined the project after it started.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT EVALUATION

Introduction

The inspiration for this project grew out of a ministry context where a lack of self-control has devastating effects. Believers in general have a sense of what a lack of self-control is when they see it, but quantifying self-control so that it can be isolated and controlled is difficult. A lack of self-control is often witnessed as a breakdown in the resolve to choose holiness over the desires of the flesh and re-lapsing into sinful habits. Compound this struggle with sin habits that are deeply embedded in the heart and the need to improve self-control is evident for all believers.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to help participants evaluate their current state of self-control and identify steps to strengthen this attribute as an essential element of long-term spiritual fruitfulness and health. Equipping believers to gain victory over besetting sins was challenging. The project implementation confirmed that measuring and improving self-control is an ambitious undertaking. Overall, the purpose and goals of the project were accomplished. In addition, executing the project uncovered additional steps that would further help believers grow in the practice of biblical self-control.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

Three specific goals were associated with the project. The first goal was to evaluate the practice of self-control. The second goal was to develop and implement a curriculum. The third goal was to guide participants in the re-assessment their practice of self-control and facilitate development of an on-going strategy to improve self-control.

Goal 1

The first goal was to evaluate the practice of self-control of participants in West Park Baptist Church's Renewal Ministry. Addressing this goal involved developing a process to help participants evaluate their current level of self-control. The core of the evaluation process centered on the completion of a self-control assessment process. The process included a personal self-assessment and obtaining feedback from a group of individuals closely associated with the participant.[1] The total number of participants was thirty. Twenty-nine participants completed the survey process, including providing survey results from associates.

The initial composite report was used to establish a baseline for the participant to utilize the information presented in two ways. First, participants' responses were used to capture their individual assessment of how self-control is displayed through their thoughts and actions. Participants' scores were averaged to provide an overall assessment of their level of self-control. The average score for the initial assessment of all of the participants was 3.2 (the score range was 1 to 6). This baseline was used to determine if a shift in self-control occurred following the instructional phase of the project.

Second, the responses from the participants' selected associates e were used to provide insight into areas of difference from the responses provided by the participant. In particular, participants reviewed the composite report to identify a minimum of three specific questions to study in depth to discover possible growth opportunities. The questions identified in this review became an integral component of assessing ways to impact self-control during the education phase of the project. In particular, these questions were captured on the blind spot form to facilitate the review by the participants. The insight gained by the participants was used to provide a measure of their level of self-control and generate a baseline to document change that occurred upon completion of the course.

[1] See appendix 1.

An analysis of the survey data was performed to measure the course's impact on the participants. One area reviewed was to calculate the average score for the entire group of participants. The group average based on the initial assessment was 3.2. Again, this was an indication of how the participants saw themselves in the practice of self-control. To provide a point of reference for each participant, the associates' feedback was used to provide insight for comparison. The composite average for all of the associates was 3.1— identifying a difference of 3 percent from the participant scores. The data is presented in Figure 1.
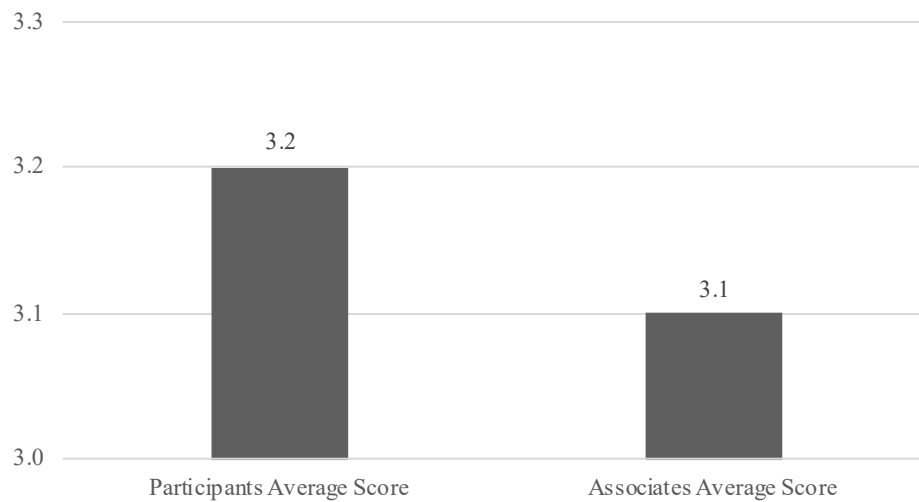
Figure 1. Participants' and associates' average scores

To develop this comparison further, a breakdown of the data into groups by degree of differences in the average was developed (see figure 2). The review highlighted that eight of the participants' scores deviated from their associates' scores from 6 percent to 8 percent. The second largest group was six participants with an average deviation from their associates of 11 percent to 15 percent.
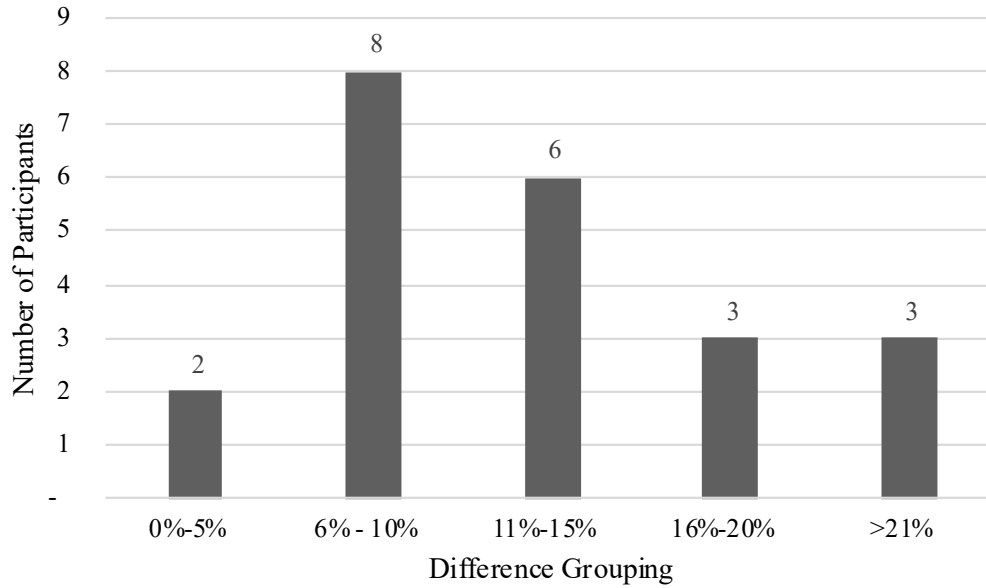
Figure 2. Difference between participant and associate scores

Goal 2

The second goal was to develop and implement a curriculum to equip participants in West Park Baptist Church's Renewal Ministry of self-control based on biblical principles. The curriculum was evaluated by a three-member expert panel utilizing a Self-Assessment Inventory Survey Evaluation Tool rubric.[2] The results from this review are presented in table 1. The average of the results was 3.71. Feedback from the evaluation affirmed that the objectives of the curriculum were achieved. No significant changes were recommended. The goal of preserving more than 90 percent of the curriculum as initially presented was successfully met per the panel evaluation.

A commitment to completing the entire curriculum was critical to the overall success of equipping participants to understand biblical self-control. Throughout the project, participants were actively engaged as demonstrated by their high level of both attendance and engagement during the course. Of the thirty participants engaged in the study, fifteen successfully completed the entire curriculum without any absences and the

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[2] See appendix 3.

average attendance throughout the thirteen-week study was twenty participants. It is also noteworthy that twenty-nine participants completed the assessment process, although not all attended each of the thirteen lessons. Twenty-two of the thirty course participants completed the assessment phase, achieving the 75 percent goal for this phase of the project. Overall, the second goal of the project was successful accomplished.

Table 1. Self-assessment inventory survey curriculum evaluation results

Criteria	Expert Score		
	ES1	ES2	ES3
Biblical Accuracy			
Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture.	4	3	4
Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible.	4	3	4
Scope			
The content of the curriculum sufficiently related to the self-Assessment process.	4	3	4
The curriculum sufficiently covers a biblical approach of assessing oneself	4	3	4
Instructional Methodology			
Each lesson was clear and concise, with defined objective(s)	4	3	4
Each lesson provides opportunities for participant to interact with the survey	4	4	4
Practicality			
The curriculum clearly details how to respond to the survey.	4	3	4
At the end of the course, participants will have a clear assessment of both how they, and others, see themselves.	4	3	4

1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary

Goal 3

The third goal was to guide the participants in the West Park Baptist Church's Renewal Ministry to re-assess their practice of self-control and develop an on-going strategy to continue improving self-control. This goal was met by twenty-two of the participants who completed the self-assessment process and developed a self-control improvement strategy that was reviewed with a Renewal Ministry Leader. The differences between the participants' initial scores to the scores collected in the re-assessment process was also analyzed. The results from this analysis are presented in figure 3.
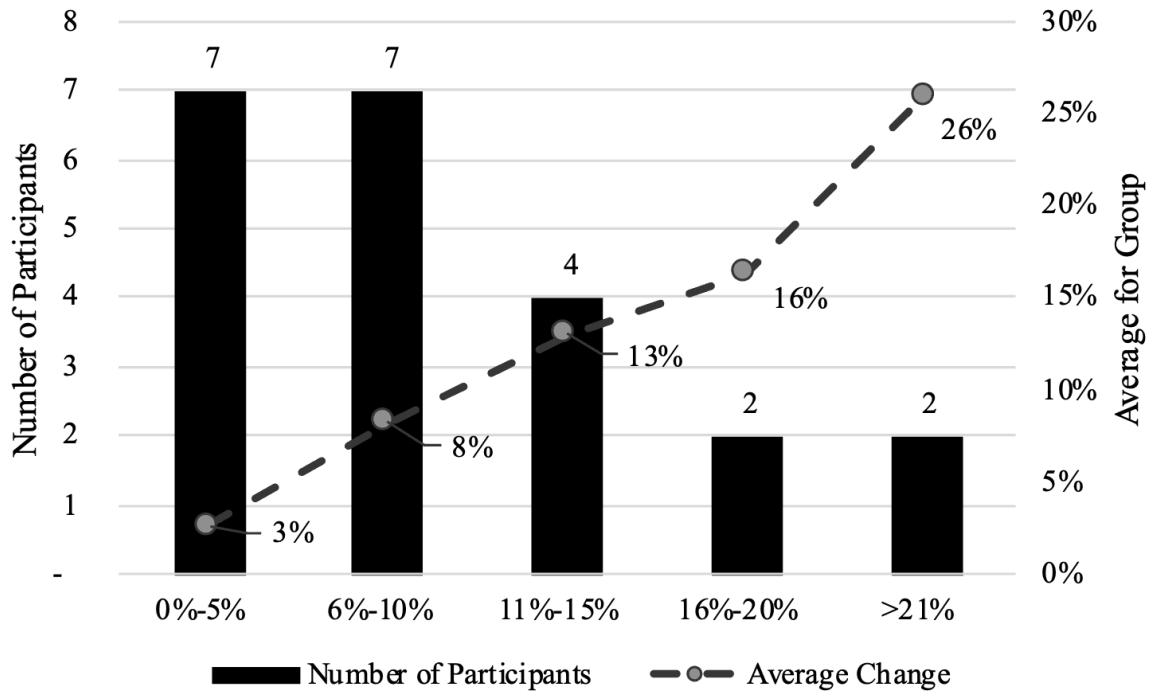
Figure 3. Participants' change in self-control scores

The data reveals that the re-assessment of the fourteen participants following the equipping phase of the project changed by less than 10 percent on average. Eight participants experienced a change of between 10 percent and 32 percent. Statistically a *t*-test analysis of the data showed no statistically significant difference ($t(21) = 0.7292$, $p = .2370$) from the participants' initial scores compared to the re-assessment when the SCI was administered following the equipping phase for the second time.

From an application standpoint, the baseline assessment provided data which supported the premise that people tend to see themselves differently than others see them. The 3 percent difference between the participants' scores and the associates' scores highlights this phenomenal. It was useful for the participants to review the questions where their scores were significantly different than their associates scores. The fact that a relative difference in scoring existed was sufficient for the participants to initiate the process of understanding why the deviation existed. During the equipping phase of the project, participants were provided the biblical background to assist them in the process

of discovering how to apply godly principles to facilitate heart change. Additionally, time spent with other participants in their break-out groups, along with the group leader, provided a forum to discuss application of the principles and also identify specific actions to apply the biblical insight they were obtaining. The value was not necessarily in the empirical score, but rather, in understanding how the heart has the potential to self-deceive (see Jer 17:9,10).

The data collected from the re-assessment process that involved participants retaking the SCI likewise provided a framework for them to realize that heart change is possible through understanding and applying biblical principles. The overall improvement in scores from the initial survey revealed that it is possible to impact self-control in a positive manner that honors the Lord. Participants were encouraged that expending the effort to look at themselves with the help of others, coupled with engaging in a community of fellow believers who were collectively engaged and committed to a rigorous study of a difficult issue, could—and did—impact their spiritual fruitfulness.

Overall, the measurement phase of the project provided each participant with an indication of their level of self-control, both from an initial standpoint and following the equipping phase. On average, each participant experienced a certain level of growth in regard to self-control, although this was not shown to have a statistical impact. The level of participation in the project was strong, as evidenced by the high level of attendance and participation. Based on attendance, participation, and participants' personal validation of growth in the area of self-control, this aspect of the third goal was successfully met.

The second aspect of the third goal was to have the Renewal Ministry leadership team work with each participant to develop a strategy to continue growing in the practice of self-control from a biblical perspective. Each participant updated the Blind Spot Form completed in the first module of the project to reflect any changes identified throughout the process. Changes included removal of any blind spots initially identified and successfully resolved by participants. Also, any new blind spots that were discovered, but

not successfully resolved, were added to the form. Each participant also signed the self-control commitment pledge. The leadership aspect of the third goal, focused on facilitating development of a self-control strategy by participants, was successfully met.

Strengths of the Project

Overall, participants' reception to the project was strong. Participants were eager to understand how Scripture addressing the topic of self-control. The unique focus of the Renewal Ministry was well-suited to the subject of self-control. A strong common linkage among ministry participants is a struggle to address life-dominating sins and increasing resistance to doing what is wrong. In addition to the targeted population, several non-Renewal Ministry participants also joined the project. The breadth of participants demonstrates an interest in the subject of self-control, and many expressed the need to have the project offered on an on-going basis.

The course was presented in three modules. Breaking the curriculum into modules facilitated absorption of the material. The intensity of the course was both a strength and a weakness. Because of the intensity of the struggle with self-control, the subject demanded a correspondingly complex approach. A concerted effort was made to present a sufficient level of rigor in the course material, but still keep it accessible for a general audience who may not have formal education beyond high school. The two books that were required reading were produced by authors who communicate effectively across a wide range of intellectual acumen.

Balancing the ratio of lecture time to group breakout time was also a strength of the project. The breakout time provided a key opportunity for sharing among participants. In regard to the group breakout time, it is important to understand that there is a distinction between group talk and group think. To ensure the success of this project, group talk must be maximized, and group think minimized. The responsibility to achieve this success fell to the leaders of the breakout sessions.

The opportunity to share openly during the breakout time served as a means of building cohesion and discovery within the groups. To promote this level of group dynamics, it is important to control the size of the group. If the group is too small, then not only does the breakout session become more like a personal counseling session, but more importantly it loses the power of leveraging shared experience. In the breakout group sessions, interaction among participants was key to opening pathways for transparency and providing encouragement to remain engaged in the process. Although many participants were dealing with categorically different sins, all could appreciate and relate to the intensity of the struggle. Group participation is a critical component of generating a good participant experience.

Conversely, group think is always problematic and a hinderance to growth. Group think is defined as the "mode of thinking in which individual members of small cohesive groups tend to accept a viewpoint or conclusion that represents a perceived group consensus, whether or not the group members believe it to be valid, correct, or optimal."[3] Minimizing the impact of group think is crucial when it does occur. The control of group think is one of the areas where the breakout session leader's facilitation skills become a determining factor in the quality of the session. The project was blessed with strong breakout session leaders. The leaders knew when to interject, how to navigate difficult topics, and when to use strong interpersonal skills to negotiate positive outcomes among participants. Depending on the need in the moment, the breakout leaders were instrumental in showing compassion, voicing exhortation, or simply remaining in the background as the group collectively worked through difficult issues. Throughout the entirety of the project, it was readily apparent that the leaders were able to maintain focus on the lesson objectives while encouraging and facilitating, individual perspectives.

[3] Anna Schmidt, "Groupthink," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed January 18, 2022, https://www.britannica.com/science/groupthink.

Overall, the self-control assessment reports achieved the intended purpose of guiding participants in identifying areas where a struggle existed in practicing self-control. A sample of the SCI is presented in Appendix 1. After receiving the survey responses from the participants' associates, the scores were combined to create a composite report. The participants' scores were recorded on the form using the red shading color; the associates' scores are the black color. The objective was to determine if there was agreement among respondents in their answers to the question.

Participants were instructed to identify questions where their personal responses varied significantly from the responses of their associates. Significance was defined as being at least two values removed, left or right, of the participants choice. Of the twenty-nine participants who completed the survey process, including receiving responses from their designated associates, twenty-five received three or more responses to their surveys that met the criteria of significant deviation in scores. Twenty participants had seven or more responses meeting the criteria.

Helping participants develop a focused strategy to address self-control concerns was also an objective of the project. During the first lesson of the final module for the project (module 3, lesson 11), each participant once again answered the questions 20-45. These results were compiled and returned to the participants during the final, and last lesson, of the project (module 3, lesson 12).

The final report adds the response from the participant to the composite report previously provided. Participants' responses from lesson 11 is the green color. Participants' associates did not participate in this phase of the study; accordingly, there is no change in the feedback from these individuals. Of the twenty participants who participated in a minimum of 75 percent of the lessons, fifteen showed some level of movement from their initial responses.

The project helped participants gain insight into areas where practicing self-control was problematic, especially through the lenses of associates whom they chose to

provide feedback. Additionally, participants improved their sense of self-control, from a biblical perspective. From the data collected through the re-examine process, there appears to be some level of change in the practice of self-control.[4]

In addition to providing the second round of survey results, lesson 12 helped participants build an actionable plan to continue maturing in self-control. A key component of this plan, aimed to encourage transparency, was to identify a group that would serve as a source of accountability in regard to building self-control. Each participant was required to initiate a detailed self-control game plan.[5] Effecting long-term change in self-control is an on-going effort. Investing in the action plan will help participants achieve this goal. Included in the action plan is a revised blind spot form that the participants developed throughout the course. The final component of the plan also included a self-control promise pledge.[6]

Weaknesses of the Project

As previously presented, the project was successful in meeting the original goals as outlined. However, based on the project execution and feedback from individuals who participated, evaluated, or helped to lead the effort, several areas are worthy of consideration to improve the project. This section is a listing of the feedback that would offer the most significant impact for increasing project effectiveness.

First, the self-assessment portion of the project received the highest level of critique and was seen as the most significant weakness. In particular, reviewing the number of questions and wording of questions is required to ensure clarity. The number of questions was identified as a potential barrier to gaining participation in the project.

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[4] See appendix 13 for the total data set.

[5] See appendix 11 for the game plan template.

[6] See appendix 12 for the complete pledge.

A second weakness dealt with participants' weekly preparation. A considerable amount of effort went into exhorting participants to prepare for the next lesson by reading the material provided and reaching out for additional support if needed. Throughout the project, the importance of reading of the material provided, along with prepping for the next lesson, was stressed.

A third weakness was not having sufficient review time built into the course schedule. As designed and executed, no formal review sessions were included. Including an appropriate number of review sessions would help to ensure that the participants were not overwhelmed with the material being presented. This became evident with an unplanned review session following the first lesson of the project. Considering the intensity of the curriculum, additional formal reviews should be considered.

A fifth weakness was allowing one of the breakout groups to become too large. The group ended up with more participants than originally planned and proved to be a significant barrier to keeping the participants engaged in the process. One of the strengths of the breakout sessions was the heathy level transparency and open discussions. When the group size became too large there was a significant decrease in the level and quality of dialogue. Also, a large group interfered with the formation of relationships over the duration of the project between the participants and the group leader.

A sixth weakness was that the current structure of the course did not include participants going back to a group of associates to gain insight. No doubt, obtaining feedback from associates during the re-examine phase would be a valuable source of information and support the project goals of determining if any change in displaying self-control has been accomplished. However, having time to carry out this additional survey element is problematic. Again, having adequate time to include this step would have extended the overall length of the course.

A seventh weakness was having multiple leaders in a single breakout group. One breakout group had three leaders at one time, which at times proved to be too many.

If the leaders are not unified in their approach, then it may lead to confusion in the group. This occurred when the dynamics in the discussion deviated significantly from the project design. As a solution, a new group could have been created, but in doing so the consensus was that it would generate more issues than it resolved. This was primarily due to the relationships already being established.

Finally, an eighth weakness was the potential subjective bias that results from gathering data using personal surveys responses. Inevitability, the weakness of subjectivity is an issue to consider. The impact of subjectivity may be minimized through how the questions are structured and communicated. Although participants expressed satisfaction with the process, developing a means of both measuring self-control in an objective manner, and then determining how to measure change from a valid baseline, is difficult.

What I Would Do Differently

Based on the feedback, especially the weaknesses identified while conducting the project, the following changes could be integrated into the course design. First, shortening the number of assessment questions would be reviewed. The initial thought is to is to reduce the number of questions by 25 percent if it did not weaken the integrity of the project design. It would be helpful to separate the first twenty questions into an information questionnaire separate from the self-control survey. A review of the self-control questions by an independent review group could help to ensure clarity of the questions, especially in addressing how interpretation varied from individual to individual.

Determining if and how to incorporate associate feedback in the re-examine phase is also an important area to review in regard to changing the project design. As previously presented, the initial approach to providing feedback to the participants during the module 3 re-examine phase is to utilize scoring from the breakout group leaders. However, because this was not part of the design initially, the leaders were not prepared to support this initiative. As a result, an informal request was requested from the leaders

concerning their assessment of a change in self-control among their breakout group participants, but it was not included in the project results. Including associate feedback was part of the strategy to address the inherent bias related to the subjective nature of the survey. Collecting data from the associates following the participants completing the course could have provided an important point of comparison to the post-course survey data provided by the participants. The associates' data would help determine if a shift in the level of self-control had occurred. This step would have extended the overall project, but the potential benefit would have justified the effort.

Adjusting the reading plan implementation would also be important. It became evident that providing a reading plan schedule, which included specific points of emphasis in the required books, is needed. Assisting participants in absorbing the required course material is critical. Unfortunately, individuals struggling with self-control issues may be challenged to follow through with the amount of pre-work and reading requested. Certainly, there is wisdom in continuing to review the material and eliminate anything that is not necessary but maintaining an expectation of dedication to meeting the expectation is part of the process of establishing self-control. There was a lot of material presented, so reviewing course material to eliminate anything that is not necessary, nor essential, to accomplishing the intended goals is a worthy undertaking.

Next, investing in additional training for the breakout session leaders to support their ability to lead the breakout group is important when the discussion deviates significantly from the project design. Conducting the project in place of the normal Renewal gathering eliminated the opportunity for personal sharing that normally took place in the ministry. The role of the breakout leaders is essential to the success of this project. Preparing this group to adequately carry out the responsibilities of this role falls to the overall leader course. Prior to commencing the study, a formal training program for the leaders must be developed and executed.

Group size should be defined prior to initiating the course. Keeping the breakout group size small will require more trained leaders. A 3:1 target group of participants to leader is the recommendation based on observations and feedback from the breakout sessions leaders. A total group size of four would optimize the discussion time during the breakout group session. This small group size would also allow leaders to build relationships with group members outside the formal lesson time.

To address this short-coming, the breakout group leader would be asked to serve as a proxy to provide limited feedback based on interaction with participants. It is still being considered how to share the leader feedback with participants. Following a discussion with the leaders on this point, ironically, the issue of maintaining confidentiality led to the decision not to share information. This decision was consistent with keeping associate feedback anonymous to participants.

Building in extra review sessions may require consolidating some of the lessons, but determining how to proceed in this area will be a key review area. Feedback from the leadership team would provide direction in this regard. The challenge is to include such reviews without extending the overall length of the course.

In regard to having multiple leaders in a single breakout group, formation of a new group was considered and discussed by the project leaders. However, in doing so, the consensus was that it would generate more issues than it resolved. This was primarily due to the relationships already being established. The solution was to have the leaders meet ahead of time to work through roles and responsibilities for the session.

It is worthy to invest in the development of a dedicated prayer team to support this effort, especially in light of the struggles many of the participants in the Renewal ministry face. Although in many ways the project was bathed in prayer prior to launching the study and after it began, it was not structured adequately by the project leader. In particular, prayer is needed for each participant individually. Incorporating the specific

areas highlighted by the survey process could form the basis of a specific prayer plan for each individual.

Confidentiality was another concern. The culture of the Renewal Ministry places a premium on maintaining confidentiality among participants. This is justified and was strictly enforced throughout the project. Respecting this element of the culture was important and adhering to it was important. Initially, there was concern about maintaining confidentially, especially with respect to addressing the Agreement to Participate. Significant corporate meeting time was devoted to discussing the purpose of the agreement. Ultimately, utilizing the personal pin was the solution to the confidentiality voiced among Renewal participants.

Accommodating latecomers was also an issue to address and adjust the course design accordingly. Late comers should be expected and accommodated. This issue may be addressed through arranging meetings with late comers to bring them up to speed with the rest of the class. Establishing a cut-off date for late comers is an option, but not preferred, especially within the context of the Renewal Ministry.

Theological Reflections

Christian discipleship is the process by which disciples become more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ. Through the application of biblical truth, every believer is enabled by the Holy Spirit to live victoriously over the pressure of trials and temptations. In doing so, believers become more Christ-like as evidenced by the presence of spiritual fruitfulness. A key attribute of the fruit produced by the Holy Spirit is self-control. Scripture repeatedly calls believers to exercise self-control (Prov 25:28; 1 Tim 2:11-15; Titus 1:8; 2 Pet 1:5-7). Living in a self-controlled manner is part and parcel of God's call to a life of holiness.

A key attribute that the Bible ascribes to God is love (I John 4:8). It is with little surprise that love is also defining aspiration for God's followers as well. As such, love is a fitting backdrop to juxtapose the attribute of self-control. It is arguable that if a believer

struggles with practicing biblical self-control, then there likely exists a breakdown in their capacity to love and commiserate with biblical expectations. Jesus is the supreme example of love infused with self-control. In an indescribable act of love while exercising the ultimate act of self-control, Jesus endured the suffering of the cross with joy (Heb 12:2). Without the ability to exercise great self-control, it is impossible to demonstrate great love.

Pursuing self-control is a serious undertaking for those who seek to follow Christ. The struggle for self-control is played out daily in the lives of people dealing with enslaving sins. However, to limit the discussion to this narrow prism would be to ignore the full scope of how self-control touches every believer as an aspect of Christian discipleship. One simply has to turn to the stories of Scripture to see how this universal struggle is played out, both in those who successfully exercise this quality, and sadly for those who do not. For instance, the narrative of Paul and Silas enduring persecution in a Roman prison readily comes to mind as a successful demonstration of remaining self-controlled in the midst of challenging circumstances. These two brothers in the Lord, beaten and thrown into prison because of their faith, were able to exercise both self-discipline and self-denial when it would have been easy to not do so. However, instead of giving into the pressure they were facing, they chose to worship with hymns of praise to their God (Acts 16:22-25). This is the epitome of practicing two vital aspects of self-control: self-denial and self-discipline.

Additionally, the apostle Paul eloquently develops the concepts of putting-off the desires of the flesh and embracing holiness by putting-on works of righteousness (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:5-17). Paul commanded the Corinthians to run the race in such a way as to win, and not lose; he instructed them to resist the lust of the flesh by denial and by building up spiritual toughness through exercising their faith (1 Cor 9:24-27). Indeed, Paul's exhortation is infused with the call to put into practice self-control. Paul also stressed self-control as a vital character trait for those who have been called to lead the church. In

particular, Paul highlighted this attribute in calling the church to examine deeply men who desired to fill the key role of elder among them (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8).

Finally, the apostle Peter expanded the call for all believers to abound in self-control, regardless of the role they were called to play in advancing the kingdom of God, most importantly in their daily interactions with one another (2 Pet 1:5-7). Peter's call to live self-controlled lives is even more persuasive because he is one of the biblical characters who demonstrates the destructive impact of a lack of self-control. His denial of Jesus prior to the crucifixion stands in sharp contrast to the emphasis he places on self-control in both of his epistles. The change in Peter's character is directly related to the power of the Holy Spirit working to transform his heart. Again, self-control is an aspect of the fruit produced by the Holy Spirit, but in an interesting manner that involves the effort of the believer.

This project's focus was on believers, but a lack of self-control is an ailment common to all of humanity. It is noteworthy because secular humanity has experienced a level of progress in understanding and exercising self-control because of God's common grace. The volume of secular research and writing concerning self-control is expansive. The motivation behind this infatuation is just as exhaustive. From understanding criminal behavior, increasing athletic dominance, to just helping children to behave differently, self-control is likely to remain a prominent issue. There is no question that the stakes are high and the benefit for society is certainly worth the effort. However, the cure for a lack of self-control remains elusive. Frustration over this predicament is increasing, and to those who understand God's plan of redemption for a fallen world, this comes as no surprise (see Eccl 12:11-14).

It is fitting to close by returning once again to the example of Jesus Christ. In particular, the episode in the life of our Lord when he had to withstand a direct attack on his faith by the archenemy of the faith, Satan. Physically weakened but spiritually resolute, following forty days of prayer and fasting, Jesus endured a planned attack unleashed by

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Satan aimed to take advantage of the circumstances to tempt him to sin. Triumphantly, while withstanding a level of temptation that no other human has faced, either in the past nor in the future, Jesus did not give in to the false promises of sin. Sin had nothing to offer Jesus that outweighed what he already had. Believers struggling with life-dominating sins tend to infuse enslaving sin with immeasurable power. The commitment to follow Christ can wilt under such pressure. Yet when faced with a temptation—a temptation that far surpasses anything we could ever face—Jesus exhibited great self-control. Believers have the power of Jesus available through the Holy Spirit. That is the reality that must be buried deep in our hearts so that we will not fall into sin (Ps 119:11).

Personal Reflections

Organizing and participating in this project was extremely rewarding for me. Self-control is an important topic, and the Bible devotes considerable attention to the topic of increasing self-control. I am amazed that I have never been availed of an in-depth study of this topic. Even as my interest in the subject of self-control increased, it was not driven by my personal need for growth in this area. In fact, my focus was on targeting a group of believers who were having significant struggles in this area of spiritual growth, that is, people who were attracted to a ministry like Renewal. So, it was not surprising that this project has provided a real-time workshop for me to engage an area I often struggle with in my own personal life. For that point alone, I am grateful to God to have had the privilege of sharing in this experience. I am very blessed that the Lord turned the focus on the beam in my own eye (Matt 7:1-5).

As much as I have gained personally through this project, I have been amazed at the way the project was embraced by the participants. It is evident that self-control is a topic that resonates broadly with all Christians—not just people struggling with addictions and enslaving sins. Unfortunately, believers can become caught up in learning about God but lose sight that with learning comes accountability and expectations. That is not the case for many of those who participated in this project. Far too many of them come to

Renewal because they are in the struggle of their life. This project was about dealing with real people struggling with real issues. I was touched that many of the participants were just thankful to have their issues receive such a thorough treatment.

However, it was also a struggle to see many who are caught in the depths of enslaving sin continue to look for easy answers to complicated issues. Caring for people caught in need for quick answers reinforces for me the importance of self-control in the facilitation of another aspect of the fruit of the Spirit: patience. Investing so heavily in walking with believers who struggle with self-control forced me to look deeply within to understand my own struggle.

Just as Jesus taught his disciples to deal with the beam in their own eyes before becoming infatuated with the spec in their brother's eye, I have asked the Lord repeatedly to help me understand why I find it so difficult to put down my besetting sin (see Matt 7:1; Heb 12:2). When he has, I find myself challenged, and frankly, severely disappointed in remaining so addicted to the lure of the flesh. I can almost hear the apostle James speaking directly to me: "These things ought not to be so" (Jas 3:10). It is a challenging and humbling realization that the Lord is using to help me become more Christ-like.

Conclusion

The focus of this project was self-control. It is an issue for believers and unbelievers alike. It is an especially dominating issue for many who struggle with besetting, enslaving, life-dominating, habitual sin. Sin is the blatant manifestation of violating God's standard and expectations. A lack of self-control props opens the door for the sin buried in the heart to erupt with devastating results for sinners, as well as for those most dear to them. Working with the participants in this project showed the span that these sins take, but the common level of destruction each is capable of.

Noted theologian, author, and pastor R. C. Sproul sums up the importance of self-control with the following statement: "Anger is [not] in itself sinful, but . . . it may be the occasion for sin. The issue of self-control is the question of how we deal with anger.

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Violence, tantrums, bitterness, resentment, hostility, and even withdrawn silence are all sinful responses to anger."[7]

       The issue of self-control is at the heart of how believers deal with the temptation to sin. The depth of emphasis Scripture places on self-control is significant. Understanding the lack of self-control, particularly how it is manifested in the believer's walk, is a worthy endeavor that every follower of Christ should take willingly and often. The personal benefit derived from this pursuit is only secondary to the joy it brings to God.

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[7] R. C. Sproul, *The Intimate Marriage* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1975), 72.

APPENDIX 1

SELF-ASSESSMENT INVENTORY SURVEY

This project utilized the West Park Baptist Church Self-Assessment Inventory Survey. Each participant completed the survey to provide data to establish an understanding of beliefs and practices in response to questions focused on beliefs and behaviors. Responses to the survey provided a baseline to determine what, if any, change occurred through participation in the project.

SELF-ASSESSMENT INVENTORY

Agreement to Participate
West Park Baptist Church's mission is to "reach people with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and see them develop as disciples who love God, love people, and impact the world." A key expression of this mission is to help believers of Jesus Christ to become better disciples. In achieving this objective, the results are two-fold. First, believers grow in their faith by yielding to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in their personal lives through increasingly yielding to His influence. As their personal lives are enriched through personal "Christ-likeness", the second aspect materializes as well—the ability to help other believers grow in their personal discipleship. A key component of discipleship lies in the area of self-control. This assessment will provide valuable insight into how believers understand the spiritual attribute of self-control and how it works in their walk.

By agreeing to participate in this assessment, you are providing consent to Al Cage to use the data you provide as part of a ministry project conducted in completion of a Doctor of Ministry degree from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS). The data provided will only be used in conjunction with this project and held in confidence, *unless disclosed with professors and other students associated with SBTS,* as part of the degree requirement.

Any personal information that may specifically identify you as a participant in this assessment will be redacted, however for follow-up purposes, it is requested that you share your name for future reference. If you elect not to share your name, please provide a six character personal pin composed of a combination of numbers and letters, plus containing one of the following special characters: **! # $ & * ?**..

Date: _____

Please provide one of the following:

NAME: _____

PERSONAL PIN: _____

Demographic Profile:

Age: _____   Gender: _____   Ethnicity: _____

Marital Status (check one): __ Married;   __ Single;   __ Divorced;   __ Widow/Widower

Highest Education Level Attained: _____

1. How long have you professed Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (in years)?

2. How long have you attended WPBC?

3. Are you a member of WPBC? _____   For how long? _____

4. I have a regular time of (Check all of the following that apply to you):
    ___ Personal Prayer   ___ Journaling   ___ Scriptural Memory
    ___ Evangelism   ___ Bible Study   ___ Corporate Worship
    ___ Serving in Ministry   ___ Discipling Others   ___ Helping Others

5. How consistent are you in having a regular time of personal devotion with Jesus Christ?
    ___ Everyday
    ___ Once per Week
    ___ Twice per Month
    ___ Not regular at all

6. How many traffic violations have you received in the last five (5) years? _____

7. Compared to what you consider your ideal weight, are you:
    ___ At my ideal weight   ___ Overweight by 10%   ___ Underweight by 10%
    ___ Overweight by 20%   ___ Underweight by 20%   ___ Don't know
    ___ Not happy with my weight at all   ___ Very happy with my weight

8. Do you actively manage the amount of time you (watch tv, play sports, video games, etc.)?
    ___ Daily: If so, how many minutes: ___ Min
    ___ Twice Weekly: If so, how many minutes: ___ Min
    ___ Other: If so, list estimated time: ___ Min

9. As a minimum, what percentage of your income do you budget?
    ___ 0%   ___ 10%   ___ 25%   ___ 50%   ___ 75%   ___ 100%
    ___ I have no idea

10. Do you remember your dreams? ___ Yes   ___ No

11. Do you often consult others before making a major decision?
    a. Yes
    b. No

12. What is the longest you have ever saved money for a major purchase?

13. Barring any medical issues, what is the longest you have ever fasted (gone without food) for spiritual reasons? _____

14. Are you aware of your spiritual gift?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    If yes, briefly describe your gift:
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

15. Are you using your spiritual gift in ministry at WPBC?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    If yes, briefly describe how you are using your gift:
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

16. When making an appointment, when do you consider yourself on-time?
    ___ 0-5 min   ___ Late by 5 min
    ___ Early by 10 min   ___ Late by 10 min
    ___ Just get there whenever

17. Do you own a pet? What kind (including number) :
    _____
    _____
    _____

18. In descending order, rate the following in your life (7 – strongest; 1 – weakness), please rate all:
    ___ Love   ___ Joy   ___ Peace,
    ___ Patience   ___ Kindness   ___ Goodness
    ___ Faithfulness   ___ Gentleness   ___ Self-control
    ___ Other (List amount: ___)   ___ I have no idea

19. How often do you regret what you say?
    ___ Most of the time   ___ Some of the time   ___ Little of the time   ___ Never

20. Do you feel slighted if others are getting more attention or recognition than you?
    a. Yes
    b. No

Please mark the appropriate answer to the questions below using the following key:

SD = Strongly Disagree
D = Disagree
DS = Disagree Somewhat
AS = Agree Somewhat
A = Agree
SA = Strongly Agree

21.	My closest Christian associates would say that I exhibit a high level of controlling my desires for the things I want?	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
22.	My closest Christian associates would say that I exhibit a high level of doing what I want but would not be good for me?	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
23.	My closest Christian associates would say that I exhibit a high level of doing what I consider to be the right thing?	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
24.	Do people say that your behavior is embarrassing?	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
25.	Do you tend to take out your frustration on others?	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
26.	I am sensitive to how my words impact others?	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
27.	I find it difficult to keep my thoughts to myself and need to express my opinion(s)?	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
28.	My closest associates would say I can be moody at times?	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
29.	People tend to be uncomfortable around me because of my unpredictable behavior?	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
30.	I often find that I regret something I have said or done.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
31.	I find that some people cause me to respond in ways that I latter regret.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
32.	Regardless of the situation I am able to maintain a "Christ-like" character.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
33.	I am a very good judge of people and how they are feeling in most situations.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
34.	People regard me as a good role-model.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
35.	If someone acts negatively towards me for no apparent reason, I tend to respond in a similar manner.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
36.	My closest Christian associates have to often remind me to watch my temper.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
37.	I am offended easily.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
38.	Others consider me cold and indifferent.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
39.	I have a difficult time of overlooking an offense from someone.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
40.	People look to me to help resolve conflict among others.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

Please indicate how you would respond to the following questions:

41. When I'm in a situation that results in an angry outburst on my part, I:
    __ I quickly get my temper under control and no one notices
    __ I easily get my temper under control even if initially I respond negatively
    __ I am able to handle my temper in an appropriate manner
    __ I lose control and it takes another person to help me gain control
    __ I lose all control and will not stop until the situation is totally out of control

42. I tend to communicate more effectively if:
    __ I respect the person I'm talking with
    __ I consider that I am being treated fairly
    __ I think the other person is willing to consider my opinion fairly
    __ I am respected by the person I'm talking with

43. In stressful situations, I tend to maintain a calm composure:
    __ Easily
    __ Fairly Easily
    __ With Difficulty
    __ With Great Difficulty

44. If left up to me, I am able to overlook an offense:
    __ Easily
    __ Fairly Easily
    __ With Difficulty
    __ With Great Difficulty

45. You overhear another Christian saying something unflattering toward you that causes you to become angry. Would you confront the person?
    __ Definitely
    __ Probably
    __ Maybe
    __ Probably Not
    __ Definitely Not

FINAL SURVEY PARTICIPANT ACTIVITY
Obtain copies of this survey from your leader and distribute to **three (3) believers** who know your well. Have them complete the survey beginning at **Question 14** to the end of the survey and return the completed document to your leader only **(NOT TO YOU)**.

APPENDIX 2

SELF-CONTROL ASSESSMENT INVENTORY SURVEY—
FINAL COMPOSITE REPORT

The Self-Control Assessment Inventory Survey Composite Report was used by the Renewal Ministry Leader to compile the results of the surveys completed by the participant and their three associates. This sheet was finalized to include the assigned Renewal Ministry leader feedback as well. After reviewing the final composite, any noted change in self-control was captured on this form during the final review session.

SELF-CONTROL ASSESSMENT INVENTORY SURVEY—
FINAL COMPOSITE REPORT

Please place the response to the questions below using the following key:

P = Renewal Ministry Participant
PA1 = Participant Associate 1
PA2 = Participant Associate 2
PA3 = Participant Associate 3
RML = Renewal Ministry Leader

14. Are you aware of your spiritual gift?

	P	PA-1	PA-2	PA-3	PA-4	RML
a. Yes						
b. No						

If yes, briefly describe your gift:

P	PA-1	PA-2	PA-3	PA-4	RML

15. Are you using your spiritual gift in ministry at WPBC?

	P	PA-1	PA-2	PA-3	PA-4	RML
a. Yes						
b. No						

If yes, briefly describe how you are using your gift:

P	PA-1	PA-2	PA-3	PA-4	RML

16. When making an appointment, when do you consider yourself on-time?

	P	PA-1	PA-2	PA-3	PA-4	RML
0-5 min						
Late by 5 min						
Early by 10 min						
Late by 10 min						
Just get there whenever						

17. Do you own a pet? What kind (including number):

P	PA-1	PA-2	PA-3	PA-4	RML

18. In descending order, rate the following in your life (7 – strongest; 1 – weakness), please rate all:

	P	PA-1	PA-2	PA-3	PA-4	RML
Love						
Joy						
Peace						
Patience						
Kindness						
Goodness						
Faithfulness						
Gentleness						
Self-Control						

19. How often do you regret what you say?

	P	PA-1	PA-2	PA-3	PA-4	RML
Most of the time						
Some of the time						
Little of the time						
Never						

20. Do you feel slighted if others are getting more attention or recognition than you?

	P	PA-1	PA-2	PA-3	PA-4	RML
a. Yes						
b. No						

Please mark the appropriate answer to the questions below using the following key:

SD =	Strongly Disagree	**P** =	Renewal Ministry Participant
D =	Disagree	**PA1** =	Participant Associate 1
DS =	Disagree Somewhat	**PA2** =	Participant Associate 2
AS =	Agree Somewhat	**PA3** =	Participant Associate 3
A =	Agree	**RML** =	Renewal Ministry Leader
SA =	Strongly Agree		

21. My closest Christian associates would say that I exhibit a high level of controlling my desires for the things I want?		SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
	P						
	PA1						
	PA2						
	PA3						
	RML						

22. My closest Christian associates would say that I exhibit a high level of doing what I want but would not be good for me?		SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
	P						
	PA1						
	PA2						
	PA3						
	RML						

23. My closest Christian associates would say that I exhibit a high level of doing what I consider to be the right thing?		SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
	P						
	PA1						
	PA2						
	PA3						
	RML						

24. Do people say that your behavior is embarrassing?		SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
	P						
	PA1						
	PA2						
	PA3						
	RML						

25. Do you tend to take out your frustration on others?		SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
	P						
	PA1						
	PA2						
	PA3						
	RML						

26. I am sensitive to how my words impact others?		SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
	P						
	PA1						
	PA2						
	PA3						
	RML						

27. I find it difficult to keep my thoughts to myself and need to express my opinion(s)?		SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
	P						
	PA1						
	PA2						
	PA3						
	RML						

		SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
28. My closest associates would say I can be moody at times?	P						
	PA1						
	PA2						
	PA3						
	RML						
		SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
29. People tend to be uncomfortable around me because of my unpredictable behavior?	P						
	PA1						
	PA2						
	PA3						
	RML						
		SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
30. I often find that I regret something I have said or done.	P						
	PA1						
	PA2						
	PA3						
	RML						
		SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
31. I find that some people cause me to respond in ways that I latter regret.	P						
	PA1						
	PA2						
	PA3						
	RML						
		SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
32. Regardless of the situation I am able to maintain a "Christ-like" character.	P						
	PA1						
	PA2						
	PA3						
	RML						
		SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
33. I am a very good judge of people and how they are feeling in most situations.	P						
	PA1						
	PA2						
	PA3						
	RML						
		SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
34. People regard me as a good role-model.	P						
	PA1						
	PA2						
	PA3						
	RML						
		SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
35. If someone acts negatively towards me for no apparent reason, I tend to respond in a similar manner.	P						
	PA1						
	PA2						
	PA3						
	RML						

		SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
36. My closest Christian associates have to often remind me to watch my temper.	P						
	PA1						
	PA2						
	PA3						
	RML						
		SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
37. I am offended easily.	P						
	PA1						
	PA2						
	PA3						
	RML						
		SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
38. Others consider me cold and indifferent.	P						
	PA1						
	PA2						
	PA3						
	RML						
		SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
39. I have a difficult time of overlooking an offense from someone.	P						
	PA1						
	PA2						
	PA3						
	RML						
		SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
40. People look to me to help resolve conflict among others.	P						
	PA1						
	PA2						
	PA3						
	RML						

Please indicate how you would respond to the following questions:

	P	PA-1	PA-2	PA-3	PA-4	RML
41. When I'm in a situation that results in an angry outburst on my part, I:						
I quickly get my temper under control and no one notices						
I easily get my temper under control even if initially I respond negatively						
I am able to handle my temper in an appropriate manner						
I lose control and it takes another person to help me gain control						
I lose all control and will not stop until the situation is totally out of control						
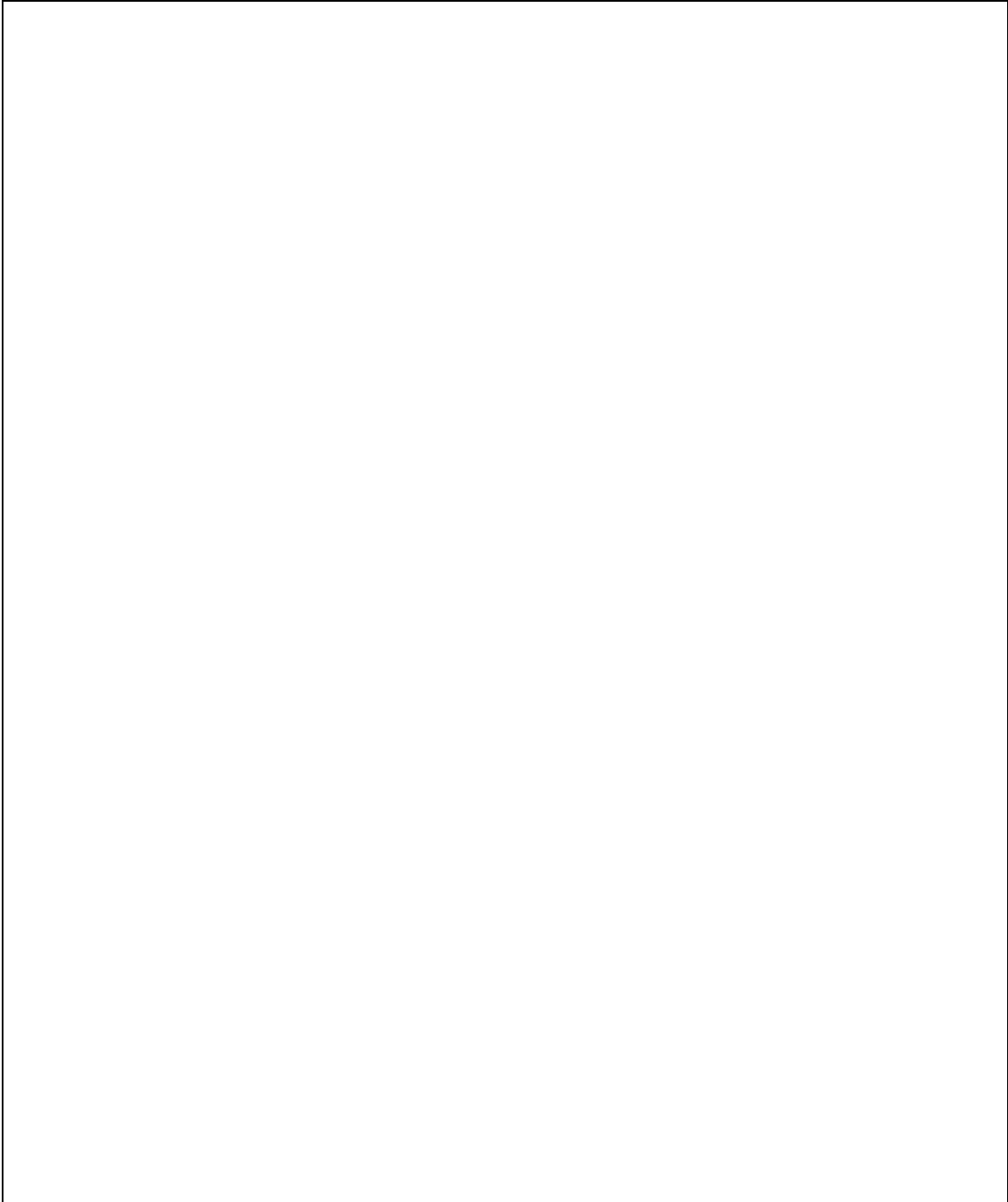
	P	PA-1	PA-2	PA-3	PA-4	RML
42. I tend to communicate more effectively if:						
I respect the person I'm talking with						
I consider that I am being treated fairly						
I think the other person is willing to consider my opinion fairly						
I am respected by the person I'm talking with						

	P	PA-1	PA-2	PA-3	PA-4	RML
43. Usually in stressful situations, I tend to maintain a calm composure:						
Easily						
Fairly Easily						
With Difficulty						
With Great Difficulty						

	P	PA-1	PA-2	PA-3	PA-4	RML
44. If left up to me, I am able to overlook an offense:						
Easily						
Fairly Easily						
With Difficulty						
With Great Difficulty						

	P	PA-1	PA-2	PA-3	PA-4	RML
45. Usually You overhear another Christian saying something unflattering towards you which causes you to become angry. Would you confront the person?						
Definitely						
Probably						
Maybe						
Probably Not						
Definitely Not						

RENEWAL MINISTRY LEADER: In the space below, please indicate any significant changes you have noted (please reference the Question No. if appropriate).

APPENDIX 3

SELF-CONTROL ASSESSMENT INVENTORY
SURVEY: CURRICULUM
EVALUATION RUBRIC

The Self-Control Assessment Inventory Survey Curriculum Evaluation Rubric assessed the exegetical merit of the proposed instructional principles, and faithfulness to biblical, historical, and systematic theology, while maintaining alignment with the instructional and discipleship methodology deployed at West Park Baptist Church.

Name of Evaluator: _____   Date: _____

Self-Assessment Inventory Survey Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Accuracy					
Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture.					
Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible.					
Scope					
The content of the curriculum sufficiently related to the Self-Assessment process.					
The curriculum sufficiently covers a biblical approach of assessing oneself.					
Instructional Methodology					
Each lesson was clear and concise, with defined objective(s).					
Each lesson provides opportunities for participant to interact with the survey					
Practicality					
The curriculum clearly details how to respond to the survey.					
At the end of the course, participants will have a clear assessment of both how they, and others, see themselves.					

Please write-in additional comments on backside if necessary

APPENDIX 4

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND READING PLAN

The self-control course introduction provided an overview of the objectives of
the course as well as additional support material required for the study.

COURSE INFORMATION

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Through participating in this course, each believer would:

1. Gain a biblical understanding of self-control, including why believers fall short of God's standard, how to biblically address common personal and interpersonal problems, and how people can change;
2. Increase dependence on God's revealed truth as the basis for growing as a disciple who is Christ-centered, Bible-driven, and Spirit-empowered;
3. Gain an in-depth assessment of their personal level of self-control and discern how to improve it biblically;
4. Develop an effective framework of accountability to identify strengths and deficiencies in biblical self-control;
5. Facilitate a biblical framework of love, compassion and wisdom as the preferred means of addressing issues that require the application of self-control.

REQUIRED READING:

"Our best advice is that you not read this book in an academic or accelerated way. If you will work through the material in a personal way, taking the time to put into practice its biblical principles, it will make all the difference in renewing your life."

Stuart Scott, *Killing Sin Habits*

"Sin is the fundamental distortion of our likeness to God's holy character. Whenever we sin, we also fail to think, act, feel, or talk like our Creator...We exist in order to image Him, but sin holds us back and perverts the portrait we would like to project."

Rush Witt, *Diehard Sins*

"When we fail to think God's thoughts, but instead choose to follow our own direction, the path always leads to destruction."

Al Cage, *Embracing Biblical Self-Control*

APPENDIX 5

COURSE SYLLABUS

The self-control course introduction included a presentation of the course syllabus to provide a roadmap for participants of the lessons' material.

SELF-CONTROL CURRICULUM SYLLABUS

No.	Module	Topic	Lead
1	Self-Assessment-PreEquip **EXAMINE YOURSELF**	Intro and Self-Control Inventory module.	ADC/RML
2	Self-Assessment-PreEquip **EXAMINE YOURSELF**	Group Self-Control Inventory module	ADC/RML
3	Self-Assessment-PreEquip **EXAMINE YOURSELF**	Composite Self-Control Inventory module results.	ADC/RML
	REVIEW SESSION	Review Lessons 1 – 3;	ADC/RML
4	Equipping **RENEWING YOUR MIND**	INTRO: The Biblical Concept of Self-Control: what the Bible presents as the critical role Self-Control plays in progressive sanctification.	ADC
5	Equipping **RENEWING YOUR MIND**	Self-Control: Self Denial is a vital aspect of biblical self-control, especially within the context of "put-off".	ADC
6	Equipping **RENEWING YOUR MIND**	Self-Control: Self Discipline is a vital aspect of biblical self-control, especially within the context of "put-on".	ADC
7	Equipping **RENEWING YOUR MIND**	Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines: Personal commitment to walk out the spiritual disciplines is an essential requirement.	ADC
8	Equipping **RENEWING YOUR MIND**	Spiritual Habitation: Walking in holiness is a daily exercise of "doing" what pleases God in every aspect of life.	ADC
9	Equipping **RENEWING YOUR MIND**	The Door of Escape: God actively provides the grace to enable believers to successfully carry out the battle to resist temptation.	ADC
10	Equipping **RENEWING YOUR MIND**	Finishing The Race: The goal is perseverance and faithfulness.	ADC
11	Self-Assessment-PostEquip **RE-EXAMINE YOURSELF**	Self-Assessment Guidance: Administer Self-Control Inventory module following Equipping Module.	ADC/RML
12	Self-Assessment-PostEquip **RE-EXAMINE YOURSELF**	Developing a specific strategy to improve self-control.	ADC/RML

APPENDIX 6

COURSE GLOSSARY

The self-control course introduction included a glossary of terms used
throughout the study to help establish a consistent terminology base for key words and
concepts.

Glossary of Terms

Accountability:	Every believer is responsible for their pursuit of personal holiness and for walking with other believers by providing admonition and encouragement (see Luke 12:47, 48).
Addiction:	A non-biblical term that the secular world has coined to represent enslaving behaviors caused by various issues, including being misdiagnosed as a disease. Within a biblical worldview, "addictions" are best described as "life dominating sins." Practice of sins becomes imbedded habits that displace God as the object of worship in the heart and dominate a person's life. It is noted that certain behaviors that lead to addictions include parental choices, i.e. infants who are born with an "addiction"; these situations require the greatest of love and discernment (see 1 Cor. 9-11; Gal. 5:16-21; Eph. 5:1-5; 1 Peter 4:3).
Bible-driven:	Submitting to the truth presented in the Bible, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, as the final source of authority in all areas covered (see 2 Tim. 3:15).
Christ-centered:	Maintaining a focus on pleasing Jesus Christ as Lord of one's life (Gal. 2:20).
Enslaving sin(s):	This term is used interchangeably with "life dominating sin(s)". Although all sins are an affront to God and detrimental for a believer, these sins have become particularly entrenched in the heart. As a result, any type of sin regardless of its nature (emotional, physical, behavior, lifestyle choice, etc.) that dominates a believers lives falls into this category Heb. 12:1,2).
Heart:	This term refers to the inner man wherein resides the seat of all emotional, thinking and spiritual identity for a person (Prov. 4:23, 27:19; Matt. 9:4, 6:21, 15:8; Mark 7:20-23Luke 6:45; Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22; Rom. 10:8-10; Heb. 10:22).
Interpersonal Problems:	Any struggle that a believer has in being able to walk in a manner consistent with biblical truth and principles with other people (see James 4:1-4).
Journaling:	The spiritual discipline of capturing one's personal experiences in written form (see Job 19:23-25; Ps. 102:18; Malachi 3:16).
Mortification:	A (see 2 Cor. 13:5-10).
Personal Problem(s):	Any struggle that a believer has in walking in a manner consistent with biblical truth and principles personally (see Heb. 12:4).
Relapse:	Returning to a believer's sin of choice, or a substitute, following a period of abstention (see Prov. 26:11).
Renewal Ministry:	A Ministry of West Park Baptist Church Knoxville TN to help believers address life dominating sins (see Rom. 6:6).

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APPENDIX 7

KEY SELF-CONTROL BIBLE VERSES

The self-control course introduction included a listing of important Bible verses referenced throughout the course and during the break-out group discussions.

KEY BIBLICAL SELF-CONTROL VERSES

Proverbs 25:28
A man without *self-contr*ol is like a city broken into and left without walls.

Proverbs 29:11
A fool *gives full vent* to his spirit, but a wise man quietly *holds it back.*

1 Corinthians 7:9
But if they cannot exercise *self-control*, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

1 Corinthians 7:5
Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of *self-contr*ol.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27
Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it *under control,* lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

1 Corinthians 10:13
No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted *beyond your ability*, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

2 Corinthians 10:4-5
For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every *thought captive* to obey Christ,

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

1 Timothy 2:9
Likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and *self-control*, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire,

1 Timothy 2:11-15
Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing— if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with *self-control*.

1 Timothy 3:2
Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, *self-controlled*, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

2 Timothy 1:7
For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and *self-control*.

2 Timothy 3:3
Heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without *self-control*, brutal, not loving good,

Titus 1:8
But hospitable, a lover of good, *self-controlled*, upright, holy, and disciplined.

Titus 2:2
Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, *self-controlled*, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness.

Titus 2:6
Likewise, urge the younger men to be *self-controlled*.

Titus 2:11-14
For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live *self-controlled*, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Hebrews 12:1
Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also *lay aside* every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

2 Peter 1:5-7
For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and *self-control* with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

1 Peter 4:7
The end of all things is at hand; therefore be *self-controlled* and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

APPENDIX 8

PARTICIPANT SURVEY RESULTS REPORT

Each participant received a detail report containing their specific data collected from the survey process. The identification of participants is redacted for confidentiality.

SELF-CONTROL ASSESSMENT INVENTORY SURVEY
Composite Report – ▮▮▮▮

Please mark the appropriate answer to the questions below using the following key:

SD = Strongly Disagree	**P** = Renewal Participant
D = Disagree	**PA1** = Participant Associate 1
DS = Disagree Somewhat	**PA2** = Participant Associate 2
AS = Agree Somewhat	**PA3** = Participant Associate 3
A = Agree	**RML** = Renewal Ministry Leader
SA = Strongly Agree	

21. My closest Christian associates would say that I exhibit a high level of controlling my desires for the things I want?

	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
P		■			■	
PA1						■
PA2					■	
PA3						■
RML						

22. My closest Christian associates would say that I exhibit a high level of doing what I want but would not be good for me?

	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
P		✓				
PA1	■					
PA2		■				
PA3	■					
RML						

23. My closest Christian associates would say that I exhibit a high level of doing what I consider to be the right thing?

	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
P					✓	
PA1						■
PA2						■
PA3						■
RML						

24. Do people say that your behavior is embarrassing?

	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
P		■		■		
PA1	■					
PA2		■				
PA3	■					
RML						

25. Do you tend to take out your frustration on others?

	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
P	■	■				
PA1	■					
PA2		■				
PA3	■					
RML						

26. I am sensitive to how my words impact others?

	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
P		■		■		■
PA1						■
PA2					■	
PA3					■	
RML						

SELF-CONTROL ASSESSMENT INVENTORY SURVEY
Composite Report – ███████

Please mark the appropriate answer to the questions below using the following key:

SD = Strongly Disagree   P   = Renewal Participant
D = Disagree   PA1 = Participant Associate 1
DS = Disagree Somewhat   PA2 = Participant Associate 2
AS = Agree Somewhat   PA3 = Participant Associate 3
A = Agree   RML = Renewal Ministry Leader
SA = Strongly Agree

27. I find it difficult to keep my thoughts to myself and need to express my opinion(s)?		SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
	P					✓	
	PA1	■					
	PA2						■
	PA3			■			
	RML						

28. My closest associates would say I can be moody at times?		SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
	P		✓				
	PA1	■					
	PA2	■					
	PA3		■				
	RML						

29. People tend to be uncomfortable around me because of my unpredictable behavior?		SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
	P		✓				
	PA1	■					
	PA2	■					
	PA3	■					
	RML						

30. I often find that I regret something I have said or done.		SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
	P		■	■			
	PA1	■					
	PA2				■		
	PA3					■	
	RML						

31. I find that some people cause me to respond in ways that I later regret.		SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
	P		■	■			
	PA1	■					
	PA2		■				
	PA3				■		
	RML						

32. Regardless of the situation I am able to maintain a "Christ-like" character.		SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
	P	■				■	
	PA1						■
	PA2					■	
	PA3						■
	RML						

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SELF-CONTROL ASSESSMENT INVENTORY SURVEY
Composite Report – ▮▮▮

Please mark the appropriate answer to the questions below using the following key:

SD = Strongly Disagree	P = Renewal Participant
D = Disagree	PA1 = Participant Associate 1
DS = Disagree Somewhat	PA2 = Participant Associate 2
AS = Agree Somewhat	PA3 = Participant Associate 3
A = Agree	RML = Renewal Ministry Leader
SA = Strongly Agree	

33. I am a very good judge of people and how they are feeling in most situations.

	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
P				■		
PA1					■	
PA2						■
PA3					■	
RML						

34. People regard me as a good role-model.

	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
P					✓	
PA1						■
PA2						■
PA3						■
RML						

35. If someone acts negatively towards me for no apparent reason, I tend to respond in a similar manner.

	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
P		■			■	
PA1	■					
PA2					■	
PA3	■					
RML						

36. My closest Christian associates have to often remind me to watch my temper.

	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
P	■	■				
PA1	■					
PA2	■					
PA3	■					
RML						

37. I am offended easily.

	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
P		✓				
PA1	■					
PA2	■					
PA3	■					
RML						

38. Others consider me cold and indifferent.

	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
P		■		■		
PA1	■					
PA2		■				
PA3	■					
RML						

SELF-CONTROL ASSESSMENT INVENTORY SURVEY
Composite Report - ▮▮▮▮

Please mark the appropriate answer to the questions below using the following key:

SD = Strongly Disagree	P	= Renewal Participant
D = Disagree	PA1	= Participant Associate 1
DS = Disagree Somewhat	PA2	= Participant Associate 2
AS = Agree Somewhat	PA3	= Participant Associate 3
A = Agree	RML	= Renewal Ministry Leader
SA = Strongly Agree		

39. I have a difficult time of overlooking an offense from someone.

	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
P		▒			▒	
PA1						
PA2			■			
PA3	■					
RML						

40. People look to me to help resolve conflict among others.

	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
P			▒		▒	
PA1						■
PA2				■		
PA3						■
RML						

41. When I'm in a situation that results in an angry outburst on my part,:

	P	PA-1	PA-2	PA-3	RML
__ I quickly get my temper under control and no one notices		■	■		
__ I easily get my temper under control even if initially I respond negatively	▒				
__ I am able to handle my temper in an appropriate manner			■		
__ I lose control and it takes another person to help me gain control					
__ I lose all control and will not stop until the situation is totally out of control					

42. I tend to communicate more effectively if:

	P	PA-1	PA-2	PA-3	RML
__ I respect the person I'm talking with			■		
__ I consider that I am being treated fairly					
__ I think the other person is willing to consider my opinion fairly			■		
__ I am respected by the person I'm talking with	✓				

43. In stressful situations, I tend to maintain a calm composure:

	P	PA-1	PA-2	PA-3	RML
__ Easily	✓	■		■	
__ Fairly Easily			■		
__ With Difficulty					
__ With Great Difficulty					

44. If left up to me, I am able to overlook an offense:

	P	PA-1	PA-2	PA-3	RML
__ Easily		■		■	
__ Fairly Easily	▒		■		
__ With Difficulty	▒				
__ With Great Difficulty					

45. You overhear another Christian saying something unflattering toward you that causes you to become angry. Would you confront the person?

	P	PA-1	PA-2	PA-3	RML
__ Definitely					
__ Probably			■	■	
__ Maybe	▒	■			
__ Probably Not	▒				
__ Definitely Not					

APPENDIX 9

BLIND SPOT FORM

The Blind Sport Form was initially completed in lesson 3 and reviewed throughout the course. Participants revised the original form as part of lesson 12 strategy session.

Blind Spot Form
instructions

Blind Spot Description	self-denial (put-off)	self-discipline (put-on)	spiritual discipline	specific habit	door of escape	finish strong
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**

1 After Lesson 3 (MOD-1), select up to three of the questions from the Composite Report Feedback report and list here.

2 After Lesson 5 (MOD-2), what specific of spiritual self-control is needed for you to address for each of the blind-spots you have captured.

3 After Lesson 6 (MOD-2), what specific spiritual self-discipline is needed for you to address each of the blind-spots you have captured.

4 After Lesson 7 (MOD-2), what are the spiritual disciplines that you need to address to maintain the changes you are implementing to lay aside your "be-setting" sin(s).

5 After Lesson 8 (MOD-2), what specific "new" habits do you need to incorporate into your walk for each of the blind-spots listed (make sure you identify the "bad" habits that the new habits will replace, i.e. "put-off" and "put-on" principle).

6 After Lesson 9 (MOD-2), reflect on how God has given you specific evidence that He will provide the "door of escape" needed to reject the enticement of sin; what are the steps you must take to walk through the "door"?

7 After Lesson 10 (MOD-3), review key insights gained from previous lessons in developing your **Biblical Self-Control Game Plan.** This plan is a key element of your strategy to sustain on-going victory over "be-setting" sins.

Blind Spot Form

Blind Spot Description	self-denial (put-off)	self-discipline (put-on)	spiritual discipline	specific habit	door of escape	finish strong

APPENDIX 10

SAMPLE BLIND SPOT FORM

A sample form was presented to help communicate the intent and use of the Blind Spot Form.

Blind Spot Form
example

Blind Spot Description	self-denial (put-off)	self-discipline (put-on)	spiritual discipline	specific habit	door of escape	finish strong
21. My closest Christian associates would say that I exhibit a high level of controlling my desires for the things I want	I struggle with watching too much TV, which takes away from my time with the Lord. Starting this week, I will diligently track the amount of time I watch TV and cut it by 20% next week.	As things come up that I "desire", I will begin evaluating if getting what I want honors Christ: **Yes:** proceed; **No:** stop immediately; **Not Sure:** stop immediately	To replace the time I usually watched TV, I will begin to have a time of daily devotion and in-depth bible study with another believer.	I will eliminate from any TV that I do watch, anything that is not honoring to God and begin to only watch specific programing that is healthy and uplifting.	My best buddy asked me to come over and watch "Game of Apples", as I was getting to say yes, a text came across my phone from Scott to go four-wheeling...I went!	It's been 11 months and I have reduced my TV watching time by 75% without even trying. Now my best buddy has put down "Game of Apples" and I'm encouraging him in his walk with the Lord.
32. Regardless of the situation I am able to maintain a "Christ-like" character.	I have accepted Satan's lie that my struggle with porn is unique and no one truly understand my situation. I no longer believe this lie and will begin to stop entertaining my "be-setting" sin. The path to victory begins in my mind.	The lust for porn has become a daily obsession that I actively feed; I have believed the lie that it is a need. As lustful thoughts creep into my mind I will replace them with scriptural truth and share my struggle with my accountability partner.	I will start each day with meditating on the promises of 2 Cor. 5:17 and Gal. 2:22. Any media outlet that I engage with will be carried out in a "public" space and limited to only what is needed. I will "cut-off" any access to porn.	It's time now to really intensify my efforts at embedding new spiritual habits into my life. I will: Daily – Personal Devotions; Weekly – Attend at least one spiritual development opportunity and worship service; Monthly: I will serve in a ministry opportunity.	As I was driving down the interstate a billboard caught my eye; my lust to seek out porn was ignited and I felt helpless to fight it; just as I was mapping out a way to sin, an officer pulled me over for speeding...I gladly paid the fine!	Christ looked to God to provide all of his needs. Whenever a trial presents itself I will look back on the testimony of how God has provided the means for me to become more and like Christ. I will renew my vow to follow him.
41. When I'm in a situation that results in an angry outburst on my part...	After attending the "Self-control" study, I realize now how true this is for me. My speech is the way I most often express my anger; beginning this way I will focus on not saying anything when I am angry.	I am beginning to understand that my anger is a "heart" issue that has to be uncovered. I need to supplement my "keep my mouth shut" with deep contemplation about what is worth more: venting my anger or the relationship?	I need help understanding the root of my anger. My group leader has recommended reading "Uprooting Anger", using it, I will begin a biblical study to understand and address the sin that is in my heart.	I will practice replacing my harsh/angry/bitter speech with words that are uplifting and filled with the hope of the gospel (see Eph. 4:29 to build up in place of tearing down).	After being discouraged that I was losing the battle to get my anger under control and ready to give up, my friend who filled out my survey shared that he had been prompted by God to share how much I have changed.	The battle to overcome anger is long and demanding. As success comes it is critical to continue to understand that confessing this sin to those I have offended and asking forgiveness is needed and required.

APPENDIX 11

GAME PLAN TEMPLATE

The Game Plan Template was completed in lesson 12 by the participants to create a personal action plan to continue pursuing biblical self-control.

Biblical Self-Control Game Plan

Addressing Life Dominating Sins

Return to the Life Dominating Sin Worksheet (Mod-2, Lesson 8, Spiritual Habitation), and discuss with your group how you are currently dealing with these issues. Be specific:

❑ This sin remains a significant issue in my life; how often are you failing to deny the flesh in regards to this sin:
- o Daily
- o Weekly
- o Other (describe):_____
_____
_____
_____

❑ What is the specific biblical virtue are you taking steps to in-grain in your life?

Return to Mod-1, Lesson 3, and review the blind spot form you completed. Are any of the "blind spots" still a struggle for you? If so, list them on a new form and also record any additional blind spots you may have uncovered:

1.

2.

3.

Now that you understand the importance of having an accountability group composed of people committed to pleasing God in everything they do, name three individuals who you will ask to partners you as you continue working on improving biblical self-control in your life:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

APPENDIX 12

SELF-CONTROL PROMISE PLEDGE

The Self-Control Promise Pledge was completed in lesson 12 by the participants to register their commitment to continue pursuing biblical self-control and develop an accountability network to monitor progress.

Biblical Self-Control Game Plan

Biblical Self-Control Promise Pledge

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.

2 Peter 1:5-7

Lord, It is my desire to make every effort to live my life in a manner that pleases you. I make this pledge to honor you through submitting to the Holy Spirit in the pursuit of Biblical Self-Control. There are sins that I have allowed to rule in my heart that have replaced you as my object of worship. I confess that this is sinful and I am committed to demonstrating the fruit of repentance as evidence by the way I think and the actions I take. Accordingly, it is my desire to:

Submit to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and yield to his influence by building a healthy conscience that is alive and sensitive to biblical principles(Eph. 4:30; 5:18; 2 Cor. 1:12).

Commit to embracing holiness and reject anything that is not pleasing to you by running with all diligence the race that is set before me (Heb. 12:1,2; 1 Cor. 9:24).

Daily strive to put-off unrighteousness and to put-on righteousness both in my thoughts and my actions (Eph. 4: 22-24;2 Cor. 10:5; 2 Peter 1:4-11).

I recognize that the race is not given to the swift, but to those who endure to the very end. I am able to persevere not because of my personal strength, but because you are the keeper and lover of my soul (Eph. 1: 7-14; Phil. 1:6; 2:12, 13; I John 1:13).

In recognition of this pledge of commitment, I humbly sign this document as a sign of my trust in you to do all that you have promised to do for those who love you and are called by you. Furthermore, those who have signed this pledge with me do so as an act of love to help me be accountable for remaining faithful as I press on to live a life pleasing to God.

_____

SIGNATURE

_____

DATE

WITNESSES

_____

_____

_____

LESSON 12 RE-EXAMINE YOU

130

APPENDIX 13

PARTICIPANT DATA SET

The Participant Data Set contains the assessment of the data collected from the participants who completed the entire assessment process. The total number of participants in the project was thirty, however eight were not included in the final data set.

Table A1. Survey data

Initial SCI Results

PARTICIPANT	Q21	Q22	Q23	Q24	Q25	Q26	Q27	Q28	Q29	Q30	Q31	Q32	Q33	Q34	Q35	Q36	Q37	Q38	Q39	Q40	Q41	Q42	Q43	Q44	Q45	PRE-TEST TOTAL
501593	2	2	5	2	1	4	5	2	2	2	2	5	1	5	2	2	2	2	2	5	2	4	1	2	5	69
BJG27!	4	4	3	4	2	6	1	5	4	6	4	2	2	4	1	3	6	2	6	2	2	3	4	4	2	86
21856#	4	2	5	1	1	5	2	1	1	2	2	5	5	5	4	1	2	2	2	6	3	4	3	2	3	73
#41590	5	2	6	2	3	5	6	4	1	3	3	5	5	5	3	3	3	2	3	4	2	3	2	2	2	84
#1169!	4	2	5	1	2	6	2	4	1	3	4	4	4	4	2	3	2	2	2	3	3	2	2	2	4	73
6718#!	4	6	6	3	5	1	6	6	1	1	3	2	4	5	3	5	1	6	3	4	3	1	2	2	3	86
BDOG$1	3	1	6	1	4	5	6	2	1	5	5	5	5	4	2	1	1	1	2	5	3	3	1	2	1	75
CHEVY!	4	2	5	2	2	5	5	4	2	2	2	4	5	4	4	2	4	2	5	4	2	3	2	2	4	82
1112##	5	4	5	2	4	5	5	4	2	4	3	4	5	4	3	2	1	1	2	5	3	3	2	2	2	82
CONT1	4	3	4	1	3	5	4	3	1	3	3	4	4	4	4	2	3	1	4	4	2	3	2	2	3	76
011IE!	5	2	5	2	1	5	2	3	2	2	2	4	5	4	2	2	2	2	2	4	3	1	1	1	1	65
FIFER!	5	2	5	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	4	4	4	2	2	2	2	2	5	2	1	2	2	3	65
!23456	4	4	5	3	4	5	1	6	2	6	5	4	4	3	5	2	4	4	4	2	3	4	2	3	4	93
0278!!	5	2	5	2	2	5	2	2	1	2	2	5	5	5	2	2	2	2	2	5	2	1	1	2	3	69
196671	3	5	6	1	4	4	1	3	1	3	1	3	1	3	3	1	1	1	1	5	3	3	3	1	2	63
13861!	4	4	5	4	2	4	5	4	3	4	4	5	5	4	3	1	2	2	4	2	3	1	2	3		83
687607	3	4	5	3	4	4	2	5	5	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	90
#97979	3	4	5	3	4	4	2	5	5	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	90
DM524!	4	3	5	2	4	6	6	5	1	6	4	2	6	4	4	3	3	4	5	5	2	3	2	3	4	96
POP21$	5	2	6	2	6	6	6	3	1	6	3	5	1	5	1	1	3	1	4	3	1	3	2	3	4	83
OWENS1$	4	1	6	1	1	5	6	3	3	5	4	5	6	6	1	1	2	1	2	6	2	4	1	2	5	83
##112	3	3	5	2	4	4	5	4	2	3	5	3	4	5	5	3	3	2	5	3	3	1	2	3	2	84

Final SCI Results

PARTICIPANT	Q21	Q22	Q23	Q24	Q25	Q26	Q27	Q28	Q29	Q30	Q31	Q32	Q33	Q34	Q35	Q36	Q37	Q38	Q39	Q40	Q41	Q42	Q43	Q44	Q45	POST-TEST-TOTAL
501593	5	2	5	4	2	2	5	2	2	3	3	1	4	5	5	1	2	4	5	3	3	4	1	3	3	79
BJG27!	4	5	5	4	5	6	3	6	5	6	5	5	2	5	4	5	5	4	5	4	4	3	3	4	4	111
21856#	4	4	5	2	2	5	2	4	1	3	2	2	5	5	3	3	2	2	2	5	3	4	3	2	3	78
#41590	5	2	6	2	2	5	5	2	1	2	3	5	5	5	3	3	3	2	2	4	2	2	1	2	4	78
#1169!	4	2	5	1	2	6	2	4	1	2	4	5	4	5	2	1	2	1	4	3	2	1	1	2	4	70
6718#!	2	5	4	2	6	3	3	6	1	4	4	4	3	4	4	5	4	2	4	3	1	2	2	3		85
BDOG$1	5	1	5	1	3	5	2	2	1	2	2	4	5	5	2	1	1	1	2	4	3	3	2	2	1	65
CHEVY!	4	2	4	2	3	4	3	4	1	2	2	4	5	4	3	2	4	2	4	4	3	3	2	2	5	78
1112##	5	4	5	2	4	5	5	4	2	4	3	4	5	4	3	2	1	1	2	4	3	3	2	2	2	81
CONT1	5	3	4	1	3	5	4	3	1	3	3	4	4	4	3	1	3	1	4	5	3	3	2	2	4	78
011IE!	5	2	5	2	1	2	3	2	4	3	2	4	5	4	2	1	3	2	2	4	2	3	1	2	1	67
FIFER!	5	3	5	2	2	4	2	3	2	2	2	4	4	4	4	2	4	2	2	4	3	4	2	2	3	76
!23456	4	4	5	6	4	5	1	6	1	6	5	4	5	2	5	1	3	3	6	1	2	3	2	3	5	92
0278!!	5	2	6	2	2	3	2	2	1	2	3	3	5	5	2	1	2	1	2	5	2	1	2	2	2	62
196671	1	1	2	1	4	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	4	1	3	3	3	43
13861!	4	4	4	4	2	3	4	4	3	4	3	4	4	4	3	2	2	2	3	4	2	1	1	1	3	75
687607	4	3	5	3	2	4	3	4	2	3	4	4	4	5	3	3	3	2	3	4	3	3	2	3	3	82
#97979	4	3	5	3	2	4	3	4	2	3	4	4	4	5	3	3	3	2	3	4	3	3	2	3	3	82
DM524!	4	2	5	2	2	5	4	2	4	5	3	5	3	4	2	4	2	3	2	3	3	2	3	3	3	83
POP21$	4	3	3	4	5	5	5	5	4	6	5	4	2	2	3	2	4	1	6	3	2	3	2	1	4	88
OWENS1$	6	1	6	2	1	5	4	2	1	2	1	5	6	6	2	1	1	1	2	6	1	3	1	1	3	70
##112	4	3	5	2	4	3	5	5	3	4	5	3	5	4	6	4	3	4	5	4	3	1	3	3	2	93

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ABSTRACT

EVALUATING AND IMPROVING SELF-CONTROL
THROUGH THE RENEWAL MINISTRY AT
WEST PARK BAPTIST CHURCH IN
KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE

Alcide Dudley Cage, Jr.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Stuart W. Scott

The project was designed to evaluate self-control and identify steps to strengthen this spiritual attribute. The presence of life-dominating sins is a key indication that self-control is lacking and requires strengthening.

Chapter 1 presents the purpose, goals, context, rationale, definitions, and limitations of the project in the context of addressing enslaving habitual sins.

Chapter 2 discusses biblical and theological perspectives on self-control in Scripture. The chapter explores a model of self-control focused on self-denial and self-discipline.

Chapter 3 explores how the church has addressed enslaving sins through self-control. This chapter also explores secular alternatives deployed to address self-control.

Chapter 4 presents recommendations on how to implement this project within a local church or ministry context.

Chapter 5 provides an evaluation of the project goals, along with modifications to strengthen the project for future use.

VITA

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