

The Fruit of the Spirit is Self-Control

(Galatians 5:22-23)

Introduction

[Teacher, before class, attach a bull's eye target to the wall. Give each child a balloon. Tell kids to blow up the balloons and hold them without tying them off. Instruct kids to let go of their balloons when you say "Go" to see if they can hit the bull's eye.]

These balloons were out of control, weren't they? You couldn't get them to hit the target, could you? That's the way we are if we don't have self-control. But God wants us to learn how to handle our thoughts, words, and actions so that we stay on target with God.

Today we're going to learn why God wants us to practice self-control.

Opening Prayer

Father, prepare our hearts, and our minds, and our souls as we study this lesson on self-control. We want to learn how to control every thought we have, every word we speak and every action we make so that our lives are pleasing to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Memory Verse

Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. (James 1:19 NLT)

Lesson

We have been learning about the fruit of the Spirit which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

The first fruit is **love**. Love is not just a feeling, it's an action word. And, if we truly have the fruit of the Spirit, we choose to love people with God's kind of love, even when they don't deserve it or even when it's inconvenient to us.

The second fruit is **joy**. True joy comes from having Jesus in your life and knowing that you will live forever with him in heaven. True joy comes from the inside out; not from something that happens *to* us.

The third fruit is **peace**. Because Jesus paid for our sins on the cross, we have peace with God. Now it is our responsibility to do all we can to live in peace with everyone; we're to be peacemakers.

The fourth fruit is **patience**. Patience is trusting that God has a difficult situation under control and being willing to wait for Him to solve the problem. It's being willing to forgive others when they do things that bug us because you know that God has forgiven you for so much. Patience is not something that you are born with; you have to develop it. It takes great courage and faith to wait upon God's timing and for His purposes in your life to be fulfilled.

The fifth fruit is **kindness**. Just like love, joy, peace, and patience; kindness is not just a feeling, it's an action word. God's kind of *kindness* is self-sacrificing; it's having compassion on others and being willing to do something for them without expecting to get anything in return.

The sixth fruit is **goodness**. Goodness involves doing things that are right, but it goes way beyond staying out of trouble. Doing things God's way, instead of the way everyone else does them, is the definition of real goodness. We show goodness by choosing to obey God, even when it is hard. We should be actively looking for opportunities to do what God says is the right thing to do.

The seventh fruit is **faithfulness**. Faithfulness means being true to your word. Always doing what you say you're going to do.

The eighth fruit is **gentleness**, quietly putting God's love into action. God wants us to show others what His love looks like through our own gentle actions.

The next fruit is **self-control**! Being out of control is the opposite of self-control. Can you give me an example in your own life of a time you were out of control? What caused you to lose control?

Often, we lose control when we don't get things our own way. By nature we want what we want and we want it now! And, if we don't get what we want we let everyone know just how unhappy it makes us.

To be self-controlled means to have power over your reactions to people and situations; being able to handle your thoughts, words, and actions, especially when you're angry. We are not born with self-control. We have to learn how to be self-controlled. We are all born self-centered. When babies are hungry they kick and scream and cry, when they want their diapers changed they kick and scream and cry. Moms and Dads have been given the responsibility to teach their children how to control themselves.

We all have to learn how to deal with anger. When you're angry, hitting and kicking is not acceptable; nor is calling someone a name who has hurt your feelings. We have to learn how to put aside our selfish desires and to put other people first. This is not something that you learn once and for all. No, this is something we all need to practice throughout our whole lives.

Learning how to control our anger is only one area we need to develop self-control. We also need to have self-control when we are faced with the temptation to sin. God's Word tells us to be on our guard so that we won't make bad choices in tempting situations (1 Corinthians 16:13-14).

We need to ask God for help so we can make good choices in life.

When might you find it hard to show self-control and need to remember to be on guard? [Teacher, let the children respond.]

Usually for me it comes with my words. What is a way words can hurt someone's feelings? [Teacher, let the children respond.] Being careful in what you say takes a lot of self-control.

Open your Bibles to the book of James. James was one of Jesus' brothers. After Mary gave birth to Jesus, she had more children. The Bible tells us that Jesus had several brothers and sisters. After Jesus went to heaven, his younger brother, James, became one of the first church leaders. The book of James is a letter he wrote to Jews who had become Christians.

James said it was important to control the things we say.

James 1:19

Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.

Why do you think it is good to be careful about what we say? When are some times that kids your age need to listen more?

James 3:2

Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way.

James is saying that learning how to control what comes out of our mouths is the key to controlling every part of our life.

[Teacher, for a hands-on demonstration of the unruliness of the tongue, purchase a cow tongue at the butcher shop. Let the children look at it. They are gross and the kids won't soon forget this lesson!]

Next James compares our tongue with three things that people are familiar with. First he compares our tongue with a horse's bit. A bit is the small piece of metal that is put into a horse's mouth and attached to the horse's reins. It's only about as thick as two pencils.

James 3:3

We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth.

What James is saying is that even though a horse is much bigger and more powerful than a person, yet a rider can control a horse with this little metal mouth piece.

Next he compares our tongue to the rudder of a ship. The rudder is attached to the steering wheel of a boat and is what controls the direction in which the boat sails.

James 3:4

And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong.

When the captain turns the wheel, the rudder turns to one side or the other and the boat moves in that direction. A very small rudder can change the direction of a very big boat.

The bit and rudder are very small, but the ways in which they are used is very powerful! In the same way the tongue is just a small part of our bodies, but the things we say with it can make big differences, too. The tongue has so much power that the words we say with it have a huge effect.

Next, James compares the tongue to a small spark that can set an entire forest on fire.

James 3:5b-6a [Teacher read...]

But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. (6)... And the tongue is a flame of fire.

A person can set a whole forest on fire by letting one spark carelessly jump out of a fire pit, or by thoughtlessly flicking a cigarette out the car window. And, just as a little spark can cause a huge, uncontrollable fire, just a few words can cause a lot of trouble!

Words can be used to encourage people to do good things *and* they can be used to encourage others to do bad things. There have been times when people have done some extremely bad things because someone told them it was OK to do it. Words spoken thoughtlessly can lead to anger, hurt feelings, and even murder and war.

Next, James tells us that even though all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures can be tamed and controlled by people, we have a hard time controlling our own tongues!

James 3:7

People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison.

Have you ever been to the circus and seen big grizzly bears riding bikes? Have you been to Sea World and seen killer whales jump through hoops? People can tame all kinds of wild beasts to do things. Why, I even saw on TV that someone had trained a parrot to sing *I Left My Heart In San Francisco*. In fact, they had trained that bird to sing so many songs it cut its own album! People can train wild animals to do some of the most unusual things, but we can't seem to learn how to control our own tongues!

How many of you have said things you regretted saying? Have things come out of your mouth that you wish you could take back? Sometimes we can say kind loving things to people and other times we are thoughtless. James says that we use the same mouth to praise God *and* to say bad things to other people.

James 3:8-10

But no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. (9) Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. (10) And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right!

This should not be! We should use our tongue only to say good things. James wanted us to realize that we need God's power and love to help us control what we say. We can always count on God to help us in controlling our tongues and using our words in good ways.

We have to learn how to listen to others, think before we speak and control our anger when things don't go the way we want them to.

The devil is always on the lookout for people who are out of control. He loves it when we do things that show we have no self-control. When we hit, punch, or kick; when we yell or swear; or when we want everything we see and don't want to wait, God is unhappy.

That's why it's so important for us to remember that God wants each of us to practice self-control.

But we don't have to try to have self-control without help. The Holy Spirit is always available to help us discipline ourselves. He will give you the will power to restrain yourself from thinking, or saying, or doing anything that would not bring honor to God. But, you have to ask Him for that help. Fortunately he is always listening and ready and willing to help us.

Not a day passes without the opportunity to rely on the Holy Spirit to help us exercise self-control. The Holy Spirit's presence in our lives gives us the strength we need to do what is right. God's Spirit strengthens us and that's what develops our self-control.

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You that You are a God who will help us be in control of our thoughts, words and actions. We don't want to forget to call upon You for the power to restrain ourselves and control our emotions. We don't want to do anything that displeases You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Snack

Cherries.

Game Center

What to Do? What to Do?

[Teacher, have kids form four groups to act out one of the following situation cards. First they are to act it out as stated, then come up with a self-controlled solution to also act out. Give the groups about five minutes to prepare.]

<p>Justin and Alex were playing ball together at recess when Tyler came up and took the ball from them. Justin and Alex ran after Tyler, grabbed the ball out of his hands, and pushed him to the ground.</p>	<p>Carrie and Emily were in their room listening to music. Carrie wanted to listen to a new CD and put it in the CD player without asking Emily. Emily started screaming and yelling at Carrie.</p>
<p>Jordan and Sarah were at the store with their mom doing the weekly grocery shopping. Every aisle they went down, one or the other asked for something. "Hey, Mom, can we have this?" "Hey, Mom can we have that?"</p>	<p>The Sunday school class was having a party, and everyone was looking forward to the pizza being delivered. When the pizza arrived, three of the kids ran up to the table and filled their plates to overflowing, leaving only three pieces for the other ten kids.</p>

Ball Toss Game

Materials: large container, softball or beanbag.

Preparation: Print the words "self-control" across the top of the white board. Draw a line down the center of the board. Print Team 1 on one side of the line and Team 2 on the other. Place container on the floor on one side of the playing area about five feet from the children.

Play: Divide the class into two teams. Have students take turns attempting to toss the ball or beanbag into the container. Each time the ball lands in the container, the tossing team writes one letter of "S E L F – C O N T R O L" on its side of the line. First team to complete the whole word wins.

Ask a volunteer from the winning team to answer one of the Discussion Questions below. Repeat the game as time allows.

Use the following questions in a discussion:

1. When might it be hard to show self-control when you talk to others? (When you're angry. When you feel like saying something unkind. When you don't like what someone is saying.)
2. What can you do when you need help showing self-control in your speech? (Follow James 1:19 and be quick to listen and slow to speak. Pray and ask God for His help. Count to 10 before you speak when you feel upset. Walk away before you say something you shouldn't say.)
3. How would your (school/home/church) be a better place if kids were careful about what they say?
4. When are sometimes it might be difficult for kids your age to listen? (They're tired, hungry, or someone is taking a long time to speak.)

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