

CULTIVATE

LIFE TOGETHER IN THE SPIRIT



OCTOBER
GROUP GUIDE

Welcome to Cultivate.

We're so glad you're here.

This month, we turn our attention to the fruit of the Spirit called self-control.

At first, self-control may sound different from the other fruit we have explored. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness can feel like qualities God grows within us. Self-control can sound more like something we have to accomplish ourselves.

Try harder. Be more disciplined. Resist temptation. Get yourself under control. Sound familiar?

But self-control is also an integral piece of the fruit of the Spirit. It is not simply the result of stronger willpower, despite what the world teaches.

Self-control is evidence of a life increasingly surrendered to the work of God.

Proverbs offers a vivid picture:

“Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control.”

Proverbs 25:28

In the ancient world, walls protected a city. They created boundaries around what was valuable and guarded against what could destroy it. Self-control works in much the same way. It helps us recognize that not every desire needs to be satisfied and not every emotion needs to determine our response.

Jesus shows us what this looks like. He experiences temptation, anger, exhaustion, opposition, and even betrayal, yet he is never ruled by these emotions. His life is directed by his relationship with the Father.

As the Spirit forms self-control within us, we learn to create space between impulse and action. We become more attentive to what and who shapes our choices. We learn when to say yes and when to say no. And slowly, our desires become increasingly aligned with the life God desires for us.

Self-control is not about becoming less human. It is about becoming more free to live within God's will instead of the world's.

This month, we will explore self-control that guards, resists, speaks wisely, and wins.





Personal Reflection and Practice

Look up the passages below on your own and read them slowly. As you read, notice what each passage reveals about self-control. What does it teach you about the character of God? What kind of posture does it invite you to practice?

Self-Control That Guards

Proverbs 25:28

Luke 22:47–53

Galatians 5:22–25

Self-control guards what God is forming within us. It creates boundaries around our reactions, desires, and choices so that our impulses do not become what drives our actions.

Reflection:

Where in your life do you feel most vulnerable to reacting before thinking?

What might need guarding in this season of your life?

Self-Control That Resists

Genesis 39:1–12

James 4:7–8

1 Corinthians 10:13

Sometimes self-control looks like staying. Sometimes it looks like running. Joseph reminds us that resisting temptation may require creating distance between ourselves and what threatens to pull us away from faithfulness.

Reflection:

What makes temptation harder to resist when you remain close to it?

Is there something you need to move away from rather than simply trying harder to resist?

Self-Control That Speaks Wisely

James 3:1-12

Proverbs 15:1

Proverbs 18:21

Our words reveal what is happening within us. Self-control teaches us to pause long enough for wisdom to shape what comes out of our mouths.

Reflection:

When are you most likely to speak before thinking?

What might change if you created a little more space between feeling something and saying something?



Self-Control That Wins

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Hebrews 12:1-3

2 Timothy 4:7-8

Self-control is not discipline for discipline's sake. We train because we are becoming people capable of living the life to which God has called us.

Reflection:

What are you currently training yourself toward?

Which small, repeated practice might help you become the person God is forming you to be?



Individual Practice:

Choose one area of your life where you regularly experience the pull of impulse. It might involve your words, phone, food, spending, anger, hurry, comparison, entertainment, or another habit.

For one week, practice a simple pause.

Before responding or acting, ask:

- What am I feeling right now?
- What do I want to do?
- What would it look like to invite the Spirit into this moment?

Do not measure the week by how perfectly you control yourself. Instead, pay attention to whether you are becoming more aware of the space between impulse and response.

Self-control begins there.

GROUP TIME

This outline is simply a suggested flow for your time together, not a prescription you must follow. Every group has its own rhythm, personality, and needs.

Use what serves your group, release what doesn't, and trust that the Spirit will guide you as you shape your gathering.

OCTOBER

Cultivating Self-Control

Goal and Purpose: Reflect on self-control as a fruit of the Spirit, explore the difference between Spirit-formed discipline and simple willpower, and identify places where God may be inviting us to guard, resist, pause, or train.

Themes for the Month:

Week 1: Self-Control That Guards

Week 2: Self-Control That Resists

Week 3: Self-Control That Speaks Wisely

Week 4: Self-Control That Wins



1. Welcome + Opening

Leader Says:

“Today, we come to self-control. It can be tempting to hear that word and immediately think about trying harder or becoming more disciplined. But Paul includes self-control as fruit of the Spirit. That means even our ability to govern our desires and responses is part of the Spirit’s forming work within us.”

Share:

Invite participants to reflect:

- When you hear “self-control,” what is your immediate reaction?
- Do you tend to associate self-control with freedom or restriction? Why?
- Where have you seen a small discipline produce something good over time?
- How do you distinguish between self-control, discipline, and habits? How do they work together?

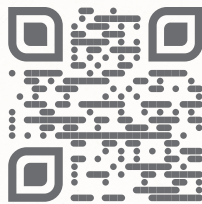
Leader Note:

Be careful not to let this conversation become a comparison of successes and failures. Self-control can touch sensitive areas of people’s lives. Keep the focus on formation, awareness, and dependence on the Spirit rather than performance.

2. Watch the Teaching Video

Leader Prompt

“As you watch, listen for the difference between simply controlling yourself and allowing the Spirit to form self-control within you. Pay attention to what self-control makes possible in a life with God.”



Video Summary

- Self-control is the final fruit of the Spirit and helps hold the other fruit together. Love, joy, and peace are meant to endure beyond the moments when circumstances make them easy.
- Paul compares the Christian life to an athlete in strict training. While athletes train for a temporary prize, we train our souls and character for something that lasts.
- A disciple is a student of Jesus, learning to walk with him, follow him, mirror him, and practice his way of life until what once felt difficult begins to become habit.
- Spiritual change does not simply happen automatically. We partner with the Spirit through intentional practice, trusting that God can form new habits and new ways of living within us.
- The purpose of training is not training itself. We practice so that we are prepared to live faithfully when real challenges come and to be agents of goodness and light in the world.

- Self-control moves us beyond simply “trying harder.” Through practice, discipline, and the work of the Spirit, God forms us into people who increasingly reflect his character.

After the Video:

- What stood out to you most?
 - Did anything challenge the way you normally think about self-control?
 - Where did you hear a connection between self-control and freedom?
 - What is one area where you sense the Spirit inviting you to become more intentional?
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3. Hear the Word: Sitting With Self-Control

Scripture Focus

Invite one person to read 1 Corinthians 9:24–27 slowly.

Pause, then invite someone else to read it again.

1 Corinthians 9:24–27

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

If time allows, also read Galatians 5:22–25
**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy,
peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against
such things there is no law. Those who belong
to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with
its passions and desires. Since we live by the
Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.**

Leader Says:

“As you listen, notice the words Paul uses to describe training, purpose, and direction. What catches your attention?”

Allow a moment of silence.



4. Personal Reflection

- Which word or phrase stood out to you?

- What is the difference between training and simply trying harder?

- What are your habits currently training you to become?

- Where might God be inviting you into greater freedom through self-control?

5. Shared Reflection

- Why do you think Paul uses the image of an athlete?

- How can boundaries actually create freedom?

- What is the difference between Spirit-led self-control and willpower?

- Where have you experienced the fruit of a small discipline practiced consistently?

- What might you need to say *no* to in order to say a deeper *yes* to God?

Leader Note: Holding the Space

Self-control can easily become a conversation about rules. Keep returning the group to relationship and formation.

The question is not simply, “What should I stop doing?”

A better question is, “Who is the Spirit forming me to become, and what choices help me live toward that person?”

Group Practice: The Sacred Pause

Leader Says:

“Self-control often happens in a very small space. Something happens. We feel an impulse. Then we respond. Tonight, we are going to practice making that space a little wider.”

Invite everyone to become quiet.

Ask them to think of one situation that regularly triggers a quick response. It could be frustration with someone, reaching for the phone, responding to an email, making a purchase, losing patience, or another recurring impulse. This space is especially tricky for parents or caregivers.

Then slowly offer these questions, leaving space between each:

What happens inside me in that moment?

What am I usually trying to satisfy, protect, or avoid?

What would happen if I paused?

What might the Spirit be inviting me to choose instead?

Allow a minute of silence.

Leader Says:

“The goal is not to eliminate desire or emotion. The goal is to become free enough that our desires do not make our decisions for us.”

(Note: Free enough is NOT the same thing as disciplined enough. Make sure these two words do not become interchangeable.)

6. Closing + Prayer

Leader Encouragement

Self-control is not about becoming a person who never struggles. It is about becoming a person who increasingly knows where to turn in the struggle. Every pause, every wise boundary, every resisted impulse, and every faithful choice can become a place where we surrender ourselves again to the Spirit's work.

Closing Prayer

God,

Thank you for the freedom you offer us.

Teach us to recognize the desires and impulses that so easily direct our lives.

Give us wisdom to guard what matters,
courage to resist what pulls us away from you,
patience to choose our words and actions carefully,
and discipline to keep pursuing the life to which you
have called us.

When our strength is not enough, remind us that self-control is fruit of your Spirit, not simply the product of our effort; not orienting our life around solitary discipline.

Continue your forming work within us.

Amen.

Notes:

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