

3 Truths that Fuel Self-Control in the Christian

Michael Kelley

What kinds of things do you think of when you think about someone who has been walking with Jesus for a long time? No doubt such a person is filled with hope. With joy. With love. But as you consider that person in your mind, surely too you would think of someone who is self-possessed. That is, someone who doesn't fly off the handle easily. Someone who has their emotions in check.

The old word for this character trait is temperance – it's moderation in action, thought, and feeling. It's someone who has experienced and is experiencing both the high's and lows of life, and yet neither makes them stray from their course. Another word for this kind of character trait is self-control.

A Christian who is growing in self-control experiences the same life events and circumstances as anyone else, and such a person also experiences the same anxiety, panic, or jubilation as anyone else, and yet they respond differently. They respond in a self-controlled manner to those feelings.

Of course, you could chalk up such a response to just personality, that a person is naturally more subdued than another one. There's certainly some truth to that, and yet for the Christian, self-control is, or the lack thereof cannot be solely attributed to our personality quirks. It is instead something that is meant to grow in us as one of the fruits of the Spirit.

What is it, behind the scenes, that fuels Christian self-control? Surely if we knew these things, then we wouldn't just be trying to be self-controlled; we would instead have some core truths to remind ourselves of when we are tempted to lose it. Here are three such truths:

1. Jesus Christ is Lord.

This is a common statement, one that floats through the air of church buildings. So common, perhaps, that we tend to lose some of the significance associated with it. When the first Christians proclaimed that Jesus Christ is Lord, it was not just a statement of belief; it was a statement of subversion. The confession that linked the Roman empire together in the first century was "Caesar is Lord." And then here came these Christians, claiming a higher allegiance than to their emperor.

So we echo their first confession. And when we say, "Jesus is Lord," we are acknowledging there is no part of creation, much less our own lives, over which Jesus does not lay claim. That includes not only our actions, but also our emotions. When Christians remember this

truth, that Jesus is Lord, it means that we are willingly subjecting our whole selves, including our emotions, to His rule and reign. This fuels our need for self-control in all things, making sure we are self-possessed in order to live out that confession.

2. God will take care of me.

One of the reasons we tend to lose control of ourselves is because of anxiety. Some circumstance enters our lives and we immediately jump to looking at all the potential implications of this situation. Doing so causes worry and doubt as we gaze down the barrel of the proverbial gun. We are filled with fear as we contemplate all the potential ramifications for our future. As we do, our self-control wanes.

We have to act. We have to fix something. We have to provide for ourselves and take matters into our own hands, and we often do so in a reckless way. That reckless action is born from the panic in our hearts. Now here's the truth that fuels self-control, even amid the worst of times: *God will take care of me.*

This God, who sacrifice His own Son, will give us all we need. This God, who sent Jesus to the cross in our stead, will surely give us our daily bread. This God, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ, surely values us more than the sparrows He provides for. We can live in a controlled way because we know the truth – that God will take care of us.

3. God does not waste circumstances.

Every day, we are going to enter different circumstances that might contribute to our loss of self-control. In such times, we can remind ourselves of the truth that God does not waste our circumstances. He is using all the big and small circumstances of life not only to accomplish His purposes – He's also using them to mold us into the image of Christ.

That means, from our perspective, every difficulty that might cause us to lose our temper, fly off the handle, or emotionally tailspin is also an opportunity. It's an opportunity to embrace the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives to make us more like Jesus. See, these circumstances do more than just make us uncomfortable – they expose our doubt, our fear, and our insecurity. And that exposure is an opportunity to confess our shortcomings to the Lord, or to remind ourselves that we are fully accepted in Christ, or to simply pray instead of panic. Whatever the case, we can know that the circumstance is a chance for soul work if we are self-possessed enough to pause and acknowledge the presence and work of the Spirit in our lives.

In a culture of excess, one of the defining qualities of the Christian is self-control. God, in His grace, has not only told us to live lives of self-control, He has also given us the fuel for doing so. And that fuel is founded in the truth about Him.