

# LIVING WITH SELF-CONTROL

*book eighteen in the series:*

**THE OWNER'S MANUAL TO THE NEW YOU**

**DOUG BRITTON, MFT**

Five-day Bible study for individuals, small groups, and churches

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Day One: Understanding Self-Control

Day Two: Choose, Don't Cruise

Day Three: Make Healthy Habits

Day Four: Stay Alert

Day Five: Review and Test

**Living with Self-Control:** Book eighteen in “The Owner’s Manual to the New You”

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# The Owner's Manual to the New You

Forty-eight short books

(Each book includes a five-day Bible study and homework)

**By Doug Britton, MFT**

Twelve books on “Knowing God”

Twelve books on “Developing a Godly Character”

Twelve books on “Enjoying Healthy Relationships”

Twelve books on “Overcoming Personal Problems”

*For*

Individuals

Small Groups

Churches

Available free for personal use at:  
[www.dougbrittonbooks.com/owners-manual](http://www.dougbrittonbooks.com/owners-manual)

# The Owner's Manual to the New You

"The Owner's Manual to the New You," published by LifeTree Books, is a series of forty-eight cross-cultural discipleship books by Bible-based Marriage and Family Therapist Doug Britton. LifeTree Books is making these books available free of charge for individual use.

Each book is ideal for a five-day study by small groups, classes, or individuals. Although this is a forty-eight-book series, each book can be studied as a complete book by itself.

## **Knowing God**

- Book 1: Who is God?
- Book 2: Becoming a Believer
- Book 3: Your Identity in Christ
- Book 4: Quick Overview of the Bible
- Book 5: How to Study the Bible
- Book 6: How to Pray
- Book 7: Key Christian Practices
- Book 8: Successful Christian Living
- Book 9: Living a Joyful Life
- Book 10: Knowing God's Will
- Book 11: Obeying God
- Book 12: Living in God's Power

## **Developing a Godly Character**

- Book 13: Growing in Christ
- Book 14: Changing Your Self-Image
- Book 15: Changing Your Attitudes
- Book 16: Living with Humility
- Book 17: Living with Purpose
- Book 18: Living with Self-Control
- Book 19: Living with Integrity
- Book 20: Growing through Problems
- Book 21: Trusting God
- Book 22: Breaking Free from Our Culture
- Book 23: Handling Money Responsibly
- Book 24: Staying Faithful to God

## **Enjoying Healthy Relationships**

- Book 25: Keys to Healthy Relationships
- Book 26: Making Friends
- Book 27: Showing Grace to Others
- Book 28: Forgiving Others
- Book 29: Serving Others
- Book 30: Resolving Conflicts
- Book 31: Overcoming Peer Pressure
- Book 32: Helping Others with Wisdom
- Book 33: Dating, Marriage, and Sex
- Book 34: Embracing the Body of Christ
- Book 35: Respecting Authority
- Book 36: Sharing Your Faith

## **Overcoming Personal Problems**

- Book 37: Overcoming Your Anger (Part 1)
- Book 38: Overcoming Your Anger (Part 2)
- Book 39: Overcoming Rejection
- Book 40: Overcoming Temptation (Part 1)
- Book 41: Overcoming Temptation (Part 2)
- Book 42: Overcoming Anxiety and Fear
- Book 43: Overcoming Jealousy and Insecurity
- Book 44: Overcoming Self-Sufficiency
- Book 45: Overcoming Guilt and Shame
- Book 46: Overcoming Discouragement
- Book 47: Overcoming Failure
- Book 48: Overcoming the Fear of Death

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## Foreword

When I was first asked to write a series of downloadable books for intensive discipleship training, I was excited. Jesus has revolutionized my life, and I am glad to share his truths with you.

The pages you are about to study come straight from God's word. They contain truth that puts our feet on the path to the fullest life possible—truth that sets us free.

As Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

May God speak to your heart as you read, and may he bring his truth alive in your life.

Your brother in Christ,

Doug Britton

P.S. LifeTree Books is offering this downloadable book and all the other books in "The Owner's Manual to the New You" series free of charge. If you find these books helpful, please feel free to spread the news to churches, ministries, and individuals who might benefit from them.

## Small Group Leader's Guidelines

**Introduction.** These studies are for new believers as well as mature Christians. They are for small groups, discipleship classes, mentors, and individuals. They are ideal for studies lasting from sixty to ninety minutes.

**Choose the key points, verses, and discussion questions** you will talk about. Don't think you need to cover every verse and question. With new believers, go over the main points, key verses, and selected questions. Go into more depth with mature Christians.

**Begin and end each study with prayer.** Start by asking God to help each person grow from the study. At the end, ask everyone to pray for help to put God's truth into practice.

**Review homework.** Before starting the current lesson, ask group members to discuss their answers to some of the previous day's homework questions.

**Personalize the lesson.** Although it's okay to read each lesson word-for-word, the material will "come alive" if you discuss some of the key points in your own words. Share your own experiences and struggles, and how God has helped you.

**As you read, identify important points and key parts of verses.** Ask group members to circle them, and then explain why you want to emphasize these points.

**Get everyone involved.** The more people are actively involved, the more they are impacted by what you are studying. Don't ask questions that can be answered by "yes" or "no." For example, don't ask, "Do you have any thoughts about this?" Instead, ask, "How does this insight speak to you?"

**Consider breaking up into smaller groups** to discuss the questions if you are leading a large group or class.

**Use day five for a review and test.** Use the questions in day five as a review and/or test. Remove these pages if you do not want group members to see the questions ahead of time.

## Want to Learn More?

**Free online resources:** For more suggestions for small group leaders as well as many online Bible studies on Christianity and daily living (anger, marriage, self-image, finances, and more), visit [www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/small-groups](http://www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/small-groups)

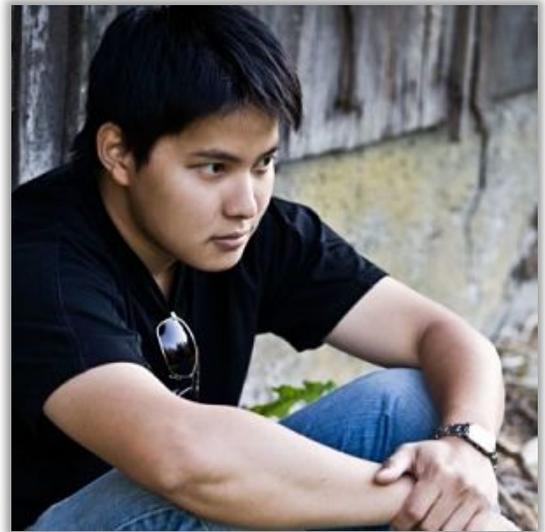
**Small group leader's book:** For detailed information on how to lead small groups and overcome typical problems, visit [www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/small-groups](http://www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/small-groups).

# Day One: Understanding Self-Control

When you read the word “self-control” what comes to your mind? If you are like most people, you might think self-control means saying “no” to something you want, or sacrificing pleasure.

For example, you might think it means saying “no” to eating too much candy or too many cookies, or resisting other temptations such as getting drunk, watching pornography, having sex outside of marriage, yelling, or swearing.

Or you might think self-control means doing something hard or unpleasant that is good for you—such as staying on a diet or exercising every day.



## Discussion questions

1. Define self-control. What does it mean to you?
2. Given your definition of self-control, describe how self-controlled you are.
3. Describe areas in which you would like to be more self-controlled.

In this book, you will be reading about “self-control” and “self-discipline.” Since self-control and self-discipline are so intimately related, I will be writing about both interchangeably in these pages.

- Self-control is the ability to say “no” when you are tempted to do something you *shouldn't* do. Galatians 5:22-23 identifies self-control as a fruit of the Spirit.
- Self-discipline is a lifestyle of saying “yes” to doing things you *should* do. It is one aspect of living a purposeful life.

## Change your way of looking at self-control

Self-control is much more than saying “no” to doing what you want to do. A better way to look at it is to see it as something desirable, something that is good or fun in itself, and something that helps you accomplish your goals in life.

In other words, self-control is saying “no” to things that are bad for you, but it is also saying “yes” to the joyful, meaningful life God intends for you. As you become more self-controlled, you can:

- Enjoy a clean conscience.
- Feel good that you are not controlled by your appetites or emotions.
- Feel strong because you are not controlled by advertising or peer pressure.
- Be excited about developing your skills, talents, and gifts.
- Be excited about serving God without distractions.

**Discussion question**

4. Do you agree self-control can be something good or fun? Why or why not?

**Enjoy true freedom.**

People sometimes say they want to be “free.” They often think that means doing whatever they feel like doing. Yet if they say they are “free” from God’s rules, they become slaves to sin.

*They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. (2 Peter 2:19)*

*Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control. (Proverbs 25:28)*

True freedom is not freedom from God. Rather, it is freedom from the power of sin. It is freedom to celebrate God’s love and live a full, joyful life. Self-control is not just saying “no” to doing wrong things, it is also saying “yes” to God.

*I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free. (Psalm 119:32)*

*I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts. (Psalm 119:45)*

**Discussion question**

5. Does freedom mean doing what you want? How can self-control give you true freedom?

**Enjoy a clean conscience.**

Feeling close to God feels great, and a clean conscience is a wonderful thing to have. Self-control allows you to do what God wants and brings you joy.

*So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man. (Acts 24:16)*

**See self-control as the way to accomplish God's purpose for your life.**

Many people think they don’t have a purpose in life, but that’s not true. Whoever you are, you have a purpose.

*For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)*

Your purpose includes:

- Loving God and knowing him better
- Praising God
- Reflecting God’s love in all your relationships
- Telling people about Jesus
- Developing and using your gifts, talents, and skills

As you become more self-controlled, you are better prepared to fulfill your purpose. Self-control allows you to make a difference in the world for Christ.

*For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. (2 Timothy 1:7)*

*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, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. (2 Peter 1:5-7)*

Learn a lesson from athletes. They exercise self-control when they exercise and practice. As they get stronger and more skilled, they experience the joy of performing in otherwise impossible ways. You can be like an athlete, experiencing the thrill that comes from growing closer to God and being used by him wherever you are.

*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. (1 Corinthians 9:24-25)*

#### **Discussion question**

6. How does self-control help you accomplish God's purpose for your life?

### **Seek God's help to practice self-control**

Most of us know we should practice self-control, yet we have a hard time doing it. We sometimes feel powerless to do what God wants us to do.

#### **Pray to live a self-disciplined life.**

You can't live the way God wants without asking him to help you use your time wisely and make good decisions.

*Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature. (Romans 13:14)*

#### **Pray for self-control when you are tempted.**

If you are honest with yourself, you know that sometimes you want to do the wrong thing. You need God's help to resist temptation.

*For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. (Galatians 5:17)*

#### **Discussion question**

7. Do you ever want to do something you know is wrong? How can you overcome this?

#### **Walk close to God.**

How can you become more self-controlled? By growing close to God and asking him to change you on the inside. Read what Jesus said:

*So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. (Galatians 5:16)*

If you try to exercise self-control on your own, you will fail, for we all need God's help as well as our own determination. If you grow in the Spirit, you develop the ability to live a more disciplined life. Self-control is one of the results—or the “fruit”—of growing in the Lord.

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

As you allow God to transform you—to change your attitudes, habits, lifestyle choices, and thought patterns—you will become increasingly self-controlled.

Make it your goal to grow closer to God through prayer, reading (and obeying) the Bible, and fellowshiping with other believers.

*I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. (Psalm 119:14)*

*I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word. (Psalm 119:16)*

### Discussion questions

8. How can growing in the Spirit help you become more self-controlled? Explain your answer.
9. Are you willing to become more self-controlled? If so, take a minute to ask God to help you.

## Remember that you are on a journey

As you grow in the Spirit, you will become increasingly self-controlled. But the reality is that you will never reach perfection. As James wrote:

*We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. (James 3:2)*

Aim for perfection (2 Corinthians 13:11), but don't give up when you fail. Instead, ask God to forgive you and move on.

### Discussion question

10. What's the point in trying to be self-controlled when we know we will fail sometimes?

## Do you know Jesus?

This book was written to help believers in Jesus grow in their faith and personal life. You will get the most out of these pages if you know Christ, since it is through his love and power that you can truly change. If you have not yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, let me invite you to accept him as your Savior and Lord. Make this your personal prayer:

*Jesus, I believe you are the Son of God, and I need your help. I confess I have sinned and failed you in many ways. I invite you to be my Savior and Lord, and I ask you to help me follow you the rest of my life. Thank you for loving me, forgiving me, and accepting me as your child.*

If you prayed this prayer, welcome to the family of God. God has plans for you—to transform you. You have an exciting life ahead of you!

## Memory verse

*So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. (Galatians 5:16)*

## Homework – Day One

1. How self-controlled are you? What is one area in which you are self-controlled? What is one area in which you need more self-control?
2. Is self-control mainly about denying yourself fun? Why or why not?
3. What is true freedom? How is this different from the world's idea of freedom?
4. Why does self-control help you accomplish God's goal for your life?



## Day Two: Choose, Don't Cruise

Several years ago, I turned on my car's cruise control when I was driving on a long stretch of highway. Before I knew it, I slipped into a semi-daze. I didn't notice that I was catching up to a truck until I almost ran into it from behind.

As we go through life, we often put ourselves on "cruise control" and don't pay attention to what's going on around us. Then when situations come up, we aren't ready to respond thoughtfully and carefully.

### Discussion question

1. Do you sometimes go on "cruise control." Explain your answer.



### Learn to recognize when you make decisions

Sometimes you may go with the flow and think that life "just happens." Few people are aware that they are making many decisions throughout the day.

#### You make hundreds of decisions every day.

The truth is that you constantly make decisions every day, even if you aren't aware that you are making them.

You make little decisions minute by minute: whether or not to brush your teeth, what to say to everyone you see, what clothes you will wear, and how much time you will spend on social media, watching TV, or playing games on your smartphone.

You also make big decisions. You decide whether to be mean or kind. When something goes wrong, you decide whether to tell the truth or lie. You decide whether or not to smoke. You decide whether to say "yes" or "no" when someone wants you to do something.

#### Practice thinking about your decisions for one hour.

Try this exercise for one hour: When you begin to do something, go somewhere, or say something, practice saying to yourself, "I'm deciding to ... (do whatever)." For example, say to yourself:

- *I am choosing to read this book instead of spending time on social media or watching TV.*
- *I am deciding to walk across the room to talk with Pat.*
- *I am choosing to sit down.*

This can be a good exercise to do from time to time. When you practice identifying decision points, you become more aware that you are constantly making decisions, and you become better prepared to make conscious choices.

**Discussion questions**

2. How can you learn to recognize decision points?
3. Describe some choices you might make without realizing you are making choices.
4. Name three decisions you already made today.

**Practice making conscious choices**

Once you become aware that you are making choices, not just cruising, train yourself to make conscious decisions that are good for you and good for those around you. For example:

- Choose whom to hang out with.
- Choose what activities to participate in.
- Choose how to respond when tempted.
- Choose what to say if you are challenged or dared to do something.

Making conscious choices can be personally empowering. That's because you realize you can make your own decisions instead of allowing circumstances or other people to control you.

**Discussion question**

5. Do you think you would feel better about yourself if you made more conscious choices? Why or why not?

**Pray when you make decisions.**

Pray for God's help. Also ask yourself, "What would please God?" and then do it.

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. (Proverbs 3:5-6)*

*Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. (1 Thessalonians 4:1)*

**Think things through when you are tempted or pressured.**

If someone wants you to use drugs, shoplift, or get drunk, think before answering. Ask yourself:

- Is this person interested in my best welfare?
- How will this decision really affect me?
- How will this decision affect others?
- Am I afraid of rejection or not seeming cool?
- How will this decision affect my future?
- How would God want me to respond?

**Discussion question**

6. Which of the previous questions will help you make decisions that are good for you? Why will these questions help?

**Practice saying “yes” or “no” to potential decisions.**

When you are facing a decision, say one or both of the following to yourself:

- *I choose to say “yes” to God.*
- *I choose to say “no” to doing something I know is wrong.*

**Discussion question**

7. Do you think saying “yes” or “no” to yourself can help you when you face a decision? Why or why not?

**Don't worry about losing friends if you say “no.”**

If someone pressures you to do something and then rejects you for saying “no,” he or she is not a true friend. If someone says, “If you love me, you will have sex,” you could respond, “I won't have sex because I love you, and that would be bad for both of us.”

**Say “yes” to healthy fun.**

If self-control only meant saying “no” to temptation, life could become boring. But self-control also means saying “yes.” Look for fun things to do to take the place of things you are giving up. God wants you to enjoy life.

**Discussion question**

8. What are some things you would like to say “yes” to?

**Make and follow personal boundaries**

It's easier to avoid temptation than to overcome it after it gets a grip on you. Whenever possible, stay away from settings, activities, and people that are dangerous for you until you are ready to deal with them without giving in to sin.

*The highway of the upright avoids evil; he who guards his way guards his life. (Proverbs 16:17)*

**Avoid “dangerous” people when possible.**

Do you know someone who is “dangerous” for you, someone with whom you are likely to sin? This could be a coworker who wants to have sex, an old friend who wants to do drugs together, or someone who wants to go gambling with you.

If there's a chance you will do something wrong with this person, stay away as much as possible. When you grow strong enough in the Lord to be a consistent Christian witness to him or her, it may be appropriate to get together, but be sure you are ready.

*Men of perverse heart shall be far from me; I will have nothing to do with evil. (Psalm 101:4)*

*Let not my heart be drawn to what is evil, to take part in wicked deeds with men who are evildoers; let me not eat of their delicacies. (Psalm 141:4)*

**Discussion question**

9. Identify dangerous people, then make plans to avoid them until you are sure you will resist sinning with them.

**Try to avoid dangerous situations.**

We often set ourselves up to sin because of things we allow ourselves to do or places we allow ourselves to go. Be honest about your motivation to go into a dangerous situation. Are you going for seemingly innocent reasons, but inside you know you are preparing to sin?

*The highway of the upright avoids evil; he who guards his way guards his life. (Proverbs 16:17)*

Don't flirt with danger, putting yourself in a position where you are likely to give in to temptation. Identify activities and settings that are dangerous for you, then avoid them when possible.

- If you eat too much ice cream, don't keep ice cream in your freezer.
- If you watch pornography using a cable or satellite TV service, discontinue the service.
- If you are tempted to get drunk, don't keep alcohol in your house.
- If you are tempted to have sex outside of marriage, don't be alone with that person.
- If you have trouble buying junk food, don't go grocery shopping on an empty stomach.
- If you are an alcoholic and might stop at a liquor store after work, take another route.

**Discussion questions**

10. What is one dangerous situation you should avoid? Explain your answer.
11. What steps could you take to avoid that situation?

**Memory verse**

*Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. (Proverbs 4:5-6)*

**Want to learn more?****Free online Bible study**

*Make Plans to Develop Self-Control and Resist Temptation*  
[www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/selfcontrol](http://www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/selfcontrol)

**Books by Doug Britton**

*Getting Started, Getting Connected*  
[www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/gettingstarted](http://www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/gettingstarted)

*Defeating Temptation*

[www.dougbrittonbooks.com/temptation](http://www.dougbrittonbooks.com/temptation)





## Day Three: Make Healthy Habits

Imagine that you made a personal goal of becoming the best football player you could be. How would you go about achieving that goal? Would you buy a football and just run around outside with it? Would you ask God to miraculously make you a great football player without practicing? Or would you do something else?

### Discussion question

1. What would you do if you wanted to become the best football player you could be? Explain your answer.

Your answer to this question might have included finding a coach, joining a training camp, and then establishing daily routines to build up your strength, increase your endurance, eat properly, and practice football skills.

These daily routines would give you focus and help you accomplish your goal to become the best football player you could be.

The same principle is true in your daily life. If you establish daily habits or routines, you are much more likely to stay focused and make good decisions as you go through life.

In today's lesson, you will read about habits or routines which will help you live an increasingly self-controlled life.



### Pray throughout the day

A key to self-control is to walk close to God. Praying throughout the day is part of this walk. A good way to get started in your prayer life is to make it a habit to pray at three major points of the day.

#### Pray when you wake up.

Shortly after you wake up, take some time to pray. When you do this, you set the stage for a close walk with Jesus during the coming day. You are determining that you want to walk in the Spirit, not the flesh.

*But I cry to you for help, O LORD; in the morning my prayer comes before you. (Psalm 88:13)*

Here are some ideas for your morning prayers:

- *God, help me stay close to you all day.*
- *Father, help me love others and be an encourager.*
- *Please help me accomplish your plans for me today.*
- *Help me be self-disciplined.*
- *Help me not to slip into self-pride.*

- *Help me not to feel insecure.*
- *Help me not to feel sorry for myself.*
- *Help me avoid dangerous activities or people.*
- *Help me prepare for and overcome potential temptations.*
- *Help me love you more.*
- *Help me love other people more.*
- *Help me understand others.*
- *Help me forgive others.*

#### **Discussion question**

2. Do you want to make one of the previous prayers a regular part of your prayer life? If so, which one(s)? Why?

#### **Pray in the early evening (or at the end of your workday).**

Have you noticed that sometimes you bring home tensions, worries, or temptations you faced during the day? These can cling to you much as dust does when you walk along a dirt trail.

Likewise, have you noticed that it's easy to make bad choices in the evening? For example, you may be exhausted and think you "deserve" to watch TV for hours, spend hours on your smartphone, watch unhealthy videos, get drunk, or stay up too late.

When you get home, ask God to cleanse you from the frustrations, worries, and temptations of the day, and help you stay close to him all night.

#### **Pray when you go to bed.**

Before you go to sleep, ask God to protect your home, your relatives, friends, and others.

#### **Discussion question**

3. Do you pray after work or before bed? Why or why not?

#### **Do what matters**

God has given us a limited number of days here on earth. He expects us to make the most of the time we are here.

*Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. (Psalm 90:12)*

*Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. (Ephesians 5:15-17)*

It's easy to spend almost all your time doing relatively unimportant things while neglecting what's most important. Here are some guidelines that can help you use your time wisely:

**Follow Jesus' two greatest commandments.**

Jesus said the two greatest commandments are to (1) love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and (2) love your neighbor (Mark 12:30-31). Look for ways to follow these commandments every day.

**Care for your family.**

It's easy to be so busy helping people outside your family that you neglect your family.

*If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (1 Timothy 5:8)*

**Spend more time on important tasks and less time on not-as-important tasks.**

We all have heard about prioritizing, but it's hard to do for most of us. It's easy to put a tremendous amount of time and energy into comparatively unimportant tasks, leaving little or no time for important tasks.

**Discussion questions**

4. How well are you doing at following the two greatest commandments? Would you like to make any changes? Explain your answer.
5. What is one important task you think you need to focus on more? What is one not-so-important task you could focus on less to free up some time for what really matters?

**Consider making short-term plans**

Do you want to be more self-disciplined—either to stop doing something or to start doing something healthy? You may find it helpful to concentrate on making good decisions for short periods of time, dividing the day into morning, afternoon, and evening. Or you may want to divide it even more—into hours. You could, for example, plan not to smoke or drink alcohol for the next hour. When that time is up, you then could plan for the following hour.

*So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. (1 Thessalonians 5:6-8)*

**Discussion question**

6. What is a short-term plan that could help you achieve one of your goals—either to stop doing something or start doing something healthy. Explain your answer.

**Take Care of Your Temple**

If you are a Christian, the Bible says you are a temple of the Holy Spirit. This means God's Spirit resides within you. When you think about this, it should motivate you to treat your body respectfully. Get enough rest and exercise. Eat healthy food.

*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? (1 Corinthians 6:19)*

*Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. (2 Corinthians 7:1)*

### **Discussion question**

7. Do you need to take better care of your temple? Explain your answer.

## **Decide on moderation or abstinence**

Do you eat too much candy, watch too much TV, or do anything else compulsively? Do you find yourself unable to eat one chocolate chip cookie without eating a dozen more?

If you have trouble doing something in moderation, it may be wisest for you not to start doing it in the first place. If you have trouble stopping after you eat one cookie, don't take a first bite. If you find yourself staring at your computer, tablet, or TV all night, turn it off at 5:30 p.m. every night.

### **Discussion question**

8. What is a habit (or sin) you would like to conquer? What would be the wisest approach—moderation or abstinence? Explain your answer.

## **Make true friends**

We need true friends, people who encourage us to do the right thing, people who want the best for us and care about what happens to us.

A true friend is someone you can be honest with, someone who will rejoice with you when you succeed, someone who will encourage you when you fail, and someone who will confront you when you are making poor choices.

*Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses. (Proverbs 27:6)*

### **Discussion question**

9. Do you have true friends? If you do, describe your friendship. If you don't, what steps could you take to identify possible friends. How could you go about knowing them?

## **Memory verse**

*Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. (Ephesians 5:15-16)*

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## Day Four: Stay Alert

If you were in the middle of a physical war, all your senses would be alert to possible danger, and you would pay close attention to your commander's orders.

You are in a battle, and sin is your enemy—not your friend. Stay alert as you go through each day.

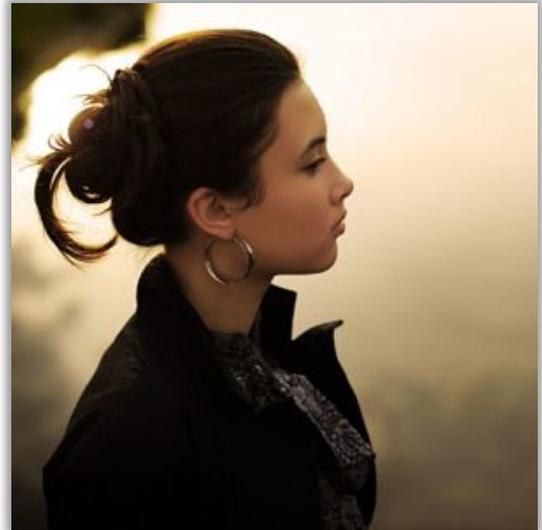
*Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it. (Genesis 4:7)*

*Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak. (Matthew 26:41)*

*So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert. (1 Thessalonians 5:6)*

### Discussion question

1. Reread the previous three verses. Choose one that speaks to you personally, then explain why you chose it.



### Stay vigilant throughout the day.

As we go through life, it is easy to become preoccupied with our job, family, finances, vacation, sports, or other activities. As a result, we are often not alert to the temptations around us.

When we think we are doing well, we are in danger. Many people have discovered that their greatest temptations come after spiritual victories. Never allow yourself to forget the seriousness of the battle.

*So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall. (1 Corinthians 10:12)*

*So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. (1 Thessalonians 5:6-8)*

### Discussion question

2. What does it mean to be vigilant or alert? Is it possible or practical to stay alert throughout the day, every day? Why or why not?

### Guard your thought life

Sins rarely “just happens.” They begin as attitudes or temptations in your mind and emotions. Don't fantasize about sin, thinking that your thoughts are harmless. Train yourself to be honest with God as you go through the day. Deal with sinful thoughts the moment they come up.

*If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. (Psalm 66:18)*

*Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. (Proverbs 4:23)*

*For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. (Mark 7:21-22)*

*Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. (James 1:14-15)*

### **Thoughts become sin when we entertain them.**

Having an impure thought come into your mind is not a sin by itself; entertaining the thought is a sin. A good guideline is to not allow yourself to consider or dwell on anything God wouldn't want you to do. In other words, don't allow yourself to think about sinning.

*Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature. (Romans 13:14)*

### **Reject sinful thoughts.**

You can become spiritually crippled if you continuously think about committing a sin, even if you never commit the sin. If you allow yourself to daydream about doing something, this thought pattern can become a habit. It can become compulsive and continue for years, robbing you of the joy that comes from a clean conscience.

#### **Discussion question**

3. What does "reject sinful thoughts" mean? How can someone reject thoughts?

### **Choose wholesome thoughts.**

Do you think you can't control your thoughts? If so, you aren't alone. Many people think thoughts just happen, and there's not much we can do about them. But that's not true. You can discipline your mind and decide what to think about. Make it a habit to think about things that are pure and true.

*Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. (Romans 8:5)*

*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. (Philippians 4:8)*

#### **Discussion question**

4. How can you choose to think about the things listed in Philippians 4:8?

### **Guard your eyes and ears**

Controlling where you look and what you listen to is a key part of living a self-controlled life. If you have trouble with compulsive shopping, don't watch advertising. If you have trouble with overeating, don't watch a cooking show on how to prepare rich desserts. If you have trouble with lust, don't stare at people who are tempting to you.

*I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl. For what is man's lot from God above, his heritage from the Almighty on high? Is it not ruin for the wicked, disaster for those who do wrong? Does he not see my ways and count my every step? (Job 31:1-4)*

*I will set before my eyes no vile thing. (Psalm 101:3)*

*A discerning man keeps wisdom in view, but a fool's eyes wander to the ends of the earth. (Proverbs 17:24)*

### **Discussion questions**

5. What are ways in which you need to guard your eyes?
6. What are ways in which you need to guard your ears?

## **Catch sin at early stages**

Monitor your words and actions. Listen to what you say. Pay attention to what you do. Remember not to let yourself slip into cruise control. The earlier you catch yourself in the process of slipping into sin, the easier it is to stop. Stay alert and identify when you feel tempted.

### **Discussion question**

7. What is one temptation you expect to face in the next week? What are the steps you might take that would lead to actually committing the sin? How can you avoid giving in to the temptation?

## **Flee from temptation**

There are times when you need to get out of a situation fast. We read about such a situation in Genesis 39:1-12. When a woman approached Joseph to commit adultery, he fled.

*She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house. (Genesis 39:12)*

David, anointed by God to be Israel's king, knew God intimately, yet he did not follow Joseph's example. When he saw Bathsheba bathing, he could have turned away, but he didn't. Instead, he had her brought to him so he could sleep with her (2 Samuel 11: 2-4). The results of his sin were devastating (2 Samuel 11:5-12:19).

When confronted with temptation, be like Joseph. Don't stick around. One compromise often leads to another. Get out of the situation. Flee from sin.

*Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. (1 Corinthians 6:18)*

*Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. (1 Corinthians 10:14)*

*Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. (2 Timothy 2:22)*

### **Identify situations in your life when you should flee.**

We sometimes think of fleeing from major sins, such as getting away from someone if we are tempted to commit adultery. But there are many other times in our daily lives when we can flee temptation. For example:

- If you are watching a movie and suddenly you are confronted with a sex scene or extreme violence, close your eyes. Be ready and willing to leave the theatre. If you are watching TV, change channels. If you are online, quickly move go to another website.

- If you waste time by watching too much TV, turn off the TV.
- If you are tempted to buy things you can't afford when you look at a magazine ad, turn the page or get rid of the magazine. Likewise, if online ads tempt you to spend money foolishly, go to another site.
- If someone offers you some candy or dessert and you know you shouldn't eat it, say, "No, thank you."

*A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it.  
(Proverbs 22:3)*

#### **Discussion question**

8. What is one temptation you need to flee from? Describe specific steps you will take to flee from it.

#### **Memory verse**

*So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert. (1 Thessalonians 5:6)*

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## Homework – Day Four

1. This day's study says to stay vigilant throughout the day. What does that mean? Is this a practical idea?
2. How can sinful thoughts turn into sinful actions?
3. If a temptation comes into your mind, does that mean you sinned? Why or why not?
4. If a temptation comes into your mind, how can you deal with it?







## Day Five: Answer Key to Test (may be removed by leader)

### Note to teachers and small group leaders

Remove this page if you do not want group members to see these answers ahead of time.

### True or false

- F 1. A clean conscience isn't very important.
- F 2. Self-control is important, but it takes all the fun out of life.
- T 3. True freedom means freedom from sin.
- F 4. When you are close to God, you don't need to make many decisions.
- T 5. It's wise to avoid dangerous situations if you aren't ready to deal with them.
- F 6. You either are self-disciplined or you aren't. There's no need to pray.
- F 7. It's not important to care for your family if you are helping others.
- T 8. A true friend is someone who is genuinely concerned for your best interests.
- F 9. It's okay to think about committing a sin as long as you don't do it.
- F 10. If you flee from temptation, that's a sign you aren't a mature Christian.

### Memory verses

- 1. Ephesians 5:15-16

*Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.*

- 2. 1 Thessalonians 5:6

*So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert.*



## About the Author

Doug Britton, Bible-based Marriage and Family Therapist, has helped hundreds of thousands of people as a therapist, clinical director of a treatment center, seminar speaker, radio co-host, and author of over twenty books that show people how to apply God's truths in their daily lives.

He has also trained pastors, counselors, mentors, and lay leaders in biblical counseling, mentoring, and small group leadership.

Doug and his wife Skeeter live in Northern California.



### Books

Doug has written Bible-based books on many daily-living topics. Visit [www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore](http://www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore).

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### Seminars and retreats

Doug is the founder and president of LifeTree Institute and LifeTree Books. If you would like him or another member of the LifeTree team to speak in your church on any of the above topics, please visit [www.dougbrittonbooks.com](http://www.dougbrittonbooks.com) and click on the "Seminars" link.

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