

Choosing Self-Control

Quarter 3 | Lesson 5 | Character Development

1. **Connecting:** Do exercises that require body control.
2. **Teaching:** Hear a story about self-control (Galatians 5:22–23).
3. **Responding:** Practice using self-control in real-life situations.

SUPPLIES

- Bibles
- Optional Supplies:*
 - Memory Verse poster
 - Tape
 - 2 Timothy 1:7 poster from the end of this lesson
 - Pencils
 - Student Pages

Teacher Devotion

May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Psalm 19:14

On the night before Jesus was crucified, a crowd of Roman soldiers and officers from the chief priests came to arrest Him. Jesus' disciple, Simon Peter, overcome by his emotions, cut off the ear of 1 of the men with a sword. Though Peter did not use self-control in this situation, Jesus was still able to use him. Later Jesus used Peter to start His Church!

Jesus knows we often allow our anger, frustration, or fear to affect our words and actions. He knows that we will say unkind things to others when we are hurt or angry or afraid. Can you think of a time when your lack of self-control caused you to make poor choices? Can you think of a time when choosing self-control could have prevented an argument or saved a relationship? Be encouraged! The Holy Spirit can help you to grow in self-control. He can help you to become a kind, gentle, loving person filled with self-control.

Lesson Time

1. Connecting: Do exercises that require body control.

Welcome your students to class. Let them know that you will be talking about self-control. Tell them you will start class with a fun physical activity.

Teacher Tip: If these exercises seem too easy for the students, have them close their eyes once they are in position. It will make balancing much more difficult.

Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart. Raise your right arm straight out in front of you. Leaving your arm out and keeping it straight, bend slightly at the waist, and slowly lift your left leg straight out behind you. Hold this position as long as you can.

Count slowly until the last student is unable to maintain the pose. Most students will lose their balance quickly. Encourage them to try again if they lose their balance too quickly.

Now we will do the same pose, only this time with our left arms and right legs. And this time we will slowly move them out at the same time. Ready? Start!

Count slowly until the last student is unable to maintain the pose. Again, encourage the students to try once more if they lose their balance too quickly.

Now stand with your legs close together. Bend your right leg and lift your right foot behind you. Grab that foot with your right hand. Slowly raise your left hand straight up above you. Now slowly bend forward. Your arm will be extended in front of you. How long can you keep your balance?

Count slowly until the last student is unable to maintain the pose.

Teacher Tip: Allow 2–3 students to answer each question in a class discussion. Often the same students will answer, so encourage different students to respond.

- Was it easy or difficult to control your body and stay balanced during these exercises? Why?
- If you did these exercises every day, do you think they would become easier? Why or why not?

If we practiced these exercises every day, they would get easier. Our bodies would grow stronger, and our balance would improve. These exercises tested our body control. It takes self-control, muscle strength, and practice to become good at these exercises. The same is true of self-control.

2. Teaching: Hear a story about self-control (Galatians 5:22–23).

Having self-control means that we do not let our emotions or desires control our behaviour. It means that we think about how our words and actions will affect others before we speak and act.

Teacher Tip: Many teens are not aware of the emotions that cause them to react in certain ways. They simply react. Help your students to see the connection between emotions and behaviour. If teens can begin to recognize when and why they are angry, hurt, or anxious, they can learn to control their actions.

Let me give you an example. Nshuti was having a very bad day. Nshuti's older brother was always causing trouble. He and his friends often skipped school, stole food and money, and got into fights. Nshuti's brother tried to get him to join them. Nshuti was feeling frustrated and angry because his brother had called him offensive names and mocked him for going to Bible class. Nshuti tried to do well in school and loved going to Bible class. Nshuti clenched his fists in anger as he walked. Nshuti felt angry at everyone. He wanted to punch something.

Nshuti saw another teen on the path. Mihigo was smaller and weaker than Nshuti. Nshuti called him a bad name. Mihigo kept walking. Nshuti ran up behind Mihigo and began hitting him. Mihigo fell to the ground and rolled up into a ball to protect himself. Nshuti kicked him and walked away.

- **Do you think it was wrong for Nshuti to feel frustrated and angry? Why or why not?**

Experiencing emotions is not wrong. Our emotions can help us know what to do. In this situation, Nshuti was angry and frustrated, but there were better ways to handle his feelings. He could have tried to talk to his brother. He could have asked someone to help him. He could have asked God to help him to have peace and patience in the situation.

- **Who in this story did not choose self-control?**

Nshuti's brother and Nshuti did not choose self-control.

- **Who was affected because Nshuti did not use self-control?**

Mihigo was hurt by Nshuti's lack of self-control.

- **Who in this story did choose self-control?**

Mihigo chose self-control.

- **Think of a time when you were hurt by someone who did not choose self-control. How did it affect you?**

Allow 2–3 students to share. Remind them to not share names but only how this affected them.

Teacher Tip: If any of the situations the students share are particularly abusive or painful, speak with these students after class to pray for them and get them help if possible.

- **What emotions do you think Nshuti was feeling?**

He was probably frustrated, angry, tense, and maybe afraid.

When someone has strong emotions like this, it affects you. In this story, Nshuti was squeezing his hands into fists even before he saw Mihigo. He may have been breathing faster and harder. His heart may have been beating fast. He might have felt hot. Remember when we learned about anger a while ago? These are all signs that Nshuti could have used to recognize that he was angry and needed to control his anger. If he had recognized these signs, he might have realized they were signals that he needed to use self-control.

Often in this type of situation, we do not think—we just react. Think about how your body felt at that time. Now, think about your emotions. Remember, feeling angry or afraid or experiencing some other strong emotion is not sinful. Even Jesus was angry and sad. But it is sinful when we let our emotions and our desires control our behaviour.

Have each student find a partner.

Think about a time when you felt a really strong emotion, such as anger, fear, or frustration.

Give students a moment to think of their own situations. You might want to share something from your own life, including how you reacted.

Share about your situation with your partner. Answer these questions as you share with your partner.

- **What happened in this situation?**
- **Did you choose self-control?**
- **What was the result of your behaviour?**

Give the students 2–3 minutes to share with their partners. Some students may not want to share their situations, but they should still listen to their partners' stories. When they are done sharing with their partners, allow 2–3 students to share with the whole group.

Sometimes when we feel a strong emotion such as anger or frustration, we react in a bad way without even thinking about it first. To choose self-control, we must think before we act. Here are some tips to help you use self-control:

1. Recognize how your body feels. Are you breathing faster? Is your heart beating hard and fast? Do you feel hot? Try to express your emotions in a healthy way by exercising or talking with someone.
2. Pray. We can talk to God anytime about anything. When you feel a strong negative emotion such as anger, you can pray. It can be as simple as, "God, help me control myself." Do not forget that God wants to hear about your strong positive emotions, too! In fact, He wants to hear everything you are thinking and feeling, so you can talk to Him anytime.
3. Stay calm. Take a few very slow breaths. Count slowly to 10 or 25. Sing a song. All of those things help you slow down and think before you act or speak without self-control.
4. Think before you speak or act. Consider the effects of your out-of-control words and actions on yourself and others. What will happen to you? What will happen to the other person? Will your words or actions make the situation better or worse?
5. Choose to do the opposite. When we are experiencing negative emotions, our first impulse is often to do the wrong thing. Behaviour motivated by negative emotions does not usually reflect self-control. Instead, do the opposite. For example, if you feel like yelling, whisper instead. If you feel like hitting someone, fold your hands and walk away.
6. Practice self-control in small things. You can practice self-control like you can practice any skill in life. For example, use self-control by sitting perfectly still for 1 minute. Slowly increase your time until you get to 5 minutes. If you are usually very loud, practice speaking quietly for an hour and then for a whole day. This helps you to train yourself to use self-control so it will be easier to do when you are experiencing strong emotions.
7. Cool off. Splash water on your face, your hands, and the back of your neck. It will help you cool down, and it will give you time to think about using self-control.
8. Look in a mirror. When you are really upset and about to lose control, look at yourself in a mirror. What do you see when you look at your face? Do you like what you see? Seeing how you look when you are about to lose control can help you regain control.

Listen now to these verses that talk about self-control.

Ask a student to read Galatians 5:22–23 aloud from the Bible.

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.

Galatians 5:22–23

Did you hear self-control in that list? The Bible tells us that self-control is a fruit God produces as His Spirit works in Christians. As we grow in self-control, we can stop doing things that can hurt or upset others. Instead we can show care toward others. Everyone, Christian or not Christian, can practice self-control. But the good news for Christians is that the Holy Spirit can help us.

3. Responding: Practice using self-control in real-life situations.

Let's see how well you can use these tips in some real-life situations.

Pick 6 volunteers. You will read a situation, and 2 of the volunteers will act it out. After each situation, ask the question to the whole group, so they can give suggestions about how to use self-control.

1. Your friend is telling lies about you to all your friends. He tells them you are doing illegal things, even though you are not. Your friends start refusing to spend time with you. Someone walks up to you and calls you an offensive name. You are very angry. You are looking for your friend so you can beat him up.

- **What can this person do to choose self-control in this situation?**

2. You worked very hard on your assignment for school. You could not finish it because you had to work late to help feed your family. When you gave the assignment to your teacher late, she scolded you. As you walk home that day, you are hurt and angry. You want to go back and yell at her.

- **What can this person do to choose self-control in this situation?**

3. You have not seen your father for 4 years. You heard that he is coming to see you, and you are looking forward to seeing him. He stops to see you but only for a few minutes. You are deeply hurt and want to hurt him, too.

- **What can this person do to choose self-control in this situation?**

Thank the actors, and affirm the whole class for sharing great ideas.

Remember the exercises we did at the beginning of class? If we practiced those exercises, we would develop our muscle strength and our balance. It would be easier to hold those positions for a longer time. It is the same with self-control. Self-control takes practice. Many of us are not used to choosing self-control. When we feel angry or frustrated, we let our emotions or desires control us. However, the more we choose self-control, the easier it will become.

There is something else you can do to help with self-control. Think again about the exercises. Imagine that someone was standing close to you during these exercises. When you started to lose your balance, you could ask this person to help you. Would this have made the exercises easier? Of course!

- **Who do you think can help you to choose self-control?**

Students may answer that friends, trusted adults, and God can help them to have self-control.

Optional: If you are using the Student Pages, allow the students to draw about situations in their own lives where they need to choose self-control.

In life, we are not alone if we trust in God! He promises that He will never leave us. When you are angry or sad or frustrated, God is with you! This does not mean God will make your choices for you. You make your own decisions. You can choose to lose control and hurt yourself and others—or you can choose self-control. But if you ask God to help you, He will. He will give you the strength and courage to choose self-control.

Ask a student to read 2 Timothy 1:7 aloud from the Bible. Show the Memory Verse poster if possible.

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

Show the students the 2 Timothy 1:7 poster from the end of this lesson. (If you have tape, you can tape it to the wall.)

Stand with your partner from earlier in the lesson. You and your partner will take turns reciting 2 Timothy 1:7 to each other. Say the verse to each other 3 times. Then, pray this verse with your partner by slowly saying it with your partner's name. For example, "God gave (your partner's name) a spirit ..." Add your own words to the prayer if you want.

Give the students time to pray for each other. When they are finished, close with this blessing based on Titus 2:11–12.

Blessing: May the grace of God that brings salvation help you to live a self-controlled, upright, and godly life. May the wisdom of God be with you as you practice choosing patience instead of anger.

Family Connection: Encourage the students to ask their family members, "Has there ever been a time when you were too angry or frightened to make wise choices? What happened?" They can then share what they learned about self-control.

Lead the students in singing this quarter's song if possible.

"Waymaker" by Sinach: <https://youtu.be/DFGDU3XZmms>