

Acting with Self-Control

Quarter 3 | Lesson 7 | Character Development

1. **Connecting:** Play a game that tests self-control.

2. **Teaching:** Read and discuss the story of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1–11).

3. **Responding:** Memorize 2 Timothy 1:7.

SUPPLIES

- Bible

Optional Supplies:

- Memory Verse poster
- *The Action Bible*, image of Jesus' temptation
- Tape (to hang up the 2 Timothy 1:7 poster)
- Pencils
- Student Pages
- 2 Timothy 1:7 poster from Lesson 5

Teacher Devotion

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

2 Corinthians 12:9

Have you ever gone a long time without eating? How did you feel? For 40 days and nights, Jesus fasted. During that time, because He was fully human, He must have felt tired, hungry, and lonely. So when Satan tempted Jesus with the idea of turning stones into bread, it must have been difficult to resist. Although His body was physically weak, Jesus was spiritually strong. He resisted temptation and acted with self-control.

Acting with self-control becomes even harder when our physical bodies are weak. God promises that when we are weak, He is strong. What do you struggle with most? What are your weaknesses? What temptations are hardest for you to resist? Confess your weakness to God. Ask Him to strengthen you. Ask Him to help you resist temptation. He can fill you with a spirit of power, love, and self-control (2 Timothy 1:7).

Teacher Tip: Self-control is a skill everyone can learn, but it takes time and practice to master. As you encourage your students to choose self-control, affirm their good choices. Your encouragement will help them to continue their efforts.

Lesson Time

1. Connecting: Play a game that tests self-control.

Greet students warmly as they arrive. Ask if they had a chance to practice speaking with self-control. Invite them to share their stories with you and with others in the group. Be sure to affirm them for speaking with self-control.

I will divide you into 2 groups. Each group will line up facing the other. Indicate which group is "1" and which is "2." Group 1 will try to make Group 2 laugh or smile. Group 1 can make funny faces, do silly things, or make funny sounds. You cannot touch anyone, and you must stay in line.

Group 2 will try to keep from smiling or laughing. You cannot leave your place, and you cannot close your eyes. Just try to not smile or laugh.

Give a signal for the game to start. Give Group 1 about 2 minutes to try to make the other group smile or laugh. You may need to redirect the students who choose inappropriate noises or behaviour. When time is up, congratulate those who resisted smiling or laughing. Then have the groups switch roles. Group 2 will try to make Group 1 smile or laugh with their actions and sounds. Give the students 2 minutes to do the activity. Then congratulate the students for their efforts.

That was funny! Some of you tried so hard to get smiles or laughs from the others. Sometimes it worked. I am glad I was able to laugh! Even though what the other students were doing was very funny, some of you were able to keep from smiling or laughing.

- What did you do to keep from smiling or laughing?
- When you started to smile or laugh, could you stop?

The idea of this game was to control your actions. If you were able to resist reacting to what others were doing, you were using self-control. Some of you may have controlled yourselves by trying not to watch or listen to the students who were being so funny.

- Can someone remind us what self-control is?

Students may answer that self-control is choosing not to let your emotions or desires control your words and actions. It is choosing to think, say, and do what is right, even when it is difficult.

This game showed us that controlling ourselves can be very hard. It was just a game, so it did not matter if you used self-control or not. But in real life, whether or not you use self-control matters very much.

2. Teaching: Read and discuss the story of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1–11).

Today we will read a true story in the Bible about self-control. It is about temptation.

- Do you know what temptation is?

Allow students to share their thoughts.

Temptation is a strong desire to do something. Here is an example. Close your eyes. Imagine you have a delicious treat in your hand. Think about how it smells. Imagine how it tastes. Since it is imaginary, you are probably not very tempted to eat it. But what if it were real? How long could you wait before you took a bite? Would you start by nibbling on just a corner? Or would you put the whole thing into your mouth at once? Would you share it with a friend? Or would you keep it for yourself?

Enjoying your favourite treat is not wrong, but temptation is what you feel when you have that treat in front of you.

Now think of the longest time you have gone without eating. Did you miss a meal or more? Maybe you were hungry for a long time.

- **How do you feel when you have not eaten for a long time?**

You feel very tired. You might feel dizzy or lack energy. You can get stomach pains. You sometimes feel sad, anxious, or worried.

Teacher Tip: If your students come from poor families or have lived on the streets, they have probably experienced extreme hunger. Do not ask students to share about this topic unless they volunteer to do so. If a student expresses that she does not have enough food, see what you can do to help make sure her needs are being met.

- **When Jesus went a long time without eating, do you think He felt the same way? Why or why not?**

Allow students to share their thoughts. Some may think Jesus felt hungry. Others may think that, because Jesus is God's Son, He did not feel hunger.

When the Son of God came to earth in the Person of Jesus Christ, He was both fully God and fully human. His body was just like yours and mine. He knows what it is like to feel tired, sore, and hungry because He has felt all these things.

Once Jesus went out into the wilderness, or desert, to spend time with God the Father. Jesus stayed there for 40 days. He fasted, which means that instead of eating He prayed to God and listened to Him.

Have different students read the following passages aloud from the Bible. Show the *Action Bible* image if possible.

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

Matthew 4:1–3

- **How do you think Jesus responded to the tempter—Satan—when he suggested that Jesus turn stones to bread?**

Students might guess that Jesus turned the stones to bread or that He told the devil to leave

Have another student read the next verse.

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Matthew 4:4

- **Jesus responded to the devil's temptation by quoting from the Scriptures—what we call the Old Testament. Are you surprised by His response? Why or why not?**

Some students might be surprised that Jesus did not argue more with Satan or fight him. Remind them that Jesus showed self-control in His speech.

Have another student read the next 2 verses.

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

Matthew 4:5–6

- **How do you think Jesus responded to the devil this time?**

Many students may think that Jesus resisted the devil's temptation again.

Have another student read the next verse.

Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Matthew 4:7

As we read the last part of the story, listen carefully to Jesus' response to Satan's temptation. Think about what is similar in all 3 of Jesus' responses.

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him..

Matthew 4:8–11

Allow 2–3 students to answer each question. Try to call on different students.

- **Do you think it was easy for Jesus to resist when Satan tempted Him?**

Some students will likely answer that it would not have been easy for Jesus to resist Satan. His body would have felt very hungry after 40 days of not having any food. Jesus must have been tired and hungry. Other students may insist that it was easy for Jesus because He is the Son of God. If they do, point out that He was also fully human, feeling all that we do.

- **We have been learning about self-control. What connection can you make between this Bible story and self-control?**

Students may answer that Jesus acted with self-control when He resisted Satan's temptations.

- **How did Jesus control Himself and not give in to Satan's temptations?**

Students may answer that Jesus knew God's Word very well, and He knew God's Word is powerful. Jesus was also filled with the Holy Spirit. Even though Jesus was very hungry and very tired, the Holy Spirit gave Him strength, and He used the powerful Word of God to combat the enemy—all 3 times He was tempted. Jesus had the strength of God because He is God!

Have students get into groups of 4 for the next 3 questions. Give them about 1 minute to discuss each question with their groups. Then allow 2–3 groups to share their thoughts before moving on to the next question.

- **What are the results when we do not use self-control in our actions?**

Students might answer that either we get hurt or we may hurt others. Losing self-control can make us sin and disobey what Jesus has taught us. Our sin makes God sad and separates us from Him.

God knows us inside and out. He knows we need self-control so we can do what is right. Because God loves us, He will help us to act with self-control. Remember the fruit of the Spirit? When we invite Jesus into our lives and become Christians, the Holy Spirit fills us. He is our Helper and Guide. The Holy Spirit gives us strength to resist temptation and act with self-control. You can choose to act with self-control even if you are not a Christian, but a Christian can rely on the help of the Holy Spirit!

- **How would having more self-control help you?**

Students may answer that having more self-control would help them act more kindly toward others, keep them out of trouble, prevent them from reacting with violence and anger, keep them safer, and cause them to be better friends to others.

3. Responding: Memorize 2 Timothy 1:7.

Choosing self-control has many benefits. Let's think back to the treats we imagined at the beginning. Close your eyes. Imagine you have that same delicious treat in your hand. Think again about how it smells. Imagine again how it tastes.

What if I told you that if you waited 5 minutes to eat your treat, I would give you a second delicious treat—just like the first one. All you have to do is choose self-control. Could you do it? And, if you did wait and get 2 treats, would you eat them both? Or would you share with a friend?

Now open your eyes. It would be hard to wait even 5 minutes to enjoy something delicious. But what if you had a friend there, encouraging you to choose self-control? Would that help?

In the situation with our imaginary treats, if you chose self-control, there would be a delicious reward—a second treat. Are there other situations in your life when choosing self-control can have benefits? For example, by choosing to act with self-control, I do well in my exams because I study instead of wasting time. Now think about a situation like this in your own life.

Give the students 1 minute to think of their situations. Allow 2–3 students to respond to each question.

- **What are the benefits of choosing self-control in this situation?**
- **Why do you think it may be hard to choose self-control in this situation?**
- **When Jesus faced temptation, He used God's Word to help Him. Can you think of a Bible verse that can help you to choose self-control in your situation?**

Allow students to offer some they know. Some of them may share 2 Timothy 1:7.

Let's look again at a verse we have been reading about self-control—2 Timothy 1:7. Everyone pair up. You and your partner will create motions for each word or phrase of the verse. This will help you to remember the verse when you are faced with temptation and you need to choose self-control.

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

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

Have students work with partners to create motions for the verse. They should say it together as they do their motions. If your students need some help thinking of motions, create the first 1 or 2 together as a class. For example, students can point up to the sky as they say, "God." They can hold their hands out as though they were handing someone a gift to represent "gave."

Give students several minutes to create motions for the whole verse. Then have each pair join another pair to form groups of 4. Have each pair teach the motions to the other pair in the group.

These motions will help us to remember this verse—especially at times when we need it! Having self-control is easier when we have help and encouragement. With your group of 4, come up with a special hand signal that you can use to encourage each other to use self-control. When you see each other outside of this class, use the signal to encourage each other to use self-control that day. And remember, when we are struggling to choose self-control, we can ask God for help.

Optional:

If you are using the Student Pages, give the students an opportunity to complete the page in class, if possible. They will need access to a Bible to write down some verses to help them when they need to choose self-control. If the students need help, you can suggest 1 Corinthians 9:24–27, Galatians 5:22–23, Proverbs 21:23, and 1 Peter 5:8.

End of Option

Have students stand together as you close your time with this blessing based on John 15:7.

Blessing: May God fill you with self-control. May you always remember that, if you believe in Jesus, you can ask for what you need, and it will be done for you.

Family Connection: Encourage the students to ask their family members, "What helps you to choose self-control when you are tempted?" They can then share that God can help us to resist temptation.

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

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