

Prayer

Dear Father, you have demonstrated your love and care in many and various ways. I thank you for all the benefits I have received from you, unworthy though I am.

Forgive me for those things in my life that have brought you dishonour. Cleanse my heart, and grant me a desire to delight in you, and serve and please you in every way, because you are the giver of abundant life; in you is hope and peace and everlasting joy.

Amen.

Song: (MHB 669) *by J.G. Whittier*

1. Dear Lord and Father of mankind, forgive our foolish ways!
Re-clothe us in our rightful mind, in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence, praise.
2. In simple trust like theirs who heard, beside the Syrian sea,
the gracious calling of the Lord, let us, like them, without a word,
rise up and follow thee.
3. O Sabbath rest by Galilee! O calm of hills above,
where Jesus knelt to share with thee the silence of eternity
interpreted by love!
4. Drop thy still dews of quietness, till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress, and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of thy peace.
5. Breathe through the heats of our desire thy coolness and thy balm;
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire; speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still, small voice of calm.

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Scripture

- Mark 4: 35-39

When evening had come, Jesus said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!"

- Galatians 5:22

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Message: Self Control

The incident recorded for us by Mark is well known by those familiar with the Scriptures, and by those who remember their Sunday School lessons.

The disciples, in the midst of a storm and in fear of their lives, turn to Jesus (always a good thing to do) and immediately accuse him of not caring (not a good thing to do). While, as armchair critics, we might rebuke the disciples for their fear and lack of faith, as Jesus did, it is the response of Jesus himself which is what needs our greater attention. He is accused of manifesting the exact opposite of who he was and what he had consistently demonstrated; a display of care unparalleled in human history, and in so doing he is told that he didn't care. We could use several terms to describe what was said to him. An insult. Gross misunderstanding. Offensive. Ungrateful. Horrible, rude and just wrong.

When it comes to reviewing how Jesus was tempted, we might think of the wilderness experience or Peter's suggestion that he would not be killed or the mockery of the religious leaders at the crucifixion. But temptation was pretty continual for Jesus, and this incident is but one example.

You've looked after a child or a disabled person, pouring out love, time and effort only to be told "you don't really love me" or "you're only doing this to make you feel good". You've been cleaning the church for years and someone complains about the leaves you left by the front door. You've been looking after the books and annual reports forever and you're told you don't do much. What's your response?

So we come to the topic of Self Control. Jesus was tempted to 'lose it', as many no doubt have under similar circumstances. Instead, as we might say, Jesus let it pass through to the keeper and addressed the situation, one could imagine with grace and authority. Jesus had left his home in glory to live among the sinfulness of men. He knew what was coming – rejection, lies, mockery and crucifixion. And this insult! What kept him going? Surely it was at least in part "the joy that was before him" (Heb 12:2). But was this not also an example of that work of the Holy Spirit Paul refers to in his letter to the church at Galatia; *The fruit of the Spirit is ... self-control* (Gal 5:22).

Paul calls it fruit. If the nectarines, apricots and apples of my trees at home are anything to go by, fruit takes time to fully develop, but after blossom, it's there from the start. And when ready it's good and desirable, although the possums seem to think it's ready before I do!

Self control – a natural development in the life of a person who has invited the Helper, the Holy Spirit, to guide and encourage, indeed to help. But it doesn't hurt to ask for it, even strive for it, as Peter's epistle would suggest: *Make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-*

Self Control

control... (2 Peter 1:5-7) and the list goes on. Self control requires effort. And this text would suggest it follows knowledge, which is to say that what is learnt needs to be put into practice. Failure to do so is sin, so James says (James 4:17). But the text also suggests that self control is a precursor, or stepping stone, to more: *...and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love*. That is, self control is a key characteristic both resulting from, and preceding, other characteristics.

In fact it is surprising where Scripture ranks the importance of self control. When Paul was asked to give an explanation of the Gospel we are told *he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment* (Acts 24:25) and this is what unsettled governor Felix. We would probably not be surprised to know that Paul spoke about righteousness and judgment to Gentile hearers, but self control!

We find another reference to self control where the original word is translated “strict training” *Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training*. (1 Cor 9:25) Some translations actually retain the words “self control”, all of which tells us that discipline and effort are required, as noted earlier.

The Scriptures provide a couple of examples of self control, probably the most obvious being control of the tongue: *Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves*. (James 1:26, 3:2)

A second example is as a required characteristic of those in leadership: *A church overseer must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined*. (Titus 1:8) It is worth noting as an aside that these characteristics of leadership are not so much a mandatory precondition but rather something to be worked on.

Prayer for suffering Christians, from Barnabas Prayer for 23/3/25

Heavenly Father,

We pray for those in different countries afflicted by natural disasters. We ask You to draw close to those suffering the effects of floods, drought, tropical storms and earthquakes. We ask for the provision of food, medicine and shelter to those most in need.

We intercede especially for Christian communities affected and pray that they will know Your presence with them even as they pass through the deepest waters.

We pray that, as they develop trust in You, they will be a comfort and a guiding light to others to point them to the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose Name we pray. (Isaiah 43:2).

Hymn: by C Wesley

1. O for a heart to praise my God, a heart from sin set free;
a heart that's sprinkled with the blood so freely shed for me:
2. A heart resigned, submissive, meek, my great Redeemer's throne;
where only Christ is heard to speak, where Jesus reigns alone:
3. A humble, lowly, contrite heart, believing, true, and clean,
which neither life nor death can part from him that dwells within:
4. A heart in every thought renewed, and full of love divine;
perfect and right and pure and good — a copy, Lord, of thine.
5. Thy nature, gracious Lord, impart, come quickly from above;
write thy new name upon my heart, thy new best name of Love.

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Benediction:

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

This service was prepared by Warren Mack for HopeNet SA