

Step By Step

Self Control

- **ROCKY VIDEO**

- In every single Rocky movie, and more recently the Creed movies, the Training Scenes are the most iconic
- Why? Because you would never be able to appreciate the fight unless you knew the work that was put into getting ready for the fight
- Also, a fair fight wouldn't be possible without the training.
- Without training and discipline, there would never be any opportunity for victory
 - We should know, that in this life, there is always a fight coming.
- And if we are not prepared for that fight before it comes, we are going to get beat over and over and over again.

- Financial troubles are going to happen, but if we have not trained ourselves to know where our true security comes from we are going to get knocked down hard.
- Our church family knows all too well right now that we will lose loved ones at some point
 - And Paul says we all grieve, yet we do not grieve as those who do not have Hope
 - And if we are not prepared and focused on eternity we will be crushed in the same way unbelievers are
- Demonic spiritual attacks will come our way when we begin to walk out our faith.
- Paul tells us that the enemy's fiery darts are going to be shot at us. But if we are not read up and prayed up, if we are not intentionally putting on the armor of God before those attacks come, we will not have the spiritual ammunition to withstand

- That is why we exercise the Fruit of the Spirit of Self Control:
 - Now Self Control is a pretty counter cultural idea now-a-days because the mantra of our day is to just be yourself, to follow your heart, do what feels best, whatever you think and feel is true for you
 - But all that does is lead to chaos and confusion
 - Because we as human being are not prone to self-control we're prone to self destruct
 - You can probably confidently agree that if you follow every feeling and urge that you have, your life would probably sink to some pretty dark places
 - And Jesus knows that and wants to help save us from ourselves.
 - That's why He didn't teach to us find ourselves, He taught us to die to ourselves
 - And whenever we come into a new life with Christ, our old self is still finding ways to

come back, and that is why Paul felt it necessary to add Self-Control to his list of the Fruit of the Spirit.

- Because it takes some self control to walk in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness
- And if we are not taking the proper, practical steps to spiritually train the right way, we are going to get thrown into a fight that we're not ready for.
- It's important for us to remember that:
 - **THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS PROACTIVE, NOT REACTIVE**
 - In every sport I ever played, all of my coaches would always drive home the point that how you play, is a direct result of how you practice
 - And every coach will agree that, in the long run, hard work will beat natural talent every single time
 - I've heard it said that private discipline leads to public victory.

- I've been on teams where the most talented athletes were not the best players, because they didn't have discipline, they wouldn't put in the work.
 - It's the ones that put in the work, that discipline themselves, that develop the proper habits to be the best versions of themselves that will get the most playing time and make the greatest impact when game time comes.
- Paul relates this to the Christian life in 1 Corinthians 9 when he says, ***“Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable [crown], but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.” -1 Corinthians 9:25-27 (ESV)***
- Now, it should be noted, that we don't train and work hard in our faith in order to make the team.
 - We don't have to worry about being cut.
 - When we confess with our mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord, and believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead. When we put our faith in trust in Him as our personal Lord and Savior, we are on the team! We are eternally secure!
 - However, too many Christians are fine with just riding the bench.
 - And that's exactly where the enemy wants you to be. Sidelined and silent.
 - The enemy has no problem with you going to church, as long as you keep church there.
 - He's not worried about you going to church because that's not treading on his territory.
 - He's ok with you singing a few songs, listening to a sermon, getting in and out of

there as long as you don't bring that Jesus stuff onto his turf

- So the enemy will creep thoughts into your mind like, "You don't need to crack that bible today, the pastor just did that for you on Sunday morning!"
- "You don't need to talk about that Jesus stuff at work, they'll think you're one of those weird over religious-y people. You don't wanna turn them off."
- "You don't need to take out the time to really talk to God, it's not like He's going to talk back, and besides, He knows all of the things you're going to say anyway. What's the point?"
 - (Sidenote that's a bit of a preview for our next series)
- But the enemy wants you to think that there's enough people out there doing all this reaching people stuff, you're busy, they're doing a good job at it, so just let them handle it

- Too often we're ok with just watching other Christians make an impact and we'll even cheer them on! But we don't really buy into the fact that the only thing separating their faith from ours is that they're putting in a little extra work
 - Not for their glory, but for God's and for the benefit of others.
 - Paul says I can preach to others all I want, but if I'm not putting in the work, if I'm not training to practice what I preach, then it's not going to make any real impact.
- Because what people are craving in their lives is genuineness and authenticity.
- Why? Because the rest of the world is superficial and fake
- That's why Paul told Timothy, ***"The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."***
- 1 Timothy 1:5 (ESV)

- Paul says this is our ministry strategy. These are our leadership goals. These are our church growth tactics.
 - We aim, first and foremost for love and care for the people of God from a pure heart, good conscience, and sincere faith
 - But you know it takes self-control and discipline to keep your heart pure, your conscience clear, and your faith sincere
- And we need to practice this self-control because game day is always around the corner
- And we don't necessarily have it on the schedule.
- Sometimes we do, with mission trips, prayer walks, service days and things like that
 - Because game day is not Sunday mornings. This is more like team practice.
- But most of the time game day is going to happen at work, at a ball game, in the neighborhood, when a conversation is struck up with an unbeliever, when your faith comes

under attack, when you or someone you love experiences a tragedy

- Are you ready to love in those situations with a pure heart?
 - Are you ready to handle conflict in a way that would keep your conscience clear?
 - Are you prepared to sincerely share your faith?
- If you can't confidently answer "yes" to any of those questions, that's ok! That's why we're here! To encourage each other and help each other
- So if we're not ready, we can get ready.
- Peter says, ***"...in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to***

shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.” -1 Peter 3:15-17 (ESV)

- A huge part of self-control is being prepared
 - That's our next point, **BE PREPARED**
 - The first step in being prepared is Honoring Christ. He is Holy, He is set-apart, He is first and He is the most important Person in your life.
 - Then He says be prepared to give a defense
 - This does not mean to argue and debate your faith. We know that because he says to do so with gentleness and respect
 - The only reason we do not handle situations with gentleness and respect is because we are not prepared
 - And when we're not prepared, we get rattled, defensive and argumentative
 - So first, we should **Be Prepared to Share Your Story.**
- We should be prepared to share why we believe what we believe and what led us to becoming a Christian
 - Can you remember the day you gave your life to Jesus?
 - Can you remember the day you were baptized?
 - What led you to make those decisions?
- If you've never done this, my encouragement to you would be, this week, maybe even today. Take out the time to write out your testimony.
 - Anticipate that some day soon, someone is going to find out you're a Christian and ask you why
 - And if you have taken the time to really think through and write out your testimony, you will be better prepared to share that story with gentleness and respect
 - We've said it before, your personal testimony is the most powerful tool for evangelism that you have in your Spiritual arsenal.

- Because people can argue with you tooth and nail about doctrine and theology, but they cannot argue with you about your personal experience. They can question it, but they cannot argue its because that's your story not theirs
- Next, we should **Be Prepared to Answer Biblical Questions.**
 - You cannot be prepared to answer biblical questions if you don't read the bible
 - You cannot rely on Sunday mornings for you biblical intake, it won't be enough
 - Deuteronomy says that Man shall not live by bread alone, but every Word that comes from the mouth of God
 - If you only eat once a week, you're not going to be getting the strength and nutrients that you need to live a healthy life
 - In the same way, if you are only in God's Word once a week, you will be very spiritually malnourished.
- Besides, the Holy Spirit wants to teach you things through the Living Word on a one on one, personal level
- There are things that God wants to teach you, and things He wants to speak to you that He will not be able to communicate to you in a corporate setting.
- He doesn't want to be a casual Friend that you just hang out with in groups
- He wants a close, intimate, one on one relationship with you.
- But sometimes it feels like a daunting task, it feels tedious or like a chore to take time out of busy our day to just stop and read the Bible
 - You could be thinking, "A lot of it is hard to understand sometimes, so many things may go over my head, there are so many versions, I don't know which one I should pick!"

- I heard one pastor say, you know what the best version of the Bible is? The one that you'll read!
- And whenever you read the bible on your own, you are going to come across some things that you don't understand
 - And when that happens, we have a tendency just to move right on by so we can finish reading the section we wanted to read so we can check off the box
 - But that's not going to help you grow and be prepared the way you need to be
- I've always encouraged that every time you come across something in scripture that you don't understand, take the time to find out what it means. Even if your reading for the day stops right there, do the research
 - Imagine that you are going to come across someone the next day that is going to ask you about that exact passage, come up with the answer or at least an answer
 - And it doesn't necessarily mean you need to scower commentaries and greek words
 - You can text or email your pastor or spiritual mentor. You can consult professor google sometimes. [gotquestions.org](https://www.gotquestions.org) is a very biblical and helpful resources that answers thousands of biblical questions. Find a way to be able to answer the questions that you have in order to be able to answer it for others.
- And finally, **Be Prepared for Opposition**, be prepared to be slandered, be prepared to be reviled, be prepared for people to talk to you like you're stupid for believing what you believe.
 - Jesus told us to expect that
 - Paul tells us the gospel is foolishness to those who don't believe
 - The Holy Spirit is the one who leads people into truth, not us

- So we don't have to take the pressure upon ourselves of talking or reasoning people into believing what we believe
- All we can do is be faithful in being prepared to share our faith, our stories, and biblical truths and leave the results up to God
- When we are faithful in our preparation and content in leaving the results up to God, we won't have to be offended when other people slander us, we can instead keep a heart of compassion desperately desiring them to come to the truth rather than seeing them as enemies.
- We can keep the heart of Jesus, when He looked out over the people and didn't see them as a bunch of unbelieving enemies, but rather He had compassion on them and saw them as sheep without a Shepherd
- So Be Prepared to share your story, be prepared to give biblical answers, and be prepared for opposition
- A Paul also tells us in 1 Corinthians 10 to be prepared for Temptation
- He writes, ***“Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” -1 Corinthians 10:12-13 (ESV)***
 - Many take this passage to mean that God will never give you more than you can handle.
 - But that's just unequivocally untrue
 - He will always let you go through more than you can handle because it causes you to rely on Him
- But Paul says, you will not be tempted in any way that isn't common to others
 - So if you are tempted with a certain sin, the bible wants you to know that you are not the

only one. There is no temptation or sin that you have committed that someone else has not dealt with as well

- That's why James tells us to confess our sins to each other, so that we can find healing
- Because when we open up to our fellow brothers and sisters about the certain sins and temptations that we are struggling with, we find so much healing when we come to the realization that we're not the only ones!
- However, Paul says, with each temptation, God will always provide a way of escape
 - Not a way to fight it, but to flee it
 - If you try to handle temptation, temptation will handle you
 - You run from it, you avoid it, you escape it
- Paul says, "take heed, lest you fall"
 - He's saying don't think you're too strong to mess up.

- Christians can be really good at turning their noses up at other Christians or Christian leaders that end up falling into a sin that gets exposed
- However, we would be much more gracious if we took the time to really look at all of the temptations in our hearts that God has so graciously allowed us to escape
- We have to stay on guard and prepared for temptation because only God, you, and the devil know the temptations you are the most susceptible to
- And if we get caught up putting ourselves on a pedestal because, by the grace of God we haven't fallen yet, it's going to be a much slipperier, and a much longer and harder fall whenever we get all high and mighty and let our guard down
- *I remember listening to one of my former lead pastors, Jeremy Peeler, share in a sermon one time that he and his wife and a couple close to*

them where the husband had been caught in an affair.

- And his wife Ashley said, “If anyone ever told me that you were cheating, I would just laugh because I know you would never do that.”
- And Jeremy told her, “We can’t ever afford to think that way. We can never afford to think that I’m above it, because as soon as we start thinking that way, that’s when I will fall.”
- Spiritual growth and spiritual strength isn’t about never making mistakes. It’s about understanding your weaknesses, depending on God, and disciplining yourself enough to avoid possible pitfalls.
- That’s why a big part of self control is self-awareness. We need to Be Prepared, and:
- **BE SELF-AWARE**
 - It’s nearly impossible to have self-control without self-awareness
 - Because you cannot work on what you’re not aware of.

- Self-awareness is not a counter cultural thing.
- This generation actually loves self awareness
- We love the enneagram tests, personality assessments, the which character are you quizzes on social media, all that jazz
- But when the world uses all of that for self-elevation, we as Christians use it to elevate others.
 - For a very long time, I had such a hard time with personality tests and all of that because too often I saw people use them as tools for manipulation more than anything else.
 - They would peg another individual as a certain personality type and use that to try and manipulate them into doing what they wanted them to do
 - And if not being used for manipulation, they would use it as an excuse.
 - “Well, I’m an enneagram 2, so that’s just the way I am..”

- I can't tell you how many times I have seen or heard someone completely tear apart another person with their words, and they just say, "Well that's just who I am. I'm a straight shooter. I just tell it like it is."
- Now I appreciate bluntness more than just about 99% of southerners, but I have no patience for that selfish mentality.
- Because that is not about making other people feel valued, that is not being gentle, kind, loving, or exercising self control, or really any of the fruits of the Spirit and that should bother any person carrying the Holy Spirit inside of them.
- Ephesians 4:29 says, ***"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."*** -Ephesians 4:29 (NIV)
- And this passage isn't necessarily just about not cussing. Its about cutting other people

down with your words. It's about using what you say in order to build up not beat up.

- James lets us know how valuable exercising self control with our words is. He says, ***"We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check...With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be."*** -James 3: 2, 9-10 (NIV)
- This is why you should put in the work to know your personality, how you are wired, and your temperamental tendencies, so that you can better understand what you are prone to say and how you say it but so you can learn how you can best build up others, according to their needs, so it will benefit them.

- Take the 5 love languages assessment for example. You do not go through Gary Chapman's study of the 5 Love Languages just to find out what your love languages are.
 - No, you do it more so to learn the love languages of those closest to you, and see which one's you are not speaking well to them so you can be better for their benefit.
- Kathleen Edelman did a temperament assessment called "I said this-you heard that"
 - And whenever I do premarital counseling, in the first session I have the couple take the assessment together
 - There are 40 questions and the couple has to agree on each of the answers for each other
 - That way they have to be honest with the answer and answer for how they really are, not just what they want to be
 - I'm convinced that the most accurate results of any assessment you'll get is if the three closest people to you take it for you
- But I love that specific assessment because it breaks down the 4 Temperaments which is your innate wiring from God
 - It's different from your personality, because your personality changes throughout the course of your life. Your personality is more based around the company you keep, your life experiences, and your age
 - I do not have the same personality I did when I was in high school
 - It develops, grows, and changes sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worst.
- But your temperament never changes.
- Kathleen takes the 4 temperaments of Choleric, Sanguine, Phlegmatic, and Melancholy and puts them into colors of Red, Yellow, Green, and Blue
- And my primary temperament is Red which is Choleric.
 - So knowing that about myself, I am prone to speak the language of power and control.

- There are pros to that like it helps me be decisive, responsible, and helps me be good and managing tasks and projects
- However, there are cons to that temperament as well that leads me to be domineering, bossy, impatient, and can be harsh with my tone.
- And it took me way too long to realize that about myself.
- Last week I mentioned about how I was trying to help in a situation where my help wasn't requested, and I handled the situation the wrong way
 - When I realized it, Avery and I had to talk through the best way for us to be able to communicate that would be helpful for both of us.
- In that conversation I came to a realization about how weak I was in this area and had to work on how I could get better.
- I've realized that whenever I'm in a brainstorming session, my face and my intentions normally don't say the same thing.
- You see, I'm the type of person that's ok with being wrong. If I have a bad idea, I'm ok with it being a bad idea.
 - I'm the type of person that can give 100 ideas, and if we have to throw away 99 of them that's fine with me, I just need to say them out loud.
 - However, not many people know that about me because my face doesn't say the same thing.
 - In my mind, I'm saying "Here is just an idea, this is all a conversation."
 - But my face says, "This is the way it's gonna be and you better get on board."
 - So I need to realize that about myself so I can make adjustments and work on it,
 - But even more so, I need to be able to communicate that with others so that when

my face inevitably goes all dad-mode, they can know that's not really my heart or what I'm meaning.

- And taking the time to learn these principles can help me be more self controlled in my marriage,
 - Because Rachel, who is primarily green, or Phlegmatic, she is wired to be more introverted, think things through before speaking, and avoid conflict.
 - So knowing my tendencies, I know with her I need to slow down and not be so confrontational, and allow her time to process, even though everything in me wants to go 100 mph and talk things through right away, I know that she needs her space and time
- Now I'm not saying I gotten this figured out, I hope I'm batting .300 with it, but I at least have a starting point in which I can begin to practice self-control in this area.

- And that's really what we're after here, it's not perfection, it's effort.
- If we can put in the effort to be prepared and be self-aware, we will be more likely to produce a greater level of the Fruit of the Spirit in and through our lives.
- And the drive and motivation to put forth this type of effort is not going to come from us.
 - We need a supernatural kick in the pants, so to speak, to get started on this
 - And that's exactly what the Holy Spirit does for us.
 - That's why we need to keep in step with Him, and follow His leading
 - And I'm telling you, you will never be in tune with the Spirit if you are not consistent with The Word.
- Show me someone who is not showing the Fruit of the Spirit in their lives and I will show you someone who is not consistently feeding on the Word of God.

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- Because Hebrews tells us that this is a Living Word. That means whenever you spend consistent time in it, there is something that supernaturally takes root in our lives and the results are undeniable
- Even David spoke to this in Psalm 1 when he wrote: ***“How happy is the one who does not walk in the advice of the wicked or stand in the pathway with sinners or sit in the company of mockers! Instead, his delight is in the Lord’s instruction, and he meditates on it day and night. He is like a tree planted beside flowing streams that bears its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.” -Psalm 1:1-3 (CSB)***
- David says whenever we delight in the Lord and His Leading and Teaching, we become like a tree.
- We become like a tree planted beside flowing streams, that means a tree that is firmly planted that the wind, weather, and water can’t knock down.
- He also says we will bears fruit in the right season. That means whenever the fight comes, whenever it’s game day!
 - Whenever tragedy strikes, whenever we come across someone in need of compassion, whenever our faith is attacked, whenever financial hardships happen..
 - We may takes some hits, but our roots are still deep and we are still firmly planted
- Pastor Tony Evans commentated on this passage and said, ***“Such trees are not easily swayed; they hold their ground. That the tree bears its fruit in its season indicates that the blessed person is productive, maximizing his or her potential. Importantly, the fruit exists for the benefit of others. Thus, you know you are blessed when you are being a blessing.” -Dr. Tony Evans***

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- Brother and sister, you are still living and breathing on this planet in order to bless others. The Holy Spirit wants to empower us in such a way that we can't help but bless the people around us.
 - Whether that is loving the people that are hard to love
 - Having Joy in the midst of struggles
 - Pursuing Peace in the midst of a divided world
 - Living in Patience when everything is going against you
 - Choosing Kindness toward those who don't believe like you believe
 - Extending Goodness to the people around you
 - Walking in Faithfulness when it doesn't make sense
 - Showing Gentleness with the people God values so much
- Or practicing Self Control to be the best for the people around you
- Let the Holy Spirit do His work in you, so He can bless people through you
- And if we have a church full of people who intentionally walk out this Fruit of the Spirit, Step By Step, there is no telling how many ways the Lord can use this little church plant to bless our community and advance His Kingdom on Earth as it is in Heaven.