

# LESSON ESSENTIALS

## CHRISTIAN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

### LESSON 6: WISDOM AND SELF-CONTROL

Jesus talked about how following Him is like walking the narrow path. We can imagine that this path is like walking on safe ground between two different fields, which may look pleasant and even more attractive than the path, but will lead us into snares and stop our progress. Virtues are just this – the center between extremes that lead to ruin. Read on to learn about the source of wisdom and self-control in our lives.

The source of wisdom and self-control is the truth of God. When we have true beliefs and practice acting on those beliefs we will have both wisdom and self-control. Without these, our lives will be in danger of foolish, painful errors .

“A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.”

Proverbs 25:28

They were young men of Godly character, as evidenced by the choices they made. They chose what was wise and exhibited self-control rather than what was easy or safe.

Some people have said that character is who you are when no one is watching. It is what you are like when you are far from home, and none of your family, your church members or friends can see how you behave. Are you going to disregard God’s truths and act in ways that are selfish or even self-destructive? Community helps each of us to be our best. But at the end of our lives, we as individuals will have to give an account of our actions, as we are ultimately responsible for our own conduct and character.

Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were four young men in the Bible who, when exiled from their homeland, displayed remarkable wisdom and self-control even though their lives were threatened! Their story is found in Daniel, chapters 1 to 3.

Imagine being taken from your parents as a young man, to a land where no one spoke your language, no one observed your customs, no one knew your God. You would be tempted at every turn to do as your captors do, live the way they live, and serve the gods they serve. What would you do? In the days when Israel was taken captive by Babylon, many young men were trained in the King’s palace to be overseers and rulers. They were taught the language, lifestyle and customs of the Babylonians in an attempt to wipe out former allegiances and grow the nation of Babylon. These four men were among them.

They were young men of Godly character, as evidenced by the choices they made. They chose what was wise and exhibited self-control rather than what was easy or safe. When fed the King’s own rich food (which was seen as unclean by the Jews) Daniel and his friends denied it. They chose to eat only vegetables instead! God honoured their decision and gave them remarkably good health. Imagine the self-control it took to choose what they knew would honour their God over what was delicious and would gain them favour with their captors! They did not have their parents with them to correct, guide or discipline them, rather they discerned what was wise based on their knowledge of God.

Daniel chose to be disciplined in prayer, even when the act of praying to God became a legal offence! He prayed three times a day in a location where he could be seen, to demonstrate that he worshipped God only and was not afraid of men. He wisely made a decision to honour God instead of participating in an evil mandate issued by his government. Because of this he received a death sentence and was thrown into a den of lions. But God spared

Daniel's life, and the King conceded that Daniel's God was the one true God.

The other Hebrew boys, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, refused to bow down and worship a carved image of Nebuchadnezzar. Even when they were threatened with their lives, they chose wisely not to abandon their faith in God. When they were thrown into a furnace too hot to approach, God sent an angel there to protect them. Once again, the king conceded that no other god could do what their God had done.

Wisdom is something everyone wants – to know what to do or say, to be able to discern God's will, to make good decisions. God's Word tells us how we can be wise: we must know, believe and apply it to our everyday lives. We must trust that knowing God's truth will help us to make wise choices, and we must rely on Him to be the source of our wisdom (not our self, our emotions, or worldly philosophy).

Self control is related to wisdom in that it resists our natural impulses to make unwise choices. Instead of being ruled by sinful impulses, with God's help we can determine to do what is right and good. Self-control is needed when we are most vulnerable to temptation. Self-control requires us to run away from sin, turn towards godliness, and come alongside other believers rather than going our own way. All this takes discipline, and requires intentional choices based on what is wise.

As we seek to develop a character more like Jesus Christ, let us pursue wisdom and self-control.

We must trust that knowing God's truth will help us to make wise choices, and we must rely on Him to be the source of our wisdom (not our self, our emotions, or worldly philosophy).

## IN REVIEW

- Wisdom and self-control require us to believe that God's Word is the source of wisdom, and that we must control our sinful impulses in order to act upon this wisdom.
- The book of Daniel gives us good examples of wisdom and self-control. These virtues require that we turn away from worldly wisdom and pleasures, and do what honours God.

## HAVE YOUR SAY

- How can you express wisdom without being condescending or self-exalting? Why is it important to use wisdom in love?
  
- What is the difference between having true self-control and simply following laws and regulations? Will creating a list of personal rules help you be more self-controlled?
  
- When are you most easily tempted (least in control of yourself)? For some people it is when they are hungry, tired, thirsty, lonely, bored or afraid.
  
- What is an area of your life where you find it difficult to have self-control? What is an area of your life where it is easier for you to be self-controlled? (Consider: spending money, sexual activity, eating, care of your body, managing anger, careful words, gossip, lying, dishonest gain, etc.)

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