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Spirit Life: Self Control

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Esther – trapped in disorienting, deep uncertainty about a future for her and for her people – lives the spiritual fruit of self-control that prepares her for the right moment, the exact right time to speak. The spiritual fruit of self-control creates a brand-new future. Living the Spirit Life of self-control gives us the focus, the preparation, to be ready for generosity.

I remember when I was first reading all about the fruits of the spirit when I was younger. I didn't like the word self-control because it felt like somebody was trying to tell me what to do. Trying to tell me... What to do? And I didn't like that. And to be honest...I still don't. And there is a very, very simple yet complicated reason... the truth is, sometimes I have no self-control. Especially around chocolate chip cookies.

On occasion my mother-in-law would bake chocolate chip cookies and leave them at our house for the kids. And then... they magically disappear. Yes, I ate them all. Sorry, Hallie, if you are watching. I blamed it on Jonah, so my apologies to you too Jonah if you are watching as well. But I ate them all. For further confirmation of this reality of my struggle with self-control, my doctor would say, yep you did eat them all. And... you need to stop. Almost asking the question – Do you know what is going on? Paul, you need to exercise some self-control. Self-control...for you, for your family and friends. Give yourself and them a gift.

And at its core, self-control is a gift. It's a gift to yourself and a gift to others. Especially self-control in relationships to what you put into your body or even how you use your financial resources. I think we all get the basic concept of self-control issues with what we put into our bodies. That is a bit easier to understand. But how does self-control with our financial resources benefit ourselves and others?

We are moving into an age-old process that every church since the beginning of time... and every non-profit... knows well... the annual stewardship appeal process. And let's be honest... most people don't like talking or even hearing about

stewardship appeals. Financial stewardship seems to be so personal... so private and close to us that we want to hold that to ourselves. However, over the years... I have grown to really enjoy and get excited about financial stewardship, especially as it relates to the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's really what we are talking about. Because, from my vantage point I have a really good idea of what is going on. You and I, a whole gang of us, we get together for worship, for small groups, for ministry and service all in the name of Jesus, and... for the purpose of furthering the gospel of Jesus. And it takes financial resources to do all of this. That's the way it happens. That's the how Jesus taught his early disciples to do it and that's how the Holy Spirit inspires us to do it now in our time. You see... the Holy Spirit invited the earliest followers, and now invites us into a different kind of living. A spiritual living. We are called to Spirit Life where our generosity is not simply a financial transaction. Generosity is included in the beautiful list of the fruits of the spirit found in Galatians 5. "Live by the Spirit," the Apostle Paul instructs his church in Galatia. And Paul continues... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. (Gal 5:22-23 NRS)

And the amazing thing is that all these fruits of the spirit that come from living Spirit Life, both help us to live Spirit Life and they grow the other fruits of the Spirit as well. If you have more love, you are bound to have more faithfulness. If you have more gentleness, you are bound to have more love. And on and on and on. It's like eating an endless supply of chocolate cookies, but... way better for you and for the world.

The same is true for generosity. As we through this year's stewardship appeal, we will dive deeper into several of these fruits of the spirit to guide us into living Spirit Life with more generosity.

So... yes, not ashamed, and not shy about it... I get really excited about financial stewardship because it leads to and is directly connected to how we proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world and draws me into living Spirit Life. And I want to get you excited about it too and call us all more deeply into living Spirit Life. So, we start with the

idea of self-control, not as a command, but as a gift to sharing the gospel. Here is how.

Years ago, before I was involved in a booster club, these meddling kids would scour the neighborhood, you know, the kids show up at your house, knock on the door and then have the little booster club card. Hey please donate, buy this thing it will help my basketball team or my soccer team or the volleyball team and for years I was like, no, I don't think I'm doing that.

And one of the excuses I used was I didn't have any cash on hand. But if I'm being honest my real hesitation was a question, I had not found an answer to. The question was "Why do these activities send their kids out to panhandle?". Must be a scam. Doesn't the school already pay for this stuff? What's going on? So, I would say, yeah, I don't have any cash you guys. But hey little Johnny, little Sally, go next door to Bill. Bill has lots of cash.

What's going on? My uniformed mind was asking that question. Now, I didn't understand what was going on until I became a part of a booster club for my own kids. And I became informed. First as booster club concessions worker, then booster club treasurer and then booster club President, and I realized the amount of money it takes for these kids to play high school sports and what the school doesn't pay for. What's going on? I found out what was going on, and from that point to now, I exercise a form of self-control, to make sure that in my kitchen drawer I have some cash on hand so when that nervous kid comes to the door I can say yes. I am able, because of self-control, prepared to give and yes giving to my local school charity is also living Spirit Life.

Self-control is also the story of Esther. Esther is a story in our Bible. A whole book dedicated to her and her story. And she is amazing. Esther was a Jew who grew up in exile in Persia. Esther was a part of a younger generation of Jews whose ancestors had been taken out of Israel. Taken as slaves into Babylon which was now Persia. And there were generations and generations of Jewish people living in Persia. Now I can't say for certain that Esther knew she was living Spirit Life or even would consider her story one of self-control, but looking

back through the centuries we get to point those really cool things out in her life.

This is what happens. The King of Persia had a huge party, big time party. Lots of people came from all over the country. And what the king wanted to do was to parade his wife, the queen, in front of everybody so everybody could go wow. Look how beautiful she is. So right away we know the king has no self-control. But the queen says no. She knew what was going on, and she would not be used in that way. Good for her. Good for the queen. However, all the men, who have no self-control get together and freak out. If the word gets out that the queen said no what will our wives do? They're going to say no too. We can't have that! We're in charge. They convinced the king to banish the queen. He banishes the queen. And now, the king needs a new queen. And how does he find one? Typical... He holds a beauty contest. Everyone knew what was going on with that. And Esther wins. Esther, the Jew, becomes the new queen. But there's another part of the story happening at the same time.

We find out that the king's right-hand man and Esther's uncle Mordecai, well... they don't get along, and the king's right hand man decides to kill not only Mordecai but all the Jews in Persia. And the king... again having no self-control agrees. What he doesn't know that is that his new bride, his new queen, the winner of his beauty contest, is a Jew too.

Uncle Mordecai comes to Esther, tells her about the plan to kill all the Jews and tells her she needs to do something to stop it. Mordecai tells Esther what is going on. But Esther is a new queen. The former queen was banished. What kind of voice does she have? Well, Esther, almost intuitively lives into Spirit Life and decides to exercise self-control. She decides to prepare to tell the king what is going on.

So, in her self-control she develops a plan. She invites the king and the right-hand man over for dinner. They have dinner together. Then they have another dinner. And another dinner. What is she doing at these dinners? Esther is exercising self-control, she's building trust, preparing. She's building a relationship because when she finally

tells the king what is going on, she wants it to really matter. She wants the king to hear what she has to say and believe her.

And finally, Esther at the right moment, at the right time, tells the king what's going on. And the king believes her, responds, and well... then kills his right-hand man and all the people that were involved in the plot. So, there's that. But because living Spirit Life she has exercised self-control and Esther saves her people. She tells the king what was going on and asks the king to respond.

The leadership here at Prince of Peace are following the example of Esther, seeking to live more deeply into Spirit Life in this season of our Stewardship Appeal. We are exercising self-control. We are taking lots of time preparing and planning to share with you what is going on. Over these next weeks we will be having, well Esther had dinners, but we will be having conversations in worship, through various communications, because as we move forward together, we really want all of us to know what is going on. What are the challenges? What are the opportunities? How is God calling us to respond? Like Esther, we are exercising self-control, our stewardship appeal is targeted and clear. You will know what is going on and you will be invited to respond.

So here is my invitation to you. Over these next several weeks reflect on your own journey of self-control, not as a command but as a gift, so you too can live Spirit Life like Esther and find that focus, that preparation to be ready to for generosity in response to this year's stewardship appeal.

The awesome thing is that in this stewardship appeal we all will get a knock on our door inviting you to be the gift that the gospel of Jesus Christ needs you to be.