

# Self-Control

By Matthew Henry

sermonaudio.com

**Preached on:** Sunday, July 25, 2010

**Missio Dei Fellowship**  
5214 47th Avenue  
Kenosha, WI 53144

**Website:** [www.missiodeifellowship.org](http://www.missiodeifellowship.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/tbckenosha](http://www.sermonaudio.com/tbckenosha)

Beginning things is very easy to do, isn't it? It is very, very easy to begin things. You can even begin well doing things. For some it's a very scary time because you're entering into a new facet of your life where you realize that you're stepping out of your comfort zone where you know what things are and how things operate. That can be as simple as going away to college or moving out for the first time or starting your first "real job"; maybe it's entering the military or getting engaged or married. There are many things you can add to that list. Starting well, even though it might be a little scary, it is actually very easy to do. All you have to do is go down in many places and have enough money and you're in, or sign on the dotted line and you're in. Starting is never hard, ending well is very hard, isn't it? Ending hard is very, very hard.

Sometimes when we make decisions there, they are the types of decisions that are really praiseworthy because you made the right decision, a hard decision, that was not easy to make and you struggled over it and you agonized over it, "What's the right thing to do?" but ultimately you make the decision and you enjoy the praise of others. As they say, "You did the right decision there." Sometimes you have to endure the shaking of the heads or the stern rebuke because you didn't make, at least in their mind, the right or good decision. But, again, beginning is easy to do but ending is not so easy to do, at least if you want to do it well, because if you want to end well, it means you're going to have to be self-disciplined, exercising self-control in much if not every aspect of your life. To end well means you have to have a path planned and then stay on it. My goodness, how many times have we witnessed people start a path only to wander off of it. And I'm not talking about small little decisions that you start and end, I'm talking about those big ones where you look and you say, "I want to achieve this or I want to be here. I want this in my life if I can at all attain it," and then asking myself, "What must I do to do it?" developing a path and then being diligent to stay on that path all the way to the end. To end well means more than just ending it or even achieving it, it's knowing what is good and what is God-focused, and then pursuing that goal with all of your life. Every ounce of strength of your being, saying, "This is where I'm going," and you stay focused to it and you drive.

I remember at one time I was at a gathering with various pastors and we were there to hear Dr. Lutzer of Moody Church in Chicago speak and he was just giving some pastoral advice after many, many years of his own work there at the church, and he was making this little comment about word order in English and how important word order is in the English language. Other languages, I believe it's true of Spanish if I remember correctly,

but most definitely in places like Hebrew and Greek you can speak your words anywhere you want and word order does change emphasis but really it doesn't matter. You can put the verb here and the subject here, it just doesn't matter because the endings of the word tell you what's going on. But in English, it's not that way and you need to be careful to make certain the word order is correct if you're going to use proper grammar and you actually end up saying what you mean to say. And he gave a little example of how this works out by showing the definition of two words that many of us would use in very similar ways; some of you might even use them interchangeably if you wanted to. The words are "effective" and "efficient." You can be very effective at your work, you can be very efficient at your work and many people would say, "Well, they're about the same." There are different changes of meaning but then you just show by using word order, of changing one word around, how as he defines these they bring out the difference and there are very key differences between those two words "effective" and "efficient." "Efficient" is "doing things right," technically rightly, but "efficient" is doing things right. "Effective" is "doing the right things." Do you see the difference? Just move the word "right" around. He was making a point and that point stuck with me so much so that I can use it as an illustration today.

I remember sitting in that room as he continued to talk about the difference of being efficient and effective and I said, "If I have to choose between one or the other, I want to be known as a man who did the right thing. Far better that I do the right thing than do things right." Many of you heard me tell you that, that very thing happens to some of you younger people, especially. As you have taken my time over these last couple of years to get to know me and I've tried to teach you and some of you have sought my private counsel and you're asking me, "What ought I do? What should I do here?" and I'll say it and I've said it so many times over the last 13 years that many of you should have heard it in one way or the other. Decision making really is not that hard, what makes it hard is as Christians we tend to do so many strange things that we mess it up and make it all complex and hard and so the result of that is that we make bad decisions all the time. But the reality is, making a decision is not that hard.

The first question that you would always want to ask as a Christian is: what is the right thing to do? Just simply, what is the right thing? And do you know what? Most of the time you know what the right thing is. Most of the time you have no doubt what the right thing is. Do you know what the only issue is? Whether you have the courage to do the right thing, right? Are you willing to actually man up or woman up and do it. Will you see it to the end? And sometimes you know what the right decision is and it's in your face and you agonize over it because it does not fit what you want. It's going to cost you; it's going to hurt; it's going to cause people to question you. That is the great struggle of being a leader is trying to make the right decision and then watch everybody behind you second-guess. Any of you who are in leadership know what that means and feels like, making the right decision even though nobody else agrees with it.

I'm going to use myself here as a personal illustration. I don't want to imply in doing so that I'm some paradigm for you to follow for self-discipline. I try to be very honest with myself in this illustration and I chose to use myself because anything else could be

potentially thought of by you as a way where I'm really talking to you or I've got a hidden message in there and so I thought, "Do you know what? I'll just stick with myself and have you understand this is me and here's an illustration from my life that might be of help to you." For some of you, you've heard these stories in various ways; some of you may have never heard these and then that will give you a little bit more of a glimpse into who your pastor is. When I was a young man, I was marked by a singular lack of self-control. I was all over the map. If I was interested in something or I got praise for doing something, I was all over it: I was focused, I was devoted and I was committed. The moment that the minds of others shifted away or I got bored, I was done with the thing; it would begin to falter and it would be done with. The result of it is that my life was a pathway that was simply littered with good intentions and horrible, horrible endings. And I speak truthfully here that even as I was writing this down for my sermon, I relived all of the shame that I had to face as a result of that foolishness in my own life. I did enter into adulthood, we all do, right? I just entered into it very poorly. I entered into it with an idiot's mind, an attitude of arrogance, lazy, undisciplined.

My father wanted to me to go to college. It was a great burden that he be able to see at least one of his children go to college because at that point, I think the older kids, I was the second to the youngest at the time, the older kids had not been able, most of them had not been able to go to college because dad didn't just have money and they didn't have money. So there was a real burden for him to see me go and I told him, "I don't want to go," being the idiot that I was. So dad allowed me to stay out. I made a deal with him, I said, "Can I stay out of it for one year and just go and get a real job?" My real job was working for a cable TV company laying cable underground and so I got to work with some semi-heavy machinery; most of the time I was a grunt; I was digging ditches and throwing a pick ax eight hours a day, 5 to 6 days a week, and I loved it. I loved it. It was good to wake up. It was good to use the muscles that I had. I was strong and I was having fun, but I remember at 4:30 in the morning and, yes, I know what 4:30 in the morning looks like, people. Four-thirty in the morning I'm sitting down in the front room and I'm tying up my boots and my dad was already up and he said, "How are you doing with the job?" I said, "I really like it." He said, "You really are having fun?" I said, "Yes, sir." And he said, "Do you really think it's going to be fun, though, when you're 40?" And I was honest, I said, "I don't think so." He said, "Then go to college, boy." He said, "Don't break your back. It's hard." He said, "It's okay for you to be, but remember your promise, go to college."

So at the end of the year I quit and I entered college. My father was going to pay my way and that's what I did. I started college with no intentions, with no plan, with no desire. I didn't want to be there. I was just simply doing it because dad said so and he was paying for it so I was there, and all I did for two years was waste my father's money. It was an expensive college, a private college, and he paid every dime of it and I wasted all of it. In the midst of all of that, I managed to get a little job at a men's store selling clothes and it was fine men's and I was a man who could not control and be disciplined with his money so I was playing it all on video games and going out to eat and dates with my girlfriend and all of the other stuff that you understand goes on at that age when you're an idiot. So I had no money so I then began to succumb to a temptation that I ultimately did succumb

to and that was stealing and I got caught. I was summarily fired and in this town that was small, it was the second largest town in Idaho but that was only 34,000 people, my father who was very, very prominent in that town was publicly shamed and I had no job and I had no ability to get a job because through that town it went like wildfire that John Henry's son had stolen and was a thief and it was a rightly earned reputation. I remember digging for cans in dumpsters throughout the city just so I could keep my car payment going, that big \$48 a month car payment. Of course, I only got \$.25 a pound so I was working hard in the dumpsters. I was continuing with college in whatever way you want to call continuing. Ultimately after two years, my dad said he had enough; he's done; I just wasted his money. I left college with a wonderful 1.9 GPA, that's not good if you don't know what that is. That's really, really, really embarrassingly bad.

So there I was fully into adulthood with no job, no reputation and a 1.9 GPA. That will get you places. I had a decision to make. My father recommended and I actually listened to him to get my knee reconstructed after having had a very bad accident a couple of years earlier and so he said, "I'll pay for it, Matt. Before you go on with your life, let's get that taken care of at least." And so he paid for the operation and I got my knee rebuilt and then in the midst of that I'm trying to figure out, "What am I going to do?" I'm going nowhere fast. In fact, I'm going so backward so fast that I'm in a scary, scary situation in my life.

My brother in Houston called and said he'd like to give me a chance to learn the trade of baking. Man, I was looking for any hole to climb in and I said, "Sure." And so at the ripe age of 21, I moved out of my house with my mom and dad for the first time with all of my lousy, worthless belongings packed into my car and I drove all the way down to Houston. And the Henry tradition and I carry this tradition, has always been that when you move out, you move out. You're done. Not in a mean way, just you're done. Don't come back. You're not allowed to come back. In fact, he said it in writing. "I love you, boy. You're my son." Ten pages of him talking about how much he loved me, but he said, "Don't come back. You're not welcome back." I had to give my key back. I remember as I drove away at about three in the morning, that my mom and dad stood on the porch as I backed out of the driveway and as I started to go and I turned right onto Midland Boulevard in Nampa, Idaho, I looked in the rearview mirror and I saw for the first time my mom and dad go back in the house and turn the light off. They didn't leave it on because I wasn't coming home and I knew it. He said, "Every decision from here on out, you'd better make well, boy, because I'm not rescuing you at all, so make them well." And I knew him. My dad, when he says something, he doesn't back down.

So I entered into Houston and began to work and I started a very hard life, self-caused, but a very hard life. Things that I should have known and understood right away began to bear down on me in a very painful way, just the realities of life. The reality that I had no money at all to speak of. Turning off the main breaker of my apartment because I couldn't dare have any electric bill because I had no money. Eating one meal a day. Having all of my clothes stolen so I only had one shirt, one pair of underwear and pants and that's it and I had no money to buy anything else. Working 16 hours a day and getting paid \$20 a day. Finally having to get a second job just to eat. So I was a seven day work week. I had

to stay up for a total of 48 hours at a whack twice a week just to eat. There is no complaint here, I deserved every ounce of it. I was a fool.

So you understand I lacked discipline, right? I'm really trying to get you because I'm going to get to a better part of me here, I just really want you to know I was a fool; I was an idiot; I lacked self-discipline; I had no sense of what self-control was and I ate it, feathers and all, for quite a while. But it was there that God began to work on me and my faith in Christ crystallized, if you will, and I became more humble and more broken before the Lord and I began to finally show the marks of repentance where I finally stopped fighting against God and fighting against foolishness. You know, there is this pathway that is nothing but a hedge of thorns and right next to it is the broad pathway of righteousness, the book of Proverb says. I was stuck in the thorn patch. Every step was painful and hard and I had to extricate myself from that, and the only way you can extricate from there is not just by good works, it's genuine repentance before God. And finally my heart was broken and God began to put me on the right path and I began to walk that path and good things slowly, painfully began to take place.

It was then that I met my wife, Kim, and it was there that I heard a man for the first time preaching on the radio and his ability to open the words so simply and yet profoundly affected me that I wept in the car and that was there that I said, "God, I want to be like him." This man was John MacArthur. I didn't know who he was, I just appreciated the fact that he made sense, the Scripture makes sense. He just explained it and it began to give me a vision of what I might be and what I could be if God was willing and I began to pursue it and therein lies the difference. A heart of repentance, one submitted to God.

So Kim and I, married now, she was pregnant with Nicole, packed up our still meager belongings and headed across the United States to Los Angeles to go to college because I had to do all that over again. Being the idiot that I was, trust me, nothing transfers when you have a 1.9 GPA. Nothing. And so there I sat and I had, and here's the thing, what I'm trying to say is I kind of do that tongue in cheek, even in my repentance, I was still paying for my folly. Does that make sense? It still was smacking me. The difference was I wasn't making excuses, I wasn't arguing about it, I wasn't winking at it, I wasn't resentful that I still had to pay the penalty, I was willing to embrace the consequences. And so as I sat there and I got informed that that was a really terrible 1.9 GPA and what could I have been doing with my life and all of that, I'm like, "Yes, ma'am. Yes, ma'am. Yes, ma'am. You're right, ma'am," as the registrar finally said, "Well, we're not going to transfer anything and you'll need to do all of it over again." This time on my dime and I don't have a dime, and what followed was 10 years of nonstop exhausting effort.

When I entered into college, my workload was never less than 18 credits per semester which is a very full-time load. I worked a minimum of 40 hours a week and I drove three hours a day commute time round trip. I functioned on about three hours of sleep every night throughout my entire time of college. In that time, we had, of course, Nicole and then my little Becca. My final semester of college was a surprise because I was informed that I somehow, not my fault this time, through the lack of discipline of my advisor, had messed me up and I still owed 32 credits. So I did my last semester of college and I did

32 credits. By this time I was working 60 hours a week and I was a jail chaplain. I don't remember that semester and I mean that. I don't have really any recollection of that. It was mindless. It was crazy but I graduated with a 4.0.

We then moved into the valley. Don't worry about what the valley is if you don't know it. Just above Los Angeles proper. We have our two children, pregnant with the third and I got a job close to now the seminary. Finally, what I came down there for, seminary. I got a job there, near there, and I was now working 60 hours a week minimum up to 100 hours a week. Two more children. I was now the head of LA jail system as a chaplain and I was preaching 4 to 8 times every week along with seminary, which is a Master's level program. What was the difference? What was the difference there than over here: 1.9 idiot, fired, living in a garbage can, 4.0, seminary, holding down a job, raising up children. What's the difference? I got my act together? No. No. It was a submission to the Lord, a submission to his word, and learning to discipline myself. Learning to shut up and do it. You've heard me say that. Some of you hate that phrase, I'm sorry. It's a really good phrase, especially to stubborn people like me.

While I was there, I had opportunities to interact with my pastor, John MacArthur, and I had two lessons that some of you have heard in various ways that have never left me; they made an indelible mark on me and they define some of the things that I do know. Two times where I interacted with John MacArthur that I'll never forget. The one was in a class where somebody asked him what was the secret to his success? And it was not an inappropriate question of success, it was just recognizing this man was incredibly busy and he managed to keep it all going. What was the secret? What did he do? And I remember him just looking at us all because he talked very bluntly and very plainly to us, men-to-men preparing for the pastoral ministry, and he said this, he said that the secret to his success was his decision, now these are his words, don't be offended, was his decision to keep his butt glued to the chair every day until his work was done. Real deep stuff, huh? Keep your butt glued to the chair every day until your work is done. And the second was once when we were at a birthday gathering for a fellow coworker and they were passing out the birthday cake, and I hate cake, and so I was telling them, "No, thank you. I prefer not." And John and his secretary were next to me and they offered John a piece of cake and he said, "No, thank you." So I turned to him and I said, "Oh, you don't like cake either?" Thinking, "Cool." He said, "No, I love cake." He said, "That's why I turned it down," and then he excused himself and he left. I looked and his secretary was a friend of mine, Pat, and Pat explained to me, she said, "John has a standard in his life that he routinely and randomly will not do something that he likes to do so that it never has mastery over him." I stuck that one away too. Keep your butt in your chair until your work is done and randomly routinely turn down things that you love so that nothing has mastery over you.

Exhaustion during that time was probably the best word that I would use to explain 10 years of my life. There were times I remember sitting in our house and I had to study and it had a lock on the door, in fact, I put the lock on the door for good reason, and I would sit in there and I could hear my children giggling and laughing and doing the things that little children do and my heart was just to go out and be with them and spend time with

them but I couldn't. I had to finish. My life was not going to be what it used to be. I had to kill that in me and so instead I would put my shooting protection, the gun, those ears, we call them, what you put on to protect you when you're shooting, I would put those on and I would sit at my desk and I would study, and if it took me six hours to study until I was finished, that's how long it took. If it took me 10 hours, that's how long it took. There were many, many times that I never slept; I just simply studied all the way through the night because I was not done and I was going to sit my butt in the chair until I was done. In other words, sleep was not an option until I was finished.

Why would I do all that? Why would I go through that? Why would I put my family through all of that? Because I was a young man who had developed a terrible habit of quitting short of the goal. My life was littered with things not finished. I was a man easily distracted and therefore starting many and finishing none was my life. How many times I wanted and was tempted to quit short of the goal are too numerous to count. Just all the time opportunities came my way. They seemed good opportunities that would cut my work short and I wouldn't have to finish and I would get these good things, and I kept on saying, "No, no, no, no, no. I will finish it. For the first time in my life, I will finish it."

Somewhere in there I decided that being a police officer might be fun as well and so I ended up being accepted onto the department and I, along with all of my other things, went to the police academy for six months. I remember once functioning on who knows how little of sleep, getting screamed at with the guy's brim of his hat bapping me right there, just bam, bam, bam, and he's just ripping into me. And I'm standing at attention and all of it was because I was walking down the hallway half-asleep and my DI came out of his office and I didn't scream at the top of my lungs, "Clear," and leap against the wall at attention quick enough for him so he decided for the next five minutes I was his and I was owned. And I just remember standing there taking it thinking, "I am working full-time, full-time seminary. I am exhausted and right now I'm getting screamed at. I think I've got better things to do with my life." And then eating those words because I was going to finish it.

I purposely, folks, I purposely, some people ask, "Why did you do all those things?" I purposely kept piling junk onto my life to make it impossible to have it easy. I purposely decided this sin has to die and so I just kept on heaping and heaping and heaping more things into my life that burdened me and took my life and my time and energy and sucked it away and forced myself to fight through it until I knew I had killed it. So some of you who have come to me and you felt my little bit of irritation at you because you're not finishing what you started, now you know why I'm so hard on you and I have no sympathy for you. You have to kill it. You have to kill it and no amount of talk means anything. I and you have heard so many people tell you this and that and all about what we're going to do and in my mind I say, "I'll believe it when I see it and until I see it, I don't want to believe it." Kill it. Pursue it. Fight it down. Run it down and fight it with all your might. That was my approach. Now, you may not agree with it but that was my approach. It was just this simple conviction. It was easy to start well for Matt Henry, it was very, very easy to end poorly and it was very hard for me to end well. I would do it and I would do it in every possible way I could think of.

So my motto in my life has been, "Shut up and do it. No excuses. No way out. Finish it." Not real deep, certainly not spiritual sounding, "Shut up and do it. Don't give any excuses. Don't look for any way out. Finish it." And that's how I came to this church. I came to this church with that attitude, that mindset. When I came here as your pastor 13 years ago, I sat down and I said whatever I was starting here I was going to finish it and I wanted to finish it in a manner that honored the Lord. If that meant shutting this place down, then I was going to shut this place down. If that meant leaving after a few years ultimately so that I had to go to someplace else that I thought God was calling me, I was going to end it well. If it meant dying here as your pastor, then it meant dying well here. But finish it. Finish it. And it's still something that drives me.

Listen, none of this is spiritual, this is just introductory just to try to get you to understand. I'm not here to talk theory to you. I'm not here to chit chat with you. I'm not even here to hold your hand and to pat it. I just don't do that. You've known me too many years to know that. For some of you, I am just going to say honestly your biggest problem is you don't sit in your chair and stay there until your work is done. For some of you, your biggest problem is you just choose to not finish. For some of you, you love sleep way too much. For some of you, you love food too much. For some of you, you love leisure too much. For some of you, you just love something too much and you have not learned what self-control means. Not as a Christian. You may have learned it from the world but what I'm going to hopefully do for you over the next three weeks is defined for you, biblical self-control, what it looks like when a Christian exercises control over his passions, his desires, his lusts, his wants and his dreams.

We have had Don Whitney come here many times and teach on spiritual disciplines and he's talked about this and we have taken advantage, at least some of you have and, Lord willing, we will be able to afford to have him back and have him continue to teach us because there are many people who have taken his course and they started well but they ended poorly, right? Where you took the course and you learned how to do the various things like how to have Bible intake, how to pray, how to do these various things. You learned and you heard it and you got excited and you walked out and then a month later they're gone. You ended poorly. We've learned that through these disciplines God has ordained these ways as channels in which he pours his blessing, his grace. We need that grace. We need that blessing every day to continue to press forward faithfully and yet oftentimes we choose to not stand in the very channels in which it's flowing, always flowing from heaven to us, and because of lack of self-discipline we fail. And so I would say that undergirding all of those spiritual disciplines that men like Don Whitney have taught us, there is a basic reality, a basic truth that is either lacking or needs strengthening for some of you to do those spiritual disciplines to the glory of God, and that basic discipline is self-discipline or self-control. So my plan is to show the need for self-control today and then over the next 1 to 2 other weeks, develop the idea of what self-control is and then various aspects to this important doctrine, okay?

Alright, so let's get down to... Now you've heard my life story, my confession that I was one lazy bum so I'm with a group of people, some of you are not a lazy bum, but some of



you are so welcome to it. I know it. I know what it's like. Let's start to figure out what then do we do with this. Why do we need self-control? So you can look good in front of people? So you can achieve your dreams? So that you can make money? So that you're not an embarrassment to your mom and dad? No, none of those. And you can come up with 100 different other reasons, in fact, some of you are already thinking this is why you need self-control. No, there's only one reason really why you need self-control as a Christian and it is this and don't miss it: eternity, meaning your soul, hangs on self-discipline. Your soul, salvation, eternity hangs on self-discipline. This gets into that whole doctrine of the perseverance of the saints which we've talked about so many times and I know it's hard to follow and sometimes we want to go more easy. Once saved, always saved or you're talking loss of salvation. No, we're talking about that the one who is genuinely in Christ shall persevere to the end, but just because you say you're in Christ doesn't mean you are in Christ and the mark of a genuine believer is one who ultimately perseveres and presses on to the end. As Jesus said, "Through many tribulations we shall," what? "Enter the kingdom of God." As Jesus said, "He who endures to the end shall be saved." That's what we're talking about. Don't miss this and don't disparage the value of your soul just so you can play another game; fish another day; shop at another sale; turn over one more time in your bed; turn a blind eye to disobedient children; wink about the truth at your job. Discipline. Your soul hangs on it.

In Mark 8:36-37, don't turn there. If you want to turn somewhere, go to 1 Corinthians 9 but as you do just hear these words. Mark 8:36 and 37, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" Do you know what? We'll give a lot of things, won't we? We'll give a lot of cheap garbage for our soul. We'll give it as its smallest, shiniest little bobble just in exchange for our soul. We just don't think much about our soul. How many people have suffered the infinite loss of their soul and the joy of eternal life with their Creator because they did not exercise true biblical self-control?

In Luke 12, we talk about a successful farmer. Jesus uses this image of this one who has been a successful businessman and farmer and he looks at his crops and he realizes, "You know, I have much coming my way, so much so that I need to build bigger storehouses for all of this." And he says, "It's time for me finally to rest. As soon as this harvest comes in I will rest. I have hit my 401(k) plan. Fidelity Investments has informed me that I have reached my goal. It is time now for me to retire. I can now take it easy. I've got the condo down in Florida and I'm going to collect seashells," as Piper likes to speak about in a very mocking manner, rightly so. "It's time to rest. I've arrived." But unknown to him, the Lord ordained that it was too late, as he says in verses 19 to 21, "And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come. Take your ease. Eat, drink, be merry.'" But God said to him, "You fool, this very night your soul is required of you and now who will own what you have prepared? So is the man who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." This man was self-disciplined, folks. He organized his money and his property and his crops. He woke up every morning to make certain that they were planted and he cared for it and weeded and watered. He planned ahead. He recognized a big harvest when he saw it and realized he didn't have the sufficient storehouse. He was going to need to build that and planned accordingly so

much that it was time to rest. He was a self-disciplined man but not a biblically self-disciplined man and he lost his soul. He lost his soul. He was rich. Oh, he was rich, just not toward God.

Well, in 1 Corinthians 9, we see this and we are going to look at several passages to try to develop this and hopefully give you a sense of the urgency that self-discipline should be in your life. In chapter 9, that would be page 134 in your pew Bible, near the back of your Bible, get to page 134 and you'll be then where I'm at. Actually, 135 will be the verses I'll start reading. Verse 24, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises," what? "Self-control in," what things? "In all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable." So notice he's making a distinction. He says there are two different prizes: the Christian is striving for a prize that's imperishable whereas the athlete strives for something that later is going to dry out; it would be that wreath that would give him honor and glory and praise and he is going to ultimately throw it away because it's going to be no good. But both those groups need to exercise self-control in all things. The only question is really what's the goal, what's the prize. Some of you may be exercising excellent self-control in your finances, excellent self-control in your time management, excellent self-control in your studies but all of it's for the wrong reason, a perishable prize: a raise, a reputation, nice clothes, big home, good retirement account, fill in the blank. It's perishable. It's going to go away. But you've exercised self-control in all those things but have you exercised self-control in all things to obtain the imperishable prize?

"Therefore," he says in verse 26, "I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified." That disqualification is not, is not, beloved, some loss of prize or reward in heaven, it is loss of life. It is eternal damnation. It is that he and you and I could be found as a people who proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to others, speak about the Gospel of Jesus Christ to others, but because we do not exercise self-control in all things, ultimately we will be found having not passed the line. Exercising self-control in all things. For Paul as well as for Jesus, understanding self-discipline, he who endures to the end. You see, you have to finish the line, go across it. If you've been in athletics you understand it so easy. I ran track, others have done football or volleyball or whatever. It doesn't matter if you play for half the game and we've all seen that, my Denver Broncos did it in the Super Bowl, they only played half a Super Bowl. Oh my goodness. You've got to finish the race. You have to run so that you win.

He understood, Paul, the foolishness of sin. He understood how deceitful it was and how it hardened the heart and would draw away from us the beauty of Jesus alone, and his answer was self-control. His answer was that he refused to allow his body to be the final determiner of what he would or would not do. Did you hear that? He would not let his body, and that's not just the physical, "I'm sleepy," it was the desires and the passions and the lusts, and I don't mean lusts in a bad way necessarily. All of those things that make us human, he said, "I'm not going to let those things, happiness, contentment, safety," none

of those things would determine why he would do what he would do. He buffeted his body; he made his body and its desires a slave to him as he brought it under control because he knew the tendency of himself to move toward sin and he knew that as he moved and allowed sin to wash over him and slowly add layer after layer after layer of baggage on him, that ultimately he would be disqualified. So he kept accounts short. He kept stripping himself from that baggage of sin and he kept buffeting and dealing with it. Very focused. He was a man who would stand daily and set his face before the Lord and determine that he would serve him that day, and love him that day with all of his mind, body and strength. You see, the great commandment Jesus said is not to love the Lord, is it? Is it? It's to love the Lord your God with all your mind and body and strength. All. Keyword there. Three little letters: all. That's the great commandment.

Very focused. Very focused on the prize. It was that which was imperishable. He kept in mind, "Do you know what I want? I want ultimately is that I don't want to sleep, I don't want to not suffer pain, I don't want to be a man who lives in freedom," remember, he had a habit of getting arrested for Jesus' name. He says, "That's not what my goal is. My goal, my focus was on the goal and that was eternal life with God"; participating with God and watching him set all of the things that are so broken in our world right now, making them, setting them all right. Watching God send away Satan and sin and death into the lake of fire never again to come into our presence. He wanted to participate in that. That was worth it. So he gets a few strikes across his back. So a few stones strike him on the body. So he spends his time in a dank cell. So ultimately he has his head parted from his body. It was worth it because he kept his eyes where it needed to be.

That was his goal. "Stay single? Maybe I had to stay single my whole life to obtain that goal, then so be it," would be what Paul would say. Pastor Matt, shut up and do it then. Stay in an unhappy marriage and attain that goal? So be it. It doesn't matter. What is the goal? Self-discipline, biblical self-discipline will never happen in you until you see the goal and the goal being God and Jesus himself and when that becomes your goal and when you fix your eyes on the author and the finisher of your faith, all of a sudden all that stuff that you allow to creep into all those fears and burdens and what if's and how comes and I don't want to's, and all the other stuff you and I have a habit of saying, just go away because you're not looking at that. You're looking at Jesus and that's worth it. When he faced hostility and violence, he would say what he told the Romans in 18 of that book, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not even worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed." He's like, "Whatever." You're like, "But Paul, but Paul..." "Shut up." "But Paul, you don't understand." "Whatever. I don't want to hear it." "But you've got to understand." He even had a prophet come up to him and say, "If you go to Jerusalem they are going to bind you and put you into prison." "Yup, off I go." His mind was not focused on the stuff that we tend to focus.

I asked Bruce a cheap throwaway question, the correct answer is yes so don't disappoint me: how much counseling would you spend with people if they would discipline themselves for the goal of Jesus? None, right? That was the wrong answer I gave you. The right answer would be none. Yeah, none is the right answer. You see, that's why I should not have participatory sermons. Right? Would not your life be easy, would not all

of our lives be easy? It might be very hard on one level but it would be very easy in the sense of our decision-making. Will this bring me to Jesus? No. Okay, then I don't do it. Is this going to add encumbrance or sin into my life as the writer of Hebrews says is "that we run the race with endurance, fixing our eyes on the author and perfecter of our faith, laying aside every sin and encumbrance that so easily entangles us." Does this encumber me? Yes. Then get rid of it. Does this slow me down? Yes. Then get rid of it. And just keep stripping it and stripping it.

Go over to Hebrews 12 to continue to fill on this and we're just going to look at two more passages and then I'll leave the rest of it for next week and maybe we'll preach four sermons. Hebrews 12, that would be on page 175 in your Bible if you're using the pew Bible. 175 near the back, chapter 12, actually 176, turn the page to verse 14 where the writer here says, "Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification," or let's say a different word, the holiness, "without which no one will see the Lord." Do you see again? Here's that emphasis. There is a soul at stake; there is salvation at stake here. He says, "I want to pursue peace with all men, and the holiness without which no one will see God."

The point of Hebrews is that Jesus is everything. He is better than everything. You see, it's the same idea that Paul had in 1 Corinthians 9, keep your eyes on the goal. The goal is Jesus. He begins everything for you and he ends everything for you and everything in between is him so keep your eye there and pursue it with all your might. So don't worry about the sin or the encumbrance. Don't let that become your focus. Just strip those things away. As they keep coming, keep remembering your perfect high priest. It's not dwell on my sin, "I never can get rid of it." No, it's just each day, every day, all the time when you see it, you strip it off because you have a great Savior, and keep running. The mark of the one who falls away is the one who says sin is greater than grace; sin is greater than my high priest; sin is greater than his death; sin is greater, I give up. And ultimately the race that was started so well and looked so good stumbles and falls and becomes ugly and you walk away and you reject it because you never had Jesus kept in your foresight or your eyesight, it would be better to say. The point of Hebrews is Christ is supreme over everything and then therefore underneath all of that in Hebrews the message is, therefore don't fall away. Don't give that up. Keep that in your eyes because the author of Hebrews knows like the rest of the Bible, that just because one professes faith in Jesus doesn't mean one has faith in Jesus, and the mark of it is to keep pressing on.

We see that built for us, just turn back a few more pages to 1 John 3. That would be on page 184. So on page 184 in 1 John, here's the first of the letters that John wrote to the churches, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him," why? "Because we will see Him just as He is." Then comes the key point, "And everyone who has this hope," that hope is the imperishable prize of Paul; the hope is that sanctification, that holiness, that vision of what is to come, Jesus, that the writer of Hebrews is talking about. Now the apostle John is saying the same thing, "Everyone who has this hope," what hope? "The hope that I will see God and be like him because I will see him and dwell

with him." The goal is not just now but what is to come, the glory that is to come. He says, "That's my hope. The one who has that hope fixed on Him," on Jesus, "purifies himself, just as He is pure. Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness." And that person is not truly his. He is not truly a child of God.

But what is my point in these passages? My point is one cannot persevere if one is not disciplined. One cannot persevere unless one brings his body under control. One cannot persevere unless he exercises self-control and self-discipline. Self-discipline deals with your soul. This is not just handy ways to succeed in life. I don't want to be a Joel Osteen. I want to be your pastor and look at you honestly as one man who has lived a life littered with sin and honestly tell you that there is nothing there. But when your eyes focus on Jesus and his death and his resurrection and the promise that he will make all things right and, in fact, he is already beginning to do so and that he is coming one day to make all things right, and when we see him we will be like him and he will finish our faith and he will say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant," and he will look at us and say, "Come and enter into the joy of your Master," trust me, every stripe you endure, every stone you bear, every mockery, every moment of loneliness or hurt all for the sake of the Gospel will be gone and you will say, "It is good. It is good."

Much more I need to say. I'm concerned that you are going to walk away and be thinking legalism here. I don't want you to walk away. It's not legalism. I'm not going to give you five easy steps to having a self-disciplined life. You know where you're lacking. But it's going to start with, "What distracts me from the Gospel? What distracts me from Jesus? What honors him?" He gives us commands to do but those commands are oriented as, "Having had Jesus now as my Lord, this then is how I live." So there are things that you need to maybe change and repent of and grow up in, all of it for the sake of the Gospel, all of it for the sake of the Gospel. It is Jesus that is your imperishable prize and you want to press on and press on forward, onward and upward until you find Jesus.