

## Self-Control:

### Mastering Our Passions

By Jack Kuhatschek

#### Study 1: Controlling Our Tongue

## WARMING UP

1. Do you ever have difficulty controlling your tongue? Explain.

## DIGGING IN

2. Read James 3:1–12. James directs his first comments at teachers and aspiring teachers (v. 1). What advice does he give them, and why?

Why do you think teachers will be judged more strictly than others?

3. Why does James assume that if we can control our tongues, we must be perfect (v. 2)?

4. Do you normally think of your tongue as the most uncontrollable part of your body? Why or why not?

5. According to James, how is the tongue like a horse's bit, a ship's rudder, and a small spark (vv. 3–5)?

Give examples of how your tiny tongue can direct the course of your life.

6. How can the tongue's impact on people be similar to a fire (v. 6), a wild animal (vv. 7–8), and a deadly poison (v. 8)?

7. When have you seen a person's life hurt or even destroyed by words?

8. If "no human being can tame the tongue" (v. 8), what hope do we have of ever controlling that part of our body?

9. How does the tongue violate the laws of nature (vv. 9–12)?

10. How should the fact that people are made in God's likeness (v. 9) affect the way we speak to them?

11. James is very pessimistic, or perhaps realistic, about the tongue. In light of his pessimism, what advice does he give to the "wise and understanding" (see v. 13)?

Why are our deeds a better gauge of wisdom than our words?

## PRAY ABOUT IT

Ask God's Spirit to put out the fire in your tongue, to tame that which is untameable, so that your speech can be appropriate for someone created in God's likeness.

## **WARMING UP**

1. Do you think Christians tend to be more sexually pure than non-Christians? Explain.

## **DIGGING IN**

2. Read 1 Corinthians 6:12–20. Paul begins by countering those who say, “I have the right to do anything” (or as some translations put it, “Everything is permissible for me”). How might some Christians come to that conclusion?

3. Even if something is permissible, why might we still refrain from doing it (vv. 12–13)?

What examples can you give of permissible actions that may not be beneficial for you or might even be enslaving?

4. Some Corinthians claimed that just as the stomach was meant for food, so the body was meant for sexual immorality. According to Paul, what is wrong with their logic (vv. 13–14)?

5. Why should our spiritual union with Christ make sexual immorality unthinkable (vv. 15–17)?

6. In Corinth, sexual immorality often involved temple prostitutes. What sexual temptations are we likely to encounter today?

7. Paul urges us to “flee from sexual immorality” (v. 18). Why is a swift retreat usually better than a calm, rational approach to temptation?

8. How should the fact that our bodies are “temples of the Holy Spirit” give added force to Paul’s statements (vv. 18–20)?

9. How would you summarize Paul’s arguments for sexual purity?

10. Which of these arguments, if any, is most helpful to you? Explain.

## **PRAY ABOUT IT**

Silently reflect on areas where you need greater sexual purity. Ask God to help you in your struggles.

## **WARMING UP**

1. In what situations do you tend to get angry?

## **DIGGING IN**

2. Read James 4:1–10. According to James, what causes fights and quarrels among us (vv. 1–2)?

3. James speaks of desires that battle within us (vv. 1–2). What kinds of desires might lead people to covet and quarrel or even fight and kill?

4. Why do we often fail to get what we so intensely desire (vv. 2–3)?

5. Is it wrong to ask God for things that bring us pleasure? Explain.

6. What does it mean to be “a friend of the world” (v. 4)?

7. Why is friendship with the world a form of spiritual adultery (v. 4)?

8. Why is friendship with the world also a form of hatred and rebellion against God?

9. In what ways are you tempted to flirt with or even have an affair with the world?

10. What ten commandments does James give us for receiving God’s grace (vv. 7–10)?

What is our spiritual state before and after obeying these commands?

11. What worldly desire do you struggle with most?

Why is humble submission to God the first step toward controlling that desire?

## **PRAY ABOUT IT**

Humble yourself before the Lord. Draw near to him in prayer. Ask him for grace to purify your motives and control your desires.

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#### Study 4: Controlling Our Appetites

## WARMING UP

1. What do you find hardest about dieting — or controlling any other “appetite”?

## DIGGING IN

2. Read Proverbs 23:20–21. What do alcoholism and gluttony have in common?

3. It is easy to imagine how a “drunkard” could become poor (v. 21). But how could gluttony lead to poverty?

4. Why do you think people who eat or drink too much rarely view themselves as gluttons or alcoholics?

5. Read verses 29–35. In what ways are alcoholic beverages, such as wine, both alluring and deceptive?

6. Based on your experience or that of someone you know, how accurate is the proverb’s description of what it is like to be drunk (vv. 33–35)?

7. What are some of the consequences of drinking too much?

8. To what extent do the proverb’s warnings against “wine” apply to other forms of addictive behavior?

9. Read Proverbs 28:7. Why do you think “a companion of gluttons” is contrasted with someone who is “discerning” and “heeds instruction”?

10. When it comes to our appetites, why does our behavior either show discernment or bring disgrace (v. 7)?

11. In what area would you like greater control over your appetites?

## PRAY ABOUT IT

Ask God’s Spirit to allow the fruit of self-control to mature in your area of weakness.

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**Study 5: Controlling Our Finances**

## WARMING UP

1. As people make more money, why do you think they often increase their standard of living?

## DIGGING IN

2. Read 1 Timothy 6:6–10. Paul tells us to be content with food and clothing (v. 8). What other material things do we often feel we need to be content?

In what ways does our culture make it difficult to be content with mere food and clothing?

3. Paul reminds us that we brought nothing into this world, and we can take nothing out of it (v. 7). How should these facts affect our attitude toward possessions?

4. What dangers await those who want to get rich and who love money (vv. 9–10)?

5. What examples can you give of the kinds of foolish and harmful desires, evils, and griefs Paul has in mind?

6. If the pursuit of riches is really so dangerous, why do you think so many people have made it their primary goal in life?

7. Is your life characterized more by contentment or the love of money? Explain.

Why are these two attitudes totally incompatible?

8. Instead of pursuing wealth, what does Paul urge Timothy and us to pursue (see v. 11)?

Why are these qualities more valuable than riches?

9. Read verses 17–19. How are those who are already rich to view themselves and their wealth (v. 17)?

10. If we put our hope in God rather than riches, does that mean we must live austere, joyless lives (v. 17)? Explain.

11. How can we use our material wealth to gain true riches and treasure (vv. 18–19)?

12. How do your current attitudes toward money and possessions compare to the attitudes God wants you to have?

## PRAY ABOUT IT

Ask God for wisdom and strength to make any changes necessary in your attitude toward money and possessions.

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**Study 6: Clothing Ourselves with Christ**

## **WARMING UP**

1. How accurate is the saying “Clothes make the man”?

## **DIGGING IN**

2. Read Romans 13:11–14. What do night and day, darkness and light stand for in this passage?

3. What words does Paul use to emphasize the nearness of Christ’s return?

4. What do the “deeds of darkness” (vv. 12–13) have in common?

If Paul were writing today, do you think his list of deeds in verse 13 would be the same or different? Explain.

5. Why do you think people are more inclined to do such deeds in the darkness rather than in the light?

6. What does it mean to “clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 14)?

7. Paul also speaks of our putting on “the armor of light” (v. 12). What does that idea add to the image of clothing?

8. If we clothe ourselves with Jesus Christ, why is it wrong even to think about gratifying our sinful desires (v. 14)?

## **PRAY ABOUT IT**

Thank God for the passing of night and the nearness of day. Ask him to help you dress in clothes fit for the occasion.