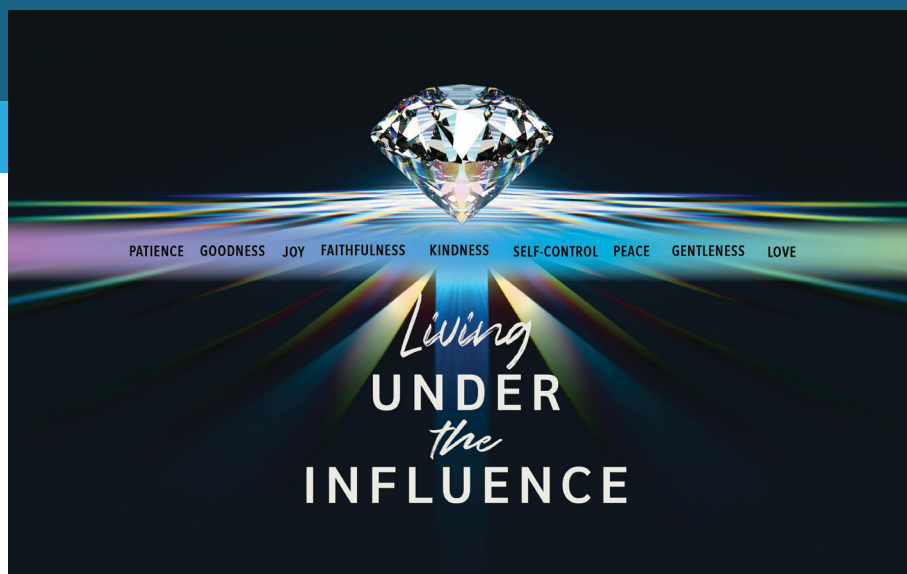


DAILY DEVOTIONAL

A 5-Day Reflection Guide

Joy



SERMON SERIES:
LIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE

WEEK & TOPIC:
WEEK 6 / SELF-CONTROL

DATES:
AUGUST 10–14, 2026

This Week's Big Idea

Self-control isn't about trying harder or relying on greater willpower. It is the fruit of a life surrendered to the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit is in control, our words, emotions, desires, and decisions begin to reflect His character instead of our impulses.

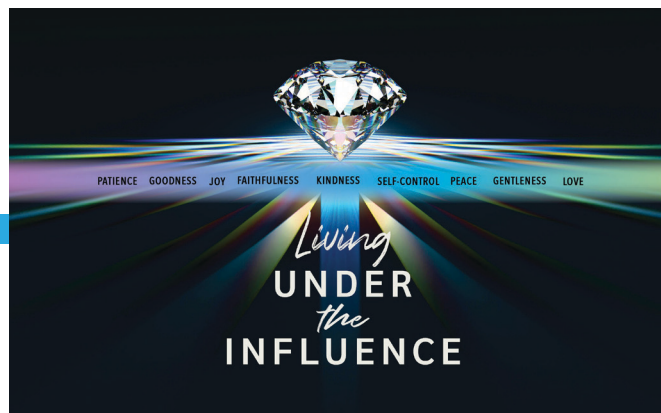
LIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Day 1: **Who's Really in Control?**

TODAYS SCRIPTURE

Galatians 5:22–23 (NLT) “But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: ... self-control.”

Ephesians 5:18 (NKJV) “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.”



TODAY'S SEED

When you hear the words self-control, what comes to mind? Maybe you picture a strict diet, or an athlete with incredible discipline. Our culture tends to define self-control as stronger willpower. The idea might be to try harder, or be tougher.

Throughout this series we've discovered something important: God gets to define the fruit of the Spirit. Culture doesn't define patience, and culture doesn't define goodness or kindness and culture doesn't define self-control. If we let the world define biblical words, we'll eventually misunderstand what God is trying to produce in our lives.

Paul didn't list self-control among human achievements. He listed it among the fruit of the Spirit and that's significant. We have learned that fruit doesn't come from striving harder, but by remaining connected to the source of life. Jesus said, “Remain in Me.” Paul said, “Be filled with the Spirit.” The Holy Spirit produces the fruit, but we create the conditions by staying connected to Him.

Think about your own life. When you're frustrated, what controls your response? When you're disappointed, what shapes your attitude? When you're tempted, what determines your decision? When you're afraid, who gets the final say?

In Ephesians 5 Paul contrasts two kinds of influence. One person is under the influence of wine, and the other is under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The issue isn't simply alcohol as much as it is a deeper issue of control. There is always something shaping our thoughts, and reactions. The question isn't whether you're under an influence. The question is which influence has control. The world says freedom means doing whatever you feel like doing. God says real freedom is living under the influence of His Spirit. Self-control isn't me trying to become stronger than my desires, it's allowing someone greater than my desires to lead my life.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

The Greek word translated self-control is *enkrateia* (ἐγκράτεια). It describes mastery over desires, restraint over impulses, and authority over one's appetites. In the ancient world, it referred to someone who governed themselves instead of being governed by their passions. But notice where Paul places the word. Not among the works of man but among the fruit of the Spirit. Biblical self-control isn't self-generated determination. It is Spirit-produced surrender.

DON'T MISS THIS

Self-control isn't about controlling yourself—it's about surrendering yourself to the One who should be in control.

TEND THE GARDEN

Spend a few quiet moments reflecting.

1. When you hear the phrase self-control, what definition usually comes to mind?
2. Are there areas where you've been relying more on willpower than on the Holy Spirit?
3. What seems to influence your reactions the most—your emotions, your circumstances, or God's Word?
4. What would change if you began viewing self-control as surrender instead of striving?

WATER THE SEED

Throughout today, pause before making a decision—whether it's your words, your schedule, your spending, or your response to someone. Quietly ask, "Holy Spirit, what would You have me do?" Practice surrender before action.

GROW THIS IN ME

Father,

Thank You for showing me that self-control is so much more than human determination. Left to myself, I often rely on my own strength, only to discover that my willpower has limits. Thank You for giving me Your Holy Spirit, who not only teaches me what is right but gives me the power to live it. Forgive me for the times I have allowed my feelings, my appetites, or my impulses to take the place that belongs to You alone. Teach me to surrender every part of my life to Your leadership. Help me remember that true freedom isn't found in doing whatever I want, but in joyfully following where You lead. Today, I choose to live under Your influence. May my words, my reactions, my decisions, and my desires reflect the life of Jesus growing within me.

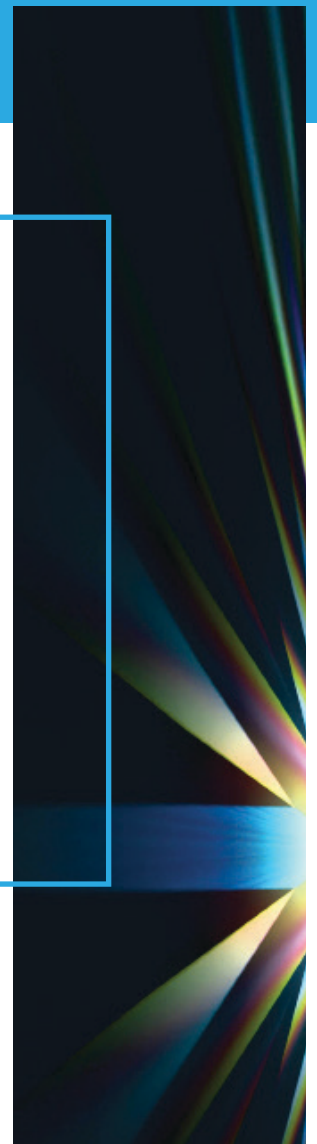
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LOOKING AHEAD

Day Two – Who Gets the Final Say?

Every follower of Jesus eventually faces a moment when what they want and what God wants are not the same. Tomorrow we'll discover that self-control isn't the absence of desire—it's deciding who gets the final say when the flesh and the Spirit pull in different directions.



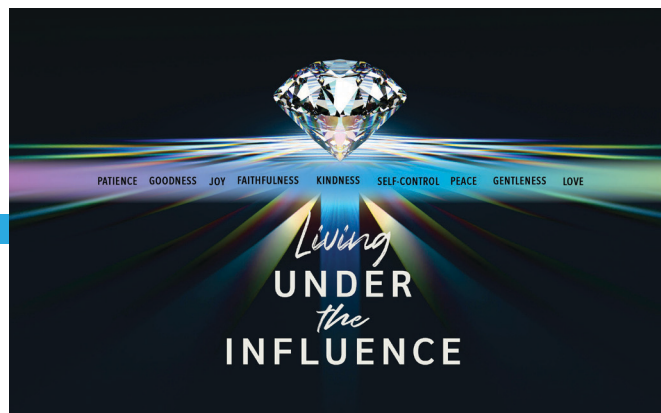
LIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Day 2: Who Gets the Final Say?

TODAYS SCRIPTURE

Galatians 5:17 (NIV) “For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.”

Luke 9:23 (NIV) “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”



TODAY'S SEED

Doesn't it seem that at times following Jesus feels like a battle? We genuinely want to honor God, we know we should forgive, be patient, speak with kindness, but then we find ourselves lashing out in anger, buying something we can't afford, or throwing in the towel and giving up.

If you've experienced that struggle, you're not alone. In fact, Paul says that struggle is normal. “The flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh.” Please pay attention to what Paul doesn't say. He doesn't say you're a failure because the battle exists, he says the battle exists because two different influences are pulling on your life.

The flesh always asks, “What do I want?” The Spirit asks, “What does God want?” The flesh says, “Do what feels good.” The Spirit says, “Do what produces life.” The flesh focuses on immediate relief but The Holy Spirit focuses on eternal transformation. Every follower of Jesus eventually comes to a moment when what they want and what God wants are not the same. And in that moment self-control becomes visible.

As long as God is asking me to do what I already wanted to do, it's difficult to know whether I'm surrendered or simply agreeable. But when His direction conflicts with my preference...When forgiveness feels impossible...When obedience feels costly... When saying “no” to my flesh feels uncomfortable...That's when the real question emerges. Who gets the final say?

Jesus answered that question long before He asked it of us. “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself...” Self-denial isn't self-hatred, or pretending that your desires don't exist. It's choosing not to make yourself the highest authority in your life. It means I no longer assume that every feeling must be followed, or every desire must be satisfied, or express every opinion. Yes, my feelings are real and desires are strong. But they are not Lord, and they don't sit on the throne of my life, Jesus does.

That's why self-control isn't really about saying “no” to yourself, it's about saying “yes” to Someone greater. Every act of obedience answers the same question. Who gets the final say?

BENEATH THE SURFACE

The word flesh (sarx) in Galatians doesn't simply refer to our physical bodies. Paul uses it to describe our fallen, self-centered nature—the part of us that wants life on our own terms instead of God's. The flesh isn't always asking us to do obviously sinful things. Sometimes it simply insists that our will should come before God's will. That's why Jesus called His disciples to deny themselves daily. Discipleship is a daily decision about who occupies the throne of our lives.

DON'T MISS THIS

Your feelings are real, but they are not Lord.

TEND THE GARDEN

Spend a few quiet moments reflecting.

1. Where do you most often feel the tension between what you want and what God wants?
2. How do you usually respond when your feelings and God's Word point in different directions?
3. What would it look like to let Jesus have the final say in that area?

WATER THE SEED

The next time you feel a strong emotional pull today, don't react immediately. Pause. Pray. Then ask one simple question: "Who gets the final say?" Let your answer determine your next step.

GROW THIS IN ME

Father,

Thank You for reminding me that the struggle between my flesh and Your Spirit doesn't mean You've abandoned me—it means You're continuing to transform me. Thank You for giving me the Holy Spirit, who lovingly leads me toward what is true and life-giving.

Forgive me for the times I have allowed my feelings, desires, or impulses to take the place that belongs to You alone. Teach me to trust that Your will is always better than my strongest emotion or my deepest craving. When my heart and Your Word pull in different directions, give me the courage to follow You.

Today I surrender the throne of my life to Jesus again. May He always have the final say.

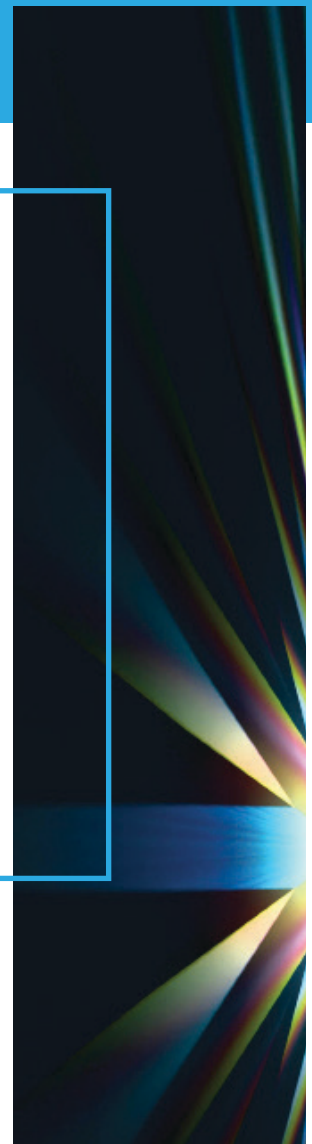
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LOOKING AHEAD

Day Three – Power Under Control

Jesus wasn't powerless in the wilderness or in the Garden of Gethsemane—He was surrendered. Tomorrow we'll discover that true self-control isn't the absence of power; it's having the power to do what we want and choosing what God wants instead.



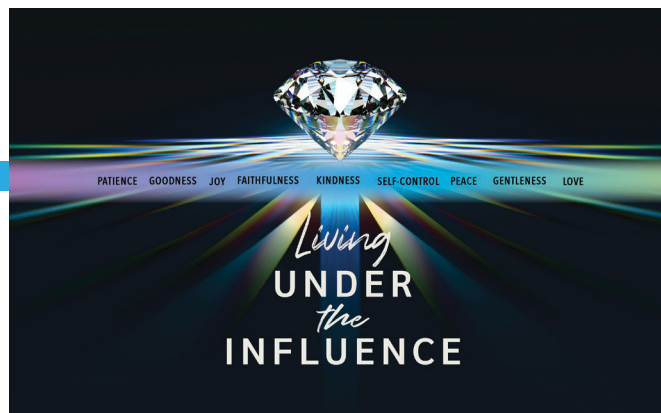
LIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Day 3: **Power Under Control**

TODAYS SCRIPTURE

Luke 22:42 (NLT) “Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.”

Numbers 12:3 (NLT) “Now Moses was very humble—more humble than any other person on earth.”



TODAY'S SEED

Jesus gives us one of the best examples of self-control in the bible. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed one of the most honest prayers recorded in Scripture. “Father... I want this cup to pass from Me.” His desire was real, His emotions were real, His suffering was real. But then came one of the most powerful words in the Bible. Yet...”Yet not My will, but Yours be done.”

That single word changed everything, Jesus wasn't denying His feelings, He was surrendering them. He wasn't pretending the cross would be easy, He was choosing the Father's will over His own. Matthew tells us He could have called twelve legions of angels, Jesus wasn't trapped, or helpless, or even powerless. He was surrendered. That's biblical self-control. Not the absence of desire it's the willingness to place our desires beneath God's authority.

Moses gives us another beautiful picture. The Bible says Moses was the meekest man on earth. Today we often hear the word meek and think weak, timid, passive. A person unable to stand up for themselves but nothing could be further from the truth. This is the same Moses who stood before Pharaoh and declared, “Let my people go.” The same Moses who confronted rebellion. The same

Moses who led an entire nation through the wilderness. Meekness wasn't the absence of strength, it was strength under God's control. That's why Jesus and Moses have so much in common. Neither Jesus or Moses lacked power or authority. They simply refused to use it outside the Father's will.

There was another moment in Moses' life, when the people complained about having no water, and God instructed Moses to speak to the rock. Instead, in his anger, Moses struck it. Water still flowed, and the people still drank. The result looked successful, but Moses no longer represented accurately God's heart. The lesson is that it's possible to accomplish something and still misrepresent God because we weren't under His control.

This is an important thought. You can win an argument... and lose the relationship. You can prove your point...and fail to reveal Christ. Self-control isn't just about what we accomplish, it's also about how we accomplish it. The Holy Spirit isn't simply producing stronger Christians.

He's producing Christians who look like Jesus.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

The Greek word enkrateia describes mastery over one's desires and impulses. Scripture shows us that this mastery isn't achieved by suppressing emotions. Jesus experienced hunger, grief, at times He was exhausted. Yet none of those emotions ruled Him. Likewise, the Hebrew word translated humble (or meek) in Numbers 12 describes someone whose strength has been brought under God's authority. Biblical meekness is not weakness, it is strength submitted to the will of God.

DON'T MISS THIS

Self-control is having the power to do what I want and choosing what God wants instead.

TEND THE GARDEN

Spend a few quiet moments reflecting.

1. Can you think of a time when surrendering your preference produced a better outcome than insisting on your own way?
2. Is there a relationship where God is calling you to respond with surrendered strength instead of uncontrolled emotion?
3. What does Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane teach you about handling your own desires?

WATER THE SEED

Today, when you feel the urge to defend yourself, win an argument, or insist on your own way, pause before responding. Pray: "Father, not my will, but Yours be done." Then choose the response that best reflects the character of Christ.

GROW THIS IN ME

Father,

Thank You for the example of Jesus and what self-control looks like and that it is most beautiful when it is guided by Your Spirit. Forgive me for the times I have used my words, my emotions, or my influence to protect myself instead of representing You. Teach me to respond with surrendered strength rather than impulsive reactions. When I am tempted to insist on my own way, remind me of Jesus' prayer in the garden and give me the courage to pray it as my own.

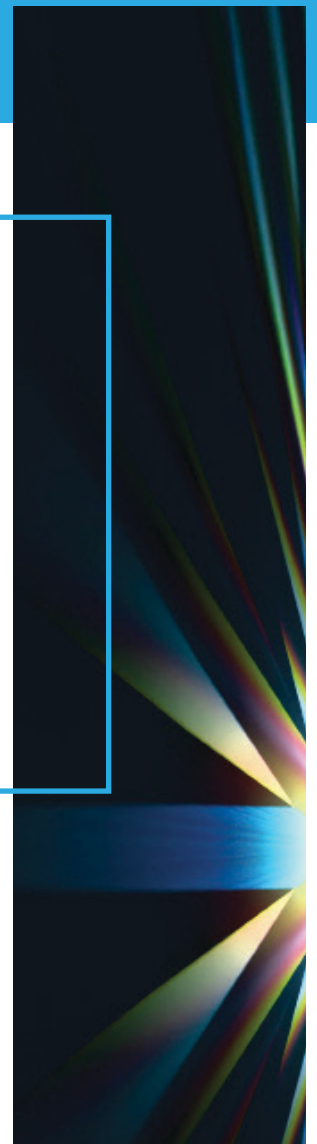
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LOOKING AHEAD

Day Four – Protected by Boundaries

Many people see self-control as something that limits their freedom, but God sees it as something that protects their future. Tomorrow we'll discover that the boundaries God establishes aren't intended to restrict our lives—they're designed to guard the relationships, calling, and purpose He's entrusted to us.



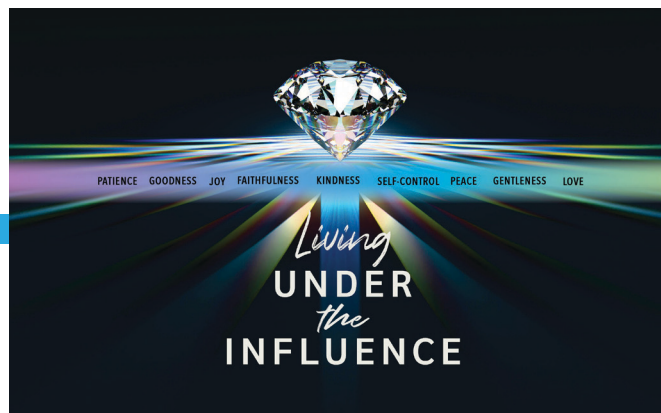
LIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Day 4: Protected by Boundaries

TODAYS SCRIPTURE

Proverbs 25:28 (TLB) “A man without self-control is as defenseless as a city with broken-down walls.”

Proverbs 16:32 (NIV) “Better a patient person than a warrior, one with self-control than one who takes a city.”



TODAY'S SEED

Most people don't enjoy the word control, because it sounds restrictive, confining or limiting in some way. For some reason we assume that if God tells us "no," He's keeping something good from us. But what if we've been looking at self-control all wrong? What if God's boundaries aren't designed to restrict our lives...What if they're designed to protect them?

When Solomon wrote Proverbs, every reader immediately understood the picture of a city with broken-down walls. In the ancient world, city walls weren't decorative, they were essential. Walls controlled access, protected families, they guarded homes and kept enemies out.

Without walls, a city wasn't free, it was vulnerable. Every invading army had an open access invitation and any thief could easily enter. And that's exactly what Solomon says a person without self-control is like that. Not because they're evil, or don't love God, but because they have no walls.

Without Spirit-produced self-control...every emotion can take over and every offense demands a reaction.

Think about how often one unguarded moment changes everything. One angry text, one careless comment. One click. One purchase. One decision made in exhaustion instead of wisdom. Most regrets don't begin with enormous failures, they begin with small moments where the walls were down.

The beautiful news is that God doesn't establish boundaries to diminish our joy, the boundaries are there to preserve our peace and joy. God wants to protect your marriage, our integrity, our family and friendships and possibly your future! Think of it this way, perhaps God's "no" is protecting a much bigger "yes."

We don't think of a guardrail as something that limits our freedom, because we understand that guardrails exist to protect us from the dangers beyond it. That's the way that God's word works as well, every boundary He gives is another reminder that He sees dangers we cannot always see.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

The Hebrew picture in Proverbs 25:28 is vivid. A city without walls wasn't merely weak.

It was exposed. Everything valuable inside the city was vulnerable because nothing remained to guard it. Likewise, biblical self-control isn't about becoming rigid or legalistic. It is the Holy Spirit building protective boundaries around the life God is growing within us. Every healthy boundary protects something precious.

DON'T MISS THIS

Self-control isn't God restricting your life—it is God protecting your life.

TEND THE GARDEN

Spend a few quiet moments reflecting.

1. Where do you most often feel like God's boundaries are restrictive instead of protective?
2. Can you think of a time when ignoring a boundary created unnecessary pain?
3. What relationships, opportunities, or areas of your life is God trying to protect?
4. Where might the Holy Spirit be inviting you to rebuild some broken walls?

WATER THE SEED

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you one boundary that needs strengthening. Maybe it's your words, or schedule. Maybe it's your phone, thought life or spending. Take one practical step today to reinforce that boundary—not because you're afraid, but because you value what God is protecting.

GROW THIS IN ME

Father,

Thank You for loving me enough to establish boundaries that protect my life. Forgive me for the times I've mistaken Your wisdom for restriction or Your commands for burdens. Help me trust that every boundary You establish flows from Your love and Your desire to guard the future You've prepared for me. Holy Spirit, strengthen the walls where they have become weak. Teach me to recognize temptation before it becomes compromise and to value obedience over temporary satisfaction. Build in me the kind of self-control that protects my relationships, my integrity, my calling, and my witness. May my life reflect the wisdom of walking safely under Your loving authority.

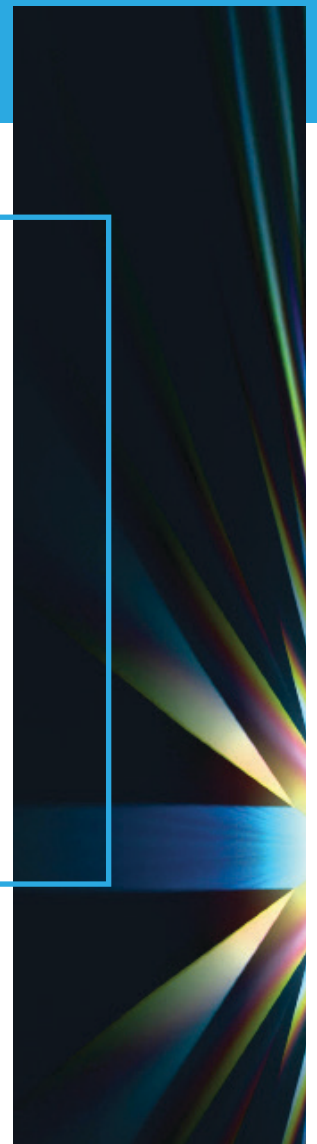
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LOOKING AHEAD

Day Five – Freedom at Last

Many people believe freedom means doing whatever they want. Tomorrow we'll discover that true freedom isn't found in following every desire—it's found in no longer being mastered by them. We'll conclude this week by asking one final question: Who gets the final say?



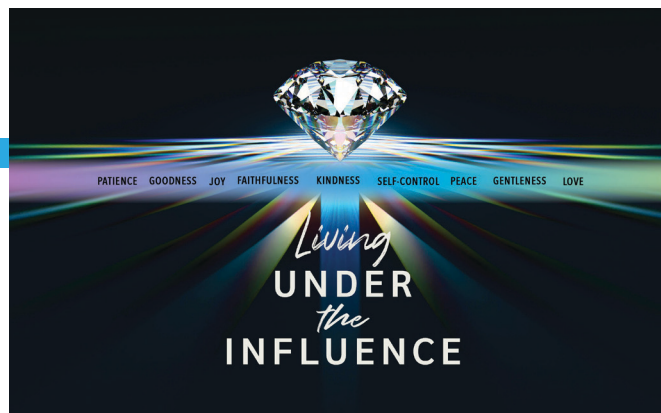
LIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Day 5: True Freedom

TODAYS SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 6:12 (NKJV) “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.”

Psalms 119:11 (NIV) “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”



TODAY'S SEED

Freedom is one of the most cherished words in our culture. It's something that we celebrate, protect and hold dear. It. But somewhere along the way, we've begun to confuse freedom with independence. We say, "I'm free to do whatever I want."

Scripture asks a different question. "Are you free enough to say no?"

Paul understood this tension. He acknowledged that many things are permissible, but then he added something remarkably honest: "I will not be brought under the power of any." In other words, "I refuse to let anything become my master except Jesus." That's real freedom. Not the freedom to satisfy every desire. The freedom to no longer be ruled by those desires.

Think about how often we say, "I just couldn't help myself." "I lost my temper." "I couldn't resist." "I had to say something." "I had to buy it." "I had to respond." Those phrases reveal something important. Whatever we believe we "have to" obey has quietly become our master.

Remember, Jesus didn't die simply to forgive us, He died to free us. He freed us from sin, fear, shame, and, our flesh! The Holy Spirit doesn't remove every temptation instead

He gives something greater. The power to no longer be mastered by it. That's why God's Word is so important. The psalmist wrote, "I have hidden Your Word in my heart..." God's Word establishes truth. The Holy Spirit gives us the power to walk in that truth. Truth without the Spirit becomes information, while The Spirit without truth can become emotion, but together they transform us.

As this week comes to a close, perhaps the most important question isn't, "Where do I need more discipline?" The deeper question is, "What part of my life have I not fully surrendered to the Holy Spirit?"

Every one of us has an area where our desires compete with God's direction. Maybe it's your anger, ambition, spending, phone, fear or comfort. The issue isn't whether those desires exist.

The question is, who gets the final say? That's the journey we've been on all week.

Self-control isn't stronger willpower, and it's not pretending temptation doesn't exist. It is living under the influence of the Holy Spirit until every part of our lives comes under His loving authority. That's not bondage, that's real freedom.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

When Paul says, "I will not be brought under the power of any," the Greek word carries the idea of being mastered, dominated, or controlled. The world promises freedom through unlimited choices, yet many people become enslaved by those very choices. The gospel offers something far better. Jesus doesn't merely forgive our sin. He breaks its mastery. The Holy Spirit empowers us to live as people who belong to Christ instead of our impulses.

DON'T MISS THIS

Freedom is not the ability to do whatever I want. Freedom is the power to no longer be mastered by what I want.

TEND THE GARDEN

Spend a few quiet moments reflecting.

1. What area of your life most often competes for control?
2. Where have you been relying on willpower instead of daily surrender?
3. If Jesus truly has the final say, what is one practical step of obedience He's asking you to take today?

WATER THE SEED

Choose one area where you've struggled to live under the Spirit's influence. Before the day is over, intentionally surrender that area to God. Pray this simple prayer throughout the day: "Jesus, You have the final say." Then act as though that's true.

GROW THIS IN ME

Father,

Thank You for the freedom You have given me through Jesus Christ. Thank You that I no longer have to be mastered by my fears, my appetites, my emotions, or my desires. Because of Your Spirit living within me, I can walk in the freedom You purchased for me. Forgive me for the times I have allowed something other than You to shape my choices and influence my reactions. Today I surrender every part of my life to Your loving authority. Let Your Word fill my mind, let Your Spirit guide my steps, and let my life reflect the freedom that comes from belonging completely to You.

My feelings do not get the final say.

My fear does not get the final say.

My anger does not get the final say.

My flesh does not get the final say.

Jesus is Lord.

Your Word is my authority.

Your Spirit is my guide.

And today, I choose to live under Your influence.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

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LOOKING AHEAD

Next Sunday – Living Under the Influence: Peace

Peace isn't the absence of problems; it's the presence of God ruling in the middle of them. Biblical peace isn't found when every storm around us becomes calm—it is produced when the Holy Spirit calms the storm within us. Join us next Sunday as we discover how God's peace guards our hearts, steadies our minds, and allows us to live confidently under His influence, no matter what we're facing.

