

Heb. 12:7-14 “That we may share His holiness” and “the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.”

Intro: We need to **achieve holiness** in 3 areas of our behavior – holy *thoughts*, holy *words*, and holy *actions*. To be thorough, we have to take all Scripture into account, but there are a handful of sermon-sized passages and key verses and even a few lists (both positive and negative) that address much of what is needed in each area. If you ever try to find a passage that deals exclusively with one area – *only about holy speech*, for example – you’ll quickly learn just how interconnected our thoughts and words and actions are! This lesson

- 1) Highlights a couple of verses that help us achieve holy *actions*, and
- 2) Proposes a scriptural “baby step” for learning to control our actions.

What Is That In Your Hand?

God once asked Moses, “What is that in your hand?” In Ex. 4:2, the answer was “a staff.” You’re going to *do something* – take some action – with what’s in your hand.

The choices of what we put in our hands

Moses was a shepherd and he had in his hand something that a shepherd needs.

Can you imagine... Moses with a paintbrush? Or, a soldier carrying a golf club? Or, a chef ready to make an omelet... with a sledge hammer. (!?!)

I’m afraid, though, that we Christians sometimes lose sight of who we are and we

take in our hands things that don’t match our identity or our purpose.

Here are **4 questions** that stem from 2 passages to help us make **good choices**:

PASSAGE #1: **1 Cor 6:12a** “All things are **lawful** for me....” Stop right there. Notice that the ESV puts this phrase in quotation marks because apparently it was just something that was commonly said. This is said immediately following a list of practices that will prevent us from inheriting the kingdom of God. So, let’s be sure in every case, because **Rom 14:23b** – Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin

Q#1: *Is it lawful (in God’s sight)? In other words, Do I have the right? Or rather, Do I have some doubt about it?*

Even something inherently harmless and pure can *become* sin *to me*, unless I am confident that it is *right*. Listen to your conscience. “When in doubt, leave it out.”

CONTINUE READING: **1 Cor 6:12a** “All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are **helpful** (KJV – expedient).“

Notice that this is the *opposite* of the “doesn’t say not to” mentality.

Q#2: *Will it help me? In other words, Will it glorify God in my body? (v. 20) Or rather, Will it choke out the word or God?*

In the words of **Matthew 13:22** (ESV), “the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.”

Listen to **Heb 12:1**

- let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely (ESV)
- lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us (ASV)

- let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares (NKJV)
Of course lay aside sin! (Cease to do evil – Isaiah 1:16; Flee youthful lusts – 2 Tm 2:22; Flee from sexual immorality – 1 Cor. 6:18.)
But ALSO lay aside *weights* so you can “run with endurance the race that is set before us.”
**Life is not training or practice or some kind of warm up –
it’s the only contest you’ll ever face!**
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CONTINUE READING: 1 Cor 6:12b “All things are lawful for me,” but I will **not** be **enslaved** by anything.
NO ONE EVER SAYS, “You know, I think I’ll start this addictive habit today that’ll take over the rest of my life and ruin my body and destroy my influence. I think it’ll make a GREAT master.” So, beware self-deception!

Q#3: Will it become too big? That is, “bigger than me”? In other words, Will I be brought under its power?

PASSAGE #2: Let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide **never to put a stumbling block or hindrance** in the way of a brother....
19 Let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. ... 21 It is good not to ... do anything that causes your brother to stumble. – Rom 14:13-21

Q#4: Can I recommend it to others?

Or rather, Will it have a bad influence on others (such as children)?

Try to live your life *so transparently* that you wouldn’t be embarrassed if the transcript of your thoughts and words and actions was posted on the internet. After all,
Heb 4:13 - no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

REVIEW THE QUESTIONS and THEIR CORROLARIES, with “QUIT.” [See SLIDES]

Now apply the questions to things commonly found in our hands:

- Entertainment
 - A book or magazine. *Is it wholesome? Is it helpful?*
 - A music player
 - A mouse – *Where will you click it?*
 - A TV remote – *Again, what choices will you make with it?*
- Money, or some fancy thing, like jewelry or a house (possessions) *Will you sell it when the brethren need it? Will you share it? Will you forego it in the first place, like Jim (Milstead)’s dad’s fancy car?*
- A baseball bat (recreation)
- Another person’s hand (relationships)
- A paycheck/job – *Should you be doing something ELSE? Some jobs dishonor God.*
- A car – *Where will you go in it?*
- Drugs – I refer to illegal drugs or legal drugs like prescription medications and even cigarettes or alcohol.

None of these things can take hold of us, but we take hold of them!

Our power over what's in our hands

As we control what's in our hands, we learn *SELF*-control.

Vicki has always been good to remind me when I preach to make it practical, to tell people how to apply whatever the topic is. So, this is "How to learn self-control."

Take your first baby step. Basically, we start with the tangible and work our way up to the invisible. Let's try this with something that comes into our hands *often* – **food!**

- 1) Pick it up. (*Gooooo! haha*)
- 2) Set it down.
- 3) Now, don't pick it up. Let this represent *whatever* comes into your hand. If it's something you need to **quit**, don't touch it again, except to throw it out or flush it!

Voila – you have control!

Now take that process one step further, and you have the Bible topic of *fasting*.

Cons

- 1) **The Bible (NT) doesn't tell us** under what **circumstances** to fast, or for **how long** to fast. We're not Jews, who had at least 4 fast days by the time of Zechariah (8:19) and continued adding to them. (There are now at least 7 traditional fasts recognized by most Jews.) http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Holidays/Fast_Days/fast_days.html, 4/21/12. We have a wide range of biblical examples, however, that suggest some possibilities. **Short**, from sunrise to sunset (Jud 20:26; 1 Sa 14:24; 2 Sa 1:12; 3:35), to **long** (40 days for Moses, Ex 24:28; Elijah, 1 Kings 19:8; Jesus, Matthew 4:2)
- 2) It's supposed to be "**invisible**," and it's quite **personal**. Fasting is as personal and individual as the Christians practicing it. Consequently it's **not something we enjoin** or enforce on others. However, **like giving alms and praying**, we can still practice and recommend it.
- 3) It's **not fun**. Actually, we should not ignore the physical impact on our bodies. **Warnings:** Side-effects include weakness (Psalm 109:24; Matthew 15:32/Mk. 8:3), so avoid it when you need extra physical strength. Children and expecting or nursing mothers as well as people with certain medical conditions should check with a physician for recommendations. **But**, as long as you drink plenty, most people can function for a normal daily routine with no real problems.

Pros

- 1) **To heighten one's prayers.** Is. 58:4 "to make your voice heard on high". Compare David's fasting in 2 Sam 12:16-23; Daniel 9:3; Luke 2:37 (the 84-year old Anna); Acts 14:23; (Mark 9:29 in some MSS)
- 2) **Shows humility.** Psalm 69:10: When I wept and humbled my soul with fasting... It was often associated with sackcloth and ashes in the OT. (There are many other biblical reasons for not eating – grief, illness, ill temper, fear – but we're talking about spiritual reasons here. There are even health benefits – not weight loss, though! – which are beyond the scope and outside the purpose of this lesson.)
- 3) **To exercise self-control.** "Afflicting the soul" and "buffeting your body" (**1 Cor. 9:27**) would seem to go hand in hand. This works especially well when you're motivated by your own spiritual failures and you're looking to express to God your humility and to heighten your prayers.
If you have a hard time **controlling basic desires** (any lusts of the flesh, any lusts of

the eye, and any manifestations of the pride of life, such as anger), then you can start (re-)gaining control by practicing controlling one of your most basic desires, hunger.

Another “pro” is that we have some really “**NICE**” passages about fasting:

NI – Necessary Inference

Luke 5:35: The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days. (Also Matt 9:15; Mark 2:20)

To be clear, Jesus, the bridegroom, has ascended into heaven. We are now in “those days.”

C – Command/Statement – Matthew 6:16, 17 “When you fast...” and it gives some guidelines.

E – Example – Acts 13, 14

Acts 13:2 While they were worshiping the Lord and **fasting**, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” 3 Then after **fasting and praying** they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

Acts 14:23 When they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

As long as we don’t try to bind it, I think a unified congregational effort of fasting and praying would be great in select instances. Consider Acts 13&14, as well as Ezra 8:21; Esther 4:16.

Excuses and objections:

“Matthew 6 is for the Jews only.” *If so, what other parts of the Sermon on the Mount, or Jesus’ teachings, for that matter, are for the Jews only?*

“The men in Acts 13 were from a Jewish background.” *Tell that to “Lucius” which is a Latin name. Also, they were in the first church where Jews and Gentiles were together.*

That’s only for those prophets and teachers. *Right, we wouldn’t want to overdo the piety, would we?*

I’d say those objections are just your stomach growling.

Speaking of **hunger**, hunger initially stems from *habit*. After several days, hunger goes away almost completely. At around the 2-week mark, a person experiences a “euphoria.” After an extended time, hunger eventually returns as an intense, *physiological need*.

Notice Matthew 4:2 “after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.”

But I submit that, although Jesus would’ve been *physically weaker* at that point, He was *spiritually stronger!* On what had Jesus been sustaining Himself during the 40 days? “Every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (singing Allelu- Alleluia!!).

You can turn your soul from sin

James 5:20: let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

and guard it from evil and lift it up to God and bless God and love God with all your soul and rejoice in your soul because of salvation.

But GOD ultimately has your soul in *His hand!*

Ezekiel 18:4: Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die.

Matthew 10:28: And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Luke 12:20: But God said to him, Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?

Take your first step to becoming a follower of Jesus. Confess your faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins. For the disciples among us, let's improve our self-control and make good choices about what's in our hands.