

Talking about Self-Control

HEARTLINES film – The Bet Preparation for the discussion

Read the notes “Leading a discussion group around the eight values” on pages 2 & 3. Read the Bible notes on Self-Control in the ‘Go deeper’ section on page 64.

KEY THOUGHT to keep in mind when leading a discussion on self-control:

We respect the boundaries God has given us when we see the ‘bigger picture’ and understand God’s perfect plan for us. Self-control enables us to make the right choices at the right time, allowing us to experience life to the full as God intended.



Ayanda



Biko

1) Introduce the discussion 3 Minutes

Briefly introduce the film “The Bet” and the value of “self-control” that the film highlights. Read the following Scripture from Galatians 5:22: *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”*

2) Show the film 17 Minutes

Show the HEARTLINES film “The Bet” as provided on the DVD in the back inside cover of this book. If you are extending the discussion over 2 sessions, and have already watched the film, read the summary at the start of the second session.

3) Start the film discussion 20 Minutes

1. What do you think were the issues or problems that each of the following characters faced in the film?
 - Biko ■ Zan ■ Craig ■ Lizzie ■ Ayanda
2. Comment on each of their ability to exercise self-control in the different situations they faced.
3. Did any of them have someone to help them face whatever problems they had? If so, who was it and how did they help them?
4. How do you feel about the bet Lizzie and Biko made?

[film summary]

Biko, Craig and Zan are best friends at high school. Their Matric year is finally coming to an end and they can’t wait to ‘be free’. Lizzie plays the role of the ‘cool girl who everybody envies’. She is also the leader of a clique promoting the slogan “Virgins suck!” Ayanda, on the other hand, is a hardworking learner who believes that God has a plan for her life and that the best things are worth waiting for. Biko attempts to ask Lizzie out on a date, but Lizzie challenges him to a bet. Biko has to get Ayanda to sleep with him and the winning prize is sex with Lizzie. Although Biko originally approaches Ayanda so that he can win the bet, a strong and meaningful relationship develops between them. He is challenged to consider his own values and choices. Biko and Ayanda are at the party and they spend time just chatting in the bedroom. The party guests think they are having sex but Ayanda sticks to her principles. Ayanda finds out about the bet and leaves the party deeply hurt and disappointed in Biko. Lizzie also reveals that all her talk about sex is just a cover up for her own fears and insecurities, and in fact she is still a virgin.

4) Discuss the film quotes *15 Minutes*

Show the following clips as provided on the DVD and use the relevant quote as a springboard for discussion:

[CLIP 1] Opening Narration by Isaiah

"You are free already to make whatever you want of your lives."

[CLIP 2] Lizzie talking about the bet with the school group

"So Biko, what do you say.....I'll be really impressed if you do"

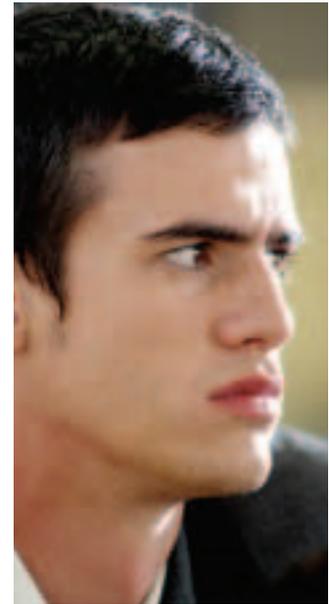
[CLIP 3] Zan to Biko in the CD shop

"The world is yours. If you want something, just take it!"

[CLIP 4] Biko and Ayanda talking after the ballet show

"Sex is a natural part of life....you don't know what you are missing" (Biko)

"I choose to wait until the time is right...once I'm married" (Ayanda)



Craig

[film discussion summary]

Biko and his friends had to learn that **there are things in life worth waiting for**, and that ignoring the God-given boundaries that have been put in place can lead to tragedy. Sex is not the only thing in life where these principles are true. Many opportunities, good and bad, present themselves to us throughout our lives. When we are young, we face the temptation to experiment with sensory pleasures, especially sex. When we get older, relationships and money issues become increasingly important to us. What keeps us on the right track — what keeps us from crashing into the ground — is self-control. But, as Zan, Biko's drug-dealing friend found out, self-control is not easy.

"What keeps us from crashing to the ground is self-control."

5) Discuss: How can we practise self-control? *25 Minutes*

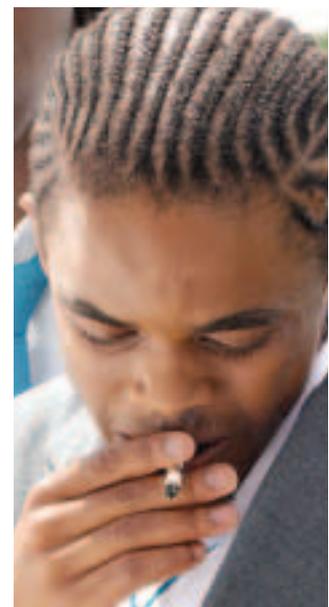
NOTE: Depending on the age and life stage of your discussion group members, you may want to select the questions accordingly.

1. What are some of the things that make it difficult to have self-control in situations where we are tempted to make a wrong choice? (If appropriate, focus on sexual choices.)
2. Read Genesis 2:24 ***"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh"***

Q: Why does God's Word say that sex is only for marriage? Do you think this is realistic?

[leader's note]

The goal of marriage is intimacy, becoming 'one flesh'. This gift of intimate companionship that God has given us is most fully experienced when we are able to give ourselves in purity to that person only.



Zan

Group discussion on Self-Control

3. Read Ephesians 4:17-18

"You must no longer live as the [unbelievers] do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts."

Q: If our struggle with self-control starts in the mind, how can we experience victory in this area? If society's message about casual sex or pre-marital sex is "ignorant", where should we get the right information on sex?

4. Where can you find the power you need to exercise self-control in situations of great temptation which we all face? Refer to Galatians 5:22-24 which reads: *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. ..Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires..."*

5. Read 1 Timothy 4:7 *"Spend your time and energy in training yourself for spiritual fitness"* (NLT) and 2 Peter 1:6 *"Knowing God leads to self-control. Self-control leads to patient endurance, and patient endurance leads to godliness."* (NLT).

Q: What do these verses tell us about how we develop self-control?



Ayanda and Friends

[He is purposeful, ordered and self-controlled]

We can trust God's intentions for our lives in things such as sexuality, money and relationships because He is a God of order and purpose. We ourselves have life because God is self-controlled. He has not destroyed humanity when He has every right to. Instead, He worked during many ages of history, through the founding of Israel, and the predictions of the prophets, to bring Christ into the world and redeem us from the curse of death.

Even when His own people who knew Him persisted in defying His ways, "the LORD was gracious to [Israel] and had compassion and showed concern for them because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob ... [and] he has been unwilling to destroy them or banish them from his presence" (2 Kings 13:23). Romans 2:4 says that God is rich in "his kindness, tolerance and patience ... [and] that God's kindness leads [us] toward repentance." Where there is God's order, there is also harmony. Where there is self-control by the power of the Spirit, there is life in abundance.

"Where there is self-control by the power of the Spirit, there is life in abundance."



Craig, Zan and Biko

[time to think...] 10 minutes

Read the following and ask each person to think about self-control in their own lives.

Reflect on areas where you need to develop more self-control.

Think about the negative impact that this is having on your life and ask God to forgive you for your lack of self-control. (1 John 1:9)

Ask God daily to give you the strength to resist temptation. Refer to 1 Corinthians 10:13 "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." and James 4:7 "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

Discuss the benefits of making yourself accountable to a friend, mentor, pastor or counsellor for areas in which you are struggling.

At home this week:

Encourage the group to read the story of Jesus facing temptation, and resisting the evil one by using the Word of God. You will find this in Matthew 4: 1-11. **Encourage everyone to memorise all or part of 1 Corinthians 10:13:** (See above)

6) Talking about HIV&AIDS (Optional) 10 minutes

1. What impact is the sexual behaviour of today's culture having on the spread of HIV&AIDS? How does this affect South Africa's youth?



[leader's note]

The highest levels of HIV infection in South Africa are amongst young people. Fifty percent of all young people have their first sexual encounter before the age of seventeen. One of the most important things that we can do is to encourage our young people to abstain from sex until they are married as this will protect them from contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, as well as from having unwanted pregnancies. However, young people face huge pressure from their peers and from the media to be sexually active. The best way to get our young people to abstain until marriage is through focusing them on a hope for the future and God's purposes for their lives (it is more effective to place abstinence in this context than focusing on sex alone).

We need to encourage them to see that in His plan His greatest gifts are worth waiting for and it is only through waiting for His timing that we will fulfil our life's purpose. We need to learn self-control in all things, including sex, so that we can have the fullness of life that God intends for us. Self-control is a value that also protects us from the dangers of other addictions such as drugs, alcohol or gambling.

7) Self-Control in Action: Ideas to make a difference in your community

1. Is there someone you know who is battling with self-control in a particular area? How could you get alongside this person and help them to develop a better picture of their future to motivate them in positive choices? (E.g. be a good listener, read the word of God together, encourage one another, be a friend or mentor etc.)
2. How can your church be constructive in developing a Biblical view on sex? Why don't you create discussion groups or Bible studies within the church, or organise occasions where you can invite non church-goers to come and listen to a talk on this subject. How can you impact the youth in your community with this message?



What God says about Self-Control

HEARTLINES film - The Bet

Two friends, bored with their routine lives, decided they would try skydiving. They thought it would bring excitement to an otherwise mundane existence.

Both got to skydive, but neither enjoyed the lasting pleasure that skydiving can bring. The first man was too impatient to wait for the right weather. The sky was thick with fog, but he still jumped. He never saw the ground coming and was killed on impact. The second man jumped on a clear day, but in the adrenaline rush he ignored the rapid approach of planet earth from below and did not open his parachute in time. He too was killed on impact.

Like skydiving, sex is a rush. Like skydiving, sex needs to be enjoyed at the right time. And like skydiving, sex has necessary limits which, if ignored, can lead to tragedy.

In the **HEARTLINES film - The Bet** - Biko and his friends had to learn this. Sex is not the only thing in life where these principles are true. Many opportunities, good and bad, present themselves to us throughout our lives. When we are young, we face the temptation to experiment with sensory pleasures, especially sex. When we get older, relationships and money issues become increasingly important to us. What keeps us on the right track - what keeps us from crashing into the ground - is self-control. But, as Zan, Biko's drug-dealing friend found out, self-control is not easy.

SELF-CONTROL begins with motivation

We often control ourselves only when we see the value of it. In contrast, we rarely practise self-control simply because we have been warned of the consequences. For example, seminars on the dangers of sex outside of marriage - such as STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) and HIV and emotional damage - may do little to prevent people from engaging in immoral sexual behaviour. Self-control begins with a deep-seated motivation or heart's desire which overrides any craving for immediate gratification.



Biko and Zan



Ayanda

“Self-control begins with a heart’s desire which overrides any craving for immediate gratification”

Self-control doesn’t deny the possibility of enjoying the benefits of something; self-control understands that the hoped-for benefits cannot be gained instantly. Self-control is motivated by a belief in a greater, future reward.

An athlete, for example, is motivated by a goal of success. But there is nothing easy about being a top athlete. As the famous cyclist Lance Armstrong says: “cycling never gets easier, just faster”. While an athlete may enjoy his or her sport, the sheer hard work is rarely fun. So why do they do it? They do it because they anticipate the rewards. Paul used this image, along with others, when writing to the young pastor Timothy:

[from the Word]

No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer. Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor’s crown unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops.

2 Timothy 2:4-6

A higher goal motivates us to exercise self-control. Recognising and valuing this greater, future goal enables us to deny ourselves short-term pleasures, work hard and make tough choices and sacrifices. What higher goals drive your choices in life?

MOTIVATION comes from understanding

Paul says in Romans 5:12 that “sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.” He does not simply mean death in the sense of termination of life, but death in the sense of degradation of life - lower quality of life. Whatever God has intended for us in a particular area becomes degraded in quality because of the presence of sin. Where does this tendency to sin come from? In his letter to the Ephesians Paul explains further:

[from the Word]

We must no longer live as the [unbelievers] do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

Ephesians 4:17-18

We will see elsewhere (see Honesty) that sin came into the world through the lies of Satan (Genesis 3). If our sinful behaviour - our tendency to bypass God’s will in a particular area - is rooted in ignorance and hardness of heart, then it would seem obvious that the solution to sin is in a change of heart and in the way we think. In his famous sermon on Mars Hill in Athens, Paul said “In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). What are they to repent of? They are to repent of wrong thinking -ignorance”.

Elsewhere Paul states that in the Christian life we use “weapons ... [that] are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.” Paul tells us that these “strongholds” that grip individuals are “arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God” and that the solution to dealing with such strongholds in our thinking is to “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). In other words, the weapon by which we deal with the problem of spiritual ignorance is knowledge. But this knowledge is a personal knowledge and experience of Jesus which replaces our thinking with His thinking.

John 1:1-18 speaks of Christ as God’s ultimate “Word” to us, which suggests that Jesus fulfilled everything we find in God’s Word written to us, the Scriptures. To know Christ’s mind then requires that we read Scripture under the guidance of His Holy Spirit. Knowing Christ’s mind is the beginning of my mind change. The transformation of my mind takes me away from dead things and degradation towards life “to the full” (John 10:10). In what areas do you think your mind needs to be changed? How will you seek this change?



Ayanda and Mira

FROM IGNORANCE to bliss: an example

The media, society and our friends all tell us - as Biko himself said to Ayanda - that “sex is a natural part of life, so why wait?” So, many of us do not wait. If the teaching of Scripture above is correct, the reason we do not wait is that we, and society, are often ignorant about sex.

Scripture paints a very beautiful picture of sex that, on first appearances, might seem similar to what the world tells us about sex. But when you dig deeper, the Bible’s picture is richer. The world’s picture is, in contrast, ignorant.

The Song of Solomon is a poem about two lovers preparing for marriage. It describes the sexual intimacy they will enjoy in sensual images! The woman longs for her lover to come into “his garden and taste its choice fruits” (4:16).

“The reason we do not wait is that we, and society, are often ignorant about sex”

The poem gives several principles about sexual intimacy: firstly, it comes out of a couple’s desire to be together (and their anguish when they’re apart - e.g. 3:1-2); secondly, it comes out of their love, respect and admiration for each other (e.g. 4:1-15, 5:10-16). Because sexual intimacy is based on such precious foundations and because sharing one’s body with another is so sacred, it belongs in the secure place of marriage. The man says to his future wife: “You are a garden locked up... my bride; you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain” (4:12). This couple is not denying the joys of sex at all. They are preserving sexual joys for the safe place of marriage. As Ayanda reminded Biko, God’s plan is that a “man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24).

In contrast, the Bible is full of examples of people who did not exercise sexual self-control and suffered the consequences: the relational injury of immorality and adultery, the violation of rape, and the self-inflicted physical damage of unhealthy sexual practices are all described in Scripture (e.g., 2 Samuel 11-12, 2 Samuel 13, Romans 1:26-27).

When we study the mind of God in Scripture, we find our minds are not filled with kill-joy thinking, but with the bright light of God's good intentions for us. His good purposes form the motivation which enables us to practise self-control.

SELF-CONTROL requires spiritual power

Nevertheless, given that we live in a corrupted environment and are led astray by our own sin-corrupted hearts, motivation alone is not enough to generate self-control. Paul says that self-control is a "fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22-23). We can never truly develop the kind of self-control over our desires (whether they be material, sexual or relational) which Scripture requires except when we are yielded to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. This comes through accepting Christ's undeserved grace, for "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires." And if this crucifixion of our sinful instincts has come through the power of His Spirit, as Paul says, then "let us keep in step with the Spirit", otherwise all the self-discipline in the world is in vain (5:24-25).

ABOUT GOD'S CHARACTER

HE IS purposeful, ordered and self-controlled

We can trust God's intentions for our lives in things such as sexuality, money and relationships because He is a God of order and purpose. Genesis 1:1-2:3 shows that God created the world with boundaries in which each dimension of creation has its proper place (see Days 1-3 of creation, in which God creates natural environments with distinct boundaries in the universe, and Days 4-6, in which he creates life specific to those bounded environments). Even when practising spiritual gifts in the local church, we are to be self-controlled, because "God is not a God of disorder but of peace" (1 Corinthians 14:33).

We ourselves have life because God is self-controlled. He has not destroyed humanity when He has every right to. Instead, He worked during many ages of history, through the founding of Israel, and the predictions of the prophets, to bring Christ into the world and redeem us from the curse of death. Even when His own people who knew Him persisted in defying His ways, "the LORD was gracious to [Israel] and had compassion and showed concern for them because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob ... [and] he has been unwilling to destroy them or banish them from his presence" (2 Kings 13:23). Romans 2:4 says that God is rich in "his kindness, tolerance and patience ... [and] that God's kindness leads [us] toward repentance."

Where there is God's order, there is also harmony. Where there is self-control by the power of the Spirit, there is life in abundance.



Iphendule, Ayanda, Biko, Zan and Craig

How can we practise Self-Control

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Q: What do these verses tell us about how we develop self-control?

At home this week:

Read the story of Jesus facing temptation, and resisting the evil one by using the Word of God. You will find this in Matthew 4: 1-11. **Memorise all or part of 1 Corinthians 10:13:** *"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."*