



Your Future Self Will Thank You

*Secrets to Self-Control from the Bible and Brain Science
(A Guide for Sinners, Quitters, and Procrastinators)*

Drew Dyck

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Introduction

A Foundation for the Soul

Why I Need this Book More than You Do

Your future self will always see your present self as unwise and immature. That means you are currently a fool right now.

– Tim Keller

I make the same resolutions every year.

In case you missed the confession in that first sentence, let me point it out for you. Making the same goals every year usually means you *failed* the year before. But self-improvement is a persistent mistress. By the time New Year's rolls around, I'm ready to renew my vows to a better future.

Exercise 5 times a week.

Lose 20 pounds.

Stick to the budget.

Not all my failures are health and finance related. Spiritual goals have a tendency to languish on my fridge as well.

Pray for 15 minutes every morning.

Read through the Bible in one year.

Volunteer in a new role at church.

After recording these goals, I close my moleskin notebook with a sense of anticipation and pride. I'm almost jealous of my future self. He's going to be so skinny ... and spiritual! I'm confident about my goals. I feel like they are laudable, and if the literature on goal setting is to be believed, accomplishable. They're concrete, measurable, and you would think, realistic.

Yet somehow I find myself failing to meet them, year after year after year. And it doesn't take months for my resolutions to unravel. It takes weeks. Days, even.

What's going on?

On one hand, it isn't much of a mystery. I'm the victim of a phenomenon as predictable as it is frustrating. Planning is easy; execution is hard. Anyone can sign up to run a marathon. Propelling your body over 26.2 miles of concrete is where things get rough (or so I'm told). The same is true of just about anything worth doing: it requires a good deal of effort. And most of us fail to follow through, despite our good intentions. As the witty football coach Lou Holtz once remarked, "After all is said and done, more is said than done." If there's anything unique about me, it's not that I fail to meet my goals. It's that I'm continually surprised when I trip over the gap between what I plan to do and what I'm able to accomplish.

Of course, not all resolution-breakers are colossal failures in every area of life. I'm not. I'm a good husband and father. I'm gainfully employed. I have two degrees and even a couple of books to my name. Heck, I had enough willpower to squeeze out the words you're currently reading, though you wouldn't believe the lollygagging and avoidance behavior that preceded the actual writing.

On the spiritual front, I'm not a total loss either. I go to church most Sundays and my closet is free of skeletons. I give to good causes. I'm assiduous in my study of theology (though embarrassingly inconsistent with Bible-reading).

And yet my failure to meet my goals—and not just ones made on New Year's Eve—haunts me, especially when failing to do so has serious consequences.

Stuck in Reverse

My brother, Darren, recently had a heart attack at 44 years old. Thankfully he got to the hospital quickly where they threaded a thin tube through a vein in his wrist up to a blocked artery and restored blood flow to his heart. As the shock wore off and we all breathed a sigh of relief that he was going to be okay, I started to think about my own health. When it comes to heart disease, family history is the poor man's genetic testing. When your brother, who is only five years your senior, suffers a heart attack, it's a wakeup call. Or it should be.

I wanted to cut my risk factors, so I hit the ground running. Literally. I fished my Asics running shoes out of the garage and started plodding around my block every evening. My diet got a makeover, too. Burgers and fries were out. Salmon and broccoli were in. I started popping fish oil pills and seeking out foods with a mysterious component called "fiber." I took a picture of one particularly depressingly healthy meal and texted it to my brother. "Look at what you're making me do!" I wrote.

I hoped to minimize my risk with diet and exercise, but if I needed medication, I'd take it. I promised my wife I'd talk to my doctor. As the father of three young children, I wasn't going to take any chances. *I guess this is what I needed to take my health seriously*, I remember thinking. *A good old-fashioned scare.*

But it wasn't. Because a couple of weeks after the new me emerged, the old me

reared his lazy, hungry head. I started supplementing my healthy meals with handfuls of *Doritos* each time I passed the pantry. My jogs around the block dropped in frequency, and that promised appointment with the doctor kept getting put off. One night as I sat watching TV eating a bowl of cookie dough ice cream, I stopped for a moment and thought, *what in the world am I doing?* ... and then finished the bowl.

None of these lapses surprise my wife anymore. She shakes her head every time I announce my plans to go on another diet. And I've tried them all: one where I counted calories on my smartphone; another where restricted eating to only the hours between 2 to 6 p.m.; another where I limited my intake to only vegetables and lean meats. Few lasted for more than a week, but I'm always eager to tackle the latest fad diet that comes along. It's become something of a joke with friends and family members. I'll start scheming about my next strict eating regimen, even as I fork unhealthy food into my mouth. Between bites, I'll declare, "The diet starts tomorrow!"

My lack of spiritual resolve is just as vexing. Above I boasted that I don't have any skeletons in my closet, and it's true. I don't engage in illegal or scandalous activities. But I say that with the full realization that many sins I do struggle with—like pride, indifference, averting my eyes from homeless people begging for money—are just as sinister as the ones that make the Evening News. Sure, I go to church faithfully. I sing songs with beautiful, inspiring truths. I listen to powerful sermons. Yet year after year, I continue to struggle with the same stupid, stubborn sins. I'm caught in my own civil war between the good I want to do and the sinful impulses holding me back.

I'll never arrive at perfection, not in this life. I don't expect to. But shouldn't Christians expect to make some progress? Shouldn't they gradually overcome bad habits and besetting sins? Shouldn't they become more humble and selfless? Shouldn't they look a little more like Jesus with every passing year? Shouldn't I?

The reality hit me with extra force the other day when my brother (yes, the heart attack one) posed a difficult question.

"Are you more spiritual today than you were twenty years ago?"

I tried to get off on technicalities.

"Well, I was a teenager then. Plus I've gone to seminary and ..."

"I'm not talking about how much you *know*," he interrupted.

My brother isn't in the habit of posing deep, difficult questions. Yet he'd posed one nonetheless. It wasn't a sideways confrontation either; he was asking because he was worried about his own lack of growth. His query kept rattling around my skull for the next couple of weeks and I couldn't shake it out.

In that twenty years, I'd attended church hundreds of times, sang thousands of Christian songs. I'd graduated from seminary. I'd written books. About God! But was I more spiritually mature? Less enslaved to sin? Was I more passionate about following Jesus?

As I looked back at my patterns of behaviors and the state of my soul, I don't know if I can say that I am. In many ways, I'm stuck—or even moving in reverse.

Finding the Foundation

Around the time I was grappling with my spiritual stuck-ness, I stumbled upon an intriguing description of a group of ancient Jewish monks. They were called the *Therapeutae*. Philo, the Jewish Philosopher, records that they received their name “because like doctors, they cure and heal the souls of those who come to them or because of their pure and sincere service and worship of the Divine.”ⁱ

And pure it was. The monks led lives of extraordinary discipline and devotion. Their lifestyle was austere in the extreme. Think the TV show *Survivor*, minus the cameras and coups. Renouncing all possessions, they traded city life for caves in the wilderness. They spent their days praying, singing spiritual songs, and meditating on the Hebrew Scriptures. They ate nothing till nightfall and gathered only once a week for prayer and a shared meal. “They abandon their property without being influenced by any predominant attraction, and flee without even turning their heads back again,”ⁱⁱ Philo marveled. The 3rd Century church historian Eusebius was so impressed by their devotion he was convinced they were actually early Christians.

What was the secret to their extreme piety? Philo offered an explanation. “Having first laid down self-control as a foundation for the soul,” he wrote, “they mastered all the others.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The line jumped off the page for me. *A foundation for the soul*. I found the paradox striking. A foundation is solid, immovable. A soul, by definition, is the opposite—airy and immaterial. Yet there they were, mashed together in one lovely phrase written millennia ago.

I was even more moved by the insight they conveyed. I didn't aspire to an acetic life of punishing purity, but I recognized that these ancient monks were onto something. Self-control isn't just one good character trait, a nice addition to the pantheon of virtues. It's foundational. Not because it's more important than other virtues, but because the others rely upon it.

Think about it. Can you be faithful to your spouse without self-control? Can you be generous without self-control? Peaceable? Selfless? Honest? Kind? No, even the most basic altruism requires suspending your own interests to think of others. And that can't happen without self-control. The theologian Thomas Aquinas called

temperance (another word for self-control) a cardinal virtue. He taught that none of the other virtues—including humility, meekness, mercy, and studiousness—could be developed without it. ^{iv} As a statement from Fuller Seminary’s Thrive Center puts it: “Self-control is an instrumental virtue. It facilitates the acquisition and development of other virtues: joy, gratitude, and generosity.” ^v

Self-control is key.

The insight about my lack of self-control was enlightening—and unsettling. I realized that lurking behind my inability to make progress was a deficiency in this cardinal virtue. My lack of spiritual progress wasn’t a matter of adequate knowledge. I wasn’t short on resources or strategies. I didn’t lack time or opportunities or talent. The chief reason I couldn’t follow through on my plans, why I felt chronically stuck in my spiritual life, why my best-laid plans and highest ambitions went unfulfilled day after day, year after year, really boiled down to one maddening, embarrassing, surprising, and undeniable truth: I lacked self-control. And making ancillary changes wasn’t going to fix the problem. Sure, I could busy myself rearranging the furniture of my life. Add some cute shutters and a fresh coat of paint. But if things were really going to change, I had to work on the foundation.

The book you’re holding is my attempt to do just that. Books are written by people who have either mastered a topic or by folks who desperately need to. I fall into the latter camp. I’m going to explore the science and spirituality of self-control, research strategies for fostering this essential trait—then run experiments in the laboratory I call my life. While this is a personal journey, I don’t plan to go it alone. I’ll be talking theologians and pastors, sociologists and psychologists. Self-control is a spiritual topic—and a psychological one. All truth is God’s truth, and I’m scouting for wisdom wherever I can find it.

I’m not looking to become a multimillionaire, or release the giant within, or follow my bliss, or any other silly self-help fantasy. My hopes are more modest. I want to make progress in important areas of life by cultivating self-control. I want a firmer foundation for my soul. If you have the same goal, keep reading ...

Chapter 1

Why Self-Control?

Because it Leads to a Life of Freedom and Flourishing

“He who reigns within himself and rules passions, desires, and fears is more than a king.”

— John Milton

“Whenever you lose control, someone else always finds it.”

These were the words of my High School English teacher, Mr. Sologar, on our first day of class. They didn’t have anything to do with literature or grammar but I guess he wanted to kick off the class with a life lesson.

It was a good one.

If we acted up at home, he explained, control of our lives would swiftly transfer to our parents in the form of lost privileges or being grounded. The same was true at school. If we abused our freedom in the classroom or in the hallways—and we did!—we’d find ourselves in the principal’s office or confined to detention. If we got really crazy and decided to break the law, the legal system would step in to curtail our freedom.

“No, control is never truly lost,” he repeated in his thick Indian accent. “If you fail to control yourself, others will control you.”

I didn’t care for Mr. Sologar. He covered our papers in red ink, hectored us about poor diction (he would have like the word hectored), and insisted we read *The Lord of the Flies* even though there was a perfectly good movie based on the novel. Yet somehow his self-control lesson lodged itself in my lazy, teenage brain. There it sat, dormant and almost forgotten until I started researching for this book. Only now am I starting to truly appreciate the wisdom of his words. As he looked out across a class of adolescents, he knew the biggest threat to our freedom wasn’t any external enemy. It was our inability to control ourselves.

Mr. Sologar, you were onto something.

Conquering Cities

The Bible has a lot to say about self-control. In that great repository of wisdom called Proverbs we’re told that it’s “better to have self-control than to conquer cities” (Prov. 16:32). I’ll admit that the city-conquering language feels a little weird

to me (I'm more of a Cappuccino-conqueror), but I get the point. In the ancient world, people built massive walls around cities and patrolled them with armed guards. Conquering a city was the hardest military feat imaginable. But here's Solomon, the wisest guy in antiquity, saying that controlling yourself is more impressive than pulling off this nearly impossible exploit. The image also provides a telling contrast between two kinds of enemies. Defeating the enemy beyond your walls is hard; subduing the enemy within is harder.

Proverbs revisits the city-smashing motif elsewhere to hammer home the point. "Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control" (Prov. 25:28). In other words, an absence of self-control is dangerous. Soldiers-breaking-through-your-walls dangerous.

It's not all wall breaking and city smashing. In one of the most beautiful passages in all of Scripture, the Apostle Paul lists self-control alongside core virtues like love, joy, and peace as one of the "fruits of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22). We tend to think of self-control as a strictly human enterprise, but Scripture describes self-control as a product of being connected to God. It's something that grows when your life is rooted in divine reality. In fact if it's missing, your faith may be a ruse. No fruit, no root.

These are just a few of the mentions of the virtue. Scripture is also crammed with examples of self-control in action; characters who demonstrated this vital virtue as they served God and their fellow man.

Unfortunately, self-control has a bad reputation these days. When I told people I was writing a book on the topic, I heard a lot of sighs and groans. "Oh yeah, I should be better about that," people would say, their voices tinged with defeat. Most of us view self-control like that overdue dentist appointment – necessary but dreaded. Others don't even see the necessity. The self doesn't need to be controlled; it needs to be liberated. For them, self-expression is the real virtue. Self-control is boring, confining, the cop that shows up and shuts down the party.

Others worry emphasizing self-control will lead to legalism, an approach to spiritual life that reduces faith to a list of do's and don'ts. Yet it's a mistake to relegate self-control to this category. Biblical self-control isn't about proud self-reliance or earning your way to heaven. It's not somehow nullified by grace. You will find no asterisks beside the biblical exhortations to exercise self-control. What you will find is a truckload of commands to resist evil, flee lust, avoid temptation, abstain from sin, control your tongue, guard your heart, and, most graphically, "kill the flesh."

Yet these drastic measures aren't meant to confine us; they are edicts from a loving God designed to bring liberty. Rather than being restrictive, the Bible portrays self-control as the path to freedom. It enables us to do what's right.

From the biblical view, there are only two modes of life available to us: enslavement to sin and life in the Spirit. The former speaks of confinement in the extreme. Today “sin” is a playful word, associated with decadent desserts and lingerie ads. We see the word sin and imagine someone sampling a menu of forbidden delights. Don’t be thrown by that connotation. Instead, think of being pistol-whipped by increasingly destructive patterns of behavior, ones that ultimately lead to your demise. That’s what the Bible means by sin: enslavement. The early theologian Augustine (who knew a thing or two about sin) described it this way: “Once the will is vanquished by sin ... our nature has lost its freedom.”^{vi}

Life in the Spirit, on the other hand, is a life of liberty. In this scenario a loving God guides and empowers you to live a life of righteousness that leads to flourishing and joy. But without self-control, you’re doomed to the enslavement side of the equation.

Resisting Marshmallows

For the past year I’ve been reading everything about self-control I can get my hands on. Primarily that meant surveying the relevant Bible passages and diving into the vast corpus of Christian thought on the topic. I’ve also scoured academic journals and poured over dozens of studies. I’ve read bestselling books about grit and willpower and resilience and habits. I’ve interviewed experts in a variety of disciplines. Along the way I’ve acquired a new vocabulary to talk about the subject. *Self-regulation. Ego depletion. Delayed gratification. Active volition. Inhibitory control.* All fancy ways of referring to our ability—or inability—to control our behavior.

It’s been a fascinating journey, even if the material at times has been a little dry. Let’s just say that studies with titles like “Cognitive, affective, and behavioral correlates of internalization of regulations for religious activities” aren’t exactly beach reading. No matter. There have been enough revelations along the way to keep me going. More than once I’ve had my assumptions about self-control challenged—or flipped upside-down. Which is to be expected. Even those who study the subject for a living have been stunned by the discoveries of recent years.

One of the biggest surprises is just how powerful self-control is. Researchers first caught wind of the importance of self-control thanks to a 1960s experiment. In the now famous “marshmallow experiment” Stanford researcher Walter Mischel put a group of preschoolers through a wrenching test.^{vii} Each child was offered a marshmallow, cookie, or pretzel to eat. Or they could make a deal. The tikes were told that if they could hold off eating the sweet or salty treat for just 15 minutes they would receive *two* treats.

Almost none of them could.

A few jammed the yummy snack into their mouths immediately. Most at least tried to resist. The children that held out employed a range of behaviors to cope with the temptation. Some would put their hands over their eyes or turn away from the tray

bearing the delicious temptation. Out of sight, out of mind, they hoped. Others started kicking the desk or tugging on their hair. Some even played with the marshmallow, stroking it “as if it were a tiny stuffed animal.”

The researchers analyzed the results, charting the children on a 4-point scale on their ability to delay gratification. But the big findings wouldn't come until decades later and completely by chance. As fate would have it, Mischel's own daughters attended school with several children who had participated in the experiment. Over the years, he heard secondhand reports from his daughters about how their classmates were doing. Mischel noticed a pattern in the gossip. The children who seemed to get in the most trouble were the same ones who had trouble waiting for a second marshmallow.

His curiosity was piqued. Mischel and his colleagues tracked down hundreds of participants from the original study, now teenagers. Sure enough, the ones who had demonstrated the higher levels of willpower as preschoolers were outpacing their peers. Not only did they have better grades and test scores, they were more popular at school and less likely to abuse drugs. The benefits continued to mount as the test subjects grew older. The children who had held out for the full 15 minutes scored 210 points higher on their SATS than their weakest willed counterparts. They went on to achieve higher levels of education and report higher levels of happiness in their relationships. They even had lower Body Mass Indexes.

Part of what made the follow-up findings so remarkable is that very few childhood traits are helpful in predicting outcomes later in life. Yet this simple test had shown a strong correlation between the ability to delay gratification in childhood with numerous benefits in adulthood.

The findings rippled through multiple fields. Psychologists had long assumed intelligence was the key to a successful life. For educators high self-esteem was the ticket. Self-control had never entered the discussion. But Mischel's marshmallow test changed everything. It showed that self-control was paramount and affected virtually every area of life. Since Mischel's famous experiment study after study has linked self-control to a surplus of “favorable life outcomes,” including better relationships, higher incomes, and higher levels of happiness. People with greater self-control are more sociable, honest, and sacrificial. They have lower rates of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and aggression. They even live longer. If you could bottle self-control, it would be one of the most valuable substances on earth.

I'll Be Good ... Later

Some researchers define self-control as the ability to delay gratification. This is what the Marshmallow experiment sought to test. Can you resist the smaller immediate reward for a bigger one later? On paper, it looks like a no-brainer. The smart move is to hold out for the better reward. But desire has a way of changing the game, and not just for preschoolers. You know that passing on that donut now will make you

feel healthier and more energetic tomorrow ... but wait, is that a maple glaze?

Our inability to delay gratification lands us in all kinds of trouble. Perhaps the most famous example in the Bible involves a birthright and a bowl of soup. You might recall the story. The Patriarch Isaac has twin sons, Jacob and Esau. Esau is born mere minutes before his brother, which means he's recognized as the firstborn. That might not seem like a big deal to us, but back then it was everything. The son with the birthright would eventually inherit all of the father's wealth and possessions.

The boys grow up and they're complete opposites. Esau is a man's man. He excels at hunting and growing body hair (seriously ... see Genesis 27:11). Jacob is a committed indoorsman who knows his way around the kitchen. One day Esau comes back from a hunt and he's starving. "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished," he says to his brother. Jacob agrees to serve him the stew—on one condition. Esau has to give up his birthright. On the face of it, it's the most ludicrous offer of all time: one meal in exchange for a fortune. But Jacob is hungry. And that makes all the difference. "Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?"

Esau was crazy, right? He was, but we all have a little Esau in us. We have a hard time holding out for future rewards, even when it's clearly in our best interest to do so. We tend to opt for the smaller, short-term payoff. We whip out the credit card to buy things we don't need, knowing we'll have to pay it back later, plus interest. We eat too much, knowing it will cause health problems down the road. We indulge in sinful behaviors fully aware that doing so will damage our relationship with God and with others. Somehow we lose sight of the bigger picture and grasp for the immediate pleasure. We eat the marshmallow. We trade for the soup. We take the easy way out. Self-control sounds like a lovely idea, but it's something we'll get to tomorrow. Saint Augustine's prayer could be our own. "Lord, give me chastity and self-control ... but do not give them to me yet." ^{viii}

What's at Stake?

As I'm writing this chapter, the news is crammed with instances of high-profile moral failings. It seems every day brings new revelations of a Hollywood executive or politician accused of sexual assault or harassment. If the allegations are true—and most of them sure seem to be—it's hard to imagine what these men were thinking. Not only did their actions degrade and traumatize other people; they boomeranged back on them and destroyed their reputations and careers.

It's easy to dismiss these issues as secular problems. Many Christians experienced an acute sense of *schadenfreude* as we watched "godless" Hollywood consumed by the scandals. But sadly the church has been home to similar behavior. For years, I edited a prominent ministry magazine, which brought me into close contact with many of the top church leaders in the country. I remember one up-and-coming leader I got to know. Charismatic and talented, he led a mega church, headlined

conferences around the country, and wrote bestselling books—and then lost it all when he was caught having extramarital affairs. I wish I could say his story was anomalous, but I lost count of how many leaders and friends torpedoed their ministries by succumbing to lust or greed.

In the midst of the scandals unfolding in 2017, theologian Owen Strachan took to social media to share this leadership lesson with his followers:

“Now more than ever, one moment can destroy—in one day—your life’s work. The essential virtue: self-control. You can have all the talent in the world, and draw a ton of attention for it, but if your ability is not matched by strong character, you are in a precarious place.”^{ix}

As Strachan observed, a lack of self-control has dire consequences. And it’s not just politicians and pastors who need to heed his warning. For all of us, even a momentary break in willpower can cause irreversible damage. Yet preventing these kinds of dramatic failings is just one function of self-control. It also plays a central role in the thousands of small decisions we face every day.

Social scientists define self-control as the ability to resist negative impulses. But when the Bible mentions self-control, it usually has something bigger in mind. Yes, it involves the ability to resist doing something you shouldn’t. But it also has a proactive element. It refers to the ability to do something you should. In theological terms, it’s about guarding against sins of commission (bad things you do) and sins of omission (good things you fail to do). It also involves resisting the entire range of unwelcome impulses: from the instinct to eat that second piece of chocolate cake to the temptation to look at pornography.

When you think of self-control in these terms, you see how it impacts every facet of life. Just think of an average day. It starts before you even open your eyes. Your alarm goes off and you’re faced with a decision. Grab some extra sleep or use the extra minutes doing something useful. Sometimes it’s fine to grab the extra zees (you probably need them). But usually you’re better off using those precious before-the-craziness-of-the-day moments to spend some time with God or get some exercise. Which do you choose? Depends on self-control.

Next comes breakfast. Do you grab a donut and coffee on the way out the door? Or opt for a healthier option, which, in addition to not tasting as good, likely takes more time to prepare? Again, self-control.

On the way to work, you get cut off. Then you hit gridlock traffic. Another decision: lose your cool and cuss or take a deep breath and let the incident roll off your back? More self-control.

At work you face a jungle of dilemmas. Do you spend the first hour at your desk surfing the web? Or dive straight in and make some progress on that important report? When people start gossiping about that annoying coworker, do you join in or defend him? When you notice that someone seems discouraged, do you risk a little awkwardness by walking into their office and showing concern? Or do you just ignore it and stick to your routine? Do you gripe about the boss? Do you look a little too long at that attractive coworker?

It's all self-control.

When you return home, the challenges continue. And now you're tired, making self-control even harder. Do you just melt into the couch and let the cable TV wash over you? Or do you spend some quality time with your kids? Do you eat too much at dinner? Or drink too much after it? Do you spend the meal staring at your phone or conversing with your family? After the kids go to bed, do you watch Netflix or take the opportunity to spend some meaningful time with your spouse and deepen your marriage?

It's not just 9-5 workers who face such choices. They come at every stage at life. If you're a stay-at-home parent, do park the kids in front of the TV? Or do you lead them in constructive activities that demand more of your attention? Do you routinely feed your children sugary snacks or push nutritional meals (even when they act like you're torturing them). If you're a retiree, do you live for your personal hobbies or to pour into members of the next generation? If you're a college student, do you start on that essay early in the semester or cram the day before it's due? Do you Snapchat with friends during class or listen to the lectures?

There are times where it's perfectly okay to just veg-out. We need down time. But too often we choose the easier, and sometimes sinful, option rather than doing things that would ultimately enrich our lives, help others, and foster growth. And typically, the difference doesn't amount to ignorance of what choice is better; it's usually a matter of self-control.

It's easy to imagine your life's outcome as the product of a few big decisions. We envision a lone hero showing extraordinary courage at a climactic moment. Or a tragic figure losing control at a critical juncture. That might be how things work in the movies. In reality, our destinies are determined in a more mundane manner. As the writer Annie Dillard reminds us, "How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives."^x While we may be tested in dramatic moments, the fabric of life is stitched slowly, through a thousand tiny choices that end up defining your life. The difference of those accumulated decisions is dramatic. They can add up to a life crippled by sloth and sin or to one characterized by freedom and flourishing.

ⁱ *Eusebius, The Church History*, edited by Paul L. Maier, (Kregel Academic, 2007), 65.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*

iii Ibid

iv John Rickaby, "Cardinal Virtues," *Catholic Encyclopedia* (2003 Online Edition).

v @ThriveCenter. "Self control is an instrumental virtue. It facilitates the acquisition/development of other virtues: joy, gratitude, generosity." May 25, 2017. <https://twitter.com/ThriveCenter/status/867798157496733696>

vi *The Anti-Pelagian Works of Saint Augustine*, Translated by Peter Holmes, Volume 1, (T&T Clark, 1989), 319.

vii Walter Mischel, *The Marshmallow Test: Why Self-Control Is the Engine of Success* (Back Bay Books, 2015), 4-5.

viii St. Augustine: *Confessions*, Bk. VIII, Chap. 7.

ix Owen Strachan, <https://www.facebook.com/ostrachan> 10/30/17.

x Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life* (Harper Perennial 2013). Pg.