

WILLPOWER

The Limits of Human Strength and the Power of Divine Will

The concept of willpower (the emphasis on character building and strict self-control) gained importance during the Victorian Era, in British history. (Queen Victoria's reign from 1837 to 1901) It was fueled by a folk notion that willpower was an internal force. This also had a similar, yet significant, effect in the United States during the same era. Thinkers and authors like Samuel Smiles, in his book called *Self-Help*, and Frank Channing Haddock, in his book, *The Power of Will*, urged readers to increase their "store" of this energy through self-denial and perseverance. However, the fascination with willpower faded in the twentieth century, which spanned from 1901 to 2000. This became weaker partly as a reaction to Victorian excesses, economic changes, and the world wars. This concept was further weakened when the Nazis embraced a "psychology of will" for mass obedience, particularly noticeable in Leni Riefenstahl's film, *The Triumph of the Will*. The period after World War II, particularly the 1950s, witnessed a significant rise of consumerism and a new advertising industry that encouraged people to "buy now," fostering a generation of individuals guided by external opinions rather than inner convictions. Cheerful self-help books like Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, first published in 1936, and Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking*, published in 1952, focused on the power of positive thinking, and wish fulfillment, moving away from the stern Victorian emphasis on character building through willpower. Psychoanalyst Allen Wheel observed a decline in "character structure" and a weakening of willpower by the late 1950s. Social scientists increasingly sought external causes for misbehavior, reluctant to suggest internal factors like character defects. The very notion of conscious self-control was suspiciously viewed by many psychologists, with some neuroscientists even claiming to disprove its existence, while philosophers preferred terms like "freedom of action." Scientists chose to focus on external factors or internal factors like self-esteem for study. However, research on each of these, including self-esteem, eventually proved disappointing in its

ability to predict success.

The "comeback of the will" in psychology refers to the renewed interest and focus among psychologists on the concept of willpower, (also referred to as self-control or self regulation) after a period when it had been viewed with skepticism by many within the field of psychology. A key early contribution was Walter Mischel's marshmallow experiments in the late 1960s, which studied preschool children's abilities to resist the immediate gratification of eating a marshmallow for a larger, later reward of more marshmallows. While Mischel didn't initially discuss the results in terms of willpower, later follow-up studies revealed stunning relationships; the children who could delay gratification at age four had better grades, higher SAT scores, more popularity, higher incomes, maintained a healthy weight, and had fewer drug problems in adulthood. These findings were remarkable because early childhood measures rarely predict adult outcomes so strongly.

Roy F. Baumeister, who was a social psychologist, and his fellow workers evaluated the positive benefits of self-control in their 1994 book, *Losing Control: How and Why People Fail at Self-Regulation*, concluding that self-regulation failure is a major social study linked to numerous personal and social problems. They developed a scale to measure self-control, which proved to be a better predictor of college grades than IQ or SAT scores. Research also linked high self-control to better job performance, relationships, emotional stability, and lower rates of violence and criminal convictions. Scientists then began systematically investigating what willpower is and where its power comes from. Baumeister's laboratory experiments, starting with the famous radish experiment, provided crucial evidence. This study revealed that resisting the temptation of readily available cookies and chocolate while being assigned to eat only radishes significantly reduced participants' persistence on a following unsolvable puzzle task. This suggests that successful acts of self-control reduce energy available for the next task requiring self-control. This led to the idea that willpower is like a muscle that becomes fatigued from overuse.

A Limited Resource in High Demand

Willpower does not have an endless supply. It is a resource that can be completely exhausted through various self-control tasks, such as suppressing emotions while watching a sad film; performing demanding physical tasks like gripping a hand exerciser; or a conscious effort to push distressing ideas out of one's mind. This phenomenon is scientifically known as ego depletion, a state when the capacity for self-control is reduced after engaging in tasks requiring large amounts of self control to regulate thoughts, feelings, or behaviors. Basically, the more we use willpower, the weaker it becomes, just like a muscle. Most scientists agree that everyone should want more willpower; yet it's just like being physically fit—there is no shortcut.

The Role of Glucose: A major discovery was the link between glucose and willpower. Glucose, the principal circulating sugar in the blood of humans and other animals, is the power source of willpower. Experiments showed that consuming sugary drinks could counteract ego depletion (reduced to a low amount) by restoring willpower performance. Research demonstrated that self-control tasks were associated with a drop in blood glucose levels. Studies with dogs also showed similar depletion effects and recovery with sugar. Neuroimaging studies (research methods that use scanning techniques to investigate brain structure and functioning) further supported the glucose connection by showing that it could reverse the depletion-induced changes in brain activity patterns. The discovery that using willpower depletes glucose also helps explain why people crave sweets after exerting self-control or why people become “hangry” (angry because of hunger).

Strong Effect of Temptation: Resisting temptation actively depletes willpower. The more temptations encountered and resisted, the less willpower remains for later challenges. It is recommended to actively remove opportunities for temptation and avoid places with temptation.

“But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil [fulfill] the lusts thereof.”—Romans 13:14.

Multipurpose: Studies have shown that the same single supply of willpower is used for all types of self-control tasks, from resisting food to managing emotions to performing mental work. Research has also shown that, like a muscle, willpower can be strengthened over the long term through regular exercise. Even though it might be tiring, consistently exerting self-control can lead to increased strength and endurance in the long run. Studies show that practicing self-control in one area—such as improv-

ing posture, monitoring food intake, exercising, or managing money—could lead to improvements and increased endurance in willpower across many other unrelated areas of life.

Decision Fatigue

Making choices, even small ones, require willpower and can contribute to willpower reduction or exhaustion, leading to poorer decision-making later on. Researchers have investigated which part of the decision-making process is the most fatiguing. Using a task involving customizing a computer, they discovered that the act of making the actual choice was the most depleting, more so than merely considering options (predecisional phase) or accomplishing the choices already made by others (postdecisional phase). Even making choices that are seemingly enjoyable, like picking wedding gifts, eventually causes depletion if the process is lengthy. However, deciding for a casual acquaintance is less depleting than deciding for oneself because the reduced concern about the outcome balances the difficulty. Have you ever wondered why stores have so many brands to choose from, even though the majority are owned by the same companies? The more choices a person makes means the weaker their willpower becomes; and this increases bad spending habits.

Side effects include: a tendency to look for ways to conserve energy by avoiding or postponing further decisions; this is commonly known as procrastinating. Marketers can take advantage of, and abuse, decision fatigue by presenting tempting impulse purchases like candy at checkout when shoppers' willpowers are at their lowest and their body craves sugar. It influences people in favor of a particular choice toward short-term thinking, making immediate rewards seem more appealing than better, future ones.

Decision fatigue weakens or damage one's capacity for fairness and a balanced judgment. This was clearly shown in a study of Israeli prison parole judges, whose likelihood of granting prisoners' parole significantly dropped as the day wore on and they made more decisions, showing recovery only after meals. Thus, it can lead to dumb decisions that are not easily explained, contributing to mistakes that can wreck careers and relationships. It makes people think in the easiest, most effortless ways possible rather than carefully considering an issue.

Anterior Cingulate Cortex

Neuroscientific research using an electroencephalographic recording (EEG) showed that ego depletion is associated with sluggish activity in the anterior cingulate cortex, the brain's conflict-mon-

itoring system or the error-detection system. This portion of the brain is located in the frontal lobe and is involved in the exercise of willpower. Its primary function is to watch for mismatches between what you are doing and what you intended to do. It acts like an internal alarm system, sounding a spike in electrical activity (seen on an EEG and called “event-related negativity”) when it detects such a conflict. This portion of the brain is affected by a psychological phenomenon where the human mind has the tendency to remember unfinished tasks better than completed ones. This is called the Zeigarnik Effect and can significantly contribute to weakening willpower. The open loop of an unfinished task actually creates a mental burden. Weakened willpower leads to a tendency to be disorganized and messy, causing willpower to be weakened further because of the Zeigarnik Effect. Those who follow habits of organization keep their minds free from mental clutter. They don’t have unfinished tasks slowing down the anterior cingulate cortex. It was discovered that making lists as a form of precommitment strategy is very effective in removing the mental burden.

Research using electroencephalographic recording (EEG) showed that when people were in a state of ego depletion (such as from suppressing emotions while watching an upsetting film), there was “notably sluggish activity” in their anterior cingulate cortex during a following self-control task. This sluggish activity weakens the error detection signals. When the ACC slows down and its error-detection ability worsens, causing people to make more mistakes. Additionally people will have trouble controlling their reactions, and struggle with tasks that would otherwise be easier.

Strengthening Willpower

Habits are one of the most effective in causing either failure or success. It is possible to develop habits that directly weaken willpower. Choices made by habit require little to no willpower and do not affect decision fatigue. The act of monitoring behaviors and actively seeking to break habits strengthens willpower. Examples include using your hand that is not dominant for routine tasks (like brushing teeth or opening doors) or changing your posture or altering speech habits by speaking in complete sentences, avoiding filler words like “you know” or “like,” and avoiding curses.

Orderly habits, like shaving every morning or making the bed, can actually improve self-control in the long run by creating habits that are triggered by the various aspects of your surroundings. Additionally, there is a link between external order and inner

self-discipline that has been recently confirmed in some remarkable studies. During these studies, it was discovered that simply being in a messy room caused people to exhibit much lower self-control than those who were in a clean room. A messy room can also cause something called hyperbolic (exaggerated) discounting. This is the tendency to prefer a smaller reward sooner than a larger reward later. It’s like choosing a candy bar today instead of waiting for a cake tomorrow.

“Order and cleanliness is the law of heaven; and in order to come into harmony with the divine arrangement, it is our duty to be neat and tasty.”—*Adventist Home*, 254.

Develop an “if-then” plan (a goal-setting strategy that links a specific situation with a desired action) designed to make a desired behavior automatic in a specific situation and reduce the need for conscious willpower—such as “If I feel like smoking, I will read my Bible instead.” Or to motivate yourself to do something, you can say, “If I don’t do this, then I will do nothing.” “If-then” plans can also help with something called the Hot-Cold Empathy Gap. It is a common failure to appreciate, in a calm state, how different we will feel and behave in the heat of a situation, such as during later moments when sexually aroused or hungry. This helps us focus on what we have already committed to rather than spur-of-the-moment feelings.

Set short-term or immediate goals that can provide regular feedback and motivation. Every time we achieve a goal, our brains release dopamine (a feel good chemical that encourages us to do something again). If we split large tasks into multiple smaller ones, it helps us endure despite difficulties.

Once a behavior becomes a habit, it can become automatic and will happen without conscious thought; thus, willpower can be used for other challenges. Habits are something God has given to minimize decision fatigue. It is human law that we are slaves to habit; therefore, let’s be slaves to good habits. Make short-term goals that increase cleanliness in your place of residence, and you will find great willpower benefits.

“Some who are engaged in domestic [family home] labor are always at work, not because they have so much to do but because they do not plan so as to save time. By their slow, dilatory [snail-paced, sluggish] ways, they make much work out of very little. But all, who will, may overcome these fussy, lingering habits. In their work let them have a definite aim. Decide how long a time is required for a given task, and then bend every effort toward accomplishing the work in the given time. The exercise of the willpower will make the hands move

4 deftly [skillfully with speed].”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, 344.

Get good sleep: As earlier mentioned, the body needs glucose as fuel for willpower. Sleep helps the body manage its glucose supply. When you are tired, sleep. Adults often cheat themselves out of needed sleep, and the result is less self-control. By resting (sleeping), the body’s demands for glucose are reduced and its overall ability to use the glucose in their bloodstream improves. Sleep loss has been shown to weaken and gradually damage the processing of glucose, which has immediate consequences for self-control. Studies of workers who didn’t get enough sleep were more prone to wrong and unacceptable conduct; and students who lacked sleep were more likely to cheat in experiments, suggesting that sleep deprivation weakens self-control and decision-making processes. “A rested will is a stronger will” is a widely accepted principle of willpower and self-control. The old advice that “things will seem better in the morning” is not about daylight but about the recovery from loss of glucose through a good nights sleep.

Maintain glucose levels: This can be achieved by eating at specific times and not eating between meals. Glucose levels strongly influence willpower. As glucose drops, so does willpower and people’s abilities to control desires and emotions. A healthy diet, with a good amount of fiber, will help the body maintain glucose levels. Additionally, it can help people with diabetes recover more control of their glucose levels. Self-control failures are increased when glucose cannot effectively reach the brain, a common effect of insulin resistance. (Insulin resistance: when the body’s cells do not properly respond to insulin [a hormone that helps glucose enter cells for energy]). Furthermore, self-control failure is most likely during times of the day when glucose is least effectively used. As the day progresses, insulin sensitivity tends to decrease, making it harder for cells to maintain their glucose levels. Thus, in the late evenings (typically 9-11 p.m.), self-control failure is more likely. Ellen White talks about this with regards to courtship.

Study the Bible: It has been proven that religious practices and beliefs strengthen willpower. One reason is the requirement to practice behavioral monitoring when one tries to keep themselves in line with their religious values. Another practice that

has proven to successfully strengthen willpower is the discipline of academic study. In one experiment, students who wanted to improve their study habits were given help to set long-term goals, break their tasks into smaller steps, and keep a log and diary to monitor their progress. These students regularly exercised self-control in applying these steps to their study habits. This affected their self-control in all aspects of life. Those who discipline the mind through prayer and Bible study are strengthening willpower in every area of life.

“The reason why the youth, and even those of mature years, are so easily led into temptation and sin is that they do not study the Word of God and meditate upon it as they should. The lack of firm, decided willpower, which is manifest [clearly revealed, shown] in life and character, results from neglect of the sacred instruction of God’s Word. They do not, by earnest effort, direct the mind to that which would inspire pure, holy thought and divert it from that which is impure and untrue.”—*The Ministry of Healing* (1905), 458.

Exercising willpower to control the thoughts will take a great amount of effort; but it will just as certainly make one mentally powerful as those who lift weights every day in the gym and become physically powerful.

Procrastinate (delay of the task to a later time) to success: Jesus gives a wonderful truth when He says:

“Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”—*Matthew* 6:34.

Researchers brought people in, one at a time, to watch a short film while sitting next to a bowl of M&M’s (a perpetual favorite in laboratories because they’re so easy to work with). Some people were told to imagine they had decided to eat as much as they wanted while watching the movie. Others were told to imagine they had decided not to eat any of the candy. A third group was told to imagine they had decided not to eat the M&M’s now, but would have them later on. In general, the instructions were effective. The ones told to assume they had decided to eat actually did eat considerably more than the ones told to deny or postpone the pleasure. The study proceeded through some questionnaires after the experimenter and (falsely) said the experiment was now over. Each person was asked to remain

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and fill out one more questionnaire that concerned the quality of the laboratory setting. Then, seemingly as an afterthought, the experimenter gave the bowl of M&M's back to the person and said, "You're the last subject we have today, and everyone else is gone; so these are left over. Help yourself." The experimenter exited, leaving the participant alone to fill out the questionnaire and eat his or her fill, apparently with no one watching or caring. But, as usual, the researchers cared very much. They had earlier weighed the bowl in order to prepare for the participant and weighed it once again after the participant left.

Left alone in that room with the M&M's, the people who told themselves to postpone pleasure had a golden opportunity to indulge themselves. These researchers knew that unfinished tasks tend to intrude on the mind due to the Zeigarnik effect; so they expected those who postponed the pleasure to gobble down the M&M's, while people who made the determined decision to stop eating candy would either remain strong or perhaps just nibble. But exactly the opposite occurred. Those who delayed eating them actually ate significantly less than those in the self-denial condition. The findings would have been impressive if the people choosing to eat them at a later time had merely eaten equal amounts to those who flatly refused to eat any. After all, the ones who postponed eating the M&M's were fully expecting to enjoy the treats later. The fact that those who delayed eating them ate significantly less than the others is remarkable. The result suggests that telling yourself "I can have this later" operates in the mind a bit like having it now. It satisfies the craving to some degree and can be even more effective at suppressing the appetite than actually eating the treat.

In this instance, procrastination is a key to overcoming—we can put the evil off by simply saying, "Not today." In doing this, we conserve more willpower than if we simply tell ourselves "No," and we overcome the temptation at the same time. Therefore, people who make concrete "I will never do it again" statements fail more often. We only have to overcome today.

Researchers studied people who made "I will never do it again" statements and discovered a psychological effect that I call "reckless abandonment."

They noticed that it occurs in dieters when they break their diet, leading them to feel that they have already failed and might as well completely abandon their goals and enjoy themselves; this often results in binge eating (eating large amounts of food in a short time while feeling a loss of control of what, and how much, is eaten). This mindset of reckless abandonment seems to disrupt self-monitoring. In an experiment, dieters who were given enough food to exceed their daily limit afterward especially lacked understanding about how much additional food they had eaten; whereas, those still under their limit more accurately tracked their intake. This suggests that once a person gives themselves over to this reckless abandonment, they no longer self-regulate. This led to what scientists call "Bright Line Eating." It consists of a single goal that one desires to achieve, such as an "I will never do it again" statement. Once this line is crossed, there seems to be no further limit to guide their behavior, leading to reckless abandonment of the goal.

We Need a Saviour

Sin is supernatural; thus it cannot be overcome by mere human willpower. We may be able to better ourselves, but we will remain slaves to sin unless we are freed by Christ.

"Feeling the terrible power of temptation, the drawing of desire that leads to indulgence, many a man cries in despair, 'I cannot resist evil.' Tell him that he can, that he must resist. He may have been overcome again and again, but it need not be always thus. He is weak in moral power, controlled by the habits of a life of sin. His promises and resolutions [decisions] are like ropes of sand. The knowledge of his broken promises and forfeited [failure to fulfill agreements] pledges weakens his confidence in his own sincerity and causes him to feel that God cannot accept him or work with his efforts. But he need not despair.

"Those who put their trust in Christ are not to be enslaved by any hereditary or cultivated habit or tendency. Instead of being held in bondage to the lower nature, they are to rule every appetite and passion. God has not left us to battle with evil in our own finite [limited] strength. Whatever may be our inherited or cultivated tendencies to wrong, we can overcome through the power that He is ready to impart."—*Counsels on Health*, 339-440.

If we submit our will to God, He will empower

6 us to overcome. If we combine our faith in God with faith in the power of His promises, we will not be overcome by the power of Satan.

“As the will of man co-operates with the will of God, it becomes omnipotent [possessing unlimited power and authority]. Whatever is to be done at His command may be accomplished in His strength. All His biddings are enablings.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, 333.

Satan has had thousands of years to study how to make mankind fall. He is well-aware of our weaknesses:

“It was in the time of greatest weakness that Christ was assailed by the fiercest temptations. Thus Satan thought to prevail [win]. By this policy he had gained the victory over both men and women. When strength had failed and the willpower weakened, and faith ceased to repose [rest and feel calm] in God, then those who had stood long and valiantly [bravely, courageously] for the right were overcome. Moses was wearied with the forty years’ wandering of Israel, when for the moment his faith let go its hold upon Infinite [having no limits, impossible to measure or calculate] Power. He failed just upon the borders of the Promised Land. So with Elijah, who had stood undaunted [not afraid in spite of difficulties or danger] before King Ahab; who had faced the whole nation of Israel with the four hundred fifty prophets of Baal at their head. After that terrible day upon Carmel when the false prophets had been slain and the people had declared their allegiance to God, Elijah fled for his life before the threats of idolatrous Jezebel.”—*Christ Triumphant (a devotional)*, 219.

We are not to understand that we have no part to play in overcoming and exercising our wills. It is our duty to increase willpower; a combined effort of our cooperation with divine help will bring victory. We cannot expect God to help us if we have not done our best:

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.” *Philippians* 2:12, 13. Man’s working, as brought out in the text, is not an independent work he performs without God. His whole dependence is upon the power and grace of the Divine Worker. Many miss the mark here, and claim that man must work his own individual self, free from divine power. This is not in accordance with the text. Another argues that man is free from all obligation, because God does it all, both the willing and the doing. The text means that the salvation of the human soul requires the willpower to be subjective to the divine willpower, which will can’t be forced, but there must be co-operation of the human and divine agencies.

“Man cannot possibly work out his own salvation without the ordained divine power, and God

will not do for man that which He requires man shall do for himself, through his own earnest willing co-operation. Man, in the work of the saving of the soul, is wholly dependent upon God. He cannot of himself move one step toward Christ unless the Spirit of God draws him, and this drawing is ever, and will continue, until man grieves the Holy Ghost by his persistent refusal.”—*13 Letters and Manuscripts (1898)*, Letter 135, pars. 3 and 4.

This does not mean that our struggles will be easy. In fact, they will be designed by Satan to force failure, if possible.

“It will take, at times, every particle of will-power that you possess, but it is God that is working for you, and you will come forth from the molding process a vessel unto honor.”—*Messages to Young People*, 153.

The great truth that Satan tries to hide is the fact that he can only gain power over us if we yield our minds to him. He cannot dominate our wills if we are in Christ; he must entice us through temptation.

“Satan cannot touch the mind or intellect unless we yield it to him.”—*2 Mind, Character, and Personality*, 710.2.

More Observations about Willpower

Willpower has a direct effect upon the health and can be used to overcome sickness. Ellen White speaks of this in several places:

“In journeying I have met many who were really sufferers through their imaginations. They lacked willpower to rise above and combat disease of body and mind, and therefore they were held in suffering bondage. A large share of this class of invalids is found among the youth.

“I sometimes meet with young women lying in bed sick. They complain of headache. Their pulse may be firm, and they be full in flesh; yet their sallow [unhealthy pale-yellowish] skins indicate that they are bilious [liver and gallbladder problems making a person moody]. My thoughts have been that, if I were in their condition, I should know at once what course to pursue to obtain relief. Although I might feel indisposed [slightly ill], I should not expect to recover while lying in bed. I should bring willpower to my aid, and should leave my bed and engage in active physical exercise. I should strictly observe regular habits of rising early. I should eat sparingly, thus relieving my system of unnecessary burden, and should encourage cheerfulness, and give myself the benefits of proper exercise in the open air. I should bathe frequently, and drink freely of pure, soft water. If this course should be followed perseveringly, resisting the inclination to do otherwise, it would work wonders in the recovery of health.”—*Medical Ministry*, 106-107.

She points to self and imagination as a means Satan uses to cripple willpower:

“Invalids, I advise you to venture [risk] something. Arouse your willpower, and at least make a trial of this matter. Withdraw your thoughts and affections from yourselves. Walk out by faith. Are you inclined to center your thoughts upon yourselves, fearing to exercise, and fearing that if you expose yourself to the air you will lose your life; resist these thoughts and feelings. Do not yield to your diseased imagination.”—*2 Testimonies for the Church, 534-535.*

She tells us that willpower is exercised through choice:

“What you need to understand is the true force of the will. This is the governing power in the nature of man, the power of decision or of choice. Everything depends on the right action of the will. The power of choice God has given to men; it is theirs to exercise. You cannot change your heart; you cannot of yourself give to God its affections, but you can choose to serve Him. You can give Him your will; He will then work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Thus your whole nature will be brought under the control of the Spirit of Christ; your affections will be centered upon Him, your thoughts will be in harmony with Him.”—*Steps to Christ, 47.*

“Remember that your willpower, the power of deciding, must be cultivated. If you would be what you might be but what you are not, you must bind up your will with the will of God. In short, you must yoke up with Christ. You must join yourself to the Lord. You then join your weak indecision to His firm strength of purpose, your ignorance to His wisdom, your unworthiness to His worthiness, your frailty to His enduring might. Then your words, your habits, your moral power, will be wholly on the Lord’s side.”—*14 Letters and Manuscripts (1899), Letter 66, par. 7.*

Science also tells us that the will is exercised in choices; this is what creates decision fatigue. We can choose to obey God; and, if we do this, He will work in us to give us the power to do what we have chosen. Just like the Israelites crossing the Jordan, we must get our feet wet, and God will do the rest. Ellen White pointed a mother to the domestic life as a means to cultivate willpower.

“Council to a Mother—You should not follow your own inclinations. You should be very careful to set a right example in all things. Do not be inactive. Arouse your dormant [sluggish] energies. Make yourself a necessity to your husband by being attentive and helpful. Be a blessing to him in everything. Take up the duties essential to be done. Study how to perform with alacrity [enthusiasm] the plain, uninteresting, homely, but most needful duties which relate to domestic life....

“Try to make a success of your domestic life. It means more to fill the position of wife and mother

than you have thought.... You need the culture and experience of domestic life. You need the variety, the stir, the earnest effort, the cultivation of the willpower that this life brings.”—*Child Guidance, 74.*

Ellen White points to the will as a means of controlling emotions:

“The giving way to violent emotions endangers life. Many die under a burst of rage and passion. Many educate themselves to have spasms. These they can prevent if they will; but it requires willpower to overcome a wrong course of action. All this must be a part of the education received in the school; for we are God’s property. The sacred temple of the body must be kept pure and uncontaminated, that God’s Holy Spirit may dwell therein.”—*2 Mind, Character, and Personality, 519.*

Notice what she says about laboring to save souls:

“Some say, Where are you going to take me? They realize their great degradation [shameful state]. They say, I am not fit to be helped. Leave me alone. But because of this, the workers must not desist [stop]. By ministering to publicans [in the Bible, Jewish tax collectors for Rome, who were often despised] and sinners, they are co-operating with God. These poor outcasts are to hear the voice of prayer in their behalf. Take them, and lay them at the feet of Christ. Compel them to come by your kindness. You can see clearly the end which you desire them to reach. They cannot see what you see. They cannot hear Christ’s call, but you hear it, and you must act in His stead. Christ’s great love must be your law, impelling [strongly urging] or compelling [persuade by forcefulness of argument], as the case demands. You must hold fast to those you are trying to help, [or] else victory will never be yours. Only as you can get them to look upon the Saviour hanging on the cross, in His inexpressible love, will they, as they become sane, make the kingdom of heaven their choice.

“When they do this, the goal of your endeavor [a serious effort] is reached; for Christ’s righteousness goes before you, and they are clothed with the wedding garment. There must be appointed over these outcasts those who watch for souls as they that must give an account. Those who have decided to make an effort to live for Christ must have the weakened willpower carefully guided, closely guarded. Be sure that they have work to do. They have lost their manhood and womanhood, and this they must win back. Everyone is born into the world with hereditary tendencies that must be closely watched and guarded against. Evil and good, from within and without, keep up a constant struggle for the supremacy. Few know the overmastering power of appetite, and the fury [frenzy] of the collision (crash) between habits of self-indulgence and the determination to be temperate in all things.”—*14 Letters and Manuscripts (1899), Manuscript 19, pars. 29-31.*

8 There is a work to do, not merely for ourselves but for others. People need to be led to Christ, to place their hope in Him:

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.”—Proverbs 18:10.

What are we doing for ourselves and those around us? All our powers and all our blessings are centered in God. He is the Source of our strength. We should not give in to a diseased imagination, believing we cannot do anything physical or spiritual for the lost. We need to strengthen the powers that God has given us and strengthen our minds and willpowers by doing, by persevering in godliness. If we can forget ourselves and believe our lives are in the hands of a wise and infinite God, we will be a force for Jesus in this wicked, dark world. We need structure in our lives; we need to understand the overmastering power of appetite and the fury of the collision between habits of self-indulgence and the determination to be temperate in all things. We need a real experience in picking up the cross. The cross is when our wills cross God’s will, and we have to either follow Him or follow ourselves. Sometimes we faint under the weight of our burdens and give in, just like Moses and Elijah did. Jesus understands. *Early Writings, 175.2* says that He fainted under the weight of His cross too! We do not have an High Priest that cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities. Hebrews 12:3-4 gives us encouragement for those times of fainting:

“Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.”

Consider Jesus and the opposition He faced in trying to save the very ones who were opposing Him. Consider His life of sacrifice; consider His love for you and me; and consider the eternal reward that He has prepared for us.

“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising [feeling strong dislike for something] the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”—Hebrews 12:2.

Brief Overview

Willpower is used in all types of self-control tasks, from concentrating on academic studies to resisting unhealthy foods. Willpower is also depleted

by choices. The more consequences there are for the choices, the more willpower it takes to decide. When willpower is depleted, it affects one’s ability to exercise fairness in judgment. Insulin resistance strongly affects willpower. Willpower is negatively affected by a messy environment and has been observed to drop as the evening progresses into night due to natural insulin resistance increasing. There are many strategies to increase willpower, but all of them will fall short against real temptation. Mankind cannot overcome sin on their own. When our will cooperates with the will of God, He gives us the willpower to accomplish His will. We may exercise the power of choice; but, at times, it will take all the willpower we possess to obey God. We are to do our part to increase willpower and look to God to supply our further lack.

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”—Ephesians 6:12.

Conclusion

We have an eternal joy set before us, mansions made of gold, and a new earth that our greatest imaginations cannot grasp. We can choose to eternally live in greater bliss than the pleasures of sin can ever grant us. We can do what we need to spend an eternity with a God who loved us so much that He left all the glory of heaven to come and live a lonely life of toil and temptation, dying for the very ones who nailed Him to the cross. Heaven is cheap enough! It takes patience and perseverance through cooperation with Christ in order to victoriously live. Paul says:

“I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”—Romans 8:18.

For a finished work,



Jonathan Taylor

Wisdom is justified of all her children. -Luke 7:35

More Food for the Little Flock —