

*Learning to  
Live a Fully  
Human Life*

*Self-Control*



**Teaching  
the Way of Love**  
*because humanity passes by way of the family . . .*

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**PLEASE PRAY  
THAT**

- **Parents will lead their children to self-control and self-possession.**
- **Our culture will start to value a fully human life rather than animal self-indulgence.**
- **Families can become a place of loving correction, true repentance and true forgiveness.**
- **Catholics will return to the Sacrament of Confession and fully embrace God's mercy and goodness.**
- **This Lent will be a time to renew passion for Jesus within our families.**
- **Children will feel the love and mercy of God because of their parent's love.**
- **No child (or parent) will ever feel they are beyond God's loves and mercy.**

## We ARE Capable of Self-Possession and Self-Control

My 9-year-old son's greatest character flaw is that he can never admit he has done anything wrong. Part of me knows that this is due to his 9-year-old boy brain. But then I look at our culture and see many adults with the same problem, and I worry about him. Our culture likes to believe that human beings are just highly evolved animals, and that when it comes down to it happiness is found in surrendering to our instincts, drives and impulses. If that's true, the logic goes, then there really is no such thing as evil. Therefore nobody really has to take responsibility for their actions.

But the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us in paragraph 355 that human beings are not just animals. We are created in the Image and Likeness of God. As such, we are an integration of body and spirit. So while we do have instincts and drives and impulses like animals, we also have a spirit – and with the spirit comes free will.

Paragraph 1731 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that freedom is the power to shape our own life. It's a force for growth and maturity in truth and goodness. And our freedom reaches its perfection when it is directed toward God and the happiness that God has planned for us.

As a parent, that's the truth I want to teach my children. We are capable of self-restraint and self-possession. So how do we teach our children that they don't need to act on every impulse or desire?



**Which way will you lead your children?**

***Because humanity passes by way of the family...***

Here are some ideas.

1. Encourage your children to practice self-control in areas that are easier for them, so they can build self-control for when it gets more difficult. Does your child like to play video games as much as mine does? My son claims that if he had the freedom, he'd do nothing but play video games "24-7." I tell him that's exactly why he can only play for 30 minutes. While he still has a hard time shutting it off when his time is up, he doesn't realize that this is just practice for the more difficult things in life he'll have to balance.
2. Encourage your children to sacrifice something for Lent. It seems the current "wisdom" surrounding Lenten practices is to forget about "giving something up for Lent" and to focus more on "doing something positive." Doing something positive for Lent is fine. But the Church gives us practices in sacrifice for a reason! Help your children enter into the full meaning of the Lenten sacrifice by encouraging them to make their sacrifice for the good of someone else – and to pray for that person during Lent too.
3. Make sure your children see you practicing self-control! If we tell our children to turn off the video game while our own face is glued to our smart phones, our actions are going to speak a lot louder than our words. Model self-control and self-possession by practicing balance and self-denial in your own life. It's also OK to point out to your children that you're doing so. But make it a statement of solidarity. "Boy, I'd really love a second piece of desert too. But let's both be satisfied with just one piece."

These lessons in self-control will teach our children a very important lesson. They are not slaves to their physical desires. They can make choices about the kind of people they become. And ultimately they have the power to choose God and the goodness that God has planned for them.

## Use Lent to Start Teaching Self-Control and Self Possession

Your challenge for this month begins with a trip to the confessional. Plan a time during Lent when you can go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a family. Even children who can't receive the sacrament yet (younger than the age of reason) can go to the Church and see their family receive the sacrament.

Once you have all received the Sacrament, plan a time to sit down and celebrate God's great love for your family. Here are some discussion starters you can use when you are together.

How does it feel to admit we did something wrong, and to receive God's forgiveness?

What's one area of life each member of the family can practice better self-control?

How will practicing more self-control make our life happier?

For whom can we offer the sacrifice that comes with practicing self-control to Jesus?

**This challenge is just a small part of good Catholic parenting. Visit [www.twl4parents.com](http://www.twl4parents.com) for more strategies that will help you become the best parent you can be. And for the best systematic approach to parenting, consider purchasing the Teaching the Way of Love program, which can be found at the same website.**

**This article series is brought to you by Alice Heinzen and Jeff Arrowood, authors of the Teaching the Way of Love home study series for parents. Find out more at [www.twl4parents.com/teaching-the-way-of-love](http://www.twl4parents.com/teaching-the-way-of-love).**