Our scripture this morning comes from 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. While you’re finding that, a story is told of an award winning farmer interviewed by a TV reporter. The reporter asked the secret of how the farmer won year after year for best corn. The farmer said – I share my seed. The reporter was astonished, “How can you do that and remain on top?” The farmer replied, “How can I not and stay on top? You see, pollen floats free. My neighbors pollen will find my field. Inferior corn degrades my crop. If I am to grow great corn, I must help my neighbor grow great corn.

**1 Corinthians 9:24-27 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain *it.* 25And everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a perishable crown, but we *for* an imperishable *crown.*26Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as *one who* beats the air. 27But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.**

Over the last several weeks, we’ve looked at Roses in God’s garden – ROSE – Reverent, Obedient, Self-controlled, and Enduring. God looks for such characteristics. In our reverence, we’re to place God first, focus on Him, and serve Him with fidelity in our person, praise, purpose, in every place that we encounter Him. God is everywhere, so we encounter Him everywhere. Last week, we talked about obedience and how our conduct reveals our commitment to His commandment. This week, we’re looking at self-control.

Self-control is a key element in a Christian’s conduct. Galatians 5:23 names self-control as one of characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit, singular, is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit exhibits through these characteristics of our conduct. Listen to the works of the flesh - adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like… these are characteristics of conduct as well. One set demonstrates self control under the rule of the Holy Spirit… the other demonstrates the world.

In our scripture, Paul uses a race, something very familiar to the church at Corinth, located in the south of Greece. They understood the race and the crown placed on the head of the winner. In verse 26, he tells the people, probably recent converts to Christianity, living in a very pagan Roman colony, in the country of a very pagan Greece, that he runs with certainty and focus on the Truth of Jesus Christ towards an everlasting crown. He doesn’t get distracted. He runs to win. In 2 Timothy 4:7, at the end of his life, he says he has fought the good fight and run the good race. We all are running a race. We all are fighting a fight. One day, we will see Jesus and we’ll receive our reward.

Look at verse 27, But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. Self-control and discipline. Self-control is a swinging door. Picture a restaurant… we’ve all seen the door leading to the kitchen. Servers push the door inward, server push the door outward. It swings both ways. As the door swings, those in the eating area glimpse the inner workings of the kitchen. Likewise, our self-control swings and allows others to see the fruit of our lives. When we are self-controlled, we don’t do the things we shouldn’t do. We flee temptation. We rebuke Satan in Jesus name. But, self-control also causes us to do the things that we should do. We fill our minds with the word of God. We assemble with other believers. The door of our self-control swings both ways. Those watching see the things we do that we shouldn’t do… If I say I’m a Christian and all my ways align with my profession of Faith, some will notice. More notice when my claim doesn’t line up with my conduct. Now I can cry all I want about how no one saw the good, they only noticed my bad. It doesn’t make it any less true. More people will use our slips of self-control as excuses than will use our self-control as examples.

Paul is very clear on our duty not to be a stumbling block to our brother in 1 Corinthians 8:9-13 But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. Lack of self-control can serve as a stumbling block to those weaker in the faith. Paul was not wrong in eating the food… he realized that, though it was not wrong, he still sinned because his example led those weaker in the faith to sin. He disciplined himself… not to claim he has rights… people should mind their own business… don’t be judging me! Notice he says – when you thus sin against the brethren… you sin against Christ.

This week, I’ll be examining what my self-control reveals about my obedience to God. What do others see when that door opens and they glimpse my true inner self? What does that obedience reveal about my reverence for God? Our self-controlled, deliberate Christian example is like the seed we share. God is not mocked, as a man sows, so shall he reap. Our Spiritual fruit is cross-pollinated by the quality of the fruit we help others grow. Self control is of the Spirit.